

The image shows the front cover of an antique book. The cover is a textured, olive-green color. A large, ornate gold-tooled decorative border is applied to the cover. This border is shaped like a large, stylized letter 'T' or a similar cross-like form. The top horizontal bar of the 'T' is wide and features intricate floral and foliate patterns. The vertical stem of the 'T' is narrower and contains several rectangular panels: a purple panel with a gold-tooled cross, a solid black panel, and a gold-tooled panel with a central oval. The bottom of the 'T' is a large, complex, and highly decorative element with multiple lobes and circular motifs, some filled with purple. The spine of the book is visible on the left edge.

The State of
Ancoria

The Splinters

Your guide to Superliga

Greetings, Overseer! Sick to death of the Superliga manual making constant mention of how it's been designed to 'empower' you to create your own stuff? Always saying that the manual wants to show you what you can do without doing it for you? Continuously harping on about how the power is in your hands?

Well, now you don't have to deal with these pathetic excuses for not having a pre-built world anymore. Here lies Ancoria, a fantastical world designed for a sword-and-sorcery campaign as well as a decent amount of loose political intrigue. The backstory for several locations is laid out, as is the 'secret hidden information' regarding several important landmarks and mysterious objects.

Author

Brendan Evans. Like always 😊

Thanks To

Megan,
The people.

What's in this book?

The plane of 'Ancoria', as imagined by its creator. There's a section listing the basic characteristics of each of the known planes of Superliga, suggestions for making yet more planes (I'm still ardently committed to the idea that somewhere out there, there's an Overseer who only reads these so they can make a primal grunt of dismissal before penning their *own* works of creative genius)

There are also some basic plot hooks for each of the major locations in Superliga and even sample adventures and encounters. I mean like... wow, guys. Just wow. There's so much *stuff* in here.

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Ancoria

In a universe of infinite possibilities, there has to be a place where everything happens. That place is not Ancoria. Ancoria wouldn't pass on the same side of the street as that place. Ancoria is a little splinter where the most marvellous fantastical stuff happens. In fact, only fantastical stuff is allowed to happen. Mechasuits are completely unheard of, Mechanowalkers are alien concepts. Similarly, most 'gunsmiths' concern themselves with the most laughable range of muskets, grapeshot cannons and other such laughable 'black powder' weapons. There's not a single registered provider of Sturgeon Laser goods anywhere on the plane.

Anchorage Kingdom

By all rights, Anchorage Kingdom could be in control of two-thirds of the landmass by now. The capital, Anchorage, lies on the western shore of the continent, offering them the plentiful bounty of the sea to supplement their constantly fertile crops. A line of mines in the Grimigan Peaks to the north provide the country with never-ending streams of ore and precious stones. To the east, the twin cities of Ballast and Bracket are tasked with maintaining and manning the Anchor Wall to the east – a potent architectural feat that combines stone walls 10 metres tall, 10m wide and mighty towers manned by doughty crossbowmen and reinforced by enchantments crafted by members of the Overlay Project.

Anchorage has even established universities and hospitals in the trade quarter as a result of its continued trade of culture, knowledge and goods with Vulodin.

The Sto plains have historically been a fantastic place for invading armies to stage a siege or regroup before taking the fight to

Anchorage. After a few near misses, the people of Anchorage coughed up the money to build the Sto Wall, a miniature Anchor Wall which also serves as a barracks for the standing army. Three ballistae towers form the backbone of the Sto Wall defence.

With all of this, why does Anchorage not turn its attentions out on the world and conquer the lands of Tom Halbut to the east? Is it simple Altruism? Is it a misguided sense of brotherhood between themselves and the besotted apes of the marshlands?

No. What holds them back is sheer, pants-wetting terror. Anchorage lives in the proverbial shadow of Tevrash, the omnipresent threat far to the north east. For many years, Anchorage has been driven mad by fear of those death-worshipping lunatics who threaten the whole continent with their insidious power. It is for this reason that the wizards of Anchorage have become such a rare sight these days – every last one of them has been retained by the king to research the Overlay project, a semi-secret royal initiative to protect the kingdom of Anchorage by sending 25% of its civilian populace to a new world to serve as colonists through arcane portals erected throughout the city. These colonists are only a diversion – the real purpose of the Overlay project is to magically rip the planes asunder once more in order to remove Tevrash from the face of the continent and replace it with something more fitting.

Anchorage City

The population of Anchorage City is conservatively given at 100,000 people. The majority of those people live in mud brick houses with thatched roofing in the south-eastern district of the city. It is separated by a canal from the rest of the city, given the regularity with which the homes of the disadvantaged catch fire.

A wall circles the outside of Anchorage City. It is neither impressive nor useful – the defense of Anchorage city relies on the Sto Wall to the east. The guard towers that once housed regiments of sharp shooters are now home to the laboratories of the Overlay Project. Someday (say, after a band of heroes cements Anchorage’s friendship with Vulodin, drives back the hordes of rampaging beasts from the Anchor Wall and neutralises Tivrash) the Overlay Project may go commercial, selling planar travel to all interested buyers, but for now the wizards will politely request that any interlopers attempting to gain access to the towers leave, before using them as test subjects in matter displacement.

The docks are on the west shore (Where else?). It is one of the few parts of the city not surrounded by architecturally impressive walls and is unprotected from naval attack – apart from the people of Vulodin, the people of Anchorage are unaware of any other naval presence on the surface of the world. Ships are forever coming and going. Deckhands move cargo at all hours of the night. The merchant class rings this district with a crescent shaped trading district, where expensive boutiques clamour to sell their wares. Most of these self-styled ‘entrepreneurs’ are actually mere cat’s-paws for one of the envoys and live in squalor above their storefronts. The envoys are a group of the wealthy elite with the wherewithal to send merchant ships to Vulodin, where they typically only do business with the wealthy elite of that country. They own a number of opulent villas to the south of the city.

The northern part of the city is an industrial district. There is a service gate that allows shipments of ore into the city without attracting the same attention as they would through the east gate. The northern gate is a tiny slit in the walls. During a siege, it is

typically blocked off by a massive conjured rock. Here, the blacksmiths toil day and night, fashioning scythes for the farmers, hooks for the sailors (it’s an image thing), fashioning complicated patterns and sigils to serve as wardings for the Overlay Project (this is done with utmost secrecy, far from prying eyes) and creating whatever metal goods a bustling metropolis may need.

The central part of town is the beating heart of Anchorage City. This is the government district, where the king makes his ceremonial home (the current king, Hamon, is actually much fonder of his summer residence in Ballast and tries to avoid venturing to the capital whenever possible) in the opulent Unnamed Palace (the palace was discovered abandoned and in pristine condition by Anchor, the marooned sailor who founded Anchorage Kingdom). The Unnamed Palace is not a magical structure, but was built in ages past by ancient hands who no longer make their home on this plane. The castle is built of perfectly ordinary stone, but no mortar. It forms a complete interlocking puzzle. In addition to this mystery, some parts of the castle are covered in ancient cuneiform scripts and others are capped with cobalt for reasons no-one can adequately explain. Most of the cobalt has been pinched by petty thieves (or poor peasants who assume it has value), but the writing and several of the largest bodies of cobalt are curiously impervious to the most devoted attempts to pry them off the wall.

The main source of Hamon’s hatred for the Unnamed Palace is the throne room. It is easily gaudier and more opulent than any other throne room in Ancoria. The reason for this is not diamonds, gold or courtiers wearing costumes made entirely out of feathers (though some of Hamon’s late-night court sessions do have the latter). The throne room is a massive chamber made entirely out of glass. The throne room reaches from the

second floor of the castle to the roof, where the glass dome focuses the light to an uncomfortable intensity. By mid-afternoon the room becomes uninhabitable without bedecking the room with festive tents and marquees. Even then, good hydration is a must. The throne itself is oddly shaped – a glass stalagmite with crenellations around its base such that four kings could sit at the cardinal points without much interfering with each other. The stalagmite juts up about 10m in height, where a tiny indentation in the spire marks the place where the diamond adorning the Royal Crown of Ancor was first discovered. It is said that the diamond is of such a brilliant size and cut that when it was first removed from its resting place, the lights in the hall actually dimmed somewhat. Overlay researchers have expressed interest in the throne room numerous times – Head Theorist Galdra has privately shared with the king his belief that the throne room was never designed as a throne room at all – it is in fact an experimental solar cannon, which was focused by the diamond when used.

Galdra has instructed some members of the Overly Project to locate possible control mechanisms for the cannon, but they have as yet been unsuccessful despite combing the castle multiple times. Hamon remains unconvinced. If this weapon was a successful experiment, where are the people who used it? Given the massive power it supposedly emits, will it endanger his people, slumbering contentedly beneath the base of the tower? In any case, Hamon cannot spare the crown. The diamond's spectacular brilliance is almost impossible to replicate and simply removing it from the crown without explaining its absence would be a major blow to the city's morale.

