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Beyond the Silt Sea
The Anattan Coast

Beyond the Silt Sea: The Anattan Coast

Lost Lands of Athas Gazetteer Volume 01

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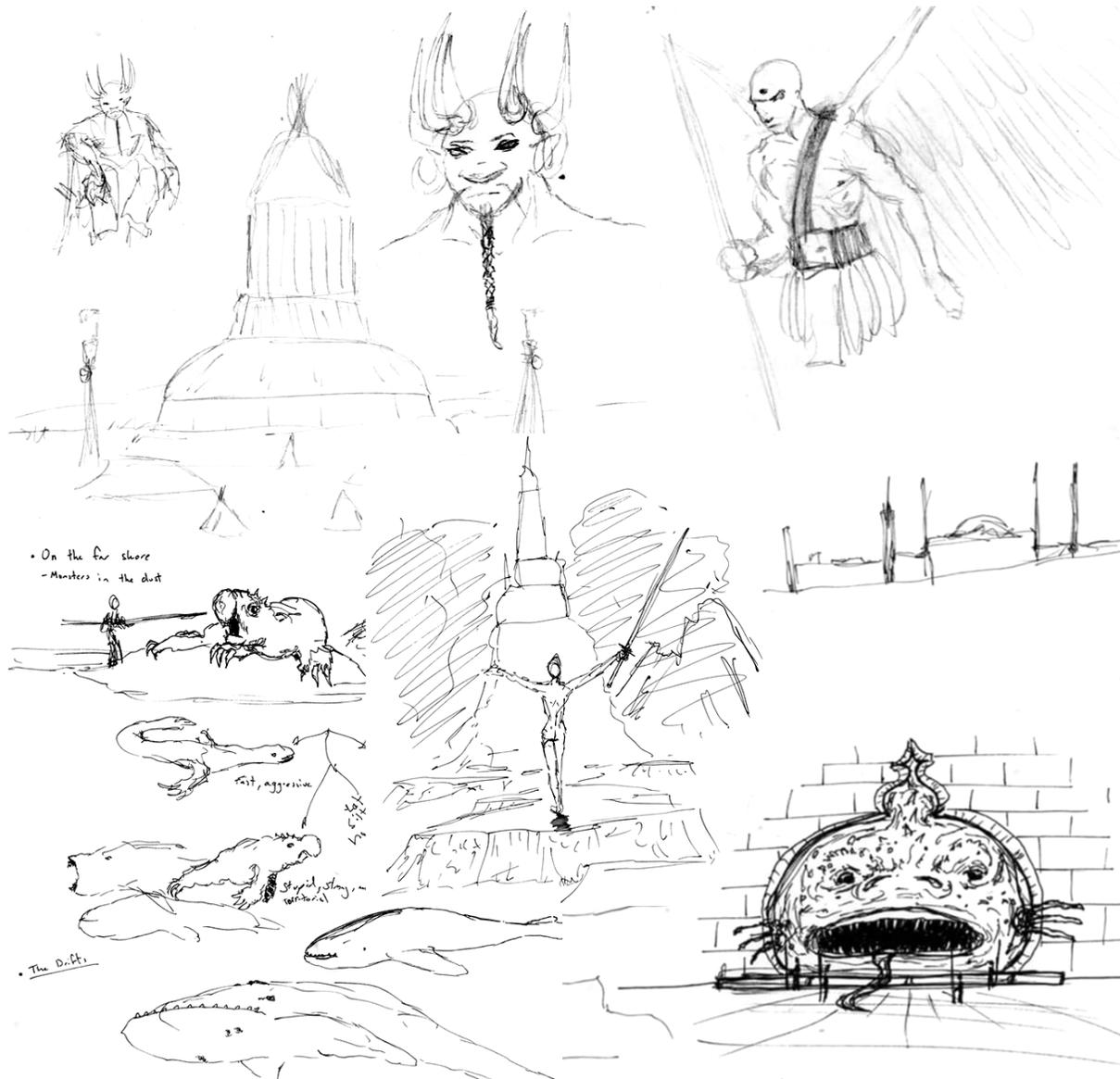
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Dedication

The name "Anattan" was adopted by Dark Sun fans in the 1990s to describe the continent to the east of the Sea of Silt. Although the name of Anattan was created by fans, the land mass itself is a relatively obscure piece of Dark Sun canon. Parts of the Anattan landmass are depicted on the Valley of Dust and Fire map, and the original Wanderer's Journal describes the existence of an eastern landmass - a sort of mirror image of the Tablelands - with a companion mountain range similar to the Ringing Mountains.

From these brief snippets of canon, maps of this region have been developed by fans and hosted on the Athasian Cartographer's Guild website. A number of authors in the fan community have detailed ideas for this eastern continent over the years, including Steve Bell, Mike Fleming, Bryan Bock (Sysane), Ed Bonny, Jhonny Picasso (Gathalimay), Brian Sanchez, and David Tirsch. This work is intended as an homage to these efforts, incorporating ideas from all these different creators.



Introduction to Anattan

Dear Collector:

Thirty long years I spent in the bowels of silt schooners in the fleet of the Lord Mariner, in dark and windowless chambers that sealed out any light, but were still somehow choking with dust. We occasionally heard stories about where our vessel was headed, and one name in particular stood out – Anattan. It was said to be a great land to the east of the Dragon’s City, though I never laid eyes upon it in all my years on that boat.

On skimmer crews out of Balic and Ledopolus, tales abounded of a land to the east of the Silt Sea, but never did I meet anyone claiming to have made the journey. I always dreamed of exploring new lands, even as a child. Fascinated with the idea of far-off lands, I joined a skimmer crew. I knew the world must be more than sand and dust and ash, and dreamt of finding something better. But my life as a freeman ended when I asked too many questions.

In a tavern near Balic’s port I met an admiral in Andropinis’s navy. Having traveled as far north as the Road of Fire, and as far east as the Silt Archipelago, I asked the Admiral what lay beyond. He dismissed me along with my questions, but I couldn’t help my curiosity and continued to inquire as he became increasingly irritated, until finally he called on a templar to place me under arrest. Two weeks later I, along with countless others, found myself pushed from a jail cart into a desolate crater in the middle of nowhere. “Perhaps you will get your answers now,” my jailer laughed. In horror, I witnessed the Great Beast descend! The legends were true, I was about to become part of the Dragon’s Levy.

I was not slain, but simply fell asleep, waking in the Dragon’s City – Ur Draxa. I was in a small village of other captives. I could see nothing but miles upon miles of fields, and an enormous set of walls that enclosed farmland in all directions. This is where I met the Draxans – noble clans that live out lives of cruel luxury. They interrogated us to see what useful skills we had. I thought as experienced skimmer crew I would be of use and avoid execution; I even thought that, perhaps, I would have a chance to explore new places. I foolishly imagined it would be to my favor.

Though not executed, I rarely saw sunlight for the better part of thirty years. Long after belief was reasonable, I thought if I just worked hard enough below deck, perhaps I would graduate to surface crew. Instead, my relentless work below only made them determined to keep me where I was.

Then everything changed.

We had braved many storms, but this one was different. First a constant thunder, then winds so heavy the vessel strained, followed by rains so intense the schooner began taking on water. Twenty terrified souls in the steerage chambers, and we were all about to drown. In desperation we mutined, tore open the gates, stormed the decks, and attacked the bewildered Draxans. Battered by the whipping winds, blinded by lightning, and beat down by sheets of rain, they succumbed to our onslaught. The storm was more ferocious than we’d ever imagined, and we later discovered it had put the Dragon’s City to ruin. This great ‘Cerulean Storm’ had marked the Dragon’s death and set upon this distant land a great wave of refugees, bringing catastrophe in their wake.

Memory did not fail me. I still recalled how to guide a vessel in a storm, and gave instruction to my fellow mutineers. Blinded by the silt haze but aided by a compass, we set a course due east, hoping to find the unknown shores of Anattan. We tied ourselves to the decks and clung for dear life. The storm was so great we could not tell the passage of time, and I am still unsure if a day or a week passed. It was a miracle our vessel survived – long enough for us to crash directly into the rocky shore. We clambered out of the wreckage and set foot upon solid earth. We were free. We were alive. And we were now in Anattan.

Enclosed are the collected stories, observations, and musings of my circuitous journey through that foreign land.

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What is Anattan?

Anattan is a major continent located to the east of the Sea of Silt whose lands are as barren and blasted as those of the Tablelands, and whose many peoples and cities - mostly clinging to its coastline - nearly as grand.

Sitting directly east of the Dragon's City, the civilized heart of Anattan is a coastal region stretching north to south for some three hundred miles. I mention the Dragon's City here because I know it was but a legend in the Tablelands, and its name Ur Draxa a complete unknown. But it is well known in Anattan, for the Draxans have dealt directly with the peoples of Anattan ever since there have been Draxans; the Tablelands may have been the Dragon's source of life energy, but Anattan was his source for materials.

In my travels I explored four regions of Anattan which comprise the four chapters of my account:

- Lying directly east of Ur Draxa, the **Central Anattan Coast** is the region's core, with an active maritime trade. Until recently, the Dragon and his minions were a familiar presence here – now his surviving minions threaten the region.
- To the southeast of the central coast are the **Sundered Lands**, a sprawling and mysterious desert region that stretches from the silt to the enormous mountain range that encircles this area, much as the Ringing Mountains bracket the Tablelands.
- Inland and east of the central coast, one finds the **Spiral Lands**, a region defined by an ancient, singular landmark: a river flowing down an enormous mountain, carving into the landscape for hundreds of miles in a vast spiral pattern, until its waters empty in an expansive mudflat on the central Anattan coast. The Great Spiral Road, dotted with villages, towns, and cities, follows the curving river's course.
- Lastly, to the north are the **Anattan Wastes**, a vast region scoured by storms and marred by volcanoes, and almost entirely devoid of civilization. This wasteland stretches all the way to the northern terminus of the continent.

The continent of Anattan stretches south and east of the great mountain range as well, though I did not explore these hinterlands.

I wondered, at first, how Anattan and the Tablelands were unknown to one another. Tens of thousands of people live here and are only separated from the Tablelands by a few hundreds of miles. But of course, the isolation existed because the Dragon himself willed it so. By controlling the seas and limiting trade between the lands, he sought to prevent the formation of alliances between eastern and western cities. But now, with the fall of Ur Draxa and the disappearance of the Dragon, this land lies newly open.

Anattan is now in a state of profound upheaval. It is awash with the survivors of the Dragon's City, many of whom are miserable wretches like ourselves: a mutinous and starving schooner crew crashed onto unfamiliar shores. Some of the refugees, however, were among the Dragon's most powerful minions: dread lords and generals, with a powerful command of the Way and terrible magic at their disposal, that not only allowed them to survive the Cerulean Storm, but to wreak havoc wherever they emerged. Even Anattan's land is itself changing – lashed by the reaching arms of the Cerulean Storm, which strike with vicious winds, torrential downpours, and sheets of lightning, leaving wreckage, flash floods, and firestorms in their wake.

Whatever balance this land once had has been upended, leaving Anattan in flux; no one is safe, no leader is secure, no land is tame, and menaces both old and new abound. I can only relate to you the state of these places as I found them – I dare not presume to know what came before or what will come to be, though I have gathered stories of the past from some of those I have spoken with.

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The Name “Anattan”

The name Anattan applies to the land, its people, and the language spoken in the region. The origin of the name is a mystery to me, though I can report three possible etymologies:

- 1) Throughout the continent, a distinctive type of geographic feature appears time and again – giant natural stone columns or spires, which are known by the name *anatta*. Some have told me the land is named after these.
- 2) Others say that Anattan is the name of a fallen empire that once ruled this region, the ruins of which lie buried in the sand. The people and land are said to share their name with the language because they once belonged to this empire.

And there are those that say the land is named not for an empire but for the lost city of Anattan - a forgotten paradise. The legends hold that the city was not destroyed, but (for various reasons, depending on the tale) cannot easily be found. Those telling these tales tend to believe that if the city were rediscovered, it could restore the land to a paradise.



The People of Anattan

Before delving into the geography of Anattan, I will share a few observations about the peoples that live here. While each city and village will be discussed later in detail, there are many commonalities.

Anattan Races

First it must be said that, as in the Tablelands, the people of Anattan are widely varied in appearance and occupy a wide range of stations in life. An individual from the Tablelands who came to Anattan would not be an obvious outsider based on their appearance alone.

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Humans are the most common people in most of the cities and major towns. Elves and dwarves, and their kin - half-elves and muls - are familiar as well. Among the elves, it is not uncommon for them to have vaguely animal-like features – large and wide-set eyes, long faces, narrow noses almost upturned like snouts, and tawny hide-like complexions. As for the dwarves, they are similar in size and breadth but their skin is extensively scarred, not from ritual markings, but rather by burn marks from having been exposed to intense fires. Beyond these minor differences, many Anattan elves and dwarves look similar to those seen in the Tablelands.

One distinctive group of humans merits mention. The further one travels into the Spiral Lands, the more

distinctive the human population becomes. The people in the upper reaches of the Spiral - who call themselves the Lan - speak their own language and have a much more uniform appearance than other humans in Anattan. The Lan tend to be short and slightly on the stocky side, with women commonly standing under five feet and men rarely more than five and a half feet tall. They are almost universally dark of hair and eye, with high cheekbones and round faces. The Lan are well adapted to high elevations, and more accustomed to mild weather than other Athasians. The further one travels into the Spiral Lands, the more these features come to dominate the people around them.

A significant minority group that live alongside the Lan are the Ghav-etuil, who I was told are the original

Ssurran Species of Anattan



Obsidian-Claw

Sandscale

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people of the high Spiral Lands settlements of Jiscenda and Toa'Farah. They seemed to me most similar to the halflings of the Forest Ridge, very short of stature and like wise children in appearance, often only showing their age in subtle signs such as around the eyes. Rumors of bizarre Ghav-etuil abilities and qualities abound. From what I could gather, they practice ancient arts used to mold and shape the environment and bodies of both men and beasts, acting as healers, gardeners, craftsmen, shamans, and even torturers and seers.

In all my travels, I encountered not a single half-giant or thri-kreen. The people I spoke with had no theories for their absence from Anattan, as they had no awareness of such creatures beyond vague legends.

Reptilian peoples are a familiar sight in Anattan settlements. Nikaal and ssurrans walk the streets; the nikaal of Anattan are mostly red-scaled, though I saw some in the familiar shades of purple and green. The ssurrans of Anattan belong to two different subspecies – one group call themselves sandscales, and look like the ssurrans I'd encountered near volcanic islands when I was skimmer crew. The other subspecies has shiny black talons and notably longer necks and arms - they call themselves obsidian-claws.

Pterrans live in Anattan as well, though they are rarer in the cities. These pterrans have enormous crests atop their heads, and two different tribes may be identified by the shape of these crests: the hazeo pterrans have sun-shaped crests, while the yrrak pterrans have axe-shaped crests.

Other strange peoples exist, and examples of note will be mentioned as they arise. As in the Tablelands, strange people are not exactly welcome, but so long as you pay in advance, most innkeepers will give a strange visitor a room.

Languages of Anattan

Along the coast, the people speak the Anattan language. Anattan shares many overlapping words with Low Draxan, which is the language of Ur Draxan captives. Low Draxan, in fact, seems to be a language with three sources – the common tongue of the Tablelands, the High Draxan language spoken by Draxan nobles, and the Anattan language. Since I spoke Low Draxan from my decades enslaved by the Draxans, I was able to quickly learn enough of the Anattan language to get by.

While none of the natives of Anattan speak the common tongue of the Tyr region, the Anattan coast is now flooded with refugees from Ur Draxa. Among the Draxan refugees are former nobles and slaves who interacted enough with the Anattan coast to learn the tongue. Some of the former slaves now in Anattan are from the Tyr Region, however, so it's not impossible to find those among the refugees who speak the common tongue of the Tablelands (or other Tablelands languages), as well as Draxan and the Anattan tongue. Indeed, for much of my travels, I was accompanied by a mul who was born in Urik but shipped to Ur Draxa, and spent years loading Draxan ships in the ports of Anattan – he spoke Urikite as well as Common, High Draxan, Low Draxan, and the Anattan tongue.

If one travels deeply into the Spiral Lands, they will find that the people there, the Lan, speak their own tongue among themselves, though the Anattan tongue is still widely known and can be used by travelers or traders.

To my surprise, the dwarven tongue spoken here was intelligible to me. The dwarves of Anattan speak with a thick accent and have some unfamiliar vocabulary, but so long as we conversed slowly, we could understand each other with some patience. This leads me to believe that at some ancient point in the past, the lands of the Tablelands and Anattan were known to each other, and because of the exceptionally long lifespan of the dwarves, the dwarven language changed surprisingly little over a span of thousands of years.

Anattan Society

The society in Anattan is similar to that of the Tablelands in many important ways. The large cities are controlled by monarchs who make bombastic claims of greatness, surround themselves with sycophants, and hide behind corrupt bureaucracies. Armies of well-trained warriors guard the cities. A powerful noble class exists in most Anattan cities. The most powerful nobles call themselves "Trade Lords," and act similarly to the trade lords of the Tablelands, except that they are considered an integral part of the nobility.

A large class of skilled craftsmen and artisans live in the cities of Anattan, and have stable - but by no means luxurious - standards of living. An even larger class of unskilled and impoverished laborers can be found in the cities too, and beneath them are those who live oppressed lives of bondage.

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Mindbenders are a common and important part of Anattan society; mighty tribes whose members number in the thousands roam the deserts, lead by powerful psionic warriors. Wizards are uncommon, and arcane magic is tightly controlled, generally only allowed in the service of a monarch; a preserver travelling companion of mine, a fellow Tyr Region native and refugee from Draxan captivity, had no success making contact with any group like the Veiled Alliance during our travels, leading me to venture that the Alliance has no foothold here. Though I suspect that people somehow keep the knowledge of sorcery alive, I have found no evidence that an organization like the Alliance even exists here.

Temples honoring the elements abound throughout Anattan, and some cities boast a unique elemental presence I will later discuss. An unusual type of priest can be found here; called spiralcasters, they claim to draw their priestly magic directly from the very landmark that lends its name to the Spiral Lands. These spiralcasters fulfill a public function not unlike that of templars in some cities.

Finally, I should note that the coast has a large class of rough and oft-maddened mariners, who live most of their lives bouncing between the port districts of cities and small silt-side towns, onboard the numerous silt vessels that ply the region. While some of these vessels are trade vessels and some are pirates, most exist to gather food. Molluscs, prawns, and countless other strange creatures - all pulled from the silt - are a major part of the Anattan diet.

As with everywhere on Athas, the scorched wilderness between the cities of Anattan is not entirely empty. Life persists in strange and stubborn forms far more varied than I could ever describe here. Wind-bitten nomads drift between oases, sun-blasted scavengers search for ruins to unearth rusted trinkets and trade them for water, reclusive mystics dwell in cracked stone towers or underground springs, and fierce and ungovernable tribes prey on communities like locusts. Each is shaped by the land's cruelty - in many ways hardened and broken - and yet, somehow, alive.



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Chapter 1 - The Central Anattan Coast

The central Anattan coast stretches nearly 300 miles from the mud-drowned harbor of Xarednay in the south, to the storm-wracked coastal haven of Brijj'apurr in the north. This coastline is dotted by settlements and bustling with activity, more so than the coasts of the Tablelands, and includes three cities of note: Nobe, in the north, Xarednay to the south, and Gilland in between. Of the lot, I found Gilland to be the only true rival to the city-states of the Tablelands, though Xarednay was not far behind, and Nobe was much diminished after enduring recent hardships.

Settlements thrive here, thanks to a coastline largely shielded from the storms that otherwise make silt coasts so unpleasant, seemingly a result of the Western Guardians mountain range and the Dragon's Tail island chain. Both giants and silt horrors, so common along the coasts of the Tablelands, are largely absent from these shores. The region is instead home to leviathan creatures known as hulgor, which seem to keep other predators out. In the absence of the tentacled menace that is silt horrors and their spawn, an abundance of less dangerous but far more palatable creatures flourish in the silt, including crustaceans, mollusks, and other shelled oddities. Mariners set out on vessels to haul in catches of such creatures, supplying the tender white flesh sold in every market in the region and gracing every table.

The silt, however, is newly choked with mudflats. The collapse of the Dragon's City has brought with it storms both terrible and wondrous. These "Dragon Squalls" appear suddenly and without warning, drowning the land in wind, rain, and lightning before quickly vanishing. They seem strangely capable of ignoring the presence of the Western Guardians, dancing around and between them. Most of the land is far too hardened and parched to welcome water from the Dragon Squalls, so it instead rips downhill towards

silt basins or the sea, scouring everything in its path in violent flash floods. Plants thrive in the resulting mudflats, but where they thrive, horrible monsters typically follow. These mudflats can form in the silt unpredictably, and when rain falls directly upon the silt, it often turns to thick mud on the spot, completely miring vessels in place. Even those that avoid being trapped in the muddy aftermath of Dragon Squalls may discover that familiar paths through the silt have been blocked by newly-formed mudflats. Even more dangerous, however, is when familiar routes become clogged with invisible mud just below the surface, and careless silt skimmers can easily become trapped in the muck.

Most travel between settlements had previously taken place via these now untrustworthy routes. Only one great land-based trade route exists in the region – the great roadway leading from the central city of Gilland into the strange region known as the Spiral Lands. Though the various peoples of the coast live on land, commerce and conflict between them is primarily maritime in nature.

Before the fall of the Dragon's City, life in this region was subjugated to the Dragon, tasked with supplying his Dread Lords with whatever goods and materials could not be produced within Ur Draxa. The Dragon's weight lay heavy upon the land, in effect rendering the Anattan Coast a mere colony of the Draxans. But the upheavals brought by recent events have challenged the existing power structures and birthed new factions, pitting neighbors against each other. Gilland and Nobe are beset by internal strife and external threats, though isolated Xarednay remains seemingly stable. Outside the reach of these three great cities, and now free of the Dragon's long shadow, no law binds people other than what communities agree upon.

