

7TH SEA

The New World

Explore the majestic Aztlani empires of the New World from the deserts of Nahuaca to the peaks of the Kuraq Empire!

7TH SEA

The New World

Change is the only constant.

Change has come to the people of Aztlan. The Théans arrived one hundred years ago and failed in their ambitions of conquest, but their words and desires changed everything. For the first time in thousands of years, the Aztlani people speak of a unified land. The three old nations vie for dominance of their splintered empire, and their ambitions consume all who walk these lands.

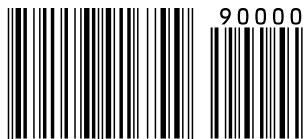
This book contains material for *7th Sea: Second Edition* including new mechanics for environmental hazards, Backgrounds, Advantages, Arcana, Stories, Dueling styles and Sorceries. It also includes the three Nations of the former Aztlan Empire:

- **Nahuacan Alliance**, an militaristic alliance of cities devoted to the same four gods
- **Tzak K'an**, a group of disparate city-states bound together by their shared culture living amongst dense jungles and ancient Synchronic ruins
- **Kuraq**, a nation led by a single Empress devoted to the dead god Suway and the undead nobles who serve her

Join the Aztlani people in their struggle to unite in a time of change!

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7TH SEA

The New World

JOHN WICK PRESENTS A SOURCEBOOK FOR 7TH SEA: SECOND EDITION "THE NEW WORLD"

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A note from John...

Back in 1999, when **7TH SEA** first appeared, I did not know how to make this book. I knew nothing about Mesoamerica, its people, its history and its stories. I just didn't have a clue.

Now, in 2017, I still don't know how to make this book. Fortunately, thanks to 11,000 Kickstarter backers, I can hire people who do. And that means the world of **7TH SEA** gets a whole lot bigger.

Reading through the text, I'm excited. Excited to see faces we don't often (if ever) see represented in RPGs. And not just as barbaric, backward savages spilling blood to make the sun come up. We see them as people. We see them as Heroes. (And yes, there are some Villains in here as well.) The total sum of knowledge on display in this book just overwhelms me. Talking to people who speak at ease on a subject that I have no clue about is always fun for me. I don't understand any sentence that begins with the phrase, "I don't want to learn..." And reading this book has been a learning experience for me.

But this isn't just an encyclopedia entry on Mesoamerican culture. It's a look into their mythology and lives. When we first proposed this book, I asked the question, "What would their civilizations look like if history was different?" And your answer is right here. A bit of history, a bit of speculation, and most importantly, a place to tell the stories of Heroes and Villains...from a point of view you may have never considered.

—John Wick

Special Thanks

Thank you to Mark for believing in me once again by handing the reigns of this book over, and thanks to Anastasia for her patience with my uncultured ways. I hope everyone enjoys the stories and mysteries they find inside as much as I do.

As always, thank you to my husband and my rock, Weston Harper.

—Danielle Lauzon

When I began writing games in 2010, I never dreamed I'd get to work on something like **7TH SEA: SECOND EDITION**. **7TH SEA** was a real roleplaying game, the kind they sell in stores with color art and hundreds of pages. Years later, I've found myself not only helping to make **7TH SEA** real again for thousands of fans...but I've also gotten to help bring Mesoamerica to **7TH SEA** in a way I'd never dreamed possible. But none of this book would have happened without our amazing team: huge thanks to Danielle for making all the pieces fit together, Anastasia for bringing a wealth of scholarly and local knowledge to the book, Marissa for pushing to make the art as sharp (and accurate) as possible...and John for trusting us to build something new in his world. And for all the minority game designers out there who wonder if all the struggle is worth it, if we can make something unique and special happen, if we have something to offer: sí, se puede. I promise. It can be done. You're holding it.

—Mark Diaz Truman

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K'awil's Run

BY JOHN WICK

The jungle slapped and cut him. His legs and lungs burned. His shoulders ached with the weight he carried. Sweat stung his eyes. He leapt over a fallen tree, the tips of his toes feeling the edge of the wood. He dodged around its standing cousin and in its shade, he collapsed. The weight from his shoulders tumbled forward, groaning. K'awil looked up and saw blood.

The Kuraq woman's skin was dark but losing color. She was dressed in traveling clothes. The hand on her belly crimson red. She looked at K'awil, her dark eyes resolute.

"You have to leave me," she said, speaking in his tongue. With her other hand, she reached into her travelling bag and withdrew a small leather pouch. "Take it," she said.

K'awil's breath would not let him rest. But not far from the place they just were, they both heard shouting. And dogs.

He shook his head. "No," he said. He put his hand on her hand and the pouch. "Put it away."

She did. "You're either very brave or very foolish," she said, half a smile finding her lips.

"Why can I not be both?" he asked, returning her smile.

They heard another shout. "I see them!"

K'awil grabbed the woman and threw her over his shoulder.

"We are close to the river," he said. "And the village is on the other side."

She winced as he lifted her. "We still have to think of a way to cross the river," she said.

He shifted her weight on his shoulders. "Apocōatl will show us the way." Then, he ran.

Seven days ago, Chuki entered the village with her hands raised and a smile on her face. She wore her traveling clothes and no weapons. Her face and clothes were dirty, and she had a bit of spiderweb in her hair. Remnants of a close encounter.

It was not a large village. Large enough to survive in the jungle. She saw men and women working. Many of them had weapons.



"Hello!" she said in a loud but friendly voice.

The villagers looked up. Chuki did not know what to expect, but she was ready to run. One of the women stood and shouted at her.

"Kuraq. Go away, we don't want trouble here." she said.

Chuki stopped at the edge of the village, walking no further. "I need your help, and you need mine," she said.

A tall man dressed only in what Chuki could assume was a warrior's belt walked forward. He had a spear and a piece of sharpened obsidian on his belt. But he also wore a compass around his neck. He stepped close enough to strike her.

"What is your name?" he asked, a little hint of threat in his voice.

"My name is Chuki," she said.

He looked her up and down. "You are Kuraq," he said. She nodded. "I am. I am also a friend of Ferdinand."

The man's eyes narrowed. "You? And why should I believe you?"

"He came to Kuraq not long ago and he came to the resistance, the Pakaykuq. I met him there," she said.

The man grunted and waved his hand in a go on gesture "Tell me about him."

"He is shorter than me. White skin and beard. Dark eyes. He likes to whistle. And he likes tea." She made a cautious gesture with her right hand, still above her head, toward the compass around his neck. "And he gave you that." She looked him in the eye. "K'awil."

The man showed no emotion. Only his eyes glaring at her. Into her.

Slowly, he smiled. "What kind of tea?"

She couldn't help but return his grin. "I don't know. Something he said you brewed from a plant grown here. He tried to explain it, but I couldn't make sense of what he told me."

The man turned back to the village and shouted, "She is a friend of Ferdinand!"

Every face in the village transformed and Chuki's heart stopped trying to explode in her chest.

The man turned back. "I am K'awil," he said. "Welcome to our village."

* * *

They sat together in K'awil's home. Hanging above a fire was a Castillian tea pot, steam escaping the spout. K'awil removed it from the fire and poured the hot liquid into a ceramic cup, also from Castille.

"Ferdinand left it behind," K'awil said. "As a gift." He put the cup into her hands.

"Thank you," Chuki said. She blew across the surface of the steaming tea then sipped it. The taste was delicious, both familiar and yet strange. She looked up at

K'awil. "This is very good," she said. "I can see why he liked it so much."

He sat down with his own cup and sipped. Then, he asked, "Why are you here?"

She nodded. Time to tell the truth.

"Calderón," she said.

His eyes lit up like the fire. His body tensing, as if anticipating an attack. "What is the beast doing here?" he asked.

"He wants the Tear of Itzzohualli. He plans to give it to the Empress of Kuraq in exchange for some kind of favor."

K'awil shook his head and stood. "Yes," he said. "It is something the beast would want."

Chuki noticed how he nearly spat the epithet. Never speaking Calderón's name.

"I'm here to make sure he doesn't get it. I don't know what the Empress wants, but I will do anything to stop her," Chuki said.

K'awil turned back to her. "How do I know that?" he asked. "Perhaps the Empress sent you here to take it."

Chuki shook her head. "No," she said. "I promise."

"How do I know?"

"I am a friend of Ferdinand," she said, her voice almost choking.

K'awil stomped toward her. "And, where is he? Why send a Kuraq on Tzak K'ani business?"

She blinked, feeling a tear on her cheek. "He's dead," she said. "He was spying on the Empress, and Calderón caught him. He barely escaped. He brought what he could to the resistance, but died shortly after his arrival."

K'awil took a deep breath. "Then the beast killed him?"

Chuki nodded.

"How do you know this?" K'awil asked.

Chuki looked up at him. "I was there when he came to our camp. I heard his words myself." She looked back down into the fire. "I watched him die. And I couldn't do anything."

K'awil looked at Chuki sitting in front of the fire and he knew she was telling the truth. He knelt beside her, put his hand on her shoulder.

"I am sorry," he said. "Ferdinand was a good man."

"He was." She looked back up from the fire. "And I need your help. Or the Empress and Calderón will grow more powerful."

K'awil nodded. "I will help you."

* * *

Olivia Corvaza Marquez hated the jungle. She hated the people, the animals, the plants. She hated everything. She hated the clothes she had to wear, she hated the food. She even hated the water.



Beside her, men and women cut away at the jungle with sharp weapons, making a path for her to walk. Up ahead, dogs barked. And further up ahead were two fools who thought they could escape.

She wiped her brow and drank another cup of wine. Antonio carried the wine for her. Sniveling little man. Olivia missed Théah and its men of power. Her mother was a courtesan. His father met her in Vodacce and brought her back to Castille. Olivia's father raised her as a son, ignoring her mother's wishes to make her delicate and fragile. She grew up as strong as the steel on her hip. And when she visited Vodacce, she drank and fought like a man. The men of Vodacce didn't know what to make of her and she liked watching the confusion on their faces. She would never be weak like her mother. Never.

"We have found it!" a voice from ahead shouted.

"Finally." She strode forward, seeing the soldiers clear away the stone ruins. It was a short building, squat and square. Olivia noted that these ruins were like the others: the stone cutting technique seemed too far advanced for the local savages. As she came closer, she noticed some of the foliage had already been cut away.

"Did you do this?" she asked one of the soldiers. He shook his head.

She frowned. "That means someone is already in there."

Antonio asked, "What do we do?"

She smiled and crossed her arms. "We wait," she said.

Almost an hour later—an hour of insects, heat and constant itching—the figures emerged. A Kuraq woman and a Tzak K'ani man.

"A Kuraq? Did the Empress send you?" she asked, smiling beside her guards.

Chuki cursed through clenched teeth. "We need to leave, K'awil."

"No? Then what are you doing here?" she demanded.

"Maybe you should spend more time getting to know who you're working with," Chuki said and spit on the ground at her feet.

"No bother. I'll just have to kill you," she said.

The Tzak Kani's eyes narrowed. He reached for his sharpened obsidian blade.

"Oh, I don't think so," Olivia said. She drew her pistol, aimed it at him and squeezed the trigger. The bullet fired, but it did not strike him. Instead, it struck Chuki.

The Kuraq woman threw herself between the bullet and the Tzak K'ani.

She watched Chuki's body slouch to the ground, her hand clutching the wound. Olivia shook her head, laughing. "All the good that did," she said. She tossed her pistol to Antonio. "Reload that," she said. Then, she turned back to the two interlopers.

But both of them were gone.

"What?" she shouted. "Where did they...?"

One of the guards pointed up. She looked and saw the Tzak K'ani running along the top of the ruin, a bleeding Chuki in his arms.

"Get them!" she shouted. "They have the Tear!"

The guards rushed forward. Olivia stood at the opening of the ruin. Antonio handed her the reloaded pistol.

"We hunt the beasts," she said. Then, she smiled. "And they will be fine pelts for my collection."

* * *

K'awil tripped. He tumbled forward, Chuki spilling over his shoulders. A sudden pain in his ankle told him everything he needed to know. He looked at Chuki. She wasn't moving, and the color was drained from her face.

He looked back into the jungle. The dogs were close. He heard armored footsteps, rushing toward them. He looked forward. Heard the rushing waters of the river. They were close.

He pushed himself back to his feet, but fell back down. He looked at his ankle. It was already beginning to swell. K'awil pulled himself up using a tree branch, keeping his swollen ankle off the ground. Then, he hopped toward Chuki.

Her eyes were closed, her breath was soft. Skin cold. She was alive, but only for the next few moments.

That was when the black-haired woman who looked like a raven stepped through the jungle with her hungry dogs and armed soldiers.

"Ah," she said. "At last."

When she spoke, the words were in Tzak K'ani, but with a strong accent.

She smiled at him, putting her hands on her hips. "I see my bullet finally slowed you down." She gestured at Chuki. "Little girl shouldn't be playing with dangerous toys."

K'awil stood between Chuki and the raven. The woman laughed.

"Ironic," she said. A word he did not understand. Then, she returned to his language. "First she takes a bullet for you. Now, you are going to return the favor, si?"

K'awil said nothing. He drew the obsidian blade from his belt.

The raven looked at her soldiers. "Él quiere pelear." She turned back to K'awil. "If you want to fight, señor, it is your choice. You will only go to whatever hell holds your bloodthirsty ancestors."

"Do you know why I dislike so many Castilles?" he asked.

She raised an eyebrow at him. "No, señor. Por favor, tell me why."

"Because they hide their cowardice behind talk." He



gestured at the guards. "And make lesser men be brave for them."

That turned her mirth into something darker. "What is that you say?" she asked through gritted teeth.

"We are not afraid of you," K'awil said, putting his blade against his chest. "You are a coward. Afraid of yourself. Afraid of the world. You walk alone because you cannot even trust each other."

The raven drew a pistol from her belt. She aimed it at him.

He raised his chin. "Apocōātl protects me."

She squeezed the trigger. The pistol roared. K'awil smelled the fire and smoke. A tree branch shattered beside his head.

On his good ankle, K'awil took one step forward.

"Apocōātl protects me," he said again.

The raven dropped the pistol and pulled another from her belt. She aimed it at his head. "Give me the Tear," she said.

K'awil took another step. He felt no pain.

"Apocōātl protects me."

She squeezed the trigger. The sound of the pistol and another sound. Metallic and sharp. Almost like a bell. K'awil stumbled, twisting. But he did not lose his stance. He stood up straight and the raven's eyes grew wide.

Her bullet struck the compass around his neck. It stuck there, still smoking.

"Apocōātl protects me," he said.

He was close now. Almost close enough to strike. She removed her third and last pistol, aiming it straight at his head.

He swung the obsidian blade. She squeezed the trigger, screaming.

The pistol made no sound, only a soft click.

His blade landed on her throat, drawing a small trickle of blood. The blade only a hair from the artery.

The raven's eyes were full of fear. K'awil spoke softly.

"You will take your soldiers and go back to the beast. You will tell him the Tear of Itzzohualli does not belong to him."

She drew in a breath through trembling lips. "Or... what?" she asked.

"Or I will move my blade and open your throat and let your blood feed the world. As my ancestors did when Théans tried to take that which was not theirs to take."

She stared up into his eyes. Her own eyes shaking.

"We're leaving!" she shouted.

The guards around him looked at each other.

"Lower your weapons! We are going back!"

A man holding a large vase said, "But if we go back without..."

She glared at him and he was quiet. The guards lowered their weapons and stepped back.

She looked back at K'awil. "Another day," she said.

K'awil shook his head. "I do not think so."

The raven stepped back away from his blade, her empty pistols on the jungle floor. "Oh yes," she said. "I have a new word for you. I'm sure your friend can explain it if she recovers," she said.

"What word?" he asked.

She smiled, saying the word as if tasting it on her lips. "Vendetta," she said. Then, she and her guards were gone.

* * *

When Chuki opened her eyes, the room was dark. She was warm. Memories came back to her in pieces. She moved her hand to touch her belly. Yes, the wound was healing.

"Hello?" she asked out loud in Kuraq. Then, she changed the language. "Hello?"

She heard sounds outside, then two figures entered the room, spilling sunlight into her eyes. She held up a hand for shade. One of them was K'awil. The other was a man she did not recognize. A Nahuacan. He had thick black hair and bright eyes, his cheeks red from the sun. He wore a blue robe and carried doctor's tools. When he spoke, he confirmed her suspicions.

"Good to see you awake," he said, his voice almost a singsong. Soft and thoughtful. "And, how are you?"

"I hurt," she said. "A gunshot wound."

The Nahuacan nodded. "Yes, yes. K'awil told me all..."

She blinked, her breath catching in her throat. "The Tear!" she said, looking at K'awil. "The Tear of..."

He nodded. "It is safe."

"And the woman?" she asked.

"The raven." K'awil said. "She is gone."

The Nahuacan knelt beside her. "I am Ome Atl. I came to join the Pakaykuq only recently. And you came very close to leaving us." He smiled and asked, "May I see your wound?"

She nodded. "I suspect you've already seen it."

"Yes," he said. "But it is only polite to ask permission."

She raised the blanket. It was an angry red.

"It looks as well as can be expected. Perhaps even a little better. I suspect you will be on your feet in no time." He stood and bowed to them both. "If you have any pain, I have some tea from my home. It's the best you will find anywhere in Aztlan."

"Thank you," she said.

He waved and left the room.

She looked at K'awil. He stood still in the dim light.

"I remember falling," she said. "But I don't remember much more." She closed her eyes. "Where are we?"

"I've brought you to a Pakaykuq outpost. I decided it would be best to keep the Tear here, out of reach," he said.



She gives an almost imperceptible nod. "Thank you. We have dealt a blow to the Empress, and to Calderón. How did you escape?" she asks almost as an afterthought.

"Apocōatl protected me," he said.

She looked at the compass on his chest. The bullet. She pointed at it. "I don't think he was the only one."

K'awil looked down and touched the compass.

He nodded. "Yes."

* * *

Calderón woke feeling a weight on his chest. He woke with the waking confusion, unsure where he was. But he saw he was in his bed, in his bedclothes. Even in the darkness, he recognized that.

Then, he looked up and saw several sets of eyes flashing at him in the darkness. Several people stood ranged around his room. A man was kneeling over him. In his bed. In his bed.

"Wh—" Calderón began, but K'awil put a hand over his mouth.

"I know who you are," K'awil said, sitting on his chest. "But I will not say your name. And you will not speak."

K'awil took the edged obsidian from his belt. When he spoke, it was in Castillian. "You come here and spill our blood. You are an enemy of Aztlan. Of all Aztlan. You think we are lesser than you because we do not dress in your clothes or speak your language." The rest of the people in the room bristled at these words and murmured discontent.

Calderón's eyes were wide. K'awil felt the man's breath on his hand, short and quick. Felt his heart under his knee. Fast.

"We are greater than you," K'awil said. "Do you know why?"

He felt Calderón shaking under his grasp. K'awil put the blade under the man's chin.

"I have you under my blade," K'awil said. "And we could kill you and stop all of this." He made sure Calderón felt the keen edge against his skin. "We could...but we will not."

He lifted the blade away from Calderón's throat. "We are not murderers. We convinced the gods themselves against it. And if we can convince the gods, we can convince the Castilles. And then they will turn their backs on beasts like you."

K'awil put the blade back into his belt and pushed himself off the bed. He moved to the window. At this, the others in the room moved to the window, opened it, and jumped out. K'awil stopped and looked back at Calderón.

"Tell your friend I know the word she spoke. My friend Ome taught it to me." He paused. "Tell her I think it makes her weak. She lets the past consume her."

Calderón sat up in the bed. Or, he tried to. That's when he noticed his arms and legs were bound to the mattress.

"I will find you and kill you," he hissed at K'awil.

"You have to do the first to do the second," K'awil said. "And I doubt you can do the first."

Calderón shouted, "Guards!"

The door burst open. Soldiers rushed in.

K'awil looked at them. Then, he lept out the window. And once his feet hit the ground, he ran.

* * *

Olivia trudged through the Tzak K'ani jungles, and cursed the ill fate that had her once again doing Calderón's dirty work after what happened with that Kuraw woman a month ago.

"Antonio, please check the compass," she said.

Antonio stopped and pulled his compass out. He stared at it for a long moment without saying a word.

"What is wrong? Can't you read it?" she asked coming closer to him. When she looked down, she could see the needle spinning in lazy circles around the face. "What is this?" she demanded.

"I'm unsure," Antonio told her.

"That always happens," a voice came from behind her. The voice was soft and syllabant, but distinctly masculine. It spoke Castillian without an accent.

Olivia turned to look at the newcomer and was faced with the visage of a huge blue-green serpent. The creature had feathers around its head and giant multicolored wings. It stood as tall as Antonio, but she could see that its body trailed far behind it on the leaf covered jungle floor.

"Who—" she tried to speak.

"Leave," he said, not unkind.

"I can't." She finally found her voice again.

"I grow so tired of doing this," he said. She could almost imagine he sighed. Then he quickly coiled his long body around hers and gave a gentle squeeze. At first, it felt like the caress of a long-lost lover, but the squeeze did not stop, and instead grew stronger and more intense.

"Stop," she begged. But the creature would not stop, and soon she had no more breath to beg.

With a quick movement, her body snapped in two and fell lifeless to the ground. The serpent then turned his gaze to Antonio. "Leave," he said, not unkind.

Antonio turned and ran, and never looked back.



Introduction



A “New” World

Welcome to Aztlan, a land of larger-than-life adventures and a place where literal gods walk the earth. The people of this land remember a time before, when the old gods walked the earth, and the old machines still worked. The people who came before lived as one, in the Aztlan Empire. They refer an event called “the Fall,” when the people who came before them lost the favor of the gods and were destroyed, their own ancestors being the sole survivors of the event.

Each of the Nations born from that event have their own story of what happened afterward, but there is one undeniable truth: After the Fall, the land changed and is now ever-changing. Some seek to reunify the Aztlan peoples, though how to do such a thing remains a matter of contention as each new Nation has developed a unique culture all their own.

Living with Gods

Among the Aztlani are their gods, who bestow magic and blessings upon them in return for worship. These gods are fully present in their lives, with physical forms and personalities and temperaments all their own. Some gods are more involved in the people's lives than others, but every Aztlani has seen at least one god in their lifetime, if not more.

Gods often tap Heroes for missions, and in places like Kuraq, the gods may even need Heroes to save them. The relationship the Aztlani have with their gods means that a god, or multiple gods, could take a front and center role in a story set in Aztlan.

While the gods may work with the Heroes and even bless them, they are not always helpful. A god with his own agenda could end up as an unwitting antagonist as he attempts to work on his own goals. Gods themselves are neither Heroes nor Villains. They may help or hinder the Heroes or Villains in their own deeds, but the gods are beyond that classification. In general, the gods work for the good of their people, and Heroes often garner their favor.

The exception to this rule are the old gods. These gods no longer walk the earth, having been sealed away long ago. These violent and bloody beings would like nothing better than to subjugate the people of Aztlan and force them into bloody worship like the days of old.

The Changing World

The fact that the world changes is an accepted truth in Aztlan. The people have carved out pockets of civilization and stability in hostile landscapes.

In the north, roads cut through the deep desert into dense coastal jungles as the only safe passages through. Just south of these deserts lie nearly impassible jungles that refuse to conform to anyone's attempts at mapping. Even further south are the forested mountain ranges and a jungle so dense that few traverse it. The people live in the mountains as the only safe spaces in the land.

Outside Influences

The Aztlani people have been in contact with Théans for a little over a century. In this time, they have learned a few things from each other. Travel between the continents is relatively frequent, and people travel to and from both places. Théans can be found throughout Aztlan in small groups. Usually, these are people who have decided to live amongst the Aztlani people, and few cities host anything resembling a Théan district.

When Théans first arrived in Aztlan, they did not make a good impression and now any large group of Théans is suspect. Alternatively, in Théah, the city of Odiseo in Castille hosts the largest number of Aztlani transplants in the Flower Quarter.

Both continents have influenced the other to some degree, and you can easily find Aztlani foods and engineering designs across Théah, and Théan guns and weapons throughout Aztlan. Théah's influence has increased Aztlani ship travel, as this was an engineering feat that Aztlani people had never bothered with before.

Just as the peoples of Aztlan are not the same, neither are their responses to Théans. Some seek to use the Théans for their own devices, while others have a wary respect for them, seeking to learn from them. Still others view them as interlopers at best, and enemies at worst.

Most Aztlani are accepting people who enjoy learning and discovery, and therefore interactions with Théans are both exciting and profitable. For Aztlani, the Théans are exotic and strange, not to be fully trusted, but worth learning from, even if their ideas on the gods are backwards and wrong.



Aztlan Nations

Three great nations make up the whole of Aztlan—the Nahuacan Alliance, Tzak K'an, and the Kuraq Empire.

The Nahuacan Alliance

The **Nahuacan Alliance** lies in the north of Aztlan. It is ruled by a council of elders from each of four great cities located at the cardinal points of their nation—Milllahco to the north, Tecuehtitlān to the west, Ōlōxochicalco to the east, and Nexhuatipec to the south—each dedicated to one of the four gods of the Alliance.

The only person above the council is the Great Speaker, a person dedicated to speaking for the people and questioning the will of the gods. The Nahuacans are a warrior people, but ones who believe in law and order. They seek to unite Aztlan once again, but few agree on the best course of action for that. The Great Speaker is young, so young that few believe he is up for the task. The leaders of the two strongest military forces in the Alliance are at odds over attempting to gain control over the Great Speaker position.

Tzak K'an

Tzak K'an borders the Alliance to the south and is covered in jungles and old Surneth ruins. Tzak K'an is a group of mostly unrelated city-states that share no central government. The ties that bind the Tzak K'ani are their cultural practices and beliefs. Many city-states are dedicated to a single god, or in some cases a god-king, and are ruled each by different leaders.

But they all have a shared respect for the sciences, exploration and the scrivener's art. Though the culture of Tzak K'an is rich and abundant, their inability to unite leaves them vulnerable in the case of a unified Aztlan. To make matters worse, the city-states themselves are gearing up for a war that could lead to a cultural collapse.

The Kuraq Empire

The **Kuraq Empire** lies further south still, in the mountains of Aztlan. The people here mostly worship a single god of death, Suway. They are ruled by their undead Empress, Asiri Inkasisa, who has maintained rule for the past hundred years. Their culture is built upon venerating their dead, who walk among them deciding all the factors of their everyday life.

The Empress is not content to simply have her Empire stop at the border of Tzak K'an, and hopes

AZTLANI LANGUAGE

Though the Aztlani are spread out between three nations, they have commonalities in their language that come from once being part of the same empire. Though the words and usage is different from place to place, this pronunciation guide can serve for all three.

x - sounds like soft h

qu - sounds like k

ā, ī, ō, ū - makes the long form vowel

hu - sounds like w

tl - sounds like t when at the end of a word

j - sounds like y

z - sounds like s

' - denotes a guttural stop before continuing

So for example, Aztlan is pronounced (AHS-tlahn), Nahuacan is pronounced (nah-WA-kan), Tzak K'an is (zahk K-ahn), Kuraq is (kur-AHK), and Apocoatl is pronounced as (ahpo-KO-at)

to one day control all of Aztlan with her god as the one and only god. To this end, she has enacted a God Hunt to destroy all the other gods in Kuraq, and eventually all of Aztlan. The common people, tired of their corrupt leadership and blessed by the gods, have set up a Resistance. They hope to dethrone the Empress and return all the gods to their rightful place in the lives of the people of the Kuraq Empire.

How to Use This Book

This book should give you everything you need to run adventures in Aztlan, or to create Aztlani characters and drop them into your existing 7TH SEA campaigns. That said, we recognize that we cannot do full justice to the complexity and richness of history of these real cultures. While we draw inspiration from real historical events and stories, we do not claim to have created an academic study into these cultures or nations.

When you look through these pages, we hope you find enough information to fill in your 7TH SEA world, but also enough questions to want to learn more about the cultures presented here.







Chapter 1

Aztlán



AZTLAN

“The god-kings of Aztlan left us with more gifts than we know. They taught us to speak with the stars, to see the truth of the land. And they should remind us that we can once again be one people, if we so will it.”

—Wa’ak Cheb’ of Tzak K’an

From the deserts of the Nahuacan Alliance to the jungles of Tzak K’an to the mountain peaks of the Kuraq Empire, all that is currently called “the New World” by Théan explorers and archaeologists is not *new* at all. Aztlan is a land with a history that stretches back to a time before history, filled with peoples whose mastery of science and magic was all but absolute when the Théans were still living in caves.

And yet, it is a *new* world. Always. The forces that once ruled Aztlan—the god-kings of the Aztlan Empire—left it forever changed, their Fall marking the continent as a strange land brimming with Synchronic ruins. A land in which maps are rendered nearly useless, little more than educated guesses as the jungles and deserts swirl and shift. Aztlan resists mastery, even by those who know it best.

Aztlan’s Heroes have long balanced a tension between understanding the past and coping with an ever-changing land. They strive to help the civilizations that arose after the Fall flourish and grow, yet seek also to reunite the Aztlan people as one. Somehow in this, they hope to not only unify the people, but preserve their unique cultures. As they look inward to each civilization, they meet with many hardships and struggles. But the Heroes of Aztlan know their cause to be righteous; the gods smile upon their sacrifices and tribulations.

But as nearly a hundred years of contact with Théan explorers, archaeologists and invaders has demonstrated, Aztlan can no longer afford to ignore the rest of the world. The gods hunger for worshippers—be they Aztlani or other—and new people insist upon arriving on their shores.



History of the Aztlan Empire

Long before Théans came to Aztlan—long before the Atabean Trading Company established slave routes from Ifri or l’Empereur dreamed of a world unified under a Montaignois flag, long before the colonies of Wabanahkik (Quanahlotye) sprung from Avalon or the Empress ruled the Crescent—the Aztlan Empire controlled every inch of the civilized world. In a time of great darkness across Terra, the god-kings of the Aztlan Empire stood tall and proud, their cities reaching to the heavens and their rituals communicating with the stars themselves.

For some scholars, the success of the Aztlan Empire was obvious: the god-kings who ruled had mastered the cycles, the unending chain of life and death that guided the workings of the cosmos. Under their rule, the people of Aztlan stood apart from the mundane world, the same way that one might stand apart from a river, watching the flow but maintaining an identity apart from its chaotic momentum.

No one, not even the most learned scholars of the Aztlan Empire, knows how the god-kings accomplished such a feat. But one thing is certain: the god-kings were majestic and graceful, and their subjects knew their perfection. Their will alone grew crops from the soil, the land itself parted jungles for their roads and buildings, and there was peace across the land. Disputes between peoples were nearly nonexistent, and when they did emerge the god-kings themselves stepped forward to resolve whatever conflict had arisen.

Today such an empire seems like a fever-dream, as the new empires of Aztlan squabble and feud over territory, religion, resources and power. But despite the many and diverse tales told about the Aztlan Empire, the people of Aztlan agree that the Empire ruled the entire continent and all the people who lived upon it in perfect harmony.

But nothing lasts forever. Not even perfection.

The Fall

The Fall of the Aztlan Empire was as surprising as it was final. One moment, the god-kings of Aztlan looked over their holdings, emboldened by the timelessness of their rule, secure in their power and prestige, vain and perfect; then in short order, all they held dear was mere rubble and ruin. The end of an Empire was upon them before they even realized it.

The people of Aztlan—the Aztlani—fled their cities and abandoned their homes. The great temples fell to looters and vandals. The jungles and deserts, long held at bay by the magic of the god-kings, swept over the Empire like a plague of locusts. The very earth itself appeared to turn against the Empire, so great was the failure that came upon it in so short a time.

No one knows precisely what happened to cause the Fall. Was it some viral madness that drove the people to destroy their own empire? Was it an invasion from some far-off land that laid waste to the greatest civilization the world had ever seen? Did the god-kings themselves dishonor the powers-that-be through some unforgivable offense? No one knows.

Each of the civilizations that arose after the Aztlan Empire have stories about the Fall, explanations that hope to explain what brought the Empire to an end. But the truth is that no one, not even the gods themselves, knows the truth. The Fall was an apocalypse, and the historical record is often a casualty in the wake of such a disaster.

Nevertheless, the effect of the Fall was unmistakable. The god-kings vanished from the world. The great cities fell to ruin. Many sorceries once practiced across Aztlan were lost forever. As the Aztlani struggled to survive in the harsh aftermath of the greatest cataclysm their world had ever known, their culture teetered on the brink of destruction.

The Nahuacan scholar Chicuei Atzintli once summed up the Fall thusly: “The bright candle of Aztlan burned in darkness, and the darkness grew tired of its arrogance. Who was such a candle to defy the end of all things?”

A Strange Land

The Aztlani eventually regrouped and rebuilt. As they reclaimed the continent—driving back the jungles and irrigating the deserts—they expected to eventually tame the land as the Aztlan Empire had tamed it. They were not god-kings, but they saw in the Old Empire a model for ruling Aztlan...even as many of them doubted that Aztlan could ever be unified again.

Yet when cities were raised and temples rebuilt, the people of Aztlan confronted a new reality: *the Fall had changed Aztlan itself*. The jungle could be beat back with fire, but it no longer held a consistent shape, no





longer retained an orderly spatial existence within its borders. A trip across a desert was no longer a mere matter of preparing enough supplies; the vast sands were as liable to spit travelers back out at their original destinations as they were to allow the Aztlani to pass without incident.

Centuries passed after the Fall, and Aztlan's form and shape grew more consistent...but it never returned to its original solidity. The Fall—whatever its cause—was more than just a political cataclysm, more than just the end of era. It signaled the end of Aztlan itself, and whatever Aztlan is now is some new beast, born from a never ending cycle that will surely bear a new Aztlan in the future.

Three Empires

As Théah struggled to claw its way out of the darkness of early feudalism, Aztlan reclaimed its grand cities and precious temples. The Aztlani, finding the technology of the Empire now foreign and unknowable, did their best to relearn what they had once always known. Some things were discovered anew...but others were lost forever.

And as they rebuilt, three distinct political institutions emerged: the Nahuacan Alliance, the Tzak K'ani city-states, and the Kuraq Empire. Each ruling body was distinct and independent; no longer would Aztlan be ruled by any one government, let alone the god-kings who had succumbed to the Fall.

Tzak K'ani City-States

Driven by many faiths (and many gods), the Tzak K'ani were some of the earliest people to reclaim Aztlan after the Fall, building city-states that pushed back the jungles and once again called forth the magic of the stars to the land of mortals. Warfare dominated the early days of Tzak K'an, but the end of conflict led to a fragile truce among the many leaders: no one Tzak K'ani would rule the loose alliance of city-states that emerged from the war.

Today, Tzak K'an is in decline, their disorganized detente turning to open warfare between cities as they make open alliances with foreigners. Many of them believe that the end of times is upon Aztlan, the closing of another great cycle, but only one thing has remained consistent about the Tzak K'ani since they recovered from the fall: everything changes. They have no reason to believe that this world should be any different.

The Nahuacan Alliance

Centuries after the Tzak K'ani founded their first city-states, the first great cities of the Nahuacan Alliance took root in the high deserts to the north. While each of the Tzak K'ani city-states stood alone, part of the ever-rotating cycle of death and rebirth, the Nahuacan Alliance emerged as four powerful cities' joined forces, ending their own conflicts and wars with an agreement to share power, at least among the Nahuacans who were worthy to rule.

As Tzak K'an falls into decline, the Nahuacan Alliance has only reached new heights. Their military victories against Théan invaders have proven the



Nahuacans' martial superiority, and their rigorous administrative systems have allowed them to integrate new territory into their collective. Many Aztlani have started to whisper that the Nahuacan Alliance might once again unify Aztlan...

The Kuraq Empire

Even more recently than the rise of Nahuaca, the Kuraq Empire claimed the south of Aztlan, as early attempts at a fragile alliance failed and an Empress arose to unify the land. City-states—once as diverse as the Tzak K'ani—were brought to heel as powerful leaders called upon the spirits of the dead themselves, magic they alone knew how to wield. Soon, the Kuraq Empire held all that could be seen south of the Tzak K'ani city-states.

But as despotic and unchanging as the Venerable Dead could be as their people recovered from the Fall, the Empress Inkasisa, the most recent ruler of Kuraq, has transformed the Kuraq Empire from a unified state to a totalitarian machine. Her agents are everywhere, destroying her enemies wherever they may be found. And yet, a rebellion grows against her, hoping to return Kuraq to a sense of normalcy.

The New Gods

Just as the people of Aztlan emerged from darkness to become new and unique peoples, so too did a new wave of gods. These deities joined the Aztlani at their meals and rituals, journeying forth from jungle and desert alike to bestow their gifts upon those who would welcome them. The god-kings had been alien and resplendent, but the new gods often appeared mortal, their true nature hidden behind a mask of flesh and bone.

Unlike the old gods, these new gods had no intention of ruling; they preferred worship to fealty. "Honor us," they said, "and we will reward you with power and wealth." And so the Aztlani honored them with sacrifice and deed. "Worship us," they said, "and you will know the path of righteous truth." And so the Aztlani worshiped them with blood and vigor. "Believe in us," they said, "and we will destroy your enemies when they come to your shores." And so the Aztlani believed.

The gods did not disappoint. Not in times of famine and drought. Not when the Aztlani asked for riches beyond riches and knowledge of the arcane. Not even when the Théans arrived.

AZTLANI TIME

The events in this section are told from the Aztlani point of view, who have their own calendars. These are not consistent across the continent: the Nahuacan, Tzak K'ani and Kuraq calendars all serve local cycles and perspectives, but can make it difficult to follow the flow of events across the continent.

From a Théan point of view, in A.V. 1553, a little-known sailor by the name of Cristobal Gallegos petitioned the court for a royal grant of exploration to discover a sea route to Cathay that would allow Castillian merchants access to eastern goods without offering baksheesh to the hated Crescent Empire (or worse—slogging across the Ussuran wastes). He found the court uncannily responsive.

King Carlos I understood that Castille was not yet strong enough to overcome the other nations of Théah, but knew that without an outlet for their ambitions, the Grandes de Castille would eventually turn on him and seek a new candidate for the title of Rex Castillium. And while Vaticine astronomers warned that the sea captain had severely underestimated the size of Terra, king and council alike dreamed of Théan conquests fueled by Cathayan riches.

And so, armed with a royal writ and ten of the Armada's fastest ships, Cristobal Gallegos set out for Cathay on 7 Coratine 1544. He returned with only three.

Théan Contact

Many years after the rise of the three empires and the new gods came the visitors from Théah. These people sailed in from the east, and made landfall, nearly starved to death from the long voyage.

Their landfall brought them close to the Nahuacan Alliance, and they were met with open arms, and some caution. The group, led by Cristobal Gallegos, thought they had encountered Cathay, and as such spoke to the Aztlani in Khazarian. The Aztlani believed that these people came from the south, or maybe were remnants of Aztlan that they had yet to meet. It didn't take long for each group to realize they were wrong.





Gallegos tried to introduce the Aztlani to Theus, giving them words of the prophet and teaching them his language using religion. In return, they taught him of the new gods and taught the Théans their language. Gallegos and his crew remained in Nahuacan lands for nine years before finally setting sail to return home.

With him he took word of the Nahuacan gods, imprinted on gold sheets as a sign of goodwill and faith. He also took their own writing, in his Castillian language, to prove their exchange of ideas. He left with a promise to return with trade and riches that the Aztlani were eager to see.

Gallegos Returns to Castille

The captain, his face windburnt and sun-seamed, confessed that he had never reached Cathay, but found a new land, unknown to Théah, vouchsafing his discovery with ten sheets of hammered gold engraved with heathen gods, and twenty bronze-skinned conversos, proof that the people he had discovered could comprehend the truth of Theus.

His crew, in turn, dispersed their riches in the bordellos and tavernas of San Cristobal, telling tales of sultry men and women and golden cities in distant jungles. From the King's Council down to the lowliest peasant, the name of this new land ran through the nation like a fever, and "Aztlan" became a kind of touchstone, a place where the lowliest hidalgo could win himself an estancia, a merchant could make his fortune or a nobleman his mark.

Soon enough, expeditions to the New World set sail with all manner of purpose: exploration, mercantilism and conquest. The Vendel League established a specific fund—the Aztlan Charter—purely to award money to those brave enough to cross the Serpent's Sea. The Castillian crown, in particular, repeatedly recruited and supplied ships and crews to sail forth along Gallegos's route, believing that Aztlan offered a unique opportunity to extend the crown's influence before Avalon, Montaigne or Vodacce could react.

Further Contact

Alas, it was not to be. While a few cautious Odisean merchants were able to set up feitorias on the eastern shore of the Nahuacan Alliance, other attempts to yoke Aztlani riches to Théan ambitions failed miserably. Many ships never arrived in Aztlan, distracted by the opportunities of the Atabean Sea or waylaid by the Brotherhood of the Coast. Several expeditions managed to land on Aztlan's eastern shores, only to fall prey to the jungle before they could make contact with any Aztlani people.

Eventually, well-funded expeditions probed the Aztlani heartlands in search of plunder, usually making contact with the Tzak K'ani in the east before moving inland toward Nahuaca and Kuraq. While most Théan parties succumbed to disease, natural hazards or Aztlani resistance, enough succeeded in making someone rich—often the person funding the journey—to ensure a steady stream of fools eager to take such a desperate wager.



Doomed Conquests

One such fool was Don Fernando Medellín, a minor noble who hit on the mad idea of impersonating a Nahuacan deity in order to win support from the local population. Alas for Don Fernando, the deity in question happened to be in town that day, and did not appreciate his chicanery. While the god showed mercy the first time, Medellín was so certain of his plan's perfection that he tried it a second time further south, only to meet the god's full wrath.

Other Castillian adventurers met with similar failure. Franco Gonzalez—an ambitious explorer of no great means—was the first to meet the Empress of the Kuraq Empire. There, in the great capital of Kuska, surrounded by the wealthy and powerful of Kuraq, he too opted to pretend divinity, and was met with a more merciful final fate than his compatriot to the north: chased from Kuraq and humiliated, he brooded for half a decade before returning with fire and sword, slaughtering the Kuraq wherever he found them.

Of his ultimate end, little is known, though the few terrified survivors of his band claim that he and those who followed him were torn apart by the very corpses of those they massacred.

In Tak K'an, several expeditions have simply been lost into the jungles without a trace. When asked, the locals simply say that this kind of thing happens sometimes. Some Castillians think it is a conspiracy as the Tzak K'ani take their people or kill them. But anyone paying attention can see that the Tzak K'ani do not wander alone in the jungles, and they certainly don't spend any more time there than they have to.

Successful Partnerships

Despite their early "misunderstandings," relations between Théah and Aztlan have settled into a watchful peace, each continent gauging the other and making what they can of the encounter. Merchants, priests, and scholars rule the day, bartering goods and knowledge; exchanging faiths and fortunes; the Théans who dreamed of uniting Aztlan as a colonial vassal of this or that Théan crown have been thwarted by a combination of bad luck, military failure and divine intervention.

AGRICULTURAL EXCHANGES

The encounter with Aztlan irrevocably altered the Théan diet, and these foreign foods have permeated Théan cuisine. That great Kuraq invention, the potato, has found a new home in soils ravaged by the War of the Cross, alleviating the worst of the famines in the Eisen countryside. Inismore and Ussura have followed the Eisen example, ignoring overwrought Inquisitorial warnings about the dangers of "Legion's Apple." To the south, every Vodacce bravo tells a story about his *nonna's* pasta sauce, how some nameless ne'er-do-well cousin brought back the first tomato plants from Aztlan, and, whether it was a vision of the Prophets or methodical drudgery, the result is always—praise Theus!—marinara.

In turn, Théan livestock has revolutionized Aztlan agriculture. The introduction of horses and oxen have allowed the Nahuacan Alliance to bring ever-larger areas under cultivation, providing the grist for their engine of expansion. In the city-states of the Tzak K'an, Théan agricultural techniques have superseded the traditional slash-and-burn approach, with manure replacing ash as the fertilizer of choice, and rotating single-crop fields supplanting the usual mixed plantings of maize, squash and beans. Kuraq agronomists plant Théan crops at agricultural research stations throughout the empire, experimenting with soils and temperatures to find out which foreign flora are suitable for cultivation.

The large number of Castillians in Aztlan—by far the most dominant group of Théans—means that a few of them have been able to integrate themselves into the local political ecosystem. Don Francisco Schulz, the son of an Eisen war hero and Castillian noblewoman, set out to conquer lands in the New World, but quickly realized that Aztlan wasn't a land that takes well to conquerers.

Now, Schulz is a local guide to new Théans in the Nahuacan Alliance; he knows all the local merchants, speaks all the Aztlan languages and even owns a large house in Pepechotlan, a gift—he claims—from the Great Speaker himself.



Aztlan Today

Such a rich history might make a foolish Aztlani Hero forget that the real threats and conflicts that endanger the continent are not the lost god-kings of the Empire or the ancient feuds between Tzak K'an city-states that have long fallen to ruin. Aztlan is beset with opportunities and troubles, more than enough for any Hero to face in a lifetime of adventures.

Deadly Politics

The three empires that arose in the wake of the Fall each have their own strengths and weaknesses, but they all fear the dream of Aztlani unification can only be realized if two of the three are destroyed. The Kuraq Empress does much to encourage this paranoia, sending spies and saboteurs to challenge the Alliance and weaken Tzak K'an. The Alliance—despite its military might—is unsure how to move forward; the Tzak K'ani trust each other less than they trust the Alliance or the Kuraq Empire.

Yet, hope for permanent political peace remains. The rebellion in Kuraq gains strength every day, and many Tzak K'ani diplomats and mediators find the Alliance's caution moving forward to be a sign of political maturity. First contact with the Théans reminded the Aztlani that their political bonds to each other may matter in ways that could bear fruit.

The Gods Themselves

Lurking in the background—always—the gods continue to meddle in mortal affairs, undeterred by the changes brought by foreigners or the petty squabbles of Aztlani kings and queens who think themselves unifiers. The gods remain unknowable and beyond reason, powerful actors who are as likely to seek out a Hero to bestow a quest of great importance as they are to destroy an entire royal lineage to prove a point to another god.

The gods do as they will, and Aztlani Heroes know that opposing them is a risky (and usually ill-fated) proposition. But Heroes in Aztlan know that standing up to a god is a job not left to ordinary mortals; if such a thing needs to be done, it is best that a Hero do it.

Los Baldíos Negros

To the west of Aztlan, one might expect to see shipping routes to the east, trade lanes that open to Fuso and Kammerra, bringing spices and silks to the Kuraq Empire or the Nahuacan Alliance. Rumor has it that the Aztlan Empire did trade with the lands that one day would be known as Khitai, but after the Fall such voyages become extremely rare.

Castillians who came to Aztlan hoping to find easy passage to Cathay were surprised to find that such travel is nearly impossible. The Nahuacan Alliance and Kuraq Empire both make use of shipping lanes up and down the western coast of Aztlan, but neither group travels further west. When pressed, Aztlani sailors offer little in the way of an explanation; ships that head into the western sea, they said, do not return.

Théan sailors who did attempt the journey—ignoring the warnings—rarely returned back to western Aztlani ports. One who did, Captain Ángela Inés Sancha de Soldano, claimed that her crew had been devoured by a darkness that emerged from the sea itself. Shaken by what she had seen, she refused to talk more about the failed voyage, repeating the same phrase that would come to be known as the name for the seas to the west: *los baldíos negros*.

Syrneth Ruins

As the jungles and deserts shift and turn in Aztlan, they often reveal ruins and structures. In fact, the New World has become known across Terra for its unique Syrneth ruins, both due to the sheer number of sites found across the continent and the distinctive character of the sites themselves. Unknown Syrneth glyphs and runes adorn the walls of the ruins found in Aztlan, and the ruins themselves are Syrneth architecture never before seen in Théah, Ifri or the Crescent.

When Théan archaeologists first arrived to Aztlan, many believed that the Syrneth sites were the creation of some *other* mysterious race, some ancient competitor with the Syrne. But as Aztlani archaeologists informed the Explorer Society's inquiries—exploring the connections between Syrneth sites in Théah and Aztlan—the truth became unmistakably clear: the Syrne built these ancient places, just as they built the Star Map in Montaigne, the Catacombs in Vodacce and the Aeries in Ussura.



Syrneth Research in Aztlan

While the Inquisition plots to eradicate the artifacts and treasures found across the continent, other Théans work to discover the truth of the Aztlani Syrne. The most successful archaeologists work hand in hand with Aztlani scholars—mostly Nahuacans and Tzak K'ani.

Research in the Nahuacan Alliance

Āyotiā is the home to the largest deposit of intact old machines in Aztlan. For the longest time, the peninsula stood abandoned and unexplored by Nahuacans, the site garnered a great deal of attention when Théans arrived. Years before, Nahuacan archaeologists had given up on exploring the site, as the machines proved dangerous to enter. They took casts of the runes etched on the outside of many of the machines and left it at that.

When Théans learned of the old machines, the Nahuacans were more than willing to send them to Āyotiā, knowing full well that their efforts there would fail. And if somehow the foreigners discovered something new, they would be the first to reap the benefits. What they got was a plethora of unskilled workers, Castellians with strong beliefs about the Syrne, and Dr. Corker O'Shae.

Dr. Corker O'Shea

Without question, the primary Théan archaeologist working in Aztlan today is Dr. Corker O'Shea, a Castellian-trained Inishwoman whose dogged determination to scientific inquiry has obtained much of what Théans know about the old machines. Working hand in hand with Nahuacan researchers, O'Shea maintains one of the largest archaeological sites in Aztlan on Nahuaca's southern peninsula, Āyotiā, determined to discover the role and purpose of the old machines.

Her 1662 thesis revolutionized how both Théan and Aztlani scientists viewed the Syrneth ruins when she proved that the stone used to construct the old machines was not carved but shaped and molded, as if the Syrneth had forged the machines like steel. Her work—co-published with several Nahuacan scholars—discredited earlier theories that the sites were not machines at all but decorative installations designed by more recent Aztlani using primitive tools. Her findings upended the Théan consensus and inspired a generation of archaeologists to prepare to journey to the New World to pursue collaborative work.



O'Shea is a striking figure, her unruly hair often wrangled back into a ponytail or braid under a broad-brimmed hat shading her pale complexion, her dark brown coat and light collared shirt making her almost a stereotype of a Théan archaeologist. One of her Nahuacan partners, Xihnahui Xihuitl, has jokingly named her *Itotia* (the woman with hat), a nickname she claims to despise but secretly adores.

Ostensibly, O'Shea's research in Aztlan is dedicated toward obtaining tenure back in Castille. But her work on the *Āyotiā* Peninsula consumes her, and she seems unwilling to delegate any of her work for fear that the Inquisition will corrupt or destroy the site. Worse yet, her relationship with Xihnahui has... evolved. Will O'Shea be willing to give up her life in Aztlan to return back to Castille?

Tzak K'ani Research

Far to the east of O'Shea's research sites, Théan and Aztlani archaeologists maintain a dozen or so sites throughout *Tzak K'an*. The jungles of the region, shifting and changing like the tides of the *Serpent's Sea*, regularly reveal new and exciting *Syrneth* ruins. As Inquisition forces hunt for academics and artifacts, the race to discover the truth of Aztlan's mysteries has never been more crucial...or dangerous.

The Olom Pa' Site

Deep in the jungles west of *Olom Pa'*, Finnén "Finnegan" Ó Beigleighbinn maintains the *Olom* site, a prominent dig conducted in collaboration with a local *Tzak K'ani* chapter of the *Explorer's Society* led by *Ix Tukun*. While Dr. O'Shea has focused her research on the old machines, Finnegan is primarily interested in discovering *Syrneth* artifacts—a research focus that often puts him in contact with dangerous materials and objects. A cavernous underground ruin, *Olom* has proven to be every bit the dangerous and difficult puzzle that Finnegan sought when he set out for the *New World*.

Finnegan's constant companion, *Riley O'Lochlainn*, finds *Olom* to be less charming. After all, she's the one that has to battle the monsters that prowl the *Olom* caverns whenever Finnegan stirs up trouble. Nevertheless, the young, redhaired *Inish* pugilist is well-known in *Tzak K'an* for her bravery and good nature. Time and time again, *Riley* has saved the expedition by squeezing into some small place no one else

can fit, slaying a monster that emerged from the ruins or brawling with *Castillian* interlopers who attempt to steal from the dig.

A graduate of *Castillian* universities, Finnegan trained under renowned professor *Eduardo Villalobos de Inez y Lobianco*, one of the earliest members of the *Explorer's Society*. *Villalobos* is too old now to travel to *Aztlan*, but Finnegan does his best to keep his mentor informed about his research, sending letters back to *Castille* whenever he can. Little does he know that *Inquisitor Calderón's* agents have intercepted many of those documents, and are plotting to seize both his site and his findings for the *Inquisition*.

Caxazul

Not all research conducted in *Aztlan* is led by Théans. The ruins at *Caxazul* are an important cultural site for the *Tzak K'ani* already, but recent excavations overseen by *Aztlani* archaeologist *Ix Tukun* has unearthed new evidence linking the *Aztlani Syrne* to their Théan counterparts across the *Serpent's Sea*. Even more promising, *Ix Tukun* believes that she may have found technology that would allow someone to travel back and forth between the two continents, a gateway that the *Syrne* themselves used to maintain contact at great distances.

Since *Ix Tukun* is a founding member of the *Aztlani Explorer's Society*—she traveled as a youth to *Théah* and has several contacts in both *Avalon* and *Castille*—her request for more Théan resources has been greeted with great enthusiasm, especially among *Porté* mages eager to learn whatever secrets such technology might hold. Yet, the situation at *Caxazul* is politically volatile; *Caxazul's* cultural heritage makes it difficult to conduct research, even when the archaeologists are local to the region.

Research in the Kuraq Empire

Very little *Syrneth* research is done by Théans in the *Kuraq Empire*. The *Empress* has decreed that Théan intervention in *Teqsimuyu* will not be tolerated, and generally discourages *Kuraq* scholars from conducting any independent archaeology. Rebel groups—desperate for resources to continue their shadow war against the *Empress*—occasionally partner with Théans willing to trade goods and *Guilders* for access, but few permanent research sites have been established.



Recently, Calderón has sent emissaries south to the Empress, hoping to strike an alliance that might benefit both the Inquisition and the Empire. She received his messengers and listened to their proposal: in exchange for Calderón's money and weapons, the Empress would permit the Inquisition access to Syrnych sites across Kuraq.

No fool, the Empress is suspicious of Calderón's true motives, but she cannot deny that the enemy of her enemies is her friend; the only problem is that the Empress views nearly the entirety of the world as enemies at one point or another. She has yet to make a decision on Calderón's offer.

The Old Machines

Among the Aztlan ruins, one type of Syrnych site stands out as particularly puzzling: the old machines. Scattered across the continent, these gargantuan structures arise from the earth like half-buried devices made of crystalline stone, obsidian or hematite shaped by the Syrne for some unknown purpose. Théan efforts to map and explore such structures have expanded since first contact, but much is still to be learned about the old machines and their true power.

Aztlani archaeologists believe the old machines to be more than just buildings and ruins cast in a foreign architecture. Their translations of the writings found in and around the sites—and their mastery of some of the artifacts retrieved by brave souls willing to enter the machines themselves—point to a unified purpose for the structures across the continent. Were these the source of the god-kings' power, perhaps? What role did they play in the Fall?

No matter the truth, both Aztlani and Théan researchers have found that investigating the old machines proves more difficult than it seems. Notes go missing. Supplies prepared for expeditions are destroyed by "accidents" just before archaeologists set out for the field. Whole expeditions go missing, never to return. Someone (or something) wants to keep the old machines a mystery.



Aztlan Technology

During the time of the god-kings, the Aztlani had technology beyond the wildest dreams of anyone today. While much was lost in the Fall, quite a bit of Aztlan's technology is far beyond that of the Théans. Through interactions with their gods and through attempting to understand what was left by the old gods, the Aztlani have advanced mathematics, art, science and architecture. To a Théan, the weapons and armor of the Nahuacans or the paddle boats of the Kuraq may appear primitive, but they are functional for their purpose. The Nahuacans imbue their armor and weapons with powerful magic, and few Aztlani ever cared to sail the seas.

What they have instead are amazingly engineered cities with irrigation, sewer systems and beautiful buildings. Their art and music rivals anything found even in Montaigne, and they use their abundance of precious stones and metals to create inlays and decorations that make their cities and peoples shine. They study medicine, the stars and the physics of the world, though these sciences are less developed than archaeology, which many Aztlani view as a sacred science. The Aztlani look to the past as much, if not more than, the future, and understanding the god-kings is a priority for all.



THÉAN TRANSFORMATION

In Théah, the privilege of command has always belonged to aristocrats, who order the lives of lesser men both on and off the battlefield. The traditions of mass training, meritocratic advancement and conscription embraced by the armies of the Nahuacan Alliance represent a decisive challenge not only to the structure of Théan militaries, but to the very social fabric they embody. The idea that ordinary men and women—trained in battle—could rise to social heights after a war is over is...disturbing to some.

Only General Montegue de Montaigne—beset by aristocratic meddling on all sides and defeated in Castille—has seemed eager to learn more about Nahuacan traditions and training. As the son of a peasant, Montegue has no illusions about the innate fitness of aristocrats for command roles, and has sent numerous emissaries to Aztlan in an attempt to learn more about Nahuacan warrior societies. So too have Eisenfürsts who see in the Aztlani methods a way to unify Eisen at a completely new level.

Technological Exchange

Théan tools of war have contributed to Aztlani armies at the tactical level. While somewhat more restricted by the forbidding terrain of Aztlan, local armies have embraced cavalry tactics where the topography permits.

A substantial tradition of horse breeding has grown among the Nahuacan Alliance and Tzak K'an, raising small, hardy mounts capable of tolerating the sweltering heat and dry climates of northern Aztlan. In addition, the Nahuacans have quickly adopted the idea of a Théan baggage train, carrying supplies on horse-drawn wagons to ensure their warriors arrive fresh to the battlefield.

The Kuraq preference for massed infantry has also increased their neighbors' interest in cavalry forces, in case the Empress's ambitions exceed Kuraq's borders.

The Kuraq Empire has directed its energies toward unraveling the mysteries of gunpowder. The seamounts of Tawantinsuyu are white with guano, and when a Vendel merchant traveling with the Kuraq let slip that the black powder in his pistol was distilled from something as common

as bird droppings, he was offered a king's ransom in pure gold to divulge the secret. Whether he traded his knowledge for gold or took a long walk off a short ledge, none have been able to say—the man was never seen again.

And while firearms have made their way into the hands of warriors from every corner of Aztlan, they are hardly a routine sight. However, the signs of illicit trade in firearms and black powder have become ubiquitous. In dark coves, pirate sloops anchor alongside the reed boats of the Kuraq, and apprentice gunsmiths ply their trades for Aztlani gold. Whatever the wishes of the Vendel League, the Aztlani's curiosity regarding gunpowder will not be satisfied until indigenous gunsmiths produce firearms from one end of the continent to the other.

Théan metallurgical techniques, on the other hand, have had a far more mixed reception. Nahuacan warriors trained to view their obsidian-studded blades as an extension of their warrior spirit have been reluctant to take up weapons of steel. Against lightly armored opponents, a chunk of obsidian applied with sufficient force is easily the equal of a steel blade.

Whatever the former lacks in subtlety and elegance, it more than makes up for it with its terrifying effect—any Théan who has seen a comrade wounded by such a blade is unlikely to underestimate it again. And though obsidian is not the equal of steel or dracheneisen armor, it's easier for Aztlani warriors to let the land itself kill such cowardly foes than face them in battle.

Only the Kuraq Empire has taken to steel with gusto. Just as muskets and pistols seem like a natural progression from the slings favored by the warriors of Tawantinsuyu, so too do steel blades appear to be obvious replacements for the softer copper spear and axe heads they favor for close-in work. The mountains of Tawantinsuyu are rich in iron and other ores, and the secret of steel has proven an easier riddle to solve than that of gunpowder.



Trade

Trade across the Atabean Sea has grown by leaps and bounds since first contact, with each Théan Nation vying for a larger share of Aztlani wealth. So far, Castille has secured the most permanent trade routes throughout the continent—they have the most boots on the ground of any Théan Nation—but all of the western Théans seek to find riches aplenty in Aztlan.

Théan Preoccupations

For a time, the greatest of Théah were preoccupied with the least of Aztlan: the humble cochineal bug. A Castillian monk found the bugs living on cacti in northern Aztlan. Their powdered corpses produced a brilliant scarlet dye unknown to Théah and without equal. Vaticine cardinals owe their brilliant vestments to the dye, and guard its origin and production jealously.

But whose jealousy can rival that of L'Empereur? Rebuffed by every priest from the Hierophant on down, the frustrated monarch turned to his nobles and procured the dye through sorcerous means.

When a few entrepreneurial Porté mages disappeared while attempting to transport dye, and a few more were found horribly dismembered in the Aztlani rainforest, the fervor cooled. Now, supplies of the dye in Montaigne are rare and expensive, as the Nahuacans have quickly learned the true price of scarlet.

The other Théan Nations confine themselves to the standard concerns of precious metals, rare woods and gems, which Aztlan provides in great quantity. While Castille conducts most trade for itself, the crown's soldiers often help Montaigne and Eisen trade vessels find goods...for a price.

The Aztlani Approach

The Aztlani cultures, for their part, have traded in exchange for knowledge of Théan industrial techniques and finished goods to reverse engineer. The Vesten in particular have grown to resent the Aztlani penchant for seeking knowledge over wealth, as it threatens the budding monopoly their guilds represent.

The Nahuacans and the Tzak K'ani have benefited from the introduction of horse-drawn carriages, and

FOREIGN INFLUENCE

The first foreigners to come to Aztlan en masse were Théans, but the “discovery” of the New World has now brought travelers, explorers and archaeologists from across Terra to Aztlan. Most at this point understand that their work in Aztlan can only occur with political support from the Aztlani, but it's not uncommon for a foreigner to run afoul of local customs or rules, especially when Tzak K'ani city-states have capricious rulers or the legal system of the Nahuacan Alliance or Kuraq Empire proves too complex for Théan understanding.

And just as Théans and Ifrians come to the New World in search of knowledge, treasure and fame, so too do Aztlani journey to Théah, Ifri and the Crescent. Some Aztlani travelers leave the continent to pursue their own goals, but others are sent by Aztlani authorities who wish to keep tabs on their foreign adversaries. After all, only a foolish Kuraq Empress would ignore the rest of the world; how can she conquer lands she knows nothing about?

overland trade among cities has flourished as a result. Trade with Kuraq has languished a bit, for reasons both political and technical: Kuraq's neighbors to the north are suspicious of the Empress's motives, and their roads were built for foot traffic, not the broad trade wagon.

While the Aztlani lack Théan blue water vessels, they are catching up at sea. The trade canoes of Tzak K'an and the reed boats of Kuraq are growing increasingly larger, with some double-hulled designs venturing further afield than ever before. It's only a matter of time before a careless shipbuilder finds himself on the wrong end of a Nahuacan *macuahuitl*, and his knowledge falls into Aztlani hands.



Religion

I have heard the truth of Theus from Cardinal Verdugo's lips, and repented of my own father's faith. For hundreds of years my people sacrificed when the gods demanded it, warred when the stars were right, and we have gained nothing. Each city believes its patron god to be the greatest, and takes up arms against its neighbors to prove it. We sate our appetites with gold, blood and maize and imagine ourselves mighty.

If I could bring the light of Theus to my people, we could put an end to this pointless warring and build a future as one Nation, united in His truth. We would no longer be petitioners before the Nahuacans, bartering trinkets with those who mean to subjugate us. We could resist the Empress, who would have us toil in her mountains to inscrutable ends. Theus has looked after his Castillian children, they have resisted the faithless Montaigne, punished the heretical Eisen, and won the seat of the Hierophant from the scheming Vodacce.

When I was newly converted, my Castillian friends would ask why I abandoned my father's gods for Theus. I answered: our gods have made us as we are, just as Theus has made you as you are. We are divided, surrounded by those who see us as pawns. You are united, fighting a ruler who fancies himself a god, wrestling back your future from those who would take it from you.

How could I want anything less for my people?

—Itzamatul of Tzak K'an,
Inquisitor and Converso, Confessiones

With a few notable exceptions, priests in Aztlan regard their Théan counterparts with something bordering on amusement. Over the past century, many Aztlani have attended Vaticine services at one point or another, and the tableau of a nervous Théan curate gazing out over pews filled with feather-cloaked Nahuacans bearing savage weaponry has become something of a standby in the few places where Théan influence runs deep enough to support permanent houses of worship.

Nevertheless, few Aztlani can bring themselves to worship a deity that Théans claim is both omnipresent and invisible, an omnipotent being who chooses to converse with its worshippers through a handful of human intermediaries, and will not bestir itself even when the foundations of its faith are disturbed and its chosen messengers murdered.

In Aztlan, the gods walk the earth and protect the faithful. Why anyone would choose to kneel before a deity who offers neither succor nor power is beyond most Aztlani.

Conversion to Theus

Théans are appalled by the fact that the Aztlani cultures seem to have little regard for a god they can't see or talk to. That Theus provides salvation and a blissful life beyond this mortal coil seems to pique Aztlani interest, until they discover they can't talk directly to him. And the Castillians were shocked to learn that one's place in the Nahuacan afterlife is determined by the manner of one's death, and not any of the works pursued in life.

Attempts by Vaticine scholars to learn the truth of Kuraq's beliefs in death and the afterlife have been rebuffed, with several earnest missionaries disappearing from their rooms, never to be seen again. The fact that the Aztlani faiths are, without exception, polytheistic inspires an instinctive and unexamined horror in many Théans, who see their monotheism as a sign of progress and a belief in multiple gods—no matter how tangible—as inherently backward.

Yet despite these challenges, Théans insist on sending missionaries en masse to Aztlan, hoping to convert the people to Theus, despite their consistent failures. Some Aztlani, beguiled by the Théans'



commitment to one particular god, have converted, but such movements are still relatively small. Recently, some Inquisitors have proposed that the Aztlani might respect Theus more if his will were enacted in a more forceful way, a line of thinking that grows greater each day the mission to Aztlan struggles.

A Syncretic Approach

In truth, while both perspectives are easy to understand, each misses as much as it apprehends. The Aztlani are right to point out that an all-powerful, all-knowing, benevolent deity must answer for earthly horrors enacted in its name, like the War of the Cross. Then again, there's something to the idea of a deity who allows his flock to find its own way, providing gentle guidance only when necessary. Is the War of the Cross an indictment of Theus, or Théah? Was it waged in the name of faith or power? A priest of Nacatlucue might say that these questions are irrelevant—that burned fields and dead children do not care. But perhaps it's only by understanding the horror we are capable of that human progress is possible.

Certainly, the Aztlani experience would seem to bear that hypothesis out. If there's one issue that Kuraq and the Nahuacans agree on, it's that divine interference played a role in destroying ancient Aztlan. If the old gods had not punished their followers' laxity with natural disasters, perhaps ancient Aztlan might have been saved.

To the extent that the Kuraq will talk about their gods with outsiders, it's clear that they regard their deities as forces of entropy, and rarely speak kindly of the gods in the presence of their leaders or outsiders. The Tzak K'ani, on the other hand, wage war against nearby city-states at the behest of their deities, burning cities and slaughtering their enemies because the stars aligned to favor their god over that of their neighbor.

In Aztlan, interventionist pantheons propel humanity to accomplish divine goals rather than human ones, while the attribution of divine causes to ancient Aztlan's fall serves to insulate the Aztlani cultures from taking a full accounting of their own role in the collapse of this half-imagined homeland. Nevertheless, those selfsame gods have protected their followers from the rapacious greed of Théan villains, and who can say what might have transpired in their absence?

The Inquisition in Aztlan

While most Théan activity in the New World revolves around trade, research and diplomacy, there are still Théan villains that lurk in the shadows of Aztlan. Powerful forces plot to undermine Aztlani sovereignty, the worst of which wear the red robes of the Vaticine Church.

The Aztlani Pogrom

Travel to the New World slowed considerably as the War of the Cross raged in the early 1600s, but the Vaticine Church has taken a renewed interest in Aztlan since the end of the War. Unable to muster funding for a widescale invasion, the Church has had some success converting Aztlani to the faith. Cardinal Verdugo has seized upon this phenomenon by deploying his old ally, Don Alonso Ruiz Calderón, to the New World.

Verdugo has declared that the Inquisition's purpose in Aztlan is to destroy the Syrneth influence on the continent, claiming that the old machines (and other artifacts) are in fact the sorcerous works of demons. The various governments of Aztlan are clearly corrupted by such influence, so Verdugo has dispatched Calderón to execute the Pogrom, an order that gives him broad authority within the Castillian military and Vaticine Church.

The Pogrom is an open secret; many of the local Vaticine parishes try to resist the Inquisition's influence, but Calderón, a large man in his early 50s, is a persuasive and dangerous figure. The lack of a centralized response from the various Aztlani governments compounds the problem; whenever Calderón's activities in one region anger too many local officials, he simply packs his bags and moves to another region of Aztlan, taking the best of the artifacts and resources he obtained through his violent machinations.

Calderón has little oversight from the Vaticine church. Verdugo trusts him, and as long as Calderón keeps sending reports about destroyed artifacts, no one really cares what he does. If those reports are padded to conceal the truth, or complete fabrications, no one in Castille will be the wiser. Calderón does destroy some artifacts, those that he can't figure out how to use, or fail to serve his purposes. The others he collects as weapons, hoping to eventually use them to eradicate the heretics in Aztlan and make space for a new Castille.



Thankfully, Calderón's objectives strain even the most likely alliances. His attempts to recruit Azeneth Medellín—the daughter of Don Fernando Medellín—to his cause failed when she learned of his commitment to Verdugo's plans. Medellín may wish to see Apocōatl destroyed, but she has no interest in the widespread destruction of Aztlan artifacts and ruins.