The other major feature of the government district is the forum. The forum is where Priam oils the wheels of government. The true power of Anchor City is an oligarchy

consisting of the trade princes and the powerful generals of the kingdom. Although the king has nominal power and is responsible for making laws, the royal family is hideously in debt. If a law is going to be passed, the king needs the money to support it and the only place to get that money is going to be from the trade princes. Thus, the king is often forced to consult with the princes before passing any laws. It's also worth noting that responsibility for the city guard rotates on a monthly basis between four of the major trading houses.

Things to Do in Anchorage City

There are always *war widows* begging for vengeance against the monsters that come screaming out of Tom Halbut, or for food enough to continue their crusade of bitterness for another week.

Some of the less scrupulous survivors of the dangerous *expeditions beyond Anchor Wall* sell the diaries of their dearly departed (he went down like a ton of bricks before he could reveal the final location of the Halbut gold stash, but the quick thinking of his friend brought this diary back to you, good sir!) as a guide to some fabulous treasure or as a hunting guide to the more deadly creatures of the Grimigan Peaks, promising glory and honour to adventurers who succeed where their kinsmen have failed. These diaries are usually genuine, but entirely useless – all too often, the failed expedition was lost, misunderstood the nature of the monsters they were fighting, or give advice on how to avoid one obstacle, only to lead one further into deeper, totally unknown peril.

The Thieves' Guild operates out of the slums. Thugs are drawn from the lower classes, while bored nobles make up the elite spies and thieves. They are unilaterally opposed to the trade princes and would like nothing more than to humiliate them or devastate their

economic superiority. The Princes have not yet been able to infiltrate the guild, but they would dearly love to hear from someone who has. Outsiders are generally welcomed into the Thieves' Guild cautiously. It takes several missions before the prospective guild member is even introduced to one of the safe houses, let alone the actual guild headquarters. The Guild is able to sell poison, lay their hands on modified weapons at a slight discount to trusted members. Healers are also retained by the guild to heal the *intelligent* members – the leadership has no real interest in keeping stupid thieves who favour combat over stealth and tact on the pay books. The leader of the Thieves' Guild is Adeipho Larix, himself a disgraced trade prince. His heritage is an open secret among the upper echelons of the guild. Adeipho plans to reveal himself when he believes he understands the day to day life of the Trade Princes. He has yet to realise that his current existence of constant subterfuge, double-dealing, espionage and treachery is almost exactly the kind of thing that the real Trade Princes do on a daily basis.

The Overlay Project has its public offices opposite the slums in the north-eastern section of town, across the Sto Road that bisects the town from east to west. This public front is known as the Artificer's Group. The Group makes use of the patriotic and xenophobic citizens of Anchorage City (and of course, eager adventurers) by sending them to field-test new weapons on the wall or even further into enemy territory. Anyone who is canny enough to survive a single mission out there but crazy enough to return for more is immediately inducted into the real business of the Overlay Project tasked with gathering magical artifacts to further the wizard's experiments, or to spy on and sabotage the magical defences of Tom Halbut and Tevrash.

Entering the **Trade district** requires the players to interact with the very dangerous

merchant class. The merchants are always willing to offer a callow youth the chance for riches and combat experience in the form of a job guarding caravans. Very rarely, the merchants lose a caravan of goods on the way from Ballast or Bracket to the bandits that plague the Sto Road (truly, if you're not inside a walled city or the welcome guest at a Trade Prince's villa, you're easy pickings for the worst humanity has to offer). When this unthinkable tragedy occurs, the merchants froth at the mouth like rabid dogs, hiring each and every able bodied man they can lay their hands on. It doesn't matter if the cost of the hired goons outweighs the lost goods! Those brigands have got to know that messing with the merchants is a bad idea! The Trade district is the place to go if you're after weapons or exotic Vulodin goods of varying quality and prices.

The city guard barracks is an imposing looking building jutting out of the central district of the city like an over-dressed sore thumb. The trade princes cannot maintain power over the guard house for more than a month, but they do their best to ensure that the long arm of the law always remembers the hand that feeds it. Thus, the city guard is a very well-equipped, well trained fighting force that functions as an extension of the will of the rich. The city guard are mostly drawn from the poorer sections of town or the sons of the artisans in the northern district, so they don't do as good a job of oppressing the poor as the rich might like and the city guard are forever frustrated in their attempts to curb the more obvious excesses of the trade princes because their weekly bread comes from the self-same excesses. The Guard Commander Voletus Simes has long since given up on making any headway in either direction and advises his men to simply keep their head down. Firebrand revolutionaries are well advised to talk to Captain Ulysses Branch if they're

interested in striking a blow for the common man and taking the fight to the heart of corruption. Prisoners are held inside the barracks. A small amphitheatre has been erected backing onto the wall of the barracks, allowing the magistrates to try prisoners. The magistrates are good and just men who are educated in the law. To prevent the abuse of their power, a jury of ten men of good education also sit in on the proceedings and

The forum is the seat of government. The building is a marble amphitheatre. By night it is a circus, a theatre, or an opera house, open to all the public. By day, it is the seat of government, but the noise level and gravitas remains unchanged. Xenophon the Radical is a demagogue who stirs up populist support for his strange dreams – literacy for the poor, establishing a ‘bank’ which could lend money to aspiring merchants, making the university free for every young child, etc. He is opposed by a staunch conservative by the name of Jason Argotex. Argotex is a relative of a powerful trade house, established as a puppet for their interests. In public, he attempts to limit the powers of the city guard and oppress the poor. In private, he has much more in common with Xenophon than he would like to admit. Regardless, his hands are tied by the nature of his position and there is nothing he can do. The third and most powerful figure on the council is Priam, the king’s deputy at Forum. Although the post carries no official power and previous King’s Deputies have been occasionally laughed out of forum or even barred from attending the ‘important’ meetings, Priam has established his power by virtue of his one-track mind – his driving ambition in life is to expand the holdings of Anchorage Kingdom. He is a great friend to the Overlay project and will always be willing to provide some kind of assistance to noble warriors willing to advance Anchorage through conquest. Priam attends the Forum

irregularly, but when he does appear the other factions cease their petty squabbling and listen to his words with baited breath.

The king’s daughter Hannah is a rebellious firebrand who sees her father as weak, the forum as a useless catchment zone for human flotsam and the trade princes as the very worst that human society has to offer (she’s not entirely wrong, but it would be silly to claim that someone so sheltered was somehow ‘right’ about anything). Hannah is a very well educated and very wanton young lady who frequently comes to shouting matches with her father. Many is the time when she has stolen away in the night with the intent of meeting up with a special interest group or mob of disaffected rabble or some kind of political dissident group with the intent of storming Anchorage City and enacting social change by force. The king’s response is typical for a father who cannot control his daughter but doesn’t have the humility to admit it: every time the princess runs away, he makes a royal proclamation stating that the princess has been kidnapped and that all able bodied adventurers ought to prove their loyalty by saving her from the peril she has no doubt been embroiled in. Many adventurers have found upon reaching the place where the princess has supposedly been ‘imprisoned’ that the burly brigand brigades are only too happy to avoid royal wrath by handing over the princess, who still doesn’t understand that her presence paints a proverbial bullseye on their collective backsides. The major obstacle to completing this mission successfully is the princess herself, who is only too happy to voice her displeasure by kicking, screaming, escaping by nightfall and joining up with a less savvy group of brigands or returning before daybreak to slit some throats (she is an expert stealth-user and her skills with a dagger are unparalleled).

The docks are a hive of scum and villainy and one is well advised to be on their guard. Press gangs frequently clash with town drunks or street gangs. It is sometimes possible to gain passage to Vulodin for as little as 50gp. This ticket entitles the passenger to the tiniest cabin imaginable; a near-guarantee that anything not physically attached to them will be thrown overboard at the first sign of trouble and a 50/50 chance of being press-ganged at the end of the voyage. The character is still required to help on board with whatever the captain of the ship demands. (The point is unless you're a hero of great renown, there's no way to get a 'free trip' unless you can deal with being press-ganged)

(Jargon: *Press-ganging* refers to a criminal practice of pressing someone into service by ganging up on them, knocking them out and then tattooing them with a series of hard-to-cover marks that identify them as property of a ship)

The Gatehouses are the only ways in or out of the city. The east is guarded by a detachment of ten guardsmen and a sergeant. The north gate is not guarded by the city guard at all, but two wizards are usually on hand to blast things that need blasting.

