

Preamble

And so it has come to pass that I, Gaius Gnaius Iustus, scholar of the Illyrian fold, have come to rest upon this prisoner's rock, one of the isles of Arriette. Having had my wings clipped with the breaking of my ship and with few voices with whom to share my knowledge of the world, I have set to writing about anything and everything which enters my head. It started as a journal, then quickly became a mess of disorganized notes. Bearing in mind my universal knowledge of nearly all things that there are to know of my world, I have wrote ahead a list of what I shall dither on about. It shall be my Compendium, my Magnum Opus to be shared with the world in the hereafter.

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The Land that is Illyria

To begin, Illyria is a land with much conflict and chaos nestled within its relatively-small bosom. To point, the long-held belief by nearly all peoples alive is that the world is a flat place that dips off on all edges into an eternity that leads to Hel beyond. To most scholars and anyone who has stood on a mountain's crown, such a notion is ridiculous, however widely-thought.

On the nose, one can see from the tallest mountain on the continent, Hamrward, that the horizon curves. If not for that, our study of the celestial bodies leads us to believe that the planet is a massive orb around which all the universe turns like a carousel. And if the planet is such a massive sphere that its curve cannot be clearly seen but from only one point, it is reasonable to assume that Illyria may not be the only piece of land jutting from the sea.

No, at a few hundred miles long and about as many wide, I and other like-minded scholars believe the continent to be but the thumb of a much greater mass that we lack the ability to explore yet. For our wont of evidence, cartographers draw the known world as a single great island. They use elden maps of Vasena to craft as accurate an image as they can and simply ink more sea into the plane thereafter. For all of our current knowledge's failings, I fear that I must rely on spoken traditions to build an imagining of the land beyond, and so we dip our toes into historye.

Historye

Historye is wrote by the victor. It is up to the scholar to whittle small truths from the tree of fluff, mythos, and blatant lie. By the written word, Man and Fey have struggled 'gainst one another since the dawn of all time, but Man has only gained ground in the most-recent Ages. By the spoken word, which I believe to be truth or moreso, Man came aground on the continent some hundreds of years ago and carved a place for himself in the harsh and desolate mountains of Kourmar. The founders of the land have been lost to the pages of time, and so I can only speculate as to why they would have chosen to land on Kourmar of all places when the bounties of the world laid in all other

directions.

Taken at face, the Settlement Mythos, as I call it, points that the Fey once called the entire continent home and that it was Man who drove them to the end. Compared to the lie that the enormous and elaborate ruins scattered about are of human origin when they are obviously not adds validity to an otherwise shaky bunch of folklore. When humanity waved its hand across the land and extinguished the flame of the Fey, the feyfolk left behind great monuments, citadels, cities, castles that were themselves works of art, and infrastructure that have since fallen into ruin. With the newly-borne nations of Man vying for survival on the war-torn land, there was little for these great structures but to dissolve into memory.

The most recent verified historye we have is that of a man named Ragnar Darcidus, herald and conqueror, the father of the Darcidian Empire which once spanned the length of the whole land. None are certain from where he came or why he did what he did, but little of his empire remains save legend and myth, and his capital on Lake Tiberon has long been lost to all. Having myself led an expedition into the unknown near the lake's edge, we returned with little more than pieces of a tattered banner recovered from a chest found in the corner of a building long-since gone.

From Ragnar, his seven sons broke forth and began dividing the empire among themselves. Two remained in what is now Tortha, east and west, to fight for control of their father's capital. Another two traveled south to where Feylanor rests, determined to wipe the Fey from the world and continue their father's legacy. Two more went further east toward the long coast, building the beginnings of Nycenia with the desire to grow their father's power and conquer. And by himself, one brother went alone into the sweeping plains and founded a city for himself. Rudille Darcidus wished only to avoid the brewing conflict and civil strife, and so carved our fair Rudil City from the earth, a place to rest our weary heads.

The Six Divided

Having seen a brief history of the little that we know before the dawning of all nations, we can now look ahead to near antiquity to what built and segregated the countries that we have, the six divided.

When the sons of Rugnar went their separate ways, it was not all at once that the empire fell. It was a slow process over many ages that brought about the downfall of Empiritus Darcidia. When Rudille created the infancy of Hysperia along the river Hyspus, he had in no mind to create the greatest country to ever exist. But with an endless sweeping of arable land and vast seas to the north and east, his people did not want for food and growth was quick to emerge. As the balance of power and the population slowly shifted from the tumultuous capital, distant, quiet Hysperia seemed the only logical sanctuary for many thousands.

After Rudille's death, his son, Tyrinius Tiber, officially created the sovereign state named after the Hyspus to the south. At that time, the other descendants of the Black Lord saw no threat and no value in the agrarian state and so allowed him to break from them with little word. So peace came to the continent in but one place and the rest of the land bathed itself in chaos. Thus began the Succession Wars and the War of the Nine Spears. Ironically, it was this exact reason, Hysperia's own lack of wealth, that allowed it to remain free of most of the conflict.

During the Succession wars, the thirteen grandsons of Rugnar who lorded over the lands that would become Nycenia and Feylanor fought tooth and nail for control of both lands. After twenty-two years of fighting, Lanoris Loxley and Narcissus the Pale, the only two survivors of the thirteen, decided to split the land in twain. Lanoris then changed the name of his land from Feyfaund (which is fey-speak for "home of the Fey") to Feylanor (a twist of irony meaning "Lanoris owns the Fey"). Narcissus traveled to the far east and created Narcena City in the image of his own name. It would only become Nycenia after his great-grandson, Nycene the Wise, founded the Merchant's Guild along the south Hyspus bank.

It was a long time thereafter before the first Saker, Etyeric the Pure-Blooded, would come to rest in the beginnings of Etyil City. In that time, the War of the Nine Spears broke out across the hills of Darcidia's remains. For nine and a half years, the descendants of the Black Lord fought against a knight named Vetali and his eight great generals. Fighting against the corruption of the government under the banner of the people, the populist group quickly overwhelmed all opposition and established the nation of Tortha (meaning "from the river Torre") and named the newly-rebuilt Vetalan City as its capital. It was in that era that Vetali and his eight spearmen generals put the old capital to the torch and cast it into the lake Tiberon, then made the flag that symbolized the strength of the nine men in their victory- Tortha's nine-speared banner.

Kourmar, ever staunch against the influence of Rugnar and unconquered by any others, stagnated as the rest of the continent burgeoned. With peace settling across the land, many left the ancestral home of mankind to make their fortunes in the warmer, more habitable climes of mainland Illyria. To this day, the only thing keeping the mountainous country alive is an influx of refugees fleeing the tides of war that consume the land.

It is under this same note of logic that I find myself pondering the mysterious Vasena. According to record, the world beyond the Wall has been lost to us since the rise of the Darcidian Empire. I have pored over every tome, scroll, and note that I could find on the matter, but came up with little more than three names: al-Muat (Vasenean for "the death"), al-Hyat (Vasenean for "the life"), and Mesom, which I believe to be a city of some kind. Beyond that, only folk tales of strange beasts and even stranger people come to memory, and talk of great monuments that touched the heavens are whispered by the eldest of Kourmarian elders.

Having looked over many cartographic maps in my stay on this island, I have come to note of an interesting phenomenon. Despite the best efforts of the good Emperor Gareth and his predecessors, Illyria, even the Hysperian Empire, remains largely divided with little national identity. Each nation is unique in its own ways and each is split indivisibly from the others by custom, culture, and geography. It is my fear that even if the god-king manages to fulfill his destiny, he will do little to unify the people into a single group and the land will be together in name and title only. I now look to the varied types of land that comprise our corner of the world.

Land Formations

Plains

Looking at my homeland of Hysperia, it is only natural that I would think to write of the sweeping plains first. They are my bond, my homeland, and a place of quiet upon which I studied at the college, Consensus. With elevations that vary from the flat salt of the earth along the seas to the low hills that creep into the piedmont, the plains are a friendly home to mankind. It is upon these plains that the wealth of the world finds itself. Hysperia was intentionally built upon the stretching farmlands split by the rivers three, a place affected by no ill weather whose only enemy is the rare drought. Many have gone to plant trees in the smooth soil, building shade for their livestock and affording a change of scenery to an otherwise unremarkable landscape.

Forests

As nearly remarked, trees are a thing of Illyria that have only recently gained status as something to be beholden. When Man originally settled the rock, the forests of Illyria were clov'n to the ground and sundered in droves to make way for the cities and farmlands that would arise. It is only in retrospect that we see the effects of this: erosion, nutrient depletion, and the corruption of land, air, and water. Despite his ongoing battle to claim all of Illyria for our people, it was of particular import to both Gareth and his murder-ed father to ensure that some amount of foliage be maintained to slow the effects of the urban decay seen in the lower wards of Rudil City and the Old Quarter of Narcena.

By themselves, the forests bear little food and useful energy compared to the bountiful farmland seen on the plains, but there seems to be a relationship between the presence of trees and the health of the land. Hunted animals oft find sanctuary within a forest's boughs and the shade and temperance of the wood gives rise to many unique types of alchemickal reagents, flora, and fauna. We have seen that the breaking of forests leads to a disappearance of these hunted beasts so important to the nobility and the various plants used by scholars to study medicine, magicks, and the natural world.

Great Forests

In line with the discussion on forests, the great forest was a topic of particular interest to me during my tenure as Professor of Biologium and Natural Historye at the college. What frustrated my position was the lack of knowledge about the forested world and the difficulty with which I studied the subject. The great forest, a classification of the strange woodland found primarily along the Hyspus and Lannis Rivers, is a harkening remembrance to the fey people who came before. It is a thickly-grown place, hot as a dog's mouth in some places and cool as a wine cellar in others. The great forest is best described as a place full of tall, ancient trees untouched by Man and having little undergrowth for the darkening of the sky by the elder wood.

The difficulty of exploring such a place came by the magickal properties inherent by its nature. When we tried to delve further into the deep of the great forest, we found little other than a myriad of trees so vast that they could not be studied and an incountable number of mushrooms, slime molds, and mosses that hung from every branch. In its confines, the heads of Fey structures reached from the ground like the clawing fingers of the undead from their graves; despite having not been touched by the hands of humankind, these elden monuments were struck so hard by the grip of the forests that they fared no better than the stones overturned by Ragnar in his time. Our movements to inspect the ruins were blocked by forces of magick and by the shifting of ancient trees that fought like sentinels to keep us out. I was further astounded by the lack of wildlife, as though it hid from us or existed altogether not. The great forest is the prime of that which I wished I knew more about regarding my studies.

Coastal Cliffs

The landforms called coastal cliffs are a place whose name serves more as irony than fact. Despite that a round third of Illyria's coast is not elevated at all, nearly all of the land's coast is considered cliff-like. Kourmar is the father example of this land type, a narrow region with sheer cliffs that fall into a choppy sea at the rocks below. This is the most idyllic form of what the coastal cliff is, but Feylanor also has a collection of shores dotted by stony outcroppings that dive into treacherous waters. It is in this form of coast that I find the most irony. The cliffs protect Kourmar from outright naval invasion as a bastion created by the heavens for mankind, but they also make the landscape foreboding to gaze upon and unattractive to the money-minded fellow. Whereas the majority of shoreline is a boon for sea trade in other nations, coastal cliffs turn ships and money away.

On the opposite hand, heading east and north away from the mountains shows the shore shifting

softly from the harsh, proud fingers ripping from the sea to long, calm beaches of sand that wrap around the remainder of the continent. It is upon this coastline that wealth has been created. The fish are smaller here than those found along the rocks, but are much more plentiful; and the fair seas, quiet waters, and gentle bays and harbors make traffic more feasible. By virtue of its small size and lengthy coast, Nycenia has put its navy to good use in a trading alliance with Feylanor and Hysperia that makes caravaneers almost obsolete. In the same vein, my home nation has turned its own eyes toward seafaring and reaping the bounties of the water, but distant travel from the mainland still illudes us due to the dangerous nature and uncompromising power of the open ocean.

Hills and Highlands

Though I hate to admit it, the hills and highlands that comprise much of Tortha are truly a thing to behold in their mighty, natural beauty. Moving west from the flats of Hysperia toward the mountains, the rolling slopes cross the river Torre and become hill, highland, and piedmont, all of which are distinct and all of which I classified in “The Devil's Fist and Tortha” which I wrote with the scholar Sextus de Promarc. More of the afore-mentioned in a moment.

The hill country is segregated from the others because of its ability to retain water. The land is marshy, the foot sinking in such a manner as to remind one of a sponge or a pillow, and so is poor for large-scale farming. This same dampness allows for the penetration of rain and growth of vast tracts of grasses, making it ideal for husbandry, livery, and shepherding. Further west and toward Illviriam and the mountains, one finds the highlands, distinct from hills by the sheer faces of granite and marble that cut from the infinite green. It is here that the earth becomes tough with clay and only the hardest plants can survive. The sheep for which Tortha is famous are common here and thrive on the misting air and wide-open spaces.

Westward on still is the piedmont, which literally means “foot of the mountain”. Trees make a stark resurgence here from the thin patches seen to the east, but the soil is rocky and wild and unfit for growth or settlement. The piedmont is a rare place where much wildlife can still be found as if untouched by the presence of humanity and it is here that the kings and greater lords of the world have historically come to make their seasonal fox and boar hunts. It is from this bending and bowing forested world that we come to stand in our next location.

Mountains

Little is known of Illyria's mountains other than what can be seen from Kourmar, which is developed to the point that much of the natural world is lost. The mountains are home to a number of strange and hardy beasts that stretch from the size of a mouse to a small fortress. From my time in the hermitage north of Korvas in the Black Mountains of Kourmar, I saw a number of things found only in the mountains: black stone, black glass, cotter's gold, greater yetis, furred abominations, great horned goats, and a cow-like beast that the locals call the "yak". There were also a number of lesser dragons in the higher places and I could think of no small animals or foods that all of these great murderers could devour to sustain themselves.

As for the north, the Devil's Fist, my knowledge is limited to only the knowings of my colleagues, for with war at-hand we were unable to visit the region. Many scholars believe that the peaks are likely no different from those to the south, but it would be imprudent to take such a notion as fact, so I must concede to my lack of evidence. What is known is that even in the absence of many plants, a number of massive beasts are able to exist in large quantities. The way that this occurs is still a mystery to me and many other scholars, but we believe it may have something to do with the element snow, which will be discussed later on.

Deserts

I write "deserts" out of the fulfillment of habit alone, as there is only one desert in all the known world: the al-Muat. From what we have seen on this side of the Wall, the desert is a harsh and inhospitable place where few things are able to live or grow for the lack of water. Receiving only one good rain or so every year from the recordings we made, it is amazing that anything was able to survive in such an arid place at all. During the day, the sun cuts with intense fury. By night, the winds beat against the body with a sheering cold.

It is unknown to me even now what caused the desert to be such an extreme place. By all accounts, it was as if the hand of God Himself was against the cursed earth.

Lesser Waters

Illyria is a land abundant with all sorts of different people, cultures, places, lands, and even waters. In the bosom of the continent, one finds the twin lakes Tiberon and Promarc connected by a narrow strip of water called the Strait of Baratheia. Tiberon is the body upon which the Darcidian Empire built itself and is also the water into which it crumbled. Promarc is the water that separates Feylanor from itself and many other places and is one of the main reasons Kourmar is so inaccessible. Both lakes are similar in size, temperment, and the land around, but are distinguished in that Tiberon to the north has cooler waters that yield fewer, larger fish, while Promarc's have given rise to many schools of small fishes, which are in turn prey to water fowl, some bears, and the silent king toad.

Shooting off from these two main bodies are the three rivers: Lannis, Torre, and Hyspus, which contributed to the names of their parent nations. Lannis is a short, slow-moving river with a wide berth and dark waters. It is flanked on both sides by small towns and unnamed villages, and peters between two densely-forested walls of rock before unceremoniously slipping into the Dafviat Atoll. By contrast, the Torre is an uncompromising beast, both wide and fast-moving, that cuts Tortha in two before meeting its end on the Pram Delta. The last of the three is the Hyspus, a lengthy and varied stretch of water that crosses two-thirds of the continents length. Teeming with life and full of energy, it is upon this breadth of water that the mills, and fortunes, of Hysperia are made, following it until it dissipates near Rudil at the Delta of Koral.

A number of lesser bodies also dot and scurry along the face of Illyria. By its own account, many rivers, creeks, offshoots, and lakes etch into the landscape from their parent waters. The largest lesser body is Lake Carruic in the northwest Torthan highlands. From it, the Chaug and Fomlhaut Rivers flow toward the sea. In Hysperia, the Lion River flows north, spills into a chain of lakes (of which Lake Meade is the largest) and becomes a river once more before pouring out at the northern edge. Nycenia, so low to the ground, is the home of many ponds, lakes, and marshes that are trapped in the center of the land, making it largely uninhabited.

Feylanor contains a number of creeks and ponds, but no major bodies. It is also the only place where one might find enchanted waters from which the most haunted parts of the great forest spring. On the other side of the Lannis, a sum of narrow rivers flow from the Black Mountains to feed the main river. In spite of the presence of water, much of the land is rocky, arid waste. And in the heart of Kourmar, a single placid body rests like wine in a goblet. Flanked by mountains on all but one side, Lake Grunar is a quiet water that dips ever down into darkness, its depths and what lie in them unknown to all. I find such a place incredibly unsettling.

Apart from my inherent fear of the unknown, which makes water ever-the-more unappealing, I am reminded that we rely on these lesser waters for sustenance, transportation, and civil stability. Without them, there would be few borders to protect the people from themselves and each other and we would lose our primary method of commerce. Even more, the foods that we harvest both from the waters and by their power are a necessity, and the precious minerals stowed within their waves makes them all the more worthy for continued study.

Greater Seas and Oceans

In the life I once called my own, I was as sure as any other man that the seas of the world extended to only just beyond our sight and that I would find either God or more land on the other side. Instead, the waters stretched on in infinence, far beyond anything even our greatest cartographers and explorers could've imagined. The seas broke my ship to pieces and left me on this shore, the sole survivor of my voyage through providence alone. Such an experience also gave me great appreciation for what laid just beyond our limited sight. The deep waters of the world are a thing worth respecting.

There is little known of the seas beyond the land, but we have named them and studied them as much as we were able. Facing north from Hysperia and Tortha, one looks out onto the dark waters of the North Sea, aptly, though unimaginatively named. The only known landmark therein is the Lonely Isle, a large, unsettled island covered with forest and rising as slowly from the seas as it falls back into them. West from there, beyond the Cape of Hyspus, is the Laskel Sea, in which the Isles of Lask (Hysperian Islands) rest. The waters here are warmer and calmer than those of the North, but winter brings rough water that makes eastward exploration impossible.

The Koral Sea lies just south of the Laskel Sea and encompasses the waters south of Lask and north of Narcena's Horn. Beyond the sea, a vast stretch of water has been dubbed Oceanus Pyhrrus (the Pyhrric Ocean, or "Sea of Fire") due to the smoke that rises from it when one ventures far enough into its waters. On the south end of the world is the Levitanic Ocean, named for the mythological beast Levitan (Leviathan) who is said to inhabit it. Smaller bodies include the Bay of Hadrata below Nycenia and Dafviat Atoll at the mouth of the river Lannis.

On the opposite side of the peninsula Kourmar is the Daiic Sea, a smaller sea that is home to the unsettled Grey Islands and meets Vasena on its southern end. With such a myserious land so closely available and seemingly easy to reach, I was disappointed when my colleague Brannis from the University of Cyrene came upon a magickal wall of water that cut his voyage short and barred passage into the unknown. The waters of Daius, he said, were balmy and fairly settled, but he lacked both the

supplies and strength of ship to go forward and turned back toward the mainland.

Scientifically, from north to south, the open waters become warmer and calmer and this seems to bear a correlation with the creatures found in the brine. In the cooler northern waters, one can find a myriad of meaty fishes that have hard frames and large eyes that are black light the night. Almost all of them are some earthy color with silvering along their crowns and all of them spawn in the Pram every autumn. In the southern are a variety of fishes that seem to have no rhyme nor reason to their make-up.

The specimens that were brought back to me were all of different colours from the next, and all in different shapes and sizes. Some were as small as a half-pence. Others were as large as a man or larger. Still more were unable to be brought back, so vast were they, and my understudies feared treading the waters further for what they might find within. The Dafviat Atoll was of certain interest to us as well. Having no real value for its lack of land features and notable wealth, the blue waters with their grey sand beaches bear aquatic creatures unlike anything seen in the rest of the world.

Beyond Our World

There is speculation of the things that lie beyond our world and no theories are more interesting to me than the idea that similar, life-bearing planets may exist beyond our own. Since antiquity our knowledge of the astronomickal has grown to a breadth that we understand the universe to an extent and, to another extent, the relationships between planets, their moons, and our sun.

Immediately next to our world Navis is the moon Kyria, meaning “the lady”. She is a pale rock with a smooth surface and a series of stratified lines across her waist in an antiquated style of dress (hence the name “lady”). Beyond her is our sun El, which means “it is”. It is believed that El rotates around our world at a much higher speed than Kyria, despite its greater distance from us. Beyond El, we have the five planets and their three moons: Fortis, with its moons Kite and Chaka, Accuria with its moon Abel, the planet Util, the planet Mox, and Titan, which is believed to be larger than even Navis.

Further from these worlds rests an ocean of stars that spin slowly around our world in an immovable pattern that has not changed since the first astronomer put their images on paper. In those ages, stars were believed to be deities and constellations were thought to be gods watching down over us. This has since been thought false, as they stars neither move nor intervene on our behalf. But by recording the placements of constellations in the night sky, Illyria was mapped and conquered rapidly and much of the waters beyond have been safely navigated. Studying the stars has also given rise to the prediction of fortunes, destinies, and major natural disasters with some accuracy.

As for the center of the universe, Navis (meaning “vessel”) is but a dot in what is likely a near-infinite space of blackness with few things scattered between. Knowing that it might be so almost makes us all seem so insignificant. Even as I write this, I find it odd that while El, Kyria, and all the planets turn around Navis every day, the whole of the universe remains almost fixed in place. Perhaps it has something to do with being close to our planet. More study is required.