The Kuraq Mask

Long before Don Calderón led the Inquisition's forces in Aztlan, he orphaned two young half-brothers: Sebastian Aldana de Soldano and Miguel Aldana de Soldano. The brothers' father, Don Felipe Aldana, had angered Calderón by collecting the full taxes due on Calderón's many properties; a poisoned blade ensured that a brief duel ended Aldana's life.

Upon the elder Aldana's death, Andrea Bejarano del Zepeda—a distant aunt—adopted the boys, training them as duelists and eventually inducting them as fellow members of Los Vagabundos when they came of age. Their father's murderer was rich, powerful and aligned with Cardinal Verdugo, and Bejarano knew the boys would be in danger if they could not defend themselves. And, she fostered a hope that the boys might one day avenge their father's death.

Calderón disappeared a few years after the duel, and neither Sebastian nor Miguel had any idea where he ended up. Perhaps he was dead. Perhaps he had changed his name or taken an alias. Miguel, the younger and more hot-headed of the two young men, demanded that they scour the world for him, and Sebastian, unwilling to allow his brother to seek vengeance alone, decided to go with him.

The Missing Mask

The brothers' journey brought them to Aztlan, where they heard word of Calderón's misdeeds. They met another expatriate Castillian—Tomás Ruiz del Gallegos, traveling under the name Vaughn Santez—who told them that Calderón had managed to get his hands on one of El Vagabundo's masks...a theft which occurred after Calderón murdered Santez's traveling companions.

Santez, the only survivor, revealed that the mask was destined for Kuraq; the Empress has attracted the attention of both Los Vagabundos and Die Kreuzritter, her undead rule uniting the two societies in common cause. Santez, a Kreuzritter, volunteered to help

MANY GODS?

Some Théan scholars have proposed that the numerous Aztlan gods are indeed manifestations or even representations of only one god. Others suggest that the different gods in each culture are interpretations of the same god, but their denominations differ because of linguistic reasons.

The Aztlan gods are not "manifestations" or "representations," as some that have encountered them can attest. They are complex beings, with distinct individual abilities, needs and desires. In some ways they may resemble humans in their personality traits—and can adopt that form, if they so desire it—but they have powers, knowledge and perceptions that go far beyond the human spectrum.

The source of these misunderstandings comes primarily from the attempt of Vaticines to reconcile their own religious perspective with that of the Aztlan—they try to make equivalent the creator god with Theus, and often have a difficult time accepting the existence of hundreds—if not thousands—of individual, distinguishable and accessible gods.

deliver the mask to rebels in Kuraq, but a double agent working for Calderón betrayed him. Cut off from his Théan contacts and alone in Aztlan, Santez's bookish demeanor hides a desperate mission: retrieve the mask and get it to Kuraq before the Empress wipes out the rebellion forever.

Sebastian and Miguel signed on to help immediately, working out a plan with Santez to rescue the mask *and* get their revenge. Now the trio are in Tzak K'an where rumors say Calderón has taken over a city-state and plans to incite a war that could tear the fragile nation apart.

Sebastian and Miguel are a striking pair—they both wear long black hair pulled back in ponytails and sport matching goatees—but they are considerably more clever than they look. For now, they drink and cavort around Polok K'anche', hoping to attract the attention of Don Calderón so that Santez can locate the mask and steal it. Ideally, they'll have time to avenge their father before they set out to Kuraq.



The Gods of Aztlan

If there is one characteristic of everyday Aztlani life that continues to baffle Théans, it is the local's unique perspective on spirituality. To most Théans, religion is usually something to be done—one of the many aspects of their lives, yes—but a dimension entirely separated from their everyday existences. They go to Mass, learn their credo, get baptized and, when necessary, get married before Theus—and that is all.

The Aztlani, however, see—and live—it otherwise.

Although separated by geography, language and the specifics of their individual beliefs, all Aztlani share a common understanding of reality that can be summed up thusly: *gods are real*. The gods are not some idea, notion, judge or extraneous observer of their acts. Instead, they are creatures of immense stature and tremendous power—immortal beings that demand and deserve the worship of mere mortals. They are *accessible*. When someone prays in Aztlan, they are not talking to the void: they are communicating with the divine. The gods, after all, are always listening.

And sometimes they even talk back.

Living Gods

The whole structure of the Aztlani relationship with the world is based on this experience of the divine. When the gods have names and are as approachable and ever-present as these divinities are, “faith” is out question. The Aztlani do not simply believe: they *know* their gods exist, and their whole worldview is shaped by this fact. After the Fall, it was the gods who informed the Aztlani about the structure of reality, the history of the world and the various fundamental truths that are the basis of their unheard-of advances in technology and science.

Although immortal, all the Aztlan gods share the follies and worries of their mortal worshippers. They have even died in some instances, but because of their nature they can as easily return to life as a human can wake up from a deep sleep. The death experience, however, is something that no deity would suffer gladly, so they usually shun it as much as—or even more so than—any other Aztlani.

Despite their impenetrable minds, Aztlani gods have the same basic desires as mortals. They want to enjoy their existence, be honored by their lesser peers (i.e., their

worshippers) and receive the respect corresponding to their station from their equals. Any time circumstances have intruded in this natural order, things have turned out for the worse in the end. That is the main reason why Aztlani are so keen on their religious practices. They know that without their devotion to the gods the whole world would simply come to an end.

Aztlani gods are powerful beings indeed. Some choose to only garner a few followers, maybe just a single Nation of worshippers, or a couple of cities. Most gods desire the worship of all, and so they appear to everyone who is willing to listen across all of Aztlan.

As such, you can find aspects of these gods worshipped in every Nation. Often, they go by different names, and their followers are none-the-wiser that the death god in Kuraq is the same god of life in the Nahuacan Alliance. The only god who refuses to play by such rules is Apocōatl, the great feathered serpent. While his form may appear different to the various Aztlani Nations, they all call him the same. Some postulate that he is one of the old gods who is still somehow on this world, others think he is just the most powerful of the new ones. Either way, his exploits make it clear that he is a cut above the rest.

The Cosmic Order

Lowly human beings have no excuse for avoiding their responsibility in the great scheme of things. According to the truths revealed by the gods in various occasions and through different media—be they priests, shamans, or diviners—reality is indeed one unit in which all things are connected to one another. The Aztlani, like all other living things, have a role to play.

In fact, throughout Aztlan all the stories about how the world was created agreed that the creator, whether it was a parent god or gods, disappeared or sacrificed itself in the process of creation. The result was the world as we see it, populated by various beings, from the living gods that now walk the earth to the mortals that worship them. The god-kings that followed the creator god worked within that god's creation, despite their great power. Even they had to honor the creator's sacrifice.



The universe, however, is not a stagnant entity. Everywhere around them the Aztlani people find proof of one constant in the world: continuous change, cycling through life, death and rebirth. The sun appears in the morning and vanishes in the afternoon. The moon waxes and wanes, as the seasons pass from warm to cold to warm again. Seeds are planted and become fully grown, only to be reaped and transformed into the foods humans need to survive.

In this sense, reality as a whole can be reduced to a dynamic balance between opposing forces. Chaos and order. Light and darkness. Death and life. Plants and animals. Mortals and gods. All are part of it, and no one force can exist without the other.

The gods' role is to watch over large parts of reality, such as the stars and the natural cycles. It is thanks to their efforts and continued existence that the world is inhabitable, allowing mortals to lead their lives unimpeded. They cannot, of course, violate this order, and that is why Aztlani who are wise enough would never pray to the gods for anything—except to carry on with their sacred duty of preserving reality.

If there is a dry spell affecting the land, for example, nothing can help it now. The cause for the drought is that something—a ritual, ceremony or festival, for example—was not performed correctly, or not at the appropriate time. As a result, the only thing to do is ensure that the corresponding rite is carried out properly in the future. Asking for it to be “fixed” is asking for reality itself to bend to the will of mere humans.

Other Worlds

Another notion deeply connected to the overarching cosmic order is that of three different realms or parts of reality. These spheres of existence are not wholly separated from one another, yet each has its own corresponding inhabitants and laws.

It is more useful to think of these worlds in terms of different nations sharing a border rather than complete realities. They exist independently—and it is more common to find gods on the Overworld rather than the Terran realm, for example—but they are close enough to allow movement between them (under special circumstances). In physical terms, these worlds exist beyond the four directions and, in spite of being referred as upper or under planes, those denominations

are used in order to designate their status rather than their geographical orientation.

Although the names and specifics differ from culture to culture, all of the Aztlani agree on a few general characteristics that these different worlds share. To deny these realities would be foolish hubris.

The Overworld

The Overworld is the realm above Terra, the designated dwelling place of the gods. It is from here that the new gods preside over the Sun, the Moon and the rest of the stars, all of which exist in their primordial form in this plane. Careful observers quickly realized that the movements of the gods could be deciphered by the astrological movements of the planets and stars in the night sky, and registered such knowledge as best as they could.

Most notions of the Overworld agreed that there a number of different layers or strata within it—usually numbered 13—and that the highest is always the one where the gods can typically be found. In some worldviews, such as the ones currently held in the Kuraq Empire, only the noble can enter this sphere after death. Others, such as the Tzak K'ani, afford such honors directly on those that died in battle or women who died in childbirth.

The Middleworld

This is the Terran realm, the physical reality that includes Aztlan, Théah, Ifri, etc. Depending on the particular Aztlani culture, Terra may be considered to reside on the back of a marine monster that was also a gigantic toad (Nahuacan Alliance) or be one of many realities that are accessible from the other two worlds (Tzak K'an).

Apart from the four directions, the Middleworld includes one other location of importance: the *Axis Mundi*. Although each culture identifies it at different locations in Aztlan, they all agree that there is only one true center of the world, one which manifests in different sites but that is, in essence, one place. The *Axis Mundi* is of capital significance because it represents not only the point from which the four directions emanate, but it is also the place that connects the three realms.

In fact, most beliefs consider this to be the most appropriate place to communicate with the gods and, as such, the peoples of Aztlan have put great effort in fashioning architectural marvels worthy



of this magnificence. In turn, these places have also become the *de facto* places of dwelling for the ruling classes of each culture, except in the case of the Nahuacan Alliance. In this last instance, the *axis mundi* it is thought to have been inhabited (and destroyed) by the god-kings of the Aztlan Empire themselves.

The Underworld

The Underworld is the place where the dead lie. One common characteristic prevalent in all Aztlani beliefs is that the Underworld is organized in nine distinct and descending levels. All cultures also agree that the souls of the living must journey through some or all of them before achieving their final resting place in the lowermost level—or transcending to the celestial plane.

Another widespread notion is that it is not only *not* forbidden but possible to enter the Underworld from various geographical landmarks, especially caves or bodies of standing waters. The latter in general—and lakes and natural springs in particular—are said to harbor regenerative powers, and are sought after by both ambitious healers and the most desperate of patients.

At the same time, the Underworld is also a place of decay and disease, filled with unnamable horrors and punishments, such as places entirely dedicated to flay people or devour their hearts. Most Aztlani scholars and priests acknowledge that these instances are essential in order to purify the souls of the dead before they can achieve their ultimate celestial destination. In spite of that, tales and stories that involve journeys through the Underworld are usually considered terrifying and are not for the faint of heart.

One culture, however, does not only embrace the Underworld with all its wonders and horrors, but actually deals with the spirits of the dead on a day-to-day basis. For the people of the Kuraq Empire, their neighbors to the north are just superstitious fools that squander the most precious of all riches: the knowledge and powers of those that dwell beyond the grave. For the rest of Aztlan, the Kuraq Empire is the land filled with fools; after all, who else would traffic so frequently with the dead?

Religious Practices

The most distinct aspects among the Aztlan regarding their spirituality are their religious practices. Since every culture has its own deities, calendars and particular set of beliefs, their main differences when it comes to religion can be found here. In spite of that, it is still possible to generalize some practices and attitudes found throughout Aztlan.

Personal Worship and Devotion

As mentioned before, the Aztlani worldview is based upon the notion that everything in reality is connected. According to their perspective—and the stories the gods have related to them in one form or another—human beings were created with the purposeful intent of serving the gods through worship and devotion. Some even whisper that the god-kings themselves created the Aztlani (and all other humans). In exchange, the gods would make sure that the world continued its existence in its current form, the only one that can sustain human life as we know it.

For this reason, the basis of Aztlani religion is not one of belief—at least not as Théans understand the term—but one of *responsibility*. The Aztlani know the gods exist and that they are, despite appearances, helping humanity as a whole with their existence. Considering that, the only appropriate thing left to do for mortals is to offer their thoughts, prayers and numerous acts of sacrifice in return in order to sustain the gods.

In essence, the gods and the mortals exist in a mutually beneficial relationship. Thanks to the gods' primordial sacrifice humans were created and given a world they could inhabit. After that, it is only proper for humans to sacrifice themselves (figuratively) and return the favor to the gods by giving them the befitting worship that will ensure they can continue their existence. Finally, the divinities once again return their favor to humanity by preserving the cosmic order as it is.

This mystical, never-ending cycle is the basis of the Aztlani way of life and, without it, all the peoples that live in these lands fear the world would inevitably come to an end.



Ceremonies and Rituals

Besides the basic practice of personal worshipping and devotion to the gods, the Aztlani have instituted a number of ceremonies and rituals that function as communal acts of veneration. Although this may appear similar to the Vatican Church's Mass, the different ceremonies and rituals that the Aztlani employ have a truly transcendental, mystical dimension to them that are far removed from the prayers and hymns of the Théans.

Indeed, every time the community gathers around such instances the results can always be immediately perceived. Sometimes they are just some words related by the conduit in charge of the ceremony, while at others the answers are reflected in the strange world they inhabit: a sudden rain, a wind that blows in an unexpected direction, or even something as radical as a day that turns to night (and vice versa). In the most momentous of occasions—or when the ritual was of particular significance—the deity

or deities often appear in physical form in front of their worshippers, communicating to them in person their answers.

The particulars of each ritual vary from culture to culture and sometimes even within the same culture, as local practices adapt or modify the specifics in order to better suit their local deities. It is important to remember that even the lesser communities have deities that have specific ties to them, resulting in particular, isolated practices that cannot be seen anywhere else, dedicated to divinities that cannot be found in any other place.

However, one aspect that all rituals across Aztlan do share is that they are composed of a specific sequence of activities that are repeated in the same order every time, paying almost obsessive attention to the details. Even so, certain steps can be identified in almost all important or massive rituals under the following general categories.

Declaration of Purpose or Intention

In this step, the participants must attempt to connect with the specific deity for the occasion expressing, sometimes verbally and sometimes in thought, the reason for the ritual.

At this point, no manifestation or offering of power has occurred yet, but this state of mind is fundamental in order to have a successful communion with the divine. This usually includes a prayer, chant or meditation done before the ritual *per se*, often in a separated location from where the ritual will actually take place.



Establishment of Protections or Safeguards

Once the intent of the ritual is clear, it is important to establish certain protections that ensure the safety of both the participants and the deity involved. These safeguards are usually of both mystical and physical nature, and are one of the reasons why it is difficult to stop a ritual once it has started.

This is a step usually carried out by the leader in charge of the ritual at the sacred location, and it involves inscribing—or renewing—the marks that protect and sanctify the place.

Banishment of Unwanted Beings and General Cleansing

Before the ritual can start, the participants must make sure that no other entities can interfere in the ceremony. Every ritual involves offering mystical power (usually in the form of a figurative sacrifice), which attracts a number of unwanted entities to the consecrated place, even if they are not the intended recipients. As such, the leader commonly guides the participants in a coordinated prayer, chant or dance designed to expel any unwanted entities from the sacred place where the ritual will occur.

The Trance

Once all the previous conditions are met, the leader of the ritual performs her role as bridge between the divine and the mortals. Although all participants share equal responsibility in the ritual, only this “conduit” can effectively communicate the wishes of the community to the deity, as well as bring back any divinely-inspired message to the assembly. This step is particularly taxing, both mentally and physically, and the reason why only the trained should attempt such feats. This trance can be reflected in the conduit losing consciousness, murmuring words in an unknown tongue or dancing to an unheard tune, just to name a few examples.

HUMAN SACRIFICES

Although it was once a common practice among the peoples of Aztlan, human sacrifice has now been almost universally abandoned as a religious practice. In fact, it is now publicly abhorred by both the people in power and those that claim to have some connection or understanding about the gods.

Closing

After successful completion of the ritual, the conduit has to ensure the connection with the divine is severed completely to prevent it from being abused by others. This is a step that usually mirrors or retraces what was done in the banishing stage, as it attempts to guard both the deity and the participants from unwanted interferences of any kind. As such, it is usual for the conduit to erase or break marks made during the cleansing step, liberating the mystical energies used in the ritual and essentially cutting the connection with the divine.

Recovery and Restoration

Finally, all the participants must perform a number of prescribed actions before returning to their usual activities in order to restore their own individuality and sense of self. Every ritual requires, at its most basic, the participants to enter a state of contemplation of, participation with the divine; and so they must remove themselves from this state.

In this step, the leader often performs a secret series of sounds or gestures especially devised to “awaken” the community and return them to their pre-ritual state.

These steps aren’t a blueprint for performing a ceremony, but simply outline the general practices. To the Aztlani, a ritual is a continuous experience that organically involves the steps previously described, interwoven in a tapestry as complex and yet as simple to understand as the world that surrounds them.



Festivals

In addition to specific rituals, festivals—loosely structured ceremonies—act as traditions that have passed into common use and that involve powerful ritualistic instances whose meaning is now no longer evident for anybody that is not a conduit or scholar interested in such matters.

In this sense, Aztlani festivals are the easiest experiences of the divine for anybody to participate in, from the youngest of children to foreigners of all kinds—even Théans. These are occurrences in which the community exults their gods in public fashion, reenacting their life stories by means of dance, song and oral storytelling. As such, they serve as both reminders of the great scheme of things as well as instances where the youngest in the community can be educated through direct exposition to the Aztlani way of life. Festivals most often honor all the gods, though some are dedicated to a single god on a specific day of the year.

In general, the Aztlani people celebrate festivals across the continent on the calendar dates corresponding to relevant astronomical events, such as the beginning of each season and other agricultural-related occasions. The Nahuacans are more likely to celebrate festivals around military victories, while Tzak K'ani festivals traditionally adhere to the old calendar. Unsurprisingly, the Empress has banned nearly all local festivals in Kuraq, claiming that state-sponsored festivals should be the focus of Kuraq life.

When pressed, most Aztlani leaders would say that the ritual sacrifice that the gods demanded was never one of simple bloodshed and destruction, but one of profound devotion and surrendering to the higher powers. The different Aztlani cultures have their own stories about how and why this changed occurred, but they all more or less agree that the shift away from human sacrifice involved a negotiation between humans and the gods.

Still, and as a way to preserve tradition, most religious practices to this day include some form of symbolical sacrifice, such as the burning of effigies or the ritual slaughtering of animals, which are subsequently consumed by the people participating in the festivals and similar instances where these sacrifices occur.

Conduits of the Gods

In the Aztlan cosmic order, only trained men and women are able to serve as a bridge between the human and the divine. Although they receive many names and hold distinct offices depending on each culture, they have one thing common: they are in charge of maintaining the connection between gods and human beings. They are the kings and queens, priests and priestesses, shamans, oracles, diviners and healers.

They are the conduits of the gods.

All cultures in Aztlan agree on the importance of such station and, accordingly, have developed a number of systems that ensure that only the most qualified, trustworthy and trained people can achieve this status. This is even more important in the case of the rulers of the peoples of Aztlan. Since they are usually elected by a council of elders (such as in the Nahuacan Alliance) or directly appointed from beyond the grave (as in the case of the Kuraq Empire), their training is even more rigorous—if possible—than that of a “normal” conduit.

Conduits keep communication between the gods and people open, performing rituals and rites that appease and praise the gods. They are specifically trained to hold this honor. That said, the gods walk among the Aztlani nations. They choose to talk to whomever they wish, and these people have no need to be a conduit. In fact, the gods often choose people who have no formal training to teach lessons and enact their will.

Becoming a Conduit

In the case of children interested in entering the service of the gods, they are usually required to receive some form of formal education, from vast priestly academies to being mentored by a man or woman of renowned wisdom on the matter. This education usually involves a wide array of topics, from learning how to read, write, interpret the stars' movement, music, dance, how to address the deities and ritual performances, just to name a few.

In this stage, the aspirant conduit usually has to successfully overcome a number of tests designed to basically test their knowledge, wisdom, and to teach them humility. Only a few of those interested ever do



finish this basic training, and even those that fail are considered men and women of substantial knowledge and wisdom in whatever occupation they decide to pursue after.

Life of a Conduit

Those who pass, however, look back on this time as a golden epoch in their lives. After becoming a recognized novice, these newly-appointed conduits have to immediately fulfill the expectations of their superiors by behaving accordingly in all instances. They have to dress, eat, talk, and even sleep as expected, apart from their obligations as assistants to the “real” conduits, those in charge of the ceremonies and rituals.

Those that survive this intense, ever-watchful training do in time become the new conduits of their people, almost without realizing it. Although this time is difficult and taxing, the results are well worth the wait: the men and women who endure it become measured, insightful and trusted intercessors between humanity and the gods worthy of their title.

Gods and Communication

Becoming a conduit does not give a person immediate access to direct communication with her god. Conduits are chosen by their community and the people, not by the gods themselves. While they do speak with and communicate with the gods, they are not the only ones whom the gods will communicate with.

A conduit is a community's chosen speaker for the gods. Even if she rarely speaks with the gods directly, she has a position of power within society. Being a conduit is a serious and powerful duty amongst the Aztlani population, but the gods rarely care if someone is a conduit or not when deciding who to chat with.

The gods choose for themselves who to speak with, though they are more likely to accept worship and give guidance to those who know the proper rituals and forms of worship, which only the conduits can lay claim to. Other people in Aztlan interact with their gods directly on a daily basis, as the god finds a need for a human to perform one task or another.

OTHER CONDUITS

Although this section mainly focuses on priests and their training, the usage of the term *conduit* is intentional. In spite of priests being the most common type of conduit, a wide array of divinely-inspired figures are part of Aztlan everyday life. Depending on their specific beliefs, each culture on the continent recognizes the existence of people that can communicate almost freely with the gods (shamans); people that act as vessels for the gods' messages (oracles); people that can guess the design of the gods through various media (diviners); and even people that can discern—and treat—the supernatural ailments that affect mortals (healers). Further descriptions of each type of conduit can be found in the chapters describing each culture.

Enlightened Rulers

Those chosen to become the rulers of Aztlan—or that are viewed as partially divine—have to deal with not only the requirements of administering justice, taxes and political matters, they must act as the spokesperson of their peoples when it comes to the divine.

In the Aztlani worldview, only a person who understands and can deal with the gods is worthy of ruling. After all, who else could be able to express the necessities and desires of the people to the gods? As such, they demand from their rulers not only substantial administrative skills, but a profound insight on the subject of the divine. Without the latter, it is impossible for a ruler to exercise their power correctly.

The Aztlani look to their sovereigns to defend them from harmful, otherworldly forces, engage in dialogue with the diving with the help of conduits and, in essence, maintain the order of the universe from their privileged position. The gods—while typically uninvolved with the day-to-day business of governance—may arrive at any time to hold a ruler to her obligations.

That is why the Aztlani see their rulers as exceptional semi-divine beings, the best their respective people can offer. This has sometimes been misinterpreted by Théans as some sort of cult towards sovereigns when, in fact, it is only a reaffirmation of the worthiness of such individuals. If the Aztlani find some someone unworthy of bearing such a burden, then they work to bring their rule to an end.





Gods and Monsters of Aztlan

The following excerpts come from the journal of a Castillian explorer trying to understand Aztlani legends. Most native Aztlani would disagree with his conclusions.

SELECTED EXCERPTS FROM HISTORIA NATURALIS MUNDI NOVI: OPUS TRIPARTITUM ("NATURAL HISTORY OF THE NEW WORLD: A WORK IN THREE VOLUMES"), BY ALFONSINA DEL CARMEN EZKIBEL DE HURTADO

FROM THE PRAEFATIO

This book is not complete—and it will never be.

An entire life dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge about Aztlan is not enough. In fact, I don't think that many lives could sufficiently chronicle all the wonders and terrors that these lands hold.

But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try now, does it?

I hope, above all else, that this book is an invitation. An open call to all the daring souls who were brave enough to come here to dedicate their lives—as I and many others have—to the cause. To explore and register, as

faithfully as possible, the truth about the mysteries that Aztlan has to offer, from the northernmost city of the Nahuacan Alliance to the last pukara of the Kuraq Empire in the south.

And though I'd love to offer something more substantial than my words as reward, it is, alas, all I have.

FROM THE VOLUMEN PRIMUS: DE AMICITIA NAHUACA ("FIRST VOLUME: OF THE NAHUACAN ALLIANCE")

AHUITZOTL

According to the reports gathered from various Nahuacan people, these "spiny aquatic things" (the approximate translation of their name in our language) seem to be very much like our dogs but with a hand in their tail, the spikes of their name, a black and smooth skin—and an insatiable appetite for certain parts of the human anatomy.

This last aspect of their nature makes them a particularly difficult

species to study and, as a result, most expeditions have returned with either no results or not at all. Out of the ones that have been successful (and they have been few and far in between) a few commonalities have emerged when comparing reports and testimonies. Apart from the aforementioned characteristics, the expedition led by Dina de Firenze revealed that Ahuizotl seem to live

in the shallow waters near the coast where they presumably capture their victims with their tail-hand. After that they appear to drag them to the depths to drown them before eating only the eyes, nails and teeth, leaving the rest of the body, which later on floats back to the surface.

After scrupulous research and interviewing with the locals, the consensus is that Ahuizotl were



created by Tlacatpochtli, the rain god. A report presented by Sir Charles Dibber records one interviewee saying that these creatures are “the hounds of Tlacatpochtli” and that they do his bidding by “hunting mortals at their creator’s command.” According to her words, they eat only

the aforementioned parts because that is where “the soul resides, and that is what Tlacatpochtli asks of them: the souls of the Chosen.”

These are some of the unanswered questions about the Ahuizotl:

Why do they eat only the eyes, nails and teeth of men and women?

Why does Tlacatpochtli demand these flesh tributes from his offspring?

If someone were to survive their attacks—and the trip—is it possible to find their lair at the bottom of the ocean?

OHUICAN CHANEQUE

Tuomas Kides was the first to catalog the Ohuican Chaneque, sprite-like creatures that many Nahuacan people believe to be nature elementals seeking to defend the wild against intruders.

In the words of fellow scholar Davena Bowles, “they can take on the forms of young children or elders and can convince a passersby to follow them to Mictlan,” this last term referring to one of the Underworlds of Aztlani belief. According to many reports, if a victim manages to escape their lure, they are often found wandering back to their homes, no memory of what actually happened to them during the time of their absence. As a result, most inexplicable disappearances are usually attributed to the work of the Ohuican Chaneque.

Apart from that, the most commonly mentioned characteristic about them is their supposed ability to scare the soul out of the body of a trespasser, trapping that essence somehow outside of a person. According to François Moreau, multiple witnesses have attested that whoever suffered such attacks and did not recover their “soul” in time have suffered agonizing deaths. This has led to numerous enquiries and explorations in search of these “lost souls,” as well as presenting Théan scholars with new evidence about the existence of the soul—and its key importance to human existence.

A species with similar characteristics is the Aluxo’ob (sing. alux), a well-known creature across Tzak K’an city-states and thoroughly studied by

Dominga Muñoz. Whether they are same or a particular variation on a common theme remains to be seen. Finally, it is interesting to note the similarities with our own Castillian duendes and the Montaigne gobelins.

These are some of the unanswered questions about the Ohuican Chaneque.

Why do they lead only certain people to Mictlan? Is this some form of punishment? How can one escape their lure?

Why does everybody lose their memories after an encounter with them? Is there any way to retain such memories?

How can one recover one’s soul if assaulted by them?

QUINAMETZIN

Few and scattered ruins is all we ever encounter about the Syrne on our native Théah. But what would our scholars do with magnificent pyramids that defy the skies or, even more so, a whole city of gigantic—and impossible—dimensions?

That is the legacy of the Quinametzin, the giants that first inhabited the world according to the Nahuacan tradition. Although the primary investigation on the field by Ragnvaldr Hendel was primarily based on records, songs and engravings, the Eisen work should not be dismissed as mere “folk-tales.” The

proof of these giants’ existence lies all around the Nahuacan Alliance—and especially in the marvelous magnitude of Millahco, the Great Pyramid of Ōlōxochicalco, and the city of Tlaichtacān. These “impossible” constructions have baffled numerous Théan experts on architecture, who seem unable to provide any past or current means to replicate these perfect structures and on such a gigantic scale. In spite of their advanced technology, it is hard to believe that Nahuacans could even today build such wonders, less so hundreds of years ago.

How, one can ask, were these titans destroyed? What manner of calamity could bring about their ending? The stories that Hendel translated and preserved for posterity talk about “the anger of the gods” about the giants “lack of proper worshipping” and some other “great sins” being committed during their reign. The truth about these statements—as anything related to the Quinametzin—awaits to be revealed in full.

In the most mundane side of things, some of the people involved in the so-called “Nahuacan



Restoration Movement” argue that the best way to bring back the wonders of old is finding out if there are any descendants of the Quinametzin and ask them to join their cause. Whether this is just mere wishful thinking or a real avenue remains to be seen but, if such descendants do exist, our entire system of belief—and existence—could be irremediably altered as a

result. After all, what can we, puny mortals, do against creatures of such power and might? And what could prevent them from overtaking not only the Alliance, but all of Aztlan or even, gods forbid, Théah itself?

These are some of the unanswered questions about the Quinametzin.

How did they build Millahco, the Great Pyramid of Ōlōxochicalco? Who guards this secret nowadays?

Are any of them still alive? Is the City of Tlaichtacān their dwelling and/or hiding place?

If alive—and willing to parley—would they join the Nahuacan Restoration Movement?

VICTIMS OF EHĒCAH TOTECH

One of the most bewildering Nahuacan deities, Ehēcah Totech embodies the union of (apparent) opposites that usually eludes our simple, Yasnavan Théan minds. Here is a god that is associated with agriculture, vegetation and spring—as well as disease, war and particularly flaying, both to himself and to other (unfortunate?) receivers of his attention.

These vessels—that from here onwards will be referred to as “victims” of the deity—were first described by Zina Ludmila Kuznetsov after encountering them in a visit to the Great Temple in Pepechotlan. According to her report (which in turn registers the testimony of a “fanatical priest of the deity”), “they

[the victims] were skinned alive so their flesh could be worn by Our Lord the Possessor [i.e., Ehēcah Totech].”

Further investigation on her part revealed that the skinless bodies that are left behind after this ritual do not die but, instead, keep existing with only one motivation on their presumably deranged minds: to seek human flesh to cover themselves. The real tragedy in this case is that even when they achieve this horrific goal, all their efforts are finally in vain because any skin that they can provide for themselves quickly decomposes upon contact with their exposed flesh, as if the result of some final blessing—or curse—of their god.

The only relieving part of the

Ussuran report is that, at least according to the information provided by the Nahuacan scholars, no new victims of Ehēcah Totech have been created by the god in a long time.

These are some of the unanswered questions about the victims of Ehēcah Totech.

How were they skinned alive? What type of crime deserves such a terrible punishment? Can anybody become one of them today?

Why do they keep living after suffering such a terrible torment? What are their weaknesses, if any?

Is there any way to pacify or give a proper burial to these creatures?

FROM THE VOLUMEN SECUNDUM: DE CIVITATE TZAK K’ANI (“SECOND VOLUME: OF TZAK K’AN CITY-STATES”)

B’OLON T’OON

Once thought to be a deity on the vast Tzak K’ani pantheon, the “Nine Strides” (approximate translation) were revealed to be something much more simple and, at the same time, much more terrifying: they are, at least according to Magnhildr Hildr’s research, plain and simply “the spirits of destruction that appear at the end of each world.”

Although many scholars have refuted the Vesten investigation as the mere delusions of a mad woman,

my most trusted sources have gathered information that various Tzak K’ani wisemen and women have confirmed Hildr’s words, at least as far as identifying the B’olon T’oon as some sort of species whose defining characteristic is being composed of nine-legged creatures.

Apart from that, all other reports are at best contradictory and at worst barely legible. One party of explorers led by one Gionata Vincenzo Guerino Gregorio Cisternino

claimed to have encountered one group of them and, after some undisclosed agreement, have been able to receive “the B’olon T’oon’s message.” What that message was has become the matter of much conjecture, since after that report both Gionata and his companions disappeared leaving no trace.

Another completely independent group recounted a similar meeting, but in their case the result was a travel to “a region in the highest air,



well beyond the observable limits of the sky.” What that means remains an enigma, one that will probably never be resolved since this group seems to have never returned from such a momentous journey.

CAMAZTOZ

This name, meaning “death bat,” refers to both the Tzak K’ani deity as well as the flock of bats that reside in Xibalba, the Underworld of the Tzak K’ani belief.

The most reliable account of their existence can be found in a translation from the Book of the People, completed by Trinidad Cruz Villaverde. They are described as skeletal in appearance, colossal in size and extremely dangerous. In one story, they are able to snatch off the head of a person in one swift stroke. They can also leave Xibalba in great numbers to block out the sky if provoked. At least three of these occurrences are chronicled in the aforementioned book, all with disastrous consequences

MANIKIN

Of all the legends and stories that I have studied in my numerous journeys across Aztlan, there is no one that has infused more terror in my soul than this one. And although I would gladly be the first one to discard it as only a folk tale, my own experience has shown me the horrific truth of the Manikin.

It was in one of my explorations deep into the Tzak K’ani city-states that I heard the rumours about them, always whispered and followed by fervent prayers to their numerous gods. In a few words, the Manikin are the remnants of the first failed attempt by the Tzak K’ani gods to create humanity. Carved from wood, but deceptively human-like, they

These are some of the unanswered questions about the B’olon T’oon.

Is it possible to survive an encounter with them? What is the key to such fortuitous outcome?

for the provokers.

The main problem with Camaztoz is that they can be encountered by accident. This is the result of unknowing explorers straying too close to an opening to the Underworld; e.g., a cave or well. These winged creatures seem to be always ready to quickly emerge to protect their realm and lord—by dragging any absent-minded explorers back to Xibalba with them.

Another probably related species is described in the same Book as “a man with the wings of a bat.” Although not as fierce as their abovementioned counterparts, these incarnations appear to be much more dangerous. Indeed, in one of the notes of her

walk amongst the living even to this day, most of time undetected because of their strikingly similar appearance to our own. In fact, the only indication of their true identity seems to be their lack of speech and their blank, mindless stares.

It was my privilege—or damnation, depending on the point of view—to be present when one of these creature’s true nature was exposed. Although shocking, the experience would have been only anecdotal if it were not because only a couple of days later I saw what I could only describe as a wooden version of myself as it left the city I had just visited to go into the surrounding wilderness.

What message do they bring, if any, about the world’s end?

Can they be ridden (relatively) safely? What would be the price of such a ride? Where would they take you with their nine legs?

translation Cruz Villaverde comments, “these creatures bring Lord Tohil’s deals—and their terms are never good news for those who received them.”

These are some of the unanswered questions about the Camaztoz.

What manner of provocation would make them cover the sun?

How can one distinguish the cursed caves or wells protected by them? Can one survive being dragged by them to the Underworld?

What message from the Underworld do they bring when they appear without provocation? What are the terms of their offering?

From that day I cannot remove the image from my mind and, I am afraid, it will accompany me to the grave.

These are some of the unanswered questions about the Manikin.

How can one distinguish them? What manner of magick protects them from being detected? Can it be used by mortals?

What spell summons them? Where it can be found? What are the costs or components of such incantation?

If somebody could summon them successfully, how could anybody stop them?



PET MO'

In the Tzak K'ani records our current world is only one in a continuum of worlds. Anybody that has read the first volume of this work will remember the Nahuacan story regarding the Quinametzin, giants from a similar previous reality and an unsettling coincidence between two different and rather isolated cultures—but I digress.

The case of the Pet Mo'—the “descendants” of a former deity—however, has its own particular characteristics that set it apart.

The first is that this name is first encountered in reference to the “One True Sun,” a deity that was supposedly shot down from the sky by the Hero Brothers, the famous legendary heroes according to the Tzak K'ani studies on the matter.

None of this would be of any relevance to anyone (beyond those interested in the study of such stories) if it were not for the obsession with this topic displayed by Fiorenzo Montagna, the infamous Vodaccean tomb raider that so much damage did to our scholarly cause here in Aztlan.

A number of trusted sources confirm that he has been sending and leading numerous expeditions following any clues that can point to the supposed descendants of the original Pet Mo', as these creatures seemingly possess some of the same abilities and knowledge as their originator. Those same sources mention that the information he has gathered at this point talks of them being able to “impart the knowledge of the previous world”—for a price. The

cost of such an unheard privilege is unknown, but anybody in their right mind would not risk their own life—or even something worse—for it.

Sadly, Montagna has never been known for his restraint or measure—especially when it comes to acquiring something powerful that does not rightfully belong to him.

These are some of the unanswered questions about the Pet Mo'.

What do they demand in exchange for part of their knowledge of the previous world?

If angered, how can they be defeated? What are their weaknesses? What type of resources did Hun-Ahpu use to defeat them in the first place?

Is there any way to restore them to the power they had before?

FROM THE VOLUMEN TERTIUM: DE IMPERIO KURAQ (“THIRD VOLUME: OF THE KURAQ EMPIRE”)

AMARU

Amarus are large, double-headed winged serpents (one of a bird, the other of a puma) that dwell beneath the Hark'apa Mountains. The first sightings of these creatures were reported by Caridad Vega de Ochoa, the first Théan to cross the Hark'apa Mountains and enter the Kuraq Empire. According to Cristina Mata, her chronicler and partner, the Amaru they saw were “flying high above the Anti and suddenly vanished into the air, as if they have become immaterial from one moment to the next.”

This report corresponds to the information gathered later on by other explorers and by the testimony of various men and women of knowledge that were interviewed by them. In the words that Augustin

Bisset recollected, “they [the Amaru] are able to transcend the earthly plane and go to the place beyond.” What that “place beyond” is has not been confirmed, but various reports from different sources agreed that it probably references the Ukhu Pacha, the Otherworld of the Kuraq people.

Related to this ability, other research has revealed a connection between the Amaru and the Celestial Realm. In this sense they are said to be the guardians of the entrances to this place although their particular role in this regard remains a mystery.

The most important characteristic of the Amaru—or at least the more politically relevant nowadays—is their identification by some as servants of Suway, the god of Death and the patron of the Empress.

Some go even beyond that and identify them as the eyes and ears of Suway, something that, if proven true, could turn them into powerful political actors.

These are some of the unanswered questions about the Amaru.

Is there any way to treat with them? What is their price for a ride to the Otherworld? Where would they take you there?

Can they reveal anything about Suway, his intentions or, more importantly, his weaknesses?

Is there any way to prevent their communicating to Suway what they see or hear?



INKARRI

The Inkarri are the deceased rulers and leaders of the Kuraq people who were never mummified—and thus, were destined to be trapped in this world, never reaching their earned state as ancestors. In a culture where the line between life and death can hardly be distinguished anymore, the Inkarri are the proof that even death cannot stop some spirits' determination to guide the destinies of their people.

Interestingly enough, the most relevant fact about the Inkarri is not the fact that they are people who are still alive after dying and being dismembered but, instead, who concocted the plan to have them keep on living like this—and for

UNU PACHAKUTI

According to the Kuraq belief, there was a previous world—one that the gods ended in a great flood. The reasons for this terrible decision are unknown, but the result is all around us: the creation of this world we now live in.

The story mentions that Ninaq'ara, the great creator deity of the Kuraq tradition, summoned a number of spirits to unleash this cataclysm over the people that once dwelt around Lake K'ayra. Of the men and women that lived there, only two were saved—and they have kept on living ever since.

They are Nawpaq and Iskay, and they now travel across the Empire

OQE PHUTIY

This is the denomination that the people have used to refer to a particular phenomenon that has arisen as a result of the arrival of the Théans on Aztlan. According to this belief the wak'as—or sacred spirits/places of the Empire—are deeply annoyed

what twisted reason. Some whisper—not quite aloud, of course—that these ancestors threatened the current rulers in life and that they, in turn, afraid of what they could do once they reached the afterlife, decided to dismember and bury the bodily remains of the Inkarri in far-reaching locations—so that they could never communicate their will again to their descendants.

If that was their plan, it has to be said that results were, to say the least, unsuccessful. Not only have they been able to defy this condemnation, but they have vowed to rise again and exact revenge on the ones that offended them. The Inkarri were, according to the words of one

warning the Kuraq people that their “wicked ways” will bring a new end to this world. One that will be brought in the watery wings of the Unu Pachakuti, the spirits of the great flood that ended the previous world.

Although many choose to ignore this cautionary tale, others have begun to reject the Empire's teachings in secret, afraid that if they do not do something radical Ninaq'ara will unleash his wrath on them—and all of Aztlan—sooner than later. Others still mention the recent climatic catastrophes and never-seen-before hard rains as sure proof that the Unu Pachakuti have already been invoked by Ninaq'ara and the only

by the presence of foreigners that desecrate the once pure lands. The result of this anger is that the wak'as have started taking possession of some Kuraq, making them dance to a silent music and announce through cryptic messages their divine will to

Pachakutek, “pieced together by the Death God in the bellies of the lost city of Kachu Pual, and their patched bodies have begun their search for those who inflicted this terrible curse upon them, eager to exact their revenge.”

These are some of the unanswered questions about the Inkarri.

Where is the lost city of Kachu Pual when they lie in wait? How can it be reached?

Can they be reasoned with? What are the terms of any kind of treaty with them?

If free, would they side with the Empress or the Resistance? Who inflicted this curse on them?

thing left to do is ask forgiveness and submit one's life to the will of the Great Father.

These are some of the unanswered questions about the Unu Pachakuti.

What incident would provoke them to finally unleash another Great Flood on the world? Would Théah be affected by such incident?

Do they only follow Ninaq'ara's orders or can they be controlled by some kind of magick?

Once unleashed, can they be stopped? What kind of ritual or sacrifice would be necessary?

end any and all Théan presence in the Kuraq Empire—and on the rest of Aztlan.

According to the testimony of explorer Terézia Szöke, who was present at the manifestation of these spirits, “They [the Oqe Phutiy]



made the possessed talk in a strange voice, revealing in a convoluted form that they had the wak'as within them. Afterwards all of them painted their faces with a red tint and then went to a special place beside some sacred standing stones. In that place they remained, while the rest of the people started worshipping them as wak'as incarnated, or 'Oqe Phutiy'." After this report was sent, Szöke disappeared and still has not been found, despite a substantial reward

being offered in exchange of information regarding her whereabouts.

As disturbing as this and other chronicles are, our hands as Théans seem tied in this matter. All expeditions that I and others have sent to the supposed places where Oqe Phutiy have manifested have encountered no trace of them and, after the Sarmatian's disappearance, fewer adventurers seem to be willing to embark in such a quest.

These are some of the unanswered

questions about the Oqe Phutiy.

Can anybody be possessed by them? What characteristics do the possessed share? Why do they paint their faces red?

What kind of ritual is necessary to complete their work and unleash the power of the wak'as on the Théans?

What is the relationship between them and the Resistance?

ADDENDUM: DE DEIS MUNDI NOVI ("OF THE GODS OF THE NEW WORLD")

In our quest to understand and chronicle the existence of the living entities of the New World, we have come across some who defy all classification. Not only are they effectively immortal, having led lives that number in the centuries

and millennia instead of years, but they also seem to possess powers and abilities that go beyond anything we have come to consider "natural." As a result, I have resorted to a language that is not primarily naturalistic and more in line with what one would

expect in the texts of the Vaticine Church and philosophers alike.

I hereby present you, then, with faithful accounts about some of these gods that walk Aztlan, for they cannot be named otherwise.

AYAR KACHI

The legendary brother of Manqu Qhapaq, Ayar is commonly known to be a giant that is trapped beneath the Hark'apa Mountains, imprisoned by his brothers in the series of caverns known as the Llakipakuy Caverns—one whose location is unknown today. The reason for this imprisonment is also a mystery, but more than one Kuraq historian agrees on his violent behavior as the main cause behind this decision. This piece of information is particularly trustworthy once the communication with the ancestors in the noble houses of the Kuraq is considered.

Another factor to take into consideration is the supposed strength of Ayar Kachi. The most conservative

stories talk about a might that was "unparalleled," whereas the most poetic and exaggerated mention feats such as his ability to bring down a mountain with a single shot of his sling.

The main interested party in this situation seems to be his brother, Manqu Qhapaq. Although no longer technically alive, his spirit has expressed through various vessels on a number of occasions his determination to avoid that his sibling escape his imprisonment at all costs. He has made public statements offering substantial riches and compensations to anybody who is willing to risk the journey to the Llakipakuy Caverns to make sure that Ayar remains in his dormant state.

The only thing that is certain is that, should he be able to escape his prison, no one knows what manner of horrors Ayar could unleash on the Kuraq Empire—and the rest of Aztlan.

Despite being locked beneath a mountain, Ayar Kachi makes regular contact through oracles and priests. An entire priesthood worships him, despite his dead brother's insistence that he remain locked away. The priests pray to him for strength and power, and can often be found hiding among the Kuraq military.



NACATLICUE

Another perplexing story that defies our usual notions of good and evil is the one that chronicles the fall of Nacatlícue, registered in our language thanks to the valiant efforts of Mies Willy Van Hofwegen, leader of the renowned Dauntless Company of Delvers. The originally fearsome and powerful “Deadly Mother” of the Nahuacans is said to wear a skirt of writhing snakes (the literal meaning of her name on our language) and necklaces made from human hearts, hands and skulls as garment. According to the Nahuan teachings, she represents the nexus of life and death—one that her story aptly embodies.

After being murdered by her

spiteful daughter, Coyolxauhqui— together with an army of four hundred other of her children—she gave life, even in death, in the form of the god Huitzilopochtli, swearing at the same time a promise of death to her betraying offspring. As her head was severed from her body, the Nahuacan patron god emerged, armed for battle to avenge his mother.

After that experience the goddess continued her existence, although her fearsome visage was henceforth amplified by two bloody serpent heads that replaced her one incomparably beautiful earthly face. The result is a deity that provides both life and death to her followers, and one

whose wrath against Coyolxauhqui and the rest of her unruly children has been coalescing for many suns. If that wrath were to be unleashed, no one seems to know for certain who the target—or targets—of her righteous revenge would be.

Nacatlícue has worshippers all over Aztlan, not just in the Nahuacan Alliance. Her conduits are priests and leaders of her faith. She guides them in agricultural pursuits, and those who follow her guidance have the most abundant crops and the best breeding stock. And while her followers claim to no longer practice blood sacrifices, if someone happens to die in her name, all the better.

LUM PAK' AND CABRAKAN

These twin brothers are the spirit of the Deepest Earth and that of the Earthquake, respectively. Lum Pak' is, at least according to the folktales of the Tzak K'ani, a gigantic caiman so powerful that was able to create mountains—at least until he was turned to stone by the legendary Hero Brothers. His story would be nothing more than fable, except for the troubling reports of mountains that appear out of nowhere, only to disappear just as unexpectedly.

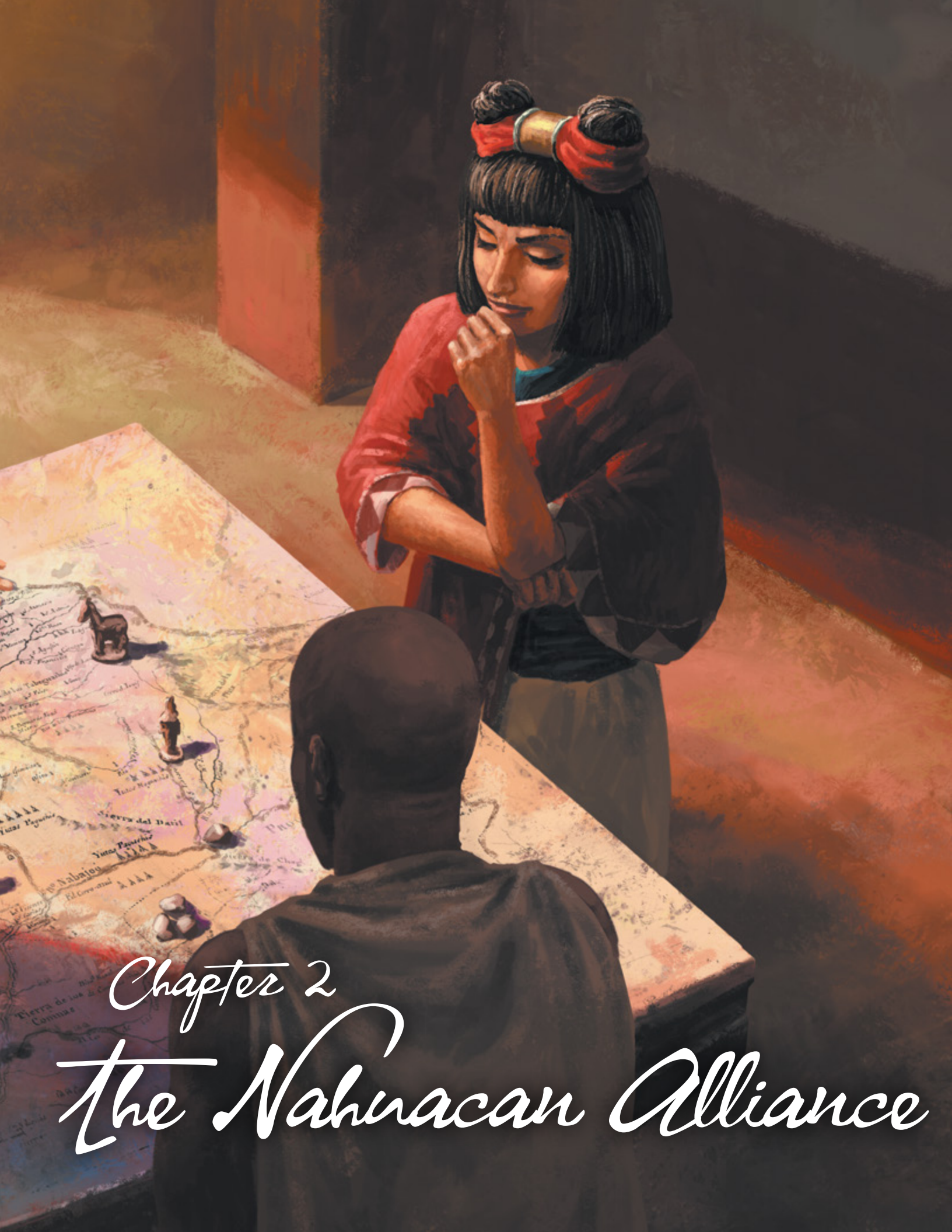
One such occurrence was reported by Elspet MacKendrick, a fearless explorer who has seen and heard more than most Théans in Aztlan and whose word I can firmly vouch for.

If Lum Pak' is free, however, that is only half the problem. His counterpart is even more dangerous, and has been described as a “temperamental spirit with no regard for any life or form of worshipping.” In fact, the reports describing the moving mountains have been accompanied by a measurable decrease in the earth movements in the region corresponding to the Tzak K'an city-states. Whether this is a sign of a cataclysmic event remains to be seen but, in any case, the duty of any scholar is to unravel the truth of these occurrences and, if possible, help the Tzak K'ani to find a solution to the problem—or problems.

Both Lum Pak' and CabraKAN have a smattering of worshippers scattered throughout the Tzak K'ani city-states. CabraKAN has no dedicated conduits. Every now and then, someone claims to have a vision of the earth moving beneath them, but it rarely leads anywhere. Lum Pak', however, speaks with his priests regularly. These priests live in Yok'ol, a small city-state dedicated to his worship. Most Tzak K'ani refute the existence of such a cult of priests, but those who run across them find out why he was locked away in stone firsthand.







Chapter 2

The Nahuacan Alliance



The Nahuacan Alliance



“We sent merchants and diplomats to request your vassalage, but you rebuked them. We’re not asking anymore.”

—Ome Tochtli of the Cuāuhmeh

The Nahuacan Alliance forged its empire in the crucible of battle, tempering it with the rigor of legal and political structures. Stretching from the eastern to the western shores of the continent of Aztlan, the Alliance unites myriad Nahuatl-speaking states—whether they like it or not—under the leadership of four great cities and their mighty deities.

Nahuacans adhere to a rigid social hierarchy, but applaud heroism and excellence regardless of class

or station. Their sorcerers wield awesome powers derived from civilization’s cultural heart and the wilderness’s deadliest creatures. Their armies, brave and organized, subjugate every state in the region. To be Nahuacan is to be the strongest.

Yet, the Alliance is at risk from the inside. Chichahua Tlatoa, the Great Speaker and elected leader, is young and untested. He does not have the influence and power of those who came before him. The leaders of the two elite military forces in Nahuaca, the Eagle and the Jaguar, are locked in a battle to gain his ear, or to subjugate his rule. He knows they plot against him, but is helpless to stop them. Neither has moved against him, yet, but he knows it’s only a matter of time.

To their citizens and allies, the Nahuacan Alliance represents order, civilization, art, wealth and security. To their enemies, the Nahuacan Alliance represents tyranny, uniformity, robbery and unbridled militarism. Nahuacan Heroes are crusading lawyers, genius tacticians, star athletes, prodigy artisans and daring entrepreneurs. Nahuacan Villains are despotic governors, merciless warlords, sociopathic witches and cultish terrorists.



History of the Alliance

The Nahuacan region spans the northern third of the Aztlan continent from the eastern to the western sea. It hosts myriad biomes, from arid deserts in the north to coastal flatlands in the east to towering mountains cutting from north to south. Most of the interior, however, is dry and arid, filled with almost impassible deserts and cut through with paved roads and way-stations between the cities. The people who inhabit such a land are not a monoculture, but the Alliance is as much a cultural institution as a civic one; some histories are consistent from city-state to city-state.

Most of the stories the Nahuacans tell about their origins are rooted in war and conquest, battles that shaped the face of the Alliance and its goals. But, before the battles—before the arrival of the new gods that serve as patrons for the core four cities that govern the Nahuacan Alliance—there was the Aztlan Empire: proud, defiant and doomed.

The Age of Empire

Myth and mystery shroud Aztlan's imperial age. Rumor maintains that the empire lasted thousands of years. It bent the earth, sea and sky to its will with technological marvels which now lie untouched, but unbroken, deep within the earth or atop the mountains. It spanned the entire continent and even crossed the sea, scattering colonies throughout Théah and beyond.

The stories of who and what the Empire was are as varied as the city-states. Many within the core Alliance cities believe they are what is left of the Empire. Others believe the Empire was populated by a different peoples. Not mere ancestors, but the first people whose life and culture are now unknowable.

Nahuacans agree, though, on the reasons for the Empire's failure. At the height of its power, the imperial government—ignored by the decadent god-kings—grew undisciplined and complacent. Petty crime snowballed into unchecked violence. Bandits and witches seized political power for themselves. Imperial armies, inexperienced and disorganized from long peace, were thin-spread and ineffective.

Where families, academies, noble houses, and merchant guilds once bound people together, feuding

criminal bands now tore them apart. The god-kings, unwilling to govern with purpose, failed to intercede as the empire fell to a battery of simultaneous natural disasters.

One coalition of families associated by friendship, marriage, and blood fled into the wilderness. Beneath a mountain overlooking their abandoned homes, people who once lived in gleaming towers and sprawling villas sheltered like prehistoric troglodytes in a system of seven caves. As temples burned and cities fell around them, they reverted to their ancestors' state before the Empire: hunters and gatherers, cowering in fear of weather and predators, wringing a meager living from the forests or tearing them from dying cities' corpses.

Hierophany

Long after the Fall, four figures entered the caves and called together these families' elders. One had skin dark as obsidian and eyes like sparks leaping off flint. One burned blue like fire. One wore no skin, bloody muscle and tendons exposed to the elements. The last was a white-plumed serpent with calm, sad eyes. They introduced themselves as four children of an ancient god who was a casualty of a lost age, the new gods come to protect humanity from itself by leading their adopted children into a new age of civilization.

These people, who would name themselves the Nahuacans, ventured forth from the caves, desperate and scared but trusting these strange, luminous beings. When enemies marched on them from the south, the god of blue flame uncoiled his belt into a burning serpent a kilometer long, scourging the Nahuacans' enemies and sending them running into the night, beating flame from their clothes. When enemies marched from the east, the red goddess with no skin seeded the earth with her blood, causing towering cacti to sprout and ward off foes with their spines.

When enemies marched from the north, the black goddess exhaled a thick, blinding mist, then sent moths and bats with obsidian wings to stab them silently to death in their confusion. When enemies marched from the west, the white serpent-god grew to the size of a great pyramid, and devoured them whole.





Taking Up Arms

The Aztlan Empire's warriors bore legendary arms and armor even in a time of legends, harder and sharper than any other metal on Terra. But the forges that produced them were abandoned in the Fall, the fine weapons they produced scattered to the winds.

The Nahuacans had few such weapons and could make no more. Aztlan's mines were exhausted—but even were they not, how could a community of refugees hope to mine and work ore without training? Instead, the Nahuacans defended themselves with what they found around them.

They learned to craft simple, deadly weapons from shattered obsidian and beaten copper, and armor from plant matter and feathers. They familiarized themselves with the forest, practiced maneuvers, and studied tactics so they could outmaneuver better-equipped enemies—presaging their eventual success against the far future's Théan invaders.

Every Nahuacan learned to fight. Even children or elders could set long spears against an enemy's charge, while stronger warriors stood before them ready for anything. They catalogued which techniques and strategies succeeded or failed, learning from every battle and drilling during every spare moment. The Nahuacan military tradition evolved from fear and desperation, but it worked, persisting unbroken to today's standing armies.

From Witchcraft to Sorcery

The Aztlan Empire feared sorcerers. By order of the god-kings, witchcraft was punishable by death. No honest Aztlani would ever think to practice magic, which belonged exclusively to hedge wizards and witches in the wilderness outside civilization. Those who plied their wicked trade for the dubious benefit of forlorn souls with nowhere else to turn.

But now, the Nahuacans lived in that wilderness. They had become the outsiders they always scorned. As villainous sorcerers overran the Empire's cities, the Nahuacans begged the gods to teach them sorcery, that they might hold their own against evil even without the gods there to defend them. The gods held no offense by magic, and readily agreed to help their followers.

Each of the four gods taught their people one sorcerous tradition. The black goddess, *Ítzzohualli*, taught the Nahuacans to divine possible futures by peering into a mirror's disk through a curtain of smoke. The white serpent, *Apocōātl*, taught the Nahuacans to evoke their souls in animal shapes, adopting a beast-totem's traits or even manifesting it as a companion creature. Flame-wreathed *Tlehuitzin* taught them to arrange birds' feathers into patterns which channeled spells, warding against harm. Finally, skinless *Nacatlícue* taught them the secret of sacrifice: that the death of something sacred to a god, or a death affected by something within a god's purview, led to an apotheosis, drawing the dead thing's life into the godhead.



These powers spread through mainstream Nahuacan society for the first time. Soon, Nahuacan sorcerers could fight spell-to-spell against the witches and bandits who had driven them from their homes. They predicted enemy movements with divination, setting deadly traps. Their warriors attacked with wolf packs' coordination and owls' senses, shrugging off blows to their feathered armor and shields. Then they sacrificed their captives to strengthen their gods.

In the present day, most civilized Nahuacans fear and reject such dangerous magics—like the ancient Aztlani did—but none can deny the worth of such sorceries in the wake of the Fall.

Separate Ways

More and more people joined the Alliance, but numbers bred division and resources were few. Each of the four deities had a strong personality and demanded that the Nahuacans worship her or him first, before the others. The priesthoods which formed around them swiftly adopted their attitudes. In-fighting was common and the gods encouraged their followers to attack those of the other gods.

Only a few years passed before the Nahuacans fragmented into four groups, each ruled by a different deity and their priesthood. Itzozhualli's people hiked north into fertile valleys between volcanoes, rich with her sacred volcanic glass, which they turned into weapons.

Apocōatl led his people west, into swamplands no one else thought safe, dredging and rerouting the marshes and building temples above the dark water. He taught them to use the plants they found there as both food and medicine.

Nacatlucue went east, following the maize plants she found, until her people found expanses of grain such as they'd never seen before. She ensured her people's lands would always be fertile.

Tlehuitzin traveled south into the woods where the hunt was best. It was a hard place to live, but his people hardened with it, becoming skilled hunters and then skilled warriors, collecting forest birds' plumage to create fine works of art and magic.

The Eternal War of the Four

The four Nahuacan cities—Milllahco to the north, Tecuehtitlán to the west, Ōlōxochicalco to the east, and Nexhuatipēc to the south—rose in prominence. The Fall gave rise to a checkerboard of city-states across the narrow continent. Hunting grounds were scarce, fertile soil scarcer. Myriad city-states stockpiled weapons and trained bands of raiders to assault their neighbors. Many even had their own gods; but it was always clear that the real power lay with the Nahuacans and their powerful patrons.

Ōlōxochicalco developed a standing army first, followed by Tecuehtitlán. Agricultural surplus allowed the priest-kings to separate out dedicated warriors. They trained in martial arts, patrolled the borders, reported back on the weak and vulnerable neighbor-states, and struck at their unprepared defenders hard and fast. Milllahco and Nexhuatipēc, smaller settlements with less secure food supplies, rushed to raise armies in response, but could not afford to spare so many soldiers from work in the towns and fields. Under their deities' direct tutelage, their priesthoods instead mustered smaller orders of elite troops.

Milllahco's specialists—the *Ocēlōmeh* or "Jaguar Knights"—were swift and stealthy, wielding obsidian-tipped spears, copper axes, and long obsidian knives. They donned black jaguar skins to blend with night and shadows, stealing into enemy camps to murder officers and poison food.

Nexhuatipēc armored its warrior-priests—the *Cuāuhmeh* or "Eagle Templars"—with magically enhanced suits of feathers. With feathered shields that could block any strike, they were Aztlán's heaviest and most durable infantry. Eastern and western armies may have been larger, but the *Ocēlōmeh* and *Cuāuhmeh* were Nahuaca's most feared and renowned warriors.

Each state hurried to repay its divine patron for their guidance and generosity. Priests sacrificed objects, crops, animals and humans atop massive stone temples. Each sacrifice invigorated the gods, multiplied the benefits of strength, luck and sorcery they granted.

For hundreds of years, the cities struggled with one another, no one ever rising to prominence over the others. When one city's fortunes rose, the others banded together against it. As soon as the high were brought low, the coalition fell to squabbling, and the cycle would repeat.



Alliance Rising from the Ashes

Each successive war spawned new military technology; new advances in tactics, strategy and organization; and ever-mounting numbers of human sacrifices to elevate one god above others.

At last, all four armies marched to battle at the intersection of their four states' borders. Their gods towered above them like walking mountains, their physical manifestations made giant by never-ending sacrifice. Battle was to be joined in a ruined city, a relic from ancient Aztlan. But before the first conch could sound, one officer trudged forth from Nexhuatipeç's lines. He raised a speaking-horn to his lips, but instead of delivering the ritualized insults which preceded any major battle, he said this.

Listen! I am an officer of the Nexhuatipeç Army. I have won fame and prominence by taking over a dozen sacrificial captives, the finest warriors I ever fought amongst my enemies' ranks. I have led my warriors to victory and defeat over and over again. Each time more honors heap upon my shoulders, more decorations appear upon my clothes. I grow tired of this endless, pointless fighting. I'm sick of watching people with families die to aggrandize my god. Execute me for treachery or ignore me, I don't care what. I'm done fighting, and if any of you have any sense you'll be done with it too.



And with that, he removed his eagle helmet and his back banner, dropped his mācuahuitl and feathered shield, and sat down.

Tlehuitzin, the most warlike of the four gods, stalked forward over his armies, reached down and scooped the officer up as he passed. The god climbed atop an ancient ball court, lifting the officer to eye level. All who watched were certain Tlehuitzin would drop the officer into his burning maw. But instead they heard this.

This man speaks a truth which no one has ever dared to speak out loud. My brother and sisters—do you deny he is right? Is it worth it to you, to watch a hundred souls perish each day to sate your hungers? Will this battle do anything the previous thousand have not? I love war better than anything else, but war is only sacred when it is a conflict of ideals, passions or survival. But what is about to happen here is of no more import than children bullying one another in the market square.

In response, the priests of Tlehuitzin strode forward from their ranks. They performed the ritual of sacrifice to Tlehuitzin, but instead of offering a human life, they broke their own weapons on the altar. Tlehuitzin was pleased.

Then, all four gods, reunited for the first time in centuries, took seats on broken pyramids and ruined temples, carrying human leaders forward in their own hands to converse. For the first time since the beginning of their history, four Nahuacan states spoke with one another as brothers and sisters. Thus formed the Nahuacan Alliance. The warrior who spoke out against the futility of war was named the Great Speaker, a new position between and above and below all four states' priesthoods, charged with a new duty: to argue on mortals' behalf with the gods.



A United Nahuaca

A single directive defined the new alliance: that every human ever killed by humans would die for the greater good of all, or not at all. Human sacrifice would end, even if it meant the gods would weaken. The gods, exhausted by the destruction of what was dear to them, were all for it.

All four nations' martial traditions were very much alive, however—and now they were ready to present a united front. East and West shared agricultural and logistical acumen with North and South. North and South disseminated their martial styles and drill instruction to East and West. In between them all, the seat of the Alliance formed in Pepectotlan, a neutral city built to guide them all equally.

The city housed each god, with their own temple and place of worship, brought together for the first time in one place. Here sits the Great Speaker and the elders from each of the four great cities. While each city continues to have vast political capital within the Alliance, Pepectotlan is the great uniter.

The alliance created the most devastatingly organized army Aztlan had ever seen. Over the next two hundred years, every city-state in the region joined the Nahuacan Alliance through diplomacy or conquest. States who resisted felt the full brunt of the Nahuacan military machine, their ravaged capitals rebuilt in the Nahuacan's image.

Théan Contact

Odisean explorers made first contact with the Alliance in 1576, setting up coastal factories to trade Théan clothing, manufactured goods and artwork with fascinated Nahuacan merchants who eagerly relayed news of these strange folk to their leadership. Interactions were profitable and benign at first. A few manufactured goods (non-enchanted featherwork, sculpture, painting) changed hands, but mostly Théah hungered for Aztlan's precious metals, rare woods, gems, and especially for a species of scale insect parasitizing local cacti which yielded a brilliant carmine dye when crushed: the cochineal.

Still, Nahuacan leadership grew anxious. They heard reports from Tzak K'an of marvelous Théan technologies, of a land where iron was as plentiful as water. Priests and generals surveyed weapons and materials brought back from Odisean factories.

Heavy breastplates and helmets made of gleaming steel, against which obsidian shattered on a direct impact. Pistols, muskets and crossbows whose missiles could pierce any armor not magically reinforced. Massive deer-like beasts which they rode into battle at alarming speeds, unstoppable on open terrain. A full-scale invasion might be catastrophic.

Early Expeditions

Some Théans were not content to sit in coastal factories and trade with the Nahuacans and their vassals. War with Montaigne had impoverished and disenfranchised many Castillian Grandes, who hungered for riches they knew lay inland: copper, gold, silver, dyes, handicrafts and Syrneth artifacts.

Various expeditions—often financed by Vendel League loans—probed Nahuacan territory in hopes of founding Théan colonies in the New World. Few expeditions proved profitable.

Lord Adán Armando

Grueling travel had demoralized Armando's forces by the time they ran into Nahuacan infantry. In open fields, the Théans proved a superior force, with their horses and steel against the Nahuacan soldiers' feathered armor and obsidian blades. The Nahuacans ran at first sight of crossbows and musket fire, luring Armando's army into the jungle, and certain doom.

Once the Théans entered the domain of the Nahuacans, they realized their folly. The horses could not enter the jungle, the Nahuacans pinned the Théans under a hail of arrows and slingstones, and as they moved deeper into the jungle skirmishing warriors surrounded the heavily armored Théans on all sides.

As Armando learned too late, the longer a campaign, the worse it was. Nahuacan regiments crossed their home terrain with unbelievable speed, drawing from local magazines and food stores placed strategically throughout the territory, while Théans struggled to hunt unfamiliar animals for food (and determine which ones were poisonous).

Eventually, Armando's expedition was lost, as the Ocēlōmeh and Cuāuhmeh eventually overwhelmed and outmaneuvered them in the unfamiliar jungles. Instead of being able to retreat, Armando had gone too far, and those the Nahuacans didn't kill were lost in the jungle.



Don Fernando Medellín

Fernando Medellín was a minor noble who came to the New World to escape overbearing parents and his family's meager means. In Théah, he had a series of failed vocations, training as a lawyer, a notary and a merchant. Eventually he assembled a crew eager to avoid the War of the Cross, borrowed money from a friend with connections in the Castillian treasury, and set out to discover new lands.

Medellín made landfall in a small state to the northeast of Ōlōxochicalco in 1631. The local leadership explained to him everything he wanted to know about the New World. They described the Nahuacan Alliance, whose overbearing leadership they resented. They described the gods, who walked around in strange human forms, sometimes demanding tribute or subservience in the service of their alien interests.

Without interrogating this last issue too thoroughly, Medellín hatched a plan: he would declare to these "idolatrous savages" that he was, in fact, Apocōātl in human form. While Armando-style assault had proven to be outright foolish, Medellín thought to trick the "savage" Nahuacans into giving up their holdings.