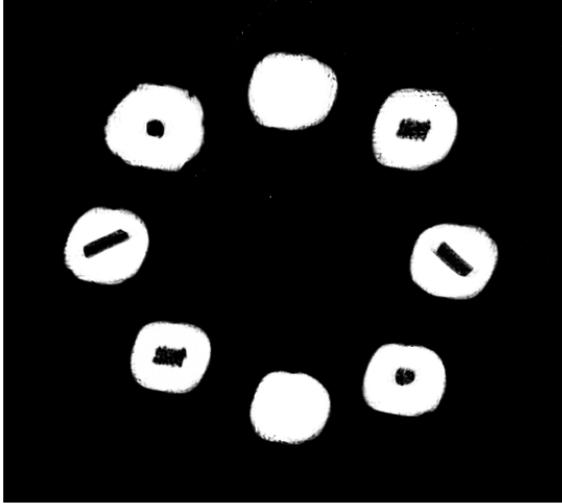
The Coastal Cities

Gilland

Known far and wide as the Silver City, Gilland lies at the heart of the strange coastal lands of Anattan. Though the city first seemed to us to be overrun by strife, it was soon revealed to be full of life and possibilities - something I have never seen before or

since in all the lands I've visited. Between muddy floods brought on by Dragon Squalls, the looming threat of violence from the remnants of the Dragon's armies, and waves of unrest throughout Anattan after the fall of Ur Draxa, the city's people were milling about in confusion. Among the many unforgettable sights I witnessed were: an entire fleet of silt skimmers

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Gilland Circle

mired in mud, with masts and giant wheels arrayed at odd angles; toothless and hobbled beggars selling fine hats and accessories; and children gleefully playing in the waters that flooded their slum, too young to grasp the significance of the bodies floating around them. After a few days in and around Gilland, it became clear we needed to find a way to more stable lands. Luckily, a caravan headed to Lan proved willing to take me on in return for news I'd gathered before arriving at Gilland and stories of far away lands.

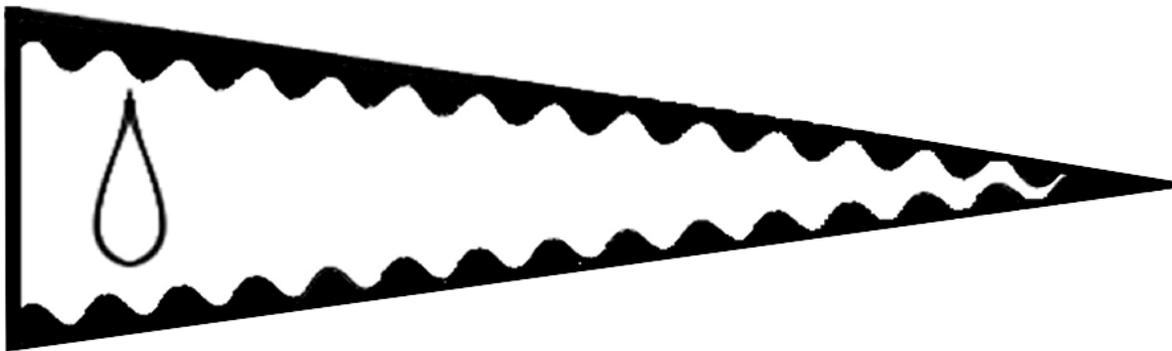
Nestled in a sheltering bay, the city of Gilland is built upon a hill abutting the Great Spiral River to the south. The surrounding land has always been filled with a fertile muddy plain blessed by the river's flow, but lately the mud has spread much farther, expanding far beyond its former boundaries and even miles out into the Sea of Silt. The area around the city and to the east

is now filled with a mixture of cultivated fields and muck-filled hollows. Like any mudflat, it is overrun with dangerous plant life as well as biting and stinging fauna in every untended corner. The air here is thick, oppressive, and suffocating in the heat of day. Unsurprisingly, most agricultural activity occurs in the early and late hours of the day.

Though the walls of Gilland shimmer and sparkle in the sunlight, their base is now ringed in mud. A great sprawling slum spreads out along the southern reach of the city, running parallel to the river. Much of the slum now lies abandoned, however, mired in muck and murky pools, though I could see people wading through the slop to salvage belongings from ruined homes. Beyond the partially drowned slum, the tops of beautiful large buildings and slender towers could be seen rising above the walls.

Inside the city, which seems the equal of Balic or Nibenay in size and wealth, long avenues stretch through a grand marketplace which seems to extend from wall to wall, overflowing with people and wares from all over. So many sights and sounds as to overwhelm the uninitiated! I was immediately accosted by several salesmen, followed by people offering friendship, protection, or guidance for only a few coins. From what I'd heard on the way to Gilland, the city was run entirely on mercantile interest under the largesse of the Trade Lords, a squabbling collection of petty nobles and elected officials in orbit around the city's most glorious and elegant Queen Passarra.

Known as the Silver Queen, Passarra is said to be a tremendously powerful mindbender and sorceress, perhaps even the equal of the sorcerer-kings of the Tablelands, though it seems her displays of power are



Trade Lords

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almost entirely focused on wealth and influence. She is known for elaborate pageants and contests, heaping great rewards on those who please her, while catastrophes follow those who misstep – often at the hands of other jealous parties seeking to elevate their own status. Described as inhumanly beautiful, Pasarra is as tall and graceful as an elf, with long silver-white hair pulled into elaborate braids and haunting gray eyes. She drapes her willowy frame in silken finery and elaborate gowns, her fashions frequently changing. Despite a foppish nature and seeming obsession with trivialities, it is said there are at least a thousand years worth of bodies piled at her feet.

The Bay of Mud

The Great Spiral River, we were told, had always flowed directly into the Sea of Silt, forming a large mudflat known as the Bay of Mud. It is upon this mud that hearty hands tended fields that feed not only Gilland, but most of the interior as well. Of all the strange sites of the Anattan Coast, the sheer scale of the Bay of Mud is perhaps the most difficult for minds to grasp, for I am told it is growing by nearly a mile a week due to the rains flooding into the silt. By the time we arrived, the mudflat stretched nearly 100 miles east to west and as far as 40 miles north to south, and was still spreading.

Through our travels in Anattan, it became apparent that the region beyond this great mudflat was barren



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even in comparison to the Tablelands. Whereas the great city-states of my homeland are surrounded by wide verdant belts supporting farmland and miles of scrub plains beyond for grazing, some of the large settlements in Anattan produce very little of the food they need. Instead, the region's agricultural inadequacies have long been alleviated by the mudflat, which in effect serves as the breadbasket for the entire region. But now, the Dragon Squalls have flattened or drowned crops, ruining many fields and unleashing pestilence upon the land. The destruction's impact upon the food supply has so far not been enough to directly threaten the people of the area, but unrest in the larger region is sure to rise as food exports dwindle.

The landscape of the bay was in a volatile cycle, and what at first seemed one giant mudflat was in fact four distinct types of terrain, shaped by the dual forces of unrelenting sun and flooding waters. Patches of sun-baked mud dotted the bay, seared until it was nearly as hard as stone, but still filled with plants and roaming herds. Most of the mudflat, however, is fertile muck - soft muds in which feet sink with every step, but from which crops grow easily. It is in this mud that most of the sprawling fields of Gilland sprout. The heavy rains, however, send flood waters racing across the bay. In their aftermath, the mud becomes a viscous mire, a thick liquid soup into which feet sink deeply, making travel difficult and often drowning crops. Where the flood waters run off into the silt, they form a dusty slurry beneath which a surface solid enough to walk on sometimes forms. Reeds, grasses, and mudthorns grow rapidly in the slurry.

With the heavy rains, however, this terrain was changing constantly: sun-baked mud softened to soft muck with enough water, soft muds transformed into impassable mires, and the edges of the Silt Sea thickened into dusty slurry; in their wake, the crimson sun stole the waters and hardened the mud once more, while the silt reclaimed the mud along its furthest edges.

Braxa

Though I rarely saw the silt, let alone the sun, during my years below deck, I knew the name Braxa as some sort of naval headquarters for the Lord Mariner. The city of Ur Draxa had neither coast nor port, forcing the Lord Mariner to maintain this base as the center of his operations. But I never saw it, nor knew anything about its whereabouts, until after my escape. I assume Braxa is located so close to Gilland to facilitate the gathering of supplies needed to maintain the fleet.

The Lord Mariner and much of his fleet swiftly regrouped here after the collapse of Ur Draxa. Traders are welcome, as the fleet is desperate for both food and supplies. As an escaped crewman, it would have been sheer madness to visit Braxa, but visiting maritime traders have reported the presence of dozens of vessels, with dozens more under construction, and that new stone ramparts are being hurriedly erected.

Braxa's central docks are constructed of immaculate gray stone that visitors say is impervious to the scouring of silt. As the heart of the Dragon's navy, no expense was spared in the construction of the central shipyard. A large stone lighthouse - a cylinder several hundred feet tall topped by an unnatural purple flame - can be seen for miles. The base of the lighthouse, we were told, is an elaborate palace that is home to the Lord Mariner himself.

In Gilland, we met a trader who had traveled to Braxa both before and after the fall of Ur Draxa, and who believed the population of the port had swelled into the thousands from an initial few hundred. Between the central port and the newly-built ramparts, hastily erected structures - many little more than shanties - have been haphazardly assembled. Though the identity of those living in the ramparts is unclear, an estimate in the thousands seems too large for the people living there to only be surviving crew from the Lord Mariner's fleets. In addition to where these people came from, one wonders how they will remain.



The Lord Mariner

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Though there are herds which wander the scrub plains of this island, they are nowhere near sufficient to support so many for long. The vessels in the port are designed for war, not reeling edible creatures out of the silt. Thus, despite the apparent military power amassed here, this settlement cannot survive for long on its own.

Nobe

Located on a broad scrub island between the Western Guardians and mainland Anattan, Nobe, sometimes known as the "Sundered City," is a small independent polity suffering from a mix of climate disaster and political upheaval. Previously tenuously attached to the mainland via a narrow stretch of land until only decades ago, the isthmus has now sunk beneath the silt and become a shallow strait.

What can be gathered about the history of Nobe is two-fold. First, the remnants of a much greater and ancient city can be found strewn about the low hills on Nobe's outskirts, which are peppered with ancient alabaster rubble. Now covered in scrub, the rubble must have once been magnificent towers, as a few of these towers still remain partially standing. The city's aquifers, and even an ancient irrigation system, remain intact from countless King's Ages past. Second, and more recently, the city has undergone a violent coup in the aftermath of the Dragon's demise. The old ruler, Gavryl of Ebe, claimed to be blood-kin of the Dragon and presented his city as a vassal of Ur Draxa. But when the Cerulean

Storm formed - an event the Nobians call the Hour of the Blue Sun - Gavryl was overthrown by his former High Vizier, Utu Maruk, himself a powerful Fire cleric. A violent civil war was fought in the streets of the city, and ultimately Gavryl disappeared, his loyalists were routed, and Utu Maruk and his Fire cult seized control of the city.

The population of Nobe has now collapsed - thousands died and thousands more fled elsewhere. I'd estimate the remaining population at 10,000, with perhaps one-in-three buildings abandoned. The enormous refugee crisis underway in Anattan is not only caused by direct escapees from the Dragon's City but by the resulting chain of events that have displaced people across the region.

Prior to the revolution, this was a starving city with thousands living in famine and poverty, as much of the city's food supply went to Ur Draxa even as Nobe's own people starved. As such, many of the surviving residents have welcomed the changes brought under Utu Maruk, and with fewer mouths to feed in the city and no more exports to Ur Draxa, there is suddenly sufficient food for the first time in generations.

Its worship of Fire is an ancient part of the city's culture. Once every King's Age, Nobe carried out a "Great Conflagration" in which celebrations of fire were held, culminating in an anarchic fury of arson and violence, typically falling most heavily upon the city's poorer districts. After each Conflagration, the fields of Nobe would bloom as the soil teemed with renewed fertility. The Fire Temple controls all politics in Nobe, from taxes (known as tithes) to policing, and its rectors serve both as government functionaries and priests of the state Fire-religion. Their religious duties include cremating the dead, tending the holy eternal flames, and burning people alive in offering to the great Fire spirits of the land. The symbol of a rector is a red flat-cap and shawl. The military in Nobe is known as the Fire Wind, with the core of the forces being a contingent of bowmen known as the Stinging Flies - who are infamous for attacking with volleys of flaming arrows.

While flames and images of the Dragon dominate Nobian motifs, Nobe's economy in fact rests upon maritime trade. The island of Nobe sits across a small channel from Hulgor Island, and it is the mariners of Nobe who mastered the art of domesticating the great beasts known as hulgors to serve as a means of transportation for both commerce and warfare.



Fire Cult of Nobe

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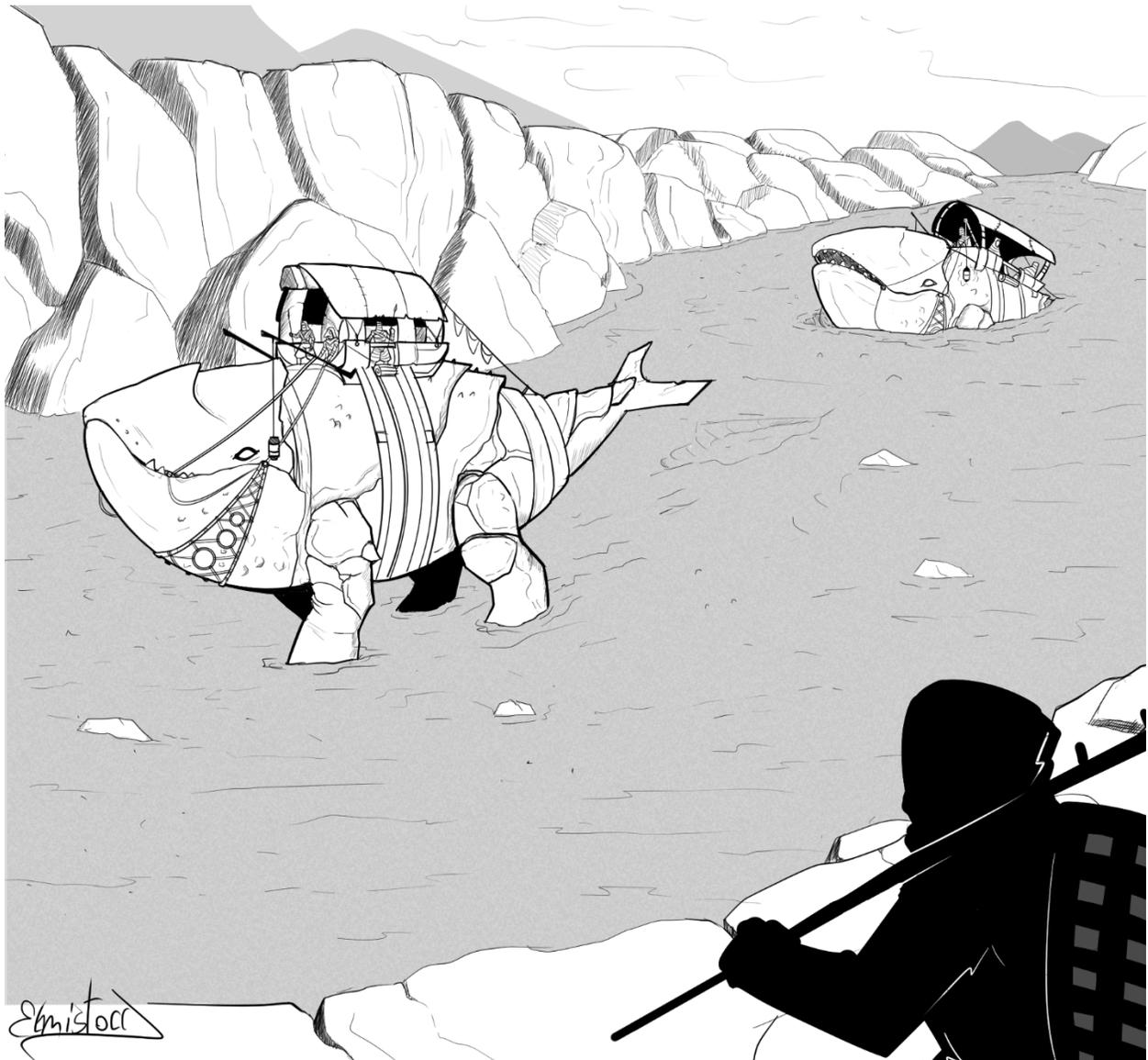
Hulgor Island

Across from Nobe sits Hulgor Island, the breeding ground of the great silt leviathans that give the island its name - the hulgor. The island is closely patrolled by forces from Nobe who treat it as a preserve, keeping outsiders off the island for fear that they could ruin the hulgor's breeding grounds. From a distance, one can only see flat rocky terrain on the island, with scattered cacti and shrubs. The island is constantly circled by patrols out of Nobe: menacing figures in red cloaks, perched atop howdahs on the backs of the great hulgor. With dazzling flames at the fore of their howdahs, they signal the risks of approach.

The hulgor is a colossal, silt-dwelling beast whose sleek body is covered in thick, blueish-tan hide.

Growing to nearly the size of an argosy, hulgor stand on four pillar-like legs, each ending in broad, flat feet, allowing them to walk across land and shallows alike, but their smooth skin is adapted to the silt and does not fare well when exposed to direct sun for long. Their wide-set, multi-lidded eyes are a striking pale yellow, and inside a hulgor's powerful jaws are rows of sharp teeth, ready to grasp and tear through prey with formidable strength. The secret to controlling hulgor is closely guarded, though it seems to rely upon the use of some sort of hypnotic flame - protruding from the front of every hulgor howdah is a pole holding aloft a mesmerizing lantern, which flickers at the edge of the hulgor's peripheral vision.

Mysteriously, the hulgor seem to give birth only on the edges of this island and nowhere else - some say



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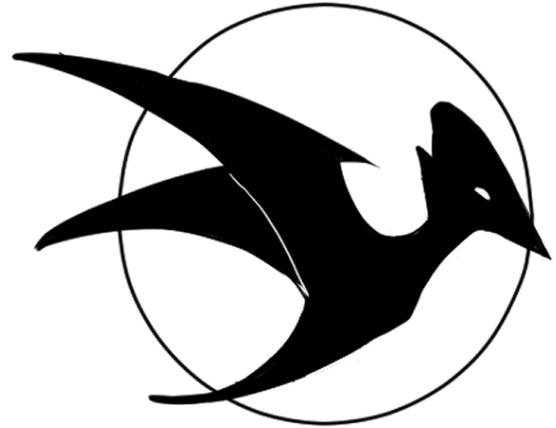
there is a network of silt caves beneath the island in which their young are born. Once grown, they hunt the few silt horrors and silt spawn that still inhabit this part of the Silt Sea. In the absence of silt horrors, other silt-dwelling creatures great and small flourish and are often harvested by intrepid mariners.

Entamoore

Entamoore is a remote village and pirate's cove built amongst the ruins of a once great coastal city. Much of the ancient city has crumbled, toppling from the seaside cliffs into the silt below, creating a rocky shoal of sorts around the cove that the residents of Entamoore are quite familiar with. The dreary silt haze that usually blankets the area only adds to the difficulty in navigating the cove. The people of Entamoore, likely numbering just over a thousand, are a mixed lot of outcasts, criminals, traders, and other independent-minded folk of numerous races. Many escaped the Spiral Lands, with a significant portion having once been slaves in the fields surrounding Lan, while the rest have come from Gilland, Nobe, and Brijj'apurr for various reasons. There is one land route from Entamoore leading through a series of canyons and passes up to the village of Qul, but it is a long, difficult journey, long enough to keep the Lanean military and slavers far away. Legends of the ruins here speak of great sorrow and misery wrought by guilt over the long-ago death of the land and sea. At night, mournful wailing can sometimes be heard coming from the cliffside ruins.

Brijj'apurr

The coastal town of Brijj'apurr sits on the sheltered side of a small peninsula, in the last hospitable site before the northern Anattan coastline descends into stormy mayhem. It is a waypoint for vessels entering the narrow estuary leading to the Glowing Gulch, and is also a trading post where ferocious tribes sometimes emerge from the deserts to barter for supplies. Perhaps



Hazeo Pterrans

most interestingly, it is home to some of the most fearless (or perhaps mad) silt sailors in the entire region. Sailing west from Brijj'apurr is a treacherous proposition, as the coast to the northwest is relentlessly hammered by storms, yet ships periodically attempt the journey and even sometimes return. In the taverns of Brijj'apurr, one can find crew members willing to set sail to nearly any destination. They will recount fantastical tales to anyone who buys them drinks, with stories about long-forgotten islands, grand cities, and even whole civilizations spilling forth.

Though not as large as Nobe or Gilland, I'd estimate as many as 5,000 people call this place home. Much of the town is built into a network of coastal caves which provide shelter from the weather, but many collapsed during a recent earthquake, killing hundreds. The town is still struggling to rebuild, and those pushed out of the caves, along with refugees from Nobe, have established a sizable tent city right outside. Fearing the quake may yet have aftershocks, many people are afraid to reenter the caves, yet life on the surface brings with it the storms that of late seem to be increasing in intensity. The more sober-minded residents have started wondering if the town might just need to be abandoned.

Western Guardians

The mountains known as the Western Guardians soar out of the silt about 25 to 50 miles off the Anattan coast. The mountains climb thousands of feet out into the sky, towering in a great chain along the western edge of the central coastal region. They are quite impressive,

often erupting directly out of the silt into sheer cliffs. The range serves to shield the coast from the great silt storms that blow out from the Sea of Silt, which strike these mountains and dissipate. The part of the sea that

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lies in between the mountains and the mainland is unusually tranquil and shallow.

A sizable population of pterrans inhabit these high mountain peaks. With enormous sun-shaped crests atop their heads - the likes of which I'd never seen before - they call themselves the Hazeo (we encountered pterrans in the far north of Anattan later in our travels, this time with axe-shaped crests -



another subspecies seemingly unknown in the Tablelands). Nevertheless, these unusual pterrans share many similarities with their Tablelands brethren; in particular, those spending time in their company



Hazeo (Sun Ridge)

will note that they have the same strange religious fanaticism.

The pterrans largely inhabit mountainside caves, traveling from one settlement to the next on the back of their cousins - the winged pterrax. The entrances to these small caves are concealed amid the rocky cliffs and jagged peaks, camouflaged to blend with the natural surroundings and protect against aerial assaults. Unless one directly sees a pterrax fly into or out of one of the caves, they are apparently quite difficult to locate amid the maze-like crags. Whether these caves are individual homes or small villages, I could not determine.

The pterrans once maintained cooperative ties with the aarakocra of Mount Adrayac to the south, but the arrival of Dragon Warriors in the mountain range has disrupted these ties. The pterrax are no match for the giant rocs of the Dragon Warriors, and are far slower as well, so they rely on stealth and the ability to fly into crevasses too narrow for the rocs. The pterrans were once frequent visitors in Gilland and Nobe, but those visits too have become rarer.