Our World's Inhabitants- Human-Like

For all that I do not know (the distant, unstudied, and immaterial) a subject about which I am most fluent is that of anthropologies, the study of humans and human-like creatures. Illyria is home to a number of races, both burgeoning and disappearing, that fit the description. These races include humanity, naturally, the Fey, goblins, merfolk, and the trow. Though different in social status and intellectual parity, all are bipedal, upright creatures with similar musculature, comparatively large heads, and some amount of social order or caste system.

Humans are a species apart from all, being both mindful in the functions of his body and spirit and aware of his ability to shape the world around him. I need not elaborate on what makes a human what he is for you, the reader of this document, are either human yourself or have seen one at some point. Humans are unique from all other creatures in two primary ways: we lead purpose-driven lives and we are God-chosen to rule this world. Such things can only be fully explained in light of the failings of the other races to achieve what we have in our short years.

In further detail, from everything I have ever read about the Fey, they exhibited little desire for conquest and little unity as a people. In contrast to humans, Fey society, as said by the few elders of theirs that I have spoken to, was tribal, matriarchal, and had little social order beyond an elder or two. By comparison to the complex structures and rigid methodology (-doxogy) of humankind, feyfolk were primitive, almost primeval in its construct. How they were ever able to build the great monuments and cities that are the stuff of fables is something that escapes me entirely.

The Fey are different from humans in more than mindset, however. They are a lean race, none of whom I have ever seen bearing fat around the waist, and have angular facial features that taper into longer, pointed ears. They are very slightly taller than humans as a whole and are a beautiful people with proud, idyllic body shapes which make one believe they are composed of magick. And magickal they are, from what the dustiest tomes of the mages have shown me. It is said that in their prime, the Fey dwelled in a world far more magickal than our own and enjoyed the benefits of high technology, supreme physickal health, and lives that were hundreds of years long, though all of these things have

been lost to them in near historye.

A step below the Fey in terms of social order, I believe, are the goblins. They are short creatures, coming up to about the waist, and are hunched along their curved spines. They have sharper features than feyfolk and are nearly comickal in appearance, but need not be trifled with for the danger that they pose to the unwary. The goblins are simple people, driven only by the most basic of desires found in the rudest of Men: feeding, stealing, cavorting amongst themselves, and gathering to the “wisdom” of their lesser chieftains, the only sort of heirarchy the poor beasts seem to possess.

About a decade before I left, my friend Laurent Aldus of Aqtilian said that he came across something of a curiosity among the goblinfolk of Tortha. A number of sheep and barn cats were being stolen in the night and it was thought that the goblins had carried them off to devour. After gathering a party and venturing into the wood, he came across a number of the sheep in crude, ruddy pens, along with several rats and some small pigs. By his account, the goblins were taming and keeping the creatures, and likely had the cats taken as pets similar to what we do with dogs. His postulation was that, given time to advance, goblins would form a society similar, though of course lesser, to our own.

To this day, I know not what to make of his theories.

According to most scholars, merfolk are below goblins on the caste of specie because they make their home in the seas and oceans, but they are a step above to me. In contrast to the juvenile nature of goblin society and their inherent lack of intellect, the merfolk seem almost equal to humans in both speech and social construct. In my younger years, I went out onto the Pyhrric in a small sailing craft and began tossing alchemye stones into the sea to gain their attention. Getting no answer, I gave up my quest and ventured back to land. Upon reaching the ground north of Rudil City, I was approached by a single young merman who wished to know what I wanted. When I inquired about his people, he began to answer after some initial hesitation.

From what he said, the mer have a monarchy like our own, but with fewer members. Because they have so many more children than humans, the inheritors of king and queenship are not firstborn like our own, but are selected based on merit and have absolute authority. There are no courts, but the merfolk have a meeting system called “Missnthalk” through which all legal matters are settled in front of a group of peers. The mer also have cities, in a way. With no real homes, whole tribes and people

groups move through a number of pre-determined points in the sea based on what season it is and weather conditions. The only static location for the mer is their capital, which is somewhere in the middle of the Pyhrric Ocean.

Before he fled, I asked how he spoke my language. He said that many of his people learned the language so they could understand fishermen and sailors and know when they were going to be attacked by the humans. When I told him that humans had no interest in slaughtering the merfolk, he merely laughed and said that I was blind to their plight. About a week ago, the body of a merman washed up on the shore of my hermitage. His flesh was oily and in poor condition and he smelled of strong drink and garbage. I think I know what that merman from long ago was talking about.

Moving on, I settle upon the least-known of human-like races, at least to me- the trow. The trow are both not so different and very different from goblins at the same time. They are of comparable size and have very sharp teeth and claws and long, pointed ears that rise from their heads. The only real differences in appearance are the trow's tan flesh against the goblin green and a mess of hair on trow heads that is not seen on a goblin. These superficial similarities are all, however. In every other way, they are opposites.

The trow are physically harmless. Acting only as pranksters and tricksters, they use some form of power called "trow magick" to "pop" into and out of the world, a power which they use to great effect to steal from all manner of both people and beasts and make off with their precious cargo. Aside from their impish grins and their tendency to delight in minor physical comedy, the trow do not seem to delight in causing real harm. For instance, one of my assistants was retrieving sparrow eggs from a tree so that we could study the nature of the birds. Before he could reach them, a trow appeared and moved a branch from his reach, causing the lad to fall. Just as he was about to hit the ground, the same little imp pulled him to a stop with magick, shook a few coins from his purse, and disappeared once more.

Thinking on their actions is both astounding and infuriating from a logical standpoint. On the one hand, the creatures only ever take food, money, and trinkets. The food is an obvious steal, as they seem to have no methods for hunting or gathering as packs or groups. It's the rest, the taking of human items that is a puzzling truth. With no obvious concepts of money or society of any kind, one wonders why the trow would part a man with his valuables. It can only be assumed that such creatures find delight in the sufferings of man, though it is more likely that they are merely endeared to objects that

are “shine-y” or seem to have some sort of value to their owners.

Having combed through a brief explanation of the human-like creatures of Illyria, it is easy to see the real social order of the world. Humans are naturally at the apex of a world we dominate and Fey are but a hair's breadth beneath us. In my opinion, the merfolk are on par with the Fey or only slightly lesser, for they are also a wise society that lives in perpetual harmony with its vast, hidden world. A good distance beneath these three are the goblins and trow, about whom I cannot decide is the greater. On the one hand goblins have structure, simple tools and clothing, and some can even speak and have integrated with society in the most minor of ways, but they are a harsh and unlearning race. On the other hand, the trow are a goodly species with access to a form of magick that even the greatest minds cannot begin to fathom, but they don't have any inkling at all of what it means to be social and are unaware that they are any sort of race at all. One begins to wonder if they are even truly self-aware.

It was suggested to me this morning by one of the villagers that I write about the serpent-likes in this section. The only reason I do not is because I call them serpent-likes and not serpentfolk. This is because they are all humans or feyfolk entirely, having taken the blood of some great beast or devil to alter their appearance and have mated with one another to create a small group of some new, abhorrent race altogether. They have no heritage, no lineage, no culture, and no hope. The serpent-likes are a hideous group of people with nothing serpent about them but ruin-ed faces and sickly skin. They are no more their own race than a one-eyed dog is a different race from a dog that has both eyes. The one is simply uglier than the other.

Our World's Inhabitants- Beasts

Due to the varied nature of beasts found in our world, I have decided to split them into two categories: the kind and the unkind. The kind are a group of animals that includes those who are domesticated: dogs, cats, pigs, cattle, sheep, some birds, horses, and oxen- and those who are wild, but have no natural inkling to attack others: mice and smallish creatures, deer, boars, most birds, wild horses, mountain goats, bears, all manner of fishes, greater cats, wolves, and sasquatch. Most of these creatures are found throughout all parts of Illyria, but some of them (mountain goats, greater cats, etc.) are seen only in the highlands or the less-settled regions of the world. Most people, however, will be far more interested in the beasts about which I will write next- the unkind.

Rats

To think of a rat as simply a rat would be a disservice to a creature that is as tenacious as the rat is. The word rat when used in this context speaks not of the small, scurrying creature known for stealing vegetables, but to a specific species: the greater brown rat, which can grow to nearly knee-high and weigh upwards of fifty pounds. This beast is far more aggressive than the common house rat and often responds with territorial screeches and some form of bellowing to scare off predators before it attacks. It is also known not to be nearly as fearful of light and sudden noises.

Like the common house rat, the greater brown rat moves in packs and hides in dark, narrow spaces (particularly cellars, attics, and dungeons). It's an opportunistic omnivore, meaning it scavenges for just about anything it can get its paws on. With its small stature, the rat relies on speed and its surprisingly powerful jaws to tear flesh from bone. From the hundreds of adventurers and thousands of commonfolk that have encountered the rat as a foe, it is known that the vermin will always either run or immediately charge the legs and turn its head sideways in an attempt to bite at the ankles with its large incisors. It is both a quick and effective attack indeed; the greater brown rat is capable of biting through strips of white iron, given enough time, and bone is no challenge.

Anthra

Moving up the chain from the more common creatures to the less, the anthra is another large version of a beast already commonly seen in the world. The creature is named after the ant, which it

resembles, but more recent studies have shown that it may be related to the giant taurus beetle instead. Due to its hive-mind nature and ability to work in groups, it is not uncommon to see dozens or even hundreds of anthra in one place. When one encounters such a creature of combatible size (usually two-feet in height and around twenty pounds), one is actually seeing the larger “sentinel” type that watches over the workers.

It was once thought that the anthra are carnivorous and slaughtered living creatures and shorn them into bits before carrying them into an underground nest, but we have come to note that the anthra feast on fungi, common mushrooms, and a number of leafy plants. It would seem that the insects attack only when they feel threatened. Unfortunately, their territorial nature and quick reactions make them feel threatened very often. It's also believed that the vast majority of the creatures live in some deep, underground tunnel system, and that the many sentinels we see are but a drop in the bucket of their numbers, a thought that I find truly terrifying.

When one encounters the anthra, it is important to remember that they will often line up and attack in unison or in a direct pattern. This mindset in battle allows the anthra to fight as one, but also makes them banefully predictable. Learning this pattern through experience can make fighting them very simple and relatively safe, and many hunters and adventurers make a living selling the meat and husks of the creatures to alchemye studies and chemickal companies. Be sure to defend early and counter quickly, as the anthra will leave itself totally open to such an attack. And take extra mind not to be bitten or scratched, as the larger insects of Illyria are thought to carry the Black Plague.

Crow Bugs

Crow bugs are another breed of giant insect in the same vein as the anthra. It takes its name from the black crow not because of its appearance or its ability to fly, but because of the morbidity with which its victims find themselves in its presence and wake. Though morphologically similar to the anthra in size and structure, our studies have pointed to the crow bug being more closely related to the carrier beetle, famous for snapping its preys neck before buzzing away with it. The crow bug destroys its feast in a similarly grotesque manner, which it also uses to breed.

The crow bug has large, finger-like mouth parts (palps or palpae) which it uses to “taste” and object before a long tongue shoots from its mouth and drags the object in. If the prey is too large to be swallowed whole, the crow bug will use its sets of hooked claws to tear it piecemeal before ingesting it

in parts. And if the crow bug finds a suitable host for its young, it will use its dagger-like stinger to inject eggs into the host and, if untreated, the eggs will grow before finally hatching. Once they hatch, they devour the host from the inside out and burrow their way through the flesh. The worst of these victims present strange growths on the body and undergo mind alteration to become what are called “parasite men”. In more unique cases, greater abominations called “heavy parasite abominations” are built from the ragged flesh of several victims. More on these to follow.

When encountering the crow bug, it is imperative to avoid getting stung. The tongue and palps are largely harmless to humans and the claws are rarely strong enough to cut through thick armor, but the stinger can split even black-iron plating. From my research, I've learned that there is a tell to the stinger. The crow bug will rear back into itself in an unusual way, as if about to break, and its short wings will stop beating for an instant just before the strike. If timed right, a sword or the side of a shield can crack or break the stinger, which often kills the insect immediately.

Dire Wolves

To quell all curiosity, there is a difference between the common wolf and the dire wolf, though they look almost identical. The dire wolf is one-and-one-half times the size of the common, more muscular all over, and generally a pale-white as contrasted with the spotted white or brown of a common wolf. The forward torso of a dire wolf is bulky and powerful and, unlike its more known cousin, it leaps with all four legs instead of merely the rear two. To compliment its massive frame, the dire wolf also sports a mane of fur around its upper back and neck, as well as a pair of canine teeth that stick out from its black lips in a fierce manner, even when the beast is quieted or asleep.

In further contrast, the dire wolf is not only territorial, but a conqueror. It will attack when it feels threatened, but it can feel threatened even when attacking the territory of another creature. Dire wolf males often compete for the affections of females in battle against each other and will sometimes even kill one another to show dominance in their heirarchy. In times of hunger, they will also attack their own pack brothers and even their pups, sparing only breeding partners for as long as necessity forces. It is for this reason, their primal lust for blood, that the dire wolf is not more common. It's single most identifying feature is also its own downfall. It should be fought as one would fight any other wolf, though larger and with more fear of the front paws.

The Undead

The much more common today than in antiquity, the undead are still a mystery to me altogether. Where did they come from? Why are they here? Have they any purpose? And if so, what or whom is their charge? Many mysteries surround the growth of the undead presence in the last few hundred years, but one thing is not a mystery- how to re-kill them.

Despite common misconceptions about the undead affliction, it is not a contractible disease, nor can one become undead by drinking dirty water or eating foul meat. These only give you dysentery. The undead are a phenomenon that commonly manifest themselves in the warriors of the past. The vast majority of undead are armor-clad and carry the weapons of their former armies, as if a part of them remembers what they once were. It is curious to note that one will rarely see a chef, a baker, or a scullery maid come back as a walking corpse, leading me to believe that the affliction has something to do with either regret about the loss of life or a desire to continue an existence steeped in combat.

In any case, what was once seen as an ill omen is now looked upon as little threat. Most undead have rotted to a point that a man with a broken wine bottle could knock one over, and our newly-buried have been dug so deep into the earth that, were they to attempt to rise, they would wear their hands down before ever making it out. The current sources of corpses have been from the battles in the last great war which were so great that gathering and burying the dead would have been imprudent. If one encounters the undead, one need only remember that they are likely weaker than you and will use the battle tactics of antiquity as described in my friend Iustinian's recent book "Battle Tactics of a World Forgotten". A combination of keeping ones wits and a knowledge of their abilities will make a fight with the undead like that with any other creature- a short one.

Werewolves

Shifting from the more common to the less, there is a natural tendency to deviate toward the more grotesque and abominable of Illyria's beasts, some of the greater among them being werebeasts in all forms. Werewolves are a people with a condition that causes them to take on the appearance of a wolf through a disease called lycanthropy. From all that we know about the disease, it is bloodborne and travels through individuals via biting, severe maiming, or drinking the blood of someone afflicted with lycanthropy (literally, affliction of wolves). Humans are the most common carriers of lycanthropy, but it affects feyfolk and, to a lesser degree, goblins. The disease causes the bones and

musculature of the afflicted to grow massively in size and strength and coats the victim in a layer of hair while also altering their features to match the titular beast.

It is commonly believed that the werewolf takes on its appearance beneath the light of the full moon, but this is a false assumption. Transformation occurs under great duress, such as when the subject is panicked or near death, but the moon seems to have some effect on the ease with which transformation is achieved. Further, the change leaves the victim seeing red and they attack anything and everything relentlessly until slain or exhausted, the former being the most common end. When encountering the werewolf, it is important to remember not to be bitten or clawed; but if lycanthropy is contracted through some misfortune, it can be cured within a week by an enlightened priest. And in battle with such a creature, always be sure to carry some form of silver amulet or weapon, as it bears allergenic properties to the werewolf and the monster might flee in fear.

The Parasite-Afflicted

As mentioned above in the “Crow Bug” section, the parasite-afflicted folk of Illyria are a lot with a particularly gruesome fate. Under rare circumstances, the infant spawn of some greater insects can infect a host and bury themselves into the brain, spine, and heart, gaining full control of the mind, body, and soul of an individual and rend'ring them helpless to the creatures' machinations. These men, coated withal by an array of whipping tendrils and worms, are a thing to churn ones stomach upon itself. The creatures scream in the garbled voices of the people they once were, screaming for help or pleading to their gods in backward tongues and the voices of devils. Once the parasites have fully implanted, the only cures for the host are dismemberment or immolation, the latter being the safest method for disposable of the horrible things.

Even worse, and something I have seen only once myself, are what are called “heavy parasites”. When a number of corpses in proximity to each other are ripped up and riddled with the insect larvae, they use some form of communication to combine the pieces of the corpses into a greater unit, something that moves and attacks like a lumbering beast, but has no other qualities of life. Such a horror is something that one does not wish to witness and so extra care must be taken to burn every corpse, to butcher every insect, and to raze every last bloody crow bug mound to the earth! Even this, though, is not the worst of creatures.

Trolls

When I set forth to write this encyclopaedia, I knew not whether to classify the trolls beneath the beasts or the human-likes. Because of their immense size and the commonality shared with the yeti and sasquatch, I decided that they were more bestial than human. Perhaps as a consequence of its immense girth, the troll is a small-minded creature that thinks only in the immediate at a level lower than goblin. They are solitary creatures who work alone or, at best, in groups of few individuals, as they do not get along with one another. Little study has been done on a troll's natural habits, but much is known regarding combat with the creatures.

When encountered, a troll will always attack no matter what, and there is no way to stop the dumb beast beyond killing it outright. If unarmed, the troll will either try to smash an opponent beneath its arms or pick it up to be crushed in-hand. An attempt at devouring humans is never made, so learn-ed folk to this day are pondering why trolls attack us to begin with. If armed, the weapon will likely be a crude club or a boulder and the pattern will be the same- downward smashing motions, or a sweeping motion as one does with a lorry bat. The preferred method of defense seems dangerous, but is most effective; one must dive to beneath its legs and stay behind it, attacking the ankles. With enough strikes from behind, the creature will fall and the fight will be over.

Yeti

Though similar in appearance to the sasquatch, yeti are different in a most important factor. While sasquatch are a peaceful, fearful, and genteel beast that eat small animals and plants, the yeti are a proud and angry sort of beast that delights in the slaughter of both man and livestock alike. Fortunately, the monsters are resigned to only the most unseemly of hills and mountains and the worst of winter weather. Unfortunately, they are perfectly adapted to this environ, covered in a thick swatch of white fur that blankets them from the elements. With this camouflage, the yeti with its vast size can remain hidden until the point of attack, waiting like a lone wolf to pounce upon its prey.

It is unknown where the yeti hide during the warmer months, but scholars speculate that they have some form of "den nesting" like bear or the familial sasquatch, though where such massive dens would be are a complete mystery. If one encounters a yeti, be mindful that the beast is faster than it appears. In the worst of weather, even fleeing on horseback is not an option as your horse may be devoured from beneath you. Instead, travel with allies, strike swiftly, and do not be surprised if one or

more of you does not survive. The yeti has three major weaknesses that the traveler and his companions need be aware of: the backs of the hands, the tops of the feet, and the ears, which are hidden behind the frontal mane. Strangely, the creature makes no defence for its face or eyes and will simply squeeze any foe that attacks those areas until the person explodes.

Lesser Wyverns

It is said that when Illyria was young, wyverns were far more common and peaceful than they are today, eating boars, sheep, and the occasional deer. It is only now, so close to extinction, that they are drove to madness, attacking everything they can and slaughtering prey far too large for them to reasonably eat, as if the very presence of such creatures is a threat to the wyverns' existence. Certainly, there are many tamed wyverns kept as exotic pets by the wealthy and even Kourmar has an entire division of its army dedicated to some sort of "rider corps", but the truly wild wyvern is a thing of fading memory and I am wont to study them before they are gone altogether, though it is obvious that I cannot in my present state.

Normally, one will encounter a wyvern in more open areas of the world: hills, plains, mountains, and cliffs, but desperation has driven them into some of the wider portions of the wood where the trees are sparse enough to afford flight. Contrary to the spoken word, very few wyverns can actually breathe fire. Almost all of them will attack with a sharp dive as a hawk does upon a rabbit, but the attack is easily avoided if one can move to the side; an attempt at blocking this attack, however, is futile. The wyvern will dive repeatedly, only landing if its prey is overturned or if diving proves fruitless. It is in this state that the wyvern is the most dangerous.

Being a lesser dragon, the wyvern is covered in tough leather that slicing weapons are ineffective against. Spears and maces are found to be the most efficient weapons for dispatchment and weaknesses are found in the collar and the whole underbelly. For this reason, the wyvern remains light on its feet, moving constantly and snapping, as if knowing of its own mortal flaws. Some years ago, I was told by an adventurer-friend of mine of a most efficient method for the defeating of wyverns. One must wait until the creature rears back, then dodge to one side when the head strikes. At this moment, plunge whatever sharp weapon is available into the soft of the creature's neck or shoulders; this should fell it at once, lest the defender be snapped up into the serpent's maw.

Dark Wraiths

I am come to a section of my writing that pains me to discuss, for to do so, I must acknowledge that so morbid and horrid a creation exists. Whatever the dark wraith is, it is a creature of great evil. It has the appearance of a skeleton, but is taller than any man who has ever been alive. Every one of them is identical, all grey-boned and clad in the heaviest black plating from foot to neck. Scarved around the nape and rising over each sullen skull is a tattered, ebon cloak that billows slowly, even when there is no wind. And the most piercing of white eyes glow softly from behind the bones.

I have only encountered such a creature once, and the experience has stuck with me always. The air grew cold even as we sat around our fire, then a finger of wind snapped the flames from existence and ushered in the dark. Shadows poured forth from the wood around us, and three of the towering husks stepped forward, drawing the biggest swords. The one in the center pointed his blade at me and spoke in some eldritch language, then they simply disappeared into the night once more, and our fire flickered back to life. I've no idea what the presence of the dark wraiths are for or the sort of omen or will they possess, but such a wretched thing cannot possibly be good. I've no further advice for the adventurer regarding a monster like this but to take caution and have God on your side.

Our World's Inhabitants- Mythos

Before I delve into this short section, I must purpose forth what I meant by “mythos” in the case of the inhabitants of Navis. Mythos, or myth in the common speak, is a collection of creatures, folk tales, and persons of legend who are either unproved to exist or factually unseemly, beings who defy logic or substantial evidence for existence, but who are believed to be real and working in our world all the same. With no satisfactory amount of information on any one subject to give them proper categories of their own, I shall combine them forthwith and write briefly on each.