Ballast

Ballast was established at the base of a adamantine Archimedes screw a few kilometres tall left over from a battle between ancient titans. In days of yore, it was believed that the incredible device was actually the cast off body of a long-dead god (typically given the name "Aybaltu, the one who possess all"). Aybaltu is described as being a horrifying beast with the semblance of a man remade in metal. His horrifying smirk and pillar of green hair were used to scare small children. As is only typical of superstitious forebears, they sacrificed a virgin each year on

each layer of the screw to appease the deceased deity. The enormous implications of this primitive ritual inspired a sense of deep religious reverence in the tribes who lived in the shadow of the screw. It also encouraged the young folk of the village to procreate a great deal in the hopes of avoiding the yearly sacrificial rounds.

Of course, Ballast has long since overcome its superstitions, but not necessarily its resultant overpopulation troubles. Several layers of the artefact have been populated now – the lowest of course is the province of the poor. High society continues much as it always has – elegant balls and political intrigue. The priests of the New God Ztakkek (attributed a rather tame description – she has a cat's head instead of a human head) maintain a benevolent hegemony over everyone below the fourth layer. In most parts of the town Aybaltu is forgotten, but here and there you can see a spiral drawn above a door, a fleck of blood on the flagstones, or catch the echoes of an ancient chant – "...belong to us."

Things to do in Ballast

Infiltrate high society! The balls never stop in Ballast. Sometimes an individual ball may slow down slightly, but it is quickly replaced by another ball more elegant and opulent than the one before it. In addition to the most well-bred members of Ballast, Trade Princes Erebus (the third most wealthy trade prince) and Apollyon (slightly less wealthy but his family is more prestigious) are often to be found carousing together in these debauched chambers. Perhaps a particularly ambitious individual might bend their ear with talk of work, at least for a few minutes. The princes employ a few courtiers to protect their interests at all times – in physical combat, but also in making appointments with intriguing investment opportunities.

Investigate Aybaltu Cults! It is true that Aybaltu is no longer the god of choice for most Ballastians and the traditional rites are no longer performed on every level of the artefact. However, his memory is not dead. The ruling council maintains the pragmatic view that if Aybaltu ever does return, having a cadre of his followers to intercede on their behalf might come in handy. So it is that when midyear rolls around, a small number of poorer boys and girls go missing and are never heard from again. The most powerful cell is to be found in a ramshackle slum building. It is staffed mostly by venerable old men who are saturated in divine protection and a sect of assassin's known as Aybaltu's Takers. Worship of Aybaltu is strongest amongst the poor people, particularly those close to the rust pit.

The Rust Pit is a section of the artefact subsumed by rust. It is the poorest section of the poor parts of town and its far end runs underground. Travel from the ground level into the slums is theoretically possible by way of the rust pit, but inadvisable. A pack of hairless wolves prowl the area – their snouts have been elongated as a result of continued exposure to the innards of the artefact and their physiology now allows them to bite off, chew and digest metal – even swords and armour are meals fit for a Rust Wolf.

The Metal Staircase runs from the ground surrounding Ballast to the second layer of the city, bypassing the slum areas of town entirely. Entry into Ballast is unrestricted but travel between layers is not – should a visitor be discovered to stink like a peasant or dress like a peasant or have a fiery peasant like temper they will be escorted roughly to the slums and be marked with a yellow sickle on their tunics as a symbol of their inherent peasant-like status. (The system can be beaten simply by buying a new tunic. In the minds of Ballastian law, if you can afford to

buy a new, sickle-less tunic you were not a peasant to begin with).

The Core of the artefact is a massive platform operated via a pulley system. It allows easy transport between each layer of Ballast. This is an addition to the city that wasn't crafted by the hands of long-dead forebears, although the architect responsible (Iolanthus the Mad) disappeared before he could show anyone else the blueprints, so the point is moot. However, anyone of middle-class or higher is allowed daily access to the lift. The lift runs far beyond the five colonised layers, allowing access to all ten of the rotations that form the Ballastian artefact in addition to the 'observation deck' situated at the top of the artefact.

The Observation Deck is a domed building reminiscent of the Oracle at Delphi. The temple has long served as the focus of divination magic. There is a crystalline deck some 10m across, orbiting slowly around the topmost level of the dome. It is accessible via a spiralling staircase in the middle of the observatory. The deck is intrinsically tied to the observatory and neither will continue to function without the other. The Overlay Project would love to have access to the deck but relations between Erebus, Apollyon and the entire upper class of Anchorage City are at an all-time low. It's not likely to happen until the nobles forgive the two for their excesses (including the petty theft of silverware from just about every major banquet in the last six years, destroying one of Galdra's research towers as a prank and embezzling a sizeable fortune between the two of them by leading their avaricious brethren into investing in a fake voyage to Vulodin) or the partners-in-crime are separated from their wealth and status.

Bracket

In any kingdom, there are the rich and the poor. In some kingdom there's talk of equality and no one makes a big deal about it in public, even if there are two lines into every store, even if there are two lines into every courthouse and only one line out. Bracket dispenses with that notion. The city was rocked by an explosion several years ago, weakening the foundations and shattering the walls of the city. All that was left outside were the villas of the Trade Princes, suddenly bereft of the support of the hundreds of serfs necessary to keep them in their comfortable lifestyles.

It took five years, but Bracket is strong again. The city is shaped like a circle. On the outside wall, every service, every range of goods, every kind of perversion and be had for the purchasing by the Trade Princes who rebuilt Bracket. On the inside of the wall, the servants roam about, contained inside a barricade of trading agreements and service providers.

Each of the major trade princes has a Villa here. In the context of Anchorage socio-political structures, a Villa is a fortified township unto itself, with farmland and livestock and ample room for the entertainment appetites of the Trade Princes.

There are six villas in easy riding distance of Bracket – Apollyon and Erebus have made their respective homes to the south west and south east but are never home thanks to the Warped Zone and their current status as debt-ridden asses to the other princes. The king has his villa overlooking the road into town, but the trade princes control a toll gate that neatly bisects his land.

Calisto is well known for his extravagant parties and near depthless debasements. Many the peasant farmer has awoken to find

that his wife or daughter has been taken away to his palatial estates, but none have ever been able to afford the hefty fine for making inquiries into their return.

Basil is a titan of industry and has several reservations filled with indentured Illyrian natives. The Illyrians are well cared-for in that each receives food, drink, clothing and adequate grooming and the children are educated in the basics of writing and reading, the better to oversee their parents. Very few of the Illyrians have been able to continue to practise their religion in these circumstances, which has voided most of their most potent holy powers.

Dion deals in wines, opiates and poisons. His acreages are covered in strange flowers and dangerous flora which cover the entrances, the exits, the contraband and no doubt the bones of those not authorised to know about any of the above.

The secret proclivities of the Trade Princes are not well known. The poorer people of Anchorage City consider that having food two days in a row is extravagance enough and don't generally attempt to diversify their hatred of the ruling class beyond that point. It takes suspicion based on empirical experience followed by lengthy investigation to happen across any real proof of the Trade Prince's extra-curricular activities.

All in all, Bracket is a fantastic place to visit if you're a social creature interested in the holiday of a lifetime or an adventure in social justice likely to end in a life sentence.

Tom Halbut

The people of Tom Halbut are a sturdy and prideful lot. 35% of the region is red-headed and 90% of it is illiterate (red-heads who are reading this should take note that they are their own proof that there is no correlation between the two statistics and have a cookie).

Tom Halbut was a man, named Tom, who lived many centuries ago. At the time, the desolate marshlands of Middle Ancoria were terrorised by plague, famine and disease, all of which could be easily traced back to a powerful Whyythragon by the name of Hsaark. (Hsaark himself aided in this discovery, recording a discourse on the side of a mountain that read as follows: "Ask yourself, humans: Who is it that plagues us each day? Who steals our loved ones as we sleep? It is I, Hsaark! Tremble and despair". He was later forced to teach a medicine woman named Susan to read so she could pass the message on)

In this miasma of despair, the folk of Middle Ancoria turned to look for a hero, but none was forthcoming – the separated tribes of Ancoria couldn't bear to appoint a hero that came from a family other than their own. Eventually a drunkard by the name of Tom Halbut, who belonged to no clan (either because he was too drunk to remember them or because they had all died of liver disease) stood up quite shakily, retrieved his balance and a worn claymore and mouthed something to the lines of "Alright, then". Tom set off in nothing more than a ragged blue tunic, his kilt and his boots, dragging his sword behind him as he stumbled into the misty, marshy, snow-covered swamp lands where the Whyythragon was known to make his lair. Hsaark found him along the way and had made up his mind to pick him off from a distance of about a thousand metres, but the tugging of destiny convinced him to terrify his

prey first by plummeting to the ground in front of him.

The exact conversation was not recorded, but it is believed that Tom variously threatened to kill Hsaark, to make aggressive love to his mother and then gestured all about him as a warning that he had a lot of friends who all felt the same way about Hsaark.

Hsaark ate him and spat out the bones.

