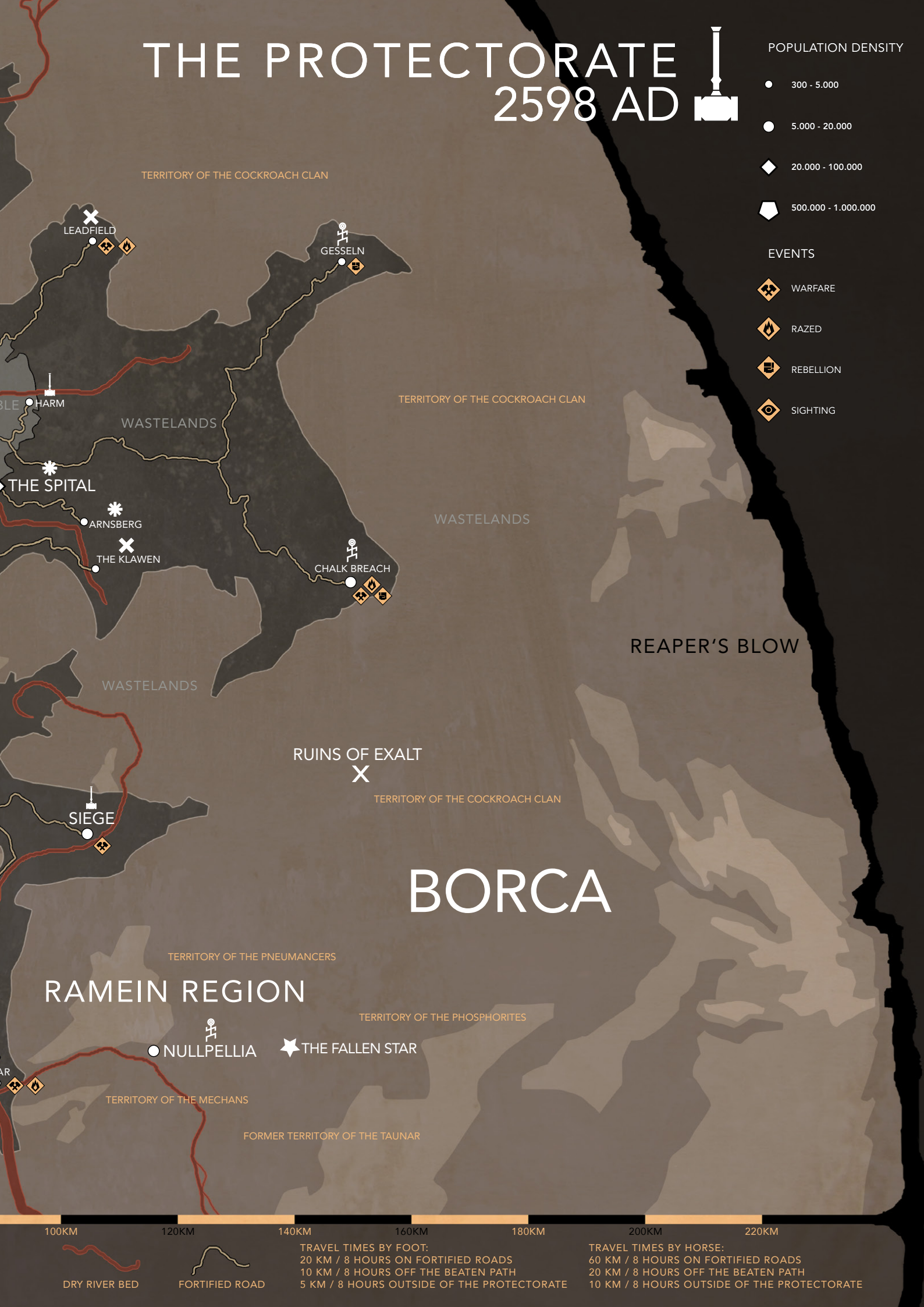
DEGENESIS

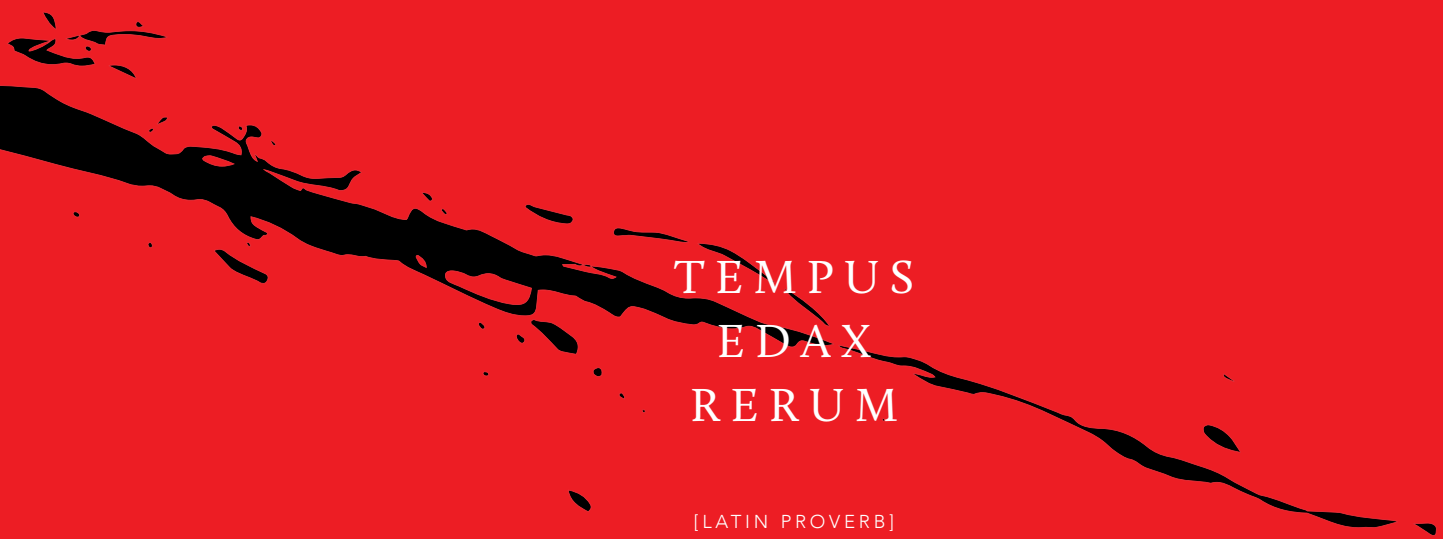
THE RIGHTEOUS FIST

STUKOV DESERT
TERRITORY OF THE STUKOV NOMADS
TERRITORY OF THE STUKOV NOMADS
GARGANTI
FRANKAN BORDER
SINDER
THE BLACK LUNG
CORPSE EATERS
DOG'S END
CAVERNIS
LIQUA
NEWCREST
THE RUBE
THE FURROWS
JUSTITIAN
FRANKAN BORDER
RAIN
CORPSE EATERS
MOBILIS
WUPPER CRATER
FERROPOL
FRANKA
THE FESTERING
GRAZELANDS
A 235
ENEMOI
BORN
PICTONS
IGNATZ
CATHEDRAL CITY
RAIN
SEVERINUS
AMSUMO
SPICAFIELD
FRANKAN BORDER
ZONE OF ANABAPTIST INFLUENCE
LAST EXIT
NORET
EXPATRIATES
WETZLA
RAIN
FRONTIER OF THE ENEMOI
DRONES
FRANKAN BORDER
BASSHAM
DRONES
20KM
40KM
60KM
80KM


THE PROTECTORATE
2598 AD
POPULATION DENSITY
300 - 5.000
5.000 - 20.000
20.000 - 100.000
500.000 - 1.000.000
EVENTS
WARFARE
RAZED
REBELLION
SIGHTING
TERRITORY OF THE COCKROACH CLAN
LEADFIELD
GESSELN
HARM
WASTELANDS
TERRITORY OF THE COCKROACH CLAN
THE SPITAL
ARNSBERG
THE KLAWEN
CHALK BREACH
WASTELANDS
REAPER'S BLOW
WASTELANDS
RUINS OF EXALT
TERRITORY OF THE COCKROACH CLAN
SIEGE
BORCA
TERRITORY OF THE PNEUMANCERS
RAMEIN REGION
TERRITORY OF THE PHOSPHORITES
NULLPELLIA
THE FALLEN STAR
TERRITORY OF THE MECHANS
FORMER TERRITORY OF THE TAUNAR
100KM
120KM
140KM
160KM
180KM
200KM
220KM
DRY RIVER BED
FORTIFIED ROAD
TRAVEL TIMES BY FOOT:
20 KM / 8 HOURS ON FORTIFIED ROADS
10 KM / 8 HOURS OFF THE BEATEN PATH
5 KM / 8 HOURS OUTSIDE OF THE PROTECTORATE
TRAVEL TIMES BY HORSE:
60 KM / 8 HOURS ON FORTIFIED ROADS
20 KM / 8 HOURS OFF THE BEATEN PATH
10 KM / 8 HOURS OUTSIDE OF THE PROTECTORATE

DEGENESIS

THE RIGHTEOUS FIST



TEMPUS
EDAX
RERUM

[LATIN PROVERB]

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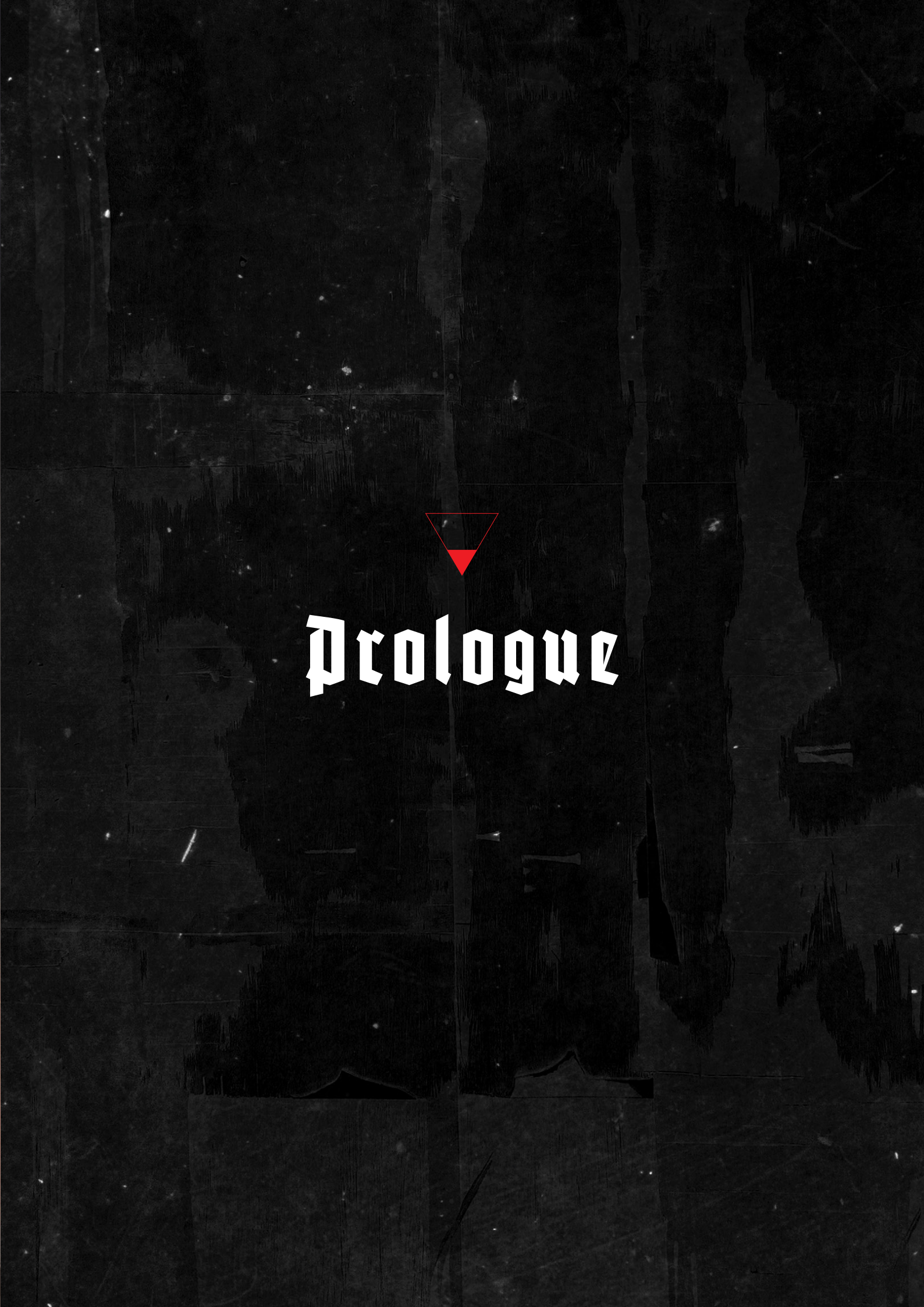


Prologue

COCKROACHES

The Cockroach King strode amongst the Broodmothers stroking his throbbing red cock. He growled like a rutted animal, presenting his erection to the females writhing in the dust of the breeding cave. The morbidly obese women cheered him with heated snarls, displaying their swollen snatches in return. With their greasy fingers, some collected milky white sap that was dripping from their holes, offering a taste of their nectar to the panting goliath.

The Cockroach King couldn't resist the smell and grabbed one of the Broodmothers by her hair, impaling her with his manhood. Waves of fat shook and thighs trembled as he pounded the Broodmother. The female groaned in ecstasy, kneading her saggy breasts so the King could drive his fangs into her soft skin. He clenched his jaws until blood trickled from the bite wound. His hips hammered relentlessly against the fertile frame of his aroused mating partner. It was a murderous display of carnality, the screaming growing louder and the act turning into violent havoc. Suddenly the King spasmed and jerked, howling like a beast released from a cage, pummeling his chest. He let go of the female and demanded food.