Medellín accumulated a few hundred allies from disaffected Nahuacan vassal states and married a handful of local women who translated for him. He encountered some initial opposition, but his gunpowder and steel weapons gave him the drop on overconfident militia who had never fought against such arms and armor before.

Don Fernando Medellín marched into the great central marketplace of Ōlōxochicalco. The crowds parted for him, for they had never seen an individual with pale skin and hair on the lower half of his face before. Clad in his gleaming silver raiment, he climbed the dais in the center of the market plaza and declared that he was Apocōātl in the flesh, come to rule his people.

A hush fell over the crowd before a little girl stepped forward from amidst the peasants. "First, Apocōātl looks like a serpent, not a man," she said. "Second, he's standing right over there." And indeed, the white serpent's feathery visage rose amidst the people, fixing his watery eyes on Medellín. He had come to Ōlōxochicalco to help Nacatlucue alleviate a drought, but since he was here, he decided to punish the usurper.

Apocōātl, gentlest of the four gods, chased Medellín and his followers out of Ōlōxochicalco and back to the sea. The Nahuacans had a good laugh about the

whole thing, confident Medellín had learned his lesson...until he tried the exact same thing again, in a different vassal state further south.

This time Apocōātl was not nearly so generous. His priest set Medellín's face on fire in front of his horrified wife and child, cooking the usurper alive in his armor atop a temple.

The Storm Serpent has not appeared in person to his priests since it happened. They tried to keep his absence a secret, but the rumor has now percolated through the entire Alliance: Apocōātl has gone dormant beneath the western swamps, sleeping off the bad memory of killing a human for the first time in centuries.

Medellín's Tzak K'ani wife escaped with his infant daughter, swearing revenge upon the god who humiliated and killed her husband.

An Uncertain Future

In Medellín's wake, the Alliance has increased border security. Ocēlōmeh remain on constant alert on the Eastern border, coordinating local militias and patrols and setting traps for military expeditions. Merchants and traders abroad in the Atabeau or even in Théah continue to send reports of Théan troop movements inland to their superiors.

Despite their preparations and intelligence, Nahuacan leadership continues to worry. They know Théans will learn to fight like Nahuacans before too long, mimicking their enemies' loose formations, light armor and easily crafted weapons. The Nahuacans know they cannot rest now. The worst may be yet to come.

Moreover, Medellín's daughter, Azeneth, has tried several times in recent years to exact her revenge against Apocōātl. She learned that he went into hibernation and tracked down his resting place. The last time she tried to enter and kill him Heironimus Frederick von Wetherald and Sonja Adalgild were there to stop her.

Azeneth's inquiries about Apocōātl's resting place did not go unnoticed. Members of the Pochteca caught wind, and though such things do not fall under their purview, they passed the information along to Heironimus and Sonja, both Théans, who felt obligated to stop her.

They eventually caught up to Azeneth at Apocōātl's resting place, and tried to convince her to leave off her revenge. When she refused, they fought her, but she was able to escape after killing Sonja, who died saving her best friend.



Government

The conference that led to the original Alliance began a process of the compartmentalization and specialization of individual arms of government. A volatile equilibrium of individual ambitions, ideas and talents drives the Nahuacan administration's vast bureaucracy. It controls a sprawling empire of different ethnicities, Nahuacans as well as smaller groups under their vassalage. The Nahuacans are great at presenting a united front to outsiders, but they face dangers from within, from the very subjects who make them strong. There are cracks in the temple stones.

The Judiciary

Nahuacan society is nothing if not legalistic. For all that the Nahuacans joke about their overbearing, complicated bureaucracy, deep down most Nahuacans deeply respect the laws and systems which keep them healthy and united. The judiciary branch of the government is thus their society's foundation.

The most senior judiciary officials are the judges themselves, venerable elders who have spent decades working as couriers, secretaries, clerks, lawyers and schoolteachers before ascending to lead the Supreme Court in central Pepechotlan or one of the smaller courthouses in every city and town in the Alliance.

Judges preside over disputes between every other member of Nahuacan society. They hold one another to an exacting standard of honesty, fairness and wise counsel, for nothing makes a Nahuacan more nervous than the possibility of going to court before a corrupt or crooked judge. If the judiciary finds a judge guilty of misconduct or gross incompetence, that judge may be executed or—worse yet—lowered to slave status, to live out the rest of his life in toil and shame.

This last punishment was the fate of Ēhuatii, a high-placed Pepechotlan judge whose own clerk publicized evidence that Ēhuatii had, for the past eight years, received bribes from various rich nobles and merchants to rule in their favor. He quickly escaped to the lake north of Pepechotlan, where he still hides, sending minions into Pepechotlan to stir up unrest among the Alliance's slaves. Many slaves are quietly in favor of revolt for good reasons, but they don't know that their leader doesn't actually care about abolishing slavery: he just wants to be back on top, and thinks a revolt is his best way there.

HEROES IN COURT

When Heroes clash with local Nahuacan government—as Heroes are wont to do—they often end up in court. Given the strong personalities of Nahuacan lawyers and judges such court cases are typified by bombastic speeches, appeals to emotion and underhanded personal attacks. Court is rarely boring when Heroes are involved.

Heroes also tend to get intriguing sentences. Nahuacan judges have a lot of leeway in terms of telling criminals what to do, so they are unlikely to waste an opportunity to send a Hero on a deadly quest to retrieve an artifact, a military expedition to fight Théan invaders or rebel cells or something else suitably over-the-top.

Nahuacan Schools

Every Nahuacan interacts with the judiciary as a child, for the judiciary operates the elementary schools everyone must attend, from the highest noble down to the lowest peasant.

The military originally founded these schools to teach basic martial arts and first aid to children, to ensure that the entire population could fight and support the standing army in case of invasion. Later, a curriculum in reading, writing, arithmetic and law supplemented the martial skills, and the judiciary took over the burden of teaching.

Nahuacan peasants are not fully literate—the program is meant to facilitate compliance with government edicts—but the schools at least open the doors for the brightest (and luckiest) to get into a secondary school and advance in society.

Nahuacan Courts

The government uses judicial inquests to check on economies and lives, and individuals can bring suits against one another even if they are of low rank. The larger courts have solicitors who help individuals with their cases, though the best solicitors charge legal fees in order to help with the upkeep of the courts. Scribes and sculptors keep scrupulous records of cases and rulings.

In the past, judges and lawyers memorized rulings, while sculptors inscribed the most important facts on public walls, setting them in stone. Since Théan contact, some jurisdictions are going stoneless, switching to keeping records on convenient but perishable paper.



Traveling Judges

While the four main Nahuacan cities have set courts and sitting judges, the outlying villages and vassal states have a harder time maintaining formal courts. Instead, judges make a circuit of towns, visiting each and hearing the town's cases, then moving on. These judges hear cases as they travel, sometimes holding court along the road, or dispensing justice within the jungles.

The Nahuacan people have a lot of respect for their judges, and even more so for the ones who travel. These can expect preferential treatment, a place to stay and a fine meal whenever they enter a town.

Many towns prefer to deal with minor infractions on their own, and only ask a traveling judge to deal with particularly heinous crimes or pass judgment on complicated issues. And when a dangerous criminal is on the loose, these traveling judges take it upon themselves to hunt him down and dispense justice.

Some judges make the same circuit, gaining a rapport with the locals, but many more travel the entire length of the Nahuacan Alliance lands, rarely making it to any individual town more than once a year.

The Military

The army is the pride of the Nahuacan people. It exemplifies their greatest heroics and their most pernicious flaws. Military achievement is the most lauded quality a Nahuacan can have. Daring strategy, hand-to-hand expertise and prudent logistics are the core of excellence as the Nahuacans imagine it.

Every able-bodied Nahuacan learns self-defense as a child, and is expected to attend occasional drills in case they are called to fight in the militia. Even small villages have an armory where farmers and craftsmen facing an attack by bandits, Théan adventurers or wild animals can grab slings and *tepoztopilli* (long spears with obsidian blades set in oval heads, suitable for both cutting and thrusting). However, the Nation's true pride comes from its standing army.

Military Training

Youths sit a special entrance exam that opens pathways into higher social standing. Those who score highest are invited to join a seminary which trains them for the highly regimented life of a priest, with its many responsibilities in the martial, spiritual and administrative realms. Scores in a lower percentile allow entrance to the military academy—less rigorous, more dangerous but equally prestigious to those who succeed.

Military cadets learn advanced reading and mathematics, relevant to their intelligence and logistics duties. They drill in the use of advanced weapons and armor such as the *ahtlatl* and *mācuahuitl*. They study strategy, tactics and logistics. They refine social skills such as rhetoric, negotiation and leadership, since even the lowest-ranked professional soldier might wind up in command of a disorganized militia section in a pinch. They even learn crafting skills so that they can cook for themselves and create new uniforms, weapons and armor while on campaign.

A cadet alternates between periods living and training within the academy, and heading out on patrols, campaigns or maneuvers with a senior soldier. Working as a batman and squire in the field for someone with combat experience ensures that the trainee learns practical skills rather than just memorizing facts and theory.

Training is extremely physical, even during academy periods: cadets participate in mock intramural battles or strive against other academies. Joining and succeeding on the school's wrestling or *Õllamaliztli* team is also an excellent way to catch the attention of one's superiors and get assigned to shadow a warrior of great status.

Rank

Rank among warriors is measured in captives taken, and expressed via uniform ornamentations. In the time before the Alliance, the difficult task of capturing an enemy alive was the best route towards advancement, since live captives were needed for sacrifices to the gods.

Enemies from stronger armies counted as multiple captives, allowing for quicker advancement. Nowadays, such sacrifices are prohibited, but capturing an enemy for questioning is still cause for advancement; such



prisoners are also useful as a bargaining chip for the Alliance.

Retired officers of note often become headmasters or instructors at the military academies or the seminary. For example, the aging Director Xochitl of the Ocelōmeh herself was considering retiring to a more relaxing job in one of Milllahco's military academies, but rumor has it that her suspicion of her counterpart in the Cuāuhmeh, Grand Master Ome Tochtli, has so far kept her in her current job: if he starts something politically dangerous, she'll need a position of power to oppose him.

High-ranking officers also liaise with the merchant corps. Merchants are invaluable to the army as scouts, diplomats and logisticians. On campaign, the army relies on storehouses of food, fresh water and extra matériel placed throughout Alliance territory, keeping supply lines short and fast. Even during peacetime, the vassal states at the edges of the Alliance must maintain these storehouses, lest a fine or worse fall upon them.



Order of Battle

The army consists entirely of infantry, divided into regiments. Each regiment's soldiers come from the same geographic region and follow a colonel, usually also from that region. The individual soldiers in the regiment often vary considerably in their experience, but each soldier's battle dress clearly marks her rank, with more elaborately adorned outfits indicating superior rank.

Every warrior down to the lowest cadet knows the chain of command so that amidst the chaos of battle, during which a regiment's formation may change every minute, everyone knows whose orders they need to follow. Colonels and other officers wear prominent back banners so that runners from other units can find them quickly to relay orders from on high.

Most soldiers carry a wooden, round shield and wear a quilted cotton gambeson, not as durable as leather or steel, but balances protection with light weight.

The toughest and most experienced warriors on the front line fight with a *mācuahuitl* and shield. Those behind them thrust or slash with long spears, and the rear of a formation attacks with arrows, sling-stones, and *ahtlatl* darts. Often a berserker with a gigantic two-handed *mācuahuitl* will cover the left or right corner of the front line to discourage flanking maneuvers.

When not in battle, the warriors train endlessly. They fight each other, play sports, study and go on rotation as scouts. Scout rotation lasts for about a week and is comprised of three or four warriors. These warriors are of differing ranks and the hope is that they each learn something from the others during the trip.

Scouts rotate location, companions and route on a regular basis to keep fresh. When they return, they report to their superiors anything of note and then have several weeks before the next scouting mission. Warriors can request to scout more often, though rarely do so as those out on scout do not go out with the regiment when the warriors march to war.

Heroes who train under the military have far more freedom than rank and file soldiers. They rise in rank faster than their peers and take on leadership roles. They are entrusted with personal missions, or events that take small groups to accomplish. They are the forward scouts, the rear guard, the infiltration force and the extraction group.



The Priesthood

The Four Deities' priesthoods are still the largest and most powerful Alliance governmental body. Every priest is sworn to poverty, living without delicious food or intoxicating drink beyond that which comes to them at festivals.

Their clothing is strictly regimented, limited to a simple habit plus whatever battle honors they may earn. They have a rigid hierarchy and schedule of duties to the gods and to fellow humans. But they wield great political power.

Religious Seminaries

The heart of every priesthood is the seminary. Great, ancient academies of holiness and learning sit in the center of every major city in the Nahuacan Alliance. Any young man or woman throughout the Alliance may take an examination at age fourteen, testing their reading, writing, mathematics, knowledge of history, knowledge of science, even agricultural skills.

The exam is grueling and covers a staggering array of topics. The children of social elites in Nahuacan society enjoy a great advantage in having more time to study and more help from their parents. But even peasant children go to primary school, and even peasant children can earn high marks on this exam and rise into the ranks of the priesthood.

Seminaries are austere, intense and prestigious. Even those who do not finish seminary are respected for getting in. Students live in drafty dormitories, spending mornings on chores and cleanup and afternoons on study and training. They learn reading, writing, history, mathematics, poetry, government, art, engineering and military science, choosing a specialty or major a year or two into their studies.

Priests go to war and serve as officers, liaising with the military branch on behalf of the government and serving as chaplains for the warriors. Martial training doesn't take as much time as it does out of a military academy student's life, but it is just as rigorous.

Graduation and Beyond

When students graduate seminary, they are ready to enter public life in one of the four priesthoods—usually their home state's. Each priesthood operates its city's and state's government. The priests become governors, army chaplains, teachers or administrators

as well as spiritual leaders. Established priests scout seminary graduations for promising youths, then mentor them to take their places when they retire or pass away. Each priesthood has a strict hierarchy with a High Priestess or Priest, often the ministry's eldest, at its apex.

Priesthoods tend to specialize in certain duties related to their god's purview. Nacaticue's priesthood contains many agronomists and doctors. Apocōatl's priesthood has artists and philosophers. Itzzohualli's priesthood operates necropoleis and hospices, caring for the dead and dying as well as their grieving families. Tlehuitzin's priesthood produces chaplains and architects.

Priests may enter the government, but many make a living simply plying their knowledge. In remote regions, priests take on a variety of duties, sometimes more than one. Priests who take up teaching or spiritual leadership may find themselves administering over several small villages, or everyone in an entire vassal state.

Heroes in the priesthood give of themselves by nature. They exemplify what is important to their gods, and encourage others to do so as well. They teach patience, knowledge and understanding as the core foundations of strength and laud those who learn to show strength through deed. As military chaplains, they encourage warriors to focus on protection and guardianship over being bloodthirsty and reckless.

Jaguar and Eagle

The Southern and Northern priesthoods also operate military religious orders. These orders consist of the seminary's most talented warriors and officers, as well as soldiers from any origin who have impressed the order's leadership with their particular heroism and aptitude in the field. Itzzohualli's order is called the Ocelōmeh. They specialize in reconnaissance, infiltration, sabotage—what we might call “black ops” in the modern day.

If you need a brave soldier to poison the enemy's commanding officer, burn chili peppers and toxic plants to fill their camp with sickening smoke, or steal the plans for a Théan fortified factory, the Ocelōmeh make it happen, and in all likelihood no one will even know they did it. It takes a special kind of person to be an ocelōtl. It's not enough to be fast and deadly:



you need to be creative, quick-thinking and daring, a lateral thinker who can outflank your foes in mind as well as body.

If the Ocēlōmeh are the shadow and the moon, the Cuāuhmeh are the fire and the sun, the most famous regiment in all the Nahuacan Empire. Cuāuhmeh are the hard core of the Nahuacan military machine. They wear the finest armor and shields Nahuacan armorers can make, adorned with beautiful feather patterns which magically ward off blades and bullets. Nahuacan units are accustomed to fluid formations, flowing and changing around enemy positions and battlefields. When you need someone to stand proud and hold the line, no matter what comes, the Cuāuhmeh are the strongest, toughest and most disciplined.

The Ocēlōmeh and Cuāuhmeh represent opposite ends of Nahuacan military doctrine's spectrum. In the time before the Alliance, they were bitter enemies, striking at one another's strengths and weaknesses in war after war. Now, acting in concert with the Nahuacan army backing them up, their coordinated operations are devastating.

Ocēlōmeh and Cuāuhmeh Heroes often work with small elite teams together to ensure the safety of the Alliance. They often seem to know where they are needed before anyone asks and they know exactly when and how to get their jobs done. They do not succumb to corruption. In fact, they are the ones to root out corrupt politicians, priests and nobility among the Alliance and ensure the health and safety of their people more than any other Nahuacan Hero.

The Great Speaker

A council of elders from all walks of Nahuacan life, from generals to high priests and from successful merchants to artists' guild leaders, selects the Great Speaker whenever the previous Great Speaker dies or retires. Whereas the priesthoods communicate with their gods, interpreting their words and wills and acting in their stead, the Great Speaker's job is explicitly to argue with the gods (and their priesthoods) on behalf of all humans.

The Great Speaker also governs the government itself, the way the High Priests govern their priest-hoods which themselves contain governors who administer the actual civil government. The Great

Speaker must maintain the balance of power between the different branches of government, apportioning responsibilities and keeping power struggles from becoming destructive. The position requires a strong will, ability to admit and correct one's own mistakes as well as others' and masterful rhetoric and leadership skills.

The Great Speaker may never be chosen from the same city twice in a row. The Executive Council, the elders who choose and advise the Great Speaker, nominates and then votes on a Speaker, sometimes from within their own ranks and sometimes from without. It is a stressful job dealing with a lot of strong-willed, powerful people (and deities), and many Speakers resign well before their death. He then relocates to Pepechotlan, the seat of the Alliance government.

The Great Speaker has the power to authorize human sacrifice in a time of dire need. This has never happened and should never happen, though extremists sometimes advocate its return during times of widespread fear. The Great Speaker who presided over the first Théan contact a century ago famously floated the idea after bureaucratic inefficiency and economic downturn borne of his own incompetence spread panic throughout the Alliance. The Ocēlōmeh exiled him (or murdered him, according to some conspiracy theorists) after a brief and widely supported coup.

The current Great Speaker, Chichahua Tlatoa, is 24 and the youngest to ever hold that position. He is doing his job, but many view him as weak and untested. They push against him in ways that no other Great Speaker has had to deal with.

Ome Tochtli, the leader of the Eagle Templars, is one such person. He believes that he can take control of the Nahuacan Alliance by subverting the Great Speaker. His counterpart, Xochitl, leader of the Jaguar Knights, is aware of his plot and hopes to gain the Great Speaker's ear in an attempt to protect him. Chichahua Tlatoa is more knowledgeable than either suspect, and has worked to keep them both at bay, but he isn't sure how long he can manage both the government and the military leaders alone.



Politics

Like any large confederation, the Nahuacans are divided over how to deal with various issues of state import.

Invasion Policy

The Nahuacan military machine has so far rolled over every city-state that they have invaded. Many others surrendered to the Nahuacans without a fight, unwilling to see their capital city plundered and their temples burned and replaced with Nahuacan icons. Their empire now reaches from sea to shining sea, crossing the continent of Aztlan.

Taxes on vassal states are high, requiring tribute not only in cash resources, but also artworks and even a few slaves. The Tzak K'an states to the south, Wabanahkik (Quanahlotye) to the north, and the Atabean Sea to the east are all possible next targets. Unlike previous Nahuacan conquests, these states are not ethnically and linguistically close to the Nahuacan. They will prove harder to take and hold from a cultural perspective.

Wabanahkik (Quanahlotye) is not a likely target. The Nahuacan merchant Centlāliā recently returned from nearly a decade abroad there, reporting the presence of well-established Théan colonies. Centlāliā also told stories of Wabanahkik's light infantry, thought to be some of the best in the world, who use tactics similar to the Alliance's and excel at defending the dense temperate forests they call home against enemies who outnumber them. Like the Nahuacans, they use light armor and guerrilla tactics, but they have mastered the use of the musket far faster than the Nahuacans.

The Rahuri of the Atabean Sea present a different challenge. Militarily, the Rahuri are in no position to resist a powerful Nahuacan army—but the Nahuacans have no naval expertise whatsoever. The priesthood has reached out to Théan sailors, shipwrights, and captains, offering them handsome salaries to share their expertise with the Alliance, but the story of Fernando Medellín's death has made these seafarers wary.

Moreover, Apocōatl made the Rahuri formal custodians of the Sea of Monsters in the beginning of

time. Any plan of conquest would have to go through him first, and he's sleeping. Nahuacan expansionists, perpetually greedy for shiny prizes to show off on the home front, are excited about Atabean riches, as well as its use as an early warning system against Théan invasion from the east. But the difficulty of creating a naval tradition they simply do not have already means that diplomatic overtures and offers of protective vassalage are much more likely to pay off than threats of conquest.

The Tzak K'ani are easily the most viable invasion target for the Nahuacans. The fragmented states which make up the Tzak K'ani region resemble the small tribes and city-states the Nahuacans customarily invade and conquer. A concerted assault on the Tzak K'ani would in all likelihood succeed, netting the Nahuacan a host of new colonies and natural resources.

Yet, three persuasive arguments warn against such a campaign. First, sending the army into Tzak K'an would leave the homeland undefended in the face of a large-scale Théan invasion. The Théans sit on the shores just waiting for an opportunity to creep ever closer and take up Nahuacan land.

Second, the Nahuacans have a hard enough time keeping their restive border states from violent revolution. If local revolts are so commonplace and such a headache for the Nahuacan military even when they win, how much harder will it be to deal with both those and an unhappy subject populace that doesn't even speak the same native language?

Third, most of the Nahuacans leadership sees their government as more than just a means to an end or a way to accumulate power. The Nahuacan Alliance formed for the good of all. It exists to share the benefits of each member state between all the states—unruly vassals included. If the Nahuacans want to become true leaders in their region, they have to win, not crush, the rest of Aztlan's hearts and minds. Another invasion may simply be the wrong thing to do from a moral standpoint.

The Nahuacan Alliance are a warlike people. They will not sit and wait for long to make a decision about where to strike next.



The Kuraq Question

The Kuraq Empire makes the Alliance uncomfortable, not least of all because it reminds them of their own sprawling hegemony. Their martial tradition is not as robust as the Nahuacans', but until Théans adapt their military doctrine to Aztlan, Kuraq remains the most dangerous foe.

Invading the Kuraq highlands is not at all viable; altitude sickness and unfamiliar terrain practically guarantee a loss against an army which specializes in fighting on inclines. Worse yet, the knowledge that the Kuraq answer to the dead, not to the living, terrifies a people who believe they merge with their gods upon death. The Nahuacans do trade extensively with the Kuraq, giving the merchants an excellent opportunity to find out what they're up to.

The biggest thing at stake between the Nahuacan and the Kuraq is the Tzak K'ani. The Kuraq are likely just as capable as the Nahuacans of taking and holding the Tzak K'ani territories. As inconvenienced and thin-spread as the Nahuacans might be if they send an invasion force south, the prospect of that territory under Kuraq control is unthinkable.

What About Théah?

The priesthoods of the four major cities do all kinds of political jockeying amongst themselves, but of late the major issue at stake concerns what to do about the Théan invasion which may or may not be coming. The priesthoods have rallied around their deities, who each have a strong opinion about how to respond to Théah.

The current Great Speaker is ill-equipped to decide between gods who won't back down from their opinions. Of all the political issues facing the Nahuacans, this one has them most deadlocked. Every argument sees the different sides settling deeper into their pride and viewpoint.

Tlehuitzin's View

Have Fernando Medellín's misadventures taught us nothing? Never mind their technology and their trade: Théans may have things we want, but they have nothing we need. The unauthorized factories they erected years ago are a continued affront to our sovereignty. Let us not risk invasion—let us drive them from our shores.

HEROES AND VILLAINS

In general, the Nahuacan policy is to unite all of Aztlan under the Nahuacan Alliance banner. In theory, this would be good for the Alliance; in practice this would erase the culture of several major powers across the continent. Heroes recognize that a united Aztlan can only occur through peaceful accord and the preservation of culture. Villains take a conquer-and-replace approach. It is dangerously easy for someone with good intentions about uniting Aztlan to fall prey to a cultural takeover approach in the face of a resistant Kuraq or Tzak K'an.

While the politics may vacillate between where to go next, the question of how clearly delineates Heroes from Villains in Aztlan.

İtzzohualli's View

Imagine what we could do with muskets, cannons and galleons! Imagine if we could cross-reference their medical knowledge with my comrade's in the west!

Let us invite them in, show them hospitality, pay them handsomely for what they know—but keep a careful watch on them. Their betrayal will never come—because we will betray them first!

Apocōatl's View

We will profit far better in diplomacy and mutual understanding than we will by showing them our teeth.

Let us give them no reason to invade us when our friendship is far more mutually beneficial. I am sure they have learned from Medellín that to attack the mighty Nahuacans is folly. When I awaken, I expect you all to have learned to get along.

Nacatlícue's View

I am happy to support whatever you three decide to do, but please decide quickly, because if and when the Théans come, they're coming to Òloxochicalco first.



Culture

The Nahuacans have brown skin, dark eyes, and straight black hair worn down or in various styles; soldiers especially favor topknots, a bit of extra defense against a blow to the head. Facial hair is uncommon. No particular build or body type characterizes the Nahuacan, but they generally lead active lives which involve manual labor for even the most rarefied nobles: strong muscles are a common sight under the light cotton clothing they wear in this hot weather. The rich often wear gold, wood or turquoise jewelry. Gauged earlobes appear frequently.

The Nahuacans would describe themselves as a proud, forthright people, always ready to lend a helping hand, with great confidence in their Nation, their values, their history, and their future. Their vassal states and other peoples in the region have a slightly more critical picture of the Nahuacans: as self-important, overbearing bullies who stride into places and situations which don't concern them, trying to solve everyone's problems by beating them down or forcing them to act more like the Nahuacans. The Alliance's foreign policy fosters this swaggering approach to social situations. The Nahuacan military custom of preceding every battle with a tirade of obscene and creative insults to hearten allies and intimidate (or just annoy) enemies also reinforces the stereotype.

"This is it? This is your army? I've never seen a paler, skinnier lot of worms on my dinner plate! Is this the first time you've left your house this summer? Do you need time to catch your breath? It looks like you walked for ten whole minutes to get here—you must be tired. But listen, I have a lot to do today, so hurry up and tell me now whether you'd prefer I cave your skull in with the edge of my shield, or just chop you in half with my sword. I'm willing to do either!"

City and Country

The four major Nahuacan states are set in a sort of diamond shape in the middle of Alliance territory. At the center, they meet in the at the Alliance's capital city, Pepechotlan: a city at the edge of a great lake, with four roads leading in the cardinal directions to the four great cities.

Navigable rivers connect the cities in some of these regions, but major roadways are also common. The stereotype that the Nahuacan didn't have the technology of the wheel before Théan contact is actually incorrect: wheelbarrows and wheeled children's toys exist, but the largest domesticable animals in the region are deer—far too light to pull carts or river barges. Théans' massive beasts of burden and the wheeled conveyances they pull intrigue merchants who travel to the factories on the Eastern coast, and the Nahuacan Alliance is slowly but steadily adopting wheeled conveyance into military and governmental operations.

City Layout

Major cities here have none of the haphazard urban sprawl which characterizes many Théan towns. The government carefully plans Nahuacan cities. Construction is strictly cordoned into different districts on a grid scheme. A giant stepped pyramid and temple to the city's patron deity, usually one of the main four, overlooks a large central marketplace and plaza. Administrative buildings and schools cluster around the pyramid for the priests' convenience. The stadium, primarily used for Õllamalitzli games, is nearby. Even small towns usually have a modest ball court where children can play.

Noble mansions are clustered in their own walled area. These grand structures display some of the finest in Nahuacan architecture: foundations of stone rising above the plastered streets, walls of finely finished and painted stucco and adobe, supporting wooden beams and frames.



A noble house is arranged like a town in microcosm, with a spacious central courtyard surrounded by meeting rooms, offices, living quarters, kitchens and workrooms: everything a noble family and their servants could possibly need, and more.

A larger district contains commoners' houses, simpler one-room structures of wattle and daub or adobe. Usually a few houses will cluster tightly around a central patio for group meals, children's play, or school; this arrangement allows multiple peasant families to share blacksmithing or weaving facilities.

While not comparable to noble manses, merchants' or successful artisans' homes, also situated in the commoners' district, tend to be larger and more comfortable apartments, with stone or wood involved in the construction with many rooms housing multiple families. Merchants and artisans often end up spending a great deal of time at their guildhouses, comfortable if businesslike buildings which ring the central plaza, even sleeping there during crunch times.

Engineering and Agriculture

Engineering and construction are a central enough element of life that Nahuacans from all social classes might end up studying them: an engineer the government contracts to build an aqueduct or temple could be a priest who decided to specialize, a military quartermaster or logistician, or even an elder farmer. Engineering is a popular course of study among nobles who want to make the best use of their landholdings—or to design increasingly imposing dwellings to wow their neighbors. Ix Nacahualli of Nexhuatipeç's rise to fame after designing a modern aqueduct system integrated seamlessly with walls, temples and other public edifices has created a new fad for virtuosic public-works designs...just as Nexhuatipeç's government planned.

Less rectilinear but still clearly centrally planned, farms surround the cities, with farmers' family huts usually sitting beside the field they work. While conventional farms for cotton or maize, or terraced hillside farms similar to Kuraq farms, are certainly present especially in the east, the Nahuacans are best known for their floating gardens. A rectangle of mud and plant matter stabilized with stakes is piled to a height of about a meter above the surface of a shallow lake, with willow trees at the corners and edges to discourage erosion.

NOMENCLATURE

Nahuacan given names are derived from their 260-day ritual calendar known as the *tonalpohualli* or "book of days". The day of one's birth is taken on as an individual's name. Days in the ritual calendar consist of one of 13 numbers—a day name—and one of 20 day signs. You can choose one of each from the lists below.

DAY NAMES

Ce, Orme, Yei, Nahui, Mahcuilli, Chicuacen, Chicome, Chicuei, Chicunahui, Mahtlactli, Mahtlactli-once, Mahtlactli-omome, Mahtlactli-omei

DAY SIGN

Cipactli, Hecatli, Calli, Cuetzpali, Coatli, Miquiztli, Mazatl, Tochtli, Atl, Itzcuintli, Ozomatli, Malinalli, Acatli, Ocelotl, Quauhtli, Cozaquauhtli, Olin, Tecpatli, Quiahuitl, Xochitl

Titles, honorifics, or nicknames are also common—"Victor at the Battle of Whitewood," "Big Ears," that kind of thing.

Usually one family will work a small number of these floating gardens. Crops are rotated during the year. Domesticated animals, dogs, turkeys and miscellaneous other birds live in small gardens adjunct to a larger farm or floating garden, or nestled someplace sunny within an urban peasant precinct.

Social Castes and Classes

Nahuacan people are rigidly divided into their social classes. Strict sumptuary laws govern individuals' modes of dress, so that any citizen's caste is obvious to anyone who looks upon them. The Nahuacans trumpet these laws as maintaining order and clarity in society, but they do not sit well with subject peoples who know better social mobility.

Judges

Judges hold one of the highest standings in Nahuacan society. They know the laws in and out and are the final arbiters of its letter and intent. Anyone can become a judge, though few do so without passing first into the priesthood or the military. A prospective judge apprentices with another judge, often working as a clerk or assistant for years before being allowed to take up the mantle herself.



A judge, unlike priests, is not sworn to austerity, though the town he oversees takes care of any expenses he may incur. His life may seem privileged, but he must stay as neutral as possible to dispense his duties properly. In small towns, a corrupt judge generally gets replaced quickly, or she loses any authority she might have commanded. In the cities, corruption is much easier to get away with, though no less damaging to her reputation.

Social classes mean little to nothing to a judge, and therefore her own social standing—or previous standing—mean nothing. A noble and a peasant are the same in the eyes of the law.

Priests

Before the Alliance developed, the four priesthoods were all-powerful. Each one operated a theocracy with an iron grip on life in its state. Nowadays, priests are still powerful, but the office of the Great Speaker and the rising fortunes of the other classes, especially the merchants, mean their dominion over Nahuacan society has weakened.

Priests may be privileged, but they lead demanding lives which require them to master myriad different subjects and disciplines. They wear simple clothing

with no dyes or adornments except for battle honors they earn—but everyone throughout Nahuacan society knows to honor and respect a priest, the link between the human and divine worlds.

Social and political tension between different priests in a priesthood, between the priesthoods of different gods, or between priests and other power players in society such as judges and military officers is unavoidable. While Nahuacan society is supposed to be united in service of their rulers and the state's goals, priests succumb to individual ambition as often as anyone else.

While a priest's duties in Nahuacan society are often staggeringly diverse, priest-as-politician and priest-as-warrior are likely specializations. Priests' lives are full of responsibility—which is to say, people asking them for help.

The Nobility

The hereditary elites' position is shifting uncomfortably. Before the Alliance, only nobles became commissioned army officers or priests. However, military expansion and the establishment of secondary education produced social mobility. Family traditions of martial and social success still set up noble children for high achievement; but the seminary and military academy exams allowed every caste to test into education and privilege.

Given the priest castes' primacy in government, nobles are primarily landowners, managing a set of farms or a precinct in a city. Tenants of all kinds, from farmers to guilds, pay their noble landlord rent. Nobles can also become army officers, priests, or (if they're willing to surrender their noble status) merchants. But with social mobility present via military achievement, the priesthood in control of government operation, and the merchants as the Alliance's primary financial movers and shakers, many nobles have begun to worry their titles are irrelevant in everything except name and appearance.



Merchants

Technically, merchants are commoners and peasants, garbed just like construction workers or woodcutters one might see on the streets of the city. Yet practically speaking, they occupy a curious position outside the normal hierarchy of priest, noble, peasant and slave. Anyone from any social class may set their life aside and apprentice to the guilds of merchants and artisans, learning the ways of trade, negotiation and craft. Surprisingly, many nobles, priests and warriors decide to do so, as well as commoners.

Merchants control the flow of goods within and outside the empire. Their adventures into foreign lands and even across the sea are the Alliance's best source of intelligence. The military frequently invests in merchant expeditions, knowing they may return from a coastal factory with reports of the latest new Théan technology, or from Kuraq with word of their latest troop movements on the Tzak K'ani border. But the merchant guilds are secretive still, sharing information within their ranks and bartering it between their different guilds. Even the government doesn't know for sure how much the merchants know that they aren't telling.

One of the farthest-ranging merchants, who now calls himself Gonzalo "Lalo" Terrazas, presides over the Flower Quarter, a Nahuacan expatriate community in San Felipe, Odiseo. He makes good money as a fixer, taking care of New Worlders in Castille and selling Nahuacan food and crafts to curious Théans. No one in town has yet caught on to the secret messages about Théan technology and military forces he's sending home to Nexhuatipeac.

Artisans

Like merchants, artists occupy a technically common, yet respected position. In the Nahuacan Alliance, appearance is everything, so visual art is everywhere. Clothing, temple and building walls, architecture, cooking, leading festival dance: each of these things provides the Nahuacans joy, cultural pride and unity. Illustrated codices record Nahuacan history. Nahuacan oratory and battle orders are coded as poetry. The Nahuacans exalt the best artists nearly as much as they exalt war heroes—not surprising, given that some art forms, such as featherwork, imbue art with supernatural power.

Artisans command a great amount of respect and have a great deal of influence in the political arena in many towns and villages. If a judge or leader wants the best craftsman in town, she may end up paying in more than money for the privilege. Artists are the Nahuacan cultural ambassadors, and spend a great deal of time in outlying vassal states, or bringing Nahuacan culture to other areas of Aztlan and beyond.

The artisan guilds lead the Nahuacan Alliance's burgeoning anti-slavery movement. While some still own slaves, slavery as a system runs contrary to guild goals and ideals. When a noble or priest forces a slave to do subpar work, artisans who have already given their lives for their craft lose out. But while profit originally motivated the guilds' abolition movement, the most outspoken of slavery's enemies tout abolition as a moral issue as well.

Commoners and Slaves

Commoners and slaves make up a large part of Nahuacan society. They lead toilsome lives, planting and maintaining the fields and floating gardens which feed all Nahuacans, lending their labor to public works projects, and serving higher-ranking Nahuacan as aides, valets and cleaners. They must also undergo regular militia training, sometimes even participating in mock battles against other cities, though in case of military action they are more likely to serve as cooks, porters, nurses and boatmen than front-line troops. Especially in outer provinces, commoners also maintain supply depots that allow the large Nahuacan army to move at a speed alarming for its size.

While they lead hard lives, Nahuacan commoners have access to various public services like temples, hospitals and courts—though society's higher strata get precedence at these services. Commoners who need medical care quickly frequently resort to folk remedies, or to the healing powers of hedge witches, mystic hermits or other outsiders.

Commoners still briefly attend school during their youth. This opportunity sets particularly ambitious students up for the possibility of testing into seminary or military school. When a student shows aptitude that might lead to such advancement, the community rallies around her, providing her the support she needs to succeed on entrance exams even as nobles' and merchants' children enjoy great advantages over her.





Slaves make up a small subset of commoners, but Nahuacan slavery is more like indentured servitude than the chattel slavery the Atabean Trading Company practices. It is impossible and illegal for a Nahuacan to be born into slavery. Adults can sell themselves into slavery to pay off debts or to benefit their families.

Slavery is also a common sentence for crimes ranging from public drunkenness to murder, and in the case of serious crimes can last for life. Prisoners of war, who were uniformly sacrificed before the formation of the Alliance, often wind up as slaves as well, though rarely for life. Keeping war prisoners as slaves and then freeing them to return to their homelands can breed resentment and fear, but it also disseminates Nahuacan culture amongst vassal states.

Organized Sports

Physical fitness and achievement matter a great deal in a martial society which not only values individual heroism in battle, but also expects every member to join in defending the homeland. Athletic trials grace every Nahuacan festival. The schools' and army's best athletes meet in great arenas for races, obstacle courses, and martial skill demonstrations such as archery and the use of the ahtlatl.

Combat Sports

Before the Alliance, great gladiatorial combats christened arenas with blood. Captured enemy soldiers received *mācuahuitls* with feathers instead of blades and fought captured animals, monsters or fully armed

and equipped soldiers, whipping spectators into bloodthirsty nationalist frenzy.

Recently, such lethal competitions have fallen from favor. Now, contestants fight with nonlethal clubs and protective equipment. Still, these battles grow predictably brutal. Sometimes one or both contestants sustain mortal wounds before they disarm or otherwise defeat their opponent.

However, wrestling matches are an even more popular event. Every child learns wrestling from friends, siblings or bullies even before it becomes a part of their basic self-defense curriculum at school. While soldiers have an advantage in mock battles, any strong farmer has a chance to become a champion wrestler, a unique opportunity in a society where mobility between classes is so difficult.

Like Nahuacan field engagements, wrestling competitions begin with a ritual exchange of intimidating insults, which often become elaborately florid, colorful and deeply personal, as athletes are lauded public figures whose lives and exploits quickly appear in the work of artists. In the ring, wrestlers are energetic and acrobatic, using the arena itself as a weapon as they leap, tumble and throw one another in pursuit of a pin.

Victorious wrestlers, like successful soldiers, earn the right to adorn themselves with elaborately decorated capes and masks, a colorful exception to the sumptuary laws even for a wrestler who comes from the ranks of peasants or the priesthood. The current all-Alliance champion is Don Tumbaga, a yam farmer turned priest turned wrestler who enjoys particular popularity amongst commoners.



Öllamalitzli

Just as popular is the game of Öllamalitzli. This brutal team sport requires a court divided into two halves and a heavy rubber ball. The two teams compete to keep the ball in the air by hitting it with pads on their hips or forearms in an attempt to volley it past their enemy's goal line.

The game is combative in the extreme, with one side's players checking or tripping their opponents to beat them to the strike. Various forms of this game evolved independently throughout the Nahuacan and Tzak K'ani territories, and the sport is swiftly gaining in popularity in the Atabean as well, with several prominent teams appearing within the city of Fort Freedom alone. The most lauded teams often go on international tours sponsored by merchant guilds, testing their strength and skill against rivals throughout Aztlan.

Poetry

The Nahuacan poetic tradition is rich and varied. The sharing of short poems on religious, emotional, natural or romantic subjects is a common activity after group meals. Short, pithy verses praising a god or hero frequently appear in decorations on the sides of temples, academies and other government buildings. Many battle orders and recipes are also formatted as rhyming verses to make them easier for others to remember. *Nezahuatzin's Odes*, originally recorded on the walls of the mayoral temple from which he ruled Milllahco, was the first Nahuacan work to be translated into Castillian.

Visual Art

Arts and crafts are central to Nahuacan society, economy and politics. Artists' guilds are busy and well-funded; there are no talented but starving artists here. Visual arts—sculpture, relief and painting—appear everywhere in the Alliance, from designs on clothing to giant statues or tableaux on pyramid walls. Richly illustrated books called codices (singular: codex) are fundamental to Nahuacan education from the earliest levels: the inclusion of pictures in basic communication makes up for the low reading level of Nahuacan peasants, allowing the government to pass on a great deal of information even to a farmer who can only read a couple hundred words.

Public works projects inevitably see competition between painters' and sculptors' guilds for lucrative decoration contracts. The priesthoods have maintained for as long as they have existed that beautiful, inspiring artwork engenders patriotism and national pride; they are correct.

Artwork makes up a significant portion of Nahuacan exports. Jewelry, decorated pottery, fine clothing and other worked goods are traded to the Rahuri for animal parts, the Tzak K'ani for honey, dyes and cacao, and so on.

Cuisine

Nahuacan cooking is one of the few aspects of their society which is mostly uniform between high and low. Most dishes are based on one of the crops grown in the floating gardens: maize, beans, squash, chili peppers, amaranth and a curious fruit from the nightshade family called a tomato. Visiting Théans at first were terrified to eat what they assumed was a giant poison sac, causing the locals no end of amusement.

Fish or game augments the vegetarian portion of the meal. Domesticated turkeys provide eggs as well as meat. Nahuacan cooks are particularly renowned for invertebrate dishes: scorpions, maguey worms, stinkbugs, flies' aquatic eggs and larvae, beetles and grubs, dragonflies, ants at various stages of metamorphosis, and grasshoppers. Tradition maintains that fish and insect recipes have been passed down from the very first settlers of Aztlan, and is the reason why the Nahuacans claim to know their prehistory. Dessert usually involves foraged fruit or, if you're very lucky, honeydew ants.

Cocoa beans are used as both food (mostly by the rich) and a sort of currency. While the cocoa standard isn't yet widespread enough to be called a currency the way the Vendel Guilder is in Théah, merchants have for some time kept records and expressed goods' value in terms of numbers of cocoa beans or (in larger denominations) cotton cloaks.

Since they are hard to grow in the Alliance except in the far south, merchants have to trade with Tzak K'an for the majority of the Alliance's cocoa. Warhawks frequently bring up the prospect of growing their own money as an argument for conquering Tzak K'an.

The most common alcoholic beverage is iztâc octli, thick and white and tasting of sour yeast. While the brewers' guild produces large quantities of it, only





nobles, priests, and military officers may purchase it, though nobles may distribute it to their tenants and slaves in carefully controlled quantities.

Rumors of merchants bootlegging lower-quality itzāc octli for trade or surreptitious distribution are vigorously investigated, though arrests are rare since merchant guilds are adept at covering up members' indiscretions. Public drunkenness is extremely scandalous within Nahuacan culture. A first offense comes with a heavy fine, a second with a term of slavery, and a third with execution.

Sorcery

Since time immemorial, the Nahuacans have mistrusted and feared sorcerers, even those on their side. Open practitioners of magic, such as hedge witches and wizards, live and work on society's outskirts. Supplicants come to them furtive and guilty, concealing what they've done from mainstream society. If they wander into town, no one will come after them with torches and pitchforks, but the anxious stares and slammed doors get old fast.

Divination

Ītzzohualli taught divination to the Nahuacan early in their history. Nahuacan oracles scry using smoke from secret combinations of plants and a reflective surface—usually a mirror, although water can work as well. The visions they see are often dreamlike and bizarre, nonsensical on their own, but revealing when cross-referenced with current astrological charts.

Feathercraft

Nahuacan hunters go to great lengths to capture brilliantly plumed birds. These birds provide more than just food and sacrifices. Master artisans of the Featherworkers' Guild adorn clothing, weapons and armor with their feathers.

Certain patterns are not only things of beauty, but also supernaturally powerful. When set in sacred patterns and blessed by the artisans with prayers to Tlehuitzin, they can imbue a sword, suit of armor or shield with supernatural durability or other impressive qualities.

Nagualism

Apocōātl teaches that humans and gods both can express the core of their character in an animal form, called a nagual. The nagual is neither a spirit guide nor a physical animal transformation; it's a way to externalize one's own identity, focusing on a set of personal strengths which tend to be associated with a kind of animal. For example, if the nagualist is determined, trusting and sociable, but she gets anxious when she's by herself, she might have a wolf nagual.

Protracted meditation on these traits, coupled with study of the associated animal in the wild, allows practitioners to enhance both the strengths and the weaknesses of their nagual as expressed through their own body and thinking. Expert nagualists can also manifest their nagual as an external, parallel being, a companion animal which is in a way both the nagualist and able to act on its own and converse with its source. Nagual externalists are the source of the common misconceptions that an individual can transform into a nagual, or that the nagual is a spirit guide which comes from nature.



Nahuacan Religion

When an individual dies of causes sacred to a certain god, they undergo an apotheosis which merges individual with godhead. The god's mind absorbs the deceased's and transfigures their body into a new form under the god's control, either creating a new manifestation for the godhead or merging with the god's existing form.

In ancient times, such apotheoses occurred infrequently and by chance. But eventually humans determined certain causes of death empowered certain gods; and priesthoods formed around various gods to seek out and sacrifice victims.

A few were willing, enraptured by the prospect of merging with the divine. Many more were unwilling. Most controversially, certain priesthoods at one point or another captured and sacrificed a god to another god, with predictably world-changing results; while some gods appreciated the gesture, others were shocked and horrified enough to wipe out their own priesthood on the spot.

After unification, the practice of sacrificing humans to the gods is an outlawed practice. Priests still sometimes sacrifice items or small animals to empower the gods, but this is more ceremonial than anything else. The gods have chosen to rid themselves of human sacrifice, and none of the major gods accept such homage.

Small cults to lesser gods may still practice such sacrifices, but when found they are removed with great prejudice. The act is abhorrant to most Nahuacans.

The Major Gods

Many gods still roam Aztlan, but the Nahuacans devote their worship to the four major gods and patrons of their most prominent cities. They still respect a wide variety of minor gods, many of whom are the patrons of their vassal states, adopted into the pantheon after a conquest.

Nahuacan gods are primal and capricious, though they offer their blessings to any who pay them homage. The gods can change their forms, but often meet with their followers in a single recognizable body. This does not mean that the gods don't wander through their cities in the guise of someone else, from time to time.

Tlehuitzin, God of the South

The gods do not have a leader—but if the position were available, Tlehuitzin would want it. The god of the southern direction, of Nexhuatipēc, of the sun, fire and war, Tlehuitzin is the loudest and proudest of the gods.

He appears as a very old man wearing a military uniform from the early days of Nexhuatipēc's settlement. He has a feathered headdress and his weapon is a fire-serpent whom he wears wound around his waist. Sometimes he appears as a ball player, and enjoys interacting with his worshippers via sport.

Tlehuitzin is blunt and brash, saying exactly what he means all the time, though when asked a question he has a vexing habit of answering a different one instead, or complaining about young people in modern times.

Tlehuitzin invented the calendar which the Nahuacans and Tzak K'ani use to this day. He wears the calendar on his back, and copies of it appear frequently as his symbol; it also represents the disc of the sun.

Nacatlícue, Goddess of the East

Ōlōxochicalco's patron goddess is Nacatlícue. While Ītzzohualli and Tlehuitzin are the current major war gods, Nacatlícue invented war to protect the crops her people grew, though she later retired from the purview to focus on agriculture and the earth. It is said that she peeled her skin away from her body in order to water the ground with her blood during a great drought.

Nacatlícue appears as a woman of indeterminate age, although the skin past her waist has been peeled down for her to wear as a skirt. Her appearance is perhaps the most unsettling of any god's. She will sometimes take the visage of a warrior, especially when protecting her people from danger.

Nacatlícue speaks in platitudes and parables, answering questions with little fables about talking animals or misbehaving children.



Ītzozhualli, Goddess of the North

Ītzozhualli rules darkness, obsidian, the night, the moon and death. Hers are obscuring fogs and confusing riddles, blades in the dark and masterful lies. She answers questions in the form of riddles and half-truths.

No one knows what her true form looks like, for when she approaches, fog rises from the ground and shadows lengthen and merge until only her eyes, two glinting obsidian sparks in the darkness, are visible. She sometimes takes the form of hunting animals or a woman with skin as black as obsidian. Most famously, her priests claim she is a creature built of black serpents, though even this form is suspected not to be her true visage.

She is the founder of the Ocelōmeh and their matron, empowering those who take on the black jaguar's mantle with superhuman senses, light steps and obsidian knives and spears which kill swiftly and silently when wielded with precision befitting their color. Hers is the city of Milllahco, nestled amidst the dormant volcanoes of the north.

Apocōātl, God of the West

Apocōātl rules the western city of Tecuehtitlān and its associated state. Deep in the Nahuacan heartland, the Tecuehtitlān region is crisscrossed with wetlands and river valleys running between the mountain peaks. The Storm Serpent himself is most comfortable swimming deftly through the rivers, as massive as a giant anaconda but as agile as a minnow. He is a predator, but takes no joy in predation: violence is a means of survival, not a source of pride.

Apocōātl knows the secrets of pure water and medicinal plants, training his priests and followers as physicians, herbalists, and philosophers. His too is the magic of the nagual; he was the first to teach people how to tap into one's totemic animal, manifesting its strengths and weaknesses, or incarnating it as a companion creature in order to create a relationship with one's own soul.

He appears as a giant serpent covered in feathers slick with water. He is sometimes white and sometimes fantastically multicolored. Of all the gods, Apocōātl is the only one who has never been seen in human form. He is the most straightforward in speech of the four gods, but is terse and reticent, almost as if speech tires him.

Minor Gods

In addition to the main four deities, small gods governing a plant species, a trade or a similar limited purview abound throughout the Nahuacan Alliance. These deities have their own temples and their own small priesthoods, though the Nahuacan drive for centralization means that the priesthoods generally fall under the administrative umbrella of one of the major four High Priests or Priestesses.

Many small gods are the patron of a town within the Alliance heartland or, even more common, one of the vassal states the Nahuacans conquered.

Relations between major and minor gods are usually benign, though their followers are not necessarily so comfortable with one another. Separatist rebels in the vassal states frequently rally around the standard and priesthood of a particular small god, sometimes without checking to see if that particular god is okay with this plan.

On more than one occasion, the Nahuacan army has destroyed or re-consecrated a small god's only temple in the process of quashing a revolution. Gods who suffer this fate are never heard from again.

Foreign Religion

A bewildering phenomenon has cropped up in the outer provinces on the Eastern coast. A handful of towns have welcomed a Théan import which alarms the priesthoods: the Vaticine religion. Castillian missionaries bring a message of peace and scientific curiosity which has captivated many Nahuacans.

These missionaries build odd Théan-style churches and mix their alien religious practices with indigenous patterns of worship. A Nahuacan who visits one such congregation still hears the music and poetry and smells the food associated with local festivals—but unfamiliar mentions of prophets pepper the usual devotions.

Most Nahuacans simply don't get Théan religion. It seems to be predicated on the existence of a god whom no one has spoken to directly, except for a handful of prophets, none of whom are around to answer questions. In fact, the absence of this god seems to be the point: the Vaticine religion revolves around "faith" in this entity no one can perceive, a value they revere and exalt. Imagine your neighbors



respecting you for believing you'll become the Alliance's best Ōllamalitzli player even when you can barely keep a ball in the air!

For some Nahuacans, the Vaticine faith is so different from what they already practice that they see no difficulty practicing the two side-by-side. This dual practice makes little sense to Vaticines interested in a single specific truth, but they view it as a necessary evil, a first step on the path to an enlightened mind.

For others, the Vaticines are dangerous offenders against the very heart of Nahuacan culture, identity and power. These Nahuacans refuse to associate with Vaticine Nahuacans, and sometimes burn down churches and believers' homes as an act of patriotism.

Sacrificial Cults

Not every religionist accepted the Nahuacan Alliance's ban on human sacrifice. Certain fundamentalist sects devoted to each of the four major deities have decided that sacrifice to their god is right and proper—whether that god likes it or not.

These death cults hide amongst the Nahuacans, meeting in secret in the wilderness or communicating in public using coded patters. They kidnap individuals who will not easily be missed such as criminals, slaves, the poor or passing travelers, then sacrifice them to the gods and hide the bodies.

They believe that if they sacrifice enough poor souls to their chosen god, that god's nature will revert to a pre-Alliance state, developing anew a hunger for human dead which mainstream society will have to sate. For the gods' parts, they want nothing to do with this form of worship, but unless they are within close proximity they cannot seem to catch the perpetrators.

These cults often join forces with other personae non gratae for mutual benefit. Witches who practice black magic not sanctioned by the state sometimes offer their services to cults who are into the idea of illegal mystical practices anyway.

Recently, Nahuacan regiments besieging a city in revolt discovered that the camp followers who had been disappearing had been dragged into the city and sacrificed to Tlehuitzin in foul rituals which granted their weapons deadlier qualities. Tlehuitzin

LET US NEVER SPEAK OF THIS AGAIN

The fact that human sacrifice was once commonplace is not a matter that is up for debate. The great temples in the four major cities, among others, prominently feature sacrificial altars. These altars still see use for the sacrifice of blessed objects. The gods themselves remember each of the many sacrifices, for the sacrifices which best empowered them are of things which they loved best, devoted servants and holy supplicants. But the gods do not answer questions about it.

Some of the history, accordingly, is less than clear. Did the gods explain the rules of sacrifice to humans at the inception of Nahuacan history? Did they ask for sacrifice to make themselves greater? Or did humans begin the tradition themselves?

At any rate, the first Great Speaker at the formation of the Alliance gave voice to a truth that all the gods were afraid to admit: they had grown tired of the bloodshed. Increasing themselves was not worth the constant death of people and things they held dear. The beginning of the Alliance was the end of human sacrifice for the Nahuacans.

himself felt the sacrifices occurring, but was unable to determine where or when they came from—and was leagues away from the besieging army at this time anyway. Nahuacan leaders were chilled at the thought that sacrifice might allow an unscrupulous individual access to divine power even without that god's consent.

Beyond the worship of the major gods in this way, some cults have sprung up around minor gods in alliance city-states. These patrons of their conquered cities accept the sacrifices with relish, and claim that continued sacrifice will enable the god to grow powerful enough to contest one of the four major gods.

These people resent the Alliance, and seek any way to deal them a major blow, but the benefits they gain from their gods in return are often small and insignificant compared to the blessing one would get from a major god. This doesn't seem to stop them from continuing their blasphemous acts.



Nahuacan Locations

Ōlōxochicalco

Ōlōxochicalco is the city to the east. They follow Nacatlícue, and through her blessing are the richest of all the four cities. Ōlōxochicalco's broad, fertile plains grow crops in abundance, and their god maintains their livelihood with rain and fertile soil. The abundance of food allowed Ōlōxochicalco to grow faster than its three major competitors; it remains the largest of the four cities today. Most of the population are farmers and doctors, though they boast a significant military trained to protect the crops.

Ōlōxochicalco has few floating gardens: most farms have expansive maize fields. The nobles who supervise these fields are rich and well-fed, though they are exceedingly respectful of their tenant farmers. Ōlōxochicalco's peasants outnumber priests, nobles, merchants and artisans even more extremely here than elsewhere. The crops grown in the city are shipped all across the Alliance, and the excess is sold to the Rahuri in the Atabean Sea.

Trade between Ōlōxochicalco and the Atabean islands has always been good, and the influx of foreign foods and goods has made the city the most exotic in all the Nahuacan Alliance. When the Théans arrived, they encountered Ōlōxochicalco first. The people of the city were eager for trade, and sure enough the city has prospered greatly in the past hundred years from well-negotiated trade agreements.

Though Nacatlícue has largely retired as a war god, today's Ōlōxochicalco is abuzz with military preparations. While they have benefited from trade with Théah, they do not trust the foreigners. Ōlōxochicalco raises the majority of the food for the Alliance, and if something were to happen, it would lead to certain defeat. The Alliance might survive the loss of one of its other states, but losing Ōlōxochicalco's maize would be a devastating blow.

The militia drills hard here, and the city builds walls up to the latest standards. Combat engineers are experimenting with Théan weapons, realizing that cannons and crossbows will work best when coupled with thick stone walls.

Nexhuatepec

Nexhuatepec's towering pyramids and temples can be seen for miles in the southern desert. When Tlehuitzin first led his followers to the region, the harsh desert heat and dangerous creatures filled them with fear and doubt. But Tlehuitzin was confident the region would teach his people strength and self-reliance. He reached out to the smaller gods of the javelin, spear and bow, and abased himself before them so they would teach his people to hunt better. From these gods they learned to craft *ahtlats* to speed their darts through the air and brew remedies to beast venom.

Nexhuatepec's people quickly developed a reputation as the toughest of all Nahuacans, as well as the most skilled hunters. Because agriculture was harder in the drier lands than it was elsewhere, Nexhuatepec's people relied heavily on raiding nearby settlements along the river, and refining their hunting skills into warcraft. It is no surprise that the Eagle Templars came from Nexhuatepec.

Nexhuatepec has produced a plurality of Nahuacan Great Speakers and houses more central administrative buildings than the other major cities. The office of the Nahuacan Army's Field Marshal is here, and the noble precinct is larger than in any other Nahuacan city.

Nexhuatepec's economic fortunes are more precarious than the other cities'. It's simply too large to subsist on hunted game and foraged fruit alone, but the sandy soil is inhospitable to cultivated crops. The nearby Cuitlacuahuitl lake allows limited floating gardens, but finding rich soil is its own problem.

Nexhuatepec trades for most of its food. Crime spiked in years of economic downturn, and Nexhuatepec created a standing police force, a City Watch under the control of the high-ranking noble and retired war hero. In most other cities, a rotating cast of militia must enforce the law along with their judges.

Modern Medicine

Nexhuatepec may not be able to grow food crops, but they have naturally occurring medicines in abundance in the jungles. While they do not have the healing waters of Tecuehtitlán, they have discovered medicines for many ailments, such as headaches, stomachaches and general pain. Their favorite stomach aid is hot chocolate, and not just because of its aromatic smell and pleasant taste.



Millahco

Millahco is nestled between the now-dormant volcanoes of the northern wing of the mountains. It gets its name from the substantial obsidian deposits available nearby, which legend says Itzhualli herself led the Nahuacan people to find. Millahco's volcano-enriched soil is fertile, but difficult to work because of its steep slopes. Beautiful terraced farms climb many hill- and mountainsides around the city.

Millahco's soldiers were never the best highland troops in Aztlan: the Kuraqi always have that title. But the narrow mountain passes have accustomed local infantry to smaller sections of troops dispersed more extensively through rugged land. It is no surprise that the Jaguar Knights evolved here. Their headquarters and nerve center, *Huey Tletepētl* (lava spire), still towers over the city. Many people refer metonymically to Huey Tletepētl when they're talking about Nahuacan military intelligence in general.

With its obsidian deposits, mountain mines, and connection to the Quauhlotye lands and markets to the north, Millahco has always prospered economically. Many merchants' and artisans' guilds either were founded here or built their headquarters here—convenient for intelligence-sharing between Huey Tletepētl and spy-merchants. Artists' guildhouses in Millahco double as museums, showing off smaller and higher-concept pieces less viable as governmental propaganda or other public consumption.

Historically, the nobility controlled most of the mines and obsidian deposits, growing in wealth and power. The merchants are better connected to the trade network, though, and are more adept at profiting from what materials they get their hands on. The tension between merchants and nobles has led to some high-profile arguments in the marketplace, and at least one awkward spontaneous melee which the militia had to break up.

Huey Tletepētl

Huey Tletepētl is named for the shape and building materials of the structure. The structure is a single tower built of giant blocks of lava stone, and polished to a smooth shine. The black building is an imposing sight and can be seen from any vantage point in the city, built as it is on the top-most ridge of the neighboring mountains.

The bottom floor of the building serves as offices and meeting spaces for the leaders of the Jaguar Knights. The floors above contain sleeping quarters for over a thousand Knights with the lowliest ranked being placed at the topmost floor. While they have an excellent view of the city, they are furthest from the action if the spire were to ever come under attack.

Every bit of military intelligence that goes through the Jaguar Knights' hands ends up at Huey Tletepētl. Director Xochitl lives here, and conducts her business from the first floor. Her bedroom suite is located at the top of the stairs on the second floor. This gives her the freedom to come and go without notice, and also to defend Huey Tletepētl in a stairway that would be a deadly bottleneck for invaders.

Tecuehtitlān

Situated in the once-foul western wetlands, Tecuehtitlān would have been a death trap if it weren't for the Apocōatl's sage advice. He taught the first settlers to purify water with fire and leaves, and directed their first engineers to dredge swamps and build floating gardens. In these wetlands, where no humans had dared to settle before, Tecuehtitlān's people found ample food. Their herbalists mastered the use of plants which grew nowhere else on the continent.

Because of the engineering demands of Tecuehtitlān's wet terrain, the city proper is built on a more haphazard plan, with floating gardens situated throughout the city rather than only on the outskirts. The Storm Serpent's temple—actually a complex of multiple temples situated around the base of a mountain—rises high out of the swamp. Here, the priests bless the swamp waters with Apocōatl's power, transforming them into pure water with healing properties.

In the days of intra-Alliance war, Tecuehtitlān's priests and scientists developed advanced medicines and toxins from the local plants, ensuring that their forces recovered faster than any others, and retained a bit of an edge over the city-states with stronger armies.

Tecuehtitlān is something of a cultural and intellectual hub for the empire; its seminaries and academies are well-reputed. The supreme court of the Alliance and its associated law schools and offices are here as well. Tecuehtitlān is easily accessible by riverboat, too, which means that the Alliance-wide Ōllamaztli and wrestling championships occur in gigantic stadia here.



The Grand Õllamalitzli Court

Situated in the shadow of the great temple of Apocōatl, the Grand Õllamalitzli Court of Nexhuatipec dominates the city's central plaza. Far more than a sport, Õllamalitzli is an integral part of Nahuacan society.

Nexhuatipec's decision to embrace art, culture and learning lessened their need for a large army, but offered cold comfort to their proud warriors. Far from blind to the situation, Nexhuatipec's rulers chose to express their citizens' martial vigor through a different medium: Õllamalitzli. A huge open arena with high walls of plaster-covered stone painted with images of gods and warriors, the grand court is a towering symbol of physical prowess in a culture of scholars.

The raw determination Nexhuatipec's people dedicated to Õllamalitzli quickly established the grand court as the most prestigious field of play in the Alliance. Noble and commoner alike throng the stands to cheer on their favorite players and forget the hardships of everyday life.

Õllamalitzli games are more than a simple sporting event. They are a haven for Nahuaca's elite society to practice their never-ending "game of spines." The stands and viewing galleries of the grand court offer a perfect venue for discreet rendezvous, cunning espionage or the intrigues that occupy the waking hours of Nahuacan nobility.

Gambling is ubiquitous during Õllamalitzli games and wagering among noble and commoner alike is so intense that entire kingdoms have changed hands on the toss of a ball. It is not unheard of for viewers to sell themselves into slavery to pay off their gambling debts.

Õllamalitzli also provides a way for Nahuacans to settle their differences without resorting to bloodshed. Many grudges have been settled on the Õllamalitzli court and powerful nobles maintain fearsome players to engage in winner-takes-all-proxy battles to the roar of the crowd.

Far from a secular endeavor, Õllamalitzli is intimately intertwined with Nahuacan religion. The greatest rituals of Apocōatl are observed on an epic scale by a throng of incense shrouded worshipers on the grand Õllamalitzli court at the base of his pyramid. The ball court itself symbolizes the universe, while the ball represents the sun. The ebb and flow of the game reflect the eternal struggle between light and darkness and the very veil of death is said to wear thin during particularly fearsome bouts.

Not even the gods are immune to the lure of the game and are known to resolve matters of great celestial import on the grand court. Dazzling to behold, these contests are tales of legend and can go on for days before a clear victor arises. Whether divining the future, resolving a dispute, or fighting a proxy war, the gods participate in the games with a vigor unmatched by their mortal counterparts. The gods often recruit mortal champions to participate in their games, sometimes as simple proxies, other times to play at their side. Few mortals survive, but those that do claim rewards beyond imagination.

Altepetal Hill

Situated seven miles east of Nexhuatipec, the tiered slopes of Altepetal Hill are a verdant profusion of flora and fauna from across the Nahuacans Alliance. Fed by an aqueduct carrying fresh water from the base of Mt. Queztloc, the visionary tlatoni Acomiztli I transformed Altepetal Hill from the barren wasteland it was two centuries ago into the work of art it is today.

Pilgrims visiting Altepetal Hill from Nexhuatipec are greeted by the sight of the summer palace at its base. An army of poets, artists and scholars crowd its lavishly appointed rooms, whose opulence is rivaled only by the botanical wonders of its water gardens. The winding and secluded paths of these gardens provide an ideal venue for contemplation, discreet rendezvous and intrigue.

Marble stairs mark the tortuous path up the manicured slopes of Altepetal Hill to Apocōatl's shrine above. Tier after tier of maize, squash and beans give way to a dizzying profusion of exotic flowers and bubbling waterfalls as the frenetic activity of the palace is traded for the solitude and contemplation of the shrine.

Ascending the summit, marble steps give way to heady incense and pious chanting, as ever-vigilant priests of Apocōatl lead the pilgrim through the maze of hanging gardens, exotic animals and reflecting pools that make up Apocōatl's most sacred shrine. A final white stone path leads the visitor to his ultimate destination...the sacred pool of Apocōatl.

Framed by a breathtaking view of Mount Apocōatl, the sacred pool is a circular basin of elaborately carved stone, set into the eastern face of the hill. Flanked by jade frogs representing the four principal cities of the Alliance and enveloped in a tranquil array of fragrant flowers and calming fountains, the pool is a miracle





of Nahuacan ingenuity rivaled only by the miracle of the waters themselves.

After his initial contact with Théans, Apocōātl sensed a terrible threat to his people: disease. Acting quickly, he used his greatest blessings to bind a portion of his essence to the sacred pool. Transformed forever, the perpetually cool waters of Apocōātl's pool are now so pure that no disease is beyond their capacity to heal. While there was only so much water available to shield his people, it was enough to preserve the core of Nahuacans civilization from immediate annihilation.

In the years that followed, control of Altepetal Hill has granted the people Nexhuatipec a "benevolent" monopoly on the healing waters that allows them to pursue their artistic and cultural traditions without the need for an immense army.

For all its wonders, Apocōātl's blessing carries a price. His bond with the sacred pool is so intimate it renders him physically vulnerable to the deprivations of vengeful Théans and the political rivals of Nexhuatipec. At least one group of Théans has attempted to infiltrate the shrine, and only time will tell if Apocōātl's vigilant priests and the rulers of Nexhuatipec can protect Altepetal Hill, and their god, from complete destruction.

Pepechotlan

Centuries after the four gods led the people to their respective cities, during the time of the first Great Speaker, the Nahuacan Alliance founded Pepechotlan. This city is located in the center of the four great cities, and serves as the Alliance capital.

The city itself is situated on the edge of a giant lake that sits at the crossroads of the four cities. Originally, the location was the site of a small fishing village and home to farmers. When the first Great Speaker decried human sacrifice and took on the mantle of speaking against the gods, he decided that he needed a neutral location from which all the gods had equal footing. He asked for riders to come from each city, and where they met in the middle would be the new seat of power for the combined Nahuacan Alliance.

Pepechotlan maintains a stolid neutrality between the four great cities and their gods. Each god has a representative High Priest, a temple for worship, and a home for when they come to visit. Each city leader has a representative government official, room for the noble families and of course a place for high judges.

Pepechotlan holds the central government for the Nahuacan Alliance, and anyone who wants to get anything done goes there for business. A high judge,



whose rulings on the law shape and inform all judges' rulings in the Alliance, is seated there. The Elder Council meets and each have holdings in the city, and of course, this is where the Great Speaker lives after being chosen.

While many would view Pepechotlan as the seat of power for the Nahuacan Alliance, the Alliance's real power remains within each of the cities' military headquarters. The heads of the two military organizations have offices in Pepechotlan, but traditionally only went there when summoned by the Great Speaker, or on official government business. Both leaders spend a great deal of the time in the city since Great Speaker Chicahua Tlatoa's election, which doesn't bode well for him.

Nahuiachahuitin

Nahuiachahuitin comprises four spring pools of turquoise waters amid the harshest desert in Northern Aztlan. They were found—or conjured up from the parched sand, as the stories fly—by maverick priest Mizzolotl, a man of plain manners and powerful words who denounced the privileges of priesthood and nobility as harmful and unnatural. Ever since his arrival, disenfranchised people from all over the Alliance—slaves, peasants, servants and misfits—have been flocking to Nahuiachahuitin in search of faith or freedom.

The oasis quickly turned into a village of fanatic rogues and dissidents. They have even declared independence from the Alliance or any other powers that be. A sprawl of adobe huts now encircle the largest pool; many of them are still under construction, and the foundations of a small temple rise from the ground across the water.