The most common of mythologickal beasts about which people speak are angels and demons (daemons), which are believed to both exist and act directly in our world to either abet or discourage those in whom they take interest. It is not known from which realm or realms either being erupts or if they are in fact working on opposite sides or the same side. All that is truly known about them is that, according to myth, they are very powerful, energy-based creatures capable of bestowing blessings and curses on humankind that have altered the course of historye and shaped the face of the world.

Moving toward the more real and physickal, the guardian dragons (greater dragons or world dragons) come to mind. Of the lot, I know only one- Koraliestarex, the great guardian of our fair capital and the one after whom all the land and sea nearby are named. On rare occasions throughout historye, Koral, as he calls himself, has chosen to enlighten us through a series of “prophets” who speak for him and exact his authority as watcher and protector. He is ancient beyond our imagining, yet he says he is hardly an adult among his kind and that they travel the breadth of the world unseen, coming to rest upon different cities and places of import to them, though what their divine purpose for these places is remains, like so many things, unknown.

In the same line as these serpent-lords, something passed down through Illyrian mythos is the concept of the god-beast. It sounds, by all accounts, like nonsense to me, but I am inclined to record all things Illyrian therein, that an accurate recording of our cultures and ideas may exist. The god-beasts are a series of between ten and one dozen (the number is argued) creatures of unimaginable proportion who lay dormant in the heart of the world, waiting and watching over the course of our destinies and

promoting the few individuals whom they have selected as avatars. It is believed that Ragnar the Black was met by such a deity, as was the fellow who discovered Illyria. Even more, it is believed that each new Saker is visited by such a creature in the center of Lake Promarc when he or she Ascends. It's also commonly held that our good king Rendall was patron-ed puppet for such a creature, as is Gareth in his stead, but this is highly disputed in the scientific community and I am wont to disbelieve all things.

I find no record of any other mythologies that had anymore validity than the next religion, so I've not kept them here. Anything that I could not find any amount of substantiation on or which was not congruous of itself I have placed in a later chapter as of yet un-wrote. The thought of mythos is both an intriguing one from an intellectual perspective and one that demands more time and resource from a scientific, especially if any of the mention-ed power is thought to be real. I shall be ever-mindful of encounters with such creatures and record any new findings in a separate journal to be addenda for this encyclopoedia at a later time.

Addendum: this 309th day of the 13th year of my unintentional exile in Arriette, I saw evidence with mine own eyes of what could have been a god-beast. T'was in the morning mists that I sighted the object, some fin to a great eel or fish, but of a magnitude otherworldly. The fin, being the only part I saw, slipped gently from the sea until it popped upward into the fullness of its size, rising nearly a quarter-mile into the air. The whole thing shifted forward as the body moved back down into the waters and took a full six minutes before it disappeared just as smoothly as it had manifested.

I stood in awe of the sight, wond'ring how such an incredible creation could survive on a planet as unsuitably small for it as ours. But then I remember that it is not for me to know everything now. I'm merely paving the way for the minds of tomorrow to follow, and so I write on.

Magicks and Alchemyes

In all of Illyria, it is easy to see the effects of magicks to affect the world around us. Magick is used to manifest and to dissolve, to create and to destroy, to heal and to kill. Of all the determining forces in the world, magick is both the strangest and the most impactful and it is important for us to ascertain its true use, meaning, and power before we are consumed by it. In the same vein, alchemickal studies seem to be of a world different withal from our Navis. The ability to use plants, dusts, humours, and chemickals to create temporary and permanent circumstances of all kinds is what drives our world forward, creates the necessity for new technology, and, most importantly, funds my research with investment grants from Rudil, Narcena, and Etyil.

Magicks

On the nose, magicks are the most prevalent of mystick properties, being both the most visible and most commonly used. For the majority of magicks, particularly war magicks and clerical enchantments, an innate, naturally-borne aptitude must exist in a person for them to attune spells through the floes (the source of the power of magicka) in the air and other places. Without this in-borne ability, these sorts of spells will simply not react. Similar spells may react, but simply peter off into nothing or dissipate to no real effect. What's worse, some magicks may work adversely for their wielders, either doing something unintended or coming apart completely and overpowering the caster with destructive force. It is because of these discrepancies that I must categorize magicks into a number of subgroups based upon the methodology (methodoxogy) of their working: spoken casting spells, wrote casting spells, scroll-based spells, alchemickal (potion-based) spells, summoning spells, necromancy, illusionary magicks, affector spells, and trow magicks, all of which I shall go into some detail, beginning, of course, with the first.

Spoken Casting Spells

Spoken casting spells are what comes to one's mind when one traditionally things of a magus and his spells. Spells cast in this manner are done so through continuously chanting either the spells name or a combination of arcane words to power the spell. War magicks are the greatest inheritors of power from this method and include the elemental magicks: fire (ragnus), ice (tacitus), lightning

(archadus), and water (formaesus), and the temporary healing magick remedy (deius). Each of these causes an immediate drop or increase in the life force of an individual, and each requires some innate aptitude to learn. It may come as a surprise that these spells share much in common with the next.

Wrote Casting Spells

Wrote casting spells are not entirely what they sound like. Rather than being wrote upon a letter or some other sort of paper, these magicks are cast by scribbling upon the air with one's hands and dancing about in a specific fashion. It is the movements in this instance, not the uttering of chants, that bring forth the aethers and floes required to cast the spell. Strangely, the spells cast in this fashion are identical to those which are summoned up by spoken casting, so it is thought that a relationship must exist between the two types, for the method of casting come down to only preference.

Scroll-Based Spells

Unlike the deception involved with naming “wrote casting”, scroll-based spells are exactly what they sound like. One scriv'ns a set of notes, words, or symbols upon a piece of paper or whichever object is intended for the casting, then simply speaks the spells name a single time during any situation to achieve the desired effect. This is a useful method for keeping a large number of spells on-hand, but is not very commonly used, as the spells take a great deal of time and energy to transfer into the object. From all that I have seen and known, only the most powerful of magi are capable of enchanting an object with a scroll-based spell and they are most commonly used to move solid objects, make them invisible, or make them disappear altogether. The practical applications for this in war are obvious (Rendall's court wizards used this method to hide munitions and siege tools in battle), but its use in other matters is less pragmatic.

Alchemickal Spells

Before delving into the subject, I will be quick to note that alchemickal spells are different from alchemyes in every way except that in which they are summoned. Both are brought forth using a combination of plants, dusts, and other objects mixed in an exact way and according to an exact proportion, but the similarities end there. Whereas alchemyes are used to bring forth an effect or a change in the environment, alchemickal spells are war spells brought about by the mixing of potions and the saying of a single phrase which will render the potion enchanted for use. This is very similar to scroll-based casting in that the potion must be prepared before battle, but it is also this similarity that

causes it to be less useful, as ingredients must be gathered and mixed with precision.

In retrospect, we have seen the four primary methods through which the most common war magicks are cast: spoken, wrote, scroll-wrote, and alchemickal casting, but there are many other types of magick which have no cohesive method of utterance. These shall be indulged upon below.

Summoning Spells

Summoning spells are a very commonly used type of magick found in the higher circles of arcana, especially in the Mage's Guilds and higher cults. Summoning does only what it says- it brings for a creature or an object into the material world, but differs from necromancy in that the summoning is impermanent. With the little that we know about summoning, we understand that we are not summoning truly living things and objects into the world. A widely-used type of summoning magick, the shield spell (proxis) is used to summon forth a temporary invisible barrier to guard the body.

When creatures are brought forth, they are not living and so cannot die, only dissolving into aethereal residue when they are defeated. Because of this strange discrepancy and the fact that they otherwise simply disappear after a certain time, it is believed that no creature is summoned at all, and that aethers and floes merely take on the appearance of something we are familiar with (hence the term "familiar" in reference to a summon-ed beast). This same logic explains why summoned food and drink, while tasting like the real thing, can neither sustain nor satisfy, instead leaving the person who consumes them feeling empty. It is because they never truly ate anything at all. This magic is different from illusory (illusion) magick, however, in that the object is actually there; it is merely made up of magickal components instead of natural ones.

Necromancy

Necromancy (necromantick magicks) are a most peculiar sort of magick considered very dangerous for the effect it has upon both subject and wielder. Unlike summoning magicks, necromancy brings forth a being or object into a permanent state of being, either by implanting motile energy into a dead object (in the case of raising something into "un-death"), or by corroding an existing object and making another one from its remains (in the case of bringing forth daemons, devils, or necromantic beasts). The use of necromancy has also been tied to a corrosion of the mind which eventually drives the frequent user to madness. For this reason, necromancy has been largely outlawed

and shunned by the magickal community.

On the subject of bringing back something from the dead, the subject or object is not really alive (hence the term “un-death”), but is merely manifested to automation by the flocs that course through it. The undead has no will of its own and does only as it's master wills. This is the primary difference between the summon-ed “familiar” and the necromantic “thrall”. The familiar retains the ability to act somewhat of its own accord, but the thrall is barely more than an extension of its master, a tool to be used and discarded. On daemons summoned with necromancy, a number of living and dead objects are consumed during incantation to bring the subject into the material world. Creatures summoned in this way are not truly controlled by their summoners and so are considered highly volatile and dangerous, which is the primary reason necromantick forces were made illegal outright.

Illusionary Magicks

Illusionary (illusory) magicks are a short paragraph, a calm before the storm, that separate themselves from basic summoning by a single condition. In summoning, whatever is brought forth is actually there, can be felt, and can be interacted with. Illusion brings forth only the appearance of something being there, but the figure or object has no material weight and no lasting effects upon the world. Illusionary magick is primarily used by tricksters, court magicians, lordly fools, and others to achieve the appearance that more is being seen or done than there truly is. A few of the more useful illusionary magicks include the “target” spell, which makes the intended target glow brightly, “harassment”, which makes the target believe that they are being attacked more than they are, “frenzy”, which makes friend indistinguishable from foe, and the peculiarly-named “precision shot”, which assists bowmen in particular by identifying weaknesses in enemy armor or structure using the same glowing effect seen in “target”.

Affector Spells

Affector spells (affliction spells) are a mess to classify and a mess to identify. There are all sorts of methods for bringing forth an affector spell and many kinds are in use today. On the whole, affector magicks are used to strengthen a target, weaken a target, or alter the world in some meaningful way, but as with most other forms of magick, the effects are only temporary. What makes affectors spells unique from other magicks is that two spells that do very different things are often the same spell, but altered slightly. To be short, look at the poison spell (consumptus) which has an equal but

opposite effect on the body from dispel (corriolus). Because of the complications involved in describing these spells, I shall take a bit of time going into detail on each.

As mentioned above, poison and dispel are some of the most commonly used affector spells that we know of. Despite its name, “poison” is not a poison at all, but a spell that causes the body to slowly degenerate unless one of three conditions is met: the subject dies, the subject is cured, or a significant time passes for the aether to dissipate. In this same vein, the mechanism used to inject the body with negative aethers is the very mechanism with which those aethers are drawn out. Casting dispel will pull negative aethers of all times, not just from poison, from the target and cause them to disperse into the air, amounting to nothing.

Sleep (dormus) is another peculiar spell in which one is suddenly afflicted with the urge to lie down and be still, regardless of the circumstances or dangers nearby. What causes the effect is still a mystery to us, as we do not know what causes a person to sleep at all, but the mechanisms seem very similar and so research is being conducted on the matter to this day. Another involuntary affector which we do not fully understand is that of “silence” (voxis) which not only renders the target unable to speak, it leaves them unable to wield aethers and floes for a particular period. A relatively new spell, silence is the reason that many parties often have more than one magus, since if one is put to silence, the other can quickly dispel them.

Haste (metabolus) and slow (letargus) are another pair of spells that are identical opposites. Haste causes the temporary detachment from real time and speeding up of all biological processes. Under the effects of haste, a person will move, think, speak, read, and process the world at a speed of about double the normal, but the effect causes exhaustion thereafter. On the other end, the “slow” spell slows down all biological processes, which can be both a severe burden and a great boon. In battle, the effect is a nightmare; being able to take action at only half the speed of one's enemies can spell death for even the proudest warriors. In the common world, the slow spell can lessen the descent of falling objects and people, slow the decay of food items, and even help prevent someone from drowning by decreasing how often they must breathe.

Yet another pairing of affector spells is the dual relationship between weakness (palitis) and strength (fortis). Between the two, the body is affected in similar but opposite ways and it would appear from our studies that the method for these changes is identical. For strength, the muscles

tighten and expand, given the target a good bit of strength for a few moments. With weakness, the muscles tighten and expand once again, but there seems to be a flushing of the skin followed by an inability to properly wield one's own tissues. It is as if strength was given to the target, but the ability to use that strength was taken away, ultimately making the subject weaker than before, if only for a minute or two.

Moving on to the final logic pairing, we come to the affectors called bless (sanctus) and curse (etiulus). Though seemingly similar to “strength” and “weakness” above, “bless” and “curse” are unique in that one does not merely gain or lose physical prowess for a period, but the whole body, mind, and spirit are affected. In the past, blessing was thought to be tied with the holy and cursing with the unholy, and so being blessed was thought to mean that someone was closer to the gods or of higher stature than those who could receive curses. I look back on this with hearty laughter, knowing that a spell can affect man, beast, or object regardless of divine affiliation and that it was a foolishly for the learn-ed to ever assume. What bless actually does is part of a multi-step process: tissues are strengthened, bloodflow is increase to the heart and brain (meaning both mind and soul are empower'd), and speed and acuity are sharpened. In all, under these spells, all aspects of a person are increased in a positive way while curse does exactly the opposite, leaving someone looking of pallid colour and sickly demeanor.

In forward mind and away from our pattern of dualistic magicks, we come to the spell berserk (barbarus) after which barbarians are called. Berserk seems to follow a pattern similar to strength. Muscles expand to a great degree and blood flows at a higher level withal, but berserk is different in that the presence of adrenal humour (a clear-white bile humour) increases in the blood and that the subject experiences a sort of temporary madness similar to a near-death experience. Withal, spells, tactics, and finesse are utterly forgotten and the target flies into a rage, using very powerful physical attacks at an incredible speed, but leaving themselves totally open to counter. This makes it both a powerful, temporary boon when one is overwhelmed, but equally dangerous to oneself and to be used with great caution.

The last specific spell to be covered under my notes is one with which I am most unfamiliar. The heavy spell (crepitus), causes a weakening of one's bone and muscle structure in a way quite different from weakness. Whereas the tissues grow and become useless with the latter, the former causes a severe degeneration of the tissues that leaves one looking shriveled, broken, and rather elderly

for a short period. I have seen the effects of the spell a few times, and each was equally devastating to the victim, having them take on the appearance of a cripple or a crone and set withered upon the ground. It is effects like this, berserk, and other such spells that affector magicks can also shape the environment, moving static objects like plants, earthen materials, and miasmae about. And unlike the oft overrated war magicks, it is actually affector spells that see the greatest, most practical use.

Trow Magicks

So little is known of the trow, their ways, and their magicks that I almost feel foolish ever putting quill to parchment on the subject. Trow magick is unlike anything which we have discovered. It is powerful. It can disguise objects or alter them entirely, causing them to take on wholly new properties with permanence. It can levitate objects freely and without direction for an interminable length of time. It can whisk objects, both living and non-living, into some other plane that we do not know of or into oblivion, though we cannot determine the endpoint.

But what is so frustrating about trow magick is not even its great power, but the ease with which its wielders wield it. The spells come innately to every trow, as if in-borne to their soul and a part of them. There is no casting. There is no preparation, nor schools, nor spells, nor scrolls, nor books, nor great colleges like mine from which they study for years and yet achieve nothing. There is only thought and result to follow. Effortless. And it is wasted on a creature so simple and foolish as the trow. How I envy the little beasts, but that is a subject for another tome.

Alchemyes

Alchemyes are a vastly broad subject about which much study has been done and its applications are so far reaching and its properties so deeply known that it would be foolish of me to attempt to catalogue it in full in this manuscript, so I shall only touch upon it lightly. Alchemye is the use of ingredients of various types (which I shall discuss below) to achieve any number of permanent and impermanent effects upon any and all types of materials, both living and non-living. To say that alchemye is an important aspect of our world is like saying that engineering merely invented the wheel. It is what powers magick, drives research, and keeps our grant money flowing in. Without alchemye and biologickal studies, I would likely be a lower artisan in the city or a chaste priest in some God-awful convent on the tip of who knows what hillside? And so we go on.

Plant Alchemyes

Plants are what one thinks of when a person says “alchemy ingredient” and for good reason. Since they literally grow across the breadth of the continent, plants are the primary resource for making alchemickal potions, but they also make the weakest potions. Nearly all plants can be used for crafting in some form or another, and many can be substituted for each other to each certain effects. For instance, one cannot substitute the root of a pine with the root of a birch, but the dried barks will work equally well in a potion where either is required. In the same fashion, grass stalks and stems are inherently different from those of a poppy flower, but the leaves that grow forth from them are identical in the eyes of the alchemist.

When harvesting a plant for use in alchemye, unless the intent is to use every part of the plant, one must be careful to not take too much, as it could cause the plant to die. If, however, that is not a person's concern, ensure that one is harvesting at the appropriate time. For instance, with leaves one must harvest in mid-summer when they are at the fullness of their green. Too early, one misses the full power contained therein. Too late, the leaves change colour and become inert, useless for one's experimentation. In the same way, be sure to harvest flowers and fruits at the peak of their ripeness unless the potion specifically calls for an unripened fruit or one which has begun to sour. It is actually through a failure to account for this difference that our glorious alcohol was made, so be sure not to fear experimentation. You may create something altogether new.

When preparing leaves, bark, petals, and root flesh, it is important to dry them thoroughly, especially if there is a demand to grind them into a powder. Too much moisture will make the poultice water-y and useless, and will make the powder too much like a glue or grime. On the contrary, the meaty parts of roots, sap, fruits, bulbs and woody parts must be carefully preserved in an ideal fluid to ensure that the moisture is contained. Do not use water or raw (medickal) alcohol for this! Water will cause the objects to become inert and raw alcohol will cause them to dry. Ideal fluids would be formic humour, medickal saliva, sassafrass juice, and cotter's wine. If one does not mind the smell, vinegar and cider vinegar are also very useful, as is uric bile (yellow bile).

If one is able to, always keep a variety of alchemickal plants in one's garden and rotate their plots annually, that they might enjoy the full benefits of the soil. Even if the plot is small, it is better to have many different ingredients for study than a great number of very few. Plants that I find most excellent for this are lemongrass, horseradishes, frost roses, Bairn's breath, king's lattice, and golden

oak cuttings and saplings. If one is more adventurous, the nightshade plants, especially the eggplant and tomato, are exceptional plants with many useful parts. Be warned, however, that both are highly poisonous plants, and that consuming the fruit or juices, or inhaling the noxious fumes, can inflict one with terrible humours that must be purged immediately (with diuretics or leeches).

Dusts

Dusts are an interesting sort of alchemickal family. In contrast to the above, dusts are entirely non-plant and are harvested from things both living and non-living, though they do not require death to achieve, as plant harvesting so frequently does. Instead, dusts can be taken from a variety of animals both human-like and beast, the pieces are dried and ground up into a fine powder, and a potion is derived from the properties therein. In rare cases, a dust may not need be created at all and the item can be used as-is (butterfly wings, fish cartilage, and sea corals), but these remain under “dusts” because they are non-fluid components of animals. We have discovered over time that it is important not to over-harvest animal dusts because populations can be entirely wiped out (as in the case of the white-maned bear), so the Circle is careful to keep track of populations and protect endangered ones from over-hunting. It's quite an endeavour, of which I am proud of having played a part in.

Animals are not the only source of dusts, though. It is important to remember that the minerals dug from the earth, shorn from stones, and dredged from waters all around are as or more useful for alchemye than those taken from Illyria's creatures. In many cases, the electrical properties that these materials exude also makes them fine objects for channel certain types of magicks (fire and lightning come to mind), besides the fact that much of a person's equipment is crafted from various ores. It is through this method that alchemye is used to enchant weapons and armours. The importance of non-animal minerals is difficult to overstate.

When one is looking to harvest or purchase dusts of any kind, it's crucial to bear in mind both the quality of the material itself and the quality of the material's point of origin. With the dusts of living creatures, ensure that the components are dry to the touch, flake gently, and have a pungent odour that is exuded even at a distance. If the animal component is not a dust, ensure that it is as intact as possible, is the proper colour, and has no scent, as this may be indicative of contamination by another substance. In the case of earthy and stony dusts, ensure a continuous colour throughout. If the dust is supposed to have a scent (sulphurs, woodstone, brine salts), ensure that the scent is powerful. Also test the consistency by using a sieve to determine that the granules are all of equal size. Stony

dusts should leave one's skin feeling dry and should stick to the flesh. Take extra care not to handle stony dusts with one's bare hands too often, as it will dampen the dust and render it partially or fully inert.

Metals, aluminums, and alloys are an altogether different beast for studying. Metals are used in very few alchemickal processes, but employ a great deal of power into the ones upon which they can react. They are able to retain heat and conduct charge at a higher rate than liquids, animal materials, and earths, and for this reason are ideal for enchantment potions and poultices. When selecting metal dusts, it will be impossible to discern quality through scent or touch. Colour is the only determinant for the type of metal one is buying and lustre is the only determinant for quality. The more lustrous (reflective) a metal is, the greater its quality. After selecting the metal dusts to be purchased, ensure that they are kept in a dry container that is away from the air and filled partially with cracked wheat, which absorbs water; this is the only reliable way to keep metals for more than a year or two.

Quicksilver

Before I venture too far from metals, I was reminded by a colleague of the uniqueness and value of the element quicksilver. Quicksilver (hydrargyrum) is a very strange and mysterious metal that is quite useful in alchemye, especially in the creation of power enhancers and slow poisons. It was also formerly used as an ingested medicine, and is now used to treat and cure topickal diseases of the flesh. Artisans can also use the substance as a finish or decoration on fine objects, and one of the former rulers of Hysperia, Despite its inherent usefulness, it has become less common over time because of the effects it has on its handler and the conditions from which it must be drawn.