Island of a Thousand Woes

While most of the Western Guardians drop directly into the silt, there is a sizable 20-mile-wide shelf of land on their eastern slope known as the Island of a Thousand Woes. For generations, the island has served as a prison colony for the cities of Nobe, Gilland, and Xarednay, where undesirables were permanently exiled and left to fend for themselves; with the exception of pirates, silt vessels avoid the island. The island's "thousand woes" are said to be the countless ways these exiles meet their demise. The exiles that survive are the ferocious, the hardened, and the mad, and thus many are a good fit to join pirate crews. The island itself is sand-swept near its shores, but some water trickles down the slopes of the mountains, causing hearty scrubs and some edible plants to grow in the middle elevations. A handful of brutal tribes of prisoners are said to stalk the island.

One wonders why the three cities would share a prison colony, as they share little else. And why were the violent convicts not simply put to death? The island is known for its thousand woes, but I also heard a thousand explanations for its true purpose. Many explanations centered around the Dragon in one way or another - that he took the captives' life energy (much like the Levy of the Tablelands), that he hunted them for sport, or that the island was a proving ground

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to identify those strong enough to serve as his personal guard. I give these rumors some credence because the Anattan sailors say the island became even more dangerous, and the exiles even more brazen, in the months since the Dragon's disappearance, pointing to a culling of the worst elements no longer taking place.

The Obsidian Citadel

Nestled in a high mountain pass in the southern stretch of the Guardians, a solitary tower looms over the horizon, so tall as to be visible for miles when the

morning sun rises over the mountains on a clear day. The tower was once believed to be abandoned and crumbling, with weathered gray stone blocks periodically falling off and careening down the slopes. Now, however, the tower gleams with new menace. The Dragon Warriors and their flock of rocs escaped the destruction of the Valley of Dust and Fire and recently seized control of the tower. They have rebuilt and reinforced the tower with obsidian - one assumes it is unnatural - and now the black glass shimmers like a dark beacon from miles away.



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The Dragon Warriors were a much feared faction in Ur Draxa, and their leader Amandia - never a shy figure - is said to be newly emboldened. Most of her warriors and dozens of their rocs are said to have escaped the valley in time. This must at least be true of the rocs, as one can see dozens circling their dark new home. The Dragon Warriors were always a small yet elite contingent, but now they are among the most feared forces in Anattan and have put out the call for fierce warriors to join their ranks.

Fort Sibblre

This sizable fortress on the westward slope of the Guardians was long controlled by Gilland, and is sometimes considered the westernmost bastion of the Spiral Lands. The fortress is ancient but well-built, with a tall watchtower and sturdy base hugging the cliff - the face of which seems to have eroded away right to the fortress's northern and western walls. The view afforded from the fortress on a calm day is considerable, with visibility often stretching for miles out to the north and west. At the base of the cliff lies a small harbor where vessels may dock, though large ballistae on the fortress walls ensure that only friendly siltcraft would consider making the approach.

Apparently, a powerful defiler by the name of Sot Mallin commanded the fortress in the name of Gilland until recently. Before being appointed commander a number of years ago, he was a top deputy to Passarra, the Silver Queen of Gilland. He was said to be one of her closest allies and, some believe, nearly her equal in sorcerous power.

When Gilland's port succumbed to the mud, contact with the fort was lost for months. A fleet of supply vessels eventually departed for Sibblre from a makeshift port beyond the mud, but never returned. Rumors in Gilland say that Sot Mallin and his forces seized the vessels and are holding them hostage, though others claim the fleet was destroyed in a storm. Whichever story is true, no further vessels from Gilland have traveled to Sibblre. However, sailors report unidentified vessels continue to sail to the fortress from ports unknown. The garrison at Fort Sibblre consisted primarily of people from Gilland, most of whom still have family in the city, and these relatives fear that Sot Mallin and Fort Sibblre may have broken away from Gilland and allied themselves with some other group.



Mount Adrayac

Mount Adrayac

The southernmost peak of the Western Guardians and the tallest in the chain is a soaring white-capped mountain known as Mount Adrayac. Adrayac is not only the name of the mountain, but also that of a tribe of aarakocra that inhabit its upper reaches. This large and powerful tribe, numbering well into the hundreds, is unlike the aarakocra of the Tablelands - rather than the drab black and brown plumage of carrion eaters, its aarakocra are magnificent shades of silver and blue.

These aarakocra are familiar visitors to Gilland, and will sometimes visit the other ports of the Anattan coast. They have little to trade, so they offer their services as aerial guides and scouts to mariners. An aarakocra, of course, would be no match for the ferocious Dragon Warriors of Ur Draxa, but for a curious superstition that has gained credence with the mariners of Anattan: they believe the great rocs are unwilling to attack the aarakocra, perhaps seeing them as kindred. Many ships now hire on aarakocra, not because they particularly value them as scouts, but because they believe an aarakocra in the crew could protect their vessel from a raid by Dragon Warriors.

This has quickly brought newfound wealth to the Adrayac aarakocra, with their services more valued than ever, but this is not the only change to their society. The Cerulean Storm has been greeted with reverence by the Adrayac flock, who believe its advent fulfills an ancient prophecy: the storm, they believe, will scour their enemies from the sky and renew the soil, leaving the aarakocra as the lords of the sky. It is not just the Adrayac that believe in this prophecy -

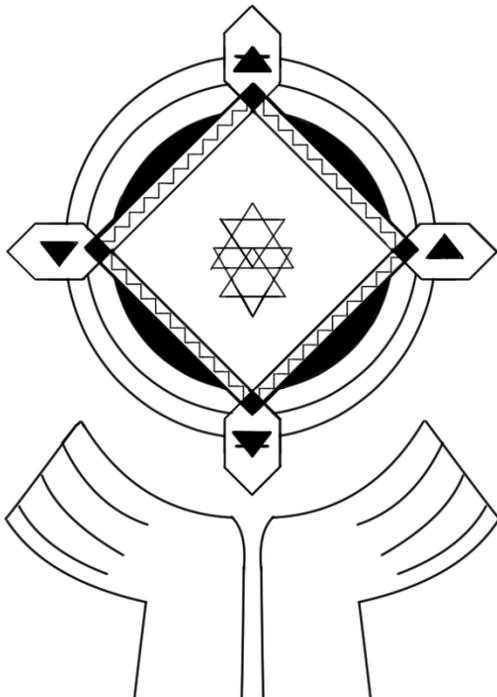
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mariners hoping for the aarakocra's protection against aerial raids choose to believe in it as well, at least for the duration of their voyages.

Xarednay

The southern city of Xarednay is the most unusual of the Anattan Coast and - we hoped - our possible salvation. The city is of large size and all of it appears inhabited; I'd guess at least twenty thousand people live here. Travelers told us the city had been a small ruin only a few generations ago, but had grown in power so rapidly under the governance of its fundamentalist elemental clerics that it had begun to resist the Dragon's entreaties. It was widely rumored the Dragon was preparing to teach the city a lesson before his disappearance.

We thus hoped that, as refugees and mutineers from the Dragon's city, we could approach Xarednay on foot and would be welcomed. It was quite a large settlement, certainly more of a city than a town. We saw humans, dwarves, and even a few muls working the fields; they watched us carefully, but allowed us to proceed. At a distance, we could see the heavily fortified walls and gleaming towers of the city.



Xarednay

The men and women of Xarednay's army were a sight to behold. Unlike the field workers, they were each infused with elemental energy, with waves rolling in their eyes, wind dancing in their hair, fire rippling along their veins, or with skin like stone. Some say elemental people like these are called ukoven, others say genasi. Whatever they were called, they were somehow infused with the very elements themselves. The one thing I noticed from my encounter was the army's focus on elemental balance - the sixteen-strong patrol had exactly four soldiers of each element, and what I took for the patrol leaders - stronger and fiercer than the others - were again made up of four soldiers, one of each element.

The patrol did not attack us, but they did ask where we were from. We admitted we were refugees from the Dragon's City. If we'd given a different answer, I believe we would have been allowed to enter the city as visitors; in general, the city seems open to trade. Instead, we were escorted into the city under careful guard. What little we saw of the city intrigued us - though its buildings appeared ancient and weathered, the earth, air, fire, and water motifs carved everywhere were not.

As silt crew out of Balic, I'd heard rumors of an elemental settlement of some sort known as Euripis. Initially, I believed that Xarednay and Euripis may have been one and the same, but I soon learned this was not the case. People from Euripis travel here - the two places have strong ties, it seems - but we were also told Euripis is countless miles to the west, across the silt. Long after our first visit to the city, we came to believe that, among all the ships leaving the Anattan Coast in the direction of the Tablelands, only ships leaving Xarednay for distant Euripis were allowed to arrive at their destination - it seems this was the only connection between the cultures of the eastern and western lands permitted under the Dragon's dominion. But even with the Dragon's demise, the passage westward is not easily achieved, or at least it certainly was not to us. We begged the council in Xarednay to accept us as refugees and permit us passage to Euripis. Some sort of four-person tribunal, one for each of the elements, debated our fate in front

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of us, but we could not understand the strange otherworldly language they spoke. It seems some of them considered our request, but they ultimately decided to turn us away, and we learned little else of the city, or the lands that lie to the west and southwest of it.

Meridional Forest

South of Xarednay lies a strange and ancient forest. The Meridional Forest is dense with trees, their roots thickly coiled, and filled with hostile carnivorous plants. It forms a verdant, yet hostile, barrier between the Anattan Coast and lands further east from whatever lies further south.

Early in our journey, our group of survivors boasted a defiler, a young apprentice from the Dragon's City

who had not used his magic thus far in our journey. The forest was not the first vegetation we'd seen - we'd just left the verdant farms outside Xarednay, as a matter of fact - but the sight of the Meridional Forest overwhelmed him. You could see a sort of hunger for power in his eyes; he was drawn to the forest. It was some sort of trap. At the forest's edge, he turned down his palm to gather energy for a spell, and at first his eyes lit up with the ecstasy defilers sometimes show when they rip the life force out of the land. But his eyes abruptly bulged and panic spread across his face. His hands and arms began to shrivel, and sores formed on his body. Somehow, attempting to rip energy from this forest had proved toxic or he had drawn too much too fast, and now the energy he had collected was killing him rather than powering any sort of spell. To our collective horror, he collapsed into convulsions and perished later that evening.

The Dragon's Tail

The Dragon's Tail is a chain of islands that stretches out toward mainland Anattan from what was until

recently known as the Valley of Dust and Fire. These three islands carry a chain of low mountains, with a



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number of minor peaks poking up just barely above the silt between them. Though generally inhospitable, they form by far the easiest route to and from the Dragon's now ruined domain. There is little mystery in the fact that those desperate refugees escaping the Valley found passage through this route in the greatest numbers. What follows is the knowledge I have since gathered about these islands.

Kybe

Once a thriving port city on the northeastern shore of the island of the same name, now there is little sign of life anywhere on the northern half of the island, which lies buried in mounds of gray powder from the Great Ash Storm. Though long abandoned and in ruin, the city's crumbling white stone buildings emerging up from the ash still hold the memory of grace and beauty. Near the center of the ruin stands a palace of sparkling blue stone beside a towering ziggurat.

The southern shore of the island is partially protected by the mountains running down its length, but is stalked by a tribe of braxat. At its easternmost tip stands a tall, well-preserved tower which periodically emanates a bright light that can be seen miles away, known as the Tower of Light. Very few have made the journey to this island in living memory, but stories of bizarre supernatural events abound: possessions, visions, disappearances, even madness. I spoke to an old man living in a village near Xarednay who claimed his mother had traveled here from another world, emerging bruised and delirious from the tower into this burnt land.

Ilyarth

The middle island of the Dragon's Tail is known to be a roc breeding ground absolutely teeming with life. Whether the rocs are rewilded from the Draxans' prized mounts, or of the stock originally tamed, I do not know, but surely there must be some connection. On the eastern shore of the island is a village inhabited by a tribe of deformed and hostile giants who are quick to hurl boulders at anything that displeases them. The giants are said to be the pathetic, though dangerous, remnants of what was once a powerful and dangerous force throughout the region. They are quite insular, spurning all contact with the outside world.

Onux

The southernmost island of the Dragon's Tail is the largest of the lot and has the most varied terrain of the three, with wide stretches of stony barrens and an elaborate maze of canyons, and small pockets of verdant terrain haphazardly tucked in between fields of rubble. The rains from the Cerulean Storm have drenched the island, which is now covered in ponds and soggy patches of mud and grass. The island is overrun with beasts of all sorts, including herds of erdlands, swarms of tembo, wandering jankz, crystal spiders, and scorpions. There are also many poisonous or even predatory plants. Nikaal and ssurrans have been seen on the island, with the latter said to live near an ancient fortress atop a tall hill, located near the island's center. The rocs nesting on nearby Ilyarth apparently hunt here regularly, and pose a great danger to travelers who leave themselves exposed.

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Chapter 2 - The Sundered Lands

After being rebuffed at Xarednay in our quest to return to the Tablelands, we headed inland. We found ourselves in a sprawling desertsic region known as the Sundered Lands. A smattering of villages and peoples may be found throughout this largely desolate region, mostly clinging to existence on the margins of the world. Tribes of powerful psionic warriors stalk these deserts. They live as raiders for the most part, as there are few opportunities to survive off the land the further inland one goes, merely doing what they can to band together and survive in this hostile land.

Ultimately, we discovered that the Sundered Lands are hemmed in to the south and east by enormous mountain ranges that are something of the mirror image of the Ringing Mountains, encircling almost the entire region with peaks that soar miles into the sky. At first we traveled the foothills of these mountains, hoping to find a pass to the south, and it only gradually became apparent to us that we were closed in. The enormity of the mountain range is such that it is known by different names throughout its extent - as the

Mooncrest Mountains in the south, and as the Jua Wall further north - but it is in truth one continuous mass.

The people here were fearful of what lies in the region's southern reaches, speaking of a great black mist blanketing the land. No one seemed to know what lay beneath the mists, save perhaps a society of sorcerers in their nearby mountain redoubt. To everyone we encountered, the mountains were sources of terror that one would be wise to avoid. The only major mountain pass of which we heard - reached by heading east, even further away from our goal - was said to lead to Anattan's own hinterlands, which we'd heard were every bit as desolate and deadly as the hinterlands lying to the west of the Ringing Mountains.

After a journey of some weeks, we realized that our only hope of reaching the Tablelands would be to turn back north - directly into the warped territory known as the Spiral Lands.

Patchwork Deserts

The Boundary Flats

To the east of the mudflats surrounding Gilland lies a windswept, nearly featureless plain where little grows. The only landmarks are the occasional anatta that protrude from the ground. This expanse, known as the Boundary Flats, separates the Spiral Dunes in the north from the Salton Sands in the south. The region is overrun with nomadic tribes, and though distantly related to the peoples of the rift plains beyond Tibbli, inhabiting a more unforgiving land in the shadow of Gilland's great wealth has made them far more savage and wild. The people of the Boundary Flats live largely off the fruits of raiding, and maintain an uneasy peace with the small nearby port city of Xilm, through which they conduct their only legitimate trade.

Has'ford

A well-fortified but otherwise modest village, Has'ford sits on the easternmost edge of the fertile region surrounding Gilland, where the Spiral River begins to spill into the mudflats. A contingent of soldiers are stationed here, guarding a supply and staging ground

for caravans heading out across the Boundary Flats. The farms around Has'ford are mostly dedicated to supplying the village and its garrison, and are frequently the site of raids by and skirmishes with the nomads of the Boundary Flats.

The Spiral Dunes

Winds coming down off of the Dataran Plateau to the east, the Zathe Plateau to the north, and the Western Guardians to the west all meet here to create minor yet frequent sandstorms, and to shape the dunes into the unusual configurations that give this land its name. There are said to be at least a few hidden oases in the otherwise barren Spiral Dunes. Along the region's long coastline can be found the ancient wrecks of a number of vessels, as well as the severely weathered ruins of many ancient villages and towns. Today it seems very little lives in the area, though tales of giant crabs grabbing people off of wrecks and out of ruins and dragging them into the silt are common.



Khormen

The Khormen

There are dozens of tribes of nomads and herdsmen that reside on the interior of the Anattan continent. Some attempt raids of the coastal settlements, and the most brazen will even attack the edges of the sprawling mudflats around Gilland, but none are more powerful or feared than the great tribe of Khormen.

Khormen raiders have been reported nearly everywhere in the region, with their numbers reaching into the thousands. Traveling in large parties, on mounts both fast and strange, they are known to appear out of nowhere with such force that their opponents often surrender before blood is even shed. The leaders of the tribe are said to be psionic warriors of great power, capable of overwhelming opponents equally well with the Way or brawn. The Khormen are too large to be an extended family, which is the way of many tribes, but rather seem to have grown by welcoming young men and women into their ranks if they demonstrate an aptitude for both physical and mental combat.

It is believed that somewhere - deep in the plains and deserts of the Sundered Lands - the Khormen maintain a great encampment known as Khobe. I say 'believed' for, while it is certain that the Khormen place great importance on Khobe, no one I spoke to claimed to have been there. It is perhaps merely an assumption that a tribe so large must have a base of some sort.

The Salton Sands

A mixture of salt and sand laying in a great basin, the Salton Sands is one of the most unforgiving places on Athas. Nothing lives here, though there are some who come to gather the salt. Sometimes small pools of briny water can be found by those foolish or desperate enough to attempt to cross through the basin, but I would caution anyone from drinking this water as it will only hasten your demise. Curiously, the shells of giant crabs can be found throughout the area, which undoubtedly feeds into the legends of giant crabs that are often told in the wider region. These legends also say this vast area was long ago filled with water.

Xilm

The old and fiercely independent port village of Xilm owes its existence to its careful observation of customs and the unintentional protection offered by a nearby lawgiver. The village operates as a port for silt skimmers which easily travel down the Kes'trekel Estuary. The people of Xilm are highly superstitious, requiring all who visit them to carry out their particular customs. There are a great number of giant shells adorning the buildings of the town.

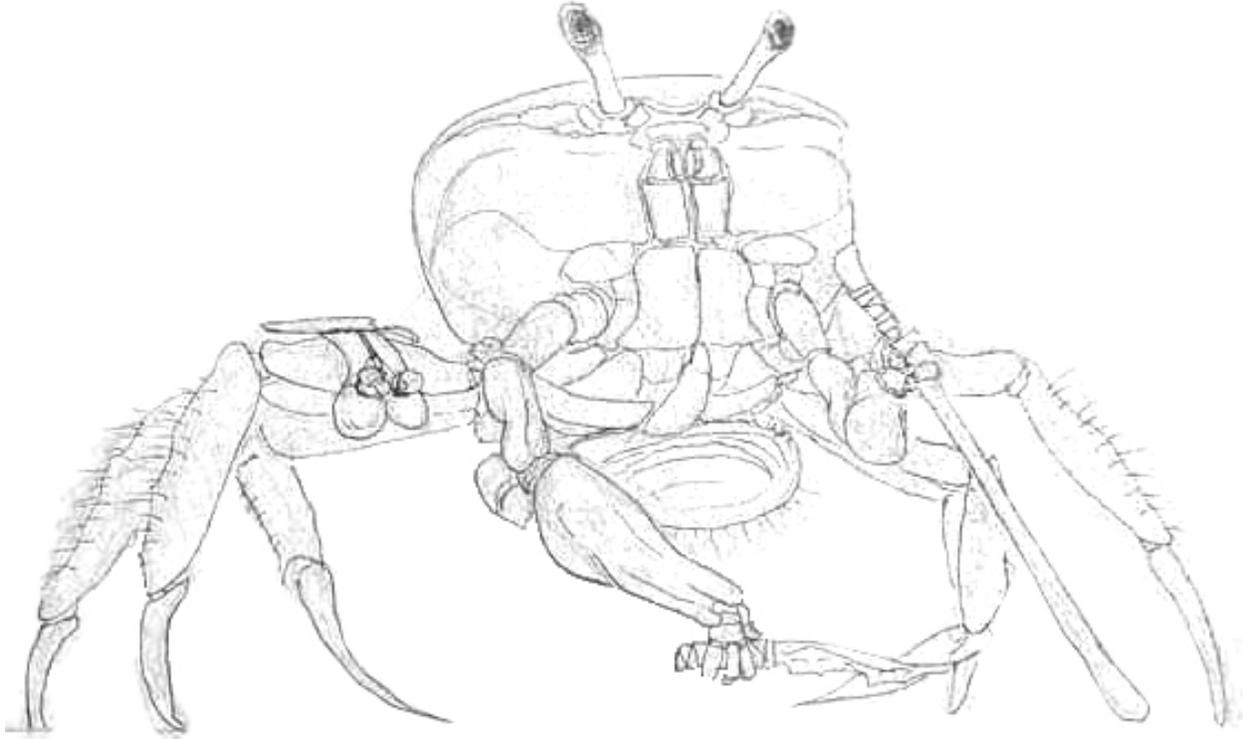
Kes'trekel Estuary

The Kes'trekel Estuary separates the Sundered Lands from the lands surrounding Xarednay and the Meridional Forest to the south. Named for the large number of carrion birds that can be seen soaring above it and the nearby badlands, the estuary is quite long and shallow but still navigable. The estuary and surrounding badlands make a formidable barrier here, serving to isolate Xarednay from the rest of the region. While we decided to not examine them too closely, there were a great number and variety of rotting corpses in the area. Perhaps the strange creatures came from the Meridional Forest to the south to die here, or were attracted for some other reason, but we were unwilling to investigate further.

The Dataran Plateau

Large, rugged, and filled with shallow canyons and valleys, the Dataran Plateau stretches from Tibbli in the south up to the Taillin Spine in the northeast and Entamoor in the northwest. The region is a patchwork of terrains, with scrublands, low rising mountains,

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stony barrens, and boulder fields all tangled up in a trackless and inhospitable mess. Enormous anatta sprout from the ground throughout the area, rising like great branchless stone trees. It is said that those entering the Dataran Plateau often fall prey to

madness, becoming delusional and turning on their companions or falling prey to bizarre obsessions. To make matters worse, the area is filled with deadly predators and dangerous creatures.

Mooncrest Mountains

Running south from the Dataran Plateau, curving to the west near the Pass of Thar'Aresh, and then extending out toward the Silt Sea is a range known as the Mooncrest Mountains. A bleak and imposing range, they form most of the southern and eastern boundaries of the Sundered Lands. By day the Mooncrests seem lifeless and somber, but at night moonlight filters down through these mountains, casting eerie shadows. Nocturnal beasts are said to stalk them in great numbers and the people that live near this area seem afraid to venture out at night. Though not as high and imposing as the mountains of the Jua Wall, the Mooncrests still serve to separate this region from areas to the south.

Ilmore and the Ruins of Haadragor

Located east of the Salton Sands, the remote village of Ilmore lies nested in a relatively fertile mountain valley, sheltered by a pair of peaks that stand apart from the surrounding mountain range. The people who live here eke out an existence herding and trading. Although the village is a small and remote one, small caravans occasionally make the trek here to trade for the rare and usual goods the villagers sometimes acquire. The people of Ilmore typically avoid the margins of the valley at night, as deadly predators are said to lurk there, but there are also claims of diminutive figures with gleaming eyes and clad in tattered dark cloaks haunting the foothills after dark.