Villagers keep themselves busy. They're terracing the banks of the pools and growing beans, some maize, even cotton. Children run wild through the village, chasing turkeys and dogs or sling-shooting vultures.

The spring pools are a boon, but they cannot provide for everything the villagers need. Mizzolotl's followers often make incursions into hamlets and towns around Millahco or even as far as the Atabean Coast to the east. They bring back anything they can carry that might be useful: kindling, timber, blankets, agave fiber, food, medicine, pottery, tools. More often than

not, raiders also bring new additions to the village's flourishing population, and not all of them seem to be there by their own will. Mizzolotl isn't comfortable with those raids. However, he is often too busy elsewhere, chasing his own goals, to enforce stricter laws in Nahuiachahuitin.

Small detachments sent by Millahco to take what the mighty city felt it was its due have been sent back pretty battered—or have simply failed to return. Nahuiachahuitin is no easy prey. It's surrounded by miles of open desert that follows the sun in the sky as far as the eye can see. The sand is white as chalk and deflects the blinding light back at you. The air is so dry that sweat vaporizes as soon as it breaks the surface of your skin. There's no shade, no cover, no hiding place, no relief.

The rebels can see you coming long before you spot a trace of their presence. The inescapable sand rises in clouds of dust behind you, and your foes have splendid vantage points atop the tall dunes that frame the northern horizon and hide Nahuiachahuitin from prying eyes. Those same dunes will spell your doom when you get closer. There's no other approach to the village, and you'll be repeatedly ambushed until you retreat, surrender or die. The rebels are well trained, and they have a good grasp of tactics and strategy.

Millahco's current assessment is that Nahuiachahuitin can pose a threat to political security and stability in the Alliance. So far, the dissidents have had the upper hand, but it's a matter of time until the army sends the Jaguar Knights in.

Hueihuactzin Woods, Haunted Forest

Théans often say the quill can be mightier and more cruel than the sword. Nahuacan interpreters nod in silent agreement, trying to conceal an afterthought they find unnerving.

The meaning of the adage isn't lost on the Nahuacans; yet they cannot help but acknowledge a simple truth the newcomers fail to grasp. Feathers have power. Feathers are power. Plumes are the nobility's regalia, the Eagle Templars' prowess, the amantecat's magic. Feathers are a tribute fit for kings, and the Nahuacans are aware of the steep price they often pay for such goods.



Torment, death and soul loss stalk the birdcatchers who procure the highest prize of the plume trade in Northwestern Aztlan: the soft, delicate, opalescent feathers of imperial egrets. These birds don't do well in captivity, and they can only be found in the pine-oak woodlands located to the north of Nexhuatipac. A sprawling realm of venerable trees, cloudy mountains, mirror-like pools, rapid streams and labyrinthine canyons, the Hueihuactzin Woods, as they are called, are rich in wildlife and hungry shadows that lurk in the dark.

Legend has it a hunter was in the woods when she accidentally strangled a hummingbird she had caught in her net. "Murder," the gods proclaimed. A flock of ravenous chaneque led by the fearsome Hueihuactzin, after whom the forest would be named, jumped the poacher to carry out the sentence and avenge the gods' envoy. The birdlike spirits were then commanded to stay and guard the woods.

Every now and then, a birdcatcher vanishes in Hueihuactzin. No tracker can find his remains, no priest can commune with his soul. People from Tepeztocatl, a hamlet on the edge of the woods, claim the lost hunter must have broken a rule.

You do not hunt early in the morning, they say, or late in the afternoon, and you must be out of your mind to wander in the forest after dark. You must leave shiny offerings to appease the guardian spirits; only then you can set your traps. You can catch egrets or even other birds and pluck their feathers, but don't you dare harm one of them.

If you spill a drop of their blood, Hueihuactzin and the chaneque leap from the ground in battlesuits tailored from twigs, leaves, dirt, rocks, acorns and old bones of eagles or avian monsters from beyond time. They'll hunt you down and eat you alive, bit by excruciating bit. They'll drag your remains and your soul to wooden cells inside the trees, and no one will ever hear from you again.

Villagers and birdcatchers only talk of such things in whispers; they know the chaneque aren't bound to the woods, and hungry spirits are quick to anger. And yet, daring storytellers spread tales about sorcerers who cut gruesome deals with Hueihuactzin and its flock.

Cochicoapan

Not even the gods' permanent vigilance can keep Nahuacans from stumbling on secrets best left untouched. Recently, a trading expedition that left the Atabean Coast on its way to Nexhuatipac wound up by mistake at the gates of a ruined town deeply entrenched in the southern lowlands that the Nahuacan Alliance shares with the Tzak K'an.

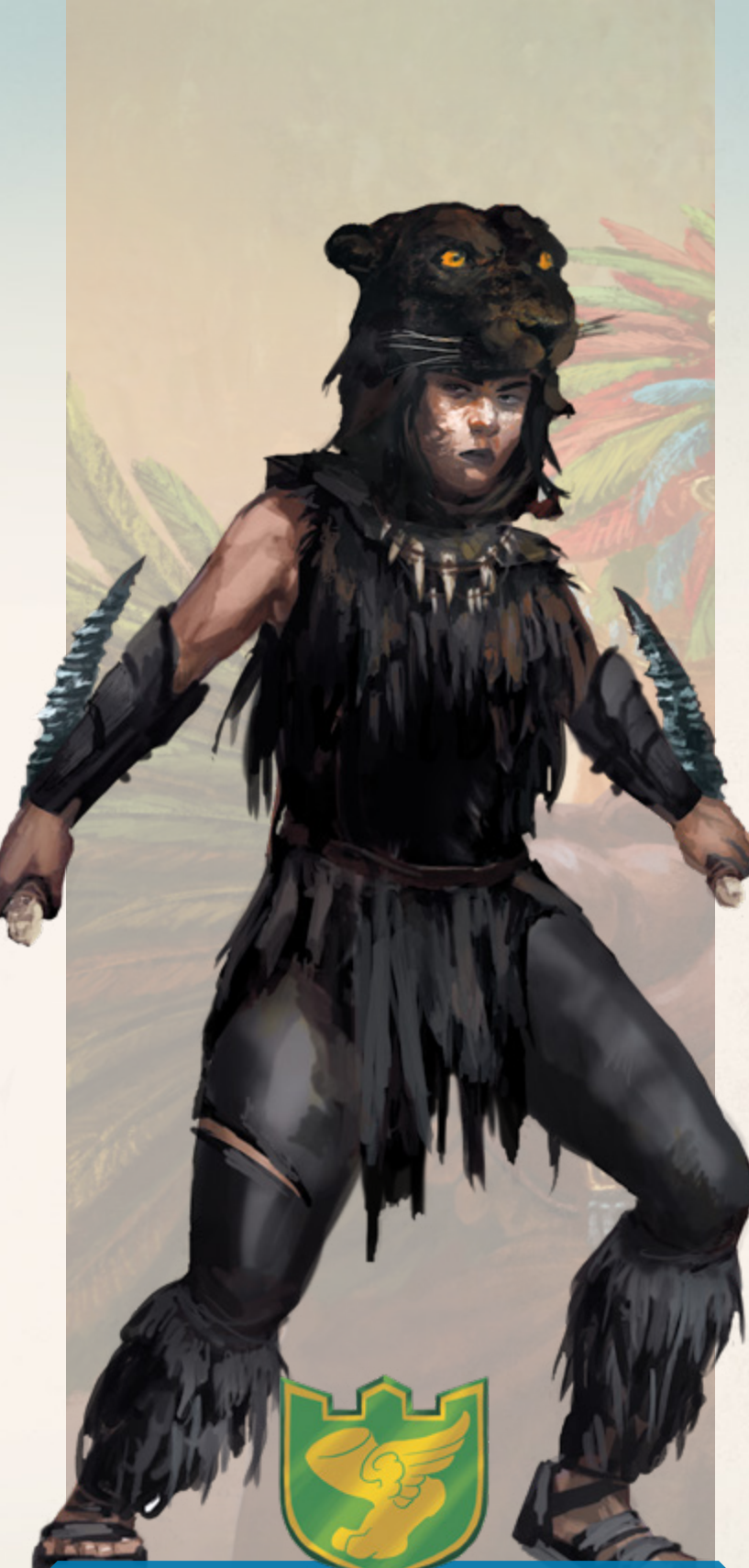
Nestled up against a ridge and half-concealed by the jungle, a terraced acropolis sprawled across thirteen levels, all of them connected by stairs of pale blue stone. The terraces sported half-buried plazas, courts and buildings, with a large pyramid commanding the topmost level. The entire city was obliterated by overgrowth. Awestruck, the merchants didn't dare enter the town, but they made it back to Nexhuatipac bearing news and a few trinkets they had enough wits to collect.

Explorers and scholars are understandably excited about the finding. Based on the reports and the artifacts the traders brought back, including a fragment of a stone frieze that shows a lethargic snake, they claim the ruins are of Nahuacan and not Tzak K'ani origin. Architecture, inscriptions and statuary are strikingly reminiscent of imperial times. Some erudite priests are even jumping to conclusions and saying the thirteen terraces that mimic the heavens and the "Sleeping Serpent" on the frieze are more than enough evidence that the Nahuacans have found Cochicoapan.

According to Nahuacan tradition, Cochicoapan was the shining center of knowledge and invention in the Aztlan Empire, not only a repository of invaluable codices—some of which were old when the Aztlani were young—but also tools, devices and artifacts that haven't seen the light of day since the Empire fell. They can only guess what wondrous contraptions the Aztlani might have hidden in Cochicoapan, but they are eager to put their conjectures and wildest dreams to the test.

Scribes and historians have a word of caution for aspiring explorers too keen on visiting Cochicoapan and unveiling its secrets. Old Nahuacan lore mentions multiple times safety measures the mindful imperials might have left in place to protect their hoard. The town itself might owe its name to the most formidable of them. A cryptic passage speaks of a gargantuan viper that lies beneath the acropolis and is bound to wake from torpor as soon as an intruder does or says something wrong.





Xochitl, Director of the Ocēlōmeh

The daughter of a farmer from the terraces of Milllahco, Xochitl tested into seminary and graduated top of her class that year. A seminary career full of sneaking out of her dorm after hours prepared her well for work as an ocēlōtl. She rose steadily through the ranks until she joined the Field Marshal's war council.

Xochitl is surrounded by powerful people: merchant guild masters, expert spies and war heroes like Grand Master Ome Tochtli. But as befits her job, she trusts no one. In fact, she maintains secret files on every powerful figure she knows: personal information, scandals, skeletons in the closet, vulnerabilities. If she needed to, she could destroy anyone within or without the Nahuacan Alliance's leadership in a matter of days.

Despite her absolute patriotism and commitment to the Nahuacan Alliance's best values, few trust the spymaster. Everyone on the War Council and in the higher ranks of government keeps her at arm's length. Social calls are brief, polite and often frosty. She pushes for tolerance and a steady hand in matters of foreign affairs, but few trust her motives.

Her biggest opponent in matters of war and state is Grand Master Ome Tochtli. Once lovers in seminary, the two have a turbulent relationship. Xochitl believes Ome Tochtli has something to hide, and she's determined to find out what it is. In the meantime, she's trying to win Chicahua Tlatoa over to her side, and if that doesn't work, then she may decide to get rid of him.

Story Hooks

- Xochitl is convinced Grand Master Tochtli is involved in a resurgence in blood magic. He is wary of her, and always on his best behavior whenever she or any of her agents are around. Can the Heroes help her find evidence against the Grand Master?
- Xochitl has heard rumor of a Théan expedition into Nahuacan lands. She wants information about their plans, but the Cuāuhmeh are also seeking the expedition out. They won't follow her instruction, and if they find the Théans first, it's likely to end in bloodshed. Can the Heroes find the Théans and get information to Xochitl before it's too late?

XOCHITL, DIRECTOR OF THE OCĒLŌMEH

“...and then, while the Atabean Trading Company representative sleeps off the tainted booze, you dress as a nurse and covertly swap the cochineal bugs out for mealybugs.”

Chichahua Tlatoa, The Great Speaker

Chichahua Tlatoa dreamed of eventually becoming the Great Speaker, just not as soon as he did. Born of noble blood and from a long lineage of reputable priests, his family expected him to follow suit. Instead, he questioned everything, including the wisdom of the gods.

After seminary, he became a judge, and spent a year traveling between his hometown of Nexhuatipac and smaller outlying cities. He learned a lot about the Alliance vassal states during his journeys, and felt that the way the gods ruled the Alliance could use a serious critique. He wrote letters and treatises on the subject, which he suspected no one ever read. When it came time for picking a new Great Speaker, Chichahua Tlatoa was just as surprised as anyone when they picked him.

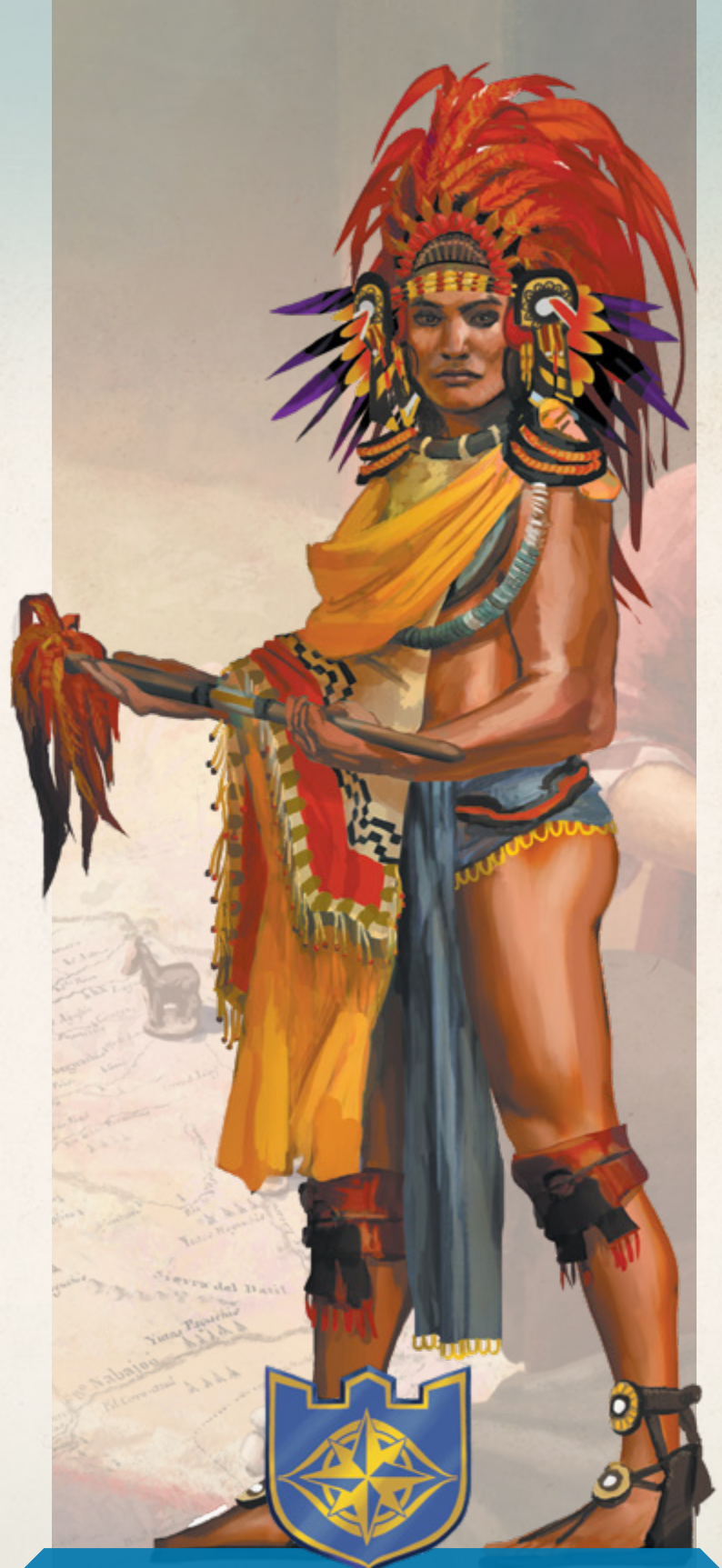
Chichahua Tlatoa is an intelligent man, but he is young, which causes people to underestimate him. Many of the Nahuacan nobility and priests tend to ignore him, or forget that he is watching. Plenty of them think he is a joke, and are waiting for something to happen to him so someone real can take his place. He trained for this job for most of his life though, and he feels up to the task.

The leaders of the Alliance military do not agree. Ome Tochtli, the Grand Master of the Eagle Templars, is trying to undermine his position, and has on at least one occasion attempted to assassinate him. Chichahua Tlatoa doesn't have evidence of it, but he is sure it was Ome. Xochitl, Director of the Ocelōmeh, seems to have his back, but she also tries to sway his opinion.

With two powerful leaders pulling him at all angles, and trying to pit him against the other, Chichahua has to be very careful. He knows he is in danger, and he can clearly see where it is coming from, but he is powerless to act against them, for fear of destabilizing the whole of Nahuacan society.

Story Hooks

- Chichahua is worried that he can't keep his eye on both Ome and Xochitl without sacrificing his ability to act as Great Speaker. He asks the Heroes to monitor their activities and report back to him anything they find.
- The Great Speaker has uncovered yet another assassination plot, but he cannot act alone to prevent it. Can the Heroes protect Chichahua without letting anyone know he is involved?



CHICAHUA TLATOA, THE GREAT SPEAKER

“With all due respect, oh great Tlehuitzin, making the rivers run red with invaders’ blood might contaminate our drinking water. Perhaps a break for hot chocolate before you make your final decision?”



Boran “Drake Storm”

Boran grew up in the palace harems of Anatol Ayh in the Crescent Empire. Amongst wealth and luxury, he was content with the fact that his beloved sister, Safiye, was first in line for the throne. Boran never expected when Safiye left to tour Théah, his brother Istani would usurp the throne.

Knowing Boran was beloved of the people, Istani took the coward’s road. He lied, claiming he won a Kavita against Boran, took his titles and exiled him. However, in secret, Istani sold him to the Atabean Trading Company, threatening to kill his mother if Boran ever returned.

Boran spent months on a ship heading towards the Atabean Sea. In cramped conditions, he suffered the cruelest treatment possible alongside other poor souls sold as slaves. Finally pulled from the ship’s hull, he felt the blessed sun on his face and remembered who he was.

Boran refused to succumb to despair and led a rebellion liberating the slaves on his ship. Taking the alias Drake Storm, Drake for Safiye’s nickname for him and Storm nodding back to his Anatoli name, he joined up with the Brotherhood of the Coast. The Brotherhood saw Drake’s heroic spirit and sent him on an expedition to the Nahuacan Alliance.

Within Nahuaca, Drake was allowed a sacred gift—a meeting with the Great Speaker—an honour not afforded to just anyone. The Great Speaker heard Drake’s true name from the gods and understood his story. He promised never to reveal Drake’s secret, for the two men’s destinies, like their great Nations, were intertwined.

Story Hooks

- The face of the empire has changed since Empress Safiye retook the throne. Drake wants to return home, but Istani still wants him gone. Can the Heroes help Drake return home with Istani’s agents hot on his heels?
- Drake is in search of a Syrneth artifact which allows two people to communicate over long distances. He hopes to give it to the Great Speaker and his sister to help form their alliance. The problem is the last known location of the artifact is in the ancient city of Cochicoapan. Can the Heroes help Drake find the artifact in the forbidden city?

BORAN “DRAKE STORM”

“A simple sailor is always much more than he appears.”

Ichtaca

Ichtaca began her career as a simple porter carrying loads of jade and quetzal feathers along the rivers and byways of the Alliance to the markets of Milllahco. She quickly mastered the art of entering and leaving cities unseen, fighting off bandits and driving a hard bargain. Ichtaca soon received the prestigious post of principal merchant on a trade mission to the newly discovered city of Achiultla. Coaxah, a decadent Milllahco noblewoman with a hunger for unique Aztlani antiquities, organized the mission.

It took weeks for Ichtaca to bring the Achiultlani to the bargaining table. Tired of waiting, Coaxah used her influence with the prior Great Speaker to have Achiultla declared an enemy of the state. Ichtaca watched in horror as the Nahuacan army razed Achiultla to the ground.

After the debacle, Ichtaca found herself demoted to market inspector. The thought of what happened to Achiultla haunted her, and she became determined never to see such ruin happen again. Crime in Milllahco's great market halved as she applied herself to her new position. Ichtaca's vigilance allowed her to thwart a plot against Chicahua Tlatoa when an investigation into the appearance of an unusual artifact revealed an assassination attempt.

In reward, the Great Speaker employed her as a spy and restored her position as principal merchant. A living shadow, Ichtaca effortlessly conceals her wealth, status and motivations as she drifts into and out of the Alliance. Ichtaca's undercover trade missions have created a vast web of contacts inside and outside the Alliance including a number of Odisean traders.

Story Hooks

- Coaxah's reputation barely survived the Achiultlani disaster and she blames Ichtaca. Coaxah has begun weaving a subtle web of intrigue to ensnare Ichtaca and destroy her dream of a unity. Ichtaca has asked the Heroes to untangle the web and deal with Coaxah.
- Ichtaca hopes to unite Aztlan through trade and commerce, but the Nahuacan propensity for war makes it difficult. She has asked the Heroes to repair trade deals with disenfranchised vassal states throughout the Alliance.



ICHTACA

“I assure you, Colonel, all I need is an hour to speak to the chieftain and they’ll join us without a drop of bloodshed.”



Ome Tochtli, Cuāuhmeh Grand Master

Grand Master Ome Tochtli was a classic success story. The son of a prominent noble family with an impressive military pedigree, he graduated from seminary with the highest honors. He could have had any position he wanted, but he joined the Cuāuhmeh, where he earned an apprenticeship with the grand master. When his mentor fell in battle with the rearguard of Fernando Medellín's retreating troops, Ome took up his banner. Though only a cadet, he led his section to victory, personally felling Medellín's bodyguard in single combat.

Over the years, Ome Tochtli has watched the Nahuacan Alliance pilfer multiple small vassal states, but never really grow or accomplish the ultimate unification goal. His expert strategy has led to victory after victory against Nahuacan enemies, from rogue Aztlan to invading Théans, but he has always been kept at bay by the Great Speaker and the gods.

What first started as an ideal—a unified Aztlan—has turned into an obsession that has led Ome to darker pursuits. He has joined a fundamentalist death cult that believes the gods are weak due to lack of sacrifices. He is encouraging a young priestess, Eztli, to make human sacrifices to grow his power. Eztli believes she will have a place in Ome's new empire, but he is simply using the woman, ready to drop her the moment she becomes inconvenient.

For the first time in his life, Ome sees an opportunity to spread the Nahuacan Alliance all across Aztlan, and the only thing standing in his way is a young Speaker, ripe for influence. Ome Tochtli has the power and influence to accomplish a formidable goal: the reclamation of Aztlan's glory by creating a new, Nahuacan-led Aztlan Empire, fueled by xenophobic militarism and human sacrifice. If no one stops him, it's probably going to work.

Story Hooks

- A few Eagle Templars have learned about Ome's dabbling in blood sacrifices. They think Eztli has laid a spell on him, and ask the Heroes to capture her so they can interrogate her.
- The Heroes learn that Ome has sent a unit to take one of the northern Tzak K'ani city-states. Such an action could throw the Alliance into a war it doesn't want. Can the Heroes stop the soldiers before it's too late?

OME TOCHTLI, CUĀUHMEH GRAND MASTER

“It's time we stopped pandering to the weak and took back what is rightfully ours.”

STRENGTH

10

INFLUENCE

5

RANK

15

Necahual, High Priestess of Itzzohualli

From her earliest days in the *calmecac* temple-schools of Milllahco, Necahual has been fascinated with the great cycles of creation and destruction that measure the progress of ages in the Nahuacan calendar. A pious soul dedicated to Itzzohualli, Necahual excelled at her studies and mastered the arts of obfuscation and subterfuge necessary to advance to the office of high priestess.

Upon assuming office, Necahual gained access to sacred texts reserved for the most pious. Devouring codex after codex, she noticed a pattern. The gods helped create the world with each cycle, but always abandoned humanity to its destruction. Seeds of doubt grew with each turn of the page; confirmed when she saw (what she views) as the gods' lax response to the Théans. If the prophecies are correct, the Théan arrival heralds the death of the fifth age and the birth of the sixth. The gods will soon abandon humanity to its fate.

A woman of action, Necahual quickly recovered from her despair and turned her subtle skills to the purpose of saving her people. Necahual maintains the guise of a devoted priestess by day, while seeking the destruction of the gods by night. The mere death of the gods is not enough for Necahual. To truly break the cycle, she must take the god's power for her own, lay waste to the Théans, and lead Nahuaca into an age of her creation.

Armed with the ancient lore of her temple, Necahual seeks out the gods' weaknesses with feverish intensity. She is enlisting explorers to scour the boundaries of the Alliance and the wilds beyond for the weapons she needs to defeat her foes. One such expedition recovered one of the ancient jaguars that destroyed humanity during the first cycle. Bending it to her will with ancient songs, she uses the creature to dispatch all who oppose her.

Story Hooks

- Necahual sent explorers into a temple to find a weapon rumored to be able to slay a god. They never returned. Now, she is trying to find someone to rescue them, leaving out the god-killing part. Will the Heroes help her?
- Chipahua, another Itzzohualli priest, has discovered Necahual's plot and opposes her. Unfortunately, her jaguar is hunting him. Can the Heroes protect him from the creature long enough for Chipahua to expose her?



NECAHUAL, HIGH PRIESTESS OF ITZZOHUALLI

“I will not stand by and watch the gods abandon us yet again.”

STRENGTH

4

INFLUENCE

8

RANK

12



ATZOPELIC

“The Alliance thinks it struggles for dominance, when really it struggles just to stay together.”

STRENGTH

6

INFLUENCE

4

RANK

10

Atzopelic

Before the Nahuacans trained their sights on Eastern Aztlán, Atzopelic was a young man of noble standing in Huitecocan, a beautiful city-state. He led a privileged life of scholarly pursuits and religious devotion to the shy but bloodthirsty Huitec god. Back then, war, defeat and exile were mere tales of fancy he used to blend into his fine poetry.

Then the Alliance came and offered to extend the Alliance’s protection to Huitecocan. Atzopelic’s grand-uncle, and Huitec ruler, politely declined. Unfortunately, they weren’t looking for permission.

The main assault came two weeks later, and the Huitec didn’t stand a chance. The Alliance razed the city, killed priests and nobles, and obliterated their whole way of life. Huitecocan is now home base for Nahuacan military operations in the east.

Atzopelic escaped the Alliance’s wrath and found a safe haven in Tetecuallan, a fishing town of Huitec ancestry on the Coast. He had no difficulty proving himself useful as a scribe and interpreter for Tetecuallan’s high and mighty. He is well-read, has a knack for languages, and is a skillful diplomat. His wisdom and advice are highly appreciated, even by the Théan envoys and entrepreneurs who often have dealings with the Tetecuatec.

He’s also a cunning and subtle schemer. Atzopelic plays an expert game of manipulation, lip-service and double-dealings with the unruly Nahuacan protectorates and greedy Théans to keep the Alliance out of balance on the eastern front. He is carefully spinning his web, waiting for the right moment to make his kill. He intends to create enough noise, dissent and outright rebellion so the Nahuacans won’t have any other alternative but to relinquish their claim over Huitecocan.

Story Hooks

- Atzopelic has convinced a group of Théans that the Nahuacan Alliance plans to invade their holdings in the Atabea Sea. They are riled up enough to threaten a full-out assault. Can the Heroes convince the Théans to stand down?
- Atzopelic has gathered a group of survivors from Huitecocan. They are inciting riots and making holding the city difficult. Can the Heroes convince the dissenters to turn to a better course?

Azeneth Medellín

Azeneth Medellín's earliest memory was the Storm Serpent incinerating her father, Lord Fernando Medellín, in front of her and her mother, Ix Itzam, a Tzak K'ani who was Medellín's wife and Nahuacan translator. Azeneth and her mother escaped, but revenge never left her mind. All through her upbringing and her studies, one goal dominated her focus: how could she exact revenge upon the demon who ate her father?

Azeneth's mother returned to Tzak K'an, and the city-state she was born in. Her merchant family accepted them both, but eventually put Ix Itzam to work for the family business, trading. She returned to the Alliance many times, apparently free of suspicion for her husband's deeds. That is, until a Jaguar Scout recognized her and murdered her for treason on the spot. Azeneth was with her at the time, but her mother saved Azeneth's life by lying about who she was. Azeneth fled into the Nahuacan jungles once again.

Since that time, she has vowed revenge. She seeks to destroy Apocōatl for what he did to her father, and the Jaguar Scout for what he did to her mother. She has learned everything she can about the feathered serpent, including where he now lies. She has tried numerous times to break into his resting place, only to be thwarted by Eagle Templars and various Nahuacan Heroes. Now, her path is clear: destroy the Nation, destroy the god. She cares about Aztlan as a whole, but certainly the Nahuacan Alliance can be cleared from its face with little loss.

Story Hooks

- ♦ Azeneth has tricked a young group of Jaguar Scouts into desecrating Apocōatl's resting place, in an attempt to sneak in herself. Can the Heroes find the group and show them the treachery that leads them?
- ♦ Azeneth has teamed up with a group of Théans and has promised to lead them deep into Nahuacan lands to launch a surprise attack. She hopes that during the confusion, she can enter Apocōatl's temple and destroy him. Can the Heroes convince the Théans to stay their course?



AZENETH MEDELLÍN

“Revenge is not a matter of if, but a matter of when.”

STRENGTH

8

INFLUENCE

7

RANK

15





Chapter 3

Tzank K'an



Tzak K'an



Located deep in the jungles of Aztlan, between the dark peaks of the Kuraq Empire and the sunny valleys of the Nahuacan Alliance, are the kingdoms of Tzak K'an. Devoted to knowledge, science and the ways of the arcane, Tzak K'an has persisted for thousands of years amongst ever-changing threats. Viewed as strange and mysterious by outsiders—alien even—Tzak K'ani people have never been much concerned by the mundane aspects of this world. For, as they know, reality involves much more than meets the eye if one knows where to look.

Obsessed with individualism and valuing kingdom-wide priorities over superficial unification, Tzak K'an has not been a single entity for a long time, if it ever was one. Rather, Tzak K'an as a name refers to a cultural horizon, one invested deeply in tradition

and innovation. Once a powerful collection of several city-states, the political landscape has fractured into a thousand pieces, held together only by the thin webbing of alliances, treaties and cultural practices.

The kingdoms are not ruled by mortal power alone. As every Tzak K'ani knows, the universe is governed by the Great Cycle; life, death and rebirth. Existence in the mortal realm is only possible when the gods are pleased. Priests and Starwatchers rule alongside kings and queens, aiming to understand and fulfill the will of the gods. They worship and praise and in return are rewarded with a magical knowledge unparalleled by any other.

Many pressures encroach upon their world, as they always have—political instability, an increasingly hostile environment, foreign invasion, dissent—and the kingdoms now stand at the precipice of collapse.

But Tzak K'an is not gone yet.

Despite all their knowledge of the coming days, the future remains uncertain for Tzak K'an. It is possible that its flame may burn brighter than ever before or be extinguished completely. Change is coming; what form it takes remains to be seen.



Origins of Tzak K'an

Conceptualizing the origin of Tzak K'an seems a foolhardy task to its inhabitants. History, like time, is never linear. Even so, some events have shaped the foundations of Tzak K'an more than others, and these stories that have been immortalized in Tzak K'ani lore.

The Tzak K'ani world is really multiple worlds, each of them cyclical and imperfect. In their history, Aztlan was but one of these worlds, a place and time very similar to ours—better in many ways—but stricken from existence by the gods due to the transgressions of men.

From what is said, Aztlan was thriving and beautiful. It represented the pinnacle of human knowledge. To the Skywatchers of Aztlan, the stars revealed their mysteries as easily as two people might converse today. The rains came regularly and crops were plentiful. The realms of the celestial plane, mortal earth and the underworld were not disparate, but united. It was a time of plenty.

But bounty and knowledge caused the people to become complacent. In their pride, they ignored their worship of the gods—they did not repay their debts or keep their days. The god-decreed consequences of their hubris was a battle against nature—drought and cursed soil—and a marring of the knowledge they had attained.

So was the end of the previous world of Aztlan. The story of this cycle is told amongst nobles and commoners alike, in palaces and around fires, as a reminder of the end that must always come and the hope of rebirth that follows it.

The Making and Remaking

<i>K'a katz'ininoq,</i>	The worlds that were,
<i>k'a kachamamoq,</i>	and those that could be,
<i>katz'inonik,</i>	they murmur to the gods
<i>k'a kasilanik,</i>	and soft whispers
<i>K'a kalolinik,</i>	Like breaths on still waters,
<i>katolona puch.</i>	they ripple.

In the beginning, there was nothing, only murmurs of a world that could be echoing in the darkness. This is how the story begins. The great gods of the age, headed by the Plumed Serpent, sat draped in green-blue quetzal feathers, and pondered creation. The water, the trees, the animals and humanity, they considered all of these. When they reached an accord on the forms of creation, the sowing and the dawning began:

*The four sides, the four corners,
measured, marked, and made.
The realms above, below, and between,
constructed.
The sacred corners staked on the earth,
by the Plumed Serpent
and the first Gods,
who know all,
see all,
are all.
From the divine center,
the edges of the earth are
measured, marked, and made.*

And so, the universe was constructed by the gods, in the same manner that Tzak K'ani create their physical world today. Great temples, pyramids, homes and even agricultural fields are still laid out by a careful measuring from the center to the four corners. It is a sacred practice, to make and remake their universe in the physical plane.

The earthly realm was carved out and made different from the celestial plane—the place of ancestors and gods—and the watery underworld of Xiabalba, where all men must go and where the Paddler Gods wait. But different does not mean separate. The three realms are always connected. The strong Ceiba tree, the tree of life and the axis of the world, which has its deep roots in the underworld, its trunk in the mortal realm, and its looming branches in the sky stands as an ever-present reminder to the Tzak K'ani of the inextricable connection of their spheres.

The gods endowed the earthly realm with plants and things of every sort, but these creations did not give the gods the veneration they desired and could not attend to divine obligations. The gods created animals, but they could not speak. They created mud-people, but they could not walk. They created wooden people, but they could not think. Each of these versions of humanity was thus created and destroyed.

At last the gods sat and thought of the remedy, and by their own blood and their sacred wisdom, the first humans were made. *They talked and they made words, so it is said. These humans will serve well as stewards to us and the earth we have made. They can keep our decrees and give us praise.*





This was the time of Aztlan. The eyes of the humans saw everything that was, and their minds grasped all the mysteries of the universe. In this time, the continent was not divided as it is now. The people were unified and prosperous.

But the gods saw that the knowledge of these people was unlimited. The humans of Aztlan understood all things, great and small, and had thus forgotten their gods and the responsibility they had to revere them.

And so the gods marred their knowledge, their cosmic vision, to remind the humans of the source of their wisdom. In their justice and anger, the gods ceased to bring the rains, nourish the soil, and control the elements. As such, the first true humans of Aztlan lost the means of understanding and the prosperous true earth.

Although each version of humanity had failed, there was still a trace of the early dawn. In the twilight of our current world, came the Hero Brothers, and the creation of the current world of Tzak K'an.

The Hero Brothers

Humanity—as we know it in our this world—and the inseparable importance of cycles in Tzak K'ani thought, has been encapsulated in the legend of the Hero Brothers. The tales are captured in sacred texts, depicted in art, and still told around the hearth of the home.

Pet Mo'

The earth was a strange place; it was an uncanny version of what we know. Like being in a waking dream, everything is familiar yet bizarre. All manner

of earthly things were animate, and what we know as “logic” only existed in odd forms. The great lights of the sky, the Sun and the Moon, were still clouded over.

At this time, an arrogant being named Pet Mo' claimed to be the light of the world. He was a giant plumed parrot, adorned in all manner of glittering gems and stones. He was as conniving as he was prideful. He would sit and declare:

“My light is great. It shines from the metal of my eyes and glitters off the jewels of my teeth. The turquoise of my face is the blue like the face of the sky. My nose shines white into the distance like the moon. I am the light of the earth.”

But he was not. The light of the world, from the Plumed Serpent and the gods, can never be a false reflection. Yet he continued to spread his lies.

The Hero Brothers saw the evil in his attempts to be the true light. Humanity could not exist under this false god. So they discussed:

“It is not good without life, without more people here on the face of the earth. We must do away with false brilliance. Pet Mo' must die, as must his sons, Tek' Winik and Lum Pak'. They too only make stone and move the earth as ways of false magnification. They are blasphemous to the gods.”

Using their wits and their bravery they shot down Pet Mo', the false light, and removed the jewels and metal from his face. Next they buried Tek' Winik deep in the heart of the earth. Finally, they defeated Lum Pak', bound him and hid him in the earth like his brother. The false ones were vanquished. So is the story of their defeat by the Hero Brothers.



Defeaters of the Underworld

One day, as the brothers cleared the brush from the forest ground to plant a garden, they ensnared a small rat who had been ruining their plot.

“Spare me and I will tell you of your family. You are begotten of great ballplayers, have you never wondered what happened to them?”

So they listened to the story.

“Your father and uncle were Hero Brothers too, the greatest ballplayers to ever exist. Because of their skills, they were sent a message by the Gods of Death to play a game in the Underworld. They arrived with their ball and their gear, but they were tricked. Your father’s head is still there, trapped in the fork of a tree. I know where they hid their ballgame gear, I can show you, and you can be great too, perhaps even avenge your family!”

And so they did. They played and practiced and made noise so the Gods of Death would come to them. When the invitation arrived, they crossed down to the Underworld as their father and uncle had; they scaled down a steep cliff to the watery place, crossed the river of spikes, the river of blood and the river of pus. They entered the Throne Room of the Gods of Death.

The Gods of Death forced them to face a series of ordeals before they could play their ballgame, passing through various Houses of Death: the Dark House, the Razor House, and the Bat House. It was in the Bat House that one of the Hero Brothers was undone, his head severed from his body like his father’s had been.

The terrible ballgame finally began, and the Gods of Death, to spite the remaining brothers, used the first brother’s still-living head as the ball. But the boys fought on, and through the tricks and indignities the boys faced they prevailed and won the ballgame.

But it wasn’t the end. The boys knew that in order for them to leave the Underworld they would have to be killed. Rather than falling for more tricks of the Death Gods, they threw themselves into a fire. Their bones were crushed and sprinkled into a river.

And then the miracle occurred.

They returned to life. Their human forms—although in rougher shape than before—had overcome the trials of death. They had completed the Great Cycle. Because of this, the Brothers brought with them the power to live, to die, and to live again.

Now, everything in the universe follows this pattern.

History

As unified as Tzak K’ani myth is on the subject of the creation of the universe, their recent history of deep time is marked by division and disagreement. Much like the current political organization of the Tzak K’ani, their early histories vary from one polity to the next.

Chok Ch’a

One of these first histories involves their chronicles of a long-lost Mother culture colloquially referred to as Chok Ch’a or simply, “The Ones Before.” These forebearers were the creators of the first cities, founding sorcerers, originators of writing, diviners and powerful interlocutors for the gods. The most iconic artifact of the Chok Ch’a’ empire is undoubtedly the giant stone heads that dot their landscapes.

They were a powerful and glorious empire. Particularly curious or adventurous Tzak K’ani and Nahuacans occasionally head deep into the hearts of the forbidden jungles to gaze upon the ruined splendor of the Chok Ch’a. But those wishing to venture to these places should be warned, the cities are surely cursed.

From what the Tzak K’ani can infer or remember, the Chok Ch’ai pantheon was comprised of ten supreme gods and included the Great Feathered Serpent. But the Chok Ch’a looked to one god as more revered—and more powerful: the Jaguar God. This god gave them superior knowledge and skill, making them the greatest people on Terra.

The mysterious Chok Ch’a declined as quickly as they had arisen. From the legends, Tzak K’ani scholars surmise that they angered the Plumed Serpent who, in his divine might, struck down the empire and wiped them from the earth. To this day, many Tzak K’ani ponder what their divine transgression may have been. Priests of the Plumed Serpent often say that it was Chok Ch’ai’s veneration of the Jaguar God above all others that angered the true gods and led to their demise.

The Jaguar Cult

Supposedly, small, highly secretive groups of Tzak K’ani still follow the cult of the Chok Ch’ai Jaguar God but many claim this is just hearsay. This cult is said to be comprised of werejaguars, shape-shifting beings who can transition between their human and jaguar forms at will.



Rumors of their existence has fueled paranoia in priests of the Great Feathered Serpent for years, and even led to the culling of children who were suspected to carry werejaguar traits. This led to the few remaining true werejaguars hiding themselves.

Some meet in secret to maintain their ways and search for fellow werejaguars to reclaim the glory of the Jaguar God, others have aligned with the Ili shape-shifters to the north, and some still do not even know of their true form. It is uncertain what would happen if this cult were to reorganize.

The Survivors of Old Aztlan

Contrary to the Mother culture story, other more staunchly insular Tzak K'ani will tell you that they were here from the beginning of time—from the “sowing and the dawning”—and are progenitors of the founders of Aztlan, a select few who survived the destruction of the old world.

The Tzak K'ani do not know the origins of these peoples, but their legacy is boundless. Marked by their devotion to the Plumed Serpent, their military prowess, and their colossal pyramids, the “Ancient Ones” were united under the Great Goddess.

Their extreme devotion to the Plumed Serpent is still discussed in Tzak K'ani households to this day. But their devotion was a terrible one. The legends tell of 1,000 sacrificial victims who were slaughtered and interred beneath the Temple of the Plumed Serpent with racks of skulls towering up to the heavens. Other Tzak K'ani say it is 10,000 victims or even 100,000 victims—the numbers seem to increase with every generation—but the crux of the legends remains similar: it was far too great.

Just as some priests will tell you Chok Ch'a were doomed by their devotion to the Jaguar God, other will say it was the “Ancient Ones” attempts to appease the gods through unjust bloodshed that lead to their demise.

Specialized Knowledge from the Ones Before

In either version of Tzak K'ani origins, the importance of both Chok Ch'ai and the Atzlan empire remains ubiquitous across the Tzak K'an landscape. Almost all Tzak K'ani attribute their superior scribal traditions to their interactions with Chok Ch'a (unlike the

“barbarous” Nahua in the north or the “blasphemous” Kuraq to the south). Their abilities as daykeepers, their control of the mountains and stone, and their knowledge of what is to come, stem from their relationship to Chok Ch'a.

The remains of the old empires litter the landscape of Tzak K'an, and learning from the past is as simple as picking up an artifact and using it. Many wonders of the Ancients or the ones who came before are still intact, their knowledge simply ripe for the taking.

The First Great Cities

The construction of the early city-states of Tzak K'an was mobilized in much the same way as current ones: the divine legitimization of their rulers (or by the propaganda they fed the commoners, depending who you ask).

Even in the early days, there was a violent rift between those cities that prioritized the ways of the Atzlan and those that followed the ways of Chok Ch'a. Two great first cities arose, each with a ruler that represented one of the two “First Ones”: Ka'anlakmul and Sak Taj.

Sak Taj and “The Arrival”

Sak Taj is said to have been founded by the cultural ancestors of Chok Ch'a. Marked in its early days by its Chok Ch'ai daykeeping and artistic styles, the leaders constructed a vast and glistening city of pyramids, plazas, altars and large stelae, which all told the story of the rulers and their divine legitimization by the gods. The days were kept, the gods revered, and the city grew under the watchful eyes of *Chak Tok Ich'aak* (Great Misty Claw).

The arrival of *Siyaj Ch'amak* (Fire Born) changed the course of Sak Taj's history. He brought with him the ways of the Aztlan empire—military conquest and a new order to replace the ways of Chok Ch'a.

It was not only Chak Tok Ich'aak who met his demise at the hands of *Siyaj Ch'amak*. With his death, the lineage of the Chok Ch'ai ancestors was terminated. So was the end of Chok Ch'ai presence at Sak Taj and the ushering in of the Atzlan ways.

Siyaj Ch'amak ordered the monuments to the past kings smashed and buried in the depths of the earth. He refaced Pyramids and structures to represent the



Atzlan order. A new lineage was installed, bearing the regalia and markers of the ways of the Ancient Ones.

Siyaj Ch'amak, and his firstborn son, K'inich Jol, oversaw the institution of the Atzlan order not only in Sak Taj, but also at powerful neighboring city-states.

K'anlakmul and "The Preparations"

To the north of Sak Taj was the site of K'anlakmul—the Kingdom of the Snake. The early Snake kings, who represented and maintained many of the Chok Ch'ai practices, constructed a towering and awe-inspiring city which remains unmatched in sheer size by any city-state today.

Under the watchful eyes of the early Snake kings, the city flourished, gained military and economic power, and watched closely as the neighboring city of Sak Taj became infested and tainted by the Atzlan's presence.

The exalted king, Taj Yuknoom, watched and carefully planned his overthrow of Sak Taj and Siyaj Ch'amak's line. His first move was the political alignment with the secondborn son of Fire Born, Ch'ul Ajau K'u B'alam, who had been implanted in a small neighboring site. Hearing that Ch'ul Ajau K'u B'alam claimed holy lordship over Sak Taj—and victory over his brother, K'inich Jol—Taj Yuknoom saw an opportunity for Sak Taj to be brought to heel once and for all.

The "Sky War"

In K'anlakmul, King Yaknoom the Great, now aligned with Ch'ul Ajau K'u B'alam, prepared his military strike. Yaknoom the Great knew that his decision to align with the secondborn might lead to a battle against his now-ally in the future, but the immediate necessity to crush Sak Taj took precedence over matters of the future.

In Sak Taj, Siyaj Ch'amak's lineage continued to amass resources and power, all forged in the deadly ways of their Atzlan forbearers. King Siyaj Ch'amak and K'inich Jol heard whispers of revolt across the city streets but were more concerned with imperial matters and complacent in their power to pay heed.

On the day of 7 Imix, the Sky War began.

The ensuing battle is said to have been celestial in scope. The cities of Sak Taj and K'anlakmul clashed in a raging war that shook both the ground and sky. Axe

met spear, blade met flesh and thousands of warriors were paddled to the Underworld. In the aftermath of the battle, the land flowed with blood and glistened with a sea of broken obsidian points, mirroring the stars above.

Taj Yuknoom was victorious in overthrowing Sak Taj and cleansing the blasphemous "Aztlán" infestation from the Tzak K'ani world. This victory, for better or worse, afforded the expansion of the Tzak K'ani realm, albeit under often disparate and contentious rival kings and queens. The culture may have been unified, but at the expense of fractionating the people.

It comes as no surprise to scholars of Tzak K'ani history that the early days were characterized by individualistic identities, aspects of the Tzak K'ani world that are characteristic of the sociopolitical climate today. The Sky War, for better or worse, led to the flourishing of these kingdoms.

The Flourishing City-States

The time after the Sky War saw great wealth, prosperity and knowledge as well as Tzak K'ani construction on a massive scale. The inhospitable landscape seemed to sprout cities from the earth itself. For hundreds of years, plumes of smoke filled the horizons, indicating the jungle clearing to accommodate the growing urban centers. The flint that sparked these fires, of course, were the various rulers who aimed to expand their reach and their power.

The multiplicity of city-states started from the handful of powerful centers which existed before the Sky War. The kingdoms of K'anlakmul and Sak Taj continued to expand their radius. To the south, they installed leaders in Nohl T'zam and Olom Pa' while Baak Ah'yiin was beginning on the eastern coast. In general, the smaller centers between the larger city-states were either under the rule of a more prominent kingdom or too small to be bothered with.

For a while, it seemed that rulers were more interested in tending their own political fields than bothering with their neighbors' orchards, so to speak. The inward focus on building personal stability for their empires meant that war was not a fact of life for once. The rains came regularly and the crops were bountiful. Tribute and labor taxation from the growing populous gave way to heightened infrastructure and



commerce. For the farmers, the maize grew tall, and for the rulers, their pyramids.

This era also saw the unification of old knowledge.

Kingdoms poured resources into the study and advancement of astronomy, mathematics, art and writing. Whereas the ideals of the Nahuacans to the north were based in empire and military might and the Kuraq to the south valued conquest and “victory” over death, the Tzak K’ani found their strength in knowledge: of the universe, the elements and the arcane. Tzak K’ani kingdoms believed that this knowledge would save them now and in the days to come.

Distracted by the pettiness of the present, the Nahuacan Alliance and the Kuraq Empire seemed to forget that the end of the world was coming. The Tzak K’ani were preparing themselves by seeking sanctuary in the various realms easily accessed throughout the countryside, rehabilitating old magics and arts, and securing ancient technologies to guide their paths.

Arrival of the Théans

The first Théan boat landed on the eastern coastal shore of Tzak K’an, near the city of Baak Ah’yiin (Bone Crocodile). At this point, talk had spread of foreigners interacting and trading with the Nahuacans up north. The merchant circles, transcending any Tzak K’ani or Nahuacan Alliance insularity, were excellent vehicles for gossip and far-flung goings-on. The ruling family at



the time, which maintained a good rapport with these coastal traders’ networks, were already informed and waiting for these foreigners to arrive when they landed.

The acting king at the time was *Chiwoj Ahau* (Lord Great Spider), who ruled Baak Ah’yiin in a more progressive manner than some of the other Tzak K’ani kings and queens. Baak Ah’yiin, likely due to its position on the coast, had always been more open to trade with the northerners and less committed to the unification of the Tzak K’ani “empire” (“Such a thing never was and never will be,” according to *Chiwoj Ahau*).

Chiwoj Ahau was more concerned with a more immediate threat, *Ka’anlakmul* (and the rest of the allied Snake Kings and Queens) to the west and *Nohl T’zam* to the south. These cities had recently grown in power and ambition. Messages of *K’anlakmul*’s desire to see a united and totalitarian Tzak K’an were spreading. Already they had been slowly conquering and spreading their ideological message across the landscape.

In *Nohl T’zam*, the rulers wished to cease most economic activity and expansion. They spent most of their days preaching about the coming end of this world and the need for cleansing the modern city to appease the gods.

Neither of these were sentiments shared by Baak Ah’yiin. To *Chiwoj Ahau*, his “neighbors” were more foreign to him than the *Castillians*.

An Unlikely Alliance

Chiwoj Ahau decided to take advantage of the newly arrived Théans to form an alliance against his Tzak K’ani enemies. Although initially underwhelmed by their appearance and demeanor, he spoke to them through a translating merchant. (Unsurprising that the merchants learned the strange tongue quickly. A profit is a profit in any language.)

Chiwoj offered *Frederico Fernandez Lopez* safe passage, protection and free reign to sell and trade in his city-state. In return, he asked the *Castillian* to join with him to conquer the other city-states, not now but in the future.

The *Castillians*, seeing the reality of their situation and also the strategic positioning of Baak Ah’yiin, agreed to the terms presented to them. *Lopez* and his men looked to gain a protected foothold for their economic expansion while *Chiwoj Ahau* sought to



protect his people and their way of life from the encroaching threats of the other Tzak K'ani city-states.

To this day, the alliance is maintained. Théans have enjoyed relatively peaceful and prosperous engagements along the coast and with inland sister cities of Baak Ah'yiin and, occasionally, smaller independent outposts along the river system. The population of the city, historically, was open to including and adapting foreign elements into its daily life and it is no different with the new Théans.

In turn, many Théans enjoy the Tzak K'ani influence in their practices. The only visible tensions seem to arise when the outsiders begin pressing their gods upon the locals, from which a popular Baak Ah'yiin colloquialism was born: *Our gods would be happy to show you towards the sea.*

But with the mounting environmental and political tensions today, the call to a potential future war, made over ninety years ago, begins to feel more and more real. Théan military leaders are being reminded, it seems, of the promise that afforded them almost a century of prosperity: "When we go to war, we go together."

Inter-City Strife

The flourishing of city-states did not last forever. Tzak K'ani superstates like Ka'anlakmul and Sak Taj may have dominated the geopolitical landscape in the early days, but the last two centuries have seen an increased balkanization of the kingdoms with rivalries and discontent.

With the breakdown of the hegemonic political superpowers came military strife between many of the smaller city-states. What was once a political landscape comprised of several powerful kingdoms expanded into the logistical nightmare that now exists: more than twenty "kingdoms" varying in size and influence, all vying for power and promoting separate individualistic ideals.

The great distances between cities—poorly managed and controlled—bred chaos and dissent. Vassal cities disagreed on the priorities of the state and non-elite residents of underprivileged regions questioned the supposed divine legitimacy of their rulers. Priests disagreed on questions of the supernatural and royal siblings took up arms against each other.

Although Tzak K'an was never a unified front, it seems now worse than ever.

Modern Tzak K'an and the Battle Against Collapse

The feeling throughout Tzak K'an is one of collective anxiety. The fog over the jungle seems to hover over the cities with a sense of dread and doom. Tzak K'ani, king and farmer alike, know that they are but part of the Great Cycle: *what grows must die to grow again.*

Throughout Tzak K'an, three positions seem to have emerged.

"The Great Snake Will Eat Itself"

With the chaos and violence that has resulted from centuries of inter-city strife, many people in Tzak K'an believe that the end of this world will be simple: The Tzak K'ani will destroy each other.

To this end, some rulers have considered the impossible: conquering the entire realm. This concept goes against the entire history of Tzak K'an as well as many of the ideals of the people. To attempt a full conquest and the implementation of an empire model seems like suicide, but a compromised and different Tzak K'an may be better than the ashes or memories of a people that once were...

Beyond the extreme improbability of a full conquest, there seems to be a popular consensus that most would rather see the Great Snake eat itself than exist in a false or compromised state. Pride and individualism course so strongly through the veins of rivals that they would choose to see the world turned to dust rather than exist under the rule of another—or with another.

"The Eagles, the Dead, and the Ones from the East..."

Although views of the world tend to be staunchly myopic in scope, not all are blind to the threats outside the Tzak K'ani realm. It seems that with dissent amongst the kingdoms growing, the Nahuacans seem to be reaching a political and militaristic apex. Meanwhile, the Kuraq in the south—although shrouded in some mystery—seem to be on the brink of something big, and terrifying. These pressures from either side of Tzak K'an are exacerbated by the introduction of the Théans. Although they seem relatively insignificant at present—kept at bay by the Great Gods—who knows what the coming years may bring.



Tzak K'ani have difficulty fighting a battle on one front, let alone two or three; organizing a unified front that could address any or all of these threats seems undoable.

Coalitions between some kingdoms do exist, but getting their sworn rivals to fight alongside them? Laughable. Many kingdoms would happily see their enemies march to their doom against any of the three foreign powers. Nonetheless, the coalitions are making desperate attempts at provisional alliances in case the threat of external conquest does manifest.

“The Will of the Gods”

The Tzak K'ani all know the history of their world and the worlds that came before this one. The gods, out of dissatisfaction or divine mandate, ceased to afford the mortal realm the means to live. The last decades seem to be hinting at the end of the current time. The rains do not come when they should, the soil is cursed, the earth does not care for the people. Some kingdoms and priesthoods see the “mortal threats” of politics as incomprehensibly petty to what might be a final cataclysm: the total end of this world.

This threat remains mysterious and the root of its growth is under much debate: *Is it a failure in sacred veneration? Have certain gods forgotten about their people? Is it simply the time for this world to end?*

To these ends, many rulers have employed investigations, changes in rituals and crusades to visit various gods at ends of the earth who have not been seen in many lifetimes. Asking primary deities has resulted in cryptic responses, and patron deities of specific city-states have given contradictory answers. Let us not forget that some gods have their own agendas.

And so it seems, most rulers wish to appease the gods by whatever means necessary and fight for the continued existence of this world. Yet smaller factions exist which believe that the end of the world is a fate that must be met.

Politics

It is difficult, for outsiders and locals alike, to determine if the political system in Tzak K'an is a logistical disaster or a masterwork of complex organization, or a combination of both. Although each city-state varies slightly in the prioritization of its political positions, certain common threads are always present. The political arena is a place of both mortal and divine jurisdiction that is highly regulated and controlled.

Kingdoms and Boundaries

The complexities of regional and interregional politics are enough to make one's head spin. Because of the variety of political entanglements—and the fact that they are almost constantly in flux—almost every major city has a scribal team which works with political advisors just to maintain the maps and charts showing current city-state relationships.

These charts—which resemble giant spiderwebs—show current and past alliances between city-states, the location of vassal sites, satellite cities and towns, tributary regions, diplomatic contacts, economic contacts, locations of deployed titled elites, family/hereditary ties between leaders, and more.

For many of these reasons, “boundaries” are extremely difficult to ascertain in Tzak K'an. Although the immediate city and the vicinity radiating to around a two-days march around it is almost always under the control of a major local power, the areas of control (whether explicitly political or economic) might extend far past seemingly “enemy” territory.

A Look at a City

The Tzak K'ani city is truly a thing to behold. Just as religion and politics are inextricable, Tzak K'ani city centers are both shaped by and part of larger cosmologies. Ever-aware of the importance of the cardinal directions, the city follows a quadripartite organizational scheme with monumental architecture at each major locus.

In each city there are also special areas where the supernatural realms connect with the mortal plane. These might be sacred caves or cenotes which can act as portals to the underworld. Certain mountains or temples to the north may be the doorway to the heavenly realm of the ancestors. These doorways readily exist but opening them or knowing the way is becoming more difficult and more dangerous these days.



Emblem Glyphs

Each city-state is referred to in inscriptions and texts by a hieroglyphic symbol called an “emblem glyph”. This symbol acts as a logo for the polity that is easily recognizable by the reader. Some emblem glyphs are direct representations of their city names (such as the skeletal crocodile for Baak Ah’yiin or the large snake for K’anlakmul) but others are more subtle.

One such example is the emblem glyph for Nohl T’zam: a lily and the symbol for fire, describing a past event in which the city almost burnt down completely, but which ultimately served to unite the region.

Royal Families

Dynastic descent and divine kingship are of high importance to royal families in Tzak K’an. Rulership is decided by either patriarchal or matriarchal descent—it varies by city—with preference given to the eldest child. Although blood and kinship are highly valued, occasionally the heir is adopted. Although the eldest might take the main throne, the siblings may be placed as rulers of satellite sites or smaller cities. As one might imagine, sibling rivalries abound within kingdoms.

Ascension to the throne is a monumental occasion marked by ceremonies and rituals. Before one can take up the white and jade headband, what Théans might consider a crown, one’s worth must be established through the completion of rites of passage—political, militaristic, religious or combinations of the three. The rite is a symbolic gesture, one which represents the ideals of the incoming ruler.

Once a ruler ascends to the throne, monumental stelae are constructed of their likenesses: stone monuments which display their power, their personal history and the ideals of their kingdom. New Fire Ceremonies take place to usher in the epoch of the new king or queen.

The ruler and his or her family are in charge of overseeing every aspect of the kingdom and are viewed as having near-absolute power. And as they are also considered to be liaisons to the gods, many fear that power. However, enough shortcomings in the kingdom—political, environmental or militaristic—and people start to question this rulership and their claims of divine lordship. Although the levels of social stratification are stark in Tzak K’an, it is not easy to forget that the commoners outnumber elites 10,000 to 1; civil unrest is a dangerous prospect.

NON-ELITES

Although much attention has been paid to the upper echelon of society, the non-elite class makes up more than 90% of the Tzak K’ani population. Moreover, this group is not homogenous in the least. Although wealth and power have been monopolized by the ruling class, it is the commoners who are the blood of the kingdoms.

Describing life from the perspective of a non-elite is almost impossible as it varies so much from one family to the next. What most commoners seem to agree upon is the fact that their exclusion from the upper social stratum does not come from lack of resources (they do, of course, control all the basic needs like food and water) but from lack of knowledge. The ruling class is either a part of the supernatural realm or has access to its wisdoms whereas the remainder of the population can only hope, with the help of their rulers, to tap into it.

The Rite of the Holy

Heirs to the throne who wish to represent a staunchly theocratic rulership often complete the Rite of the Holy. To complete this rite, the incoming ruler must venture to either the celestial plane or the underworld and undergo a series of tasks from the holy books.

Although this rite takes time, the wealth of knowledge the Tzak K’ani have of the supernatural worlds usually provides the future ruler an idea of what trials he may encounter. One who has successfully completed this rite is granted the title of Aj/Ix Haah Ch’ul at the beginning of their ruling name—*The Worthy Divine*. Once given this title, these kings or queens are held in higher regard by many deities and often given godly aid when requested.

The Rite of the Warlord

Those wishing to convey their military prowess usually choose to undertake the Rite of the Warlord. This rite involves the capturing of one or more influential rivals of the kingdom. Although a potentially quick rite to complete, this endeavor is risky.

A ruler who has completed this rite has the title of Aj/Ix B’olon B’ak for other incorporated at the beginning of their royal name—*He/She of Many Captives*. These rulers are then forever feared by those who may stand in their way on the battlefield.



The Rite of the People

Less common and sometimes less revered (by other rulers) than the other two, those rulers who are invested in gaining the support of the commoners will pursue the Rite of the People. There is no clear-cut path for the completion of this rite but it usually entails one or many deeds done for the common good.

The bestowal of this title is left in the hands of the non-elites, who must collectively organize to show support for the hopeful ruler, often collecting en masse at the foot of the city's pyramid and chanting the name of the new king or queen with their new royal prefix, *Aj/Ix Paj'* Payal, or *The Chosen*. Although seemingly less impressive than a warlord or a divine, few leaders now actually have the support of the populus and a large scale rebellion is always a worry. A ruler who has completed this rite has the full support of their population as well as loyal eyes and ears everywhere.

Priests

The priesthood in Tzak K'an is extraordinary. The complicated branches make the Vaticine Church seem almost simple! From what I can tell, the priesthoods here oversee the following: festivals and rites, ceremonies, political advising, divination and sorcery, history and astronomy, "daykeeping" (an interesting and seemingly important local practice), medicine and agriculture. I'm certain the list goes on but with our limited resources and rather obvious foreigner status it is difficult to penetrate their most inner circles. We hear rumors of a priestly academy but have yet to find it and those that have mentioned it to us seem to keep disappearing...

—Report from Vinnius Flank
(Professor of Xenoreligious Studies)
to the Magisterium

Politics and religion are inextricable from each other in Tzak K'an. This dualism is seen most clearly, both symbolically and logistically, in the importance of priests and other holy leaders within kingdoms. Priests act not only as the right hand of the king or queen but also as the voice of the gods.

Becoming a priest is no easy task and, like many positions, is largely decided by lineage. Priests and priestesses are usually children of such but sometimes the secondborn child of a ruler or lord is sent into the priesthood as well—a good way to maintain an influential foothold.

Almost every important aspect of Tzak K'ani life has a dedicated faction of the priesthood devoted to it. Priestly social status is thus often connected to their speciality; the priesthood of political advising is held in much higher regard than that of agricultural ritual.

Priests, like scribes, must go to a dedicated academy in order to learn the esoteric ways of the priesthood. Unlike the unified scribal school of Cahal It'zat, more than one priestly academy exists, which may be one of the reasons there seem to be more diversity in religious practices and disagreements today than there were in the centuries past.

Shamans have all but been banished from Tzak K'an. However, every so often a rogue shaman can be found, usually in seclusion or hiding, who is just as powerful—if not more—than a priest. Generally disheveled and eccentric due to their pariah status, these shamans are a stark antithesis to the ornate and wealthy priests.

These shamans may not have much respect for traditions of the priesthood but make no mistake, their abilities are great. Unlike priests, shamans are born with the gift of visionary communication with the gods rather than through rites taught by rote. They have a direct and unmediated access to the other planes of existence, a power that the priests both envy and fear.

Although priests must attend a vigil lasting over two years to cleanse themselves of mortal agendas, they are not incorruptible. More than once has an evil priest lead an entire kingdom to its doom.

Court

Tzak K'an has a system of court which is present in every major city as well as subsidiary or satellite sites. Court takes place in a highly regulated space, one meant to control the perception and experience of those who enter.



The arena of court includes an elevated bench or throne upon which the holy ruler, the *k'uhul ajau*, of court sits, so as to be looking down upon his or her subjects. This ruler acts in the stead of the royal dynasty and represents the intertwined aspects of political and religious authority.

Appointed by the ruling king or queen, the *k'uhul ajau* is often selected by lineage, the child of a *k'uhul ajau* themselves. These holy rulers are often flanked by a *sajal*, a “feared one”, and an *alk'uhuun*, a “knower of the holy books”—appointed counselors and executors of courtly practice.

An open space, much like a stage, is usually in front of the seating area of these titled elites. This area houses the many secondary and tertiary members of court, such as the legal scribes and consulting priests, as well as other visiting elites, the general public, captives and servants. Many of these courtly proceedings are performative in nature, theatrical even, and include the wearing of deity masks, actors performing the events to be judged, and entertainers maintaining the spectacle.

During court proceedings, thick copal smoke and fragrant incense cloud the air and alter the senses of those present, adding to the otherworldly aspect of the events. It is a near-physical transportation to another plane. In order to pass judgement, the *k'uhul ajau* must leave this world to seek divine guidance. To do so, a subject holds a polished mosaic hematite mirror—a portal to the sacred realm—in front of the ruler’s gaze; as they peer into the murky abyss, they contact the gods for direction.

“a-winak-en...I am your servant”

After the case is presented, and practitioners and public return to the physicality of the earthly realm, a decision is made. The public spectacle of court both prompts just findings and sentences, and also maintains the ability to showcase the absolute power of the *k'uhul ajau*.

But such an absolute ruler is wise to act with care. Some *k'uhul ajau* have found that ignoring the wishes of the masses is a sure way to earn themselves a rebellion. Because of this, a case is often resolved to the satisfaction of both parties.

Military

The military system of Tzak K’an shares distinct similarities with its neighbors to the north and south but also includes many unique aspects. Elites, especially those in the immediate royal lineage, are trained in warfare tactics as well as military leadership. Military service for Tzak K’ani commoners is not mandatory unless active wars call for it. However, many non-elites join the military voluntarily.

This service is considered a form of familial tribute towards the kingdom and greatly reduces (or eliminates) the amount of taxation a family must pay. One member serving would thus allow for the family to increase their profits and savings for the duration of service. In times such as now, where agricultural production is not ideal, many farmers have chosen to serve in order to offset their crop taxes.

Military positions are not as standardized as they are with the Nahuacans since warfare looks very different in the Tzak K’ani world. Although the common positions are present, such as warlords, officers and footsoldiers (called *holkanob*, “the brave ones”) who are trained in the use of common items such as spears and ranged weapons, other more specialized positions exist as well. The armies have factions specialized in guerilla warfare tactics, snare and trap-makers, and even sorcerers.

Everything in Tzak K’an is a performance and war is no different. A siege often includes musicians playing formidable music, priests armed with idols of their patron deities, sorcerers, and military actors wearing masks.

Taking captives is politically and symbolically more important than killing the enemy and falling prey to the bounds of a rival military is truly terrifying indeed. This may often lead to public humiliation, prolonged torture, enslavement, or worse. The unfortunate victims who face capture usually wish for death instead.

The Great Star of War

The astronomers, skywatchers and daykeepers of a city also keep track of the time for war. Like any other aspect of Tzak K’ani life, certain days and times can be divined and tracked to exploit key supernatural advantages. The time for war is associated with the movement of Venus (known as Chak Ek’, “the Great Star”).



Culture

Tzak K'ani culture, to locals and outsiders alike, is a sensory feast of complex sights, sounds and smells that surround one constantly. The ideals of the Tzak K'ani can be found in the prioritization of supernatural reverence, science and knowledge, and the constant battle against the ever-fickle environment.

Environment

The Tzak K'ani landscape sits predominantly in the lowlands of Aztlan. The environment is characterized by large swaths of dense rainforest with slight more arid locations along the eastern coast. The rainforest, although rich in flora and fauna, is seen as more of an obstacle for the highly urbanized Tzak K'ani people than a blessing.

Thousands of acres of forest would have to be cleared for cities and agricultural fields to be established. But this does not mean that plants are seen as a complete nuisance. Often carefully planned orchards with fruiting trees (such as guava, papaya

and avocado) are found in major cities, with parrots and toucans perched on their branches. Small urban gardens for spices such as chile peppers, allspice, agave, and other small cooking needs are also cultivated. Beyond these, certain trees hold symbolic importance to the people, such as the large thorny Ceiba tree, and others like the chichem tree are used medicinally.

Adaptive agricultural strategies have been employed for many years in this formidable environment. Raised fields, complex irrigation systems, terracing, multi-crop sowing and slash-and-burn methods help in the productive growing of maize—a highly important crop in both the utilitarian and ritual sense—cacao, squash, beans and cotton for textiles. Clay sourcing for ceramics and pottery is also relatively easy in these areas.

Animal domestication is not particularly widespread—although growing in popularity recently—but sometimes pens with dogs, turkeys or some captured wild deer will be seen. Hunted animals include monkeys, large wild pigs, the occasional tapir or armadillo, and whatever unfortunate reptile happens across the path of a hunter. Jaguars, although threatening and dangerous adversaries, are sacred and highly valued amongst elites for their pelts. Fishing is also quite popular along the rivers and the eastern coast which also provides opportunity to harvest marine shells, a highly valued item for adornment and ritual.

Because of the dense forest and difficult and uneven terrain, the vast river systems are used similarly to highly trafficked road networks, providing easy connection from one site to the next. For foot traffic across smaller areas, raised white limestone roads—called sacbeob (sing: sacbe)—are frequently used. Tzak K'ani people are not particularly impressed with the large beasts of burden that the Théans seem so fond of. They are sometimes used for small loads on the sacbeob but do not seem fond of canoes. Plus, the inland merchants often grumble about how much they seem to eat.

