



Maelstrom Storytelling

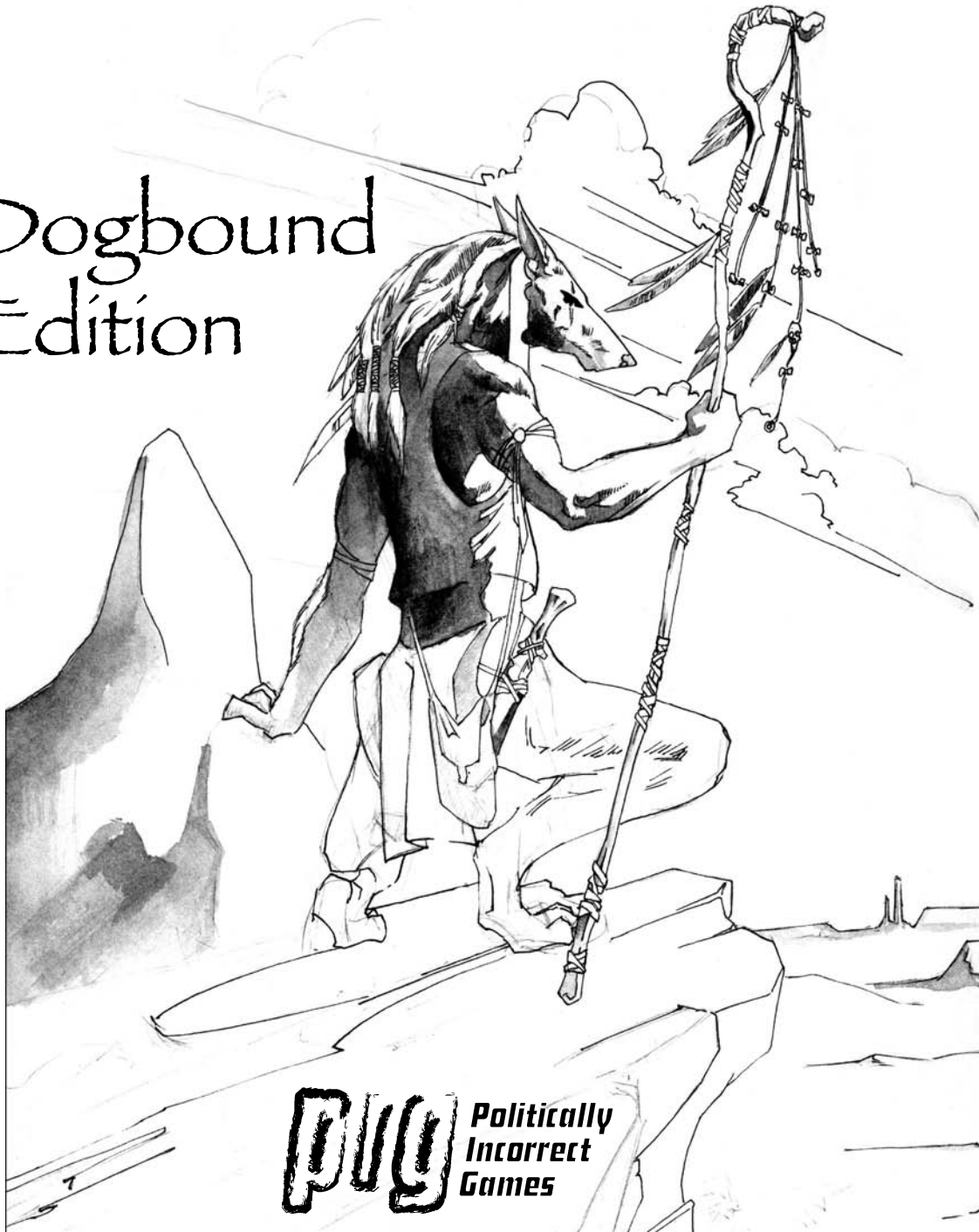


PIG Politically
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Games

Maelstrom

Storytelling

Dogbound
Edition



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Eye of the Storm

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Eye of the Storm

“Welcome aboard, my friend, welcome aboard. Fine day to sail, let me tell you; calm seas and a fair wind, and clear skies as far as the eye can see. But that won’t last, believe you me: The storm’s coming, and when she does, not even the goddess can save us then. But don’t you fret, my friend, no don’t you fret, `cause here on the sea you’re in good hands. You’re aboard the Seventh Star, and if anyone can sail this world and make it through, it’s this ship. So get your bearings and find your feet, my friend. The whole world’s waiting for you. Newcomers are a sacred thing, and we’re glad to have you. So look around, and when you’re ready, we’ll take you places like you’ve never seen. We’ll weave a tale and craft a story the likes of which only the Empire has known. I’ll tell you about the goddess and the sea, the storm and the shifts, and all the things that make this world the way it is. A world we call the Maelstrom.

“Now, we’re not from here either, my friend, so you’re among friends. Like me, most of us are born here, but our souls are old and from another world. Some of us are like you, and just wake up in this world, already born and already full grown, but no idea what our lives were like. Well, I’ll tell you one thing: You’re straight from the Dog Star, whole and entire. Why you’re here now, well, that’s another story and the answers aren’t so easy. Me, I was born here, but my souls from Her like yours. How it happens, can’t quite say, but don’t you fret—we’ll show you the ropes and take good care of you.

“The name’s Magdellan, friend, and these eyes have seen a world like no other. The only thing they haven’t seen is the Valley, and that’s a place even the goddess won’t go. But you’ll figure it all out soon enough, friend, so just take your time.”



Introduction

Welcome to the Maelstrom

Whether you're a writer, a movie fan, or daydreamer, you'll find a whole world of possibilities in this book—a world we call the Maelstrom. Maelstrom is a story world, where you set the adventures that take place in this game. Adventures you both write and take part in as you create new stories every time you play. It's a different reality, and a different place: We hope you enjoy your stay.

All Kinds of Stories

Adventures in this game can be about almost anything you want: Murder mysteries, treasure hunts, political intrigue, piracy, exploration, romance—whatever grabs your interest. There are suggestions and plot seeds throughout this book. The simple beauty of role-playing is the freedom to do whatever you want.

The Beginning

In a different place, in another reality, there is a world that once knew the glory of an empire that is now only known in stories. It's a world that shifts and changes. A place where dreams are sometimes real. A reality where magic is science. Where alien cultures live next to humankind. A place for war, for mystery, for romance. And through it all rages a storm so strong it can change the world, a storm they call the Maelstrom.

The Game

There are two parts to this game: the setting and the rules. The setting is the world in which the story takes place, and the rules are the structure that determines the outcome of events.

So flip through the book and get a feel for the world by reading whatever grabs your interest. Then start looking over the rules in Chapter Five. There is a glossary of game terms in the back of the book, as well as reference material spread throughout to make your travels easier.





Eye of the Storm

Excerpts from the Dogbonds

Dogbound (dôgbound) *n.* [colloq.]
a relatively long fictional prose narrative with a more or less complex plot or pattern of events, about actions, feelings, motives, etc. of a group of characters

Torrat's Story

from *The Oldcomer*

After three months of living in this infinite wasteland, Torrat began realizing the changes within and outside of herself, in her dress and manner. When the people under the Grotto of Ancient Hearts offered to her a set of two daggers made of crystal for the valiant actions she had performed in defense of their souls and homes, Torrat felt a new confidence with the heavy crystal in her hand. She felt she could alter the firmament of the universe, and she could affect the feelings of change within herself and in turn alter the world around. She felt confident to travel where she pleased, to meet and best whatever she came across, and eventually master all, all save the Valley of Shards.

The Square of Roses

from *The World Nine Times*

Sitting there on the bench didn't make Lyle feel any better. The weather was getting cold, the coming night blowing through the square in a breeze, and the leaves of fall skittered dryly over the flagstones.

He loved her. He knew that much. But that wasn't important right now, he thought, what's important is whether or not she'd come. They had found out so much since the professor died. Died and left them with so many questions, so many things they had never begun to think about. The secrets of the world, they had said to themselves. Now everything was turned upside down. The more questions they asked, the more trouble they found themselves in. And foolishly, tonight he had let her go alone. Alone to meet the one man who seemed to know something. Man wasn't the right word, of course, but Lyle didn't know what else to call him. A foreigner, that was for sure, from a race he had only heard about. Not Venthi, no, not one of those riff-raff beggars, but another people altogether. Which was rare for Taloban—not many people came through Taloban, deep in the folds of Critee under the shadow of the mountains. Except recently, since the professor died, the shift had moved the mountains further, and that was odd. Odd enough to make the old people talk, and tell stories about the Empire again.

Lyle stamped his feet lightly, holding his raincloak tightly around him as the breeze blew colder. His feet made an echo in the quiet square, the rustle of leaves the only other sound. Then he turned, footsteps rushing up. It was her.

Maelstrom Storytelling



An Introduction to Role-Playing

If you've never played a role-playing game before, there are a few things we should explain to make this game easier. Role-playing games are like ongoing stories, in which the players have roles that they control as the story unfolds. The narrator plays the part of everyone else in the story, as well as guiding the outcome of anything the players choose to do. Really, it's like collaborative storytelling.

Role-playing games require a lot of imagination, and some concentration on the part of the players and the narrator. This book provides the two essentials of the role-playing experience: the rules to determine how events are resolved, and the world in which the story takes place. The only other items needed are a few dice (any kind will do), pencils, and paper.

The story is called a narrative, and the players get to play the parts of the people in it. They can choose almost any kind of person, and in advanced games they can play other races or even spirits or stranger creatures. The hardest part belongs to the narrator, who works a little harder by preparing the story ideas for each game session. The narrator needs to understand the world, and how it works, and how the rules work. Though the rules system in this game is fairly complex, it's ultimately very simple. In each scene the narrator presents the situation, the players decide what their characters will do, and then the scene is played out. If the results are not obvious, then the narrator refers to the Scene Resolution rules in Chapter Five.

There are many decisions made in this game, from where the story takes place to what the story is about. The players will make decisions about the characters they are playing as well as deciding what their characters do. In most cases these decisions are simple, but at times they can be difficult. The rules help determine the outcome of scenes that aren't obvious or involve conflict and danger. Otherwise, this game is like writing a novel. We even refer to decision-making as *authoring*, and as long as it contributes to the story and adds enjoyment to the game, there are few wrong decisions in role-playing.

Winning (or: What's the Point?)

The goal of this game is to tell a great story. There is no real way to win a role-playing game. Because the goal is open-ended, there is no clear victor and no clear loser. There may be important goals for the characters to reach in the story, and the characters may even die in the course of the game, but as long as the players enjoy telling the story it doesn't actually matter whether or not their characters succeed. There is, of course, a certain satisfaction in finishing a story, or ending a chapter in that story, but otherwise the tales in Maelstrom Role-Playing can go on forever. You could play out the entire life of a character, or the height of their lives, or just the escapades that may have made them famous. The roles you choose might be heroic and adventurous, or they might be daring and villainous, or they might just be your average guy or gal caught in the middle of a great adventure.

What Happens in a Game

Characters will have goals they want to attain, and obstacles to overcome. The story that the narrator creates will provide the setting and the plot. In that plot the characters might stumble into adventure accidentally, or become embroiled in international espionage, or choose to seek out fame and fortune as tomb-robbers or pirates. The important part is that the players author the tale through the actions of their characters.

Getting Started

The first thing to do is decide who will be the *narrator* for the game. Everyone else is called a *player*. Players will control characters and 'author' these roles throughout the story.

The narrator then designs a story set in the Maelstrom world. There are sample scenarios in Appendix 2 that can be used to start a game, as well as story ideas in Chapter Seven.

Last, the players need to choose characters to play in the story. Players usually control one character each. Chapter Four discusses character creation.

Once the story is in progress, Chapter Five will explain how to run scenes in the game.

The world presented here is a springboard for your own ideas. Don't look for detailed explanations of how the world works or who is who; think of it more as a novel, where the important things are explained but the rest is left to your imagination.

You will find many different explanations in this book. Don't think of them as contradictions, but rather as reflections of the many ways things may be done, and the many ways the people of the Maelstrom world interpret life.



Eye of the Storm

The Escape from *Crimson Sails*

The ship churned the air as it glided just over the ocean's surface. The tip of the long rudder trailed in the water leaving a fine spray behind them.

"Do you think we'll make it?" Milo asked, perched on the aft railing as the sun behind them turned the water red with its glow. J'klt didn't answer. He just twitched one antenna and made a click with a pincer. Milo hadn't really expected an answer, of course. J'klt wasn't one for idle questions. The Kril were like that.

The sails rippled in the new breeze, and with a moaning creak the ship shifted course. J'klt reacted to this, though, and that made Milo nervous.

"What is it?" he asked as J'klt stood up, turning his head and letting his antennae out to the sides. He turned to Milo and filled him with the image of the storm. "Sweet prophet..." Milo whispered, and then the soft red of the sun faded, black clouds of the storm swallowing up the world behind. J'klt took two long strides and slipped down below-decks. Then the shout went up from the crow's nest: "STORM DEAD ASTERN!"

Milo looked back, the sky turning dark as the world was engulfed. Below he heard the gears shift and knew J'klt was putting it into overdrive. There was a clattering as the machinery shifted into place and then the whole vessel lunged forward.

"Better the storm than the Alliance." muttered Brey as he slipped onto the deck from the rigging. "I'm going below—you should too." he said in his deep-throated dialect. Milo liked Brey—liked him because he made him feel safe. Safe despite the danger, safe despite the storm.

"I'll be there," he answered, still staring at the clouds behind them. Like squid ink they spread over the water, spreading wide and far like arms outstretched to take in the whole sea and everything on it. But Milo wasn't sure he agreed with Brey. The Alliance was not something to cross—that was sure—and cross it they had. But at least he knew what awaited him in the courts of the Alliance: As the storm swept up behind them he could only pray for the best.

"Come on, Milo!" shouted Brey. Milo turned and went to the hatch. Behind him, the air got cold and the world went black.



Chapter One

The Maelstrom

THE MAELSTROM

The Maelstrom is a different world, a world where reality shifts and time is fickle. A gathering of lands called realms that are linked together by ideas, not maps. A world with many races, where magic is a pseudo-science, and reality is defined by the believer. And when the storm comes, all things change.

It is a reality beyond the limits of this material universe. It is a place where the powers of the natural world are assembled, and the spectacle and majesty of these forces are readily at hand. The Maelstrom is a constant storm, an unadulterated tempest that spans a thousand lands. Those who travel in it, whether by choice or out of a random twist of fate, are made aware of both how random and disastrous it can be. Paradoxically, they also become aware of the presence of a hidden order that defies and goes beyond the limitations of human reasoning.

The Maelstrom is not a place, and it is a place. It is something that is happening to the land and the countryside, a terrible product of some possible catastrophe, the memories of which are wiped clear by the driving rains and weathering storms of the Maelstrom.

The lands within the Maelstrom exist in a subjective and chaotic space. The laws of physics, so closely held by our modern society, don't work quite the same way here. The reality of the situation changes around the inhabitants in small ways, and at the same time it always stays the same. The most direct consequence of this is measured in distance from point to point: From one landmark to another could take a day's walk one day, the day after it might take an hour's easy travel, the next day the destination might be gone entirely. The inhabitants of the Maelstrom world, in trying to understand or measure this, have come up with no common system or pattern; the works of great minds have philosophized and quantified and theorized to no real end. Even time appears to vary subtly, like currents, through cycles like tides. Mechanics, even the most simple ones attributed to complex mechanisms, work differently from one realm to another, one creator to another. But behind all is a maddeningly elusive order—because in the Maelstrom, there is a certain chaos to any order.

The realms of the Maelstrom contain jungles to wind-swept deserts, and above all are the storms and mists that end up covering everything over time. Colors are brighter than they should be, and darkness a pitch beyond black. These are things a native might not notice, but the newcomer can never forget.

Humans in the Thousand Realms

(see *Chapter Three*)

By traveling through the lands it becomes evident that Humans must have flourished. Elements of the Empire exist everywhere that Humanity has settled; but now, the different civilizations and cultures vary as much as the terrain.

The human races of the realms are often very different from one another. Some live long lives, some have light skin, and some have long legs. Most humans consider themselves all very much the same, but others feel themselves to be very different from other human races.

Many creatures of the race of Humanity were born here, and lived their whole lives dealing with the Maelstrom. These people consider themselves part of the Maelstrom. But some, though they know no other way, instinctively know it is not right—not the world they were meant for. The followers of the *Dog Throng* for instance, base most of their beliefs on this principle. And others exist, in no small numbers, that have not lived their lives here. They have awoken to the Maelstrom, like dreamers torn from another world, of which they have only vague and elusive memories. There doesn't seem to be rhyme or reason as to why or how this could be.

But humans are not alone. Other sentient races exist, each with their own cultural identity, some of which appear to have undergone the same processes as Humanity: coming from another place where the world was different. Here they are, on the other side of the Maelstrom, each with their own views of why and how they are here, and what this great storm is that carries them off towards a destination found only in myth, only in dreams, and only in their memories.

The Humans alone appear to be able to harness the power of the Maelstrom through themselves, becoming conduits for a



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vast reserve of inner power. Because of this, other intelligent races often react with trepidation, and even try to use the creatures of Humanity for their own purposes: As slaves or thralls or unwitting tools. The *Gift of Kael*, a spiritual power found in Newcomers, is a rare prize for many people—and this gift is found almost solely in Newcomers, who are almost always Humans. The Kril, the Diodeians, and many others value the Gift of Kael enough to try and extract it and tap its power for their own. The Dog Throng covets it as a natural god-given power. All this makes things more dangerous for Humanity, and in other ways extends their limitations beyond the realm of the ordinary. But, of course, nothing is ordinary in the Maelstrom.

The Shifts and the Storm

Where mountains were the day before, a forest is the day after. When the storm passes over, all things can change—but some things never do. These shifts affect the world in large and small ways, and all the places of the world are touched by it. But there is order, or something like it: places share certain ties to one another, and so while one place might shift from one place to another, it might always remain in one region—or two towns always shift together, or a valley always lies south of the same mountain. These are the patterns in the storm, some obvious and others not. These relationships are *affinities*, linking the world into some order despite the chaos.

And shifts don't always wait for the storm, either. Overnight the land can change. And sometimes people just realize that the world around them is different.

A Note on Mapping and Order

Most sentient races have a certain need (and gain a certain comfort in) classifying and ordering the world around them into a pattern that they can more easily understand. But the Maelstrom is beyond simple reasoning. This doesn't stop the ambitious, the speculative, or the adventurous from trying. The answers people find are the premise of many dogmas and religions, but few maps.

The Empire built the roads, or at least most of them. And these roads cross the world like a web, woven into an architecture that can only be understood by understanding the Empire. These roads, no matter how scattered, are the only link in a changing world, the one relatively safe way from one place to another. So the traveler sticks to the old roads and hopes for the best. On the sea there are no roads, and the traveler trusts the stars and the storm to guide them to their goal.

There are those who map things by the roads. Others by the relationship between the places—a map of *affinities*. And maps by the stars. Most of the maps of the world, the ones

Gauthier's Informal List of Great Drinks

Tchoma Tea—"a good tea, not too bitter"

Slamming Jack—"best thing for a thirsty day"

Old Wall Mead—"from Picarni, and worth the price"

Blithe Gin—"if you want a kick, this is it"

Snail Hash—"odd name for a cider, but what the hell"

Talobani Beer—"if you like lager, this beats the rest hands down"

Queen's Coffee—"now, the Diodeians are good for one thing, at least"

Fat Duck Stout—"drinks like a meal"

Cobblestone Ale—"Dacartha's best"

that actually work, are diluted and transposed copies of the old Empire Map—the one true map, or at least the one map that ever made sense.

And there must be some order, some pattern in the chaos that is the world here. Because birds still migrate, and seasons still pass, and crops still grow.

On Newcomers

Out of nowhere these lost souls appear. They have no clear memory of who they are, or understanding of how they got here. Awakened into a foreign world, they are the Newcomers. Every culture and every town has a story to tell about them, a myth to explain them, and a few who live among them. They remember no proper nouns, and most remember much less than that. The memories that they have are confusing and make little sense, and have no logical explanation. Most of the memories only occur as needs or desires: the longing towards a faceless and unnamed loved one, the feeling of responsibility, the knowledge that old dreams and aspirations are now, for some reason, out of reach.

Some have even found, in their travels, that their identity is not theirs alone. In the thousand realms there are *doppelgangers*, people who are their double in every way, but who have led entirely new and different lives, have made completely different choices. How these split-souls come to be is part of the enigma of the Newcomer reality.

And so these new travelers walk the world to find their destinies. They walk the weed-strewn roads of an old empire of Humans, an empire that had prospered, for a time, leaving relics and colossal monuments. And yet it failed, and is gone. The travelers must start new, build new lives, and follow new passions. They must face the chaos and the pain of change, they must rebuild and re-begin, they must learn not to look back.

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Currency

Currency in a changing world is a mish-mash of barter and coins. The heavy metal coins of the Empire are still used, which are the only true universal currency. But the old Imperial silvers and coppers have different values from one realm to another. Otherwise the barter system is as real as any means of trade. Coinage is not always common, and since travel is limited to the few who brave it, coins are not always needed. The Selemprici states have a paper currency to track debt, and the Trade Alliance has an elaborate tithing system that they track in their trade ledgers, but many other means of trade can be found in the thousand realms.

Arithmetic changes between the realms: Base 10, though common, is not always the norm. Like clocks that count to 60 and pints and quarts and ounces on our Earth, counting is as diverse as the currencies. Many cultures use base 12 or base 20, or even base 7 and base 9. This means that 13 in base 12 is 15 by our count—(3 plus base). In many languages in the Maelstrom, the base is identifiable by the words: 13 would be “three and twelve” in base twelve, and “three and ten” in base ten.

The Imperial Units are still used in many places, but their actual measurements aren’t always the same. Over time, without the Imperial Censors to maintain a uniform consistency, the cubits and leagues and gallons of the Empire have taken on their own shapes and sizes in each different realm. But with the shifts the realms of the world maintain many commonalities, and so an Imperial Cubit or League is usually not too far different across the lands.

Standards in a Non-Standard World

The variety of cultural differences have led to many varying standards—from vastly different legal codes to different systems of measurement. With the heredity of the Empire shared by most people, and the re-integration of neighboring lands brought by the shifts, there is some unity to an otherwise disparate world. How people are named, whether or not family names are used, if the line is traced through the mother or father—all these things differ in the Maelstrom. Once the traveler has made their way to another realm, the world around them slowly begins to make sense, as though this new way of life was theirs all along: “Of course that makes sense. I wonder why I didn’t realize that before.”

Language

Almost all human realms can trace their dialect to the Imperial Word, a language that is now dead but was once the common language of all realms. The Imperial Word and the pictograph and early cuneiform writing is still found on monuments, scriptures, and even some of the dogbonds the com-

mon people read. The Diodeians claim to be the soul inheritors of the *true word*, as do the Selemprians, and the legal tongue of the Trade Alliance is also referred to as the Imperial Word. The Belzaine Caliphate is one of the few human realms to speak its own language, though they use a form of the Imperial script that resembles the later kanji from the late Empire.

Dogbonds

“never let truth stand in the way of a good story”

Thanks to the printing press, and widespread use of the Common Word, books are common among the realms of the Maelstrom. The advent of soft leatherbound books has helped make writing available to almost anyone. Printers like *Sirbuh Press* in Picarni specialize in cheap novels nicknamed dogbonds—for reasons best not explained. In a world where travel is dangerous, people thirst for tales of adventure set in foreign and exotic lands. The veracity of the material in these novels may be questionable, but what they lack in accuracy they make up for in imagination.

Time

Most histories establish the past relative to the Great Equinox. This event is said to have taken place at the Empire’s fall, and the end of the Third Age of the Imperium.

But though the solar year is about as long as a year on Earth, and the days are some 24 hours, time does not pass evenly in the Maelstrom. The Equinox is an event shared in all cultural histories, but the time since is not.

Dacartha has a calendar based on the First Sun, and they count the day in hours like the Diodeians. The Ismolahti weigh their time in phases, not hours, and base their calendar on the moon. The Aleneans have a week of seven days in their intricate calendar they call a *mandala*. But for all the effort, the common man sees time pass by the day and season, and pays no attention to the mystery of time in this changing world.

Machinery and the parts required to maintain and build machinery all require exact matching parts. In some places, interchangeable standards have been created, so that parts form one machine may be used for another. If bolts only fit one type of nut, they can only be used in that nut—but if a standard exists, then bolts are just bolts, and will fit a variety of nuts. Ateliers and machine shops in the industrial realms have developed a variety of systems to recognize what works together and what won’t: “This has Smith & Co’s symbol on it—they use the Dacarthan Standard.”



Eye of the Storm

The Role of Spirits

There are spirits in the world—souls disincorporated or ideas incarnate—stepping out of the mists and storms of the Maelstrom, from places where people rarely go.

They are real to the world, though what they are and what their nature is is not so clear as the reality of their existence. While the myth and legend may refer to them as ghosts, echoes, faeries, and even shapechangers and devils, they are beings as unique as they are different. Different from the touchable people of the world, and different from each other.

Other Races

The Maelstrom stretches to unusual and often completely alien terrain, towards the realms of alien civilizations. Some travelers and explorers, most notably the mysterious and often feared Strangers, talk of traveling to far and distant places where fantastical creatures exist, creatures that have never laid eyes on the people known as Humanity. Closer to home, several races of intelligent creatures interact near the borders of the thousand realms. Among these are the following:

A nomadic culture of creatures known commonly as Sekoreh or Shrikes. Acting in packs, they live on the fringes of civilization, occasionally massing in large armies to foray deep into the civilized realms. The Shrikes, though feared and labeled as evil and blood-thirsty, have been known to come upon lost or lone humans, wounded or sick, nurse them back to health and send them on their way.

A race of crab-like creatures that stand at least five to six hands above the average human head. Called Kril, are gregarious and gather in large, towering cities in the South Sea. They are known to be prolific slavers.

The Venthi, a slender tall people with little remaining native culture or civilization. They have a bird-like quality to their shape and manners, and may be the remains of the indigenous civilization that predates the Empire. These people are the rabble and the poor of the realms.

The Sowl, who like the Venthi are hatched from eggs. They live in the Great Mountains among the humans of the Selempri Citystates. They stand just taller than a human, and just shy of a Venth. They have a loose skin that stretches from under their arms to their legs that allows them to glide through the air.

A reptilian people who walk on all fours and run five to six feet in length. Called the Darig, they are said to have fostered an ancient kingdom in what is now the Desert of Endless Sun.

The Kenratha, a sentient people who live mostly in the Veldt. They have a velvety fur and a prehensile tail, and stand as tall as the average human.

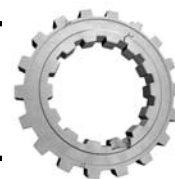
A spiderlike people who live in the volcanic islands of the South Seas. Called Adollans, they have little contact with the outside world.

There are others races that live on the edge of the world in places that shift along the rim of the Maelstrom, and creatures in the depths of the sea who live a separate life from the people above, like the dwellers of the Dream Lands. People like the Mallatin, and the Uobi of the Cold Wastes, and the Lillondi of the Deep Sea. There are also races that are nearly extinct, tucked among the realms, who may even be remnants of the indigenous people who predate the Empire.

from the Dacarthisite Elich Meinster's *Of The Spiritual Incarnate*:

"Spirits are most often found in the mists on the edge of the storm (labeled by Lunas "*Reflective Spirits*" in his work *Translations of the Soul*), or places of historical significance, as well as abandoned and ruined remains of civilization. These latter spirits we refer to as "*Echo Spirits*." Some spirits appear as the recently dead, but whether they are or not lies without easy explanation. Other, more intriguing spirits perhaps, seem to offer glimpses of how newcomers were in the dreamlands from which they have awakened (see my notes on *Lands of Dream in Incorporate Travel*.) Newcomers have reported encountering spirits entreating them, calling them by foreign-sounding names, dressed in strange clothes, with odd yet somehow familiar faces, stirring up emotions they knew were there but could not, and can not decipher. These spirits we label "*Spirits of the Psyche*"—see my notes on *Incorporate Dissonance*."

Maelstrom Storytelling



Societies, Fraternal Orders, and Alliances

The world may shift, but still there are groups who work together across the world, in many regions and many cities. Some are religions, some are cults, some are societies, and some are secret and unknown.

From the monastic Shroud of Khem to the proselytizing Shriling Order, to the Belzaine Merchant Guild and the Trade Alliance, to the Dog Throng and the Strangers—these orders manage to survive the shifts of the storm, each in their own way. Whether they sell religion, salvation, or gunpowder, they exist within the chaotic tides of the storm and link the thousand realms together in a network of people not unlike the web of roads built by the Imperium.

The Twin Suns

There are two suns over the world, one that glows a hot yellow and gives light to the day, and the Second Sun that follows the other like a forgotten child. This second sun is a soft and dying red, and it holds a course askew of the day sun. In the spring, at least since most people remember it, the second sun can be seen at night, lending an impatient red to the skies.

Called the *second sun*, *night sun*, or the *red sun*, and prayed to in some cultures as the harbinger of lust, love, and death.

The Moons

In Ismolaht the moon is the center of its culture and faith, honored by temples set in the center of their huge pyramidal cities. But over Picarni there are two moons, called the Guardian Moons or Shepherd Moons, with their own myth and meaning to the people there. And in Dacartha there is one moon, and it has no meaning except to lovers and wolves.

How there can be a change in the celestial bodies is a mystery to some, and an assumed truth to others. The stars do not change, the skies are the same, and the twin suns weave their pattern overhead in a semblance of constancy, but the moons do not. The Ismolahti will tell you why, and the Shroud may claim to know the secrets of the world, but the simple truth is that the moons are not the same wherever you go.

Little Pete's Favorite Dogbonds

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| The Long Passage | The World Nine Times |
| Whispers of Empire | Thief of Dahl Lindy |
| The Key of Arn | Noistoi |
| Meltzer's Journey | Murder Under the Night Sun |
| Purgation | |

Whorls

Some call them *hell-holes*, or *eddies*, others have more scientific or mythic names. But they represent a real hazard to traveling in the Maelstrom, each encounter unique and nearly all of them dangerous. It's quite possible that there are individuals out in the Maelstrom who have never escaped one of the Hell-holes, and live there trapped like flies in amber.

"Are whorls part of the dreamworld? Is the door accessible to dreamwalkers, a side-realm to the landscape of dreams?"

from Dialogues of the Sowl Tradition

Whorls almost always seem to be set around dramatic events that often repeat themselves in time. They represent their own pocket realms within the Maelstrom itself, places where time continues to run in loops around one event. They are by no means limited to the technology or reality of the Maelstrom, but the further they stray from the norm the harder it is to remember what exactly has happened inside of one. Inside the Hell-hole, travelers often have specific roles, and will continue to play out specific events over and over again, until a release is found, either through death or escape. Whether an epiphany, or a nightmare, these places rarely leave their victims unchanged.

Some people have speculated that when a land in the Maelstrom loses all of its affinities it slips from the world to become a whorl. These are Lost Lands, and have no region and no place among the realms of the Maelstrom. It may even be that the Empire slipped from the world this way. It may be that newcomers are born from these places.

Magic

"If you surrender to the wind you can ride it."

- Toni Morrison, Song of Solomon

Magic, called the Natural Arts or even Science, is as much a part of the Maelstrom as the people in it. It is innate. It is unpredictable. It is part of the storm itself.

The Maelstrom exemplifies chaotic energy. Its churning, storming threads of truth make it the unique reality it is. As one might imagine, the power to alter reality swirls and curls around every living thing. People can act as conduits for this power, to try and turn the waves of chaos in their favor. As a conduit, the magic caster is a passive thru-way, yet is integrally tied to the winds of change coursing through them. Magic is not a subtle art in the Maelstrom.

Casting magic can be a painful and difficult thing in the Maelstrom. Imagine chaotic tides of reality-altering power coursing through the body as the caster tries to turn it, focus it, or alter it. It takes someone *at one* with the power tides



Eye of the Storm

to sense them and sense how each might be changed. The Strangers know the most about the Maelstrom's untamed power. They have wandered it alone. They have tasted the winds and silently watched them work their power. Their eyes reflect the churning of power lines. They are the most qualified to have the unique respect for the storm and innate understanding of it that it takes to try and manipulate it. People new to the Maelstrom cannot use its form of magic, and trying to force it to their will in their own type of magic system of domination commonly causes an overload. No one forces the Maelstrom to do anything. The best they can hope for is to ride its power, know its direction, or possibly re-direct its flow, like diverting an irrigating stream from a raging river. With this in mind, traditional "spells" don't apply. A practitioner learns through experience and observation how to sense and alter the currents. How to alter them, and to what end, is only limited by one's imagination, and one's power is determined by experience, innate perception, and amount of willpower and primal energy. They must be able to take some punishment, because casting is painful and draining. It becomes exponentially more so the longer it goes on or the closer together the attempts are. These are its limitations, and its only limitations.

Those people who use the magic of the storm are tied to the storm—they share an *affinity* with it, and they can work the magic of the Maelstrom even as it tears at their body and leaves them shaking.

They say the Empire was built on the magic of the natural arts, its power coursing through it with such strength that it tore the world *together*. Like powerlines the roads of the Empire joined it and made it whole, spreading like veins of magic between the Seven States, aimed and focused by the monuments they left behind.

All Told

This is the Maelstrom. From the flying skyships of the Kril to the diaspora of the Venth, the free city of Dacarta to the ancient ruins of an Empire that fell before the Great Equinox, there is a past to be discovered and a destiny ahead. In a changing world, all things are possible and all things meet. Whether the dream city of Albatton is real or the Valley of Shards is a gateway home, the traveler must find for themselves.

The choices made by the narrator will determine much of what is true and what is not. Each narrative will have its own reality, like the thousand realms of the world itself.

Story Ideas

Chapter Seven discusses story ideas and narratives at length, and two sample scenarios as well as story settings are offered in Appendix Two. This is a quick list of ideas:

treasure hunting
archeological finds
prospecting
exploration
banditry
piracy
war
political intrigue
romantic escapades
heroic quest
murder mystery
espionage



Chapter Two

“A Fearful Symmetry”

The Maelstrom

The Maelstrom is not a place, it is something that has happened to a place, like and unlike our own Earth. Some say it is a brilliant paradise, broken and cursed because of the dark pride of the children who lived there. But it is no more broken than anyone of us: a place with its own rules and nature, and its own dreams. When we attempt to perceive it by our own laws, we are denied any simple answers.

Is there such a thing as a genetic memory? Is there a common truth to all things, that transcends the differences our minds can't understand? Is this the one truth that binds this other world together? Because it is a thousand tide-pools, and a spinning vortex seeking to drown any individual understanding. It is many things, and few generalities can do it any more justice than they can interpret the human heart.

The Thousand Realms

Each realm is unique, each one has its own curiosities and its own interests. In some ways, some are alike: alike enough to perhaps have been at one time physically connected. Some appear like nothing else in the world. Are there actually a thousand different realities, all part of this one greater world?

People like you and me live from day-to-day in these lands. Some are practical, and take advantage of what they can from it; others adapt only as much as they have to.

“Thomas”

from The Stern Aunt

Always, the storms came. In drenching waves, the storms seemed to batter the heath, wearing the rocks and the trees. They turned into cold and violent streams, and then rivers, swelling tan with mud and soil, carrying uprooted trees and the occasional tuskbeast screaming down with them.

This time the rains lasted four days. Thomas the Stutterer had been walking through the hills, against the wishes of his aunt, when the rains began to fall. At first, he gazed glassy-eyed up at the gathering clouds and the drops of water falling from the sky. Then, when the sky shook and roared with anger, and light flashed through the clouds, he became afraid. He ran through the drops of rain until he found a small cave under a rock, where dry shelter was to be had. At the end of the fourth day, nothing was dry, and Thomas was cold and hungry. He awoke light-headed, and crawled outside to move home and accept the punishment that would be waiting for him.

But instead of the soft and rolling hills, strewn with rocks and squat, heavy trees, there were mountains that rose around him, up into the sky, white-capped. The air was much colder here. Past the mountains were lands, cragged and broken and grey. And somewhere, just on the horizon, a slender black wisp of smoke carried itself up into the feathery clouds.



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The World According to Mulligan

Mulligan had seen just about all kinds of people in his life. From peasants lining the roads to the spider-like creatures of Adolla-noi, crawling out of their smoking pits. In the beginning, certain things had stirred in his mind: the way a person wore a hat, the color of a dress on a peasant girl, or the perfect order in the march of the Dragoons. Now, it all blended together in some mindless whirl, leading him back to drink and a certain, rootless, shifting desire for something he could not even fathom in his dreams.

But the roads kept leading him onwards, past the caravans and the cities, lines of refugees and wide-eyed newcomers, past the world of humans and onwards, into the darkness, into the eye of the storm.

Mulligan had seen the world. He had found the edge of it and returned. In all his travels he had learned many things, but most of all he had learned to respect the storm and not fear it.

Mulligan's Story

What Happens is This:

As far as a body can see in any direction is safe. But after that, it gets complicated. You see, in the Maelstrom, things tend to get moved around. Usually they will only change a little bit, and they don't exactly change as much as they get switched.

Where a mountain range might be, mist could come up one morning and where the mountains were is a jungle plateau. Or the bright and shining sea. Or more sad, rocky, rolling hills like the ones you're standing on that day.

It doesn't happen every day. But it happens enough. Some people say it wasn't always like this—but say that in the wrong village, and you're likely to get stones thrown at you as much as anything else. People are like that.

Not everybody minds this very much: Some people like the change in scenery without having to pick up and move. And nearly every vista is breathtaking in its own little way, like some great god went around taking all the best bits of all the places in the whole universe

and put it in his bag, but he keeps moving things around and shaking it all up and ruining it for everyone who happens to be there.

We're not all supposed to be here. Or else why would the newcomers all be coming across all the time?

The Newcomers

People are popping up everywhere. Especially these days. It's always the same, they come walking out of the darkness or the forest or just down the road, all innocent eyes. The creepy thing is, they don't remember what has happened to them. Well, that's not exactly true. Sometimes, they can recall a face or something, but usually it's nothing good at all. Usually, they've got no clothes, or they're dressed in something awful unusual to be walking around outside in.

There's only one thing that's the same for all of them. They all know in their hearts they're from somewhere else. Just like us normal people, except sometimes I think we just remember it that way cause we were told to.

The Weather

It's so sunny sometimes you can barely look at things, and other times it's all cold and wet and misty and just icky and cold all over. It's hardly ever just nice out, it's got to be really really nice out. Most places, there's something that obscures the sky every once in a while, whether it's clouds or smoke or fog or dust or something. This keeps you on your toes, cause you never know what's going to be there when you can see again.

Relationships

Some things are just meant to be: It's a part of life. People get stuck on a place or a certain way of doing things, and I'd guess from my travels that it's about the same with places, too. Some places in the thousand realms get caught up on certain things and that's how it's going to be. I can't explain it well, but it's like this: There's this village travelers call Mullen. They have good beer there, not great beer, but it's pretty good—got a weird tangy taste that really beer shouldn't have. But that's all moot. What I mean to say is: In Mullen, the sun rises in the east every morning, and there are mountains there. And there always has been, as long as there's been a Mullen at least. When I was there, the mountains were these grand, snow-capped wondrous things that looked like big bluish rocky knives going high up in the air. But when I first heard of Mullen, I was told the mountains were grey and brown rocks that

Maelstrom Storytelling



just went straight up for a bit and then headed off. And when New Sally came over, she said the first thing she saw were forested high mountains with waterfalls. So it goes.

I've heard a scholar or two talk about the nature of the Maelstrom (a favorite topic whilst sipping hot tchoma tea and playing cards). Some say that there are realms that are always next to one another, unless a realm might be tossed between them for the sake of the storms. Grudgingly, like ice floes, the realms are split apart like, until they can squeeze the wayward realm off flying in some other direction. I like it when scholars talk; even though they never seem to make whole cloth out of the Maelstrom, it's comforting to know people are trying so awful hard.

Roads

Roads seem to have an affinity for one another. The Empire, they built things real good. Most people stick to roads, cause it's easiest not to get lost that way. Since roads tend to keep with other roads, you know you'll end up in civilization if you keep going. I mean, you know what they say: All roads lead to Dacartha. It's true, unless you're talking to a sailor. All roads do lead to Dacartha. They have like sixteen roads coming from that city, all spreading out to the universe. I've been there before. It's really big.

I think the same things hold true with coastlines, at least the way sailors keep it. That's why there's a lot of them. That and the adventure. But fighting off pirates, hi-jackers, natives, and crab people isn't exactly my idea of joy, if you get my idea. But apparently all coasts stick together, too, so it leads to a point of reference for some.

The Regions

The Realms are made up of various regions—places where one has a greater affinity towards one another than anything else. Though this isn't all the case: there are many, many realms which apparently have no true affinities towards anything but perhaps the idea of a mountain range to the north, or what have you. These realms tend to traverse across the broad range of the thousand realms, pushed about by the storm itself. Dacartha is supposed to be one of those places, like its ruined and empty sister city they always talk about. Never found that sister city, not in all my travels.

The Cold Sea

Some foolish few say that just a generation or two ago, the place was just as populated as anything else, but the Wastes were hit especially hard by the Shrikes in an ugly war. Others I trust have told me that the Shrikes were always there. It takes a hardy suicidal mind to try and make a living out there, but all of the realms depend on its whale-oil for their lamps and their gears. I don't know, there's a lot of weird stuff up there. Edge of the world it is. The whalers, they tell you stories of Albatton, the Olarves, the Ulobi, and the arctic outposts of the Diodeians and all that. But me, I just think if you're stuck out there in the middle of nowhere you're bound to go crazy. Furthest I've been in that direction is Springtide.

The Anterior

Low, rocky, rolling hills and wet forests here. Possibly the lands most heavily populated by us human folk, it's also where the most ruins of the Empire can be found, mostly in the stones and the rocks that make up the walls of all the new cities. So if you're looking for ruins, the Anterior is the direction to head to, but nearly anything useful was pulled out of it years ago.

If you're in the Anterior, head to the southern region. Down there, I've heard, it doesn't take long to come across a little parish called Picarni. That's where I was born, long ago, and it's not so bad as things go. When you're there, visit the Sirbuh Press, where over half of the trashy dogbound romances are printed, and all of the good ones, as far as I'm concerned.

The Veldt

The Veldt is what I've heard it called, at least that's what I heard from a traveler or two. It's all tall grass, a half-head shorter than the average person of these parts, and little else of interest. There isn't much in the way of features, save for slow, gliding hills and the occasional crooked tree. Civilization, where it is to be found here, is centered around sources of clean, useable water, mostly dug up from wells. Packs of hunter-beasts roam the lands, preying on the large herds, as do men. There are ruins of the Empire here, mostly in the weed-strewn roads that crisscross the land. Weather-beaten monuments, and nearly everywhere, the strange obelisks the Men of the Empire left behind. At the center of it all is the Temple at Sholcarta. You've heard about that place. I know a man from Picarni that lost half of his face there.

There are several major political powers in the Veldt, of which only one, the caliphate of Belzaine bears any mention. An aggressive mer-



Eye of the Storm

cantile center, traders and caravans often begin there, figuring that in a few years they'll start heading back towards the city somehow. I wouldn't buy anything from a Belzaine trader. Sure, it's probably cheap, but it just might break down in a few days. But my friends tell me I've got a prejudice against the Belzaine, cause they don't speak the Word. They got their own language, and that irks me.

The South Sea

Now this part of the world I only saw for a while. I ain't the seafaring type. Boats always make me puke. But let me tell you, those people that live the sea-life, they won't have it any other way. I never really saw the Cold Sea, and thank the prophet for that, but I spent a season in the South Seas working a Geregonian sloop.

Now the Sea, that's the Trade Alliance. That's all it's about, as far as I can tell. You got the Geregונים and their fancy uniformed navy, and the Diodeians and their lot, and the Ismolahti or what's left of that nation. Course you got the Kril and all, and they ain't chopped liver, but all of them they bow to this Trade Alliance. It's not a country or nothing, but it might as well be. It has more ships and more money than I've seen. And except for the Dog Throng and the Black Pirates, ain't nobody with the guts to mess with them.

You got weird people here, too—not exactly civilized. Like the Aleneans—I don't know if they're cannibals or not, but people don't go visiting, that's for sure.

But the place is like paradise. Rich too. If you go far enough you find these little jungled islands with the whitest sand. And beautiful, I mean beautiful little towns. Even the fortresses overhead have a charm and a feel for them. All different, mind you—not like there's any one way to things in this world. But I miss it sometimes. Dangerous and uncertain life on those seas, but close to the prophet as I'll ever come.

Human-occupied Lands of the Maelstrom

It's mostly true when they say there are a thousand realms in the Maelstrom. It seems that way sometimes. No one's ever bothered to count them all: it's like trying to count ants. They just won't stay still long enough.

Some scholarly types, like the ones at the Colleges, they say the Maelstrom goes on much farther. That the human realms are just a minuscule fraction of the whole thing. I'm not so sure of that myself, but you never know. But however small they may be compared to the whole, there are as many different lands and people than can be

dreamed of. But don't get me started on dreams—people talk about dreams being real and all and that just freaks me out.

But for all the diversity, the realms are all alike in some ways: All are built on the remains, or at least the memories, of the Empire.

What I love most are the festivals. Every place has holidays, you know, to celebrate life and good times, or remember the bad times, or anything really. This one place, Altalla, it was just a village in the Anterior. But they have this affinity with a town called Graben. Now Graben only shows up every few years, and then for only until the next shift, but the two towns they love each other. When Graben shows up, the children from each town run out over the fields towards each other and everyone drops their work and they get ready for the biggest feast and celebration they can muster. All smiles and excitement, and reunions between loved ones and families—cause they marry between the two towns, and some folks run off together, and some people are caught in the other town when the shift takes them away. But regardless, I was there when Graben came to Altalla, and it was a great time all around.

The Grand Empire of Humankind

At some point, long ago, humans put things right. Or at least, they put it together. They imposed order on the storm. The people of the Empire made it safe to walk down the road, over the hill, and throughout all that was in the Empire proper. The lands didn't shift, held together by the power and the technology of the Empire. They say that was a time of Enlightenment. This much is believed true by all. Everything else is rumor and speculation. Some say the Empire of Man was built on the remains of another empire, older and alien, which held the keys to taming the wildness of the storm itself. Or even that maybe the world was always stable, till the Empire messed with it and did something bad. I don't know, but they knew more then most people today, that's for sure. Ain't no one can figure out half of what they knew. They had ships that could fly, clocks that told time true, roads that led where they were supposed to, aqueducts to get water where they needed, and huge machines to make it all work.

They built the roads, and great cities, like the one Dacartha is built on. They mined the ideas and memories of the Newcomers, bringing great technological achievements. They warred with the crab people and the shrikes, and kept the realms safe for us humans. But some say it was crabs what killed the Empire off. I don't know. Everyone's got a theory about something like that.

Maelstrom Storytelling



Some of the Things The Empire Left Behind

There are the roads, and the ships on the sea, and the skiffs that used to traverse the sky. Some of the troops of the Empire had these bladed staves almost like the ones used by the damned Shrikes (or Sekoreh, whatever you want to call them—it doesn't make 'em any nicer, that's for sure).

Some of the stuff still works. Underneath some cities there's like strange machinery, which cranks, or glows white-hot, and others just dark and dead.

I don't know how it happened, but the Kril, the crabs you know, they wound up with the skiffs. Skyships, except they don't really fly, just glide over the water and sink gently back down when they ain't moving. The Kril, they use them now. Only people who can really work them.

Now I've been in an Airship, and those are something else. They got big balloons overhead that make them fly. Slow and calm, but they really fly high. The Diodeians build these things, and they say it's from the Empire too. I believe it, except it ain't got the machinery quite like the skiffs.

And then there are the simple things, which we would scarcely do without. Most everyone takes the wheel for granted, for example. Or the printing-press, for which without you wouldn't be reading this. And everyone uses the coins of the empire, still, with their Word all over it. Even if everyone calls the coins something different—a guinea here, a florin there—it all amounts to the same, and makes trade all that easier.

No one knows what the obelisks are for, if anything at all. Anyone familiar with the Maelstrom has seen one: Sprouting at some foreign angle on the side of a wooded knoll, or jutting out of the grasslands, far in the distance. Some are tall as a ship-mast, and slender as all could be—but some are short and squat and no taller than my dad. Most all of them have the Imperial Word carved on them—like little pictures or brush-strokes. And the Eye—least that's what we called it when we were kids—It's actually a gear, like a cog, carved into the stone near the top, and it's usually only on one side. Strange things, really.

But They're Not Here Anymore

However great the Empire of Humankind was, and remember this when you hear some chump on a crate in your village square rousing the youth to arms: They weren't good enough. No matter what myths or rumors or outright lies you can hear in a tavern about their mastery of the forces of the Maelstrom, their innovation or wondrous achievements, they died. All of them.

All they left for us is rubble. And the few of us that can trace our lineage back that far. And that's it.

You've probably heard the stories. The Grand Myth, of how the scientists of the Empire forged the world into their hands, and the world reformed it back. Edhillond's account of the Venthi song, of how the empire of man was destroyed by the crab people from the southern seas. And a thousand other interpretations, and a thousand cults waiting to take your soul away. The Empire exists only for their ruins to be plundered so that you or I might live to see tomorrow. And if there is a moral in the stories, it's that you should never, ever let your guard down.

Rumors of the Empire

Be warned when walking the old, weed-strewn roads. Be watchful of strangers telling you of the return of the Empire. They are not to be trusted, and certainly not to be led about. They will tell you that the Empire never left, that it's still here, locked, maybe underground or possibly in a realm no longer reachable through shifting reality.

There are two kinds of people who are likely to tell you such things. They are thieves and fools. There is also a possible third kind: the grey-eyed Wanderers—the ones folks call Strangers.

On a little bit of a brighter note, I also wouldn't put much credence into the stories you hear after a few drinks. Everyone likes to hear a tale or two, and they tend to get embellished. Be around a good storyteller enough, you'll hear that roguish swordswoman's breasts get larger with every retelling. And all the good stories have to do with the Empire, which has been told and re-told for generations—so they're bound to be all screwy.

But who am I to say? Maybe there is a lost city of gold, deep in the mountains, which comes out when the two moons are full. Maybe if you look hard enough, you'll find some spooky discus of the sun in the market bazaar—right there in plain sight, except no one notices it. Course, maybe it's all just a dream and we'll wake up one day and laugh like the fools we are.



Eye of the Storm

We're in the Maelstrom, and starkly beautiful it may be, but get all idealistic and you'll end up dead. Like so many would-be heroes I've met in my life—and I'm not even old yet. So don't get your hopes up too much. Best to stay inside and not get killed chasing dreams. I tried it mind you, so I know. Now I wouldn't trade the life I've led for nothing, but I'm lucky to still have a heart-beat. Most folks don't live long wandering around like I have.

A Thousand Different Realms—And More

There are people of all different shapes and colors around here. I think people develop an affinity for one another, and then, bang, the whole village ends up with hair the same color, or big noses, or what have you. But that's not the half of it.

No matter where you go, everyone has something to cling to, and something they got that makes them better. Sure, I'm a cynic, I guess, but as much as I'd bet that a Geregonian thug would crack your skull in for half of a florin, their songs are the most beautiful thing I've ever heard. Everyone has a way of doing things that's just a slightly different from the lumps down the road. And that's not superiority or foolishness, it's just a way of life, a way to survive in the Realms. It's what happens.