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About 10 miles northeast of the village lies the ruins of a once great fortification, now filled with crumbling and unrecognizable statuary. A complex of chambers and passageways lies under the ruins, which the villagers are reluctant to explore too deeply, for many who dared do so have either disappeared or been later found wandering through the valley, bruised, confused, and wearing nothing but tattered rags, with no memory of what had occurred. Deeply ingrained superstitions surround the ruins, including rites of offering in which villagers leave valuables outside the entrance to the complex. What goods they leave are based on dreams that the villagers are said to receive after beseeching the “Shadow People of Haadragor” to grant their requests.

Tor’Lem and the Pass of Thar’Aresh

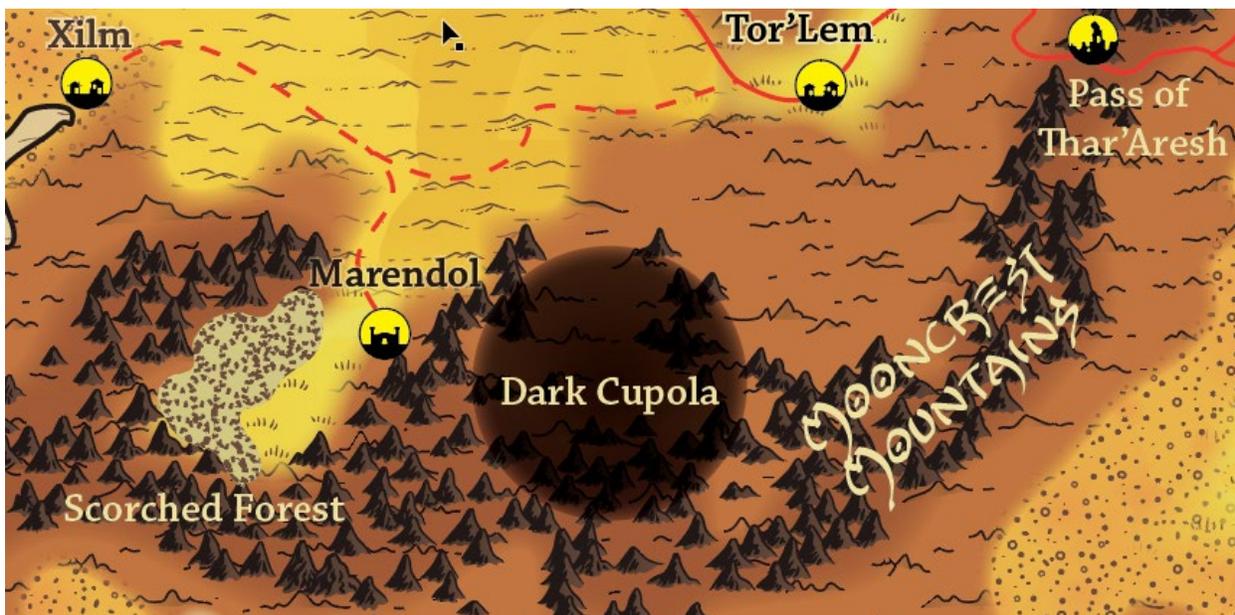
The prosperous village of Tor’Lem sits at the far edge of a long grassy valley that rises up toward the Jua Wall. Tor’Lem is an important trade village in the region, located about 40 miles from the Pass of Thar’Aresh, the only access point to the lands beyond the mountain range. Exotic fruits and spices from these hinterlands are sold here, as well as objects of art and dangerous contraband. We saw many strange people here, including elves unlike any I had ever encountered in the Tablelands, possessing animal-like features and apparently outcasts from their eastern homeland.

The Pass of Thar’Aresh is a long winding road through the mountains that form the southeastern border of the Sundered Lands. To my knowledge, no other passable trade route connects Anattan to its hinterlands, and even here only small, nimble caravans are able to make the journey through the rubble-strewn terrain. There are apparently several ruined fortifications in the mountains that can serve as shelters for those journeying through the pass, though travellers should be on their guard for other things that may have already taken refuge there.

The Dark Cupola

One area within the Mooncrest Mountains is particularly feared, standing out as a true oddity in all my travels. From a distance, a heavy haze appears to hang over a part of the Mooncrests lying southeast of the Salton Sands, causing their base to seemingly disappear into the blurry desert sky.

As one travels closer to the area and its mysterious atmospheric phenomena, the base of the mountains still never come into focus – instead the haze is resolved as some sort of black mist or shadowy membrane, a dark umbral shroud blanketing miles upon miles of the land at the base of the mountains, forming a vast circle. From my own observations and the tales of other travellers, it is clear nothing has ever been observed emerging from the ineffable darkness – not flying creatures, nor people, nor even light or sound. No one knows what lies beyond, and those that dared to enter were never seen again. The darkness is



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known by many names throughout Anattan, but the nearby sorcerers call it the Dark Cupola. Rumors abound regarding what lies on the barrier's other side, from a twilight jungle paradise to the lair of strange and terrifying creatures.

Scorched Forest

Not far from the pall of the Dark Cupola, one can find the remains of a once-great forest that filled nearly an entire valley to the west. Now known as the Scorched Forest, it seems the entire woodland was just recently consumed by flames. Burned tree trunks, like thousands of black spires, poke out of a thick sea of ashes. There is new growth amid the burned trunks, and there are clear signs there have been efforts to help the forest recover, but the devastation was so complete that it may well be hundreds of years before it is fully restored, if such a thing is even possible.

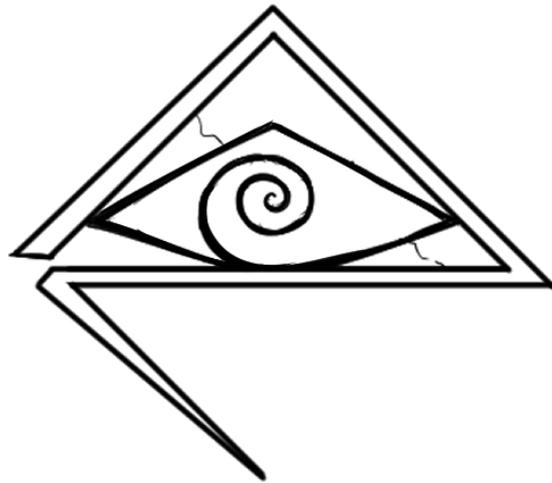
Marendol

If anyone knows the secrets of the nearby Dark Cupola or Scorched Forest, it may be the reclusive society of mages that live in the mountain fortress of Marendol.

Located on a mountain plateau of moderate elevation near the mouth of the valley containing the Scorched Forest, the fortress of Marendol is built out of a magnificent gray stone with lavender accent. The fortress consists of a tall central keep that can be seen from miles away, surrounded by a sprawling and partially-forested bailey containing many smaller buildings, and enclosed by a curtain wall that runs along the edge of the plateau.

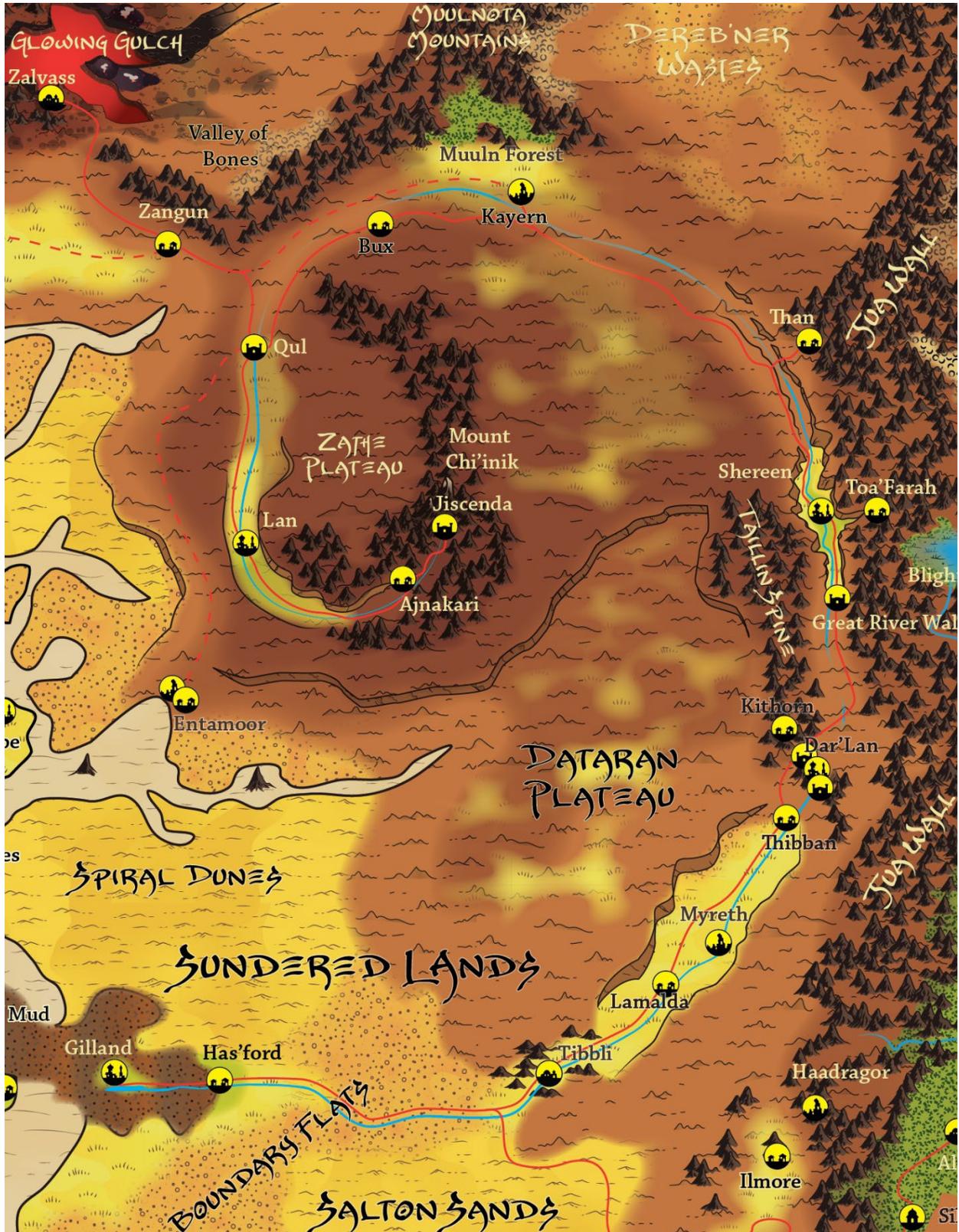
A narrow path, no more than a dozen feet wide in some places, leads to Marendol's gate. Visitors are generally welcome; the mages receive trade delegations with some regularity, and visitors with useful goods are allowed into the outer bailey, where there is a guesthouse and tavern. From inside, one can see that the buildings in this area are of much newer construction. What appears to be a forest from a distance is in fact a well-maintained orchard with abundant fruit growing on the trees' branches, and a dense foliage of gardened vegetables underneath.

Those who know of the mages regard them with great fear, and so we had assumed they were likely to be defilers, but the abundance of vegetation in their fortress suggests that they must instead be an unusual sect of preservers.



Marendol

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Chapter 3 - The Spiral Lands

When we first entered the Spiral Lands, we failed to grasp their true nature, for so vast is the breadth of the terrain. It is not immediately obvious that the land is continually twisting inward on itself – we only noticed the path ahead slightly rising and twisting to the left. But the farther we traveled, the more apparent this feature became until everything we observed around us - rock formations, dunes, even the region's long river - seemed to rise up and twisted to the left in a vast but tightening spiral, as if a vortex were pulling on the land and lifting it into the sky. Once we understood that we were traveling in a great spiral, it came to preoccupy our minds.

In the center of the region is an enormous mountain, known as Mount Chi'inik – easily the tallest I've ever seen. On clear days, the mountain can be seen for hundreds of miles, sometimes even visible as far away as Nobe or Tibbli. Spilling forth from the mountain is a river of running water, the likes of which exists nowhere else on Athas - as far as I know. Though far narrower than the Estuary of the Forked Tongue, for example, this river of water forms a difficult barrier for travel. Unlike an oasis, the river flows continuously downhill and can knock a person off his feet, making it far more treacherous to cross.

By the time we reached the Spiral Lands, it had been nearly a month since the Great Storm began, and the river was full. The contour of the land is such that when rains fall nearly anywhere in the region, the water ultimately gushes into the Spiral River. Travelers told us that before the storms, the river was rarely more than a trickle and would sometimes run entirely

dry for months at a time; this fullness of the river was new. Rains are normally welcome, but the slope of the Spiral acts to speed the water on its way downhill, and so even small rains quickly cascade into rapid floods, rushing across the parched earth and washing everything in its path on its way into the river.

Despite the lack of time or tools to accurately survey them - to say nothing of the vexing nature of the land here - I have come to surmise that the Spiral Lands cover an area roughly similar in size to the region stretching between the seven city-states of the Tablelands. The threats of thirst and heat exhaustion are uncommon in this region, but dangers still abound. Most notable is the madness which seems to await travelers who venture off the narrow band of civilization that follows the Great Spiral Road. The road follows the river and, though there are some routes, villages, and encampments that stray from this path, those who dwell in these lands live a precarious life. Travelling off the Spiral Road brings great risk, with many disappearing in the wilderness, never to be seen again, or losing all sense of purpose, place, and sanity.

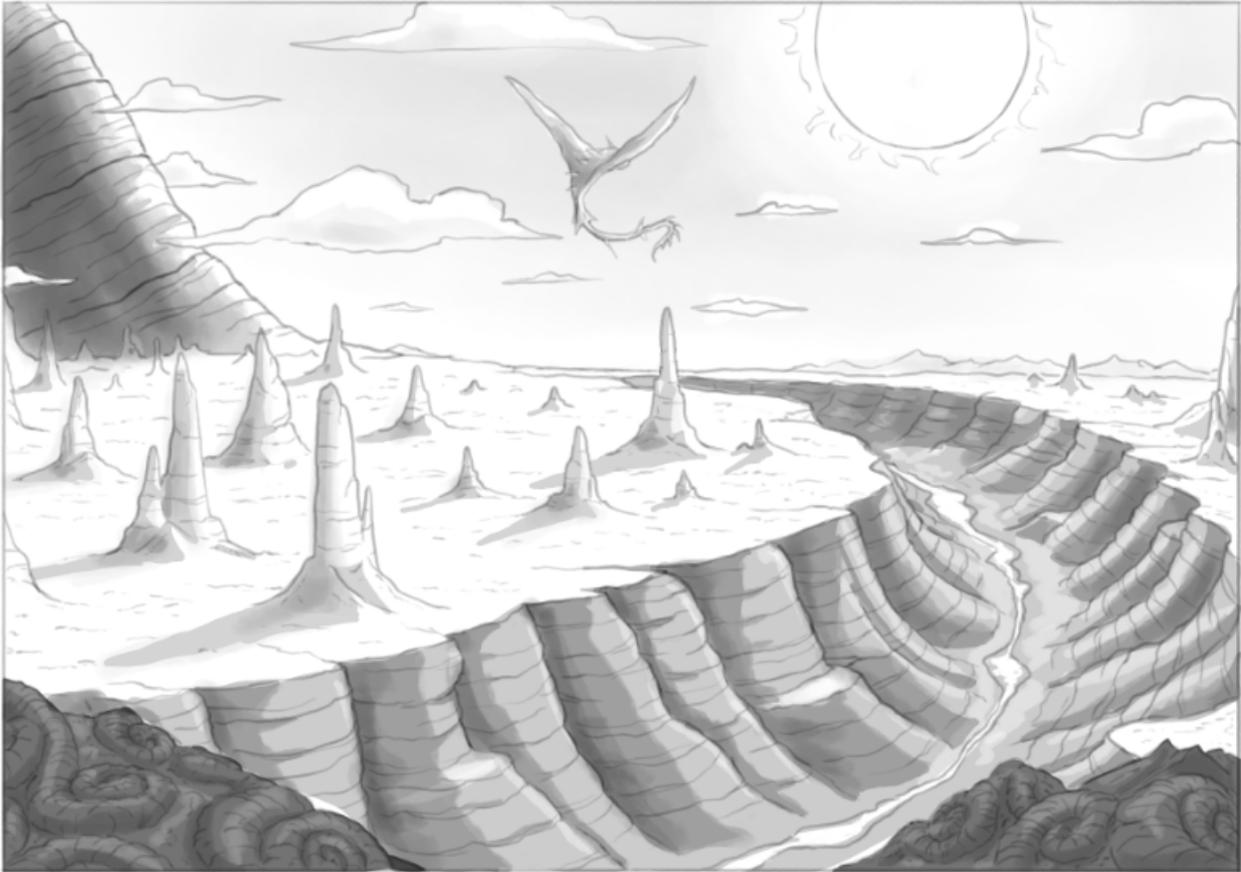
I am no sage, but the Spiral Lands do not feel like something created by the natural forces of wind and earth. It is as if some unknown force grabbed the land like a cloth and deliberately wrung it out. It is beyond the mind of someone like myself to imagine what could possibly twist the land itself to such a degree. But perhaps I am wrong; one of my companions pointed out that the simple sand mollusk grows its spiral shell with no apparent magic.

The Great Spiral Road and River

A seemingly impossible route stretches through this land, gently spiraling inward along its entire path. A series of canyons of varying breadth and depth make up this path for much of the way, opening up most grandly in the Sunken Plains which cleave the Dataran in two and again in the Great Valley of Lan near the highest reaches of the Zathe Plateau. A road and a river both follow this path, spiraling out from the base of Mount Chi'inik - where the mysterious holy city of Jiscenda houses Altire the Seer, the Dragon of the East - to the grand markets of Gilland where the river meets the Silt Sea.

The Great Spiral Road, or the Seers Way as it is also known, connects a series of villages, towns, fortifications, and cities, roughly following the ancient banks of the Great Spiral River. Wide and well traveled, the Great Spiral Road is smooth and easy to follow along most of its length, though there are notable exceptions, including the twisting canyonlands leading up to Tibbli, the narrow path cut into the rock leading through the Taillin Spine past Dar'Lan, several rubble-strewn stretches in the Dereb'ner Wastes, and the series of snaking paths leading up from Ajnakari to Jiscenda. While much of

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the Great Spiral Road remains unchanged since ancient times, its route has been altered in two places to avoid the ruins of once beautiful cities now overrun by evil spirits. These detours cause the road to stray from the course of the Great Spiral River, and on them you begin to feel the pull of madness that tugs at the corners of your mind in the wilderness of the Spiral Lands.

Three great bridges spanned the canyons of the Seers Way, and I saw in them evidence of the former glory of the Great Spiral River. Two of them still serve to grant passage from one side of the river to the other over great canyons, while the third is impassable, its center collapsed to rubble. Though the river once flowed much stronger than it does today, the Dragon Squalls have renewed its vigor considerably. Until recently, there were large stretches where the river disappeared underground or dried up, only running weakly or seasonally, but now the storms have swelled its waters, causing flooding and destruction all along its length wherever people had settled closer to its diminished banks or where small springs welled up from its subterranean flow.

Altire the Seer

One cannot discuss the Spiral Lands without first saying a word about Altire the Seer. At first, when I heard people speak of the Seer, I didn't realize it was a real being that was being invoked, as the caravan guards I traveled with whispered prayers to "The Seer" while gesturing over their chests in a quick spiral pattern. Similarly, when I was warned against being swallowed by the "great maw of the Spiral" by what I thought was a mad beggar in the market of Gilland, it registered only the barest hint of curiosity and confusion in my mind. As it slowly itched at the back of my mind, however, I grew bold enough to inquire about the curious customs and phrases. Many were either unwilling to talk candidly or had few details, only saying things such as: "The Great Beast at the end of the road may devour or bless you, but only the desperate and foolish seek his audience." or "Altire the Seer sees all, even as he slumbers; nothing hides from his ever-watching eyes." But a merchant was more forthcoming after I agreed to purchase some of her wares, and so I was told of Altire, his symbol, and those who carry it.

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It seems that Gilland is something of a special case, as it is both the outermost settlement of the Spiral Lands and an important part of the Anattan Coast. There is little sign of Altire's presence there, with all power instead seeming to rest with the Trade Lords and Gilland's ruler, Passarra the Silver Queen.

In Tibbli, the second great city of the Spiral Lands, I was granted the opportunity to speak with a spiralcaster, one of the region's templar-like priests who carry Altire's symbol. When he was pointed out to me, it was as a servant of Yuddh, the ruler of the unusual fortress town of Tibbli. The spiralcasters, I learned, carry both the mark of their city and the mark of Altire, whether openly or hidden. When I asked him about this, I was told: "Yuddh is my queen, and I obey her will in all things, but all who enter the Spiral serve the will of The Seer. Some simply do so more knowingly and willingly." Whether this truly is the case I cannot tell you, but I got similar responses from others along the way.

The sum of what I managed to gather about this mysterious ruler follows, and I have done my best to discern truth from mere rumor. Altire the Seer, also

sometimes referred to as The Beast of the Spiral, The Devouring Eyes, or The Dreamer, is horrible of form and countenance. Altire appears to visitors as an immense creature with three large piercing eyes, an impossibly wide fang-filled slit of a mouth, and two gapping nostrils smeared across the intervening space. He is little more than this, a massive deformed wreck the width and height of a mekillot, but immobile besides his massive face and the ability to turn slowly in place within his great chamber. It is said that he can open his great maw wide enough to swallow a braxat whole, and he is known to devour whom he pleases with a flick of his impossibly long and prehensile tongue. Though asleep much of the time, it is said when The Seer is awake, his sharp eyes will bore into anyone they meet, with his mere presence effortlessly overwhelming all but the most powerful of minds.