Uka felt warm piss running down her leg. The excitement was too much for her to bear as she watched the King standing there in all his majesty. One day she'd be fertile enough to be fucked by him. She looked over her shoulder and saw the Feeders arrive, carrying the corpse of a fallen Sphingid warrior. They dropped the rigid body before the King and hastily retreated.

Uka knew what she had to do and rushed toward the dead warrior to prepare his body for the feast. She clutched a sharp flintstone in her hand and cowered over the cadaver. With her fingers, she traced the features of the man. He was dead because he was weak - and the weak existed only to replenish the strong. The Cockroaches never left their departed behind, for they were nourishment for the Clan. The King stomped impatiently. Uka had to act quickly.

She placed the flint at the right temple and drew a precise cut along the jawline, all the way to the other side. Then she dug her fingers into the incision and tore the warrior's face from the skull. Swiftly, she offered the King the first share of the kill. The goliath seized the flappy piece of skin and placed it over his own face. The Broodmothers cackled, and continued to stroke his dick, teasing him to fuck them some more.

Uka didn't have any time to lose, she had to continue with the dismemberment of the corpse so the King could divide the feast amongst himself and the fervid females. She sliced off the corpse's genitals and placed them on a flat stone for later consumption. Then she carved a slice along the belly, all the way to the collar bone. With steady hands she pulled the layers of muscle and fat apart, revealing the ribcage and the soft tissue of the abdomen. She didn't have

to think twice to remember the next step. Uka buried both arms into the warrior's frigid guts and tore them from the stomach wall. With a bigger stone she went on to crack the ribs, pulling out the lungs and heart from the chest cavity. She circled the cadaver and kneeled next to the head, where she placed the small flint at the peak of the skull and hit it firmly with the larger rock. The cranium cracked and the brain lay open. Uka felt a jolt running down her spine as she saw the bloody viscera oozing out. She severed the organ and took it to her King as a prized offering.

The goliath eyed Uka with a satisfied smile and picked the brain from her hands, stuffing his cheeks and gorging on the meat. Suddenly he stopped chewing. Warriors entered the breeding cave in droves. Uka was agitated. They would never dare to interfere with the mating ceremony if it wasn't urgent. Was the tribe under attack?

Light fell through the opening of the cave and the warriors created a corridor for a tall figure striding behind them. The stranger bore an oversized crown made of jagged spikes and splinters. His body was covered in black resin and painted with brightly glowing runes. Uka could read his piercing emerald eyes from the other side of the cave. He was a Bale Lord, a Champion of the Phosphorites, and he held a severed head in his hand.

The Cockroach King examined the contending clansman with suspicion, anticipating what would come next. The Bale Lord nodded and hurled the chopped off head across the entire length of the cave where it landed before the Cockroach King's feet. The next instant he roared in the ancient language of the Beast: "Dhe Kreeogh he beghunne"

The eyes of the King widened. He looked at the Bale Lord with surprise. "Velkhe Kreeogh spreekhes Dhau?" he answered, slamming his chest in an exhibition of power.

"Dhe laaste, dhe Kreeogh vann Eehre!" the Bale Lord replied, full of scorn.

Uka lifted the severed head from the floor and held it in the direction of her King. The face was strangely clean, old and swollen, like that of a man who had had a lot of food in life. The King studied the head, smelled it, and tore a chunk from the cheek to taste it.

"Chammer Mannske!" he roared, gripped by fury. He smashed the head on the ground and crushed it with his feet.

"Dhe Wey is frih, dhe Grinzje he brokheen!" the Bale Lord spoke. "Vheer brokhee ajnanther fho dhe longste Nait uf Rhakhe!"

The King agreed. His gaze was full of hatred, and a thunderstorm brewed in his mouth. "BHUND IN BHLUT!" he rumbled, his final call reverberating from the walls of the breeding cave.

Uka understood. There would be war. And the Sphingids would rise to eat the world.

Crimson Flood

The year is 2598. The world has lost most of its recognizable features. The upheavals of recent years paint a chaotic picture. House Bergamo controls the Eden Route and the supremacy of Anabaptists in the Adriatic Basin is crumbling. The Southern Coast of Franka groans from the aftermath of the civil war of Toulon. Briton, once a stronghold of the Anabaptists, is cut off from the rest of the world. At the coastlines of the northwest, Leviathanics pushes ashore. Aquitaine, bastion of Chroniclers in Franka, is ruined. Ninety-thousand souls incinerated in the blink of an eye and yet no one knows the reason for the disaster, to this day. Refugees from all over Franka now push into the western foothills of the Protectorate, flooding Bassham, and are redirected from there towards Justitian.

The world is on the brink of destruction, and the Protectorate fares no better. For more than one hundred years, there was nothing in the way of the Judges' urge to expand. Year after year they conquered new territories, annexed towns and villages, spread their influence, and pacified the people. But the Protectorate has reached its critical mass. It breeds desires and covetous thoughts. The Clans are back and suddenly the glorious empire loses its fortifications. Wetzlar falls. Leadfield follows. Chalk Breach turns into a beleaguered cauldron. Gesseln revolts and breaks away from the city union. Siege holds out for survival in a mindless battle of attrition. The borders of the Protectorate are ablaze. Raids occur on formerly secured routes within the Black Lung. Reports of shock troops are now on everyone's lips. Justitian is surrounded, and the enemies are so manifold, the hatred of the Judges, Spitalians, and Chroniclers so deeply rooted, and the roar for revenge so loud that no one dares to downplay the events any longer. Borca burns.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Justitian is one of a kind. The largest metropolis of Europe, along with the surrounding Protectorate, is the main focus of this book.

Cults have written history in this city. It serves its rulers as headquarters, military camp, bulwark of civilization, and navel of the known world. Decisions are made here that unfold their impact across all Cultures. If one wants to grasp Justitian, they have to oppose the city and its patriarchs, face its intrigues, and stand their ground. Those who fail will be swallowed by its magnitude.

JUSTITIAN combines regional overview, full fledged city description, non-player character roster, and campaign material into two source books exploring and expanding the world of Degenesis in previously unseen and spacious detail.

BOOK 1: THE RIGHTEOUS FIST

◈ Chapter 1: THE BLACK LUNG is devoted to the landscape of northern Borca, revealing Clan territories and adjacent regions while providing an overview of the dangers lurking at the borders.

◈ Chapter 2: THE PROTECTORATE examines the entire history of the Black Lung followed by a journey through the satellite cities affiliated with mighty Justitian. Liqua, Bassham, Mobilis, Ferropol and many others are revealed in depth.

◈ Chapter 3: THE ETERNAL CITY finally closes in on Justitian featuring an overview of its vast footprint, from the Rubble inhabited by the Providers, to Downtown's overcrowded and diverse districts, all the way to Uptown where the Judges, Chroniclers, and Spitalians lord together over their domain.

◈ Chapter 4: DARK OMENS deals with the outlaws and criminal powers of the Protectorate, introducing new enemies lying in wait, ready to expand their area of influence.

Suit up and follow along. Dive into the chaos of the raging Clan Wars, defy the policies of Uptown or drown in a veritable hell of vice in Downtown, hunt for artifacts on the Forecourt or establish a base of your own in one of the Protectorate's many cities. It's up to you.

BONIFAZIUS

The Black Lung

GUSEV

Attica passed the corroded iron gate leading into the graveyard at the center of Noret. Gusev would only ever ask to meet her on these hallowed grounds if the situation was truly dire. For everyone else, this place was off limits. He cared for the graveyard more than anything else in the dying city. This was where he came to mourn the fallen. The Marauder had carved crosses for every deceased member of the Clan with his own cold, dead hands. It was his way of saying goodbye to his children – children he was cursed to outlive.

A layer of fog hovered a few inches above the ground as Attica stepped between the tombstones, across gnarled roots and brittle foliage, looking for a sign of him. With every step, she left powdery drifts in her wake, her fingertips tingling as she closed in on the grave of Anton Bonifazius – Gusev's preferred spot.

He stood there in silence, against the backdrop of a ruined vista caked in ashen soot and white dust, lost in thought. She was barely fifty feet away from him when suddenly a Reset drone burst from the fog, hanging in mid-air, scanning her iris with a laser beam. Attica twitched. She'd never gotten used to Gusev's security systems. The drone blinked a red light, confirming that she wasn't a trespasser, and propelled itself back into the night sky.

Attica exhaled. "You have to stop using them on us!" she clamored.

Gusev lifted his head as if in slow motion and turned his gaze toward her. Attica looked him in the eye. The same abyssal glare she'd known all her life. He remained quiet, waiting for her to speak.

"We're out of granulate." she said, fully aware that this was the worst possible outcome of the current crisis.

"It was just a matter of time. The cooling chambers?" Gusev asked, his voice reverberating like a choir as the sound travelled around Attica's ears, cascading into a spectral symphony. She hated it when he played his Bygone tricks on her. She raised her fist and ordered him to stop in the sign language he had taught her. He nodded, beckoning her to come closer. Attica stepped forward into his deepfrozen aura, feeling his radiance, hearing the clicking sounds of the strange mechanical contraptions and pipe systems running across his body, keeping him shackled to life. A gust of cold air engulfed her. "Temperature keeps rising. There's no way to stop the defrost." her voice cracked.

The Marauder leaned toward her, whispering softly between his rotten lips. "How much fuel is left in the vehicles?"

"Enough to make the journey as you proposed, but it's risky. If we have to detour in the Alps, the Convoy won't make it." She'd had this argument with him before, and she knew that he was aware of how uncomfortable the plan made her.

"You will make it. There is no other way, Attica. Danzig is your only option. You have to make sure you traverse the mountains intact. There has never been a chance like this, now that Karminov is gone."

Attica shook her head in disbelief. She didn't want any of this. Noret was her home. It was all that she had ever cared for. With her jaw clenched, she stood up to Gusev. "But how? As soon as we leave the secure perimeter, the Chroniclers will pick up our signature. They'll have the Hellvetics informed before we even get to Mulhouse. What are our odds of crossing the tunnels if the Cluster pays them off ahead of time?"

"The Chroniclers know nothing of our mission and they cannot warn anyone if they are blinded by their own

fears. You must divert their attention. How many of your people can you muster for a final gambit?"

"One crew at best. A single truck. We already just about dismantled the Orion in anticipation of… all this. It's an empty husk now. Everything that was salvageable was transplanted into the rest of the Convoy." Her voice trembled. She was certain that Gusev wouldn't change his mind, and that was what she feared the most. He was resolute. There were never ifs, only whens. She had to cope with his determination, and there was no backing out from this point forward. She wanted to scream in anger, but she couldn't allow herself to show weakness. That wasn't how he had raised her. She searched for answers in his cadaverous eyes…

"Well then. Use the Orion as your Trojan Horse. Do you remember the story I read to you when you were little?" he asked. Attica cracked. She did, and it tore her apart.

"But what if it doesn't work?" she hissed. She wanted Gusev to know her pain, wanted him to understand that she wasn't accepting of his course of action, no matter how much he attempted to convince her.

"Do you believe in synchronicity or coincidence? The Chroniclers are obsessed. Make it look like an attack that compromises their territory. They will respond, and do anything to encircle and trap the Orion. Some of your people will die, but it will buy the rest of you time to reach the eastern realm beyond the Reaper's Blow undetected."

"They're your people too!" she screamed back at him. Gusev turned away to avoid her look, but he ignored her protest. "If you have to shoot your way through the Alpine tunnels, do not hesitate."

Attica knew that he disapproved of her outburst. "What about you?" she asked, after a moment of silence.

"I must stay."

"You mustn't! They will come for you. Most of the Enforcer units are already down, and the Tankers can't produce any more refills. You have nothing to defend yourself with. How long before they figure out that you're alone out here?"

Gusev chuckled. Attica knew that he was dismissing her concerns as childish, but the departure of her people would leave him vulnerable and exposed.

"You can't deter them forever!"

Gusev whirled around, fast as lightning. His arm reached across the empty space between them. He had Attica by the throat before she even saw him move.

"I created Noret. I cannot leave. I cannot let them have it!" he roared. A silent rumble rose like a distant echo sweeping the landscape, the ground trembled, and dead leaves crumbled.

"You need treatment! Why can't she help you like she'll help us?" Attica choked under his iron grip.

"Trice's wound cannot be healed." he snarled.

"So this is the end? You're giving up on us?"

The Marauder pushed her away and she stumbled backwards, catching a gravestone to stop herself from falling. Gusev's eyes glowed in the dark, like restless sparks seeking a payload to ignite.

"You were never meant to be. You were never supposed to see the world the way it is. You know that this is my doing, and that there is no redemption for my sin."

"We don't care for your sins Gusev! You gave us life!" she howled.

Gusev didn't speak. He lifted his hands and answered in signs. "Leave in peace. Do as I say. Do not force me to cast you out."

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The world is changing. What was considered safe law yesterday is no longer worth the paper on which it was summarized. Throughout the past hundred years, the Protectorate was considered a symbol of human progress, a zone of peace and safety, and bulwark of reason. Justitian, its capital, was a successful experiment, forged by the joint efforts of three Cults which declared themselves the victors of the City Wars and wanted to lead mankind into a new age of prosperity.

From Judgement Hall, the Protectors rode out into all corners of the Black Lung. In their boundless craving for expansion their cavalry conquered every pocket of resistance, subdued neighboring cities, and occupied former Clan territories. Their model of settling geographical affairs with sheer force seemed unstoppable, and their alliance with the Chroniclers and Spitalians kept their backs free.