Some people are a lot better off than other people. Some cultures and cities either had enough to build on from the ruins of the Empire, or had canny newcomers come over to them with useful ideas. But most of the people in the world weren't so lucky at all. Most of them are poor and starving, eking out an existence from day to day.

But even so, all things aren't so bad. People have this way of making do, and that's something I've come to understand over the years. It's not always that they settle for things, its that people have this knack for finding beauty and warmth in the little things. Like how much I savored my first sip of tchoma tea after going so long without, you know.

The Gatherers

There are three types of cultures out there. Those that got it bad, those that got it good, and those that got it best. It's all it comes down to. I'd say the great majority of all the people in the Maelstrom are the ones who got it bad. Wandering nomads, beggars, and all that, using sticks to defend themselves from the wolves and Shrikes. Some of them keep to the roads, looking like a crowd of Venthi beggars on the ruined highways of the Empire. Others keep

to the wilds, travel by night, hunt down and kill what they need and keep going. Some of them have a trick or two, but in general they don't do so well. Most of these roamers, at least the ones I've met, have clans or tribes or some form of culture, some form of spiritualism, and some way of communicating with the outside world.

Strangely, I think a lot of them really don't mind their way of living, no matter how bad they got it.

They do have a few advantages: They have their band of people to stay with, they never have to pick up after themselves, and, weird thing, the Shrikes leave them alone for the most part. Shrikes don't seem to bother vagrants and drifters so much. That doesn't mean you can sleep easy, mind you.

The ones that keep to the wilds get a little crazy. A lot of them have lost all civilized ways—even their languages are evolving away from the Word. I've heard stories that some of them eat people. Carry the heads away like toys. Some of them even act a bit like the Shrikes, which makes quite a few people get a bit uneasy.

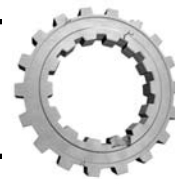
Shantytowns and Fiefdoms

Then there are the places the traveler sees, if they keep to the roads. At any crossroads, someone's put up a few shacks and given the place a name or two, maybe even built a two-story hovel out of foreign planked wood to keep travelers with a florin, a mark, or a guilder on a feather bed. Most of these places are pretty lawless, or got some tough guy or a warlord that keeps everyone in line somehow. Some of the places are whole villages, and do well on their own—some of 'em ancient and happy, like Fergon or Kislet.

They grow up a bit, maybe get walls around the hovels, and they call it a fiefdom or maybe a barony or something, or maybe Dacartha shows up down the river and looks out for them, and then disappears a few days later and for two generations they're a province of Dacartha and hear no hide nor hair of any Dacarthan for miles around. People have funny ideas about governments, you'll find, if you stray from your own village. The fortifications are a good thing, keep the idle and the headhunters and the plague bearers out, but they tend to attract shrikes like flies to a corpse. If this happens, keep within the walls, and hope the locals had sense enough to stockpile food and water.

Always someone or two in a town like that who has made some kind of trinket that's gonna save the world. They usually work for a while, before they fall apart. I knew a man in a high tower that

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created little purple guys to do his work. They used to walk around his tower with their noses to the ground, mumbling and occasionally bumping into the walls, and sometimes they'd even do what he told them to. Fascinating stuff. I wanted to keep one, but he wouldn't let me.

I still have a trinket I bought in the black markets under Dacartha. It always shows you which direction the city is in. It's awful useful, if you like going back to Dacartha, and got a few kids there like I do.

A Confederacy or So, and a Couple of Republics

The best places in the world are where everyone doesn't have it so bad, or at least pretends by hiding the dirty and the poor someplace out of sight. Dacartha's the famous place for that. Most everyone there can read, and there's a government and voting citizens and militia to muster and legions and everything. They have money and industry like the wheels of the prophet. Ships that end up back in their ports. Feather beds for just about everyone. The Empire must have been like that (only better, of course), but still that's pretty damn good all around.

Hellholes

There are times when a traveler travels alone, or sometimes even in a group, and they wander off the beaten path. Sometimes, far from the houses and the roads, what is real and true fades away. People get caught in places that are not places, times that are not times, where all that is real folds back on itself. In Picarni, when a traveler mentions these things, we called them Hellholes. Other people have different names for them. Scholars usually call them whorls, or eddies.

What I've heard of these things defies any attempt to give a truthful opinion about them. They are too different to be classified in any way. But there are a few common factors. First, they always seem to happen to small groups or lone travelers. This is one of the reasons why it's good not to travel alone. Second, you get a feeling of vertigo, or something like that, just before it happens—even though there may be no physical change in the environment. Third (and this one has tons of exceptions) people in whorls start to believe that everything happening is real—no matter how unusual they seem later, after some reflection. Last, they are usually accompanied by changes in the outside world, such as a new realm appearing down the road. Other than that, there are few similarities I can make out. Course, the professors at the College of the Gates, they told me this wasn't always true—they said it had to do more with barometric

pressure, or something like that. I don't get a chance to talk to professors very often, so I was a little unsure of what they were really trying to say—I mean, they've got fine minds and have studied all they can, but they can't even agree with each other half the time, so I don't know if they've really learned much more than me.

The eddies, they don't happen all of the time. In fact, it's really quite rare. But they're strange enough that when they do happen, it's certainly memorable. People tell tales of travelers getting caught in a hellhole and never being able to leave. Others tell tales of being caught for days, even months on end, and exiting in foreign lands. I would hazard to question most of them.

An Experience of Mine

Once I found myself in one of these things. I had gotten lost from my companions, and couldn't find them. I was in some mountains, and the terrain had shifted without me realizing it: The trees at our campsite, which had been like wiry, tall shrubs with small leaves, were different: They had mosses hanging from them, and they were more tangled, harder to hack. I barely realized that I might have been separated from my companions—and from the road I was traveling on—when I started feeling terribly dizzy.

Experiences of others

(from an account by Malik Reading)

"I was being pulled by my arms and dragged somewhere.

"I was dragged up the stairs to a small room, where there were several men in unusual clothing.

"They tortured me with knives. Knives that had been put into the fire until they glowed red-hot. They kept asking me something, but I couldn't understand them. I pleaded with them, screamed, asked for their mercy. But they just continued.

"Eventually, they grew tired of me, and had me dragged away to a cell, where I collapsed. Not a second had passed since I closed my eyes then I was back on the stairs, with the same men. It continued, over and over, no matter what I said.

"After what was possibly the seventh, or maybe the ninth time out, I spent a great time attempting to understand what they were saying and mimicking it to the best of my abilities. Eventually, I said something that they liked. I repeated this over and over, and then agreed with every question they asked.

"I was let go. Still, no one could speak my language. I walked outside the walls of the village, and down a dirt cart-track. When I found a road, I was back where I had started—back where I should have been before the whorl."



Eye of the Storm

I looked around, but I couldn't even think straight. It was like where I thought was 'down' had been pulled sideways, then, like a pendulum, it shifted the other way. I fell to my knees, and shut my eyes tightly.

Then there was singing. Strange singing like from a bird but it felt real human. I opened my eyes and I was in this gilded golden cage, high in a room, swinging just ever so slightly, the sun from a bright day outside pouring in. And no one there. Just this singing and this cage, and I tried to get out but when I moved the cage swung more, and I was terrified, and this singing just wouldn't stop. Finally I shouted for help. And then it all went away. Everything just went black. And I was back in the mountains, right next to the road.

Except it was a month later.

Mystic Forces

There are some real weirdos in this world. The Shroud, now they're just creepy. I don't understand what they want—I only know what the Pulmites told me. But the Shroud of Khem, now they're an ancient thing that's been around since the Empire. I don't even know if Khem's a place or not, but I usually steer clear of the Shroud. Not that they mess with you or anything, they just creep me out. They have these great big cloaks and hoods, and no one dares touch a hair on their head. Underneath the cloak they're just people, I guess, like you and me, but they don't act like it. They usually deal in politics and all, and you don't run into them much in the streets. But when you do, you don't stand in their way. I talked to one, though, and she was alright. Except the whole time, she was looking past me and thinking of other things.

But if you think the Shroud is scary, just try talking to a Stranger. Now them, they're just insane. They aren't really people anymore—like something changed them. Their eyes are clouded over, and they don't act natural, you know. I mean, the Shroud at least eats and drinks and seems to have a point, but the Strangers are like a touch of the storm walking among us.

The Mallatin, now, I don't know much except what I've been told. These are people, but almost like spirits. People say they're from another world, but I don't know about that. What other world? I've heard different things in my travels, but all told the Mallatin are best explained by the Sowl: they say they're from dreams, and they come over from the Dream World. It almost seems like it, from what I've heard. I'm still not sorry to have never seen one.

Places of Power

There are places in the realms that have been heard of by almost everyone. They live in the stories and the myths of the people and the travelers, and some of them actually exist. There is no way I can gather together all of the stories and figure out which is what.

These places have some kind of spiritual force which even the most pragmatic and obtuse person can feel. They feel strange, and the ones that I have visited made me feel like there was some kind of pit that had opened up in my stomach. Only the most foolhardy would attempt to visit them.

There's the Tower, of course, and this place I actually saw. In the middle of a shift it appeared right in front of me, and it was tall—tall to reach the sky. But as I looked up at it and kind of gaped in awe, it shifted away and I was somewhere else. The tower is like a stair to the skies, and in it many things are found. Some people say there's wisdom there, and others look for money and power. I heard one guy tell me it was Khem, and another told me it was the home of the Strangers. I wouldn't believe any of it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. Big as the world it is.

The desert of eternal sun's not really so mystic. But maybe that's just because it's a place, and you can find it. But it's a strange place, let me tell you. I mean, it's not just a desert, it's more like an oblivion. I been to Anton's Dig, and they have ruins there that make you wonder who the hell ever built something in a desert. Course, it probably wasn't a desert then. But who knows? Maybe the sand is all that's left of the Imperial City.

I've been to the temple at Sholcarta, too. Went there with a gang of folks looking for books. Books they said would change the world. Well, we found it. And we found a lot of trouble on the way. Not all of us made it back. But we didn't find anything there. We looked and looked, and then the night came and we didn't stick around. Strange place, those ruins.

The Valley, well, that's not a place I want to talk about. But since I already mentioned it, I might as well say a few words. The Valley of Shards, that's what it's called. It's the eye of the storm, as far as I can tell. No one ever comes back from there, that's for sure. I'd rather find myself back in a whorl anyday, or food for a tuskbeast. I've never seen the Valley—only dreamed of it. Place full of dead people and memories, with a blinding darkness in the middle like all the bad things twisted into one big mess. Well, like I said, I've never been, but I don't want to. If there's a bad place in the Maelstrom,

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then the Valley's it. I mean, some people told me it's fear and ignorance that make people scared of it, but I don't know what's wrong with being afraid of a bad thing.

Travel

People can spend most of their lives traveling, so you better get used to a few things. I've heard that horrible little phrase "Getting there is half the fun," and you know, it probably is true in memory, but there is a lot of grit and hardship along the way.

There are things you do and things you don't do. When embarking on a trip, make sure you are prepared for whatever is ahead. Find a rucksack that's comfortable to your shoulders, a good sturdy raincoat, maybe a walking stick, and whatever provisions you can cram in that might be needed. Food that keeps is good, for example, and maybe a used dogbound for company.

The good traveler has everything he might need within reach. Nifty trinkets are good to keep an eye out for when you're in the bazaars. Most are useless, but the ones that work are treasures.

The intelligent traveler also brings a handy weapon. Something light, balanced, and shiny is good. The perfect weapon looks threatening at a distance, but isn't a pain to carry. You'll notice most of the tribesmen have feathers or something to attach to the top of their spears or whatever they have, and there's a reason: Threats are an important part of having a weapon, and being able to threaten well from a distance is the best thing.

A strong and thick-bladed longknife (like a Dacarthan Leafblade) will do just fine. And it looks quite pleasing at the side of the hip as well. It's good for cutting branches and clearing away foliage too, or in a pinch, digging or other labor.

It is most advisable to stay with a crowd, even if its just to placate the superstitions—there are people who believe that lone travelers must be spirits, shapechangers, or just folks gone mad through the Maelstrom. But more important is to keep people around for your own sanity—without the people around you to verify whether what you are going through is real or unreal, it is very possible that the first shade or dream you come across could be the end of a bright career of tourism.

How not to Travel

Traveling across open land is a good thing to avoid doing at all costs. One false turn, and it may be a long time until you see a human face again. Or the faces you find are those of headhunters, or worse.

Keeping to the wilds is a good way to get hopelessly lost. Better to stick to landmarks and destinations that are known to the common people.

The old roads of the empire are the best ways to travel. Course, in some places they just end, or have been erased by the elements. You always know that wherever the road takes you, it has to lead back to civilization. Which civilization, well now there's a problem, but at least it's civilization.

And where there are roads, there are travelers of all shapes and sizes, and the majority of them are friendly. Sure, you gotta deal with the occasional bandits or highwaymen, and the occasional Shrike may be waiting in ambush, but really it's the only way to go.

If you're at sea, then find someone who knows the stars. The sea is just a great shifting mass anyway, so the storm makes a wreck of any maps pretty fast. But the sailors, they know their stuff, and they find their way in the end.

So keep warm, and don't go thinking you're some hero from a dogbound. Caution and a good blade will do you more good than foolishness. And let me tell you, adventure can be overrated. It always sounds good when someone's telling a good tale by the fire, but once you're out there it's just bad weather and hard ground to sleep on. But I wish you well on your travels, and with some luck and a good head you'll find your way. And who knows, but maybe one day we'll meet again and you'll be able to tell me some tales.



Eye of the Storm

Aisolin's Story from *The Long Passage*

There was a time, Aisolin knew, when he lived in a tall and widespread city, in a hot and dry climate. When Aisolin awoke nameless into the Maelstrom, he felt and knew that he had been given an opportunity to awake within himself. The hopeless anger he had known in the other world was gone, he thought. He easily made friends with others like himself, free from the shackles of a former life he had no memories of.

In time he came across a chance for renown, to make a name for himself and his friends. While fending off the raids of beasts known to the people as the Sekoreh, he and his companions first knew success. Then they found the hot bite of war when the tide turned, ambushed and far from home. Feeling the pain and his own steaming blood across his stomach, Aisolin embraced the end for both him and his comrades.

But he lived as his comrades lay dying. The Sekoreh took what they needed and left things behind, stripping him of all things that mattered—his friends, his hope, and the bracelet he still wore to remind him of a woman he held dear. And then Aisolin knew that the hopeless anger he felt so close to had never left. He came to the burnt ruins of the village he was supposed to protect, leaning on a broken saber, and stood there for a long while. Finally he left, to go in search of the Desert of Lost Solace, where he had heard he might be cleansed and left barren, to rediscover himself once again.

Alone, he walked the ruined roads of the old Empire towards a place known only in myth, to battle the greatest war, a war within himself.



Chapter Three

Cultures and the Thousand Realms

The Maelstrom extends past the edge of its own reality. Within the known world are two oceans and two continents. In the previous chapter, Mulligan told his tale of the world and his travels—but of all the world, Mulligan had only seen part.

This chapter presents the main regions of the known world, and describes in part some of the many countries and civilizations within it.

“Uncle, where does the world end?”

“Where you stop believing, my child, where you stop believing.”

REALM TO REALM: CULTURAL PARADIGMS

“reality is defined by what people believe”

The Maelstrom is made of many different realms, each with their own reality. These differences define the cultural reality, and therefore the *cultural affinity* of each realm. Each realm is distinguished from the other, but all are held together within the Maelstrom.

It's not that physics change or time moves differently, it's that the reality itself is different. The understanding of how things work and what the world is can be defined by what the people believe it to be. Their belief in turn is imposed on the reality itself, and helps shape it as the world shapes them.

The Dream World

The Dream World is a reality all its own. Unlike the disparate realms that comprise the Maelstrom, the Dream is something so different it can not be reached by travel. The Dream World may be a repository for all thoughts, a place where a collective gathering of all minds forges an ever-changing reality, accessible only through the veil of sleep.

“What relish is in this? How runs the stream?

Or I am mad, or else this is a dream.

Let fancy still my sense in Lethe steep;

If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep!”

Twelfth Night IV.i

Like any dream, the Dream World is different for everyone who enters it. The landscape is made of stray thought and emotional needs. Like the Sowl, some creatures believe they can control dreams, and in so doing bring more of themselves into the dream until they have fully crossed over.

Whorls may lead to the Dream, or they may be small catches of dream cast off and left to swirl in their own pockets of reality. The storm may stand between the Dream and the world, or even hold it inside. The *Dream Take* of the Natural Arts might also lead far enough to reach the Dream.

It may be that the Dream World lies between the Maelstrom and the world we call Earth. It may be that Earth is only a dream, taken in parts and made whole by the Newcomers.

“When the mind reels and drops the knowledge of fact that was one realm in order to embrace the reality of the new one, it may be that the old thoughts help shape the Dream World and are left there behind.”

Daedalion's Dream of the Serpent King

You might say the Dream World is made of fragments. Fragments of feelings, thoughts, memories, and maybe even a glimpse of what's to come. The world of Dream is a tussle of different ideas, fueled by different people. The Dream is not always happy, nor is it always grim—like the range of possibilities, it extends outward like a sea of tumbled thoughts.

The Side Realms

The Side Realms are places that exist alongside a Realm, in another reality—a shadow of a Realm. Like mirrors of a realm, they are dependent on the realm they mirror. The difference is that some things, and even creatures, are able to withdraw from the main realm and exist solely in the side realm. In this state they are able to witness all the events of the main realm (because all those events will be mirrored in the side realm) but they may not interact with anything or anyone.

Events and actions taken only in the side realm can not affect anything—only events taken in the main realm have an effect on both realms. So travelers to the side realm become phantoms, unnoticed and unseen by everyone. They may travel places in whatever manner they normally can, and witness events, but they have no tangible form in this state.



Eye of the Storm

Spirits are things that dwell only in the side realm, and when they can enter the main realm they gain the power to affect things. Legends say the Kenratha have this power, as well as the Shroud, and the Mallatin.

THE SHIFTS

Affinities bind a region to itself and keep a semblance of order. Places have some form of connection to other places and characteristics that keep them together through the shifts of the Maelstrom. Some towns are always close by, some rivers always run to the same ocean, some roads always take you to the same place.

When places shift, they move from one place to another. They shift when the storm comes, or when the mists rise up. And sometimes people just realize that the horizon has changed.

Most realms stay in the same region, and most regions stay in the same part of the world. Just not always in a pattern that anyone can understand.

Place Affinities

The Maelstrom reality is not governed by the same laws as other worlds. Within the storm the world shifts and changes, and few things stay the same. But though chaotic and unpredictable, there are patterns in the Maelstrom.

These patterns are called *place affinities*, because though random there are relationships among the places of the Maelstrom that preserve some continuity. With the remnants of the Imperial roads and an understanding of the world and its affinities, even travel is not the impossible task it appears to be.

The realms in the Maelstrom share special relationships with each other, as well as certain ideas and landscapes. Certain places or ideas are strong enough to be the central focus for others, like the hub of a wheel around which other places shift or spin. One place may have an affinity for several things or places, and so as they shift, it shifts in relation to those affinities. The stronger the affinity, the more likely it will be the focus of the place. A place may have an affinity for some other place, a type of landscape, and a type of weather, as well as affinities for certain cultures. Without any affinities the place will shift randomly, and these places are called *Lost Lands* or even thought to be *Whorls* and *Hell-Holes*. They are rarely populated.

The strength of the affinity is rated from weak to mild to strong.

The regions and places of the Maelstrom usually preserve their position relative to the poles. There is a magnetic pull to north as well, and with these two constants there are some predictable aspects of the world. Climate is constant as well, which would indicate that places never move too far from their relation to the equator—though there are places that have slipped

from the Cold Sea to the Desert of Eternal Sun, or jungles that find themselves on the peaks of the High Mountains. These are places whose affinities have *changed*, and are no longer anchored by the same forces as they were. But affinities rarely change, and crops are planted and grown, and cattle raised, and water and rain in the expected amounts for those who pay attention. And if you don't wander too far, life can almost seem normal.

When the shifts come, they reshuffle the world. The realms settle into a new pattern, preserving their affinal relations for the most part. The stronger the affinity, the more likely it will be preserved. A realm with a strong affinity for the region of Critée will almost always be found in Critée. Mild and Weak affinities are more likely to be broken, but often all affinities can be preserved and still allow a shift. If that same realm with an affinity for Critée has a Mild Affinity for Bad Weather, then it can still find bad weather in Critée. And often a realm will bring with it the affinities it holds—like Bad Weather or Good Crops. Unless an affinity is outside the realities of a new shift, then they are most often preserved. In this way if a realm with a Strong Affinity for Tropical Weather is somehow shifted to Souther, then the weather in that part of Souther is warmer than usual—the realm has pulled its affinity with it. If that same realm were shifted to the Shelf, then the Tropical Weather is definitely outside the reality of the frozen wastes of the Shelf and the Affinity is lost while the realm stays there. Since Strong Affinities are rarely broken, however, it would be unusual for a realm like this to move outside regions with the appropriate weather.

Regions

Regions are places larger than the individual realms that make them up, but like realms they share many affinities. Regions have weather and terrain affinities that keep them together, and may have other affinities toward other characteristics. It may be that over time regions slowly shift into different parts or drift together to form new regions.

In the known world, there are two oceans, the South Sea and the Cold Sea. In the South Sea there is Adolla, the Swarm, Alenea, and the Rim. In the Cold Sea there is the Reef, Souther, and the Shelf. There are two continental land masses that often touch, called Nether and Farlong. The land between the two is called the Fold. On Nether there is the Anterior, the Veldt, the Desert of Endless Sun, and the Great Mountains. On Farlong there is Critée, the Old Mountains, and Edge. These names are what the common person calls them, and are as close to universal as a name can be. In each place these regions have their own name, their own identity, and their own story. These are just the main areas—in the shifts of the storm there are a thousand realms.

Maelstrom Storytelling



Realms without Regions

Some realms are known to move between different regions. The most popular of which is Dacartha, whose expansionist ambitions are constantly thwarted by its movement between the thousand realms. Dacartha, like some other realms, has no relationship toward a specific region, but relationships towards other characteristics.

Traveling Between the Realms

With the shifts, finding your way can be extremely hard. In Chapter Six travel is addressed in the section called *Travel and getting Somewhere*.

A passage from *Astronomy*, by Winsforth, D.S.C.:

“The skies over the world are filled with stars, and as such can be used to navigate. But the world below still changes, and so the skills of astronomy are more speculative than practical. If the world is a planet, and it has an orbit, then it follows a bi-elliptical pattern around twin suns, rotating evenly along its own north-south axis. This would mean that it winds in a figure-eight pattern between two suns, both in orbit around each other, spinning opposite to the rotational pattern of the planet. For half the year, as it passes between the two suns, as one sun sets the other sun rises. Regardless of why, there is always a north and a south, and the suns always seems to move east to west.”

The Regions

This is a brief look at the main known regions of the world. There are other places past the edge of known regions, as well as whole new (or forgotten) regions that appear at times.

ADOLLA

A small collection of volcanic islands deep in the South Sea, to the east of the known world. Adolla is tropical, with one active volcano, and removed from the rest of the world. It is home to the Adollan spider-people.

ALENEA

A gathering of volcanic islands in the South Sea, Alenea shifts radically in the storm. It is home to the Aleneans, who are a warring tribe of humans. Like Adolla, Alenea is a tropical region, but it never shifts close to Adolla.

THE ANTERIOR

Full of rolling hills and temperate forests, the Anterior is home to most of the human realms of the world. Extremely large, the Anterior even has a region within it called Timberlund that shifts within the Anterior.

With good summers and cold winters, the Anterior has a fair share of creatures to hunt, timber to build with, and agreeable farmland. The stones of the Anterior have built half the world, and ruins of the Empire can be found across the region.

THE LEGEND OF THE NIACHI

(as told by Kreeg, boatswain of the whaler Knifebeam)

“Of all the violent folktales of the northern whalers, there are none more chilling than the sighting of a strikingly painted craft, gliding in a haze of mist across distant pack ice. Known throughout the Cold Sea as the ghost ship Niachi, it is whispered to be the manifestation of cruel justice among the Iceblade League.

“We were running heavy with blubber, just two nights sail back to Port Smiley (Finner’s boat was not so lucky). Our lookout spotted a cargo sloop, listing badly and rudderless in the wind. The seas were picking up, but we had no room for castaways. I signaled to Finner, but his mood was snarly. ‘Twas nothing but bad hunting for his crew all season. The dozen cargomen pleaded for his mercy as his lighter ship passed on their port side, and their abandoned screams still haunt me to this day.

“Poor Finner had no chance to sound his final cry. Out of nowhere she loomed- The Niachi! Faster than an Alenean rammer, and silent as dreams. Big and mean she was, with weird black stripes and not a mast nor funnel on that slimy hull -No you scribbling Venth-hole, there wasn’t a living soul on that thing! Just this icy mist around her, and a cold I felt deep in my liver. Like a harpoon through a tuskier she swamped the boat of heartless Finner—just devoured a hunter built for rough work in this freezing hell.

“...When the Niachi takes you, she does it for a reason. She strikes and fades into fog where there was blue sky a moment before. The funny thing is, it knew I was running a full load. One more body aboard would have swamped us. Instead, it sniffed out Finner and dragged him down to the bottom. There he suffers, with all the bastards who turn away Those In Need.”



Eye of the Storm

THE COLD SEA & THE SHELF

Far to the north there is an ocean large as the world, called the Cold Sea. Past it lies the Shelf, a vast apparent wasteland with sharp, rocky peaks over barren snowswept plains. The plant-life that survives here is sparse, the summers are short and pleasant, but with the haunting of a long winter not far behind.

The Shrikes here are called Talloks, and make life hard for the humans and other races that fight for survival. War with the Talloks is an ongoing part of the Cold Sea and the Shelf.

The whale-oil trade is strong, and the oil is prized far and beyond for lamp oil and a thousand other uses. The mountains mine gold, copper, iron, and other ores including coal.

And there are tales of a civilization trapped in ice, a whole city from the time of the Second Age of the Imperium.

THE CRESCENT

In a semi-circle around the Swarm lie the islands of the Crescent. They serve as a natural barrier that protects the Swarm from the world beyond. Except for the Kril, few ships pass beyond the Crescent.

Temperate in climate, the Crescent has long summers and brief winters. The storms that plague the islands make passage difficult for those who don't know the way.

CRITEE

In the shadows of the Old Mountains lies Critee, tucked within the long arms of the foothills. With thick underbrush and poor land for farming, few people live in Critee. There are few large game animals in Critee, and like the tuskbeasts that run wild within it, most of the edible creatures are violent and dangerous to hunt.

THE DESERT OF ENDLESS SUN

"Is the desert a region in and of itself, or just simply one where no life can survive, so no accurate observations can be made? Or is it, like Dacartha, a realm unstuck in the firmament, and traveling through the Maelstrom without rhyme or reason? I have found no real answers."

from Gray's Travel Notes

The Desert is most often found south of the Veldt, but they say that it is just as easy to stumble into it from the Anterior, or any of the other places of Nether. But some people find it from Edge as well.

The Remains of The Darig Civilization

A few of the Empire roads stretch into the desert for a ways, some of them disappearing under the sands. A few lead through, or to other places along the way. The ruins along the roads, bathed in sand for centuries, are assumed to be the remnants of the Darig nation. The Dacarthises say it fell with the Empire. The Ismolahti have records of an enduring war that was waged between the Darig and the Ismolahti. The Alliance believes the Darig civilization was destroyed when the region turned into the desert that is there now. What truth there is is hidden under the sand. Even the Darig don't seem to know what befell them.

The Desert itself has no vegetation. There is no night, because in the desert the Second Sun is always at midpoint. Darkness only comes from the dust storms that sweep and decimate anything standing. Those who manage to exist have never seen a nighttime. They find refuge in the caves and tunnels that dot the landscape. Some of these places have been worked and built, lost remnants of older realms. Ancient wells are supposed to be hidden under the sands, some still reachable through the grottos of the stone bedrock.

The Desert of Endless Sun is testimony to the fury and power of the Maelstrom—power gone horribly wrong for the people who once lived here.

Inhabitants

Few creatures live in the desert. No one can escape the blistering heat and the winds for long. The Shrikes and the Darig appear to be able to survive the winds and the heat, but no one can survive without food or water. And with the shifts there is no straight path.

EDGE

The Edge runs along the eastern shores of Farlong, in the shadows of the Old Mountains. Home to Ismolaht and the Geregon Citystates, roaming the Edge can occasionally lead to the Desert of Endless Sun on Nether. Arid to the north (Ismolaht) and more temperate to the south (Geregon), Edge is defined mostly by the ocean it borders and the mountains beyond. The sea, which is to the east of the known world and between the South and Cold seas, is called the Edge Sea. There is no known land past the Edge Sea, and few people travel it.

THE FOLD

The Fold is a land bridge between Nether and Farlong. Near sea level, the Fold is lightly forested and mild in climate. A variety of animals cross the Fold between Nether to Farlong, which like the shifts helps maintain the world's cross-pollination.

The unusual part of the Fold is that it often shifts away, breaking the land bridge and allowing the two seas to meet.

Maelstrom Storytelling



THE GREAT MOUNTAINS

Scraping the sky, the Great Mountains are the highest known mountains in the world. Snow-capped year round, they rise out of Nether and form a barrier between the southern and northern lands, much like the Old Mountains in Farlong.

The Great Mountains encompass a large portion of Nether, and roll into other regions with the foothills. The mountains are known for the cities of the Sowl and the Selepri Citystates.

OLD MOUNTAINS

Though lower than the Great Mountains, these hills are called the *spine of the world* by the people who live here. Sparsely populated, the Old Mountains separate Edge from Crittee, and form a crescent that cradles Crittee on three sides.

THE RIM

At the edge of the world, at the southernmost edge of the South Sea, there are a series of islands called the Rim. They stand up like teeth from the water, and no one has ever found a reason to sail any further. Temperate in climate, the Rim is home to the barons of the Rim Kingdoms, so far from the world that few nations ever conflict with their needs.

THE SOUTH SEA

"Now the Sea, that's the Trade Alliance. That's all it's about, as far as I can tell. You got the Geregonians and their fancy uniformed navy, and the Diodeians and their lot, and the Ismolahti or what's left of that nation. Course you got the Kril and all, and they ain't chopped liver, but all of them they bow to this Trade Alliance. It's not a country or nothing, but it might as well be. It has more ships and more money than I've seen. And except for the Dog Throng and the Black Pirates, ain't nobody with the guts to mess with them."

"But the place is like paradise. Rich too. If you go far enough you find these little jungled islands with the whitest sand. And beautiful, I mean beautiful little towns. Even the fortresses overhead have a charm and a feel for them. All different, mind you—not like there's any one way to things in this world. But I miss it sometimes. Dangerous and uncertain life on those seas, but close to the Prophet as I'll ever come."

Mulligan

The South Sea has tropical weather, jungles on many of its volcanic islands, and is home to Geregon, the Trade Alliance, and the Kril. Sea-trade is busy and prosperous, and with it the danger of the Black Pirates or the Dog Throng.

Jungles rich in fruit dot the long coastlines of the South Sea. This sea is as close to paradise as the Maelstrom gets: The weather is perfect, when not storming, the water is clear and

inviting and usually just the right temperature. Because of this, the coasts of the South Sea are populous.

SOUTHER

On the southern side of the Cold Sea is a stretch of land called Souther. The last hospitable land on the Cold Sea, Souther is the gateway to Nether and the Great Mountains.

TIMBERLUND

Timberlund is a place in the Anterior, a region within a region, that finds itself almost always in the large expanse of the Anterior. With the same climate, it is darkly forested with tall trees and underbrush, and few roads pass through it. Mostly unsettled and untamed, Timberlund is home to a variety of creatures, as well as a few settlements of people tucked among the hills.

THE VELDT

The Veldt is a vast plain of high grass. Wild with tigers, antelope, and any other creature well suited to the climate, the Veldt has winding rivers and few roads. Famous for the Kenratha, the Veldt is also the home of the Belzaine Caliphate.

THE WASTE

Like Timberlund, The Waste is part of the Shelf. At the far side of the Shelf the land changes to a desolate land of ice, wind, and snow. What lies past it is unknown. The people of the Shelf don't venture into it without good reason, and other than the Udiaians and the arctic creatures of the deep shelf, only explorers make their way into the Waste.

The mythic city of Albatton may well lie in the deep Wastes.

Ships

Most people identify vessels by naming them.

The Kril name their vessels only by type, of which there are over forty different varieties by their definition.

It doesn't seem to matter that many ships have the same name this way—the Kril are able to distinguish somehow. The Geregonians name all their war vessels after their home port, such as Milene's *Sixth* and Geregon's *Ninth*. The Dog Throng names their ships after stars. Other people name them for sea creatures, mythical beasts, or their true love.



Eye of the Storm

The Realms

This is a brief look at many of the Thousand Realms. There are many more, and room for each of these to be expanded and developed to suit the narrative being told.

The name used for the people of each realm follows the name of each realm.

Adolla-Noi (adollan)

Relationships: Adolla, seclusion, tropics

Adolla (strong): Adolla-Noi and Adolla-Lin are always in Adolla in the South Sea

Seclusion (mild): the Adollan islands are usually off the beaten path

Tropics (strong): the islands are volcanic and the weather is always tropical

Arts: easy

Sciences: hard

In the volcanic islands of the South Sea, far past the Rim, there is a small series of islands called the Ileynas by the Trade Alliance. There is a race of people that live in the depths of the volcanic caves and lava rock that form the greater part of Adolla-Noi. These are the Spider-people, or the Adollans, and theirs is a secretive, predatory world alien to the man kingdoms and Kril alike.

The Adollans have little trade or contact with the outer world, except through the outpost town of Tarnygon on Adolla-Lin.

There is no evidence of the Shroud in Adolla.

Adolla-Noi

This island is formed by a huge, active volcano, and is the largest of the several islands around it. Together they form Adolla, which can be seen from afar by the smoke from Adolla-Noi's volcanic peak. The Adollan cities lie deep under the mountains, in crevices, tunnels and caverns where they build their nests and homes. There is an outpost, built long ago, on Adolla-Lin, which lies on the edge of the island series, and it is the only formal link to the Adollans and the cities of Adolla-Noi.

A story among some sailors is that the Strangers come here to die. Why that would be is not explained in the story.

Adolla-Lin

Built long ago on this island by the Trade Alliance, there is a stone walled village (Tarnygon) on an outcrop of rock. For reasons that are not publicly known, the Adollans do not come

to this island, which may have been the reason the outpost was built here. There are under a hundred people who live in this town, mostly human, a few Kril, some odd races, but no Venth. In the center of the square is an Imperial obelisk, whose inscription in the Word says only "May the Summerland Watch Over Us."

Few boats come here, and little trade transpires. The Kril and the Trade Alliance seem to have abandoned it. The Dog Throng and the Black Pirates are occasionally docked here, and it is home to other outcasts and fugitives as well. There is no constable or legal system, but there is a church to the Little Sun.

On the hillside of the tiny island, lost in the jungle, is a large disk of stone, on its side, some 9 feet high. The side that faces the beach has the likeness of the volcano of Adolla-Noi on it, erupting, and the back has a symbolic icon of the Queen Mother, who rules over the Adollans. The villagers of Tarnygon won't say what it means.

Contact with Adolla-Noi comes in the form of a small boat the Tarnygons claim is the only vessel allowed to land on Adolla-Noi.

Albatton (albattoni)

Relationships: mythic, the shelf, dreams

Mythic (mild): few people know if Albatton actually exists, and there is very little evidence

Shelf (mild): Albatton is assumed to be on on the Shelf

Dreams (mild): Albatton is close to the Dream World, and is often dreamed about

Arts: easy

Sciences: hard

It may be just a fable, but Albatton appears in many cultural myths. This is, or was, a great city of ice. It was home to a race of people called the Maeli (or the Kvinn, among other names), who some say were spirits in human form. They lived like ghosts or dreams, and shared little with other races. In a variety of tales, from the Whaling Guild to the Trade Alliance, lost sailors would find themselves in the icy spires of Albatton where they were nursed to health in a dreamstate and then returned to the world.

The Udaians see the Albattoni (whom they call Maeli) as the ancestors of the Uobi, and generally consider it bad luck to talk about Albatton.

In a passage of the contemporary dogbound *Melzter's Journey*, the protagonist finds Albatton under the sea, enclosed by a dome of ice.

Maelstrom Storytelling



Alenea and the Hegemony of the Hundred Islands (alenean)

Relationships: Alenea, shifts, tropics, volcanos

Alenea (mild): the Hegemony is always in Alenea, except for the islands that shift away

Shifts (mild): Alenean islands tend to shift, both away from Alenea and each other

Tropics (mild): the weather is almost always tropical

Volcanoes (mild): the volcanos on the islands are often active

Arts: easy

Sciences: very hard

Alenea is situated near the Fold in what appears to be the closest thing to a stable passage between the North and South Seas. The volcanic island chain sits in a strategically important location within the Thousand Realms. The central island of Hanaku is the largest known island in the realms, with four active and one extinct volcano present. To the north of Hanaku, the main islands of the chain are Kaila, Hatzanao, Wenezia, and Tzaulo. Wenezia and Tzaulo often lie to the north of the Fold, and smaller islands that exist in the Fold, shifting frequently. Only one large island, Nautzopa, sits to the south of Hanaku.

The Alenean tribe rules over all other tribes, from the great city of Kaikalea. From this city in the heart of the extinct volcano of Hanaku, they gather tribute in the form of trade goods and sacrifices from the lesser tribes. All the tribes of the islands are an aggressive, warlike society, and know their place under the rule of the Aleneans.

Whenever these islands find themselves moved to other locations in the Thousand Realms, they set up their “tribute gathering” in that part of the world. Seen as savages, no nation in the South Seas has been safe from the Alenean’s when their islands shift into view.

Wandering Islands and Human Sacrifices

Land within the islands themselves stays stable, as does the relationship between the larger islands of Hanaku, Tzaulo, Wenezia, Hatzanao, Kaila, and Nautzopa. The lesser islands, however, have been known to be moved to far sides of the South Sea by the shifts. Instead of being disconcerted by these events, the residents go about their lives as though still ruled over by the Alenean tribe. “Tribute gathering” raids are begun, and the tribal sorcerer-priests (the *Kahuatzal*) prepare the *heiau* (temple) for human sacrifice.

Taboo states that exactly nine victims are to be sacrificed over the course of a week. Sacrifices are also performed to any live volcano on the islands. It is understood by the Aleneans that the gods of the four volcanoes on Hanaku have always been sated by these sacrifices, but gods on other islands still occasionally unleash their fury on their islands.

Foreign Relations

The Aleneans, with their marauding, are not well received by many of the other cultures within the Thousand Realms. Relations with the Geregion Citystates are particularly bad. The ships of the Geregion Navy and the catamarans of the Hundred Islands usually attack each other without provocation.

Like all other powers, the Hegemony of the Hundred Islands bows to the Trade Alliance. Almost more so. There is an odd symbiotic relationship between these two entities which transcends the cultural differences. There is speculation in Geregion that the Trade Alliance has some piece of knowledge so vile that the Aleneans bend before the Alliance.

The Alenean tribe benefits from this relationship as well. A major Trade Alliance outpost, Agos, lies on the south coast of Hanaku. Agos is practically a small city, surrounded by the tribal world of Alenea but built of stone in the likeness of Dacartha.

The ships of the Whaling Guild are also well received. The islands of Tzaulo and Wenezia both have ports where the various ships of the Cold Sea are allowed to winter and trade their oils.

Religion

The religion of the Alenean tribes revolves largely around sacrifices to their gods, who are thought to inhabit the active volcanoes throughout the islands. The caste system and the taboos are carefully watched over by the *kahuatzal*, who are the sorcerer/priests at the top of the caste system. Sitting in their temple complexes known as *heiau*, the *Kahuatzal* are responsible for performing sacrifices, seeing that the various taboos remain enforced, and maintaining the schooling of the young to preserve the myths and calendars of their people.

Caste System

KAHUATZAL: The highest caste of the Aleneans, the *Kahuatzal* are the final arbiters, though they rarely lord their power over the *Alii*. This is one of the two castes where membership is predicated upon ability, not bloodline. All members of the caste are practitioners of the Natural Arts, and all members of the *kahuatzal* remain celibate and chaste. *Kahuatzal* chosen from the *Alii* are the nominal leaders of the caste, and many of the priests attempt to become *Kuao* as well. Note that it is taboo for *Kahuatzal* to even come into contact with a Practical Scientist, let alone learn their theories.



Eye of the Storm

Alii: The highest of the purely hereditary castes, many members of the *Alii* proper attempt to become *Kahuatzal* or *Kuao*. As those left do not fill priestly or military roles of any kind, they have become bureaucrats and caretakers of society.

Kuao: Those who enter the warrior caste through the yearly games keep their original caste, and must marry within that caste. The yearly games are great affairs, only open to those who have taken at least three prisoners for sacrifice. Each tribe has an organization for the *Kuao* of their tribe, these organizations are called lodges, and are considered the elite unit of each tribe.

Maka'ainana: These are the peasants and artisans who make up the bulk of the populace of the Alenean's sprawling empire. Many attempt to enter the *Kuao* and *Kahuatzal* castes.

Merchants: There is no word in the Alenean language for merchants. Once the Aleneans returned from Exile, there developed a new caste: the merchant classes (who had done very well under the Empire). This caste is just marginally above the *Kaitza*, but has many freedoms not allowed to the other castes. It is rare for a merchant to want to enter the *Kuao* or *Kahuatzal* castes.

Kaitza: The *Kaitza* are the unclean, not subject to taboo, and are therefore able to perform tasks no one else is allowed to.

Tribal "Castes"

The Aleneans have set up a system of four *tribal castes* (plus the *Kaitza*) in order to more efficiently administer their empire. While the Alenean tribe sits at the top rung by itself, there is only the slightest of difference between the status of the Alenean tribe and the six tribes that shared their Exile. Five of the "ruler tribes" oversee the greater islands, while the sixth administers Hanaku for the Aleneans. Within the two highest rungs of the caste system, there is only a small percentage of *maka'ainana*, who are mostly *Kuao* as well. There are no merchants among the seven top tribes, as this caste was not present before the

Foreigners, unless under the blazon of the Trade Alliance or in a Whaling Port, are in an unusual predicament while on the islands. While Naturalists and Nobles will be treated with respect by all those below their "caste," even the slightest infraction against the taboo system will very quickly get you fed to a volcano. Foreign merchants are treated with even less respect than native ones, and almost any excuse will be found to sacrifice them. Newcomers are considered to be suited for nothing but sacrifice.

As long as a foreigner stays within one of the two Whaling Ports, or Agos, they are safe from the laws of the island—as are any representatives of the Trade Alliance, no matter where they go.

Exile. Next come the *administrative tribes*, those tribes who were rewarded for initially siding with the Alenean Alliance during the Wars of Unification. The more important of these tribes were given a smaller island to run, while others were given areas of the main islands to administer for the *rulership tribes*. They have a decent proportion of merchants in their tribes, more so than the *ruled tribes*, even. All other tribes are considered *ruled tribes*, and make up the bulwark of society of the Hundred Islands. These tribes have very few *Alii*. (They were wiped out during the Wars of Unification.) As stated before, the *Kaitza* don't have tribes, and can be viewed as a "metatribe" filling a role right under that of the *ruled tribes*.

Taboo

Taboo, as much as a set of restrictions, are a system of keeping the balance between the holy and the mundane within a society. For example, it is dangerous for the *Maka'ainana* to experience the level of holiness of the *Kahuatzal*, if they are not prepared to handle it.

Taboos can cover such things as how one speaks to an inferior or superior, what kinds of food one can eat, or what sorts of activities one may engage. Some tribes may not engage in certain activities; others may be able to perform those tasks, but only at specific times if the right sacrifices have been made first.

It is up to the *Kahuatzal* who are also *Kuao* to enforce taboo. Depending upon the taboo broken, a person may be burned, drowned, strangled, or clubbed to death. It is the rare taboo that is not punishable by death.

Heiau

The walled temples, or *Heiau*, of the *kahuatzal* are more than just temples. While they do contain prayer areas and sacrificial altars, they function as the center of all activities performed by the *kahuatzal*. Schools and religious courts take up approximately one quarter of the complex, the functional areas another quarter. The other half of the *heiau* is the personal domain of the *Kahuatzal*. Living quarters, libraries and research facilities for the *Kahuatzal* and their students take up the most space in these areas, but the most important are the thermally-heated pools that represent the apex of holiness and cleanliness for the *Kahuatzal*. The chambers are made entirely of basalt, and braziers of sandalwood incense cover the pillars that hold up the ceiling. There is always one side, towards the volcano, that is open to the air, and that is the side with coolest pools. The hottest pools are truly steaming, and it is a great act of courage and devotion to actually enter them.

Maelstrom Storytelling



There are three distinct types of myth within the religious framework of the islands. Cultural Myths are those stories, like the creation of the islands or Hanaku's sacrifice, and remain the same from tribe to tribe. The Mandalas that tell these stories hang on the walls of every heiau. Tribal Myths are only told within the tribes of their origin, and do not affect tribes other than their own. (There are cases of tribes having the same or parallel myths, but just as frequently, a tribe's mythology will contradict those of a tribe a few miles down the road.) The only exception are the Alenean Myths, the last category. The myths of the Alenean tribe, and their sea-serpent god, Alutza, have been foisted upon all the other tribes by the conquerors. These myths, for the most part, serve to reinforce the Alenean right to rule. Central to this third category of stories is the Myth of Exile, portrayed in mandala form at the gate of every heiau within the Hegemony of the Hundred Islands.

The Myth of Exile is the story of the coming of the Empire to the islands, and the subjugation that followed. The Alenean tribe would not submit, and the Empire confined the entire tribe to the great island south of Nautzopa. As this was in the days before the god Hanaku sacrificed himself to allow the islands that were his children to have a sense of stability (some say, due to the loss of his favorite nephews, the Aleneans), when the island disappeared shortly after, it did not reappear for many years, and was in fact cast adrift. It took all the might of Kaikalea, a great Kahuatzal/Alii to keep their people together, but they became stronger. When the

island returned to its original place twenty years later, the Aleneans convinced the Imperial Governor that they could behave. Within the month, the Aleneans had begun a great rebellion that tore down many of the strange constructions the Empire had begun. The Imperial Governor and his eight chief engineers cast a great spell that flung the island back into the Storm for another seventy years. Along with the Aleneans were the eight tribes that had supported their rebellion. It was during this time the god Alutza first came to the Aleneans and guided them slowly back. One of the other tribes was wiped out entirely, and another deserted the quest, taking up residence in a realm far-removed from ours.

When the seven tribes returned from their exile, things had changed. Hanaku was dead, and four new gods had raised new homes on Hanaku's island. These gods were the guardians of Hanaku's island. The Empire was gone, but most of the remaining tribes were in such a sorry state, they knew not what had happened to the old Empire. It was not easy for Alutza to convince the four new gods that one tribe (i.e. the Aleneans and their allies) needed to unite them all, but he tricked the other four. The Aleneans and their allies left their island and conquered all the other tribes. Their island prison, Tziehau, disappeared shortly after they abandoned it, and has not been seen since. The Kahuatzal claim that when the island returns, it will be the Imperial Governor and his engineers who will inhabit it, and this time, the Aleneans will win the war...

Kaikalea

In the heart of the dead volcano, Hanaku, on the island of the same name, sits the great city of Kaikalea. The city sits in the middle of a lake by the same name. While there were many islands in the lake to begin with, many artificial, floating islands have been created as well, and raised platforms and roads cross the areas between the islands. In the very center is the great *Heiau* of the Alenean tribe, with the Great Obelisk of the Empire allowed to stand to remind the Aleneans of their history. The great step-pyramid of the Aleneans sits on the same plaza with the *heiau*, and it is from here that the Alenean *Alii* and *Kuao* manage their empire.

ANTON'S DIG

Relationships: desert, well, Dacartha, ruins

Desert (strong): Anton's Dig is always in the Desert of Endless Sun

Well (strong): there is always a well, which is almost never dry

Dacartha (mild): Anton's Dig has a cultural tie with Dacartha and things Dacarthan

Ruins (mild): in addition to the actual ruins, new sites are often found near the Dig, as well as new layers of the old city under the present excavations

Arts: hard

Sciences: easy



Eye of the Storm

The town of Anton's Dig lies around the ruins of an ancient city at the edge of the Desert of Endless Sun. Originally an archeological expedition under the Dacarthan Antonius, the original tent-town grew into a small city over time. Centered around a well that dates to the ruins themselves, the town is a gathering spot for many different peoples. It is also one of the last watering holes, deep into the desert.

Antonius brought Venth slaves with him for labor, and now the town is a haven for Venth from all parts of the world. The archeological dig itself is mostly abandoned, Antonius having dragged off most of what he found years ago. There are Darig here as well, trying to prove that the ruins are actually from their lost kingdom, as well as Ismolahti trying to do the same. With loose laws and little structure, Anton's dig is home to drifters and criminals as well as the assorted prospectors, professors, and caravan merchants. The regiment that looks after the Dig and enforces the law is the Dacarthan 5th Garrison, from the Foreign Expeditionary Forces that form a sort of Foreign Legion for Dacartha.

The Belzaine Caliphate

(belzaine)
Relationships: Veldt, Trade Routes, Prosperity

Veldt (strong): Belzaine is always in the Veldt, with Arn Muhr lying somewhere near the Central Veldt

Trade Routes (mild): trade throughout the Caliphate is strong, and most roads through the Veldt lead past Arn Muhr.

Prosperity (weak): the Caliphate is relatively rich and thrives off the trade routes of the Veldt

Arts: hard

Sciences: easy

The people of Belzaine are human, with dark bronze skin, dark hair, and eyes with a metallic tint. They use tinctures to adorn their skin, and unlike most human the Belzaine do not speak the Common Word. They have a breed of fairly intelligent, domesticated monkeys that serve them for life.

The city of Arn Muhr rests on a crossroads of old empire roads that split five ways. In the center of the city, the roads meet in a five-pointed star, and an obelisk rises up towards the sky.

The Belzaine people worship the One, a solitary creator who speaks through messengers and proxies and grants the ability to work miracles through the power of faith. The prophets of the One believe in moral certainty and a need for order. Great mathematicians and theoreticians come from Belzaine, all hailing the teachings of the man who brought the word of the One

to them—a man referred to in their holy book simply as the Prophet. All the teachings of the Prophet are written in a tome called the Uoratt, which all the Belzaine people study as they are raised.

They are known for being competitive, clean, and unswervingly loyal. On the flipside, they are often seen as patriarchal, hierarchical, anachronistic and bullheaded. Regardless, they are an aggressive trading nation that spreads its brightly colored caravans out across the Veldt toward the rest of the world.

Belzaine is a place of many splendors. Arn Muhr is an especially large, sprawling, clean city—a city with towers that look out to the plains of grass that stretch in every direction. The huge obelisk at the crossroads has five sides instead of four, each facing a different road. Called the Obelisk of the Eye, it's the only known Imperial obelisk to have five sides, if it's from the Empire at all. In the main plaza, where the Great Bazaar is held, there is a huge stone cog; this gear stands half submerged, its axle just below ground level. Every 63 years the city holds the Festival of the Wheel when the gear moves: The wheel moves on its axle one notch, then resettles.