As I traveled further along the road past Dar'Lan, I began to encounter pilgrims, many of whom carried spiral shells sewn onto strips of red cloth, heading toward Jiscenda where the Seer's palace lies. Those who had heard the calling, those who had lost their place or way, the desperate, and the bold banded

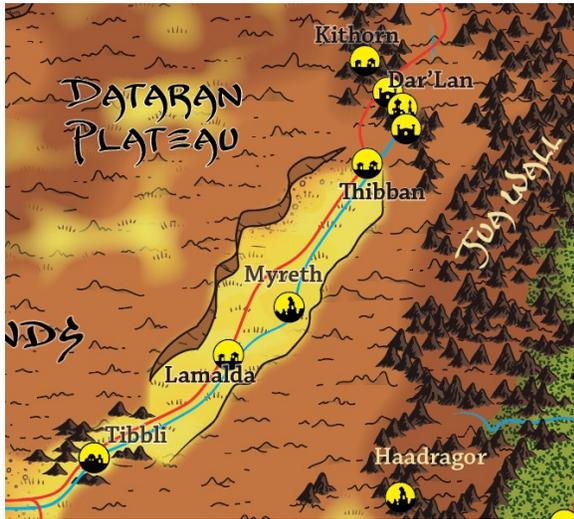


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together into groups of increasing size as they traveled further up the Spiral, with the hope of reaching Altire's chambers. I know not why, but many seemed willing, even eager, to offer their lives up to the Beast of the Spiral. However, most people - at least until I drew

close to his den in the shadow of Mount Chi'inik - seemed to only invoke or consider Altire the Seer as a sort of blessing or curse, a habitual superstition and not an immediate presence or power in their lives.

The Outer Spiral



Tibbli

Ancient Tibbli, called the Hidden Gateway by the merchants I traveled with, is something of a natural wonder. Situated within a range of heavily weathered sandstone mountains and hidden beyond a veritable maze of weathered canyons, many a traveler has become lost on the twisting and turning road to Tibbli. It is said that its ruler, the powerful sorceress Yuddh, is able to twist the canyon paths to her will to break the spirit of unwelcome travelers. Locals claim that Yuddh delights in this cruelty, savoring the despair of the lost.

While traveling through the twisting canyons, we were frequently beset by the appearance of dangerous creatures in the distance, though mercifully none approached us. It seems this road is somehow protected from such dangers, as long as one does not stray from its path. When we finally came upon the town, it seemed to come upon us without warning, with the natural stone archway that serves as its western gate opening into a great plaza.

Beyond the Twisted Gate, as it is known, lies the Grand Arrival plaza. I was told this immense space was once a thriving market, but what I saw was perhaps only a few dozen people and a scattering of tents within a

huge bowl-like canyon. Though it wasn't obvious at first, the walls of the great canyon are filled with arching windows, doorways, and passages, as well as a number of wide, deeply shaded balconies. Bread, cheese, fruit, and cloth seemed to be the primary items of trade in the market.

We did not venture far into Tibbli beyond the Grand Arrival, but what I did see was a series of narrow avenues and multitiered compounds and dwellings carved directly from the rock. Atop many of these compounds were well-tended gardens bearing fruit trees and ornamentals. Basements descended further into the canyon floor as well, holding cool cellars and storehouses. At times we could hear the rushing of water clearly through the rock and feel moisture in the air. It is clear that the Great Spiral River flows somewhere through or underneath the settlement, though I could not see it with my own eyes. There were elaborate reliefs carved into the stone everywhere we went in Tibbli, all following some beautiful abstract language.

In stark contrast to Gilland's colorful raucous character, Tibbli seemed mostly quiet, empty, and mysterious. Set deep within the canyons, the people are protected from the harsh sun except during midday, when everyone avoids the streets and open spaces. When the sun set, the town once again came alive. Although I was told several thousand people live here, I never saw more than two dozen at a time outside of the Grand Arrival. The people we did encounter were always polite, though most were reserved and closed off. The local dress, made of very long wound strips of cloth, covers the bodies of the people almost completely, and is even wrapped over the lower face and head at times. Most residents' garb was very plain, coming in pale and mid-range earthtones, though some were adorned with long strings of glass beads and brass bubbles, and more richly-colored and woven fabrics. Those that serve Queen Yuddh were uniformly dressed in black with their heads and faces uncovered, looking stern and alert.

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Legend has it that the Thorn of Tibbli, as Yuddh is sometimes known, is said to be able to appear in a variety of forms, though most iconically as a fearsome and striking woman with large feathered wings and a serpent's tail. This was the form she wore when she first appeared, descending one day into the midst of the Grand Arrival during a rare conjunction of the moons, bearing the mercy of rain at her back and fire in her eyes. The throngs gathered in the market on that day immediately bowed before her terrible glory, and she has ruled over Tibbli ever since.

Lamalda

Beyond the sandstone canyonlands of Tibbli lies a great open plain bounded by rugged highlands. This long river valley extends beyond the curve of the Spiral River itself, with several small ruins lying along its length and one much larger ruin where the Spiral Road veers away from the river to give the ruins a wide berth. Several days' travel out of Tibbli, we came upon the village of Lamalda, built near an eroded cliff leading down to the muddy and overflowing Spiral River.

The land here is more fertile than the barren Boundary Flats and is blessed by occasional rain showers, but is still dry and prone to fire. The people of Lamalda have built a settlement for themselves here and irrigate meager fields to supplement the livestock they herd. The village is as much a gathering place and shelter in times of distress for the local farmers as it is a true population center, as it seems that most of the population spreads out to graze their animals, forage for roots and berries, and hunt the wild game of the region for much of the year. From time to time, dangerous predators come down from the highlands in great numbers, and the warriors and hunters of Lamalda have become well-practiced in the setting of traps and ambushes to slay or drive them back.

The locals told us that Lamalda was once a mere trade post, little more than a fortified stop, on the route between Tibbli and the now ruined city of Myreth. But there were a great many people and animals gathered when we came upon the village, with a number of domed tent-like structures erected within a walled area that extended far beyond the stacked stone buildings that form the core of the town. There was much music and rejoicing, and many animals were being slaughtered in preparation for a great feast. Blood was smeared across the chests and faces of young hunters and warriors who were engaged in

ritual combat that seemed to involve dance and acrobatics as much as swordplay. Well over a thousand individuals were gathered here. The leader of Lamalda, Ashgollan, seemed tense and weary despite the celebrations, as he was apparently a reluctant replacement for the former legate, who had recently been dragged off in the night by a horrid beast.

Myreth

Once the heart of the Sunken Plains, Myreth is now a forbidden ruin surrounded by dark legends. It is said that the Dragon destroyed the city in ancient times, leaving a dark curse upon it. After passing over Tibbli, the Dragon tore Myreth asunder, casting its people out to wander the Sunken Plains. Those who now venture too near are afflicted by the same ravenous madness that once consumed the Dragon.

The warrior spirit of the people of the Sunken Plains may be an effort to tame and root out this curse. The telltale sign of someone newly set on by this affliction is said to be a golden flame seen in the eyes that matches the Dragon's own radiant breath. Those who fall to it are said to hunger for the taste of human flesh - after they taste it, there is no coming back. If they are not quickly put down, it is said that their forms and minds twist over time into terrifying, shadowy forms that stalk the plains when the moons are absent.

Thibban

The elevation begins to rise again at the northeastern end of the Sunken Plains, with the land growing more rugged and rocky. As one travels up into these foothills, they come upon the village of Thibban, set about a day's travel from the fortress city of Dar'Lan. It's clear Thibban was once a larger and more important location - several rings of walls surround it, with the outermost wall crumbling and in total disrepair. An old market space sits next to a ruined part of town that now houses dangerous vermin and criminals.

The Spiral River runs near the edge of the ruins, through a gorge with a stone bridge. This area, though now lying outside of the village proper, has a well-maintained path leading to it and still features a well-staffed guardhouse. A smaller path - evidently too small for a proper caravan - runs up along the side of the gorge, climbing directly up to the cliffs on which Dar'Lan sits, suggesting a more direct connection between the village and fortress city, while the Great

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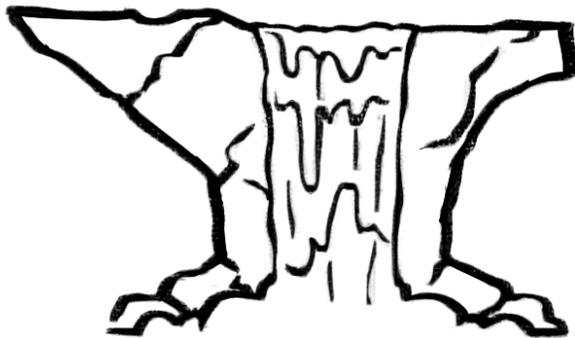
Spiral Road swings wide to follow a gentler and more circuitous path to the north.

Laying between the second and third walls, the village boasts a smaller but still active marketplace that houses a constantly burning pyre at its very center. The winds are strong here, causing the flames to dance violently, the flickering light casting shifting shadows among the surrounding buildings at night. The largest buildings are three stories, appearing oddly fragile, though most of the buildings are squat solid-looking stone structures. The people here mirror the architecture, with some seeming to have a fire in their eyes but looking oddly fragile, while others are squat and solid yet windblown in appearance.

The leader of Thibban is a zealous Fire cleric named Ki-rah, appointed regent of the village by the ruler of Dar'lan. The people here view Ki-rah with a mixture of fear, devotion, disgust, and joy, though none seem willing to speak against her. It is said that she is keen to use her position of power to cleanse the village of what she calls "the blight," frequently burning defilers and mutants in the pyre at the center of town in grand spectacles. The unfortunate victims are often brought in from the surrounding countryside or other villages near Dar'lan.

Dar'lan

Deep within the mountains known as the Taillin Spine, the fortress city of Dar'lan sits wedged between three rocky peaks whose tops have been leveled and fortified. The city is laid out in three crescent-shaped tiers that rise one above another, with much of it cut from the granite of the mountains. There are two approaches to the city, one to the south near the base of the cliffs and one from the northwest that branches off from the Great Spiral Road. Both approaches are decorated in gruesome displays of capital punishment.



Dar'lan

The great outer gates fully block the pass leading to the city from the south. Nearly a hundred feet high, they slope gradually outward with a rounded edge at the top. When we passed through these gates, they stood wide open, held by supports that could be removed at a moment's notice to send them crashing closed. Inside this outer gateway is a long and relatively straight mountain pass leading to the city's main gates, which are similarly imposing. Beyond the gates, the natural pass is slowly replaced by a cut and carved road until it becomes a square tunnel through the mountain, eventually emptying out into a large open courtyard at the southeastern end of the city which serves as the city's market district. Walking out into this courtyard, one can see the rest of the city rising up into the surrounding cliffs.

On the far side of the courtyard, a sheer cliff drops nearly 200 feet into the mountains and canyons below. At the base of this cliff sits a heavily fortified gateway with a set of wide stairs snaking down to meet it, as well as a small road that leads down to Thibban. An elevator is set into the cliff that, amazingly, was once powered by the flow of water, or so I was told, though it now relies on muscle power and the counterbalancing of goods being sent down the cliff. Apparently, it rises up directly into the city, with the latter part of its path entirely encased in surrounding rock.

I was told that Dar'lan serves as a great stronghold built to shelter the people of this land from the Dragon's rage. Even inside the excessively protected city, numerous towers and defenses can be found. But to me and those I traveled with, it felt like more of a prison than a fortress: gray, harsh, and unforgiving. Outside the relatively friendly and colorful atmosphere of the market, the people - mostly Lan - were sullen and severe. This was where I first encountered the presence of the Ghav-etuil. It seemed as well that there was far more city than people to inhabit it, with the many empty buildings and streets giving the place a grim, haunted feel. This was not at all helped by the corpses set on pikes along the route leading up and into the city, some of whom continued to move and moan.

The ruler of Dar'lan, Viatathen, the "Master of Purity," is both feared and respected. The head of the Watchers, a psionic police force operating both openly and in secret throughout the Spiral, she also commands a large military force which patrols as far as the outer reaches of the Spiral. Her elite soldiers are all equipped with iron weapons from the nearby mines controlled

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by the city. Viatathen herself is a small, quiet, and plain-looking woman by all accounts, with dark hair and eyes. But she is said to be a master interrogator, and an immensely powerful mindbender.

As refugees from the Dragon's City, we were interrogated by Viatathen's minions at length about what we knew. A particular subject of interest was the Lord Assassin, who oversaw Ur Draxa's network of spies and rogues. Her minions were desperate for any information about whether he was active in Anattan. It was clear that our interrogators feared the Lord Assassin had indeed survived and was plotting machinations against them. It was a distressing thought – what if the Lord Assassin's network had gone rogue and now deployed its skills only to advance its own ambitions? What quickly became apparent to our interrogators, however, was that we had nothing to hide, for this was a topic about which we truly knew nothing. We were then allowed to continue on our way.

The Master of Purity seems to have a major grudge against the Enlightened Kaman, ruler of Shereen, and it is said the two have warred several times in the past. With recent major acts of aggression from both sides, the tension between the peoples of the two cities is clearly evident. It is said that Viatathen receives visions from Altire the Seer even as he slumbers, and claims to enact his will, rooting out traitors, filth, and other mysterious threats, but Kaman is known to make similar claims to very different purposes.

Although there is little crime in Dar'Lan, soldiers are everywhere, and even the people themselves appear to be always watching each other, with no one quite sure who is a spy for Viatathen. The consequences for crime are severe, with the accused often disappearing, never to be seen again. But perhaps worse than the Disappeared are the Reborn. Those found guilty of conspiracy, insurrection, or treason are taken away for a time then returned, utterly loyal to Dar'Lan and Viatathen. The Reborn serve as a chilling public reminder of the presence and power of the Watchers.

The Jua Wall

When the Mooncrest Mountains reach the Spiral Lands, the peaks nearly double in height and the range takes on a new name – the Jua Wall. With the same reddish appearance from a distance as the Ringing Mountains, the Wall's highest peaks also boast visible snow and ice caps, and it is said that the trickle of melting snow feeds a forest on the mountains' far side. The Jua Wall forms the entire eastern border of the Spiral Lands, and continues hundreds of miles further north, where it also forms the eastern border of the Anattan Wastes, with the range ultimately disappearing into the Sea of Silt far to the north.

The Taillin Spine

A band of mountains running almost directly north to south along the inside of the Spiral, the Taillin Spine marks the edge of the Dataran Plateau and is separated from the mountains of the Jua Wall by the Valley of Shereen. These mountains are home to rich mineral deposits, though much of it has long been depleted. Hej-kin and braxat are said to be endemic to these mountains, save for the area immediately surrounding Dar'Lan and its holdings.

Kithorn

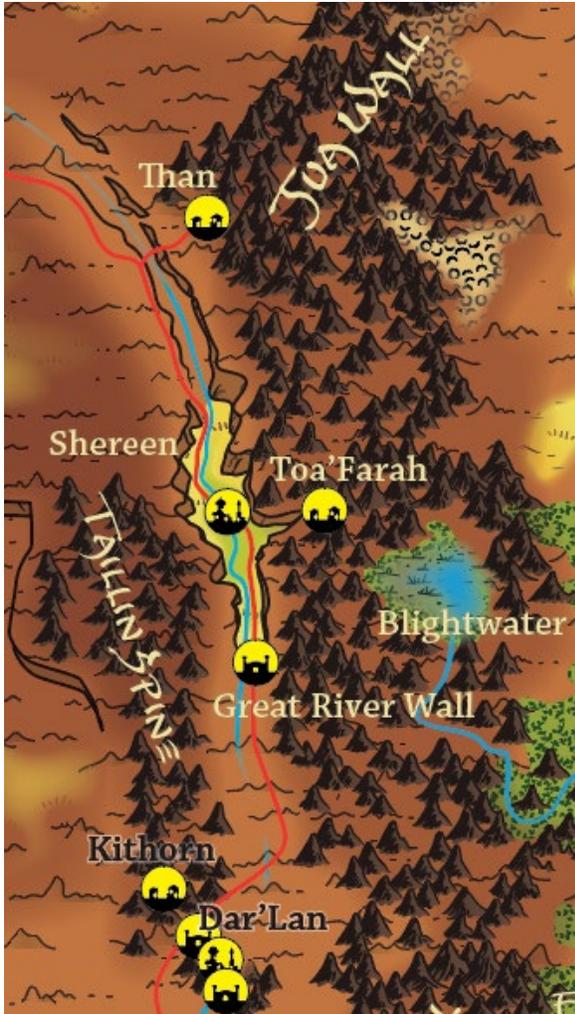
A bit further down the Great Spiral Road from Dar'Lan, and several miles up into the Taillin Spine, sits the village and fortified mining camp known as Kithorn. The long abandoned ruins of several previous mining sites can be seen if one strays a bit from the current road. The area's caverns and abandoned mining shafts form a loosely interconnected network of intersecting passages. Off the main path, this area is known to become quite dangerous, with all manner of creatures taking advantage of the sheltering tunnels.

The road, village, and mining camp are all well guarded and patrolled, thanks to the mine's importance to Dar'Lan. Much of the city's slaves are stationed at this camp. Supplies, iron ore, slaves, and other workers traveling up or down the route are a nearly daily occurrence.

The Valley of Shereen

Situated between the Taillin Spine in the west and Jua Wall in the east, the Valley of Shereen cuts a jagged path between the two mountain ranges. Shallow toward its southern end, the valley grows steep and

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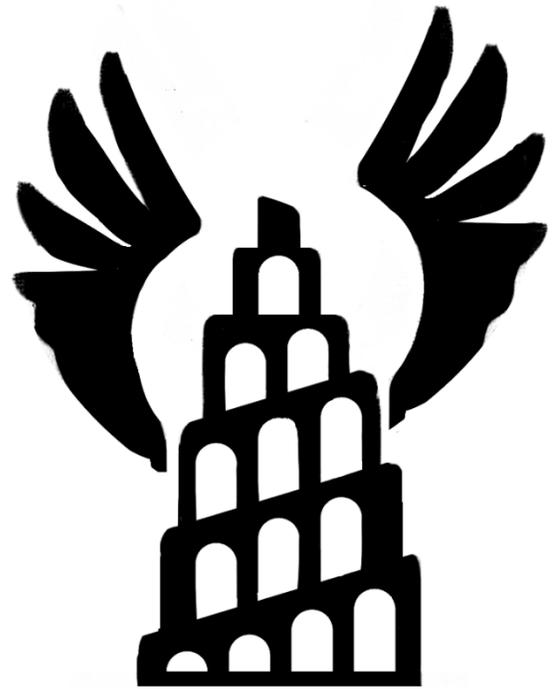
canyon-ridden towards its center. Though dotted with anatta, not unlike many other parts of the continent, those seen in the valley become noticeably larger and more clustered closer together the nearer one gets to the city of Shereen. Even as the Great Spiral River meanders through the valley's lowest reaches, the road follows a different path, one cut long ago by the river's own past meanderings. The valley of Shereen is lush by Athasian standards, and grows increasingly so as one approaches the center of the valley - terraced fields can be seen along its length, cut into the canyon walls and hilly lower reaches of the valley. There are ruins here too, and while many have been rebuilt and repurposed, others are little more than scattered rubble and half collapsed structures clinging to the eroded cliffs.

The River Wall

At the entrance to the Valley of Shereen, there is a great fortification stretching the width of the valley and continuing on to either side for some ways, filling in the gaps between peaks. Known as "the River Wall," part of this great structure appears to be new while most of it seems ancient and decaying. Perhaps it once served a very different purpose than defense, as some of its features make little sense in its current context - most notably the large gaps in the base of the wall, in an area filled with rubble where the river runs through, and areas of discoloration along a large section above the gaps, suggestive of water staining. Guard towers are built along its length, providing a wide view over the surrounding area.

Shereen

In the center of the Valley of Shereen lies a city unlike any other I have ever heard of. Placed among a large concentration of anatta, Shereen is as much a collection of interconnected villages as it is a city. Not only does it fill the valley floor here, clustering around the bases of the great pillars and in between them, parts of the city also sit atop the tall pillars, on smaller nearby cliffs, and carved into the very faces of the anatta. Many of these structures seem to float, suspended between anatta, boldly defying gravity, while plazas and



Shereen

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walkways cross and connect at multiple levels to create a dizzying layered effect when one looks up, all complemented by a remarkable pattern of shifting shadows on the valley floor.

Our caravan stopped at the market in Shereen's central square. The part of the city lying on the valley floor is known as Lowtown, and is the only part of the city accessible to most travelers. More than half the population lives here, in the shadow of the Floating City above. There was evidence of recent conflict when we visited, with many damaged buildings - particularly those on the southern edge of town - actively under repair. The Great Spiral River actually flows through Shereen, passing through its central square. Along its banks was evidence of further damage from flooding, with many buildings washed out. While there, I saw a great wheel attached to a large building and turning in the water; I was told it powered a mechanism lifting water into the city above through bamboo pipes.

The people of Shereen seemed less grim than those in Dar'lan, though I did note many with unusual features, including mismatched or oddly colored eyes, discolored skin, extra fingers, or abnormally long tongues. These people are said to be "the blighted" and aren't generally welcome outside of the valley. I was told that many of the inhabitants of the Floating City, particularly those dwelling in the small cliff-facing buildings clinging to the sides of the anatta, are Ghav-etuil. Those who dwell in the Floating City are said to be free of this blight, enjoying greater safety and privileges in their lofty homes.

The ruler of Shereen, known as the Great Kaman, lives in the Floating City, atop a high tower on the largest pillar. The buildings there are thickly clustered and rise high into the sky, with many bridges radiating outward, crisscrossing and supporting suspended plazas - some even supporting small buildings. We saw people and goods floating through the air as well, though I know not under what power. I heard that the Great Kaman can be seen flying through the sky as a radiant winged figure from time to time, but that he never descends to the valley floor, and that those who wish to speak with him must find their way up the pillars and into the city above.

There are two important temples here: an ancient Earth temple in Lowtown, built into the base of the immense anatta on which the Great Kaman's tower rests, and an equally ancient Air temple, up in the floating city. It seems the ruler of Shereen is supportive of reverence for the elements, though he employs spiralcasters such

as I saw in Tibbli and elsewhere to enforce his will. Though the Great Kaman has a reputation as a tremendously powerful sorcerer, perhaps the equal of the sorcerer-kings of the west, there was little to substantiate such claims other than perhaps the marvel of his city's construction.

Toa'Farah

To the east of Shereen, atop a high cliff overlooking the valley, sits the village of Toa'Farah. I was unable to see the village for myself, as access to it is strictly limited and difficult to accomplish by any route outside of flight or traveling through the Floating City. The stories I heard paint a mysterious picture of a sacred Ghav-etuil village built near ancient ruins. It seems there is a great deal of superstition about the place and the abilities of the people that dwell there, as well as rumors of a swampy valley called the Blightwater that can be reached from the village.

Blightwater

The Blightwater is the name of a tainted body of water hidden in a high mountain valley of the Jua Wall. The tales we heard of the Blightwater were horrific: strange and unique creatures, predatory patches of slime, and plants that birthed tiny, deformed people with clawed feet and piercing blue eyes. Some claimed that it was tainted from the Blightwater that caused the unusual features I had seen in Lowtown. There were several places along the eastern side of the Shereen valley where water trickled or cascaded down, eventually meeting the river below. Perhaps the Blightwater is leaking its terrible curse into the Great Spiral River. Reflecting back on my time in Dar'lan, those grisly warnings I saw along the road seemed to be made up of the so-called "blighted," whose living presence I did not notice in that great fortified city.