All went well until Chernobog woke from his slumber. Within weeks, the news of the fall of Praha spread through the unconquered regions of Borca like a pandemic. Everywhere, long forgotten Clans rose from the ashes and gathered in the hinterlands. Thousands first, then tens of thousands more. They marched north, howling with the wind, banging the drums of war, calling for their brothers and sisters in hiding to join them in their crusade. A gust of battle cries billowed through the air rolling across the land like a thunderstorm. The Clans were back to reclaim their heritage.

NORTHERN BORCA

We start our journey high up in the north, in a region that every child knows as the Black Lung. The people who have populated this tundra for generations are bred tough and raw. They have survived the turmoil of history, and endured its great catastrophes: the Eshaton, the Era of the Beast, Exalt's malice, and the savage bloodshed of the City Wars. They defied dust storms, harsh winds, and the relentless and brutal winters as well as the short, merciless summers. They are forever branded by the environment they inhabit. Their skin is furrowed and resembles the bark of an old tree, stretched like tanned leather across protruding cheekbones.

They are Borcans and their appearance gave these peoples a name, becoming their trademark, unifying label, and symbol of their grit, ultimately granting them an identity of their own. No matter what Clan they belonged to or which gods they worshipped, they all were part of the same descent, molded by the inhospitable nature of their wide and open motherland. Borcans of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

ICE BARRIER

This is the limit. A colossal ice shield inches forward, devouring a few meters more each year. Its glacier tongues are hundreds of meters tall and carve their way through the countryside, crushing everything that gets caught underneath. The entire north of Bygone Europe has already fallen victim to its endless hunger. Secrets and artifacts which have been buried forever by the Ice Barrier are the framework for the wildest and most hair-raising legends.

This is a hostile place. The wind burrows incessantly into the ears, gnaws at the bones, freezes the fingertips, and jolts the senses. On days when the sun glares from the sky, the endless white flashes so brightly that it creates black blotches on the retina. Without protective goggles one goes blind within a few hours. Nobody ventures here voluntarily. Only punitive workers condemned to hard labor by the Judges have to cut glacier ice in this frozen hell. Via Sinder, the northernmost town of the Protectorate, the ice is transported back to the cold stores in Justitian to conserve food or to provide refreshment during Borca's brief but vicious summers.

As if the prisoners along with their overseers didn't already have their hands full fighting off stray Stukov Nomads who add just another threat to the extraction of glacial ice, mammoths were suddenly sighted this year. The Garganti appear to have surmounted the Reaper's Blow and reached Borca by traversing the ice sheet from the far east of Pollen.

What do the mammoth riders want? To fraternize with the barbaric Clans from the south? Are they also targeting Justitian? Will the whole world rise up against the Protectorate until its last resistance is broken?

Sinder is preparing for a frontal onslaught by the Garganti. Ragnulf, the City Judge in charge of this remote settlement, has ordered the population to dig trenches around

the city filled with spikes and explosive niter barrels. All watchtowers are to be manned day and night. He's written an urgent letter asking for support from Judgement Hall, but his call for help has yet to yield any response. Archot seems to be focused on the southern border beyond Siege, where Cockroaches and Phosphorites are drawing their armies together.

THE CORRIDOR

Nobody can navigate the Ice Barrier. Common sense forbids the thought. But the corridor used by the mammoth nomads is unknown to the people of the Protectorate. The Marauder Gusev, however, knows it perfectly well, as he has repeatedly wandered across the vast ice sheet throughout the last decades.

Setting off in Noret his journey takes him to distant Danzig, where he has become known as the Icebreaker, each of his surprise visits listed and locked in the files of the field hospital. Time and again the mysterious stranger, clad in rags and bandages, crossed the eternal glaciers leaving electronic markers in his wake that serve as a path guiding back to the fringes of the Protectorate.

For a long time, this corridor remained a mystery, only available to this lonesome wanderer whose motivations are an enigma, even to the Spitalians in the far east. But now, the electronic markers have begun firing an impulse that interferes with a sound frequency that can only be perceived by mammoths. Something buried deep within their genetic code commands them to travel the ice sheet toward the Black Lung. The Garganti herding these animals are stunned, as the beasts don't respond to any of their riders' attempts at steering them back to Pollen. Instead they stomp forward like calves following the call of an invisible mother.

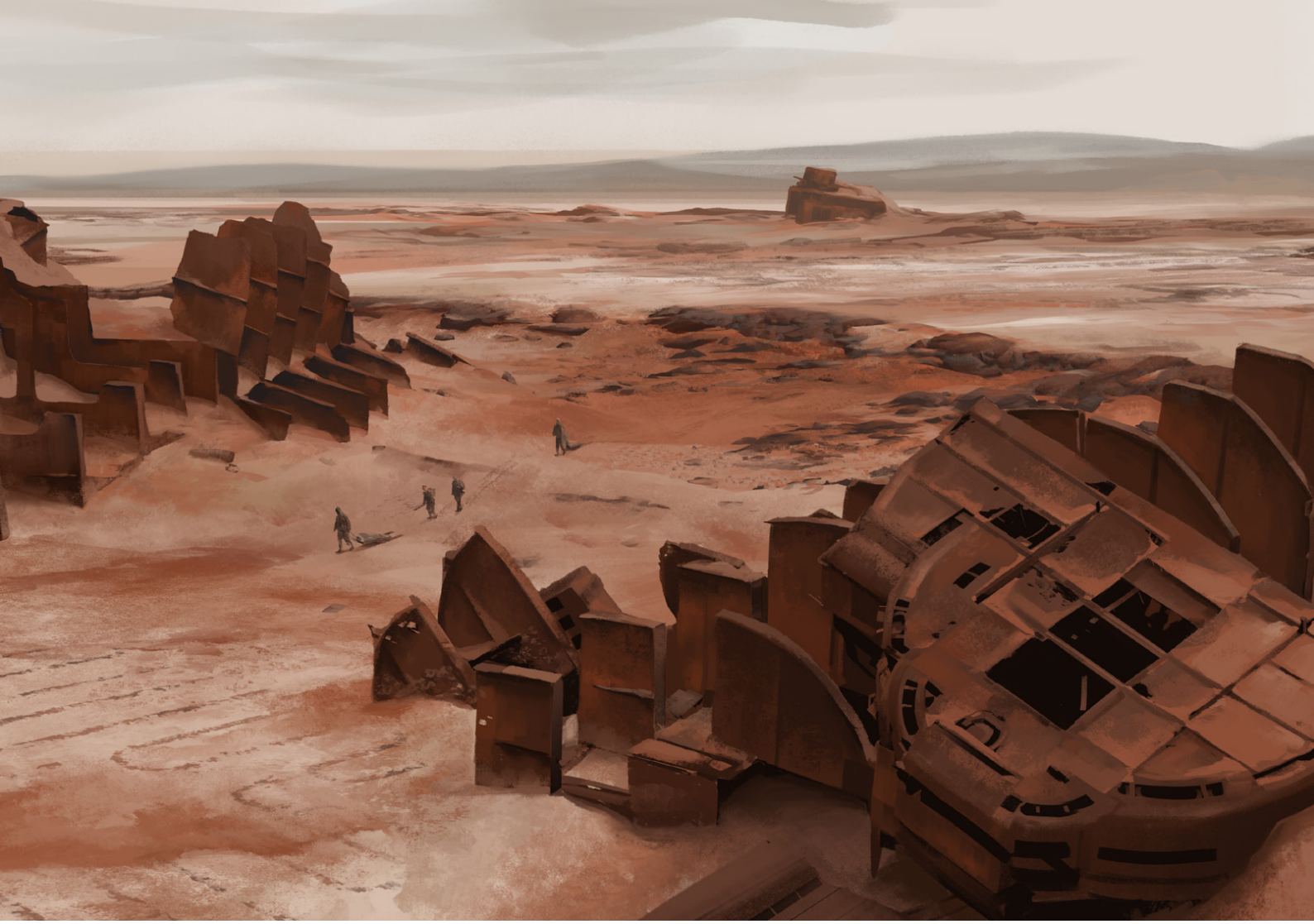
STUKOV DESERT

An infinite plain of salt flats stretches across the north of Borca, from the Janus Crater in the west to the roaring canyons of the Reaper's Blow in the east, separating the Black Lung from the chilling breeze of the Ice Barrier.

The Stukov Desert is a nightmare of its own. The air is so dry that breathing alone is a difficult undertaking. The ruthless wind sweeping the cold down from the foothills of the glaciers never ebbs, instead it billows dust particles into red clouds, blowing them through the air until the entire sky turns into a smear of rust reducing visibility to just a few meters. Keeping orientation in such a dust storm without a compass or other technological means is nigh impossible. Worse yet, the dust cakes everything, covering tracks, landmarks, ruins, extinguishing campfires, clogging filters, and jamming complex electronics. Any Chronicler's Source module exposed to such conditions would go haywire within seconds.

Legends told in every tavern in Tech-Central has it that entire cities lie sunken underneath the carpet of salt and dust. Occasionally, rooftops of submerged skyscrapers become visible, in other places the bows of gigantic freighters rise from the ground like ghosts of a long forgotten past. These sightings spread like wildfire among Scrappers, who suit up immediately to inspect the validity of a suspected cache. But getting deep into the territory is anything but an easy job for the dirt diggers. They have to face the reclusive natives of the area, and they don't like unannounced visitors. The Stukov Nomads appear out of nowhere, camouflaged in the crimson colors of the surrounding landscape; barely detectable to the eye. First they fire a warning arrow, the tip made from the stinger of a Stukov Scorpion and coated in fierce venom. If the Scrappers don't respond with retreat, the Nomads will be back a second time, turning the single shot into a hail of vengeful arrows or setting deadly traps for the Scrappers, hidden beneath the sand.

During summer, when the sun is strong enough, the Ice Barrier thaws and sheds water. Small streams meander across the salty flatlands before they are soaked up entirely by the ground. In some depressions, however,



the waters accumulate into tiny pools and ponds for a few weeks. If Scrappers make it to such an oasis trying to replenish their supplies, they have to do so with utmost care, as the Stukov Nomads poison these watering holes with Dust Worm larvae; a final parting gift for the unwanted visitors.

THE STUKOV NOMADS

Who was the First Wanderer that brought the Stukov Nomads to this barren land? Barely anyone truly cares. The Black Lung is filled with myths that have spiraled so far into the realm of the unimaginable that they're hardly digestible. If one follows the logic of the Chroniclers, the answer is rather simple. During the first years of the conquest of the Black Lung, the wounds were still fresh. Judges drove the native tribes before them with reckless abandon, trying to crush even the slightest defiance with a barrage of lead.

In this time one tribe supposedly fled into the desert to survive the purge. Were they led there by an enigmatic figure? Did they hide there on purpose? Do they carry faint knowledge that needs to be wrestled from them? Who knows.

What the Chroniclers do know is that the Stukov Nomads are a nuisance, and that they sit on top of formidable treasures buried beneath the salt. They pay extra for every reckless hunting party ready to march into the dunes and eliminate a few of these primitives, thus clearing the turf for proper excavations.

The Cluster has intel of at least three active RG caches which still hold Sleepers of unknown Cascades. These deep-frozen soldiers are a far bigger threat to Justitian's safety than the spear-wielding barbarians of this salty domain. The Chroniclers must destroy the Dispensers before they eject their Project Tannhäuser cargo, yet they're facing a double bind as they cannot make this knowledge public. If the Palers caught wind of these hidden bunkers, the whole operation would turn into a race against time of who gets there first.

Dust Storms

Rain is a rarity in the Black Lung, and so is snowfall. Years go by without a drop of water falling from the heavens. Where is all the water? Trapped within the ice shield up north of course, the Spitalians answer and shake their heads in disbelief. How dumb are these people?

That doesn't mean the skies are clear and sunny, though. The most common weather phenomena in the region are dust storms. A tiny dust devil picks up speed, accelerated by downdrafts racing across the plains. Miniscule dirt particles begin to swirl, drifting through the tumultuous air, rubbing one another and creating friction. The maelstrom attracts more and more dust, towering far above the landscape now in vivid colors of violent purple and raging scarlet. Sizzles of electrostatic energy can be felt miles away, hairs tingle, and eyes dry up. Suddenly, blue lightning cracks across the low cloud cover, fanning out into a network of smaller bolts that discharge toward the surface.

For a spectator far away this incandescent light show is nothing short of a miracle, as he stands there watching the horizon set ablaze by a myriad lightning strikes, waiting for the thunder to roll in. For anyone in the vicinity of a dust storm the safest bet is to leave the open field as fast as possible and hide in a basement or barn, waiting for the winds to disperse the galvanized haze.

In contrast, the Chroniclers and Scrappers don't run for cover. Instead they utilize the immense power built up in the storms to their advantage. Mobilis in the west and Justitian's Uptown in the east bristle with lightning rods designed to capture the unleashed energy and funnel it into capacitors where it can be stored for weeks at a time, while Tech-Central features its own crude contraptions for leeching the electrical charge from the air.

THE REAPER'S BLOW

This is not a question that needs to be pondered over or discussed. The Reaper's Blow is widely accepted as the most perilous location in all of Borca, and for good reason. Sudden earthquakes are followed by cascades of pyroclastic explosions. Clods of earth the size of cities heave, pressed skywards by bursting magma bubbles or collapsing into canyons of charred debris. Clumps of rock sail through the air like oversized cannonballs thundering aimlessly into the landscape. Dark clouds drenched in sulfurous gases and toxic vapor turn the day into an endless night, cloaking the horizon in every direction. These are just the heralds of this murderous warping of the Earth's crust.

The closer one gets, the more it stinks of hell. After less than two hours in this area, lungs rattle from all the ash and tar deposits accumulating in the bronchi. It is no wonder the Anabaptists consider the Reaper's Blow proof of the Demiurge's unholy work. The soil is rotten, burnt, and forever scarred by the cataclysmic erosion. Nothing will grow here ever again.