The Black Pirates

Relationships: South Sea, Storms, Kril

South Sea (strong): the Black Pirates are in the South Sea, often at the edge of the Crescent

Storms (Strong): the Black Pirates are often accompanied by storms, and manage to stay afloat and sail through even the worst ones

Kril (strong): though exiled, the Black Pirates are still part of the Kril, and share a variation of their cultural affinity

Arts: easy

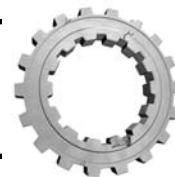
Sciences: easy

The Black Pirates are Kril dissidents who live nomadically on the South Sea, most notably in the Outer Crescent and the Rim. They live by trade, piracy, and tribute, and war constantly with the Alliance, the Rim Kingdoms, Geregion, and Alenea.

"Among the Kril there are those who do not follow the Law. They follow the Sea, and reject all things that have tainted it. The Law is one such thing. When the Prophet comes, he will redeem them and they will be raised to rule over the Inner Swarm."

As outcasts, they live by piracy in the Outer Swarm and Rim, and make forays deep into the lands of the man-peoples. Some say they have allies among the Sekoreh, and work with the Strangers. They have powerful skiffs they paint with black tar, and they raid the coasts and sell their wares to a variety of buyers.

Maelstrom Storytelling



They have treaties with the Dog Throng, and together they have held off the Trade Alliance for hundreds of years.

Kril of the Black Pirates are known to paint or even carve symbols into their carapace, like stylistic eyes and symbols of the sea or the storm.

The Cliff People (arnain)

Relationships: Arn, Anterior, Foothills, Picarni

Arn (strong): the Cliff People live along the coast of the South Sea

Anterior (strong): the Cliff People are on the coast of the Anterior

Foothills (mild): inland from the cliffs are rolling foothills, where Picarni usually lies

Picarni (mild): Picarni is easy to reach from the cliff cities, but the cliff cities are not always easy to reach from Picarni (see below)

Arts: easy

Sciences: hard

"With passion they dug themselves into a warren of nested towns in the cliffs over a sea they call Arn."

From dogbound *The Thief of Dahl* Lindy

The Cliff People, who are called Arnians or Arnain by the Trade Alliance and Sabber by the Geregonians, are a provincial, agrarian people who live by the South Sea along the cliff-tops. There are nine towns along a few miles of cliffs, linked by terraced balconies and a network of halls.

Race

Human, with a reddish tint to otherwise brown hair, and simple pink skin with solid features. What distinguishes them is their eyes, which are a soft shade of yellow.

Place-Relation

In an ordinary world they would find themselves a few days from the valley of Picarni, guided only by unmarked paths in a wilderness of temperate forest. In the Maelstrom it can be said that they share an affinity with Picarni, and though the people of Picarni can rarely find them, they can usually find Picarni.

History

It may have been that they were a technological people, but for all the known stories there is no saying whether they built their cities or moved into them long after they were built. So long as the Sayers can recount, they have been there in the cliffs in their burrowed warrens of endless halls and balconied terraces. They farm from above on the soft slopes of the hills and

live below, safe from the world at large, with the Arn to guide them. The Seven Halls of Sephis where the Cliff Lord holds his court is deep inside the earth, and oldest of all the halls—there the writing is in the language of the late Empire, and so the only trace of history. The Sayers reason that their yellow eyes were the gift of Arn when he found them on his shore.

The Myth of the Long Passage: it is held that two souls return time and again across the Arn and grace the world with new lives. Their forms are always the same, and they are born like children into the world, not to know of all that has passed before. When at death they travel again across the Arn to Asparil, they live there as spirits once more and know all things they have witnessed. Their fate is to know friendship and hatred, and in so doing kill one another.

It is the story of Jeremoth, whose hair is always red, and Pleyan, whose right hand is always lame. Karas sails with them, as with all souls that pass across (the) Arn to Asparil, and he has seen them back and forth since before the Great Equinox. Karas knows one thing: Pleyan returns first to Asparil. The day that Jeremoth sails first for Asparil on the boat of Karas, the world will end.

The Millenary Myth of Passage: in a version of the myth that still lives, there was a time when this should have happened. As the Great Equinox began, Pleyan slew Jeremoth on the cliffs over Arn. He looked into the skies, the Great Sun pounding the world as it would for seven days without an end, and he knew the shame that was murder. He threw himself from the edge, his body striking the rocks below. But Karas took his soul first, as he always had. The soul of Jeremoth was so angered that he refueled the rage that would lead him to murder Pleyan for another thousand years.

The Diodet Obelisk: in Diodet Proper there is an obelisk of the Imperium that tells a tale that might be the Myth of the Long Passage. This obelisk, taller than most, stands in the Queen's Square, which is home to many poets, students, and romantics. It reads as follows in the Imperial Word: Two friends, Piros and Layne, are to walk the world three times, and three times Piros will kill Layne. The two are soul-mates, and so in killing Layne Piros kills the world in three different deaths. But after the second time Palm, who is the guider of souls, tells Layne of the fate that awaits the world if he is slain a third time. Knowing this Layne kills Piros and in so doing saves the world.



Eye of the Storm

The Sayers

The old are venerated—with age comes wisdom and place, and a seat on the Council of Sayers. They judge all crimes, establish all laws, and choose who will be the Cliff Lord in the Halls of Sephis. Both men and women aspire to this, but only those chosen by the Sayers while still young can attain a seat on the Council. Families petition the Council from all the warrens with their children. The Sayers hold the Truths, which are the ways of Arn and what He would have for His children.

The Arnain View Of the World

The Arn is the embodiment of their truths in the form meant to guide them. It has a character and a pattern and is for all purposes their god figure. Even so, and venerated above all things, the Truth is held higher, because it is a concept and not an entity—the one concept that eludes definition and embodiment as an entity.

“There are patterns for all things, though they may be greater than the lives of men. In the pattern of the world there is wisdom, and through this wisdom can be seen the Truth which is as the center of all things. The Sayers have arrived, through a long history of oral tradition and collective wisdom, at a philosophy that guides them. It is founded in the aspiration to an all-encompassing truth, and the view of all things as entities in that truth, as follows:

“A truth exists in all things, and is come to only in times of trial. Then it becomes a place, and this truth must be found. Of all things in the world it is the one thing that is within us all. This one truth manifests in the place we call the Valley of the Shards. Within it lie all things, as it lies within us all; fear and the unknown, which are parts of god and truth.”

Of the Shroud of Khem

Figuring strongly in their view of the world is the Shroud of Khem. They are seen as messengers of truth, who grasp the patterns of the world and who are disciples of truth on earth. As told to the young in the Teaching Years, they are explained in a mystical form:

“Know then that there are those who walk among us who are not of our kind. They hold the pieces of the truth that can only be gathered in the Valley, and as such are to be feared as one fears the brightness of the sun. They come to us and pass through in a pattern that is beyond our understanding. They walk a course that holds the world together, from Shij-Gabril and outward like the spiral of a spider-weaver. Do not think your encounters with them are random, but do not try and understand them. Let them be, like the tide on the Arn, lest you fall from the pattern that is this world.”

Of the Empire

The Sayers teach the story of the Empire as a parable of wrong-doing. It is in their story of the Empire that they teach their societal warning against hubris. Hubris for the Cliff People is a defiance of the order of things, a desire to impose one's will on the patterns of the world. They say the Empire in its arrogance and power destroyed itself by losing sight of the world and its truth in a vainglorious effort to tame the mysteries of the world. The Cliff People have no love for change or technology, for fear of falling out of synch with a perfect, but misunderstood, world. The Empire fell because it had to fall, but in so doing it redeemed itself by teaching man the lesson it had learned.

Of the Strangers

Unlike the Shroud, the Strangers are loathed by the Cliff People. Aberrations, walking souls of the damned, spirits in human form—the Cliff People seem to fear and avoid them at all costs. In Picarni they have a story that they won't tell you around the Cliff People. In this story Sephis was a snake god who gave birth to seven sons that were part human, part snake. To live they stole souls, and wandered the world to do it. The soulless victims rose one day and killed them all, and drove Sephis back into the earth. These people are the Strangers, called Gatherers in Picarni.

DACARTHA (dacarthan)

Relationships: River, inclement weather, the Temple at Sholcarta

River (strong): Dacartha is always on a river, which is often the Warmouth River

Inclement Weather (mild): Dacartha is prone to rain and fog, and snow in winter

Sholcarta (weak): though the Temple is almost always in the Veldt, it is usually reached by going through Dacartha

Arts: hard

Sciences: easy

“And so fled the people to the gates of a ruined city. There they made their home and built it anew, and renamed it Dacartha in the light of a new era: Here, under these crystal spires, they would create onto the Maelstrom a lasting legacy; here they would build a place for all of Humanity to rest, to hold sway over their powers and over the lands as it had been done in the Empire; here they would create a land of their own in this our insane world.”

-Edhillond, the Dacarthane Saga, II:i

“my darling left me at the Dacarthan Gates”

Fragment of a Traditional Song

Maelstrom Storytelling



There is another city like Dacartha. It may be just a story. Still, one occasionally hears of it. Talk of an empty city, identical in every way to Dacartha. This one, however, houses little else except the echoes of the dead. In some stories, it is lost in a huge forest or a jungle. In others, it floats. Still others speculate that there could be more than one. They point to the six Imperial roads that lead out of Dacartha, more roads than any other city, even the sprawls of Diodet and Arn Muhr. On some of the maps of the old Empire, still copied and passed around, seven cities are shown, each with six roads leading away. Like the other cities that date to the Empire—Diodet, Geregion, Arn Muhr, Shij-Gabril, as well as the lost cities of the Darig civilization—Dacartha may have been a provincial capital. Regardless, Dacartha likens itself to the old Imperial City, which is shown on no map.

Many Dacarthans believe it is their fate to renew the Empire and build a stronger, more powerful Empire in its place. It is a claim commonly at the tip of any tongue of a Dacarthan who speaks of affairs outside of the walls of their city. Also is the dream that some have, a vision of a gleaming Dacartha in the distance, but in the foreground corpses piled to the skies. Many Dacarthan soothsayers have hailed this as the city rising victorious after an oft-foretold bloody war to unify the realms of humanity. Scholars and skeptics are less optimistic.

Dacartha has been built on and around the foundations and machinery of what is generally held to be one of the great metropolises of the Empire. An example to many cities, it has developed into a cosmopolitan society of trade and industry. A populist city, it is often dogmatic in its patriotism. Confidant and fierce in its practices, the city can raise a solid army in times of need and has a strong and dedicated people to support it.

The first thing the traveler might see are the large gates leading through the high walls of the city. Looking up, the literate traveler reads *"Let all who touch these gates be Free,"* a phrase made famous across the realms. There are songs and stories relating the practice of Dacarthans who absolve bonds of servitude on crossing the threshold of the city. Some of the songs explore both the good and bad results of this tradition:

*"if you think it means freedom, you just might believe them,
but all bets are off."*

An aggressive industrial city, built on the work of immigrants, refugees, and entrepreneurs, Dacartha is led by the working class and the common man. The middle class is the outgrowth of the strong industrial production of the city and its influential

and pioneering commerce. Though there are barons of industry and the wealthy beneficiaries of the city's strong economy, it is still a people's city, with power in the hands of the unions and the consuls.

In general, the people of Dacartha live well and have come to expect to continue living well. A forward-looking people, they are concerned more with the present and the future than the past. Their success, combined with a short history and mixed cultural base, give them an identity of the present.

Dacartha imports grains, foods, and liquors to fill the pubs and alehouses that are sprinkled among the many neighborhoods. Aided by a constant influx of immigrants, merchants, the adventurous, mercenaries, and all those yearning to throw off any of the many enslavements (real or imagined), the city is busy with travelers, foreigners, and business. A haven to Newcomers, the city benefits from an infusion of new and different ideas, cultures, and manpower.

"What gives with the lager this month, Darris?"

"The Fold. Hops don't cut it in the Fold. But we're closer to Abashu now, and the Veldt's always got good hops."

The twin suns of the Maelstrom don't shine on all of Dacartha. Underneath the many pathways are the warrens of the city, where no consul reigns. Outcasts of all stripes have gathered together here to escape persecution or imprisonment for their crimes. Lit only by the venting flames, the pathways at times shake from the constant rumbling of machines that churn towards an unknown design. This labyrinthine undercity is no place for an innocent tourist. If it can't be found in the marketplaces and bazaars of the city above, then it can be found in the undercity.

Organization

A limited form of participatory democracy thrives in Dacartha, where each of the seven wards is represented by a Consul. The political maneuverings of the Consuls are notorious. They all meet in the City Council with two other representatives: The Governor and the Ninth Seat. The Governor is the executive officer who handles Council protocol and arbitration, as well as all foreign diplomatic functions. The other position, a powerful and often tie-breaking seat, has been held since the state began by a member of the Shroud of Khem. This last position, the Ninth Seat, has nominal control of the Dacarthan Guard, a regiment designed to protect the city from both external and internal threats.

"The problematic course of conquest undertaken by our Great City is one of manifest destiny. Liberation of all kinds is our forgone duty, be it through war or trade. Freedom at all costs. We spread the message through the shifts of the Prophet's own storm, and if it takes conquest to teach the world then conquest it shall be."

from General Asduil's Speech to the Consuls



Eye of the Storm

The Old City

There are great rumbling machines in the bowels of Dacartha that have no visible purpose. Powered by mechanisms deep under the city, they are orphaned remnants of the Imperium. The original function and purpose of this machinery is one of the mysteries of the Empire, even to the scholars at the libraries of the College.

The College of the Gates

Near the Square of Consuls is the College. Built from the remains of a great, columned building, it has a large inner courtyard and many wings, with tall iron gates that open onto the Square. The College is a repository of information, theories, science, and philosophy. In contrast to Queen's College in Diodet, the College of the Gates is a haven for revolutionary ideas and new theories. And unlike the other universities, most courses are taught in the Dacarthan Word.

DIODET (diodeian)

Relationships: The Warmouth, the Anterior, good weather, the Empire

Warmouth River (strong): Diodet is always on the Warmouth river, near where it hits the South Sea

Anterior (strong): Diodet is always in the Anterior

Good Weather (mild): the weather over Diodet is mild and fair, with little rain and a long spring and fall

Empire (weak): there is an affinity to the Imperium, which generates the studies and research of the Empire, and strong fascination with all things Imperial

Arts: hard

Sciences: easy

With claims to the Imperial bloodline, the Diodeians are tall and slender, with a dark olive skin and dark to black eyes. They have no facial hair, narrow faces, and long necks.

Diodet is an ancient, and some say wicked, city that thrives along the river delta that flows to the South Sea, past many cities of the Anterior, all the way from the High Mountains. It once ruled the strip of land along the Warmouth all the way to Dacartha (or at least that is what they will tell you in Diodet). Held to be a provincial capital of the Empire, it is a trading port

that sells everything from clothing to religion to people. The Diodeians will tell you in no uncertain terms that their dialect is actually the true Imperial Word, and their blood the only direct bloodline to the Empire. The Caphir, who rules over the city of Diodet Proper, is believed to be over two hundred years old. This lack of aging is a common thing among the nobility of Diodet. The nobility say it is their high-born Imperial blood. Others ask quietly if drugs and sorcery may help.

It is a city of finely dressed rakes and ancient secrets, sideroads and alleys, secret alliances, politics and witchcraft. The Caphir rules through an elaborate web of political intrigue, and has kept his power for as long as most can remember. The ambitious jockey for position, the foolish think grander thoughts. Architecturally, it is a city of winding, cobbled streets with small parks and fountains tucked away in courtyards and squares. These serve as the perfect locations for lovers' trysts, and illicit meetings. It is a city of bright days and hot weather, where people drift leisurely from cafe to cafe, and even those with pressing business take their time. The Court of the Caphir is attended by dignitaries from the Trade Alliance to the Shroud, and is as full of subtle nuances as it is dangerous.

A City of Art and Learning

While the great markets (the airship yard, docks, and Caphir's towers) are where business is done, they are by no means the heart or mind of Diodet proper. The heart would have to be the great Opera House that stands on Empire Road, just inside the inner walls. Everybody in the city tries to attend the opera once each season, no matter how poor they are or how poor the performance. Conflict between directors and singers is often more talked about than the show itself.

The mind of Diodet is Queen's College, arguably the greatest repository of knowledge in all the Thousand Realms. While the College of the Gates tries to change the way people look at the world, the professors at Queen's College refine the old theories, perfecting what has come before them. Admittance to Queen's college is by sponsorship, usually available only to those who have already proven themselves well versed in some great theory of the past. The most prominent department is that of Imperial Studies. The departmental library takes up the equivalent of four city blocks.

If Dacartha is the New City, then Diodet Proper is the Old City; still alive, still standing, rebuilt since the first recorded records, and old before the Great Equinox.

from the popular
dogbound author Anna Rashka's journal:

Diodeians smile as if they know something and are prone to talking in low, polite voices. Some are beautiful, with high cheekbones, and enchanting eyes. Some are quite grotesque, with their skin pulled back along their face and every part of their body coming out wrong. It seems not to matter, or even be apparent to them what others see as beautiful—as long as Diodeians see it as beautiful. Their standards are quite different, even alien to the normal person. Money matters are of a different bent—they say that in Diodet, it's not a crime to be poor. What is a crime, however, is to be poor and dirty.

Maelstrom Storytelling



Fashion

Diodet is a city of whimsical fashion. In addition to the many styles that come into vogue of their own accord, Newcomers bring clouded ideas of life—ideas which frequently become new trends. This is how, in the music scene, an acoustic version of jazz came to Diodet—one of the longest-running newcomer trends. The grisettes (female students, or often the mistresses of students), have long been the arbiters of what is new and fashionable. Their diaphanous outfits and stylized tiaras are copied by both aspiring social climbers and the nobility alike. Among the men, high-collared jackets, fine boots, and a shapely pair of trousers have never seemed to lose appeal.

In a city known for its almost perpetually nice weather, lighter fabrics are the mode. Colorful garb is a trademark of Diodet, with jewel-colors prominent in many color schemes. Hats are in, but more to shade one's eyes from glare than to protect them from the elements.

Missing a trend can be a fatal setback for an aspiring socialite. Young men and women scour the theatres and the cafes to spot the latest styles, and spend small fortunes hunting for the right tailor.

The Myth of the Queen: Waiting for the Return

Diodet was ruled by a queen for centuries. There are references to kings but no clear dates for when the city may have been ruled, if ever, by a man. Not since the Great Equinox. The common view is that the Imperial Governor in Diodet in the Age of the Imperium was also a woman. But five centuries ago the last queen was lost while traveling abroad, and since then the Caphir has ruled in her absence. Legend has it the queen was about to discover the secret of the Empire, and she will return with that knowledge; whether what she found was the answer to the obelisks, the Key of Arn, or the Lost City, it will usher in a new age for Diodet and a return of the Empire...

History in the Diodeian Eye

History is recorded in great detail at the College. The scholars have broken down the passage of history into the following epochs:

Pre-Empire

First Age of Empire

Second Age of Empire

Third Age of Empire

The Great Equinox

Fourth Imperium

In Diodet, the Empire is still considered to live on in the form of their city, which reigns in the Fourth Imperium under the Queen, who is sole inheritor to the rights of the Empire and its destiny.

THE DOG THRONG

(dog thronger)

Relationships: the sea, humans, newcomers, piracy

The Sea (strong): the Dog Throng lives on the sea, mostly the South Sea

Humans (strong): humans make up the entire Dog Throng

Newcomers (mild): much of the ideology focuses on the sacred nature of newcomers, and many members of the Throng are newcomers

Piracy (mild): the Throng is well known for piracy, much of which is aimed at liberating human slaves

Arts: easy

Sciences: easy

This is a fraternal order of Newcomers. Its people live a nomadic existence on the seas. The Dog Throng has ties in many places, and works as guides, pirates, merchants, and mercenaries. They span the gap from the Cold Sea to the South Sea, and have an “ethnic” pride that drives them to racial Newcomer Purity.

The Dog Throng holds to a strong ideology: The bright star that can be seen on some nights in winter, called the Dog Star, is the home of all Newcomers: “From thence they came, and to there they will someday go.” Why they are placed here in the storm is known only to their people, who live across the skies in the stars. They are different from all other things in the storm, and blessed by this difference. The Dog Star guides them, and under her they hold their fraternal order high.



Eye of the Storm

The Kingdom of DRYER MOB (dryan)

Relationships: Veldt, Trade, Snakes

Veldt (strong): Dryer Mob lies in the Veldt

Trade (mild): with an Imperial road running through it, and home to many wells, the city benefits from the Belzaine trade routes across the Veldt

Snakes (weak): snakes of all kinds find their way to the city

Arts: hard

Sciences: easy

People

Dryer Mob is home to a human people, for the most part lithe and with a perfect ebony skin, and eyes of green. The Kenratha find their way into the city at times, as do Darigs, and a large number of Venth who fill the city as beggars and homeless. There is a small community of Belzaine ex-patriots as well.

The City

The city is on the trade routes of the Veldt, spread over the grass plains. It is an old city, built of mud bricks and washed over with white plaster, walled by the remains of a high city wall. The buildings have flat roofs and terraced balconies, with rich gardens tucked behind them in inner courtyards.

Under the rule of Maba Des, the city has continued to make itself known for a rich culture of art, oral tradition, radiant festivals, hospitality, and military ineptitude. Bowing to the Belzaine Caliphate, Dacartha, and any power that finds itself near, the city has never had true autonomy nor has it ever held more than the land around it. Despite having made its way through history by compliance in the political arena, it has never lost its strong cultural independence.

The Shrikes

Dryer Mob has a longstanding problem with the Shrikes. Without an actual standing army, the city has rarely been able to do more than withstand attacks. The continuing war rages on and off, with long periods of relative peace interspersed with deadly fighting. The Battle of Tusk Ohna, in the time of Maba Des' father Kiothi Ty, was a great victory, and for many years thought to be the decisive end of the war. More recently, the Purple Siege is remembered for the famine it brought, and the fire that erupted near the end that burned down a third of the city.

Field Station LaReine

Relationships: The Shelf, Diodet, Airships

Shelf (strong): LaReine is located deep in the cold wastes of the Shelf

Diodet (mild): Though affined to the Shelf, the Field Station maintains a Diodeian Cultural Affinity

Airships (weak): usually located right off a magnetic line, Airships have a easy time finding the place

Arts: easy

Sciences: easy

Field Station LaReine is one of the many Diodeian outposts scattered across the realms. This one, deep in the Shelf, is both a scientific expedition and a coal mine.

Citystates of Geregion

(geregonian)

Relationships: Edge, expansion, sea trade

The Edge (strong): the Citystates are mostly in the Edge, though geregion has expanded in many directions

Expansion (mild): the history of Geregion is marked by expansionist efforts of all kinds—military, political, cultural, and economic

Sea Trade (mild): the Citystates thrive on a prosperous sea trade

Arts: hard

Sciences: easy

The flag that flies over the Geregion Citystates suggests that at one point there were seven cities. Now, however, it is hard to tell. These States are representative of a specific idea of expansion: Their pretense is that if one cannot hold down and conquer actual land in the Maelstrom outside of one realm, then the culture itself must expand to every realm. In this way, the Geregion Citystates are zealous: Some would say that their culture is their religion.

The Citystates that show up in stories and dogbonds are large and industrious, filled with proud and defiant people. It is an image they would like to maintain. They are an immaculate people, well-ordered and well-structured. Their upper classes, a landed nobility, cast votes to determine courses set by the city at large. They have large armies, and impressive fleets. They favor decorative, yet not overly gaudy uniforms. Their courts have the requisite amount of intrigue, with emissaries from along the coasts of the Sourthern Sea, yet the manner of their intrigues suggests but rarely emulates the decadent splendor of Diodet.

Maelstrom Storytelling



The Court of the Fourteenth President

(A narrative choice, this is one of many ways to create the court at Geregion Proper)

In Geregion Proper, in the spiralling towers of the Presidential Palace, Eduard Linneassey holds his court. The nobles of all Geregion attend in high style, and lavish balls are held to honor the recurring victories of the Citystates. In this court of high ceilings, formal dress and beautiful gardens, the politics of the South Sea are played out alongside the social games that entrance the ruling class of all Geregion.

His Eminence, President Eduard Linneassey

Still young, Eduard is the consummate diplomat and a perfect host. Attractive and well-schooled in charm and politics, he maneuvers this vast array of people with the grace and skill of a master. Groomed from a young age by his tyrannical father, Willam Shandalley, Eduard made the most of his opportunities. By the age of 42, he had sailed the four seas, won the Wars of Linneas, filled the Presidential coffers that his father had squandered, and extended the reach of Geregion past the Fold to Springtide through his marriage to the Talobani princess Heathis.

Margrave Rechais

A survivor of the brutal Shandal Wars, the Margrave is an old man with a battered body which he hides under the finest clothes and latest wigs. Once the dark-doer for President Willam, Rechais is an icon of the old court of the Thirteenth President. It is commonly assumed that his loyalty to Eduard is due to the blindness Eduard chooses to show to his past deeds.

Ambassador Havon Tiel

Havon is the resident emissary from the Trade Alliance. He is a shrewd man whose job is to watch over the affairs of Eduard and ensure that the Agreements are upheld. From Dryer Mob, Tiel has the black skin and green eyes of his people. He has two servants, a Udaian sailor who acts as his bodyguard, and a Darig named Jai who handles his business.

Princess Heathis

As Presidente, Her Eminence is well-spoken and suitably charming. Most often assumed to be a political trophy, Heathis is not given credit for her fine mind. Though only 22, she is well versed in politics, and like Eduard has been raised in the world of intrigue. By no means the power behind the throne, she does however have her own designs, one of which is the discreet subversion of Ambassador Tiel and the Alliance's hold over her native Taloban.

Viscount Lessure

Lessure is a man who derives pleasure from the ruination of others. Deceptively polite, Lessure watches the intrigues and does his best to cause as much trouble as he can. He has an entourage of young courtiers who do his bidding and spread his gossip.

Ambassador Lemais

The Diodeian envoy, Lemais is caught up more by the social chess game than the actual political goings on.

Baroness Lattimore

Lattimore sits on the opposite side of the chessboard from Lessure, and trades pawns with him. Not nearly as cruel, but just as capable, she also has her own entourage of young courtiers who do her bidding. She and Lessure do their best to recruit all new arrivals in the court to their side.

Ambassador Ollon

Often recalled, and rarely in attendance, Ambassador Ollon is the envoy from Ismolaht.

Ambassador K'It

The envoy from the Kril. Though rarely at court, K'It will sometimes accompany Tiel in formal appearances. Of the Spoken Caste, K'It is well acquainted with human affairs and the manner of the Geregionians. Sent when the Kril need a first-hand look at events, or to make their presence understood, K'It is a skilled negotiator.

Ambassador D'vanni

D'vanni was a rising star in the courts of the Rim Kingdom, until a scandal that sent him into near exile as Ambassador to Geregion. A charming and indulgent man, the thought is that he doesn't have much time before he gets beheaded for his advances toward the Presidente.

Admiral Parron

Winslow Parron is an old man, known mostly for his defeat at Shandal at the hands of the Ismolahti. Assumed to be a great hero of the Citystates, Parron may well be its most incompetent leader. With a long presence in court, and ties to the Margrave, his position is unquestioned. Eduard has deftly employed him for affairs of state and sent more capable officers to fight his wars, like young Gregor and Colonel Daemer. Rumors have it that Parron has a spirit-guardian who can be seen in his shadow.

Captain Gregor

The pride of the Kesset, Gregor is an engaging young man who finds himself in favor with the president and the admiral. His fame was enhanced by the romantic tales based on his rivalry with Colonel Daemer. It is assumed that when Gregor is made Colonel, he will challenge Daemer to their third duel.

Captain Viver

Elen Viver is of the old breed of officers. She enjoys the social status and the fine uniforms, and is a regular at all the palace functions. It is rumored that she once was courted by Ambassador Ollon, which may explain Admiral Parron's dislike for her.

Colonel Daemer

Daemer still limps from the wounds he received fighting the Kril at Marv Pettlet, a battle that made him famous. Hardly an attractive man, his nerve and prowess have won him notoriety and the respect of the upper echelons. In a court of beautiful people, he is forced to hide his misshapen face behind heavy make-up and a fine wig of the latest style.

Captain Vandelais

Vandelais was a newcomer who was taken in by the late Colonel Fite. After Fite's death, Vandelais has attempted to gain favor with the Presidente and her entourage. Vandelais has a grave distrust of Daemer, who is rumored to have murdered Fite during the battle at Marv Pettlet.



Eye of the Storm

It is the plan of every young officer to march off to war, to conquer and settle another new kingdom, to raise the flag of the Citystates. Such expansive efforts are not looked on well by neighbors, of course—Ismolaht is in near constant war with one citystate or another, and often the states even war with one other.

The cultural and territorial expansion of Geregion toward Ismolaht has created a number of cities where the cultural tide has washed back beyond the border of conquest: Almost a third of the Citystates have a strong Ismolahti cultural base, to the dismay of the homogenous and xenophobic ruling body of Geregion.

The Citystates have spent little effort expanding inland, preferring to hug the coastal trade routes. Except for the cities that have shifted inland, and outposts past the Fold into the Cold Sea, Geregion is confined to the coasts of the South Sea.

HAIS (haer)

Relationships: Great Mountains, Lake, Storms

Great Mountains (strong): Hais is in the Great Mountains

Lake (strong): Hais is almost always overlooks Prigtain

Storms (mild): rain, winds, and electrical storms are common over Hais

Arts: easy

Sciences: very hard

The assumed center of the Shriling Order, Hais is a mountain city, on the far side of the Anterior and west by Empire Standard from the Fold. It lies on the shores of a large lake called Prigtain, which on the other side touches the Selemfri Citystates.

Overlooking the city is a large, dome temple that outsiders are forbidden to enter. The secret rites of the Shriling faith are held there, and the building houses the highest members of the order.

The Shriling Order

The Priests of the Shriling Order are proselytizers of the first water. They roam across the Anterior, and even into the Veldt and the South Seas, to convert the world to the Seventh State. Wrapped in blue robes and barefoot, their hair never cut, and owners of little, they have a diverse but strong following across the Anterior.

The Iceblade League

Relationships: Cold Sea, whaling, fraternity

Cold Sea (strong): the “league” is based in the Cold Sea

Whaling (mild): the main industry is whaling

Fraternity (mild): there is a fraternal bond among the sailors of the “league”

Arts: easy

Sciences: hard

The adventurous and the desperate head to the northern seas to travel with the ships of the Cold Sea. The brotherhood of ships that sails the Cold Sea is bound together by many factors, from the hardships of the weather to the threat from the Shrikes and piracy. Only foreigners call it the Iceblade League: It is an outsider’s moniker, a misnomer, for a collection of factions of merchants and whalers who sail and cross the cold wastes of the Shelf. The sailors stick together in the north, and it’s rare to find a human who will not help a fellow traveler. Hospitality is a near sacred thing, and rarely withheld.

The Iceblade League, or the concept of it, is an example of how the human population has come to adapt to its terrain. It is a culture of trust and exact retribution for crimes.

In the “Iceblade League,” if you have a boat, you have status. If you have tattoos, you are respected. Scars have stories behind them, so do dreams. The tusked whales that the sailors sustain themselves on are dangerous and deadly to hunt: The very source of the economy could kill them at any moment.

These merchants and whalers are allowed in any port in the Cold Sea—as is nearly any ship that can survive and plow through the floes of ice. The ships of the Cold Sea that make it through the Fold to the South Sea are even welcome in Alenea, where many ships spend their winter.

ISMOLAHT (ismolahti)

Relationships: Edge, the Moon Goddess, the past

The Edge (strong): The Ismolahti cities are in the Edge

Moon (strong): there is one moon over Ismolaht, and it is central to their culture

The Past (mild): the Ismolahti are strongly rooted in their past and history

Arts: hard

Sciences: hard

Maelstrom Storytelling



Ismolaht Proper is a fertile stretch of coast usually to the East of the Desert of Endless Sun. The Ismolahti are industrious builders, agrarian traders and devoted followers of the Moon Goddess. Their cities are built in places that reflect the odd Maelstrom orbit of their moon, which is such a complex formula that very few understand it today. These cities are square and raised in increments to form short pyramids. The temple to their goddess is always at the top (and the center) of these pyramidal cities.

The Ismolahti are engaged in an enduring struggle with the Geregon Citystates, the Trade Alliance, and the Kril for dominance in the sea trade. Long ago Ismolaht had economic power and a large sphere of influence on the sea. With a steady encroachment by the Alliance and the Kril abroad, and constant war with Geregon, the Ismolahti are left with very little of what they once had.

LOST RITE (riter)

Relationships: The Shelf, the Cold Sea, Whaling, Disease

Shelf (strong): Lost Rite is always on the Shelf

Cold Sea (strong): Lost Rite is also always on the Cold Sea, and has a deep harbor

Whaling (mild): a center for the Whaling Guild

Disease (weak): a hard place to stay healthy, with poor sanitation, and unsophisticated medicine

Arts: hard

Sciences: easy

Lost Rite is the hub of the Whaling Guild and all ships that work the Cold Sea. A mixture of human races, with Udaian blood running through most of it, Lost Rite is also home to the Venth and even the Kenratha.

There is a huge wall around the tightly packed city to protect it from the shrikes. In recent history the shrikes have been driven back, but the general opinion is that they'll return.

Full of bars and brothels, Lost Rite is ruled loosely by Admiral Bard. Bard never served in a navy, but made his fortune as a whaling merchant.

The city has narrow streets and packed, wooden houses. Fires are not uncommon. Fighting off the cold environment is the main concern of the Ritters. The summer is brief, and spent foraging inland for wood and coal. Otherwise, Lost Rite is supplied almost entirely by trade from the sea.

The Outer Crescent

(kril—or krillers, if not of the kril race)

Relationships: Crescent, sea trade, peace, skyships

Crescent (strong): not surprisingly, the Outer Crescent is a part of the Crescent

Sea Trade (mild): the Kril profit from an elaborate sea trade, centering on slavery in particular

Peace (mild): the Kril are rarely at war

Skyships (mild): the Kril are masters of Skyships

Arts: hard

Sciences: easy

Kril Diriul

This outpost city is the furthest from the Inner Swarm, and is the gateway to the Swarm. It sits like dribbled sand along the cliff sides of an island called Ferris Darling by the Trade Alliance. The spires of Kril Diriul are tall and slender, and sit like minarets atop the citadel city below. The docks are all within the afternoon shadow of the spires and cliff face, and harbor the huge galleons of the Crabfolk. The slave-pens are near the docks; along with the cries and clicks of the goods hawkers that line the port roads, they contribute to the cacophony of the docks.

The business of the port is like all things here: Well organized and efficient under a facade of turmoil and seemingly disparate events.

Ai J'k-It and the Strangers

The island at the tip of the Outer Crescent has many names, but is called Ai J'k-It among the Kril. The Trade Alliance (and most sailors) call it Woden. There are seven pillars of stone that stand on it in a rough line, each one some 15 feet tall and 5 wide. Otherwise it's barren and rocky, and no more than a mile wide. The story has it that the Kril, in the days before the Imperium, chained a Stranger to each one and let them die as a warning to any of their kind who would enter the Swarm.

In Picarni:

Newcomers are called Lost Souls and Dreamers. The Shroud is Welcome. Spirits steal Memories. The Strangers are called Gatherers. Bad people can turn into Animals. Faie Spirits and Wolves live Outside. Vampires and Baby Eaters hunt Inside. The Valley of Shards is never Mentioned. And the Bishop rules over All.



Eye of the Storm

Picarni Parish

(picarnian)

"When you leave the Parish the Guardian Moons stay behind."

A saying among the Parishioners

Relationships: Anterior, Cliff People, Shroud, Faie, Forested Valley, Twin Moons, Good Beer

Anterior (strong): the Parish is always in the Anterior, in a valley among foothills

Cliff People (strong): Picarni is always near the Arnain cliff cities, though it is not always easy to travel between the two

Shroud (mild): the Shroud is often meddling in the affairs of the Parish, and members of the Shroud are often in the city

Faie (mild): the valley surrounding Anterdim is home to faie creatures

Forested Valley (strong): the valley around the city is always forested by dense, temperate woods

Twin Moons (strong): there are always two moons over Picarni

Good Beer (weak): Anterdim is known for its fine beer

Arts: hard (except in the woods, where they are easy)

Sciences: easy (except in the woods, where they are hard)

The traveler to Picarni would likely notice that there are two white moons overhead, clearly seen from all points in the Parish.

The Parish of Picarni is centered around the city of Anterdim, in a wooded valley in the hills.

The city has a high, crumbling wall that keeps it shaded and prevents a good clean wind from clearing the air. The Picarnians are extremely wary of outsiders, though they pay a grave respect to the Shroud. The Strangers here are called *Gatherers*, and though never harmed they are avoided. The Shroud is said to be part of the church, and the Bishop is rumored to hold a high title in Khem. The city layout has serpentine, narrow streets, and the whole thing is packed tightly behind the walls. Stone and plaster and thatch—a real fire hazard—as well as open gutters and all the other charms of a packed, agrarian city.

Anterdim is old, but no one knows how old. It was built and rebuilt, and repaired, and a long time ago sacked by the shrikes. There is no proof of the Empire here, but there is, in a lonely square on the edge of the city, a leaning obelisk that dates from then. Whether it was brought from elsewhere or placed there by the Empire itself, no one knows. Outside the city the woods stretch into the hills on all sides. There are small farms with squarish, dull people tending them, and the woods are the

assumed home to wolves, killers, and spirits. Inside the city there are stories of baby-eating monsters, vampiric spirits who walk by day unseen, and times when the faie spirits sneak over the wall and switch babies for one of their own.

The newcomers here are sometimes called *dreamers*, but mostly referred to as *lost souls*. They are welcomed into the city with a certain hesitation. Like the Picarnians, they are encouraged to join the congregation that forms the center of all social and political power in the city. Led by a Bishop, the church holds power in the city over the nominal elective position of the Lord Mayor.

There is a park near the church which is called the *Sanguine*. It is home to the homeless and the lepers and a good few rabid animals growling around among the trees and shrubs.

Rising out of the center of the city is a spired cathedral to a god that has no name. The church is a huge and ancient complex, sprawling below in catacombs and above in spiraling towers. It is dedicated to the great god, the one god, the god who has no name.

"Anyone who claims to have seen the Valley of Shards is obviously insane."

Mistress Prellstag (of the Veils)

The Bishop

The Bishop has a role in the city with that wonderful amount of power stemming from the church, the state, and everything in between. The role has many possibilities—from a Beckettesque reformer bent on truth and integrity, to the delightfully corrupt Inquisitor who has a thing against happiness. For instance, Bishop Montpellier: a man of no uncertain style, whose last meeting with the common man was when he threw up on one from the pulpit while drunk. Blissfully unaware of reality, Montpellier is concerned with maintaining the latest fashion, his permanence as Bishop, and the coffers of the church. In great contrast with his predecessor the Bishop Delgrassi, Montpellier has few morals. However, if forced, he can quote with moderate accuracy from the Great Book. Blessed with the knowledge that his title will beget him a rich afterlife, he has forsworn the other devices of salvation. The other factions in the city and the church have taken the uncertain course of catering to his lifestyle in an effort to keep him removed from their everyday actions. They do this either through malice, greed, or a legitimate desire to fulfill their duties.

Maelstrom Storytelling



The Valley of Shards is a feared thing, so much so that the Bishop is known to say it does not exist. There is a Parish ordinance that makes it illegal to mention it in public gatherings.

Spirits are a big theme in all of Picarni. Picarnians are wary of all things foreign, and hide behind the walls of their city for fear of what lies outside. The spirit myths are associated with vampirism of blood, shapechanging, pestilence, hauntings, and the power to filter away memories—a unique fear to all in the Maelstrom.

The Cliff People live not so far away, and some of them share relations with the people of Picarni. They are the only people outside the Parish not generally feared.

Underneath the city, accessible through the catacombs of the cathedral, are old machines. They don't work, except for one huge gear that still spins from the waterwheel deep below in an underground stream. The Bishop has been known to deny its existence as well.

An underground group of outlaws, social critics, and revolutionaries called the Sons of the Sanguine have a small, quiet influence on the city. They wonder if the cathedral, of strange and different design, might not have been built by the shrikes when they ruled the city after the Great Equinox. They are poets, drunks, and idealists whose ideals do not rise beyond theft, pretense, and a fair share of apathy.

The Faie Storyline:

These creatures are a colorful addition to the valley and probably the only things that keep people in the Parish farms from keeling over from boredom.

As long as they are unpredictable, unreliable, and beyond the full grasp of the locals, any form of faie creatures suit the setting. Irish folklore is a perfect source, as well as a variety of games. As conceived here, they are neither good nor evil as a whole, and have enough sway to keep the most threats at bay. It may be that they use the Side Realms to hide from and toy with the normal folk.

Following the Irish example, they throw great parties, play wonderful tricks, and hold court in a most dreadfully beautiful way. Some fall in love with the locals, or travelers, and for a thousand years might enchant the crops of the descendants of a long dead mortal friend. It might be that they avoid the Shroud and the Strangers. Likewise, they may avoid all who stay on the road, and be forced to entice them off into the forest to have any sway over them. Lastly, they don't always stay in the forest. Sometimes they venture over the walls...

The Church

The church is the single most important aspect of life for all those in Anterdim, and for a great many in the periphery of the Parish as well. Led by the Bishop, the church is a large political and religious machine that centers around the great cathedral in the center of the city. It sprawls out in many directions, having been enlarged and repaired over the centuries.

The Building

The Rectory was added on the adjacent block five hundred years ago, and is reached from the church by great arched walkways that link it to the upper stories over the road. The catacombs underneath spread out as well, though not too many people know exactly where or how far. They intertwine with the sewers to form a network like an underground maze.

The Beliefs and the Great Book

The faith is based on the Great Book of Picarni, which calls for many things in its doctrine. The Sanguine Brothers disagree as to which works are part of the canon (which is heresy of course). Since most Picarnians are illiterate, no one really knows what the Great Book says. The Bishop takes it upon himself to elaborate in his weekly mass.

The premise is that there is one god, and only one god, who has no name. All other gods are false reflections of this one true god. There is another figure, who walks by his side, known as the Adversary. This person has the thankless job of disagreeing with all of this god's wisdom, and questioning the faith of his followers. Herein lies the heresy: many bad things are assigned to be the fault of the Adversary (since he has the great knack of duping the one-god into all sorts of stupid things) the crime is that some people treat the Adversary as an equal to the one-god. This goes against the precept of there being only one god. The Holy power of the one-god is absolute, but somehow the Adversary has power as well, if limited to what he can con the one-god into, and this is called Unholy power.

The life of the common person is in many ways a tug-of-war between the path of the one-god and the suggestions of the Adversary.

Picarni Parish: Outside the Wall

A squarish dull peasantry live on a few farms within sight of the city of Anterdim. In the woods that encircle the valley city, there are a few cottages and homes, but mostly these are assigned to the insane, the criminal, and those possessed by demons. There is one main road through the valley which links east to the South Sea and west to the Anterior. Usually. Inland there is an Empire road, and like all such roads is known for its consistency. Otherwise this city is mostly lost from the web of traffic and sits in this valley as a haven to the hidden.



Eye of the Storm

The folklore is rich with thieves, goblinsque monsters, mischievous spirits, and large tusked animals with a penchant for charging.

Witches, Demons, and Other Things People Avoid

No better place to go when cursed, ill, lovesick, or vengeful than to the hut of some old witch. Conveniently, they often live alone in secluded places that are hard to find. The church has a great love for branding people as heretics and as consorters with the Adversary. As mentioned in the section on the Church, there exists in this valley the power of a holy nature, and this is undermined by the forces of unholy nature, and by those who pray wrongly to the Adversary. All sorts of things live in the dark woods of Picarni, and despite being under the domain of the Parish, they like it here.

Villains and Their ilk

There are bandits and killers, as well as lost heroes, who live in the dark expanse of the woods. Some of them have answers to important questions, or are needed for a certain quest. Others are sometimes pardoned for past sins and invited to return. Falling out of favor with the church is a common pastime for many people in the Parish. Fortunately, redemption seems to be easily bought through friends. The Brothers of the Sanguine have ties to some of their banished friends, and are said to be the only ones who can smuggle a man in or out of the walls. This may be because they have the only known key to a small unused side gate, of course, and is not necessarily testimony to their political clout.

REMSTRIKE (striker)

Relationships: Old Mountains, coal, rossials, Taloban

Old Mountains (strong): Remstrike is always in the Old Mountains

Coal (strong): The mountains around Remstrike are rich in coal

Rossials (strong): Remstrike hasn't seen a rat since the Great Equinox. The whole town is swamped in rossials, who outnumber the inhabitants two to one

Taloban (mild): Taloban is easily found at the end of the one Imperial road that leads from the hills down to Critée

Arts: Very Hard

Sciences: Hard

A mining city in the Old Mountains, Remstrike is home to a hardened breed of humans, as well as Venth, Darig, and a plague of rossials. There are even stories about Adollans in the deeper mines.

The humans here are a mix of races from many places, such as Taloban, Springtide, and Ismolaht. The red hair of the local people is found in many of the children, and the fingers of most Strikers are even in length.

Remstrike is a coal mining city, and at its core are the old stone buildings that date it to the days of the Empire. A clocktower stands in the center of the main square, overlooking the steep hills. The tracks of the coal carts run all the way to the square itself, and the clocktower is mostly used for storage (its clock long since broken).

THE RIM KINGDOMS (rimmer)

Relationships: The Rim, Shipwrecks, Bad Weather

The Rim (strong): The Rim Kingdoms are in the Rim

Shipwrecks (mild): the Rim is treacherous and shipwrecks are common

Bad Weather (weak): the weather in the kingdoms is cold and rainy much of the time

Arts: hard

Sciences: hard (except on Pol Adok, where it is easy)

The Rim Kingdoms are a collection of baronies and island cities to the deep south of the sea. The weather is colder, and storms are prevalent. Near the edge of the known world, many sailors will not sail south past the Rim for fear of what lies beyond. Like a shield wall, the Rim Kingdoms are a loose confederate league of feuding lords that guards the world from the unknown.

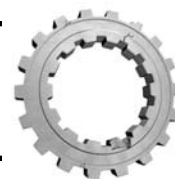
Margras and **Tuelin** are the largest cities, ruled by the King of the Two Isles. The people there trade only with the other islands of the rim, and are known for their distrust of outsiders. Myth has it that they aren't people at all, but seals in human form.

Tarras is the furthest outpost north, and a home port to pirates and renegades of all stripes. Under the rule of a man called the Black Baron, the city runs itself below the cliff-top castle that overlooks most of the Rim. Lore has it that the castle has never been taken.

Minion is a small city with a deep harbor, and is the most visited by the outside world. The Alliance has its only outpost here, under a loose agreement with the Prince of Minion. The prince is actually a woman.

Pol Adok is the furthest isle south. Little visited, and under nominal Minion rule, Pol Adok is a foggy, densely forested island with no inhabitants except the Steward. The only structure is an immense lighthouse, supposedly built by the Empire in the Second Age.

Maelstrom Storytelling



Selempri Citystates

(selemprian)

Relationships: Great Mountains, Selempros, Spirit, Dreams

Great Mountains (strong): the citystates are in the Great Mountains

Selempros (mild): all of the cities have a special relationship with Selempros (see below)

Spirit (weak): anyone living in the citystates will eventually switch one descriptor to Spirit

Dreams (weak): Dream Takes have an added die for success, and reaching the Dream World is Extremely hard instead of Impossible

Arts: easy

Sciences: very hard

High over the world lie the Selempri cities of the Great Mountains. Peopled by humans and Sowl alike, the Selempri Citystates consist of fourteen small cities spread over the valleys and slopes. Defined by the cultural unity of its people, and separated from the world at large by the mountains themselves, the Selemprians have a homogenous confederacy with deep spiritual views.

On the slopes of the Three Mountains lies the city of Selempros itself. All fourteen of the cities shift independently, but all thirteen surrounding Selempros shift in a pattern not unlike an orbit. Selempros is the center of all affairs in the mountains, high above the valleys below and almost inaccessible. The Monastery at Selempros holds some of the most ancient writings in the known realms, many of which can't be found anywhere else. Though not as extensive as the libraries of the universities, the monastery holds texts dating from the First Age of the Empire, and spiritual texts from many cultures, including the Venth.

Borrowing greatly from the Sowl culture, the Selemprians of the Great Mountains believe strongly in dreams. Records of dreams are kept in families, and certain dreams in the mythology of Selempros are named: *The Dream of the Elephant* and *The Dream of the High Path* are two of the most renowned. These dreams are told along with the histories of the people, and the events in them are given as much credence as the other cultural myths. In Selemprian legend, the Empire was a dream—a dream so powerful that all the world dreamed it together. As told, the Empire was destroyed by the Waking, which is a fragmented dream in which the world began to dream separately.

SHIJ-GABRIL (shroud)

Relationships: Hard to Find, Mists, Spirit

Hard to Find (mild): Shij-Gabril is not easily found. It will add two levels of difficulty to a “traveling roll” without special means of finding it (see Chapter Six for Travel)

Mists (mild): there are almost always mists, fog, and drizzle around and over the city

Spirit (weak): the affinity to Spirit means that all rolls in Spirit Aspect are one step easier, and dreams stronger and more vivid

Arts: easy

Sciences: easy

The monastic capital of the Shroud of Khem. Little is known about the actual city, if it even is a city. As presented here, the definition of Shij-Gabril is a composite picture based on the assumptions of most people—if the world believes it to be one way, then reality might well shape itself to fit that belief.

A sprawling city of grey stone with open courtyards and terraced levels spread over steep hills, Shij-Gabril lies in the realm of Khem. A former province of the Empire, or a small parcel of land around the city, no one can say. The people who find Shij-Gabril are the ones who are meant to find it. To others it is an elusive realm that may even dwell solely in a side realm.

In the Sanctum of Ages lies the Council, where all things are decided. The inhabitants of the city are housed in proximity to the Sanctum based on their rank in the hierarchy of the Shroud. It is assumed that the austere lifestyle of the Shroud is maintained at all times, and embellished only by the beauty of the city around them.

In the Dacarthish Agrere's account, which is often labeled as fiction, there are hot baths fueled by coal fires, and ornate fountains in the courtyards where feasts are held. Agrere also states that the city has exotic slaves to do the work, bought from the Kril in an old arrangement dating to the Third Age of Imperium.



Eye of the Storm

SPRINGTIDE (springtider)

Relationships: Souther, shipwrecks, the good pass

Souther (strong): Springtide is in Souther

Shipwrecks (mild): ships tend to sink more often near the city

The Good Pass (weak): Springtide is often near the inland pass through the Great Mountains

Arts: hard

Sciences: easy

Founded by an adventurous man from the Anterior, Springtide is a trickster's name for a city. It's inhabitants live a life far from the image of spring. This bastion of civilization has been razed by the Tarroks, sacked by Dacartha, plundered by barbarians who walk the Shelf, and is now currently a less than proud member of the Geregion Citystates. The battlements of the city, stretching around peaks of stone and ice that rise up like daggers towards the sky, have been shorn over and refined over countless attacks. The Springtide army may not be the best trained in the thousand realms, but it is surely the most seasoned.

It is the location of Springtide, with possibly the finest harbor on the Cold Sea, that serves as its occasional downfall. Springtide guards one of the few passes across the Great Mountains toward the warmer regions of the Anterior and Veldt, thus controlling a good portion of trade moving to and from the area.

Under the new flag of Geregion, the inhabitants go about their lives just as they did under the other flags. The majority are sailors, traders or enlisted in the army, and are usually welcoming to travelers if they know a good tale or two of the south. Towards the port, in the north section of town, a row of cheap tenements, hotels, barrios, and various public houses support the near constant influx of travelers and sailors of the so-called Iceblade League.