Quicksilver is easily identified because it is a metal with all the properties of water is pulled from a material called "cinnabar" (sinnabar), a red stone which is drawn up from riverbeds and deeper mines. On its own, cinnabar is a dangerous substance that cannot be ingested, nor can its dust be inhaled. Quicksilver is believed to be of the same mind as cinnabar, and constant study of the substance leads us to believe that it is more volatile than initially thought. It would seem that the metal is toxic, allergenic, and can afflict its wielder with tumours, blindness, and insanity. If one is to use quicksilver, one must take great care never to come into contact with the substance, nor should one breathe in its dust, and never, never store it next to other things! Keep it in sealed glass only.

Snow

Snow (also called snoe, sleet, and light frost) is an element that I have yet to study fully. It is a product of wint'ring and falls from the heavens periodically at the end of every autumn to usher in winter. There have also been rare cases where no snow has fallen. Snow is a difficult material to ascertain because of its tendency to degenerate into simple water. It is believed that heat, salt, and other substances can cause such a degeneration, but the relationship is not known fully.

On the whole, snow is a valuable commodity outside of winter because of its rarity, its incredible properties, and the safety with which it can be handled. When used in alchemye in its pure form, snow can work as a buffer, slowing reactions and increasing the precision with which they are accomplished. It also serves to preserve different foods and other substances for a time without the need for salt, sugar, or spices, which makes it a cheap alternative in the frigid months. Until further testing is conducted, we cannot know if there are side effects to the use, handling, or consumption of snow. Take caution that excessive handling can cause burns and even the death of flesh, though this seems to be more attributed to the cold that comes with snow than the substance itself.

Heat

Another element of special import to alchemye and to mankind withal is heat, the material matter which cooks food, warms houses, and speeds up all manner of processes both mechanickal and alchemickal. Heat is perhaps the most important part of alchemye, as temperature is the primary determinant for whether a potion will properly mix or not. But to know the effects of heat is a simple thing. Knowing what heat is, where it comes from, and how Man can harness it for his uses is what will surely drive science forth and lead us into the future.

Heat is a liquid, this much everyone knows. Heat is a clear, colourless, odourless liquid that travels from one object to the next away from itself. Fire and electrickal charge are the most common methods by which heat is studied, and under all tests, the most heat was created at the center of the reaction, from which it seeped out into all other areas. Heat can flow from one object to the next through the air or water even at great distances, but moves most efficiently when the objects touch. Heat's true importance lies in its ability to change the properties of other matter (solid to liquid, liquid to gas, and combusting of certain materials), but it is this ability that makes it volatile. If one is able to harness heat through fire, metal, or some sort of conductor, be sure not to touch the object directly.

Humours

In biologiū, we identify four basic humours of the body, each with different properties. They are: blood, phlegm (aqueous, viscous fluid), yellow bile (chemickal bile), and black bile (poor humour or diseased bile). Going into the medickal applications and characteristics of each humour would be far too much and would defeat the purposes for including them in this encyclopoedia, so I shall mention only what is necessary pertaining to alchemye.

Blood is the first and most primary humour, drawn from suffering and let from every living thing. The purpose of blood is to carry other humours and disease throughout the body, but it also seems that a certain amount of blood is required for full health, so traditional letting is discouraged in place of leeches, who may extract disease from the flesh with minimal blood loss. Few alchemickal processes call for blood in its liquid form, but many call for the components of blood to be separated from one another. Blood dust (red dust) is the most easily obtained, as one need only let the blood dry. Obtaining yellow and white blood glues are significantly more difficult, as one must separate the blood into its three raw components and extract what is needed from the whole.

Phlegm is the second humour and the least harmful to obtain, but is used in few alchemickal processes and only as a buffer in those cases. White phlegm is also called saliva and can be taken easily by letting a drunkard drool into a cup. Brown phlegm (glue phlegm) is generally taken from a sickly person for use in minor disease and curative alchemyes through the draining of the sinuses and throat with either an herb or a spice. The process is thoroughly revolting, so be sure to have an understudy conduct the retrieval for you.

Yellow bile is the humour that is most often used in alchemye as it has the greatest number of effects both in potions and in the body. We are still unsure as to what the different types of yellow bile actually do, but they seem to exhibit behavioral effects on others and so are often used in poultices and salves that heal, alter the body, and even affect the mind. An unfortunate side effect of this usefulness is that yellow biles are often necessary components of their hosts and difficult to obtain, leading to the death of whatever they are taken from. They are also extracted in small amounts and from small organs like the gallbladder, spleen, and adrenal glands, places that are hard to find for the untrained eye. When selecting yellow biles for purchase and use, ensure that the colour and odour are correct, and that the fluid is viscous without being sticky or hardened.

Black bile, the final humour, is one about which I am hesitant to speak. It is a very powerful humour used in alchemye, but it is also dreadful to obtain; its ownership is also significant, since black bile can only be drawn from the body of someone who is afflicted with or has died of some terrible illness. Because of this inherent relationship with sickness, black bile is commonly used in powerful poisons, alteration potions, and potions with strange effects. In days past, the Great Plague swept through Illyria like a phantom, leaving an abundance of black bile for scholars to study. It is through their notes and experiments that we are now learning of black bile's applications in curative salves as well as enhancing the effects of healing spells. The reasons for this relationship are a mystery, but that's what men like me are for.

Chemickals

Chemickals, for me, shall be a short chapter, though they should surely be the longest. Chemickals are unnatural, meaning they are man-made and must be manufactured from a variety of processes to produce something entirely dissimilar from the source. Chemickals come primarily in liquid and dust-like forms, but exude no properties of other known liquids or dusts. They are easy to manufacture, easy to preserve, usually stable, and always very consistent. The only drawback is their expense; the components used to make chemickals are often rare, and much of the material is lost in the process of their creation. Despite this, however, it is my opinion that chemickals shall be the face of alchemye and perhaps even biologickal study; and so I wait with bated breath, looking to the horizon.

Combat at a Glance

In line with our most recent discussions on the applications of alchemyes and magicks, physical combat is a logic forward point. It is the basis of warfare, the driving purpose behind magickal and alchemickal studies, and the very thing that shapes all current events. It is only recently that combat has been seen and studied as a science in a formal manner, but the intensive training involved with it by so many sources has given us a breadth of information in a very short time. For our purposes, I spoke to a number of different warriors from different nations, people groups, and castes. From the great deal of historye and knowledge that they passed to me, I have narrowed down our categoryes to a few of the more practical combative styles, divided into ranged and melee combats.

Melee

-To take blade or broad into one's own hand and attack at the close.

Standard Attacks

Standard attacking in melee is what one would most commonly see in training exercises and in use by civil authority. Standard attacks are in use pimarily by the Hysperian and Torthan military (since the method is easy to teach to even untrained individuals) and are composed primarily of three attacks: the cross slash, the downward slash, and the thrust. These are very natural attacks taken from the mid-swing and with the intent to catch the offender at the middle of the blade and can be completed with either a sword and buckler combination, or with a two-handed weapon.

The cross slash and downward slash are cousins, used for injuring lightly-armoured foes and inflicting great scars upon them. Each is completed by preparing the blade by shifting one's weight onto the non-striking foot, then stepping forward with the striking foot while bringing the blade across or down to contact. For one-handed weapons, the cross slash is suggested. For two-handed, the recommendation is the downward. Also remember that these can be completed with non-bladed weapons such as spears, clubs, and flanged maces by treating the forward (guiding) hand as if it's the striking hand and guiding the injuring end to meet.

The thrust stands alone and is not to be confused with the counter-thrust or stepping-thrust. The thrust is used against armoured foes and creatures with thick skin, though quicker foes will find this attack both predictable and easy to dodge. It begins the same as any other standard attack, with one shifting their weight to the non-dominant side and stepping forward, but one must ensure not to step too far when thrusting, as balance is easy to lose. This is the primary attack for the spear and thinner swords, but will see no use from those who wield axes and maces.

Berserk Attacks

As I begin discussing the berserk attack, I must be clear about something. This sort of attack is not identical to the berserk affector spell because it is a voluntary attack, compared to the involuntary nature of the spell. In the berserk attack, one abandons all pretense for defence, stepping forward with all of one's weight, force, and speed to attack as many enemies as possible in the shortest amount of time. While the attacks can be devastating if properly employed, they also leave the user completely open to counter attack. This method of combat is chiefly used when one is facing an overwhelming force and must dispatch a number of foes quickly, or in cases where death is almost certainly assured since there is inherently no regard for one's own life or safety. Because of the nature of the circumstances of its use, the barbarian tribes of Kourmar (so called berserkers for it) are the primary employers of the style.

There seems to be little methodology (methodology) to the use of the berserk attack other than allowing the attack to continue to its fullest extent. It is almost entirely repeated slashing motions or one continuous slashing motion that ends in either a "power strike" or a "berserk stab", in which one nearly buries the weapon into the ground. For this reason, there is a hierarchy of the weapons suitable for the use of berserk that is relative to their speed and ease of recovery: light blades, axes, swords, flanged maces, clubs, two-handed swords, two-handed clubs, two-handed axes, and polearms (staves). Also remember, when employing the berserk style, take no regard toward one's balance at the end and put all available force into winding for the final attack. The idea is that the opponent will be either dead or in so crippled and broken a condition that recuperation and retaliation shall be impossible.

Counter Attacks

The countering style of attacking is one which is most dear to me for a peculiar reason. Since my younger years, I have been fascinated by the villainous type, the naivish highwayman who picks

coin at the point of a sword, but my fascination grew as I did into adulthood and I turned, ultimately, toward the mercenary as a favourite. Unlike the many hundreds in armies across the land, mercenaries must hone and refine their craft on an individual basis, using only what is most useful in combat and discarding all else. Small-scale combat is the most common form of fighting in our world and so its study and refinement are most prevalent for our purposes. Thus, I defer to countering.

Counter attacking is something that is both artful style and combative style in one. To be short, it is when one anticipates the enemy's motions, waiting in errance until the moment of their strike. When the attack comes, one must side-step quickly, avoiding the weight of the blow, and bring one's own weapon to meet the opponent's exposed weaknesses. I have seen this done many times by smaller, more frail men and women who have rent even trolls to the ground by themselves. It is for this reason, its effectiveness, that I shall go into depth upon the subject.

Counter attacks are difficult to perform with two-handed weapons (barring staves and spears), as one must often turn one's back toward the assailant to muster the power for a good swing. As I have been told dozens of times, turning your back to your opponent at any point is tantamount to suicide, so the use of larger weapons for the task is ill-advised. Spears and staves are an exception to the rule, however, as they are equally-weighted to both ends and can often be used to attack using any part of the weapon to great effect. In these instances, one must step away entirely, not attempting to block, then either swing downward with one's weight or upward using muscles (downward is recommended, though upward is faster). It is from this point, the initial counter, that one may unleash a flurry of blows or a single precise strike to finish the opponent.

In the case of one-handed weapons, countering involves the use of what is called a “glancing”, in which the defender takes the hit across the side of the weapon or armour and shrugs the opponent to his side, leaving him open to painful retribution. It is a difficult technique to master, but I have seen it performed with such great ease that battle was altogether effortless. Using this technique, one may slay as many opponents as exist or until the defender tires. Glancing is done the same way with a shield, though with the opposite hand. It is the defence I have seen used against guardsmen and the city watch more than any other sort of attack, which harkens to its effectiveness. On the whole, countering is recommended for anyone who will face creatures that are larger or far stronger, but slower for it.

Guard Attacks

The guard attack was developed by the Nycenian Royal Navy in response to the growing threat of pirates and Kourmarian raiders along the Levitan in the last one-hundred years. Since the majority of Nycenian navalmen were, at the time, armed with little more than small, wooden shields and one-handed blades, an effective method of combat was required that allowed them to combat their better-equipped enemies on the narrow decks of merchant ships with their uneven footing. They created a style similar to the counter attacks employed by their pirate enemies, and thus the “guard attack” was borne. When the untrained eye bears witness to a guard attack, it may seem entirely similar or identical to the counter, as the defender waits for his opponent to strike, throws him off-balance, then finishes him in the same motion. However, there is a very subtle difference that holds the key between guarding and countering- glancing.

As stated above, glancing is the act of brushing one's opponent's blow to the side, taking some of the force and throwing them off balance. With guard attacks, the defender will remain in-place, stepping backward slightly for the glance as the opponent steps forward. When the strike comes, more of the force will be met upon the defender, who will push it upward and away, but take more physical damage than someone using a counter attack. This does two things: it pushes the opponent's arms upward, leaving them wide open for a more deadly strike than the counter, and it allows a person to draw very close to the enemy, granting them the ability to plunge their blade deeper into the flesh.

With one-handed weapons, the motion is almost identical, except one shall keep their weapon closer to their mid-body and force the opponent upward rather than downward. With shields, the defender will run the enemy's weapon over his own head, then use the striking arm to afflict the undefended body. It is with two-handed weapons and polearms that the technique changes entirely. Large weapons are ideal for the guard attack, as no glancing is needed; you simply parry the blow, then drive your weapon downward with its own weight. It's a very fluid and natural feeling, from what I've been told. With spears, instead of driving the opponent's weapon upward, you draw it across your own body with the pole, then force all of your weight into the motion as you bring your weapon into the back of your falling enemy's head. It's quite a feat to see in real life.

Heavy Attacks

As the guard did with the counter, heavy attacks shall seem very similar to berserk attacks when taken at face value. Both attacks involve generating a great deal of force and striking hard with little regard for defence, but the heavy attack is fundamentally different because of what a person uses it for

and how the attack ends. The heavy attack is done with heavy weapons, by heavy people, or a combination of the two. It's a slow, deliberate, predictable attack designed to trap the enemy in his own defences, and is a technique developed by and for our own heavy knights, the Hysperian gallants.

I have seen the attack used on many armoured dummies and thrice on common foes. The user of this technique need only step forward with weapon drawn high, jump as much as one can, and come down with the forces of gravity, weight, and muscular power to cleave a foe in twain. The foe will attempt to bloke, but it is a foolish effort. The combination of bulk and power from a guard attack must be enough to either split their weapon before them or crush the strength of their arms beneath it, and the blade of the attacker's weapon must come down into his foe's shoulder before being drawn across the length of the torso. It makes a frightful fountain of blood which fells the enemy and causes great psychologickal harm to the remaining forces. Even if the attack fails to destroy the opponent, they are often so stunned or shaken that they cannot retaliate immediately, leaving them open further.

The reason the guard attack was developed is because it's the ideal attack for the heavily-armoured, often the only ones able to use it properly, and because of the impression it leaves upon all others. Hysperia likes to keep its people in check and taken care of, but the guards cannot be everywhere at once. The threat alone of being cut down the middle in a horrible mess is often enough to halt any would-be criminals. Though truly a horrid sight to behold, it is a fearsome form of attack, a weapon on its own, and one of the many innumerable reasons for which I am proud of my nation.

Advanced Combat- Single Targetting

Single targetting is not a new method by any means, nor is it truly a combative style as we have discussed above. Single targetting is merely the school of thought that involves singling out a specific target and going after them, regardless of other factors (even at the cost of one's life, if need be). The need for targetting has existed since the dawn of warfare, when combat elements would be drawn to target less-armoured units that were capable of doing great damage (magi, archers, mechanical weapons), and the principle remains the same. Generally in small-unit combat, the priority for attacks is magi, then healers, followed by archers, lightly-armoured melee, and ending with heavily-armoured. This allows the attacker to take out his opponent's most destructive forces in as efficient a manner as possible and, even if allied units are expended in the process (in what is called a "suicide mission"), it can minimize casualties on the field.

Ranged

-To draw string and arrow and loose upon the foe from a distance.

Standard Attacks

Fortunately or perhaps unfortunately, depending upon one's opinion of my writing, there is little to say for ranged attacks, as the method for drawing the string of any bow is quite the same as all the others. In concession to this fact, I shall instead elaborate on the qualities inherent in each type of bow and the purposes for which each is duly-crafted. To begin, the standard attack with any sort of bow is as simple as drawing back and firing with the intent to damage a target. As there are specific techniques regarding areas of the target to strike, I shall instead do as I said I would and discuss proper form and use for each bow.

When most people think of a bow, they think of a short bow, a small, composite weapon that is easy to draw, easy to aim, and does decent enough damage. When one uses a short bow, it means that the enemy is within reasonable range to hit with a fair amount of accuracy. The short bow (composite bow) is used by taking a side stance against the foe, drawing with the grip and nocking point (arrow notch) on-line with the cheek, then releasing. The composite bow is ideal for this close range, as its limbs (the parts that stick up and down) are shorter and have poor accuracy at much of a distance; however, this “design flaw” allows them to be drawn quickly and with little effort, affording its wielder the use of a technique to be discussed further below.

By contrast, the long bow is a larger cousin of similar design to the short, though it is more commonly seen on large fields of battle where a great distance must be covered. Because of its size, affording its accuracy, it takes a great deal of energy to draw back and so is a slower weapon. The problem is alleviated slightly by the ability to pull with all of one's body, based on the way the weapon is held. To point, the side stance is taken and the lower limb is planted either next to or on top of one's forward foot with one drawing the bow back across the chest. At this range, the intent is to hit any target rather than a specific one, though very skilled archers may strike a solitary foe dead with ease.

A strange relative of the short and long bows is the recurve, so called because of the way in which the limbs ebb forth and back to look rather like bat wings. The recurve bow generates a great

amount of tension in a small weapon and fires its projectiles with great power at a short range. With this, one gets the greatest force of penetration available in a smaller weapon, though it is slightly more difficult to wield than a standard bow. The recurve is ideal for piercing light armours and for precision-firing at a medium range. Its use is identical to the short, though much more force is required to draw.

Frenzied Attacks

Though one would not think it so, a method for firing the bow that is effective at both close and medium ranges is what is called the “frenzied attack” (frenzied method), wherein one looses as many arrows as possible upon a single or multiple targets with little regard for accuracy. Though a majority of the arrows will do little good, it is an excellent stall technique against a greater force. And when dealing with overwhelming odds, the multitude of arrows is guaranteed to fall true upon a number of targets.

Because it requires speed, the long bow is all but disqualified from use in this technique unless one is very strong or very skilled. The composite bow is the ideal weapon, as stated further above, because of the little energy required to draw it and the lack of true skill required to use such attacks. This is also an effective technique to use against larger opponents and beasts since they are often confused and frightened by the sheer number of arrows coming at them. If they are not outright killed or injured, they will often flee from surprise alone.

Harassment Attacks

The ranged technique described as “harassing” is an interesting sort of methodology (methodology) that focuses less on doing permanent or painful damage and more on disabling or disrupting key figures or elements, such as damaging the hands or feet of opponents, injuring horses, and breaking mechanical weapons. The technique was conjured up by the Fey and refined by Feylanorians who saw fit to use it against Hysperia in the earliest days of the last war. Few Hysperian lives were taken by the assaults, but the damage to equipment was incalculable and the advances were slowed before the Greyvon Offensive took place and Feylanor's advance guard was soundly crushed.

In small-unit combat, this technique is intended for specialized units like magi who use many interesting weapons and equipments that can be damaged to disrupt their spells. It also works effectively against armoured foes, who more often than not leave their hands and feet less protected.

Even if the Bowman cannot kill their foe outright, they can render them ineffective, which is almost as good. This technique is where the recurve bow works well because of the power it holds at short distances and the precision with which it can be fired. Its penetrance also allows for the piercing of thinner armours and causing structural damage to smaller machines, as mentioned earlier.

Precision Attacks

Precision attacks are exactly what they sound like- attacks designed to strike the weakest parts of a foe's defences to inflict the greatest damage with the fewest hits. The attack is slow by design and is so more fit for the long bow, which also allows the greatest damage, even at short ranges. Another excellent weapon is the recurve, which is slightly faster and affords high accuracy at mid-range. Because of the time required to line up a shot, precision attacks are not intended for close combat, and attempting to use this technique at striking range can leave one dead without having fired a single shot. Like all other types of ranged attacks, it is only effective in specific situations and caution must be taken when weighing the options for using each.

In Retrospection

In retrospection, one can see that the methods for physical combat, both ranged and melee, are a varied and unusual collection of techniques. It is because each nation known to us has contributed to combat that we have come to know so much so quickly, and for once I am grateful that we live in a world of conflict where all are so different from each other. Because of our abilities to conform, adapt, and alter our attacks and defences (and those of our enemies), there is a wide variety of options available to anyone who has one hand and the will to survive. Combat often leaves a sour flavour in my mouth when I pause on it, but it is a subject both broad and of great import, for what would Illyria be if it did not have its conflict? It would be no Illyria, indeed.

Hysperia and Her Cities

Had I not lived in Hysperia nearly all my life, I would still look upon her and her cities, bastions, fortresses, and vales with amazement and thoughtful introspection. On no part of Illyria is there otherwise a capital such as ours. Nor are there as many large cities, defensible fortresses, great monuments to greatness, or sweeping fields of beauty that stretch as far as the eye can see. I must take care, in this section, to not allow my passion and nationalism to get the better of me, lest it taint the already slim bias that my work attempts to afford. The given account must be accurate, but Hysperia is almost surely without flaw. Originally, our flag was a simple red and white, symbolizing the courage of our people and the purity of their cause; it was only after Koraliestarex came to roost in the capital that we emblazoned our banners with his image.

Rudil City, the capital, was founded by Rudille Darcidus at the height of the Darcidian Empire at the mouth of the Hyspus River where it pours out into the Koral. Knowing that a great deal of silver laid in the mud around the delta, Rudille had the vision to establish a trading post on the bedrock nearby and began minting silver coins within the year and exporting vast quantities of food to the other parts of the empire as war began to beat its drums. The town of Latchil was built soon after by the waters near Nycenia as the direct economic center that led to both there and the growing Feylanor. At its height, it threatened to rival Rudil in size, but it was sacked twice in its history, the most recent of which occurred in the Conqueror's War, reducing it to a fifth of its greatness. The city of Gollmar was also built in Hysperia's early days on the border where Tortha meets near our country, but it was totally destroyed in the War of Nine Spears. The town of Hiven is actually made up of the refugees from Gollmar.