But this blasted realm is not without life. Those who come here are looking for the warmth of the Reaper's Blow. Within a narrow artery twenty kilometers wide the temperatures remain stable even through the most desolate of Borcan winters. Countless tribes of Cockroaches breed in this tectonically unstable death zone; hundreds and thousands thrive where others would go extinct. Here their kind is safe from Judges, as nobody in their right mind would ever consider this place for conquest or expansion. And so the Reaper's Blow has been the natural hideout for the Winged Ones, the Sphingids, and the Weavers ever since their formation. Whenever their numbers dwindled, they retreated into the safety of this infernal expanse, breeding another generation to replenish their colonies.

BORDERLANDS

FRANKA

Franka has always been a land desired by the Protectorate and over the past decades the Judges have tried to expand into this territory on several occasions. Bassham is currently the westernmost extension of the Protectorate's border. Beyond its blackened walls, however, lies the sphere of influence of the Pheromancers and their legions.

The transition into Franka is fluid. There are no guards and no fences. Only the language changes abruptly. Anyone arriving in Born and looking for lodging to stay overnight should know a few syllables of Frankan to find their way around. The food also tastes different. At least it seems prepared with more care and basic understanding of cooking. The lentil stews are heavy, bloating the belly and keeping it filled for the long day ahead. Borcans could really profit from adapting their cuisine with a few of these recipes.

For quite some time, the area has been at peace. The success of the Anabaptists against the Pheromancers inspired the population and initiated a period of growth. First Arquet was liberated from the plagues, and later on Bassham stood united against the Pheromancer King Markurant. There was momentum and progress, and the inhabitants on the western side of the Protectorate appreciated the coalition between the Anabaptists, Judges, and Spitalians. Their cooperation radiated safety.

But all of this abruptly changed three months ago. A tsunami of Frankan refugees crashed into the borders of the Protectorate, overwhelming Bassham with their sheer numbers. People were fleeing from the conflicts that had unfolded during the civil war of Toulon and the events ravaging Briton. This unrestrained migration stirred Pheromancers and drones alike, who followed in the refugees' wake. So did the Corpse Eaters. For the first time in over a decade Orgiastics now report Expatriates breaking through the security perimeter trying to seed spore fields in Bassham's vicinity. The troops act fast and cut down the approaching Pheromancers, but there are more on their way.

Baptist Amos has ordered all Orgiastics to be battle ready and demanded the Spitalians to act with equal vigilance. Something is brewing and the leading figures of Bassham prepare for the worst case scenario: Parasite releasing a newborn Pheromancer King to come their way.

SOUTHBOUND

Borca's deep south is a world drenched in fire and blood. The density of the Clans is insurmountable. Wetzlar, the Protectorate's furthest expansion southward, fell in the blink of an eye. The Mechans, driven out of Nullpellia by the now ruling warrior caste of Pneumancers, regrouped in the hinterlands and dealt a sudden strike against the outpost. Before Justitian could respond and dispatch a cavalry squad to retaliate and reclaim the lost territory, Siege transmitted a radio warning to Judgement Hall: Phosphorites and Cockroaches, two Clans presumed insignificant or extinct, were gathering in numbers previously unheard of. Tens of thousands of warriors led by Bale Lords and Cockroach Kings had formed an unholy alliance and marched towards Siege.

Justitian abandoned Wetzlar and left it in the hands of the Mechans, instead drawing its defenses together in the city that once was synonymous with Supreme Judge Archot's rise to power. It was here that he had led the Judges into war against the Krawe Clan four decades prior, and it was the success of this monumental campaign that cemented him in office. Never would Archot allow Siege to fall, for this was the birthplace of his regency.

Immediately, Judgement Hall issued a distress signal to the Alpine Fortress, paying a fortune to the Hellvetics so they would deploy troops for additional support and help expand the city's fortifications. The first mercenaries and Genies arrived within a month's time and manned the flanks, establishing themselves in the garrison and orchestrating counter measures to keep the Phosphorites and Cockroaches at bay.

This accumulation of force in a single place was a miscalculation, one that the Clans took advantage of right away as they launched three separate attacks on the easternmost border towns of the Protectorate: Leadfield, Gesseln, and Chalk Breach. The cunning behind these split tactics took the Judges by surprise. Justitian had no choice but to respond and unleashed a first wave of Protectors to charge the southern front. But the cavalry rode straight into a deathtrap, suffering massive losses. Supposedly, over a hundred Judges were slaughtered during the altercation and served as food for the cannibal hordes.

Archot had to devise a different strategy. From now

on, the Protectorate would hole up and hold the lines against the invaders. This policy has been in place for the past three years. How successful it will be cannot be measured as of yet, as the Clans continue to scout the border, looking for ways to funnel their shock troops into the Protectorate's territory, wreaking havoc across the Judges' turf.

THE WASTELANDS

The areas beyond the Protectorate's borders are simply rounded up under the term Wastelands. This includes the territories of the Clans and uncharted domains, as well as unsettled provinces. Some arrogant Advocates in Uptown go so far as to call everything a Wasteland if it lies outside of the grasp of Justitian's influence, including other Cultures, the Mediterranean sea, and the African continent. But such trash talk is useless when it comes to narrowing down unexplored territory, and there's plenty of it south of Siege. These regions haven't seen pacification since the days of the City Wars and there lie the unexploited remains of the Bygone era, caked in soot and debris, eroded by time and left untouched since the Eshaton. In this great expanse, Scrappers search for the only thing of value left in the world: artifacts.

Today the Clans nest in this malicious environment and use the ruined landscape as their refuge. To venture into these desolate areas is a dangerous undertaking, as death lurks around every corner in many forms. From starving Gendo packs and raiding Cockroach cohorts to glistening image walls that transmit hypnotic messages, the Wastelands are a deadly trap for anyone entering unprepared.

Firsthand reports come from hellbent Scrappers who dare to traverse this treacherous terrain. Other intelligence is collected by Preservists who pierced through the fog of war to get a glimpse of the other side. All accumulated information leads back to the same conclusion: these areas are hostile to life. The landscape is jagged and cracked, well-trodden trails end nowhere, burnt hills block the view, and totem poles of the Clans rise like ghostly warning signs.

TERRITORIES OF THE CLANS

They hail from a different age, the Era of the Beast, when the whole world was consumed by their thirst for blood. They lived here long before humanity ascended from the dust to reclaim its legacy. They were powerful in a time when the Cults were nothing more than fractured groups of frightened survivors, penned up behind the walls of Bygone fortresses. The Clans were here when the warlords of Exalt assembled their forces to purify the land and ravaged the soil from which the Protectorate feeds today. The Clans were always here.

Their territories are the lands of their ancestors and forefathers. Generations of champions and chieftains are buried under the ashes from which the Protectorate rose - warriors of a lost and forgotten age, heroes of the Apocalypse, and warmongers of the Eshaton. Their monuments were pulverized in the City Wars, and their tribes were scattered by the conquest of the Judges, driven away from their burial mounds and holy sites by the cracking thunder of lead and black powder. They watched from afar as others tilled their fields and desecrated their temples, splitting ancient stone circles to rebuild fortifications and cities from the debris. They struggled, driven to the edges of the known world, devoid of a homeland. They bred, and with every new child that sprung forth from their unity, they rekindled their hatred.

The Black Lung was once their home. If one digs deep enough, they will find skeletonized residue, mass graves, and the tombs of chieftains. In 500 years, this soil was plowed through, razed, and lined with corpses. The bones have formed calcium deposits underneath the red layer of dust. Children of the Protectorate sometimes dig up ancient skulls, baked in iron oxide, and play football with the cranium of some former chieftain who murdered his way to glory half an eternity ago.

LOCKED IN

North, south, east and west - the direction doesn't matter, the dilemmas remain the same. Enemies lurk everywhere. The Protectorate is encircled on all sides, and the safe ways out can now be counted on one hand. The only secure trade route to Hellvetica leads via Bassham towards Mulhouse, and from there to the Alpine Fortress. The Northern Passage, once connecting the Protectorate to Briton, has collapsed.

Reports of Clan raids have become daily routine, garrisons are wiped out, stables are looted and set ablaze in the Rubble. Within four short years the Protectorate's frontiers have turned into a death zone. Those who set off there risk their lives.

The Judges respond with violence. It is their strongest weapon, but even they know that the outcome of this conflict will be decided by numbers alone, and those are on the side of the Clans. For decades they have bred and multiplied until they reached terminal size. Their territories are no longer large enough to supply them. They are pushing forward.

ENEMIES MANIFOLD

The Protectorate faces a barrage of hostile activity and the savage Clans have united to dance atop the corpse of Justitian. The tension can be felt in every border town and every outpost, taprooms are overflowing with news from the front lines, and uncertainty lies in the air. Will the Judges prevail? Will their alliance with Chroniclers, Spitalians, Hellvetics, and Anabaptists be enough to push back the invaders? Will there be a home to return to tomorrow?

COCKROACHES

The Cockroach Clan has returned from obscurity in overwhelming numbers and their collective is larger than ever before. In the past twenty years they retreated back into the womb of the earth and bred their most formidable colony of warriors yet.

Led by the hulking Cockroach Kings the Clan is divided into different tribes, each following a distinct totem and focusing their attacks on different areas of the border. The Weavers took Leadfield by storm and massacred the resident Scrapper population. The Winged Ones have drawn a ring around Chalk Breach, cutting the mining town off from its support lines in an attempt to starve the inhabitants to death. Meanwhile, the Sphingids have taken position along the southern front, settling all across Exalt's former territory and coordinating their attacks with their Phosphorite brothers in arms.

PHOSPHORITES

When the star fell on Nullpellia, the Phosphorites saw the first sign. They waged a brutal battle against the Pneumancers, but were ultimately defeated and driven back. They had lost their chance but not the will. The Irradiators excavated new chemical compounds from the depths of the Phosphorite temples and brought them before the Bale Lords. A surge of determination gripped the Champions of the Clan. Never would their proud people face another setback. Nullpellia was not meant to be, but the gods could be pleased by offering an even greater sacrifice: Justitian.

When the Judges sent one of their own as a mediator into the lands of the Phosphorites to establish relations, the Bale Lords responded to the insult by slaughtering the ambassador. Justitian's arrogance was unbearable. The hammer wielders had crossed the line and humiliated the Clan. Now was the time for revenge. But the Bale Lords knew that they would need others to join their conquest. They used the momentum and won the favor of the Cockroach Kings, who were already stirred up by the rise of Chernobog. Together, they would rain hellfire onto the lands of Justitian.

MECHANS

Toppled by their own warrior caste, the Mechans went into hiding to lick their wounds and set up a new plan. They had been stripped off their power by those they had put into power. Such folly should never repeat itself. But they needed a new base, something in the vicinity of Nullpellia, so they could keep an eye out for a sign of weakness in the lines of their former slaves and strike back when the time was right.

Their greedy eyes fell on Wetzlar, the closest outpost of the Judges' realm and a stone's throw from their former kingdom. This was the right place to regroup and rise back to glory. The attack was swift. The Mechans unleashed a cascade of chemical agents, backup arsenals they had stored away safely since the days of the Mechanist. All they had to do was break the ancient seals and resupply themselves. An hour after the first attack on Wetzlar's garrison, all Protectors lay dead with their tongues swollen blue. The Mechans stormed the settlement and took the remaining inhabitants hostage. Within a week, they had established a new regime of slavery, forcing the population to work and fortify Wetzlar against future attacks.

But the retribution never came. To this day, Wetzlar remains cut off from the Protectorate and under control of the Mechans, who enforce strict regulations and punish every form of defiance with death. In the chaos of the Clan Wars, they can continue erecting their new base of operations without opposition or interference. All eyes are on Siege.

PNEUMANCERS

Nullpellia has remained a neutral force since the outbreak of the Clan Wars. The Pneumancers in their newfound liberty have sealed off their domain against foreign influences, only allowing traders in and out of the city and monitoring all suspicious activity.

They have yet to decide on which side of the conflict they will stand. Therefore, they have sent their ambassador Luren to Justitian to establish relations and guarantee them safety against any ambitions of the Judiciary to place claims on their territory.

Their warlike instincts are held at bay by Luren's regular reports of negotiations with the leaders of the Protectorate, claiming the talks are fruitful and that Nullpellia will soon be enjoying the benefits of a large-scale partnership with mighty Justitian. The reports have been unchanged for the last three years.

ENEMOI

The Enemoi have breached the Protectorate's territory and established a base camp at A235. They made a pact with the Raven Chagall who offered them protection and opened the gates of the outpost for the Orion. The Enemoi have been in league with the Marauder Gusev for decades and they were the only ones allowed inside the forbidden zone of Noret. It was the Marauder who supplied the Clan with the biofuel needed to operate their vehicles. But something has changed. The Enemoi were told to leave – for their own safety.

The Protectorate

WARCRY

Stenner stood in a field of wild wheat. A breeze blew across the tall, softly swaying ears. The gentle wind billowed through his beard and ruffled his long hair - every now and then he had to spit out a strand caught in the corner of his mouth. He aimed his stoic gaze towards the hills on the distant horizon. Nothing moved. This stupid patrol was pointless. No hostiles for miles around.

He sighed heavily, pulling a tobacco leaf from his coat and stuffing it between his lips. Pollen drifted through the air. Late summer around the corner, he thought. Stenner chewed on the cigarillo without lighting it, hands rummaging through his coat pockets in search for his flintstones. There weren't any. Annoyed, he drew his hands from the coat and stuffed them into the pockets of his pants, searching, not letting the horizon slip out of view. Nada. Had he really forgotten his fucking lighter back at the barracks?

Stenner cursed between his teeth, calling himself an idiot over and over. He tore the dry leaf from his mouth and crushed it between his gloves, inspecting the broken particles as if they held some finite truth before blowing them into the wind. Fucking front service! What's the worth of being a damn Judge if you can't even light a single tobacco leaf!