At that moment, the other would-be heroes began to appear out of the mist as they called his name, having heard the commotion and thinking the better of sending so ill-prepared a hero to his grave. When they saw his bones, their search cries turned to a war cry, uniting the tribesmen into a cohesive whole. Hsaark slew all but one, but he was forced to admit that his time in Middle Ancoria had come to an end and disappeared. The day was Hsaark's, but the week firmly belonged to Tom Halbut. The last survivor - Harold the Hard-fighter – was discovered on the brink of death with an arrow just below his neck. For weeks, he lapsed in and out of a fevered dream. When he awoke he found that he had declared himself the high chief and Tom Halbut a hero. Middle Ancoria was no more, but the nation of Tom Halbut stood united together, like a gaggle of nervous teenagers on a group date.

Tom Halbut Today

The 'country' of Tom Halbut is a loose collection of families with a high chief in the middle, forever trying to bring the clans closer together but not so close that they're within striking distance of each other. Chief Ronald is the son of Harold and the epitome of Halbutian manhood – red frizzy hair, chest-length beard and a kilt voluminous enough to traumatise an entire circus at once. Ronald was born in an era of strained peace – though he has spent his life in the saddle and is the

equal of any man he spars against, he has never seen real combat and daily contends with chieftains who believe he wouldn't last a moment.

The Priestess leads the spiritual welfare of her people. Some say she is an orphan hand-picked by Susan, some say she is Susan's daughter, others say she is Susan, albeit a Susan who has mysteriously begun to age *backwards*. The Priestess leads her flock in the worship of the Mother Goddess, Velma the Wise. Velma is usually depicted as a young maiden in the prime of youth, clad in the saffron robes of wisdom. The Priestess has been gifted with a sacred relic of the Goddess – the lens of wisdom, an arcane device that provides the vision of a hawk and the wisdom of the owl. She is currently out of favour with most of the chiefs for her constant attempts to unite the clans directly under Ronald.

Tom's Rest

The only truly populated area of Tom Halbut is the pilgrimage site where the eponymous national icon fell. The town is built on log platforms strapped together by vines and ropes, covered in clumps of dirt and covered in buildings that are made in much the same way. The priestess holds the most sway in the western half of the town (as the chiefs are fond of pointing out - the part most likely to be over-run by Anchorage in the event of an invasion), while the high chief Ronald and his followers keep order on the eastern side of town. Crime is practically unknown in Tom Halbut – families stick close to each other and will support each other from birth to death. Occasionally violent skirmishes break out between rival families, or the Halbutians will violently rob an outsider clan (any clan who did not contribute to the 'defeat' of Hsaark) of all their possessions, but these are not necessarily crimes under Halbutian law. The high chief only rarely intervenes in the day to day running of Tom's Rest, such as when one

clan is on the verge of complete extinction or when individuals or clans prove their worth to Tom Halbut through their deeds. This distinction is bestowed only rarely.

Things to do in Tom's Rest:

Unless you're a distinguished veteran of the battles at Anchor Wall *on the right side of the wall*, keep out of *the marketplace* as though it was Mal Dorno. The clans arrive at the market place each morning not to trade, but to display their finest treasures in an attempt to shame the other clans. Their preferred treasures are swords, cloaks and crowns. The best items are generally in the possession of the chieftains or the chieftain's guards.

For those who can't deal with the constant threat of greedy tribe members, *the Retreat* is the safest place for those looking to make a home in Tom's Rest. The acolytes of the Priestess are friendly and welcoming, but they take a dim view of violence inside and outside the city walls. They are happy to treat any wound that doesn't come from a fight inside the city for a small donation to the temple of Velma.

The Temple is the holy seat of the Priestess herself. The Priestess is always willing to hold audience with someone she believes will help her in her overall desire to unite the clans – raiding the marketplace, defeating the chieftains in honourable, single combat and indirect support for Ronald.

The Fort is where government 'happens'. Here, the High Chief Ronald spends his days in counsel with his most loyal advisors – Chief John Hard-fighter, his uncle, Chief Henry Track-well and Chief Adrian Lame-foot. Hard-fighter is a grizzled veteran of many skirmishes against the Anchor Wall. Hard-fighter believes every man should spend some time opposite 'The Wall' as a spiritual pilgrimage and he frequently expresses his

opinion that Ronald should have spent some time there himself before becoming chief. Track-well has more military experience in ambushes along the Grimigan Peaks to the northwest, where the wild things are and the people of Anchorage grow fat off the ores they bring back. Track-well is a vulgar and unpleasant man, but he maintains his seat on the council by virtue of the caravans of iron and gold his tribe has pried from the cold hands of Anchorage. The last permanent member of the council is Lame-foot, who cares nothing for the war in the west, forever demanding more support in the North-East. Lame-foot is continuously exasperated by the presence of supplicants hoping to curry favour with the High Chief or the various chiefs challenging their every decision. Lame-foot has some dealings with the Priestess as they both share the belief that Ronald cannot coordinate the defence of Tom Halbut if he is continually begging permission from his 'subordinates'.

Tribes of note:

The **Hard-fighter** tribe is the tribe of Ronald Hard-fighter. They are the epitome of Halbutian culture, being strong in battle and generous in peace. The Hard-fighters contribute the largest number of men to the war effort. They have the distinction of being related to Harold Hard-fighter, who produced Ronald Hard-fighter, the current High Chief. John Hard-fighter serves as the Chief of the Hard-fighters in order to give Ronald more time to dedicate to his role. The majority of Hard-fighters make their home in the swamps surrounding Tom's Rest, to better hone their fighting prowess. They are frequent visitors to Tom's Rest and serve as the unofficial police force as they have little interest in the market place or partaking in the internecine war.

The **Track-wells** hail from the north-west, beneath the shadow of Grimigan Peaks. They

are unparalleled hunters with both bow and crossbow and routinely produce the finest steeds and hunting animals in Tom Halbut. They are frequent participators in the marketplace rivalries, supplied as they are with iron, gold and looted weapons from Anchorage City. Henry Track-well leads this tribe.

To the North-East, one finds the **Keen-eye** tribe of the Borderlands, nestled in the rolling hills and treacherous ravines. The Keen-eye tribe is small but potent, having lost many of their numbers to the **Fleet-foot** tribe in the south-east and the horrors of Teverash. The Keen-eye contributes almost no goods or men to the war effort, but they single-handedly guard the north-east from harm. Their chieftain has called on some of his kinsmen to learn magic from him. His request has thus far received almost no support from his own kin. A precious few have begun to learn the craft of Arcanistry, although all stay away from actually casting magic, content to merely bolster their chieftain's powers. The **Keen-eyes** loathe the Fleet-foot for their murderous tactics.

The South-western tribe is the **Fleet-foot** tribe. They are known for their underhanded dealings and sadistic ways in battle, having driven the **Keen-eye** tribes from their shared lands by striking during the night and killing livestock and women before disappearing without ever crossing blades. Both tribes loathe and despise each other. The **Fleet-foot** feel that the **Keen-eye** tribe is weak for being unable to defend their lands and their animosity has hardened into hatred as Adrian's loss of mobility and crippling reliance on magic is an affront to all Tribal ways. When this tribe does appear at the marketplace, they usually reveal goods stolen from other tribes – the chief's favourite shield, his wife's favourite pendant (sometimes with a lengthy, vulgar description

of her supposed skill in bed), or some other valued item that the chief would hate to have lost.

The **Long-stride** clan are all but gone from the land of Tom Halbut. They make their living spread from the south-west to the south of the country. They have spent a great deal of time on the front of the war as theirs is the only territory that borders the Anchor Wall, which has contributed greatly to their reduced numbers over the years. It is rumoured that Tom Halbut himself was cast out of this clan in the years before his heroic sacrifice, but there are few left alive to remember Tom Halbut, all of whom point out that if they had encountered him in the days when he was a mere drunkard instead of a hero, they would be unlikely to have any flattering stories to tell. The Long-stride clan also borders the Warped Zone.

Many smaller clans make up the lands of Tom Halbut, particularly to the south (where there are too few Long-strides left to protest) or the north (left as a pristine uninhabited wilderness by the Hard-fighters). None of these clans have any great heroes to speak of, but all eagerly contribute to the war effort and long for the day when they have some item of great import to present at the marketplace.

The Wilderness of Tom Halbut

History of the Borderlands

Many years ago Adrian of the Keen-eye and his tribe relocated to the North-east, where it was believed they would find a rich harvest. Instead, they found the people of Tevrash (who found Adrian's tribe to be a good harvest). Adrian earned his surname not as a mark of shame, but valour – in protecting a convoy of women and children he fell afoul of a ten foot tall skeletal wizard attempting to

drain his kinsmen. He hurled himself in front of a scythe of ice intended for a young woman and her child and it stripped his leg to the bone. Adrian's fighting days ended in that instant, but when the time came for a young hopeful to challenge him for the position of chief, he had the 'good fortune' to be defeated by none other than the husband of the wife and child he had saved. The young hopeful, Frank Keen-eye, spared his life.