Other important places that currently exist include Castle Mintak, which was built following Latchil's fall, and Onriast, which we have traded with the Torthans repeatedly, leaving it in a sorry state. Castle Laskel was built by Emperor Rendall at the dawn of his conquering to protect the Koral Sea and Rudil from the Nycenian Armada. Currently, the people of the Isles of Lask consider Laskel to be their capital, but still pay tribute to the crown, so they go largely ignored. On the north end of Hysperia proper is the town of Himoore, a once-small village that has seen a great deal of growth thanks in part to its noblest resident, the merchant lord Ansel Ardent. Because of him, Himoore is now the primary center for importing the tea grown on the islands, bringing vast and sudden wealth to the vale.

Other places of note include Conscentus, the college where I completed my tenure, resting in

the bosom of the Golden Belt north of Mintak. There is also the White Palace, the Saker's secondary home when she is not at her temple in Feylanor. It sits directly west of Rudil City, and there's also Abbey Amfrisse, another beacon of the church, which is near Himoore. The final unique place that we know of is the Menelen Lighthouse, a Fey artifact that is taller than any known building and juts out into the sea east of Menelen. Why it is there and for what it is signaling, we do not know, but it led us to speculate that there may be islands further west that we do not know of. Many ruins also dot the Golden Belt, but the Hysperians of old seem to have dismantled most of the stonework, leaving only holes in the ground for us to inspect.

Nycenia and Her Cities

Nycenia is our most powerful ally, but also our most feared for that reason. With a great deal of naval technology and trading power at his disposal, King Marle Morian could easily undermine the efforts of the empire, though it would cost him his kingdom. In exchange for his loyalty, Emperor Gareth has offered to supplement the Nycenian Guard and suppress the presence of the Thieves' Guild and the many murd'rous foes that inhabit his corner of Illyria, giving some bit of real power back to the crown. When I asked about the flag, I was told that the raven symbolizes Nycenia's cunning and its patience, as it will wait until the proper moment to strike. Fittingly, the orange symbolizes wealth and power; and ironically, the blue symbolizes loyalty.

The capital has been Narcena City ever since Narcissus founded it in the last age, but a great number of cities and towns grew up around it, eventually being absorbed within its great mass. To be factual, the city encompasses more landmass than even Rudil, but it has a lower population because its buildings are smaller and older, and much of the city rests outside of protective walls. Many smaller villages exist along the Denar Archipelago, the stretch of islands east of the capital, but they are no more than fishing villages of little consequence, save Forgeg, which exports spices used in some alchemyes. Another small town of note in the country is that of Monchiard, the place that birthed the Purifiers into the world. It grew quite a lot in the short era of extreme Fey hatred, but the slip of the Purifiers into irrelevance has left the town seeming empty.

Apart from the capital, only two major castles exist within the nation's borders- Blitegan (Castle Blight) and Vodeed (Castle Dread). I have been to both many times during my studies on the ecologium and biologium of the Nycenian marshes and I can say with certainty that the two could not be more different. Castle Vodeed is a tall, imposing beast of a building that stabs from the land like a sword, towering enough to see even distant Rudil from its highest spire. Built from the strange, glass-like stones found in the area, Vodeed has never been conquered and sits as the home of half of the country's army and a third of its navy. On the other hand, Castle Blitegan is a sprawling castle with short towers and granite walls, resting on a sea wall on the southern coast. Over the years, the land has shifted, causing many of the walls to crack and even toppling several towers into the waters. Despite its precarious nature, the castle is host to a massive town and port, and is the home of a very peculiar section of the Nycenian Navy called the "marine corps", a group of specialist warriors whom I have never seen in action.

Feylanor and Her Cities

Unlike Nyccenia in almost every way, Feylanor derives much of its wealth from agriculture, and is a place of few towns and lacking in technology, but rich with hidden histories. With mystery and magicks as important parts of its past, the nation's flag represents both its past and its present. The claw of a Fey wizard is at the banner's center, though it is coloured purple to symbolize their departure from power. The green that comprises its back marks both the wealth that the land bears and the guile that its people are famous for having. Because of its many disadvantages as a nation, it is a wonder that it ever rose to the prominence it possesses, enough so that even Gareth worries at the uprising of the Iron Lady; to make the God-King fearful is truly a feat on its own.

As mentioned before, Feylanor was begun as a nation by one of the many descendants of Rugnar Darcidus, but it was not until the arrival of the first Saker that its current capital was founded. Biladeld was the original seat of power as both a major fishing port and a trading hub to Kourmar, but the arrival of Etyeric all but sealed its fate into relative obscurity as his feet came to rest on "holy ground". The city itself stretches from the edge of Lake Promarc a fair distance into the woods, but there are few major buildings beyond the Temple of the Saker which sits on the short cliffs over the lake.

The only other locations of interest are Castle Heets and Kathgathe Castle, sitting at opposite ends of the queendom. Heets (said "heese") is a small fortress of little import that watches over the Hyspus from its perch on a short mountain. Likely built as more of a scouting point than a real, defensible position, it still functions as a bastion for merchants against the bandits that sneak around in the depths of the forest. Kathgathe, on the other hand, sits on flat land nestled back into the wilderness, making it remarkably difficult to besiege. For this reason, it is the only Feylanorian fortress to never come under attack, though it is currently used as little more than a food store for the nearby Janchley and Biladeld. Still, crossing through the thick of the wood and seeing its pointed spires striking from the trees is a comfort as evening approaches on the trail.

As mentioned before, it is not Feylanor's standing structures that lend it interest. On the contrary, many of the sites that we studied were of Fey origin, including Candle Rock near Heets, the burial mounds west of Kathgathe, and the ruins of Fey'Felerien in the thick of the elder woods east of the capital. I wished to do a great deal of study on these locations, but my apprentices and students said that such an endeavour was impossible, as the sites were protected by ancient magicks. We know not what rests deep within these ruinous wrecks of time, but I have no doubt that the secrets they hold

would teach us more about the historye of our world than all that we know, so Feylanor has a special place in my heart, despite our precarious alliance with it.

Tortha and Her Cities

For all the ill I have spoke of it, one might think that Tortha is a dark and ruinous place with little more to see than overturned stones and many corpses, but quite the opposite is true. As the former seat of the Darcidian Empire and one of the first places that Illyria was truly settled, many warriors and legends were borne from the land and the Torthan crown has done well to preserve these sites, for which I am most grateful. When he was still king, I sat with Benton and discussed the historye of his nation and the meaning of its flag. He was quick to explain the meaning of the colours purple and gold- nobility and wealth, and that the nine spears were the mark of the knight Vetali and his eight generals, all of whom were spearmen and founded the nation at the end of an age of great turmoil. Ever since, Tortha, like Hysperia, has taken great pride in its warrior class and treats its folk heroes as if they were living kings.

Vetalan City, named after the nation's founder, is a place that did not see much growth until the other nations rose to power. By their success, the capital became a great trading hub at the end of the Torre River. With the money that the empire has sunk into it since Donnald Greyvon was crowned, a new wall is being erected, larger than the last, which was lost in the final great battle of the Conqueror's War. The sister city to Vetalan is that of Eriez, which I place under the Torthan section because, though it is ruled in name by Feylanor, its many people, buildings, and customs still reflect Tortha entirely. Eriez is actually older than Vetalan, but lost importance as power shifted north. Since its sacking by Hysperia some years ago, the city has begun to rebuild many of the structures that were lost, and its once-proud gate, still missing large pieces, is a stark reminder of the power of the sleeping giant that is our empire.

Close to the capital is Illviriam, a castle founded around Charr's Rock, where Caerd Caerduness founded the Fighters' Guild an age ago. With that as its historye, the keep is the largest in the land and the source of much of the nation's military training, a heritage it takes pride in. Illviriam also rests on the duchy Tir Charris, to which Benton was deposed after his dethroning. The other great city is Castle Algat, with walls so strong that when the empire came through to conquer Tortha, it sent its troops around the fortress rather than attempting to siege it. For his brilliance in the defence of his holdings, Torthan general Bryce Dunnegan was given a large sum of money by Emperor Rendall, which he then gave as a gift to Benton in secrecy (which I heard about from Benton, himself).

Kourmar and Its Cities

Because of its supposed status as the birthplace of Man in Illyria, one might think that there is more to Kourmar than there is. The storey is different, however, as it would seem that mankind was quick to branch out from the cold and desolate place, leaving it to its original settlers and the few foolish enough to scrape out a life there. The nation's flag reflects this. It is entirely a light-blue colour, a nod to both the frigid nature of the region and its people, who must stand strong against their harsh world. The mountains in the back are an obvious forward to the whole of the peninsula, all of which rise so high that their peaks reach into the chilling winds. In the center is Ruenweld (literally "wielder of ruin"), the axe of the hero Halfric Golden-Braid, who first culled the ancient goblin hordes, according to legend.

Because of the difficulties with which the citizenry must deal to survive, I was surprised to see how large Kourr was compared to my expectations. The name means "rock" in the elden speech of Man, and it is a befitting name, as the entirety of the city of encompassed in massive walls with broad towers, making it look more like an enormous castle than any standard city. It is smaller than any other capital and lacks many homes and features that one might expect, but from my own eyes, it looked like much of the citizenry lived in older fortifications and much of the defencive complex. When I was patron to Othric's court, he showed me the vast network of underground tunnels and hidden structures that belied Kourr's smallish nature, none of which I remember in full.

Only two other castles exist in all the nation, but both would be difficult to siege. The first is Foreldstem to the west, which looks like it was built as an after-thought. Because of its position against a wall overlooking the sea, one would have to sweep all the way around the peninsula and besiege it from the waters, a difficult task. On the other hand, Castle Setatch sits right at the entrance to the nation, a fortress with walls that span the narrow breadth of northern Kourmar. Being surrounded by dense forests, it would also be a difficult siege, with walls that could only be assaulted by moving towers and ladders, if not for the catapults that line the outer circle. But no, the only Kourmarian city that I have real hope for is Mitorot, a trading town that grew larger every time I passed through it. Of all of the nation's land, it is the only one founded upon anything hospitable, and its location at the feet of Tortha and Feylanor makes it the ideal darling for the nation's growth if it does not die by Gareth's hand.

Vasena and Beyond

What can I say about a place of which I know almost nothing? Vasena is a kingdom most ancient, perhaps older than all of the kingdoms of Man on Illyria, and no one truly knows what lies inside its borders. It is skirted entirely along its western edge by the Iron Wall which has only two gates, one at Korvas' Folly in Kourmar and one at Westgate in Tortha. Because the land of Tortha becomes desert just before the wall is reached, it can be assumed that what lies beyond is of the same substance. The empire is in possession of two very old Vasenean banners and one tapestry which we cannot decipher the meaning of, but the flags may very well give us some insight. They are black and gold divided, the gold meaning wealth, of course, but the black having something to do with either death or dark magick. There is also the red face of some kind of strange wolf, but I have never seen anything quite like it in my travels.

From our records, I know only that many magickal and scientific experiments were conducted about the area, and that the Iron Wall may very well have been erected as a means to trap the evils of those magicks within a prison of sand.

What more can be said?

Oh, there are a few pieces of statue and ancient ruin that stick up from the land in western Tortha near the wall, but they yielded little information regarding Vasena. One of these statues is the one we call "Feet of the King", and consists only of a pair of feet on a dais. Each foot was maybe twenty feet long, so I can imagine that the statue must have been hundreds of feet tall. At the base of the dais is a tablet with a plaque on it bearing script that no one can read. Another monument as that of an obelisk toppled on its side and sunken part-way into the sands. The part that remains unburied is about a hundred feet long and is also covered in the strange script.

The last artifact I can think of is the ruin of a city, again partially buried in sand, that barely dips from the dunes west of Dalgarby. After sending my understudies to look over it, the only information they brought back was that the ruins held a large, black stone in the center of the town. It was also covered in Vasenean writings, but written much smaller than those on the monuments. By their reckoning, it served as either a sort of information board or a "city code" of some kind, but we have only speculation. With all of Vasena lost to us, I am grateful to know what we do. The only other thing we have is the Torthan village of Narcoom, long ago conquered by Darcidia. Since then, much of its culture was wiped out by Rugnar and his children, but the people retain skin and hair a bit darker than

what is seen in the rest of the land, so there is more to think on.

The Five Families

There exist five non-ruling families in Illyria who, above all others, seem to have such control over the functioning and direction of our fair land that life without them would be utterly unimaginable. Through deftness, cunning, and great foresight, they have secured lofty places of great power for themselves and now vie for control both together and against one another over all of the land. The five as they stand are House Greyvon of Hysperia, House Seloria of Nycenia, House Meirnour of Feylanor, House Korral of Hysperia, and House Dowd of Tortha. What makes these families distinct is that none of them truly has any official bearing over any nation, state, or guild, but all have come unto their own through exceptional perceptiveness and no small amount of foresight. By their own hands, they were made great. And through heroes and monarchs, they are even greater. Let us delve further.

House Greyvon

House Greyvon is the first on the list because of the complicated turmoil that it now finds itself seated in. When the Church of the Saker began growing its Purifier arm, it was Greyvon who stepped in and funded the many expeditions and activities that were undertaken. Because of this and because of great loyalty shown to the empire in the conquest wars, the current father of the house, Donnald Greyvon, was handed the throne of Tortha by the newly-crowned Gareth as a show of both force and contempt against the upstart nation. By placing a notable Hysperian upon the throne, Gareth solidified his dominance over the region and brought shame upon then-King Benton, forcing him into commanding the duchy of Illviriam, a no-man's land on the western side where little exists but many sheep and a single castle, sticking like a stone from the grass.

More a governor than a true king, Donnald Greyvon has adopted a fairly lax policy toward the people of Tortha. He has allowed commerce to continue largely uninhibited, though I know he collects a certain amount of tax as "tribute" from each of the duchies every year to add to his personal coffers. He must strike the fine balance between pleasing Emperor Gareth and keeping the citizens of Tortha satiated enough that they do not rebel outright, a difficult task considering how much they despise him. Despite his intense hatred of all non-humans and the air of superiority with which he carries himself, I am told that he carries no special contempt for the people of Tortha and, while seeing them as inferior to Hysperians, respects them as humans and wishes for the day when they will join the empire of their own free will.

In other areas of the empire, House Greyvon commands a number of caravan trains, which is how they made their fortune. They are a family secondary to House Greed in the Merchants' Guild and

are responsible for providing high-quality steel to the cities Rudil and Etyil. Through their control of the supply of good metals, Donnald has secured his legacy by providing himself and his sons and men with the best equipment which, I am told, he also uses to bribe the Torthan guards in Vetalan City. Thought it is unlikely, if the people ever wished to rise up against his rule, they would find themselves facing an enemy that is well-equipped and loyal to their wealthy master. Donnald Greyvon is a wise man in this way, but his headstrong manner clouds his vision at times.

House Seloria

House Seloria of Nycenia is an interesting house in that it is entirely independent of many organizations. This restricts it because it has no official funding or backing, but also allows the house the freedom to do as it pleases without restriction. Its greatest boon is its brilliant minds, starting two-hundred years ago with Amistad Seloria, the founder of the house, and leading to the modern day with Arrikur, its greatest son. In those days, Illyria was in great upheaval following the shaping of nations with the fall of Darcidia. As Nycenia was borne into the world, Amistad secured their legacy by developing white steel, a malleable metal that was easy to craft, heat, and shape into many forms, yet retained the hardness of standard steel. When Nycene the Wise offered Amistad a seat at his right hand, the man refused, asking only for a great sum of money and a place to craft his works unrestricted. Ever since, House Seloria has built new technologies, vessels, and other implements of war for the kingdoms, leading to this very day.

Now, the house is led by Kerouac Seloria, whose mind has grown frail since his more brilliant days. The shining star of the house is his grandson, Arrikur. Since his youth, Arrikur's skill in engineering has not gone unnoticed, and he has implemented magicks into all sorts of new mechanical inventions to the point that he threatens to craft the face of the world into something new altogether. Beyond him, his brother Pollox is a close ally of House Meirnour and is able to procure many crafted metals for Arrikur's inventions. His father Galleus runs the largest fishing company in all the land and provides Illyria with a round fourth of its stock fish (the largest supplier of meat on Illyria). And his cousins Titon and Angelus are the primary investors in the Shipyard of Narcena City, home to the largest dry dock on the continent and the place where Gareth himself has most of the empire's ships built.

House Meirnour

House Meirnour is one that is often not discussed, as its influence is not always directly seen. The study of my colleagues on its dealings, however, has shown evidence of a vast network of rumours, conspiracies, dark dealings, and webs of deceit that run deeper than perhaps anything else seen on the face of the known world. Through the vast network of information that the house seems privy to, it may well be the most powerful of all, waiting for just the right moment to bear its teeth like some great predator as it pounces. At the surface, however, the house is like any other of import, invested in many guilds (the artisan guilds, in their case), but leader of none. It, like House Greyvon, has also been gifted a portion of Tortha by the empire, though no great loyalty is seen from Meirnour as with Greyvon, so the decision is curious.

House Meirnour, because of its great muscle over the many artisan guilds, is at the apex of a vast network of supplies of superior quality. It is actually through Meirnour that Donald Greyvon receives the many exceptional weapons and armours with which he supplies his men. Because of its control over the guilds, Meirnour has all but ensured that Etyil City, its seat of power, is the only place where the best goods might be obtained, and the house receives the brunt of the profits. With its great wealth, the house built up a massive fortress dug into the ground, with walls thicker than even those of Rudil City. The Armoury, as it is called, is where all of the empire's weapon stocks for the western war effort against Kourmar are held when not in use, so Meirnour has direct hold and control over a third of Hysperia's implements of war.

On the surface, it would seem that Gareth is a fool for entrusting so much to a house that has not proven itself, but this is where speculation comes into play. I know nothing solid on the matter, but my sources have told me that the house may be lording over a number of entities which create death and disorder across the empire. Much of this is rumour overheard during the parties and drunken orgies hosted by the nobility, but I think that enough separate voices saying the same thing may have gleaned some truth of the matter. In any case, whatever secret power that Meirnour holds is enough to bend our emperor the slightest bit (which is saying a great deal) and Antoine Meirnour, the house elder, has become a very powerful man in a short amount of time, though he flaunts it not. In the same vein, Eriez, an upstart city of Imperial Tortha, was given to his son Pierrot (Pelot) as a personal gift, a decision which caused much internal strife in the last year or so.

House Korral

House Korral is a relatively harmless, though very wealthy, house that is fairly new on the face

of Illyria. Founded in the last hundred years by Davit the Common, Korral came into being during the "age of castling" when Eddard the Great, the first of the Turin family, took over Hysperia from the Vaths. In those days, Eddard sought to create a great number of castles and fortified cities across his growing nation, so Davit, head of the Masons' Guild of Rudil, showed him many blueprints and locations over the land. Wealth came immediately, and Davit designed more than thirty fortresses, many of which still stand to this day, of which the might Fort Sunhawk is the most notable.

After Davit's passing, his son Wilhelm founded House Korral, named in honour of Rudil's guardian dragon and the land upon which the capital was built. Wilhelm designed all of the city's fortifications and devised many methods for sieging other castles that would be later used by Rendall and Gareth both in their taking of the continent. To this day, House Korral rests upon its laurels. The elder Marche Korral spends his days counting his money and devising battle tactics when he is called upon while his sons sit in the Hysperian court, advising Gareth directly and watching over the many hands of the empire; Marche's eldest son, William, a childhood friend of the new emperor, even sits as his personal guardian. From what I am told, the Korrals have taken interest in the Armoury and others have planted themselves firmly in positions of power, though they do not take part in the wickedness and intrigue that are common in the House of Lords.

House Daud

Of all five of the families, House Daud is both the most ancient and the newest to come into its own. According to spoken historye, the house was there at the side of Rugnar when Darcidia was founded so long ago, though no record exists of whom it was who took his side under the name Daud. It was also the general, Angus Daud, who stood next to Vetali when Tortha was founded after the War of Nine Spears. Throughout historye, the house has continued to appear and disappear, being important for a while before vanishing back into the aethers of time. It is always for its many heroes that the house is known, and it is for that reason that it is respected so, even by the other houses and lords.

In the modern age, the most notable member of House Daud is Ulfberth Nine-Finger, husband to Queen Tonnil Atannis of Feylanor. During the Conqueror's War, he commanded many legions of rebels who fought valiantly (and I say this of my own enemies) against the forces of King Rendall. By himself, he is said to have slain hundreds of Hysperian soldiers, even cleaving the heaviest knights in twain with his blade Evenwield- shield, armour, and all. By the end of the war, he had been captured at the threat of the sacking of Vetalan City and thus surrendered himself to the newly-allied Feylanor.

Instead of killing him outright as a criminal of war, the young queen took interest in him, saying he was the only real man she'd ever known. After he proved his strength and will against three trolls at once, she took him to bed and wed him, making him King of Feylanor, if only in title. It is because of Ulfberth that Queen Tonnil withdrew much of her support from the Purifiers, along with the softening of her hand against the Fey and the people of Eriez, whom she used to despise. Though he now stands against his own nation by his title, it would seem that both he and the Iron Lady have become persons of interest under Gareth's rule, as he fears that Tonnil's love for her husband may affect her loyalty to his crown, though she seems to follow his word to the letter, if nothing else.

Beyond the great hero, Ulfberth had seven brothers and sisters, almost all of whom were slain in battle during the great war and all of whom were valiant warriors of the highest calibre. Because of House Daud's unwillingness to dip its fingers into the shadowy world of politicks, it has avoided all of the social stigma associated with the other houses. And though it lacks much of the money, power, and influence that the rest have, its name is revered by them as an example to be followed. If nothing else good was ever borne of Tortha, the house of Daud would surely stand alone.

Guildship, Recognition, and False Guilds

As one shall see in other sections, guildship is both an important factor in the functioning of the world and a part of society inherent to Illyria's social order. Guilds offer structure and commonality to a diverse group of people and bind them together through trade, creating large networks of skilled

craftsmen, laymen, and artisans that make up the majority of the merchant and mercenary castes. Without them, the quality of wares would slip dramatically, prices would rise, and the availability of many goods would disappear altogether. Beneficially though they are, founding and maintaining of guildship has created a massive bureaucracy that dips fingers into nearly every aspect of urban life, including polity and rule of law. Because of this, many of the most respected guild members and masters are all but exempt from common laws and taxes that are imposed upon lesser folk, but this comes with the benefit of the many services the guilds provide to both fellow and founded land.