He marched forward. Six steps. Brushing aside the wheat stems before him, scanning the ground ahead thoroughly. One foot before the other. Vigilant. Just as the instructors had taught him. He ran through the mantras drilled into his head, "Careful steps; enemies leave traps! Watchful eyes; hostiles plant mines!", anecdotal rhymes Stenner had internalized since his days as a Vagrant. He had to do something, anything, to occupy his mind, or the oppressive dullness out here would kill him before any savage got the chance.

He tried to reflect upon his childhood – his fat sister Etna, who had always hidden snacks around the barn and who later inherited their parents' farm. Stupid bitch! That land should've been evenly split among them, instead she got it all and Stenner had to sign up with the Judges to make a living. For what? To be transferred to Siege, running endless patrols along some featureless no man's land. They could've at least sent him on a more glorious mission, against the Neolibyans or something. He shuddered.

Crickets were chirping in the tall grass. He dared to take his eyes off the hill line and looked back behind him. In the distance he could see the silhouette of the nearest watchtower poking out of the landscape like a miniature pinhead. He squinted, wondering if the rear guard would notice him from this far away. He wanted to make sure and

waved his hand. The tower answered with two short flashes of a mirror reflecting a beam of sunlight. Stenner felt safer now. He turned his view back southward and listened to the noise.

Was it really crickets though? Something sounded distinctly off. Like the sounds were coming from a single direction instead of being spread out across the field. Was he daydreaming? Zoning out? Had the infinite plain robbed him of his senses? No, Stenner was certain. He followed the chirping, step by step, lowering his head, pricking his ears, readying his musket, sensing, spotting. He drew closer to the source, quietly parting the brushery before him.

The shape of a bare-naked child materialized in the tall grass, kneeling on the ground, and covered in black grime. It kept staring at its bloodsoaked hands, panting like a frantic animal – and making cricket sounds.

"Boy!" Stenner gasped. "What the hell is wrong with you, kid?"

The child threw his head around, staring at Stenner in shock, feral eyes widened like a panicking reindeer. Stenner felt an ice cold chill crawling up his spine. All of a sudden, the boy started screaming at the top of his lungs, a shrill, piercing warcry, revealing blackened gums and sharpened teeth. Stenner lost his nerve and grappled the kid, forcing a glove over his mouth to shut him up. The boy foamed from his throat and nose, thrashing around like a petrified beast, calling Stenner's attention away from the rustling in the grass and the shadow approaching at high speed. Something hit Stenner like a battering ram. He crashed into the ground with a thud, dark blotches staining his vision, obscuring the endless sky above him and the dust all around.

A naked man entered the panorama, covered in grey ash and with a pair of raging bloodshot eyes, taking aim with a bone axe. Ambush! Where was his fucking gun? No time to think. The axehead came slamming down into his shoulder, splitting muscle and sinew. A fountain of blood gushed from the wound. Helplessly, Stenner raised his arms above his head, choking on dirt. He heard grunts, screams, and terrifying snarls surrounding him, and jerked in pain as he felt a merciless sting in his flank – another blade piercing his stomach and entering his body.

Ash-covered hands grappled him from all sides, pressing him into the ground, immobilizing him, yanking off his chestplate and tearing chunks of flesh from his body. A rag was tossed over his head, blocking his vision. Stenner trembled in agony, unable to see what was happening, unable to fight for his life as it faded away. There was no glory in dying like this, none at all…

THE CULTS

SPITALIANS

Spitalians lord over life and death. As the third strongest Cult they hold dominion over three settlements in the Protectorate, and plant their representatives in every city to pull the political strings. In Justitian they are the anchor of health, in Bassham they embody one of the three military powers in charge. Their laws and control mechanisms promote hygiene and keep the crops germ-free all year round.

CHRONICLERS

The Protectorate would be nothing without the Chroniclers - and the Chroniclers would have long since drifted into oblivion without the Protectorate. Justitian is the condensate of all of their pursuits for security in their continuous search for the key to reviving the Stream without interference. The Fragments in particular view the Protectorate as Exalt 2.0 as they try to steer their utopia, directing the masses towards a new age of civilization with but a mere set of advanced algorithms.

HELLVETICS

Business and trade have always fueled the relationship between Justitian and the Alpine Fortress. However, some Hellvetics watch the expansion of the Protectorate with suspicion. How will the Judges act when they have annexed the last villages north of Bern? Their greedy urges for territory cannot be overlooked. Will they continue to cultivate their audacity and try to absorb the Alpine Fortress? Such attempts would hardly yield successful results. Most Hellvetics, however, see the Protectorate not as a threat, but just as a country in the far north. A country that could surely use a bunch of mercenaries to keep its wide borders safe.

JUDGES

They created the Protectorate. Without them, the City Wars would have left behind a charred realm of broken remains. The Judges had the foresight to claim this piece of earth and grant the people a future. The Protectorate is their home and at the same time the optimal state for a torn country like Borca once was. They see themselves as a strict father who takes his child by the hand and explains the world to him. A tough upbringing will make him a worthy successor one day.

CLANNERS

The Clans of the Protectorate were once diverse and multifaceted, rulers of their territory and adhering to their various traditions. Today they are labeled citizens and are categorized according to the cities of their origin, forming the backbone of all civilized life within the borders of the realm. Rebellious families were pacified and broken apart, ancestral ties cut, and ethnic customs outlawed. Those who did not belong to the savage Clans living on the fringes of the Protectorate had their identities vanquished and ground to dust.

SCRAPPERS

They are the true heroes of the Protectorate. Justitian's power is founded on their ceaseless work: they install pumps for irrigation, repair generators, work metals, clean drainages, serve in construction, salvage building materials, or haul replacement parts from the ruins. Their work is visible in every settlement and at every intersection and the empire would not be sustainable without their knowledge and skills. While loved by the people, they're treated like scum by those in charge.

NEOLIBYANS

Cities are the nexus of trade and the foundational pillar of diplomacy. But cities are also a confluence of power - by that regard, fighting power. The Neolibyans are still in disagreement whether it would be more profitable to establish proper trade relations with the Protectorate, or just overwhelm it with sheer force and plunder the remains, turning the whole damn Chronicler realm into a bazaar the likes of Tripol.

SCOURGERS

For the Scourgers, the Protectorate represents a conglomeration of hereditary foes, all hiding behind city walls instead of searching for the conflict of the open space. They travel here as bodyguards of their Neolibyan masters, and while they hate the weather, some fall in love with the weird amenities this strange northern land offers to them and decide to stay.

ANUBIANS

The land is dead. The Jackal's call is little more than a faint whisper. Anyone who runs into an Anubian in the Protectorate sees it as either the greatest luck or worst of all evils. The Anubians in turn are haunted by unease. The landscape bears no spiritual resemblance to anything they are familiar with, and most of them feel truly lost upon setting foot on this barren soil.

JEHAMMEDANS

For the Cult's hardliners, Justitian is a misguided cesspool drowning in sin: idol worshipers like the Chroniclers, heathen Clans, belligerent Scrappers, godless Apocalyptics, and their archenemy, the Anabaptists, all confined to one space - the best place to gamble away one's salvation. The simple Jehammedan tribes, however, appreciate the security that the Protectorate promises them. In East Borca, the Shepherds eye their western brothers with reservation. Their children and grandchildren have been spared from the devastating wars raging through Hybrispania or in the Balkhan; their flesh has become saggy and the bellies are swollen from peace, Osman's priests say, and grimly sink back to their prayers.

APOCALYPTICS

Countless Flocks move across the Protectorate's territory, yet they all pay their tribute to the largest Flock of them all, the Carrion Birds, and their reverent Mother.

For decades, the Protectorate was a free port for the Apocalyptics. The Judges' laws were stumbling blocks, but they were easy to spot and circumvent. As long as there weren't any massacres and no one contested the Protectors in their claim to power, all major problems could be avoided without much effort. For a while it seemed as if Supreme Judge Archot had found amusement in the Apocalyptics. But with the rise of Spitalian influence in Uptown, the golden years have come to an end. Apocalyptics caught in the Burn trade cannot expect mercy.

ANABAPTISTS

Tens of thousands of Anabaptists settle in or around the Protectorate. Cathedral City is but a stone's throw away, and the west of the Protectorate is completely under the aegis of the Broken Cross. With their monopoly on the water trade, the Judges have to keep the Anabaptists as close partners, or they'd suffer the consequences.

An agglomeration of people like in the Protectorate attracts Cults that hunt for new souls. Cults like the Anabaptists. The Chroniclers loathe them, but as allies of the Spitalians they have a permanent place in the Protectorate. In contrast to Purgare, however, it is mostly Ascetics who live here, as hundreds of thousands of people need to be fed daily.

PALERS

The Protectorate extends over a vast area that was once covered in Bygone magnitude. Who knows what treasures are still waiting to be unearthed? Getrell's presence can be felt everywhere. The Palers sense that there is more than meets the eye. They suspect that at least a handful of the 44 sacred bunkers are located right underneath the Chroniclers' feet. Time to establish a base and find out.

History of the Protectorate

2100: The Wretched Hag seeps into the collective subconscious of the surviving Pollners and becomes the symbol of their worst fears. The icon of the Hag is drawn on ruined walls to warn others of her presence.

2102: A strange Streamer cult seizes an abandoned Maglev freight terminal sitting on top of a desolate plateau jutting from the Black Lung's ruined landscape. The strangers spend months adding fortifications to their new base. Centuries later this place will go down in history as the Central Cluster, and the plateau will become known as Justitian's remarkable Uptown. Locals refer to the hooded cultists as Chroniclers. Probably because they scurry through the ruins searching for old records and constructing huge libraries.

2146: Exalt rises from the dust. The city casts long shadows and imposes a fragile peace upon the surrounding regions.

2148: The Streamer cult has spread rapidly in recent years, but suddenly there is a fatal setback to their operations that brings them near the brink of extinction: Cathedral City, their headquarters, is vanquished by an invasion of Anabaptists. The surviving Streamers flee and take refuge in the Cluster. The Anabaptists under their leader Rebus do not pursue the insignificant techno-pests.

2155: The Cluster attracts Scrappers, solitary artifact hunters from all over Borca who come to trade with the Chroniclers. During winter they settle south of the plateau to rest their tired bones, and set out again in summer searching for remains of the Bygones. Their filthy outpost is referred to as Tech-Central by everyone who passes this ditch brimming with trash and scrap.

2173: The Sleepers awaken. They can only be recognized by an ominous 100 tattooed on their wrists. They have arrived to usher in the first phase of Project Tannhäuser. In no time at all they create food, water, and weapons depots, infiltrate communities and tribes, and topple the ruling chieftains. They guide the population of Borca by establishing agricultural communities, poach in the domain of the Clans, and send their scouts to Cathedral City to spy on the Anabaptists. The first Cascade is in cahoots with the Chroniclers and freely goes in and out of the Cluster. A few weeks later, Sleeper squads begin to divide parcels and create fields for crop rotation in the middle of the ruins.

2194: Clans thrive in the area that has become known as the Black Lung. One of the largest tribes are the Stukov. They rule from the great salt desert in the north to Nullpellia in the south and trade with the Chroniclers, Spitalians, and Mechans of their time.

2270: Exalt's power radiates far beyond Borca's cultural borders. A period of unprecedented upswing and hope engulfs all of northern Borca. Ambassadors of the soaring city state are spotted in the Cluster. With Exalt's help, the underground facilities of the Chroniclers' stronghold are expanded.

2306: A group of Asian researchers settles in Ferropol and revolutionizes blacksmithing. They are said to come from the west coast of Franka and have travelled from Saint-Brieuc all the way to the Black Lung. They become known as the Steel Masters. In service of the warlords of Exalt, they begin transforming the city of Ferropol into a formidable arms factory.

2309: Sudden clashes between Exalt and enclaves under the sway of the Sleepers become commonplace. There is clear evidence of growing hostility between Exalt and its neighbors.

2311: Aspera appears in the Cluster, warning the Chroniclers of Exalt's true intentions and urging them to cut their ties to the Sleepers. If they don't heed her warnings, they will face their personal Armageddon soon enough. To convince them of her sincerity she presents the Fragments with a relic of the Static Stream she retrieved from the lost archives of Cathedral City. Before the Chroniclers can ask any questions, the enigmatic Marauder is gone, leaving the hooded Cultists to their own devices.

2312: **FIRST CONTACT:** The Spitalians east of Justitian have been holding out on their own, hidden behind the walls of their Bygone military hospital. For as long as anyone remembers, they kept to themselves, using their knowledge of healing to trade with the neighboring Clans of the Black Lung.

Suddenly a dark figure, clad in rags and bandages, visits their headquarters. He supplies the reclusive Spitalians with ceramic cartridges, filled with entropic nanites which he sourced from his own blood over the past decades, and points their attention toward the blooming Mother spore field of Menden. It will not be the last of Gusev's interactions with the Spitalians.

2320: The Clans of Bygone Scandinavia flee from the Ice Barrier and the encroaching salt flats of the Stukov Desert, flooding into the Black Lung and replenishing the ranks of people the Sleepers hold dominion over. Their enclaves are growing. On their flight southward many of the tribes bring their horses into the region. The animals turn into a valuable form of currency.

2381: A man dressed in a heavy leather coat and a floppy hat strides through the lawless villages of northern Borca, which don't belong to Exalt's sphere of influence. The locals drag criminals before him, whom he holds trial over and punishes accordingly. Years later people will remember him as the First Judge.

2390: The First Judge has inspired imitators and copycats. Everywhere in the Black Lung there are reports of men with floppy hats and hammers chasing outlaws. They gang up in cavalry squads and proclaim a new order.

2409: The First Judge has disappeared. His followers are at a loss as they comb the settlements of the Black Lung in search for their idol. But there is no trace. The Chroniclers finally hand over the testament of the First to these new Judges: a small leather-bound booklet, collecting his records along with descriptions of punishments and punitive measures. Until the day these fledgling Judges develop a self-image of their own, this book will serve as a sacred guideline for their newfound identity.