Adrian has transformed entirely from a man of steel to a man of incredible foresight and sorcerous power (favouring the school of Earth), defending his people and his country from the full horror of Tevrash. Frank Keen-eye now serves as Adrian's right hand man (He is sometimes called "Lame-foot's Boot" by his rivals), following his chief's plans for the Borderlands to the letter.

The Borderlands

The Borderlands consists of picturesque hills broken up by ravines that carve their way through the countryside seemingly at random. Keen-eye warriors patrol the area diligently, taking special care to remain within line of sight of the Cairns that adorn the tallest hills. The Cairn stones are the most effective defence against Tevrash – they devour magical effects, making it near-impossibly hard to cast spells in their vicinity and dampening enchantments and magical objects in the area. The agents of Tevrash and Anchorage alike are very interested in the destruction of these stones. The occasional Fleet-foot saboteur can be found in the area, hoping to pick off an unwary patrol or desecrate the stones. Garumel are also a common enough sight and dangerous to unwary adventurers who believe they may have found respite from the beasts of Tevrash only to find themselves devoured by the very Cairnstone they sought shelter underneath.

Tom's Swamp

The centrally-located swamplands of Tom Halbut are the exclusive province of the Hard-fighter clan, who have expressed their desire to make the swamplands a source of combat experience for their descendants for years to come. The oldest members of the Hard-fighter tribe capture Fernling Queens in order to breed the native Fernlings together into ever more dangerous and exotic forms before releasing them into the wild, where their youngest hunt for them as a means of testing their skill. This ritual is a gruelling, arduous process repeated many times over a young one's military career and is known collectively as "the grind". However, the results speak for themselves as the Hard-fighters remain the most numerous and prosperous of the clans. The Swamp is also home to Berylgwomps and all other kinds of strange beasts.

The Northern Stretch

The former lands of the Hard-fighters are among the more lethal areas of Tom Halbut and one of the few areas where the snow falls in the winter (in other places, it does not. In the Warped Zone, it moves sideways). The Hrothvigar make their home here. They have seduced several of the newer tribes with promises of a taste of their unearthly power and protection from the war outside the borders of the north. The Hrothvigar see their followers as little more than cattle, with all the food-like implications.

The Warped Zone

There is a place in Ancoria where it is clear that real magic has happened. Not common garden-variety magic, only good for pulling rabbits or fireballs out of hats, but the real, shake-down-the-firmaments variety. The Warped Zone is the reason why long-forgotten relics of bygone ages are curiously absent from Bracket – it is said that Galdra once drunkenly stole the city's most powerful weapons and detonated them as a sort of

magical fireworks prank. (The truth is a little less believable than that: Erebus once demanded that Galdra find some way of supporting the treasury by using his magic for such useful purposes as cutting the cost of defending the Anchor Wall, making it easier for him to manage his farm or showing that his pet project had some merit. Galdra teleported Erebus with him to the Anchor Wall along with some of his valuable family heirlooms and detonated a planar spell of unimaginable power. The wall and everyone else on it vanished: "maintenance costs reduced", several acres of Erebus' own land were consumed: "less work for you" and Galdra took sadistic pleasure in pointing out that no living thing would be able to walk across the purple, oozing surface of the world he had transplanted into this one for more than ten minutes before dying. He then forced Erebus to stand there for nine minutes and thirty seconds before teleporting him back home.)

Regardless, the Warped Zone represents an area of weakened planar stability. Although it would be inadvisable to walk across it, wizards hoping to take a jaunt into another world will find it easier to pierce the veil of this reality in the Warped Zone. Regrettably, planar travel is a two-way street and several slithering, slimy creatures of the Etherium have been sighted blinking in and out of sight along the edges of the zone. At the full moon, a single ephemeral tower can be seen jutting out of the ground, always a few miles off and oddly bent as though it were somehow built on an entirely different angle or law of physics to the norm.

The Iron Path

Long ago, the pitter-patter of pointy elven shoes graced the northwest of Ancoria. Thankfully, those days are long since passed and the elves are very much dead. The Iron Path is the great walkway that led from the

Elven hunting grounds in the Northern Stretch all the way to Tor Fidel, north-west of the Grimigan peaks. In this modern era, Dimitri swarms hover over the path, descending haphazardly to gorge their tiny bodies on the metal framework of the path before returning to the Demeter-class Golems (Dimitri means 'of Demeter'. Demeter-class Golems are capable of both unarmed combat and gunplay and are able to produce Dimitri swarms if provided with enough raw materials).

Beneath the heart of this massive iron edifice beats a crystalline heart once responsible for powering the bewildering defence system employed by the Elves. At present, its energy signature is faint and the majority of the defence systems are offline, but if the heart could be recovered by the machine kings they could no doubt find a great many uses for such a powerful object.

Tor Fidel

Nothing stirs in Tor Fidel. How is it that a tower that was once so beautiful and so powerful is now no more than a shell, resting on a beach? The horrific desecration is ringed in all directions by dormant machines. The fragile wings of Dimitri swarms stir gently as though caught in a dream. The faint sound of internal mechanisms emanates from the Demeters' iron hides, but they do not awaken from their sleep. The frozen face of dreamless torpor is plastered on the faces of the three scarab lords who ring the base of the tower. Though the beasts sleep now, a multitude of traps both magical and mundane line the streets of Tor Fidel. These traps are all in perfect working condition, suggesting that they were prepared by master craftsmen but never used in the defence of the tower. Several survivors have reported that triggering the defences have caused the awakening of the machine kings, if only momentarily. The basement of Tor Fidel is a labyrinthine prison that either takes up half of

the core of the planet or has been transplanted into a separate dimension. Thousands of walkways line the abyss, their edges sloping away into air. The lack of handrails was designed as a taunt to those who lack natural elven agility and balance. Numerous skeletons float aimlessly through this timeless chasm. Narrow platforms dot the escherscape. Each one holds a blue orb which shatters if touched. The blue orbs will contain either valuable treasures, supplies, or a ravenous fiend thirsting for mortal flesh. Even here, in the supposed sanctum of Tor Fidel, there isn't a single elf to be found.

Grimigan Peaks

The Grimigan peaks hold the most dangerous non-magical fauna in Ancoria. Alkatar and Grimigan are numerous no matter where one travels, but here and there they are supplemented by Garumel, Berylgwomps. Other beasts make their nests further up in the foreboding peaks, but they have never been identified in any way more specifically than "it had lots of teeth, plenty of claws and I think it just ate Edward. It will find my hiding place soon, and then I wil-" in a 'survivor's' diary.

As though this were not nearly enough incentive to young people hoping to make their way in the world, the numerous mines drilled into the face of the Cliffs of Sanity provide a huge honeycomb of peril and treachery, where each corner could bring one face to face with either terrified miners hoping to defend their work, a nest of petrifying beasts, or the relative boredom of immediate death by rockslides.

The Grimigan Peaks is not without its quirks. The tiny town of Gormen was once the only settlement anywhere along the Grimigan Peaks. When Anchorage Kingdom turned up seeking a place to build a mining camp, they found Gormen. The Gormenites convinced

them that burning down their village just to build a new one and importing merchants was a waste of time for both parties. Instead, they suggested, they would provide a safe haven for the people from Anchorage. Anchorage was only too happy to agree. As a show of good faith, they helped to improve Gormen's fortifications and train their militia in the use of crossbows, so they might do a better job of defending the people of Anchorage from the marauding beasts. This agreement continued for several years until the Track-wells began to raid the Anchorage mines, focusing in particular on ambushing the miners as they returned to Gormen. This caused no end of grief between the Trade Princes and the de facto mayor of Gormen. Apollyon wrote an official notice to the mayor (Mervin), ordering him to use any and all methods to reduce casualties in and around the town of Gormen within three months or they would institute martial law over the city. In a fit of defiance, Mervin hit upon his own ingenious solution – he constructed a trench along the eastern border of the city and opened up a marketplace. When the first Keen-eye raiders showed up, they were offered as much wine as they could drink as a bribe in exchange for not killing the merchants. A very happy Apollyon was only too keen to behead the raiders then and there, but Mervin merely tilted his head and ordered him to sheathe his sword.

“What right have you to order me about?”

“This writ.”

Not one to be made into a moral lesson, Apollyon took the writ from Mervin's unresisting hands and tore it up.

“Now, by what right do you order me about?”

“The ten metre tall walls and the fifty crossbows you have so generously provided”, responded Mervin, gesturing to the loyal garrison of Gormen.

Apollyon slumped his shoulders in defeat,

consigned forever to the fate of the straight man in a fable about the joys of being too cunning by half.