The sacred hills, mountains and volcanos of the landscape also serve immediate material functions. Looking around any city, the first thing most Théans seem to remark is, “That is a lot of stone.” Indeed, the amount of limestone needed to construct the features of a city (and all the plaster that is needed!) requires



intense and constant quarrying. Stone and mineral materials—such as jade, chert and obsidian—are used for the making of tools and jewelry. What many Théans do not seem to realize at first glance is that timber is often considered much more elite and valuable, but the edges of usable forest are being slowly chipped away. Everything requires fire and wood is becoming more and more difficult to come by.

Food

Local cuisine includes many of the meats and crops mentioned above. The dietary staples include the Three Sisters: maize, squash and beans. Granite manos and metates are used to process the maize and form tortillas or *atole*, a form of gruel. These items, mixed with the varieties of meat and spices available, are common dishes eaten in the home.

Special beverages include fermented maize beer and, for the very privileged, a frothy cacao drink flavored with honey, chili or other additives. Since the cacao bean is so highly valued, this beverage is often viewed as literally drinking your currency away.

Economy

The Tzak K'ani economy is less standardized than that of its neighbors. The majority of the commoner population uses a system of bartering in small informal marketplaces for daily goods and many rural communities are self-sustaining hubs. In the cities, larger marketplaces provide an area for the exchange of other items. Although bartering is still common in marketplaces, certain items do have a set currency value such as cacao beans and salt. There is often a sign in the market stating the conversion rates for these items for the day.

Items that are not local are usually brought in by traveling merchants and fetch a higher price the further they are from their source. For example, obsidian cores are relatively cheap in the north where there are multiple volcanoes, but expensive in the east. The same goes for materials such as marine shell, jade, and other such wares.

The elite families, as well as civic constructions, are funded by systems of taxation and tribute. This tribute can come in the form of labor, military service, or the giving of items such as crop yields, artisanal crafts such as jewelry or textiles, or sourced raw materials.

Language

With the great expanse of the Tzak K'an world and the high degrees of separation and insularity between and of the city-states, it should come as no surprise that the people do not all speak a common tongue. Many different languages and dialects are spoken across the land, much to the frustration of the Théan newcomers. Although some common words prevail across all the languages, two farmers from either side of the Tzak K'an expanse likely won't be able to communicate beyond pleasantries and some simple phrases which still require some extensive miming to get across.

Writing

Our writing is our weapon. It is swifter than darts and more enduring than death.

—Scribal proverb

For the Tzak K'ani, the written tradition symbolizes the nexus between art and information and usually discusses the happenings of the elite class or the gods or affairs of business. Although the rifts between factions supporting the disparate early history of the peoples are still present in the cities and streets, most scribes—vocally or not—pay homage to Chok Ch'a before them. It was from them that the seeds of the complex writing system were planted.

Writing in Tzak K'an is complicated and beautiful with high levels of variability and freedom. The hieroglyphic system includes logograms, phenoms, variants, and combinations of all of the above. One word can be written in multiple ways and scribes, often to showcase the fluidity of the language, will write one word several different ways in the same text.

Théan scholars have found this unbelievably frustrating and overly complicated. In turn, most Tzak K'ani find Théan script quite boring and unsophisticated and tend to find a slight enjoyment in the frustration of the foreigners.

Numbers, which are of extreme importance to the highly mathematical Tzak K'ani, are written in combinations of bars, dots and a symbol for zero. The location of these three features indicates which numerical placeholder it is situated in. In this way, huge numbers can be represented with few symbols and relative ease.



Learning the ways of the words is a lifetime pursuit and a lifelong commitment. Scribes are usually selected by lineage and begin their training as soon as they can hold a brush. Scribal children are often seen tracing with their fingers into the soft earth the markings they were taught that day.

Cahal It'zat: The Scribal Complex

And yet not all scribes are equal. Some are taught, formally or informally, enough to service local necessities such as aiding potters or marking conversions in the marketplace. But the chosen few are brought to *Cahal It'zat* (Place of the Scribe), the centralized but secretive scribal school.

The way to Cahal It'zat is as complex as the words it guards in its depths. Protected by subterfuge magic, snares and the formidable environment in which it is located, this school is often considered to be a mere legend by many common folk. Yet, to the initiates, this place is more home than any other in Tzak K'an.

A microcosm of the universe itself, the school is reminiscent of a small city. At the center stands a looming pyramidal structure with carvings on every surface of the stone. The raised limestone sacheobs are carved with words; the staircases, the lintels, the walls and every other available surface is etched and painted with the glyphs that chronicle the Tzak K'an universe. Cahal It'zat is a city made by and for words.

Beyond teaching the complex ways of writing and chronicling events, the school serves a secondary purpose: it unites the disparate tongues of the Tzak K'ani people.

Centuries of staunchly individualistic city-states have maintained and generated separate languages amongst the people. The scribes work to maintain a common written language, one of the last shreds of unity in the Tzak K'an lands. The kings and queens reluctantly but pragmatically allow this practice to go on—for what good are words of war or fear if they cannot be read? Scribes trained at Cahal It'zat are sent back to their city-states and given a formal position as the private chroniclers of kings and queens.

In this way, scribal lineages that serve rival rulers have been interacting at Cahal It'zat for generations. As a scribe, more than a decade may be spent studying languages next to sworn political enemies. But Cahal It'zat is not a place for politics or strife. It is a higher calling that is fulfilled and maintained here, one that will outlast all the kings and queens until the end of times.

In the darkest moments, Cahal It'zat also served as a safe haven for initiates seeking refuge. During times of war, scribes have been primary targets. In one hallway of the main compound, the dangers of the profession are carved into the walls: a picture of seven scribes with their fingers removed—some dead and decapitated, some left to live through their torture—bleeding at the feet of the conquering ruler. Below it reads: *True destruction only exists when history is erased and forgotten.*

Cult of the Tsii'uun B'ak

The recent decades have required—according to some—adapted control of the sacred words. The holy Tzak K'ani books, containing the most secret and complex features of their society, have recently been in high demand by Théan foreigners (although their motivations are somewhat unclear).

Much to the dismay of the scribal elders, more and more sacred books are being stolen from palaces, temples and libraries to be traded or sold to the foreigners for high prices.

Almost all scribes contend that the writing is so complex, even with the books, the Théans would never manage to accrue any sort of information. But some see what might come if the words are understood by enemies of the Tzak K'an. Beyond that, the loss of such texts could spell the end of an era in which the learned Tzak K'ani remember all their past. Irreplaceable texts have gone missing.

Born out of this fear, a militant group of scribal guardians—led by Iktan Chikul—has formed from the devout factions of the *itz'at* school, the Cult of the *Tsii'uun B'ak*, “those who guard at the edge of the white paper.” Not satisfied with merely safeguarding existing texts, Iktan Chikul has begun to speak about tracking the stolen materials and recovering them, even if such a journey would take them to Théah itself.



CODICES

Any crucial information regarding the world of Tzak K'an is documented meticulously in codices. Most of these are kept at Cahal It'zat or within royal libraries across the kingdoms. However, there are some that have gone missing and are scattered—or hidden—in the far reaches of the continent. Finding a codex with lost or secret information is highly valued among scribes, royals, and commoners alike.

Art

Art, and the artisans who make it, are highly valued in Tzak K'an culture. Artisans who focus on painting, whether they are creating magnificent murals on palace walls or drawing elaborate scenes on ceramic vessels, are considered to be part of a noble tradition. Like scribes, many artists come from hereditary lineages of painters and, after proving themselves through rigorous apprenticeships, have the opportunity to move up the social ladder quickly.

Also similar to the scribal tradition, art is relatively standardized. Artistic ideals and representational methods are regulated and similar across Tzak K'an, but there is always a little room for an artist to leave her personal flourish.

Often, a team of artists work together on a single finished product since each craft is so complex. A master potter works with painters and pigment-makers for weeks on a single god pot, and architects and engineers work with sculptors for years on pyramids. Each of these art forms, unique and beautiful in its own right, truly becomes a masterpiece when combined with the skills of other artisans.

Like every other aspect of life, a priest is almost always present for each step of the artistic process. If art is displeasing to the gods, it does not bode well for the rest of us mortals.

Clothing and Adornment

Textiles and their raw materials are highly valued items and often important tributary goods. Cotton and hemp are grown in many areas of the kingdoms and it is not uncommon to find specialized weavers and artisans who process the materials into appropriate finished items, depending on who is meant to wear them. Clothing and adornment are but continuations of the flesh in Tzak K'an; they represent the status of the person in them.

For this reason, clothing and adornment are highly regulated with punishments ranging from fines to death if the rules are broken. For the most part, the differences in clothing between elites and non-elites are based on the elaborateness of the garment. Whereas most commoners wear textiles that are simply woven and cut, clothing meant for elite consumption is dyed beautiful colors, adorned with shell beads or quetzal feathers, or made to shimmer with specular hematite.

Men usually wear cotton loincloths which are wound around the waist and draped between the legs. Sometimes this is paired with a cape-like cover called a *pati*. Women often wear a *pati*, tied under their armpits, paired with a long skirt or a single sleeveless dress-like garment which is fastened or cinched at the waist. These garments are occasionally worn with a scarf-like head covering which holds back the wearer's long hair. This typical clothing style, for both men and women, comes with a variety of sandals. For elites, these styles—already more elaborate because of their quality, colors and prints—are further embellished with impressive jade belts, jewelry and animal pelts. Leggings made from jaguar skins are sometimes worn in place of a loincloth.

Men grow their hair long and pulled back into a ponytail or long braid or arranged around the head in a crown. Hair that is worn loose, unkempt or shorn short is seen as a sign of captivity or shame. Males sometimes shave or burn the hair of their forehead in order to present a more elongated face and tend to remove facial hair if they grown any (although some elites keep small tufts of facial hair). Women similarly wear their hair long and loose hair is common for younger unmarried women. Older or married women wear a variety of styles, some everyday styles being one or two long braids which might be gathered at



the base of the head or in low buns. For commoners, these hairstyles are sometimes accessorized with ribbons, headbands or scarves.

Because the illusion of an elongated face is considered an ideal of beauty, some city-states maintain a tradition of cranial modification which begins at infancy. This involves the boarding and binding of the head while still pliable in order to achieve a flattening of the lower section of the crania.

Just as clothing between elites and commoners is differentiated by levels of ornamentation, these hairstyles are enhanced with elaborate headdresses for elites to present a heightened social status. Elite headdresses have many forms with specific headdresses worn at special events. Often they are made of wicker or wood and decorated with large plumes of quetzal feathers, jade, small sculptures of gods and animals, beads and animals skins. Other forms of elite jewelry and adornment include pectorals, bracelets, necklaces, ankle tinklers, masks, and knee bands.

The body is also modified to better represent the individual and his status. Special body paint is worn for significant events such as war or ritual. Tattoos and ornate scars are worn by both men and women, and depict elements of nature, the gods and symbols of social position. These markings are present on many parts of the body but often facial tattoos and scars (usually on the cheeks) are worn only by females.

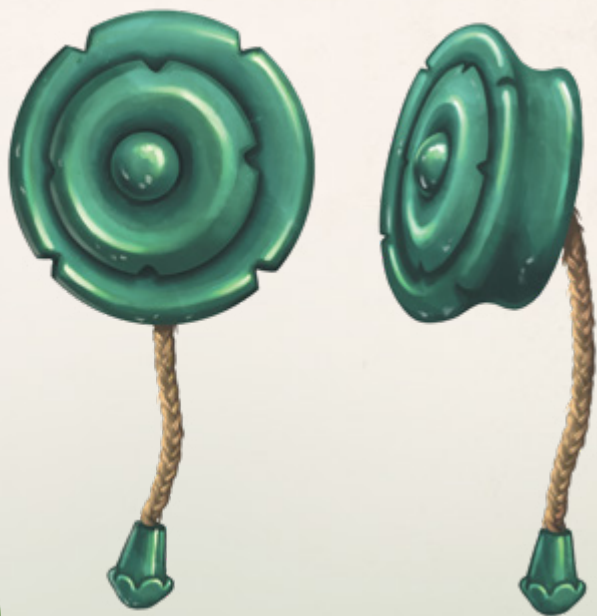
Stretched earlobes are common for much of the populace, with the size usually being indicative of age or occupational status. The first rite of passage in the life cycle of a Tzak K'ani person, from infancy to true childhood, is the piercing of her ears and the insertion of his first earflares. Commoners wear earflares made from simple perishable materials such as wood, bone or shell whereas elites have beautifully carved and complex—and usually much larger—earspools made from jade or obsidian.

Large septum and lip jewelry is more common amongst rulers or warlords and equally as intricate as earflares. Dental modification is similarly controlled. Elites may have jade inlays drilled into their front teeth or file the teeth into points or geometric shapes which simultaneously display their wealth while differentiating their physical appearance from common mortals.

Gender and Sexuality

Although gender binaries exist in the Tzak K'an world, it is not completely uncommon to have non-binary or third-gender individuals. Amongst commoners, but especially elites, gender can be fluid or combine aspects of the established binary. A well-known example is *Sinan Ajau* (Lord Scorpion), child of *Ix Tokal Chan* (Lady Cloud Sky) and *K'inich Pasaj Pakal* (Lord Dawn Shield), who is depicted in many of their royal stelae and murals wearing the woven dresses and adornments of their mother but still often chose male pronouns for the associated royal text.

Sexuality follows a similar suit and really only becomes an issue in elite contexts where an heir must be established. Blood and bloodlines are important and sacred but, as scholars of Tzak K'ani culture know, adoptive children are considered as equal kin in the dynastic traditions.



Naming Conventions

The Tzak K'ani favor putting titles and prefixes in front of their names. Some denote nobility such as Aj/Ix, and the type of leader. A prominent leader may have a multifaceted name that includes multiple prefixes, such as Ix B'olon B'ak Ek' Imix.

Male and female names are often interchangeable, though most recognize the names themselves belonging to one gender or another.

Prefixes: Chak, Ek', Sak, Taj, Tzi, Yax

Male: B'alam, Chan, Etz'nab, Ich'ak, K'awil, K'in, Kawak, Pakal, Tok, Tun, Tzul

Female: Chan, Chij, Imix, Itzam, K'uk, Muyal, Pasaj, Pet, Tukun, Tz'unun, Xoc

Calendar

Given the demands of the gods for the Tzak K'ani to keep their days, it is unsurprising that the calendric system was a foundational aspect of the earliest Tzak K'ani ways of life.

The importance of cycles is ubiquitous in Tzak K'ani thought and permeates their conceptions of time and history. Just as the Nahuacan to the north are living in the age of the Sixth Sun, the current Tzak K'ani universe is situated towards the end of the current *katun*, a time of 13 *baktuns* measuring 5,125 ½ years. The current universe was thus created on 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u 13.0.0.0. The foreign Théans, with the help of a translating scribe, have deciphered this date to be August 13th, 3114 BC.

The basic calendar system consists of intermeshed rounds, including the 260-day *tzolk'in* calendar count which was comprised of days titled by the numbers 1 through 13 and followed by a subsequent cycle of 20 names. This calendar is further subsumed by the 365-day *Haab* count, or "vague solar year" consisting of 18 months with 20 days. The remaining 5 days are added to the end of the year, a very unlucky interval indeed.

Every one of these days has its own supernatural associations, omens and deities. Tzak K'ani who have intimate knowledge of their days can thusly plan for fortune or posterity in accordance to the gods.

These smaller intervals of time are nested in longer cycles from greater to smaller, that consist of *bak'tuns*, *kat'uns*, *tuns*, *winals*, and *k'ins*. Each of these measure the distance from the beginning of the current Great Cycle.

Religion

Religion touches everything in Tzak K'an, from the raindrop to the maize seed to the parchment and the throne; nothing is devoid of its role in the sacred cosmology. Whether it is the commoner saying prayers to his modest household idols or the priests hosting elaborate ceremonies in the temples, all must venerate the the gods.

As all Tzak K'ani know, there are three planes of existence: the earthly realm, the celestial plane and the underworld. Almost all aspects of Tzak K'ani religion are devoted to the various planes of existence and the concept of the most Great Cycle of life, death and rebirth. But this sacred cycle is only maintained when mortals act accordingly; failure to please the gods or keep their days is often cause for disruption in the cycle and leads to misfortune: disease, drought, cursed soil or other cataclysmic events.

Major Gods

The gods walk among us, or so they used to. Some have walked elsewhere and some have stopped walking altogether.

Like the Tzak K'ani mortals, the gods are stratified and sometimes disparate. Many cities have patron deities that more closely align with their personal kingdom's beliefs and an increasing number of commoners also venerate a handful of the minor gods. The major gods used to rule alongside certain kings and queens of old but they have been ever more absent in recent years. Some gods of the elements have not been seen in more than two generations.

Although the gods may have different roles, levels of influence and inconsistent presence in the earthly plane, certain gods are ubiquitously known within the Tzak K'ani world.

Apocōātl, The Feathered Serpent

All Nations in Aztlan believe in the Great Feathered Serpent, even if they call him by different names. The Tzak K'ani recognize him as the oldest and most powerful of the gods, and even those city-states that are dedicated to one god or another have shrines devoted just to Apocōātl. He serves as their god of all animals, including the jaguar despite the fact that they have their own diety.



Itz'hun, the First Priest

Although more than just Itz'hun was present at the beginning of our world, he is often venerated as one of the primary creator gods; a creator of not only this world but also of many sacred aspects of writing and the formation of the priesthood. Often taking the form of an elderly man with sunken cheeks and eyes and clothed in white, Itz'hun is rarely seen.

It is said that he may be found occasionally visiting the priestly academies but, if so, the priests do not speak openly of their interactions with him. Perhaps because he has a distaste for the heightened political nature of our world, or maybe because he is displeased with the turns the priesthood has taken in the last centuries.

Ix Kin, the Sun Goddess

Ix Kin can be seen in her natural form simply by looking up. She crosses the sky as the bright Morning Sun and becomes the Jaguar Sun in the evenings. When taking on a form to walk the earth she is a tall formidable figure with teeth filed into sharp points with elaborate shimmering clothing.

Ix Kin is particularly fond of four-petaled flowers, symbols that are often printed on her robes or worn as large earspools in her ears; wearing this symbol is considered an invocation of her power. Many rulers and commoners alike respect and praise Ix Kin for her loyalty to their world and the responsibility with which she wields her power. She is the twin sister of Po Ch'en, The Moon God.

Po Ch'en, the Moon God

The calm and quiet twin brother of Ix Kin, Po Ch'en is the primary Moon God. Like his sister, he is easy to find in the sky and can be occasionally spotted perched on the crescent of his moon in his "human" form flanked by his greatest companion—a giant iridescent rabbit.

Responsible for the tides, the changing of seasons, and fertility amongst other things, Po Ch'en often takes on the form of a lithe young man with long hair gathered in a flowing ponytail. Although he is exceedingly shy, humans that have sought him out for issues of fertility have spoken of his ability to calm and soothe those around him and praised him for his kindness.

Kimi, God of Death

Kimi is considered to be the primary Death God, although there are many that work under his command. A looming skeletal figure with patches of eternally decomposing flesh and an affinity for wearing bells around his ankles and neck, he is usually found in the belly of the Underworld flanked by other minor gods and giant death bats. An understandably great player of the ballgame, he thrills in taking on arrogant mortal adversaries, betting their lives against his granting of supernatural powers, but be warned—he rarely plays fair.

Legends say that people have seen glimpses of him from the corners of their eyes on the mortal plane, usually hiding in the houses of the sick or wandering soldiers' barracks during during war... waiting... This has led to the following colloquialism signaling imminent death: "Do you hear the bells ringing?"

Cha'kal, the Rain God and Their Aspects

One of the most important deities in Tzak K'an, especially for the majority of the farming population, is Cha'kal. The bringer of life-giving rain, they are one of the most sought after gods in the pantheon. More reptilian than human in appearance, Cha'kal has divided themselves into four aspects in order to ameliorate the high demand of their presence. The Red services the east, the White oversees the north, the Black resides in the west, and the Yellow maintains presence in the south.

Although usually attentive, Cha'kal is quick to anger and slow to forget a grudge. These traits can be seen in the irregularity of the rains. Areas dealing with these issues are thought (by rival directions) to have annoyed the deity and often take smug satisfaction when they are still in Cha'kal's favor.



Buluk Cha'wil, The Lightning God

Considered to be one of the closest goldy friends of Itz'hun, Buluk Cha'wil is a powerful and quick-tempered god. Revered by many warlords and war-minded kings, this god often visits the human plane in his mortal form during times of battle. Adorned in commanding warriors' armor and holding a giant smoking axe, Buluk Cha'wil speaks with a voice of thunder and is quick to strike down those who oppose him.

It is somewhat unclear what his ideals are, for he does not seem to revel in battle for its own sake, but his presence—although revered—is also feared. Spending too long in his company has not served many rulers well.

Pillars of the Earth, the Four Elementals

At each corner of the earth is a Pillar, a supernatural force who mediates the elements between the gods and the mortal plane. Although the gods may be performing their duties, the lack of mediation of a Pillar may prove disastrous. These Pillars are elusive and mysterious. Unlike many of the major gods who can usually be found in one place, the Four Pillars rotate constantly and a months-long journey to seek the Pillar of Fire may prove to be in vain upon discovering that it has moved to an opposite corner and been replaced by the Pillar of Water.

The truth of their physical descriptions is debatable, but a tattered text remains in the Scribal Library from three centuries ago that many use to form their conceptions of them:

The Pillar of Fire: A four-legged creature with a body of sizzling embers. Sometimes locatable by faint white plumes of smoke. The Pillar of Water: A giant whose watery flesh is constantly dripping off its being. Leaves trails of flowing streams behind it. The Pillar of Electricity: Seemingly invisible, but easy to feel. Noticeable by an eerie silence caused by lack of animals in its radius and by one's hair standing up. The Pillar of Earth: Moves slower than other Pillars but does not stop as others might. Easiest to notice, appears as a tree-giant but may be rock with plants sprouting from its flesh.

—Small Codex Written by
an Unnamed Traveler

Minor Gods

Although there are many minor gods always attending to various duties and venerated as patrons for specific occupations, some of the most well known are listed here.

Ek Pakax

The Merchant God is a social and outgoing deity. Noticeable by his almost ostentatious taste in adornment, a lingering scent of cacao, and a large tattoo of a black scorpion across his face, Ek Pakax is a fan of promoting interaction through trade and has an affinity for exotic goods.

Ix Sak

The Rainbow Goddess is an beautiful but feared older woman. Considered to be slightly spiteful against men, many non-males seek her out when they have been wronged. A rainbow in the sky is thus seen as a powerful symbol for women and non-binary individuals and as a horrifying omen for men.

Che'b' T'ul

The Scribal God is often sought for guidance alongside Itz'hun, the First Priest. Unlike the First Priest, Che'b' T'ul tends to have obsessions with more mundane aspects of scribal culture, often correcting mistakes and promoting truth and style in writing. She is considered to be the epitome of brilliance but also somewhat eccentric. She enjoys visiting court in the form of a large rabbit (quill in hand...or paw) simply because she can.

Puilay Balam

Puliy Balam is the Jaguar God of Old, and his existence may just be legend. Somewhat blasphemously said to have been of equal power with the Great Serpent, he is only discussed now in low voices.

Death and Burial

Death in Tzak K'an is but the beginning of another journey. For many, the next life begins with the descent into the dark and watery Underworld. Greeted by the Paddler Gods, the deceased enters the long canoe and is brought to her next destination.

If the deceased has been given the proper death rites, he has some small tokens that he might give to the Paddler Gods for a speedier trip across the River of Death or





may even convince them to take him to a more agreeable shore, for there are many shores beyond the river.

Where the deceased are brought is dependent on their actions in the mortal plane. Some people might have to navigate a complex series of trials or tests to move through the Underworld. Each of these trials takes place in a “house,” a formidable location ruled by various minor death gods. For example, a backstabbing sibling may have to pass through the House of Blades whereas a deceitful politician would be required to undertake the House of Poison Smoke. Some may even be forced to pass through multiple houses. Some never escape.

If and when they pass through their required houses, they ascend to the Celestial Realm, a place of tranquility and knowing. The Celestial Realm is a reward for those who have repaid their mortal debts but is also the direct home for certain individuals who are deemed worthy by the gods. Those who have proven themselves in their mortal lives or died in a manner that was deemed to be an ultimate, righteous sacrifice are permitted to forgo the trials of the Underworld.

Ancestors in the Celestial Realm are accessible, if one knows the ways to reach them or the lines of communication. Those in the Underworld are a bit trickier to track down, but it is not impossible. For these reasons, many Tzak K’ani find the ways of the Kuraq to be particularly blasphemous and heinous. The Kuraq disrupt the Great Cycle of life, death and rebirth and this profanity against the gods—as many Tzak K’ani believe—may anger the creators and bring doom upon this world.

Rituals

Many rites and rituals govern the way of life in Tzak K’an. Almost every mortal aspect, from the mundane to the elite has special associated practices. Ranging from the blessing of a seasonal crop or the seating of a new ruler, each social class has a knowledge of the rite they must undertake in order to appease the gods. Many rituals need to be conducted at certain special calendrical moments, a promise that must be kept to keep the days of the gods.

The Ballgame

The ballgame symbolizes the crux of the Tzak K’ani cosmos; it is a metaphor of existence, the universe and the cycles of life and death. Often played in a monumental ballcourt within the city walls, the game can be played merely for sport, as a proxy for warfare, or as a ritual sacrament. Anyone can play for sport, but the other two aspects can only be played by selected elite.

Donning the heavy equipment of the game transforms the individuals into cosmic players. Individuals or teams may play against each other in attempts to move the heavy rubber ball—a symbolic metaphor of the skull of one of the first fathers of humanity—into a large masonry hoop using their bodies. When the game ends and a victor is decided, a ceremony takes place. Depending on the context of the game, sacrifice—in various forms—may be required from either the winning or losing team.



Sorcery

Although many manners of divination exist in Tzak K'an, the most sacred and powerful form of sorcery is used only when the stakes are high and sacrifice is willing to be made. Just as the gods have sacrificed, so must we.

Although humanity is in a constant state of blood debt to the gods, blood magic for mortal gain comes at a great cost, both physically and mentally. After all, you never do know what might rise from the smoke...

Summoning the Wayak' Kan

The most feared and revered sorcery in Tzak K'an is the summoning of the *Wayak' Kan* (vision serpent), sometimes called the Quest for the Wayak' Kan.

The Quest begins like many bloodletting rituals, with an individual prepared to take on physical harm, and uses tools similar to those for drawing blood like long ropes (sometimes with imbued thorns), stingray spines and obsidian blades.

But this is more extreme and more dangerous than a simple ritual. One must have an intention in mind before the Summoning: a question that needs answering, advice that must be given, aid that is needed, or the presence of a specific person. This sorcery has the power to breach all planes of existence.

With the intention set, the summoner pierces or cuts himself, drawing as much blood as needed to complete the rite. Often, this involves drawing the rope of thorns through the tongue or cutting symbols into the face and body. With this bloodshed, the edges of reality blur for the sorcerer. The blood is dripped onto bits of paper and collected in a sacred bowl. When enough has been drawn, the paper is ignited and erupts in plumes of thick colorful smoke.

From the smoke emerges a giant serpent, writhing and terrifying in its appearance. If pleased with the summoner, the head of the serpent whirls, reconfigures, and transforms into the head and torso of a figure.

But is it the correct figure that has been beckoned? Although the goal of the sorcerer is for an intended person or deity to materialize—an ancestor, a warlord, a god or whomever else was summoned—this is not always the case. Because this is a breach in the planes of existence, opening the portal may lead to unwelcome visitors and the Vision Quest can bring visions that were not meant to be seen.

Closing the portal is not as easy as opening it but, hopefully, as the smoke subsides the now-weakened sorcerer has found what and *who* they were seeking.

In ancient times, Wayak' Kan sorcerers would attempt to use the blood of others as their sacrifice. The great serpent looks poorly on these sacrifices, and often refuses to come at all. Only the most devout or skilled practitioners could get results, which were unreliable at best. Once practitioners discovered that self-sacrifice was not only superior, but reliable, other types of sacrifices stopped being as common.

Some practitioners still use animal sacrifices when seeking inanimate objects, as this has always proved both sufficient and effective.

Minor Sorceries

Some minor forms of sorcery, especially those that are more in the divinatory realm, can be done by any worthy Tzak K'ani. *Knowledge of the Days* gives insight to future events or omens of what is to come. This allows for advantageous planning in missions, diplomatic meetings, and major events.

Many city-state rulers employ daykeepers to help manage the city. Some even go so far as to refuse to do anything without first consulting the daykeepers and ensuring that omens are in their favor.

Other minor sorcerers wear items to take on aspects of deities or animals, usually in the form of masks, body paint, or enchanted pelts or feathers. Lastly, rare *Blessed Mirrors* are used for quick looks or conversations with the dead or divine, but the user must be cautious...a blessed mirror is difficult to distinguish from a hexed one and what is seen on the other side may lie.



Tzak K'ani Locations

The Tzak K'ani city-states are as diverse and fluctuating as their people. They rise and fall and rise again, always vying for supremacy and domination against each other. As such, it would be a futile endeavor to try to paint in even the broadest of strokes the political landscape of the land.

Instead, the following city-states are presented only as an example of the current powers that be, their schemes and vassals, and how the latter are plotting to change sides—or become powers unto themselves.

Cahal Naab

Cahal Naab is a port city built on a river delta, where the Ak Way River meets the sea. The area is swampy, the land wet and fertile and impossible to build on. The marshes barely support stone, and the small islands between these marshy areas flood constantly. Despite all this, Cahal Naab stands as a testament to what people will do to eke out a living.

No one rules or leads Cahal Naab, and the city was not planned and built by architects and engineers. It wasn't built at all, but instead grew out of the delta as more and more people came and called this place home.

The river delta makes a good port, the waterways wide enough for ocean-going vessels to enter the river mouth and sail up it a good ways. Where there's a port, people will settle, hoping to make trade and money off sailors. Cahal Naab is such a place, and the people who build and live on the land are vagrants, smugglers, con-artists and anyone else who realized that a place without rule is a great place to make money.

Cahal Naab isn't a city; it's a waterway, chock-full of lashed-together boats, floating houses and shacks meant to last only until the next flood season. It is filled with the worst sorts of folk, those without a home or family, those who might have had those things once, but are now on the run, and those who have no loyalty but to themselves. Only the most itinerant priests give these people any kind of blessings from the gods.

The whole place is supported by an itinerant economy. During the dry season, people come from all over to open the port to foreigners and traders. They trade and sell every type of questionable good people can think of. Théans are welcomed as bearers of novel and odd goods, and preyed upon as naive and dim-witted.

They have fantastic boats, and many locals simply want the Théans to teach them more about them, or maybe sell them a boat or two. Kuraq and Nahuacans are welcomed only slightly less warmly; the Kuraq are creepy and the Nahuacans are imperialist bastards but all is forgiven if you're willing to roll dice, tell a good story, or have something interesting to trade.

Thus far, no city-state has managed to dominate Cahal Naab, but many say it's only a matter of time before some ambitious ruler tames the lawless place. Every monarch worth his salt has agents in the city, though: how else are you going to track the trade that technically shouldn't exist or hear the foreign gossip before everyone else knows about it?

Cahal Naab also serves as a handy neutral ground, a place for monarchs and their proxies to work out deals with the sort of people it might be politically damaging to be publicly associated with—mercenaries of dubious morality, agents of foreign kingdoms, etcetera. Got a magical artifact, a set of stolen sketches, something you want to sell or pass along discreetly? Cahal Naab's the place to go, and there's plenty of smugglers, thieves and fences who will kill in order to assist you.

It is also a beautiful little bayou. Mangroves everywhere. During the flood season, the place is completely abandoned, people taking their boats and floats upriver to prevent disaster. And yet, each year during the dry season, the city grows just a little larger. Every now and then, some ambitious monarch attempts to take the city by force. The army arrives, the locals disperse into the swamplands, taking their goods and boats with them. The floods come, the army retreats, and the next year Cahal Naab is larger than ever.





Yaxbal

In the center of Yaxbal stands the largest pyramid, Chan Witz (Sky Mountain). Intricately painted in reds and blues and carved with images of the Earth Monster, the patron deity Cha'kal and various supernatural scenes, the stepped pyramid rises high above the plaza below. The steep central staircase leads up to a small superstructure—the most sacred space in the city. This space holds carvings and paintings of deities and venerated ancestors along with an altar for sacrifice and worship.

Every major city has at least one ballcourt. Yaxbal has four ballcourts, with the largest just to the southwest of Chan Witz: a medium-sized ballcourt with elaborate markers and large seating platforms. Here, games are played to mark momentous occasions or celebrate city-wide milestones. The three smaller courts are spread around the outskirts of town and are used for smaller rituals or as practice courts.

Near Chan Witz are various administrative buildings used for everything from performative rituals to the handling of taxation and tribute and logistical organization for vassal cities.

An observatory sits near the center of town. From here, daykeepers, skywatchers and priests watch solar and lunar events, and mark the locations of important celestial bodies like Venus. This structure also acts as a meteorological station, with careful notes taken on

things like rainfall, changes in atmospheric pressure and the movement of the winds.

Walking through the main plaza from one structure to the next, a resident is constantly reminded of the divine power of the ruler through numerous giant carved stelae, altars and monuments that dot the courtyard. Near this plaza are the elite residences of the royal family, high-ranking priests and nobles.

As one leaves the city center, the grandeur of the center gives way to the more functional areas of town: the marketplaces, shops and artisan production areas. This area bustles with activity. The smells of spices being prepared and kilns burning and the sounds of fine tools chipping away while merchants haggle with customers fill the air. Although less ornate than the core, this is the lifeblood of the general population.

In the terminating radius around the city, and scattered for about another day's march, are the agricultural fields and residences that hold the bulk of the population. Masonry structures here are rare, with most homes being constructed of perishable materials with thatched roofs and set on modest platforms. Life in the fields is not easy, but in Tzak K'an, the main tenets of life are the same for elite and farmer alike: existence is a constant cycle of life and death whether playing the ballgame or planting the maize seed.



Chun Pixom

Many city-states have risen and fallen in Tzak K'an since the end of the Old Empire, too many to remember their names and traditions. In their place new ones emerge, sometimes supplanting the lost ones entirely and sometimes building upon them. A few have lasted long enough to leave their mark on the customs and traditions of the Tzak K'ani.

One of the oldest, most revered city-states in all the land, Chun Pixom has come to define what foreigners usually refer to when they talk about Tzak K'an, its peoples and traditions. Over its eight centuries of illustrious tradition, the "people of Knot"—as they have come to be known—have survived the coming and goings that have ended other apparently more prosperous city-states. This has put them at the forefront of their peers, allowing them to dominate the region politically, economically and militarily without question.

From time to time, however, a challenger rises and tries to compete with Chun Pixom. All of them have been either conquered or completely vanquished—even the memory of their existence erased from the stelae which preserve Tzak K'ani history in stone. The most recent of these is Ka' Tuunich, located only 100 miles to the northwest of Chun Pixom. These upstarts believe they have what it takes to end the unbroken line of queens who have ruled longer than any other monarch in Tzak K'an. One which includes 33 Ladies of Chun Pixom to this day, and whose influence extends as far as the great metropolis of Tlaichtacān in the distant Nahuacan Alliance.

This same influence has been questioned by the Stone people. According to their version of the story, it is the people of Chun Pixom who have been influenced by the Nahuacans—and not the other way around. As such, Chun Pixom's prolonged existence is only a result of their ways being non-Tzak K'ani. When the current Kin'ix Jun 'Tan Janaab' (queen) and her advisors hear these rumours, they just shake their heads and continue working on their plans for conquest across the region.

The city is surrounded by rainforests located in a privileged place among fertile upland soils. From this vantage point the settlement rules over an east-west trade route, which has been historically the main source of its people's riches. Their only problem is that they have no natural course of water readily available.

VASSAL CITY-STATES

Chun Pixom's power is based upon three tenets: fear, riches, and conquest. Most city-states fear their immense military power and remain obedient. Those who do not, are offered riches beyond count to keep their loyalties fresh. The few foolish enough to reject both the cold and soft approach receive the hammer strike. Few of these survive to tell the tale of their stupidity.

Nowadays the three most important vassal city-states of Chun Pixom are Óox Wíinik, Chaktun, and Ma'yax Ha. The first was directly founded by Chun Pixom, who overtook the previous sovereigns and forced their own through arranged marriages. This vassal, in turn, captured Chaktun and indirectly added it to Chun Pixom's political power and influence.

The latter, Ma'yax Ha, is a northern outpost of Chun Pixom who functions as its shield, protecting the people from attacks from their northern opponents. Apart from that, Ma'yax Ha is an invaluable trade link to the Atabean Sea, allowing the people of Chun Pixom to extend their influence and commerce far beyond their own land and to distant shores.

To remedy this problem, the people employ—and have advanced—technology concerning rainwater collection. The result of this effort is that now they possess the largest fresh water storage in Tzak K'an, in ten heavily guarded reservoirs spread throughout the city. This has been one of the city's greatest strengths when fighting the few enemies who have been able to reach their walls. In spite of the city's riches and immense power, little to no conflict has come to their doors.

This is because the city is hidden from prying eyes.

Chun Pixom is covered by the jungle. No one can find it unless they have been there before and, even then, the ways through the jungle are not trustworthy. Apart from that natural defense, the people of Chun Pixom are cautious. They dug ditches and other earthworks to the north; large areas of swampland protect them to the east and west; and they have built additional fortifications to the south.



Chaktun

Situated at the juncture of several important trade routes, Chaktun is a nominally unimportant vassal city-state whose importance and relevance to Tzak K'an's politics has only increased over the years.

The contrast between its humble origins, as a mere market center founded by Óox Wiinik, and its current prosperity is most clear in its architecture. Since Chaktun was conceived by its founders as only a commercial hub, its ceremonial architecture is modest to the point of nonexistence. The people's gods, if they ever had them, have long been forgotten, replaced by those of their invaders.

On the other hand, Chaktun is a city marvellously decorated by a myriad of sculptures, some of them counted among the tallest in all of Aztlan. Most of them are the result of what the people call their "Revival" but that their supposed masters in Óox Wiinik have dubbed a "Rebellion."

The Revival started a century ago, when a devastating flood coming from the Great River—Chaktun is on the north bank of its lower reaches—buried the city. The destruction yielded an unexpected result, though: the waters were unable to undermine the few structures built on red sandstone. The reconstruction labor focused then on transforming the city to its current shape, and their name changed accordingly.

In the past 100 years the once humble outpost became the focus of a dispersed rural population. In time, the people became the major controllers of the trade of uncut jade, as well as other important commodities, such as cacao beans.

And then, Lakam Tok Ajaw became their king.

He seized and burnt the wooden images of Óox Wiinik's patron gods. He challenged the city sculptors to produce the most magnificent emblem glyph any city ever had. And they did. Then they received the visit and explicit support of the high king of the distant Ka' Tuunich. So when Lakam Tok Ajaw told them that they would become the new capital of the Eastern Tzak K'an region, they believed him wholeheartedly.

Now the people of Chaktun are ready to turn that dream into a reality.

Ka' Tuunich

One of the largest and most powerful cities in the Tzak K'an lowlands, Ka' Tuunich is the seat of power of what is known as the Kingdom of Stone. For over 100 miles around the city, the mark of stone can be seen everywhere in the form of their emblem glyph: their namesake, a mountain devoid of trees or the "tuun" for stone.

Inhabited by over 150,000 people, Ka' Tuunich is one of the most magnificent wonders of Aztlan. The two structures that lend their name to the city join together to form one marvelous great pyramid, the largest in the surrounding land. From its top one can see the large seasonal swamp around the settlement extending to the west.

Although separated from the urban center, the swamp around the city is the main source of its abundant resources—and the indirect cause of its political importance. This is due to the incredible fertility of the soil along the edge of the swamp, which has been so since the city's foundation. These lands have also provided the Stone people with access to abundant flint nodules. This material has been the basis of Ka' Tuunich's impressive architecture, and even provides their military power with the necessary tools to accomplish what their rulers envision.

The stone that the people have chosen as their emblem glyph represents their main belief. In short, the people of the Stone Kingdom believe that their people must be as immutable as stone and resilient as the mountain. Through proper worship and ritual, they will never fall. The two pyramids represent the mountains that they revere. Here they hold festivals dedicated to establishing strong foundations. Here they perform symbolic rituals of weathering change and hold a lot of reverence for earlier generations.

As a result, the family units in Ka' Tuunich are based not on lineages and marriages, but on what each member contributes to the whole. Stone families are made up of cooperative groups of like-minded individuals. They are often founded on blood ties, but include members who simply join by choice.

These familial foundations are said to give the Stone People strength. Instead of marriages to unify non-blood relations, the Stone People seek a blessing from their gods each time a new person is added to a family to ensure the group remains strong and faithful.



The Library of Manik Ju'un

Long ago, the Manik Ju'un city-state was a poor example of the normal Tzak K'ani cities. It was a poor kingdom, and courtiers squabbled over what to do with what little they had. Finally, the wise young queen of Manik Ju'un declared they would use their small surpluses to build a little library at the edge of town. The queen then declared this library open to all scribes and learned folk from across Tzak K'an. And they came, and with them they brought their disparate ideals, languages, religions and stories.

While the scribes who came might have been loyal to whatever city-state they resided in, they also found loyalty to each other in their shared passions. They began sharing information, technologies, and the locations of obscure texts; standardizing languages; introducing new phrases. The queen was careful never to press politics within the walls of the library so scribes from all cities could feel secure while visiting—this was a place where they could be themselves and not merely representatives of the monarchs they served.

The library stood for centuries untouched by wars and the squabbling of nearby city-states. Scribes from conquered cities sought refuge in Manik Ju'un, and its library, and the city grew. Manik Ju'un developed a policy to take in refugees, provided they forswore their former cause and pledged to serve the library, to seek and copy all that was already recorded, and to write what was not. They often brought whatever texts their city harbored, and these joined the multitudes already housed in the library. Thus the library grew until it was without a doubt the greatest library in the world—some claim it held every codex that ever existed, or ever could.

Six months ago, there was a fire in the Library of Manik Ju'un.

Post-blaze investigations (carried out by the king's advisors) suggest an unknown assailant managed to leak a large amount of lamp oil into the library and used it to start a fire among the books. While the librarians saved a majority of codices, the Chief Librarian (who happened to be the king of Manik Ju'un's younger brother) was killed in the blaze. The king responded by closing the library to anyone outside the royal household. He claims he will re-open the library when the assailant is found and the mysterious fire explained.

Many scribes, meanwhile, complain that Manik Ju'un's king does not have the authority to keep the library closed. The library is, for all intents and purposes, a neutral space for scribes, and if anyone should be making the decision whether to keep the library closed, it should be the scribes themselves, not the monarch of the city the library happens to be in. The King's response is that if they didn't want him to be the one making these decisions they should have moved the library out of Manik Ju'un centuries ago, or at least provided their own security.

Teo Puh'tex

The Temple of the Plumed Serpent lies beyond the current political boundaries of Tzak K'an and upon the golden desert sands of the Nahuacan Alliance. But that is not the only standing reminder of the unrequited bloodlust of the Old Aztiani.

The small city of Teo Puh'tex is situated in near isolation, just south of Nahuacan Empire border. Teo Puh'tex has only been visited by a handful of Tzak K'ani who have returned to tell its story. It follows the old ways, and it remains nearly untouched by either the Fall or by the rise of the Tzak K'ani city-states to its south.

I have made it to the city of the silent killers. They call this place Teo Puh'tex. It seems they have only allowed me in because I recognized the iconography painted on their palisade walls. Exhausted from my journey: nearly eight days on the rivers and another five on foot through the jungle, I raised my hands and proclaimed fealty to the old gods painted upon their exterior walls. They had their arrows pointed at me from the watch-towers. I thought I was surely going to be killed, but I was near dead already, I might as well make the effort. To my surprise, they opened the massive doors to the city. Nothing had prepared me for what was inside. They follow the old ways, the forbidden ways. They take blood easily because they give it. It flows like rivers. I do not know why they keep me, or maybe it is that I do not want to admit it to myself. I am attaching this to the leg of the next quetzal that roosts near me. My name is Aj'bootz. I was sent by Kinich Ta'jooj. Remember me.

—Note found in the northern jungles,
now kept in the scribal library.



Munyal Kaah

Ten thousand feet above sea level, atop the Tzak K'an mountains and at the end of the longest stair—carved on the living rock—lies the most impressive city ever built by man or god. It has had many names, some mockingly doubting its existence and some praising it as the wonder it is: The City at the End of the Snail Stair. The Impossible City. The Three Stone Place (where Creation was first made). Its citizens, however, care not for such things. They prefer the simplest truth, and so they call their home Munyal Kaah, “Cloud City.”

Built on extensive terrace systems, Munyal Kaah is not only a marvel because of its location. Its impossible features include but are not limited to: all of its structures are situated equidistantly; it has over 100,000 inhabitants (making it the most populated urban center in all of Aztlan); and the whole city sprawls over 100 sq. mi., just to name a few.

As if that were not enough, the Cloud people have developed an intricate trade network unique to them, employing places and passages unknown to any other city-state in Tzak K'an. In this way they are truly independent from any of the “ground politics”—as they like to call them—and can choose to conduct commerce with whomever pleases them.

It is said that once they were a vassal state to Chun Pixom, but that their tax collectors and diplomats could not be persuaded to ascend Sina'an Xiinbal to do their job. After a time, if the stories are to be believed, they simply stopped coming. Now many covet their allegiance, but if the Cloud people have any desire or other way to be convinced remains unknown. They have all they need within their floating gardens and pyramids, and may well decide one day to simply stop commercing with the rest of Tzak K'an.

Munyal Kaah's wonders do not stop there, though. Their social organization is as admirable as the Sky Palace from where their nobles rule. Although they still have ruling figures and the usual social strata present in Tzak K'an, the Cloud people practice an innovative form of life where everybody has access to elite material goods. This has provoked that many commoners have provided their compatriots with inventions and innovations that have benefitted all of them.

Tak'ooj A'bak

The world of Chok Ch'a has largely been swallowed up by dense jungles. Located somewhere in the eastern expanses of the Tzak K'ani maps, within uncharted forest and between twisting rivers, the city of Tak'ooj A'bak rises quietly from the greenery.

Tak'ooj A'bak, although not the biggest of the ruined Chok Ch'ai cities (such as Caxazul or Ik'Tun'a, which are clustered along the eastern shores), is impressive in its own right. Although most of the large temples and complexes are buried—unnoticeable as anything beyond mounds to the untrained eye—there are some clues of the majestic remains just under the earth.

Tak'ooj A'bak, like any other Chok Ch'ai city, is characterized by several distinct features. Massive earthen mounds, monolithic altars covered in strange writing and looming stelae mark various areas of ritual or functional importance.

The most distinct feature is certainly the city's collection of Chok Ch'ai colossal stone heads, whose visages have been eroded by the elements of time. The heads are intricately carved out of massive basalt blocks, far bigger than seems logically possible here (after all, the nearest volcano is several hundreds of miles away). They all wear the same somber and menacing countenance that is associated with “The Ones Before,” and their deep pupilless eyes seem to watch those who dare walk the streets of Tak'ooj A'bak uninvited. And yet each head is slightly different...who might these be?

Beyond the courtyard of heads lies the main ruined plaza. At first glance, there is nothing of note beyond the occasional refuse you would see in any long-abandoned city: broken ceramics, a discarded stone tool, and other odds-and-ends. Most of the buildings are completely buried by the sands of time or crumbled beyond recognition.

Within some of these buildings are massive caches of carved jade, cinnabar, hematite and every sort of glimmering and other unusual polished mineral ores. These highly valued raw materials have likely lured many enterprising merchants to their doom. In fact, many who enter this ruined city (either intentionally, or through an unfortunate mistaken turn off a path) have simply never been heard from again. One particular legend speaks of odd, hastily-done etchings on blocked doorways at Tak'ooj A'bak that simply state “Up,” “Down,” and “Through.”





JASAW

"I will find a way to bring my parents home from the clutches of Xibalba."

Jasaw

Jasaw's parents died when he was young. They went to investigate a newly-revealed cave with two other men from the village. The village priest told them not to go, that it was unsafe, but they went anyway. They didn't return, and the only evidence of their passing was bloody smears at the edge of the cave. Clearly they trespassed, accidentally set foot in the realms of the gods and been dragged into Xibalba.

Jasaw knew the stories of the Hero Brothers, and knew that one could cheat death by besting him at a ballgame. He determined to become the best ballplayer in the world, go to Xibalba and return his parents to life.

Jasaw became the best. He beat all the best players. He won flawlessly, and it still wasn't enough, because no god ever showed up to invite him to the Underworld.

Jasaw has never seen a god. He knows they wander the earth and on occasion, people point them out to him, but they're always gone by the time he turns his head. He's half-convinced the gods are avoiding him on purpose. But, how can he get to Xibalba if not by a god's invitation?

He returned to his home village to try to enter the same cave his parents did, but found that priests had closed it off. No one could enter. He sent a scribe to the Library of Manik Ju'un to find other entrances to the Underworld, but the Library of Manik Ju'un lit on fire and the scribe died of smoke inhalation. Now, it seems as if Jasaw has given up his quest.

At least, that's the obvious conclusion. He plays exhibition matches, drinks with kings and sleeps with myriad men and women. He has certainly earned enough fame and reward to live a pleasant life. But Jasaw is still seeking his way into the Underworld, he's just keeping it under wraps, hoping that whatever was plaguing him before won't notice his continued search.

Story Hooks

- Jasaw has a lead on an entrance into the Underworld, and is looking for someone to help him. Will the Heroes go with Jasaw on what might be a suicide mission?
- Jasaw suspects that someone has been actively working against him to find a way into the Underworld. He has hired the Heroes to find this person without giving away that he suspects.

Ix T'zutz

Ix T'zutz lives in a little house that sits on the edge of an abandoned metropolis, Kamaktul, a ruined city-state that crumbles in a clearing where the forest meets the shore. She lives there mostly alone, and is the queen of this ruined and dilapidated city-state. She has plans for it though, and she isn't without means to enact them.

Ix T'zutz wants to build her city-state in a new image, that of a melding of various cultures from across Terra. She has friends from across Aztlan, Théah, Ifri, and the Crescent Empire. Everywhere she goes, she has a way of making new friends. And many of her friends share this dream of hers, and have devoted money to help her rebuild her city.

Talk to Ix T'zutz and she will ooze enthusiasm for the unique technology of every Nation she has had the privilege of learning about. The "City of the Future" (she has a lot of monikers for the city-to-be but always circles back to that one) she says, when built, will exist to encourage integration and experimentation with Théan, Nahuacan, Kuraq, Ifri and Crescent technology, all under the watchful eye of the world's finest Tzak K'ani engineers.

This would seem a ludicrous dream, impossible, except Ix T'zutz has a knack for wrapping other people into her enthusiasm that has carried her surprisingly far. The city itself, in its current ruined state, was "gifted" to her by the king of Manik Ju'un, supposedly in honor of her noble lineage (a remarkably *obscure* noble lineage). City acquired, Ix T'zutz has now convinced a number of wealthy merchants to back her in building it up; she's got money to burn and she's actively courting prominent cartographers, architects, mask-makers. The first buildings have barely broken ground, but that just means she needs surveyors, astronomers, augurs and the rest to ensure development is as auspicious as possible.

Story Hooks

- Ix T'zutz has hired the Heroes to map a series of underground passages beneath the ruined metropolis. When they search, they find an unmapped gateway into the underworld. How will the Heroes deal with this discovery?
- Ix T'zutz's plan for a multicultural city has a neighboring king upset to the point of war. Can the Heroes help protect Ix T'zutz and her city from this outside threat?



IX T'ZUTZ

"Every nation has something worth using. Now to just put them all into one place."



IX K'AHK' CHI'

"I never wanted to be in charge.
I just wanted to be free."

Ix K'ahk' Chi'

Ix K'ahk' Chi' was orphaned at a young age and sold into slavery. Her master, a wealthy potter, kept her with hundreds of other slaves, forced to fire and glaze his pots. When he discovered she had some control over the fire, he hoped to make a great deal of money from her talent. He first took her to a local priest, who said she was a child of Kinich Ahau. He then took her to a Nahuacan priest who said she was a child of Xiuhtecuhtli.

When he took her home, she proceeded to light his house on fire. She found herself free for the first time in her life, and she fled along with several hundred other slaves to the top of a volcano. A group of soldiers tried to follow the slaves, but suffered serious burns at Ix K'ahk' Chi's hands. She then sent emissaries to make it very clear that no one was to follow them up the mountain.

Word of Ix K'ahk' Chi's deeds spread. Devotees of Kinich Ahau and Xiuhtecuhtli both started leaving offerings on the side of the volcano, and the slaves ate the offerings. It sustained them for a while, but as slaves escaped from masters, they came to the mountain looking for Ix K'ahk' Chi's protection. Now they don't have enough food, or really any way to grow some.

In the city below, slave-owners have called an emergency meeting to discuss how to best handle her; local priests are still squabbling over her lineage while the nobles make plans to extract her. For now Ix K'ahk' Chi' sits at the top of the world, threatening to rain fire down on any who threaten her and hers. A few brave souls climb the volcano to give her news, and she gives them messages in return, or asks for assistance. She is going to need support to sustain what she has created, but her current situation is precarious, and even with all the firepower in the world, her success is far from guaranteed.

Story Hooks

- Slaveowner pressure has reduced the amount of offerings coming to the mountain. Ix K'ahk' Chi' asks the Heroes to help her procure a stable food supply.
- Ix K'ahk' Chi' is not a leader. She is timid and scared. The ex-slaves look to her for leadership, and finding none have begun to get restless. Can the Heroes help her regain control over the people before they revolt?

Guy de Malvaux

Guy de Malvaux was born Guy de Levesque-d'Aur. During the Ussuran campaign, a failed assassination attempt left him stranded in the winterlands. Residents of a nearby village saved his life, despite being part of a foreign army. When he was well enough to travel, he set out to find out who tried to kill him. Unwilling to let him venture into the harsh Ussuran winter alone, Illya Ekaternava Borisovitch and his Castillian companion, Bartolomeo Garcia Torres, offered to travel with Guy.

The group followed the trail of the assassin all the way to Vodacce, where they were only able to learn the name Henri. Guy changed his name to de Malvaux, in an attempt to throw off the assassin and gain some anonymity. Illya and Bartolomeo remained with Guy, as their relationships evolved from mere friendship to a bond almost like family.

The Henri lead seemed dead, and the group learned that Bartolomeo's brother was reportedly missing after a mission to the New World. Abandoning his own search for the time being, Guy promised to go with Bartolomeo to help find his brother. They took the next ship they could find, and landed in Tzak K'an, the last known location of Torres.

When they arrived in Tzak K'an, they learned that Torres had come through with an expedition seeking Syrnych artifacts. Guy's party has set out into the Tzak K'ani wilds, following the path of the expedition and hoping to either find Bartolomeo's brother, or find out what happened to him.

Story Hooks

- Guy's assassin seems to have followed him to the New World. The expedition is plagued by night raids and pitfalls. Will the Heroes help Guy discover his assassin and put an end to the villainy once and for all?
- Guy's own expedition is slow moving as the Théans are unfamiliar with the Tzak K'ani landscape, and he hires the Heroes to guide him. Will the Heroes help Guy to find his goal, or use him to their own ends?



GUY DE MALVAUX

"I've escaped death's grasp once before, but now I fear that even the land is out to get me."



Alonso Ruiz Calderón

Don Alonso Ruiz Calderón joined the Vatican church at an early age. He trained as a priest and joined the ranks of the Inquisition well before Verdugo took over as High Inquisitor. He could have been Verdugo's right hand if he wanted, but his ambitions lead him towards land acquisitions. When Verdugo asked Calderón to take the lead on the pogrom against Synchron artifacts in the New World, he was happy to scout out new holdings.

Calderón came to Aztlan and initially followed the Inquisitor's orders. His secondary purpose, though, soon gained prominence. This land was beautiful, and he wanted to own it all. His first attempts were in the Nahuacan Alliance, but the plethora of laws prevented him from getting very far before the locals grew angry and expelled him.

He moved on to Tzak K'an, where he found a land ripe for dissent and subjugation. The way the city-states functioned meant that if he angered one monarch, few others would know of his mistakes. While each city-state is different, the culture of the Tzak K'ani people made it easy for Calderón to learn and move on.

He currently resides in Polok K'anche', poisoning King Kal'omte Chan K'awiil and using the man to attempt to first take over Tzak K'an, and eventually all of Aztlan. While his current efforts are focused in Tzak K'an, Calderón has sent emissaries to both Kuraq and the Alliance in an attempt to gain allies elsewhere. He has learned a lot in his time in Aztlan, and knows exactly what the people want, in order to convince them to align with him.

He still nominally continues his work for the Inquisition. Instead of destroying artifacts his agents find, he sets to learning how to use them and turn them to his purpose of conquering the New World.

Story Hooks

- The Heroes are attacked on their way back from investigating a Synchron ruin, and artifacts they found are stolen. Can the Heroes track them down before Calderón makes them disappear?
- Calderón has sent for Kuraq death mages, promising that the city of Polok K'anche' will begin worshipping Suway. King Kal'omte is unaware, and would never let the Kuraq interlopers in his city. Can the Heroes convince the king to cast Calderón out before it's too late?

ALONSO RUIZ CALDERÓN

"This land is ripe for the taking,
I just need a little help."

STRENGTH

7

INFLUENCE

13

RANK

20

Ix Tzak Cho'k-Taak

Ix Tzak Cho'k-Taak is a cocoa farmer. Her plantations are hidden and scattered all across Tzak K'an. She maintains them with the help of her daughters—over twenty both biological and adopted—who are singularly devoted to the woman. Together, they run the largest counterfeit business in Tzak K'an.

To counterfeit the cocoa pods, she first removes the coveted bean from the pod and replaces it with cocoa-colored clay. She peddles these cocoa pods to Nahuacan merchants—rightly assuming they aren't as discerning as their Tzak K'ani counterparts. She sells the beans directly to Tzak K'ani wholesalers, making a profit from her labors twice over.

Of course, the enterprise wouldn't be as profitable as it is if it weren't for her labor force. She captures small children and forces them to work for her. Their tiny fingers allow for minimum damage to the cocoa pods during the bean extraction, making her counterfeits nearly undetectable. And when they grow too big for that service, she either sets them to harvesting the pods, or sells them to slavers.

Capturing children is easy. She lures them away with the promise of hot chocolate or fresh food. She has become something of a legend among the superstitious Tzak K'ani. Parents warn their children of Ix Tzak Cho'k-Taak, the old crone who steals bad children and drinks their blood to stay youthful. Metropolitan city leaders work in her favor by dismissing the stories as speculation and rumor, and she couldn't be more grateful. She and her daughters continue to kidnap children unchecked.

This entire operation generates tremendous wealth for Ix Tzak and her daughters, much of which they use to pay merchant networks, keep their counterfeits nicely distributed and bribe the occasional authorities.

Story Hooks

- A local leader hired the Heroes to find her child who went missing a week ago. Can the Heroes find Ix Tzak's plantation before their snooping causes her to move her base of operation?
- One of Ix Tzak's children has escaped. The girl is young and confused and asks the Heroes to take her home. Can the Heroes help the child find her home before Ix Tzak and her daughters catch up with them?



IX TZAK CHO'K-TAAK

"This cocoa is the best the Tzak K'ani jungles have to offer. Trust me."

STRENGTH

4

INFLUENCE

8

RANK

12



IX MIOL

"These things belong to our people. So what does it matter if I take them?"

STRENGTH

6

INFLUENCE

4

RANK

10

Ix Miol

Ix Miol is a Tzak K'ani wanderer. She was raised in Sakbe'nal, and at an early age traveled on trade missions with her parents. As she got older, she traveled the whole of Tzak K'an trading and working as a merchant in various city-states.

She always hated being a merchant, and wanted instead to be an archeologist. Ix Miol cherished any time she could spend with those who studied the ancient ones, and her parents often chastised her for wasting time. When she was old enough to carry on the family business, she abandoned it, and went to work on a Syrneath dig site with some of the most famous archaeologists in the Nation.

Ix Miol had a knack for artifacts; learning their secrets and uses was something that increasingly drew her interest. Like many Tzak K'ani, she hoped to learn from these artifacts, and use the technologies to better Sakbe'nal. When her parents learned that she had abandoned the trade business, they were none too happy, and disowned her. Without funding, the archaeologists had little desire to have her around anymore. She knew that if she could just help make a technological breakthrough, she could win back her family's favor, and help her city-state. So, she began stealing artifacts to study.

What started as a noble purpose of learning from the technology to help her home soon became seeking out items she could weaponize to better steal artifacts. Which then led her to become the most wanted artifact thief in the Nation. Now she has a small band of people she has gathered to help her, and she sells weaponized artifacts to help further fund her expeditions into not only stealing from archeological teams, but destroying their research to cover her tracks.

Story Hooks

- An archeological expedition has hired the Heroes to serve as guides and guards. Can the Heroes ensure their safety in the face of the strange weapons Ix Miol employs?
- Ix Miol sells her weapons to the highest bidder, which includes the land-hungry Calderón. Can the Heroes convince Ix Miol to turn over a new leaf and work against the evil Castillian?

Kal'omte Chan K'awiil

Polok K'anché' was a city-state devoted to astronomy, art and science. The people prided themselves on the love of study and peaceful practices, and the prosperity it brought. Even their king, Kal'omte Chan K'awiil, was a scholar and a scribe. The citizens love Chan K'awiil a great deal. He is wise, patient and an expert strategist. He gives his wealth back to his subjects and lives beneath his means, which only makes them love him more.

When Don Calderón came to Polok K'anché' he found potential. It didn't take much for Calderón to instill fear into the intelligent and peace-loving Chan K'awiil's heart.

Calderón's insidiousness was that he told the truth. The Alliance in the north are warriors, and they look to Tzak K'an for conquest. Kuraq to the south seek to subjugate everyone under their death god. Théans are greedy and seek to take Tzak K'an for themselves. Tzak K'an is the center of the world, but it is divided; enemies would exploit those divisions. It would take someone wise and skilled to unite Tzak K'an against these threats. Of course, Chan K'awiil was the best man for this job.

Although Chan K'awiil once counseled peace, he realized peace could not unite his disparate people. He could see the wisdom in Calderón's words, even if he couldn't see the greater intention behind them. Chan K'awiil dedicated himself to the unification of Tzak K'an.

Thus began the great undertaking. Polok K'anché' went from a flourishing commercial hub to a military center in the span of a few weeks. Half-built towers stand abandoned by construction workers suddenly conscripted. Palaces and monuments are pitted, stripped of obsidian, jade and gold—those precious stones and metals sold or forged into weapons. The army, ferociously streamlined, has already subjugated several smaller city-states and demanded tribute in turn.

Story Hooks

- Kal'omte Chan K'awiil has his sights set on Cahal Naab. If such a city-state falls, others are likely to follow. Can the Heroes help defend the city against his army?
- Chan K'awiil only wants what's best for his people. Calderón misguides him, but he can't see it. Can the Heroes convince him to change his ways and help them against Calderón?



KAL'OMTE CHAN K'AWIIL

"I just want peace.
But I will capture that peace
with fire if I must."

STRENGTH

2

INFLUENCE

8

RANK

8





Chapter 4

The Kuray Empire



The Kuraq Empire

*There are doors to the next world. They lie inside of you.
There are doors to the land that lies
beyond life. You know the way.
Behind those doors are voices that
you can hear. If you listen.
They're calling out for you.
Haykuykuy! Come in, venerable ones! Be welcome!
Imataq sutyiki? What is your name?
-Kuraq Children's Song*

The Kuraq Empire is a Nation of once disparate city-states, brought together from the ashes of a legendary fallen kingdom. The Kuraq set aside their differences and united under the leadership of a single imperial seat over two hundred years ago. Since then, it has grown in infrastructure and power, resisting outside influence and invasion to achieve a stable and strong Nation whose people are proud to be called Kuraq.

The power that drives the Kuraq Empire comes from an unusual source. The Kuraq are ruled and led by their dead ancestors—spirits bound to their

mummified bodies—who control the Empire from the afterlife. Each generation is dedicated to serving their ruling ancestor who plans, manages and controls their descendants in every aspect of their lives. These souls use the bodies of their descendants and retainers, spying through their eyes or else overtaking them completely to speak once more on earth.

These spirits are the Venerable Dead, and under the watch of the Empress Asiri Inkasisa, the dead have helped their people rise from a fractured polyglot gathering of tribes into a monolithic, united empire.

Still, not everything is as united in the Empire as the nobility would like their people to think. Though dead, each noble schemes from inside her tomb for the day when her own house could rise to power. Ancient grudges from generations past become blood feuds that rage across the Empire, pitting entire lineages against one another in trade, politics and clandestine warfare.

And so the Empire stands, a monolith on the precipice of toppling, a powerful land of the dead ruled with a brutal hand.



Origins of the Kuraq Empire

Time changes all stories, but some are universal. The story of the ancestors—those that came before—is universal but the details are hazy, lost to time. The Kuraq tell the stories as best they can with the understanding that they are poor hosts for long-ago knowledge, from a time before even the Venerable Ones lived and died.

The Fall of Aztlan

In the time before, Aztlan was a shining jewel, a kingdom spanning from the glorious western oceans to the tumultuous eastern sea. In those ancient days, the gods walked as giants across the landscape, carving out valleys with their footsteps, surrounded by their shining offspring and those blessed with their power.

The mountains rang with the laughter of well-fed children and happy communities, all protected by the great Feathered Serpent, the mighty and terrible Apocōātl. The Winged Grace, as he was known, protected Aztlan and drove off any who would harm its people. Under him were the gods, his own children, who served their father with joy. The population lived happily, guarded under his incredible power, and flourished. The ruins and relics of those ancient times indicate a civilization rife with innovations in agriculture, medicine, art and more.

The gods fought over the state of Aztlan. They blamed one another for the suffering, for the uneven distribution of rain, fair weather, bountiful crops and healthy livestock. Outsiders noticed the disruptions and invaded, pressing the borders of the once-impregnable Nation. Apocōātl reacted in fury, withdrawing his blessings from the gods and even driving off those who angered him the most. This only caused the gods to squabble even more. They gathered their favorites to themselves behind the walls of powerful cities and ignored the cries of those left out to suffer.

When the smoke cleared, even the landscape of Aztlan no longer looked the same. Left behind was a scattered people, all huddled behind the surviving city walls, the connections between their communities broken by fear, distance and mistrust. It would be generations before these city-states once again reestablished contact. And when they did, it was often through conflict and bloodshed.

The Conference of Seven Feathers

For six generations, the city-states across Kuraq remained independent of one another, ruled by their sovereigns. Each of those rulers had their own patron god, who fled the fall of Aztlan to take refuge among their most devout followers, looking down on them from high above the cities on plateaus carved out of the mountaintops. Yet, the gods were never far out of reach. Their followers made pilgrimages to the mountains to pay homage and ask for the gods' blessing, and the gods came down the mountain to share in the day-to-day lives of their people. Capricious and inscrutable, the gods blessed and cursed in equal measure.

Eventually, the rulers of each city-state sought to expand their territory, seeking more farmland and resources for their people. Eventually, a single bloodline of rulers from the mountain kingdom of Kuska grew weary of the fighting. Their leader, Yaca Yma, sent messengers across the land, up and down the great mountains, each bearing an invitation to the other great kings. King Yaca Yma wanted to end the bloodshed and unite the people, once and for all.

The emissaries and rulers met together in the holy resting place of Kikinpaq, the ancient and monstrous primordial god. Kikinpaq sat in his dark palace built into the mountainside and offered to preside over the meeting, and none would harm anyone and risk the terrifying god's wrath. It was Kikinpaq who gave the kings a peace offering, a single golden feather for each given to Kikinpaq by his father, Apocōātl.

The kings each brought the feathers to the meeting and swore to broker a peace throughout the land. Each swore in the name of their god, who also together promised to maintain the peace together. In thanks for his peaceful vision, King Yaca Yma was given a cloak made out of Apocōātl's golden feathers. He retired to the holy mountain estate of Manqo Pacha and gave over reign of his kingdom to his son, Pakacocha. For a time, under these thoughtful kings, peace and prosperity thrived.

But the peace was short lived. The stories say one of the gods began sowing distrust between his fellow gods in an effort to get more resources for his followers. When an enemy from far to the north ransacked the countryside, the kings turned on one





another, accusing the other of betraying the peace and siding with the foreigners. Finally, the very same god whispered that the power of Apocōatl could secure their kingdoms, a power held in the cloak of golden feathers.

Three of the kings turned on the retired King Yaca Yma, marching their united forces against the peaceful king's palace. When Yaca Yma came out greet his old friends, the three kings slaughtered the peacemaker and set fire to his villa. In the fighting, the golden cloak of feathers disappeared, smuggled by a loyal servant of Yaca Yma out into the night.

The War of Wach'i and Suway and The Rise of Pachacunya

After the collapse of Yaca Yma's peace, two city-states emerged as dominant. P'alqacamba and Kuska both wanted to be the greatest power in the land to fill the vacuum and bring honor to their patron gods. The warrior priests of P'alqacamba, followers of the death god Suway, wished to spread Suway's worship across the land. They believed only by uniting the lands of the dead and the living could a glorious new kingdom arise, strong and powerful against all enemies.

Meanwhile, Yaca Yma's two sons, Supacha and the illegitimate prince Pachacunya, led Kuska. The two were as different as night and day, with Supacha a studious and serious leader while Pachacunya was the most powerful warrior in the kingdom, fearless and beloved by the people. Kuska was the home to the sun god Wach'i, and the god blessed Pachacunya with incredible speed, strength and brilliance in battle.