2410: The Chroniclers invite the Judges to settle in close proximity to their Cluster. The Judges agree, and establish their headquarters atop the crown of a dilapidated Bygone high-rise, which becomes known far and wide as "The Bastion." The foundation stone for Justitian has now been laid. Tough years will follow.

◇ **THE PROCLAMATION OF THE PROTECTORATE:** Executioner Garwald (Justus I) announces that the era and rule of the Judges has begun. A week later, he establishes the office of Supreme Judge and coronates himself as the leader of the nascent Cult. His term of office lasts only three months before his closest opponent Nassius stabs him to death. Nassius leads the Cult through the next fourteen years of its existence and becomes the first influential dignitary of the office.

◇ The Stukov, Brenni, Adiki, and Krawe Clans have settlements in the direct vicinity of Justitian's new borders, and their territories now nominally fall under the aegis of the Judiciary. The chieftains are troubled and disagree over how to deal with the situation. The Stukov in particular, who settle in the area of today's Downtown, are anything but pleased with the imperious demeanor of the Judges. They send their heralds to Exalt to seek help from the warlords in hopes of getting rid of the Judges.

2425: The Judges' campaigns of conquest are in full swing. They ask tribute of independent villages and establish themselves as local militias. In Newcrest, a small outpost on the northwestern banks of a dry riverbed, they begin breeding stallions for their ever growing ranks.

2443: The Spitalians refuse all offers of alliances or protection. They appear comfortable in their independence and brush off any of the Judges' or Exalt's advances.

2482: THE CITY WARS: A warlord by the name of Cultrin strikes the country with conflict. His proclamations unite the masses and he promises a golden age for his followers. His troops set off from Exalt and storm villages all across the Black Lung. Bloody battles shake the region to its core. Cultrin's warriors are equipped with arsenals of the Bygone era and they make short work of Exalt's enemies. The Spital remains silent and keeps out of the escalation. The Cluster and Justitian are not touched by Cultrin's troops. The cities of the Black Lung, on the other hand, fight with all their might against the hostile takeover. Cathedral City sends a whole generation of Orgiastics into the field to hold off Cultrin's forces.

- Noret breaks its vow of silence. For decades, the domain of the Marauder Gusev to the south of Cathedral City was shrouded in mystery, but in the midst of the turmoil of the City Wars something is stirring. AMSUMOS. There had been no sightings of machine warriors in ages. Suddenly they stand in the field once more, directing their fire against Exalt's troops.

- Enceph and Trice, two of Cultrin's generals, manage to heavily wound Gusev. In the following years he will look for a way across the Ice Barrier to receive treatment in the Danzig field hospital, and urge the Spitalians to develop a cure for his ailments. It is during these stopovers that he becomes known as the Icebreaker.

- Aspera supplies the Cluster with intel about the advances of Project Tannhäuser and Exalt's opposition. Two ideologies founded by the Recombination Group stand in direct conflict to one another. One tries to establish a new age of obedience and total dominion, the other wants to initiate a chaotic reign of blood to wash itself of sins past. Both threaten to turn Borca into hell on earth. The Chroniclers initiate the Shutter program and respond with a purge of all Sleeper agents in their midst.

- The agenda of the Recombination Group is shrouded in mystery. Records left behind by the 100s allow for little more than speculation. Meanwhile, the Anabaptists suffer heavy losses and lose one fortification after the other. Cultrin's troops march toward Cathedral City.

- Exalt conducts public executions. Apprehended Tannhäuser agents are killed by Paler firing squads, so-called Halos, who have completed Exalt's mental decontamination protocol in the underground facility of the Grindworks.

- Sleepers of Project Tannhäuser are sighted in Praha and Berlin, spreading their memetic seed. One record has it that an artifact stolen from the Grindworks was hidden with the Archivists of Praha. All signs point toward a global conflagration of escalating events.

- Cultrin goes missing. Right before the conquest of Cathedral City, the warlord abandons his army. Rumors spread in no time, some claiming he fell in the swamps of Franka, others about an encounter with a mysterious creature from the depths of time who dissuaded Cultrin from his course of action and put him in his place.

- Exalt's generals and officers are not about to bail out of the plan this close to their goal, but without Cultrin at the helm the army breaks apart into warbands who ravage the landscape, plundering and killing everything in their path. Exalt loses control of the situation and dispatches its own hunting divisions to put an end to the leadership crisis.

- Gusev supplies the Preservists - a secretive military organisation among the Spitalians - with Noret's arsenals: chemical compounds and biological weapons, manufactured and stored in the depots of the forbidden city. In a hit and run operation, the Preservists spread canisters of artificial bacteria strains across Exalt's territory and poison its water supplies. Within days, Exalt's mercenaries are covered in black blisters, riddled with fevers and muscle cramps.

- Meanwhile, the Spitalians administer vaccines and antibiotics in Justitian and the Spital, and prepare for Exalt's final onslaught. The counterattack never comes. Pestilence has brought the remains of Cultrin's army to its knees.

- The winter of 2482 brings Exalt's demise. The energy supplies of the Grindworks collapse. Maddened by the plague, some of the surviving generals assume that a treatment for their condition can be found behind the secret portal system of the underground facility. Armed with explosives and jack hammers they demolish the portals in an attempt to gain access to the forbidden sections. This act of sacrilege spills into an all out conflict with the remaining population. The Exalters rise to behead their own leadership. Acts of violence drown the streets. Payloads detonate across several city districts. Fires rage. Stores are plundered. Starvation follows.

- Exalters flee in droves. The refugees scatter across the remaining cities of the Black Lung that withstood the year of bloodshed, namely Justitian and

Liqua. Exalt on the other hand turns into a ghost town, its charred ruins slowly disappearing under a layer of settling dust.

2483: During the height of Cultrin's massacre, the Judges take advantage of the ensuing chaos. They topple the Stukov and take their chieftains hostage. As a result, a three-week long civil war shakes the foundations of the young Justitian. The result is devastating. The Stukov Clan is disempowered and declared a vassal tribe. On the plateau, which the Judges now refer to as Uptown, they erect Judgement Hall, built by convicted Stukov rebels and prisoners. This will be their new base. The Bastion is no longer their headquarters. Now they sit in their new war camp beside their closest allies, the Chroniclers.

◇ The Mother of Ravens arrives in Justitian. The Fragments detect her presence and send envoys to collect information on her agenda.

◇ The City Wars have drained Exalt. The city bleeds to death as the last residents have fled from its ruins. This is the right moment: the Enemoi stage a flat out heist, driving their trucks into the wreckage, and dismantling everything they can get a hold off. They dig through the Grindworks, collecting artifacts, relics, power sources, and conductors and fill up their Convoy. They finish up their business in no time and speed back towards Noret to unload their cargo.

Once the Chroniclers get wind of this operation, they brand the Enemoi as public enemies and use every underhanded tactic at their disposal to demolish the Clan.

2496: Liqua, in the west of the Black Lung, withstood the City Wars. Built on a huge water reservoir and in the hands of the Water Lords for generations, the enclave forges alliances with Cathedral City and opens its gates to the Anabaptists. The trade routes that once converged in Exalt must be redrawn on the maps. Now they run towards Liqua. In the coming decades the city will grow to become a powerful rival of Justitian, swelling in size through the arrival of the Exalters who seek asylum behind its walls.

2497: Ferropol is deserted. Without Exalt's protection, the Judges can subjugate the resident Steel Masters without much effort. Their people are rounded up, expropriated, and relocated to Justitian. Ferropol's factories are demolished and rebuilt atop the Bastion. The Judges plan to create an arms factory in the middle of their capital that is second to none. The project reaches completion in the same year and the enslaved Steel Masters are forced to populate their new home, which will also serve as their prison forever after.

◇ A flood of refugees and displaced tribes due to recent events have made Justitian's population rise like yeast dough. The Judges must now man their towers and walls and keep an eye on new threats emerging in the Black Lung.

◇ The savage Clans fill the void left behind by Exalt's downfall. Before long, their scouts map the former city state's territory and push forward, coming closer and closer to the borders of the dawning Protectorate.

2498: The Judges gain enormous influence - and the weapons of the Steel Masters make it possible. People flock to Justitian, apparently the only safe place in all of Borca. In appreciation of the economic and orderly upswing the inhabitants of Justitian rename the Bastion to the Steel Monolith.

2499: The administrative work of the Judges is increasing rapidly. Their departments and offices already cover half of Uptown. As a result, all residents who do not share close relationships with the Judges or Chroniclers are relocated to Downtown.

2500: The district between the Steel Monolith and the towering Uptown plateau rises to unprecedented fame. Known as the Forecourt, thousands of traders from all over the world flock to Justitian to barter and sell their goods in this exclusive market square.

2501: The Carrion Birds, an Apocalyptic Flock from Franka, settle three kilometers west of the Steel Monolith. The Scrappers love them, but the Judges patrol the streets more often than before. Some claim that the Chroniclers placed their hands on the Judges' shoulders, although whether it was to just calm them down or to restrain their quick-tempered companions can only be speculated about. The brothels of the Carrion Birds are now an integral part of the cityscape. The Woodpeckers of the Flock convert a rusty barge in the dry harbor basin into a dazzling casino.

2502: **THE GREAT RELOCATION:** Peasant families who are affiliated with the Judges are resettled all around Justitian. This ring of fat and fertile soil, over 20 km wide, is called the Rubble. The families themselves are honorably referred to as Providers, because they form the basic provision for all of Justitian's ambitions of growth, safety, and expansion.

2503: **THE YEAR OF THE COCKROACHES:** Scrappers who try to plunder the ruins of Exalt and gain access to the underground facilities report a mass movement from the south. The Cockroach Clan is on the rise. This cannibal tribe had already troubled Borca as far back as the Era of the Beast. Now they are back, and take the former territory of the city-state by storm.

2504: Tech-Central booms and thrives. The resident Scrappers don't follow any leaders, but manage themselves. Although the district is convoluted and full of sketchy figures, the dirt diggers' activities flush enormous creativity and potential into Justitian.

2521: Justitian is running out of fuel. The Chroniclers are nervous about the voltage fluctuations in the Cluster, and calculate growth disorders and supply shortages. Their gaze falls on the ancient coal mines situated in the west.

In the winter of the same year, the Cluster infiltrates the scrap fortress of Mobilis with a commando of Shutters. Ulfir, a notorious Cave Bear and junk lord, rules over this fortified enclave and demands horrendous tributes from the surrounding cities for electricity from his power plant. While Judges lay siege to the city, the Shutters manage to storm Ulfir's lair and assassinate the Cave Bear. As a result, Mobilis falls under the administration of the Cluster and is now tightly guarded by the Chroniclers.

2530: The Preservists, who haven't made public appearances since the City Wars, leave the Spital's fortifications behind and take over a crumbling Bygone castle in the hinterlands, expanding it into a headquarters of their own throughout the upcoming decades. Arnsberg is recorded on but a handful of maps and only a single guarded route from the Spital itself leads up to this remote fortress hidden in the hills.

2531: The Spital, which has been independent for centuries, suddenly joins the Protectorate. No official statement is issued. In the following years, actions are put in place to establish the first public hospitals across Justitian's sprawling districts.

2537: A community of Anabaptists settles on the westernmost flank of the former Stukov territory, in close proximity to the dry harbor basin of Justitian. These new settlers are Ascetic pilgrims. Fraternal and hard working, they share their knowledge of agriculture with the farmers of Justitian. Within a short year, the Ascetic settlement swells by a thousand stragglers following in the wake of the first arrivals. Over the next few decades, this place will become known as the Cross Quarter and merge with Justitian's urban area.

2543: For decades Justitian kept commercial relations with the mining town Cavernis, with its rich sulfur ore and pyrite deposits necessary for the creation of the black powder fired by the Judges' muskets. The time has come to include this Scrapper settlement into the Protectorate's larger corpus and devour its resources. Important metals that are crucial to both the Chroniclers and Spitalians alike are waiting to be sourced from its caves.

2545: Justitian grows and prospers. The city limits have now surrounded Tech-Central in the southeast like a hungry amoeba. The annexation is only a matter of form. Justitian's newest district, however, will cause a whole lot of worrisome problems for the Judges and Chroniclers in the near future.

2546: On behalf of the Spitalians, the Judges annex Chalk Breach and its rich limestone quarries, thus reaching the easternmost extension of the Protectorate. Behind this last border town lies unknown territory, and the Reaper's Blow spews poisonous clouds in the distance. Have the Judges advanced too far?

2548: **THE YEAR OF UNFINISHED BUSINESS:** The Judges establish a massive garrison in the southern reaches of the Protectorate. Siege will become their secondary weapons depot and training facility. They use the momentum generated by the economic and cultural growth of Justitian to hunt down old enemies and put an end to unsettled grudges. They incite brutal skirmishes against the savage Clans Deever and Molkorvai on the fringes of the Black Lung and in a final swoop vanquish the Clan of the Adiki.

2549: After several bloody clashes, the Krawe Clan is pushing back against the Protectors. The tribe has recovered from earlier defeats and now draws new claims on the Judges' turf, circling the city of Siege like a hawk.

2556: Harm, the large pig farm in the northeast, along with its endless batteries of pigsties and mountains of pig shit, is incorporated into the Protectorate.

2557: Old maps point the Protectors to a salt deposit in the far reaches of the northwest. In the same year, prison workers drag the first loads of mineral salt to the surface. This remote campsite is named Dog's End and serves the Judges as an additional beachhead against Liqua to the south.

◈ The great Typhoid epidemic strikes Justitian. Spitalians topple the Brenni Clan and position themselves as the only leading authority in all matters of public health.