Springtiders have rejected the self-proclaimed enlightenment of Geregion and continue to worship a pantheon of spirits. The prevalent deities appear to be a goddess of alcohol called Inosk, and a grinning jester named Death.

TALOBAN (talobani)

Relationships: Critee, Remstrike, Safe from Shrikes

Critee (strong): Taloban is always in Critee

Remstrike (mild): the city is easy to find from Remstrike

Safe from Shrikes (weak): Shrikes are rarely found in Critee

Arts: hard

Sciences: hard

Taloban is a small city tucked into the hills of Critee in the fold of the Old Mountains. Built of a slate-grey stone, the city has an ancient wall around it and flat-topped buildings that overlook the region.

The people of Taloban are dark-skinned with black hair and dark eyes. They tend to dress in black clothes, with black scarves covering their hair. There are also many Kenratha in Taloban, who like the Talobani have adopted the black clothing and cultural beliefs.

With poor farming land and little trade abroad, the Talobani subsist on the produce of small gardens and the limited trade from their vineyards.

Culturally, the Talobani are known for their rich festival dances, in which the dancers wear flowing white garments and are trained from a young age. They are receptive to outsiders, but tend not to marry outside their own kind.

The mythology of the Talobani is rich with tales of travel and love, and buried kings in the hills. One myth explains that the Shrikes were sent by god to punish the people for the impiety of their last king, who reigned some four centuries ago.

Taloban is ruled by an oligarchy of elders, who hold one seat vacant for "the consul for the Empire."

TENDARAS (tendaran)

Relationships: The Fold, Time

The Fold (strong): Tendaras is in the Fold

Time (mild): (see below)

Arts: hard

Sciences: hard

Tendaras is a realm of two small cities on the Fold. The Tendarans are short, reddish skinned humans with the yellow eyes of the Arnain. They also have the mixed blood of the Aleneans. They are fishermen and farmers, and trade only rarely with the outside world. They are self-sufficient and pray to Arn as their divine protector.

Maelstrom Storytelling



Their legend has it that the two towns are always nearby until the Fold shifts and lets the ocean through. This event is called the Rush, and in their myth the two towns used to move to opposite sides of the Fold when this happened. In the myth, the Empire came and placed an Imperial obelisk between the two cities to hold the Fold together, but the Arn was too strong and it tore the land apart. To punish the Tendarans for their faith in the Empire and their iconic totems, Tendaras is banished from the world whenever the Fold is opened to the sea.

In a variation of the myth, the Fold never opened until the Empire placed the Obelisk, and the fury of Arn was to tear the land apart and swallow the obelisk, creating the Fold. In this version, the two cities vanish from the world to symbolize the time when they were literally engulfed by the cataclysmic torrent that created the Fold.

Whether the myths are true or not, neither town can be found when the Fold opens, and time passes much more slowly for the Tendarans.

The Trade Alliance

Relationships: Longevity, Business, Influence, South Sea

Longevity (strong): the Alliance has been around forever

Business (strong): the Alliance is the definition of business

Influence (strong): the Alliance has allies and influence in most courts of the world

South Sea (mild): the Alliance is based in the South Sea, though it extends to other regions as well

Arts: hard

Sciences: easy

Spanning the whole known South Sea, the Trade Alliance has embassies in Geregion, Ismolaht, Diodet, Alenea, and the Rim Kingdoms, as well as serving as the Voice of the Kril.

The Trade Alliance is as ancient as it is corrupt. It is run by powerful, rich men who are beholden to no king. It may well have outlived the Empire. It may well have been the Empire.

The Alliance has emissaries in every major port. Few people know how many ships serve the Alliance, or how many people are a part of it. There is no known headquarters, and as a mercantile order it has no navy. It is tied to the many realms that depend on it to guarantee trade, as it has a presence in many places, including the *Third Brotherhood of Engineers*.

TURLIN (turlini)

Relationships: Anterior, destitution, lenth

Anterior (strong): Turlin is in the Anterior

Destitution (mild): the town has always been poor

Lenth (mild): the economy is based on the Lenth plant

Arts: easy

Sciences: hard

Turlin, an unimportant hamlet in the broad scheme of things, is covered here only because it is representative of many settlements in the Thousand Realms: small, impoverished, and ignorant.

Turlin is an excellent example of how the normal and the mundane survive and go through life in the wild confines of the Maelstrom. As such, it should offer a point of view that differs slightly from the popular depictions of life in the thousand realms held in the romanticized dogbounds many travelers carry.

Place Relation

The place where Turlin exists is a broad, flat plain covered with scrubby plant life and small streams which never bring much water. For as long as anyone has known it, to the West are low rolling hills and the East edge stretches as far as the eye can see. In the past, snow-capped mountains were seen in the distant east, but for the last five years this has not been so. Over the skies, somewhat North of West, a small moon hangs, always in the same place in the sky, at times casting a barely-visible shadow.

There are only two applicable seasons in Turlin. The first is a hot season when the mud is baked, and at night lightning plays across the sky. The other is a nine month rainy season, where heavy storms buffet the hills and countryside. During the rainy season, it becomes extremely hard to find good firewood and often even the ground in the hearth lodges is wet.

As the residents count it, less than seven years ago the Turlin of today did not exist. The crossroads were weed-strewn and forgettable, except for stories about some hermit living by a well. A well that no one has ever found.

Seven years ago, there was an influx of newcomers to this area. They came from the hills West, and along the roads, congregating in a temporary encampment that barely offered shelter. They cleared away the majority of the tangled and thorny shrubs and heavy, thick-bladed grasses that grew up to a person's shoulder.

Many encampments like this have existed within the Maelstrom. The great majority have popped up and then disappeared, some through unfortunate occurrences like droughts, Shrike attacks, war, and disease.



Eye of the Storm

Throughout this, for seven years, Turlin has remained. The people learned how to till and cultivate a tuber root they call *lenah*, a long gnarled root that has many nutrients but unfortunately is accompanied by a bitter and acrid taste. They lived in relative peace for a few years, building and strengthening their hovels to the best of their ability. They offered a place to sleep for the occasional traveler, gathering to hear their stories of the world around them. Passing travelers taught the people of Turlin to make simple bows and pots, and caravans began selling goods and trinkets for food or a place to stay.

Eventually the Turlini consolidated their hovels into larger hearth lodges: they dug long pits into the ground and brought lumber from trees found far away. They drew large rocks from the streams to build low walls, and put a heavy thatch over the roofs using the broad-leaved grasses and a thick, clay-like mud.

Four years into their stay a group of nomadic warriors raided Turlin. They came down from the hills, wounded and weak. They refused to parley. They wore sheets of a heavy faded wool and many of them painted their faces. The band stayed for nearly six weeks, sneaking in at night to steal livestock and abduct people. Then they burned down three of the hearth lodges, and killed many of the Turlini. The people of Turlin organized and learned how to defend themselves as a group, taking the homeless into the remaining hearth lodges, and sending out scouting parties. They even captured several of the warriors, learning something of their ways before arranging an exchange of prisoners.

When the wanderers left, there was a time of peace and rebuilding. Everyone took on more chores: Raising the newly-orphaned children, building lodges and building a series of small spires (rocks piled upon each other) on several of the rolling small hills. The spires can be seen from the hills to the West, as well as the roads.

At the end of the rainy season that year, three strange creatures came to town. They were Kril. They came with a host of small, unintelligible spidery slaves that did their bidding, and sold a collection of things—including people. The crab creatures traded some of the more healthy males for a good amount of *lenah* and a wagon to carry it, and continued on down the road. The young men, mostly newcomers, joined with the people of Turlin, though a few left in the night to make their way again on the roads.

Then fifty people in rags straggled down one of the roads: Refugees from a civil war in a nearby land. They came, often in groups of twos and threes, sometimes in larger quantities. The Turlini tried to put them up, in the end building a large hearth lodge to cover them during the rainy season. Some of the people of Turlin ended up starving along with the refugees that year. At the end of the season a large number of the crab people showed up in a land-ship. They offered ridiculously low trade on

the foodstuffs, and were soon gone again. It was only afterwards that the Turlini noticed some of their children and a few of the outsiders had disappeared.

uDAI (udaian)

Relationships: Shelf, spirits

The Shelf (strong): Udai is on the Shelf

Spirits (mild): the culture is closely tied to the mythology and belief in spirits

Arts: easy

Sciences: har

Udai is a haven on the Shelf for the deep-dwellers who make their lives in the Wastes. Buried into the ice of the Shelf, Udai is a collection of tunnels and domed halls, insulated from the cold above by the stone and ice above them.

Udaians are wary of strangers they meet in the Waste for fear that they may be of the Uobi—a race of spirits that figure strongly in their folklore and drive travelers mad. If the Uobi are welcomed into a Udaian community, they will have power over the people there.

A primitive people, the Udaians use few tools, and rely on the wisdom of their ancestors to make their way. They have a rich cultural heredity, with a folklore full of spirits and gods who take the shape of whales.

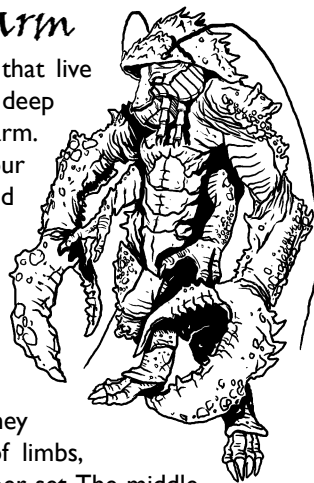
Maelstrom Storytelling



The Other Races

The Kril and the Inner Swarm

The Kril are a race of creatures that live in a remote part of the South Seas, deep within what is called the Inner Swarm. They stand around seven feet, with four sets of limbs, a cartillaged back and forearms, and small heads crowned by two antennae that fall back behind them like hair. They speak a clicking language that can only be mastered by their race, and are known for their ability to share emotions and ideas through thought. They walk upright on their lower pair of limbs, and have great pinchers on their upper set. The middle sets are vestigial, with something akin to hands, with two large digits and an opposable third. Their coloration varies from a greenish-black to an earthy red.



The Kril have antennae which are rarely used. They hang down their backs in two long stalks when in open air, and are outstretched when under water and in darkness.

Called by many names, the Kril are the greatest traders on the sea, and even with little open military strength, they are feared and rarely challenged. Some realms pay them tithes, and others offer them slaves: the domain of the Kril is slavery in all forms, from the sprawling city of Kril Keljit in the deepest reach of the Inner Swarm to the outpost cities of the Outer Crescent.

There are several different species of Kril, not all of which are seen outside the Swarm. Few people can easily distinguish between all of them, and often mistake coloration or size for a racial distinction within the Kril.

Language

The Kril language is mostly unintelligible to other races, since the Kril do not have the vocal chords of humans. It is a language of clicks and squeals, churrups and growls. Their syllables depend not only on the type of sound being made, but how it is stressed and how loud it is spoken. In the slavehalls and ships, the Kril sound like clattering dishes. They seldom listen to just one per-

THE TRADE ALLIANCE

the Trade Alliance is allowed to enter the Outer Crescent without tithe. Theirs is an old arrangement, in which they have been chosen to represent the Kril in matters outside the Swarm.

Commodore Attikai's notes, in the time of the Third President:
"The Krillos, and their Distinctions:

The bulk of these creatures are comprised of a worker class. These are larger, do not stand upright, and seem incapable of speech. The warriors of the Krillos are often smaller, but seemingly more agile, and have a dark jade color to their crustaceous bodies. These are seemingly very intelligent, but yet like the others have no gift of speech as we know it. The ones I have dealt with most are a mercantile caste, well-suited and accustomed to dealing with human kind: they stand upright when communicating with humans, and are able to use our words and sounds. Many of them even dress in a semblance of our clothing. Like the warriors, these negotiators have shown a great intelligence."

son, and tend speak at the same time as others. One-to-one communication is mostly silent, and either relies on telepathy or use of their antennae.

It is very possible that the majority of Kril communication is through some type of telepathic contact—and that their spoken "language" is merely an addition to their telepathic speech that helps signify some rapidly-changing hierarchy among them. Another theory is that the majority of the Kril "language" is in higher frequencies than can be heard by human ears.

Some examples of their speech:

K = A 'K' sound is a mandible click, that seems to be placed for emphasis—especially status-oriented emphasis

-il = The -il suffix is a high-pitched whine of varying degrees. The whine apparently comes from air forced through passages not unlike human sinuses. Variations of it are translated as: -el (a lower pitched whine) -'l (a shorter whine). This sound appears to apply roughly to a noun, or object-oriented speech.

-jet = The jet sound is a sort of chirp that appears to be one of the main phonetic characters of the Kril dialogue. A variation of it is translated as -lt, or -lit, depending on the author or the tone.

-rrp = (also translated as -rhp)—sounding more like a grackle or whining growl, the way someone might roll 'r's.



Eye of the Storm

As Seen By Others

In **Picarni Parish**, they are called the Gregarian Crab folk, which is mostly due to the romanticized writings of a past author who wrote exotic foreign adventure tales despite having never traveled (*The Thief of Dahl Lindy*, and *Whispers of Empire* were two of the most dramatic).

Among the Cliff People

"The Kril are Arn's children, and theirs is the sea. They trade in souls of the living as Arn trades in those of the dead. To place all things in order and control through thought, these are the ways of the Kril."

Philosophy of the Kril

"Like the sea there is discordance, but all told it forms patterns of simple order. Embrace the chaos and work to find the order beneath."

"All things are made of the sea, and the sea is all things. Know the sea, know the trade, know the Law. Power is a word of humans. In the world there is only value, and with value comes importance, and with importance there is responsibility. All things have value, and if barter cannot decide the value than it either has none, or has all."

"Do not attach meaning that is not there. Meaning has value, and this gift is not to be bestowed unless it is the Law."

"All things are prescribed by the Law. At birth there is the Law, and at death, when one's value is no more, there is the Law. The Law is to us as the sea is to the world."

"Walk the Trade. Know the Sea. Live the Law."

And one day, the Prophet will come."

Landships and the Guides

The Kril are the masters of the landships (or *skiffs*), which float on the air. The creators of these machines, or the inheritors from the Imperium, it makes no difference. Alone are the Kril in their power to build them now, and make them fly. Other realms have these ships, but not in the numbers of the Kril. Great galleons that hum a deep sound as they slip over the ground, and spread the water with tiny ripples as they slip into its mutable surface. Some of these ships fly, called skyships of highskiffs, and they are rare and wondrous things outside the Swarm.

See the notes in Chapter Six under *Technology* for notes on more of the Kril devices.

The Venth



The Venth are a fixture on the old Empire roads in the realms of the Maelstrom. Little is known about them except for the briefest glimpses of their enduring and communal society. They travel in groups from five to several hundred: Bands that travel in rags, carrying everything they would need on their long backs or clutched in their small hands. Venth is a term they call themselves: As much as *Venth*, they are known as *refugees*, *beggars*, or *outcasts*.

They can be found in most human cities, gathered at corners begging or performing menial labor. Venth are an underclass that has remained impoverished and unempowered, and may have been slaves of the Empire.

Physiology

Venthi physiology is long, slender, and frail. Their bone structure carries them nearly half-again higher than the average human, and their unique 'crests' which ride along the ridge of their skulls only add to their height. Their skin is harder and more leathery than human skin, and of a drier texture. The skin folds and hangs easily, increasing as the Venth ages. The bones of a Venth are hollow, which lightens their body and allows for their height.

Venth legs fall easily into a crouching position. Their digits are longer (though less dexterous) than human fingers and toes. They have large, opalescent eyes that are dark and glittering for the majority of older Venth and nearly all young Venth. However, some Venth eyes cataract over completely white, and others mist into a milky grey. Venth appear to have no noses. They have small ears at the base of their skulls, underneath their jaw. Their mouth is set in a large overbite. Venth have a semblance of what would be teeth—a bony ridge on their upper mouth that can be quite sharp.

Nearly all Venth have some form of vestigial tail. For some, this is pronounced, and can be used to balance themselves while running. In their society, tailless venthi appear to be more sedentary, and more authoritative. Venth with tails appear to have a more physical role.

Though their arms and legs are long, the great majority of Venth are weak compared to other races, and the average Venth is unable to lift what an average human can. Venth skin color ranges in a broad spectrum of muted, washed-out colors, the predominant majority being a slate blue grey, ranging into green and cool browns. A small minority of Venth have spotted, freckled skin.

Maelstrom Storytelling



All Venth appear to be vegetarian in nature, and most follow strict diets. They are unable to digest red meat, and have trouble with fowl or fish, preferring insects and grasses of many types.

Known Traits and General Perceptions

The average Venth wears ragged, layered robes that hang about their frame. Many of the traveling Venth that are most common appear to have and maintain the same clothing for most of their lives. The Venth who leave the masses of beggars and refugees adapt well to the customs and styles of their adopted culture, though few Venth manage (or choose) to do this.

The Venth are known for their ancient role in the world: Their place in human myth is rife with stories of Venth wisdom. But the Venth one sees, begging in the streets with their bare grasp of language, tells a different story. Nearly everyone has a story about the wretched lives of the Venth, or a joke at their expense—but nearly every culture has a myth espousing the wisdom of a Venth mystic, found in “faraway lands”.

“The Venth, they hold ancient secrets. One of those is the secret to why they hate the crab people.”

Ambassador D’vanni

Known History

Little of the Venth is actually known. Recorded history seems to have passed them by. There are two major assumptions:

1. At one point, before the advent of humanity, thousands of years ago, they had a great and enlightened civilization. Some say it was these ancient Venth that built the earliest ruins, and that the Empire learned its power from the Venth.

2. The other major theme is destruction (which most attribute to the Kril) who do seem to possess an inordinate amount of Venth slaves: “More in one major city than can be seen on all the roads of the old Empire.”

Venth tell their histories through oral tradition. Their stories, told of uncles and grandmothers and great-aunts, include complicated genealogies. They tell of the wandering, tribal Venth that appear to go back generations on generations, starting always at *S’Nn’pth*. *S’Nn’pth* is a Venth word which can only be translated as either *The Loss of Voice*, or *The (time of) Murder*, or more generally, *The Problem*. It is in this last way that the word *S’Nn’pth* comes across in Venth dialogue, a problem with no apparent answer. This event is often called the *Venth Exodus* in the dogbonds.

General Notes

Large numbers of Venth are cause for concern among human populations. Deemed a “burden on society,” they are often sick, as well as being a flood of poor and unskilled mouths to feed.

In many communities, it’s considered bad luck to kill a Venth, but rarely is it considered murder.

“Never seen a Venth, heard them bad luck & all, but I’d bet one’d make good eating.”

—Hob the Gaffer, village of Turlin

The Venth and the Shroud of Khem

The Shroud of Khem say little about the Venth. The many dictates of the Shroud do not seem to concern themselves with the Venth, though there are some Venth members of the Shroud. The Shroud has on occasion called for action against people who have slain Venth.

The Venth and the Strangers

Little is known about the way the strangers react to the Venth. The Venth seem nonplused by the Strangers, and seem to have few stories about them in their oral histories.

The Kenratha

The Kenratha figure in many of the myths of the Veldt, and are mentioned eighteen times in the Uoratt of Belzaine. There are two types of Kenratha: One is an intelligent race of large felines, striped and patterned like the tigers of the Veldt; the other more resembles human stock, with a fully prehensile tale. Kenratha have a soft, short fur over most of their bodies that lends a velvet touch to their skin.



They have a highly developed sense of touch, and sleep often but only for a short span of hours.

“Like a young thing, she found herself beguiled by the silk of my shirt. She ran

her soft fingers over it repeatedly, and I realized she now had no interest in the conversation we were having.”

In the view of the Kenratha, the waking world is no more real than the sleeping world. Except that the dream of the waking world is linear. They are drawn into consciousness as they wake, and spend their waking hours like guests in a body not wholly theirs. Like humans who do not usually identify themselves with apes, most Kenratha do not relate themselves to cats.



Eye of the Storm

The Adollans

The Adollans have small, roundish furry bodies the size of a man's torso, and a small head with huge eyes, as well as six legs. They do not have hands as we know them. They are an intelligent species with a harder skin on the top and a soft belly, with two joints in each leg. They weave webs from a fluid that excretes from the rear of their torso, and communicate in high pitches at the edge of human hearing. It is thought that their language uses ideas instead of words.

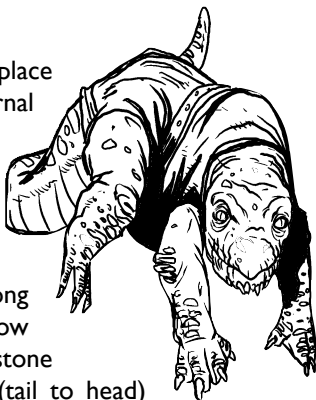


The Kril will tell of sales of Venth to the Adollans, who are taken into the mountain and never seen again. Otherwise, they have a random pattern of trading precious metals for dogbound books, metalwork, and liquor. It is not clear whether they drink the liquor.

The Adollans have never been known to leave their islands in the South Sea, though related species have been found in the Old Mountains and Souther.

The Darig

Some say the Darig are from a place far beyond the Desert of the Eternal Sun. They are scaled and reptilian people who are little known among the human lands, though they can be found in every corner of the thousand realms. They walk on all fours, with a large and long tail, and have no hands as we know them. They weigh up to ninety stone (350 lbs), and can reach lengths (tail to head) of up to 6 feet. Cold-blooded, the Darig tend to avoid colder climates.



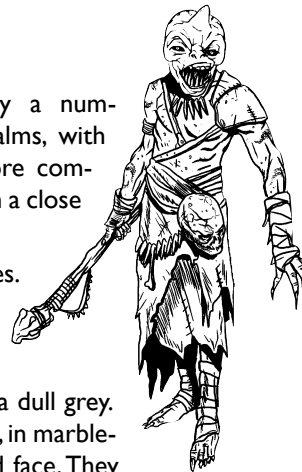
Though their culture is by comparison rural and backward, there have been Darig scholars and explorers who have led their fields. Despite the best efforts of the Kril, they have never proven to be good slave labor.

The Shrikes

("Hseh-Henthihai thenthel-eh")

These creatures are known by a number of names in the thousand realms, with Shrikes and Sekoreh being the more common (Torraks and Defilers coming in a close second).

Shrikes are long and wiry creatures. Their skin is rubbery and glistens with a sweaty secretion. They are often described as yellow, but their skin color is more of a light tan to a dull grey. Their skin is accentuated by freckles, in marbled "streams" down their back and face. They have eyes that in a relaxed position fall on the side of their heads, making them look like fish; when they concentrate, the eyes swivel under a beaked "forehead" to provide more human-like forward vision. The back of their head is large and soft, as if their brains were cushioned. They have sharp teeth that jut out of their mouths and prevent them from closing their mouths completely.



They often wear small harnesses, but rarely any other clothing. They emit high-pitched shrieks, a "howling", which will attract others of their kind (some say that this "howling" exists half within the force of the Maelstrom itself, and half in other worlds). They carry staves or sticks of some foreign construction, with crystals fastened at one end. The crystals focus power, and can do severe physical damage. Called "shrikesticks" and "oblats," it is unclear whether other races can even use them.

Aggressive hunters, they seem to attack locations and communities over individuals—they have a reputation for causing vast destruction, but their motives are unclear. There are no tales of a successful attempt to communicate with them, though it is generally believed that the Strangers have some influence over them. They have been known to raze sites to the ground, and are assumed to have had a factor in the destruction of the Empire..

They have their own language, and though their facial structure makes it impossible for them to pronounce several human syllables (such as "w," "m," or anything that would force them to close their mouths) some have been known to speak human languages in a halting, lisping manner. It is curious to note that Venth appears to be bastardization of a Shrike word (though it's meaning is unknown).

In contrast to their behavior, their voices have been described as "angelic."

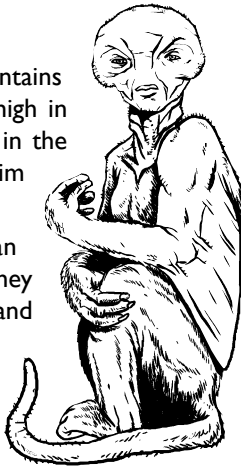
Maelstrom Storytelling



The Sowls

The Sowl people live in the Great Mountains on Nether, in the Selempri Citystates high in the mountains. Some stories put them in the Old Mountains as well, but the Sowl claim to have never left the Great Mountains.

Sowls are a sentient race, taller than a Human but shorter than a Venth. They have four limbs, with three digits each and opposable thumbs. They have short tails that just brush the floor when they walk upright, which they do as often as they use all fours. Sowls have a dark skin that varies from a purplish brown to a coal black, with a soft leathery feel and a downy hair on most of them that is a shade lighter than their skin itself. The distinct feature of the Sowl is the fold of skin stretching from their elbows to their knees, which when spread allows them to glide in the air like a flying squirrel. They have muscles to draw this skin closer to them when they are not in flight, and with gaps under their arms and at their hips they can even wear human clothing. Their heads are rounded with long necks and have an avian quality, with small crests along their necks to their heads. Their eyes are quick and small. Their body is light with a thin bone structure (not unlike the Venth) that allows them to fly. They use their feet as often as their hands to eat, write, draw, or hold things. Sowls are hatched and not born.



Sowls have integrated into human society, speaking the Common Word and wearing the clothes and studying the histories of humanity and the Empire. They have not lost their own cultural priorities, however; as is evidenced in Selempri, there has been a mutual adaptation on the part of both races.

The Sowl culture is tied to Selempri, and the Sowl have a mystical religion that forbids them to leave the Great Mountains. They have a passivist view that reveres wisdom, and aspires to a transcendence of the soul. They hold that most mammals have souls, except for the Sekoreh. By Sowl tradition, the Kril are not mammals. Adollans and other races away from the Great Mountains do not figure in their insular theology.

Part of the Sowl mysticism revolves around their view of the duality of existence. In their view, the dreaming world is also real, and can even be controlled. They see an important relationship between the world of dreams and waking, and though there are no stories of Newcomer Sowls, they believe that Newcomers are dreamers from another world who have been grabbed by the storm.

Sowls have the ability to reproduce sounds through their voices that exceed the full range of Human hearing. Sowls are known for their melodious songs, which usually do not have lyrics. The music of the Sowl is tied to their cultural religion, and as such has a sacred connotation. Their mysticism holds strongly to shared social ritual, which leads to an understanding of the greater picture in their pursuit of transcendence.





Eye of the Storm

Other People

The Shroud of Khem

The Shroud walks the world and travels to all places. They are revered for the one thing that defines them: They and they alone seem to hold the answers to the world. They do not pay for their meals, they do not wait in line, and they never fear for their safety. In great hooded cloaks they walk with heads down in small groups and rarely speak. Nothing is asked of them, it is only offered to them.

“where there’s the Shroud there are Shrikes”

The Shroud of Khem is so old that there is nothing known to be older. Whether they have their roots in the Empire or pre-date it is irrelevant to most, because it does nothing to change the fact that the Shroud holds the power that is knowledge in this world.

“Know then that there are those who walk among us who are not of our kind. They hold the pieces of the truth that can only be gathered in the Valley, and as such are to be feared as one fears the brightness of the sun. They come to us and pass through, in a pattern that is beyond our understanding. They walk a course that holds the world together, from Shij-Gabril and outward like the spiral of the spider. Do not think your encounters with them are random, but do not try to understand them. Let them be, like the tide on the ocean, lest you fall from the pattern that is this world.”

From the Sayers of the Cliff People

It is assumed that the Masters, who first led the Shroud, were of the Empire, and that in those days they were one with the Plan and understood all. It is this assumption that defines the life of those among the Shroud; without their semblance of knowledge their power means nothing.

The Masters say that all was once known, and that the Shroud was the center of all knowledge; like a pool at the center of the valley it collected the diverse thing that is wisdom and labored long to shape it into power.

Organization

One theory is that the Shroud recruits from those who make the pilgrimage to their city-monastery. It is also thought that a good many people awaken there as well from other worlds, and are inducted from the start. Regardless, the Shroud conditions its acolytes thoroughly over a long period of time. They are said

to have great powers, according to their rank. The Masters are thought to total 9. There are some dozen grades of rank below, beginning with *acolyte*. The monastery is referred to as Shij-Gabril by the Cliff People and in Edhillond’s DS, and some say the Empire called it Khem.

Some astute studies have brought out the similarity between the 9 Masters of the Shroud and the “9 Rulers of the 7 States,” which was an order of the Empire referred to in some inscriptions. The relationship is based on the fact that the 9 Rulers of the 7 States were responsible for “the One Plan that was the goal of the Emperor, the One Plan that brought from many the whole that was his Empire.”

Powers

In the vein of all folktales, the travelers of the Shroud have been ascribed to have a variety of powers. From the curse that befalls anyone who wrongs them to the power of clairvoyance, telepathy, a gaseous form, and a banshee-like shriek if attacked. It is commonly believed by the Sowsls that the Shroud is one entity and so all of its members share the same consciousness and powers. Other people have called them shape-changers and witches.

Wolves

The shroud often are followed by tamed wolves, who act as guides, guards, and companions. There are many stories about the wolves and why the Shroud uses them. Some people say the soul of any member of the Shroud is tied to a wolf, or that the Shroud sees through the wolf’s eyes. There is a thought that the wolves are not actually real, but shadows or spirits. In the dog-bound *The Edge of Dreams*, the wolves are described as the evil half of the soul, and in one chapter they sneak into the homes of a village and kill all the children.

The Shroud and the Physical Sciences

The Shroud has always shown an interest in the inventions of the world, particularly when they involve items from the Empire. Whether they are watching for something, or monitoring the world, they take no written notes and rarely interfere. Members of the shroud do not use or carry items of technology for the most part, but it is said that Shij-Gabril is full of grinding machinery like the gears of Dacartha.

Maelstrom Storytelling



Stories of the Shroud

The Shroud of Khem is tied to and defined by their knowledge. What if the Shroud has lost this knowledge, or never had it to begin with? The initiate is cloaked in ignorance, told that the Masters know all. After years the seeds of doubt begin to grow: What if, in fact, the Shroud of Khem is a lie? Without their vaunted knowledge, what might do they hold? Their mystic routes through the peoples of the world, are they truly charted and controlled by the Plan? Or are they as happenstance as that of any wanderer in the Maelstrom? Has it been so long since the Shroud had the power of knowledge that perhaps they have forgotten it? This is the fear that lurks among the dark-robed gatherings of the Shroud: The Great Lie, the one truth among the mendacities of time. The Masters live on, and time passes, and nothing changes in the Shroud of Khem. The continuity through time of the Shroud might even be the one symptom of power it holds, the one continuity it has control over, beyond all things. Did they learn something from the fall of the Empire that no one else knows? Have they transcended the mundane and moved to a higher level of knowledge?

The Strangers

"We exist without your time and space, child"

-A Stranger, as told by Edhillond (DS, IV:ix)

"No one is called a Stranger save those that walk alone through the Maelstrom, in between the mists and the storms, unaffected by all that rules each living creature of the Maelstrom. They are rarely seen in groups, and it is a dark portent when they are. Instead they walk, friendless and alone in the Maelstrom, accepting their fate as a ship accepts the winds of the sea.

"Where they go, they are feared, though no one dares strike them: for it is said that those who best a Stranger will be cursed to walk in the place of the Stranger, alone and without companions of any kind. In the flux of the Maelstrom, no one would want the loss of the only thing familiar: a human face.

"When a human becomes one of the Strangers (if that is what happens and the Strangers are merely not spirits of the Maelstrom in human guise), it is said their eyes cloud over and are forever seen as grey orbs through which, if gazed upon long enough, swirling mists can be seen. It is said one who gazes long enough into their eyes will end up mad with the comprehension they glean. Still, many a scholar and scientist would give nearly all in their possession to interrogate, dissect, and study one of these people.

"They go where they will, and none dare bar their way.

"Strangers walk alone through the Maelstrom, apparently without purpose or desire. They carry with them only a ragged cloak, and occasionally an old relic, such as a bronze shortblade at their side. With them is brought pestilence, pain, and sadness.

"Those who carry the Myth in their hearts tell of one of the original Seven who brought Humanity back to the lands of the Maelstrom: Yelin the Wanderer left human territory after she experienced hatred and disgust upon seeing the destruction and strife they had brought against each other. According to the story, she gave up her humanity at seeing nothing that was good about it. She accepted, and became one with the storm and chaos around her, and has never been seen again."

As told by Vellina, Bard to Argost

Motives and Purposes

If the Strangers, as a whole, have a long-term motive or purpose for their wanderings, they don't speak of it. If there is one, it is as inscrutable as the Maelstrom itself. However, their entire lives seem driven by quixotic purposes and needs.

Examples: A Stranger may come across a village merchant that has an overstock of fairly useless but marginally interesting pots. The Stranger purchases every one of them, walking off never to be seen again. A Stranger may be found defending a small abandoned shrine. A stranger may engage you in normal conversation. A stranger may ignore you completely. After an hour or so, they will be gone.

Technology and the physical sciences do not always work around the Strangers, and the natural arts often have unexpected success.

Regardless of how the Strangers are used in a narrative, they are always tied closely to the storm. They may have been normal people before they became what they are, and they may be spirits incarnate. They have a few affinial gifts, some of which may be very powerful. These are Primary Affinities that give them powers beyond the ordinary, like turning into the mist of the storm, or repelling magic, or clairvoyance. They often use the Arts as well.

The Mallatin

"And what would your world be without dreams?"

The Mallatin (also called Dreamwalkers,) are rarely seen, but they figure in the folklore and lives of most people of the realms. They are called the Kvinn in Udai, Students of Kael at the Universities, and Spirit Guides by the Sowl.

The Dreamwalkers are sentient creatures that usually appear in human form and interact with the world as though flesh and blood. They may be spirits, and are assumed to have the power to disincorporate and fade out of touch. The Sowl associate them with dreams and the dream world. They say they are guides who have the power to walk through sleep into the day world.

The Udaians of the Waste claim they are the people of Albatton, and call them Kvinn. In this way they are spirits who live outside the tangible world at the edge of the storm.



Eye of the Storm

From notes written by
Magdellon, of the Dog Throng:

The Mallatin are usually seen in small groups, and seem to avoid prolonged contact with society. They often engage travelers in simple conversation, asking simple questions but with a seemingly higher importance. They might approach a shepherd, for instance, and inquire about the health of her sheep, the weather, and her town. There are no stories of the Mallatin ever harming people or even making much physical contact. They are said to vanish if attacked, or to fade away if injured.

The Kril, who do not dream, see them as yet another creature in the world, no more important or strange than any other.

The Dog Throng treat the Mallatin with great respect, and supposedly attribute to them a relationship to the Dog Goddess and the homeworld of the Dog Star.

Newcomers are often drawn to the Mallatin, because like the Dog Throng, most people believe the Mallatin come from another world. In turn, the Mallatin are said to show a great interest in newcomers.

The Picarnians, like some other cultures, see the Mallatin as envoys of a god figure—angels of sorts—who walk among us. The Udaians express a similar feeling, but with an apprehension—they see the Mallatin as spirits of the dead or messengers from our darker dreams.

From Professor Lioness' Notes on the Mallatin, written shortly before her disappearance:

"The question was asked again, and at this point Irvre applied the restraint field at a higher level than previously attained. He noted that the arbiter gauge registered 20 over 13. The creature responded as though physically wounded, and Irvre took notes since this was the first physical reaction we had achieved. The creature then responded to the question (once it was made clear that the restraint field would only be reduced by doing so). It used the Common Word and said: 'I am a student, like your man here. Our trip here is to study the stage-steps that lead to your manifestation.' At this point the restraint field wavered, dropping to 14.3 dissonance, and the creature faded quickly out of our realm of contact."

Fraternal Orders

The Order of Hellene

The Order of Hellene is an ancient order of Natural Artists that may no longer exist. Dating to the Second Age of Imperium (by most accounts) the Order is a collective of Artists who were ultimately banned by the Empire for heresy. The root of the schism is not clear, though Hellene by many accounts was a city that took part in a brief civil rebellion under the Empire. The stigma associated with this order has caused it to be likened to a witches coven, and practitioners will often accuse one another of being involved in the Order of Hellene in order to blacken their name.

Third Brotherhood of Engineers

A fraternal order of Physical Scientists, the Third Brotherhood traces its history to the Empire (of course.) The Brotherhood is a secret society, and the rites and ranks within it are not well known outside of the order. It is involved with the Trade Alliance, and has some political pull in many cities (like Dacartha) as well. Some people have gone so far as to say that the Brotherhood has political ties in half the realms.

Society of Practitioners

The Society of Practitioners is a loosely organized order of scholars among the major urban realms. The Society hosts lecture circuits, and is committed to the furthering of knowledge and the Arts. Many members of the faculty at the major colleges are members of the Society, whether they practice the Arts or not.

Min Taroff

Min Taroff has its origins in Belzaine. The Taroff is an order of practitioners who specialize in the powers of the mind. They are generally distrusted in most circles, and this may be due to the secret nature of their order. The Min Taroff may be one of the few schools of Natural Art that does not derive its history from the Empire.

Maelstrom Storytelling



Other Creatures

Haunts

Most people steer their minds away from the unknown if it frightens them. Haunts are a reminder of the unknowable. They are touches of the Dreamworld, and are often heard, seen, or even felt.

"The question I posit, fellow colleagues, is this: What if these manifestations are shadows of something else? If the World of Dreams is real, and there are those who can enter it, could these things be their attempt at communication? People trapped in this other world? Or creatures from the far side of all realities, trying to break through?"

Professor Monraison of Queen's College

Unlike spirits, haunts draw their lives from the Dreamworld. Manifestations of the landscape of the Dream, haunts are a collection of ideas and memories. Some seem to have the power to intrude into the Maelstrom itself. In many ways they are walking whorls; eddies that can draw you in and capture you in their own reality.

Some haunts are almost sentient, and might possess their own rationale and needs. Most are fragments of people and thought, stuck in an almost programmed repetition until the Dreamworld shifts them into a new thought or a new memory.

Mermaids

*"Spread over the silver waves thy golden hairs,
And as a bed I'll take them and there lie;
And in that glorious supposition think
He gains by death that hath such means to die."*

Comedy of Errors III.ii

The sailors of the South Sea have tales of many creatures, most of them as mythical as the mermaid. But many will swear they are real, and in the recorded history of Geregion, the Sixth President was tended by mermaids when he was shipwrecked near the Outer Crescent. In the dogbound *Theolyn of Seven Fleets*, mermaids are sirens who lure men to them in order to mate, and in one chapter they slip into the dream of the protagonist to mate with him there.

Mermaids are often associated with the myths of the Lillondi, who are supposed to dwell in the Deep Sea past the Rim Kingdoms.

Ravens

The ravens of the storm are highly intelligent animals. They are able to understand the spoken words of sentient races, though they are not capable of such speech. Though of an intelligence not far removed from the sentient peoples, ravens do not have an evolved culture or advanced society.

Rossials

A rossial is a small marsupial, a cross between a mink and a house cat. Weighing 10 to 15 pounds, with a long body, good body strength, and the ability to squeeze into anything. They have four legs, paws with sharp small claws, and a long tail. They have good noses and excellent hearing. Their vision is attracted to moving things, like a cat. The Kril keep them on their skiffs to kill the rats. The average rossial isn't much brighter than your ordinary mouser, but every so often one of them realizes they can speak. Every few years there is a great unspoken call that goes out among the speaking rossials, and they gather for an event called the Great Meskeet.

Serrets

A serret is a Kril-sized sea creature with a long floating tail and body not unlike a jellyfish. They have no head or arms, and subsist on algae and bacteria in the water. What makes them unique is that they project dreams. Divers and anyone else who comes across them will most often find their mind filled with the imagery of someone else's dreams. These dreams come from people in the area, but there are times when the serret picks up the dreams of someone across the Maelstrom. The dreams come from all races that dream, from humans to venth to lapdogs.

Dice: Characters with Spirit Aspects are more likely to receive the dreams of a serret, and add their Spirit Aspect total to the dice total of the serret should any rolls be required.

Spirits

Spirits figure in most cultural lore, and reflect each culture's efforts to understand the unknown. What are called spirits may well be echoes in time, the mind's imagination, or actual sentient creatures.

Regardless, there are creatures that have no physical manifestation in the realms, but are sentient and might even be called "living." These creatures live in Side Realms. Many of them can not leave their realm at all, others can cross into the Prime Realm (which is the realm we know), and others can travel wherever they want.



Eye of the Storm

Unlike Haunts, spirits are individual entities for the most part. They have goals, needs, and fears. Because of their foreign nature, these driving forces might seem very different from those of a regular person.

In many places, the nature of spirits is shaped by their cultural affinity. In Picarni, for instance, spirits are monstrous baby-stealers, as well as faie creatures in the dark woods. To the Udaians, they are the Uobi. The Mallatin may even be a powerful manifestation of spirits.

Spirits as Roles

As long as some of the questions about the nature of spirits have been addressed in the narrative, spirits can make great roles for players. Though they have affinial gifts, they also have weaknesses. The narrator should decide what Primary Affinity Gifts they have, as well as what affects them in the Prime Realm. Traveling to the Side Realms might be called Spirit Travel, and cost a descriptor to invoke. Their lack of corporal form might make them immune to bodily harm, but they also might blow away in the wind. Also, they may be affected by the superstitions of the local cultural affinity. A powerful spirit might be able to possess a body for their own, or siphon Kael from people. Both of those powers would be Primary Affinities. They could also have personality traits that compel them to do certain things: a spirit might always use doors and walk on the ground as though they were human, or even have a need for sleep. A general suggestion is to establish a limitation or weakness for every special power the spirit has, unless game balance is not an issue. It is assumed that spirits can not use the Arts or Sciences.

Taili (Belzaine Servant-monkeys)

In Belzaine they have long groomed a race of monkeys to live among them. These domesticated creatures are brighter than the average human child. They can understand most of what people say, though they are incapable of human speech. They serve the Belzaine people as maids, babysitters, goat-herders, theft deterrents, and companions.

Dressed in miniature outfits like those of their masters, these servant-monkeys have a special relationship with their owner. Considered a spiritual bond, the Taili usually live as long as their master, and die shortly thereafter.

Whales

As large sea mammals, whales are much like the whales of Earth. Some of the smaller ones are tusked, and the larger ones live lives centuries long. Whales have a gift for emphatic thought—like the Kril, they project feelings. The images they convey are either too complex, symbolic, or simple to be understood as language. But like the whale song, it can be felt moodily for miles under the water.

Realms by Region

This is a list of the realms listed in this chapter, grouped by their affinial region. Each region has its major affinity listed next to it as well. Needless to say, there are many more, as well as places like Dacartha and Shij-Gabril that shift among regions.

Adolla (South Sea): Adolla-Noi, Adolla-Lin

Alenea (South Sea): Hanaku, Kaila, Hatzanao, Venetzia, Tzaulo, Nautzopa

Anterior (Nether): **TIMBERLUND**, Cliff People, Diodet, Picarni, Sholcarta, Turlin

Crescent (South Sea): Kril Diriu, Ai J'k-It

Critee (Farlong): Taloban

Desert of Endless Sun (Nether and Farlong): Darig Ruins, Anton's Dig

Edge (Farlong): Geregon, Ismolaht

Fold (Nether and Farlong): Tendaras

Great Mountains (Nether): Hais, Selemprici Citystates

Old Mountains (Farlong): Remstrike

Rim (South Sea): Rim Kingdoms

Shelf (Cold Sea): **WASTES**, Albatton, Udai, Field Station LaReine, Lost Rite

Souther (Cold Sea): Springtide

Veldt (Nether): Belzaine, Dryer Mob

Maelstrom Storytelling



Chapter Four

Acting the Part: Playing Characters

Story Engine Universal Rules (v.2)

The rules in this book remain unchanged from their original release in 1997. Since then, a revised set of rules have been made available. Dubbed Story Engine, these updated rules can be found in PDF format from the Politically Incorrect Games web site like this edition of Maelstrom. A plug-in is provided with the Story Engine book, so that you can easily play in the Maelstrom setting if you have both books.

Visit www.pigames.net for more information about Story Engine.



CREATING A CHARACTER

This chapter outlines some of the ideas behind creating characters, and explains how to get started. At the end of the chapter there is a Quick Start section that gives a brief overview of the game system.

Playing a character can be very demanding. It requires imagination, creativity, and decision making. Starting a narrative with the right character is important, and deciding which character is right is not always easy.

The Narrative

Each narrative is conducive to different characters, or roles. These roles can be chosen by the player or the narrator, and in some scenarios certain roles are sometimes suggested by the designer (see Appendix Two for sample scenarios).

One of the most creative and collaborative ways is for the narrator to talk about what kind of narrative will be run, and then see what kind of roles the players want to play in that story.

The simplest is for the narrator to create roles for their narrative and assign them to the players. This is fast and ideal for quick games, but removes the players from the creative process.

The Basics

If you've role-played before, then many of the ideas here may be well known to you. But whether you're new to gaming or not, they provide useful tips for enjoying the game.

In creating a character, the main question is what you would enjoy playing. Role-playing is a chance to play the roles of people different from yourself, and each game offers a chance to play a new role. You can play the role of almost anyone, so long as it works with the narrator's story. It is ultimately up to the narrator whether or not a character is appropriate to the story, though we encourage narrators and players alike to explore new ideas and try new twists.

The narrative system used in Maelstrom for scene resolution is cinematic in scope, and does not attempt to provide perfect realism or rules for every possible action. Instead it focuses on the story being told and adds a structure to that story, providing boundaries that challenge the players as they collaborate in an effort to write their story. The climactic scenes are made more enjoyable with the thrill of knowing they could end badly for the characters. Success, if not guaranteed, is not only rewarding, but also more exciting along the way.

Getting Started

The first part of this chapter deals with playing characters or roles native to the Maelstrom world. These are people or creatures that have lived their whole lives, or most of them, in the Maelstrom. The second part of the chapter discusses Newcomers and offers guidelines for playing them.

Once the narrator has told you what kind of story to expect, and you've worked out an idea of what kind of person you want to play, then the rest is about working out the details of that role.



Eye of the Storm

What Do You Want To Be?

This is the fun part. What part in the story would you like to play? What race? What gender? What kind of person? If it works in the context of the story, the players can play anything from a human to a Venthi to a rossial, from spirits to even the family dog. If it sounds fun and can add to the story, then there is no limit to what can be played.

The premise of the story might rule out certain races or creatures. Most people choose to play someone they can identify with. It is harder to relate to a creature we have little in common with. This can be challenging as well as rewarding. From different ages to races to genders, the discovery of trying to see through someone else's eyes is a creative and even enlightening experience. Once the race and gender and age are decided, it's time to move onto the *personality* and *background* of the role.

Personality

Who is your character? How do they think, and behave? This can be as simple as “tough gal, but with a heart” to a deeper psychological understanding like “always afraid of failing, which makes him careful and cautious, to the point of panicking when quick action is called for.”

Most of this is window dressing, to help the player understand the role, and play that role well and enjoyably. Remember that the goal of role-playing is not only to enjoy the game but to con-

tribute in a way that allows others to enjoy what you are doing. These descriptive sentences or adjectives will be important as the rules are applied. They will become *descriptors*, which are discussed in the following chapter.

There are a thousand ways to make a character rich and enjoyable, from selecting simple mannerisms like a tick or an accent, to providing insight into their thoughts and their hearts. Characters are people. With all the qualities and flaws of people, and shortcomings can be the most enjoyable and loveable part of a character.

Background

The background of a character is their past. This will determine what they know, who they are, whether they have family, and help the player get a feel for what kind of person they are.

As the background is worked out with the narrator, many of the choices will be used as *secondary affinities*, which are explained in the following chapter.

The environment of the character is important to understand. It will have had an impact on how that character sees the world, what they think, and what they know. Chapter Three provides an overview of parts of the Maelstrom, and Chapter Two is a walking tour of the world through the eyes of one particular person. The narrator will flesh out the details of the setting and help provide a feel for the world and its culture.

Character Creation Made Easy

Creating a character in the Maelstrom is a simple but creative process. Sometimes it's best to set the first session aside just to come up with the character that you'll play. The choices that will be the most difficult are creative—the rules themselves are very simple. Once the race, gender, and rough sketch of the person (or creature) is decided, two Descriptors are chosen, as well as a Weak Descriptor. Once the background of the character is established, a Primary Affinity is chosen (almost always a Cultural Affinity, except for Newcomers who begin with the Kael Affinity) and then two Secondary Affinities are decided. That's it. All of these terms are explained in the following chapter, as well as briefly defined in the Glossary.

Step by Step:

Personality

- Race, Gender
- 2 Descriptors
- 1 Weak Descriptor

Background

- 1 Primary Affinity
- 2 Secondary Affinities

If Newcomers are being created, they have a similar but slightly different process. The Newcomer character begins with a blank character sheet, having only the Kael Affinity. The same Descriptors and Secondary Affinities are chosen as for another character, but the Newcomer decides what these are as they play, to reflect their gradual understanding of who and what they are. As characters progress through the narrative, they receive Story Points. These points can be used to develop the character further. Remember that these numbers are suggested. The narrative style itself will determine whether or not the characters should be more or less proficient. Someone playing an elderly sideshow performer might need more Secondary Affinities, or a magician might need two Primary Affinities (Cultural + Magic). These decisions rest with the narrator and the story being crafted. Just remember that not all characters in a good story need to be equal as long as they are enjoyable to play and contribute to the story.

Maelstrom Storytelling



Example:

The narrator has chosen to use the scenario in the Appendices, *The Mill Mystery*. He tells the players it's a mystery about an investigation that takes place in a small rural town set in the Anterior. He suggests the roles mentioned in the scenario. After some discussion the players decide to play some of the suggested roles (the curate's daughter and the steward's son), as well as the blacksmith and the schoolteacher. These last two roles are not mentioned in the scenario, but as long as the narrator thinks they make sense and can work in their story, they can be added. Now the players and the narrator work on the *personality* and then the *background* of the "character".

The player who chose the steward's son talks to the narrator and they decide that he's a scholarly type, who resents his father's stolid conservative views, and is terrified of becoming trapped in Fergon and one day having his father's job. They add some color to this by deciding that he and the curate's daughter have an arranged marriage neither of them wants. Developing this rebellious yearning for a better life and the scholarly ideas, they decide that he has been studying secretly with Professor Montmartre in the windmill. This ties in the plot of the story to the background, and the marriage helps interrelate the backgrounds of all the characters.

Adding to the Game

The character is the player's tool in the story. With that tool, the player contributes to the story. The trick is to make interesting choices that add flavor and interest to the game, while remaining true to the role. Just doing what makes sense for the character is only half of it. Find new ways to approach dilemmas, and make choices that other players can "play off of." Information that the player has, but that their character does not have, should never be used to benefit the character—but that information can be used to add flavor and color to the story.

Example: Pendleton has a lot of money, all safely kept in a safety deposit box. His friend Lillith winds up with the key by accident, but doesn't know where it came from. Pendleton looks frantically for the key, describing it to his friends as he searches. "A little silver key? like this one?" Lillith asks, showing him his key. "Yes. A silver key. Very much like that one." he answers, continuing to search.

A Common Person's View of the World

Life in the Maelstrom varies greatly among the different regions and the thousand realms, but there are some common views and opinions about life, death, and everything in between. Following are three viewpoints on life in the Maelstrom: One from a Dacarthite Human (Hassman), one from a Selemprian Sowl (Yanar), and one from a Dog Throng Human (Magdellon):

The Maelstrom

Hassman: "The storm is the soul of the world—it's god or all of god you'll ever see. It gives the world a new life every time it passes over, like a good rain after a hot spell."