Obtaining Guild Status

With our rise in population and the strengthening of the foundations of our society, guildship is harder to obtain and keep than it has ever been, but having the status also affords more benefits than ever. In ages past, one needed only ten signatures and a vote on the floor of city hall during the meeting hour to establish a guild. Today, one must jump many hurdles, pay innumerable fees, and have the vote of confidence of the populace and lords in order to achieve status.

First, one needs about ten-thousand pence (fifty handswiths) to show that one has the monetary backing to support a guild. One must also have a meeting place, a guild hall, that rests in any enclosed space and can fully contain one's meetings and standard practices and functions. There must be popular support at the cost of one-thousand signatures of the local man, so it is almost mandatory that a guild be founded in a city. Once the signatures are obtained and the money is paid, the legality of the guild's constitution must be presented to the local court, then to the regional high court (in Hysperia's case, the one's at Himooore, Rudil, and the westward Hiven). If the courts approve the constitution, a founder's ledger must be presented to the House of Lords (or House of Merits, in the case of Nycenia, and the Saker's Watch, for Feylanor). If a meeting of at least two-thirds of the House approves the guild's status, it must maintain a membership of fifty active members and two-hundred inactive members, lest it come up for review in court at a later date.

The structure is complex and not without its flaws. For the friends of presiding judges and lords, many rules can be skipped and one need not even spend a gold cent, and many guilds can perform illegitimate and illegal functions to the benefit of the higher castes (as in the case of certain unknown mercenary guilds and the supposedly-hidden Thieves' Guild). On the whole, I believe the majority of all guilds are inducted in the proper manner, but there shall always be the few who slip through the cracks. The real problem comes with the creation of illegitimate guilds (false guilds) who

deem passing the rules by to be entirely necessary, but I shall outline them further down. For now, let us look at existing guilds and their functions.

The Merchants' Guild

The Merchants' Guild is, for good reason, the oldest-known guild in all the land and the one with the most clout. Founded in what became Nycenia at the height of the Darcidian Empire, Nerus the Elder, father of Narcissus the Pale, created the guild as a means to consolidate the wealth and trading power of his half of Nycenia. With no formal opposition and a breadth of public support for his actions, he garnered two-fifths of the empire's wealth and assured the victory of his oldest son in the war to come. Not only did the Merchant's Guild create a formula for tax imposition and price standardization, it also identified black market trading and drove it deep underground, unintentionally planting the seeds of the Thieves' Guild.

Today, the Merchants' Guild is headed by Azuras Greed (a fitting name) and his four sons, each of whom runs a region of the guild beneath him (with the exception of Kourmar). The guild watches over all mercantile trading prices for commodities like wood, iron, and stonework, and ensures that growth is able to happen evenly throughout the empire. Though it can't officially impose any legal restrictions on other guilds, their ability to control both supply and cost for many goods keeps a number of artisan and craftsmen guilds beneath their thumb. For this reason, Azuras has influence that can at times rival that of kings, and it is believed that he is the true will and mind behind Nycenia as opposed to its legal ruler. This has caused friction within the nation and was one of the factors that led to its downfall in the Conqueror's War.

Craftsmen's Guilds

Because of their similarities and breadth of influence, I have decided to mark all craftsmen's guilds beneath a single section. As opposed to the Merchants' Guild which controls the prices of many commodities and basic goods, craftsmen's guilds function as a union of tradesmen who sell products directly to consumers and include several smithing guilds, ferriers' guilds, tanners, clothiers, and some provisioners. This is also the heading under which glass-makers can be found, as well as the finer masons who make laced brick and stone shingles. What differentiates this group from the artisans is that all craftsmen items are largely functional building and outdoor goods, whereas the artisans craft luxury items and housewares for nobility. Socially, craftsmen are on a tier directly below artisans and

above masons, but the strength of their collective guilds gives them more pull in the politics of guildhood.

On the whole, craftsmen's guilds are in place to ensure the fair payment of their workers and the affordability and quality of goods. It is the system through which all apprentice craftsmen are approved and sent out and the method through which their quality is controlled. It is recommended to anyone purchasing weapons, armor, clothing, or provisions in a town to look for a guild symbol, as it ensures the best and fairest prices for the area. The guilds also have enforcers that patrol the road and ensure that travelling merchants are offering goods at the approved prices.

Artisan Guilds

Unlike the aforementioned collection of skill-hands, the artisan guilds deal entirely in luxury goods and those meant for the home use of wealthier folk. They are functionally identical to other protectionist guilds, but their fare is entirely different. Because of this, the artisan guilds collectively have more money than most other guild types, but their smaller market base keeps their influence low, as the fewer numbers of wealthy and the lack of necessity of their goods makes them less important to the functioning of the world. The common citizen or adventurer is unlikely to ever encounter artisan guilds or employ their services, but their work can be seen in the many manors, castles, and throne rooms that spread across the landscape, and their influence can be felt in the whispering corners of any party.

The Fighters' Guild

The Fighters' Guild is a largely not-for-profit organization of military and non-military warriors who exist as a sort of university system. For the price of tuition, they educate anyone and everyone in whatever melee and ranged combat styles the person wishes, so long as they have the skill. The Fighters' Guild ultimately exists to ensure that standards and practices are maintained, that all guilds are equipped to properly teach any form of combat to its highest level, and to provide a neutral territory inside cities and towns where physical duels may be performed between rival combatants without fear of reprisal or arrest by the local watch. The guild also ensures that honourable combat protocols are instructed and followed, and that only the highest standards of chivalry (a Torthan honour code) are

held to.

The guild was founded after the consolidation of similar entities when Tortha was first formed a few hundred years ago. Caed Caerduness, seeing the need for a group of trustworthy and honourable warriors to pass on the legacy of chivalric combat, founded the Fighters' Guild at Charr's Rock in Illviriam, where the central hall stands to this day.

The current guildmaster is Morley Dunnan, a broad-faced and boisterous man whom I have met twice. Under his leadership, the Fighter's Guild has expanded and new halls have been planted in nations considered hostile to Tortha. Despite opposition to this, Morley believes that honourable combat should be available and taught to all, even those who come from "dishonourable homes".

Unlike the Mercenary Guild, the Fighter's Guild does not hire out its members as strong-arms, bodyguards, or a supplement to any military force, though its members may choose to do so on their own. It also accepts any person, as long as they maintain a clean legal record and have no outstanding warrants. The guild does not accept people who murder in cold blood, people who have ever been assassins, or people who use dark magicks, though I am told that werewolves may not be so foreign a thing in some of the higher echons of the guild. By and large, the Fighter's Guild is one of the friendliest, most available guilds in existence, and it is my opinion that the world would be a darker place without them.

The Mages' Guild

One might believe that the Mages' Guild would work on alternate and unfriendly terms with the Fighters' Guild because of their different scopes of practice, but the truth is quite the opposite. While a rivalry exists, it is entirely companionary and respectful, and both guilds are known to help one another out in times of great need (the Grey Line and the Highmoon Incident come to mind). And while the Fighter's Guild exists to ensure the fair and standard practice of artful physickal combats, the Mages' Guild continues the legacy of the education of magicks to the public and the largely-free availability of information.

Funding for the guild is performed in the same fashion as the Fighter's Guild, an instructional

fee is paid to learn different magicks according to a set standard to anyone who has the money and aptitude to use aethers and floes. The guild is entirely private and does not hire its membership to governments or organizations and as such is not constrained by the stringent and often brutal tactics employed by others (such as "culling" seen with Hysperian magi). This has been more-strictly enforced by the new guildmaster, Nihvus Aran, a Feylanorian responding to the sudden resurgence of dark magic from the deep forests of his home. He, like the first guildmaster, Gadarax the Blue-Clad, is trying to add legitimacy and a genteel face to an oft-thought mysterious group.

The guild also contains a vast library of books and scrolls that it has transcribed into each of Illyria's languages and spread to as many guilds as it can afford. If one brings in food, alchemickal ingredients, or useful implements, one may access any of the knowledge contained within the tomes for the remainder of the day. The guild is also responsible for a number of eldritch spells and scrolls that it has thus forbidden for use by any entity, either for their power or their latent effects (the earthquake spell comes to mind). On the subject, all are welcomed into the Mages' Guild with few exceptions. The black arts are illegal, as are necromantic arts, and so anyone who uses them is not allowed and information on their use, though in existence, is barred from review. Criminals are also not accepted and all outstanding warrants must be paid. Because of their practices, magick is becoming more commonly accepted and employed, and I feel as if Illyria is on the verge of an age of great discovery and learning that I wished I could be a part of.

The Mercenary Guild

The Mercenary Guild is like the Fighters' Guild in so many ways that many do not see it as a different entity at all. However, the differences that exist have changed the guilds so fundamentally that they cannot even function in tandem. To be short, the Mercenary Guild is an off-shoot of the Fighters' Guild from some two- or three-hundred years ago, begun by a man called Shor the One-Eyed in response to what he saw as weakness in the existing guild. He saw the potential for money-making in selling his sword arm to those in need and so took like-minded brothers to found the guild. Today, the mercenaries are led by a Nycenian woman called Nadia "Knives" Esparza, which is very peculiar to me.

Not all mercenaries belong to the guild, but those who do make more money than most and fall under the protection of their guildsmen. With these benefits come specific rules, however. The guild must conform to the rule of law, so assassination is not allowed (though most believe that it occurs

anyway). Mercenaries are also not permitted to harm innocent non-combatants and must pay for any property, physical or animal, that is destroyed in the process of their work. As sell-swords, bodyguards, and augmentation to the local militia, mercenaries under the guild may only attack specified targets, in addition to not attacking animals or children, regardless of what the client wishes for.

One would not think that so many rules constrain a band of mercenaries, considering the treatment of bandits and other such vagrants, but members of the guild are far and wide a congenial group with whom I became well-acquainted in my travels. Like the Fighters' Guild, the Mercenary Guild enjoys a close relationship with the craftsmen's guilds, alleviating the power that the Merchants' Guild has over them. And while the Mercenary Guild makes much more money than their non-hiring counterparts, their status as strong-arms garners them less respect than the Fighters' Guild, as their members are more difficult to control.

Laymen's Guilds

Laymen's guilds are by and far the most common guilds on the face of Illyria. There are literally dozens of laymen's guilds that cover everything from people who dredge sulphurs from the soil of the deltas Pram and Koral to the people who maintain the sewer lines beneath Rudil City. Laymen's guilds do not function in the same way that standard guilds do and as such do not have to undergo the lengthy processes for guildship that others must complete. For the most part, laymen's guild act as unions of labourers who vie for improved working conditions and pay for the commonfolk. They also bend toward the Merchants' Guild, since it is that guild that ultimately controls costs of the things they make.

While the existence of these guilds has made life easier for city workers and created a class between the rich and the poor, it has also increased the prices of nearly all goods throughout the empire. Rural workers (those who live and work outside of cities) often do not fall under the protection and membership of laymen's guilds, so they receive the same pay that they always have, but the cost of goods for them has increased. A point that we have been studying with vigour is the relationship between these cost increases and the resurgence of the vassal state. In the past, lordship across the continent was in decline, but an increase in the peasantry has brought new strength to land-owning lords. I do not know what this holds for our future, so I will have to listen for news from Illyria.

False Guilds

False guilds are a by-product of the imposition of bureaucracy on the status of guildship. Lacking funding, purpose, or popular support, many people wanting to create guilds instead establish a guild hall in a non-designated area and continue their practices as if their constitution was legally-binded. Because of their unlawful nature, many of these guilds do not have lawful order and are untrustworthy and unsafe by nature (the Thieves' Guild, etc.), so it is recommended that one steers clear of such institutions.

Despite their illegal status, many such guilds exist and their influence is widely-felt. In particular, the Thieves' Guild is an example of a secretive, illegal organization that is remarkably easy to identify and not secretive at all. The strength of the guild rivals that of the Nycenian monarchy, and King Marle Morian has put an enormous bounty on the head of Joric Loch. From what I understand, the guild covers a variety of militant and monetary operations, all of which are illegal and all of which are lorded over by sections called "hoodships". Each hoodship is its own rival faction within the guild, each covers a different form of activity, and each is responsible for ensuring that a different part of Narcena City works according to certain protocols. I've also been told that this inner rivalry, while leading to some internal conflict, forces each of the members to keep the other hoods sharp with the threat of ridicule and loss of face in their hooded court.

A potential off-shoot of the Thieves' Guild is one that is actually as secretive and dangerous as the Thieves' Guild attempts to be. Spoken of only in whispers, a group called the Assassins' Guild may or may not currently exist, as no official records of the death or capture of any members exist. There is a tell-tale mark left by the Assassins' Guild on each of their targets- a handprint made of blood impressed upon the face, but the Nycenian Guard insists that the guild has disappeared and that the work is that of independent vigilantes. In all of the texts that I read upon the subject, most of which were entirely speculative, I found only one sentence about its organization: "The Assassins' Guild is lead in cloak and shadow by a dark figure called 'The Watcher'."

Other guilds similar to the three combative guilds exist- unsanctioned magickal guilds, fighters' guilds, and the like which exist to study the forbidden arts or to spread the grotesque wills of their ill-minded masters. One that I remember in particular was that of a new sort of guild dedicated to rounds of fighting (in the manner of dog fights) between people for money. I know nothing else on the subject, as I believe the guild may just now be in its infancy, but as illegal and barbaric as the activity

seems, I can imagine such a thing growing and getting far out of hand in a short matter of time.

Food and Culture

Ah, the food and culture of our fair Illyria, such a broad subject that I worry about showing my own foolishness at merely attempting to cover a topic so great and varied as this. I divide the subject into two parts: food and culture, for a particular reason. Food is a subtext, but so powerful a shaper of who we are that it is much an alliance-maker as it is a nation-ender. It, hunger, is the driving force

behind all that we do as we flee from its grasp, and it is our ultimate social issue that separates rich from poor. It is food that separated the countries from each other initially, shaped the people in them, and led to Hysperia's greatness at the dawn of the new world. It is culture that has risen up around food, and so I shall largely cover to topics independently, with nations segregated beneath.

Foods of Our World

Illyria is a place that is varied in its food choices and rich within them. The landforms that so divide the nations do evermore because it is those landforms that decide what there is to eat, at what time it can be eaten, and even the manner of its making. Each nation has similar foods to the others (all have meat, bread, and so on), but all are varied from the next in the preparations of these foods and the flavours expressed.

Hysperian Food

To point, I begin with my own nation. Hysperia has a long-standing tradition with culinary delights that dates back to our founded. On the sweeping plains, our many crops are grown, and Illyria enjoys a wide variety of grain- and vegetable-based foods that, while once mocked as "the food of the poor", have since been become the darling of royalty as our abundance brought us into a golden age. Three kinds of breads exist and each has qualities that indicate the class for which it is made.

Barley is the easiest grain to grow and the most common, but grinds poorly and has a ruddy flavour and is so dedicated to the impoverished to supplement their diets. Wheat is the next, with a smooth texture and a plain flavour suited for the many cremes, tarts, and delicacies produced by the Bakers' Guild and the royal ovens, wheat grain is the staple food of our Hysperia and it is the substance around which we base so many recipes. At the top is oat, a grain that makes a flour too fine for proper bread, and so we differ it to a meal-y substance used in porridge, sweet meat pies, and some desserts. It is rare that wheat and oats are combined, but the pair are a necessity in some recipes like the bread-coated Beef Onriast and sugar-ed lime tarts.

Hysperians typically enjoy two meals a day, breakfast and dinner, though some wealthier folk and hard labourers consume a mid-meal called luncheon. Breakfast is usually smaller than dinner since the stomach has not awoken, and the order of the meal is normally a motley of stewed vegetables and cheese stuffed between two pieces of hardened bread. The evening meal is much larger and contains

multiple courses. For the wealthy, this includes a meat (usually beef or mutton), multiple breads of different grains and makes, stewed or steamed vegetables with salt, cow's cheese, and a bread- or milk-based dessert such as creme sorre, fruit tarts, pastilles, or eclairs. A sweet treat indeed.

Nycenian Food

Heading geographickally south to our greatest ally, Nycenian food takes bits and pieces from both Hysperia and Feylanor and uses its bounties from the sea to create everything from strange delights and culinary atrocities. My taste for fish has never been a strong one, either spiced or pickled, but the seasonal fish fries hosted in the royal court and during the Harvest Festival are a real treat. Great numbers of fish carts are brought up from the sea when fresh, are coated in wheat flour and egg, and are fried in animal fat or vegetable oils. The same is done with the chicken, a wretched, diseased fowl that Nycenia uses in lieu of the cow, which it doesn't have the land to support.

Another strange product of Nycenia is pasta, a grain product made with egg, salt, and water and fashioned into all manner of strange shapes. The Nycenians pour cheese, creme, and herbs over the stuff and eat it with chicken, fish, and, to a lesser degree, pork. I never acquired a taste for the stuff because it felt like eating eels or worms, but to the people of that nation, it was the answer to common bread. On the whole, the people of Nycenia enjoy fewer red meats than those of Hysperia and largely avoid soft breads, porridges, and hard cheeses. They make up for this, however, with a myriad of the strange foods that I described and for being the nation to invent deep-frying.

Feylanorian Food

The food of Feylanor, not to be confused with that of the feyfolk, is a very strong and flavourful stuff that is based upon the many herbs and spices grown in the region, along with river fishes, crayfishes, and the (in this author's opinion) awful foodstuff called "rice". Feylanor's great forests and deep wetlands do not make well for the raising of livestock, so the country relies primarily on subsistence farming, hunting wild animals, gathering from local plants, and importing staple crops from Hysperia. Because of this, many of their recipes focus on the use of many food types in a single recipe, such as mixing meats with spice and sauces and pouring it over bread or rice.

My experience with Feylanor's food has been one that deeply involves curry, spiced cabbage, and pickled carrots, all of which find their way into most of the country's recipes and all of which are to

my distaste. As for rice, it is a poor man's grain which cannot be easily ground into flour and which has no flavour. It is a ruddy vegetable meant to fill one's belly and offer no real substance. Apparently, it used to be eaten by only the meanest of peasantry, but a surge in the popularity of exotic foods has seen it presented to the late King Rendall, to my dismay, and a number of courtiers have begun to love the ease with which it cooks. The soups and stews that are poured over it are also some of the saltiest, hottest foods I've ever had, which is another item I take offence at.

Desserts, on the other hand, are a delight. Whatever cuiraces are, they're excellent: sugar-ed sweet, cooked to a crisp, light, and drizzled with honey, but I threaten myself with a false hunger if I go on. And the good people of Feylanor begat us sugar-ed beets, of which I'm an enormous fan, and the process of salt-spicing, whereby we might allow fruits and vegetables to last longer by spicing them in a fashion similar to the salting of meat. Whether the food is good or not is irrelevant in this case. The ability to take fruits and vegetables along with oneself for a while has given sharp rise to the exploration of our continent. Though I utterly despise most of Feylanor's foodstuff, it is difficult to express the importance of their impact on our present.

Torthan Food

Torthan food is terribly boring and mostly flavourless, but the things that they do right, they do very well. Because Tortha relies so heavily on shepherding and the raising of pigs and cattle, the majority of Torthan food is meat-based, with most recipes consisting of soups, stews, or roasts and all of them smothered with gravy and eaten with bread. Where Tortha fails is in the preservation of meat. The taste for most salted meats (except salted pork) is lost upon them, so they boil meat on the third day of its keeping and create many soups and stocks from the hock and bone and mix in vegetables like cabbage and millet, of which they are a large producer. Hard cheeses are another product of Tortha, and Gareth himself dines on only the sharpest cheddar and Torthan white. They have also invented a dessert stuff from the milk- yogurt, which I have never had, but I've heard they mix it with dried fruit.

What Tortha is exceptional at making is foodstuff with the leavings of meats: pies, sweet meats, sugar-ed tripe, blood pudding, and spiced jerk roast. The culture is entirely dedicated to the flavouring of meats in so many creative ways that I am, for a moment, glad that we did not annihilate them in the last great war. Of import, Torthan culinary skill gave rise to a round third of the foods seen on Gareth's table, as he is an eater of sweet meats and pies, and it is their country that gave us the idea of boiling meat to preserve it without having to salt or can it in jelly (a disgusting process). Bland though it may

be, the food is very economical and may be an excellent way to get edible meat into the hands of the commonfolk, which may make them more productive like their noble betters.

Kourmarian Food

For my lack of knowledge on Vasenean culture, I shall defer to Kourmarian food as the last of my word on the subject. As for Kourmar, it is a desolate rock, almost entirely devoid of arable land and with a climate inopportune for serious gardening. From my knowledge, the people rely on ruddy breads such as mealbread, hardtack, oat, and rye, and eat no fruits or vegetables unless dried or pickled. They are a lover of stockfishes, though, and often pickle, dry, or smoke fishes such as herring, cod, and salmon. Because of the rough nature of life in Kourmar, the people eat three or four smaller meals in a day, including something at the dawn hour called breakfast, which is eaten cold. These meals are often single-course and consist of a meat or bread slathered with a strange fruit sauce called "jam".

They Kourmarian people are a diverse group and so have many flavour influences that utilize their few ingredients in many different ways. With meat, they make roasts, bastes, smoked sides, sweet pies, gut paste (which is better than it sounds), and something called sausage, whose origin I cannot discern. They are enormous eaters of game, of which boar and elk (a type of deer) are favourites and from which they craft a number of items. They also make use of the local plant life and eat berries, particularly juniper, in abundance, and have created "jam" as a paste to preserve the flavour and substance of fruit for long periods. Despite the same-ness that the nation's food expresses, Kourmar has been excellent for science and industry alike. It has allowed us to view the extent that humanity can go to survive and has given us food preservation techniques that allow us to maintain the flavour and nutrient value of the stuff at minimal cost.

Speaking of preservation....

Alcohol

Alcohol is a miracle foodstuff, without which our society would collapse from disease, thirst, and having to look at each other. Alcohol comes in many forms, the most common of which is bar ale (weak ale) and the rarest of which is Golden Boar Mead from Kourmar. Because of the undependable nature of water, alcohol is what allows us to drink our fill without the threat of disease and gives us something to whet our thirst at the end of a meal. In its absence, we look likely die away very quickly

from the breakout of illness and our cities would collapse upon themselves.