Than

Past the city of Shereen, the Great Spiral Road eventually climbs up into the highlands to the north of the narrowing valley. A day's journey along these highlands, a great and ancient bridge spans the valley's width. Though it is much weathered, the bridge is still passable for all but the largest of wagons and beasts. A ruined but still occupied fort sits at the far end of the bridge, and the village of Than lies several miles beyond. Than hosts a copper mine and a

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mixed population of humans and dwarves. Perched on the edge of the Dereb'ner wastes, Than is a dry and dusty town that is rather unwelcoming to outsiders.

We met a b'roh laborer here - the men who worked with him claimed he was allowed to dwell in Than only because of his unusually gentle nature.

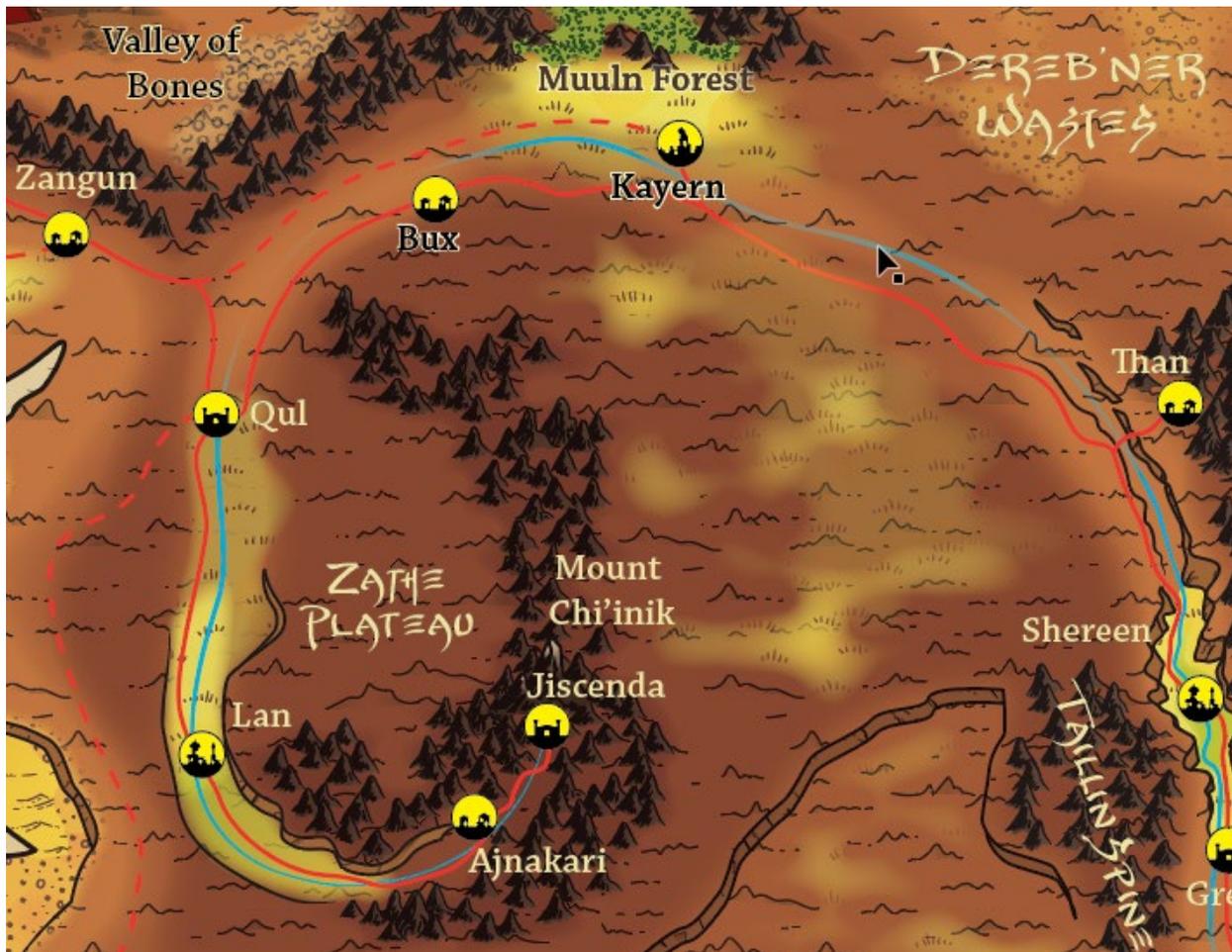
The Inner Spiral

Dereb'ner Wastes

A huge stretch of badlands extending north of Than and the Great Spiral Road, the Dereb'ner Wastes are said to be filled with savage tribes of b'roh and other peoples unwelcome on the Spiral. The land itself is twisted and treacherous, affording ample shelter for those familiar with it, but promising many dangers for anyone else. Water is difficult to find in the Wastes, though not so rare if one knows where to look. The inhabitants of Than are the only people on the Spiral that are even willing to consider trekking out into the Dereb'ner Wastes, and some even claim to have met with the tribes that live here in both peace and war.

From the stories I heard, the b'roh of this land are far more wily and civilized than those of the Tyr region.

Small caravans passing through the section of the Great Spiral Road that runs south of the Dereb'ner Wastes are known to disappear without a trace, leading those making this stretch of the journey cautious and liable to band together into larger groups. For this reason there are often temporary encampments of pilgrims and others waiting in the ruins near the edge of the wastes for larger groups to gather.



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Kayern

Kayern

Near the northernmost bend of the Great Spiral Road, where it comes closest to the edge of the Dereb'ner Wastes, lies another ancient bridge. Unlike the bridge at Than, this one has collapsed to the canyon floor below, forming a great deal of rubble behind which the Spiral River pools before it eventually flows through. Across the chasm sits the charred corpse of the once great city of Kayern, the former "Jewel of the North," its ruin somehow still smoldering. The smell of ash and sulfur linger in the air here, and the ruins are said to be haunted by the restless dead and - perhaps - things even fouler.

When we came upon Kayern, we met pilgrims headed to Jiscenda. One told us a tale of Kayern's destruction "in the time of his grandfather's grandfather;" of how King Abaland of Kayern sought to take Jiscenda for his own whilst the Seer slept, and the fire and fury that was laid down upon his city; of how it consumed the city's beautiful gardens and cracked its great domed buildings, spawning the "ash devils" that are said to now haunt its scorched streets, burning the living to consume their terror and feed their continued tormented existence.

Bux

West of Kayern lies the village of Bux. A welcome site for travelers despite its unimpressive sprawl around a drab-looking central fort, Bux is the first permanent settlement after a long trek through an unforgiving wilderness and the horror of Kayern's still-burning remains. The village seems larger at first than it

actually is, but many of the buildings are hollowed out and used to house animals rather than people.

Officially a client village of Lan, over half of the population of Bux are soldiers and watchmen stationed here, perhaps as punishment, as few seem happy about the posting. Two tall towers rise out of the fort, on top of which signals can be lit that can be seen for many miles. The function of this fort seems to be simply to keep an eye on any dangers coming from the north and the east - mostly from the ruins of Kayern. The guards stationed here seemed battle tested and quite alert.

Qul

Resting on the edge of a deep but narrow canyon crossing, the fortress village known as Qul sits split in half on either side of an ancient bridge, the most intact and well trod of the ancient bridges that once spanned the Spiral River. Qul serves as an important crossroads, connecting the inner and outer curves of the Spiral, as well as serving as the only major route leading out of the inner Spiral - aside from the Great Spiral Road itself. The village is built up almost entirely around this function and can be a lively place when caravans or other travelers pass through in large numbers.

Soldiers from Lan are stationed here to control the bridge and its gatehouses, collecting a toll to feed Lan's coffers. Pilgrims are sometimes allowed to cross without paying a toll, but others who attempt to cross without paying are likely to be cast down into the canyon to dash upon the rocks and be devoured by the ferocious creatures that dwell therein.

Lan

Among all the cities of Anattan, the Great City of Lan (which shares its name with the people of this region - the Lan) is one of only two that truly rival the cities of the Tablelands both in population and power. In many ways it is the seat of power for the Spiral, though it is not where Altire rules from. Lan sits both open and well-protected, surrounded by vast irrigated fields filled with slaves and estates, yet heavily patrolled and watched over from high towers. The valley it rests in appears open and inviting, but the approach is actually long and well secured. The caravan I traveled with reached its final destination in this valley and although no wall separated us from entrance into the city, as the road gracefully curved up and into a grand open

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Lan

archway, still I was denied entry and thought better of pressing the point.

Where the road crosses into the city, the huge Arch of Enlightenment sweeps overhead, with two large towers standing on either side. There is no gate here, boldly proclaiming the confidence of the city to repel any would-be invader. Near this grand entrance are barred gates to levels below, and it's said that the two large openings nearest the Arch of Enlightenment house enormous, horrific creatures capable of pressing an army to retreat all on their own. Spread out around this entrance is a great sprawl of shacks and hovels filled with laborers, slaves, pilgrims, and others deemed unworthy to enter the city. It was here that I remained to converse about the city and the lands beyond, pausing for several days before heading back toward Qul and exiting the Spiral. While outside Lan, I did see a creature known as a soar whale with my own eyes. Evidently harmless themselves, soar whales serve as mobile platforms for war and reconnaissance. I was told that there were only a few such beasts under the control of Altire's generals and high council, but that they frequently docked in Lan at the high tower.

As for the city, I was told it is a chaotic thing with winding streets and a jumble of architecture pieced together over its very long history. Apparently, guides must be hired to safely navigate its streets, and people of various classes mingle together in many places due to its strange organization. I was told that the city dips or rises in several places, and occasionally spires or walls from older incarnations of the city push up from below. Built on the foundations of older structures, many of the larger buildings are said to have several floors below street level. Most of these subterranean spaces are blocked and inaccessible, but there are stories of foul beasts clawing their way up to wreak havoc in the streets at night. Despite this, it seems there's also something of a market for treasures from the buried past, and more than a few desperate or brave souls have returned from the under-city with

valuable objects or harrowing tales and gruesome trophies.

The people of Lan are mixed, though many are short and dark of hair, with a sizable Ghav-etuil population. The people outside the city walls were of all sorts, a mosaic of the peoples of Anattan. Inside the city, the residents are in the habit of wearing masks and other strange costumes to separate and distinguish themselves by guild, class, or profession, and I was told it is highly impolite to expose your face in public. Terrible diseases have torn through the city in the past; perhaps they led to this mask custom, but few of those outside the city bore masks or expressed fear of contagion.

About Marinnia, the ruler of Lan, I could find little information - only that she was rarely seen within the city and never outside of it, preferring to work through intermediaries and emissaries, and remaining within her jet black tower in the center of the city to conduct experiments and hold council. It seems that other than her spiralcasters - and a mysterious and feared group known as the "fleshweavers" - none who gain entrance to her tower ever emerge from it again. Marinnia is only predictably seen outside of her tower on Arena days, where she presides over the great games held in the city's arena. Cloaked in an elaborate costume and hidden behind an ever-changing series of equally elaborate masks, she comes to observe the combatants as they are tested before the gathered throngs.

Ajnakari

Past the great irrigated fields of Lan, the Spiral grows tighter as it rises more steeply into the highest mountains of the Zathe Plateau. As the road approaches the ascent up into the Zathe Mountains, the air grows so thin that many must stop to rest frequently. I was told that there is a small but densely built village known as Ajnakari, located at a pass

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where the Spiral River flows from the side of a cliff. This is the last stopover and sometimes final resting place for many a pilgrim and traveller seeking access to the town of Jiscenda high above. A vast graveyard lies a short distance from the village, filled with stones and other markers both new and ancient. Ajnakari is a strange place full of fallen zealots, outcasts, and opportunistic traders, as well as others from all walks of life. A blind, venerable Earth priest looks over this site, presiding over a motley council of characters. It seems it is impossible for those who were not born of this land to travel higher without supernatural aid, and so many give up their journey to remain in Ajnakari for a time before returning back down the Spiral; those who have nothing to return to find a way to make a living here.

Jiscenda

The rumors of Jiscenda were elaborate and varied, with some claiming that it rested atop Mount Chi'inik (said to be the highest mountain in all the world), while others claim that it lies in a sheltered valley near its base. All spoke of a place at the very center of the Spiral and of a grand palace behind alabaster walls, where dwells Altire the Seer, casting his vision out into the

future and lands beyond. I was told by an old pilgrim returning from meeting with the Seer that Jiscenda is cool even during midday and that shimmering bits of solid water sometimes fall from the sky to blanket the area. For this reason, those approaching the fortified palace must wrap themselves in layers of clothing to protect against the cold and many pilgrims can be found dead along the side of the road in the early hours of the morning. Even more bizarre, it seems that one must purchase a potion-fruit or wear a living creature known as a "breather" upon one's face in order to finish the ascent, for those that don't soon find themselves passing out and falling from the steep road to their deaths or never waking from their slumber after stopping to rest for a short while.

The palace of Jiscenda - said to be filled with pilgrims, the military, and the servants of Altire - is sustained almost entirely by the flow of goods from Lan and lands further down the Spiral. Having not seen it with my own eyes, I cannot speak to the accuracy of any of these details and have left out much of the wild rumors and speculation I have heard. There was evidence of few pilgrims returning from their journey into Jiscenda in the time I remained outside Lan's walls, perhaps owing to the Seer's great appetite or the pilgrims' deaths along the way.



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Chapter 4 - The Anattan Wastes

The northern reaches of Anattan are a largely barren wasteland still suffering the blight that some say scoured an ancient empire from the land. I define this region as the lands north of the Spiral Lands and Brijj'apurr, where civilization begins to give way to wasteland.

Legends say that this land once belonged to an ancient empire that stretched across much of the continent. A powerful and wealthy nation, it is said that they ruled for many King's Ages until their hubris and disregard for the desert's spread cost them dearly. Storms buffeted their every settlement and bastion until nearly every trace of their prideful empire was scoured from the stone.

As we traveled north from the Spiral Lands, we encountered a belt of vicious terrain which makes this wasteland incredibly treacherous to cross. The coast to the north and west of Brijj'apurr, on a peninsula known as the Dragon's Reach, is battered by frequent and horrific storms. The storm winds pass over a large volcanic scar in the ground – the Glowing Gulch – and push that intolerable heat upon the landscape beyond like a great bellows. To the east of the Glowing Gulch is a deep trench – the Windfalling Canyon – that is a

formidable obstacle to travel, for it is nearly impossible to scale on foot, or even to fly over, because of the powerful downdrafts that give the canyon its name, which make it dangerous for even skilled flyers to attempt a crossing by air. Whichever route one follows, they then find themselves confronted with the great Shifting Sands desert, which stretches hundreds of miles across the continent.

Once one passes through the Shifting Sands and reaches northern Anattan, people can again be found eking out an existence. We were eventually able to find our way through this bleak wilderness to the Strait of Arala at the northernmost reaches of this land. Here, the Silt Sea narrows to barely 25 miles, and so the two great landmasses – the western landmass on which the Tablelands sit and the eastern landmass of Anattan – almost touch each other. It was only by traveling all the way to the northern limits of the continent of Anattan that I was able to finally find a navigable route back home. There is no doubt that the incredible distances in question have played a role in keeping the people of these lands apart, and I can see how someone less obsessive than myself never would have made it back.

Muulnota Mountains

Dividing the Spiral Lands from the northern wastes beyond are the Muulnota Mountains. The land here is generally acknowledged to be too dangerous for any but the most foolhardy to travel, featuring unforgiving terrain and frequent rockslides. These mountains are littered with boulder fields and shear cliffs. Only the mountains' westernmost reaches are relatively safe to pass through, where an ancient road leads from Zangun to the dwarven settlements in the north. East of the mountains, the plateau of the Spiral Lands gradually descends to the Dereb'ner Wastes, where the braxats native to the Muulnota are known to clash with the b'rohgs of the Wastes.

Zangun

The only road that leads north out of the Spiral Lands winds some 40 or 50 miles through the foothills of the Muulnota Mountains before finding its way to the trade village of Zangun. The population here is largely muls, claiming human parentage in the Spiral Lands

and dwarven parentage from the settlements of the Glowing Gulch. About 200 muls live in the village, along with smaller numbers of humans, dwarves, ssurrans and other races, which certainly makes it the largest mul settlement I've ever encountered. One wonders – though it seemed imprudent to ask – how the population has sustained itself over time.

The muls maintain a heavily-guarded mine at this location. None were willing to say what quarry they carved from the mountains – it was apparent that asking too many questions about the mine would also be imprudent.

Valley of Bones

On the northwestern edge of the Muulnota Mountains is a massive boulder field that fills a triangular valley stretching over 50 miles from east to west. The heat radiating down from the Glowing Gulch in the north makes this area incredibly dry and lifeless. The land is littered with bones, all scattered among the boulders:

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the skulls and femurs of giants, entire skeletons of long dead beasts, and the more recent remains of those who unsuccessfully attempted to traverse the valley. Known as the Valley of Bones, the area no doubt holds many secrets regarding the region's past.

Muuln Forest

North of ruined Kayern, hidden amongst the southern valleys of the Muulnota Mountains, is said to exist a forest just as lush and rich in life as the Forest Ridge, though of a much smaller size. Known as the Muuln Forest, it is said to boast strange and unique creatures, and I wonder if perhaps the fleshweavers of Lan, or some other, much older force, have something to do with it. Feral tribes of bestial elves - perhaps similar to

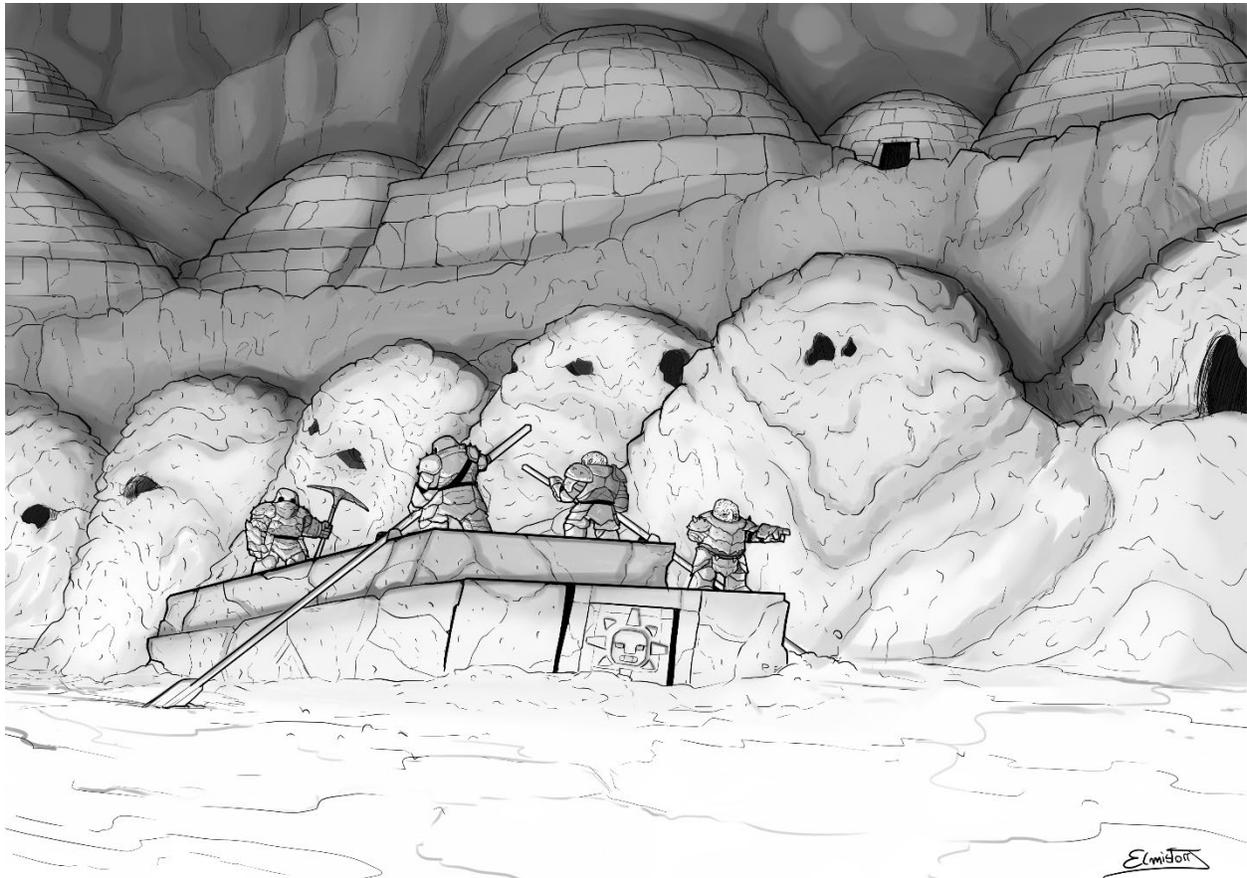
those I saw in distant Tor'Lem - are rumored to make this forest their home.

There are few reasons to journey here, though there are roaming elven tribes who - having braved the horrors of Kayern - pass through this region to trade for hardwood and exotic herbs with the forest settlements. Though distinct from the elves of the Tablelands, they did not sound wholly dissimilar. I could not confirm anything I heard about this forest, though legends somewhat connect it to the destruction of Kayern. Paradoxically, all the stories about the forest seem to contain a motif of forgetting about its nature (and indeed its very existence) after one leaves the woodland, but I cannot fathom how that could be if local legends about it still circulate.

Glowing Gulch

Northwest of Zangun and the Muulnota Mountains, one finds the Glowing Gulch. Filled with roiling lava, this deep chasm in the earth serves to sharply divide central Anattan from the wastes to the north. As one approaches the Gulch from the south, the landscape

transforms from arid desert to rugged rocky terrain and treacherous shard flats. Further north, the air warms and starts to smell of sulfur, hinting at the volcanic activity and churning lava within the canyon's depths.



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Despite being so inhospitable, the Gulch is home to large populations of dwarves and ssurrans. The dwarves here are a fearsome sight, with dark red skin that is heavily scarred. I think that at birth, these dwarves may be no different than those elsewhere in the world, developing their burnt and scarred appearance over years of being scorched and splattered by searing lava. The dwarves make their home near the bottom of the cliffs instead of the top, and thus are constantly exposed to brutal heat. At the same time, they are safe from raiders and most predators, who don't dare venture too close to the Glowing Gulch. How so many dwarves subsist at the bottom of the cliffs is something of a mystery to me, as there are no signs of nearby agriculture, nor plants that seem capable of growing on the cliffs, and no obvious prey to hunt at the bottom of the Gulch.