Yanar: "There's a fear and an awe in the souls of the people touched by the storm. It is something we can all see and all share, and in so doing it binds us all together."

Magdellon: "If there's one thing I hate more than anything it's the storm. Like hell on earth. Only thing it's good for is keeping the greedy hands of the Alliance away."

Newcomers

Hassman: "Newcomers are the embodiment of hope. They only live for tomorrow, not pining for yesterday. They're perfect people—like newborn babies in their innocence—but they're newborn adults."

Yanar: "Newcomers scare me. They can't be real people. They have the shape and the blood and the eyes, but not the souls."

Magdellon: "Newcomers, that's us. They have the gift. They are the true race, from the dog star herself. They know this world isn't ours."

The Empire

Hassman: "The empire, that was fine, and it had power and it did good for the world. Or so I'm told. But it's gone. Dacarthia is here now, and we're the new hope—because you can't look back, you know, or else you grow old without knowing it."

Yanar: "I dream of the Empire sometimes. I don't know what it was actually like, just stories and pictures and what's left of it's beautiful machinery. But I hear it in my heart, and I know it's coming back. One day. And then the storm will go away forever."

Magdellon: "The way I see it, the Empire is proof positive that we are the true race. The dog star, she ruled us well then, and sent us here in numbers like no tomorrow. But that's all history. Time we did it right and proper, and built it to last."

The Valley of the Shards

Hassman: "If there is a bad place, it's the Valley. My brother, he left us long ago. Lost on the roads. I have dreams where I see him, trapped in the Valley. Those are the dreams that take me days to get over."



Eye of the Storm

Yanar: "There is a story in my family, of a Darig journeyman. He found the Valley and lived. It's a bad place. It's as though all the bad things—the nightmares and fears and pain of the world—have gone there."

Magdellon: "The Valley is the eye of the storm. Hell like no hell before it. But you know, I don't want to find out mind you, but people say it's the Gate. Gate home to the Dog Star herself. A proving ground for the strong."

Travel

Hassman: "Travel's not so bad as they say. Be smart. Stick to the old roads. Because like they say, all roads lead to Dacartha."

Yanar: "You have to know the world to travel it. Know its soul. And that means the storm. Only the brave roam the world, and only the foolish do it by choice."

Magdellon: "Travel ain't so bad. Steer clear of the storm—you can feel it, you know, like dead air and a calm like no other before she breaks. But the stars, they guide you true. Keep people around who know the world and know the tides, and with a little luck you'll be fine."

The Shroud

Hassman: "There's a secret to the world, and the Shroud knows it. They won't tell you what it is, of course, not like those Shriling fools, but more like the Pulmites. They understand something we don't, and they keep it to themselves. My mother always said it was better that way—that they were guardians of a truth no one wished to know."

Yanar: "They are messengers. Envoys from the last vestige of the Empire. There are stories that say they are older than the Empire—older than the First Age of the Imperium. But the common people say it best: *where there's the Shroud there're Shrikes*. Bad news comes with them. Harbingers they are."

Magdellon: "I don't trust what I don't understand. The Shroud, that's ancient, and I have to respect that. But they have secrets, and politics, and they deal with the Alliance and that's not a good thing. Besides, their god is not mine."

The Strangers

Hassman: "Never knew what to make of them. Best to leave them alone. When I was about 7, this one he took me aside at market and he smiled so big and he told me stories. Stories I can't quite remember, stories that I think I still dream. I always wondered what happened to him."

Yanar: "When the soul of a Human has been unleashed, they are Strangers. There is a beauty and a power in these souls that fascinates me. And frightens me."

Magdellon: "Burn 'em. The Kril had the right idea, on that island people call Woden. Freaks and aberrations, the lot of them."

PLAYING A NEWCOMER

This part of the chapter handles newcomer characters, from creating them to understanding how they see the world and their plight.

The role of the newcomer in the stories that make up the Maelstrom are wide and varied, and are part of the fundamental mystery of the Maelstrom and its elusive meaning.

Newcomers are a strange phenomena, and how or why or what they are is not a simple task to understand. Most newcomers spend their lives trying to answer the question of their existence, and this section talks about different ideas and theories behind the newcomer enigma and the few consistent facts that frame their sudden appearance.

Far From Home

Incarnate, lost in the spires of a changing world—alive and wandering in a place bereft of memory—incarnate but not whole—a traveler, newborn to a new world—a newcomer to a place called the Maelstrom.

Newcomers to the Maelstrom arrive in a variety of different ways. The one addressed in most detail in this book is the awakening of the traveler in a new and alien environment, bereft of past memories and experience, in the place we call the Maelstrom. In this incarnation the prevalent people are human, from a variety of cultures and historical periods extant on our own Earth. While other races awaken in this way, absorbed into the world of the Maelstrom, the vast majority are human.

The phenomena of newcomers is touched on in most of the cultural myths and philosophies of the different realms.

The term "newcomer", while a popular term in the world, is one of many names given to them. They are also called travelers, lost souls, dreamers, firil, and revenants, to name a few.

"I remember waking up and feeling like it was very cold. If it wasn't for the shelter I'm sure I would have died. Several of the others who had come over with me ended up losing fingers, and being scarred on their ears and other extremities. We sat there in the icy cave, waiting for the snowstorm outside to relent. After an agonizing night, it did."

Maelstrom Storytelling



Baraka's Story

It's been four hours since I came over from the other side, and already I'm surrounded by tribal warriors. This land, heavy with mists and broad-leafed, wet plants, is slowly brightening with the dawning sun. Rays of light mark broad swaths across the alien foliage. Nothing of this realm seems familiar to me. I am in a world so different from what I know in my heart is the true world, yet I remember so little of that other place.

Of the other world, I have no visual clues, only heartfelt certainty. What I do remember is this: I lived in a box, got in a box to go to a larger box, stared at a box all day, and carried another box. I do not remember what any of these look like. And I remember a woman's face, tears drying on her cheeks, red-rimmed green eyes looking at me. But who was she?

The warriors around me, move quickly through the foliage, spread out in a crescent formation. As I look to the left and right, I see their figures darting past the tall fronds of these curious plants. Their faces and arms are painted green and brown in animal patterns. This seems right in my heart, a good thing to do. They carry pointed wooden sticks and what I recognize to be crossbows. This does not seem right: like there is some other weapon that they should be using.

I speak to the woman next to me, running as I am to keep up. "What are we doing?" I ask.

"Be silent, Newcomer!" she breathes. Her long, sinewy legs tense as she leaps over the serrated edges of a ground plant, darting her head up to peer around as she lands. She turns back to me, her crossbow pointed ahead. "We are hunting the hunters," she whispers, and then turns ahead and moves forward through the fronds.

Later, I get a chance to see one of these hunters. It is man-shaped, naked or nearly so, with a harness over one shoulder. The thing is long, and probably somewhat taller than a man if it stood straight. It has long, powerful, many-jointed arms and legs, its skin is a jaundiced tan with lines of freckles or spots. Its head is monstrous: the back of the head a hairless sack that hangs down at the neck, the forehead a beaked ridge, a glistening and round eye on one side of the ridge, scanning, and its mouth an assembly of teeth or tusks pointing outwards, keeping the mouth constantly open. It holds in its arms a spear-like contraption: a long pole, on one end a spike, on the forward end a crystal glowing yellow from the inside, surrounded by three jagged blades.

It truly doesn't belong in the reality that up until four hours ago I was a part of. I want to tell my new warrior friends this, but I don't think it's the time. We are slowly moving through the trees to surround it. I am staring from under the broad, thick leaf of a plant, so close I could nearly reach out and touch its skin, or so it seems. The woman lies next to me, her crossbow pointed at it, waiting for a signal.

We wait for the signal while the thing moves its head slowly around. It is maddening, and I am nearly dying from fear. My shoulder aches from the strain of propping myself up in this position, and finally I give in, shifting to relieve my body. I watch the thing as it turns its head slightly and croons to itself as if it were a baby, in a beautiful, childlike voice. I hear a snap from below my elbow, and my stomach jumps into my throat.

It turns, the eyes swiveling forward under the ridge. In a half-second, its weapon is aimed at me, the crystal glowing brighter and those two angry black eyes glittering at me. At once there is confusion, I get up, and the woman fires her crossbow. From the trees, there is rustling and snapping as thin, slender quarrels fly through the air from every direction at the beast. Some fly past, others dig into and hold in the sinewy flesh.

And it screams, and the scream shatters my heart, like claws on slate, like coiling thunder...



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The Great Book of Picarni:

"And God gave unto the damned a healing light, a light which rebirthed the soul and gave new hope to the lost. These sinners who embraced God were cleansed of all evils, and left without memory lest their past rebathe them in the pools of iniquity. Given back to the world they are sinless once more."

In common holdings, of course, this divine view is chucked in favor of the more practical view that newcomers are people from the past or future who ventured into the Valley of Shards.

The Truths of the Cliff People:

"Out of the dreams of all the people, young and old, a power is drawn and given shape incarnate. This dream takes form and comes to be, and in it is life and thought. In this way the dreams of all peoples beget us travelers. These people we call the Dreamers, and they are part of us and part of the dreamworld that is our sleeping mind's vision of the great truth."

Common parlance of the Cliff People might well involve the belief in incarnate people and things, such as their view of the Arn as thing/god/creature. As such the dreamers are still people, touched with the truths in a way that have left them, well, touched....

The College of the Gates in Dacartha:

"It is argued that there may be a different world, a cohesive world from which these travelers come. Not merely dreams or souls, but actual people that have shifted in the storm from their home to ours, like the places of our world when the storm comes. Is this possible? Like the followers of the Dog Star who say they come from that very celestial body, or the reports of those people dubbed the Students of Kael who hold a similar truth to be real. If this is so, then what governs the passage, and how can the barrier be traversed?"

The Kril View:

"The world is made of two, and this we know as the sea and the land. There is no barrier where the two join—one merely ends and so begins the second. So it is with the Other World that newcomers call home. Like falling things that sink towards the water, they are drawn to us. Providentially, and for our use."

The philosophers of the spiraling sea towers of the crab folk are few, superseded by the oligarchal merchant guild and its elders. They do hold that the world is not singular, however, and that travelers may well be people from other worlds caught up into the might that is the Maelstrom (which is the primary world). All of this is just food for thought, of course, while they haggle over the practical value of the traveler in the slave-mart.

For game purposes, it can be assumed that these travelers come from our Earth, our reality. However, this may not be completely true, as will be theorized later. A short list of common traits is shown here:

They only appear in deserted places, or when no one is around.

They are either found sleeping or unconscious, and wake as if from a terribly deep sleep, or they are already awake on their feet, but dazed.

The people appear to come from all walks of life, cultures, and time in history.

In most cases, the people who "come across" have features that represent natural looks: skin that varies from a light, nearly pinkish beige to a darkened earth tone, and hair that ranges from yellow to red, black to grey. "More human than human," as they say in the Dacartha.

Very little comes along with the newcomers physically. Occasionally a newcomer will have something tattooed on their flesh. Or clothed, or partially clothed, and possibly wearing jewelry.

The memories of the newcomers, when they have any, usually fall into two categories: The first is a "logical association," without sensory information. The computer specialist may know they spent their days putting information into a box made of glass, metal, and other parts, but might have no idea what this box would look like, or what information they had to put in it, or how they did it. "Sensory memory" recalls smell, vision, or sound that is brief and evokes a strong emotion that may or may not make sense. Examples include the vision of an oddly dressed boy, evoking sadness, or the sound of a crowd cheering, or the haunting, strong sweet smell of a flower that invokes a sense of dread.

In addition, there are random factors that may or may not be keys to a greater order. These newcomers appear as solitary wanderers, lost souls, but sometimes in groups up to nine or more, though this is rare. Some say that there is more of a chance of a newcomer "coming over" to this side when the realms shift.

Since before the empire there have been such newcomers, to break up old traditions, and create new, fresh factions in the political framework of the Thousand Realms.

The Newcomer as a Role

The Newcomer begins their life in the Maelstrom *tabula rasa*, a blank slate on which the experiences of the Maelstrom take shape and form.

Immediately thrust on your character are several environmental factors: The first is the realization of your *self*, what you look like. It would help to have a few ideas of how strong or attractive

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or tall or large you are. It's not crucial at this point, and the rules are made so that you can develop what your character *was like all along* from what you start enjoying about the character.

It usually helps to have an idea of what the character's face looks like.

Your character may have clothes and even objects from this unremembered past. This could be the ragged remains of some 20th century clothes, or cascading folds of raw white silk, an earring, a bobby-pin, or nothing at all. Some Newcomers cling to these items as important parts of their soul, others cast it off at the most practical time. A tattoo that reads "Britain Rules the Waves" (which is not in a language known to the Maelstrom), blue jeans, a wristwatch, a match, a camisole—these are items that might wind up "making it over" with the character. If the item has a mechanical function, then it may not work the same way in the new reality (see the notes on *Technology* in Chapter Six.) The items can have a poetic feel (a ring from a loved one,) a practical value (a pocket knife,) or a colorful bent (an Elvis outfit.)

The next important thing is environmental, what you confront when you "wake up." You could awaken to a scene of calm beauty, or a sack being thrown over your head as you get carted off.

This is your character's first interaction with the Maelstrom, and it should immediately become apparent that something just isn't *right* somehow, as if you weren't supposed to be here at all. Factors that a newcomer could notice right away might be:

The colors are much brighter than they should be

They can see further than they think they should be able to

Darkness is a like a pool of ink

Striking and erratic weather

Time doesn't seem to pass the way it should

The places where newcomers show up are often places that are striking in their beauty and solitude: ruins, meadows and glens, or even underneath a roaring waterfall. However, the attic or guestroom are also fine choices for the arrival—or tucked away among the Shepherd's flock, or even appearing unnoticed in a crowded bar.

Next come the memories of the other side. These memories, foggy and clouded at best, are filled with gaps where important parts of what your identity used to be: memories that changed and shaped you, made you what you are today. Most of the time, the newcomer has no idea whether they were inherently good or bad, whether they were upright and rigidly ethical or amoral and selfish. They just have fragmented memories of a life they may have never had.

And some, of course, have no memories at all.

Sometimes the memories are of ideas, sometimes they are an attempt to logically translate something that transcends words in the new language. These could be as easy as attempting to remember and define the way things looked in, say, geometric terms, or it could be an attempt to attach a recognizable symbol in such a way that you know makes sense, but sounds completely illogical. For example, remembering *we rode in things made of metal, that had shoes, or something like shoes, and had eyes that were not eyes because they couldn't see, only help you see more clearly.* You have no visual cue or other memory, just this abstract idea. What do you do with it? Do you just forget it, or try and make use of it in some way?

Other memories are attached to emotions. Usually connected with a sensory image, such as a vision or a sound, they make the character feel some emotion, or complex mix of emotions. Examples of this could be a face, or the sound of someone laughing, or the smell of smoke, all eliciting emotional responses such as fear, love, or desire.

The newcomer never remembers any proper names, even their own. They know they are not in the right place, that something has gone awry, but they have no choice but to continue.

Awakening

Outside this strange place could be a road, weed-strewn and abandoned, trees and foliage growing all the way up to where the road begins. The stones are broad and flat and cool to the touch, often broken and cracked. Down the road could be an inn or a roadhouse, filled with travelers in foreign accents and unusual appearances. Or refugees, fleeing from the ruined remains of their villages, burned to the ground by strange, yellow-skinned devils.

There could be a walled city teeming with inhabitants toiling through their daily lives, children peering out at you in your rags and motley, their faces hidden by the thatched eaves of the ill-kept houses. Maybe down the road a ship is laying anchor, just in need of a few sailors willing to cross the mists and follow the coastline to see what strange sights may be found offshore. Or perhaps other newcomers like yourself are further down that road, all asking the same question: *Well, what are we going to do now?*

From the dry facts of what these "newcomers" are, and what they represent in the fabric of the Maelstrom, arises a colorful garden of ideas and theories. The reasons for such speculations are easy to understand: These castaways seem to represent a key to why the Maelstrom is the way it is. They are walking representations of the nature of the universe, and all of its frightening potential.



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The ideas and talk regarding the nature of this curious event could fill many books and a hundred dogbonds. This is a chronicle a few of the more frequent, colorful, and disturbing of these ideas. They have been somewhat arbitrarily named ease of understanding.

A Conservative Approach

Newcomers are people who have come over to this realm from another, one that is structured and ordered, and one where all things make sense. They were sent here to make this world make sense, as the other one does. It is important to try and understand the memories of these new people, for they often hold clues as to what it is that we are trying to accomplish.

Retribution

People are flung into this world when they have done something bad. They are exiled to this world to learn how to live life, because they are too erratic and violent and unpredictable. We know not what bad things these people have done.

A Return

It is simple: Everyone thinks that the Empire failed, that it collapsed and was destroyed. But perhaps the opposite is true. Perhaps they succeeded, perhaps they achieved transcendence over this reality, and managed to leave this existence for another reality, one that worked in ways that make more sense to human understanding. The newcomers are descendants, originally from the Empire, who have left their new realm.

Why they've come back is not clear. It may be a punishment, or they may be sent as guiding lights to the people left here. This may be their afterlife.

Spirits

We Newcomers are spirits who form when the stars align, and our sister realm drifts close. The spirit forms into matter, an inexact replica of certain dramatic individuals in the other realm. As spirits of our own right, we have very little connection to this other realm save memories that may have been brought over from the first. We have no other memories because we are born anew, and what memories that do exist are ripples in the fabric of the soul, and nothing more.

Shepherds

We are sent by a higher power to look after and guide the people of this world. Our memories are abstractions of our celestial existence prior to our incarnation in this world. We are angelic spirits of a higher truth, one which we must discover before we can lead others.

The Maddening

There are some who do not cross over well. These are the ones who long solely to return to what they remember. They cling to those images and those memories with a fervor that sometimes never fades, a madness that is called many things. Though many slowly awaken to the world around them, others never do. Either their memories are too strong and too powerful, or their minds and spirits too weak to fully emerge into the life of the Maelstrom.

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This is a brief overview of the game system for new players

CREATING YOUR CHARACTER

Choosing a role to play in the game is the first step. Players can choose indigenous people from the world or play “newcomers.” The narrator, who guides the story, will give you an idea of what type of character will work best in the narrative.

Era on Earth

If you are playing a newcomer, you need to choose the time and place on Earth that this character seems to have come from.

Descriptors

All characters have a handful of words or phrases that describe key traits of their personality, physical make-up, and understanding of the world around them. These are called “descriptors” and are used in the game to help characters overcome obstacles and achieve their goals.

Aspects

Each descriptor is assigned to one of four “aspects,” which are Mind, Matter, Spirit and Chaos. The chosen aspect helps give context to the descriptor, and will determine when a descriptor can be used in the story.

Secondary Affinities

Characters have many skills or talents. They range from such things as *Horseback Riding* to *Juggling*, and allow the character to perform these tasks more easily. The narrator will explain which “secondary affinities” are best suited to the story.

Primary Affinity

This is the one thing to which a character is truly attuned. Most often it is the culture from which the character came, and allows the character to know the things a person from that culture would know, from language to customs to everyday skills.

The Newcomer Affinity

Newcomers begin with Kael as their primary affinity. This allows a newcomer to assimilate into whatever culture they are in contact with, as well as a few extra points to use in the bidding (see below).

THE RULES

The game uses a text-based system that is cinematic in scope, in which the players collaborate with the narrator to “author” a story.

Bids

Scenes are most often resolved by a bidding process, in which the opposing sides bid their descriptors until one side passes. The final bid is counted as dice, and then a roll is made.

Success Range

After the dice are rolled, the “success range” is determined by how many more dice came up as “successes” by one side over the other. “Successes” are odd rolls of the dice. The outcome of a scene depends on the degree of success.

Quick Takes

Within a scene, there may be moments that are particularly important, like a jump across a ravine. These moments can be played out in sub-scenes by invoking a Quick Take. Using Quick Takes “burns” a descriptor, as explained below.

Burning a Descriptor

Burning a descriptor can do one of two things: another die can be added to the scene, or a Quick Take can be invoked. Each descriptor can be burned once per game session. Descriptors are always counted toward the Aspect total of a scene, whether they are “burned” or not.

Health & Injury

The character you play might well find themselves injured or even dead. Characters usually have four levels of health:

Healthy
Injured
Out
Dead

If your character dies, your part in the story is not necessarily over. You can always bring introduce a new role to play in the story, or take over the role of someone the narrator was controlling.

Using Secondary Affinities

When a scene involves activities that a character has an affinity for, one of their dice in the bid is counted as an “automatic success” and doesn’t need to be rolled. As the character progresses, their affinity can become stronger, and are allowed up to 3 dice as successes.

Using Kael

In addition to adapting to the local Cultural Affinity, characters with Kael may add two dice over the course of each session to their bids.

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Character Record

Name

Story

Description

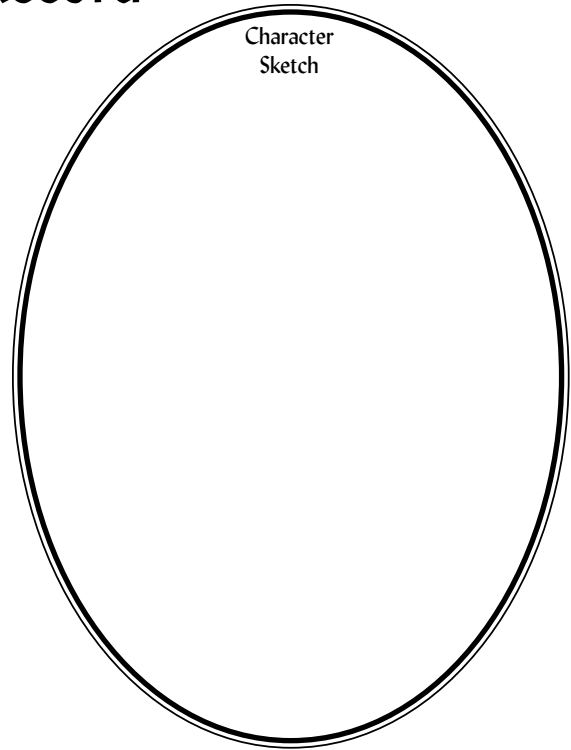
Primary Affinity

Descriptors

Secondary Affinities

Possessions

Character
Sketch



Story Points



Chapter Five

Scene Resolution System

The Basics: Authoring a Story

At the heart of this game is a story. The narrator and players write each scene over the course of the game. By authoring the actions of their characters, the players contribute the main ingredient to the story—because the story is ultimately about them. The narrator authors the overall story by guiding the characters from scene to scene.

Running a role-playing game can be a complex task. This chapter explains the rules that are used to resolve scenes. Chapter Seven discusses storylines and narratives, and there are some sample scenarios in Appendix Two. Chapter Four addresses the idea of characters and how to create them. The rules for all of these chapters are explained here.

The System

We call our narrative system the *Hubris Game Engine* (or *Story Engine*). It provides rules as a framework for the storyline. This framework is scene-based to support the story-telling environment of the game. It is cinematic in scope to allow the freedom to create an interesting and collaborative story.

In many scenes, the rules are only used as guidelines to how people would act. These are called *open scenes*, and are purely

about role-playing and telling the story. In other scenes, the outcome is not obvious, and the rules are used to resolve the events. These are called *rolled scenes*, because dice will be used.

All action in Maelstrom is scene-based, and the scenes can range from large, elaborate ones to the simplest of actions. These simple actions we call *Quick Takes*, and are often a part of the larger scene, as explained below.

Though the narrator should know the rules fairly well, it is not necessary for a new player to know all of them. Players only have to understand their *Descriptors* and *Affinities* and how to use them within a scene. This game is about role-playing, not rules strategy, and all the rules will become clear over the course of the game. When characters are created, they begin the game with a character description, building their character slowly through the addition of adjectives and talents which we call *Descriptors* and *Affinities*.

RESOLVING A SCENE

Bidding

Most action scenes are resolved by a process of bidding. The numbers used for the bid come from the character descriptions, which are called *descriptors*. These *descriptors* are broken into four categories, which are called *Aspects*. The bidding process is used when there is a conflict with another person or group of people.

Difficulty Factors

Some scenes call for *difficulty factors*. These are *target numbers* the players need to roll in order to succeed.

Passive Tests

There are times when a simple roll is made by rolling a die for each *descriptor* the character has in a particular *Aspect*.

Successes

When the dice are rolled, any die that comes up with an ODD number is counted as a *success*. Any die with an even number is ignored. In all rolls, there is a *target number*: this is the number of successes required to win the scene.

There are four principles to the rules in Maelstrom

1. Use of key character personality traits, called *Descriptors* and *Affinities*, which are used to determine scene resolution and may be invoked to add *Quick Takes* to a scene.

2. Scene based resolution, where the entire scene is described and resolved as a whole, not by each individual action within the scene. *Quick Takes* allow for moments within the scene that can be as simple as an individual action, but overall scene resolution focuses on scene objectives and encourages group cooperation.

3. Integration of scene objectives and resolution through a bidding system that encourages creative role-playing and group cooperation.

4. Magic as a creative, narrative force with descriptive properties, to emphasize the narrative context of magic over the mechanical and strategic value.



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BIDDING AND DICE:

In most climactic scenes, the players roll dice to determine the outcome. The number of dice that they roll is determined by a bidding process. Descriptors allow the player to bid a certain number of dice. The more dice, the better the odds are of “winning the scene.”

WINNING THE SCENE: This means that your character or group accomplishes its goals in a scene. How successful you are will depend on the Success Range

SUCCESS RANGE: The success range is determined by how well your dice roll

DICE: Any kind of dice will do. There are only two types of rolls in the system—odd numbers (success) and even numbers (no value). Rolling three six-sided dice and getting a 3, 6, and a 1 would mean 2 successes (the 3 and the 1), and the six (even) would have no value

BIDDING POOL: The total of the dice used by one side in a scene is referred to generically as a *bidding pool*

SUCCESS and SUCCESSES: In this chapter the word success has two meanings—one is the overall success of a scene, the other is a success on a die when it is rolled. “Successes” almost always means successes rolled on a die, but “success” can mean scene success or die success

SESSION: A game session, usually the time spent in one day playing a game. An all day game might be broken into two sessions, but generally a session refers to the four to eight hours spent playing the game

Target Number

Regardless of whether there is a *bid*, a *difficulty factor*, or a *passive test*, there is a target number. A target number is the amount of *successes* required in the dice roll to win the scene. With a difficulty factor or a passive test, the target number is predetermined by the narrator. In a bid, the target number is based on the number of *successes* rolled by the opponent.

ASPECTS

All characters have four Aspects: Mind, Matter, Spirit, and Chaos. These four traits define not only the character but their role within the Maelstrom reality.

Descriptors, which are explained below, are broken down by which Aspect they belong to. Aspects are used to determine the base number for the bidding that takes place in scene resolution. Descriptors are grouped by Aspect and each Descriptor a character has in an Aspect raises the value of that Aspect. The total number of descriptors in an Aspect the group or individual has is totaled when scene resolution is required, and this is the base number of dice that may be bid in the bidding process.

MIND

Mind oriented scenes can be about perception, social interaction, reaction speed, or anything else that is mundane but does not fall into a physical category. Common actions might be interpreting the gestures of a Venth, blending into a seedy bar in a foreign port, digging through information in a stack of tomes, or engaging in barbed banter with upper-crust dignitaries at a soirée. The goal of a Mind oriented scene is to overcome the obstacle using the wits, personality, and resources of the characters.

MATTER

Matter oriented scenes address acts of a physical nature. The most common scene would be combat, though combat is not limited to Matter. Crawling across rain-slicked rocks, intimidating someone with physical prowess, sprinting down a hallway before the alien artifact explodes, or using delicate precision to take apart an antique timepiece would also be appropriate. The goal of a Matter oriented scene is to overcome the obstacle through physical action.

SPIRIT

Spirit oriented scenes address the power of belief and the hidden inner strength of the soul. The Spirit oriented scene is about determination beyond the normal drive of a character, and the connection that character has with a higher purpose. Spirit is different from Mind in that it begins where the personality of the character ends. “Determined” as a Spirit Descriptor is about an inner drive, but only for certain things that are most meaningful to the character. A Spirit based scene could range from resisting the mental draining powers of an unseen opponent to convincing the king of the reverent ideals of your cause. The goal of a Spirit-oriented scene is to overcome the obstacle through the inner strength and will of the characters.

CHAOS

Chaos oriented scenes deal with understanding and confronting the power of the Maelstrom. Scenes in which Chaos is the primary aspect is either larger than life or omnipresent. Examples of Chaos-oriented scenes are standing on a hilltop to determine the weather, getting lost somewhere in the thousand lands and finding your way back to civilization, or understanding the nature of that strange relic. The goal of the Chaos-oriented scene is to overcome the obstacle through a connection to the environment and forces that are greater than the individuals present.

DESCRIPTORS

A Descriptor is an adjective or sentence that best describes one facet of the character’s personality. They may be simple, such as:

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- *vivacious*
- *powerful*
- *sneaky*
- *cunning*

Or they may be elaborate, such as:

- *quick as a snake on a hot day with an attitude*
- *charming, in that disarming way that puts people at ease and makes them adore you*
- *determined like no tomorrow*

The character usually starts with two descriptors. These are a vital part of the character in that they both define the personality and mettle of the character and allow for Quick Takes when the trait is applicable. All descriptors have a broad range, and can be invoked in most situations.

Descriptors are assigned to one of the four Aspects. As long as it makes sense, the choice is up to the player. Above, for instance, *quick as a snake on a hot day with an attitude* could be Matter, or maybe Chaos. If it refers to mental speed it could even be Mind. Whatever best suits the flavor of the Descriptor. Once assigned to an Aspect, it cannot be changed, and will always be read in context of that Aspect.

Sample Descriptors by Aspect

MIND

brilliantly cunning, charming as charming gets, persuasive, determined, radiant, sincere, moody, Machiavellian, quick on the take, observant, shy, confidant, saucy, sly as sly can get, sultry, engaging, curious

MATTER

resilient, strong, quick, gorgeous, lithe, ambidextrous, long limbs, tough as an ox, vibrantly healthy, nimble, bounces back, can take a hit to the head and never know it happened, imposing, cute as a button

SPIRIT

in tune, aware of the greater truths, unwavering will, sees the light at the end of the tunnel, resilient beyond the will of the body or the mind, loyal beyond reason and without question to those she loves, transcendent

CHAOS

sees the pattern, cognizant, sees the greater picture, finds calm in chaos, wild, unpredictable, goes with it, lives for the day, appreciates life's unexpected turns, never thrown for a loop, looks forward to danger

Invoking Descriptors

Descriptors will always count toward the Aspect total they are grouped by. Descriptors can also be invoked for added story

impact in two ways—both of which *burn* the descriptor (as explained below):

- A Descriptor may be used to invoke a Quick Take, as described below. This allows for a Quick Take within the scene, and automatically adds a die to the bid of that sub-scene. Using a Descriptor for a Quick Take *burns* the Descriptor
- A Descriptor may be used to add a die to any bid within a scene, without invoking a Quick Take. Using a Descriptor for added dice *burns* the Descriptor

Burning A Descriptor

When used to invoke a Quick Take or add a die to a bid, the Descriptor is *burned*. This means it can't be used that way again for that session. It will still count toward the Aspect total.

NOTE: In many narratives, only the main cast in the story can burn Descriptors. There are times when a background character in a supporting role might assume a larger part and adopt full Descriptors, but normally the background characters in the story only have aspect *totals* like this:

Bob, a farmer "cheery sort of guy"

Mind 2/Matter 1/Spirit 0/Chaos 1

THE SCENE

The scene is the central element of the narrative game. Just like film and literature, the story as a whole is comprised of individual scenes that further the storyline. It is important for the narrator to establish clear scenes. These scenes should be framed around the actions of the characters, and further the storyline of the narrative.

There are several ways to resolve scenes. If the outcome is obvious, or merely descriptive, then there is no need to use the resolution system. If the outcome is not obvious, then the system adapts to the scene.

Scene Types

Scenes that require resolution are called *rolled scenes*, and scenes that do not need to be resolved are called *open scenes*.

Rolled Scenes can be resolved as follows:

Opponents: If there are active opponents in the scene, then the scene is resolved through a bid. There may also be a difficulty factor, but not always.

Obstacle: If there is an obstacle, it is resolved through a difficulty factor. This is sometimes combined with a bid if there are also active opponents in the scene.



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Setting the Scene

Before the scene can be resolved, it needs to be framed. How large is it? How long is it? Some are obvious, others are not. The chase over the rooftops could be one great scene or a few little ones. The more scenes, the more points the characters will bid, and the more points they stand to lose. We suggest the following guidelines to set each scene, but as with all things in a good narrative, scenes should be adapted to suit the feel of the game, the players, and the genre of the narrative itself.

- **STORYBOARD:** frame each scene as it leads the story forward. The scene is as long or as short as it needs to be, ending when new options become available that will lead the story forward. *Example: The scene at the bar talking to the informant is one long passive scene, ending when the informant gets shot unexpectedly. The scene is framed by the gun shot, which leads to the next scene*
- **TIME & SPACE:** frame scenes by environment—as the story moves from one location to another, new scenes are established. *Example: The trip to the monastery to talk to the abbot can be broken into the journey there, the greeting at the gates, and the scene in the abbot's chambers. And unless something exciting or colorful happens on the way back, the journey back can be skipped and next scene can be back at the campsite*
- **SCENE CUTS:** like in a film, you can skip to the good scenes. Frame scenes like cropping a photograph, leaving the good part and skipping the intro unless it's useful or adds to the story
- **CROSS CUTTING:** if more than one scene is taking place at once, cut between them like a film. This maintains the excitement and keeps everyone involved. Find a good point in the scene and then cut to the other scene, so that they happen side by side. *Example: "I wouldn't be so sure, if I were you" says the professor as they get ready to dive off the Diodeian Airship. Meanwhile, back at the college, Marris bursts through the door...etc.*
- **CUT SCENES:** Cut Scenes can even be added, where the narrator cuts to a scene in progress that does not involve the players, and describes the action there. This is similar to Cross Cutting, except that the Cut Scene is a descriptive scene designed to enhance the story for the players. *Example: the players arrive in port and take in the sights of the new city, blissfully unaware of any dangers awaiting them. The narrator describes a Cut Scene: "In a dark, smoke-filled room, a man enters and approaches the large figure behind the desk, who is only seen from behind. 'They're here, boss, just as you said they would be.' says the man. The larger figure exhales and says simply: 'Good.'*

Presenting the Scene

Once the scene has been defined, the scene can be established and *described*. The description of the scene is very important, because it is from this information that the game is played. Players will make decisions based on the scene as it is presented, and the tone will be established. Though the style of presentation will vary by taste and genre, there are some fundamentals that should never be overlooked. Much confusion can be avoided by a clear and concise description, and the story can be advanced better by a tightly crafted scene.

Scene Objective

This is where the Narrator turns to the players and asks them to define what they want to get out of the scene. Goals can be as simple as 'get as much information on the Sekoreh from the library as possible' or "Bernaise **MUST** die," to as complex as "we want to humiliate the museum staff, get the chalice, and jump out the window into the water below."

The Narrator should attempt to relate to the players how difficult their goal might be to attain. In one of these examples, the Narrator could decide to tell the players, "there is no way to get around the staff to the chalice, you must defeat the armed staff." The players, in turn, could opt to invoke Quick Takes to guarantee certain actions like grabbing the chalice. If they use tactics that could make a significant difference to the outcome, a difficulty factor could be used (see the section on *Impacting the Scene*).

The Narrator lets the players know what the opposing force will achieve should they succeed. In some cases, the range of success is narrow, especially in scenes without opponents: "You will have wasted the better half of the day searching through the Librarian's books without anything but frustration." However, in opponent-based scenes, the range could be great: "The guards are preventing you from getting close to the chalice" to "the guards are trying to kill you all."

Example of Play:

(Some of the rules mentioned here are discussed later in the chapter, as well as the Arts which are discussed at length in the next chapter.)

Narrator (summing up where they are as they frame the new scene): Since you rolled a full success, you accomplish all your objectives: You outrun the guards and make it through the door, closing it behind you. Sari bars it with the heavy bolt. Now, you look around and...

Player 1 (playing "Harf"): Wait! Harf is going to lock the door as well, just in case.

Narrator: OK, but that's part of the new scene since you didn't establish that in the last scene.

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Player 1: Okay, that'll probably be my objective then.

Narrator: Now, the hall you're in goes left to right. To the right a short way there's a large window. To the left you hear shouts and footsteps—it looks like some other guards are coming that way towards you.

Player 2 (playing “Sari”): Yowza. How far are they?

Narrator: The hall takes a turn to the right after, say, 20 feet. By the sound, they're probably another 20 feet away past the turn.

Player 3 (playing “Jeffries”): How many?

Narrator: Probably half a dozen. You can hear the rattle of equipment, so they're probably armed. What's the plan?

Player 1: Well, we're no match for them, right guys?

Players 2&3: Right.

Player 3: I say we make for the window and see how far the jump is.

Player 1: I'm not going to bother locking the door at this point.

Player 2: Okay, the window it is, but we'll be ready to fight 'em, sword to sword. I may use the Arts, of course, to push them back.

Narrator: Okay, so this scene is about getting to the window quickly, and seeing what's out there?

Player 3: Yeah. Weapons drawn.

Narrator: Great. This is an Open Scene. You guys run for the window, weapons drawn, and Sari hangs back in case she wants to use the Arts.

Player 1: Are they in sight by the time we're there?

Narrator: They just clear the turn as you get a good look out the window. The other guards reach the barred door at this point—you can hear them shouting and banging on it.

Player 3: So what's out the window?

Narrator: A two-story drop into the moat. Looks pretty far, but you know the moat's deep from the time you had to swim it before.

Players 2: And the guards are as well armed as the other batch?

Narrator: Yes. What's the plan?

Player 3: I say we go for it. Agreed?

Player 1&2: Right.

Player 2: Sari initiates a Quick Take, burning “irate when cornered.” She's going to hurl a force wall at them to buy time while we jump.

Narrator: Great. Any other tactics?

Players: Nope, just do it fast and try to stay alive.

Narrator: Okay, we have a Rolled Scene. If Sari manages to push them back, that will Impact the Scene, so let's resolve her Quick Take first. The Guards are trying to capture you, not injure you, and the other set of guards is trying to break down the door—which is a Cut Scene that I'll describe to you once I resolve it.

Player 2: So total success gets us out alive after a plunge into the moat, right?

Narrator: Right. The jump is going to Impact the Scene as well, making it more difficult for you. I'll say it's a “hard” feat, considering the height and the fact that you're rushing to open the window and time your fall. That adds two dice to their pool. Now, this is a Matter scene, so how many descriptors do you have in matter?

Players: 5 altogether.

Narrator: Okay, the guards are the aggressors, so they start the bid. But first, let's resolve Sari's Quick Take, and I'll describe the Cut Scene with the other guards trying to break open the door...

DIFFICULTY FACTOR

The difficulty factor determines how many successes must be rolled in the throw. Difficulty is rated in simple terms from Easy to Impossible. These terms are *relative to the characters involved*. What might be Really Hard for one person might be Easy for another. If actions are taken that Impact the Scene, the difficulty factor is reduced accordingly.

- **Easy** (1 success required) This task shouldn't be taken for granted, but with an effort can be achieved.
- **Hard** (2 successes) This task is tricky, and should be taken seriously. With good effort and concentration, it can be completed.
- **Really Hard** (4 successes) An attempt is not likely going to succeed, and may even be dangerous. With a lot of luck, and a great effort, it can be attained.
- **Extremely Hard** (6 Successes) This is a feat for a specialist. With training you might stand a good chance. Otherwise it would take with a lot of luck and an amazing effort to accomplish.
- **Impossible** (9 successes) This is one of those moments when you realize the futility of things. No one short of a highly trained pro even has a shot at this.



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The Sliding Scale

Tasks that have a difficulty rating relative to the group doing them are rated on a *sliding scale*. This supports the story value of the event. If the door the group is trying to break down is supposed to be a real obstacle, then it will *extremely hard* no matter what. Players should be rewarded for creative thinking of course, and that is outlined under the section called *Impacting the Scene*.

How it Works

When using the sliding scale, a die is added to the opposing side for each person in the group. For example, if the group has 2 people in it, 2 dice are added to the opposition's Bidding Pool. In the case of a difficulty factor, these dice are rolled and the successes are added to the target number.

Optionally, more dice can be added, if it fits the balance of the scene. Times to use the sliding scale:

- When the story calls for an obstacle of a particular difficulty level, then the sliding scale helps maintain the difficulty of the task no matter how many people work on it.
- In group conflicts, with multiple people to a side, the sliding scale maintains the relative impact of the difficulty factor. In other words, if ten people are fighting ten other people, and the bid is being modified by a difficulty factor of *hard*, then unless the sliding scale is used, the two dice for *hard* don't end up making it much harder.

The sliding scale is a tool to be used to keep the cinematic spirit alive in scenes, and preserve the "big encounters" as "big encounters." It helps the climactic scenes remain climactic.

Impossible Actions

"It looks like you're going to fail; now tell me how it happens."

When an action is judged to be unfeasible, the narrator can either assign a higher value to the target number, or treat the scene as an *open scene* in which the only result is failure of some kind. If the characters fail, the way in which they fail can be offered by the players.

It is generally more enjoyable, however, to give the group a chance, no matter how remote. At the same time, some of the best moments in a story come from the blunders and mistakes of the protagonists. See *Rolling Ones* below for another way to handle the impossible.

Rolling Ones

The "rolling ones" rule can be used throughout the game, by both the players and the narrator-controlled characters in the story. The impact of this rule will also depend on what kind of dice are used in the game.

Literal vs. Conceptual

A good way to run the *Hubris Engine* is to use "scene ideas" to convey the scene, instead of literalisms. The scene idea is the scene concept, as imagined in the mind of the narrator, whereas that might be different from the literal elements of the description when the scene is presented. A ten foot fence might seem really tall to one person, and a little tall to another. But if the fence is described as really tall instead of 10 feet, everyone gets the idea. In other words, focus on the intent behind the elements in the scene, and not on how big or how far things might be. If the difficulty of the task at hand (such as jumping across a chasm in a cave) is explained in terms of difficulty, it doesn't matter how far across the actual chasm spans. In a movie, for instance, the camera zooms or pans to emphasize the danger or the emotional reaction to the scene, and in so doing it manipulates the real distance of a chasm to suit the mood or "feel" of the moment. It then is no longer about how far across the character has to jump, but how hard the feat is for the character. In this way, the presentation of each element of the scene focuses on the difficulty of the obstacle, not on laws of physics. It is the idea of how hard it is, not the actual measurement of the obstacle that is important. Everyone understands adjectives such as easy, hard, and impossible, but a wide range of arguments can arise from saying that the chasm is 15 feet across. By supplying the difficulty of the task, the player fills in the distance relative to their character's capabilities. The difficulty of all things is relative to the character, not to objective science, and this is much more appropriate to narrative role-play. If the players enjoy the challenge of figuring out how high and far someone can jump, they should be allowed the pleasure of doing so—as long as it doesn't interfere with the narrative flow and enjoyment of the game.

The scene should be presented therefore in terms relative to the character's abilities. A chasm can be "very wide, the kind of wide you don't want to think about jumping" and the rogue can be "so charming that your feet fall off." Either way, the player gets the idea. Players who want to climb onto your coffee table and jump across your living room to prove that their character could jump over the chasm have probably missed the whole point of the story.

Simply put, whenever a die rolls a 1 (which is a success) then another die may be added to the throw (bidding pool). This means that there is always a chance of success—mathematically speaking, at least. The new dice that are added also count under the Rolling Ones rule, so if they land on a 1, then yet another die is added.

Automatic Successes: dice that have been set aside as automatic successes (for Secondary Affinities) may be rolled to see if they turn up with ones. Regardless, they count as successes.

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Six sided dice are recommended. It gives a 33.3% chance of any success adding a new die to the pool. Any die with less sides makes it too easy. Ten sided dice are also good for this, giving a 20% chance that a success will add another die to the pool. If this rule is used, it's important to state which type of die it will apply to.

SUCCESS RANGE

The outcome of any scene is determined by the number of successes rolled compared to the target number. The result of this roll is then compared to the success range below. Some Affinities, and a few other events, have individual lists of consequences based on a similar range. The following list reflects the standard range of success (or failure) in the narrative system:

- Total Success (made it by 4 or more)
- Success (made it by 2-3)
- Partial Success (just made it)
- Partial Failure (just missed by 1)
- Failure (missed by 2-3)
- Total Failure (missed by 4 or more)

What it Means

These are the guidelines for establishing the results of scene resolution, based on the six options above. The players collaborate with the narrator to suggest ways in which their efforts coincide with the success range.

The ongoing example used here is from a scene outside Hais where a group is attacked by Shrikes during a storm. The group objective is to get back into the city alive. The shrike objective is to kill the group.

Total Success: with total success, the scene objective is attained to its fullest.

Example: the group, with total success, easily outpaces the shrikes, thanks to the daring bravery of the sub-altern who holds them off and the gifts of the apprentice who gives them a solid push from the storm back toward the woods.

Success: with success, the group goal is reached. All key elements are obtained, but without any extra flourish or ease.

Example: the group, with success, just makes it back to the gates after a daring race across the fields. The sub-altern is almost left behind as she fends off the shrikes, trying to buy them time, and the apprentice makes a bold but futile effort to push one of them back across the field.

Partial Success: with partial success, the main scene objective is accomplished, but nothing else. There may even be a bad side to the outcome.

Example: The group makes it to the gates safely, but without Amriss, who remained behind to buy their escape. She is close to the gates, however, and in the following scene the group can try to help her fight her way in.

Partial Failure: with partial failure, the group will fall short of their goal, but may succeed on some level of the scene that is not contested by the opponent(s).

Example: the group makes it to the gates after a bloody fight with the shrikes. The apprentice is gravely wounded, as is the sub-altern, who barely makes it inside alive.

Failure: with failure, the main goals are not achieved, and though the group may make some small progress towards an uncontested goal, they do not accomplish much.

Example: the group is wounded, some more than others, and though they make it closer to the gates, they are cut off before they can reach them.

Total Failure: total failure is, by definition, the worst possible outcome. The opposing side achieves all of their objectives swimmingly, and the losing group fails to accomplish any of theirs.

Example: taken off guard, the group is hit hard by the Shrike attack, and despite their best efforts, they fail to make it any closer to the gates. Much of the group is injured, and the apprentice is out cold.

SCENE RESOLUTION

Now that the key elements of the rules have been explained, it can all be put together as follows:

First: The narrator determines that the scene is a *rolled scene*, so they choose a form of scene resolution.

- A *difficulty factor* is used
- The *bidding process* is used
- Both a *difficulty factor* and the *bidding process* are used

Second: The Narrator indicates what Aspect is dominant during the scene. The players can suggest a different Aspect, but unless the reasons for a different aspect are compelling, the narrator's choice should be used.

The dominant aspect applies to all sides involved in the scene. Exceptions: Ties and Quick Takes (Quick Takes, which are their own sub-scene, may involve a different aspect than the larger scene).

- Mind
- Matter
- Spirit
- Chaos



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Third: If the scene does not involve opponents, a roll is made against the difficulty factor and the scene is resolved (go to step 6). If the scene does involve opponents, then the different groups offer their scene objectives.

Fourth: The players determine their base number of dice for the bidding pool—this is the total number of descriptors that the group has in the Aspect being used for the scene, plus any base dice from Primary Affinities.

Quick Takes are resolved at this point.

Fifth: The players and the narrator bid until one side or the other passes. To add to the bid, descriptors need to be *burned* and added to the pool. The bid opens with the side initiating the action, or randomly if neither side initiated the action.

Sixth: the bidding pools, once decided, are rolled. The success range (or failure range) is determined, and the narrator works out the consequences of the scene with the players based on the success range.

Spontaneous Quick Takes may be invoked at this point, if they are not “Opposed.”

Weapons, Armor & A Good Heavy Stick

In a fight, weapons and armor can have a significant effect on the scene. If one side has superior equipment, then it will *Impact the Scene*—the narrator determines the degree of superiority and the significance in the scene, and establishes a difficulty factor.

Some weapons and armor have descriptors of their own, which can be invoked whenever the equipment is in use. Some armor could even add a level of health to the character wearing it by absorbing a level of injury. These are decisions each narrator makes, and reflect the feel of each narrative (chapter Six elaborates on technology in the realms).

An example: two characters with rapiers are fighting two other people with rapiers. Obviously, neither side has an advantage. But if one of the people on one side had a pistol, then that side might have an easier time of it, unless range is not relevant to the scene. A well-armed contingent of soldiers is at an advantage over a poorly equipped mob, but not if the mob is throwing rocks and bottles on them from the roofs above. Likewise, the crew of a war machine would have an edge over oncoming cavalry, but not once the cavalry rode close enough to engage them. The framing of the scene will determine the strategic value of weaponry and strategy.

Injury as an Objective

For descriptive purposes, injury might occur in many confrontational scenes. But to intentionally wound or kill an opponent depends on the Success Range of the scene. The appropriate number of successes are converted to Injury Levels and then applied to the opponent(s).

Partial Success: Half of the successes are converted to Injuries

Full Success: All the successes are converted to Injuries

Total Success: One and a Half of the successes are converted to Injuries

NOTE: the successes converted are successes rolled after reaching the target number.

As mentioned under House Rules at the end of this chapter, narratives that are combat intensive may wish to add weapon charts that add specific dice to all combat scenes. In general, combat is no more complicated than the other thousand actions that take place in a scene, so unless it adds to the enjoyment, we don't encourage weapon charts or modifiers beyond the rules presented here.

Ties

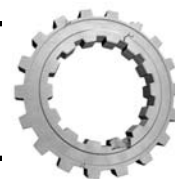
When the same number of successes are rolled in the bidding scene, then a tie is reached. Ties open the door to different Aspects than were used in the bid. These become the tie-breakers, and can often be a blessing to a group that was outmatched in the original bid. Once a tie has been reached, both sides enter a second round of bidding. This round, the Tie Round, does not take up any more time in the story—it is a new resolution of the same event. So if time is important to the outcome, it should be treated as though there is no new round. The players need to justify the use of the new aspect in their proposal during the bid.

Though no time is actually spent in a tie beyond the frame of the scene, they can be treated as a momentary standoff if it adds flavor to the scene.

A second tie will result in a stalemate, at which point real time resumes and a new round of normal bidding begins.

Optionally, the third round is *Chaos* based to reflect the nature of things in the *Maelstrom*.

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THE QUICK TAKE: DETAIL IN SCENES

Quick Takes Defined

Descriptors may be spent to add a Quick Take to the scene. There may be events within the scene that the character wishes to guarantee through a Quick Take; this way, instead of relying on winning the overall scene to accomplish the action, the character invokes a Descriptor to allow a Quick Take. By establishing the use of a Descriptor, the character is allowed a separate sub-scene that is based on a simple action, such as *grabbing the chalice during the sword-fight with the museum guards*, or *charming the barmaid with a wink during a bar room brawl*. The player states the use of the Descriptor in a contextual way: “I am so *tenacious* that I can make my way to the chalice during the fight” or “I am so *charming* that I can win the affection of the barmaid despite my obtuse behavior in this bar fight.” With this stated, the character is allowed a Quick Take, which is resolved separately from the overall scene. This enables the character to grab the chalice despite losing to the guards, or charm the barmaid despite being knocked flat by the big lug.

The Descriptor that is used to invoke a Quick Take is burned when invoked, and it is used in the bidding total for the Quick Take itself.