Starting from the bottom by strength, we have child's beer, which is weak ale mixed with water or milk. The child doesn't get drunk and is able to have the good substances found in milk and water without taking ill or consuming the vital humours of animals. A step up from child's beer is weak ale, which is the common fare found in bars and taverns across Illyria. It's an ale that quenches the thirst and contains just enough alcohol to warm the bones. It's a grain beer made from barley and hops, and has the shortest fermentation time of all drinks.

Another step beyond is wine, fermented from the grapes grown in Nycenia and southern Hysperia along the Hyspus River. Wine is becoming increasingly-more common than many drinks for the nobility as a luxury item, but it leaves the mouth feeling very dry and has a strong taste, and one feels thirsty after consuming it, so wine has seen limit to its use. Another step up from wine is hard ale (dark ale or lager) which is fermented from wheat, barley, hops, or oatmeal, and has a very bitter taste that makes the mouth tighten. Hard ale is commonly drunk by men in contests of will and constitution, as hard ale is more than capable of putting someone beneath the table. Another drink made for the same purpose is cider, an alcohol made from fruit in the same manner as dark ale. It requires continuous turning, churning, letting, and distillation, so it is more expensive than other types of alcohol, but is more flavourful.

Nearing the top of our ladder, we come to mead, the most difficult to make of all alcohols because it requires a lengthy fermentation process and the availability of bees for honey. Kourmar is the only place in all of Illyria that can make the stuff, and the meaderies upon the rock refuse to share the secrets to their recipes with the remainder of the continent, which has caused tension between them and brewers in other nations. Because of its rarity, the exportation of mead is a large part of Kourmar's economy (save the export of gold ore), and the nobilities of Kourmar's enemies are wont to overlook Kourmar's trespasses against them for a cask or two of Golden Boar. The final unifying portion of drink is a new and varied sort of drink called "liquor", a spirit made from alchemickally-distilled water and fermented grain mash. It is difficult to make, and so expensive, and is a terrible-tasting alcohol with a great deal of strength.

With the existence of liquor dawns a new age for Man and perhaps for medicine, as we know alcohol can purify different liquids for safe use. Alchemysts across the continent are studying the

distillation of alcohol into a finer product to be used to purify more than drinks. Perhaps it can one day be used to cure diseases, clean objects, or even bathe oneself in, but the applications are limited and unknown for now, as the science is new. In retrospect, alcohol is both a vital part of Illyrian life and culture, and may be a step toward our future. Only time can tell.

Entertainment

Even when locked in the throes of war, the people of Illyria are not without their love for fun and entertainment. Between the classes, wealthy and poor seem to enjoy many of the same things, which leads one to believe that the rude fellow may not be so different from the regent, but conjecture is for another tome. Across all castes, the people of Illyria seem to enjoy music, dance, theatre, and humour, though levels of refinement vary widely between the castes. While the commoners enjoy dancing to the hymns of tavern bards who strum on lutes and beat hands upon knees, wealthy folk may desire a myriad of instruments that include bells, horns, wind instruments, and trained singers.

All classes through all realms seem to enjoy dance, though the dances of nations are as different as the nations themselves. Tortha has a simple sort of three-step dance that goes on for a while, but Feylanor has a short dance with many complicated movements. Nycenia has its quick-step dance, which requires little movement of the body, but a great deal of footwork, while Kourmar's hop dancing requires little actual learning and more eclectic movement. Hysperia has a combination of the four, yielding the best sort of dance used in the houses of kings and lords to impress their patrons and aid in polity and the progress of courts. Humour and theatre, like dance, are unique to different countries and some, like Kourmar and Tortha, do not have theatre at all. While the laymen who can afford entry enjoy a good comedye or sung work, the nobility seem taken with complex dramas, romances, and more professional sung work.

Hair and Clothing

The clothes make the man, but the clothes also make the nation. It is by clothing that we most easily identify people by both nation and caste and through which we may judge the character and composition of a man. At the most basic level, the peoples of the world are indistinguishable in common clothing except for those in Kourmar. While most every layman wears a belted tunic and leggings or pantaloons, the men of Kourmar wear whatever they can in fashions that fit them tightly. And women all over tend to wear dresses that cover them from neck-to-toe, though the more sultry bar

wenches and courtesans will bear themselves to attract the coin of ruder men.

It is in the higher castes that hair and clothing become distinct. Wealthy men will often cut their hair at head length and trim or shape it and their facial hair into all sorts of different styles befitting the expenses offered by their positions. Nycenians are patrons to the shaped moustache, Hysperians, the shaped beard, Torthans, both, and Feylanorians prefer to be clean-shaven, with the hair cut closer to the scalp and combed. Wealthy women of all nations have begun a contest among themselves, it would seem, about who can wear their hair in the largest, fanciest, and most vivid styles in contrast to women of the field, who must either keep their hair up in a tight bun or cut it short enough to hang flatly in an unattractive fashion. The Iron Lady of Feylanor, Queen Tonnil Atannis, is the exception to this rule; she purposefully keeps her hair cut shorter than many men as a testament to her combative past, though she does not allow other women in her court to follow her example, as they have not "earned the right".

Clothing for the nobility is a fanciful version of that worn by the poor. Tunics are worn with vests over them and coats over that by the men, and doeskin and velvet leggings and stockings are worn beneath and tuck into fine-leather, high-heeled shoes. Women wear plain shoes hidden beneath extravagant dresses that loop upward into fitted bodices laced with fine cloth. The ladies also have headresses for their hair and mantles that rest upon the shoulders of the bodice, while men wear flat, round hats called coifs. The wealthiest in both classes also have ear piercings and shaped eyebrows, and the bleaching of teeth became a popular fad just before I left the continent.

Social Structure

All knowing Men understand the social structure of Illyria, a rigid ideology that has been borne into us and stuck to us since the dawn of time, but I feel that there may come a time where we cast down this part of ourselves and a new sort of order rises. It is in preparation for this that I write what follows, for the age when mankind no longer knows things as we do. Society is separated into two primary castes: common and nobility, and both of these into lesser castes according to function.

Common Classes

At the very bottom of every social order is the unskilled labourer, the serf, the ultimate commoner, a person with no abilities whose maximum potential is consumed in labouring upon the soil. These people have common rights to food, money, and property, but own no land and cannot rise

in social order except by conscripting oneself into professional military service to a lord or king. A step above the common peasant is the layman, the skilled labourer who can craft or build things. These people cannot be landowners, but neither must they sell themselves into servitude. Another step upward is the common soldier, a military person who is neither knight nor landed. They cannot purchase or claim ownership to land unless inherited, but they can serve in the local guard and can achieve higher rank through valour in battle to obtain knighthood.

Higher still than the common soldier is the artisan, a highly-skilled individual who crafts items for common use and noble luxury. Artisans, like laymen, must go through an apprenticeship (though the artisan's is lengthier and more involved) before their status is obtained in court. Artisans are able to purchase and own land on the property of a lord, and can sell wares in a shop, but their land rights are limited, and they are restricted to wearing the lesser clothing of the commonfolk and cannot eat the better foods offered to the gentry. The highest of the common classes is the lesser clergy, a caste that includes travelling priests, the caretakers of chapels, nuns, and lower healers. The lesser clergy is not permitted to own many possessions, but they are cared for by the state and each is claimant to an abbey, monastery, or cathedral that is also patroned by the nobility.

Noble Classes

The noble classes differ from the common classes in that they have title, status, respect, and land (if in-name only), and that many women cannot be inheritors in almost all cases in the upper castes. These classes are also not restricted to travel within cities and can wear whatever clothing and eat whatever food they can afford. The lowest of noble classes is the landed knight, a soldier who has performed admirably in battle and has been given a parcel of land for his valour and a number of serfs who must work the land to be given to a higher lord. Directly above the knight is the merchant, a person who achieves his or her status through the unconventional means of accruing a great deal of wealth; merchants are a higher form of the layman or artisan, though it is most common that an artisan becomes a merchant, as they deal in more expensive goods.

Above the merchant is the landed gentry, a person who inherited land from a relative, who in turn received it from a higher lord. These are often the sons of knights or other warriors, and many of them have no land at all, but only a willed title in the event that another relative dies. To be a landless gentry is thought to be the greatest dishonour one could receive from God, as greatness is inherited, but cannot be utilized. Above the gentry is military command: captains, commanders, generals, anyone

who commands a group of professional soldiers greater than five-hundred people (which is surprisingly rare in Illyria). These men answer directly to a baron, governor, or king and have control over great acreages across the continent. General Leward Scott is the highest among these men, I believe, and has a parcel of land that constitutes a round tenth of Hysperia's mass.

The only people higher than military command are the high priests from the Temple of the Saker and governing nobles in the House of Lords. The high priests are elected by church officials and sent about (the one from the college was Bishop Emerit Randt) and include the offices of bishop, archbishop, cardinal, and saker-cardinal. The higher one gets in the Church of the Saker, the fewer the functions one must actually perform; why this is, I shall never know. On the same level with the high priests are the governing nobles, starting with barons, who are generally the non-military sons of commanders, the count (or the Torthan "earl", and Feylanor has the "viscount" beneath this level) who owns a county, the duke (which Leward Scott nominally is as Grand General of the Western Armies) and whom lords over a great portion of the land, and the governor, who is nominally-identical in title to a duke, but who lords over a great city (as Morris Annex does over Rudil City). At the top, we have the Saker herself, whose position is decided in childhood and who rules for life. Her selection is similar to the monarchy, who is chosen at birth. The monarchs of Illyria are generally thought to be directly beneath the Saker, but Gareth, as Empirator Illyrius, considers himself to be on her level, just as his father did before him.

Festivals, Traditions, and Customs

The customs and traditions of Illyria can be varied in many ways, but a surprising number of the things we celebrate are similar. In all nations, there is a Harvest Festival at the end of every harvest in mid-autumn, whereby we celebrate the fruit of the year and feast for ten days to two weeks in preparation for the winter months. It is also during this festival that Gareth every year decides to throw one-million pieces of gold to the throngs that gather in the capital. For this reason, Rudil City's population increases thirty-fold for a single week, and the city actually makes more money for the crown than he ever throws down to the people. There are also a few church holidays such as the Saker's Birth Festival, which is a two-day feast celebrating the birth of the current Saker (whichever day it is). During this holiday, nearly everyone in Illyria, whether they worship the Saker or not, gives a gift to a loved one in remembrance of the "gifts" that the Saker gives to all.

There is also a Spring Festival, where people feast for a week on what remains of the winter stock, if anything, the Pouring Feast, where a great deal of bread and ale is consumed during the summer solstice to celebrate and prepare for the harvest to come. Other festivals include Children's Day, the King's Feast, the Week of Fasting, the Stone-Thrower's Festival in Tortha, Nycenia's annual grand fishing contest, the Royal Jousting Tournament, the Tournament of Lords, and the Iron Man Games in Hysperia. If one wanted to (and some of the wealthier folk do), one could travel across Illyria to the different festivals, hitting each as they begin and leaving as they end, and one could enjoy an entire lifetime of endless feasting and revelry, save for the lengthy journeys between cities and towns. Despite all that has happened to us, we are a land of celebration, thankful for what we have and ne'er reflecting upon that which we do not.

If one travels to different places, though, one must remember the different customs and courtesies native to each country and people group. Spare yourself the suffering I endured by remembering a few basic rules depending on where you are.

In Hysperia, Feylanor, and Tortha, if you eat among nobles, keep elbows off the table and bring the food to your mouth instead of the opposite. Food must also be eaten in a certain order as prescribed by the chief servant or house lord. When greeting someone of higher rank, a bow for men or curtsy for women is sufficient, bowing at the waist for men and bending to near-knee for women. All must kneel before the king of any land and all must prostrate before the Saker. When greeting someone of equal rank, or of higher rank in Kourmar, a nod is sufficient or, if wearing a hat, a tipping of the hat. Tipping the hat is also something to do to ladies of the upper class, regardless of rank.

In Hysperia, it is custom for women to eat only as much as one needs and for men to eat as much as they are able. In Nycenia, both are welcome to eat their fill, but food must be consumed in order and all courses must be partaken of. In Feylanor, it is considered an insult for either gender to eat a great deal of food, but it is more insulting to not indulge in certain foods, especially if a delicacy is offered (to my dismay). Tortha has few restrictions on the order or amount of eating, but it is generally considered rude for men to sit before women of any social caste, and men are expected to wait until the women are served before they begin eating, themselves. When eating in the court of Kourmar, the only rule is that one must stop eating when the lord of the house stops eating, but it is also because of this rule that much of Kourmar's royalty will play with their food, affording their guests plenty of time to

indulge.

When in Hysperia, Feylanor, and Nycenia, waving to another person is considered the standard for non-verbal greeting followed by a "hello" or "good day" when the parties approach. In Tortha, the handwave is considered patronizing, so the simple raising of the hand is sufficient and always followed by a "hail". Kourmar has no such verbal form, and so only the hand raise or nod is required. When greeting to speak, always shake with the right hand, as it is the sword hand and implies trust in the other person. In Kourmar, one must grab the forearm of the other and shake firmly, followed by a light embrace between kin. In the other nations, grabbing the hand and shaking is enough, though Nycenia requires a firm handshake to avoid risking insult. For the opposite gender, a kiss on the cheek is permitted, and one for each cheek in Feylanor, usually followed by an embrace. And always, always, always remember- never the left hand. Never the left hand.

Religions, Falsehood, and Abatement

Religion is, for now, the unifying factor that keeps much of Illyria's people in line with social order and under the command of the monarchy. It is for this reason that I both fear it and am impressed with its ability to maintain the functioning of the world. I know within my scientific mind that much of religion is nonsense and that it may be completely inordinate in regard to its divinity, but I cannot deny

my own existence and that of all around me, and I see the necessity of religion to keep the common man in check. Ultimately, there will come a time when Man shall bend to no king, for He will become too great for any ruler to control, but I believe that Man shall always fear God. And so it is this concept of a god that I looked to when I studied the history of religions during my peerage at the university, but there are many religions and gods, and not all are compatible with the existence of one another.

Religions of the Past

I shall begin my didaction on religions by discussing those that came before and are still adhered to by many thousands, the pagan religions to which mankind so feebly clung in its dawning days and under which many of our healers, scholars, and magi still bow as they vie for understanding of their abilities. There are three primary religious types that we have and all three existed in some form in the past, as well. The three are: polytheism, the belief in many deities who each rule over a sphere or section of the working world; monotheism, the belief that a single god created all of Navis and the universe around it; and pantheism: the belief that everything we see, everything we are, and everything we experience is all a part of some god who is also in all things.

In the past, polytheism was most common in the form of Darcidian mythologye and the Fey mythologye, two competing sets of Pantheon gods with different names, powers, and spheres of the world that they controlled. Darcidian mythologye used the Pantheon to explain the functionings of the world around them (why rivers flowed, why trees grew, where lightning came from) as a pseudo-science that existed before the dawn of real learn-ed men. Fey mythologye existed as a parallel to the Darcidian to explain the existence of magicks, the spirit of mankind, and the concept of the soul, but it is believed that they Fey had no gods for worldly functionings, as their knowledge was great enough to be beyond it.

The Fey Pantheon was ultimately largely forgotten following the destruction of the Fey Empire and the casting of its capital into the sea. Even to this day, despite everything we know about the world and everything we've tried to do to stamp it out, many institutions still use and teach the Darcidian mythos, stifling the good work we've done for science and attributing the wonders of magicks and alchemyes to gods which do not exist. So great is my despisal for the Darcidian Pantheon that I have done well to keep it from my head and so can only tell the reader about the great lot of nonsense it is that there exists a god for water, a god for fire, and a god who can only control the growing of wheat and barley. Were it not a fading relic of a world we leave behind, I might indulge the reader more, but

alas, there is nothing of value in it.

By contrast, Kourmarian mysticism is a form of monotheism about which I learned much while I was in the court of Orcus, the king before young Othric. According to him, God was a man who was also a dragon called Jormanhund, the Great One. Jormanhund was the father of all spirits that inhabit every living thing. Everything has a spirit according to the people of Kourmar: rocks, trees, every kind of animal, bodies of water, and even the air. There are no other gods to lord over these things, but each is both commanded and protected by a father spirit who is king over that portion of the world. I laughed at this, telling Orcus that it sounded similar to the Darcidian mythos. He laughed in turn, saying that he knew this, but kept the tradition for the sake of his country.

Cultic Falsehoods

To further differentiate, there is a group today that is becoming more cultic with the passage of time, a people from the western portion of Tortha who call themselves the "One Mind". Their claim is that they are all god and god works through them and that Man is therefore perfect and that all creatures are perfect. The flaw in their logic is that mankind so often works against himself that no thinking deity could possibly be doing everything against itself that Man does. Another sect of the One Mind also believes that the Age of Man is coming to an end and that all things shall collapse. They partake in the sacrifice of animals and people, even the children of enemies, for the power to usher in some sort of new dawn, and so the many governments of Illyria have a small alliance to combat this growing threat as it spreads through the land.

The Purifiers

The Purifiers are not so much a religion as a school of thought, but I know that they, in their vehemence, would wish to be considered a religion of their own. They began as a lower sect of the Church of the Saker, but grew to prominence in the last war as many Illyrians desired to see the end of the fey race. The Purifiers claim that mankind has an inherent right to the lands of Illyria and that humans are most fit to use and grow the land. When confronted with evidence of Fey technology and architecture, they are quick to claim that those are relics of Man from before the Fey first attacked us, and they pay well to have any scholars who disagree silenced.

The power of the Purifiers reached a peak in the Golden Age of conquest near the end of King

Rendall's reign, but his death cast doubt on their beliefs and Kourmar's sudden free acceptance of all non-humans put a hole in the ability of the Purifiers to wipe the Fey out. Since then, money for the group has begun to dry up and the most fervent followers now see themselves taking less-controversial roles in the Church of the Saker, becoming many of the clergy who have no official stance on the non-humans of sovereign Kourmar. The official head of the Purifiers is Donald Greyvon of House Greyvon, the newly-crowned king of Tortha. He takes no real charge in the dealings of the Purifiers, but much of their funding comes from his coffers and he officially approves their activities throughout the land.

Lately, much of their dealings have been near the south corner of Tortha, where it meets Feylanor and Kourmar by the mouth of the Lannis River. With no more people joining their ranks, much of their propaganda has been torn down and the theatres have all stopped playing their production, "The Birth of Man". From my understanding, though it is all unofficial, the Purifiers are reduced to only the core sect, a group that studies different magicks in the wilderness to combat the protections cast upon the non-humans of Kourmar by druidic sages. If this is true, then in only twenty years, the Purifiers have fallen from rivalling the Saker herself to being a group of assassins bent on murder. By this account, I can only hope that they fail in their mission.

The Church of the Saker

Because of the pervasiveness of the Church of the Saker in all aspects of life, discussing its impact on the world would be pointless. Instead, I defer to its primary functions, beliefs, and processes, and perhaps the little that is known of its history.

The church is responsible for caring for the poor, providing healing to the young and elderly, and for spreading the word of the Saker. There are many other functions performed by the church, but there is a cost. Healing and similar services are offered to working-aged adults at a cost, along with birth rites, funerary rites, and consecrations. A priest is normally available for confession, and baptism in holy water is always free. The church also has a multitude of smaller abbeys called "sanctuary houses", but they are not welcome to those wanted by the law. Along with these standard services, members of the clergy enjoy food, lodging, and, in some cases, the safety of armed guards.

The church was founded by the followers of Etyeric the Pure-Blooded, a human man who stepped out onto Lake Promarc as five-thousand people watched. He claimed that he was a conduit for the One True God and that he would lead the people of Feylanor into a new age where they ruled over all of their land without the burden of the Fey to stop them. The people were quick to gather to his cause and dubbed him the first Saker, "the one who exists for the sake of all Man". Etyil City was founded on the shore of the lake in his honour, with the temple built on the place where he set foot as he reached land. Since then, every time the Saker dies of old age, it is said that their spirit passes into a new conduit, and it becomes the church's priority to find the new Saker, normally a small child, wherever and whomever they may be.

I have some limited knowledge about the processes that the church performs and the many rituals that entail being a member, however, I feel that I have only scratched the surface. There are five daily prayers that happen at exactly the same time and must be completed in the same ritualistic fashion. There is also a fast every Thursday where none in the church are permitted to eat anything but certain foods, though many simply ignore the rule or eat in secret. Other such rules exist: laws against certain actions, forms of dress, customs, words that can be used, but for as many constraints that the church creates, its followers create ten different ways to be free of them.

As for the current Saker and all others, she is chosen as the conduit of God sent to lead us into glory and a golden age of paradise during both life and the afterlife. It is said that the Saker can heal people with a word or a touch, and some have been brought from the cusp of death by merely brushing against her robes. In all of my time seeing her, the woman has said little, instead hiding behind a wall of woven, golden hair and a hood over it, her eyes peering from beneath like pearls in the darkness. Many people, even some of the highest echelons at the college, believe that her gifts come from God and are proof of her divinity, but I and a few of my colleagues studied her intensely. From what I have seen, and I shall likely be excommunicated for it, it is more likely that the Saker is privy to some much higher form of magick than the rest of us, rather than simply having the gifts of any god's light.

Abatement

In light of the growth and mission for the Church of the Saker, most Illyrians, and Hysperia in particular, have begun to perform certain practices against other religions in an attempt to dissuade their use or abolish them outright. The church is the official church for Hysperia, and so is the same for

all of her territories. The church is not subject to taxation as the others are, and any man is free to preach the sanctified word from any pulpit at any time, though not all are required to listen. On Saturdays, all practicing members are required to attend service, as it is generally looked down upon to miss the service during the week. Many towns also require all townfolk living within a certain distance of the chapel to gather for the same Mass, but this is less common.

What is becoming more common is the accusation, imprisonment, and trying of witches and those accused of necromancy. These people are different from magi in that they supposedly summon diseases and misfortunes on the land, and many blame individuals for the resurgence of the undead in the last few years. The scientific community is quick to douse the flames on any such action since we know that disease only follows miasma and cannot be summoned up, but the church seems more than content to let any outsiders be killed. It is upon this notion that I come into conflict with the church, that they would do so much good, yet also work so hard to stifle progress. At times, it feels as though they would have us remain in this age of darkness for all time, but I'm beginning to digress upon opinion. Until I see the whole of the world for what it is, I can only assume the best in things and watch in quiet pond'rance.