Today, the original Gormen is one-half of a complete city. The natives move freely between both sections, carrying tiny pink squares on their left glove. Natives of Anchorage Kingdom are limited to the western half, while the Keen-eye raiders are free to replenish their energy in the Eastern bloc, separated from the west by a trench and with its own wall to protect it.

The only real winners in this arrangement are the people of Gormen, who gleefully overcharge both parties for their services and insist that no bloodshed occur “within shooting range of the city guard's crossbows”, on pain of the city guard's crossbows. Mervin oversees the running of the metropolis and skims a fair bit of the profits for himself, which are all channelled into additional training for his guards and extra weaponry. Entering Gormen is safest at twilight, when one cannot be picked off at range by a confident sniper but there's still enough light to see any ambushers up close. Leaving is best done on horseback, at great speed. The inside of the town is the only safe place in the Grimigan peaks.

Things to do in Grimigan Peaks

There is a small *pitched battle* that begins a few hours before sunset each day, just a few inches south of the maximum range that a city guardsman can fire a crossbow bolt from the wall of Gormen (and thus, outside of Gormen jurisdiction). There are only very rarely casualties (most of the combatants are drunkards intent on starting a brawl, but you do catch the occasional fanatic with an axe). The battle keeps morale up and reduces the number of skirmishes around the gates. Some merchants are happy to make bets on the daily outcome of the brawl. Others are happy

to purchase mementoes from the previous day's brawl. A few young idealists won't have anything to do with the proceeds of violence against other factions, but these wet-behind-the-ears types never last long in business.

To the south-west lies the *Anchorage Mines*, one of the few sources of minerals anywhere on the continent. These mines are hotly contested by the people of Anchorage, the people of Tom Halbut and the occasional hastily-awoken monster.

The north holds a long and winding road. It is rumoured to lead to the *Temple of Grol-Haddak*, a God dead long before mighty AYBABTU was even born. It is believed that speaking his name three times causes a chill to run down your spine – proving that although Grol-Haddak is dead beyond chance of resurrection, his name once possessed great power and still has an amazing half-life. Tentacled monstrosities and slithery bipeds await the unwary, as do a barrage of psychic attacks. The Gnolls sit watch faithfully beneath the shadow of the temple, worshipping the image of a cerulean crown said to be created by Grol-Haddak himself and still present somewhere in the temple complex.

Somewhere about here, rumours of the fountain of life persist. Sadly, they are only rumours, albeit an engaging one that has caused hundreds to throw away their lives chasing after it.

Tevrash

Tevrash has a mixed reputation. Some see them as a nation of evil wizards, others as a nation of complete monsters. In a sense, nothing could be closer to the truth.

The fact of the matter is, Tevrash is not nearly as politically stable as the other locales of the world. Tevrash has no king. Tevrash does have a current High Priest – Koschei the Deathless, who was an accomplished wizard in life in addition to his divine powers, but his office holds little political sway when dead predecessors make a habit of feasting on the living and publicly mocking your efforts to instil order.

The word “Tevrash” refers to a unified kingdom that existed thousands of years ago, making them roughly concurrent to the elves, the coming of Grol-Haddak and essentially the creation of Ancoria. The mighty Serpentine River was pristine and pure, forever being compared to the purest of sapphires by incompetent poets, and the islands that surface in the midst of its mighty course were dotted with alabaster temples to various benign gods.

In the intervening millennia, Tevrash has been through several dynasties punctuated with experiments in every other kind of government, using exotic terms such as Timocracy and Republics before turning to Oligarchy and Democracy before returning to that basest state of Anarchy. The priests of the Serpentine Temples at that time were overcome with grief. What could they do to stave the tide of time? How could they ensure that their once-great nation could benefit from their wisdom when they finally recovered from their lawless ways? At first, they wrote a holy book filled with guidance, but the ignorant peasants burned the first copies that circulated among the public. Enraged, the priests turned to magic to create

the perfect, living word for the world of tomorrow. Each priest scribed their most pertinent thoughts on a scrap of vellum and stored it in a case of adamantite. For years, they were convinced that these cases would be all that was necessary. As they congratulated themselves on protecting the valuable wisdom they had accumulated, a thief stole into the temple and pilfered three of the cases, stopping only to kill several senior priests when cornered.

With their numbers reduced and the available pool of wisdom drying up, the priests decided to immortalise not the words, but the teachers. Led by Koschei the Impetuous, a man prematurely aged by his reliance on magic and crippled by the toll his experiments took on his body, they turned to the art of black magic and over the course of a month the entire priesthood transformed from human teachers to undead tyrants.

Ordinarily, such a process would have attracted the attention of an entire universe, but the ancient framework of the temple had absorbed the accumulated weight of several millennia of learning and almost a century of dementia. As each of the priests began the ritual of lichdom, the arcane resonance was absorbed by the magical field of the temple. Not a single living soul outside of the temple walls knew the crimes against magic the priests were committing. But the kingdom of Tevrash was not to escape their karma so lightly: At the eve of the final transformation, the moon was covered in black clouds and the entire population sunk into dreamless sleep. When they awoke, the kings, nobles, priests, scholars, merchants and heroes of ages past were among them, peacefully going about the business of feasting on the living and spreading terror in the world. In short order they butchered 50% of the once great nation of Tira Alma and moved on to Tira Glam, killing three quarters of the populace and

enslaving the rest. At this point, the priests looked upon their mighty works and despaired. The ritual had lifted the veils of insanity, senility and emotion from their eyes. They took to the night skies and did battle with the undying hordes above Tira Deva, the shining jewel of the Serpentine River. During the battle, the liches themselves decimated Tira Deva (decimated is used in the classical sense of 'one in every ten', not the modern 'nine in every ten'), hurling the pointed spires of the tallest towers into the chest of powerful mummies, tangling abominations of stitched-together humans down with a well-placed block of civilians before blasting the lot into oblivion and distracting the vampires with juicy human steak.

In the end, it was barely enough. The undead *retreated in fear* and the liches returned to their temples as the malevolent saviours of the day. The day dawned and life was changed.

Tira Alma

The Temple City is the only river that remained physically intact after the long night. Here, the Liches (now known as the Order of Koschei) make their home, frantically scrabbling to regain the trust of a populace they have long since ceased to understand. The mortals left in Tira Alma are completely loyal to the Liches out of fear and the belief that if they disobey their order they'll be the first ones to go. Tira Alma is built on several small islands. The largest is the Temple District, the second largest are the Docks and the two smallest are the Residential and Government district. The Temple District is the seat of power for the Liches, the long-abandoned Government district is overrun with swarms of the undead. The residential district is heavily saturated with zombies and a few risen wizards. The docks is the only way out of Tira Alma short of magical flight and is the subject of frantic battles between mortal

and dead in order to bring much needed supplies into the town.

Tira Glam

When the undead were beaten back for the first time, they fled to Tira Glam. Tira Glam was impregnable, once. The city was built on a thousand years of well constructed catacombs and the walls relied on the same sturdy foundations, stretching for metres above the city's buildings. When the undead burst out of the ground and clawed their way to the moonlight above, they did so by carving through that sturdy foundation as though it were butter. All but the tallest and strongest of buildings collapsed and the base of the walls cracked, letting the water in. Tira Glam is a flooded basin with the ruin of a glorious civilisation peeking out of the wreckage. The undead infest every room of every building. The lone exception is the Southern Light Tower. There, perhaps a hundred human refugees fish from the Serpentine River and crouch underneath the flames, praying for a salvation they doubt will arrive in time.

Tira Deva

The shining jewel of The Serpentine sits at the edge of Tevrash, where the Serpentine drain into Lake Heed. Tira Deva was built in ages past during more optimistic times as a future capital of the Serpentine when their leaders planned a conquest of the known continent. Now, it is the main population centre of Tevrash. Tira Deva claims no special allegiance to Tira Alma, feeling that both groups of undead are about as good as the other. The problem lies in the fact that the folk of Tom Halbut make no distinction between any of the three cities. When the burgeoning horrors making their way from Tira Glam, they are chased by the occasional atoning Lich and always followed by cadres of elite black-cloaked warders from Tira Deva. As far as Tom Halbut's rulers are concerned, these beasts are all working in cahoots, with

the monsters acting as an advance guard, the Lich filling the role of magical artillery and the warders picking off everything they meet for fear of allowing word of the undead to get out.

Things to do in Tevrash (when you're alive)

Tira Deva is never welcoming to new people. If they're here, they're clearly aware of the undead and this is never a good sign. Eager help-givers are given directions to Tira Alma and a sack of food. Over-eager help-givers are given directions to Tira Glam. Anyone who looks like they may have an unhealthy interest in necromancy will be tracked out of town by a warder and shot as soon as the suspect lets their guard down.