2558: **ARCHOT BECOMES SUPREME JUDGE:** The year begins with a test of faith and fortitude for the Judges stationed in the garrison of Siege. The Krawe Clan launches an all out assault on multiple fronts, but even though the Judges are outnumbered five to one they turn the tide and deal a crushing defeat to the enemy, wiping them off the face of the earth, and losing only two Protectors in battle. For years, Siege is considered the epitome of Justitian's strength. With the death of Supreme Judge Markoff, the Senates appoint the young Executioner Archot as his successor, thereby paying tribute to his spectacular display of military leadership during the battle of Siege. Justitian blossoms and jolts forward - Archot demolishes the encrusted structures that his predecessor still defended on his deathbed. The Judges now move aggressively and confidently into the Wasteland to grab anything that's up for taking.

◇ The southernmost outpost of the Protectorate is being set up in Wetzlar. Archot wants his political opponents to see how far he intends to extend Justitian's empire during his tenure. But the settlement lies in Nullpellia's zone of influence. The ruling Taunar consider this affront a declaration of war. They send an expeditionary force of Pneumancers as a first response. A quick skirmish ensues with both sides coming away with considerable losses. Archot orders news about the conflict to be suppressed at all cost. He doesn't want his term to be blemished by bad publicity. Instead he sends a mediator to Nullpellia to calm the Taunar with gifts and promises of peace.

2559: Arquet, a small farming community in Franka, suffers from the local Pheromancer Diapazon. He controls swarms of locusts that lay waste to the community's crop harvest. Cathedral City sees danger germinating and sends a scouting party of Orgiastics, but the Pack is obliterated by Diapazon's Expatriates. Cathedral City fears that the plague will penetrate further into Borca and calls upon their legendary general, Emissary Zamuel, to liberate Arquet from its blight.

2562: So far, Ferropol has been more trouble than it's worth to the Protectorate. Without further ado, the old basement complexes are converted into a vast prison camp in which incurable and anti-social subjects are incarcerated. As the penitentiary of the entire Protectorate, the last glory of this once esteemed armory finally gives way to a grim new purpose.

2563: The Needle Tower fiasco shatters the Central Cluster. The nerves of the Fragments are raw, but only limited news emerges from the chaos and becomes public knowledge. The Chroniclers do everything in their power to save face.

◇ **THE BATTLE OF ARQUET:** Emissary Zamuel has assembled an army to deal with Diapazon. His youthful shield bearer Vincent will rise to fame in a future battle. Zamuel directs the warbands of the Broken Cross with a lifetime of combat experience. They break past the defense lines, slaughter the drones, and hack Diapazon to pieces.

2564: Arquet is renamed into Spicafield and placed under the rule of the Anabaptists. The community nominally belongs to the Protectorate, but the Judges have little to say around this neck of the woods. Archot doesn't give a damn about the legal situation. In addition to Born, Spicafield is now his second expansion into Frankan territory. What is supposed to stop Justitian's power surge?

2565: Jehammedans set up camp along the southern wall of Justitian. A wave of settlers from East Borca and the Balkhan washes up in the city. They present dusty records featuring settlement claims and are courted by the Chroniclers. The Spitalians welcome the new arrivals, even if it infuriates their Anabaptist allies: the Jehammedan bath houses raise the city's hygiene level, and their puritan lifestyle stands in direct contrast to the filth of Tech-Central. In the same year, the construction of another city wall is issued to allow for the Jehammedan Quarter to be included in Justitian's footprint.

2570: The Chroniclers set up Last Exit as a listening post and are now closer to the forbidden city of Noret than ever before. All of their sensors are geared towards the domain of Gusev to record any suspicious radio transmissions.

2571: Scrappers discover promising concrete structures and Bygone tunnel systems in eastern Leadfield. There are rumors of Spore Beasts circulating. The Spitalians have a hard time believing such nonsense and ask the Judges to expand their territory northeast, thereby fortifying Leadfield and allowing the Scrappers to continue their excavations in safety.

◇ The Spitalians establish the hygienic regulations in Justitian and cement their power in Uptown. The Office of Hygienics becomes the bulwark of crop certification and birth control.

2572: Gesseln is of little interest to the Judges: a handful of crazy Scrappers, an old industrial plant, and an adjacent artifact vein. Every now and then a Protector stops by. Strictly speaking, that's enough to call the settlement a Protectorate city: one more flag on Archot's ever-growing imperial map.

2573: The Chroniclers set up The Peak in Leadfield - a sonar antenna developed to monitor Needle Tower communications and interfere with their frequencies. The Cluster is dead set on sabotaging every progress of the renegade Chroniclers east of the Reaper's Blow.

2574: A Preservist Corps under the young Commando Prime Kranzler penetrates deep into Frankan territory. They kill Pheromancers and nail the bloated bodies to trees. During their mission, they discover termite trails that run underground converging just forty kilometres south of Bassham.

2575: A star falls on Nullpellia and puts an end to the reign of the Taunar. Bloody territorial conflicts shake Nullpellia in the aftermath of the events, with Mechans, Pneumancers, and Phosphorites struggling for dominion over the ancient city.

2577: Spitalians and Judges subjugate the Klawen, and use the outpost to develop experimental arsenals and armors, while training their recruits in tactical and hybrid warfare. The whole settlement serves as one giant training ground in which new strategies for urban combat and field deployment are tested.

2578: The East Wind Flock has taken over the Burn trade in the city. The Spitalians are nervous and dispatch Dr. Elliott Heilkamp to tighten up and enforce the hygienic regulations.

2579: Archot's most clever move to date: Liqua is under control of the Anabaptists. The old Water Lords are merely puppets, who dance according to the instructions of the Broken Cross. Archot offers Liqua's annexation to secure the water supplies for Justitian, yet leaving the city under jurisdiction of the Anabaptists, factually making it an independent enclave within the Protectorate's borders. Chroniclers and Judges would have no say in the city's politics, so long as Liqua sticks to its deliverables. The Anabaptists agree, and the Spitalians applaud. Securing the pipelines and aqueducts is an integral part of keeping Justitian safe and clean.

The Chroniclers on the other hand consider this solo move a betrayal of the common cause. Archot, however, doesn't care for the opinions of the hooded man in the room.

2580: Worrisome news spreads. The Spitalians report a Ziggurath on the border of the Protectorate. A Pheromancer King is said to have reared his ugly head. His name: Markurant. The only settlement near the Ziggurath that could serve as a theoretical field camp is Bassham, a tiny village south of Spicafield and home to 600 souls, located in the middle of restless Frankan territory. The Spitalians rush a platoon down south to set up observation towers. Panic is in the air.

2581: THE BATTLE OF BASSHAM: Vincent, the young shield bearer of retired Emissary Zamuel, fights alongside the Baptist Amos and his Orgiastic packs flowing into Bassham from Cathedral City. Together they field an army of enormous size. Joined by platoons of Famulancers and cavalry squads dispatched from all over the Protectorate they march forward to meet the enemy in his own territory. The battle will go down in history as the first real victory against the Demiurge, yet it will cost the lives of thousands.

◇ While the war rages in Bassham, a prisoner revolt shakes Ferropol. With the help of the local Splinter Hawks, the inmates free themselves and turn the labor camp into a drug fortress.

2582: On Archot's orders, the Judges embark on a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the remaining savages of the Black Lung. The dreaded Cockroach Clan is nearly wiped out. The price is high: Justitian loses several dozen of its veteran Executioners in the purge. The vacancies back home must now be filled with Jurymen.

◇ A delegation of Neolibyans is approaching from the south. The Judges invite them to the Uptown, where they are accommodated in a spacious building in the Ambassador Quarter. The African traders remain unimpressed, as they're used to far more luxurious lodgings. The Chroniclers are alarmed and try to sabotage the meetings between Archot and the Neolibyans.

2583: The independent outlaw settlement A235 sits like an ulcer next to the trade route connecting Cathedral City with Justitian. Its position is formidable and it would require enormous efforts on the side of the Judiciary to conquer this outpost. Archot has a different idea. He invites the Raven Chagall to Uptown and offers him the title of personal Juryman, if the Apocalyptic turns his nest over and joins the Protectorate. Chagall accepts the offer. A daring move that brings the empire's border closer to Cathedral City than ever before.

2585: In recent years, the remote settlement of Ignatz has made a name for itself as the hideout of the Plague Birds, a Flock conducting raids on Justitian's traders. That is until a radio message tells the Judges the exact

position of their hidden nest. The Protectors act mercilessly and smoke out the Plague Birds. Slowly but surely, the Protectorate is running out of enemies.

◇ **THE FALL OF FERROPOL:** The Judges have had enough of the Raven Apok and his Splinter Hawks. They infiltrate the drug fortress with one of their own, and deal a surprise strike against the outlaws hiding within. The official records claim that no Splinter Hawk survived the assault. The Judges set fire to the drug laboratories and turn their back on the deserted ghost town forever.

◇ On the other side of Franka, in Briton, Vicarent triumphs over the Pheromancer King Ganaress. The news of the spectacular victory spreads all the way back to Justitian.

2586: In the aftermath of Ferropol's prison revolt the Cleft is being rebuilt. Protector Kant takes over the prison camp. Criminals are now incarcerated within Justitian's very own penitentiary and are forced to work off their punishment with hard labor across the city proper.

◇ **THE COLOSSUS INCIDENT:** Neomi Hagari, citizen, faithful wife, loving mother of six, and deeply religious follower of the teachings of Jehammed, wakes up on Monday morning, the 10th of April, at 5:02am, with a firm conviction in her heart.

At 9:18am she is seen boarding the elevator platform and at 9:21am a Chronicler drone records her marching across Calendar Square. A City Judge stops her at 9:27am to ask what she's carrying in her bag. Roasted chestnuts for sale, she says. He checks her citizen papers and her daily sales license for selling food at a nearby stand during lunchtime, issued at 8:44am from an Alcove located on Nassius' Street close to the Cleft. At 9:32am the young Judge concludes his routine security check and lets her pass. She is spotted by an Observer at 9:35am, who registers her as the 2,586th passenger arriving in Uptown that day.

At 9:38am she reaches the foot of the Colossus and her eyes travel up this icon of sin. Then, at 9:39am, she presses the button connected to the charges in her bag and detonates her payload.

◇ At 10:04am Archot wants to see blood. At 6:53pm Gideon, Isaaki and blessed child of the Shepherd of Osman, is taken out by Black Judges. His youthful body is vandalized and put on public display. At 8:16pm Archot issues decrees to put the Jehammedan Quarter under lockdown.

2587: Reconstruction begins. The political landscape of Justitian changes and the Cartel is slowly becoming known as the major player in Downtown. Bosch finances fifty percent of the construction material needed to rebuild the Colossus in even greater splendor.

2594: Bassham grows at breakneck speed, becoming the fourth largest city of the Protectorate in less than thirteen years.

◇ The Dust Riders, an Apocalyptic Flock from Purgare, land in Justitian. Their leader Vulco humiliates Dejan, the Raven of the Carrion Birds, in a duel - beaten up like a defenseless child, he has to crawl back to his people. The Dust Riders take over the Flotsam in the Harbor.

◇ Chernobog rises in Eastern Borca. Woken from his slumber, he sets off toward Praha. Tens of thousands of Clanners follow the Marauder on his swath of destruction.

◇ Fierce clashes with savage Clans outside the Protectorate's borders make the headlines. Senator Laakon tries to seize the moment to publicly dismantle Archot's policy of forceful expansion of the Protectorate. He assigns Executioner Holberk as a negotiator, and sends him on a secret peace mission to establish relations with the Clan of the Phosphorites. Laakon wants to prove that the wild Clans can be pacified by other means than combat. What the Senator doesn't know is that the Phosphorites recovered from their crushing defeat at Nullpellia twenty years prior and have regrown to their old size and power. They consider the Judge's appearance and arrogance a dire insult. Holberk doesn't survive that day.

2595: THE BLACK YEAR: The Great Cleanse sweeps across Justitian. Chief Protector Rutgar and Provost Kranzler take the relationship of their Cults to a new level: at a secret conference, they decide to totally eradicate the East Wind Flock. Kranzler assures Rutgar that the Spitalians won't question the laws of the Judges in Downtown if they join forces during the operation. The handshake that follows seals the fate of 400 Apocalyptics.

Dr. Elliott Heilkamp directs the operations from Uptown. Across his seventeen years in Justitian he has created files on every Apocalyptic even remotely connected to the East Wind Flock, collecting sexual preferences, movement patterns, and records of reported offenses.

Half an hour before the intervention, Rutgar

gets Archot's approval - the Old Wolf always knew how to convince the Supreme Judge during important sign offs. The operation takes place in broad daylight. Fast and precise. Ignatz and Ferropol were just warmups. Gas cartridges are fired into cellar vaults; Apocalyptics are dragged out of pubs and executed with head shots; huge explosions tear through Burn storages in the Rubble. Judges and Spitalians are everywhere. Only a handful of East Wind Apocalyptics escape the carnage.

Rutgar will have to justify himself before the Senates. Advocates are swarming through Justitian in preparation for the big man's case. They want to see him fall. The Old Wolf has turned gray. Will his pack finally abandon him?

What's left are the Burners: They stumble through the streets, banging on doors behind which the East Wind Flock sold Bion or Glory just days ago. The Scrappers crave their supplies. Acts of violence seep into the streets and discharge against Judges and Spitalians. Justitian is facing mass withdrawal.

- In the east of the city, the ground collapses in an area 1,500 meters long: hundreds of people die, and entire city blocks are destroyed. The Chroniclers seal off the sector immediately. The smell of decay hangs over the district for well over a year. At the same time, the water level of the public wells is dropping all over Justitian: presumably one of the water veins is blocked by debris. Hellvetics are ordered to help with the reconstruction of the area, which is now labeled as the Crack.