The ssurrans here look different than those I'd encountered in the Tablelands. They call themselves sandscale ssurrans, and they have blunt, thorny heads with a frill that runs from skull to tail. They are also stouter than other ssurrans, with relatively long arms that help make them excellent climbers. When one stands at the ledge overlooking the Gulch, ssurrans can sometimes be seen scaling far off cliffs. There seems to be no rivalry between the ssurrans and the dwarves, and indeed ssurrans can often be seen walking freely among the dwarven settlements. We could not, however, determine if these ssurrans actually lived among the dwarves or were merely visiting.

Within the Gulch was one of the most unusual spectacles I'd ever witnessed: the dwarves operating ferries made of basalt that could sail across the open lava. I wondered if such a thing could possibly be the result of natural construction or if it was only possible via some sort of elemental magic, but I was unable to investigate the question, for the Gulch was ultimately far too hot for me to get close enough to a ferry to actually inspect one. I can't imagine personally withstanding the heat for long enough to survive a ferry crossing, but from atop the cliffs, one can see these strange vessels passing back and forth between the two main dwarven settlements: the smaller town of Zalvass on the south side and the larger city of Calvass on the north side.

Zalvass

A fairly well-maintained road leads from the Spiral Lands to the town of Zalvass, and a steady stream of caravan traffic makes the journey between the two. The dwarves here are skilled obsidian artisans,

weaponsmiths, and armorers, and send a steady supply of weaponry into central Anattan. Sometimes, mysterious caravans - heavily-armored and extremely well-defended - travel this route on behalf of the great cities of the Spiral Lands. Rumors abound about the cargo within these caravans, but as with so much in Anattan, truthful information is hard to come by.

Though there is a fortress and trade emporium at the top of the southern cliffs, the main part of Zalvass sits on a small plateau a mere dozen feet above the churning lava. From the plateau, ramps and staircases lead down to the stone piers where the basalt ferries begin their journeys. The molten appearance of Zalvass' stone buildings is due to occasional eruptions of lava that can reach high enough to actually rain down lava on the plateau, covering and melting the stone that makes up its buildings until they take on the appearance of mud huts. Constant clean-up efforts only barely manage to keep the ramps, staircases, and piers functional.

The population is perhaps as many as 2,000 people - mostly dwarves, and some ssurrans as well - all somehow clinging to life here. On our journey we descended the cliff and visited the town; I had initially considered attempting to cross the Gulch on a ferry, but during my brief visit it quickly became apparent that the heat was far too much for me - I would never survive a ferry crossing, for unlike these scarred dwarves, my flesh and breath were unaccustomed to such blistering heat. As a fellow dwarf, the people of Zalvass were curious about me, as they did not know of the Tablelands, just as I once did not know of Anattan.

Calvass

Because it sits on the north side of the Glowing Gulch, Calvass is connected to the south of Anattan primarily by the strange ferries that traverse the open lava. To reach Calvass by land or by sea is a journey of impractical difficulty for all but the most determined of travelers, but then there are few as determined as I.

Though I could not take the ferry, we eventually traveled the long way around, traversing the Shifting Sands until we reached a pass in the Abo Mountains that led down to the city. I am glad we made the trip, for it was a magnificent sight. Though I yearned, desperately, to return to my home, when I laid eyes on Calvass I had the strange feeling that I *was* home.

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Calvass is built upon a series of plateaus that rise above the lava, situated on top of huge stone pillars sculpted into strange roundness by the molten rock, jutting out of the lava to soar high into the air to form a magnificent vista. From atop the cliffs, the pillars look like towers and palaces, their glowing silhouettes illuminated day and night by the dull red-orange glow of the molten rock below.

I would not be surprised if ten thousand dwarves called this place home, for the palaces and towers were that large, the homes that many, and the squares and streets so full of activity. Several great forges and quarries could be seen, with dwarves constantly hard at work. The plateaus are large enough on this side of the Gulch that, if one sticks to the northern and upper reaches of the city, the heat is tolerable. The water offered to visitors tasted of sulfur but was safe to drink; for food, we were offered only meat. The dwarves of Calvass were open to visitors and even curious about us. It was clear they had no fear of visitors, as almost everyone who comes to visit will be too exhausted and overwhelmed by the heat to attempt anything that would threaten them.

Abo Mountains

The sharp, black peaks of the Abo Mountains form the northern edge of the Glowing Gulch. The closer one gets to the Gulch, the more unstable the mountains become. Landslides are common, and the dwarves say that a number of years ago an entire peak in the eastern mountain range collapsed into the magma. Even the pass that leads between Calvass and points further north suffers from frequent rock falls.

One wonders why so many dwarves would live in such a place. I suspect the answer is that these mountains are said to be rich with gems and mineral deposits. The constant rumbling of the earth (not to

mention the native creatures like fire lizards and magma horrors) makes exploration a deadly endeavor, but the dwarves are not to be dissuaded.

Or perhaps the dwarves of Calvass are looking for something even more important. They claim that the Glowing Gulch was formed when the Dragon was born, and that he tore his body out of the living rock of the mountains in a great explosion, leaving behind this deadly volcanic caldera. The dwarves telling this tale were suggesting the Gulch was a site of great historical significance, and it made me wonder if they had hoped to excavate some secret that would help defeat the Dragon. I found this tale amusing, however: in the Tablelands, people tell precisely the same tale about the formation of the Dragon's Bowl near Urik. They can't both be true; in fact, I suspect neither is.

Windfalling Canyon

East of the Glowing Gulch, further separating central Anattan from the northern wastes, is a great trench through the earth at least a hundred miles long.

This long, straight, and steep walled canyon cuts across the land east of the Glowing Gulch. Tremendous winds scour through the canyon day and night, creating a deafening roar. This canyon seems like it might have once been the path of another mighty river, one which may have flowed into a lake where the Gulch now sits. Now, however, an oasis that springs forth from the edge of the Jua Wall far in the east is the only hint that such a mighty river might have once existed. Seemingly against all reason, there are apparently tribes that follow this path to trade with the dwarves of the Glowing Gulch. They are said to shelter in protected spots along the canyon, somehow knowing just when the deadly winds are about the pick up.

The Dragon's Reach

Unable to cross the Glowing Gulch, we turned west to travel on foot across the large peninsula known as the Dragon's Reach. This barren and battered peninsula protrudes so far to the west that on a clear day you can see the Cerulean Storm raging in the distance – with lightning periodically ripping across the southern horizon – and, before the fall of Ur Draxa, it was said one could see the Great Ash Storm from the shoreline.

This barren and blasted peninsula is said to be so empty because the Dragon himself scoured every village and trace of civilization from the land. Who can say if that's true? What is clearly true, however, is that the peninsula and its coastline are regularly hammered by some of the worst storms I encountered in all my travels. Ferocious winds stir up great silt and sandstorms, and ash storms blow in from the Glowing Gulch, sometimes turning into fire storms. Though the

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peninsula is said to contain many forgotten ruins from the lost Anattan Empire of ages past, we encountered nothing grander than small ruins along our path.

The westernmost extent of the peninsula is covered in powdery sand. The winds are so constant that it can be hard to say where the sandy shoreline ends and the silt begins. The estuary that forms the peninsula's northern edge is sometimes so buried under sand drifts that one can simply walk across it to the Shifting Sands on the opposite shore. This is a dangerous region to travel on foot – we were twice stalled for days by flensing sandstorms – but it was ultimately easier than attempting to scale sheer canyon walls or cross a volcanic basin.

Valley of the Sleepers

North of Brijj'apurr in the empty expanses that mark the beginning of the Dragon's Reach and the Anattan Wastes, is a site believed to have been sacred to the forgotten peoples of this land. Within a great sheltered box canyon stand dozens of sandstone columns that resemble slumping and sleeping forms. Eerily eroded, they are dotted with a multitude of holes. They are anatta, the columns that appear throughout this region of the world, though nowhere else are so many found grouped so closely together. In Brijj'apurr we were told

that these anatta are the souls of those who survived the Dragon's initial onslaught of the peninsula, cursed and unlucky to not have been killed outright.

As the crimson sun makes its way through the sky, the shadows here seem to come alive, dancing as the shifting rays filter through the pitted pillars. The ensuing shadowplay is nothing short of mesmerizing, and is often accompanied by eerie song, as the passing wind gives rise to a multitude of tones. The stunning interplay of light and shadow, as well as the eerie music of this place seem like no accident of nature, and I am convinced that these formations have been carved and shaped purposefully, yet I know of no technique by which one could fashion such a strange landscape.

Fort Vamish

At the westernmost edge of the Dragon's Reach, just before entering the mouth of the Swarming Shallows, one can find the coastal settlement known as Fort Vamish. The 200 miles of coastline between Fort Vamish and Brijj'apurr are pummeled by such frequent storms that trade along the coast is infrequent and difficult, and most people who travel to Fort Vamish do so by land.

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Fort Vamish is a small trading enclave founded by House Eiko, which we learned is from some mysterious civilization known as Tian Bo. The representatives of House Eiko claim Tian Bo is a distant mercantile power that sails the great expanse of silt that lies far to the north of Anattan. The fort is the southernmost foothold for Tian Bo, situated to trade with the cities and peoples of the central Anattan coast. The mariners of Tian Bo are said to be unwilling to transport outsiders to their home island or any other points north.

Fort Vamish provides a number of travel supplies, and acts as a last stop for travelers going north or south, though windblown sand and silt often obscure the fort from view. A small well provides the fort with fresh water, which the inhabitants sell at inflated prices. A contingent of mercenaries defend the fort, and a bureaucrat templar of Tian Bo, called Shidafu, also is stationed here, tasked with observing travelers and scouting out potential craftsmen or other specialists that their emperor may be interested in inviting to their city.

Swarming Shallows

A narrow estuary known as the Swarming Shallows separates the Dragon's Reach from the Shifting Sands to the north, reaching nearly all the way to the Glowing Gulch. The shoreline of the Swarming Shallows is constantly shifting as storms strike the region.

Silt horrors are rampant in the estuary, using it as a safe place to breed away from hulgor predation. The nearby Sinking Pass (when it is open) permits juvenile silt horrors to escape out into the larger Silt Sea; those that head out into deeper silt or to the north have a good chance at survival, while those who head south are often eaten by hulgor.

Sinking Pass

The ruins of an ancient stone tower stand upon a lonely rock here. Atop the tower glows an eerie blue flame that can be seen for miles, even through fairly silty skies. Windblown sand often accumulates enough to create a temporary landbridge, though Ezirach - a Silt priest residing here - actively removes the sand to destroy the bridge, though he can be enticed to leave it be long enough for travelers to use.

Shifting Sands

A vast sandy waste covering the southern reaches of the Anattan Wastes like a belt, the Shifting Sands stretch from the shores of the Silt Sea in the west all the way to the great Jua Wall mountains in the east. I was told this desert is impossible to map, as windstorms perpetually reshape the terrain. The only landmarks in this ever-changing landscape are the handful of anatta scattered about the region. The sands of the Dragon's Reach Peninsula might also be considered a part of this great desert, since the sandstorms stretch into that region as well. The skies here are frequently filled with a sand haze so heavy that it can blot out the sun, and an inexperienced traveler can easily lose their sense of direction and become lost. Entire days might pass where one can rarely make out their own outstretched hand. The sandstorms are said to create dunes hundreds of feet high only for a different storm to blow them away a few days later.

In addition to the threat posed by the constant sandstorms, a cruel species of (at least somewhat) intelligent manscorpions are known to dwell in these

trackless wastes. We had several close calls where we glimpsed the manscorpions at a distance, but they did not pursue - perhaps we were merely lucky to spot them before they spotted us and to keep our distance. Our guide told us they prefer to attack by surprise, poisoning people while they sleep and dragging them away never to be seen again. True or not, none of us slept on those nights after manscorpion sightings. These creatures closely resemble silver mastyrals, and in fact frequently travel in the company of such creatures. They are bipedal brutes, standing 6 to 7 feet tall, and heavily armored in silvery or dark blue carapaces, with enormous pincer forearms. Their arachnoid heads have compound eyes and a small, razor-sharp maw, and they sport a powerful, four-foot-long segmented tail with a venomous stinger.

Ancient tales suggest that the Shifting Sands were once a mountainous forest, and it is said that the Dragon, in his great fury, incinerated the trees, scoured the mountains down to sand and cast the debris across the land. The sands are almost impossible to navigate,

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with only a handful of anatta scattered throughout the region to serve as guideposts in an ever changing landscape.

Crawling Tower

After surviving our first encounter with the manscorpions, my companions and I were keen to avoid further run-ins with them. Our guide told us there is no predictable way to avoid the manscorpions, for they are said to make their home in a massive fortress within the Shifting Sands.

The fortress is called the Crawling Tower, as some travelers claim to have witnessed the tower move. They say this odd tower wanders the Shifting Sands (sometimes crossing onto the Dragon's Reach) on a massive set of spindly, chitinous legs. It is not known how it acquired legs, or if the structure is mounted atop some kind of giant creature, but the existence of the tower cannot be disputed – we saw it ourselves in the distance during a brief moment of clear skies. I have never been so grateful for a sandstorm than for the one that subsequently hid the tower from us – and, more importantly, hid us from the tower. We did not

witness the tower moving, but when the storm passed a few hours later, the tower was nowhere to be seen.

In addition to serving as a hive, nest, or base of operations for the manscorpions, the tower is said to also be home to ravenous flying creatures that swarm anything that approaches, stripping them down to the bones within moments. The movements of the tower seem to be completely unpredictable, which makes traveling through the area even more hazardous than the winds and dust storms would normally make it.

Eleven Stones

In the middle of an island in the Swarming Shallows estuary lies a most unusual site – a ring of eleven enormous upright slabs composed of an oddly porous material. Though hard like stone, their surface is a puzzle of tiny holes and ridges, as if a thousand worms had carved their homes into it. If the stones were not precisely the same proportion as each other, one might think they had been grown rather than carved.

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The site is known to those in central Anattan, for it is believed to have strange healing properties. Some who have suffered the strange influences of the Blightwater make pilgrimages to this site, hoping to be cured of their deformities.

A mysterious Ghav-etuil druid is known to reside here and protect the site. She seems to be engaged in a protracted struggle with the Silt priest Ezirach over control of the Swarming Shallows estuary, though so far it has been a nonviolent one. The druid tells visitors that the structure is “not only older than the Dragon, but older than whatever came before the Dragon.”

Northern Anattan

Anyone who survives the hostile environment, constant storms, and enormous geographical barriers to make their way north of the Shifting Sands finds themselves in a calmer and much emptier region. Though it is far from large-scale civilizations and societies, there are still people here. Though they struggle to survive in this wasteland, many of them in fact escaped from the oppressive civilization of the south and are happy to live in a wild desert instead.

Split Rock

The path of our journey took us along the coast where we found a short silt estuary and the village of Split Rock. The village is named for a massive monolithic stone which is split vertically as if struck by a massive

blow, rising over a hundred feet above the surrounding boulder field. Between the two halves of the monolith rests a small dwarven village. For those traveling north along the coast, this settlement of dwarven artisans and traders serves as a last civilized stop before encountering a great stretch of emptiness.

The dwarves of Split Rock both trade and fight with the varied tribes of the area, sometimes ranging as far north as the Northern Ghats. The dwarves have made numerous attempts to retake a site to the north known as the Ruined Citadel, which they claim was once a dwarven stronghold.

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Ruined Citadel

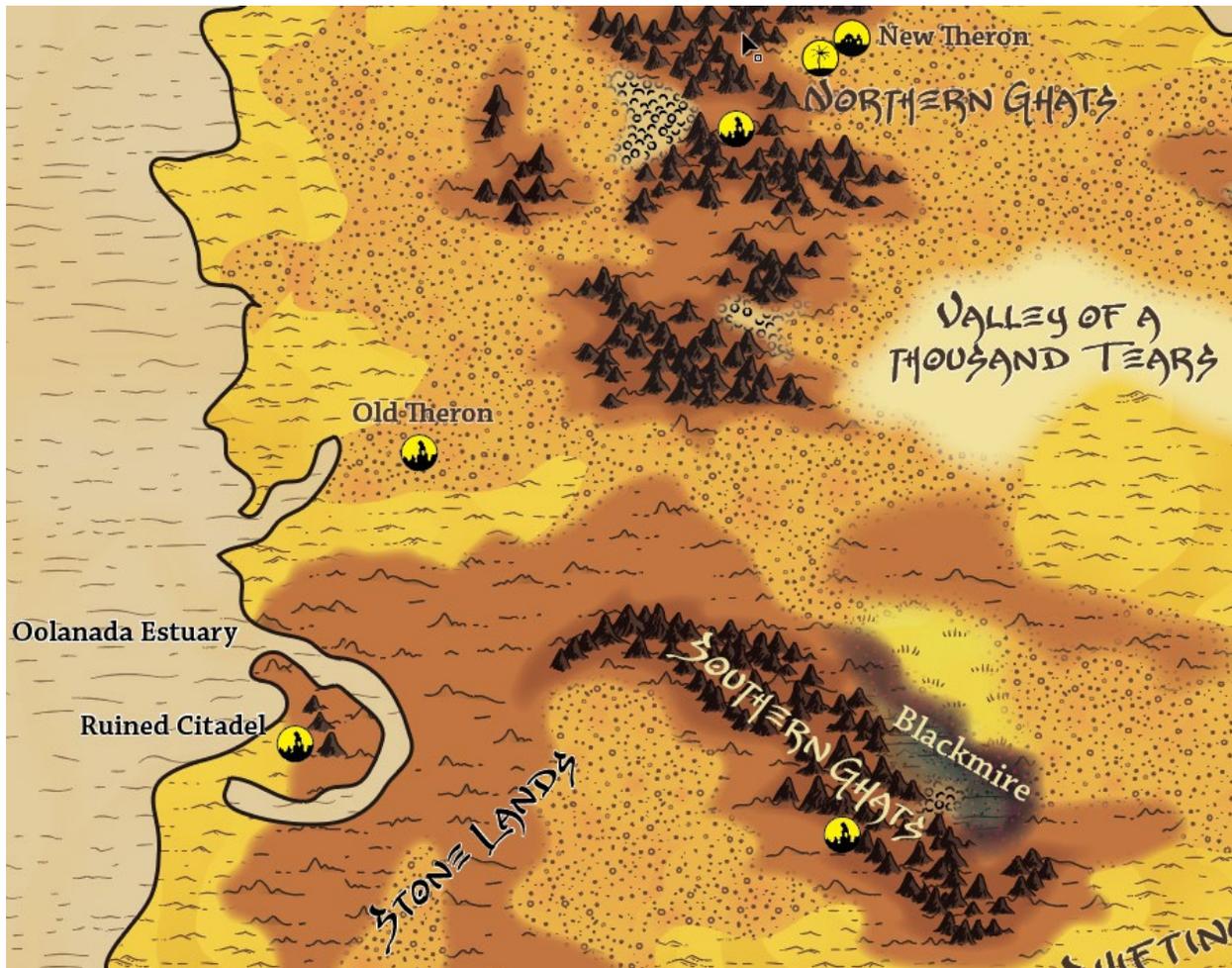
The silt-shrouded holdfast known as the Ruined Citadel appears to have once been an imposing fortress built around a pit mine, but what remains of the fortifications - a great number of towers and walls - are now cracked, crumbling, or even collapsed. The ruins, rumored to have been crushed long ago by giants, are thick with dwarven banshees, who are said to be doomed to reenact the defense of their great citadel at night, their piercing wails often heard miles away. However, they sit slumped upon the crumbling ramparts during the day, pale burning eyes staring blankly at the ground, their grotesquely flayed bodies unmoving unless someone approaches.

Oolanada Estuary

According to legend, this hook-shaped estuary was carved by a giant in an attempt to isolate the Ruined Citadel. His attempt failed, but his work remains, with the Oolanada Estuary almost completely separating the area around the Citadel from the rest of Anattan. The land is ragged and torn around the estuary, and the shores sometimes choked with floaters and razorwings.

The coastline of Anattan north and south of the estuary is incredibly exposed – to the elements, to predators, and to hostile vessels – and so the land surrounded by the Oolanada Estuary represents one of the few places on the coast to shelter from all manner of threats. The key downside to this, however, is the risk of finding someone else already hiding there.

The Ghats Region



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Two large mountain ranges, known as the Southern and Northern Ghats, form a sort of central region within the Anattan Wastes. The region is home to nomadic tribes and roving monsters, as well as some settlements of note. The winds are relatively calm, which proves only a mixed blessing as, in the absence of a breeze, the air swelters with constant, oppressive heat.

Stone Lands

The Stone Lands are an expanse of stony barrens and rocky hills surrounding the Southern Ghats and extending west to the Sea of Silt. Very little grows here thanks to a number of savage defiler-led tribes that almost constantly wage war against one another. These tribes rarely make peace with each other and alliances are almost unheard of. The Stone Lands tribes are known to be cannibals and to traffic regularly with terrible otherworldly creatures summoned by their defiler chieftains. The tribes all have complicated relationships with the Split Rock dwarves, variously raiding the dwarves or trading with them, depending on a tribe's current strength and needs.

Southern Ghats

The Southern Ghats are a range of flat-topped mountains that run through the Stone Lands. Some of the braver and more desperate Stone Lands tribes have hideouts in the western edges of the Southern Ghats. The eastern side is noticeably more verdant, containing many shrubs (some poisonous, some fruit-bearing), hardy grasses, and large cacti. These mountains are said to be home to the last sizable population of giants in the region. Tagsters, jackals, saber-toothed rodents, and a variety of lizards are common here.

Blackmire

The Blackmire is a vast, open tar pit where bones frequently rise to the surface and assemble themselves into tar-covered undead monstrosities from another age. The great pit hugs the eastern edge of the Southern Ghats and is sacred to the giants of these mountains, who use it as a burial site. They closely monitor the pit, aggressively containing the wandering undead by destroying any that crawl out of the tar, but only along the western shore, allowing the creatures to roam freely to the east. The tar itself is valued for its sealing



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and preservation properties, making it a resource that the dwarves of the Glowing Gulch covet, often sending expeditions to collect the substance. Sometimes these expeditions trade with the giants, but they often just steal it.

Old Theron

Northeast of the Oolanada Estuary but before reaching the Northern Ghats, we found a ruined village. We could tell its destruction was recent, for some of the buildings were made of wood and mud, and many were still partially standing. The village huddled around an oasis, presumably once its water source. The sun-bleached bones and carcasses of animals that ringed the oasis – avoided even by scavengers – made it obvious that the water had become tainted at some point. Parts of the town, especially its ramparts, were heavily damaged, but other parts of the town were largely intact.