Together, the brothers opposed the spread of Suway's death priests and their veneration of the afterlife. The two princes left Kuska side by side and led their army into the valley south of their city to battle Suway's legion and protect their home from destruction.

The battle was pitched and ferocious, with neither able to truly defeat the other. While Pachacunya wanted to fight on, wise Supacha convinced his brother to seek peace with Suway's priests if they sought to truly understand the power of the death god. Supacha then went down into the valley alone and sought out the priests as a gesture of goodwill.

In the three days they met, Supacha became fascinated by the power of Suway and, in earnest reverence, set aside his god Wach'i to worship Suway alone. Prince Supacha became the first ruler of Kuska to convert to the worship of the dead. When the priests saw Supacha's devotion to Suway and to seeing their land become strong under the death god's power, they surrendered and vowed to follow Supacha and the rulers of Kuska thereafter.

Prince Supacha returned a hero, eager to tell Pachacunya what he'd learned. Yet the prince had kept a secret from everyone: he was ill, and the strain of battle had taken its toll on his ailing body. Supacha soon succumbed to his illness and died, but not before sharing the glorious knowledge of Suway's power and the priests' message of strength and unity with his brother. After Supacha died, Pachacunya was crowned king of Kuska. Out of respect for his brother's wisdom, Pachacunya set aside worshipping Wach'i and embraced the power of Suway.



King Pachacunya soon rose to become the greatest king in the land, conquering or converting other city-states to his side. United under his leadership, Pachacunya introduced the people to the power of the dead. He sent priests across the kingdom to teach the people how to connect with their ancestors, how to preserve the dead so their spirits might stay in the mortal world and guide their descendants after death. Pachacunya led the ancestors back, bound in their bodies, and created the Venerable Ones, an entire class of returned ancestors whose spirits inhabit their descendants to continue living.

The Age of the Venerable Ones

The early days of the new king appeared peaceful on the surface, but they were plagued by assassinations, sacrifice and bloody vengeance. Resplendent in the legendary cloak of golden feathers, the new king negotiated with the rulers of other city-states. When delegates arrived to speak about peace, the king introduced them to the idea of the Venerable Dead.

Soon the first of the Venerable Dead were created, nobles and former royalty once dead and bound in spirit into their mummies to rule after death. Many believed this noble duty to the ancestors would earn them a chance to become Venerable Ones themselves when they died. Yet most learned the awful secret: once chosen to become a Speaker, their lives were no longer their own. In only a few short years, Pachacunya secured all the major city-states into an early empire.

War of the Panacas

For years, the Venerable Ones and their descendants clandestinely carved the Empire into tiny pieces under the Emperor's nose. While open conflict was forbidden, these shadow conflicts and political machinations became so pervasive that they became known as the War of the Panacas, or more popularly as the War of Bones.

The Emperor himself could barely contain the in-fighting long enough to rule effectively and the people recognized this weakness. The rural communities banded together and, tired of the aggressions of nobles and their trespasses, threatened civil war. Just when it looked as if the Empire would spiral into chaos, an unlikely heroine arrived to solidify the empire once and for all.

THE TRUE HISTORY

The history of the Kuraq Empire is passed down by oral tradition, codified and approved by the imperial seat. But the commonly known origin story is a piece of propaganda, written to unite the myriad tribes behind its Empress and the Venerable Dead. In fact, the true history of the Kuraq is mired in blood, destruction, and above all, treachery.

The story of the collapse is murky but well-known as a fact. And the initial unification of the city-states under King Yaca Yma, a desperate bid by a mortal man to unify without the meddling of the gods. That destroyed peace set the warring tribes on the path towards the mighty Empire they would soon become, and paved the way for the Venerable Dead to rise.

When Supacha and Pachacunya went to war against Suway's followers, they were afraid and outnumbered. Supacha wanted to either flee or surrender. When Pachacunya refused, the prince ran, and the priests of Suway captured him. Supacha convinced the priests that he wished to convert. He'd seen how powerful and popular Pachacunya had become, and he confessed his fear that his illegitimate brother could steal his birthright.

They came up with a plan. Supacha sent a message to his brother telling him he had brought peace. He invited Pachacunya to a feast to honor his victory. When Pachacunya arrived, the two drank and talked like brothers late into the night. Pleased by his brother's change of heart, Pachacunya drank and ate with his brother until he was almost insensible. Before the sun rose to greet them, Supacha attacked the inebriated Pachacunya and strangled him to death. Once Pachacunya was dead, Suway's priests entered from their hiding places and animated Pachacunya with Supacha's spirit. Thus, the rule of Pachacunya-who-was-Supacha was born.



Rise of the Empress

Asiri Inkasisa was born into a noble family who once worshipped Kikinpaq. Asiri's family had tended the sleeping god's shrine since the days before he entered his eternal slumber, but during the War of Bones, Asiri rose to prominence by turning away from the old ways and embracing Suway worship. Upon her father's death, Asiri defied his dying wish and entered his death shrine. She emerged wearing his funerary mask, declaring herself his speaker, the first woman to become the head of a noble house.

Asiri became wildly popular, including at the royal court at Kuska where the nobles gathered to attend the Emperor. It was at one such gathering that a traitor in the Emperor's house changed the course of Kuraq history and brought Pachacunya's dynasty to its knees.

In the shadows of court during the harvest festival of Kuska, Yara met Asiri Inkasisa. Yara was the illegitimate great-granddaughter of the true Pachacunya. The two became lovers, and Yara revealed to Asiri the true identity of the Emperor as Supacha.

After this discovery, Asiri rallied the people in open revolt. A force led by Asiri stormed the monolithic panacas at Kuska and dragged the Emperor down from the throne, killing him on the steps of the pyramid. Without a leader, the people turned to Asiri, who donned the cloak of golden feathers and became the first Empress of the Kuraq Empire. The new Empress promised her people the time of instability was over.

The Empress

During the next two decades, the Empress led the kingdom through progressive reforms that led to stable, prosperous growth for all the people of the empire. She divided the land into territories and assigned each noble dynasty areas they would rule to keep them away from each other, with emissaries from each dynasty sent to serve on the Council of Sixteen—advisors to the imperial seat.

She also created the Tokoyriq, a force of personal guards and secret police, trained to maintain the peace and serve her will. These guards would soon become the face of the Empress's power throughout the Nation.

Arrival of the Théans

Eventually, the Castillan explorer Franco Gonzalez arrived on the eastern shore of the Kuraq Empire after a harrowing crossing through the Serpent's Sea. Many priests hailed Gonzalez as Kikinpaq returned, and installed him at the great panacas on the cliffs above Takana.

The Empress soon heard about the supposed return of long-lost Kikinpaq, the god she worshipped in her childhood. Curious, the Empress sent for Gonzalez to appear before her at the royal panacas at Kuska. Yet when the Castillan explorer arrived, the Empress knew he was no god and hatched a plot to use the pretender for her own ends.

To the rest of Kuraq, the Empress let Gonzalez keep up his charade as he pretended to be a god, while she took what time they had behind closed doors to mine the Castillan for information on Théah.

Gonzalez's arrival had not gone unnoticed. Apocōatl himself awoke from his long sleep and, enraged at the interloper's arrival and his lies, struck down Gonzalez's fleet off the coast. Only Gonzalez's ship and one another survived the attack. Gonzalez fled back to Théah, swearing to return and get revenge.

The Hundred Deaths

Gonzalez returned to Kuraq five years later, at the end of the twentieth year of the Empress's reign. Gonzalez brought a small fleet with him and landed at Takana, where he put the city to the torch and massacred the population. Any mummy he discovered, he set afire, destroying dozens of Venerable Ones and killing thousands. The Empress then called upon Suway's priests to drive back Kuraq's enemies once and for all.

Yara and her sister Alqacha watched in horror as the Empress slaughtered their family and killed herself to use the power of one hundred sacrifices to become a powerful Venerable One. The priests bound the Empress's spirit into her recently dead body, which rose flush with the power of the sacrifices. Now undead and functionally immortal, the Empress turned the remaining power on the invading Théans. The Empress blasted them into oblivion with her death magic.

From that day onward, the people of Kuraq were devoted to the Empress as wise warrior, powerful Venerable One and defender of the empire. Under her rule, they felt safe. Under her protection, they would make Kuraq mighty.



Modern Kuraq

With the threat of the Théans thwarted, the now-immortal Empress returned to the business of ruling her growing Empire. Secure in her undead body, the Empress could stay awake longer, working from her rooms atop the royal panacas to unify the kingdom and deal with challenges. The Empress began what became known as her Renewed Reign by instituting reforms to help Kuraq become more prosperous and pacified.

She codified the laws of the land, standardized what was considered equitable trade, and further expanded the roads and irrigation systems. She even expanded the study and creation of art across the Empire, encouraging patronage by noble houses in every territory. More than anything, she turned her eyes towards the future and began a one hundred year reign that lasts to this day. And if she orders a sacrifice here or there to maintain her power, who could complain?

Today, the Empire is stable. Only one last threat to the rising power of the Kuraq empire remains.

The God Hunt and Rebellion Against the Dead

The gods of the Kuraq were once the mightiest force in the land. From the city-states where they sat patron, the gods walked the kingdom alongside their followers, involved in their everyday lives. But with the rise of Suway, the other gods fell to the wayside, losing followers and power. Still, the gods were unwilling to give up their place as guardians of the land. That is, until Suway's priests took steps to end them once and for all.

No one is certain when the hunt for the gods began or whose idea it was. Suway himself had not been seen in public for generations, though rumors circulated that he had chosen the Empress as his consort and visited her once a year. The priests of Suway named the Empress the bride of their god and Suway worship became intrinsically tied to loyalty. It was only a short jump to the conclusion that for Suway to rule supreme, the other gods needed to be destroyed. So the priests unleashed their clandestine warriors, the Awqaylli, to hunt down the gods and bring them back for imprisonment and destruction.

Now the ancient gods of the Kuraq are on the run. Those they capture they imprison deep in jungle strongholds. Many presume the priests are killing the gods, their power used for *Wañuy Ñaqay* (death magic). Once a god disappears, his blessings dwindle out, leaving behind confused followers with no choice but to embrace Suway for protection.

The general population has no idea about the god hunt, nor how the gods' deaths fuel Suway. But after years of hunting, only a handful of gods remain free. The Empress's propaganda machine tells the people they are lucky to be rid of the divisive, mercurial gods. Yet the gods have not given up on the people, and beneath the calm veneer of prosperous Kuraq, a revolution is fomenting in the shadows.

The Revolution Underground

The Kuraq Empire is a place of restricted freedoms. Under the Venerable One's control, the lives of every descendant in a dynasty is controlled and planned out by the undead ancestor. The Venerable Ones decide what their descendants do for a living, whom they marry, and maintain all other important choices for the family. While many see this loss of personal freedom as a small price to pay for stability, others chafe under the rule and miss the days of the ancient gods and their protection.

The gods come to these people. The surviving nine gods approach mortals in disguise and offer them their blessing if they oppose the Empress and her rule. A resistance has formed under the careful nurturing of the gods, a guerilla underground called the Pakaykuq whose goal is to free the Empire from the iron grip of the dead. Their motto is simple: *life is for the living*.

The gods, and the Pakaykuq, must be careful. The popularity of the Empress's rule and her powerful control over every aspect of the empire's infrastructure make it difficult for the gods to remain undiscovered. The gods and their followers have taken to the mountains in recent years, locations that are largely considered holy by all Kuraq people. There they hide amongst the old holy sites, and plan their schemes against the throne.



Politics

Where once the gods roamed freely across a land full of the promise of freedom, now there is only strength through conformity to the Kuraq way. Where those within the system can find life comfortable, if stifling, those who choose to rebel against the status quo will discover the eyes of the Venerable Ones, and the dead, are everywhere.

Ideals of the Empire

One Kuraq, one Empire. This idea is the cornerstone of Kuraq belief, the notion of one Nation working together towards the goal of a united, prosperous future. Parents teach their children about the ancient days, when freedom of choice led to squabbling and chaos among the tribes and city-states. It was only after unification that power was consolidated behind the throne.

With society guided by the eternal wisdom of the Venerable Ones, Kuraq builds towards a stronger tomorrow. Once Kuraq is sufficiently ready and powerful, it will expand beyond its borders through diplomacy, annexation, intrigue or military action and bring its vision of peace through unity of purpose to the rest of Aztlan.

Unity comes with a price. Kuraq has seen an unprecedented period of peace, with improved quality of life and innovation across the kingdom, though sacrifices have been made to achieve this growth. The people have accepted a strict hierarchy, from the lowest peasants on their farms, to the Venerable Ones who rule each household and the noble families who serve the royal throne.

Above it all sits the Empress, supreme leader of Kuraq. Her edicts are law by both god-supported right and the strength of her rule. No noble is strong enough to challenge her, nor any willing to openly try. Instead the nobility vie for power amongst themselves while serving as advisors and military leaders to the Empress.

Many of these nobles are no longer alive. The Venerable Ones rule from their mummies, bound inside their Speakers to rule from the other side. Together with the devout of Suway, they envision a world in which the dead and the living exist side by side, where death is no longer the end but simply a step towards eternal life. And this gift must be extended to everyone the world over for the dead to truly be free. Kuraq is an empire ruled by the dead, and soon, the rest of the world will be as well.

The Venerable Ones

From the time the Venerable Ones first rose during the time of Supacha, Kuraq gained a powerful asset in maintaining direct contact with their ancestors. Where once powerful rulers or wise thinkers would die, the ability to return as a Venerable One allowed them to remain, their families and the Empire as a whole benefiting from their years of experience.

Only the best and brightest are chosen to become Venerable Ones. Every Kuraq therefore strives to earn the honor by reaching their highest potential during their lifetime. Children are evaluated at a young age by their Venerable ancestors for talents and skills, then assigned to train in a profession that utilizes those resources best.

The final decision of who becomes a Venerable One or a Speaker falls to the house's ruling Venerable one, with the rest of the undead ancestors attempting to influence the decision. Politicking within families is common as the living fight to secure a place for themselves or a loved one among the ranks of the undead. Should there be multiple mortal candidates, infighting among the family is common. Bribery, sabotage, and even violence are not uncommon, and in some families, such ruthlessness is encouraged.

This dedication to becoming the best has made Kuraq a society advancing quickly in terms of technology, scientific discovery, art and magic. Walk down the street in the Empire and it becomes clear Kuraq cities thrive with an almost single-mindedness and intensity due to this competitive streak. Truly ambitious mortals work hard to prove they deserve to be enshrined alongside the Venerable Ones, and their contributions to Kuraq have set the country at a breakneck pace of discovery and innovation. Venerable Ones lend their wisdom to continuing their studies beyond their own lifetimes.

In everyday life, Kuraq citizens work and live alongside the Speakers of the Venerable Ones, serving them and paying them deference, as well as protecting the mummies housing the Venerable Ones' spirits. Venerable Ones are revered as more advanced by virtue of years of experience, and a Speaker wearing the funerary mask of his ancestor is given the utmost respect throughout society. Speakers



can be recognized by the funerary masks that connect them to their ancestor, a mark at once giving them the wisdom of the ages and setting them apart from all mortals around them.

It's because of this perceived supremacy the Venerable Ones control almost every level of society, from political structures down to individual family lines. The Venerable Ones rule their family lines as patriarchs and matriarchs, maintaining power of their descendants for hundreds of years. It is not unusual for a family to have several Venerable Ones, each vying for control over the span of decades or even centuries.

Lying in the balance is the future of all their mortal family. Anyone seeking to gain aid from a mortal in Kuraq must also make sure they gain the approval of the family's Venerable leader, as mortals rarely make a move without the approval of their undead. Family undead arrange all marriages and even decide how many children couples may have, matching descendants together to connect family lines and secure peace.

The difficulty in the Kuraq social structure lies in the very thing which gives the Empire its power. Since individuals can keep their power even after death, there is rarely any upwards movement in politics, business, or control of family lines. As more Venerable Ones are made, the youngest undead vie against their elders to earn something for themselves. While infighting and squabbling in public is frowned upon, the Empress secretly encourages such conflicts to keep the Venerable Ones fighting one another instead of vying for the imperial throne.

The Empress and the Outside World

With the nobles focused on one another, the Empress has turned her eyes to the next important task of her reign: expansion. Initially the Empress considered annexing territories to the north. But the kingdoms of the Nahuacan Alliance and the Tzak K'an both have powerful military forces, and the Empress has decided that Kuraq political power might be better suited turning outward, past the oceans and to the greater Terra beyond.

The Empress has taken her time gathering information about the outside world since Gonzalez's destruction, sending out her spies to listen for word

of anyone landing in Kuraq from other parts of the world. If any such visitors arrive, the Empress scoops them up for interrogation about the outside world, methodically extracting what information she needs.

After a hundred years, she is satisfied she understands enough to first engage in the politics and economic complexities of places like Théah and beyond, all in the service of her ultimate plan: eventual take-over of such lands from the inside by the Venerable Dead.

To that end, the Empress ordered Takana, the port city destroyed by Gonzalez, rebuilt and prepared as a port to welcome outsiders, a project which has taken thirty years of continuous labor. The Empress wished the city to be the most beautiful, most impressive city to greet outsiders to their land, and has continued building perpetually, always adding something new.

Though the city is considered terribly haunted and ill-omened by most Kuraq, the lure of work has drawn many to the newly built city as Kuraq prepares to welcome outsiders for the first time. But like anything else in the Kuraq Empire, visitors and their ideas will be tolerated only within the framework of Kuraq belief and life. After all, they are not in Théah anymore.

It seems the Empress's plan for expansion is off to a great start. Yet, there are difficulties. In her hundred years of snatching up outsiders, the Empress realized the largest threat to cooperation with and infiltration of the outside world is the protectors of Aztlan, namely the Feathered Serpent, Apocōātl. Though the ancient god does not stop every visitor to their shores, the gods often strike down those they see as threats. For every outsider the Empress found, more were destroyed by Apocōātl before she could learn what they knew.

To prevent their intrusion, the Empress and the god Suway have worked together to diminish the power of the gods within Kuraq. The Empress has convinced Suway that his reach will expand should the Empire be allowed to expand its reach to Théah. Still, even the undead Empress and the god of death know better than to anger the great Apocōātl, and so the expansion of Kuraq has gone slowly, in the hopes of keeping the Feathered Serpent appeased, or at least unaware.



POLITICS OF THE GODS



The largest obstacle for the Empress's expansion plans, as well as to her empire's stability, is the old gods of Aztlan. Despite being displaced from their places of power and stripped of their followers, the gods have stubbornly refused to be silenced or destroyed. Now hunted by the priests of Suway and their warriors, the gods have gone underground to oppose the Empress and the rule of the Venerable Dead. The gods have thrown in their lot with the Pakaykuq, rebels who oppose the Empress's control of the kingdom. They bestow what gifts they can to the freedom fighters, all while staying one step ahead of the God Hunt.

The largest figures in the resistance are Wach'i, the sun god, and Ninaq'ara, the father of the gods. Wach'i was once the most powerful, the patron god of Pachacunya and chief rival of Suway. When Pachacunya fell, Wach'i gathered his followers, heroes that might resist the Venerable Dead and keep the old ways alive. Ninaq'ara transformed himself into an old man to lead the people from the ground. And so the Pakaykuq were born.

Not all of the gods can take the fight to the establishment, as their power has dwindled over the centuries. Some, like the harvest goddess Saramama, seek only to stay alive and help the farmers of the land prosper. Others like the shapeshifter Urkillay travel in hiding to inspire revolt and change among the people. Others work separately, using their followers to manipulate, maneuver and subvert right under the Empress's nose.

The Resistance: The Pakaykuq

The resistance movement called the Pakaykuq is the light in the ever-darkening world of the Kuraq Empire. The Pakaykuq are Kuraq citizens who have kept alive belief in the ancient gods and eschew the support of Suway and the Venerable Dead. With hideouts in the holy mountains all over the kingdom, the Pakaykuq walk side by side with the gods they venerate, blessed in some small way with a piece of their power to wage their guerilla war against the establishment.

Recruitment

To become part of the Pakaykuq, you first must believe in the ancient ways. Members come from all walks of life, though there are few born in noble families that wish to leave the rigorous but opulent life of the wealthy. Still, anyone who chafes under the supreme control of their lives by the Empire and the dead might find an alternative in the old gods. These disgruntled seekers then find their way to reach out to the underground, or else their actions catch the eye of a follower of the gods, who brings them into the fold.

The prospective member of this clandestine group is tested, and tested again, until the local members of the Pakaykuq believe that the new recruit is sincere. Only then do they bring them to the hidden temples of the gods, located in out-of-the-way places to protect the gods and their worshippers from the Tokoyriq.

In ruined cities, ancient mountain caves, sewers and overgrown temples, the new recruits meet their god and swear a blood promise to combat the spread of Suway's priests and the Venerable Ones across the Empire. Their god then blesses them with a token, a gift or bit of strength that sets them apart from others. They are touched by the gods, on a holy mission to save their kingdom. There are few as fanatical and as devoted to freedom for all Kuraq as members of this order.

Organization

The Pakaykuq operate in a cell structure, organized loosely for fear of one group giving up the entire structure under torture. The organization employs rogue priests of Suway, turned against the god of death, to ward against dead spying from the other side as they perform hit and run attacks against the Empire. The sacred duty of all Pakaykuq is to keep the gods themselves protected against the God Hunt.

These killers for the dead are the Pakaykuq's mortal enemy, and their battles across the Empire are things of whispered legend.

For now the only political power the Pakaykuq wield is that of a hidden revolution, striking from the shadows. Yet as the Empress tightens her grip on the empire and the noble houses play with the lives of their offspring, those dissenters who disagree with the direction of the Empire begin to turn their aid secretly to the revolution. In fact, two of the greatest assets of the Pakaykuq were bred in the Empress's own court: her granddaughter Princess Miyatala, worshipper of the god Wach'i, and Tolanaq, the last surviving



descendent of Pachacunya himself. Should either of these powerful leaders rally noble families opposed to the Empress to their side, it could spark a civil war that would set the Empire ablaze.

The leader of the Pakaykuq itself is a mysterious figure named Ninaq'ara. Ninaq'ara is a wily old man who came up from the rural communities to raise the people against the Empire. He stays on the move, always in contact with the god Wach'i in his travels. Wach'i himself is the most heroic of the gods, leading from the front, providing the Empire with a moving target they cannot help but chase.

Challenges of Revolution

Wach'i and Ninaq'ara, as well as the Pakaykuq cells know they will need to step out of the shadows and lead a true revolution. But against the ever-expanding powers of the god of death and his Empress, there is no guarantee of success, and with the whole empire in the balance, no one is willing to risk defeat. Not when the very soul and future of Kuraq is on the line.

The Pakaykuq also face a problem of disorganization. Each cell of the Pakaykuq are spread so far apart that communication is difficult. The cells smuggle messages to one another through textiles woven in the red, yellow and gold patterns dedicated to Wach'i, or else through runners who have been swayed away from the Empress's cause. Still, messages get lost and often each cell must rely on itself to maintain operations.

The resistance's membership is also comprised of the followers of many gods from across multiple classes of Kuraq society, which makes conflict inevitable. Worse yet, the Pakaykuq spend much of their time protecting the gods from the God Hunt instead of acting outwardly against the establishment. To that end, the leadership of several cells have approached Ninaq'ara to consider enlisting the aid of outsiders, such as the Nahuacan and the Tzak K'ani, not to mention various Théan organizations and countries, for aid. So far Ninaq'ara has been adamant against such involvement, but as their numbers struggle to make a dent against the Empire, the idea has gained popularity. Yet with outsiders still mostly anathema within the lands that make up Aztlan, the Pakaykuq remain, largely, on their own.

Culture

"The history of a people is the backbone of its present, a pure truth that echoing through the ages. When studying the culture of our great empire, one realizes our history laid the foundation, brick by brick, of the world we live in today. Understand that history, and you will see your place in it, your path forward to greatness. For our culture builds the walls that make us strong, here and in the next life."

—Recitation of surveyor Titu Thonapa,
Scholar in Residence at P'alqacamba

Geography of the Empire

The Kuraq empire lies on the southern-most tip of what was once the great Aztlan empire, separated from their neighbors to the north by a small strip of land and the great bodies of water that lie on both sides. Though the land itself is vast and arable, meant for farming and raising vast herds of hardy cattle, the geography is dotted by vast mountain ranges rising high as the clouds. These mountains serve as natural barriers between populations, and once kept the people of the region from uniting together.

After the unification under the first Emperor Pachacunya, the imperial court set about creating an infrastructure that could bring together the far-apart population centers. Their first great innovation was a system of messengers called Runners. Hailed as heroes of the Kuraq, these hardy runners first traversed the wild landscape before roads were ever created, carrying supplies, messages and stories from one community to another. They served as voices in the dark, bridges between the still disparate tribal cultures.

Behind them came a complex road system connecting the far-off territories of the Empire to one another, and to the capital of Kuska. These roads allowed merchants, traders, craftsmen and of course the priests of Suway to travel across the Empire, building a common culture together in the name of a unified Empire.

They brought with them a central set of laws, set down by the imperial seat, as well as commerce standards such as fair trade laws and management of imports and export from every region. A system of tithes paid for expansions of water and waste management in cities, and irrigation in the rural areas, with



water travel allowing for shipment of goods along the coasts and rivers. Once the Empress took control, the roads were further protected by the power of her military police, the Tokoyriq. The Runners were expanded, named most honored and revered guardians of the road. These well-trained warriors became heroes as well as a time-honored message system. To harm a Runner is punishable by death.

Considering the vastness of the land, the kingdom was split into four quarters, called suyus, for the purposes of governing. The capitol of Kuska lies at the very center where all four quarters meet. From her high pyramid above the city, the Empress can see her kingdom laid out before her eyes in every direction, every suyu and all those who dwell within.

To the north-west is Apuchsuyu, birthplace of the Empress and prosperous home of trade centers like Aqo Allpa and the jungle city of P'alqacamba. In the north-east lies Antasuyu, ruled by the nobles in various cities like the pleasure city of Kapuli and Patanatambo, former home of the lost dynasty of Pachacunya. K'uychisuyu lies to the south-west and serves as provider for most of the food grown in the country. It has also become the seat of the rebellion against the Empress, led by the old gods in cities like ancient Manqo Pacha. Last is the south-east suyu of Manchansuyu, home to a multitude of holy mountains, as well as the newly rebuilt city of Takana.

Though each of the suyus is different, life in the Empire is largely divided between three regional types: the cities and their panacas, the rural villages and lands, and the wild places between.

Cities and Panacas Life

Though united by the common culture of the Empire, every city has maintained some of the ancient styles and cultural markers from the tribes that once called them home. Some similarities spread across the Empire, however, including basic structures. In ancient days, people believed the closer one lived to the sky, the closer one would be to the gods.

Therefore most of the cities are built in tiers, with the poorest populations living on the lowest ring, while the highest point in the land is reserved for the nobility and their families. The poorest of the populations live in stone buildings built into the hillsides

outside the city proper. The streets are stone, with walls scrubbed and dyed with colored dye and painted with geometric pattern borders and even murals in the city's wealthier areas.

City life is often fast-paced, loud and intense. Free trade is encouraged and offers a brisk business, regulated only by the trade standards established by the imperial seat. The open air markets are a flurry of color and noise, with artisans, tradesman, merchants and laborers sharing the streets, fighting for the best places to display their wares based on their popularity and wealth. The streets are kept safe by the Tokoyriq, who travel in units. All citizens of the Empire travel side by side despite rank in the city, enjoying leisure activities such as sporting events, festivals, and access to the Empire's public terraced gardens and temples. Only the Venerable Ones demand special reverence, and the population adds special deference when a Speaker wearing a golden funerary mask goes by.

The noble compounds, called panacas, lie higher in elevation, and act as the central points for the entire city. The city's roads lead up to the panacas and people travel every day to bear news, trade and visitors up to the noble's gates and courtyards. Those wealthy enough live just outside the panacas's walls, just north of large open-air marketplaces operating as the central point of business. The artisans work nearby, while those in the filthier trades live in the lowest tier of the city nearest the walls. Every city has a temple to Suway, occupying a place of prestige nearest to the panacas and in view of the whole city.

A city might have multiple panacas, with the most powerful noble family's compound at the highest point of elevation. The panacas itself is demarcated first by a simple wall providing a separation from the commoners outside. From there, a expansive courtyard creates a space where visitors may enter and do business with the household. The courtyard also allows visitors to stare up in wonder at the central huaca, a mighty pyramid built to mimic the form of the holy mountains.

The pyramids are built into the hills themselves with chambers dug deep into the rock. Great staircases lead up the side of the pyramid to man-made terraces full of lush gardens, walking palisades and open-air porches offering glorious views to the nobles dwelling within. The most powerful members of the family live



at the highest apartments at the top of the panacas just below the huaca, with all guards, indentured servants and guests occupying floors below based on rank and years of service.

In the depths of every panacas lies the household crypt, a well-protected series of vaults guarded by the priests of Suway and their Awqaylli warriors. Entombed there are the mummified corpses of the Venerable Dead of the house. None may enter unless expressly allowed by the noble family and the Venerable Ones themselves, on pain of death.

Rural Lands

Outside the cities, many hard-working farmers, shepherds, and tradespeople settled the countryside and labor to cultivate the land. For miles outside of every city, rural communities act as satellites to the larger population centers, operating under the protection of the local nobility but often largely independent. These rural communities work diligently together to produce their bounty, toiling side-by-side with the communities who cut lumber, mine or craft vessels for the empire. These lands are the heart of creation in the kingdom, and without them the entire population would starve.

Life in these rural communities is far less centralized and requires much self-management. Each community operates largely on its own, with a local *Chuki* (esteemed man) or *Palla* (respected woman) serving as leader for the population. A representative of each house acts as their advisors in any public matters, and each family then rules their own household in turn. Should an area be large enough, a representative of the nobility, called a *Takiy*, translated as Chanter, acts as coordinator between the *Chuki* and *Palla* of the area and the nobility. The *Takiy* answer to the local noble, providing tithes to the nobles from their town in tribute to be passed up to the Empress in the capitol. Should the tithe fall short, it falls on the communities to make up the difference, as the tithe pays for the maintenance of the infrastructures such as roads, Runners, and the *Tokoyriq* soldiers keeping them safe.

Safety in these rural regions is imperative, as beyond the farmlands, orchards and pastures lies the wilds, where animals, bandits, revolutionaries and monsters prey on anyone in their path. The jungles are dark places of ancient dangers, where deep caves dug into the



earth lead to openings to the underworld. These wild jungles are home to the wild dead, undead monsters who long ago lost any sanity and reason.

These rotting corpses wander up from their disturbed graves to tear apart any prey they can and feast upon their bodies with an all-consuming hunger. Local militias are common, and communities band together to face crises ranging from bad harvests to bandit raids. Should the dangers to the community become too severe, the Takiy may petition for aid from the local nobles. Often Tokoyriq forces are dispatched to assist, and their responses are swift, efficient and deadly.

The Wild Places Between

Outside the rural areas of the Empire lies the darkest corners of the kingdom, lands still wild and untamed by the hands of the ever-expanding Empire. Many of these regions lie too far afield of the far-reaching road system, or else remain blocked by geographic boundaries. The great jungles at the foot of some of the great mountains are such places, overgrown and packed with dangers. Most can travel around these areas, but rumors abound about hidden treasures long lost inside the green places—relics of ages gone by. Lost cities of fallen Aztlan are found buried here, as well as temples to the gods long given up to the overgrowth. Only hearty explorers seek out these places, eager to find what lies within. Most never come back.

The most prominent of the wild places are the holy mountains of the Kuraq, recognized by all as the backbone of the land. Once the people sought out the mountains as spiritual centers, places to connect with the great sky above and the gods. Despite the Empire's departure from worshipping most of the gods, the mountain slopes and high peaks are considered places of great solace and spiritual contemplation, where people can commune with themselves and their ancestors to find peace or inspiration. This idea has remained central to all Kuraq people and is inviolate. No violence is allowed in the wild mountains, no matter the conflict, and all recognize the mountains as places of safe passage.

For that reason, many meetings between feuding parties are arranged in the solitary mountains. Natural terraces on the mountainsides were long ago manicured into meeting places, furnished with stone villas built into

the mountain where travelers might refresh themselves and restore supplies. Traders who serve mountain travelers are treated with the utmost respect, and often serve as mediators between parties seeking resolution to their disputes on the mountain's slopes.

One important agreement binds all people wandering in the wild places: the Water Truce. Should any traveler meet another in the wild places, they must aid one another in finding water and never restrict another from seeking water out. Even if warring parties meet near a source of water, both must maintain the Water Truce and allow the other to replenish themselves before going their separate ways. Violators of the Water Truce are branded traitors to the Empire and are hunted by the Tokoyriq for punishment.

Class Structure

While Kuraq imperial society is not stratified into a rigid system, the population is separated into strict social classes. At the top is the Empress and her royal household. Beneath the Empress lie the noble families, descended from the ancient kings of the city-states united under the First Emperor with promise to join the ranks of the Venerable Dead. These families operate in a strict hierarchy, with the most ancient of their undead ancestors in command of both the other Venerable Ones in the household and their mortal descendants.

The noble families rule as regional governors and lords in the various corners of the four suyus, tithing back to the Empress and enforcing her laws under the watchful eye of the Tokoyriq.

Beneath the nobles are those families sworn to serve them, from their household servants to their personal guard. Nobles usually do not take on individuals but instead gather whole families into their service. These families are sworn to the nobility not only for their lifetime, but for the lifetimes of whatever children come after them.

The ruling noble often decides what jobs the children of these houses will have, superseding any decisions by the sworn family's own Venerable Ones, leading to generations of people given no choice in their own futures outside of the noble family's needs. While not nobles themselves, their place is far higher than other Kuraq and to serve a noble family is a great privilege.



Merchants and Priests

Below nobles and their households are those who are unassociated with the noble families who work as tradespeople, merchants and even military families, providing necessary services to the Empire. Achievement among the population decides rank, with those who distinguish themselves by their skill or bravery in combat given higher standing.

The priests of the gods, especially the priests of Suway, are considered a special class outside of all the others. They and the Tokoyriq are considered special servants to the Empire, as are the Awqaylli warriors trained by Suway's priests at P'alqacamba. To harm a Tokoyriq, a Awqaylli or a priest is considered a harm to the whole, and the punishment is severe. Some view the priests are the true power behind Kuraq and treat them with more respect than noble families.

Peasants

Last but not least are the indigent, those without families to speak of or ancient lineages or steady jobs. Those without employment are considered a drain on the Empire as a whole, undisciplined and disloyal to the greatness of the Empire.

Despite the rigidity of this system, advancement for anyone is possible given the right opportunity and hard work. No one may be discriminated against based on one's origins within the empire, or based on gender or orientation. All who work hard are rewarded.

Daily Life

Though the life of a citizen differs depending on his location and status in society, some similarities bind all Kuraq together. From the day a child is born into their family, she is measured, tested and inspected for her rightful place in the family hierarchy. Even the poorest child is afforded a basic education by an *amauta* (teacher) at a providence school. Children are taught to memorize and remember large amounts of information, from units of measurement on fingers and toes, to the distance one can travel measured by *thatki* (one pace).

Every child must learn to record numbers and complex measurements on *quipu*, long braided ropes, and must recall and recite the history of the Empire, the names of the noble houses, and their own lineage going back to the time of the first Emperor by heart.

There is no written language to record this knowledge, therefore memory retention is key.

By the age of five, all children no matter their station in life are evaluated by their families. The Venerable Ones sit in judgment, testing the child to decide where she will study and what profession she will enter. All education thereafter is aimed towards that goal. The child is reevaluated at age ten to enter apprenticeship, and again at sixteen. Dedication to one's profession is considered the highest form of loyalty one can give to the empire. Failure is not permitted, and reassessment to another profession usually means a demotion in status and shame to one's family.

This dedication to the whole can become stressful for children and even adults. For that reason, nobles provide leisure areas such as gardens, amphitheaters for performances and sports arenas for exercise and ball games to help maintain a healthy work-life balance. Many nobles also distribute coca leaves for chewing or eating. This miraculous plant soothes frayed nerves and allows the population to dedicate themselves to their duties more fully without strain.

Upon successfully passing one's assessment at sixteen, a child graduates to adulthood and leaves his apprenticeship to seek his fortune or get married. Marriages are arranged by the family's elders with the intent of securing a good match to provide children and continue the family line.



The young people involved must consent to the match, though strong-arming, bribery and coercion are common to secure such consent. Anyone of any gender may marry, with surrogates secured to produce offspring for same-sex couples to continue the family line. Marriages also carry over after death, although once a spouse passes on to become a Venerable One, the living spouse may remarry as well. It is not uncommon for a person to have a Venerable husband or wife, as well as a living spouse at the same time.

Kuraq families usually live under one roof or within a series of houses close to one another, built around the central crypt housing the family's Venerable Dead. Many Kuraq live at home all their lives with several generations under a single roof. Children are raised cooperatively by all involved, and filial respect and affection for all, especially the elderly, is required. Kuraq dedication to hard work means everyone works, even into their old age, until infirmity drives the family to question whether the person has reached the end of their time. Together, the family gathers to make the decision whether that person passes on, or if they join the ranks of the Venerable Dead.

Naming Conventions

Kuraq take their surnames from their most prominent ancestor. Usually determining son (*churi*) or daughter (*ussi*) of, though it could be anyone in their family line. So the daughter of Sonqo would be Atoqa Sonqo'ussi. The following are common first names.

Male: Amaru, Atec, Atikuq, Ch'awchi, Kumya, Manqho, Samin, Sumaq.

Female: Atoqa, Chaska, Cocohuay, Illari, Kayara, Paqari, Quilla, Sonqo, Wayta.

Economics of an Empire

Since the stabilization of the empire, the Empress has focused resources on economic solidification and expansion. One of the Empress's first resolutions was to codify trade standards, rules which remain to this day. Barter is still a large part of the economy, but the trade laws require everyone to follow a fair and stable market price established by the Royal Advisor for Trade.

These laws also regulate import and export between *suyus* and from neighboring countries, including setting down a system of taxes to benefit the imperial coffers. This system is new, as the older system required

people not to tithe or tax with goods, but to offer up services and labor to the community instead. This practice, called *llank'ay*, still survives in the more rural areas where the nobles can afford to be more lax.

By far, the Empire's primary trade partners are not their internal communities, but their neighboring Nations, backed by the production engine of the rural communities. The advanced irrigation and agricultural techniques, created by generations of Venerable Ones and their hundreds of years of experience, have turned the fertile lands of Kuraq into a production giant in the region. Food stuff, textiles, animals and weapons are all produced and exported to neighboring countries.

With export going out to foreign countries, the Empress established a gold standard which has begun to overtake the barter system in many areas, and mining operations for gold have become a massive industry in the southern mountains. Her new coin, the *ipa*, was inspired by Franco Gonzalez's descriptions of coin economies in Théah. Many traditionalists hate this new innovation and see no reason to transform their way of doing business. But where the Empress insists, the Empire follows.

What resources are not being shipped out for trade have been turned towards producing greater innovations in technology, food production and medicine. Healers across the empire have been studying plants for medicinal use for generations, and have developed advanced techniques for internal surgery, especially of the brain and spine. Much of this knowledge was shared by the priests of Suway, whose knowledge of the dead allowed medicine to advance tremendously. The medical study of best preservation tactics for mummies is a booming industry, with a thriving black market for practice corpses in every city.

Outside of commerce, much of the empire's resources are turned towards creating new infrastructure dedicated to turning Kuraq into the most advanced country in the region. The Empress's dedication to education has led to establishing imperial schools across the Nation. The roads linking the *suyus* are constantly being advanced, with builders extending the known lanes deeper into the mountains and wilds. New systems of creating tunnels through hillsides, as well as creating storehouses underground for supplies have led to the creation of vast networks of warrens underneath cities. Cities



themselves are under renovation almost constantly to accommodate for the growing population of both living and Venerable Ones, with focuses on large channel systems within each city to bring fresh water and better sanitation to the population.

Most important of all, the Empress has turned a great deal of her trade to importing trees and boat builders from elsewhere to establish a standing navy. While she insists to all her neighbors the ships are made for trade, emissaries from neighboring Nations have shown a growing concern the Empress may soon have a navy capable of invading anywhere across Aztlan.

Art in the Shadow of the Dead

With the focus on so much production, art has taken a backseat in recent generations. Many artisans were supported largely by the temples and their communities, but once those revenues dried up, they were refocused into the workforce elsewhere. Only the noble classes truly enjoy a robust artist class, with singers and storytellers and textile artisans. Among the peasant populations, art during leisure time has become a form of resistance against the great empire.

Many of the revolutionaries use paintings left on walls, or messages woven into textiles, to share their treasonous plots. Still others hide their messages in songs and stories, passed along by Runners who have been corrupted against the empire. All such uses of the arts are quickly removed by the Tokoyriq when found, and the artists involved punished.

Law and Government Structure

The laws of the empire are derived from several basic tenets, set down by the imperial seat and maintained by the imperial structure. The authority of every noble and local leader comes from the Empress herself and below her the Royal Council, her sixteen advisors sent from the noble families to aid her in all things.

All Kuraq law stems from one basic principle: *Ama Sua. Ama Llulla. Ama Quella.* Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not be lazy. All resources of the empire are dedicated to the whole and not the individual. To that end, squandering any of those commodities is punishable, and those reprisals are swift, public and harsh. There is little to no imprisonment in Kuraq, and most crimes are paid for in blood.

Should someone be caught in or accused of a crime, they are brought before a local community leader, called a Takiy, to be judged. Smaller crimes such as personal trespasses and laziness often involve public shaming, in which a person is put on display and ridiculed, with objects pelted at them. If someone manages to avoid such a punishment, they are instead set to *llank'ay*, serving the community for a term of time decided by the Takiy.

Theft of property of any kind is punishable by mutilation, the severity of which is determined by the nature of the theft. For more serious punishments, however, losing a limb or being severely disfigured is common. Minor treason against the Empire, such as speaking out against the Empress, is the most common reason for this punishment. Those who survive the punishment are left with their scars as public example to others of their status as a criminal. Since criminals are considered the lowest rung of society, they must rely on the kindness of others to get by. By law, they are required to answer truthfully about their crimes and tell their story as a cautionary tale to others. Often people reward a good story with more food or support, so a criminal had best learn to tell the story of his contrition well or risk starving.

All punishments are meted out by the town's local Tokoyriq, whose loyalty to the Empress is considered absolute and therefore their actions inviolate. Many consider the Takiy, by virtue of their position, a wholly impartial source and therefore cannot be prosecuted in the case of mistakes made and wrongful punishments meted out. Though the Takiy is considered above reproach, all Kuraq know corruption is common and those who can pay a bribe can get the Takiy to look the other way.

The death penalty is swift and brutal. Such a punishment is only levied against the worst offenders, recidivists who have already lost limbs for previous crimes. Repeated treason against the Empire is the number one reason to incur the ultimate punishment. The perpetrator is stoned, hanged or pushed off a high cliff. Their body is then destroyed and cannot be preserved into a mummy to join the ranks of the Venerable Dead. The worst offenders are stricken from their family's dynasties and stories, lost to the emptiness of time and forgotten.



Religion

“Here I recite the message of Naqual, First Tupaq of the Kuska Tokoyriq. He bids greetings to his commander father and hopes this message finds him in good health.

He passes to you, his esteemed father, the messages being spread by the Pakaykuq to the outer provinces, that you might know the words of the rebellion. They wish to remind the people of the ancient religion, the ancient ways of the gods, now outlawed. As a humble Runner, I ask that you remember: these are the words of rebels, and not me. Do not stab the messenger.”

*— Recitation by Runner Moraika,
repeated from memory, to Royal Advisor
Masca of the Council of Sixteen*

The Kuraq Gods

The people of Kuraq maintain that after the Fall, their gods did not flee them like in the other Nations. The truth of that is harder to pin down. Before people began making cities again, they had nearly forgotten their old gods. When gods came to them and showed them how to gain sustenance from the land and bestowed their blessings, the people began to worship again. The lines between the old and the new blurred, and people used the old names. The gods walked among their people once more, and none could deny that.

Then came the priests of Suway, who drove the gods into hiding and instituted a God Hunt to wipe away the old gods once and for all. The followers of Suway took over the kingdom, and destroyed or chased into hiding those loyal to the other gods, while the gods themselves went into hiding.

Suway’s priests have killed many gods, and only a few remain. Those gods remain on the run, and their followers maintain their faith, worshipping in secret, waiting for the day when the gods and their rebels, the Pakaykuq, might free the land once more from the tyranny of the Venerable Dead.

Ninaq’ara

The father of the gods, Ninaq’ara rose from the great caves beneath the world to offer his light to the people, making the skies, the storms and the other gods beneath him. Ninaq’ara remained a powerful protector of the people until the fall of Aztlan. The loss of the great empire saddened Ninaq’ara, and he handed over his godly gifts to wander the earth as a man.

He remained this way until he saw the Suway rise against the other gods. witnessing the imbalance Suway’s actions caused, Ninaq’ara reappeared, the wise old father ready to guide his people in rebellion against the Empire. He is the living memory of the ancient past, the storm bringer and truth-keeper.

Wach’i

When Ninaq’ara set out to create his children, the gods, he created first a son and gifted him with the power of his primordial light. Wach’i became god of the sun, protector of the people, and bringer of bounty to the world. For generations, Wach’i was patron god of warriors and farmers, nobles and peasants alike.

Suway’s rise and the subsequent destruction of Wach’i’s champion Pachacunya was a mortal blow, and for a long time Wach’i went into mourning. Suway’s priests hunted Wach’i across the kingdom until Ninaq’ara reappeared and reunited with his hunted son. The proud warrior joined his father in leading the Pakaykuq against the death priests, bringing his light and strength to the cause.

Suway

Suway, god of the dead, is the most powerful and popular god in all Kuraq. Every song, story and temple across the land officially sanctioned by the empire venerates his power. Suway was once a god alongside his brother Ninaq’ara, acting as the reaper of souls and protector and guardian of the afterlife.

Early on, his priests petitioned the god for the knowledge of how to seek wisdom in the land of the dead. Intent on providing his followers with power, Suway brought knowledge of his sorcery into the world and soon, the priests spread across the land in an effort to turn Kuraq into a land of the dead.

Now everyone worships at the feet of death in the empire. But whispers say the god of the dead is no longer seen by his own followers in his temple at P’alqacamba, nor at the Empress’s chambers in Kuska, leading many to wonder if he’s happy with the chain of events. The Pakaykuq say instead Suway has become a prisoner of his own followers, and the balance must be restored to free the death god from his own worshippers.



Kikinpaq

Kikinpaq is one of the few gods not born of Virococho. A child of the Great Feathered Serpent himself, Kikinpaq walked the earth when Aztlan was young, a terrifying monsters creature, powerful and mercurial. When Virococho brought the gods into being to help the people, Kikinpaq joined them in protecting Aztlan, for he loved humanity and their ingenuity.

That very love drove him to help make peace among the gods and the mortal kings of old. When the Seven Kings fell to warring again, Kikinpaq's rage drove him into a deep slumber from which he hasn't awakened. Today, many of Suway's death priests seek to sacrifice Kikinpaq to him, the ultimate sacrifice that would make Suway unstoppable. Should he be found and sacrificed, or else awakened to help the Kuraq people, the devastation Kikinpaq could rain down is unfathomable.

Pachamama

Pachamama, Kikinpaq's sister and daughter of the Great Feathered Serpent, is another powerful monstrous being. The goddess of dragons, Pachamama is capable of hiding her true power and appearing anywhere in any guise. A consummate face changer, Pachamama was abandoned by both her brother and her lover Ninaq'ara and took to wandering the land to protect the children of Kuraq when no one else would.

With the God Hunt underway, Pachamama stalks the land as an unseen spy, rewarding those who sneak in the shadows to fight against the empire. More than anything, Pachamama seeks to awaken Kikinpaq from his slumber so they might fight side-by-side once again.

Katoylla

Once the powerful, wild god of storms and sports, Katoylla was celebrated as a protector of youths whose festivals heralded the transition between childhood and adulthood. Now with the power of the gods all but broken, the fierce god has lost nearly all his followers. Katoylla travels the land in wild revolt against the Empire, one step ahead of the God Hunt and laughing in the face of all danger.

Rumors say it's only a matter of time before Katoylla's luck runs out, and then the land will lose one of the great untamed things left in the world.

Urkillay

Urkillay's story is one of transformation. Born to Ninaq'ara as a god, legend says from the moment Urkillay was born, she travelled the land searching to find a place she belonged. She represents transformations and changes, sometimes taking on various aspects of things in nature she finds beautiful.

Never quite comfortable with the other gods or even humanity, Urkillay found happiness among animals and became protector of wildlife and nature, goddess of transformation and primal life. When the God Hunt was called, Urkillay withdrew deep into the jungles to guard her charges. But as the hunters draw closer, Urkillay has been drawn into the fight, and soon the hunters will be hunted instead.

Mama Quilla

The freedoms the empire has taken from the Kuraq people has driven one of the most peaceful of the gods into full revolt. Mama Quilla, goddess of the moon, marriage and children, was once the most serene daughter of Ninaq'ara. But the goddess has listened to far too many prayers of the young, forced by their Venerable ancestors into lives they never wanted.

She travels the land now, freeing those trapped by their dead ancestors and giving blessings to all children who yearn to be free. She does this in the most militant way possible: she destroys the Venerable Ones she finds to free their families.

Ekekko

The god of wealth and good health, Ekekko is a god turned traitor against his own. The stories say when the God Hunt captured Ekekko, he bartered with the priests of Suway in exchange for his freedom. Now he offers his support to the kingdom and showers the empire with his blessings of monetary good fortune and health for the people.

Under his blessing, the kingdom has grown economically prosperous and the Empress only more powerful. Now the other gods have turned their back on Ekekko, who in turn is all too happy to turn them over in exchange for his continued protection.



Saramama

Sadness follows the goddess of the grain and harvest, the sadness of a mother looking out on her people in despair. Where once the people tilled the land and harvested in joy, the oppression of the empire instead drives those to farm and plant out of fear of the tithe, rather than out of celebration for the land.

Saramama has fallen into a deep depression and is kept safe by the Pakaykuq and her followers, sustained by the power of their belief. Many see Saramama's lack of action as a dangerous liability, as the rebels expend energy to protect the nearly catatonic goddess. Yet many hope the goddess of the earth will rise up and help her people before it's too late.

The Veneration of the Dead

The most popular practice across the Empire is worship of Suway, god of death, and the veneration of the dead. When Pachacunya, first Emperor, brought the worship of Suway to the people, they embraced the idea of building a better future with the help and wisdom of their lost ancestors.

The truth of the story, of Pachacunya's murder and possession by his brother Supacha, is a heresy whispered by those who would undermine the veneration of Suway, while most see the coming of the god of the dead as the birth of a brilliant Empire that will span far into the future. Yet those who remember the ancient worship of Suway know the priests have even twisted the god's practice to create this new Veneration of the Dead.

In ancient days, those who died would pass into the realm of the dead and their souls would reside there in peace. The priests would gather the body and prepare it for mummification, after which the mummy would be placed in a sacred shrine by the dead person's panaqa, their descendants and caretakers. Eight days of funerary rites were respected in full mourning black, and then the family was allowed to enter the shrine to ask for advice from the recently deceased. The dead were not seen as fully gone, but instead still able to interact and give advice from the afterlife, where they would rest until they could be reborn into another form.

Unfortunately, the true process of interacting with the ancestors was long ago corrupted by Suway's

followers and the cycle of death and rebirth was disrupted. The corrupt priests rose from a small faction at the temple of P'alqacamba, where a single corrupt priest called Kakusha sought immortality and plied Suway for the secrets to enshrine a spirit into a mummy.

Once Suway provided the knowledge, the priests, with the help of their terrifying Awqaylli warriors, began the war that led to Pachacunya's murder and the empire as it is today.

Now there is a priest of Suway in every city, and the veneration of the dead is the leading religious belief in the empire. It is hard to turn against the practice when the Venerable Ones have contributed so much to every aspect of the empire. The worship of Suway is the imperial religion, as well as its primary support structure, and the two cannot be separated easily.

The Yana Takiya

The term Yana Takiya translated to outsider tongue means simply Black Singers, and the name is accurate. The priests of Suway were once meant only to be bearers of the mourning songs and funerary rites that guided the dead home. Instead, the Yana Takiya now bring their corrupted worship of Suway into every home.

The priests themselves are taken at a young age from those unwanted members of society: the orphans, abandoned, or criminal. The priests then train the new initiates in their temple at P'alqacamba, indoctrinating them into the mysteries of Suway. Those more militant-minded are trained to become the Awqaylli, warriors fiercely loyal only to the Yana Takiya. Only the most devout are taken to learn the secrets of Wañuy Ñaqay, their death sorcery. But once taught, a world of power is at their fingertips.

The death priests are welcome in every part of the land by families who wish to mummify their family members to become part of the Venerable Dead, or make a funerary mask to allow communication with the afterlife. These powers are meant only for the priests, although the knowledge has been stolen and used by powerful laymen all across the kingdom. Yet for all their power and devotion, even the priests of Suway must earn their way to becoming a member of the Venerable Dead, and their return from the





afterlife is not guaranteed. Transgressions against the order are met with unending death.

For all their support of the Empress, the Yana Takiya are a conservative order. They do not allow many women to join their ranks and are ferociously intolerant of anyone who does not worship Suway above all others. To that end and with the clandestine support of the Empress, they have begun the God Hunt, intent on wiping out the gods and their followers wherever they hide. The Yana Takiya wear only black funerary robes and gold chains about their necks to demarcate rank. Only the leaders of their order wear funerary masks, which allow them to channel the Venerable One who is their advisor and guide from the afterlife.

Sorcery in the Empire of Death

A long time ago, magic in the lands of the Kuraq people was a wild and beautiful thing, taking many forms. The gods walked the world giving blessings to the people, and spirits roamed the land. While that wild magic still exists in small places, mostly in blessings given by the gods, for the most part the magic of Kuraq has been twisted by the influence of the Venerable Ones until it is almost predominantly the magic and sorcery of the dead.

Wañuy Ñaqay was once only the purview of the Yana Takiya in their worship of Suway. Through their training, they could reach out into the land of the dead and make contact with a spirit for guidance and wisdom. Once the contact was made, a priest could coax the spirit of the dead back into its mummified

body, carefully preserved by the priests during the funerary rite. The corpse vessels would remain well preserved for a long time, able to move and speak, but kept for protection within their family's sacred shrines.

Each body would receive a funerary mask, treated with holy oils and washed in the blood of a sacrifice to make it a holy mask, capable of connecting a mortal with the spirit, now known as a Venerable One, bound inside the mummy. The spirit would then choose a Speaker to wear the mask, communing with them through a direct spirit link. At its most benign form, the connection is a sharing, the Venerable One communicating inside the Speaker's mind, speaking through her, and watching the world through her eyes. At its most invasive, the Venerable One can force his way inside the Speaker's body to take command and speak for himself, destroying the free will of the mask-wearer until he becomes a hollowed-out husk over time.

This isn't the only use for Wañuy Ñaqay. Should a priest or a Venerable One wish to control other weaker spirits of the dead, or even reanimate desiccated mummies or recently dead, they can do so with the proper sacrifice of a life force. Indeed, the greatest secret of the Yana Takiya is that death magic must feed on life. The lives of the Speakers are slowly drained away to maintain their contact with the Venerable Dead, and any great use of Wañuy Ñaqay must equally require life be sacrificed to achieve the work.

It's for this reason Venerable Ones maintain large groups of retainers and panaqa at their side, so they



might sip life from each when they need to perform magic so as not to drain their Speakers dry. Most members of a Venerable Ones retinue, their panaqas, wear small talismans of the Venerable One, miniature funerary masks that connect the Venerable One to their life forces. In desperate situations, a Venerable One may even use these retainers to possess their bodies for a time.

The largest works of Wañuy Ñaqay require larger life sacrifices, rather than tiny sips of life force. Animal sacrifices are common, with the use of human sacrifice kept for only the largest magical rites. The greatest of these was the hundred sacrifices by the Empress to drive back the Castillan invasion force at Takana, but no such rite has been done since.

The most powerful Venerable Ones are those who use life energy to maintain their recently dead mummies to resemble near perfect human appearance. The most notable example of this is the Empress herself, who still maintains use of her original body and has not taken a Speaker. The Empress maintains her body so well she still resembles the middle-aged beauty she was in life. Still, every Venerable One must return to her mummy's resting state inside a protected crypt every once in awhile to consolidate her strength. The length of time they may walk about is based largely on the power they wield and how much life energy they sacrifice to maintain their bodies.

With the steady stream of sacrifices made in the Empress's name, for example, she's been known to go weeks without returning to her panacas's crypt. These gifts of Wañuy Ñaqay were once only in the hands of the Yana Takiya. Yet priests who defected from the order taught many nobles and peasants in secret over the years, and so such death magic can be found and studied, for a price. Should a layman be discovered using the sorcery to make new Venerable Dead, however, the perpetrator is executed and the spirit they meant to bind is destroyed forever.

Blessings of the Gods

The gods persist in the lands of Kuraq despite Yana Takiya's manipulations and history itself working against them. With them survives an older kind of sorcery that carries with it the oldest power in the kingdom: the power to bestow the blessings of the gods.

In truth, the death priest's power was once a blessing from Suway just like any other gods' bestowed gifts, until the priests perverted it and spread the practice. The other gods still have the capacity to imbue their followers with their blessings, and those who cling to the old ways have been gifted with Advantages that set them above other non-believers.

These Children of the Gods, as the blessed are known, are generally among the most devout worshippers and must maintain that worship for the blessings to continue. Just like in the ancient days, worship involves sacrificing life, much like the power fueling Suway's followers. As the old saying goes in Kuraq: *the power of death can fuel the creation of wonder.*

The blessings each god can bestow are not never-ending. Each god may bestow gifts from within their natural purview. For example, followers of Wach'i are known to receive physical blessings of martial prowess, strength and speed, along with the blistering power of the sun's heat, while followers of Pachamama may find themselves more stealthy and hard to notice. Still others receive more complicated gifts, such as those lucky to be chosen by the illusive shapeshifter Urkillay.

Once gifted, a follower only loses those gifts at death or if she turns away from the worship of her god. Each follower must wear a talisman with the symbol of her god on it, even though such markings can be conspicuous and often attract the attention of authorities on the God Hunt. That is the bargain the Children of the Gods make for their power. They must walk the world boldly in the name of their patron, keeping alive what hope there is for the living in the empire of the dead.





Kuraq Locations

Kuska

Follow any road in the Kuraq Empire heading towards the country's interior and the path will lead to the same place: Kuska, center of the Empire. The glorious capital city began as the home of the Killke tribe before the unification under Pachacunya, and the remnants of the ancient fortress of Saksawaman provided the blueprints for the modern city's growth.

The Killke taught the rest of the Empire their advanced building techniques and helmed the undertaking to expand roads outwards from Kuska to all corners of the empire's four corners. Their aqueducts carried water to all parts of the city, making Kuska bloom as a city of greenery in a harsh scrub valley. Up the hillside the builders created the great Qurikancha, the Temple to the Sun and the seat of power for the Emperor. With the coming of the Empress however, the temple was rededicated to Suway and renamed the Seat of the Venerable. Rebuilt to nearly twice its original height, the golden stones shine in the sunlight and cast a shadow over all the city below.

Kuska also serves as home to a bustling metropolis, with all nobility required by law to keep a household in the main city as well as in their home territory. One member of each family must remain in the capital to act as ambassador to the Empress, and the most

ambitious flock to the city to jockey for position and advancement.

The lower classes live on the edge of the city, from workers and laborers to those previously convicted of crimes. Still, they consider themselves blessed to live in Kuska, a city of opportunity. Catch the eye of the right person in power and should the person be worthy, they can find themselves climbing the ranks to walk among the most noble. Social climbers are warned to do so within the confines of the law, or the ever-vigilant Tokoyriq will intervene and remove the offender to their headquarters, known to all as *chulpa*, for interrogation and dispensation of bloody, swift justice. All in the name of the Empress, of course.

Qurikancha, Seat of the Venerable

The great temple sits at the edge of the city overlooking the sprawling expanse below. The temple proper is relatively small, with enormous stones creating an inner chamber, which Empress Asiri uses as her receiving chamber. The outside of the stone is carved in delicate murals of the sun god, which are under constant revisions to replace with images of Suway. The walls are studded with gold plates and delicate filigrees.



Outside the temple are quarters for the Imperial family, and noble guests, and far below the temple dug into the hillside are the Imperial crypts. Further down the hill spreads the rest of the city, with nobles building houses as close as they can to the temple. Those with better standing are located closer to the temple, and the lesser noble families radiate inward towards the middle of the city.

Kapuli

Travel north into Antasuyu and you will find Kapuli, the pleasure city, nestled between two holy mountain peaks. This valley getaway was created by the nobility as a far-off destination where the powerful could entertain their vices away from the prying eyes of the Empire. Once discovered by the Empress, the nobles were shocked when the imperial seat not only embraced the idea of a pleasure city, but outlawed all violence between factions within the city walls.

For the wealthy of the empire, Kapuli became a glorious paradise, a terraced city with cultivated gardens, sports centers, hot spring baths and pleasure houses full of good music, drink and company. The city is run by the *kulla uya*, a designated group of courtesans who are trained to entertain the visiting nobles, cooking various meals or providing companionship for the trip.

The term *kulla uya* was once an insult, meaning 'shameless ones,' but the entertainers of the city embraced the term with a fierce pride that has made it now a profession all its own. People from across the empire travel to Kapuli to petition the esteemed Sinchi (leader) of the order for the right to be trained as a courtesan at the Tulpa Qawari, the Hearth of Songs.

The *kulla uya* have become a class of artists from across the land, protected within the walls of the bloodless city. It's also no secret that Kapuli has become a hotbed of political intrigue, because as the nobles carouse, there are secrets to be learned. The *kulla uya* remain neutral in all things publicly, but are often incredible sources of information given they are sympathetic to a cause. Visitors to the city may wander through the lush gardens, shop in the glorious market, or take in a storytelling competition among the elite of the empire, safe in the knowledge that their lives are secure in the glorious mountain air.

Chuqi K'iraw

The most wanted location in all the Kuraq Empire, the "Crib of Metal" is the Pakaykuq's base of operations, hidden in the spurs of the Hark'apa mountain range. Its main buildings and terraces are built above and below Sunch'u Pata, the truncated hilltop that is the most recognizable geographical feature of the place.

According to legend, the place was discovered and founded by Pachakusi but actually built and expanded by her daughter, Killay, from whom the place finally derived its name. Although originally one of the main entrances to the Hark'apa —as well as an important political, social and economical center— the City of the Great Yachaywasi was hidden from mortal eyes by Wach'i, and the knowledge of its existence purged from all records.

From that day onwards, only those that the god has shown the way can find it. In this manner he ensured its security and, thus, turned it into the perfect hiding place for his followers—soon to become the Resistance against the Empress' regime.

The city's main structures are concentrated around two plazas along the crest of the ridge. A number of common buildings are placed away from the plazas. As with most urban Kuraq wonders, the natural terrain was greatly accommodated before any construction. The result is a self-sufficient city with a system of cultivation terraces, an aqueduct and enough residential buildings to house a large number of people comfortably.

The most important structure in the Crib is the *ushnu* dedicated to Wach'i at the top of the truncated hill. According to common wisdom, only those that the Sun God allows can climb the huge staircase that leads to this terraced pyramid with a flat top. What manner of revelations one receives while there are unknown, since all who have made the ascent refuse to share the particulars of what transpired. This temple constitutes one of the last undefiled sacred places dedicated to Wach'i and has, as a result, both a symbolic and spiritual importance for the Resistance.

Along with increasing civil unrest across the Empire, more people are receiving visions from Wach'i and the necessary guidance to find the city and join the Resistance. The god seems to be careful with his blessing though, mainly because if the Tokoyriq were to find the Crib, all hope of the Resistance's victory would be destroyed.



Manqo Pacha

Before the crowning of Pachacunya, and the conversion of Supacha to Suway worship, their father King Yaca Yma briefly united the city-states during the Conference of Seven Feathers. Having achieved peace, the old king left his rule to his son and retreated to the holy mountain top estate of Manqo Pacha.

The beautiful city was dedicated to the sun god Wach'i, and sported a fabulous temple filled with golden offerings that made the mountain gleam. The city was devastated, however, when three kings rose up and killed King Yaca Yma, and sacked the city. Few of the initial inhabitants survived.

It was years after Emperor Pachacunya took the throne that locals traveled up the sacred mountain once more to rebuild the haunting crumbled city. As the spread of Suway worship drove the other gods underground, their followers found refuge in the beautiful open air plaza and glorious ancient temples. The city was rebuilt not by the nobility or the Empress, but by the hands of those still loyal to the old gods. That dedication attracted the attention of the gods themselves, and their followers, the Pakaykuq.

While the newer cities in the empire clearly follow a similar pattern and a well-thought out plan, Manqo Pacha is a mismatch of older architectural styles and modern roads and buildings. The city cannot build out, as the sides of the mountain are treacherously steep for building on. Instead, newer buildings are built atop older ones, making the city look like a patchwork.

Manqo Pacha is small by comparison to the Empire's more modern cities, but its natural glory is unmatched. The city sits on an open plateau at the top of the mountain with nothing but the sky above. The altitude can render visitors euphoric and as such, much of the open air plazas are full of people in silent, dreamy contemplation. The difficulty of the climb to the city also keeps the population sparse, and those who live there are a hearty, thoughtful, spiritual people, dedicated to preserving the old ways no matter what.

Patanatambo

Few cities started out with such a sorrowful story as Patanatambo, the citadel in the middle of rural Antasuyu. Originally the city was a farming community; a collection of rural families brought together for mutual protection.

One night, soldiers of the Tokoyriq rode into the area and declared that the Empress would grace their land with a glorious settlement, all in the name of protecting the Empire. The families believed this meant the soldiers were there to help them defend their farms. Instead, they watched their land torn up and harvested to create the Empress's prison city, Patanatambo.

Outwardly, Patanatambo is a walled citadel with high stone walls excavated from quarries dug out of the mountainsides nearby. The back of the citadel sits against the nearby mountain and allows only one approach up through what was once farmland into a massive gated palisade. Its imposing presence can be seen from over two miles away.

Inside lies a fully enclosed community sealed behind a second set of gates, with the first courtyard meant only to receive supplies for the community inside. Those that live in Patanatambo are the Empress's prisoners, kept alive despite the usual severity of Kuraq law for their political uses. The first inhabitants were the family of Pachacunya, who lived and bred within the walls for ten years before they were sacrificed to drive back the Théan invasion.

For a short time, the city remained empty, but it didn't take long for the Empress to lock away nobles who displeased her. As her grip tightens on the empire, more and more make their way into the citadel. While the Tokoyriq kill many of the Pakaykuq outright, a few noble sympathizers or high ranking officials end up there as political exiles.

No one visits the citadel, and no one leaves, except a single chaskis messenger of his choosing. The entire complex is maintained by Kimsa Parwa, a high ranking toyoriq commander and spy for the Empress. He and his entire family reside in the city, as much prisoners as those he keeps for the Empress.



P'alqacamba

Few places in the Empire instill such terror as the mention of P'alqacamba, the jungle city of Suway and his death priests. Situated deep in Chinchaysuyu's deepest wilds, P'alqacamba is known also as the Lost City due to the difficulty of traveling there. However hundreds of nobles and petitioners make the travel yearly to petition Suway's priests to accept their children as students so they might learn to harness the power of death. There in the wilds they find a city of dark black stone with golden accents, a holy city packed with Venerable Ones and their retainers.

The city sits nestled deep in the foliage of the jungle, every building draped in vines sprouting unusual flowers. At the very heart of the city lies Suway's Temple, the headquarters of the Yana Takiya, the tupaq training school, and Allin Tulpa (the Good Hearth). These modern buildings are made of black stone pulled from deep within the earth, with a huge pyramid in the center of the Temple complex.

The city also hosts the *Great Yachaywasi*, the House of Knowledge. This elite school is dedicated to training young nobles to the best their education and privilege can offer. Children live there in vast dormitories and Suway's priests train them in everything from combat to statecraft to physical arts. The competition between students is cutthroat and it's not unheard of for students to disappear in the wilderness, and never be heard from again.

Allin Tulpa

Allin Tulpa holds the largest concentration of Wañuy Ñaqay practitioners in all of Kuraq. The school sits just outside Suway's temple in the center of P'alqacamba. While less lustrous and grand than the temple, the school is a wondrous feat of architecture, with gold inlays tracing around carved black stone depicting all the histories and myths of Suway and Wañuy Ñaqay.

Students come to train at an early age, and only a select few ever learn Wañuy Ñaqay, though all who study there receive a top notch education. Where the students in the Great Yachaywasi are competitive, the students in Allin Tulpa are cooperative. Those who do not learn Wañuy Ñaqay take up other priestly roles to support those who do. No one goes to waste, though entry into the school is extremely selective.

Some say that Suway himself chooses the students, and only those with his blessing may enter the school, though the priests never speak of it if that is true. The priests who come out of Allin Tulpa are devoted, and fanatically loyal to their god. They learn not only to understand the magic, but are skilled in combat, warfare and various forms of assassination. No priest of Suway is spared serving as a Tupaq warrior.

Takana

The breathtaking eastern coast city of Takana is a testament to the modern building innovations of the Kuraq Empire. Built on the bones of the burnt-out city destroyed by Gonzalez during his aborted invasion, Takana was long since believed to be a cursed place. The Empress decided to rebuild the city, in defiance of the would-be conqueror, to act as a welcoming port for any and all traveling to the Empire from Théah and beyond.