In **Tira Alma**, the Liches will beg for help with defeating the mysterious undead menace. If questioned about their skeletal appearance and arcane robes, they will be as evasive as possible, stating that they've been this way ever since the undead first appeared and that they believe it is irreversible before stressing that they are using their current situation to help "the people" as best they can. They will never admit any fault or responsibility for the fate of Tevrash to foreigners. The exception would be a very eager death mage wishing to join their order as a full lich, in which case they induct them into the order with a very much abridged and edited history lesson.

In **Tira Glam**, the best one can hope for is to go down with arrows firing and swords swinging. From the first moment out of the tower, a sortie against the undead is likely to be separated from the Southern Light Tower by wall-climbing zombies. Transit from building to building is only possible by rickety wooden planks laid out haphazardly by previous groups who believed that they might be the ones to make a difference in this armpit of the world. Until they draw their last

breath, they will be hunted down by every dead thing within smelling distance of their location. Each night, creatures made of shadows and wings set flight and carry with them a small army of the undead hordes out into the world. Each morning, more return. Somewhere beneath the many metres of flooded city there is the opening to the catacomb where all the madness started. Somewhere in that catacomb, there is an answer. Finding the answer would be a suicidal quest for glory all on its own, but using that answer to shape the right question would remake Tevrash in a new image.

Vulodin

Across the sea from Anchorage Kingdom lies Vulodin, a place where dragons live in caves and rivers, where the way of the sword is paramount and where honour is worth killing and dying for. Vulodin has three major islands (which viewed from above appear to form a crescent moon) and two rulers.

Murasaki is the largest island, located in the middle of the crescent formation. Here, the mighty city of Edo has been built by mortals and destroyed by the Gods many times over the years. House Gon, House Ade and House Nen make their homes here.

Momoiro is the southern island. This island is over-run by the saurian children of the great kami Gojira. House Zar defiantly makes their home here, paying their respects to their patron kami even as they cull his offspring.

The last major landmass is the tranquil island of Mizuiro to the north. Here, House Ryu and House Ken tend to their orchards. The aquatic beasts of the sunken world beneath Vulodin occasionally encroach on human lands from Mizuiro in order to carry off the hapless monks and deflower the orchards.

In terms of country-wide politics, the Emperor serves as the chief mediator and interprets laws. He is also responsible for most diplomacy and economic treaties. The wizards of Vulodin report directly to the Emperor. In contrast, the Shogun is responsible for military decisions, requisitioning a certain number of Samurai from each House during peace time to serve as the royal guard and commanding the entire army in war. The Shogun controls the navy and as such takes responsibility for training sailors and policing the waters to keep them free of pirates. Somewhere in the background of this elegant political tapestry, there are also ninja.

Murasaki

Edo

Built on the border of the Bay of Moon's Light, the city of Edo has been sacked many times by outsiders, yet its position overlooking the only safe harbour on Murasaki and proximity to fertile soil have made it the economic powerhouse of Vulodin. Edo is home to the fabulous Layered Inner City, a palace filled with so many courtiers and dancing girls that it boasts its own farm within its walls to ensure there is always enough food for the courtiers to receive a cooked meal each night. Here, the Emperor spends his life in a frantic whirlwind of diplomacy and subterfuge. Emperor Quan Xi Yin is a benign looking old man who has killed more ninja with his walking stick (a combination of concealed sword, blowgun and portable protective enchantments) than his personal servants have had hot dinners.

The House of Flying Dragons overlooks the bay. It is here that the finest samurai infantry are trained by none other than Shogun Kawaii, a beast of a man said to be seven foot tall with a voice like hot coals. The Shogun has never been seen without his Tengu Mask or anything less than full armour. Some say that this is so he cannot be identified after death or to evade some deadly foe from a past life. Some say he sold his face to a kitsune to receive his mask. Others say he has a terrible secret that removing his mask might reveal. Regardless, with the possible exception of the Zar Mounted Samurai, there is no finer body of fighters in all of Ancoria.

The Temple of the Evocative Image forms the religious backbone of Edo. Here, the offering of small buns covered in glazed honey are wrapped in leaves and left underneath the awnings of the temple to honour one's ancestors. The populace acknowledge that it is the act of leaving the buns that honours the

ancestors and laugh at the concept that their ancestors or Gods have any interest in eating humble mortal foodstuffs.

It is expected that several of the buns will be eaten by the priests, who then share the remainder amongst the poor (the priests never keep more than their due – the honey buns are delicious but you can't eat more than one at a time)

Tian Square is the festive centre of the town. During normal market days, there is an array of fresh produce, animals, vanity saurian pets and of course, loads of katana (which vary in quality but are generally the equivalent of an Ancorian bastard sword, only they *cost more*).

Great Swordsmith Masamune is known to set up his forge in Tian Square on Night of Blue Moon, which occurs every year-and-a-day. Each time he arrives, he accepts a single commission with a nod of his head before leaving without saying a word. Generally only a single person is allowed to request a sword from Masamune – each daimyo sends their best samurai to compete for a chance to be honoured with such a weapon. The winner is permitted to approach Masamune on the day. In semi-rare cases, Masamune will refuse with a curt shake of his head.

The clients never see Masamune again – when the sword is complete, a blind and deaf beggar carries the sword from an unknown location all the way to Tian Square. The beggar can be identified by the silk scarf worn about his eyes. Any Vulodine who sees the beggar will generally be obligated to help him reach his destination. Once he arrives, he sits in the middle of Tian Square and awaits the arrival of his client. The beggar releases the sword for a sum of 100gp and then walks away. Many have tried to follow him back to the home of Swordsmith Masamune, but the beggar will generally give the money to the

temple before drinking himself stupid for weeks.

The **residential district** of Edo is built, maintained and tightly controlled by the Emperor. The smallest houses ring the outside of the city, with each successive circle a few stories taller than the rings before it. In wartime, one in every four of these buildings is converted into a siege crossbow site while the samurai of the Kawaii Dojo barricade the narrow walkways. Edo has never been under siege for more than a few weeks: When the daimyos attack the emperor, they send assassins, not armies. When foreigners try to invade, the siege crossbow embankments are more than capable of dealing with any of the enemy's naval-bound siege weaponry. The docks are never properly protected and the gates are always closed but not secured. The Kawaii Dojo considers it a far more efficient use of resources to allow the enemy to lose themselves in a poorly planned raid on the maze of Vulodin's streets and butcher themselves on the barricades.

Momoiro

Momoiro is the fertile soil on which legends take root. Packun-Packun Vines choke most of the forests, snapping unwary travellers up with barely-sentient red bulbous growths. The native fauna is dominated almost entirely by reptiles and other scaly beasts. Raptors roam the rolling plains, the turtle population is mutating out of control (resulting in both mutant quadruped strains with exceptionally aerodynamic shells and mutant bipeds with exceptionally aerodynamic kicks) and somewhere in this madness, Gojira the Lord of Scales waits for the time when he and his bastard offspring will swarm over the house of Zar and further their war of chaos and madness into the mainland itself.

The House of Zar accepts any human wishing to join their ranks without question and without prejudice, training them in the ways of the samurai. The House of Zar is broken into two halves: The Home Guard protect the isthmus that connects Momoiro to Murasaki, repelling the frequent incursion of raptors and Sauri raiding parties seeking to reach the mainland. The Home Guard is based in Kaiju Castle, which squats on a cliff above the isthmus below like some strange titan pondering its own tail.

The Zar Mounted Samurai preach a doctrine of self-sufficiency and mobility, which is best shown in their *initiation rites*. Upon being inducted into House Zar at the Kaiju Castle's dojo, an initiate is stripped of all their possessions but for their cloak and a single weapon and sent into the wilderness with a day's worth of rations. The initiate is expected to establish camouflage, find food and water for themselves and camp out long enough to learn firsthand the dangers of the Packun-Packun flower before ambushing the first dinosaur they see (wild or domestic, ridden by a foreigner or a careless would-be-fellow samurai who ought to know better). Once they prove capable of wrestling a dinosaur, they are charged with the training and maintenance of their mount as well as crafting and scavenging their own weapons from the deadly jungle floors. Whenever a lone initiate encounters a band of their brothers-in-arms, there is much rejoicing as they are instantly made a full member of the group and many of their fellows will provide them with spare armour or rations. Loyalty between the Zar Mounted Samurai is tight-knit and any member would gladly risk their lives to aid another, secure in the knowledge that they are in good hands with each other.

The *Kamejin* are the most cunning mortal foes to oppose humanity in Momoiro. The Kamejin are born in places where Gojira has

shed one of his scales. They are seven foot tall and covered in calcified growths that dot their skin in odd patterns. Their back and chest are covered by a dense carapace providing a ward against all but the most powerful blows. The Kamejin culture places special emphasis on the virtues of martial prowess and skill with weapons, though their spiritual leaders draw their power directly from their ancestral deity – Gojira himself.