Characters invoking Quick Takes still add their base die (if any) to the full scene, as well as to their Quick Take sub-scene. Any other resources, such as their aspect total, may only be used in the Quick Take.

If a character is involved in a Quick Take that they did not invoke, they are able to use their base die (if any) and their aspect total in BOTH the full scene and the sub-scene. Any burnt descriptors may only be applied to one or the other, however.

Quick Takes are resolved before the scene is resolved, except for Spontaneous Quick Takes, which may be invoked and resolved during the resolution phase (as long as they are not Opposed Quick Takes, as described below).

Opposed Quick Takes

If the action of the Quick Take is directly opposed to the scene objective of the opponent, and the opponent wins the scene, then the Quick Take results can be modified by “borrowing” successes from the opponent’s success total. Successes “lent” in this manner are deducted from the total number of successes in that roll and then in turn subtracted from the Quick Take successes.

In this way, if Boris grabs the chalice (he rolls two successes versus Hard, which is exactly what he needs) but his side loses by two successes, the opponent may “lend” up to two successes against him. Since he just made his roll, they only need to lend one success to take away a success of his, which causes him to fail.

What is important to remember is that by reducing the total number of successes from the winning side, you may affect the degree of success. By taking 1 success away to help prevent Boris from grabbing the chalice, the degree of success drops from Success (2 to 3 successes) to Partial Success (1 success). By diverting attention to stopping Boris that side focused less on their scene objective. See also *Countering Quick Takes*.

Spontaneous Quick Takes

There are times when the scene takes a turn that is unexpected, and the resulting event needs to be addressed. These can be solved through Spontaneous Quick Takes. They are just like Quick Takes, except that they are declared during the Resolution Phase in response to events that are happening.

They cannot be used to change the standard scene resolution, but they can be used to counter an opposing Quick Take, assist a failed Quick Take, or address an aspect of the scene that is not opposed by the opposing side (like grabbing an Ismolahiti vase that is falling as a result of the fight).

Countering Quick Takes

One side can opt to counter the other side’s Quick Take, which converts the Quick Take sub-scene from an obstacle-based sub-scene to a sub-scene with an opponent. This means that instead of a difficulty factor, there is a bid. There may still be a difficulty factor that would modify the bid.

Regardless of what form of sub-scene the Countered Quick Take becomes, it allows for the opposing sides of the larger bid in the full scene to “lend” successes from their rolls, just like Opposed Quick Takes.

Burning a Descriptor for added Dice

This use of a Descriptor allows the player to add a die to any bid. As many descriptors as desired can be burned this way. The Descriptor must be appropriate to the scene, but does not have to be from the Aspect of the scene. Creative use of a Descriptor in an effort to make it appropriate is encouraged, but there will be times when a Descriptor is so inappropriate that it cannot be invoked.

EXAMPLE:

Marsha is trying to grab hold of the condor egg in the nest while swinging on a rope during a big fight scene on a cliff. Her Quick Take is about getting the egg. If the egg has nothing to do with the objective of the opponent in the larger scene, then this is a standard Quick Take. If the goal of the opponent prevents her from getting the egg, then her Quick Take is an Opposed Quick Take. If someone in the opponent’s group invokes a Quick Take to stop her, this is a Countered Quick Take. Since she’s on a rope in the middle of a fight, there would be a difficulty factor applied to her Quick Take, whether it’s a regular, opposed, or countered Quick Take.



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For instance, in a Matter scene a player can invoke the descriptor “clever as a fox” even though that descriptor is part their Mind Aspect. They only need to explain why being “clever as a fox” can help them in the scene. However a player trying to balance on a narrow beam would have a hard time justifying the use of “clever as a fox” as an appropriate descriptor.

Descriptors and Passive Tests

In descriptive scenes, there will be times when the Narrator may call for a Passive Test. If the character has any Descriptors that are appropriate to the scene, then they may add them to their die pool. This pool is rolled against a difficulty rating. These Passive Tests are often used to determine simple outcomes, or add flavor that reflects the character’s Descriptors and Aspects. They can be rolled against a character’s total Aspect, or against any relevant descriptors.

EXAMPLE:

Minoche has a weak descriptor of Painfully Shy. When the bakery she works in is robbed, she invokes a Quick Take with this descriptor to grab the lockbox key and hide it. The player states that Minoche is “so painfully shy that the thugs don’t pay any attention to her as they rough up the proprietor.”

Weak Descriptors

Weak descriptors represent parts of the character that most would perceive as faults, weaknesses, or disadvantages. In the Maelstrom system, weaknesses can contribute to the story almost as much as strengths can. As the player authors the actions of the character, they may find opportunities to invoke a weak descriptor, often in ways that help the character or the group. A weak descriptor, like *gluttonous*, *sickly*, or *spiteful*, can’t be used to bid towards winning a scene, and doesn’t count towards their Aspect total, but can be used to invoke Quick Takes. As long as the player can explain how their Weak Descriptor can be used to invoke the Quick Take, it functions as a regular descriptor, or, only no dice are added to the Quick Take.

IMPACTING THE SCENE

Many actions taken during the scene can have a major impact on the scene itself. Whether the result of a successful Quick Take or the consequence of clever playing, events have an impact on the scene. When this happens, dice are added to the side that benefits from the actions (they are “impacting the scene”). For instance, if during the scene a Quick Take is invoked to pull a lever that will open a pit under the opponents, and if that Quick Take is successful, then there is a change in how the scene is resolved. The new resolution takes into account the added difficulty of the pit, which is reflected by the dice added the scene.

The range used is the same as for Difficulty Factors, except that the **LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY IS ASSIGNED TO THE OPPONENT** based on how difficult the scene has now become.

- Easy (adds 1 die)
- Hard (adds 2 dice)
- Really Hard (adds 4 dice)
- Extremely Hard (adds 6 dice)
- Impossible (adds 9 dice)

The degree of difficulty is **ADDED AS DICE** to the side that benefits from the situation, or **SUBTRACTED FROM THE SUCCESSES OF ALL SIDES** if multiple groups are affected adversely.

Example:

*In a prolonged debate in the judge’s chambers, one of the debaters is feverishly ill. The narrator decides that this **IMPACTS THE SCENE** and assigns a **HARD** modifier to that debater. The 2 dice required for a **HARD** difficulty factor are added to the opponent’s roll. If both sides were ill, 2 dice would instead be subtracted from both sides. In other words, the added difficulty is added to the group that benefits from it, unless no one benefits and then everyone suffers the difficulty.*

Magic, as explained in the following chapter, uses this same principle when it is invoked in a way that directly affects the scene.

See *Weapons, Armor & A Good Heavy Stick* above for an illustration of how weaponry and equipment affects a combat scene.

PRIMARY AFFINITY

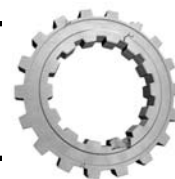
Affinities reflect a character’s connection and aptitude with some talent or element of the Maelstrom. A Newcomer has an affinity known as Kael, which is almost unique to Newcomers, and as such is a rare and often sought-after power in the Maelstrom reality. Other affinities include Magic, which is the power to control the elemental powers of the storm and use them, Cultural Affinities, and Gift Affinities. Having “Cultural Affinity: Kril” would affect how that character feels and acts within the Swarm and the among the Kril people.

Affinities may be lost over time through disassociation with the source of the affinity, and gained through strong association with key elements of the affinity. Affinities, once lost, are converted into Story Points which can then be used in turn to gain other advantages (see Story Points later in this chapter).

Primary Affinities are so encompassing that they are often “in play” in the course of the story—especially Cultural Affinities, if the character spends the session in their home culture. “In play” means that the affinity is relevant to the scene.

In practical terms, a Primary Affinity allows a character to have a base die for all bidding. For this to happen, the Primary Affinity

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must be “in play.” This means that the Primary Affinity must be relevant to the scene. But no matter how many Primary Affinities are “in play,” the character never receives more than their base die because of them.

Example:

Like a fish out of the water, a character in a realm that is not his Cultural Affinity may find that they have no Primary Affinities “in play”—this means they have no base die when bidding.

Affinity: Kael

Kael, the so-called “Newcomer Affinity,” is inherent to all Newcomers. On occasion, there are other creatures born with it. It is almost unheard of for someone to acquire it later in life.

Kael is an important part of the Maelstrom. It is tied to the shifts and the storm, and is chaotic in nature. It allows the Newcomer, or any creature with it, to adapt to any realm and assimilate into any culture. As such Newcomers can speak the language and the dialect of the culture they awaken to, and even understand and know the customs of that culture. In game terms, Kael allows the character to mimic a Cultural Affinity they are exposed to, changing Affinities as often as once per session.

The additional power of Kael, which is a reflection of ties with the Maelstrom, is that the character may add two dice over the course of a session to any roll they choose.

In the realms there are many uses for Kael. From ancient rituals and sacrifices to extraction and siphoning, Kael is sought by many people. There are those who create thralls and simulacrum from Kael, and those who store it for use and power, and those who venerate it as holy and spiritual.

Affinity: Magic

The Natural Arts, Pseudo-Science, and many other names are used to describe the Affinity with Magic. There are two different Magic Affinities described in the following chapter, including rules on usage, capabilities, and effects on the bidding pool.

Affinity: Culture

Affinity to Culture allows the character to exist within the cultural reality of their affinity, to work their sciences, and manipulate their technological magics. Most people have a Primary Affinity to their home culture.

With this affinity the character has a working knowledge of all things a normal person would know in that culture. If people in that culture ride horses, the character probably knows how to ride horses, or swim, or read and write—whatever fits the background of the character. If the cultural reality includes it then the character might know it. Note, however, that this includes only perfunctory abilities. Any “real” talent, such as one that involves extensive training, requires a Secondary Affinity.

Other Affinities: Gifts

There are powers in the world, from the supernatural to the spiritual. Like Secondary Affinities, these gifts should be tailored to the narrative itself. Beyond allowing the character to perform the power of the gift itself, they may require passive tests in an Aspect, or require a descriptor to be burned to invoke the gift.

Should they be relevant to scene outcome, see *Impacting the Scene* to determine the dice they might add to the pool.

A few examples of Gift Affinities like this:

- Healing Hands
- Shapechanger
- Dreamwalking
- Side Realmer
- Cat Vision
- Sleepless
- Kael Sponge
- Regeneration of Limbs
- Ageless

SECONDARY AFFINITY

There are skills and actions that a person may have a gift for, such as swordplay or social charm. Secondary Affinities reflect a relationship and aptitude for something—they can be a natural gift or a trained skill, or a combination of the two. These secondary affinities are important to the character, and often only one character in the group of players has each affinity. A Secondary Affinity in Hagglng, for instance, would help the character whenever they were in a bartering situation.

Secondary Affinities can be pragmatic, like cooking or swordplay, tracking or cobbling. They can be specific—rapiers, ballet, trout fishing—or generalized like swords, dance, fishing. Each narrative will have its own affinities appropriate to that story. A story about court intrigue and romance might have very specific affinities when it comes to those events, but might generalize about others outside of the story focus.

Secondary Affinities are divided into three levels of familiarity and expertise. These both help the understanding of the character and reflect in the bidding pools when dice are used. These three levels are rated as follows:

- weak affinity
- mild affinity
- strong affinity

Other terms are often used to reflect the affinity itself or the narrative style of a story. These other terms could be as follows:



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- talented
- practiced
- mastered

In Scene Resolution, if the affinity can be used during the scene, then it helps guarantee a set number of successes on the dice when they are rolled. Each degree of the affinity guarantees that a die will be a success automatically. A weak affinity yields one automatic success, a mild affinity yields two, and a strong affinity yields three.

Example:

A mild affinity guarantees 2 successes out of the bidding pool. When the roll is made, that many dice are put aside as successes, and only the additional dice need to be rolled.

Secondary Affinities are different from Descriptors. They are learned or acquired skills. Descriptors are personality traits. Beyond the descriptors, a character is known, and defined, by what they are good at—their Secondary Affinities.

Secondary Affinities can also be used to supplement a Primary Affinity, like specializing in one area of the Primary Affinity. In this way the two compliment one another, and can add a base die as well as guaranteed successes to a roll.

Secondary Affinity Examples

- Swordsmanship
- Mechanics
- Astronomy
- Lion Taming
- Dogbonds
- Imperial Word
- Airship Design
- Medical
- Alcohol Chugging
- Bakery
- Finance
- Commerce
- Theatrical Arts
- Showmanship
- Bartending

Secondary Affinities shouldn't be too general, or else they become universally applicable. If the affinity is "survival" for instance, it should only apply to "wilderness survival" perhaps, but couldn't be used in a bar fight. It might not even be appropriate to use while hunting, if hunting is a separate secondary

affinity. "Scoundrelry" for instance, is an affinity that is too broad, as is "jack of all trades," and similar universal affinities.

STORY POINTS:

Story points are gained through role-playing, and may be used to add descriptors, aspects, and affinities to the character. They may also be used to affect the story outcome, replenish burnt descriptors, and avoid injury or death. They act as a measure of experience and should reflect the character's concept and what they are good at, and what they have been doing. The Newcomer, at the end of the first session, is given a total that reflects their newly integrated identity in the Maelstrom. In addition, Newcomers may "cash out" by choosing to lose affinity with Kael, and use the points from it for other things. Over time characters can become powerful in the Maelstrom through the use of Story Points.

Generally, the narrator gives Story Points out at the end of each session as follows:

Everyone is given 1 Story Point automatically (assuming their character is still alive at the end of the session). In addition to this point for "attendance", the following points are awarded:

Learned Something, Contributed to the Game (1) and/or Plot Success—Accomplished Major Goals (1) and/or Chapter's End (1)

The **Plot Success** parameters are often predetermined by the scenario itself. For examples, see Appendix 2 for Plot Success descriptions in the sample scenarios.

Chapter's End: Ongoing narratives are composed of chapters. As each chapter concludes, another Story Point can be given out as a reward for completion of that phase of the story.

Additionally, the narrator can give out special points for creative role-playing or major accomplishments.

Alternate Means of Advancement:

Some games may be best suited for role-play oriented development of Descriptors and Affinities. In this way after each session the narrator discusses any new Descriptors the character demonstrated that could be added to the character sheet, as well as any Secondary Affinities that have been learned. This is a story-based approach that can greatly reflect the events of the narrative itself and require creativity and role-playing from the players to advance in this way. It is suggested that no more than 1 Descriptor or 1 Secondary Affinity be given out per session, and that Primary Affinities require multiple sessions and an in-game storyline to acquire. Story Points can still be awarded (at a lower rate) and used for other things such as recovering burnt descriptors or "Contributing to the Story" (see below). Otherwise, the gaining of Descriptors and Affinities under this optional system is up to the Narrator.

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Adding to the Character

As the game progresses the character grows, and to reflect this the player can add Descriptors and Affinities to the character. These descriptors and affinities should evolve out of role-play, being things that character has done or become good at, or that are in some way justified by the story being told. A simple chart shows the suggested Story Point costs:

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Descriptors | 2 points + Aspect Total |
| Secondary Affinity | 3 points |
| Mild | +3 points |
| Strong | +3 points |
| Primary Affinity | 7 points |

Descriptors: The cost is 2 Story Points plus a point per descriptor the character already has in that aspect.

Secondary Affinities: The cost is 3 Story Points for a new secondary affinity at weak, and additional 3 to raise it to mild, and another 3 to raise it to strong. In this way it would cost 9 points to get a new secondary affinity and raise it to strong.

Contributing to the Story

A creative use of Story Points is to spend them to directly add information to the story itself. The player spends the Story Point and then states an addition to the story in progress, as follows:

Narrator: *You finally get to a village, tired and hungry, without any food or any money, in the pouring rain.*

Player: *Ah, well fortunately, as we get closer I realize that this is the little town my uncle lives in. What a pleasant surprise, especially since he runs the local inn.*

In this way the players contribute actively to the story, as co-authors in the most collaborative sense. They are limited to the Story Points they have to or want to spend, and all decisions are ultimately up to the narrator. Story Points used in this way should be limited to free scenes.

Replenishing Descriptors

At the beginning of each new game session, character descriptors that were burnt in the previous session are restored. Additionally, during a session a player may replenish up to four descriptors in a single Aspect per Story Point they spend.

Narrator Considerations

Reward players for their role-playing, but be careful not to give more or fewer points than the game needs. Each narrative has its own feel, and characters can grow quickly if allowed. Make sure the growth rate is appropriate to the story.

INJURY

Injury can have a serious impact on the story. Beyond the risk of a character dying, injury changes the events in many ways. Healing and recovery take time, and limit what a character can do. Chasing down the killer in a murder mystery is not as easy if you're in a wheelchair.

In the game, there are four levels of injury, as follows:

Healthy: *the character is fit and well, give or take a cold or some bruises*

Injured: *the character is very ill, badly hurt, or both*

Out: *the character is so injured that they are out cold. This may be temporary, or long-lasting, depending on the nature of the injury and the story itself*

Dead: *the character's vital signs have left the building*

Injury is sustained through failure in scenes that risk physical injury, from rock-climbing to laboratory tests to poison. Healing and healing rates are up to the narrator (see Health Dice below), and should fit the style of the game being run.

NOTE: In narratives where the characters are rarely meant to die, another level of health can be added, either as bruised, to supplement the conscious levels of health, or comatose, to add a level of unconsciousness to make it harder to actually die.

Health Dice

Once enough time has passed or some means have been offered to heal a character, the narrator can decide that they have recovered a level of health, or are completely well. In times when the outcome is not obvious, or whenever an element of chance is desired, the character can roll on a passive test. The Aspect in question can vary, from Matter for wounds to Mind for unconsciousness, Spirit for determination, to Chaos for the larger-than life or quixotic elements of the story.

Avoiding Injury or Death

By spending a Story Point, a character can shake off or absorb an injury level that would otherwise hurt them. They must take some form of scar or disability, or mental debilitation. To do this they drop a regular descriptor and create a weak descriptor. This new weak descriptor can reflect the event or nature of the injury, or it can be a reflection of a long-standing character trait that is now quantified by a weak descriptor.

Example: Pivoc is running screaming through the woods, chased by Seven Really Angry Wolves. He doesn't make it (failure), and is cut down (2 injury levels) before he can dive into the river. Pivoc opts to take a weak descriptor instead, avoiding the injury level that would take him down. He spends a story point and drops his descriptor "courageous" and adds the weak descriptor "nervous around animals." He could also drop a descriptor and add "easily annoyed" or "flaming"



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sweet tooth" to reflect traits of his that he has always had, but were never quantified. Note that in this case Pivoc absorbed 1 injury level, which was enough to keep him at Injured instead of Out.

Additionally, characters may opt to take permanent injuries instead of damage. A level of injury can be avoided by taking a grievous wound or a crippling injury. Generally, the wound should have bad consequences that are highly undesirable—such as losing fingers, limbs, an eye, or severe scars, crippled limbs, and the like. Unlike taking weak descriptors, injuries like this do not cost a story point.

Generally, a character can only absorb one injury level per scene, regardless of story points spent or injuries sustained.

HOUSE RULES: TAILORING THE GAME

The purpose of the Story Engine is to offer a free-flowing game that encourages both role-playing and story telling. As discussed later in Chapter Seven, it is important to adapt any game to the tastes, mood, and style of each group of players. With the principles of the narrative system in mind, variations on the rules are encouraged, as well as additions. Other rules systems can even be used to run stories in the Maelstrom reality.

The Maelstrom reality focuses on the unknown, and this ambiguity will slowly lend itself to answers that evolve through gameplay and world development by the narrator. As decisions are made about the way reality works in this world, rules decisions will be made as well—from the detailing of Affinities to new and diverse uses of Magic and Science. Cultural realities will also result in some rules decisions, from the speed of some creatures to the descriptors of others. These unique answers will result, intentionally or not, in a variant to the rules presented here. This diversity is encouraged, because it reflects the many different gaming groups that role-play, and allows for the variety of different styles and tastes to co-exist and add to the gaming experience. Maelstrom was play-tested in across the United States in order to develop a system and a game world that was fluid and open enough to accommodate the many different tastes and styles of play. Our web site (www.pigame.net) on the Internet has a forum for new ideas, rule variations, suggestions, and scenario outlines.

Verisimilitude

The narrative system is cinematic in that it does not attempt to provide detailed, realistic resolutions to any and all possible actions. It can easily be modified to suit a more "realistic" or detail-oriented dynamic. Everything from adding a specialized Health Dice system that covers hit locations, movement effects of injury, and weapon damage tables. We discourage the use of Quick Takes as a substitute for scene-based resolution, since the premise of the narrative system is to resolve events on a scene scale. Otherwise, make of this game your own creation.

Diceless Narratives

On the other end of the spectrum, there are games that focus solely on the narrative aspects of the story and discard the random factor of dice. These can be highly creative games, and we encourage adaptation of our system to a diceless format. There are diceless systems on the market from which ideas can be drawn as well, such as Amber Diceless™ and dice-optional systems such as Theatrix™. The narrative system in Maelstrom can be easily adapted to diceless, using the success ranges and bidding system as a guideline to resolution.

The Global Gaming Network

Our web site (www.pigames.net) has a forum for all players of our products like Maelstrom Storytelling. We want to provide a place where players can share their experiences and their game variations, as well as offer access to the narratives, stories, and development that players share with us over the Internet. Feel free to comment on rules, add new rule and rule variants, or share your stories. We recommend player interaction and allow players to get in touch with one another to share ideas and game experiences.

A Better Mousetrap

There is always a better way to do things, and each group has a different way of doing them. Tailor this system to your needs, use another one, or create your own. Regardless of how you use it, we hope you enjoy Maelstrom Storytelling.

THE BIG EXAMPLE

This is an example of game play in which a variety of different events take place to demonstrate the ways in which the rules can be applied.

The story so far:

Ashland and Daevera, two fortune-seekers, have managed to gain entrance to the masque ball being held at the towering estate of the Marquis of Hillios. Their goal is to use the party as a diversion while they steal the artifact known as the Key of Arn from the library.

The story shown:

Ashland and Daevera hob-nob among the socialites, and eventually are told that a certain staircase past the foyer leads right to the library. Satisfied, the two make their way discreetly to the foyer, not knowing that one of the officers in the pay of the Marquis has overheard them and is following.

In the library the two of them manage to sneak the key from its display case just as the officer bursts in with a handful of the Marquis' goons.

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There is a great chase over the buttressed rooftops of the castle, with swordplay and acrobatics, until Ashland swallows the key just as Daevera grabs him and jumps off the walls into the moat below.

After a harrowing plunge and a cold swim, the two of them are washed ashore downstream, the castle just visible under the moonlight behind them.

Scene One:

The narrator chooses to set the scene in the ballroom, having already played out the scene that got Ashland and Daevera into the party. She frames it as follows:

“Once past the valets at the door you are ushered into the grand salon, full of the finest and wealthiest people in all Geregion. Most everyone has a masque, and some are even in costume. The military officers who are attending are in full dress uniform, and have their ceremonial swords at their sides. The room is long and large, with high ceilings, and mirrors inset into the paneling. There seem to be many exits. What is your scene objective?”

Players:

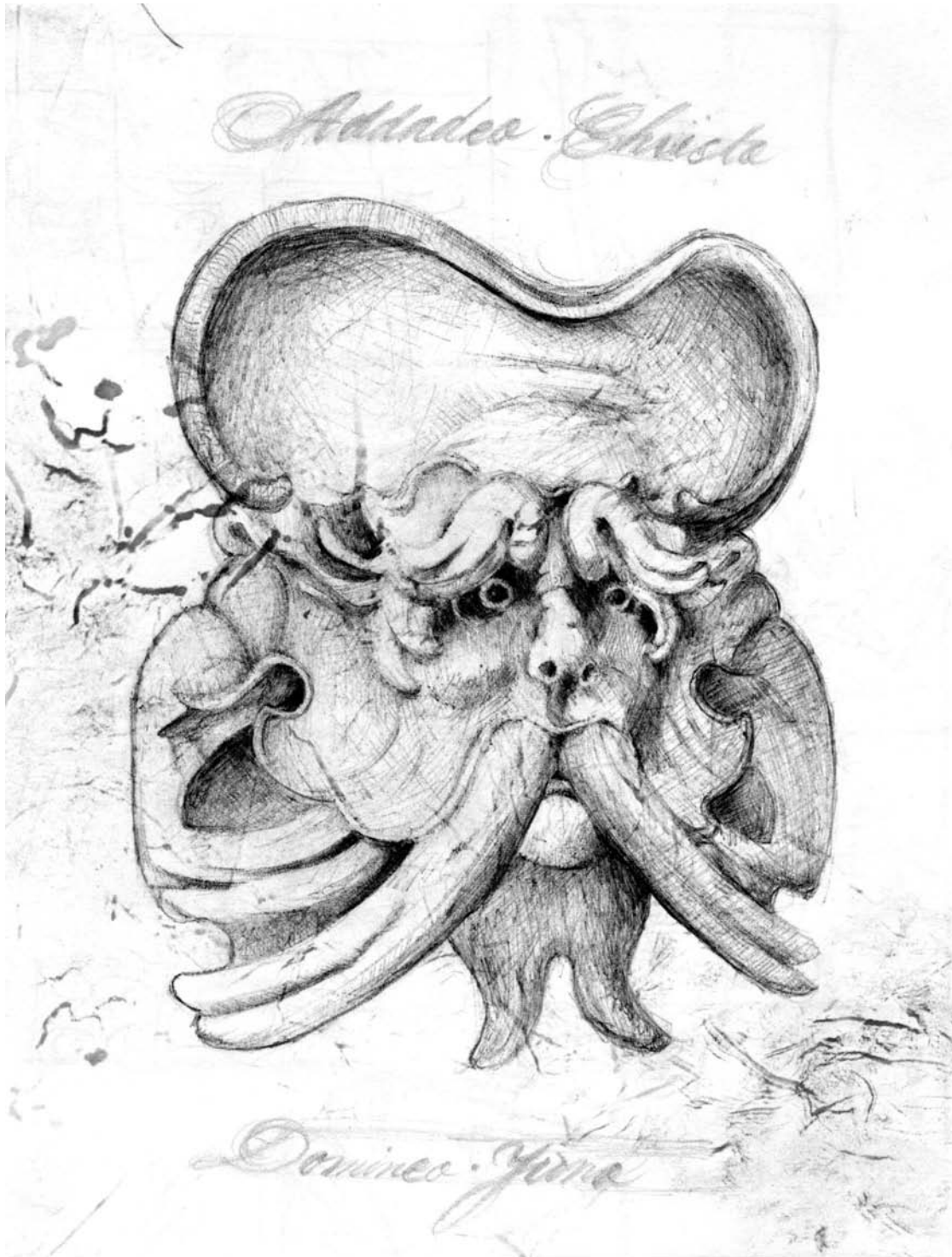
“We’re going to hob-nob among the guests, and while admiring the castle we’re going to try to find out where the library is, without drawing any suspicion.”

The narrator decides that the scene is mind based, and calls for a roll against a difficulty factor. She decides it’s hard, because the guests may not know the answers and suspicion needs to be avoided. She uses the sliding scale: Hard (2 dice) plus 1 for each character (sliding scale)—which means the group needs to roll 4 successes. Daevera has a Secondary Affinity (Talented) called Finishing School which guarantees her 1 success. Between them they have 4 descriptors in Mind, plus their Primary Affinities (Geregion Culture) which adds 2, for a total of 6 dice. They roll 5 dice (one is already a success because of the Finishing School), and get 3 odd numbers. Add the automatic success and they have 4 successes, which just makes it! With Partial Success, the Narrator suggests that they discover the general whereabouts of the library without arousing suspicion. The players suggest that they learn the exact whereabouts, and which stairs to use, but someone is on to them. The narrator agrees. On to the next scene.

With this sort of give-and-take, the group collaborates to write the whole story. The chase over the roofs is a bid scene, with Ashland and Daevera bidding against the Marquis’ goons, and would most likely involve a difficulty factor as well. The plunge into the water could be its own scene, or the end of the main chase over the rooftops. Swallowing the key could be a consequence of the success range or an individual Quick Take to make sure Ashland doesn’t lose the key.



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Chapter Six

Pseudo-Science, Leonardan Magic, and Travel

Magic

Power flows and channels through the Maelstrom. It exists in every rock, fiber, and air molecule. What is known as magic is the ability to tap into this power, and channel it to your own devices. Magic has the power to shape reality. It can be used like a science to turn inventions into reality. It can be pulled into the chest and thrown out like a raw force. It can take people into their dreams.

THE NATURAL ARTS

The Natural Arts are powerful. Limited by the imagination and what the body can afford to channel through it, the Natural Art is the art of channeling the storm through the body.

In some ways the Natural Arts are similar to magic in other worlds, in more stable places, but here they are more powerful—because they are raw. Whereas magic cast on a world of Earth-type powerlines has the accuracy of a tweezer, casting Maelstrom magic is more akin to removing a splinter with a ball-peen hammer. Since these forces are strong enough to alter the reality of spacial existence, think of what is would do coursing through your body as you tried to bend it to your will.

How it Happens

Magic is cast through the chest of the caster, not focused in the hands. Accordingly, it has a broad effect range, and a poor accuracy. The practitioner of the Arts must take a moment or two to become “one” with the essence and its tides at the time and place of casting. The caster is then in a trance, and stimulus-response time is decreased accordingly.

A caster is sometimes able to “read” down the lines, like a form of divination. They may discover many things that are tapping the powerlines: people, places, and even things. The caster must be in a calm environment to do this, or must sacrifice more response time by going deeper into the trance. The information depends on the caster’s familiarity with reading the lines, and their familiarity with the subject as well.

A powerful disturbance sends out vibrations that will automatically be picked up by anyone accessing the powerlines, in a

radius determined by the strength of the disturbance. Only the most basic caster will be significantly disturbed by this, otherwise it will simply be noted while in the trance and remembered once the caster re-joins the dominant reality.

Powers

There are no actual spells, and no rituals or chanting involved, unless the character’s personality, habits, or culture demand this in order for the caster to reach the needed state of trance.

There are several common uses of magic. Easiest and most common is the transference of power into a physical state, and its projection from the body. This creates a crude but powerful “force wall” which slams back everything in its path. This wall is not affected by gravity, so arcing it is impossible. It simply shoots out in front of the caster until it dissipates, which depends on the caster’s power, will, and the power of the lines in the area (line power is dependent on the amount of order around it—more order, less power). Casting in the middle of nowhere is more effective than casting in or around a stable city. It impacts all objects in its path, intended or not, living or inanimate. It also causes no recoil against the caster when impacting objects (only a little when actually leaving the body).

A caster can also sense people, places, and even some items of power by divining along the lines, as mentioned earlier. In fact, sometimes divining happens whether welcome or not. This is a simple cast, and the only negative effects possible are that a clumsy divining projects itself along, and like loudly opening a door to look inside a room, anything you can sense is alerted to both your presence and your attempt, though not necessarily your identity.

A much more complex usage is for transportation. This takes a lot of refinement to accomplish successfully because of the delicacy needed. The idea is to surround the caster and—if powerful enough—other people or things, with an outward-pushing force. This force can be directed (usually in an extremely clumsy way) in the opposite direction then desired. Gravity does come into play this time, so the arcing effect applies. However, the caster must be in the trance-state to decelerate when the ground comes back around. As one would imagine, this is a highly complex usage of power. However, a much easier derivation can



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also be used to push the caster, for example, sliding across an icy plain. Since a wall projected outwards has very little recoil, a tender shove towards the caster is a much more effective use.

Another reasonably simple task, depending on the power of the natural phenomena, is to re-route a natural phenomena. For instance, a strong wind blowing could be made to bypass an area, or re-route the direction and supplement its power by consolidating it. Or with enough control you could re-route an existing forest fire. The amount of the change is contingent on the power of the caster and the lines. Accuracy doesn't come into as much play in a case like this. The caster's influence is immediate and affects the outcome only circumstantially.

For example: *A caster shields herself and friends from a burst of heavy rain by "routing the path of the rain around the camp." Doing exactly this, the rain is left free to pool around the outside, and wash in. So while protected from the deluge, the group still got their feet (and anything else on the ground) soaked.*

The Dream Take is the power to capture moments and live them out briefly as in a dream. The Dream Take crosses the bounds between reality and the mind's eye. The Dream Take has led many people to insanity.

Trouble for the novice

They bite off more than they can swallow and are either painfully tossed back from the trance, negating the magic and causing some possible injury. Or they are baptized by fire, bodily thrown back, with their effect more powerful and less accurate than anticipated

Not being able to tap into the lines—this is rare...and usually only happens to beginners who have never cast magic before.

Casting too close together. Since casting is physically, and even mentally, draining and disorienting, the physical damage, mental strain, and disorientation are inversely proportional to the time between casting, and are also exponentially mounting. This means that though there are no restrictions on how often a person can cast, frequent castings without enough recovery time in between can lead to severe injury, massive disorientation, and even death—though usually by the time a character is that far gone, they are too out of touch with reality to concentrate enough to cast a final, deadly time.

A practitioner's ability to use magic within the Maelstrom is only limited by their creativity, and their physical stamina. The more in tune with the chaotic harmonies of the Maelstrom they are, and the more times they have accessed it, the greater their accuracy and control.

MAGIC AND THE PHYSICAL SCIENCES

The natural magic of the storm is chaotic by nature, and wieldable through the body and the will of the caster. The sciences of the world rely on order, and a rational understanding of how and why things work. In each realm these truths are different, while the chaos of the storm is unchanged. In each realm the reality is a shade apart, all governed by the affinity of the place itself. Working the storm into order is to understand the natural science of the culture and the land, and derive power through the order in that natural science.

Technology is a thing of inventors. Technology in the Maelstrom is a Jules Vernian dream, a Leonardian magic that through the extension of natural laws brings about the fantastic. In this way, as Edison captured electricity and turned it into light, the world of Maelstrom is rich with the power of tinkerers and scientists and engineers who bring out the hidden magic of all things and make them into miracles. But like all things, once commonplace even the wondrous and the unthinkable become mundane. Like the microwaves and the televisions and the cellular phones of our Earth, these things lose their mystery over time, even if no one can tell you exactly how they work.

What is possible is determined by the affinity of the place and culture where the invention exists. Once a ship can fly, the reality shifts and it becomes believable that ships fly. To make that shift takes fundamental change, that on our Earth can be counted as the turning points in history. But to flesh out the possible and work items that do not change the reality and the perception of the people—this is the art of science and invention on the common level.

The inventor and the craftsman aren't too far apart. The craftsman builds what the inventor imagines. Whether or not it works is a different matter. The inventor must reach into the very core nature of the device, elicit its capabilities and bring them out in their full power. Like the sculptor who sees the statue hiding inside the uncut stone, the inventor must find the power in the creation. In this way, and only this way, can an order be drawn from the storm. It is not so much about imbuing an item with power, but bringing out the latent power within it.

The scientist, therefore, is an architect, a creator—part imagination and part science.

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How it Works

The scientist, through the slow process of imagining, drafting, and building, elicits the power of the creation. This ritual of inspiration is the trance-state required to tap into the storm. Once achieved the scientist summons the power to the surface, and carefully distributes and crafts it like an artist. This is the *summon* and *control* sequence.

What the limits are depends on the cultural affinity of the place itself and the inventor. The experiments in the art of science can be both lethal and wondrous. Over-ambition has led to catastrophe, but with the fire of prideful creativity has also come creations that have changed the Maelstrom. The Empire may have been destroyed by the ambition of its creations, just as it may have risen because of them.

Spread over the lands are hints of the magic that the Empire wove, and even traces of those who lived before. In the Three Ages of Imperium, many things were done to the world, and like an over-tilled field the ruins lie like the ravagings of a great machine across the land. Some of the power they unearthed is still found in pockets here and there, and parts of their vast network of machinery still work. The great wheel in Belzaine's Ahr Miran shifts and turns once every sixty three years, and the clocktower in Diodet still tells time to the minute. But the bulk of their monuments and their creations are broken or buried or ruined, built over or dismantled by the successive generations since the fall of the famous empire of man.

Limitations of the Physical Sciences

What can or can't be done with the physical sciences is largely dependent on the cultural affinities of the place and inventor. There are, however, some guidelines for what the physical sciences are capable of affecting.

Once the energy of the storm has been drawn into an item, that energy can only be used to affect the vessel of the energy itself. For example, one could create a dueling pistol that had an incredibly high rate of fire, or bullets that were more effective at ripping through flesh, but not a pistol that could enhance the bullets fired out of it. A printing press could be designed that allowed black ink to come out as any color, or print in any known font, but not one that imbued the paper that went through it with any magical properties.

As a general rule, the Natural Arts allows one to affect somebody else with the power of the storm and affect them directly, while the Physical Sciences allows one to put that power into an item and augment it somehow. The Natural Arts have a short-term effect, while the nature of the Physical Sciences results in a tangible creation.

There are reputed to be people who have managed to surpass the accepted limitations of the Physical Sciences. All the people who belong to this small group have one thing in common: they are hopelessly insane. It is not easy to say whether they were mad to begin with or their work bent them past sanity. The inventions of these people (the ones that actually function) are as strange, dangerous, and unpredictable as their creators. The rare genius has produced devices such as the Belzaine Traveling Sideshow (see the section on Technology), but generally the end product of a device that attempts to breach the barriers of the Sciences will not function.

*The
Krill refer to the Arts
as K'I-Nj, and believe it to be
inherently tied to the same forces
that bring about Newcomers in
the Maelstrom reality.*

The Magic Affinities

NATURAL ARTS

Depending on where in the realms the character learned the use of this affinity, it may be called magic, sorcery, witch-craft, the natural arts, pseudo-science, or any of a dozen other names.

This is the power to manipulate the forces of the Maelstrom and control them. It is tied to the Aspects of Spirit and Chaos, and is often very hard to control. A Quick Take is invoked and the character attempts to summon the powers of the storm (using their Spirit Aspect) and then once summoned, attempts to control them (using the Chaos Aspect). The success of this is determined separately from the scene; once the outcome is determined, the result will add to (or reduce, in the case of bungling or other mishaps) the bidding pool. There are many outcomes which might not affect the bidding pool directly in an active scene, as well as those that are used in passive scenes (in which there is no bidding).

The use of the Magic Affinity requires the character to burn a descriptor to invoke a Quick Take. During the Quick Take there are two rolls, one to summon the power and another to control it. The total successes rolled will determine the success of the cast, as well as the impact it has on the scene.

Summoning:

The first stage is the summoning of the magic into the character's possession. This is done by drawing the chaos of the Maelstrom into the body of the character. This process takes the caster into a light trance. In this state the character is not as receptive to outside stimulus, and is generally unaware of surrounding events. To expedite the summoning, a powerful practitioner can delve more quickly into the trance. This is a Spirit based sub-scene.



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Dice: Speeding up the trance makes the roll 1 stage more difficult, or 2 stages for a significantly reduced trance time.

The difficulty is usually 1 (easy), but may be modified by other Affinities and the location itself. The character may spend Descriptors as well to improve their dice total, in addition to the Descriptor spent to invoke the Quick Take. Any descriptors spent may be used to modify both summoning and controlling rolls.

Failure by 1 success is marginal failure; it means that the summoning brings only an unwieldable amount of power that can have no practical or tangible effect. Failure may result in visible, random effects of energy nearby, but not in the body of the caster (such as flickering lights, hair-tingling, sudden wind, strange sounds). These may or may not be detrimental to people present. Complete failure is the result of bringing too much of the storm into the body, and will invariably bring an undesired effect which can be fatal to the character and those nearby.

In the case of failure, the character may choose to end the magic and not begin the control sequence; in this way they cut their losses. Otherwise, the character may opt to channel it into the desired form during the Control sequence. Any additional successes rolled during the Control sequence may be used to absorb failures in the Summoning sequence. However, if this is attempted, there is the possibility of *double failure*, in which case the failures of the Control sequence are added to the failures of the Summoning sequence.

Controlling the Effects

Once the power has been summoned, then it is shaped into the desired form, called an "effect." What the character may shape it into is described later under Effects. The character makes a roll using their Chaos Aspect, adding any Descriptors they have spent in addition to the one spent to invoke the Quick Take itself. If the Summoning was a failure, then the number of successes rolled is reduced by the amount of failures. The success range is the same for Summoning.

Effects

The main effects that are used in the Maelstrom are listed here, as mentioned in the overview above. There is no real limit to what the magic can do, as long as it fits within the guidelines of the story being told. All practitioners have the ability to summon

the storm and harness it. Shaping the storm is an Effect, each of which are different and none of which is innately known to a caster without a Secondary Affinity in the Effect.

While summoning the storm they often gather information from the powerlines in process. The amount and accuracy of the information is determined by the success range:

Partial Success: most often nothing is read in the lines

Success: the proximity of the Storm itself is felt, as well the presence of anyone or thing in the immediate area that is presently tapping the powerlines

Complete Success: as above, but the range is further (often the whole realm). Additionally, the caster often obtains a quick glance into the scenes where the power is being tapped (these are resolved as Cut Scenes)

The following effects require study or aptitude, and are gained through a Secondary Affinity.

Transference: this is the forceful hand of the storm, and can be used in many ways. The caster calls the storm into themselves and then thrusts it outward, bowling over whatever lies ahead. The success range determines the outcome. Generally, subtle force is hard to master, as is its overwhelming force and range.

Reading down the Lines: though a caster of the arts has a passive ability to sense this when gathering the storm, this effect is an active ability to read the lines, and is controlled by the caster. By creating this effect, the practitioner raises the degree of success on the chart above by 1. In this way, a partial success is treated as a success for purposes of the chart.

Traveling: use of the storm to propel oneself through space is hard to master. A new Quick Take is called for every time a change in the original trajectory is required, and the effects require more Quick Takes to maintain. Generally, the effect lasts for as many minutes as the character has successes. The speed is up to the caster, and usually ranges from a few miles per hour to as fast as twenty.

Redirection: a simple use of the storm, redirection roughly covers a ten-foot diameter for every success rolled. If the target of the redirection is large, heavy, or dangerous, it increases the difficulty roll proportionately.

Example: Redirecting rain is an easy task, but avoiding a river of lava is an impossible task. A shower of gravel might be very hard, and hail might be hard. Using redirection against things like arrows or any aimed weapon is usually very hard.

The limits of this effect are suggested as follows:

Delicate Push (move a tea cup without spilling):

Very Hard

Gentle Push (a solid shove to open an unlatched door):

Hard

Every 20 feet of distance (after the first 20):

One Level Harder

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Dream Takes: this effect is subtle, and involves the creation of a Quick Take scene that happens only in dream. Blurring the lines between reality and dream, the Quick Take scene does not actually take place (unless the scene fails), and is only a brief moment in real time. The other person(s), thing(s), or device(s) in the Quick Take respond in the same manner as they would normally, and depending on the range of success may or may not remember the events of the dream scene.

Keep in mind that failure might mean the dream touch scene actually happens, or that the information gathered is false, or that the caster may suffer other standard consequences for scene failure.

Once the success of the cast is determined, the impact the cast has on the scene is decided.

Descriptive Effects and Other Casts

The effects above are by no means the only powers of the Arts. A practitioner develops many effects, and these casts tap into the immense diversity that is the Maelstrom. As mentioned below, practitioners find their own paths and eventually are masters of their own Art.

For descriptive purposes, a wide range of visual, tactile, and poetic effects can arise from a cast. Once the success range of the scene has been established, the descriptive properties of the cast can be as enjoyable and creative as they need to be.

Effects beyond the list above are like the many Secondary Affinities—they are tailored to each narrative. In one game, elaborate detail in casting might be part of the game, whereas in another the Arts might be more untamed and primal in their simplicity. The only question is game balance.

Example: the player wants to channel the storm into a magnetic lock, thereby releasing it.

- If this is a use of the transference power, or reading the lines, then this is a stretch from the normal use of that effect. If the narrator allows it, it means that other people in the world are able to do the same. This is fine, but it means the engineers who build these locks (using the Sciences) do their best to make them immune to this power. Regardless, all creative use of a character's power is encouraged, but the difficulty level may be very high.

- If this is an effect (secondary affinity) that the character has mastered, then the world may well know about it, and the engineers would still try to guard against it. But unlike a creative but unorthodox use of magic, if this is an actual effect called "Triggering" (or something like that) then it is more likely to succeed. The task may be difficult, but less then without the established affinity for "triggering."

Art by Any Other Name

Becoming more proficient in the Natural Arts is often a spiritual journey through the chaos of the Maelstrom. Miraculous powers aren't learned in libraries—true power must be discovered in yourself.

The path most often begins at the same place for all Natural Artists; they learn how to sense the energy, bring it into them, and finally, to expel it. This is reading the lines to find the storm, taking it into the body to harness its power, and shaping its force to create an effect. From there, paths diverge as one discovers how the storm has changed them as individuals.

"Know thyself"

Inscription at the temple to Apollo at Delphi

The knowledge of the storm is the knowledge of oneself. The truths discovered inside allow for the understanding of the world outside. Many years are spent learning the limitations of one's mind and body, and then surpassing them. This is why no two natural artists develop in the same way. Two Artists may embark on the same road, with the same goals. They may both come to the same destination eventually, but the experiences they had getting there will have differed enough to make each of their effects unique to themselves.

There are guides for walking down these roads; it is not an entirely lonely journey. Mentors can point you towards certain truths, and these mentors come in many forms. Much can be learned from the experiences of others, and much of that is locked away in the writings of those who have gone before. The tomes that exist are like the maps of place-relations, but the places are places in our souls. Sometimes they walk down roads one wouldn't want to walk, and most often they hold no truths beyond the evident.

Dream Takes

Example 1: Luthien meets the Queen, and as he kneels and kisses her hand, he invokes a Quick Take for Dream Touch (he has to have a high degree of success to avoid showing signs of casting). In the dream, he reaches up and kisses her hand, giving her a wink. Afterwards, the Queen might have just a fleeting sensation of having her hand kissed (success), or may feel that it actually happened (failure) and have him beheaded.

Example 2: Mider is hesitant to open the door, for fear of a potential trap. She opts instead to use a Dream Touch scene to open the door, in order to get a look at what might lie behind.



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MAGIC: ADD TO THE BIDDING THROW

The impact of the Effect on the scene should be judged, and then the appropriate number of successes added to the bid. By successes we mean the number of successes AFTER the required difficulty rating has been met, or the amount short of that number for failures. In the case of failures, the same criteria are applied, in which the failures are taken from the bid total, or added to the opposing bid total:

- **UNRELATED EFFECT:** The Effect, though perhaps successful, has no immediate impact on the scene. Nothing is added to the bid.
- **DIRECT EFFECT:** The Effect has direct impact on the scene, but not so much as to turn the tide or change the outcome. Half of the successes rolled in the Quick Take are added to the bid.
- **STRONG EFFECT:** The Effect has a strong effect on the scene, enough to change the outcome of the scene. The total number of successes rolled in the Quick Take are added to the bid.

NOTE: the numbers added to the bid count as automatic successes or automatic failures.

AFFINITIES AND MAGIC

The core reality of the Maelstrom is that there are multiple co-existing realities within the greater reality of the Maelstrom. These places are governed by Affinities. How magic works is determined by which affinities affect the magic in use. It is not only a matter of summoning and controlling; it is a matter of a summoning and controlling, and then applying the affinities that would affect the magic itself. In some cases there will be no affinal connection. In others there will be.

The Natural Arts are affected by the level of order imposed on the environment. Almost always, the order of cities and even the pattern of ploughed fields distance the caster from the chaos of the storm. In those places the difficulty is raised, to hard or even extremely hard, for the Natural Arts. The Physical Sciences are affected by the cultural affinity of the environment. The Physical Sciences, though based in Chaos, are affected differently by order in that they are tied to the physical laws of the culture they are based on.

Example:

In a bar brawl, Monty opts to blow out the lamps so that his friends can run away. He rolls against Hard because they're in a city and he has to do it quickly. He makes his summoning by 2 and his control by 3. The narrator decides that he has a Direct Effect on the scene, and so half of the successes are added to the scene. 5 successes were rolled over the required difficulty rating, so the total halved is rounded off to 3.

Technology is the main affinal factor, and is assumed to be the most mercurial reality within the Maelstrom. Using magic to manipulate or control a technological item requires the character to have an affinity with that item's culture. Without this affinity, the character is required to make twice as many successes than usual. With the affinity, the item is used normally with magic.

All realms have their affinity to the Arts & Sciences listed next to them if they are relevant enough to affect the magic. The narrator decides what might be considered within the range of each realm's cultural affinity. The physical scientist finds that they have trouble maintaining their devices in a different cultural reality, and may even begin to question the way in which it was originally designed, until they dismiss it as a fluke entirely.

PHYSICAL SCIENCES

Like the natural arts, a trance-state is reached and the power summoned and subsequently controlled. The difference lies in the application of each of these three elements in the use of magic as a physical art.

The trance state is a prolonged state achieved through the invention and creation process.

The summoning is a search for the power in the invention itself, and a harboring of the storm within the object or creation.

The control lies in applying the power in the intended way, a way conceived in the trance and brought out in the summons.

The summoning is a Spirit based scene, and is often the first prototype in the experimentation of the inventor. Difficulty for the physical sciences is doubled, so the base number of successes required is 2.

Control is Chaos based, and is also most often taken in the form of the final experiment. Difficulty is doubled, so the base number of successes required is 2.

The creation in question will modify the difficulty of the process, as explained below. Generally, there are three things that can be accomplished with an invention:

Creating the item: this gives it functionality

Adding descriptors to the item

Bestowing the item with Powers

See the section below on Functionality for more details on the distinctions between these three factors. Powers are similar to imbuing an item or device with a Gift Primary Affinity.

Maelstrom Storytelling



Difficulty of the Task

The difficulty rating to create anything through the sciences is based on three factors:

The relative impact such an invention or device might have

The time spent developing the project

Access to the materials required

Each of these factors might add to the difficulty rating, or improve the chances of success. If the narrative is all about creating one great device, then the obstacle should be fairly hard and time consuming to overcome (like building the Hanging Gardens), but if the creation is only a side-story, then there is no need to make it harder than is reasonable for the story. Don't give away power too easily, of course, since this can interfere with the game balance.

Uses of Kael

Kael is an inherent power in the world, and some of this force can be tapped or siphoned. Many different ways to do this have been found over the years, but most of the technology was lost with the Empire. While the consequences of the extraction can be dire, or even fatal, though some means can leave only a temporary or even unnoticeable effect.

Regardless of the method, Kael can sometimes be channeled from the subject who has it, and then used to power other things or facilitate the creation process.

In many ways, Kael is like a piece of the storm. Because it is tied to a person and therefore one location, many people find it useful as a quantifiable and consistent power source.

Kael Extraction

The Kril use a device most people just call "the machine," and in appearance it is a metal bowl that holds the head of the subject on a table or workbench.

Extracted Kael can be used to power a variety of devices, like the magnetic engines of the Kril. Kael can be siphoned into devices that hold the power, to be used later as anyone uses the storm. Used this way, Kael can be tapped and used by a practitioner of the arts. It can add dice to Quick Takes. It can breath life into artifacts. It can be used to resuscitate the dying. As a creation force, it is part of the formula for simulacrum and homunculi.

Kael Powered Devices

A theory is that the oblates of the Shrikes are powered by Kael. There are strange devices such as the Belzaine Traveling Sideshow that thrive on Kael. It also might be that the obelisks of the Empire softly filtered away Kael to imbue themselves with their power.

Regardless of speculation, Kael can be used as a power source for creations of the Sciences. Just as a practitioner of the Arts can tap a reserve of Kael to cast the Arts, a scientist can power machines with it.