An Adventurer Ist Thee

I know that "ist", the elden form of "is", should not be capitalized, but the title looks better that way to me, so any disapproving readers can keep quiet. That is all I shall say upon the subject.

The whole purpose of this encyclopoedia was a method to quell my boredom on this rock, but as I've scrawled fisherman's ink onto heavy parchment, I've become quite attached to my work and wish to turn it into something more useful than a list of everything that is and is not by my opinion. At

the turn of the last age, when Gareth ascended the throne and all of Illyria seemed to come into place before him, a new class seemed to be appearing on the face of the world, that of the "adventurer".

The adventurer is a strange class, as it doesn't fit anywhere on the caste ladder in particular. The majority of adventurers fall somewhere between layman and common soldier, but some, like the great hero Ulfberth Nine-Finger, can ascend to a level of respect reserved for the House of Lords, a level where even the Iron Lady, Tonnil Atannis, calls a person to courtship.

What an adventurer does can vary, depending on the bravery, skill, and perhaps fool-hardy nature of the person. Many of them manage small problems that the local guard has neither the time nor resources to take care of. Others are man or monster hunters of a different vein from mercenaries, and even more are hired by different institutions to retrieve all sorts of items and ingredients for them from a variety of places. The greatest among them are sent for by kings to bring down armies, or to handle situations that would be too difficult or unresourceful to have larger forces manage. These people often travel in groups or parties, and some of these "parties" can become legendary.

Provisions

To wield a pun, provisions are quite literally the "bread and butter" for the adventurer, the necessities required to avoid misery and often times survive outright. Provisions consist of food, animal skins filled with water, the implements for shelter, usually some furs against the cold, and wineskins for the bitter nights. All provisions can be purchased with the Hysperian penny, or "pence", often found in the form of gold or silver. Some of the lazier residents of the kingdom will just call it "gold" outright, but the currency is standardized across the continent, even in Kourmar, where it is often counterfeited. Provisions can be purchased at a provisioner, at most stall merchants, and a number of general stores that cover a town, but the best prices will be found at the local member of the Merchants' Guild.

Food purchased for travel often consists of dried or pickled fruits and vegetables, smoked, salted, or roasted meats and sausage, hard cheeses, jams, hard breads, hardtack, and "hot coffee", which

is a drink made from boiling chestnuts and walnuts in a manner similar to tea. One will always wish to have the most food for winter when provisions become scarce and more food is required to warm the body, but during the other seasons, a myriad of wild animals shall emerge and one can glean from nature's bounty to feast upon them and the many edible plants that are available.

Water is another important stock for the adventurer, who often goes to places where ale is not available for some time. Most of the world's water is poisonous and filled with miasma, but each town generally has one or two wells that are continually blessed by the church, making them largely disease-free. Water is carried in canteens, usually animal stomachs swathed in leather, and it is recommended that one only restocks their supply in-town, though outside sources can be taken in a desperate situation. When travelling through the desert, drinking twice one's normal consumption is recommended, as the heat can dehydrate a person and inflict misery very quickly if one is not careful.

To quell misery, this author suggests the regular consumption of wine. There are many types, but even the cheapest will do (I recommend Nycenian merlot). It is not recommended to imbibe when riding or travelling, as drunkenness can lead one to stray from the trail or be caught off-guard in times of trouble, but consumption during the evening is fine as it will warm both the body and spirit and bring ease to sleeping. Of course, wine is not required to recuperate when one takes to his tent, but regular consumption can make an otherwise arduous journey more bearable, so its use is good for raising morale, especially after a tiresome day. In emergencies, wine can also be used as a partial or a base for some alchemies, but its many impurities can make potions less effective or altogether inert, so its use comes with a cautionary advisement.

Furs serve multiple purposes in Illyria. Primarily, they can keep the body warm during the chilling winter months to avoid the illnesses borne into the air by winter's breath. Secondly, their use in so many clothings, armours, and crafts makes them an ideal item for trading if one is able to obtain them on the road. The most common form of fur is found on the back of a deer or a creature like it, but they may also be gleaned from yetis, the noble sasquatch, and the hands of many human foes that one may encounter on the more dangerous paths. Boar leather used to be a recommended item, but the stink is irremovable, the leather is difficult to tan, and the fur is too coarse and matted to be very good for warmth, so I suggest using a boar's pelt to repair tent damages, warped saddles or whatever else, but not for the wearing on your own back. Be warned, also, that the bitter cold, nipping winds, and harsh sleets are very hard on fur, and it will become damaged over time to a point where its usefulness is

spent and it must be discarded. Always have spare furs on-hand in winter in case of this occurrence.

Weapons and Armours

Regardless of whether an adventurer is passive or not, I cannot stress enough the requirement of carrying weapons and armour of some type, regardless of skill. As for myself, I have always been a thinner man of ill constitution, so I carried studded leather, a small shield, and a knife, which did me well on four occasions. As I shall explain below, different weapons and armours have different sorts of ratings, usually outlined on a chart or a board at any reputable smith. If none exists, the skilled artisan could answer any necessary questions about an item, so be sure to inquire fully.

There exist many sorts of armours categorized into three major groups and many subgroups according to design and materials used. At the highest level, they are divided into cloth armours, leather armours, and those made of metal. Any of these pieces can be interchangeable and many can be made from multiple materials, but metal armours shall always be the heaviest, most protective, and most expensive. Usually, heavier armours will provide more protection than lighter ones, but I shall later explain the circumstances of "quality", which can be even more determinant.

Illyria is home to many sorts of weapons with all types of uses. Their uses can vary from the need to cleave flesh or armour in a slashing manner to the thrusting of a pointed edge. There are also blunt instruments which are useful for bending metal helmets and cracking shields, and ranged weapons can see usefulness in even close quarters when a quick flit of death is needed. There are small arms, one-handed weapons that come in a variety of shapes: daggers, sword, axes, maces, flails, and the less-common spined shields that one can beat an opponent with. The effective wielding of a shield requires the use of a one-handed weapon, as only a fool would try to use a shield with half a hand. Larger, heavier weapons include: swords, axes, maces, flails, staves, polearms, and bows of all types, and these are usually reserved for people who use heavy armour, as the lack of a shield can leave one very vulnerable otherwise.

When selecting equipment, it is not only shape and size that one must consider. Quality is an important aspect of a person's gear that determines its effectiveness in battle even more than standard strength. As an example, a dagger of exquisite quality (as produced in the Imperial Armory of Etyil City) can potentially do more damage than a claymore of lesser quality. It may not seem like this would be so, but one must remember that the sharpest blades and the toughest armours come at great

cost, but their effectiveness cannot be matched. When selecting what equipment to wear, it is important to remember one's strengths and weaknesses, the "attributes" which determine one's fitness for certain areas in battle.

Morale and Karma

As noted by the greatest of tactical and political minds in our modern age, morale is an important part of maintaining any discipline and fighting spirit in an armed force of any size. For this reason, the Hysperian Army is the best-fed of any, and Gareth is the only king to supply sweet meats and fruits to his men, not only to fill their bellies, but also to keep them happy enough to fight on his side. I find it strange to mention happiness in a world at war with itself, but from what I have seen, our soldiers fought not only for the cause of uniting Illyria, but also because being a soldier garnered much respect, many women, and a fairly good standard of living.

In one's travels, one must ensure that the party's morale is maintained to as high a degree as possible. If it is too low, one risks having members fight with less vigour, stand against the direction of the group, or abandon the party outright. Having high morale ensures the smoothest journey with the best outcome. Maintaining and raising morale can be as complicated as doing a mighty deed or visiting an expensive brothel, or it may be as simple as grabbing a drink or resting by the campfire. To keep morale high, make sure not to let any allies collapse from exhaustion either on the trail or the heat of battle. Be careful not to start arguments and to pick your fights carefully, as one may say many things that are not necessarily meant when one's blood is boiling.

In the same vein of watching one's actions, karma is a vital force of the world that can raise nations and armies as quickly as it can dissolve them. No one is quite sure how the force of karma works, but it would seem that the gods or God has in mind to watch over their children and bring aid to those who do either good or evil. The world is a small one with fewer people since the Plague and wars, so the actions one takes can determine how even strangers may treat you, if they have heard of your exploits. On one end, good karma will make most people like you, including the clergy, and you may find yourself privy to many benefits of being "good"; the cost is that the darker forces of the world will seek you out and hunt you down, and many evils may come against you.

Bad karma is often associated with evil, but this is not always the case. In some instances,

taking the most efficient method through a situation can be looked down upon if it harms another. With enough of an "evil" aura, many people will fear or avoid you, but the dark creatures of the world may also fear you or even ally themselves with you in rare instances. In the past, some of the most powerful people in the world (including Ragnar the Black) were considered to be iron-fisted folk who did whatever it took to succeed. If necessity so dictates, it may behoove a person to do what must be done, whether it is "good" or not.

Attributes

When one experiences enough of what the world has to offer, one becomes adjusted to the workings of the world. This applies to all aspects of life, from regular living to the great undertakings that one might partake of on incredible journeys across Illyria. No matter what one might do, the experiences shall allow a man to be shaped and to grow into something new, something greater, and the impact is lasting. This is where attributes come into play- aspects in which one might grow, which are divided into three categories based on the effects of the person.

Strength is attributed to the body and affect a man's power and constitution. Greater strength comes from physickal training and allows a person to carry things of a heavier weight and to deal with more external pressures. With greater strength, one is able to handle the many forces of the world that one might comes against, which translates to one being able to take more attacks and of a higher "order" (such as getting struck by a troll). Ulfberth Nine-Finger is a perfect example of a person who has exercised their strength to a great degree. It is said that the man, to impress Tonnil Atannis, faced three trolls by himself. He caught the club of one in a single hand, then threw the creature over himself before felling the second and third in two great blows. By building his strength, he was able to withstand their attacks and deal fatal attacks in single strikes, along with wearing his heavy plate as if it was cloth.

Agility is another common aspect of human force and is attributed to the building of spirit, the ability of the body to endure continuous exercise of motion. By increasing agility through vigorous calisthenics (quickness exercises) and practicing precise and rapid striking techniques, one may train to body to act and react faster than one's opponents. The hero of the last age, Gadriel Greymoore the Shadow, who yet lives, was once able to move and strike so quickly that his opponents were dead before they ever saw him move. He would attack in the night, hence his name, and flee before sunrise, leaving entire fortresses empty. It is said that he once fought a dozen men, felling each of them without

taking a single blow, himself. By increasing his agility to such a high level, his movements were vastly superior to his opponents and he was able to dodge even the most furious of attacks, walking away without effort.

The final unique attribute of man is one that is often associated with the feyfolk- intellect, the strengthening of the mind. Higher intellect is thought to be inborne, but can be expounded upon the a great degree. Many people are brought into this world with a natural amount of intellect (those chosen by the imperial court to be magi), but anyone can develop their mind through reading, research, and the study of the world around them. Intellect is associated with the ability to learn many things at once and to a great degree, and even the strongest of physickal warriors are often blessed with levels of intelligence that allow them to perfect their arts. My own intellect made me ideal for the use of alchemyes which saved many lives as I traversed the land, and the hero Edamus Locke (from an age long past) was said to be so great an alchemyst, healer, and mage that he could cure diseases in the middle of battle and summon up spell with a mere thought. It was he who, with a wave of his hand, wiped out an entire legion of enemy soldiers in the Battle of the High Rock.

In summary, each attribute is useful for something: strength for power and constitution, agility for speed and dodging, and intellect for spells and the ability to learn more. Though it may be tempting to focus on one as so many heroes did before, it is recommended that one become a master of all three like the ancient hero, Freja the Red. According to legend, Freja stood at the right foot of Ragnar the Black, himself. It was she who cut down many thousands of enemies of the empire before vanishing from the face of the world. Her methods are lost to us now, but it is known by all who studied her that her mastery of the three major attributes made her the most powerful warrior of her time. By her example, it is recommended that one either master all three attributes, or have a selection of party members who have mastered each, lest the party be unbalanced.

Skills of Sorts

During one's travels, a variety of situations may come into play that test the will of a man and his ability to adapt and overcome. There may arise a time where, in one way or another, the knowledge of a particular skill may behoove a person to be privy to, and it is often that entire confrontations may be avoided with the proper word, action, or thought. It is for these circumstances that the concept of "skill-building" was borne, and entire institutions (the Mages' Guild and Fighters' Guild, for example) are founded upon. The need to improve upon the major schools of thought: stealth, persuasion,

discernment, hunting, scouting, engineering, and alchemye, has become a driving force in the world and an economy of its own accord. By themselves, each skill is incredibly useful and many guilds exist to pass on the mastery of even individual skills, but it is the mastery of all that the greatest of adventurers shall strive for, though few will ever achieve such greatness for all the study and monetary requirement.

Starting from the beginning of the list, stealth is a skill that is self-explanatory. It is one's ability to remain hidden, to use one's own body and the environment in such a way as to be like a shadow, completely in the presence of one's foes without their knowledge. Through the mastery of the elements of stealth, one might go into places unknown or non-permitted, get the drop on enemies that would otherwise be a challenge, or avoid confrontations entirely. What the master of stealth does with their incredible powers is entirely up to them, but it must be known that there are those who, even against the most quiet of rogues, can seek out their target no matter what. Regardless of these exceptions, stealth is a skill held close by any respectable thief and the most skilled of hunters and assassins.

On our next item, and in the same vein of thievery, is the skill of persuasion. Persuasion is the ability to convince a person, whether by truth or deception, that acting according to one's own will will benefit a person more than any other course of action. People who are skilled in persuasion can do anything from obtaining free drinks to unraveling kingdoms and everything in-between. Let it be known that the tongue is a powerful instrument, mightier than the sword, and one must be cautious when speaking as one might undo oneself. The person who has mastery over this skill, though, may see doors open that would otherwise be closed. And the one gifted with the silver tongue will gather many allies to their self, whether honestly or dishonestly, to shape the course of the world in their favour.

Discernment is next on our list, and is an important one, to be sure. Discernment is the ability to see the world for what it is, to look through the disguises, deceptions, and falsehoods all around, and to unravel the lies of the world to see it for itself. It is the ability to perceive that which is not obvious to most and to peer into the true hearts of men. With great discernment comes great power over others, and it may be obvious when a man seeks to shield himself from you. Even more so, there are many in Illyria who would try to do one harm, and great expertise in this skill will allow someone to quickly identify and deal with those situations when they arise. People who are excellent at discerning often become diviners, able to predict future events through current actions, and are difficult to lie to, as they

can see into the darkest corners of someone's mind.

Hunting is a very practical skill and one that serves many people greatly every day. The most basic of hunters can easily plant an arrow in the arse of a deer and bring down a boar in under three shots. The greatest of hunters can pierce a bird's eye in mid-air, and can graze an animal's hide without drawing a drop of blood. While it is a useful skill for obtaining free food and fur, its true efficacy is seen in the heat of battle, where an exceptional hunter might fell a foe before he is ever within striking distance. It is also most impressive to see, as I have seen, for a single Fey woman to bring down a wyvern with a single shot. The arrow or spell flies, it strikes true, and the enemy is down, for the weakness has been identified. With sufficient training in hunting, one may cross a hundred foes without the need to ever draw a sword, for they shall be dead before one ever sees the look upon their face when they die.

The skill of scouting is a powerful technique that is oft underestimated or confused for discernment, though the two are truly different. While discernment allows one to see the weaknesses in an enemy or identify certain traits upon sight, scouting grants the ability to peer into the lay of the land, the build of a city, or the composition of a greater force. To be true, scouting is discernment of a higher order, and a knowledge of scouting can grant one the vision of how an enemy would scout, giving them an advantage on the field. By knowing what the enemy will look for, one can change the composition of an army, the location of certain elements, or even make an entire division invisible. On the small scale, one might track even the most elusive of foes with ease. The master of scouting shall never get lost, shall never be followed, and will never lose the scent of a target. The skill is hand-in-hand with the greatest of hunter-trackers.

It was on the field of battle, a battle I took no part in, that I saw it, a man who defeated an army single-handedly. He was a regular militiaman of no particular skill or import, but his quick mind and ingenuity were such that many lost their lives by simple means. With one moment, he brought a catapult back to life. With another, he cast a hundred enemies into a ditch of burning tar. And with a single strike of his sword, he brought the forewall of Vetalan Fortress down, ending the bloody war with Tortha. The man was Leward Scott. Back then, he was no great warrior, but the Battle of Vetalan had such an end that he became the darling hero of the new empire and an entire school dedicated to his craft was built in his name.

Engineering, until the last age, was seen as a skill of little import. It had been used only to build new weapons and armaments, but its sudden spread has seen the sharp rise in great buildings that now dot the landscape, all sorts of new castles, works of art that reach to the heavens, and a great growth of Man's footprint on Illyria. Engineering is the ability to see the potential in things to either be repaired or created from scratch, and its use can mean the difference between victory and total destruction. It is a mind of engineering and superior technology that has won Illyria for the empire, and it is through the science that Arrikur Seloria has built his fortune. Technologies seem to be the way of the future and Hysperia is at the forefront of them all. That is why we are Hysperia, Hyspus, "the spear", that shall pierce into the heart of the world and conquer all.

Alchemye is something that I have long discussed, as it is a science with which I am most familiar. Everyone knows that alchemye is how money moves in the world, as every nation is looking for the new potion or spell that shall turn the tide of battle, or for the new elixir that shall prolong life, or for the new drink that shall obtain a level of inebriation yet unseen. For practical use, alchemye is used for crafting curatives, temporary healings, disinfectants, and salves. It can also be used to identify plants and objects that are safe for contact and consumption, and can mean the difference between a full belly and foaming at the mouth. In my own travels, many lives were saved by even my mediocre skill, so I can imagine that a vast knowledge of alchemye might change many lives. As for use in battle, I cannot begin to think on the poisons and solutions that exist and the methods that they might be used in. Surely, they are incalculable.

Useful Things to Remember

One might think that I, a desk worker, might have little knowledge on the subject, but my experience in the world is vast and varied because of all the study I did when collecting data as a prefect. I look back upon those years wishing I had written more, as my mind is less accurate than record, but I am glad at what I yet retain, and seek very much to pass it on to any who are willing to listen.

When preparing to travel, ensure that one has enough supplies to make it to the next place. Having several days worth of provisions and money is always a wise decision. Be sure, however, not to have too much on-hand, as one might become a target to bandits, mercenaries, or, worst of all, the trow. If one finds their self in great excess of provision or find, I recommend investing in skills and the learning of attributes at a guild, or in gathering better equipment, as these are permanent benefits that

cannot be taken away. Besides being able to avoid much of the conflict that the world has to pour out, great skill in many areas will allow one to be privy to the many hidden fruits of the world, and one may even glean of the secrets that have been long-buried just beneath its surface.

If one can afford it reasonably, always purchase the best weapons and armours, bearing in mind that one must have the strength to bear them effectively. In addition to what implements of war are carried, one must make room for provisions and the like. A horse or other pack animal can help with this, and one can purchase saddles of greater quality to make the travel easier on one's body. With the proper horse and saddle, one can travel at a much higher speed than on foot without inflicting any misery, saving both time and the money spent on provisions, though one must still be careful to not push one's companions too hard.

When it is available, I recommend increasing one's knowledge in hunting, engineering, and alchemy, as it is easy to obtain extra food and get through certain parts of the world with these skills. Hunting will allow one to glean of the beasts of the wild, while alchemy will help identify the good and edible fruits of the world. Engineering will allow one to traverse the difficult places in new and creative ways, and may even unlock features that may have been hidden otherwise. Let it be known, however, that these are not enough by themselves, and many battles will not be affected by one's knowledge in these subjects. For combat, I advise mastering stealth, hunting, and scouting. Persuasion, while its use may be limited at times, can mean the difference between getting something for free and having to butcher an army for it.

Whenever possible, though it may be expensive, I beg of you to study at a local guild or college in the ways of the world, as battle shall, on the whole, become easier when you achieve a mastery greater than your enemies. With low skill in various combat styles, one might struggle through battles, barely dodging and blocking, and flicking one's blade whenever the situation arises. With great mastery, a man might fell a dozen enemies one after another or set fire to an entire line of foes with a simple wave of the hand. Training in combat styles is expensive, but it is so for a reason. Make good use.

When healing, remember that warhealing is as temporary as other war magicks. Just as an enemy cannot be permanently set ablaze, the tending of one's wounds in battle shall unravel only moments later. If one is severely injured, be sure to rest and recuperate, though it may cost provisions

for the days spent. Also remember that healing at a church is expensive, but many wounds (except for diseases) can be tended to by resting in a tent or a tavern. Parties with the best healers can even walk away from the most severe of bodily injuries after only a few days of magickal attention, so bear in mind the usefulness of rest.

For party structure, and I am only an amateur, I recommend having two flanks of forces. The standard party size for adventurers is between four and ten people, so dividing the number of ranged and melee attackers in twain seems to afford the best results. There should be one or two people skilled in healing for the worst battles, and if every member cannot be armoured well, it is important to ensure that those in closest combat have some defence. For the most part, I was brushed to the side to avoid being injured or killed, but on the rare occasion, I was commanded to the second row. From there, I provided support with my many alchemyes and natural magicks, keeping hidden behind a shield and my light armour as my heavier allies took the strikes upon themselves and I kept them alive. This strategy carried me to the end of my journey, and so I cannot see flaw in it, but one is master of their own destiny, so build as you see fit.

In Summary

As you have read by now, Illyria is a world of mystery and magick, bright and beautiful, dark and fearsome, a place where both glory and ruin can be found and met upon the field and where one might find their end or their fortune if they are so dedicated. If I have any advice for those daring to venture from the normal life and make their way into the world, it would be to always be prepared. For everything. Assume that nothing shall work properly and prepare for all contingencies. Life is not to be taken lightly, as you only live it once. There is no going back and doing it again in some new way, and there is no way to correct an action once it has been made.

If there is ever a way to die, to come back, and to try one's hand again, I shall be damned and let

this Compendium, my Magnum Opus, be cast into the seas. Until that day, let it serve as both book of knowledge and handy guide to any and all who require its help. I pray that this eventually finds its way into print and then into hands that can use it more thoroughly. I sit upon this rock 'til that day comes and wait patiently.

Here's to the future.

Cheers.

-Gaius Gnaius Iustus