Builders transformed the bay into a well-appointed port, with warehouses built over the water to welcome any ships in need of repairs and supplies. Inns and eateries welcome weary travellers, and guides are ready to help visitors acclimate to Kuraq life. All establishments and businesses are run by friendly, accommodating people, ready to lend their aid. And ready to report back to the Empress's spies about all foreigners entering the empire.

An ambassadorial building sits snug in the hills outside the port with a breathtaking view of the sea below the cliffs. There, the Empress's dispatched Advisor Anka waits to welcome any envoys in sumptuous splendour. The port does sport a military brigade of Tokoyriq warriors and a temple with a large contingent of Tupaq warriors of Suway, in case outsiders decide to test the might of the Empire once more.

What the people don't talk about is the city's curse. When the Empress made her hundred-person sacrifice, she could not harness the full power she manifested. She used it to good ends, but much of it seeped into the city, and into the dead and burned who littered the streets. Since that time, these shambling undead have occupied the city, though the Tupaq have cleared most of them out.

Now, Tupaq warriors spend time chasing down the undead that crawl from aqueducts and caves below the city, hoping to keep the new inhabitants from seeing them.



Kachu Pual, the Last Pukara

To most foreigners—and even to those locals that live mostly around the capital area—the control Kuraq has over its territories seems to be absolute. In fact, most maps drawn by Théans show an unbroken territory south of the Hark'apa Mountains until the end of Aztlan as “The Kuraq Empire.”

The reality, of course, is not that simple.

In order to establish their current dominance the Kuraq people had to deal with a number of other groups of inhabitants of southern Aztlan. Some they subdued with diplomacy and some required a full display of strength in order to annex them to their territories. There is one, however, that has resisted any and all attempts to be governed, an indomitable people who dwell in the southernmost corner of the continent.

They are the *purum awqa*, the “wild people,” and Kachu Pual—from the namesake river that crosses it—is the last *pukara* (“fortress”) the Kuraq have been able to defend from them.

In this place at the end of Aztlan most of the political conflicts of Kuska—such as the Resistance and other courtly intrigues—are considered as news from some distant land. In Kachu Pual every day is a fight for survival, and each man, woman and child behind its walls recognizes only one political affiliation, one origin, and one credo: to defend this stronghold from the *purum awqa* at all times and under all circumstances.

The consequences of failing in their duty are dreadfully simple: if Kachu Pual were to fall, all its residents

would be put to the sword, dismembered and probably eaten by the wild people. After that the fortress would be burned to the ground, erasing any evidence of its existence. They know this because that's what the stories say that the wild people have done to all the other pukaras that one day existed south of the river Kachu Pual.

The result of these extreme conditions of existence is a group of hardened individuals that do not allow anything to interfere with their duty. Most of them are low-rank officials of the Empire and their families, or banished courtiers that decided to begin anew as far from Kuska as possible, and all of them ended up becoming seasoned defenders of the pukara.

Others still are lone wolves with stories of their own that appreciate that raw and simple life that Kachu Pual offers them, one in which they are not asked to conform to any of the social norms that are compulsory in the northern parts of the Empire.

Finally there are the Théan adventurers and explorers that have fallen in love with the fortress' beautiful natural surroundings and cannot stand the thought of seeing this people and this place disappear. Although in many other places in the Empire they would be considered outcasts, or at least foreigners

with no say in Kachu Pual's matters, here they are considered equals—at least as long as they contribute their part to defend the pukara.





YARA

“There is nothing I desire more than to correct the mistakes of my youth.”

Yara

Yara once had a family to call her own. Born of the mighty house of Pachacunya, the first Emperor, Yara lived in Kuska in luxury at the feet of her Venerable *quapaq*, always ready to serve. Then she met Asiri Inkasisa and her life changed forever. It was Yara’s love for Asiri that made her share the secret of Supacha possessing Pachacunya’s body, but it was the Empress’s love for Yara that kept her alive for the years after.

When the Empress conducted her blood sacrifice to save the empire, Yara’s family was the first on the chopping block. Partially as a tribute to the dead first emperor, and partially so that none would rise up and try to claim her throne. She spared Yara alone, and Yara spared her sister Alqacha, whom she secreted away before Asiri even knew she existed. Whatever love Yara might have once had for the Empress died with her family, to be replaced by burning hatred.

When death came, Yara petitioned to become one of the Venerable Dead, which the Empress granted willingly, and assigned her a family of retainers to act as her Speakers. The Empress wanted to keep Yara by her side forever, never knowing that Yara now works from the afterlife to undermine her former lover.

Yara’s single most important job is to preserve the life of her sister’s descendant Tolanaq, the last living prince of Pachacunya’s line. The boy is a political prisoner in the Empress’s panacas, though Asiri has no idea of his true lineage. Yara will do anything to keep him safe, for she believes one day the rightful dynasty of Pachacunya will return to power and save the people. Her Speaker is a girl named Isi, chosen for her lack of political experience. Yara spends her free time molding Isi into a weapon, training her to one day fight what she knows will be a bloody battle for the soul of the empire.

Story Hooks

- Tolanaq is being transferred to another prison, but Yara does not know where. She doesn’t want to give away her interest in the man, so she asks the Heroes to keep an eye on him, and if they can help him escape, she’ll reward them well.
- Yara has learned about Pakaykuq and set up a meeting with them, but her contact in court has gone missing. Can the Heroes help her find the missing man before Asiri figures out his connection to Yara?

Awqasisa, the Empress's Voice

Awqasisa serves the Empress as her voice, wearing her death mask and announcing her commands on a regular basis. The heir to a minor noble house, she stood out from a young age as a deft courtier, one who was able to navigate the dangerous waters of the Imperial court with the grace and charm of a natural. As such, few were surprised when the *Qhapaq* announced her decision to make Awqasisa her voice.

Shortly after that, the Resistance started becoming a problem.

No one connected those facts. After all, who could blame the new chamberlain for the unseemly acts of a small group of insurgents? Her work was flawless and her dedication to the court and the Empress, unquestionable. When *chaskis* came in and out of her chambers, everyone assumed they carried messages that the Empress had her deliver. Most were, though sometimes one young boy or girl would memorize a message and knot a *khipu* then run all the way up to Chuqi K'iraw, the fortress where the Pakaykuq has its base of operations.

Awqasisa is spying for the enemy.

She has done so since the beginning, for she is a true believer. And her station as Asiri's Speaker has only shown her more of the wickedness that she despises. Her labor for the Resistance has been one of the only reasons why their plots have recently succeeded. The privileged information she provides is fundamental, and without it, the most probable result is that the Tokoyriq would crush the Pakaykuq once and for all.

Story Hooks

- Awqasisa's flawless façade is falling apart. She is developing unwanted feelings for the Empress, and she doesn't understand them. Can the Heroes help her figure out what is happening to her without alerting the Empress?
- The Empress has begun to suspect Awqasisa's involvement with the Pakaykuq. Can the Heroes help her divert attention away from the Speaker while she helps organize a major resistance push?



AWQASISA, THE EMPRESS'S VOICE

"I may speak for the Empress, but she does not control my heart"



K'UYUQ

“The only thing I've found sweeter than revenge is revolution.”

K'uyuq

When K'uyuq was young, his family received news that the Empress had selected yet another of their children for the *qhapaq hucha* (“royal sacrifice”). When his parents made a formal protest, she responded by promising to burn the entire family alive, to spare them from the suffering she had inflicted upon them. Before the sentence was carried out, K'uyuq's family smuggled him away, the last words he remembered being “avenge us.”

K'uyuq vowed to hunt down any who benefited from the Empire, from the lowliest soldier to the highest noble. During this time, he made a statement by burning his enemies alive. He went about this way for a time before he met Intiawki, who offered K'uyuq his most prized possession—hope. Hope of a life after the end of the Empire, one in which he would have something more than fire and ashes to comfort him.

And that is how both fell in love.

Although he was the first one to deny it, the kindness and passion that he found in his love made K'uyuq more careful and less ruthless in his practices. He gave no enemy quarter, but also stopped torturing them, giving them instead clean, quick deaths. At the same time, the lone hunter started getting involved in the Pakaykuq like never before, becoming a leader and a teacher to new recruits.

Story Hooks

- Intiawki has come back from the dead, but K'uyuq does not believe in the miracle. He fears his love treats with their enemy, but doesn't want to believe it without proof. Can the Heroes help K'uyuq decide what to do?
- K'uyuq believes the Empress burned his entire family alive, but has heard rumor about a woman with the same name as his little sister. His duties to Pakaykuq are too important to leave, so he asks the Heroes to search for this woman and find out the truth.

Lora Antonia de Ochoa y Ochoa

Lora Antonia Lidia Teresa Adelaide Ferreira de Ochoa y Ochoa was born in Barcino, Castille. She was born to landed nobles, which afforded her the very best education money could buy in the Vaticine City.

She loved science and physics the best, but by that time, Inquisitor Verdugo had begun forbidding such sciences from regularly taught curriculum in seminary. Her professors viewed her as an astute asset, often underestimated due to a physical ailment that causes her to favor her left leg.

While Lora's interests lie more towards the discovery of new technologies, her professors began taking her on archeological trips. Little did she know that their constant back and forths across Théah were smuggling trips to take forbidden texts to safe places. That is, until an Inquisition raid destroyed her professor's laboratory and the rest of his texts. He assured her, before the soldiers took him away, that his texts were safe, and she only had to return to their mutual friend Diego Saldana to find them.

When she finally caught up to Diego, he was boarding a ship to the New World and taking the collected texts with him. She joined him, and hopefully will help learn new technologies with a special scholarly exchange he had orchestrated with the Empress of Kuraq. She jumped at the chance, and now she resides in Kuska.

Lora views the Empress as another Inquisitor Verdugo. She may appear to be leading the people in good faith, but she is corrupt and vile. If this is so easy for a foreigner to see, there surely must be locals who see it as well. And sure enough, with only a little searching, she found the Resistance, and asked to join up immediately.

Story Hooks

- Lora worries that the Empress is using Diego for some kind of plot against Théah. Can the Heroes help her infiltrate the royal court and find out her plans for her home?
- Lora is fully on the side of the Resistance, but she has no idea what that means. She is not a fighter, but she does have access to all of her old professor's science texts. She hires the Heroes to help her translate them into the local language so that she can disseminate the information, and possibly serve as guides to help her find the Pakaykuq.



LORA ANTONIA DE OCHOA Y OCHOA

“This place is like all others.
The powerful oppress the weak.
We are not so different.”



KURAQ QHAPAQ, ASIRI INKASISA, EMPRESS OF KURAQ

“My people don’t need trust and coddling, they need structure. They may push against their god, but they cannot deny the prosperity he has brought them.”

STRENGTH

8

INFLUENCE

10

RANK

18

KURAQ QHAPAQ, ASIRI INKASISA, EMPRESS OF KURAQ

There is no one as infamous and as awe-inspiring in the Kuraq Empire as Asiri Inkasisa, Quapaq of the imperial seat and most Venerable consort of the god Suway himself. Born of a minor noble house, Asiri Inkasisa rose in court through cunning intelligence and ruthless determination. With Yara’s help, she unseated the Emperor Pachacunya and took his golden feather cloak to become empress. Twenty years later, she sacrificed herself and 100 others to solidify the imperial territories into a powerful political machine under her control.

One hundred years later, the Empress is still on the throne, either walking the panacas halls at Kuska in her incredibly well-preserved mummy, or else riding inside one of her Speakers to command from afar. The magic that destroyed Gonzalez’s army also preserved the Empress’s body in a nearly perfect cast of its original beauty.

Despite the power she gains through regular blood sacrifices, the task of animating her corpse exhausts the Empress, and she returns often to her crypt to renew her strength. No matter her physical state, the Empress holds the entire empire together, and her personality, as well as the dedication of her nobles and people, make her a terrifying force of will and nature.

She can seem cold and cruel, as little upsets her and she often acts for the better of her empire without concern for whom she may hurt. She rules her land with an iron fist, and she encourages squabbling between the houses and their Venerable Ones as a way to prevent anyone from taking too long a look at her rule.

Story Hooks

- Miyatala is one of Asiri’s own descendants, and is well-loved within the empire. If anyone could take Asiri’s throne, it would be Miyatala. Can the Heroes help the princess overthrow her long-dead ancestor?
- Asiri has ordered the death of all the gods except Suway. Her warriors hunt them across Kuraq and beyond. Some gods have joined the Pakaykuq, though others are still hesitant. Can the Heroes find and convince the remaining gods to join the Resistance?

Anka, Head of the Chaskis

Anka serves the empire as the head of the chaskis. He encrypts and decrypts all messages, trains and pays the chaskis, and negotiates the rates with peasant and noble alike for sending a message to any place south of the Harkapa Mountains—and sometimes even beyond them.

From his privileged position Anka has access to all the secrets of the Empire, and although always under surveillance from both the Empress and the Pakaykuq, he trades information for favors and money to anyone willing to pay. This alone isn't so bad, except Anka is willing to do whatever it takes to keep his position secure.

Anka was born into an important noble family who had been in charge of the chaskis from time immemorial. His life was filled with luxuries, and no desire ever went unfulfilled. Except when his ancestors decided to skip him over for the title of head of chaskis, and have his dead mother speak through his sister instead. At that moment, Anka decided that he did not care to have his desires thwarted, and burned his mother on her deathbed before the priests performed their rituals.

From there, his ambitions know no bounds. He mostly deals in information, and has no scruples about whom he sells to. He gives information to both the Empress and Pakaykuq; sometimes the same information for two different prices. He usually does so in secret, and if anyone finds out his identity, they disappear into the night.

Story Hooks

- Anka's ambitions stretch beyond his current power base, and he is using the Pakaykuq to attempt to overthrow the Empress and take over the throne for himself. Can the Heroes discover his plot and steer the Resistance away from helping him?
- Anka has damning information about the Empress, and is ready to sell. Will the Heroes buy his information, or try to steal it out from under him?



ANKA, HEAD OF THE CHASKIS

“If more than one person knows about it, it is no longer a secret.”

STRENGTH

5

INFLUENCE

6

RANK

11



Intiawki, Leader of the Resistance

Intiawki was born amidst the Resistance, never knowing any other life. His parents died when he was young, and he simply became the camp orphan who wanted to fit in. While other children played, ran and laughed, he was always serious. His toys were the weapons of the Resistance, and his battles were the real skirmishes with the Empress's troops. He watched people he knew and loved die on a daily basis.

Some voiced concern, and some even advised against this style of education. Those voices were few, and no one had the wherewithal to take him in hand properly. So, he continued to fight and learn nothing but the resistance. As the leaders died, and Intiawki grew older, he became a fundamental piece of the movement, until his voice was the loudest in every council and his words were the wisest in the matters of war.

Like so many leaders before him, Intiawki died fighting for the only thing in life he knew. That would have been the end of it, if it weren't for Suway's priests who tried to bring him back. They knew that he would be a potent ally against the Pakaykuq if only they could turn him. As Intiawki passed on to the gates of the Ukhu Pacha, he met Suway, who gave him a choice.

It was the first time anyone had ever given him a choice, the first time anyone ever cared what he wanted. Above that, Suway offered the boy a wealth of knowledge, riches and eternal life after death, with only a small fee of servitude. Without a second thought, Intiawki took him up on the offer.

When he came back from the dead, the Pakaykuq considered it a miracle that spelled doom for their enemies. And they are right, for doom is fast approaching, but not for the Empress and her subjects but for the group of rebels that is the Resistance.

Story Hooks

- Intiawki continues to lead the Pakaykuq, the members convinced that he is chosen by the sun god to lead them to victory. Can the Heroes convince the Pakaykuq that their leader is working for the enemy before it's too late?
- Suway offered Intiawki a deal, but his service is not everlasting. Once he performs his part of the bargain, he will be free again. Will the Heroes help Intiawki to fulfil his debt and possibly rejoin the resistance against the Empress?

INTIAWKI, LEADER OF THE RESISTANCE

“I was wrong for so long, and it feels good to finally know I'm right.”

STRENGTH

6

INFLUENCE

7

RANK

13

Cornélie Blanchet

Cornélie was abandoned as a girl. Left alone in the streets of Montaigne, she had to make her own way. She survived through sheer grit and determination, making a name for herself, though she had none. She stole noble clothes, joined the court and before anyone who had opinions on the matter could say a word about it, Cornélie became Madame Fournier. After a while tragedy struck, however, and poor Cornélie became a widow. But alas! Her sadness was short; soon she became Madame Blanchet—and departed to the New World with her prosperous husband.

The untimely death of Monsieur Blanchet—along with the rest of his expedition—was another test in Cornélie’s life. As such, she did what she had done from the days at the orphanage: watch and learn. She saw how the gods turned her people to stone, ashes or worse, so she played the part of the innocent bystander and bided her time. When she realized that neither the Nahuacans nor the Tzak K’ani were going to budge to her charms, she moved south.

She found a group of people whose nobles were all dead, from their Empress on down. Cornélie was herself ready to become dead, though not this particular way. She found her way into the Empress’s court, but Asiri had different plans for her. She would take the Montaigne woman’s life, but she could never become a Venerable One, not unless she proved her devotion to Suway.

The Empress wanted to know about Théah and its inhabitants—and was more than willing to pay for it with riches and status. Being the survivor that she has always been, Cornélie joined the Empress’s court. Now she gives the Empress everything she wants; and who better than Cornélie, who knows all their weaknesses?

Story Hooks

- Cornélie is not satisfied with her relegation to the Empress’s Théan puppet, and seeks to undermine her rule by selling her secrets to Théans. Will the Heroes stop Cornélie from inviting Théan troops to their shores?
- Cornélie hopes to prove herself to the Empress by destroying the Pakaykuq. She has convinced a group of Théan traders to help her infiltrate the camp. Can the Heroes root out her infiltrators and save the Resistance?



CORNÉLIE BLANCHET

“Loyalty is such a loaded word. I’m loyal to myself, what more do you want?”

STRENGTH

4

INFLUENCE

5

RANK

9





Chapter 5

Mechanics



AN AZTLANI HERO

Aztlan is far away from Théah, but rich with its own history, story, intrigues and adventures. You can either play visitors to this majestic land, or natives. What makes a Hero in Aztlan is the desire to do the right thing against all odds. Sometimes that comes in familiar forms, such as stopping a Villian in her tracks, or helping those who cannot help themselves. But other times, it may look less familiar, such as preserving a unique culture against being wiped out of existence, or honoring the gods.

Aztlani Heroes

Depending on which Nation she hails from, an Aztlani Hero has a wide array of reasons to be a Hero. She may believe in a unified Aztlan won through peaceful agreements. She may want to destroy evil city-states in Tzak K'an, ending whatever terrible practices they may adhere to. She may simply want to liberate her people from their Villainous leader. Whatever it is, she sees something wrong with her world, and she has vowed to fix it.

An Aztlani Hero prides himself on being brave and intelligent. He finds allies wherever he can, and refuses to allow fear to dictate his actions. While his Nation may fear war with Théah, he understands that he has great allies in Théan Heroes. As he is always willing to help those less able, or in need, he

finds himself easily embroiled in his allies' concerns, just as he asks them to help him with his.

Théans in Aztlan

Théans have been interacting with Aztlani for three-quarters of a century. Théans are not new, and many of them have integrated into the various Nations. This means that there are plenty of mixed nationality people living in the New World. Théan Heroes could be second generation, born of Théans who moved here years ago; someone who just arrived; or half-Aztlani half-Théan.

Where your Hero comes from determines the kinds of things she cares about. Those born in Aztlan have the same cultural concerns as anyone else in the Nation, though they also have ties back to their Théan roots. Théans who have come to the New World recently have any number of reasons for being here. Maybe they are running away from a bad past and trying to start a new life. Maybe they are seeking fame and fortune in the Tzak K'ani jungles. Maybe they are seeking political advantage in Kuraq. And maybe they are looking for someone in particular who came before them.



Aztlani Heroes in 7th Sea

This chapter covers everything you need to make a Hero from Aztlan. The rules for making a Hero are still the same—you'll be using the same steps from the CORE RULEBOOK—but New World expands your choices to Heroes outside of Théah.

There are General Backgrounds and Nation Backgrounds, just like the CORE RULEBOOK, so if you've read about the Tupac warriors of Kuraq and you want to play one, you can. This chapter also includes a bunch of new Advantages, new Arcana and new Stories. You can even find new Sorceries, new Dueling Styles and new Ship Origins and Adventures unique to the New World experience.

Mix and match bits from the CORE RULEBOOK with this one, but pay close attention to the limitations. Your GM may allow exceptions—such as a Tzak K'ani alchemist—but those should be rare. Yes, Heroes are exceptions to the rules, but those exceptions require both explanations and the possibility of future stories. For example, the Nahuacan with Sorte may have gotten it from her grandmother who married into your Nahuacan family fifty years before.

Step 1: Traits

Every Hero has five Traits defining what that Hero's core strengths are. The Traits are:

Brawn is a Hero's strength and physical power.

Finesse measures a Hero's coordination and agility.

Resolve is a Hero's willpower and endurance.

Wits measures how quickly a Hero thinks on his feet.

Panache is a Hero's charm and personal magnetism.

Every Hero begins with all of her Traits at 2. You have 2 additional points you can spend to increase your Traits.

Step 2: Nation

Your decision of Nation affects your Traits, and also grants you access to Nation-specific Backgrounds and Advantages. Apply these bonuses after you have spent points on Traits.

NATION	BONUS
Kuraq	+1 Brawn or +1 Resolve
Nahuaca	+1 Finesse or +1 Wits
Tzak K'an	+1 Wits or +1 Panache

Step 3: Backgrounds

In the world of Aztlan, few ever pick their own life path. Often, a child takes on the same role as her parents before her. Your Backgrounds represent what your Hero did before the game begins. Were you trained to be a priest or warrior? Did your parents send you to seminary to become a judge? Perhaps you were raised to venerate the Honorable Dead. Or maybe you were born into a life of luxury as one of Aztlan's noble families. This isn't where your Hero ends up, but it is where he started.

Backgrounds represent your past. You were a warrior, you were a scribe, you were an assassin. While these things had a strong influence on you, they are not necessarily who you've become.

Backgrounds give you a few things that make your Hero distinct from others.

Restrictions: Some Backgrounds have restrictions. Make sure you follow these; they are a part of your Hero's story.

Quirk: Backgrounds come with a Quirk, a personality trait that is common among people of that background. If you act in accordance with a Quirk from your background, you gain a Hero Point. You may only gain a Hero Point from a particular Quirk once per session.

Advantages: Backgrounds give you Advantages. Advantages are abilities most Théans will never have. If your Background lists an Advantage, you may add that Advantage to your Hero Sheet at no cost. Unless otherwise noted all Advantages can be found in this book or the CORE RULEBOOK. The notation will give you the book and page number.

Skills: Each Background also gives you a set of Skills, which begin with 1 Rank. Skills are specific bonuses for specific tasks. Like Traits, Skills have Ranks that tell you how many dice they give you. A Skill's Rank can only go as high as 5.

Two Backgrounds

First, pick two Backgrounds from the following list.

You get all of your Backgrounds' Advantages. If you have duplicate Advantages, take another Advantage of the same point cost, your choice.

You get 1 Rank in all your Backgrounds' Skills. If you have duplicate Skills, add 1 more point (for a total of 2 points) to the duplicate Skill.



General Backgrounds

ATHLETE

You are known throughout Aztlan as a famous ball player, wrestler or similar such public figure.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you use your fame or reputation as an opportunity to inspire another character.

Advantages

Clever Tongue
Quick Reflexes

Skills

Aim
Athletics
Brawl
Intimidate
Perform

CHARTERED TRADESMAN

You have been licensed to promote trade between Théah and the New World, transporting rare material across the ocean.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you use your mercantile connections to forge closer bonds between your home nation and a foreign power.

Advantages

Married to the Sea
Cross the Palm
Direction Sense

Skills

Convince
Empathy
Sailing
Scholarship
Weaponry

THÉAH IMMIGRANT

You were forced to leave Théah by some form of ill-luck, and are now attempting to rebuild your life in the New World.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you try to solve a problem the way it would have been done in the old country, and it gets you into trouble.

Advantages

Bar Fighter
Valiant Spirit

Skills

Brawl
Convince
Empathy
Notice
Sailing

RELIC SMUGGLER

You obtain artifacts—through legitimate or illegitimate means—to help preserve Aztlan culture.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you acquire a relic (either from ancient Aztlan or from Théah) by less-than-honest means.

Advantages

Second Story Work
Streetwise
The High Sign

Skills

Empathy
Hide
Sailing
Theft
Weaponry

Kuraq

AWQAYLLI

You act as the strong arm of Suway, protecting his priests and destroying his enemies—including the other gods.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you defeat an enemy more powerful than yourself.

Advantages

Duelist Academy
(Waglichina)
Sorcery

Skills

Athletics
Hide
Notice
Scholarship
Weaponry

CHURIKUNA

You are one of the Death Priests of Suway and call upon the power of the Venerable Dead to fulfill their wishes.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you follow orders without question.

Advantages

Direction Sense
Sorcery
Sorcery

Skills

Convince
Intimidate
Perform
Scholarship
Warfare

PAKAYKUQ

You believe that Suway is not the god your Nation needs, and secretly fight back in favor of another god.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you take great personal risk to stand up against a tyrant.

Advantages

God Touched
The Old Traditions (CE
p. 156)

Skills

Athletics
Hide
Notice
Ride
Tempt

TOKOYRIQ

You are tasked with maintaining the peace within Kuraq as both guard and secret police.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you uncover a secret, and it gets you into trouble.

Advantages

Psst
Over Here
Think on Your Feet

Skills

Aim
Empathy
Intimidate
Notice
Weaponry



Nahuacan Alliance

CUĀUHMEH (EAGLE TEMPLAR)

You are one of the greatest soldiers of the Alliance, and your distinct eagle helmet denotes your position.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you take on a problem that doesn't involve you because it's the right thing to do.

Advantages

Adorn with Feathers
Signature Item
Survivalist

Skills

Athletics
Convince
Empathy
Warfare
Weaponry

OCĒLŌMEH (JAGUAR KNIGHT)

You and your brothers and sisters in arms stalk the Nahuacan jungles, defeating the enemies of your Nation.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when your commitment to working as part of a team or unit helps you to solve a problem.

Advantages

Duelist Academy (Icniuhitli)
Shadow Stalker

Skills

Athletics
Hide
Intimidate
Warfare
Weaponry

POCHTECA (MERCHANT)

You use your position as a merchant to travel Aztlan to make alliances as well as dig into the secrets of those who oppose you.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you sacrifice or jeopardize a mercantile deal in favor of a useful secret.

Advantages

Barterer
Cross the Palm
Linguist

Skills

Convince
Empathy
Hide
Tempt
Theft

TEPANTLATO

You are tasked with defending the accused through your mastery of law.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you convince your allies to solve a problem with diplomacy and words, rather than with violence and swords.

Advantages

An Honest
Misunderstanding
Rise Up Brothers and Sisters

Skills

Convince
Empathy
Hide
Perform
Scholarship

Tzak K'an

HOLKANOB

You are one of the footsoldiers of Tzak K'an and stand between your people and the invaders who would do them harm.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you are outnumbered, outgunned or outclassed and refuse to back down.

Advantages

Hard to Kill
Survivalist

Skills

Aim
Athletics
Hide
Notice
Weaponry

LA VENTAN

Your bloodline is cursed with the taint of the werejaguar, and maintaining your secret keeps you alive.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when your ancient bloodline comes into play and causes you trouble.

Advantages

Foreign Born (Nahuacan)
Soothe the Beast
Beyond Sight

Skills

Athletics
Brawl
Hide
Notice
Scholarship

SHAMAN

You have been exiled from Tzak K'an because of your innate powers, but you still have your Nation's best interest in mind.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you turn down an offer of supernatural power or influence because it is too dangerous for any mortal to wield.

Advantages

Sorcery
The Storm Serves Me

Skills

Athletics
Brawl
Empathy
Notice
Scholarship

VISION PRIEST

You have been provided with great power to guide your people, but all power comes with sacrifice.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when advice you provide to another leads to trouble.

Advantages

Sorcery
Sorcery
Time Sense

Skills

Convince
Intimidate
Notice
Scholarship
Weaponry



Step 5: Skills

You gain 10 points to add to existing Skills from your Backgrounds or to add new Skills to your sheet. Each point buys you one more rank of a Skill, whether you already have any ranks in it from your Background or not. You cannot raise a Skill above Rank 3 when making your Hero.

Achieving certain Ranks in Skills grants your Hero additional bonuses beyond dice.

- At **3 Ranks**, you gain the ability to reroll any single die when you make a Risk using that Skill.
- At **4 Ranks**, you gain the ability to earn 2 Raises per set by creating sets of 15, rather than only 1 Raise per set for creating a set of 10.
- At **5 Ranks**, all dice that roll a 10 explode, allowing you to roll an additional die and add it to your total.

AIM

Use Aim when you point a pistol at someone and pull the trigger. Use Aim when you throw a knife through the jungle with pinpoint accuracy.

ATHLETICS

Use Athletics to swing across a pit of quicksand on a vine, jump from rooftop to rooftop, or otherwise perform a dangerous physical stunt.

BRAWL

Use Brawl when you punch or kick someone. Use Brawl when you drag someone into an alleyway.

CONVINCE

Use Convince when you appeal to someone's better nature. Use Convince when you assure someone you're being honest with her and she should trust you.

EMPATHY

Use Empathy when you want to tell if someone is being genuine. Use Empathy when you determine someone's general mental state—afraid, nervous, etc.

HIDE

Use Hide when you keep a weapon or other item hidden, and avoid it being found if you are searched. Use Hide to attack an unsuspecting victim.

INTIMIDATE

Use Intimidate when you make someone do what you want under threat, physical or otherwise.

NOTICE

Use Notice when you investigate a temple or search a Villain's study for clues. Use Notice when you want to pick out fine details at a glance.

PERFORM

Use Perform when you try to captivate an audience with your showmanship. Use Perform to get across a particular message to your audience or to elicit a specific emotion from them through performance.

RIDE

Use Ride when you need to drive a wagon through hazardous terrain. Use Ride when you ride a mount at a gallop.

SAILING

Use Sailing whenever you navigate your way through a ship's rigging. Use Sailing when you attempt to steer a ship during a pitched battle at sea, or through a dangerously narrow channel.

SCHOLARSHIP

Use Scholarship when you consult your knowledge to fill in the details on a subject. Use Scholarship when you call upon medical training to tend to an injury.

TEMPT

Use Tempt when you bribe someone to do something for you that she really shouldn't agree to do.

THEFT

Use Theft when you swipe something from someone's pocket without him noticing. Use Theft when you pick a lock, crack a safe, or something similar.

WARFARE

Use Warfare whenever you need tactical expertise, such as when you're invading a city-state. Use Warfare when you lead an army in battle.

WEAPONRY

Use Weaponry when you attack something with a sword, axe, hammer or knife in your hand.



Step 5: Advantages

Although you already have some Advantages from your Backgrounds, you may now buy new Advantages. These are distinctions that set you apart from everyone else.

You have 5 points to buy new Advantages.

Advantages cost between 1 and 5 points and may cost different amounts depending on your Hero's Nation of origin. Some Advantages have restrictions.

All Advantages may only be purchased once unless explicitly stated otherwise.

An Advantage with the Knack tag (K) requires a Hero Point to activate, but no Raises—meaning that it doesn't take an Action, even though it is probably activated on your turn.

1 Point Advantages

ADORN WITH FEATHERS (NAHUACAN ONLY)

You must have the “Signature Item” Advantage.

You have learned how to enhance your Signature Item through rare, mystical materials such as feathers blessed by the gods or enchanted obsidian. When you buy this Advantage, choose one of the following abilities. You can always spend a Hero Point to use a chosen ability in the same manner as the abilities provided by the Signature Item Advantage.

- Prevent Wounds from being reduced below an amount equal to your highest Trait when using the Signature Item.
- Prevent a number of Wounds dealt to another character equal to your highest Trait when using the Signature Item.
- Apply Pressure to a number of targets in the current Scene equal to your highest Trait when using the Signature Item.
- Ignore Ranks of Fear equal to your highest Trait when using the Signature Item.

A Hero can buy this Advantage multiple times. Each time they do, choose a different Adorn with Feathers ability.

THE HIGH SIGN

You can convey a single-word message (such as “danger,” “help,” “go,” or “flee”) to any allies who can hear or see you through an innocuous sound or motion that others won't understand and often even seem perfectly normal. Most often these are bird calls, animal cries or subtle gestures.

TWO BLOODS

You have a mixed heritage—your mother and father were from two different Nations, and so the blood of each runs in your veins. Choose a Nation other than your own. You may choose that Nation's Sorcery option if you take the Sorcery Advantage (although you can still only choose a single type of Sorcery to learn). You may also purchase Advantages at that Nation's discounted cost.

2 Point Advantages

BETTER LUCKY THAN GOOD

Whenever you make a Risk using a Skill that you have one or zero Ranks in, spending Hero Points gives you 2 bonus dice instead of 1.

BEYOND SIGHT (K)

Spend a Hero Point. Until the end of the scene, you can ignore any impediment to your vision, no matter the source. For example, if you are blindfolded or plunged into complete darkness, you may act as if you can see normally. Most commonly, Heroes with this Advantage have the ability to focus their other senses in order to compensate for the loss of sight.

CLEVER TONGUE

When you act first in an Action Sequence, and you spend your first Action to brag about how you're going to defeat your opponent in particularly colorful and inventive ways, the first time you deal Wounds to your opponent they must spend 2 Raises for each Wound they prevent.

CONFIDANT

You must have the “Trusted Companion” Advantage. Choose a Basic Background for your Companion. Whenever they take a Risk using a Skill from that Background, they roll 2 additional dice. They gain the



Advantages from that Background; any effects that require the expenditure of a Hero Point must be paid by you. Your Companion may now take 10 Wounds before they become Helpless, although they'll still need you to rescue them.

CROSS THE PALM (1 IF TZAK K'AN)

When you spend Wealth to reroll a die in a social Risk swayed by money, you can reroll up to 2 dice.

FACE THE STORM

Any Raises you spend to overcome a Consequence created by a Hazard count as 2 Raises.

FORAGER

When you have at least one hour to spend foraging in your surroundings, you can find materials to create at least rudimentary weapons (a stone or wooden spear, a sharpened stone knife, simple wooden or stone arrows, etc.), protective clothing, or basic tools (such as a crude hammer, hatchet, chisel, skinning knife, etc.). These items function normally for one scene (not necessarily the scene they are created in). If the GM spends a Danger Point, your foraged item breaks.

SHADOW STALKER

Spend a Hero Point to move in silence, vanish into the darkness or otherwise demonstrate your affinity with the shadows.

TEAM PLAYER (1 IF NAHUACAN)

When you spend a Raise to create an Opportunity, you can spend a second Raise. If you do, you activate the Opportunity on behalf of another willing Hero—she doesn't need to spend her own Raise.

3 Point Advantages

DESPERATE EFFORT

When you have zero Raises in an Action Sequence, you can spend a Hero Point to take a single Action. You ignore Improvisation for this Action, but you can otherwise perform any Action that you would normally be allowed by spending one (and only one) Raise. A player may only use this Advantage once per game session.

GO ON WITHOUT ME (1 IF KURAQ)

Spend all of your Raises, at least 1 for each Hero (aside from yourself) in the current scene. All Heroes (aside from yourself) are removed from the scene, and you stay behind, stranded and alone. You cannot escape the scene early by any effect (such as the "Wily" Virtue), and those you have removed from the scene cannot return. All players (but not their Heroes) must be willing for this effect to work—if even one player does not want to leave, *all* Heroes remain and you still lose your Raises.

PLAY POSSUM

When you are the only Hero remaining in a scene involving a Villain or Brutes employed by a Villain, you can choose to become Helpless. If you do so, you are immune to Murder and any Villains present (or Brutes in their employ) will let slip some useful bit of information. The GM will tell you the information that is revealed to you, but in general you can expect to learn a single useful bit of information or insight into the Villain's motives and plans.

The Villain might smirk over your (supposedly) unconscious form and confess that you look just as your father did, right before he died (thus revealing that the Villain is the one who killed him, or at least was present), or a squad of guards might reveal that they intend to lock you in the Duke's dungeons below—in the cell next to that annoying Baron (thus revealing that the Duke has captured and imprisoned the Baron in his dungeon).

The Villain or Brutes will either ignore you, leave you for dead, take you prisoner, or anything else they might do had they rendered you Helpless, but they cannot kill you. At the beginning of the next scene, you are no longer Helpless.

SOOTHE THE BEAST

You may spend a Raise on your Action to prevent an animal or Monster from taking aggressive actions. The animal or Monster may still do other things (such as run away, try to hide, etc.) but it will not attack anyone present. This effect immediately ends and cannot be resumed if any effect causes the animal or Monster to take any Wounds, or a similar action that it interprets as aggressive is taken toward it. This Advantage does not function against creatures with approximately human levels of intelligence or greater.



THE LAST WORD

When you have zero Raises during a Dramatic Sequence, you can spend a Hero Point in order to take a single Action, ignoring the rules for improvisation. A Hero may only use this Advantage once per game session.

THINK ON YOUR FEET

The first time each Round you would have to pay an additional Raise to perform an Action due to Improvisation, you do not need to spend the extra Raise. This applies only to increased Raise cost from Improvisation—any other effects that cause an increased cost in Raises still apply as normal.

WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

Spend a Hero Point when you stalk your prey through natural surroundings, such as a jungle or heavy wood. The first time you deal Wounds to your target, they take an additional Dramatic Wound. A Hero can only use this Advantage once per scene, and it does not function with firearms.

4 Point Advantages

GOD-TOUCHED

You have been marked or chosen by one of the gods of Aztlan. Choose which god has favored you, such as Suway, the Plumed Serpent, or Itzzohualli. After rolling dice in a Risk, you may spend a Hero Point to call upon the favor of the gods to select a number that you rolled one or more of in the Risk. All dice which rolled the chosen number explode during this Risk.

For example, if you selected the number 7 then all 7s that you roll will explode (in addition to other dice exploding such as your 10s if you have been dealt 2 Dramatic Wounds). You may use God-Touched only once per Scene.

PARTING SHOT

When you have a pistol, bow, crossbow, throwing knife or a similar projectile weapon and have no Raises during an Action Sequence, spend a Hero Point and select another character in the scene. That character takes one Dramatic Wound, and you can choose to either become Helpless or immediately leave the scene, unable to return.

SILENT TAKEDOWN

Spend a Hero Point to immediately defeat a single Brute Squad, regardless of its Strength, so long as they aren't aware of your presence before you launch your attack.

5 Point Advantages

HUNTER OF THE MIGHTY (3 IF KURAQ)

Spend a Hero Point when you deal Wounds to a Villain or Monster. You deal additional Wounds equal to the difference between their Strength and your highest Trait. For example, if your highest Trait is your Finesse of 3 and you are dealing Wounds to a 10 Strength Villain, you deal 7 extra Wounds.

RISE UP BROTHERS AND SISTERS (3 IF NAHUACAN)

When you spend a Hero Point to give another Hero bonus dice on a Risk, you can divide the dice you grant between any allied Heroes who can see or hear you. Any Hero who receives bonus dice in this way may still spend their own Hero Points for bonus dice, and may still receive bonus dice from another Hero spending a Hero Point to aid them. Basically, your Hero Point expenditure does not count toward the “a Hero can only receive bonus dice in this way once on a Risk” limitation.

THE STORM SERVES ME (3 IF TZAK K'AN)

Spend a Hero Point. For one Round, one Hazard (page 199) in the scene gains the Dominion Element—with you as its master. If the Hazard already had this Element, you become the master of the Hazard and the previous master loses the benefit for one Round. While you are the master of a Hazard in this way, you can spend a Raise in response to the Hazard taking an Action; if you do so, the Hazard's attempted Action fails, although it still loses any Raises it just spent. A Hero can only activate this Advantage once per scene.



Step 6: Arcana

For your Hero, you choose a Virtue and Hubris either from this list, or from the **CORE RULEBOOK** (page 156). They do not need to be from the same card.

You may only activate your Virtue once per Session.

You may only activate your Hero's Hubris once per Session. Activating your Hubris gives you a Hero Point. The GM can offer a Hero Point to activate a Hero's Hubris, but the player may refuse. If he accepts, he gains the Hero Point and must act in accordance with his Hubris.

The Mountain

Virtue: Enduring

Activate your Virtue when you receive your fourth Dramatic Wound. For the remainder of the round you may act normally and are not considered Helpless.

Hubris: Immovable

You receive a Hero Point when your character hears of someone else's troubles and does not act on it.

The River

Virtue: Adaptable

Activate your Virtue when you are put under Pressure. You do not need to spend an additional Raise to take a different Action.

Hubris: Unregulated

You receive a Hero Point when you go against an order of someone in a position of authority.

The Great Cycle

Virtue: Alive/Fortunate

Activate your Virtue to reroll any number of dice when you take a Risk.

Hubris: Dead/Unfortunate

You receive a Hero Point when your GM spends a Danger Point and it impacts your character.

The Scholar

Virtue: Knowledgeable

Activate your Virtue and make a statement about an event either happening in the present or that happened in the past. This statement is always true.

Hubris: Misinformed

You receive a Hero Point when you insist to act on information that is unreliable and it turns out poorly.

The Skywatcher

Virtue: Perceptive

Activate your Virtue after you ask another character a question. You know if the other character lies or tells the truth.

Hubris: Parochial

You receive a Hero Point when you refuse to acknowledge another character's insight and it causes trouble.

The Explorer

Virtue: Brave

Activate your Virtue when you are affected by Fear when rolling a Risk. During that Risk your 10's explode. If your 10's already explode due to a different effect your 9's explode as well.

Hubris: Impulsive

You receive a Hero Point when you choose to act without all available information and it leads you to trouble.

The Morning Star

Virtue: Captivating

Activate your Virtue to force all Actions performed against your allies for the remainder of the round to be performed against you.

Hubris: Pretentious

You receive a Hero Point when you refuse to take part in an action because you feel doing so would be beneath you.

The Evening Star

Virtue: Steady/Consistent

Activate your Virtue when you spend a Hero Point to aid an ally. That Hero gains two additional dice.

Hubris: Stubborn

You receive a Hero Point when you put your foot down on a subject and it causes trouble.



The Ceiba

Virtue: Strong

Activate your Virtue when the GM spends a Danger Point. The Danger Point has no effect but is still spent.

Hubris: Guarded

You receive a Hero Point when you withhold information from your allies and sharing that information would be to your benefit.

Step 7: Stories

While Heroes work together to tell a larger story, every Hero has their own story to tell. Your Hero is no different. The promise you made to your father on his deathbed. The man whose wrongful testimony sent you to prison for all those years. The woman whose love you've sworn to recapture. Stories are more than the things you tell everyone you'll accomplish one day. Stories are also the road you'll walk to get there.

More information on Stories can be found in the **CORE RULEBOOK** (page 159).

Cursed

Perhaps you wandered into a forbidden temple or inadvertently spited a sorcerer in disguise. What you know for certain is that since then, you've been cursed. Every manner of curse exists in Aztlan, but how you deal with it is up to you. What this curse does, what caused it, and how it may be lifted must first be determined.

Endings

- I perform the ritual and the curse is lifted.
- I exact my revenge upon the one that cursed me.
- I learn of powers that come with this curse and decide to live with it.

First Steps

- I hear of a ritual that may break the curse.
- I vow to hunt down the one that cursed me.
- Little is known about this curse and I set off to find answers.

Rites of Passage

Whether scribe, scientist, artist or astronomer, there are schools and rites for nearly every specialized occupation in the New World, and you have not yet finished your training. Your mentor or institution still needs you prove your worth before you can move on.

Endings

- I make the discovery of the century! People will be citing me for generations.
- I realize that adventuring is much more fun than the family profession. I abandon my pursuits for a new—less pretentious—way of life.
- I am finally allowed into the Guild and my work is met with newfound celebrity and awe.

First Steps

- I locate a major gap in the literature of my field that I could fill: a lost city, missing species or new technology.
- I come from a long line of the same respectable profession, but I am terrible at it. I set out to make my family proud and become equipped to take over the family business.
- I have been apprenticing as an artist for years but keep getting rejected from the Guild due to "bland style". My old master said that seeing and documenting life outside of my small town could help my case.

Missing

Someone, or something, is missing. Nothing will be okay until you find them. Unfortunately, Aztlan is a big place. Thick jungles, perilous mountains, labyrinthine cities and harsh deserts mean that there are many corners where what is lost might be hidden.

Endings

- I find the lost rain deity and save my town from drought.
- I locate the heir and dethrone the fraud.
- The heirloom isn't magic, it's cursed. I leave this gift in the "right" hands.



First Steps

- The rain deity is gone; the crops won't grow and my town is on the verge of collapse. A village elder tells me of a trail that may lead to his location.
- The rightful heir to the throne is thought dead and my city-state is being run into the ground by a mad ruler! I find a clue that hints they the heir is still alive.
- I was told by my grandfather that the old trinket I sold for next-to-nothing is actually a magic family heirloom.

Alliances

The New World is built upon complex political, social and economic alliances. Perhaps you aim to forge new partnerships with foreigners or disparate groups, convince an adversary to join you against a common enemy, or quash a feud between two warring leaders.

Endings

- I realize these “allies” will do more harm than good and sabotage the agreement I worked towards. I establish a vast trade route and become wealthy in the process.
- For every alliance I garner, I make an enemy.

First Steps

- Trouble is brewing, and there is no way my hometown can deal with it alone. I leave to find aid from anyone who will listen.
- An embargo is ruining my business. I set off to convince others to buy what I'm peddling back home.
- A friend of a friend might be able to help me break into the nicer class of person and elevate my social standing.

Step 8: Details

Finally, let's fill out the blank spots on your Hero Sheet: we're talking about Reputation, Secret Societies, Wealth and Wounds.

Your Hero's **Reputation**, **Wealth** and **Wounds** are all identical to those of a Théan, and work the same way. For more information, see the **CORE RULEBOOK** (page 164).

Your Hero can join a **Secret Society** as well. All of the Societies from Théah are open to you, and this book presents three new ones: the **Guardians of Aztlan**, the **Jaguar's Heirs**, and the **Potechca**.

The Guardians of Aztlan

An organization dedicated to protecting all of Aztlan from external threats, this group struggles to defend against the ever present threat of the return of the Old Ones while conflicted on their response to the Théans who have reached their shores. Read more about the Guardians of Aztlan on page 170.

The Jaguar's Heirs

Each Nation of Aztlan worships the jaguar in one form or another as both a creator and destroyer, and this group of magical practitioners is dedicated to collecting and mastering mystical knowledge of all kinds from across the continent while thwarting any Villainous sorcerer. Read more about the Jaguar's Heirs on page 170.

The Potechca

A group of merchants who have given up the obvious trappings of their wealth in exchange for the ability to trade without restriction, this faction has grown to value using their resources to support the commoners of Aztlan rather than lining their own pockets. Read more about the Potechca on page 170.





Sorceries

Wayak' Kan

"Just as the gods have sacrificed, so too must we."

While there are plenty who lay claim to lesser gifts in Tzak K'an, true sorcery is only used when a sacrifice is made willingly. This potent form of blood magic, known as Questing for the Wayak' Kan, the "vision serpent," comes at a great cost, both physically and mentally. After all, you never know what might rise from the smoke.

The Quest begins when the sorcerer, called an Ahez, is prepared to take on physical harm, often using tools for the drawing of blood like long ropes with embedded thorns, stingray spines or obsidian blades. The Ahez fixes his intention in mind, pays the price demanded by the gods, and breaches through the mortal plane of existence to somewhere else.

For a moment the edges of the reality blur for the Ahez and he glimpses into the realm of the intention. Instead of blood his cuts weep a thick colorful smoke coils and writhes until the Ahez is faced with a giant, terrifying serpent. If pleased with the Ahez, the head

of the serpent whirls, reconfigures and transforms into the Ahpulul, the item or person of intent.

With intent in hand the Ahez is left with only the hope that after his needs are fulfilled his summoning returns to whence it came. Oftentimes his summoning vanishes into smoke once the Ahez is done but sometimes things linger. Sometimes, the Ahez becomes an Ahpul, one who carries something, for things that do not belong in this world.

How It Works

When a Hero acquires the Sorcery Advantage they select Ahpulul she knows how to summon; two Baxan and one Pixan. Each additional time acquiring the Sorcery Advantage the Ahez gains two more Baxan and one more Pixan.

Whenever the Ahez wishes to call an item or spirit to her aid, she takes a single Wound that cannot be healed until the item is returned to its home. If summoning an Ahpulul during a Sequence it costs a Raise to reach through the barriers between the worlds to pull the Ahpulul to her side.



Summoned Baxan remain with the Hero for the remainder of the scene before they simply vanish into smoke. There is no limit to the number of Baxan the Ahez may summon in a single scene. Summoned Pixan usually vanish at the end of the scene but the player may decide to keep the Pixan around and become an Ahpul. At this point the Game Master and player should work out what the Pixan wants to accomplish so once its desire is fulfilled it can return home.

Aside from having a Pixan at your ready call, becoming an Ahpul has a few other unique benefits. First, the Wound inflicted when summoning the Pixan is healed, as the Ahpul becomes one with the Pixan. Second, being an Ahpul is both a mark of pride and source of fear among the Tzak K'an. When dealing with the Tzak K'an, an Ahpul treats her Intimidation as one Rank higher but her Tempt as one Rank lower. Finally, the Ahpul become cleansers of the soul; whenever the Ahpul helps another Hero complete a Redemption Story that Hero gets to remove a second point of Corruption.

Aside from fulfilling the Pixan's desire there are two other ways to lose a Pixan. When a player attempts to summon a second Pixan the first vanishes. The gods can only entrust so much power to any one person. If a player fails a Corruption check the Pixan also vanishes. Only those pure of heart are deemed worthy enough become an Ahpul.

Ahpulul

The things a Ahez pulls from elsewhere are collectively called Ahpulul. The Baxan are unintelligent things like items, weapons or clothing while the Pixan represent anything the Ahez summons with intelligence like spirits, creatures or souls. Occasionally, an Ahez will learn of an intelligent weapon or item, but more often the Pixan are shaped like beings.

Baxan

Baxan are minor items and objects a Ahez can summon to aid him. They always last for a single Scene before vanishing into a puff of smoke. A Baxan may be used multiple times in a single Scene as long as the Ahez continues to pay the Hero Point cost for activating its abilities.

Bloody Knife of Vatanchu

In Tzak K'an folklore, Vatanchu was the first person to take another's life against their will. In some tellings it's a forced sacrifice, and others it's legitimate murder. The reason for the killing also changes from telling to telling, as does the victim and even Vatanchu's gender. Stories of Vatanchu are cautionary tales, intended to remind the listener the price of taking a life. When carrying the Bloody Knife of Vatanchu, a Hero may spend a Hero Point to apply Pressure to everyone in the scene. Any violent action costs 2 Raises instead of 1.

Cit-Tum's Necklace

In life, Cit-Tum was a renowned medicine man, healing the sick and mending the wounds of hundreds of thousands of Tzak K'ani. As he laid dying he whispered, "I have saved many lives. Healed wounds. Cured sickness. I prevented nothing. I would rather have endured the pain myself to spare the injured their wound." While wearing Cit-Tum's Necklace, a Hero may spend a Hero Point to redirect all Wounds inflicted on another Hero to the wearer.

Coyopa's Sun Sling

For her entire life Coyopa was the greatest slinger of all the Tzak K'ani tribes. She could throw a stone farther and harder than any man, woman or even god that she encountered. A favorite tale is of how Coyopa was challenged by the god Kakmo. Kakmo said that if Coyopa could throw a rock into the sun it would grant Coyopa eternal life; if Coyopa failed then she would be forced to serve Kakmo for all eternity. When a Hero is carrying Coyopa's Sun Sling he can spend a Hero Point to cause a number of Wounds equal to the Hero's Ranks in Aim to any single person in the scene.

Feathers from Tepeu's Scales

Before the Tzak K'ani were born Tepeu, the Sovereign Plumed Serpent, tried to create humanity in it's image. Tepeu's first creation, Vucub-Caquix, was quickly corrupted and only proved to Tepeu that he was not worthy to create humanity alone. However, that didn't deter Tepeu. He gathered others and after several more attempts, he helped create the Tzak K'ani. When adorned with Feathers from Tepeu's Scales, a Hero may spend a Hero Point to reroll his entire dice pool once, keeping the new results.



The First Armor

The first Tzak K'ani to ever don armor was Qaholom. Having grown tired of seeing warrior after warrior leave her village only to never return, Qaholom set to work. By layering cotton, cloth and leather Qaholom created a quilted body suit for her own protection. Once her work was complete she tempered her creation with blood for protection against enemies inhuman. While wearing the First Armor a Hero can spend a Hero Point to completely prevent all Wounds taken from a single source or attack, so long as that source or attack would cause a Dramatic Wound. A Hero may only activate the First Armor once per Round.

Flares from Kinich Ahau's Ears

Even before he was divine the legends say that Kinich Ahau could light up a room. The stories talk of how, as a child, Kinich Ahau would comfort the sick or stop a fight. Perhaps it was this power that made a local war chief, Ekchuah, fear him so.

The day before his 13th birthday Ekchuah kidnapped Kinich Ahau and sacrificed him to the gods. Knowing that Kinich Ahau would always be feared by evil men, the gods instead elevated Kinich Ahau to divinity. He was given control over where the sun may shine, so he can root out darkness wherever he sees it. A Hero wearing the Flares from Kinich Ahau's Ears may spend a Hero Point to illuminate a room, removing all shadow, and deal 1 Dramatic Wound to anyone with Corruption.

Maximon's Pati

In life, Maximon was a traveling merchant, medicine woman and midwife. She became the most well traveled Tzak K'ani in history in part due to her intimate knowledge of the jungle. She crafted sandals that made almost no noise, covered herself in oils to disguise her scent, and colored her pati to match with the leaves and trees of her surroundings. While wearing Maximon's Pati, a Hero may spend a Hero Point to vanish from sight, sound and smell. This effect lasts until the end of the Scene, or until the Hero interacts with her surroundings in some way (such as picking up an object, attacking another character, or speaking).

Naum's Headdress

When the gods created humanity they were mindless creatures, surviving on instinct alone. Some of the gods decided to imbue them with thought and mind. They crafted an elaborate headdress and gave it to one known as Naum. Upon placing the headdress upon her head, Naum smiled and thanked the gods for the gift. While wearing Naum's Headdress, a Hero may spend a Hero Point. Until the end of the Scene, the Hero does not have to pay Improvisation or Unskilled penalties when taking Actions governed by a Skill in which he has zero Ranks.

Obsidian Teeth

When Zipacna speaks, soot and smoke pour from his mouth. This has given him a reputation for being evil, but that couldn't be further from the truth. The few who know Zipacna say he might be the most heroic of the gods. When Kisin tried to destroy humanity, it was Zipacna that bit into Kisin's spear, destroying it to save humanity. While wearing Zipacna's Obsidian Teeth, a Hero may spend a Hero Point to bite any item, even magical, destroying it in the process. The Hero takes a Dramatic Wound if the object she bites is magical or unique in some way (such as being made from Dracheneisen, a Syrneth artifact, or a Signature Item).

Paint for Yaluk

The Tzak K'ani all think of Yaluk as their wizened grandfather. Legends tell of how, very late in years, Yaluk went to the temple and for 260 days did nothing but slowly climb to the top. As he placed his foot onto the final step lightning cracked out of a clear sky and burned Yaluk's flesh with the most beautiful design. While wearing Paint for Yaluk the Hero may spend a Hero Point to gain 2 Bonus Dice to any Risks that involve wisdom, planning or steadfastness.

Pipe of Oxlahuntiku

The legends say when Oxlahuntiku was alive no creature in the sky was safe from her blowpipe. She even once hunted down the mighty Vucub Caquix, a great bird demon responsible for severing the arm of Oxlahuntiku's rival and friend Ah-Tabai. When wielding the Pipe of Oxlahuntiku a Hero may spend a Hero Point to inflict a Dramatic Wound on any Monster that is unaware of the Hero's presence.



Sandals of the Bahlam

Some communities of Tzak K'ani preferred to be left alone and would do whatever it took to remain isolated from the rest of the tribes. It was these people that the Bahlam, jaguar gods, would protect. Stalking the edge of the villages, high up in the trees, the Bahlam would give warning to the tribe in cases of outsiders or invaders. While wearing the Sandals of the Bahlam, a Hero may spend a Hero Point to act first in any scene. The Hero still spends Raises as normal, but she takes her first Action before anyone else.

Shield-Altar of Buluc

Buluc was a warrior not renowned for defeating her enemies or conquering their lands, but instead for protecting her people and ensuring her warriors won their battles. Legend says that before battle she would lay her shield upon the ground and make sacrifices to the gods. The blood and ash of her gifts would stain the shield and protect her people from harm. While carrying the Shield-Altar of Buluc, the Hero may spend a Hero Point to divert any attack directed at another character to target himself instead. Any Wounds that would be inflicted are reduced by 1.

Spear of Ah-Tabai

It is said that no animal of the land, air, or sea was safe from the great hunter Ah-Tabai's spear. Stalking the jungles for days in search of his prey Ah-Tabai's downfall came when he decided to hunt a monster not of this world. His pride cost him an arm but the gods, having pity on him, imbued his spear with great power. While wielding the Spear of Ah-Tabai, a Hero may spend a Hero Point whenever dealing Wounds to deal an additional number of Wounds equal to her own Dramatic Wounds.

Xaman's Elaborate Loincloth

The greatest merchant who ever lived was Xaman. Tales say that he was so rich he even his loincloth was crafted from gold and silver. Xaman was also so exceptionally generous that his friends were often as wealthy as he was. Charitable, kind and honorable, Xaman was what all merchants should strive to be. While wearing Xaman's Elaborate Loincloth, a Hero may spend a Hero Point on anything he would normally spend a Wealth Point on.

Pixan

Pixan are major items and creatures an Ahez can summon to aid her. They are always sentient and can persist for longer than a Scene if they have something they wish to accomplish. As long as a Hero carries or is accompanied by a Pixan she can use the Pixan's power by paying the Hero Point cost associated with the Pixan. However, Pixan also come with a catch—something that makes life a little harder should the Hero choose to become an Ahpul.

Alux

Generally benevolent nature spirits, the Alux appear as knee-high Tzak K'ani. They are more than happy to run errands and perform simple tasks for an Ahez as long as they are treated with respect. It's considered rude to call them Alux or to issue them commands. Instead, the Ahez should treat the spirits as friends, asking instead of telling.

Whenever an Alux is following a Hero, the Hero may spend a Hero Point to issue a simple task to the Alux. They are not capable of (or perhaps simply not willing to perform) complex tasks or elaborate commands. After issuing the order the Alux will run off, to return only when the task is complete. However, for as long as the Alux is around it must be treated with the utmost courtesy and politeness. An irritated Alux will begin taking commands, often in secret, from the Hero's enemies.

Camazotz

The Camazotz are massive bat-like creatures from the underworld of Xibalba with vampiric tendencies. The Camazotz are malevolent spirits and while they will gladly drink blood used in rituals they far prefer blood acquired by attack. Only a desperate Ahez would dare summon a Camazotz, one who didn't care what kind of hell he unleashed upon his enemies.

After a Camazotz is summoned the creature will haunt, or hunt, the Ahez and all those around the Ahez until it leaves. Whenever anyone in the same scene as the Camazotz takes one or more Wounds, the creature swoops in and delivers an additional Wound. The Hero may spend a Hero Point to protect everyone in the scene from the Camazotz for a single Round.



Codex Itzam

The first of the Tzak K'ani was Itzam, born without gender or bias. Itzam taught the tribes of Aztlan to sow crops, build homes and bear children. When Itzam finally decided to leave the world they turned themselves into codices on the history of the tribes, of basic and complex knowledges, and even wisdom in parables. A crafty Ahez can claim a codex from Itzam's vast corpse library to help guide her through tribal squabbles, negotiate new deals or better understand the worlds around her.

When summoning a Codex the Hero must specify the single topic the book covers. Then for as long as a Hero carries a book from the Codex Itzam she may spend a Hero Point to receive two bonus dice on any Risk involving the subject of the book. The Hero may take this action multiple times, gaining two dice for every Hero Point spent. However, she never receives Flair for any actions related to the Codex's topic, even when not spending a Hero Point to use the Codex's ability.

Holcan's War Club

Holcan was a combatant of such prowess his name became synonymous with the warrior profession. Upon his death Holcan traveled beyond the waters of the dead to conquer lands unimagined and become one with his club. Now Ahez can call upon him in times of great strife and conflict for the honor of wielding his War Club in battle.

While wielding Holcan's War Club, the Hero can spend a Hero Point to know any one non-Style Maneuver for the remainder of the Scene. If the Hero can already perform Maneuvers, his Weaponry is considered 1 Rank higher for the purposes of Maneuver effects (such as the Wounds dealt by the Slash Maneuver). However, while a Hero is carrying Holcan's War Club he can not heal or reduce any Wounds he takes.

Sisemité

These shaggy powerful humanoid look more like large monkeys than Tzak K'ani. They are non-verbal creatures that only make howling or screaming sounds depending on their mood. However, their non-commutative nature shouldn't fool the Ahez who knows the Sisemité are powerfully prophetic creatures capable of granting visions of the certain future. Regrettably, the Sisemité tend to be sexist, preferring to deal with female Ahez.

As long as the Sisemité follows the Hero, she may spend a Hero Point to have the Sisemité grant them a vision. The visions always show a definite answer, though being able to decrypt the meaning might not be so easy. However, as long as the Sisemité is with the Hero it will ask her to do things. Again, these requests are communicated in visions and they can be anything from simple favors to elaborate quests. The hero may see herself bringing a cup of water to the Sisemité or traveling to the deepest forests of Ussura (a land literally half the world away), collecting freshly fallen snow, melting it over a fire, and serving it to the Sisemité. Sometimes these tasks are impossible, and failing to grant a Sisemité's request results in them returning to the world they came from.

The Votan Stela

The hero Votan was an architect who designed monuments so pleasing to the gods in Old Aztlan they gifted her with free will beyond death. She was given a small, talking stela to persuade the Paddle Gods to carry Votan from eternal shore to eternal shore. Now the Ahez can summon Votan's Token, assuming she's not using it, to ensure safe travels.

When a Hero is carrying the Votan Stela he may spend a Hero Point to arrive safely at his destination, avoiding any trouble he might have encountered along the way. These avoidances are often disguised as setbacks (a fallen tree blocking the normal route) but turn out to be life saving (there was a large encampment of bandits along the route the Heroes have now avoided). However, as long as the Hero carries the Votan Stela he also carries Death with him. Unless a life-saving action is taken, any character that is rendered Helpless dies at the end of the scene.



Wañuy Ñaqay

While once a benign sorcery used to commune with the spirits of the recently departed, Wañuy Ñaqay (Death Magic) has grown and twisted over the years since the Empress took control of Kuraq and the people began worshiping Suway as their primary god. Since that time, the Churikuna (descendants) who practice this magic, in addition to the Venerable Ones who share the ability to use Wañuy Ñaqay, have escalated their power exponentially.

By crafting tokens from the mummified body of one of the Venerable Ones, a Churikuna is granted incredible control over the powers of death. These followers of Suway are granted the abilities to command the undead, commune with their ancestors, and even feed on the souls of the dead and living alike. Those who practice Wañuy Ñaqay walk a fine line: when dealing with death and souls everyday, it is easy to fall to Villainy. Heroic Churikuna exist, but their own morality often keeps them from using the most heinous abilities of Wañuy Ñaqay: those that include the destruction of souls, and especially those that feed upon the souls of the living.

Those trained by the death priests to become a Churikuna are easily identified: all Churikuna wear a mask resembling a human skull while in public, and as their power grows the Churikuna begins wearing even more artifacts empowered by their ancestor. Each of these items are made with a piece of the Venerable One which empowers the Churikuna's power, and the Churikuna protect these holy artifacts with their lives. Churikuna, like the death priests who cannot use Wañuy Ñaqay, wear the black robes and golden chains of their office, but can be identified through their Death Tokens, specifically their Death Mask.

The death priests guard the secrets of their magic closely: Wañuy Ñaqay is a sorcery which is entirely learned. A rogue Churikuna has all of the knowledge needed not only to create a new Venerable One but also to teach others to use that Venerable One to make Death Tokens and use Wañuy Ñaqay. Because of this, incredible care is taken amongst the death priests when it comes to determining whom to teach this magic. If knowledge of Wañuy Ñaqay, and what the Churikuna are truly capable of, became public knowledge it would be a disaster to the status quo within the Empire.

How It Works

Each time you purchase the Sorcery Advantage, your Hero learns 1 Manifestation and 1 Turn. Each time you purchase the Sorcery Advantage after the first, you gain 1 additional Manifestation and 1 additional Turn. In addition, each time you purchase this Sorcery you must create a new talisman or fetish, called a Death Token, in order to channel your ancestor's power.

Death Tokens

The first time you purchase this Sorcery, you create a Death Token that incorporates some bit of bone or similar bodily relic from the ancestor whose spirit you channel. The first such Death Token created is always a mask carved and painted to resemble a skull. While rarely made from the actual skull of the ancestor, the mask always incorporates some small bit of their physical remains. Perhaps one of the mask's teeth isn't made of wood like the rest of them, or a bit of bone ornamentation is more authentic than the rest.

Each time after the first, further Death Tokens are still constructed but the form they take varies depending on the Churikuna. Some choose to create rings or amulets, gauntlets or bracers made of bone, or even incorporate bits of their ancestor's remains into their weapons. The more powerful the Churikuna, the more potent their connection to their ancestor, the more ornamentation they wear.

Occasionally, individuals wear counterfeit Death Tokens to either reap the social rewards associated with being a Churikuna or in an attempt to overstate their actual capability with Wañuy Ñaqay. This subterfuge rarely lasts long, and most Churikuna are quick to punish such imposters.

A Churikuna who loses a Death Token (stolen, destroyed, etc.) must regain it, either by reclaiming it or creating a new one (and thus visiting their ancestor and being put in the uncomfortable position of explaining how the previous Token was lost). A Churikuna who uses a Manifestation or attempts to use multiple Turns without all of her Death Tokens in her possession must pay additional Hero Points in order to activate her power for each day the Death Token has been out of her possession.



If a Hero has lost one Death Token, the first day each Manifestation costs 1 additional Hero Point. The next time the sun comes up, each Manifestation costs 2 additional Hero Points, etc. This penalty is cumulative—if you lose 2 of your tokens, you must pay double the additional price in order to activate any Manifestations or to use additional Turns. If a Hero has lost two Death Tokens, the first day each Manifestation costs 2 additional Hero Points. The next time the sun comes up, each Manifestation costs 4 additional Hero Points, etc. If a Churikuna loses all of her Death Tokens, or if she loses her initial Death Token mask, she cannot activate any Manifestations at all until she reclaims her mask, at which point she can once again activate her Manifestations with the penalty for lost Death Tokens.

Manifestations and Turns

When a Churikuna activates a Manifestation, she spends a Hero Point. The Churikuna chants in an ancient tongue, makes sweeping gestures, her hands or eyes glow a brilliant green or purple, etc. The specific visual effect might vary depending on the Manifestation or be left up to the Churikuna, but the presence of magic is obvious to even a casual observer.

Activating a Manifestation immediately grants the effect. In addition, the Churikuna chooses one Turn they know, and applies that effect to the Manifestation. A Churikuna may apply additional Turns to her Manifestation by paying an additional Hero Point for each Turn beyond the first, but can apply a specific Turn only once. For example, a Churikuna could choose to spend a Hero Point and activate Witness with the Turn Subtle. If she wanted her Witness to also use Reach, she could pay an additional Hero Point (meaning her Witness would have the benefits of Subtle and Reach). If she wanted her Witness to use Reach, Subtle and Echo, she would pay two additional Hero Points for a total of 3. She could not use Echo multiple times on a single Manifestation.



Manifestations

Arise

Activate this Manifestation when you touch a creature that recently died—within less than a minute. You force his spirit back into his body, and return him to life. The character remains Helpless, but he lives again.

Returning a creature to life takes a toll on the Churikuna, however. The Churikuna's Resolve is permanently reduced by 1. The only way that a Churikuna can replenish this point of Resolve is by raising a Trait through a Story. If this Manifestation reduces his Resolve to 0, he dies. A character who dies in this way cannot be saved by any means, even supernatural—he willingly sacrifices his life to save another, and this price cannot be circumvented.

When you activate this Manifestation, your hand is wreathed in unnatural energy and you visibly grasp the spirit before it can drift away from the body, forcing it back into the corpse.

Channel

When you learn this Manifestation, choose one Background that you do not possess (either a General background, or Kuraq background). This Background represents what your ancestor was in her life.

When you activate this Manifestation, memories of your ancestor's life and the skills she learned flood into your mind. You gain 1 Rank in each of the Background's Skills, and you gain the Quirk from the ancestor's Background in addition to your own Quirks. This effect lasts until you choose to end it, or until the end of the Scene.

While this Manifestation is active, your ancestor's form appears in ghostly light and moves along with you, but only slightly out of sync with your motions—like an unnatural after-image.

Grovel

Activate this Manifestation when you make a Risk during an Action or Dramatic Sequence using Intimidate as your Approach. You can spend Raises to reduce an Unliving Brute Squad's Strength, even if you would not otherwise be able to do so. When you spend a Raise to reduce a Brute Squad's Strength (regardless of whether or not that Brute Squad is Unliving), you reduce the Brute Squad's Strength by 2 instead of 1. When you spend a Raise to apply Pressure to another character who is undead or who possesses Wañuy Naqay, the effect of your Pressure is doubled—they must spend 2 additional Raises (for a total of 3) in order to overcome your Pressure. This effect lasts until the end of the Round.