"Samuel was never able to rebuild the clock. Built of a thousand brass pieces in the time of the Empire, it was more than he could fathom. So he converted the top floor of the tower into a special room. With money no one knew about he bought his materials from many strange places, some far abroad. One of the things he bought he got from the Kril, and this was the living source of the power he sought to use. The Kril sold him people, people with Kael. He tied them to his workbench over a spool of wires and tubes, and with a great cranking a slow stream of sparks began to wind itself along the wires into the floor below. No one knows what became of the people, but with his stolen piece of them he made the clock work again."

from the dogbound *Purgation*

Technology

Technology is tied to the culture that built it. Using items requires that the character have the Affinity for that culture, or that they have a Secondary Affinity that could include an item or device of that type. The Secondary Affinity will not allow the bonus given to characters with that aptitude unless they also possess the cultural Affinity for the technology as well.

Items of a different cultural reality either cease to function after a short time, can no longer be worked because no one knows how, or necessary parts are lost or need replacing. How technology is perceived in different realms also can determine how it works in that realm: Gunpowder is a matter of science to some, alchemical magic to others.

Items, Weapons, and Devices

Within each culture there are advances in the world of pseudo-science that allow for different and often exotic or powerful inventions. These range from pistols and weaponry to flying airships and music-boxes. These items are created through



Eye of the Storm

the combination of the physical sciences and the cultural affinity. Each culture has a motif or feel that is part of its reality. Determining what can and can't be done in each culture is part common sense and part a general feel for the mood and style of each culture. Each culture operates in a different reality, a different paradigm, due not to a lack of logic, but mystical differences in the working of each separate reality.

Simple devices use descriptors, which can be spent like regular descriptors when the device is in use. A special sword might have "cuts like lava through a mountain village" as a descriptor, and a set of spectacles might have "sight like a hawk" as a descriptor. These items contribute to the narrative as story devices. Their descriptors can be spent for Quick Takes or to add to the bidding pool. Either way they offer a contribution to the story being told, which lends them a quality beyond their practical usefulness.

Example

The Kril do not use gunpowder, despite its limited use in the South Seas. The Dog Throngers, Black Pirates, and Trade Alliance all use cannons and even pistols and muskets. But gunpowder is not part of the Kril reality. Their Affinity allows for many things, but not that. This doesn't mean they can't understand or make gunpowder, it just means they don't use it. So while there are Kril who use these weapons, they do it through a Secondary Affinity, or even sometimes through a cultural Affinity with a different culture. The average person finds ways to explain this, like thinking the magnetic pulse of the skiffs is interrupted by the metal of cannons, or the weight of cannons impedes the flight of the skiff, or that Kril can die from exposure to gunpowder, etc

Functionality

Devices have two types of functions if they possess special powers: The mechanical capabilities of the device and special powers that can only be used by invoking a Quick Take. The mechanical capabilities are functions that the device can always perform, like a sword or a pitcher of water. If that sword has the descriptor perfect aim, it can contribute a descriptor to the scene, but it still has the same function. However, if it has a special power, like Drains and Extra Health Level, then a descriptor must be used to invoke a Quick Take in order to perform that power. Obviously, building a device that allows for special powers is a difficult task, as explained later. Another example: A pitcher with the descriptor great taste—less filling doesn't actually have any special ability, it just adds a descriptor to the scene. However, if the pitcher has the power to Keep Contents Cold, then the

descriptor can be spent to use that power. Powers are, for all practical purposes, like the Gift Primary Affinity for people.

Items like guns (that require powder and balls) and steam engines (that require fuel), might have descriptors, since they are unusual devices that only some cultures can produce. The gun will still fire (if it still has powder and balls) even if the descriptor(s) is spent. The steam engine will still run (if it has fuel) even if it has no more descriptors. What this means is that those items no longer contribute descriptors to the scene, not that they don't work anymore—their function is still there. This means that a gun with no descriptors still allows for a weapon difficulty modifier (Impacting the Scene) and for long range shots, and the steam engine can still power the machinery it is supposed to power.

A SHORT LIST OF DEVICES

Telescopes

Made of lenses and reflectors, these devices can range from simple magnifiers to elaborate machines that gaze at stars. Only if the cultural affinity is extremely alien to science will these require the Physical Sciences to operate and create. For the larger, more elaborate devices, however (like the ones in observatories), the physical sciences are the only thing that allows them to work.

Steam Engines

While railroads have not emerged in the realms, many devices are powered by steam. Much of the machinery below the cities was run by steam power. Brother Harold, the famous pirate from Springtide, supposedly had a steam-powered skyship.

Cannons, Pistols, and Blunderbusses

Gunpowder is used with varying success across the world. Some of these weapons are as likely to explode as to shoot. The range is limited, and accuracy is poor. However, there are some cultures that have developed more efficient guns thanks to the sciences. The Diodeians and the Geregonians, for instance, have effective pistols and reliable cannons.

Elevators

Simple lifts are used in many realms, but counter-balanced elevators can become elaborate with the sciences.

Clocks

A creation of the Empire, clocks are littered across the realms. Usually found in the clocktowers that the Empire erected, they are elaborate machines with many pieces, often tied to other functions far less obvious than the clock. Many of them rely on magnetic power, while others are simpler and tied to other sources of inertia.

Maelstrom Storytelling



There are simpler time pieces, or less elaborate clocks, built since the Empire. These timepieces serve solely to tell time and are not tied to the other machinery of the Imperium. Because of their intricate nature, these pieces still require the Sciences.

Mills

Mills are engines powered by air or water, and can be used to grind grain, saw wood, or power any form of machine. The Imperial mills were elaborate structures, often housing many different machines. From windmills to watermills, they served many functions, as well as generating power for their magnetic engines.

The Perfect Oven

The perfect oven is an oven "that always cooks things just right." With this descriptor, the owner might not even know the oven is in any way part of the Sciences—it's just a great oven. The descriptor is invoked and the food comes out "just right." Like many devices, this is an example of how regular or household items can be used with the Sciences.

The Skyships of the Kril

Skyships are large sea vessels, which like other ships have sails and are able to float and travel in the water.

Using a magnetic technology generated by wind-power relayed to the gearing mechanisms in the vessel, the skiffs of the Kril produce an energy field around their vessel that repels it from the water below. The long trailing keel and rudder maintain nominal contact with the water below, in effect "grounding" the vessel.

The skyships can actually break their contact with water altogether and tap into the power streams of the Maelstrom like Airships. By doing so they switch their energy field in the process to one conducive to the air and drawn to the power streams. Because of the weight and relative simplicity of the mechanisms involved, the Skyships have a limited ability to actually fly, and can not attain any great altitude safely without "falling from the sky." By doing this, skiffs can move over land—but if they lose their magnetic stream they will crash without water below them.

The Airships of the Diodeians

Airships are graceful vessels that are held aloft by ballasts and balloons not unlike a zeppelin. The ship itself is wooden and resembles a fine galley made for the sea. Moored to the air balloon above by an elaborate rigging, the ships have an upper deck and as many decks below as size permits. They dock at air stations, where they lower ropes and rig themselves to a tower, always remaining aloft. They are propelled by wind power, and guide their course along the magnetic lines similar to the sky-

ships of the Kril. Not as fast as skyships, they do manage to attain a great altitude and are capable of long voyages.

The Printing Press and Sirbuh Dogbounds

With the advent of the daguerreotype press and its later innovations, the written Word became available to all literate people. Instead of becoming a source for shared knowledge and a bridge between the shifts, the main use of this device has been to print the common dogbounds. Sirbuh Press in Picarni is one of the largest presses in the world, pounding out more pages of cheap adventure and romance than anywhere else.

The press is a product of the Sciences, in which the concept of imprinting information into a visual form found its birth. Capable of printing lithographic art as well, these machines have changed the way that information is shared.

The Obelisks

There are many theories to the purpose of the Imperial obelisks. They are found in every corner of the Empire. They seem to have even been erected in remote places where no one lived or traveled. Whether monuments to their enduring power or pieces of a larger machine, the obelisks are still there.

The average Imperial obelisk has four sides, stands taller than a house, and is domed by a short pyramid. They are almost always made of stone. On one face there is the "Imperial Gear," which from below looks like an iconic sun or eye.

Science is often a stage easier in the vicinity of an obelisk.

Mad Morris' Time Machine

Adam Morristi was a brilliant man in his time. A professor at the College of the Gates, Morristi was well versed in many fields, particularly the Physical Sciences. His reputation was soon changed after a visit to Anton's Dig in the Desert of the Endless Sun: After his return he was never the same man. What he saw there, or why he changed, no one knows—but on his return he abandoned his teachings and secluded himself in his attic laboratory. He died before he finished his work, leaving few notes and a strange, seemingly unfinished device. The invention is built into the attic and the house around it. It has wire coils set at irregular intervals along a route of electrical wiring. The wiring ultimately encircles the entire house in an apparently random order. His colleagues had heard him mention time and the possibility of controlling it, and referred to his project as a "time machine." They were right, but not in the way they had surmised: Morristi's machine, which has a seat in front of the unlabeled control panel, is a time control machine—it stabilizes the house in the time continuum and synchronizes it with the Imperial Clock. The two problems are as follows:



Eye of the Storm

1. The Imperial Clock was in the Imperial City, which is lost
2. The difference between the Imperial time cycle and the Dacarthan time cycle is so small that in the span of one lifetime there is no perceivable effect

The machine is still in place in what is now his great-nephew's home in Dacartha. Whether it needs to be turned on is unclear. It may be a clue, however, to Imperial Unity that was imposed upon the world.

The Dream Catcher

The dream catcher is a box like a toy box. If placed under the bed, it will catch the dreams of the dreamer above. When it fills up, it will begin to filter its reservoir of dreams back to the dreamer. If the dream catcher is used this way over a long period of time, the dreamer will cease to dream altogether; instead re-dreaming what the box gives them. This may lead to personality disorders or even insanity.

The dream catcher can also be placed "full" under another person's bed, and share its captured dreams with another person.

With the Arts, a practitioner might be able to tap the dream catcher and bring its dreams to life. Or use it to reach the Dream World.

The Belzaine Traveling Sideshow

Relationships: Veldt (strong), Children (strong), Dreams (Mild), and Kael (Mild).

The Sideshow is a long train of wagons painted in bright colors and housing every device, prop, performer, and animal needed for the show itself. When the Sideshow comes to town, it usually arrives at night and sets up by morning. The show travels across the Veldt, though it has been seen in other parts of the world as well.

Unlike the many sideshows and circuses that wander the land from Belzaine, this one has a reality all its own. It is powerful enough to affect the cultural reality of the realm it enters, keeping to smaller places with less control over their reality than the cities. Like the other shows, the people of the town hear of its arrival as the wagons, bright enough to be seen for miles, make their way slowly along the road. The show sets up outside the town in a field, or even in the square.

The show is full of fire-eaters, acrobats, strange animals, deformed or strangely born people, and Belzaine servant-monkeys. The power of the show is that it brings its own magic to the audience, and the whole town. While the show is in town, no one can talk about anything else, and at the show itself there is a dream-like quality that entrances the spectators beyond the spectacle being performed. There is a horror-show, storytelling,

sword-swallowing, tightrope walking, and lion-taming. There are gas-lights billowing flame and all the shows are performed at night under the tents.

Once the show has left town, it seems hard to recall, and little evidence is left behind to even prove it was there. The local cultural reality is reasserted and the realm of the show is diluted from the minds of the people. Despite the few days spent obsessing about the show and every detail of it, the people return to their routines and barely remember it at all.

How it works: Built by a master craftsman of Arn Muhr, the wagons of the show are all parts of a great machine. They are set up at angles that align them to the streams of the storm, and together they create an electro-magnetic field that spreads out from the center of the wagon train. The bright colors and gas-lamps all serve to hypnotize and amplify the effect of the dream-show itself. The show is powered by the power of Kael, and within the field it projects it draws out the Kael of anyone present. The effect is temporary, as follows:

| | |
|------------------------|----------|
| Watch some of the show | 1 day |
| See the entire show | 1-6 days |

Anyone who travels with the show will permanently lose their Kael affinity over time. The effect of losing Kael is that the extra dice are no longer available, nor is the base die. The other cultural knowledge is available, but the adaptive quality of Kael is not.

The wagons all have mechanisms and gears, which are activated by the machinery in the last wagon. With the strong affinity for children, there are many kids who venture among the wagons and see things they shouldn't. These are the children who are missing when the show leaves town.

Shrikesticks

Called oblats, spitters, and elenits, these devices are the trademark of the Sekoreh. They have a three bladed end that houses a dark stone, and often a spike on the other end. They range from 3 to 5 feet. Whether this device is from the Empire, or an alien technology of the Shrikes, it shares some similarities with the devices of the Imperium.

The power of the oblats is the burst of energy they can spit out of their bladed end. A streak of black "electricity" that can shoot as far as 30 feet. In normal circumstances, this unique power to the oblats is understood only by the Shrikes. However, certain people have been able to unleash the blast. Generally, without the Shrike Cultural Affinity, a test on Very Hard with Chaos is required, and any affinities in tinkering or mechanics apply. After an initial success, the roll drops to Hard, and with practice might even drop to Easy. After time away from the Shrikes, the oblats tend to lose their power outside their Cultural Affinity.

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Thought-Boxes

A Kril device used on the skiffs to relay orders, these brass boxes allow for the transmission of the Kril telepathy over a short distance, linked by a tube to another thought-box. Seemingly unuseable by other races, the boxes may not even be very accurate for the Kril. Other races can often pick up the transmission from the receiving box, but not reliably.

Slave Collars

Devices of the Kril, slave collars are made of some malleable material that is warm and hard to the touch. Inside the collar is an acidic fluid that burns through flesh if released. If the collar is broken, then the fluid is released, often killing the bearer.

The Kril have an alchemical means of neutralizing the fluid before removing the collar, which they do once slaves are sold. The device they use is like a thought-box, and they rub it over the collar briskly a few times before they cut the collar. Like thought-boxes, the chemical agents inside are activated by thought, which makes it nearly impossible for anyone else to use them.

Magnetic Locks

Used especially by the Kril, magnetic locks are engaged and disengaged by a unique magnetic frequency. The face plate of a magnetic lock has no keyhole, and the key is a thin plate of metal magnetized to the correct frequency. By passing the "key" over the lock's face-plate, the lock is disengaged.

"He called it the Kael Key, and I never asked why. But it opened any lock the Kril could make, and with it we plundered riches from the Swarm to the Fold."

from the dogbound The Sixty-Third Shift

These can be elaborate with many frequencies, or simple with one broad frequency. As such, some are easier to "trick" while others are almost impossible to open without the right key.

In the days of the Empire,
they say the roads linked all of the provinces
together like a spider web. They say the Empire was
so strong it held the world together and places stopped
shifting. The roads served less as pathways and more as
binding to hold the shifting realities down. A man
could walk an Empire Road and know where
he'd wind up.

Travel and Getting Somewhere

Frequency of the Shifts

The Maelstrom shifts as often as it needs to. What this means in a narrative is that it shifts as often as befits the story being told. Generally, shifts occur within hours to a few weeks from each other, and almost invariably when the storm passes over. Natives to the Maelstrom can tell the difference between a weather storm and the Maelstrom itself—this latter storm is an entity, with an electrical charge to it and pitch black mass like squid ink. Most creatures burrow, hide, and run from the storm, and when it comes no one risks being far from home.

The shifts, whether in the form of the storm or subtle shifts, can be used to advance the story. They add flavor, and often cause problems for the players. They can also help the players, by taking them from a bad place to a better one. Generally, using the storm as a Deus Ex Machina can take away from the story by herding the players along, instead of allowing them to write their own destinies. For more on this, refer to Chapter Seven.

Roads

There are roads in the Maelstrom, roads that stretch from one side of the known world to the other. Travelers can tell you that the Anterior has most of the roads, but they can be found over the Veldt and the High Mountains as well as stretching into parts of the Endless Sun. The Empire built most of them.

The roads that remain meander aimlessly across the Maelstrom. If they had a certain power in the past, it is mostly gone now. They do strengthen the relationship between their place of origin and their destination. And they bypass such things as Hell Holes. Usually.

Travel across the Maelstrom is best done with someone who has a Secondary Affinity in navigation, travel, astronomy, hunting, or any affinity in your narrative that would be appropriate. There are other tools, such as the Magic Arts, and some devices that can guide or transport the traveler. But travel is still an unreliable event at best.

Travel is a Chaos based scene. Finding one's way is Extremely Hard. A road lowers it to Very Hard. An Empire Road takes it to Hard.

Open Travel

Extremely Hard

Road

Very Hard

Empire Road

Hard



Eye of the Storm

Generally there are trackers and hunters and guides who serve as scouts and messengers between places. But outside of each area of affinity there is little traffic and communication. This means limited commerce, a slow spread of information, and an amplification of the cultural differences between affinities. On the other hand, with the shifts there is contact between realms that would never otherwise happen, allowing for a shared cultural reality and unity in the world despite the scope of differences.

Cultural Affinities and Travel

People are prone to certain things and places as well. Characters with a Cultural Affinity will find it easier to find places of that Affinity. They may also find it harder to find places that are adverse to that Affinity. Affinities draw people, as they do places.

When traveling in a place where a character has a cultural affinity, they may use their base die for a "finding one's way" scene.

Eddies and the Valley of Shards

Though some people travel without a destination in mind, they avoid the places called Hell-Holes, if they have a choice in the matter. And no one has ever been known to seek out the Valley of Shards by choice.

Eddies

Also called whorls, or even hell-holes, these places are rare and dangerous. They are places in which reality shifts so strongly that a new reality emerges. Whether they are quasars of time and space or just enchanted places of dreams, or Lost Lands, they are still real enough to kill. Finding oneself in an eddy, the character is trapped. There is rarely a warning.

Once there, a new reality takes over. But unlike a dream, the events are real. They may be quick and barely noticeable, or prolonged and tangible. Some people say they spent years in an eddy. Others have never returned.

Failure to find one's way often leads to a Hell-Hole. Total Failure can lead to the Valley of Shards.

The Valley of Shards

What takes place here is up to the narrator. The myths of the Valley are varied, but they all have a common thread. A character who finds himself entering the Valley should try to leave. In the Valley all things meet and become one—things such as time, space, and ideas. All elements of the Maelstrom are present here.

Living through the experience should be considered unlikely, at best. No one ever survives the Valley without severe, lasting effects.

It is a common thread that survival in the Valley of Shards is somehow linked with the Strangers. Here the stories vary: Some say that those who survive, but "fail" become

Strangers—hollowed out husks of their former selves, enslaved to the force

of the Maelstrom. Others say that the Strangers represent the effects of enlightenment brought by the forge of the Valley.

Characters who get off easy should take Weak Descriptors for the experience to reflect the impact and magnitude of the events. Others should expect physical deformity, insanity, or not to come back at all.

The Valley of Shards in a game

The Valley of Shards is meant to be a powerful myth, one less talked about and more innately understood by the peoples of the Thousand Realms. It should be noted here that passing through the Valley should be underscored as an extremely dangerous event, and the Narrator should set it up as so. Even in games where protagonist death is rare or unheard of, the possibility of dying here should be exceedingly real.

People in Picarni say that Hell-Holes are always in dark, cold places, where the sun doesn't touch. Forgotten places where bad things happened and refuse to leave. These are places where the Adversary dwells.



Chapter Seven

Telling the Story

Role-playing can span from an evening's game to an ongoing story over many evenings. Regardless, all form stories that we refer to as narratives. In the long- spanning game that runs for multiple sessions, the story can be told in chapters, each chapter part of the larger narrative that forms an entire story. These stories can be elaborate and far-reaching over time.

This chapter focuses on the game in the context of the narrative story, and discusses ways to craft and build an ongoing story to suit the playing style of each different group of players.

For a quick list of story and adventure themes, look at the sidebar in Chapter One.

Building A Story: Narrative Gaming

The Basics

A good narrative needs a good plot. In a game, the players control many of the events and will steer the story their own way—which might be the opposite way the narrator meant it to go. That's where plot comes in: The plot will guide the events of the story, and whatever the players do the plot should be able to adjust.

Running a game can be a demanding task. If done well it can be very rewarding. The narrator needs to build a story in which to set the game, and use the rules to properly frame the story. This requires some work, both to create the story for the game, and to know the rules well enough to resolve the scenes. The random element of dice in scene resolution, as well as the spontaneity of the players, means that no narrative ever goes exactly as planned. This is what makes it an interactive story. The narrator needs to create a plot that can take twists and turns and still be rich and enjoyable. Appendix Two has some practical sample scenarios, and others can be purchased adapted from other games. The story ideas in this chapter are just sample plot ideas, to demonstrate the many different ways a story can run. They also can be adapted for use as a narrative by adding a plot outline and a rules structure underneath.

What is a plot? A plot is a story outline, and the events of the plot need to happen for the story to be told.

In the fairie tale, the hero has to defeat the dragon to rescue the princess. He can't rescue the princess until he has defeated the dragon. Simple as that. If he plans to marry her, he may need to win her heart. And the princess isn't just going to wait around to be rescued—she might defeat the dragon herself, and ditch the hero in favor of her favorite scoundrel.

In a cinematic game, all these things can happen. The plot needs to adjust to fit them. The players should be encouraged to try new things or take risks. Just because the hero has a sword doesn't mean he should use it to kill the dragon. It might be easier to poison him. Or drop a rock on his head. Or befriend him and ditch the princess.

Drama

The nature of drama is defined by conflict. This can be the inner conflict of the soul or the external conflict of humanity (as typified by a life and death situation). The genre of the narrative often determines what types of conflicts face the characters and world around them; the high-spirited narrative of the fantastical might involve sorcerous battles and wild swordfights across the roof-tops, whereas a narrative of a more introverted nature might be the struggle to regain favor in the eyes of a loved one, or the struggle between power and the soul. Many narratives encompass all of these, and it is the goal of the Maelstrom reality to make all of these possible.

The narrative is, all told, a story. This story should be enjoyable. What makes it enjoyable is a matter of style, different from one group of players to another. There are a few elements that are universal, but otherwise the task is to determine what aspects of the game are appealing to the players involved, and craft that narrative to the best of one's ability. The Maelstrom reality and the narrative scene-based rules of the Maelstrom game are designed to both facilitate this task and allow for the thousand variants of taste, style, and mood that give color to any genre of play.



Eye of the Storm

Genre

The maelstrom world is one of altered reality, and in it many things meet and are possible. The Thousand Realms are home to many different people, things, and technologies. And all of it dwells in the shadow of the Empire.

Neither is genre not limited solely to technological realities; genre is determined by style of play and atmosphere. Swashbuckling can be as real in the golden age of piracy (*Captain Blood*) as it can be in the far future (*Ice Pirates*)—the princess and the hero and the evil lord themes are retold from Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* to Lucas' *Star Wars*. For simplicity's sake, the elements of genre can be broken down into the setting, style, and tone of the narrative.

Setting: The environment of the narrative. Is the story set in a backwards provincial farm town or the high-seas? A city enjoying an intellectual renaissance or a suppressed land of inquisition? War or peace? City or wilderness? People or animals? *Examples: City, Tombs and Ruins, Wilderness, High-Tech Pseudo-Science, Sorcery and the Wizard's Academy, Pastoral Hamlets and Child-Stealing Fairies, Thievery and the Underworld*

Style: Style is the defining feel of the game—swashbuckling swordplay or sleuthy investigations? Sorcery and the occult, or science and invention? Court intrigue or heroic rivalry? Often the parameters of style determine the style itself: do people die? If they do, is it everyone or just NPCs? Are the characters larger than life, or ordinary Joes? *Examples: High Adventure, Verisimilitude, High-Seas & Piracy, Vainglorious Adventure, Occult, Swords & Sorcery, Investigation, Politics, The Diplomatic Chessgame, Throne War, Romance & The Heroic Quest, City Life and Good Bar Brawls, Good vs. Evil*

Tone: Tone is the elusive atmosphere that blends with both Style and Setting. Is this a narrative about the heroic? Is it epic in proportions? Is it romantic? Comical? Light-hearted or grave? Tragic? Is it about mystery and the unknown or the psychological and real? This is the job of the narrator, to set the tone of the narrative and maintain it when needed. *Examples: Heroic, Tragic, Romantic, Light-Hearted Fun, Mystery, Epic, Comedic, Moral, Icky, Sad, Gloomy, Hopeful, Humorous Satire, Pandoric*

Conflict

Within all of these things there is the heart of drama: conflict. Conflict is the defining element of any drama, because it is the measure of all other things. Conflict arises when one thing cannot allow another without change. What solution is found determines all the events that follow, and allows insight into the people involved. In human terms conflict is traditionally

established by an objective that is hindered by an obstacle. The objective is the thing a person or people are striving to attain. The obstacle is what is in the way. If the obstacle is large enough, the solutions can be “dramatic”. Conflict can be illustrated in simple external ways (such as a duel to the death) or complex internal ways (such as Hamlet's soliloquy: “To be or not to be, that is the question...”).

The Narrative and All Things In Between

None of this has to be addressed to run a good game, because much of it has already been addressed without having to think about it. “Style? That's obvious.” Yes, it can be, but examining the choices that go into a game can lead to new ideas and a better understanding of the game already in motion. Why is it, for instance, that the arrival of the Belzaine trader after the snowstorm seemed too improbable? The answer lies in whether or not that event was believable within the style, tone, and setting of the narrative. In one narrative, with the same plot and elements, it might be perfectly real for him to arrive in time to save the group. In another, it defies the elements of realism established by the tone and style.

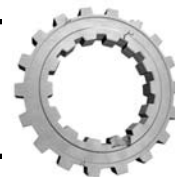
In film the reality of the world in which the story takes place is called the *diegesis*. This reality can be very different from ours, but it still has to have a set of parameters or lose its credibility. This is equally true in a role-playing world.

A narrative is a complex thing, and maintaining an engaging story for a prolonged time is a challenge. The Maelstrom reality begs challenge, and with it a good narrative. With these ideas in mind, we urge you to consider the elements of your narrative before you embark. Not that there is anything wrong with the quick game, the game-on-the-fly, or the pick-up game; but to craft the multi-session game requires a certain degree of preparation, even if it's just making sure the planned elements all work together.

The narrative rules for Maelstrom Role-Playing encourage “House Rules”. House Rules allow the system to reflect the narrative choices, and help support the tone, style, and setting of the narrative. *Example: A combat intensive narrative set in a wizard's island with a gory tone might benefit from detailed combat charts, which detail hit location and injury, the addition of critical hits, and permutations to the magic system to reflect the uniqueness of the wizard's island and its not-so-friendly chimerical inhabitants.*

The golden rule in all games is to have fun. Crafting the game carefully can greatly enhance that fun, and prolong it over the course of an ongoing narrative. The craftsmanship of a narrative will often allow it to continue far beyond where it might otherwise have fizzled out—by adding the support structure under the “game” that builds a great story with enough substance to keep it going.

Maelstrom Storytelling



The Storyline

A good storyline keeps players coming back for more. A fun and interesting story is the base of most good games. Find an idea and build in a good plot. A through-line for the whole narrative is important, or else the characters are just wandering around, drifting from one adventure to another. Objectives may shift chapter to chapter, but the overall goals should remain the same—they should be important life quests for the character, so important that they drive the character onward despite the obstacles that stand in the way.

For the one-time session, the goals of the character are important only for the story of that session. Whether or not these goals tie into the character's life goals is not as important as whether or not they motivate the character to accomplish the task for that session.

The Adventure

The questions that might be asked: Is this a one-time adventure, or the launch of a long saga? A set number of chapters with an end in mind, or the beginning of an ongoing game that has no set end. Many role-players have had the good fortune to be part of a long-running role-playing game that lasted years. These games may have fallen in place by themselves, or slowly evolved into the large-scale narrative they became. But without good craftsmanship, many great games never happen.

Setting

The setting for the narrative can be anywhere that grabs the imagination. The Newcomer can find themselves at any point or place, and so the Newcomer narrative can begin anywhere—from a prison cell in Dacartha to a lightning storm aboard a skyship over Adolla. The answer is defined by the question: What kind of game do you wish to run? The thousand realms are, by definition, a thousand different places. Chapter Two gives an overview of the Maelstrom reality, and is a source of narrative ideas. The thousand realms range from human cities to alien cultural realities, Dacartha to Adollo-Noi. Setting a story in a foreign environment can challenge players to new levels by taking away the known and reliable things to which they are accustomed. The Thievery & the Underworld storyline can be as well developed at Kril Diriul among the Kril as it can be in Picarni or Diodet or Mithlion. Exotic settings in places like Shij-Gabril, which are not even fully explained in this book, can lead to great narratives that touch at the core mysteries of the Maelstrom reality.

Style

Likewise, the world reality lends itself to almost any style of play, from the South Sea and the Trade Alliance to the volcanic wastes of Adolla-Noi, from court intrigue to full-scale war. The element of continuity within the Maelstrom is the presence of

the unknown. It is the one through-line that defines the world and the narratives within it. Whether it is an intellectual chess-game of politics among the Kings of Hannah Forj or the wanderings of a nomadic Venth hunter, there is always the mystery of the Maelstrom, of the Empire, and of the Valley. As with Setting, the thousand realms are conducive to most any style of game, from pseudo-science to Leonardan magic, from the rooftops of a corrupt and decaying city to the balcony of a lonely princess. Style might dictate rule changes as well, as noted under House Rules in Chapter Five; style is the flavor of the narrative, and so with it the rules need to reflect the reality of that flavor. In some narratives the hero can survive a fall off a cliff into a raging river. In others she can't. In some, haggling with a vendor at a Belzaine Bazaar is an *open* scene, in others it is a *rolled* scene.

Tone

Alongside the other two elements of the narrative is the tone: a lighthearted look at the human condition, or a tragic tale of heroism and futility? The tone lends color to the narrative, and within the Maelstrom it can range wildly. There can be lustful epics on the high seas and humorous adventures in the Last Metropolis. Tone will be largely determined by the narrator and the players, and how they interact and why they enjoy the game; but that does not interfere with the layer of tone the narrator adds to the narrative. The two combine to reflect the personalities and playing habits of the players involved. The thousand realms do not have to be altered to reflect the different tone of each narrative; the plot might be changed, but the realities of day-to-day life in the realms are the same, within the tone of the narrative. A humorous romantic tone does not necessarily mean that cartloads of buffoons are traipsing around every town after blushing maidens and their nurses, but it may mean that the bars are full of forlorn lovers and quiet squares are home to trysts and communiques.

EXAMPLI GRATIA

Theatre

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, is a tragedy; it has strong elements of romance, as well as themes of violence, pride, rivalry, lust, loyalty, and youth (among others). A good narrative might have all of this and more. Unlike a play, a narrative is not confined to limitations in space and time (such as Aristotle's *unities*); it can have as many scenes and characters as it needs. R&J is set in Verona, in a time of swords and masquerades, rival merchant houses and devoted nurses. Its style is urban gangs and adolescent escapades among the ruling merchant class. Its tone is tragic.



Eye of the Storm

But though Shakespeare and a hundred other classics provide wonderful source material, it doesn't mean that great narratives can't come from sitcoms, comic books, soap operas, or late night stories. Imagination is the thing.

The Fall of Selisis

The Court of Selisis had always held the Gates of Passage; it had been their birthright since the Great Equinox. Now came the time of trial, when all things were undone. Outside the smoke was heavy, and the walls were broken. The gates had sundered, and the last of the Havenhost had been driven into the citadel. "To the King!" went the call, and they gathered all that they could for a final, dutiful stand. The loyalty of his people was the last solace of the king as he watched his city burn. Surely the time had not come for the city to fall, ravaged and burnt; surely there was salvation from this fate. But none came. And then the doors to the citadel boomed with the impact of some great engine of war. The Defilers were here.

Setting is a war in a feudal kingdom, the style is "Heroic Battle vs. Evil," and the tone is tragic.

Death from Above, and a Tankard of Ale

"Prepare to die! And if my fireball doesn't kill you, then by the Seven Sapphires of the Gilded Throne, I'll strangle you with my own hands!" boomed the evil magi. He stood in the center of the throne room, his arms upraised as he gathered the storm within him. He would have said more, but the chandelier hit him in the head and knocked him clean out.

"Well. That's that." said the warrior at the head of the group, sheathing his word.

"About time. Let's go get a drink," added the thief.

The setting is "Ancient Swords and Sorcery." The style is heroic adventure, and the tone is lighthearted melodrama.

NARRATIVE IDEAS IN THE MAELSTROM

Travel as Recurring Theme

Though an entire saga can take place in one realm, much of the mystery of the Maelstrom is unraveled by traveling through it. Travel exposes the characters to the shifts and the storm, as well as the ordinary dangers of the outdoors. By traveling they can reach unexpected places. Travel is an adventure in itself, which is one of the reasons why most people in the realms don't venture far from their community.

Newcomer Plotlines

Newcomers offer a variety of storylines, from the search for an identity to the dangers of Kael extraction. From the psychological dilemma of their situation to the immediate need for shelter and survival, Newcomers add an element of the storm to any story.

Magic as a Source of Story

In the Dogbonds, elaborate spells are cast, and rituals are performed by dark orders. Curses need to be removed or undone, and heroes leap from the pages to do battle against evil. Though there may be some elements of this that exist in the Maelstrom, the magic of this world is less simplistic and more tied to the storm. Regardless, a great deal of power can be garnered from magic, whether in the Arts or the Sciences. There are differing schools of magic, from the Guilds who dub it science to the Shroud that calls it spiritual.

Kael is a force that many associate with magic. Kael is sought after for its inherent power, and certain devices exist that can extract it from the host. The slave trade is a great source of newcomers, who exact a high price for their Kael.

Simulacrum are also a good source of story. These are creatures created from scratch, either from dirt and rock, gears and grease, or a combination of the two. Some of them can even be sentient, or near clones of real people. Others can be monstrous.

All of these can be the goal of the story, or simply color for the story. The plot can revolve around many of these issues, as the characters attempt to gain power and knowledge, and solve the mysteries of the world.

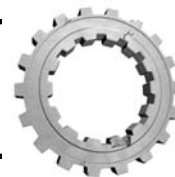
The Artifact Chase

There are a thousand people searching the world over for relics of the past. Whether artifacts from the Empire or just important devices and items, great stories can revolve around the acquisition (or loss) of an artifact. Some artifacts have no inherent value, but are important cultural icons. Others, like the mythic Key of Arn, might hold clues to the secrets of the Empire. Artifacts can lead the character on great adventures across the world, as well as make the characters rich or powerful.

Shadows of Empire

The presence of the Imperium can be felt in almost every corner of the Maelstrom, and one of the greatest mysteries is how it fell. It might be important to first understand what it was, how it worked, and what it was like in the Age of the Imperium. The remnants of the Empire are scattered, and many things are assumed to be from the empire that aren't. From the mechanical devices most evident in Dacartha, to the obelisks strewn across the Maelstrom, to the languages that evolved (apparently) from the Imperial Word. Basing a narrative on any aspect of the Empire is rich with story plots and discovery. Many people are fighting for this knowledge, and guard it precious. The myths have altered the events in the retelling, and the cultures that have evolved since are so mutated that they might bear little resemblance to the Imperial way of life. The search for items of

Maelstrom Storytelling



power, and knowledge, and sorcery, and riches, all can be found in this storyline. Almost any large-scale narrative will at one point involve an item or a secret or a piece of the empire in some form. What the Empire was and what is still means is up to the individual narrative, but it can be a great source of plotlines and unraveling mystery as well as the source of artifacts and lost power.

Adventure on the High Seas

The South Sea setting is ripe for the swashbuckling theme, as well as for exploration, travel, and mercantile trade. Finding a navigator can be an adventure in itself. There is intrigue between the various pirate leagues, such as the Dog Throng to the Black Pirates of the Kril, and colonial ambitions of nations such as Geregong and Ismolaht; and over all there is the Trade Alliance and the Kril of the Inner Swarm. From lost gold to captured princesses, mercenary work and open piracy and romantic wooings, the South Sea is the place to be. With the folding of the coast there is also access to the Cold Sea, where the Melville epics can be recreated or rewritten, and where the arctic waste is home to strange things or lost worlds.

Sagas and Grand Scale Narratives: Alternative Ideas in Narrative Role-Playing

Though people tend to enjoy stories about one set of people in one time and era, there is always room for larger-scale stories or different points of view in a story.

For instance, a narrative might tell the tale in each chapter of a successive generation. The players play a character in the first chapter, and then in the next they play that character's daughter or son, and then they play that character's daughter or son. In this way they tell a story that spans the generations of one city or realm or family line. Within a story like this there could be a recurring conflict, and inherited characteristics, and a family legacy. Or any number of things to tie the whole saga together.

Cut Scenes or stories that tell the same thing from a different point of view can also be interesting. In each chapter the players can play the roles of different people in the same setting. This allows for a new perspective, and the players may get to see or interact with their characters from the previous chapter. Also in this vein is the possibility of the players changing parts between chapters—trading roles between the players.

Resolving major events as one or two scenes can be done many ways. The simplest is to treat the entire event, no matter how many years or people are involved, as one rolled scene. The other is to break up the events into a few key moments. For example, in the fall in Geregong there is a political rally called the "Autumn Race." The event takes three to four months, and involves a variety of official and unofficial events as the aristo-

crats jockey for position. Though this may be a wonderful narrative to play out in detail, it could also be resolved by choosing the key events within the Autumn Race and hopping from one to another. This could be narrowed to as few as two or three events. The events could range from a fund-raising speech or a glamorous ball to a horse-race with the President's entourage. In each scene there would be a variety of goals and outcomes, each one contributing to the overall success of that character in the Autumn race.

Ilтан and the Serpent Dream

"The Dream was always there, and so it had been for the generations since the Great Equinox. Serpent Earth awoke, and all things trembled until they were no more. The Valley spread like wildfire across the plains and Serpent Earth laughed in the death of all her children, all her lands, and ultimately herself.

"Ilтан had asked his parents what the dream meant, like all children after they had had the dream. They took him aside and spoke long and hard about God and Duty, and how Serpent Earth was not real and only an image sent to them all to warn of what would come—what would come unless they changed the sinners into good people.

"It was this one conversation when he was 7 that drove Ilтан to devote his life to the priesthood and save the world from sinners. As he grew older he began to travel and spread the word. His travels took him far, and though they warned him about the world and the dangers and the Valley, he always came back. Until one day, when the roads took him to Dacartha. There all things changed for Ilтан, in a city where no one had ever had his dream, no one had heard of his town, and all things talked of the Empire, the Temple at Sholcarta, and the Shroud of Khem.

"It was at Dacartha that he met the Belzaine merchant. And later the Shriling Priest, and began the travels, and ultimately found himself in the Grand Bazaar at Ferris Darling at the edge of the Inner Swarm in the South Seas."

This narrative, from the perspective of Ilтан, centers on the local myths of his cultural background, and blends it slowly with the greater cultural realities of the Maelstrom as he joins his narrative with other characters. The recurrent themes are cultural prophecy, fate and the unknown. If he meets a Newcomer, that character might be introduced to the Maelstrom through the prophetic views of Ilтан, and later modified by the views of the Belzaine trader and the Shriling Priest. The mix of these three people, with different views on the Maelstrom reality, might lead them to try and understand the mystery of their reality and piece together the common elements of their cultural myths. The Shriling Priest could see the serpent imagery common to his scriptures, and the Belzaine trader might identify with the moral imperatives of the prophecy.



Eye of the Storm

Once they have begun to form a commonality of views, despite their own prejudices and preconceptions of the world, the narrator might lead their story so that they meet one of the Students of Kael, whose perspective is so very different by its alien otherworldly nature that it forces yet another analysis of the understanding of the Maelstrom. In this vein, in a setting of travel and mystery, the characters can search among many cities, ruins, and lost places, or trade on the seas for information and relics, all in a philosophical quest for understanding that gets to the heart of the Maelstrom enigma: the unknown.

This narrative requires the narrator to answer some of these questions, but not in absolute terms. Only find the commonalities and the reasons for the Maelstrom realities from new viewpoints within the world's philosophies. And who is to say that much of it isn't true?

Narrative Tools

There are many ways to tell a good story. In role-playing, the key is to keep the game interactive so that the players are collaborating with the narrator in telling the story. The whole premise of role-playing is the freedom the players have to take their characters in whatever direction they want. It is important to maintain this free-will, and not lead the players with a heavy hand down a course only the narrator controls. Though the narrator may tell a great story, it loses the rich creative spirit of role-playing if the players have little say in what happens.

When running a game, make good use of the scene devices discussed in Chapter Five. These basic devices help build the flow and maintain the excitement of the game:

- Storyboard
- Time & Space
- Scene Cuts
- Cross Cutting
- Cut Scenes

These are technical devices which help to create the cinematic feel of the story. In addition to these tools, there are authoring devices that add the flavor and richness to the story:

Pace

Keeping a good pace can really improve a game. Each genre has its own feel, and each story its own pace. Skip over boring scenes, and frame scenes so as to capture the best parts. Pace is something that's built—it has highs and lows. As the climax of the chapter draws near, the pace generally speeds up. Decide what each session's story is about, and how it fits into the chapter, and plan the scenes accordingly. But just as there are many

scenes that are unnecessary or dull, some scenes are important to the enjoyment of the game even though they might seem drawn out or slow. If the players are enjoying the scene, or they need a scene for the color and flavor it provides, then by all means frame it to include whatever makes it better. On the other hand, one dull or overly slow scene can ruin the pace of an entire session.

Informative scenes are generally open scenes, and provide flavor and mood, as well as expository material the players may need to know. The pace for these is often slow—but make sure they are still fluid and move ahead towards the next scene.

Action scenes are fast. To reflect the excitement of an action scene, build to it with tightly framed scenes and then unfold the action scenes at a great pace. Don't let the scene drag on. As long as the players are comfortable with the facts they need to know about the scene, then whip through the bidding.

Resolution scenes, which generally follow action scenes, are great moments to slow the pace and recover from the speed of the action scene. These scenes are a "taking stock" time, when the players get to assess the consequences of the action scenes and determine what to do next.

Chapters

In a narrative that lasts more than a few sessions, the story can be broken down into chapters. Chapters help build the framework within the larger story, and create a pace for the plot as a whole. Chapters are segments, really, and what defines them is similar to what frames a scene. As a major breakthrough in the plot or closure to a momentous event, chapters can give a sense of progress and allow the story to have a resolution scene in which the players chart their way as they assess their situation.

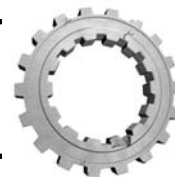
Suspense

Suspense works hand in hand with pace. Use cut scenes to add flavor and help add to the level of danger the players may sense. Suspense is also helped by foreshadowing. Tight, quick scenes work well. The underlying tension of suspense lies in not knowing what's about to happen—but fearing that something may happen at any moment.

Description

Descriptions are the most important part of any scene. They need to be as elaborate or as concise as each scene requires. Not just "flavor text", descriptions convey the whole mood and feel of the scene, both in the set-up and in the resolution. The information provided in a description is all the players have to work with. A good description should give a feel for the scene and provide the factual information necessary for the players. Too much can be boring, too little can leave the players feeling lost. They don't have to be eloquent or verbose, but they do

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need to be effective. (note the sidebar in Chapter Five entitled *Literal vs. Conceptual*)

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing can be used poetically, or can add to the suspense of the story. Foreshadowing is the art of hinting at what lies ahead. It may be subtle, like describing the weather changing for the worst, or obvious, like having the characters witness a funeral. Often the foreshadowing can be personal, like seeing a knife and having a cut-scene in which the character suddenly imagines a knife plunging into their heart. Dreams also can serve as devices for foreshadowing—the character may dream of horrible things, adding to the apprehension of what might lie ahead.

Reward

The reward for overcoming obstacles should reflect the effort and creativity the players put into the story. Reward can come in many forms, from flavorful scenes where the character is handed the keys of the city, to the discovery of important clues. The important thing is for the players to feel as if the effort is worth it. Likewise, the feeling of success is devalued if rewards are given out too easily.

Incentive

To make a story move, the characters have to have a reason to attain their goal. The more important the reason, the more they'll fight to get it. Incentives can range from money and fame to personal salvation. Don't assume that players will choose to follow the storyline just because it's there. If their characters have no reason to advance the plot, then they won't, no matter how good the plot is.

Symbolism

Symbolism is an abstract story element that can add a level of color that greatly enhances a story. Symbols are images that stand for something else. Recurring symbols can add a through-line of imagery that lends a creative hand to the story. Whether the group always seems to hear church bells before one of them dies (foreshadowing), or their benevolent benefactor always wears white, the symbols can be subtle, humorous, or broad. The poisoned cup the character drinks from can be the same cup he toasted his health to in the previous scene. The evil nemesis can have the shadow of the church symbol fall on her in a way that makes it inverted. All of these things are a matter of style and taste, but a touch of symbolism is rarely wasted.

Active Authoring

Players should be encouraged to take initiative in the scenes, from creatively describing the outcome once the success range has been determined to adding interesting elements to the scene itself. Since outcome is largely determined by the success range, the bulk of the scene is descriptive and not strategic. This frees the narrator from carefully balancing the elements of the scene, and leaves the doors open for dramatic effect. The players are free to state such things as *I sit back in the chair and help myself to the fine cigars on the desk*, even if no cigars have been mentioned by the narrator. Unless there is a reason why there wouldn't be cigars on the desk, then the player is able to add that detail to the scene as part of their authorship of the scene itself. If they add elements during a *rolled scene*, then the actual outcome may be determined by the Success Range.

Downtime

Large portions of time can be skipped by using “downtime.” In this period, the players establish the general things their character tries to accomplish, and the narrator determines the results either through a straight decision or a roll. Large amounts of time can also be handled as described above under *Sagas and Grand Scale Narratives: Alternative Ideas in Narrative Role-Playing*.

General Advice

Keep a tight pace to a game, but don't force the story along unnecessarily. Players often enjoy tangents and scenes that might not advance the plot simply, because they are fun to play out.

Be fair. If the rules seem to be applied arbitrarily, or the narrator clearly favors one player over another, then the fun is lost. Don't impose your own taste over those of the players.

Follow the mood of the game. Each session has its own mood, which may not always be what you had expected. If the players are feeling serious, then let the game be serious. If they're feeling boisterous, tailor the chapter to fit their energy. Live performances in theatre always gauge their audience and adjust to it—so think of each session as a new performance.

This is a collaborative game. Remember to work with the players to craft a good story. But don't make it too easy, or the challenge is lost.

Above all, have fun. There is a certain amount of concentration and effort required in any creative project, but not if it's at the expense of the game.



Eye of the Storm

Meiliz from Musings of the Moon

When I was seven I met him. Like some imaginary friend, he appeared, this little newcomer boy. I found him in the garden, and he opened his eyes and smiled shyly as I looked at him. Aoul, we named him, for the breath on the wind. Kaiba took to him from the first, and my father made him a brother to me and we became like two songs intertwined. He followed me everywhere, and we were best of friends—and though he never spoke, I always knew what he would say if he did.

I was in my tenth year when my life turned away from the course it had seemed to promise. My father was unseated in the Erleir, and shortly after that I was sent away. In the middle of the night we were woken, and after we dressed quickly, my uncle took us far away to a city by the sea. We were entrusted to a man my uncle called Jalali, and we watched sadly as my uncle left us there. Aoul was very good to me, and he could see how frightened and sad I was. Kaiba looked after us too, as he always did, my dear servant-monkey. For a season we stayed there, and heard no word from home. Then, without any explanation, Jalali sold us into slavery.

We spent five seasons with the Kril. It was a strange time, a languorous time, and in those five seasons I saw most every corner of the South Sea. The ship we were on was a slender, swift vessel—one the Kril call a long-skiff in their strange language of thoughts and sounds. I never knew why they kept us. We had no jobs, no rules, no chains. We lived on their ship while they traded their wares across the sea. They kept us well, and shared their lives with us in their own way. Aoul and I watched the suns set at night, and learned the rope-craft of the rigging, and swam naked in the clear warm water of the South Sea. In many ways we were like pets to them—these two humans and their monkey—pets to care for and play with. They watched us play our games, our childish minds coming up with a thousand things to do on that ship. And they watched me take care of Aoul, whom they treated with an odd tenderness.

In the fall, as we sailed north to the Fold in my twelfth year, they let us go. They handed us money and sent us on our way. They did it quickly, and to this day I still think it broke their hearts to see us leave.

As we slowly became adults over the years, I wondered what to do for Aoul. He was so lost in his world, watching me turn into a woman while he remained a child inside. I wouldn't let anyone tell me, but I knew he was mad. A sad and quiet madness, one that ate at his mind and would not let him go. One night he sat there on his bed, and in the darkness I knew he was watching me. I turned to him, his eyes the only thing I could see, and he spoke. I never knew how or why, but what he said were words from his dream, from the world his madness would not let him leave: *There are none of beauty's daughters with a magic like yours; and like music on the waters is your sweet voice to me.*

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He didn't speak again, and I looked for the answer he couldn't find. My poor friend, my poor brother. I opened my ears to the tales of the world, hoping to find some clue that would save him. I heard the song-tales of the Sowl, the spirit-myths of the Udaians, the literature of Diodet, and the preachings of the Pulmites. But in it all I found no clue to save my Aoul. There was only the Tale of the Tower that told me anything at all—for in the Ouratt I had always found wisdom, if not answers. The Tower was a place where all answers were to be found. But no one had ever found the Tower—not in all the places of the world. A myth, they told me, until I met a man who shared with me stories of Marit-Tal. He told me of a great tower on the third mountain in Selepri, a tower that held the gates to dreams themselves.

We were never to make it there, and I trust in the Ouratt that it was for the better. As we passed the city of Hais at the foot of the Great Mountains we ran across Jezmini, who like me had been run off some years before. In a long night I will always remember, we sat smoking from her long pipes near the edge of the lake at Hais; she told me what had come to pass in Arn Muhr, and how my family had fared all these years. Aoul sat with Kaiba on his shoulder, and to me it seemed he was glad to hear of our home, and of our house. I became determined to go with her to the Veldt and take my birthright as seventh daughter.

We left that very next day, my spirits lifted by thoughts of home. To think we had come so close to Selepri and the tower of dreams, only to turn back. I can only trust that Jezmini was sent to guide us, and that our path was not meant to take us to the Tower.

In Arn Muhr we found my father's house. It was empty. Kaiba climbed in through the tall window over the doors and unlatched the door. Aoul and I looked at our old home, and as I walked the lonely rooms I began to cry. I cried in great breaths, and Aoul held me as hard as he could. In the morning I saw the first sun pour its light across the red tiled floors, and I knew that I was home.

We walked through the city, travelers to this place that gave birth to me. In time we found the Place of Names, and together we looked over the stones until at last we found them. My father, and my uncle. Both dead long years since. But I did not cry. Instead I took Aoul by the hand and we walked to the Erleir. When we reached the Silent Square I raised my head and walked into the shadows of the Gates, and no one stopped us. We walked past the clerks, the messengers, and the pages. We walked past them all, into the Hall of Votes. The old men stopped talking and stared at us.

"I am Meiliz, of Jarhin." I said, but the words came out crooked and wrong.

"I am the seventh daughter of his house!" I said, and this time my voice had more strength. They looked at one another, and I opened my shirt to show them my shoulder. There was a great tumult of voices as they saw the mark that is my birthright. Out of the shouting the Pretor walked towards me, and in his old hands was the mantle of my father. He placed it over my bare shoulder, and everyone was silent again. He smiled slowly, and nodded, and as he did, so did the others.