Gojira's shadow hangs heavy over the entirety of Momoiro: many of the native inhabitants are his descendants, *Kaiju Castle* is said to be carved from the body of a petrified enemy and it is a jape among the house of Zar that the luscious flora owes its abundance to the fertility of Gojira's manure. Although the house of Zar works tirelessly to cull Gojira's offspring and would greatly respect a mortal capable of felling the mighty beast, they respect Gojira as a cunning and fierce opponent who embodies all that they wish to be and venerate him as a God.

Gojira himself is as tall as a mountain and his scales are as thick as plate armour. His claws are like a legion of samurai at the end of each of his limbs and a swipe of his tail will easily level a section of the jungle. He does not breathe fire, but his breath burns with an intense heat that strips the flesh from bone and makes metal poisonous to the touch. Masamune, the only mortal ever to have injured Gojira and lived, refuses to speak of his encounter with the beast. Many years ago, a monk with a generous supply of sake eased the following words from Masamune's lips:

As the rose of Gojira's blood blossoms on scale, it heals his wounds.

As the thorn of Gojira's blood blossoms on skin, it burns through.

As the nectar of Gojira's blood takes root in the ground, it grows new life.

The actual poem is much more attractive to the eye in the language of Vulodin.

Gojira the terrible raptor is not the only kami to make its home on Momoiro:

Mothra is the adoptive mother of all kami and resembles a magnificent spectral butterfly when she takes a physical form. Her transfixing beauty is matched only by her transfixing pollen, which can coat a mortal's lungs in venom in minutes. Mothra is also the only kami to rely on psychic powers rather than arcane or physical force.

Ghidorah the King of Terror is one of the few kami living on the island who give Gojira pause. This great father of dragons has three heads, two tails and its cry resembles a chorus of cathedral bells. Ghidorah's three heads act independently of each other in combat, snapping and biting in every direction simultaneously and plot together when tackling an obstacle that cannot be overcome by brute strength.

Destoroyah the King of Destruction slumbers beneath the crust of the earth and has not stirred in the thousand years. Prophecy dictates that the red moon will return and he will awake in a feast of fire and brimstone and claw his way back to the surface on his six crablike legs. His muscled torso stretches a hundred metres into the sky. On his chest is the stone flower, a powerful emblem capable of calling down fire and lightning upon all Destoroyah surveys. Destoroyah's hands are clawed and his brow is crowned with a row of powerful horns. His maw is lined with thousands of dagger sharp teeth. A single swipe from any of Destoroyah's numerous limbs can obliterate a small island or large castle.

Among the other Kaiju who trample over this fearsome domain are Rodan, Gamera, Gigan, Angirus, and Hedorah, but these beasts have

slept for an age and have never been encountered by modern scholars. It is hypothesised that they were all locked away by a powerful sorcerer until the return of a rare celestial event that was later discovered to be a will-o-the-wisp or swamp gas. The sorcerer's embarrassment is to the benefit of humanity.

Deep within Momoiro is the **Emerald Gateway**, a cylinder twice the size of a man. It is said that this artefact can carry a man through the splinters to wherever he desires, or into oblivion. It is believed that Gojira and his children first came to Ancoria through this mystical portal. The portal is guarded from Ancorians by three demons – The Red and Green Oni are brothers who appear to be old wrinkled men until they are threatened in combat. They can grow to double their size at will and cover great distances in a single bounding leap. The Pink One is a seductress who uses her golden locks to ensnare her prey before feasting on their souls with an enchanted parasol. The last defender of the gate is the son of Gojira, a massive green raptor with a snaking tongue. In combat, the beast can snatch up a samurai and his horse with its tongue and devour its hapless victim's life-force in an instant, spitting the bones back to the ground as flaming debris with a blood-curdling gurgle. Gojira's son has no name because it devotes its existence to guarding the Emerald Gateway against travellers attempting to enter Ancoria from outside. Should they ever discover a name for Gojira's son, they would have power over him.

Mizuiro

Tranquil Mizuiro has served as the seat of religion in Vulodin for thousands of years. There are four temples on the island of Mizuiro, each at a cardinal point.

The majority of the populace live in the arid plains below the shadow of the Earth Temple, where it is believed that the spirits of their ancestors will give them good luck and better harvests.

Each family pays reverence to the temple monks with prayers and offerings of food and water, or with the provision of goods and services.

The monks of each temple are sworn to an ascetic lifestyle and are not permitted to concern themselves with mundane affairs nor return favours from the unwashed and unordained. They do not accept supplicants attempting to join the brotherhood, so their numbers are perpetually dwindling, yet somehow each new generation still has enough monks to continue the order.

The fertile land along the *water temple* on the west coast is dotted with simple stone shrines to the long-dead families of forgotten heroes. Each year, the water monks venture out of the slimy depths and wrap their clammy hands around a single babe who has not yet spoken their first word. The babe is taken carefully into the swamp and never seen again. During the rest of the year the water monks are only seen from a distance – rowing gondolas through the narrow swamp ways and bearing a long-handled spade and lanterns attached to their staves. It is said that they are tasked with laying the dead to rest and laying the undead back to rest, only more forcefully.

The insane and the visionaries suggest that the air temple should balance on the top of a

single hairpin, or a feather or perhaps float in the skies, mystically supported by the combined holiness of its brethren. So far, it has done none of those things.

The *Air Temple* is paradoxically the most physically grounded of the temples, built on nought but a common hill. The monks tend the Endless Orchard on the eastern flank of Mizuiro with singular determination, consumed by their purpose of making the trees reach a little bit higher, the leaves a little bit more vibrant, the cherry blossoms a little more blossom-y. Outsiders found stealing from the gardens are usually offered a decanter of the finest poisoned wine or stung by the wasps that hide at the outskirts of each walled orchard.

The *Earth Temple* in the centre of the island is the closest thing to a populist movement in Mizuiro – though the monks never descend from their holy ground to the unsanctified ground below, they do not forbid the city of Aman from nestling underneath its protective shadows, nor do they impose much upon the commoners, with the exception of the standard tithes.

The fire monks do not have a temple, only a time. In summer, as the sun reaches its most intent heat, the volcanos begin to roar like caged beasts and the fire monks of the northern temple spill forth from their mountain shrines to spill the blood of whatever they come across for two weeks. Though none carry weapons or wear armour, they turn weapons aside in the instant before they strike, generally launching anything smaller than a Lochaber axe back through their opponent's eye sockets and decapitating their foes with a single well-placed punch, followed by several minutes of frenzied clawing. The monks never venture indoors during this time, but they will burn down any structure with a locked door. The natives of

the land nervously refer to this time as the '*Summer Festival*'.

In the south of Mizuiro, one can find a simple flat plane of featureless rock. There is *no temple* here now, though perhaps there might once have been. The monks will never speak of its name, especially not to outsiders, no matter how valiantly their deeds.

In reading the previous summaries, one may come to the conclusion that the monks are oppressive, negligent, and evil. This is not true. The warlords who carve up sections of Mizuiro and impose law on the people are oppressive. The judges sent from Edo to clean up the lawless streets of Aman are negligent, preferring to stay in the finest taverns of Edo harassing serving-girls.

The *kraken* who threatens to devour all of Mizuiro unless the water monks sing hymns to quiet it each evening and feed the beast a steady diet of fish, decaying corpses and a single suckling child each year is certainly evil.

The *volcano god* who slumbers only as long as the fire monks of the north shed blood in his name once a year is evil.

The *deadly wasps* that 'guard' the air monks are the spawn of a single all-pervading hive mind which would spread all over the continent and bewitch the whole continent unless they were continually thrown off-guard by the bewitching scent of the orchards.

The gigantic plateau that serves as the foundation of the earth monk temple houses the bound forms of *108 demons* of great and terrifying power. Each of the earth monks are bound to the soul of one demon, forever wrestling with its power.

The monks do not reveal the true nature of their service to the continent: if they did, they might receive more respect from the

populace and rebellious scum might spend less time attempting to raid the temples looking for non-existent wealth, but they would also face the problem of mass emigration followed by famine. As it is, the people believe they are oppressed by cruel and uncaring monks for the good of their souls and thus a number of quirky, masochistic families have made an uneasy home here, supplying each temple with the necessities they need to continue their watch. If the truth were ever to break out, Mizuiro would be overrun in a single month as religious tenacity gave way to religious terror.

In a more mundane sense, the *wilderness areas* of Mizuiro are mostly flat scrubland with the occasional clusters of rocky outcropping. Inside these makeshift shelters one can find all manner of native wildlife, particularly the ubiquitous Alkatar and Garumels waiting to prey on the unwary and many a band of nomadic ronin and the occasional lost merchant. The ronin have no love of the villagers nor the monks, who they see as harsh autocrats worthy of revolution and execution.

Tranix the Shifter is known to make his occasional home in this region. He has an intimate knowledge of the nature of the monks' mission, but for reasons known only to the capricious elemental he has yet to share it with the people of Aman.