We eventually learned what happened here. The village was originally known as Theron, and was established over several generations by refugees and escapees from Eldaarich's Kulag Fleet, the silt sailors who serve that city. About a decade ago, however, the village was savagely attacked by a large coalition of tribes from the Stone Lands. The villagers and tribes decimated each other. The few survivors found their water source tainted and the threat of a renewed assault to be too great, so they abandoned the town and fled far to the east. They established the settlement of New Theron near the Northern Ghats, and the ruin here became known as Old Theron. Exactly how the oasis became poisoned, and who was responsible for the act, was left unclear to us.

Despite being over a hundred miles apart, the people of New Theron continually scout the site of Old Theron, hoping to find and rescue any recent refugees who know of the old site. It seems many sailors in the Kulag Fleet knew of the legends and dreamed of escaping to Theron. When they spotted us, thirsty and at risk of death, and clearly refugees rather than members of a Stonelands tribe, the scouts approached us. We were given food and water, and escorted to the safety of New Theron.

Northern Ghats

Our escort to New Theron led us around the Northern Ghats, an irregular patchwork of mountains, foothills, boulder fields, and canyonlands. The Northern Ghats are filled with ancient ruins, hidden pterrann villages, and warring gith tribes. Many of the ruins here seem to have been made by smaller-than-human peoples, as do the few crumbling artifacts that can still be found in the area. Large packs of wild jhakar are common, posing a serious threat to travelers not familiar with their habits and signs, but it seems that they keep the even greater threat of nearby tembos at bay.

The Northern Ghats are the home region of a subspecies of pterrann known as the Yrrak, distinguished by giant axe-shaped ridges atop their heads. The Yrrak are largely nomadic, and continually circumnavigate the Ghats in a pattern they call the Loop of the Seasons. These pterrann have transitory villages – little more than campsites, really – that they set up for a few weeks at a time before moving on to the next stop in the loop. They often trade with the various tribes throughout the region, sometimes even traveling as far as the coast in the north to do so.

While we heard little talk of the Dragon from the people of the Anattan Wastes, the Yrrak were an exception. They said the Dragon had an army – the Legion of the North – that they had encountered years ago in the Ghats. The pterrann knew the Dragon's City had fallen and were on high alert for the possibility

that the Legion, or at least some remnant of it, may still be on the loose.



Yrrak Tribe

Valley of a Thousand Tears

The name for this vast salt pan comes from a strange legend. Our guide told us that an ancient people known as goblins – the little people that built the ruins in the Northern Ghats – fled from their mountain homes and traveled through this stretch of desert, hoping to find shelter in the mountains far to the east. Their tears salted the plain and remain to this day, along with many goblin dhaots, which still haunt the places where they fell.

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Yrrak (Axeridge)

Terrible salt storms scour the land in this blighted bowl, flensing bare skin, shredding cloth, and even cutting through leather armor. Local tribes collect salt from the edges of the valley, but very few are willing to cross it.

New Theron

Far away from any other civilized center, nestled in a valley in the Northern Ghats, lies the town of New Theron. This settlement has grown so much that one might almost consider it a small city. The entire town has been built in just the 10 years since its residents fled the site of Old Theron, and so there is constant construction activity. The priority is strengthening the ramparts of the village, and as stone is cut it goes directly into the walls. But the desert beasts provide a constant stream of bone and hide from which most structures in New Theron are built.

It is a curious people that live here. They live in fear of the monsters in the deserts, yes, but not in fear of oppression. Those from the south do not fear the rulers of the Spiral Lands, the refugees from the west do not fear the sorcerer-kings, nor do the people here even fear the Dragon. Indeed, rumors of the Dragon's demise had not even reached New Theron before our arrival. The people here are perhaps the most diverse group I've ever encountered: humans, dwarves, elves, nikaal, ssurrans, pterrans, tareks, and even strange bipedal drik-like creatures called turtles. I'd only previously seen such an assortment of people living alongside each other in gladiatorial pits, yet here they had formed a society.

The town is overseen by a council of druids, and at first blush, it seems almost idyllic. But over the course of our stay in New Theron, we realized that in some ways the town is a victim of its own success and that the

peace here is far more tenuous than it first appears. The town's rapid growth has strained its resources, especially its food and water supplies, nearly to the breaking point.

The dynamic that has evolved is as follows: the druids who oversee the town tightly control the food supply; to anger the druids is to risk going hungry and, ultimately, that hunger would force someone to return to the very wastes they had fled. Because the food supply is so strained, the druids won't risk any conflict, as a single fire could unleash famine on everyone, and they allow no public tensions of any sort among the different peoples. It is only through druid magic that the area's meager springs can support a town so large. This means that turning against the druids is not an option, as the death of even a single druid would likely lead to food shortages – or, at least, the druids have convinced the townspeople of this. The druids also make the case that only by working together (by which they mean doing what the druids command) can the townspeople help develop a more stable food supply. Tensions also exist over the trees that are peppered throughout New Theron. The wood would be quite useful but the druids won't allow anyone to cut so much as a branch – warning that it will inevitably lead to destroying all the trees. Most of the trees are still saplings, planted and tended since the town was established, but as the trees get bigger, the tensions over them will inevitably grow.



Theron

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These edicts from on high feel like fear-mongering to some of the residents, yet I suspect the very real consequences of disregarding them ensure their effectiveness. The druids lead the townspeople in constant efforts to secure food. The stony barrens that surround the town are simply not naturally fertile enough to support so many people, and so the constant efforts to transform the land and flora into arable plots and cultivated plants have been necessary to keep pace with the growing population. If some people resent the druids and their control, even more believe that banding together in a ceaseless battle against starvation is their best and only hope.

Wailing Towers

On blustery days, when the winds are blowing westward, a terrible wailing can sometimes be heard as far away as New Theron. When I first heard it, I thought it some horrid undead creature coming to destroy the town, but the people of New Theron assured me that it was a natural phenomenon of sorts, portending nothing, and if I wanted to see the source

of the sound, I could visit the Wailing Towers several days' journey to the northeast.

Upon making the journey, we found the sprawling ruin of an ancient city, largely buried under silt and sand. From bluffs overlooking the ruins, one can see that the city went on for several miles along the coast. Our guide knew of no name for this forgotten city, merely calling it the ruins near the Wailing Towers.

Out across the eastern horizon, a series of strange sandstone spires can also be seen, stretching at least 20 miles into the silt. They appear to be similar to the stone pillars known as anatta that dot the continent, though larger and with visible hollows. Their arrangement followed no obvious pattern, and they appeared to my eyes to be natural stone formations rather than something man-made.

After waiting atop the bluffs for some time, the winds shifted and we learned the reason for the towers' name. The large anatta catch the winds and produce horrible wailing sounds, acting like a series of great pipes.

Our guide said the city was once known as Keltatas. He claims the city is uninhabited, though I'm not sure

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I believe him, for he was unwilling to enter the ruins. Supposedly the wailing sound keeps the ruins empty, as none can stand the noise, but I wonder at this explanation. The wailing is certainly loud and fearsome, but it hardly seems so terrible as to keep

everyone away. I didn't get the chance to investigate the city more closely, however, as our guide was adamant that we should leave the area before sundown.

Carnivore Coast

The Carnivore Coast is the name for the far northern edge of Anattan and the eastern shores of the Strait of Arala, and it was the final region to which we traveled. The name, I believe, owes not just to the general brutality of this region, but to its role as the spawning grounds of the drik-like creatures known as tortles. As adults, they are civilized if ill-tempered, but as hatchlings tortles are deranged menaces that attack from the beaches in violent and thrashing swarms.

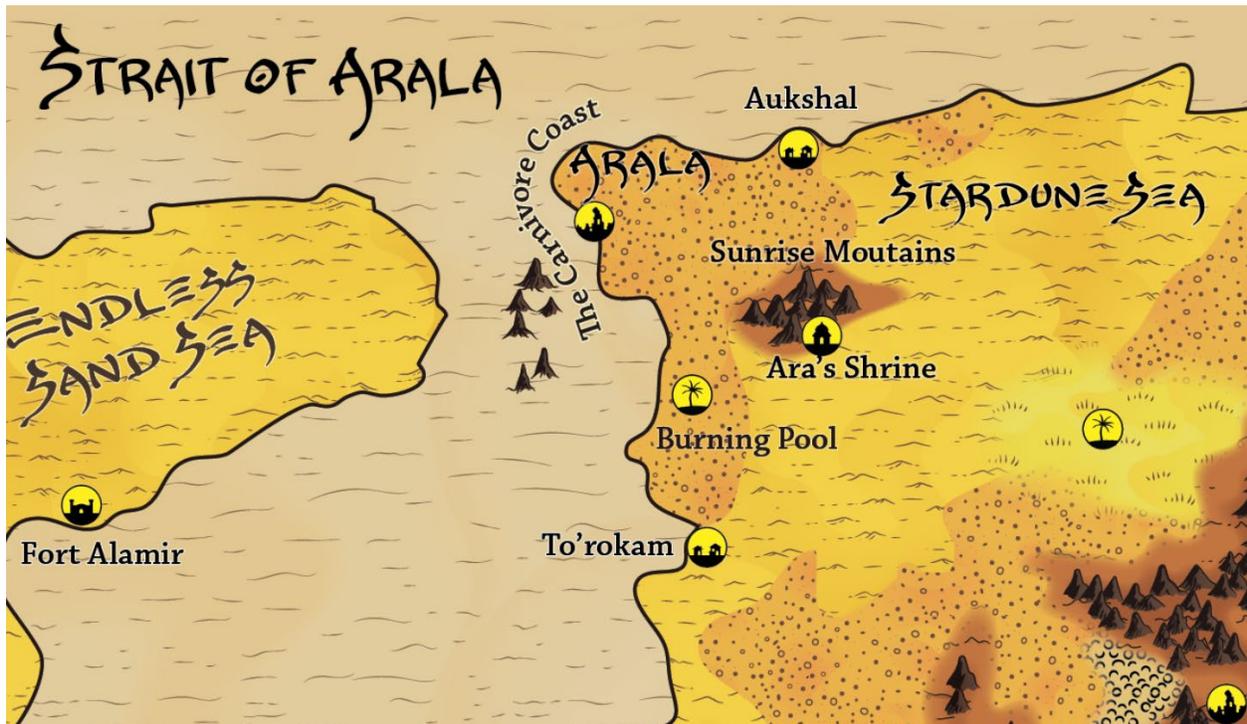
Along the Strait, the wind frequently changes direction, causing the silt to roil powerfully to the south for a few hours before switching abruptly to the north. This scours the land, leaving nothing but exposed bedrock for miles upon miles of coastline.

On the northern coast of Anattan, the silt behaves differently: even when no wind is blowing, the silt constantly swells and falls. Periodically, the silt gathers into enormous crests, like a merchant gathering a bundle of cloth, which can be dozens or hundreds of

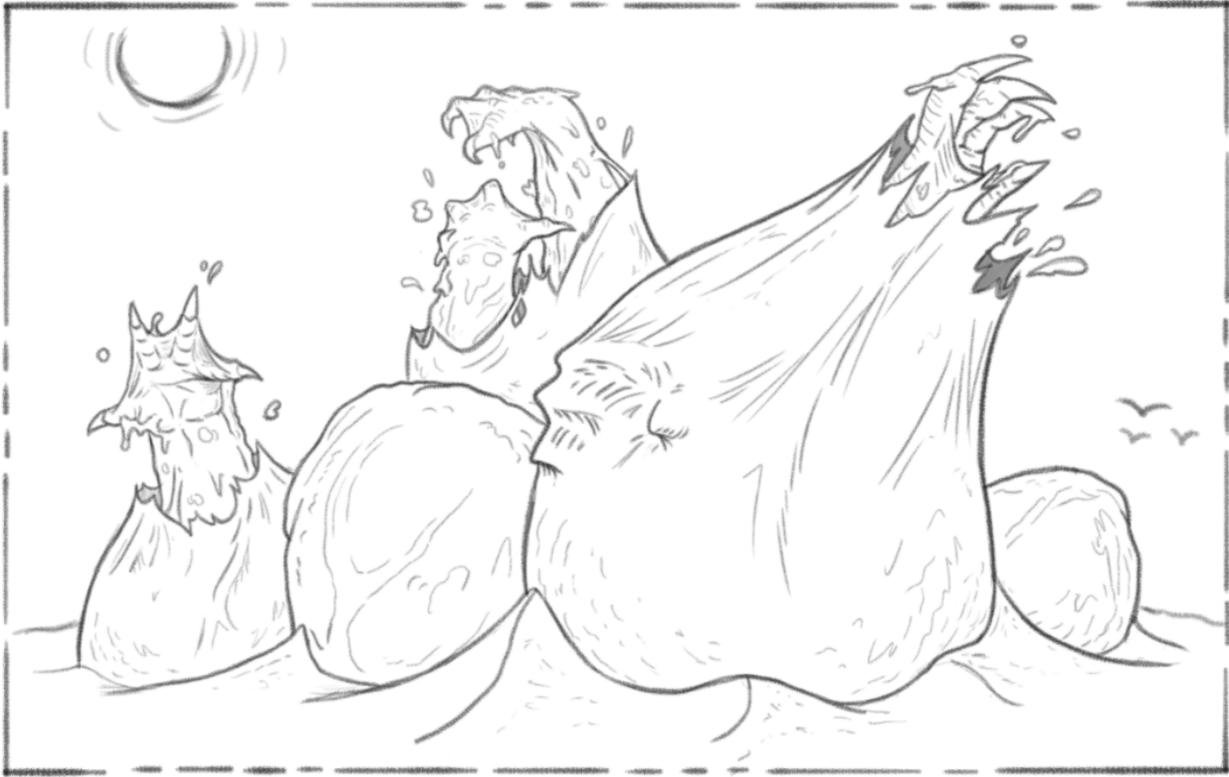
feet high. These crests can be seen forming from great distances and, when one is spotted, the people here know to flee to higher ground. These great crests of silt crash into the ground and then recede back into the distance - never before have I seen the silt behave in such a way. What we know as the Silt Sea is wedged between the continents of Anattan and the Tablelands, but some say the silt to the north of Anattan has nothing on the other side of it.

Sunrise Mountains

A small range of mountains visible from the Carnivore Coast, the Sunrise Mountains cast long streams of light and shadows across the nearby lands in either direction (depending on the time of day), as the land surrounding them is flat and largely featureless. These mountains are low and worn, but densely clustered, and the light is known to sometimes reflect off of them in places where the bare stone has gained a mirror-like



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finish. Though largely barren, small shrubs and cacti cling to life in the crevasses between the crests of the mountains, where condensation gathers at night.

Ara's Shrine

Nestled at the end of a long valley on the eastern edge of the Sunrise Mountains is a peculiar site known as Ara's Shrine. The sides of this valley are made of highly reflective stone that redirects the sun's light towards the shrine at its center, and is said to sometimes focus with such intensity on the site of the shrine that it can scour a man's flesh from his bones and boil his blood on certain days of the year. The people of the area bring sacrificial victims to this shrine for the glory of Ara, their name for the sun. They are led by a fearsome-looking woman who has burns covering half her body, is blind in one eye, and has hair that has been bleached nearly white; she claims to have been empowered as Ara's servant by surviving such an ordeal many years ago.

Aukshal

While most Yrrak pterrans are nomadic, traveling in a long loop around the Northern and Southern Ghats, a

few dozen families of Yrrak have permanently settled in the coastal village of Aukshal, a small trading and silt trawling outpost. The village is a series of low mud-brick buildings, all partially dug out of the stony ground. A few families of turtles, which call themselves septs, live in the village as well, where many work as gatherers who venture out into the silt in search of the molluscs and crustaceans that crawl along beneath the silt.

There are often a number of nomadic Yrrak making camp in the streets of the village, having travelled here to trade. Enough visitors find Aukshal on their way to the edge of Anattan that the town boasts not one, but three inns. The inns are most often occupied by silt runners (who are welcome here so long as they pay for their lodging in advance), though trading expeditions of visiting turtles sometimes stay as well. Silt vessels also occasionally make land near the village, as do travelers from New Theron. Inns run by pterrans and full of silt runners, turtles, and pirates would once have been an unimaginable spectacle, but by this stage of my travels, nothing surprised me anymore.

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Strait of Arala

We first learned of the Strait of Arala in New Theron, where men and women who had once been sailors in the Kulag Fleet told us a little about the geography of the Silt Sea. For most of its expanse, the Sea of Silt is hundreds of miles wide, but, if one travels far enough north, the sea narrows and narrows until, for a stretch, only about 20 miles of silt separate the continent of Anattan from the continent of the Tablelands. This narrow passage is known as the Strait of Arala, and we recognized immediately that our best and greatest hope of returning home lay in finding the strait.

For flyers, the trip is an easy journey, and we spotted both aarakocra and pterrax circling the small mountains in the middle of the strait before heading toward one shore or the other. Pterrax, it is worth noting, are strong enough that they can carry riders back and forth across such distances as the strait, assuming one can convince their pterrax caretakers to allow such a trip.

Few ships of Eldaarich's Kulag Fleet patrol this far north, and thus a number of vessels unaffiliated with any major powers can be found traversing the strait. Some of these vessels primarily search for food, while others ferry goods back and forth between the two continents. This is perhaps the only part of Athas where the existence of both continents is common knowledge.

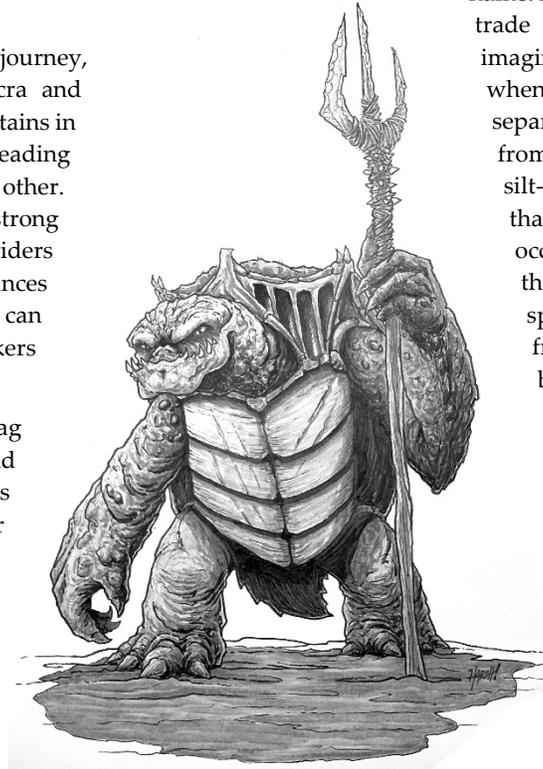
It is curious to consider that small amounts of trade travel from the Tablelands to Anattan. These goods originate in the city-states, pass from the dynastic merchant houses to the smaller houses or elven tribes that venture far to the north, and eventually pass to ssurrans or nikaal traders who bring the goods to the shores of the Strait of Arala. From here, the goods are often shuttled to the ruined city of Arala, from which the northern pterrax tribes might take the goods to New Theron. From there, intrepid dune traders periodically set forth to trade with the dwarves of Calvass, who might ferry the goods across the magma to Zalvass. Then, a caravan might take the goods into

the Spiral Lands, where they travel the great Spiral Road all the way around to Gilland, and there might find themselves reaching one of the other coastal settlements of Anattan loaded on the back of a great hulgor. All along this journey, the goods reside with individuals who only know one or two of the connections in this great route.

Ruins of Arala

The final place we visited in Anattan was the ruined city of Arala, from which the strait gets its name. It is apparent that Arala was a great trade city ages ago, and it's easy to imagine the city built its wealth in an era when these two lands were not so separate, and not so sundered. It is clear from the ruin's deeply weathered and silt-scoured ancient stone structures that the apex of this city's greatness occurred centuries, if not millennia, in the past. You can still see the splendor that once flowed into Arala from serving as the gateway between two lands.

The city itself appears to stretch deep into the silt. At first it can look as though the silt has swallowed the city, but upon closer inspection it is apparent that a network of canals criss-cross Arala, with some of these canals running so far inland that they disappear into sand dunes. The city wasn't swallowed by the silt, but rather was built to stretch out



into the sea.

The ruins are largely empty, and in most of the city the canals are filled with silt horrors and their spawn. The exception is an enclave of the city where many of the buildings and canals have been taken over by a large tribe of turtles. We had heard in our travels that these hard-shelled reptilian people are too ill-tempered to cooperate with each other beyond small groups known as septs, yet in Arala it seemed their reputation was not entirely fair. Hundreds upon hundreds (though I'd guess not quite a thousand) of turtles live here together, sharing a common purpose that includes, but is not limited to, restoring the city of Arala one block at a time.

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While there, we were introduced to the leader of Arala's settlement, a female turtle named Ookuulaanai, called the "Horde Shepherd." She was the largest turtle we had seen, with ancient-looking, milky-white eyes and a blood-red hide marred by scars. She regaled us at length about the civilization of turtles, but was briefly interrupted when a seemingly deranged young turtle darted from a nearby building and fiercely bit her leg. She kicked the angry creature – albeit in a motherly way – into the silt and went on with her conversation as if nothing had happened.

It was in this strange society that we encountered a silt skimmer captain planning a passage across the Strait of Arala, back to our homeland. After all this, it didn't

even take much negotiating or expense. If one makes the journey of hundreds of miles across all of Anattan to arrive at Arala, from then on the passage between continents is but a minor affair.

We made the crossing in two days. We left late enough the first day that our captain found it necessary to locate a small, and largely hidden, inlet in the mountains and rest there overnight. Our vessel lay undisturbed, and in the morning we continued on our journey. North of the strait, the silt opens up to unimaginable width. Sometimes great winds blow through the strait, as they did that day, smothering it in the Gray Death.

Epilogue

We started our journey blindly sailing east until we hit the land of Anattan, and ultimately we left that land much like we arrived – on a vessel, holding wet cloths over our face to breathe, and barely able to see our hands held at length before us, but sailing due west this time. Around midday, the silt started to become shallow and our skimmer soon emerged onto solid ground. Just like that, our feet were on our home soil once more.

It is a testament to the Dragon's terrible power that he succeeded in keeping these two continents so separated that their residents were barely aware of each other. It's not hard to consider the similarities of Anattan and the Tablelands – the people of both lands have been terrorized by the Dragon, oppressed by tyrannical monarchs, scoured by storms, hunted by vicious monsters, seared by the unending heat from scorching sun and boiling magma, and yet somehow they have carried on.

I trust this accounting of my journey and the current state of the far shore of the Sea of Silt will serve your purposes well enough to buy my passage back to my homeland.

Farewell, dear collector, may your will never falter.

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Anattan Map - Free Year 1





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