While you are under the effect of Grovel, your Mask glows and shimmers with unnerving and terrifying spectral flames.

Leech

Activate this Manifestation and touch a corpse or another creature. If the creature is unwilling, you must also spend a Raise to do so. You siphon off some of the creature's life essence in order to fuel your own.

If you use Leech on a corpse or undead creature, you may choose one of the following effects. Each additional effect costs another Hero Point, but each effect can only be triggered once on any given corpse and on any given activation.

If you activate all 3 effects of this Manifestation on a single corpse, the corpse's soul is completely destroyed—all of your Wounds are immediately healed, but you gain 1 Corruption. The destruction of a soul is always an Evil Act.

- Heal a Dramatic Wound.
- Heal all Wounds on your current Death Spiral tier.
- Increase a Trait of your choice by 1, but reduce another Trait by 1. This effect lasts until the end of the Scene.

If you use Leech on a living creature, you may choose one of the following effects. Using Leech on an unwilling living character results in immediate Corruption. If you render a character Helpless by



use of Leech, you immediately heal all Wounds and Dramatic Wounds, your victim instantly dies, and you consume their soul. This results in Corruption beyond any that would be earned from the character's death otherwise (for example, if you perform cold-blooded murder by eating the soul of an innocent, you gain 2 Corruption).

- Cause one Dramatic Wound, and you heal one Dramatic Wound.
- Heal all Wounds on your current Death Spiral tier. Your victim takes half that number of Wounds.
- Increase a Trait of your choice by 1. Your victim has the same Trait reduced by 1. This effect lasts until the end of the Scene.

When you activate this Manifestation, a trail of light streams from your victim and leads to you. Some Churikuna choose to absorb this light through the palms of their hands, while others breathe or drink it in with their nose or mouth.

Obliterate

Activate this Manifestation when you face an undead Brute Squad (such as a Monster Squad with the Unliving Quality). The Squad is reduced to 0 Strength and immediately destroyed.

You can destroy multiple Brute Squads in this way, spending an additional Hero Point for each Squad, but you can only activate this Manifestation once a Scene.

Sequester

To use this Manifestation during an Action Sequence, you must spend a Raise as well as the normal Hero Point.

Touch an undead creature. That creature cannot move from its current location until you free them, or until the end of the Scene. A creature affected by this Manifestation may only inflict Wounds on another character that they can reach (such as a Duelist who is in combat with them, or if the creature has some method of attacking from range).

When you activate this Manifestation, a flash of light flies from your hand or eyes and strikes your victim, wrapping him in spectral chains and bonds while the Manifestation remains active.

AWAKEN

While sacrifices such as the one hundred to empower the Empress have not been completed since her ascension, some Churikuna have learned to enact a similar form of magic to protect themselves if they are ever killed. With the cost of a human life, they are able to propel their own souls out of their dying body and into the body of a member of their retinue. While this always kills the follower, it allows the Churikuna to live on for as long as he desires, so long as he continues to have bodies to possess.

This same ability is used by the Venerable Dead to possess members of their retinue if they need to possess a human body for a period of time.

This Manifestation may **only** be learned by Villains, and may only be used by a living Churikuna when killed.

Activate this Manifestation when your body is destroyed (you have taken your fourth Dramatic Wound and are killed). Your soul is released from your corpse, but does not move on to the land of the dead. Instead, you may enter the body of anyone bearing the markings of Suway (most often a member of your retinue, but other opportunities may be available). If attempting to Awaken within a Hero, you must spend at least 1 Danger Point. If the Hero spends as many Hero Points as you spend Danger Points the possession fails and you must select another target. The target is immediately killed and her soul is destroyed, forced out of her body to make room for your own. You return to life in the new body with all of your abilities.

While this Manifestation is active, your soul, glowing with a ghostly light, appears to float out of your mouth and moves towards the target, entering through her mouth when your soul comes close enough.



Witness

When you activate this Manifestation, you touch a dead creature, an undead creature or another character who possesses Wañuy Ñaqay. For the rest of the Scene, you may see and hear as if you were that creature. If you use this Manifestation on a corpse, you can still see and hear normally (even though, obviously, the corpse cannot).

This effect lasts until the end of the Scene, until you choose to end it, or immediately if either you or the creature you target is rendered Helpless, or the corpse you target is destroyed (such as being burned, defaced, dismembered).

The victim of your Witness is not aware of the magic influencing them, and there is no visual effect on the victim. For the duration of Witness, your eyes glow with a ghostly light, most commonly a brilliant unnatural green or violet.

Turns

Bestow

Give another character one of your Death Tokens. The character can activate the Manifestation once before the end of the Scene, or until he returns your Token to you. Any additional Turns must be chosen when you use Bestow, and all costs for the Manifestation are paid by you, now, rather than the other character upon activation.

So long as that character carries your Death Token, he can be considered an undead creature for any effect (such as being affected by Manifestations from other Churikuna, taking Wounds from Dracheneisen items or weapons, or being influenced by Unguents from the Hexenwerk Sorcery). The effect lasts for as long as the Manifestation does, or until the character returns your Death Token to you. Remember that you have given away one of your Death Tokens, so activating any further Manifestations requires additional Hero Points.

Dominant

The target of your Manifestation cannot be affected by any magical effects (such as those resulting from Sorcery, Synchron artifacts or anything similar) until your Manifestation ends.

Echo

The Manifestation targets a second creature, Squad, or character that it could normally affect. The effects of the Manifestation are repeated exactly—if you choose to Echo Leech, for example, you must choose the same effect for both victims.

Lingering

The effect of your Manifestation continues beyond what is typically possible. If the Manifestation is instantaneous (such as with Obliterate) this Turn has no effect. If your Manifestation ends after a Round, it persists for an additional Round. If your Manifestation ends at the end of a Scene, it persists for an additional Scene.

Rapid

If the Manifestation requires a Raise to activate, you can activate it without spending a Raise. You must perform an Action before you can activate another Manifestation while using this Turn.

Reach

The Manifestation can be applied to any valid character or creature that you can see. The Manifestation immediately ends if your line of sight is broken for more than a few moments, even if the effect normally persists.

Subtle

The Manifestation has no visual or auditory effect, aside from a small gesture or brief and small flash of light in the eyes. Anyone actively observing the Churikuna knows they have activated a Manifestation, but does not know the Manifestation's specific effect (unless it is immediately obvious).

Anyone not actively observing the Churikuna must spend a Hero Point (or a Danger Point, if they are a Villain) to notice that anything is afoot.





Swords, Ships & Secrets

Dueling

Unlike Théah, few formal Dueling schools exist in Aztlan. Dueling has always been an informal affair. Fights between individuals show off fighting prowess and demonstrate bravery, ferocity and strength of arms.

Dueling is legal in each Nation with little oversight. Masters of the various styles take on students as they desire, sometimes traveling all over Aztlan to train new specialized warriors.

Duelists within Aztlan ply their trade in one way: warfare. Once trained by a master, a Duelist has little trouble finding a position within the military of one Nation or another. Usually Duelists find positions within their own homeland, but others (especially those trained by Duelists from a different Nation) move outside of their own borders. Each Nation in Aztlan has an unending need for Duelists to field in battle. A trained Duelist has few long-term opportunities other than military service. When employed as a soldier, these warriors may lead units, serve as the champion of an army or team up with other expert Duelists to crush units of less trained enemies.

Each Aztlani Nation maintains at least one Dueling tradition to implement in war, and their warlords and generals often follow Duelist traditions as well.

Beyond warfare, Aztlani Duelists also engage in personal duels of honor. Without a governing body these duels are always unofficial and can occur in any number of locales for a staggering number of reasons. In many cases, they are bloody and violent affairs. A surprisingly large number of duels in Aztlan are to the death, and even duels that don't end with a casualty go far beyond a first blood duel.

Dueling After Théan Contact

After making landfall on Aztlan and encountering the natives, Théan Duelists learned the stark differences between the traditions on the two continents. Aztlan Duelists found the idea of a Duelist's Guild bizarre; after all, most of these Duelists are employed as soldiers. Théans find the lack of order and the blood shed between Aztlani Duelists to harken back to the days before the Duelist's Guild was officially recognized. On the rare occasion when a Théan attempts to



convince an Aztlani Duelist of the need for a Dueling Guild, the Aztlani is likely to laugh at such a ludicrous suggestion.

Even with their differences, the two continents' Duelists are interested in learning each other's styles. Outside of battles and raids between the continents, there is little intermingling of Aztlani and Théan Duelists. Both sides bear grudges against the other. Each group still raids the other, and taking a foreign Duelist into your camp, who could act as a double agent, is a risk few leaders can accept. Little by little, some of the less xenophobic Duelists on each side accept Duelists from other traditions into their midst and share styles.

Elicia Zambrano, an Aldana Duelist from Castille, was the first documented Théan fully trained in an Aztlani style after winning the trust of an ocēlōtl. Since that success between the continents, both Théans and Aztlani have been more open to training each other, but tensions remain high.

Recently, a Castillian soldier named Manuel Maria del Rio has taken to calling himself the "Ambassador of Dueling" between Théah and Aztlan. An entirely unofficial title, as he has no formal backing from the Duelists Guild, Manuel has spent much of his adult life attempting to build bonds between Duelists of the two continents. Thus far the Guild has not chastised Manuel for his actions, and he has taken their silence as permission.

As a master of several Théan styles, he followed the lead of Elicia Zambrano and surrendered to a skirmishing unit from Tzak K'an. After earning the trust of their warleader he began training the Aztlani in exchange for learning their styles. Manuel continued this trend throughout Tzak K'an as well as the Nahuacan Alliance and Kuraq, and he considers himself to be the foremost Théan expert on the Dueling styles and culture of Aztlan.

ICNIUHTLI IN THÉAH

If not for expeditions into the New World, Icnuihtli would never have reached Théan shores. However, Elicia Zambrano, a master Duelist traveling with one of the many Grandes seeking riches on foreign soil, watched the natives in combat and over time grew to respect their prowess. Against the advice of her companions Elicia surrendered herself to the natives during an encounter. Elicia was taken prisoner and, after earning the respect of Tlaloc, one of the greatest Icnuihtli masters amongst the Nahuacan Alliance, was able to convince him to take her as a pupil.

After living with the Nahuacans for several years and learning the style, Elicia returned to Castille to further master the form and, after a time, began to take on students. Schools teaching Icnuihtli are unique in that they do not admit individuals; instead they admit groups who are all trained together to act as one seamless military unit. Many of the finest skirmishers in Théah trained at one of these academies.

Dueling Styles Icnuihtli

Icnuihtli can trace its original roots back through generations of the Nahuacan Alliance. The style originated from, and has always been most popular among, the Ocēlōmeh, although other military organizations make use of it. These warriors, lightly armored and wielding spears, weave in and out of combat creating openings for one another to take advantage of. While dangerous individually, practitioners working as a part of a team are deadly, and a dedicated group of Icnuihtli warriors is truly devastating. Multiple masters of Icnuihtli perfectly coordinate their strikes to completely overwhelm their enemies.

While warriors from all over the Alliance practice Icnuihtli, none are as proficient as Tlaloc, a devotee from Milllahco. He, along with his brothers and sisters, make up a squadron of the most elite Ocēlōmeh known to the Alliance. Some say that their familial bond makes them so dangerous, while others attribute their skill to a mystical link to an ancient totem. Whatever the case, Tlaloc's unit is called on for the most dangerous and important missions. Their coordination is so perfect that even in the thick of



battle, members of his retinue do not speak to coordinate their attacks. Each member knows where they need to be to take advantage of feints and openings on an instinctive level. Tlaloc has never known defeat in battle, even against overwhelming numbers.

Style Bonus: Jaguar's Guile

When you wield a spear in one or both hands, you gain a special Maneuver called Jaguar's Guile. When you perform Jaguar's Guile you deal one Wound, and the next source of Wounds on your target this Round deals one additional Wound. Additionally, you may select one ally to immediately take one action, spending Raises as normal. If the selected ally uses the Action you grant them to deal Wounds to your target, the target suffers additional Wounds equal to your Ranks in Wits. A Hero may perform Jaguar's Guile once per Round.

Quetzuo

The Quetzuo Warriors were originally trained to hunt witches and wizards. They used techniques to keep their target fixated on them, and these techniques were later adopted by the Tzak K'ani for hunting and in the military. Quetzuo warriors use a shield in one hand and a weapon (usually a club, knife or spear) in the other. The shield, known as a Challi, is round and made of wood and leather, constructed by the warrior during training. The Challi is decorated most often with feathers and precious stones, and the decoration and ornamentation on the shield is often a mark of high rank or status.

During training, the master loans her Challi to her apprentice, who uses it until training is complete. The master chooses a Yencotetl, a stone ranging from an ordinary rock to a large piece of turquoise. As the Quetzuo apprentice completes a lesson, he chips off a piece of the Yencotetl and uses the piece to make a mosaic on the Challi he is crafting. By the end of their training, the Yencotetl is a sculpture, representing the journeys the student has taken and the trials he has overcome during his time in tutelage. The Quetzuo warrior becomes attached to his Challi—it is a great honor to receive a master's Challi, as giving up your shield is considered a great sign of respect and trust.

Style Bonus: Challi Taunt

While using a Shield in one hand and a weapon in the other, you gain a special Maneuver called the Challi Taunt to use your shield to throw your target off balance, turning her focus on you. When you perform a Challi Taunt, deal one Wound; the next time your target deals Wounds this Round she deals one fewer Wound for each Rank you have in Weaponry. If your target chooses to inflict Wounds on any Hero other than you on her next Action, she must spend a number of Raises equal to your Resolve.

Hatz'ik

Hatz'ik originated among the commoners of Tzak K'an due to its reliance on a quarterstaff, a weapon which farmers or laborers can obtain more easily than a spear. Legend states that the style was originally taught by a traveler amongst the mountains of the Nation. This master would teach anyone willing to learn, asking for nothing in return. In the last several years, Hatz'ik has boomed in popularity. The warlord Iktan Cha'zah is currently one of the Nation's most accomplished generals whose quarterstaff is extremely well used after years of battle.

In the hands of a Duelist who has mastered Hatz'ik, once a quarterstaff begins spinning it does not stop until the fight is over. Many instructors teach their students that it does not matter how slowly you move, as long as you never stop moving your weapon. However, in the hands of a master, the movements of the staff are almost impossible to follow. Once the quarterstaff begins to move, it creates a zone around the Duelist which allows for a response to even the most cautious feint with a barrage of strikes. And once the enemy has been worn down throughout the encounter, the Hatz'ik user unleashes the momentum built by spinning her weapon in an extremely powerful crash.

Style Bonus: Hatz'ik Spiral

When you wield a quarterstaff in both hands, you can perform a special Maneuver called the Hatz'ik Spiral. When you perform the Hatz'ik Spiral, any character who deals Wounds to you takes one Wound in reply. The next time you perform the Slash Maneuver this Round, you deal extra Wounds equal to your Ranks in Panache and the effect of your Hatz'ik Spiral ends. You may perform the Hatz'ik Spiral only once per Round.



Tzolran

Tzolran is a nimble fighting style that uses distractions and opportunity to take down an enemy. Originally a game played by bored soldiers, Tzolran uses whatever you can get your hands on to distract your opponent, keeping low to the ground and weaving back and forth to throw your target off. The game used a stick, but those that use this style in combat typically use a knife.

In the original game, two competitors started back to back. Once the game began, the two combatants quickly dropped down and turned to face each other, keeping low. They threw dirt, leaves and anything close at each other.

The combatants darted back and forth both to confuse their opponent and to dodge incoming attacks. Once a combatant was struck, the round ended and they returned to standing back to back, letting the dust settle. The first combatant to land three strikes won the game.

It was Xriisateh Tzolran, from whom this style gets its name, who first used these tactics in battle. Since then, many have followed her lead, to great success.

Style Bonus: Dust Trick

While using a small weapon (such as a knife, stiletto, a small club, or something similar) in one hand and nothing in the other, you gain a special Maneuver called Dust Trick. When you perform Dust Trick, you grab sand or debris of some kind and throw it into the eyes of your target, catching them off guard. The next time that character deals Wounds, reduce the Wounds they deal by your Ranks in Finesse and create an Opportunity. Activating this Opportunity causes the next source of Wounds on that target to deal two additional Wounds. A Hero can only perform Dust Trick once per round.

Waglichina

Waglichina is a style created and used almost exclusively by the Tupac warriors of Kuraq. Suway's priests trained their most talented warriors in this style at P'alqacamba. It emphasized killing one specific type of being—the gods. Tupac warriors sent on the God Hunt ensured that the gods remained at the mercy of Suway's most dedicated soldiers. In battle, Waglichina Duelists kept the gods—as well as their mortal worshippers—off balance. When knocked to the ground, other Tupac would swarm them, attempting to score a killing blow.

While originally a style taught exclusively to the Tupac, the Waglichina style has moved beyond the borders of Kuraq into the rest of Aztlan, and beyond. The first masters of the style to teach those outside the order were disillusioned Tupac warriors who left their position to get away from the death priests. Now, Nahuacan and Tzak K'ani Duelists are teaching Waglichina to their own students. Within Kuraq, however, the Tokoyriq are vigilant in identifying any wayward teachers of Waglichina. Teaching the style outside the Tupac within Kuraq is a dangerous choice to make.

Style Bonus: Waglichina Rush

While using a heavy weapon (such as a club or axe) in one hand and nothing in the other, you gain a special Maneuver called Waglichina Rush. When you perform Waglichina Rush, you deal 1 Wound as you trip, push or otherwise put your opponent off balance and knock them to the ground. You apply Pressure to the target to remain on the ground. Until the target overcomes the Pressure and takes a different Action she takes 1 additional Wound each time she is dealt Wounds.



Ship History

A Ship has an Origin. This is the Nation, region or area of the world where your Ship hailed from during its maiden voyage. Different cultures have different ideas of the best way to construct a Ship, and no two Ships are quite the same.

Some Origins grant Bonus Dice under certain circumstances. These circumstances are left purposefully vague and up for debate—the GM ultimately decides if a Background or Origin grants Bonus Dice—but our advice is to be generous with them. When such a bonus does apply, however, it can be used only by a single Hero at a time.

Origins

Kuraq

With few ships built by native craftspeople, the Empress of Kuraq has been importing trees and boat builders to create a modern navy. While purportedly built for trade, their numbers make Kuraq a threat upon the sea. While carrying less than its maximum Cargo your Ship may have 10 additional Crew.

Nahuacan Alliance

Nahuacan ships are used almost exclusively by merchants for trade. When making a Risk related to trade (such as getting the best deal possible or withholding your wares to coax a secret out of a buyer), you gain 3 Bonus Dice.

Ship Backgrounds

Backgrounds grant Advantages to your Ship, but more importantly they tell your Ship's epic and unique tale. These are the events in the Ship's past that build a reputation, that contribute to the Crew's pride, that turn your vessel from "just a boat" to "a Ship."

A Ship may have a specific Background only once. Each Hero who purchases the Married to the Sea Advantage (**CORE RULEBOOK** page 150) contributes one Background to the Ship's History.

Foreign Built

Most Aztlan Nations are new to shipbuilding on the scale of the Théans, and have taken to hiring foreign shipwrights to modernize their fleets. Select another Origin; your Ship gains the benefits of both your original Origin and the Origin granted by this Background.

Sole Survivor

Your Ship was present in port during a raid by another Aztlan Nation or a foreign power and was the only surviving vessel. Select the Nation which attacked; when engaged in a Ship Battle against a Ship with that Origin your Heroes gain 2 Bonus Dice.

Adventures

Adventures grant the Heroes bonuses and abilities the first time they do something specific with their Ship during play. An Adventure is not always a positive experience (getting robbed by pirates or running aground on a remote island is rarely pleasant), but the Ship and her Crew learn and grow from the experience.

The first time you, your Ship and her Crew accomplish an Adventure during play (not in pre-game discussions, in a talk about what the Heroes do between sessions or over downtime, not in your Ship's Background, but during play at the table), your Ship gains a new bonus or ability associated with that Adventure. The bonus for completing an Adventure is gained only the first time you do something.

Remember that the bonuses from Adventures are in addition to whatever the Heroes and the Ship would have gained or lost from the events that lead to the Adventure's occurrence. The Adventures listed here are not an exhaustive list, but serve as a good baseline for how a GM can design his own Adventures and associated rewards.

Across the Sea

Travel from Aztlan to Théah (or vice versa) and back again. When transporting goods from one continent to another you may carry 1 additional Cargo.

Blessed by the Gods

Complete a request given to you by one of Aztlan's gods. When rolling dice in a Sequence while aboard the Ship, a Hero can spend a Hero Point to have their 10s explode.

Outclassed

Defeat a ship that is larger, has more cannons, or has more Crew. The first time each Round that your Ship takes Hits from another Ship, reduce the amount of Hits dealt by 1.



Aztlani Secret Societies

The Guardians of Aztlan

The three Nations of Aztlan have many differences in their traditions and stories, yet they all agree on at least one thing: Aztlan has been destroyed and created many times. The most recent of these cycles is commonly referred to as “the Imperial age,” and scholars and priests across Aztlan have their own theories and dogma about how or why it happened. No one has reliable information about the time before the forming of the current nations.

No one, that is, except the Guardians of Aztlan.

The oldest organization in all of Aztlan, the Guardians have the only faithful records about the previous age, the Aztlan Empire and the Fall. They are the only ones who know that the Fall was not a literal destruction of Aztlan but a *movement*. Their encrypted texts reveal the true cause of that cataclysmic event.

Whereas most scholars consider that the ancient Aztlan Empire provoked the anger of the Old Gods, the truth is that the Syrne enslaved the Old Gods and used what has come to be known as “the old machines” to push the whole of Aztlan into a parallel dimension—the Seventh Sea. There they ruled as god-kings, far from the reach of any who would journey to Aztlan.

At some point, however, the old machines failed. Some say they were not meant to endure, but others argue that whatever annihilated the Syrne also caused their technology to fail. The Guardians should have prevented it, but when they realized what was happening, it was already too late. Aztlan had come back to Terra.



Since that time—but even more so after the arrival of the Théans to Aztlan—the Guardians have sworn to defend the peoples of Aztlan from any and all external threats. With all their accumulated knowledge they are ready to deal with any situation that may arise. With enemies on all sides, they are needed now more than ever. And yet, they are more divided than ever before.

Guardians' Factions

In Aztlan's most desperate hour, the Guardians are divided on what to do. One group, who identify themselves as the Protectors, consider that the “Théan menace”—as they call it—is too much even for the Guardians to confront. These Guardians argue that, considering the continuous attempts of gold-seeking explorers and power-hungry, would-be conquerors to abuse the peoples of Aztlan, the best course of action is to use the old machines to move the continent once again. Only then will their people be safe.

The Progressives argue that moving Aztlan would cause more harm than good. The only way to truly protect the Aztlani people is to allow them to deal with this foreign threat on their own. Furthermore, the Progressives point to the active role of the new gods in protecting their people as further proof that the situation with the Théans is under control.

Both groups are firmly divided, and no agreement on how to proceed seems possible at the moment.

The Great Enemy

Although the Théan arrival has become the biggest concern for the Guardians in recent times, the oldest and most revered members in the group remind their younger peers that their greatest enemy does not come from across sea, but from deep below.

From the time of the Aztlan Empire, the Guardians' primary task has been to defend the common people against the threat of the Old Gods, bloodthirsty immortals who once demanded constant ritual sacrifices in their name to appease their wrath. The Syrne once dealt with these powerful beings, moving Aztlan to another dimension to weaken their hold on the continent.

The Syrne's plan did not work as intended, though the Old Gods were trapped in the Seventh Sea during the Fall.



They can no longer influence the destinies of the Aztlani. There they remain to this day, waiting for a moment when enough blood sacrifices are performed in their name so they can enter Terra and rule over the Aztlani once again.

After the Fall a large number of the Guardians disappeared along with various documents from the previous age. Some of the Guardians fear that the Old Gods may have corrupted these defectors. With the help of the texts and their knowledge of the ancient tongue of the Aztlan Empire, they could find a way to release the murderous deities from their prison.

The truth, however, is worse than the Guardians can imagine. These dissidents have become their greatest enemies: the Council of the Old Gods.

Ranks in the Guardians

The ranks of the Guardians are filled with people who have devoted themselves to Aztlan above all others. Most new initiates are taken in as small children, often orphans or from less fortunate families.

The Guardians raise them as their own, and teach them various important skills. These Initiates often remain with a single Master during their formative years.

The Initiates are rigorously trained in various areas, including but not limited to:

- Learning to read and write Old Aztlani.
- Advanced fighting techniques, both in close quarters and at a distance.
- Understanding and using the technology from the Aztlan Empire, such as the one present in the old machines.

A Master presents her Initiate to the Grand Masters' Council whenever she feels he is ready. They test him, and promote him if they find him worthy. If not, they assign a Grand Master to teach the Initiate his final lessons.

The new Master becomes an independent member who can serve the Guardians as he sees fit. A new Master often works with his former instructor, since she is the only close relationship he has developed in his life.

The Grand Masters choose from among the best of their Masters to rise into their ranks. If the Master

accepts, she retires from active duty as a Guardian. A Grand Master's role is to monitor the activity related to the Aztlan Empire's technology—especially the old machines—as well as directing the Masters' efforts in their struggle against the Old Gods.

Favor with the Guardians

The Guardians primarily concern themselves with defending all the peoples of Aztlan—regardless of their Nation, religion or social status—from external threats. Since time immemorial, their greatest enemy has been the Old Gods, but in recent times the Théans have occupied their attention. They are silent benefactors and prefer to do their work without attracting too much attention, if possible.

A Hero who belongs to the Guardians can earn Favor in the following ways.

- Providing the Grand Masters' Council with information regarding an external threat to the Aztlani people is worth 3 Favor. The Grand Masters need to receive reliable information in order to direct the Guardians' efforts as a whole.
- Defeating an external threat to the Aztlani people is worth 6 Favor. The main task of the Guardians is to protect the peoples of Aztlan from any and all external threats.

A Hero who belongs to the Guardians can call upon them for aid in the following ways.

- Requesting access to a text or artifact from the previous age costs 7 Favor. The texts and artifacts from the previous age are considered to be not only relics, but containing potentially the dangerous information and technology available in all of Terra. As such, the Guardians only lend them to experienced and trustworthy members of the Society.
- Requesting the aid of a Master of the Guardians costs 4 Favor. The Masters are powerful individuals with a lifetime of training under their belts. They are Strength 8, but never have the Sorcery Advantage.



The Jaguar's Heirs

The jaguar is an ever-present figure in stories all across Aztlan. Some tales from the previous age claim that it was a line of werejaguars that founded the old Aztlan Empire. The Nahuacans, for example, used to pray to Tahtli Ocēlōtl, a god whose name can be translated as “the Great Werejaguar,” who was considered the Chief of Magicians, the Great Sorcerer and the Great Shapeshifter. The priests who dedicated their lives to it were considered unparalleled wise people, sorcerers and magicians.

Nowadays, the Tzak K'ani consider jaguars of the night and symbols of the sun on its nocturnal journey towards the dawn. The Tzak K'ani worship a jaguar deity whose areas of influence include war and the Underworld. They consider it the power animal par excellence thanks to its great prowess, ferocity and dominance in the forest.

Even the Kuraq Empire views jaguars in high esteem. People who reside in the forests of the south of Aztlan worship a star which they say is a jaguar. Its charges are the jaguars, bears and pumas of that region. As such, the jaguar has been and still is one the most important figures in the Aztlan cosmology.

And the Jaguar's Heirs are considered the rightful descendants of that most-honored tradition.

The Heirs is a group of magical practitioners deeply interested in gathering all the magical knowledge of the different Nations of Aztlan and producing unheard-of advancements in that area. That is why they encourage all forms of magical experimentation and have no problem accepting and even supporting magical research that delves into areas considered forbidden by others, such as necromancy. For them, as long as a magic practitioner is using her gift to help people—especially the less fortunate—then she is worth supporting.

This is the main reason why the Heirs include members from all the Nations of Aztlan. They are an open-minded and welcoming group who discriminate against no magical practitioner, regardless of his origin or chosen path of study. The only limit they impose to members of the Society (and even to other magic practitioners) is that they cannot use their powers for villainous purposes. If they do, they risk the ire of the Heirs, who in that case will summarily send a were-jaguar Hunting Pack to destroy them.

Ranks in the Heirs

The only requisite to join the Jaguar's Heirs is to have used magic to help people in need. The Heirs care little for the origin of this magic, as they consider all magic to be a gods-given gift. Because of this, the Jaguar's Heirs is the only Secret Society in Aztlan to have a significant Théan presence.

The Heirs find a sorcerer who expresses any interest in joining—they have eyes and ears *everywhere* on Aztlan. She must complete an assignment to prove her worth, designed to force her to show her magical skills, resourcefulness and determination. Once a candidate has demonstrated her worth, she is one of the Heirs and has full access to the organization.

The most powerful members of the Society form the Inner Circle, who control the secret Face of the Jaguar. They act as judges and administrators to the Heirs. Any Heir who wishes to enter the Inner Circle must be ready to put her life on the line in service to the Society. Only those who have been with the Heirs for years of faithful service can advance to their highest ranks.

The Way of the Jaguar

All jaguar-deity followers across Aztlan agree on one thing: the jaguar is a creator but also a destroyer; it provides fortune but also disaster. The Heirs consider magical studies to perfectly embody the essence of the jaguar. After all, sorcerers have the powers of creation and destruction in equal parts.

The Heirs have established a series of laws that are known as the Way of the Jaguar. The main precepts of this code are:

- Using magic in malign ways is expressly forbidden.
- A sorcerer must report any malign magical activity she discovers.
- An Heir must follow the bidding of the Inner Circle.
- No sorcerer outside the Heirs can be taught the secret of the Face of the Jaguar.

An Heir who breaks one of these laws can expect to suffer serious consequences, from being forbidden to use magic ever again—under penalty of death—to receiving the mark as prey for a werejaguar Hunting Pack.



Face of the Jaguar

One of the greatest gifts that the Heirs received from the jaguar was the ability to shape-shift and adopt what is known as the “Face of the Jaguar.” In that form, a magical practitioner transforms into a werejaguar, with a snarling mouth, toothless gums and long fangs and claws. In that form the Heirs become a deadly enemy, especially for other magical practitioners, as they retain their magical abilities and can combine them with the prowess and swiftness of the night-hunter jaguar.

In time, as more sorcerers joined the Heirs, the Inner Circle decided that it was too risky to teach the Face of the Jaguar to all their members. Instead, they agreed that the secret would remain within the Inner Circle and that other Heirs could request its use. In that moment the werejaguar Hunting Packs were born.

A werejaguar Hunting Pack is a group of Heirs (and in rare cases other non-Heir members) blessed with the Face of the Jaguar for one night. They usually receive this blessing with the sole purpose of hunting down and killing Villainous sorcerers. In this form, the Heirs are almost certain to accomplish their goal, although it is not a risk-free endeavor.

Once the pack has completed its task, its members must return to their point of origin—or another agreed rendezvous point—to transform back into humans. If the dawn finds an Heir still in animal form, the sun claims her soul, instantly killing her. Because of this, many Heirs prefer to inform the Society about Villainous activities but stay out of harm’s way. Others choose to face the Villain through other means instead of requesting the aid of a werejaguar Hunting Pack.



Favor with the Jaguar’s Heirs

The Jaguar’s Heirs primarily concern themselves with recovering ancient magic (be it text, artifacts or components), expanding magical knowledge all across Aztlan and hunting down Villainous sorcerers. The Heirs’ main goal is to safeguard and expand magical knowledge in Aztlan.

A Hero who belongs to the Jaguar’s Heirs can earn Favor in the following ways.

- Discovering an unknown magical text or artifact, or presenting the Heirs with innovative research in any of the known magical disciplines is worth 4 Favor.
- Defeating a Villainous magic practitioner is worth 8 Favor. There is nothing more harmful to the magical cause in Aztlan—and the Heirs’ efforts—than Villainous magic practitioners tarnishing the good name of magic users. As such, the Heirs highly value any agent able to bring down one of these undesirables without the help of a werejaguar Hunting Pack.

A Hero who belongs to the Jaguar Cabal can call upon it for aid in the following ways.

- Requesting the aid of a werejaguar Hunting Pack costs 10 Favor. The Hero and any of her associates who choose to can become part of a werejaguar Hunting Pack. If they do, they become werejaguars. The werejaguars are Strength 8 Monsters with the Nocturnal, Shapeshifting and Swift Monstrous Qualities. In that form, the Heroes retain the use of all their abilities (within reason). The transformation lasts for one night only.
- Access to a magical text, artifact or component costs 3 Favor. The Heirs possess the vastest repository of magical knowledge in all of Aztlan (and maybe the whole world). As such, any magic practitioner who belongs to the Heirs can have access to anything she may need to further advance her magical inquiries.



The Pochteca

The Pochteca were founded in the year Eight Rabbit (1474) by twelve of the most powerful merchant families in the Nahuacan Alliance. Fearing that their rulers would resent their wealth-based power, these families negotiated a pact with the Great Speaker. They abandoned all visible trappings of their commercial success and, in exchange, they got to continue conducting their business without any fear of noble interference.

As years passed, the Pochteca realized that their wealth and position could be used for something more. In that moment, they agreed to use their immense wealth to help the less fortunate all across Aztlan, reorganizing into twelve guilds, each based in one of the most important urban centers in the Nahuacan Alliance.

At first they only cared for the basic necessities of the poor but, in time, it was clear that feeding and clothing them was not enough. In spite of their best efforts, the Pochteca were unable to actually improve those people's lives. In that moment the Pochteca understood that the problem was not the amount of wealth and resources, but their distribution.

Since then they have become an organization dedicated to bettering the lives of common citizens in Aztlan. Sometimes they do so by distributing groceries and clothes. At other times they use their wealth to straighten out elites who abuse their power. In those situations, they bribe, coerce and even threaten these misguided rulers, all in order to ensure that everyday people's lives are improved.



Some rulers are too stubborn or powerful to be swayed, though. In those instances, the Pochteca use their resources to incite and help anybody who dares to oppose such Villains.

Organization

The Pochteca are organized in guilds specialized in different parts of their commercial endeavors. Each guild operates out of a major Nahuacan city and is controlled by three to five venerable elders known as "Mothers" or "Fathers" who speak for the guild.

Each guild is responsible for one aspect or another of general operation. The textiles guild may be responsible for ensuring its members have access to weapons and armor in order to better protect those less able, while the merchant's guild sends emissaries out across Aztlan to seek out Villainous rulers.

While all members of the Pochteca do what they can to help the common people, it is the guilds who give guidance and direction on how to go about such endeavors.

Ranks in the Pochteca

Membership in the Pochteca only requires one to be able and willing to serve. While the original Pochteca were wealthy merchants, they now employ anyone who has a desire to make Aztlan a peaceable place.

Lesser ranks in the Pochteca include merchants that lead trade and exploratory expeditions, porters and warriors who carry goods and protect caravans from bandits and disguised and spying merchants who unobtrusively gather information about Villainous elites all across Aztlan.

Each guild recruits elders from within their own ranks. These Mothers and Fathers direct their guild's function and facilitate communication between guilds.

The Mothers and Fathers meet once a year in Pepechotlan to discuss strategy and share their discoveries. Few outside these gatherings understand that there is far more to the Pochteca than a mere lust for profit. They seek nothing less than to turn Aztlan into the most just place in the world, one ruler at a time. At this point, who knows? Maybe one day they can transform all the Aztlani Nations into places where the wealth is better distributed among all their citizens, regardless of their status.



Favor with the Pochteca

The Pochteca primarily concern themselves with the accumulation and distribution of wealth to help the less fortunate all across Aztlan, reshaping Aztlani society via capitalism, and funding rebel groups in places under tyrannical regimes, such as most places in the Kuraq Empire.

A Hero who belongs to the Pochteca can earn Favor in the following ways.

- Helping to protect a caravan, putting forth diplomatic effort in the name of the Pochteca, or informing a Mother or Father of a misguided ruler is worth 2 Favor. The Pochteca consider any and all efforts made to ensure that the common people's lives are better worthy of recognition.
- Deposing a Villainous ruler is worth 5 Favor if the replacement represents an improvement with respect to the former ruler. There is no higher service to the Pochteca cause than to make sure that a community's leader cares about all people under their leadership—and not only about their own well-being.

A Hero who belongs to the Pochteca can call upon it for aid in the following ways.

- Access to the storehouses of the Pochteca costs 4 Favor. Up to 2 points of Wealth in trade goods or a minor Aztlani relic that functions as a signature item can be acquired. Failure to pay back this wealth or return the item to the Hero's guildhall when the mission is complete results in severe punishment ranging from loss of guild status to summary execution.
- Requesting the help of the Pochteca costs 6 Favor. The amount of resources at the hands of the Pochteca is so vast—and their commercial networks so extensive—than anybody who appeals to them is sure to have access to anything they may need. This can go from mere material objects to political secrets and even meetings with otherwise secretive and elusive figures, such as rebel leaders.

The Council of the Old Gods

The inhabitants of each Nation in Aztlan are devoted to their respective gods. After all, it was thanks to them that they were able to rebuild their world during the bleak days after the Fall. Before that, though, all the peoples of Aztlan used to worship the same deities, nowadays only known as “the Old Gods.” To worship these Old Gods is forbidden now—and it has been so for more than an age—but these decrees have done little to stop the Council of the Old Gods.

The agenda of the Council is simple: to restore the ways of the Old Gods and bring Aztlan back “into the light of its early glory.” The only problem is that “the light of its early glory” implies the destruction of Aztlan and all its current inhabitants. The members of the Council, however, are sure that they, as the faithful, will be spared once the Old Gods return.

What the Council knows—and other Aztlan scholars ignore—is that during the Fall the Old Gods were not killed but imprisoned. The Syrne themselves turned the Old Gods to crystal to fuel the old machines, cursing them to watch the turning of the years from sparkling prisons. After the Fall, the walls of those prisons held...but just barely.

To free the Old Gods the Council needs to gather 13 Blood Crystals and return them to the Heart of the World. Only in this manner will they be able to open the portal to the Old Gods so they can enter Terra and rule Aztlan and its peoples once more.

Once they accomplish this, the Council expects to rule in the ashes of the world that now exists, governing a domain that unifies Aztlan under one religion and one cultural identity. If they succeed, there will be no more Nahuacan Alliance, Tzak K'ani city-states, or Kuraq Empire: all differences will be erased in the wake of the Old Gods.

Modus Operandi

The technology of the Blood Crystals was discovered by the Council in ancient, heathen texts from the previous age that are their most precious possession. Those texts revealed that, in order to create one of these crystals, massive bloodshed must first occur. One in which many human beings die at the hands of each other, their deaths dedicated as sacrifices to the Old Gods.



Because of this, the agents of the Council's primary task is to ensure that conflicts between large groups of people occur. Their best scenario is open war, and to that end they scheme, whisper in the ears of both rulers and rebels, and incite the use of violence in any and all circumstances. They have no interest in whoever "wins" the conflict because, in the end, the only ones who benefit from the chaos and bloodshed are the members of the Council. Each violent death takes them one step closer to their goal of freeing the Old Gods.

The Council is led by three First Prophets, one originating from each Nation of Aztlan. They have met in secret for the past millennia in the Heart of the World, a location that defies all logic. Below them there are a handful of (but highly influential) Council members, as well as countless field agents. These agents are usually recruited from among the most desperate individuals, those who have lost all hope.

Sometimes, however, apparently successful and happy people join the ranks of the Council. They do so because the Council shows them a vision of a world no longer divided and chaotic. What they see there is their heart's desire of an ordered, homogenous society with no differences or conflict. What they do not see—or do not want to see—is that that vision can only become a reality when the world is destroyed.

Heroes and the Council

Heroes cannot join the Council. To become a member of the Council, you must face the Old Gods drenched in the blood of an innocent you killed. If you are not accepted, the rest of the Council kills you and offers your paltry life as sacrifice to their dark deities. If you are accepted, you listen to the Old Gods whispering their twisted commands directly to you, shattering your mind forever.

Knowledge of the Council

The secret of their existence is the Council's greatest strength. Thanks to it they have been able to infiltrate all the current Nations of Aztlan—and even the recently arrived Théans—from the lowest to the highest ranks. The Council does not care whether a prospective agent is a noble or a commoner; as long as they can perform their work in provoking more bloodshed in the name of the Old Gods, they are welcomed.

Most of the Council's agents are so disturbed by their initiation ritual—in which they have to kill an innocent to prove their faith to the Old Gods—that they never doubt their allegiance to the organization. The few that do are usually summarily disposed, their deaths serving as one last contribution to the Council's efforts to free the Old Gods.





Tzak K'ani City-State Generator

To create a Tzak K'ani city-state, all you need is a handful of dice and some imagination. Here we'll walk you through the process (which includes lots of questions for you to answer). By the end you'll know all sorts of things about your new city-state, from local important iconography to a snapshot of the regional leadership.

Generating a City-State

There are three ways to create a Tzak K'ani city-state. You can use any of these methods to create as many city-states as you desire, and there's no reason why you can't use one method to create a first city-state and a completely different method for another.

Method 1: À La Carte

The most straightforward method of creation is to simply choose an item from each list and respond to the writing prompts. If you have multiple players who are interested in this aspect of the game, you might allow each of them in turn to choose something from the list and respond to the prompts within the entry they've selected.

Method 2: Roll the Bones

You could simply roll a die for each category, down the line, and respond to the prompts one by one. This can lead to a very chaotic process, but it can be a lot of fun to stretch your creative legs a bit and make sure all of the random numbers generated by the dice come together to create a cohesive, single city-state.

Method 3: Building Blocks

Finally, you could opt to roll 5 dice (or 6, if you want a bit of room to discard one roll that you don't like) and assign those values to each category as you see fit. Again, if you have a group of players who enjoys this aspect of play, you could have each of them roll a die and then choose which category each of them wants to "spend" their die in. Of course, if you spend your die to create the region's Ruler, you should be prepared to respond to the prompts that are given.



Anatomy of a City-State

This generator breaks down the makeup of a Tzak K'ani city-state into a few broad categories.

Iconography tells you something that the region holds in high regard or is of symbolic importance, and could range from plentiful local wildlife to natural resources. The city-state's Iconography also determines the first word of the region's name. Iconography has a notation called "Alternate Terms" that you can use interchangeably when you decide the city-state's name.

Geography informs you about the local area's land features. This might be the region's most plentiful features, or one that is simply prominent due to the location of settlements, trade routes, or religious practices. The city-state's Geography also determines the second word of the region's name. Geography has a notation called "Alternate Terms" that you can use interchangeably when you decide the city-state's name.

Patron God determines the primary mythological or religious figure in the area. This figure is likely to feature prominently in local folklore, and could influence speech patterns or turns of phrase, but if nothing else they will tell you a great deal about the area's priests and priestesses.

Atmosphere shows you the tone and feel of the region, whether they are welcoming to outsiders or shun them, whether the people are warlike or pacifists. The region's Atmosphere is likely to color most (if not all) interactions the Heroes have with the region's people.

Ruler reveals the largest political player in the area and gives you insight into his motivations and drives. The region's Ruler will color what happens when the Heroes inevitably run across the local establishment, and will likely determine what shape that interaction takes.

Iconography

ROLL	ICONOGRAPHY
1	Jaguar
2	Crocodile
3	Eagle
4	Monkey
5	Deer
6	Gold
7	Sky
8	Stone
9	Blood
10	Morning

Jaguar: Jaguars are common and dangerous predators in the area, or perhaps the locals have domesticated jaguars and hunt alongside them. Do the locals venerate and admire the jaguar, or do they fear and loathe them? *Alternate terms: Claw, prowler, feral*

Crocodile: This region has a fascination with the crocodile. Perhaps crocodiles are the area's apex predator and children are regularly told cautionary tales about keeping away from them, or maybe hunting a crocodile is a rite of passage for the warriors here who all wear headdresses made from the heads of those they slay. *Alternate terms: Maw, scale, tooth*

Eagle: The eagle is a powerful image here. The local population could view them as semi-divine, serving as messengers and emissaries of the gods. Or maybe they take a much more practical approach and train eagles to aid them in their hunts. *Alternate terms: Talon, feather, wing*

Monkey: In this area, monkeys are viewed in a certain significant light. Do the locals despise them due to the monkeys' habits of going wherever they please and generally making a mess, or do they consider a pet monkey to be a mark of good luck and a sign of the favor from the gods? *Alternate terms: Leaping, banana, swinging*



Deer: Even in Théah, the deer is often regarded as a majestic and sometimes sacred creature. Do the locals hunt deer in this area for their valuable fur and antlers? Or perhaps they regard the creature as the form of a young god, and strive to protect them from other predators and hunters. *Alternate terms: Antler, hoof, prancing*

Gold: Gold is, or was, plentiful here, and the region earned its name from the precious mineral. Is gold still common here, adorning even the most common of farmers' clothing and jewelry? Or did the mines dry up, the gold traded away or stolen during past wars, and now all that remains is the memory of wealth? *Alternate terms: Glittering, shining, precious*

Sky: The wide open sky is a powerful image of freedom and openness, and often can serve as a path to communing with the gods. Perhaps the locals here are particularly pious, or the region's weather is notable for some reason. *Alternate terms: Cloud, storm, blue*

Stone: Metal is almost unknown in modern Aztlan, and so stone is often used in its place. Perhaps the stone of this region is particularly valuable due to some unusual property it has, or the locals have a tradition of training master stonemasons. *Alternate terms: Granite, obsidian, chisel*

Blood: Blood represents life, death and family. This region considers blood more important than most—do they put a high emphasis on family bloodlines and lineage, or do they have a reputation for sacrifice (animal or otherwise) to ancient, dark gods that the rest of Aztlan have forgotten? *Alternate terms: Crimson, bone, dripping*

Morning: The morning represents renewal and redemption, the literal and figurative dawn of a new day. The people of this region may regard dawn as a sacred time of worship and reflection, or have customs about never making an agreement when the sun is down. *Alternate terms: Rising, dawn, bright*

Geography

ROLL	GEOGRAPHY
1	Forest
2	Jungle
3	River
4	Mountain
5	Hills
6	Valley
7	Plain
8	Island
9	Beach
10	Wastes

Forest. *Alternate terms: Copse, thicket, bough*

Jungle. *Alternate terms: Tangle, web, wilds*

River. *Alternate terms: Bend, rapids, falls*

Mountain. *Alternate terms: Peak, summit, mount*

Hills. *Alternate terms: Bluff, mesa, ridge*

Valley. *Alternate terms: Basin, canyon, gorge*

Plain. *Alternate terms: Field, meadow, expanse*

Island. *Alternate terms: Isle, reef, atoll*

Beach. *Alternate terms: Coast, shore, bank*

Wastes. *Alternate terms: Barrens, desert, stretch*



Patron God

ROLL	PATRON GOD
1	Itz'hun
2	Ix Kin
3	Po Ch'en
4	Kimi
5	Buluk Cha'wil
6	Ek Pakax
7	Apocōatl
8	Cha'kal
9	Che'b' T'ul
10	Ix Cha'mim

Itz'hun: Mythology considers Itz'hun to be the first priest in history, raised up to godhood. He takes the form of an elderly man with sunken cheeks, clothed in white. Itz'hun values learning, history and tradition.

Ix Kin: The goddess of the sun, and twin sister to Po Ch'en. Ix Kin is usually represented by a tall, glowing woman in shimmering clothes. She is fond of flowers and has the flower symbol printed on her clothing or tattooed on her body. Ix Kin values loyalty, responsibility, shows of power and consistency.

Po Ch'en: God of the moon, and twin brother of Ix Kin. Po Ch'en is often shown as a lithe, shimmering young man with long hair. He is always in the company of his favored companion, a giant iridescent rabbit. Po Ch'en values change, progress, kindness and calmness.

Kimi: God of death, Kimi and his devotees are a terrifying sight to behold. Kimi is most often pictured as a looming skeletal figure with bits of decomposing flesh. He often wears bells around his ankles and is accompanied by giant bats. Kimi values fear, intimidation, chaos and competition.

Buluk Cha'wil: The god of war and lightning, Buluk Cha'wil is revered by warriors and generals. He is depicted as a grizzled, aging male warrior wearing glowing armor and holding a smoking, flaming axe. Buluk Cha'wil values action, militarism, structure, power and sacrifice.

Ek Pakax: The god of mercantilism and trade, Ek Pakax appears as a gaudily dressed merchant with bags of exotic goods and a large tattoo of a black scorpion across his face. Ek Pakax values trade, exchange, exotic goods, finery and materiality.

Apocōatl: God of animals, nature, hunting, forests, and the jungle, Apocōatl takes the shape of brightly feathered serpent with red and green hues. He values respect for the earth, success in hunting and foraging, sustainability and innovation.

Cha'kal: God of the rain and storms. They are split into four aspects the Red services the east, the White oversees the north, the Black resides in the west, and the Yellow maintains presence in the south. A temperamental god, they are quick to anger. They often take the form of a reptile.

Che'b' T'ul: Goddess of the written word and scribes, Che'b' T'ul is portrayed as an anthropomorphic rabbit. She and her priesthood value the written word, truth and honesty in writing, and intellect.

Ix Cha'mim: Goddess of doctors and healers, Ix Cha'mim appears as an old woman carrying jars of healing herbs and medicines. She also has a strong affinity for snakes, and often is shown as having a snake draped across her arms or over her head. Ix Cha'mim values compassion, healing and mercy.



Atmosphere

ROLL	ATMOSPHERE
1	Tranquil
2	Tense
3	Lawful
4	Adventurous
5	Fearful
6	Open
7	Isolated
8	Proud
9	Hostile
10	Zealous

Tranquil: This is a place of relative calm, far from the troubles, warfare and chaos of other places in Tzak K'an. Is this tranquility a legitimate result of a lack of significant conflict? Is there some magical effect that keeps chaos and conflict from creeping in on this area? Or is the population in thrall to some dark sorcerer, who keeps them all complacent to maintain his own power and influence?

Tense: Peace balances on a knife's edge here; you can feel it in the air, as if everyone is holding their breath. Are the people unhappy due to some sudden change in the region's leadership or economic status? Perhaps an unpopular war has just begun? Or conversely, perhaps the population has had enough of their violent neighbors and are ready to march with spear and shield in hand, but their leaders are more fearful.

Lawful: This is a place of order. Things are done a certain way, and those who stand out against traditions are promptly put back into their place, one way or another. Is this because the place has a history of chaos and bloodshed that a new leader has promised to correct? Or maybe there is a myth of a local spirit who punishes those that insult their ancestors by insisting that they know better?

Adventurous: Change is good, and this region embraces it. This isn't the same as a region of chaos or disorder, but the people here have a reputation for acceptance when it comes to new ideas, new approaches to problems, or people who are a little bit different than the norm. Have they recently broken

free of the rule of a tyrannical despot, and are still in the exuberant throes of a successful revolution? Perhaps the region is a trade crossroad, and because of this they are simply acclimated to the strange customs and appearances of travelers.

Fearful: The people here are terrified of something. The markets are quiet, the streets are deserted after sundown, and everyone locks their doors and keeps to themselves. Maybe there is a legend that states a monster stalks the streets at night, abducting or killing those foolish enough to be caught outdoors—and this story has recently begun to come horrifyingly true. Or perhaps the source of fear is much more mundane: bandits in the region have begun collecting "taxes" from the people, and they become angry and violent in the face of even the slightest resistance.

Open: Smiling faces, open arms and hospitality are how these people greet others. There is a sense of generosity and giving that goes above and beyond what you might receive in other places. Maybe the region is particularly pious, and they revere a story of their god being taken in by a generous farmer who then became their saint? Perhaps they are simply founded on a notion of giving, and have a strong sense of community? Or maybe their region is particularly harsh, and their generosity is borne out of survival—if I am dying of thirst and you have water, share it so that someday I might return the favor.

Isolated: These people have probably never seen anyone quite like you, and your strangeness colors every interaction you have with them. Some may treat you with hostility, while others with a sense of wonder and curiosity that borders on awe. What has led to this region's isolation? Are they geographically remote, such as a mountainside village or secreted away in the deep jungle? Or perhaps their rulers have closed the borders, fearful of the influence of outsiders.

Proud: The locals here have a strong sense of pride in themselves, their hometown, their rulers or some other aspect of their lives. Perhaps there is an ancient hero, well-regarded throughout all of Aztlan, who



hailed from this region. Maybe the region has a specific export or craft that it specializes in, and the people here take particular pride in the item's quality or craftsmanship. What is it that these people hold in such high regard, and is their pride well-founded?

Hostile: These people don't like you or anyone like you, and they aren't likely to be very shy about admitting it. Maybe such aggression is simply part of their culture, and what comes across as rude to outsiders is perfectly ordinary and polite to them. Or maybe their hostility is exactly what it appears to be—distaste, or outright hatred, for something they don't understand or they view as dangerous.

Zealous: This region puts a great deal of emphasis on religion and their relationship with the gods and spirits. The region could be, according to mythology, blessed by a particular deity, many of the inhabitants claiming to have divine blood in their veins. Or the region's religion could be significantly different from the rest of Aztlan, which sets them apart from their peers and drives them closer together. What do these people revere, and why does it dominate their day-to-day lives so thoroughly?

Ruler

ROLL	RULER
1	Warlord
2	Theocrat
3	Scholar
4	Progressivist
5	Insane
6	Usurper
7	Unlikely Heir
8	Artiste
9	Populist
10	Traditionalist

Warlord: The region's leadership is warlike, either through personal ability (an accomplished and strong soldier) or through leadership (a peerless strategist and general).

Theocrat: The divine chose this region's ruler, or so he would have you believe. He is blessed by the gods, and has a responsibility to represent the divine and reward the faith of the people.

Scholar: This ruler prizes knowledge and learning. She may emphasize the education of her people, or seek to keep them ignorant to secure her own power.

Progressivist: This ruler believes that failure to change is equivalent to death. Adaptation and growth is what grants a people prosperity and wisdom.

Insane: Madness clouds every action this ruler takes. One day he might sign a treaty with a neighboring city, and the next declare them to be mortal enemies.

Usurper: This ruler seized power from her predecessor, and might be considered an "illegitimate" ruler. She might also be a puppeteer, controlling the "true" ruler from behind the scenes.

Unlikely Heir: This ruler might be the illegitimate child of the previous leader, or a distant relative to an otherwise-dead dynasty. Whether this ruler is popular or not is another question entirely.

Artiste: This ruler seeks to turn his region into an artistic or engineering marvel, the envy of their neighbors. Does he have a particular artistic discipline he favors (song, or painting, or architecture), or does he try to strike a balance between these various works?

Populist: This ruler fancies herself as the voice of her people, for better or worse. If the people cry out for war, this ruler listens—even if she knows it will lead to doom.

Traditionalist: This ruler places great importance on the past, on traditions and rituals of their ancestors. He might use this as a shield to protect himself against critics, or hold fast to a tradition even when it is disadvantageous.





Hazards

The sudden, wild storm that whips up as the Heroes give chase to their nemesis across the high seas. The abandoned mine that locals refuse to explore—anyone who goes inside vanishes, never to return. The temple to the old gods, converted into the center of power for an insane warlock. A dangerous tunnel through the mountains, inhabited by a very territorial family of ferocious bears. The untamed, unexplored jungle, teeming with jaguars and snakes.

Hazards are a new kind of antagonist—like Villains and Brute Squads—you can use as a singular threat in a scene or Sequence (exploring an abandoned ruin or a haunted house in the middle of a forest) or only one facet of the dangers facing the heroes (the wild storm that suddenly whips up as the Heroes face a Villain in a dramatic rooftop duel).

Hazards can be overcome a number of ways.

First, Hazards are often restricted to a geographical area. If the Heroes simply leave, the Hazard usually cannot pursue them. This doesn't require any Raises, although the circumstances of the Heroes running from a Hazard might result in their becoming Helpless, having no control over their destination, or otherwise landing in a messy situation.

Second, a Hazard can be Braved. Braving a Hazard means that the characters involved in the scene, collectively, must spend a number of Raises equal to the Hazard's Threat (see below). Spending Raises in this way does not reduce a Hazard's Threat—the haunted house doesn't get less spooky the closer you get to uncovering its dark secret—but it does mean that the Heroes find what they want or achieve a favorable, controlled outcome (such as maintaining their course during a violent storm, or discovering what lies at the top of an ancient Synchron temple).

Hazards have a Threat Rating that determines how many dice are rolled. Threat Rating ranges from 5 (something dangerous, such as gusting winds on a narrow precipice) to 15 (something nearly cataclysmic, such as a gaping hole in reality created by a careless or Villainous *sorcier*).

Hazards also have Elements that give them special ways to spend their Raises or allow the GM to spend Danger Points. Unless otherwise noted, Elements may be activated multiple times or have variable effects depending on how many Raises the GM spends on them, but a Hazard may only activate a single Element on its turn.



Default Hazard Elements

All Hazards must have the following Elements.

INTENSIFY

The GM can spend a Danger Point before dice are rolled to increase the Hazard's Threat Rating by 1. This effect persists until the end of the scene. The GM may only spend one Danger Point in this way per Round, but otherwise there is no limit.

CHAOTIC

The Hazard can spend a Raise to cause a Wound to all characters in the scene, immediately. Brute Squads instead each have their Strength reduced by 1.

HABITAT

Any creature or Monster who lives in the Hazard ignores any Wounds or disadvantages from the Hazard spending Raises or Danger Points. Heroes and Villains (unless they are also Monsters) cannot benefit from this Element.

TREACHEROUS

The Hazard can spend a Raise to create a Consequence. This Consequence occurs at Action 0 (at the very end of the Round), and causes one Dramatic Wound to *all* characters present in the scene. Players need 5 Raises to overcome this Consequence. All Heroes and Villains may spend Raises collectively to overcome this Consequence, but if it is not overcome completely all characters still take the Dramatic Wound. A Brute Squad subjected to this effect has its Strength reduced to half its current value.

Optional Hazard Elements

The list of Elements a Hazard can have are as follows.

CONFOUNDING

The Hazard can spend a Raise to separate a character from the others in the Scene. Until they are reunited, the separated character cannot benefit from any Advantages or abilities that rely on proximity, sight or hearing, and cannot benefit or affect other characters with any effects of spending Hero Points (such as receiving or granting bonus dice). In order to be reunited, another character must create an Opportunity, and the separated character must activate it.

DEADLY

When the Hazard spends a Raise to use the Element Chaotic, it causes 2 Wounds instead.

DEAFENING

The Hazard can spend a Raise to become unbearably loud. Until the Hazard spends another Raise, any form of verbal communication between characters costs 1 Raise.

DESTRUCTIVE

The Hazard can spend a Raise to destroy a structure or object (like a small building, a boat, a bridge). This causes a Wound to any character who is in a position to be harmed by its destruction (such as a character who is standing on a bridge when it is destroyed) unless that character spends a Raise in response. If a Hazard uses this Element in a scene with one or more Ships, all Ships present take a Critical Hit rather than being destroyed, but other effects (such as characters in perilous positions needing to spend a Raise or take a Wound) remain unchanged.

DOMINION

The Hazard is under the control of a character present. The character controlling the Hazard is immune to the Hazard's effects from spending Raises.



ESCALATING

The GM can spend two Danger Points per Round to increase a Hazard's Threat with Intensify.

FOREBODING

The GM can spend one Danger Point whenever rolls are made during a Sequence. For this Sequence, the Hazard has 1 Rank of Fear for every 5 Threat Rating.

GLOOMY

The Hazard can spend a Raise and plunge the area under its control into near-total darkness. Any Action that would rely significantly upon sight requires 2 Raises instead of 1 until the end of the Round.

INTENSE

When the Hazard deals Wounds, the GM may spend one Danger Point to have each character damaged lose 1 Raise.

PIERCING

When the Hazard spends a Raise to activate the Chaotic Element, that Wound cannot be prevented by the afflicted characters spending a Raise.

SAVAGE

When the Hazard's Treacherous Element deals Dramatic Wounds, randomly select one Brute Squad in the present scene. That Brute Squad is destroyed, regardless of its Strength.

SURGING

The GM can spend an unlimited number of Danger Points to increase the Hazard's die pool. Each Danger Point gives the Hazard 2 bonus dice. This does not increase the Hazard's Threat, and thus lasts only for one Round.

UNPREDICTABLE

The Hazard can spend a Raise to increase the Action that any Consequence it creates occurs on, including from the Element Treacherous. The Hazard can do this even after the Consequence is created, and even if that would cause the Consequence to occur immediately. For example, an Unpredictable Hazard could spend a Raise to create the Consequence "all characters will take 1 Dramatic Wound on Action 0." Later, it can spend a Raise to instead make that Consequence occur on Action 1.

UNWELCOMING

The Hazard can spend a Raise to apply Pressure to all characters present. Typically, Hazards with this Element apply Pressure for all characters to leave, meaning that if characters wish to remain in the Hazard their next Action requires 2 Raises, rather than 1.





Adventuring in Aztlan

Aztlan is a land of danger and mystery, a swirling mess of political conflicts, magical Hazards and heroic opportunities both large and small. In other words, it's the perfect place to set a game of **7TH SEA!**

Yet running a game set in the New World isn't quite like running a game set in Théah or the Crescent Empire; there are new types of problems and pitfalls you might encounter while leading a group of Heroes through Aztlani stories. In this section, we give you some tools for thinking about stories set in The New World.

Core Conflicts

First, it's important to identify which kinds of stories work best in an Aztlani context. If you're looking to run a game about a crew of ruffians who sail the Seven Seas, then you probably want to look at **PIRATE NATIONS** for setting material instead of **THE NEW WORLD**; Aztlani people don't have a strong culture of piracy, and the political structures of Aztlan tend to focus more on subtle politics than they do on living free and dying young on the open waves.

Here are a few of the conflicts that suit Aztlan well, with a few notes on how to make the best use of them.

Théan Contact

Despite their own political conflicts, every empire in Aztlan has been forced to contend with the enormous impact of Théan contact. Will the empires fall to the cruel machinations of men like Calderón or can they weather the constant, chaotic contact with their institutions intact? This doesn't mean that the only stories worth telling surround Théans, but the last hundred years of contact has exposed new opportunities and dangers for both the Aztlani people and the Heroes and Villians who have come to the New World that you can use at your table.

Be careful not to slip into easy stereotypes when introducing stories that concern the activities of Théans in Aztlan. The Aztlani aren't savages who need saving, nor are they unemotional figures who only act when a white person shows up to motivate them to finally address problems. The best stories that revolve around Théan contact are those in which both sides have resources and information that contribute to understanding and addressing the problems the Aztlani face.



Political Drama

The Aztlani have their own ways of handling problems, including looking to the gods for direct and immediate answers; those ways are no more or less sophisticated and meaningful than Théan courts and law enforcement. Give your players opportunities to engage these systems by presenting injustices that affect ordinary Aztlani people in ways both large and small, daring them to act in the face of political systems much bigger than the Heroes. After all, how much trouble can the Heroes get into when they stop the Empress of Kuraq from executing a political rival on trumped up charges?

Aztlani Heroes are especially important to these types of conflict because they provide a gateway for non-Aztlani Heroes to engage the story, encouraging local communities to trust Théan Heroes and offering information about the Villains at hand. If your group doesn't feature Aztlani Heroes as player character, make sure to present lots of Aztlani Heroes as non-player characters, eager to draw the Heroes into a fight for the right cause. Of course, some Aztlani "Heroes" might actually be Villains who see naive Théans as the perfect political tools...

Exploration vs. Exploitation

The Villains of Aztlan all have one thing in common: they see Aztlan as a place to be conquered, in one way or another. For Calderón (and many other Théan despots) that conquest is literal; he would like nothing more than to see the empires of Aztlan wiped away to make room for a Vaticine dictatorship. But for other Villains like the Kuraq Empress or Azenath Medellín, their conquests are subtler, more insidious, and no less dangerous. They too want to take and take and take ...

The New World holds new treasures and riches for all, even the local inhabitants who have lived in Tzak K'an or the Nahuacan Alliance their whole lives. There are Syrneath mysteries to be explored, trade routes and new cities to be established, and Sorceries that were once lost and can be found anew. But the Heroes will first have to figure out who can be trusted to preserve those findings, and whose archaeological inquiries will lead to greater wealth for all Aztlani people instead of just a select few.

Conveying the Setting

One of the challenges that comes with running a game of 7TH SEA set in Aztlan is that players are often less familiar with a Mesoamerican setting than the traditional Théan backdrop. There are literally thousands of novels, movies, and shows set in fantasy Europe, but Mesoamerica gets only a tiny fraction of that kind of attention. Here are some ways to convey what Aztlan is and how it works without requiring your players to sit and read this book before they can play.

Start with Théans

If your players are most comfortable playing Théans in 7TH SEA...let them! Many, many Théans come to the New World every year to make their fortunes, pursue their own personal business or simply to see a new land they've never seen before.

Aztlan has hundreds of reasons for characters to journey west, and players might feel more comfortable exploring the setting if they don't have to worry that they are "playing a Nahuacan wrong." While this method puts a bit more burden on you to make sure you've mastered the setting before sitting down to play, you'll give your players a unique opportunity to explore a new part of 7TH SEA from their characters' perspectives.

Be careful, however, not to let the "fish out of water" story turn into a stereotypical jaunt through the savage jungles of Aztlan. Challenge the Heroes with complex problems that require investigation and subtlety. Remind them that the customs and practices of the local people are meaningful and important. And never let them forget that the Aztlani too have Heroes and Villains that pursue their own goals, no matter what Théah might have planned.

Use Local Geography

The Aztlani empires are spread across three incredibly different parts of The New World, featuring deserts, jungles and mountains respectively. Each of these biomes plays a prominent role in the development and cultures of the Nahuacan Alliance, Tzak K'an city-states and the Kuraq Empire, giving you an opportunity to showcase each Nation's society through the land the Heroes must travel to move from place to place.



MIXED GROUPS

It's possible that your group wants to play a mix of Théan and Aztlan Heroes, perhaps even adding in a few pirate or Crescent Empire characters as well! That's great! Nothing gets across the unique nature of the New World like a mix of characters who represent the viewpoints that are coming into conflict around extended contact. Make sure that those characters have the same strong ties you would build between Théan characters to keep them traveling together, and your diverse collection of Heroes will allow you to drop in new plot hooks and stories that will keep the group busy across multiple empires!

Imagine an adventure that starts on Aragosta, moves to the grand cities of Tzak K'an, pushes the Heroes north to Nahuacan and then south to Kuraq!

But the goal with these travels isn't just to show off Aztlan; look to the Hazards and Villains they would meet along the way. Use their wanderings to drive home how huge Aztlan is compared to Théah, and how diverse and different the people are in each region.

Traveling also lets you show off how awesome and interesting individual Aztlan Heroes can be without stifling the main Heroes' contribution to the story. Make one Aztlan Hero matter in Tzak K'an and then have another save the Heroes in Kuraq.

Employ Magical Realism

The New World—warped by the Fall of the Aztlan Empire—doesn't conform to the same rules of time and spaces as the rest of Terra. As the Heroes explore the physical land, you can remind them of what Aztlan truly is by revealing old ruins, hinting at dark mysteries, and blurring the line between the past, present and future. In other words, Aztlan is ripe for magical realism, a type of narrative in which the magical elements sneak into the realistic fiction without proclaiming themselves to be specifically otherworldly before they arrive.

The Heroes might, for example, find an abandoned city-state in the jungles of Tzak K'an. As they explore the city and overcome its Hazards, they realize that the city-state is lost in time; whatever tragedy befell

it has not yet happened. The Heroes must find a way out of the city and back to their own time, but only after they have determined what caused the city-state to be lost so that they can fix it. And if a God or a Villain gets in the way of setting things right, then the Heroes will just have to overcome her as well.

Adventure Hooks

Now that you know what the core conflicts of Aztlan are, and how to harness the setting, let's talk about a few adventure ideas for the New World.

Artifact Hunt

The jungles of Tzak K'an are filled with old Syrneth Ruins. While in Théah, ruins are well documented and often controlled by The Explorer's Society, ruins all across Aztlan remain unexplored. That isn't to say that people aren't also looking for these same ruins and sites. Many Aztlan do not view these artifacts as rare or dangerous, instead they are a natural part of the world.

You may find Théans seeking to steal an artifact out from under a village that has been using it for agriculture. You may also find yourself at odds with larger organizations that seek to keep Aztlan safe.

The Guardians of Aztlan make it a point to ensure that dangerous artifacts pertaining to the old gods disappear. They could easily complicate your day if you happen to be trafficking in such artifacts.

Rebellion

The Kuraq Empire isn't the only place with a regime the Heroes might want to thwart. While Kuraq is certainly the place for rebellion, any Tzak K'an city-state could have a despotic leader in need of an overthrow. You may have a friend who needs goods and aid to help the resistance. You just need to get it past the ruler's guards.

Political intrigue in Aztlan requires just as much finesse and gentle maneuvering as it does in Théah. The Heroes can't just walk in and kill the Empress, or a king, not unless you want the campaign to end very quickly. Also remember that many Aztlan people see unification as a good thing, so making alliances with nations to work against your terrible leader plays right into those goals.





Appendix



Tz'ak K'ani City-State Sheet

CITY-STATE NAME

ICONOGRAPHY

GEOGRAPHY

PATRON GOD

ATMOSPHERE

RULER

What does the Iconography say about the history and citizens of this area?

Important People

How does the Patron God influence the region?

Important Places

Is there something specific that causes the Atmosphere of the city-state?

Who is the ruler? What are their ambitions? Their goals for the dominion?
If the ruler is a Villain, what are their Schemes?

Important Events

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