Eye of the Storm

That night, one by one, the men of the Erleir brought things to the house. They knocked on the great wooden doors, and when we opened it they said “to Meiliz, of Jarhin,” and they nodded that same nod, and then they left. They brought chairs, plants, tables, pictures, tapestries, and great baskets of food. All the things that had been in my father’s house, they brought to us. And we drank the wine and ate the food and I cried a sad but joyful cry, and Aoul smiled and held my hand while Kaiba ran among the new things and sorted them.

I took my place again in Arn Muhr, and we lived well for some years. I danced naked in the halls of my father, and we laughed and slept late and reveled in our new found life. A life I had thought lost to me.

In time it came time to marry, and I found a man who loved me, and planned a handfast in the way of my mother. My joy was burdened by the sadness of Aoul, who, though dear to me like no other, was not well. His soft madness had never left him, and his dreams troubled him more and more. It broke his heart to see me with someone else, someone who could speak to me and talk with me till the second sun rose. This new man, my new love, could never replace Aoul, and though Aoul knew this it did not lessen his sorrow.

Aoul died shortly after the wedding. He died in the garden, near the same bench where I had found him so long ago. I held his body and wept like I have never wept. And then, with my lungs pained from the strength of my grief, I washed his body. In the morning my husband and I carried him to the garden, and with his hand in mine, I let Kaiba carry the flame and ignite his pyre.

Kaiba died shortly after. He loved Aoul that much. I put him on a pyre in the garden, next to Aoul, and with his death so passed my youth and all my years before. I miss them, more than I can say, but in their death I did find freedom—freedom to live a life solely for myself. A life here, in the house of my father, in the city of my birth. The Ouratt tells us to find wisdom in our suffering, and freedom in our grief. Though I will always wonder if I could have saved my Aoul, my brother, I will never regret the friendship and love we had.

When I pass the Place of Names I stop, and run my hand over his and Kaiba’s. I smile to myself and remember our time together. Because that’s the way he would have wanted it.



Appendix One

Religions & Realm Creation

"As far as I can tell, the purpose of religions is to give people a bit of stability within their lives—to explain why their village is near Dacartha one day, and in the middle of the Belzaine Caliphate the next. Perhaps that's why religions, for the most part, spread into regions other than where they were started; anyone who travels sees how little stability there is. But can you imagine an Alenean who would worship a Queen to bring back the Empire? Or a Dacarthan who believes he can keep his city from shifting by throwing somebody into a volcano?"

"And yet, there are certain shared cultural beliefs that many of these religions seem to have in common. Like the Myth of the Long Passage. And a conception of the Newcomers as a conscious act of god. I don't understand it all, personally. Then again, maybe that's just because I'm not a religious person..."

Professor Ninneas, Queen's College

Religions

"The storm works in mysterious ways."

Religion is an idea that is larger than the faith attributed to beliefs. Religion is also cultural, and political. The idea of religion is as old as the Empire. Without faith some people fall to nihilism. The religions of the Maelstrom are varied, but at the same time they hold many universal truths.

In the Maelstrom reality, religion can be seen as the offspring of two separate needs that affect the people in the Maelstrom world:

One, the need to bring stability and understanding to the chaos of the Maelstrom, to have an explanation for a setting that appears to have none. Why does the Maelstrom exist, how is it possible for it to move our homes half way around the world in one night? Is it malevolent, sentient, controllable? Can we gain knowledge and understanding through it? Most importantly, how is it possible to have a stable view of the world in the highly malleable environment of the Thousand Realms? Some cultures, like Picarni or Alenean, attempt to answer these questions directly, while others (such as the Dacarthan belief in the Prophet, and the Diodeian Return of the Queen), await the answers in the form of a prophesied event to come. Some cultures find comfort in the storm, and a solace in their small part of a greater world.

CREATION

"Before there was a beginning, there was just the Storm. Eventually, the Storm became aware of itself, and knew that it wanted to be something more. Yet the Storm was everything and everywhere, and there was no room for anything else. And so it withdrew from an area of space, the space where it would create the world. The Storm detached segments of itself from its main body, and sent these vessels to carry out the work of creation. And so the world was created, and it was time for the Storm to draw its vessels back into itself. Something, however, went wrong at this point. Some say it was 'evil.' Others, that the Storm, in its attempt to make itself something more than it was, could not ever be whole again. The vessels broke, and creation was sundered. That was the first moving of the land, as the pieces of the storm fell to earth. To this day, the Storm attempts to put all the pieces back together, and when it does, there will be a great age of universal peace. We, as residents of the Storm, can help to hasten this day, if we live right, and search out those pieces of the storm that were lost to the whole..."

These words give a transposed view of the creation myth of the sixteenth century Kabbalist, Rabbi Isaac Luria. It has been modified to answer some questions about why the Maelstrom exists, instead of explaining why the Jewish Diaspora must exist. The religions you create can be very fantastic without being fantastical. Why does the Maelstrom exist? Why are there newcomers? How do these gods give the people a sense of stability?

The story above is an example of how you can just as easily take our world's myths and incorporate them into your narrative.

"Pater, is the storm a bad thing?"

"No, son, the storm is a wonderful thing. It guides us all, and keeps us safe."

"But Pater, why is everyone afraid of it?"

"Because it's god, son. It's like looking at the face of god. A thing so powerful and so beautiful it frightens us. It makes us look into our souls and see our sins. It's a beauty so terrifying it moves the world around."



Eye of the Storm

The second need comes from the existence (or appearance) of the Newcomers. People attempt to make sense of the foreign visions they bring. While many established religions have answers to these questions, cults and heresies will spring up around a specific Newcomer and threaten those very answers. These newcomers frequently have bring a vivid and compelling vision—one that offers hope, or even answers. And who's to say they're wrong? Whether the vision has any implications past the present situation, or the very nature of the Newcomer themselves, these cults sometimes evolve into larger religions over time—and the heresies are sometimes incorporated into the body of other established religions.

Universal Concepts

There are certain ideas that seem to carry across cultural and racial lines—as with the *Myth of the Long Passage* or mythic cities like Albatton. You may well come up with other universal themes to sprinkle over the belief systems of the Maelstrom. You may have some answers as to the origin of Newcomers—one of the most prevalent of the universal themes. These concepts can become a premise for an entire storyline.

“In my father’s time, there was a strange fervor that gripped people from the Arnain cliffs all the way to Dacartha. An idea seemed to come to many people all at the same time: the Storm was transcendence, and the Whorls were really a gateway—a road to the heart of the storm. In some places, newcomers arrived with visions that supported that point of view, in other places the idea just came to people. Even Diodet was gripped by this fire: There a Newcomer who had seen herself trapped in a metal bird that flew her into a storm, a storm that took her here to our world. Some people actually thought she was the Queen... For about six months, people threw themselves into storms, and actively searched out Hell Holes. Eventually, the enthusiasm wore out. Most of the fools who actually searched out transcendence have never been seen again. Who knows, maybe they found it. The idea that they may have found a portal to a higher reality, a way to become one with the storm, still intrigues people. ‘Transcendence cults’ still find followings.”

Professor Ninneas

NEWCOMER RELIGIONS

Newcomers, who start their passage through the world without a past to draw from look for answers to their lives, their existence, and the mystery of their arrival. This is the dilemma of the newcomer. Many find solace and answers in religion, others in myth and history, while still others move on and embrace the new world ahead without looking back. Newcomers are absorbed into the world, into towns and farms and cities, and thereby into the cultures and beliefs of those places as well. Some newcomers band together, either in small groups or larger settlements, from villages like Turlin to whole societies like the Dog Throng.

How does the newcomer place meaning on their existence? With strong feelings of a past they can't remember, and a world around them that does not feel like their own, different people have found different answers.

Newcomers won't remember names, but might recall part of a philosophy, or pieces of what they held as strong convictions. But without the literal understanding of the ideas, and with only an emotional and vague understanding of a different life, the newcomer has to put a puzzle together without the pieces. Think, for example, of the Catholic Trinity. How would someone express the Trinity if they felt it to be true but had no clear memory of it? One newcomer might have an entirely different viewpoint based on what they remember and how they interpret these memories. The maddening problem is that it all sounds terribly close to the truth ...but not quite right.

Followers of the New Beginning

When you die on the other side, and you are bad, you go to a bad place to suffer. And when you are good and you die, you go to a paradise of earthly delights. We have gone to where the Maelstrom ravages the lands, therefore we must have died. We were never good nor bad there, because the Maelstrom is neither good nor bad, but we were close to god. We were special and precious to god, and so we are sent here to build a new world close to him. It is wrong to think of the past, because god has put us here to start again, a new beginning that transcends good and evil.

Realm Creation

There is room in the Maelstrom for a nearly endless addition of realms. Chapter Three outlined a few of the main realms, scattered over the known world. And in the known world there are a thousand realms. Outside of the known world, at the edge of it all, and in eddies and lost lands, there are a thousand more.

Realm Creation

Societies within the Thousand Realms are numerous and diverse. While there may be similarities between Earth cultures and those of the Maelstrom, these are distinct cultural realities made possible by the reality of the Maelstrom.

When you create new societies within the world of the Maelstrom, keep them distinct, both from real world cultures and the other cultures of the Maelstrom. What follows are suggestions of how to create new realms that are both colorful and fresh.

What are the needs of your narrative? If this is to be the basis for an entire long-term narrative, you are going to want to put more time and detail into it than you would into a small village that the characters will visit just once on their way somewhere

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else. How large is the community? These are some of the first questions you need to ask yourself.

Who are these people? Do they have some ties to another culture within the Thousand Realms, or are they entirely new?

If the culture is linked to an established Maelstrom culture, how is it both similar to and different from the parent culture? Imagine Gathen, a small town, sitting at the crossroads of two Imperial Roads. Twenty years ago, Dacartha appeared down the road, and absorbed the town. Dacartha stayed for ten years, and then disappeared. Some of the questions raised would be: what was the original Gathen culture like? how much was it changed by Dacarthan rule? how much influence does Dacartha still have? how has society changed since Dacartha left? and have other imperialistic cultures tried to influence Gathen?

What about an entirely new culture? Maybe the society was founded by a newcomer with one memory of his past world, and the entire culture has been built around that one idea. Do you have a real-world society to base it on? How are you going to change that society and make it native to the Maelstrom and not earth? Alenea, for instance, is a cross between Hawaiian and Aztec cultures, then adapted to the Maelstrom reality.

The cultural affinity will define the realm as well. The roots of the realm's reality dictate the affinity of the realm itself. The ties it may or may not have to the Empire, as well the non-human influences over the course of years.

The humans of each realm are different as well. In addition to the cultural individuality of each human race, there are more basic questions as well: do they have three main fingers instead of four? What color is their skin? What sort of hair do they have, or do they even have hair at all? How long do they live?

Thematic Considerations

There are certain questions that need to be asked in order to fit the work into the Thousand Realms. The most important of these is to determine what spatial Affinities a place has. Gathen obviously has a Strong relationship with the crossroads it sits on, but does it now have some relationship with Dacartha as well?

Other questions include how a society deals with newcomers, and what they believe the storm is. The town of Gathen may believe in the Prophet at this point, or maybe they have been largely converted by the Shriling Order. Or do they have their own answer to these questions? These are the main questions to address when you design a realm or a race for the Maelstrom. There are few limits.

Example: Meir Viron

In the Third Age of Empire, shortly before the Great Equinox, engineers from the Imperial City were sent deep into the Wastes. They were to build a tower of huge size, the likes of which has never been seen. It would reach the skies, and following an elaborate pattern of electromagnetic streams would help link the lines of the storm.

In practice it would serve as a bastion of the Empire in the Wastes, and ground the storm more firmly where the Empire was weak.

With materials brought from all corners of the world, the engineers of Meir Viron began to build. First they erected a regional Obelisk to align the realm, atop of which was an Airpost for the Imperial Airships.

Then came the Equinox, and the world was changed. Meir Viron was cut off from the world, tucked in a corner far from civilization. With the devices of the Empire the engineers kept the people alive. The walls were high enough to drive off the Shrikes.

Now, though the Empire is long gone, Meir Viron is still waiting for orders from the Imperial City. The tower is in a perpetual state of construction, and the engineers are the descendants of the old Imperial Architects. The humans have mixed their blood with the people of the Wastes, and have witnessed many strange events so far from the human world. Their language has evolved from the Imperial Word, their looks have changed, and their culture has slowly transformed over the years.

In some ways they are like a look into the past, and in others they have become their own individual culture.

The story of each realm helps shape its reality.



Eye of the Storm

Appendix Two

Scenarios

Mythic Places

Included here are a few examples of interesting places in the realms, as well as suggestions for how to use them in narratives. The real definitions of these places are up to each individual narrative, where they could take on earth-shattering ramifications—or be nothing short of a tourist attraction. The ideas in the previous Appendix on realm creation can be used to design and create the rest of the “MYTHIC PLACES” that litter the countryside of the Maelstrom.

MARIT-TAL

Relationships: Great Mountains (strong), Selempri (strong), Three Mountains (strong)

By definition, Marit-Tal doesn't shift beyond the Three Mountains in Selempri. It is a mythical place that may not even exist. If it does, it may just be ruins. But it ties to the dream myths of the Sowl and is part of their Creation Myth in which the gods reached into the dreamworld and drew out the souls of all mammals.

The Myth of the Sowl

At the top of the Third Mountain lies a place we call Marit-Tal for the God of Wind, and there in a forgotten hall is the Gate of Dreams. Through this passage the waking can walk the dream world.

According to the myth, finding Marit-Tal and the Dreamgate requires climbing all three of the Three Mountains, because no matter what, Marit-Tal will be found on the third mountain climbed.

Uses of the Gate

There may be many reasons for wanting to cross into the dreamworld. Through the dreamworld people might move through time or even between worlds. For the Newcomer, this might seem like a way home. To the Dog Throner, a gate to the Dog Star. A source of Kael, the root of time, itself, the passage to Lost Lands, a hole in the universe, or a one-way trip to the Valley.

THE TEMPLE AT SHOLCARTA

Relationships: Enigmas (strong), Anterior (mild), Dacartha (mild), Valley of Shards (weak)

The *Temple at Sholcarta* can serve as a scenario or become an element in an ongoing narrative. It holds the possibility of much information, from Imperial relics and artifacts to lost knowledge and a better understanding of the Maelstrom itself. As presented here it is a “place of mystery” and “depository of the unknown.”

Location

In a part of the world sometimes called the East Empire, there is an expanse of plains and grass with no streams or water or noticeable animal life. In the midst of this, lying half-ruined, is a strange and foreign structure in disuse. Though called the Temple at Sholcarta by the Dacarthians, it may well have been a palace.

Place-Relation

Towards the Great Mountains, it lies on a trail that has been home to the shrikes and a path to the Valley of Shards.

The Temple can often be reached from Dacartha, regardless of where Dacartha lies. Many travelers who head East from the city will happen on it, and it is commonly held by the Dacarthans that there is always a reason a traveler finds himself at the Temple.

Other Views

A traveler might assume that if the city floated, it may have belonged to the Kril people beyond the sea, who are held to have land and sea ships that float on air. The lack of monuments such as obelisks and other traditionally Imperial structures sheds doubt on the relation to the Empire. Also rumored to be the original home to the shrikes, the sister city of Shij-Gabril, or the Imperial Palace, and many other things.

Layout

This temple city is vast, and reportedly holds inside a library. But whether it flew, or was part of the Empire, can't be answered by the first visit. It lies sprawled over the wastes, and the ruins

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are treacherous and old. Things live there, and the “vaulted library of the lore master” is somewhere underneath.

The ruins encircle an open area in the middle, a great court or palatial parade grounds. There is a fountain there, which has a tale of its own: the Dacarthises have stories about lost things in the waterways under their city being found in the empty, dry bed of the fountain.

Now if there is any truth to the skycity theory, it lies in the fact that all stairs leading downward end in dirt and rock. Except one. And that one leads to the library.

The Library

The problem with the library is that no one can read the language of the texts. Great scrolled writings in ruined, rotting shelves, among the lizards and rats and mold. That is, for those who find the door, and find it open. No one who has seen the door closed has ever been able to get in. But the ones who find it open have brought back pieces of these texts, not like the writing of the Empire, or any other language.

In III:i of Edhillond’s Dacarthise Saga, he writes:

“The Sages of the Imperium were of one with secrecy, their writings known only to them and the Emperor, their ways like shadows in a darkened place.”

To those who take this to heart the texts are from the Imperium. The 9th Seat of the Council of Wardens in Dacarthis, held by a disciple of the Shroud named Balat Kirl, was given the first texts retrieved from the library, after which he denounced them as “alien and heretical.”

Librarians and scholars have also said that the Strangers have gathered many of the writings.

Narrative Uses of the Temple

The existence of the temple leads to the hope of answers. Newcomers can be drawn to the place for that reason, as are disciples of many faiths looking for everything from truth to god. Looters and treasure-seekers look for it, as well as scholars and scientists and historians, but not very many tourists.

The potential to unlock some of the mysteries of the storm is at the heart of most intrigues in the temple, and these answers might be (if only in part) found here. The question of what the place is, what purpose it had, who built it, and what it all might

History According to the Pulmite Priests of Dacarthis

“Sholcarta was a flying thing that held the knowledge of the world in the vaults of a library. It floated like heaven over the Empire, and ours was not to wonder why. The key to the golden doors of the Library at Sholcarta was held by one man, and his was the gift of immortality, the keeper of all knowledge and the flame of wisdom. Then crashed the city, and all things felt the loss. Whether the Empire lost its might and so fell Sholcarta, or Sholcarta fell and brought the Empire with it, this can only be answered in Sholcarta. Alone can it be said that one did not outlive the other long.”

mean is answered only by a trip to see it. Among the pundits and the dogbonds conclusions have varied, so the answer is apparently not evident. Whether it is a puzzle piece, clue, answer, or source of new mysteries, the Temple lies in the middle of a grassy waste and begs the curious or the greedy to find out.

NASCENT

Relationships: Timberlund (strong), Farlong (weak), Spring (mild).

Nascent is the popular name given to a collection of nine stone menhirs raised in a semi-circle or crescent on a small rise. These monoliths are not evenly spaced, but their positions appear intentional. Nascent has no set locational affinity, and follows Timberlund in a confusing pattern that many people have studied. The questions are simple: who built Nascent, and why? Does it predate the Empire, or is it from the First Age of the Imperium? A symbol much like the Imperial gear icon is etched on top of each menhir, in the same approximate position as used on Imperial obelisks. Each icon faces a different position.

Strange things happen at Nascent. From visions to healings. And people sometimes vanish. A variety of cults hold ceremonies here as well, but the unpredictable appearances of Nascent make it hard to find. Ideas and Common Myth:

- Nascent’s journey through the shifts is related to the position of the stars
- There may be two Nascents, mistaken for the same one, that together form a circle
- The relationship behind the position of the stones, the angle of the icons, and the position of the stars form an elaborate time-piece by which “true time” can be told
- Nascent, predating the Empire, interferes with the workings of Imperial “alignments”
- Each monolith has an Imperial counterpart in the world (an obelisk) and Nascent works as a gate between them
- Each stone holds a soul of the Nine Rulers of the Empire
- Lodestones spin while within the half-sphere of the stones
- Nascent is a dream, shared by anyone who goes there
- Nascent is anti-polar to the Valley—it will always be half a world away from the Valley
- A relic of the Venthi civilization



Eye of the Storm

Scenarios

The Mill Mystery

This scenario takes place in the Anterior and is meant for a handful of starting characters. The premise is that the windmill west of the village has disappeared. The characters play the roles of whatever locals might be sent to investigate, or even of travelers who have just come to town, or even newcomers. So long as the characters have a reason to get involved, it doesn't much matter.

Background: Fergon is a small agricultural village with little going on. Some years back a foreigner, Professor Montmartre, came to town and eventually took up residence in the old rooms on the top floor of the windmill. He is generally thought of as

A few rumors from the dogbounds:

There is a lost obelisk that belongs in the central courtyard where the foundation still stands. It has for writing, not the Imperial Word, but the strange lettering from the library texts. Replace that obelisk and the temple will come to life again.

The temple is the lost city of the Desert of Endless Sun. When the Empire fell, it shifted the world and brought that realm to a fiery crash here in the East Empire.

The Shrikes will not enter the temple. (in Geer Pynt, a torrid and lavish dogbound, the hero escapes the Shrikes and saves his mother by bringing her to the temple.)

The city is Shij-Gabril, the monastic capital of the Shroud. It lies ruined here, a secret the Shroud will never divulge.

The temple is a gate to the Valley of Shards, and one should never sleep under its roofs. Bad things and whorls come to you there, and dreams not meant for man.

This place is the only remnant of the pre-imperial civilizations—realms plundered and assimilated by the Empire.

an eccentric tinkerer, and occasionally has long talks with the steward of the clock tower, as well as the priest.

Story: The windmill has gone : Professor Montmartre, along with Young Gravis, has managed to re-orient the Imperial Alignment in their tests. They are getting parts for the machinery from Picarni. The locals of Torthi, where Gravis has set up camp, are skeptical of all the tinkering by foreigners. The Shroud, ever watchful, has sent two members to Torthi to monitor progress.

The windmill hasn't actually disappeared, it just moved (something it never used to do in the shifts), Montmartre managed to realign it, and in the last shift it moved in an orbit of Torthi, no longer in an orbit of Fergon. The players can find this out in Torthi, where Young Gravis has his temporary headquarters. Or they could scour the countryside, or use the Arts and read down the lines and find it.

Story Success: Discover what's up and tell the town elders

Complete Success: Above, but realign the Windmill to Fergon

OPENING

The news of the disappearance is the beginning scene. The farmers return from the field in the morning and spread the news. Quickly the town gathers in the pub, and the mayor attempts to calm the crowd. This is the opening scene. Its purpose is to announce the crisis and generate the mood of apprehension and confusion that fills the town. This is a great time for the players to step forward and volunteer to investigate.

Choose a few of the town's leaders who speak during this scene. The mayor, the steward, and the curate are obvious choices. Bronsun, one of the Mill foremen, can be used to stress the importance of the event, and stir up fear while demanding that something be done.

FERGON

Relationships: Anterior (strong), Torthi (strong), Safe from Shrikes (mild)

A small town in the soft countryside in the Anterior, called "god's town," people say it has "always been here—here before the Great Equinox changed the world."

About 250 people, there is a small town square where the main public buildings are:

Pub "Empire's Ruin." Proprietor is John Bobbins, a good fellow.

Clock Tower: Long ago, though no one remembers, the tower served as an Airship Hitching Post, with a skywalk along the top. Still called by the old Air title of steward, the tower is run by Arvis who maintains the clock.

Church of Aerviel "who walks with the moon," "the mother of both suns." The curate is Father Brigham.

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Statue of the Venti Exodus “Aerviel knows why it’s here”

There is an Imperial Road, called the Old Road, that leads to Torthi.

THE WINDMILL

Relationships: Torthi (strong), Fergon (mild)

Tall, grey, huge, sloped like a blunted obelisk, with living quarters on top not unlike the clocktower. Before the experiments, it used to have a strong affinity for Fergon, and weak one for Torthi. Professor Montmartre (a Diodeian), lives in the top with his projects and inventions all in various states of completion. The top room is his lab and study with gears and brass time-piece style devices.

Young Gravis, Montmartre’s former student, came with new ideas from Dacartha on “*Alignments and the Seven States*”—brought from a piece of writing supposedly found at the Temple at Sholcarta.

TORTHI

Relationships: Anterior (strong), Fergon (strong), Picarni (mild), Cliff People (weak)

Torthi is in the hills, and the locals there say the Cliff People built it. Many of the people here have the yellow eyes of the Arnain. Like Picarni, this hill town has a high wall around it. Some 300 people live here. There’s an obelisk in the square with the Imperial Word, which tells the tale of Jeremoth and Pleyan (see the section on the Cliff People).

Pub “Inn on the Square”

Barkeep Shilon, who sailed from Geregon (a woman)

Darig Justin “who has always been there”

Gathering with Young Gravis “It is inconceivable that we can’t get the parts we need!”

The Shroud, two of them—I Venti, I Old Man “Cardinal” watching

Shrine to Arn

Temple to Aerviel

High wall, like Picarni

Empire Road, which leads to Fergon south and Picarni east

SHRIKE ATTACK

This attack can happen on the first outing to the windmill, or be saved for later, depending on the needs of the story. If the group is large or has any help with them, the Shrikes can be tougher or more numerous.

This encounter serves to elevate the sense of danger in the scenario and show the strange things that are happening after the realignment: Shrikes haven’t been seen in 10 years.

2 Shrikes, with shrikesticks—I with Weapon Secondary Affinity (mild), 3 Matter Descriptors “Vicious like all get out” and 1 Chaos “Spooky like all get out”

Sticks have Descriptor “Hurts like all hell”

Suggested Roles

Lyla, the Curate’s daughter: with an insatiable curiosity, Lyla is coming of age in a town that bores her to death. Friends with Andomi, she has been gathering the courage to leave home and explore the world.

“Persuasive and obstinate, with a deadly curiosity”—Matter 1/Mind 2/Spirit 1/Chaos 1.

Andomi, the Steward’s son: Andomi is the informal apprentice to the professor, and is fascinated with machines and the prospect of one day traveling to Diodet.

“Wide-eyed youth with a fine mind for gadgets”—Matter 2/Mind 2/Chaos 1

Tates, a hunter: a solitary type, Tate is a fine tracker and good hunter. He has a strong friendship/love affair with Shilon in Torthi.

“Lithe like a cat, and acts like one too”—Matter 3, Mind 1, Chaos 1

Parker, the town Sheriff: Parker took the job after her husband died in a fight that no one stopped. With a strong belief in justice and community, Parker does her best to look out for her town, and is friends with John Bobbins and Father Brigham.

“Determined like no tomorrow, and a heart of gold”—Matter 1/Mind 1/Spirit 3/Chaos 1

An Old Skiff, a Few Kril, and a Bottle of Rum

This scenario takes place on a Kril ship and takes the players from the South Seas to the Wastes and then to Dacartha. It is designed as a Newcomer adventure, but other characters could easily be added, either later in the scenario or by placing them in one of the other cells.

Background: An old ship, the Kril skiff has just taken aboard a handful of Newcomers. They appeared below-decks on a merchant ship from Geregon, which promptly sold them to the Kril ship they were rendezvousing with. The Newcomers will all have Kril slave collars on.



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Story: The Newcomers, still all in a deep sleep, are placed in the forward holding cell in the bottom deck, all dressed in burlap, no belts, shoestrings, or shoes. As they come to, the skiff is entering a nasty storm that will soon take them through a shift.

THE SHIP

This is a low skiff of the frigate class, way past its prime. It has three decks below and two masts. The crew numbers 12, not counting the Venth and the Darig, or the rossials (see below).

Bottom Deck

Cells and old parts, as well as a hatch out the back. At the joint of the floor and wall there are lookholes that are 2' wide portholes with a bubble of glass that looks down over the water when flying, and is submerged when floating. There are four to each side. Along the ceiling is a long chassis like a transmission from a '57 Chevy that grinds and clanks. At the rear are steps up and a door to the aft room. There are crates with old parts, like ball-bearings, pipes, cogs, and greasy things used for maintenance.

- **Aft Room:** A small room with ropes, short rusty chains, and rags. Another door opens along the rudder-well that can be used to exit the vessel at sea-level when floating.
- **Cells:** There is the forward cell and four others, two to each side, with a wide walkway between them that goes from the larger forward cell to the steps and aft room behind. The cell is made of strong, thick metal bars in a cage on all sides. There is straw on the floor.
- **Locks:** The kril locks are magnetic, and take a key of the right magnetic pull. There are five such keys among the Kril, around their necks on a chain.

Middle Deck

Home to the gearing mechanism, the magnetic engine, supplies, and cargo, as well as some crew in the forward room.

Top Deck

Navigation, quarters, steering, and a cargo hold that opens to the Open Deck. Anchor-room in the forward room.

Open Deck

Back-up steering, rigging, lashed-down cargo, etc.

(see the notes in Chapter Six on Skyships)

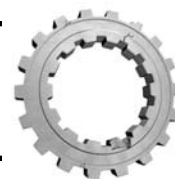
THE CREW

The crew, like all Kril ships, has no set captain. It does have functions assigned to each member, and there is a navigator, a slave-master, a cook, two protectors, and a negotiator. They have a Venth who tends the slaves, a Darig in a cage in the navigation room, and rossials.

The average Kril is Matter 4/Mind 2/Spirit 1 with appropriate affinities. Protectors are Matter 6 and have Mild Weapon affinities. All can be armed and all have Weak Weapon Affinities, if need be.

- **The Venth:** Calls himself Abrom. He will tell the group what awaits them at Kril Dirilul if they ask, but won't help them escape. He will sit, barely visible, and watch them from under the stairs. If they make a commotion he will give them water and bread. His legs are chained together, using a normal lock. Abrom has resigned himself to his fate. He occasionally talks to Fellipus, but does not trust Rieling. He will tell them they must go to Dacartha to be free. Matter 1/Mind 2/Spirit 2.
- **The Darig:** Goes by Rieling. He was a pirate, and friend to a man named Fires. Together they hid a lot of loot. The crew captured him ten years ago, and are still waiting for him to tell them where it is. He hopes to outlive them all. Trying to befriend Fellipus, who only recently starting speaking. Rieling is a rat—he tells the Kril useful things, hoping one day they will give up and release him. If freed and still with the group, he will take them to the Rim Kingdoms and find his old mate Fires. Matter 2/Mind 4/Chaos 2.
- **The rossial:** Fellipus was named by the Darig. He can speak, but he isn't so bright. He likes the ship, and doesn't know why people wouldn't want to be slaves. The Kril are fine and all, so what's the problem? Many of his non-speaking relatives have been mangled or killed in the gears. He will get a key for Newcomers if given some good incentive.

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GETTING OUT

There are only two ways out: Getting the key, or demagnetizing the locks by way of a shipwreck (in a wreck, the doors demagnetize). The bars really can't be broken. But the chassis overhead can be mangled, which will bring the ship down in the water (not an actual wreck, but close). The Kril will only come Below Deck if the chassis is damaged, or if Fellipus tells Rieling that the slaves are trying to escape—Rieling will then tell the Kril. They will send down the slave-master, or an engineer for the chassis. Both would have keys.

REMOVING THE COLLARS

A dangerous thing. They are made of a malleable material that resists cutting, and is filled with a deadly acid. The acid spews out when punctured, doing from 1 to 6 levels of injury total, divided among the bearer and anyone trying to cut it. Short of a lab, or magic, the characters will have to reach a major city to remove them. Dacarthans will remove the collars safely and for free.

(see the notes in Chapter Six about Kril Slave Collars)

EVENTS

As the storm gets worse, the Kril will become more concerned, and their thoughts will be projected down Below Decks—*storm, shifts, danger, trouble, work, etc.*

About 15 minutes after the Newcomers wake up, there is drastic shift from the storm, which takes the skiff to the Wastes—over a frozen ocean. The rudder scrapes, the storm becomes a snow-storm, and the ship will eventually stop, teeter, and fall onto its side. If the chassis was damaged, the ship will come to a jarring stop after the shift: The main engine will blow and snap the mainmast, the ship will fall over, and within 15 minutes it will be ablaze. Either way, when the ship goes on its side, the locks will open. If the ship is not blowing, then the Kril will systematically grab their gear, abandon the slaves, and hoof it within 20 minutes, bringing the Darig with them. If it's about to blow, a handful of the Kril will die in the blast, and they the others will abandon the ship immediately.

The Kril leave and head south. They will not stop the Newcomers from following, but will not share supplies with them. They will eventually find Udai, get killed by Shrikes, or die of exposure.

If the players leave, they will see travelers from Udai, who will avoid them at all costs, thinking they are Mallatin. If followed, they will lead the group to Udai. If the players stay in the ship, they will be rescued within a day by a Diodeian airship on an arctic journey to Field Station LaReine. The ship will take them to Udai.

UDAI

Once in Udai, the characters are branded as runaway slaves. They will be avoided, but with some luck they might get smuggled onto a whaling ship and taken to Springtide or Lost Rite. The adventure from here is about being fugitives. Many people will try to capture them and give them back to the Kril for a reward. Others might help. The Dog Throng, though not very active in the Cold Sea, might get wind of them and try to help. Another goal for the group is Dacartha, and many people will tell them that.

If the scenario is being used as a one-time game, then arriving at Udai can be the end. For story purposes they can quickly be taken in by people who will remove the collars and help them out.

Narrative Settings

Queensgate

Queensgate is presented here as a possible “home base” for adventurers as they explore the world of the Thousand Realms. In an alien world, it might serve to have a place relatively familiar for the occasional retreat. *Queensgate* can also provide a place for training (of both the martial and scholarly kind), research, and romance. It can also serve as an adventure setting of its very own.

Location

Queensgate sits in the center of Diodet. The term *Queensgate* itself is used in three different ways. Specifically, it refers to Queen's Park and the buildings directly facing that park. Usually, it is used to describe the neighborhood around the park, which includes Queen's College, the Guards' Regimental Barracks, and the Theatre District. Finally, on rare occasions, the term *Queensgate* has been used to describe all areas within the Inner Walls.

An Area of Idle Money and Idle Time:

The four types of people that most often live in the area surrounding Queen's Park are the students of Queen's College, soldiers of the Guards' Regiment, theatrical types, and “fast set” nobles. Many other people visit the area to go to the theater and sit in the cafes and restaurants that dot the park. Besides the restaurants, cafes, and beer halls, there are many other businesses that cater to students, soldiers, and nobles. Tailors and fencing masters sell clothing and weapon skills to the fops,



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while pawn shops wait for them to have to sell off their fine clothes and rapiers once they're broke. Book stores provide the students with the tools of their trade; theatrical and art supply stores deal with the needs of the artistic. Time and money make for a fertile breeding ground for romance and adventure.

Queen's Park

Where the four Imperial roads meet there is an obelisk. The Diodeians claim is **the** Imperial Obelisk, with it's own inscription of the myth of Piros and Layne. A large park surrounds the obelisk, it's only other structure is a ruined amphitheater, the Queen's Amphitheater. There is a wrought iron fence around the park, but it has not been maintained (This doesn't stop the people from selling keys to Queen's Park, however). Many a student and avant-garde playwright who find trouble being produced in actual theatre halls put on plays here. Though illegal, highly publicized duels take place here.

The Empire

Made famous in the Dogbound serial, *Tales from the Empire*, this cafe sits on the south side of Queen's Park. A block off of Theatre Row, it is the place where those not from Queensgate feel they can "safely" experience the district. The locals don't like coming here, they all have their own favorite haunts. The Empire is a common meeting place due to its renown and central location, however. It has good jazz, as well as a *strong affinity for coincidental meetings*. Many a great story has begun with the phrase, "We'll meet up at the Empire and move on from there."

The most prominent fixture of the cafe, after you muscle your way through the outside seating area, is a huge brass machine. The machine takes up about two thirds of the main room, and can dispense almost any beverage you can imagine. The machine has been here for centuries, and the proprietor Gathric is the eighth generation of his family to run the cafe.

Queen's College

Reputed by many to be **the** premier university in the Thousand Realms, Queen's College sits to the Northeast of Queen's Park. The area between the college and the park is largely filled with dormitories, boarding houses, and student apartments, but there is also the occasional smaller school with ties to the College. (Many natural scientists prefer to be associated with the school while not being actually part of it.) The Society of Practitioners is engaged in many activities at the College, as well as other societies involved in the Arts and Sciences.

Just south of the College, still next to the inner walls, sits the cozy neighborhood of College Park. Situated around the small gated park for which it takes its name, this area is the favorite of professors who wish to live close to the school, but not be completely surrounded by their students.

Regimental Barracks

To the Northwest of Queen's Park, adjoining the walls of the Caphir's Towers (which is technically within the Inner Walls), sits a parade ground, where all of the Caphir's troops drill. Surrounding the parade grounds are the barracks of the five companies of the Guards Regiment, along with armories and administrative offices. The first and second companies, the Caphir's and Queen's Guards, are both double strength.

While technically part of the same regiment, the various companies of the Guards are basically independent of each other, and rivalries develop. The First Warmouth Watch, brown and khaki-clad outriders who guard the Warmouth River, stay clear of these petty bickerings, but the other four companies revel in their quarrels. A friendly rivalry exists between the 3rd Sky Marines and 1st Diodet Lancers, but not so between the Queen's and Caphir's Guards. Duels between the White and the Purple often end in fatalities, despite attempts by the Caphir's officials to end the squabbles. It is rumored that the Caphir and his courtiers actually encourage these duels, and keep a running tally of which side is winning the centuries-old duel.

While all five companies have their barracks and offices around the parade grounds, they are not the focal points of company life. Each of the five captains maintains a large townhouse within Queensgate, which serves as a combined training facility/club for the members of that company. Most famous of these houses is that of Captain Gramarde of the Queen's Guard, who lives right on the west side of Queen's Park square.

The rest of the area west of the Park is home to more residences and cafes, fencing academies, and occasionally a department of the Caphir's bureaucracy that has spilled over from the Towers.

Verona

Shakespeare's Verona is an example of how to adapt a setting or scenario from literature, theatre, film, or even another game world, to the Maelstrom reality.

In theatre, certain choices are made regarding the motivation of the characters, the relationships between them, and how they shape the events of the play—these are interpretations necessary to any production of a script. Most people have read or seen a production of *R&J*. There are also film versions, notably by Zefferelli (1976) and by Luhrmann (1997), as well as adaptations like *West Side Story*. Consider this the Maelstrom production of *Romeo & Juliet*.

Shakespeare's story is a backdrop for a narrative. The events of his play may or may not involve the players and their characters. The players might hear of these events, read about them, or

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arrive in Verona in time for Juliet's funeral. They might bump into Romeo, befriend Paris, or fall in love with Mercutio. If they arrive before the events of the play begin, they might change events, thereby creating a play called *Paris & Juliet*. And of course, the players could play the characters in Shakespeare's story as well.

The genre of this story can change to fit the narrative. It could be a comedy of errors as the players interact and interfere with the events of Shakespeare's plot, but as presented here Shakespeare's story runs as follows:

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Setting: | <i>a city of prestige in a time of peace, prosperity, and merchant rivalries</i> |
| Style: | <i>youthful rivalry and loss of innocence</i> |
| Tone: | <i>tragic</i> |

The City

Relationships: River, South Sea, Diodet, Trade Alliance, Mantua

Verona is nearly always on a river, which is nearly always one of the river deltas of the Wyvern. The weather is generally fair, and inland by way of an Imperial Road lies a town called Mantua.

*"Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean."*

An old city, not so large, a cousin city to Diodet maybe, Verona is ruled by a prince, who has autonomous authority over the affairs of the city under him. The city is rich with the trade off the South Sea, trade that winds its way inland past this port. Verona is one of several anchors in the sea trade that runs inland to Nether, spreading past it to Diodet and other places.

It is a time of prosperity and idleness, peace and indulgence. The two powerful trading companies of the city are House Montague and House Capulet, who along with other trading houses have made the city strong and rich. With this wealth there is money for the arts, patronage in many trades, and wonderful masque balls.

Politics

The prince, His Royal Highness Escalus, owes his power to Diodet and the Trade Alliance. Of the line of the Queens of Diodet, his family has some prestige in the Diodeian court. The Trade Alliance has its hand in the workings of the city and the prince, but all told leaves the city alone as long as the tithes are paid. The Pulmite Church has nominal say over many facets of life in Verona, and only under the roofs of the church are all factions joined.

The Church

The church is the social center of the town, home to confessions, ceremonies, gossip, and of course marriages and funerals. The church takes no sides in the feud between the Houses. A beautiful building on the Square of Princes.

It is a Pulmite church, which in practice is the common man's version of the Shroud.

The Veronan Word

The common word in Verona is an archaic dialect, which some scholars place as an interim tongue between the Imperial Word and the present Common Word spoken in many dialects today. The Diodeians see the Veronan Word as an offshoot of the Imperial Word, not a later variant. Flavorful, the speech of Verona is prone to imagery and allusions, simile and metaphor.

The Houses

"Quarrel, and I will back thee"

No one's really sure when the trouble started, but the two richest families in the city just don't get along. Both sides have held a grudge so long that reason doesn't enter into it. The other trading houses have aligned themselves with either the Montagues, the Capulets, or the Prince.

The two families feud economically, socially, and politically, despite the best efforts of the prince to stop them.

The Sycamore Grove

A perfect place for the forlorn, the grove is at the edge of town and overlooks the sea and is lined with sycamores (of course). Romeo is prone to pining here.

Mantua

Mantua is quiet little town in the hills, just outside the reach of the prince and the law of Verona. A good place to go if you get banished.

Events in the City

The main events that link the plot of the story together are fairly simple. Outside of Shakespeare's story whole other plays are being written, one of which is the narrative that comes out of any game set in Verona.

Opening of the Play:

A truce has been declared between the houses, and a time of tense peace has settled on the city. Romeo is pining over Rosalind, and all seems well.

Synopsis of the Play:

There are skirmishes between the Montague and Capulet boys, but the truce stands. Then the Montague boys decide to crash the Capulet masque ball thanks to



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Mercutio, who has passes. At the ball Romeo meets Juliet. Tybalt discovers the Montagues at the party, but Lord Capulet holds him back. Romeo and Juliet get married in secret. Tybalt finds Romeo and challenges him, and in the fight Mercutio gets killed. Romeo kills Tybalt in return, and is banished by the prince. The Capulets force Juliet to agree to a marriage with Paris. The friar arranges to have Juliet fake her death so she can run away with Romeo. Romeo kills himself at the news of her death. Juliet in turn kills herself upon finding Romeo dead. Mourning their losses, the two houses bury the axe.

Time can be drawn out between the events of the story, and new scenes added to accommodate the narrative of the game.

Key Characters

Capulets

Lord Capulet

A staunch traditionalist, who will not see his family ruined. His love for the family is stronger than his love for any individual member of it. However, he is no fool, and bears no ill will to the new generation of the Montagues—his fight is aimed at Lord Montague.

Lady Capulet

Unfortunately for Juliet, Lady Capulet shares much of her father's views. Though she may understand the needs of her daughter, she will not let her choose a course that conflicts with the family's needs.

Juliet, daughter to the Capulets

A young thing, stifled by the limitations imposed upon her. Though naive, she is creative and intelligent, as well as resourceful. Loves her cousin Tybalt.

Tybalt, nephew to the Capulets

An angry youth, dedicated to his family, but perhaps at the expense of reason. A trained swordsman and a fine athlete, they call him the "king of cats."

Nurse, servant to Juliet

Loyal to the end, Nurse does her best to make Juliet happy within the confines of her parent's wishes. She raised Juliet, and thinks of her as her own daughter. Nurse is not without her own needs, however.

Peter, servant to the Nurse

A young lad, shy, with a speech impediment. Doesn't dare cross Nurse.

Sampson, servant to the house

Sampson, though not related by blood, is more or less one of the Capulet boys. He runs with Tybalt and likes a good fight.

Gregory, servant to the house

Much like Sampson, except that Gregory is less inclined to violence. Has strong feelings for Juliet.

Montagues

Lord Montague

Weary of the long feud he inherited from his father, Lord Montague is more relenting than his rival. In family matters he bears a strong love for Romeo and Benvolio, and has a good relationship with his wife.

Lady Montague

In many ways, Lady Montague is the strength of the Montague family. She does her best to further the cause of the merchant house, but like her husband, she is weary of the war.

Romeo, son to the Montagues

An idealist, Romeo pines for a better life. Never a violent lad, he is sick of the fights, and doesn't really care one way or another about the family feud. Eloquent and determined, his ideals can lead him into trouble. He bears a strong love for his friends.

Benvolio, nephew to the Montagues

Benvolio is Romeo's shadow. Rarely seen without him, Benvolio enjoys his status as one of the Montague boys, but respects his uncle's wish for peace. As Romeo hit the rebellious stage of adolescence, Lord Montague has relied on Benvolio to take care of his son.

Balthasar, servant to Romeo

A young lad, loyal to Romeo, whom he admires, and the Friar.

Abram, servant to the house

One of the rambunctious boys in the Montague bunch. Has no qualms about starting a good fight to settle matters with those pesky Capulets. Afraid of Tybalt, however, so he relies on Benvolio's more imposing presence.

Maelstrom Storytelling



Others

Mercutio, kinsman to the prince

As kinsmen to the prince, he has friends in many places among the jet-set crowd of Verona. With mercurial moods and a gift for words, Mercutio is a loyal friend to Romeo and his gang. He has a penchant for landing them all in trouble, though, like getting them passes to a party at the Capulet mansion.

Friar Laurence

Laurence is a good man, with a soft spot for people in trouble. A dabbler in horticulture, he is also a mildly good alchemist. Laurence does his best to be true to his heart while being true to his god.

h.r.h. Escalus, prince of the city

Escalus inherited the feud between the houses when he became prince. Still relatively young, he has watched his prosperous city come to grinding halts because of the Montagues and the Capulets. He has grown frustrated in his failed efforts to end the civil strife, and has run short on patience.

Sebastion, officer to the prince

Of no real note in Shakespeare's story, Sebastion may be the link between the players and the prince.

Paris, kinsman to the prince

A rich man, Paris is in search of a bride. Though he may not have found true love, he has nothing but the best intentions with Juliet. In a world of arranged marriages, he is just going with the tide in his effort to marry well. It is assumed that he is unaware of her love for Romeo, but then again, he might know better.

Rosalind, of house Ferroni

One of the jet-set crowd, Rosalind enjoys a good chase. Which is probably why she's tired of Romeo. A young woman with lots of money and nothing to do until she's forced to marry. She spends her time finding ways to keep herself entertained.

(There was a play that spliced the works of Lave's *Labours Lost*, *As You Like It* and *R&J* called *Romeo & Rosalind*, written by Jacobina Martin in 1987)

Reynard, servant to Rosalind

One of the Ferroni boys, Reynard has a fine arm and a fine wit. Enjoys the escapades that Rosalind seems to always land them in. Reynard the Fox, she calls him.

Public Events in the Play:

Skirmishes between the boys
The Capulet Masque Ball
Juliet's Funeral
The Reconciliation

"Now that you've found your sea legs, how does it feel? Whole world of opportunity out there, let me tell you. Now, no matter what they tell you, don't forget that past of yours—no matter how little you remember, Newcomer. Just know this: it's your past that makes you sacred. That little part of you there, that's your soul, and don't let them take it away. Now you gotta adjust, and make yourself part of the world—just don't go and forget what it is that makes you special.

"Feel the storm, my friend, and know it's there. The storm, you see, that's what makes this world. And unmakes it. Stick close to what you know and don't be afraid. And in the end, the goddess will set you free."



Eye of the Storm

Glossary

Affinities—A reflection of a character or place's connection and/or aptitude with some talent or element of the Maelstrom.

Aspect—The four traits (Mind/Matter/Spirit/Chaos) that define both the character and their role within the Maelstrom reality

Authoring—The act of telling a story through the players' descriptions of the characters actions in the world described to them by the narrator.

Bidding—The act of burning *descriptors* in order to attempt to increase the chance of success within a *scene*

Bidding Pool—The total number of dice rolled by a side in a scene.

Chapter—A segment in a long-term narrative that helps build the larger framework by breaking the narrative down into smaller "mini-narratives".

Character—One of the roles in the story; a persona taken on by a player or the narrator.

Cultural Affinity—A relationship to a realm's cultural reality; basic knowledge of all things within one realm.

Descriptor—A word or phrase that describes a key trait of a character's personality, physical make-up, or understanding of the world around them.

Difficulty Factor—A way how to gauge how hard or easy any particular action may be.

"Gifts" Affinity—A catch-all category for all powers of the world that do not fit into another *Primary Affinity* category.

Kael—The "Newcomer Affinity," allowing its possessor a certain amount of malleability within the various realms of the Maelstrom.

Magical Affinity—One of two different *Primary Affinities* that deals directly with the power of the storm. *Magical Affinities* may be in either the *Natural Arts* or *Physical Sciences*

Narrative—A collaborative story created by a narrator and their players.

Natural Arts—The ability to channel the *Maelstrom* through one's body and manifest it in the world around them.

Passive Test—A die roll which does not require the burning of a descriptor.

Physical Sciences—The ability to harness the power of the *Maelstrom* from a device or invention.

Place Affinity—Patterns of relationships between one place and another.

Primary Affinity—The one thing a character is most attuned to. *Primary Affinities* may be *Cultural*, *Magical*, *Kael*, or special *Gifts*.

Quick Take—Any action a character wishes to take that requires a separate sub-scene within a larger action scene. Using a Quick Take requires burning a *Descriptor*. *Quick takes* may be standard, countered, opposed, or spontaneous.

Realm—An place in the world with its own reality, distinguished by the realm's *Cultural Affinity*.

Region—A place, larger than a realm, held together by certain weather and terrain *affinities*

Scene—A smaller period of time within a *narrative*. Scenes can be of almost any length, but have a common thread running through them. Scenes can either be *rolled scenes*, with dice involved, or *open scenes*, which are played out through role-playing.

Secondary Affinities—A relationship or aptitude for some skill or action that a person has a specific gift for, such as sword-fighting or haggling.

Session—One day's/evening's worth of game play, often four to six hours.

Story Points—Given out at the end of a session; *Story Points* may either be used to add to a character's capabilities or to contribute to the story during the game.

Successes—The total number of dice from the *Bidding Pool* that come up with odd numbers.

Target Number—The amount of *successes* required in the dice roll to win a scene.

Weak Descriptor—A word or phrase that describes facets of a character that might be perceived as flaws or shortcomings.



Inspiration and Source Material

The following is a list of books, movies, and games that have elements of what the Maelstrom is about—some more than others. Consider it a bibliography of sorts. There is merit in all of these works, some more than others, and in designing a narrative they can serve as an invaluable resource:

Novels/Literature/Theatre

The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath, by H.P. Lovecraft, as well as any of his “Dreamlands” cycle.
The Glass Harmonica (Macmillan) by Byfield for a delightful look at Western folktales
Gunnm, by Yukito Kishiro
Metropolitan, by Walter Jon Williams, for an example of how Maelstrom’s magic would work if it were more controllable.
The first *Amber Chronicles*, by Roger Zelazny, for an alternate view of moving through realities
The World of Pooh, by A.A. Milne for the “wonder” and innocence
various *Sandman* graphic novels, by Neil Gaiman, et. al.
Faeries, *Lady Cottington’s Pressed Faerie Book*, *Goblins*, or any other book illustrated by Brian Froud
Flow My Tears, *The Policeman Said*, by Phillip K. Dick, for what was probably the kernel of the idea behind ‘newcomers’
Horace, by George Sand
John Carter of Mars series, by Edgar Rice Burroughs, or any pulp-romance fantasies
The Tempest, and *A Winter’s Tale* (among others) by William Shakespeare
The works of Jules Vernes, for his imaginative visions of science and technology
Dumas’ *Count of Monte Christo* and *Three Musketeers*
Various works by Ionesco and Genet if you want to question assumptions on reality

Films/Movies/Television

Blade Runner, especially the fashion styles of the android-makers
Delicatessen, and *City of Lost Children*.
White Dwarf televised movie, Fox TV. It may have been bad, but it looked good!
Time Bandits, *Baron Munchausen*, or other works by Terry Gilliam
Akira, , *Beautiful Dreamer*, *Battle Angel Alita* (the movie version of *Gunnm*), *Dragon Half*, or several other anime
The technology and feel of *Iria*
Angel Heart
Labrynth, or *The Dark Crystal*, by Jim Henderson Productions
Legend, especially the dreamy quality
The snazzy fashions of the Centauri on *Babylon 5*, whether or not you like the show
Impromptu for a good look at Diodet