2596: **THE CLAN WARS:** The Protectorate trembles from an unforeseen wave of attacks on all sides of the empire. Cockroaches, Phosphorites, Mechans, and Enemoi launch a series of devastating strikes that leave Judgement Hall in shock, searching for an appropriate response. Vanguards of the Clans make it all the way into the Rubble and wreak havoc among the Providers. Raids occur in the middle of the day across so many different hot spots that the Judges have trouble keeping up with the multitude of attacks.

- The Mechans set off an unknown chemical warfare agent in the Wetzlar garrison. The poison gas makes short work of the stationed Protectors. The outpost falls within a single day.

- The Weavers smash into Leadfield. The Scrappers of the settlement try to hold their position. They band together and override The Peak, sending an alarm signal to Justitian and calling for backup, but the Judges do not respond. The Scrappers keep fighting back, despite being outnumbered. The Cockroaches manage to burrow through the concrete Bygone tunnel system which once served as their breeding cave in ancient times. They know the terrain better than the resident Scrappers and take the defenders out, one by one. The mayhem lasts for a week. By the end of it, all of the Scrappers have been slaughtered and devoured by the cannibals.

- The Central Cluster loses its most valuable device capable of monitoring the Needles' activities. With the destruction of The Peak, their recordings grind to a sudden halt. From this point on they collect no new intel on what is happening on the other side of the Reaper's Blow.

- Gesseln suffers from a barrage of hostile encounters with the Cockroach Clan. However, the citizens fare better than in Leadfield. They manage to hide behind the walls and smuggle an outrider out of town to warn the Judges. But Judgement Hall refuses to send aid and draws all of its forces together in the south instead.

  Boriak, the local Alpha Wolf of Gesseln, cannot believe the lack of brotherhood and support, officially renouncing his loyalty towards Justitian and the Protectorate as a whole. The settlement revolts. Together with his men, Boriak manages to build crude mortars and fires shells into the lines of the rabid invaders. The Cockroaches retreat, but Gesseln is now on its own.

- In the heat of the escalating Clan Wars, the Central Cluster stages a coup with its Frankan counterpart in Aquitaine to oust the Raider of Toulon, Hamza Abubakar III, and take control of the Neolibyan's domain. The Chroniclers are sure of themselves and initiate Operation Mirage. In the last hundred years, they've studied how the Judges conquer territory. Now it's their turn to put these tactics to the test.

- The luckless Scrapper Zander digs out a strange artifact in the ruins close to Exalt that will eventually turn him into a rich man overnight, yet lay the foundation for a series of fateful events unfolding in the following years.

- Preservists patrolling on the western edges of the Protectorate run into a new threat coming from the Janus Crater. Pictons, Argyre's hellhounds from Briton, step into the Judges' territory, hunting for a man called Helios.

- The Chroniclers don't pay enough attention to their

underground facilities. Before they know it a Paler Horde, led by the Demagogue Vesna, slips through their security network and entrenches themselves in Exit C-3. The Palers are heavily armed and deflect all attempts by the Cluster to regain control over their occupied tunnel network.

◇ South of Siege, Cockroaches and Phosporites set up a death trap for the Protectors sent against them. With a calculated pincer movement they surround the attackers and turn the first retaliation strike of the Protectorate into a disaster for the Judges. The death toll remains unreported at first, but the news hits Justitian with a delay of two weeks. The invincibility of the Righteous Fist is publicly put into question for the first time.

2597: The year begins with a nightmare. Chalk Breach is surrounded by a massive cohort of Winged Ones. The Cockroaches manage to cut off the mining town from all supply lines. The resident Spitalians open the storages to supply the local miners, trying to stave off any advances of the Cockroaches. Weeks go by without any help. The miners lose their patience with the Spitalian overseers and topple the leadership, taking over the command center in an attempt to divert the attacks. The Winged Ones use the same tactics as the Weavers who were successful in the Leadfield massacre. They burrow tunnels through the perforated mines of Chalk Breach, and strike against the citizens on the inside. Nobody knows how long the miners will be able to hold their lines. They've already resorted to eating Cockroaches killed in the conflict.

◇ The Pheromancer King Markurant is reborn within the city limits of Justitian. The Foster Itis manages to steal the child from its human mother.

◇ Briton falls. Emissary Yasen seizes Rennes and has all of the Spitalians stationed in the city hanged from the blackened city walls.

◇ Aquitaine is destroyed by an unknown weapon. The mass murder sends a shock through the Central Cluster and jolts the Fragments into action, scrambling to find out who is behind the blitz attack.

◇ Chagall betrays Archot and opens the gates of A235 to the outlawed Clan of the Enemoi, thereby causing additional concern in the ranks of the Chroniclers.

◇ Dog's End on the far northwestern reaches of the Protectorate falls prey to a Corpse Eater infestation in their midsts. Several of the prison workers stationed here get infected by a strange parasite, turning the incarcerees against one another.

◇ The Arianoi Naraka has found refuge in the Jehammedan Quarter. On his endless search for Jehammed's Will, he foresees the next destination of the holy artifact to be in Justitian. He bides his time.

2598: Bassham registers an unbelievable wave of refugees fleeing from Franka. In the first three months of the year, 70,000 people rush into the westernmost entry point of the Protectorate. Meanwhile, in Justitian, the Central Cluster registers the signature of a Needle within the city limits and puts every Streamer at its disposal on red alert. Nobody dares to make forecasts on what horrors this year will bring...

The Time is Now

Divided Territory

COMPOSITION

If one imagined the Protectorate as a living organism, Justitian could be considered its brain: powerful in spirit, yet completely dependent on the heart, lungs, liver, and kidneys in order to make use of its abilities. The Protectorate's satellite cities are, in the broadest sense, the vital organs which grant Justitian strength and competence. Therefore they must be protected at all costs to keep the body moving.

Twenty major cities and outposts, along with hundreds of hamlets and tiny settlements, make up the entirety of the Protectorate. Every large hub plays a key role in the chain of supply and demand, with all significant trade routes converging in Justitian itself.

The Chroniclers estimate that somewhere between three and four million people inhabit the area, yet they can only rely on calculations based on the census conducted in Justitian. Most other cities have erroneous counting systems, which makes it harder for the Cluster to assess the population as a whole.

LIFE IN THE PROTECTORATE

Tell me whatever you fucking want! Yesterday I had to be vigilant and report outlaws, today I'm being told the Clans are on the rise, an' tomorrow some baldie will come along and yell at me that my harvest can't be certified. Come on! How long am I supposed to eat up this garbage? It's the end of the world, weekly now. You can't even walk into a tavern anymore to buy a pint of moonshine without some asshole claiming it's already doomsday.

I tell you, things used to be fine just the way they were. My parents ran their business, paid them bloody taxes, and owned a bunch of stuff. Things were well. Every year we could afford to gut a pig, and we had enough water and tubers stacked for the winter. We bought distillate from the Anabaptists and celebrated the harvest. But nowadays everyone's so goddamn stern and rigid all the time. All these new rules and regulations, down payments and deposits, paperwork and whatnot! Who's supposed to get a grip of all this shit? Instead of them Judges riding out to beat them fucking Clanners they come galloping onto my parcel, telling me I need to collect some new yellow an' blue papers in Uptown or they're gonna confiscate my dead parents' land!

Has everyone lost their minds? I mean, I've seen my fair share of stupid in my time, but it's never been this crazy. Why don't they round up them Anabaptists, and

them eggheads, march 'em south and wipe it all clean? I'll tell ya why! Cause they're scared shitless. It's easy for them to be pushy with us Providers, cause we've no grit and no teeth to fight back with. They're bullies because they can be. But once they've gotta face them cannibals, you see them stuffing their tiny dicks between their legs and hiding behind walls. I tell you man, if I was young again, I'd pick up that spade over there, sharpen its edge, and sign up for war. Them cannibals can do me no harm. I'd split their fucking skulls, one after the other!

Eh, but my time's coming, I ain't what I used to be. Right? Yeah, I can tell you suffer the same. Hear me brother, d'ya have any more of that moonshine to spare for your old neighbor? I could use a drink to wash all them shitty thoughts from my skull. Thank you son. That's how we do it out here. Us Providers need to stick together…

CITIES AND SETTLEMENTS

Most settlements are so insignificant they don't even appear on regular maps. Nobody would take the time to mark down their position. These hamlets, rarely sporting a population larger than twenty souls, grow along the fortified roads criss-crossing the Protectorate. They serve traders as lodging, or as small markets to resupply travellers who are still a day or two away from the next major town. Some of these backwater settlements sprout an occasional Alcove that houses a local Agent who has been demoted by the Cluster to prescanning passing artifacts and informing the Central Exchange ahead of time if something of interest is headed in its direction.

The major cities of the Protectorate, such as Bassham, Mobilis, Liqua, Cavernis, and others, all feature their own distinct flavor. Some exist purely to feed great Justitian, while others are in direct competition with the mighty metropolis. However, they all must pay fealty to the Righteous Fist or they would be faced with an army of Protectors riding their way.

TAXES AND EXPENSES

Justitian finances projects ordered by the Judiciary through taxes collected in the Protectorate and the city itself. The satellite cities, in turn, have a duty to tax their citizens if they are to continue to enjoy Justitian's protection. Every citizen of Justitian is obligated to pay his taxes directly to the Judges, month after month. The tax rate depends on the social strata to which the individual belongs; Providers receive benefits, city dwellers with citizenship papers enjoy tax deductions, and guests, subjugated Clanners, and other transients are rigorously asked to pay. The fees are to be settled personally at the beginning of each month at the Forecourt Alcove. The Protectorate cities, on the other hand, are required to assign a treasurer to deliver the deposits from his settlement all the way to Uptown. During such forays, the treasurers enjoy the privilege of being accomodated in Justitian's Ambassador Quarter for the length of their stay.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The tax revenue of the Protectorate is redistributed by the Senates to the Offices. A tough process, because the budget is rarely sufficient to equip each Office with the same means. One of the reoccurring agendas of Judgement Hall are the endless debates over which Office should be supplied with how much funds, with parties arguing back and forth in hour long hearings.

Additionally Uptown burns through its resources, fi-

nancing projects that appeal to the Supreme Judge Archot. Be it the upgrade of Uptown's Ambassador Quarter, or the decorations and statues displayed on Judgement Alley, there is always some new vision cooked up by Justitian's prime leader.

TRADE

The entire region depends on the continuous flow and handling of goods, as well as the trade routes that enable swift exchange, purchase, and resupply. The main transhipment hub is the Forecourt at the center of Justitian, the most impressive daily market in all of Europe. However, all other Protectorate cities also sell their goods locally and have their own markets, albeit dwarfed by the size of the Forecourt.

To ensure the safety of goods, several heavily protected junction points and warehouses litter the Protectorate from east to west, allowing trade caravans to load up additional assets declared for sale.

FORTIFIED ROADS

The most common form of transportation in the Protectorate is walking. A central nervous system of fortified roads ties the major cities together and connects smaller settlements via pathways. These main routes are secured and one will find Judges, Anabaptists and Spitalians patrolling ever so often. For a long time, the roads of the Protectorate were considered safe. In many places they are paved, lined with concrete slabs, and peppered with watchtowers.

During major festivals, such as the Harvest or Archot's Birthday, the roads clog up with travellers from all corners of the Protectorate. Traffic jams, often several miles long, bring all movement to a grinding halt, especially if some trader's cart has broken down in the middle of a road and there are no Scrappers close by to help with the repairs. Judges are sent out to dispel the congestion and navigate the streaming masses toward Justitian in orderly fashion.

DRY RIVERBEDS

All major rivers of the Black Lung have fallen dry centuries ago. The empty beds now serve another purpose entirely. Ascetics settle in the depressions, and use the rich alluvial soils to grow their crops. Narrow paths lead from parcel to parcel, across fields of wheat, rye, and rapeseed, and connect the tiny communities of farmers with one another.

TRAVEL SPEED

Getting from city to city within the Protectorate using the fortified road system is a relatively simple affair. Traders and workers can march 20 kilometres any given day, if they travel along the main arteries, and are not slowed down by a sudden dust storm or unforeseen accident. Off the beaten path, progress stalls and slows down to approximately 10 kilometres per 8 hours of walking. The terrain itself is rougher, the roadwork shabby, and carts can get easily stuck in narrow trenches. Beyond the Protectorate's borders toward the south and into the Clan Territories, the situation is an entirely different one. While it is possible to charge through these areas at high speed, it is not recommended. This strip of land is hostile and every Scrapper adventuring down there is well advised to slow down his movement and watch out for traps or sudden vanguards.

RAIDS

Raids have been back on the rise since the outbreak of the Clan Wars. The south and east of the Protectorate in particular are now considered unsafe. While guerrillas and bandits still hovered around the Protectorate territory robbing traders during the early years of Justitian's ascension, they were later joined by Apocalyptics who wrestled for control of the road network and attempted to get their piece of the pie. The Judges did not tolerate criminal splinter groups in the hinterlands and hunted them down one after the other, establishing order throughout the past decades.

With the return of the Clans, the situation has deteriorated vehemently. The war binds Justitian's forces and some roads have become deserted. The density of patrols is on the decline, and one gets to see Jurymen more often than actual Protectors these days. Therefore, travelers must be all the more careful.

LAWS AND PENALTY

The laws of the Protectorate are based on the laws established by Justitian and the Codex employed by the Judiciary, but they can vary depending on which Cult holds rulership over a settlement. Different Cults influence local jurisprudence or add their own peculiarities. In Liqua, for example, the Water Lords and Anabaptists are in charge of the legal practice and apply their flavor to what's commonly accepted. Anyone relying solely on his knowledge of the Judge's application of the Codex will soon find himself running into trouble by disrespecting communal differences.

THE TYPICAL BORCAN

The typical Borcan has grown up within the safety of the Protectorate. He has never seen a Psychonaut, subordinates himself to the Judges, and fears the Demiurge as the greatest antagonist of mankind. He doesn't understand much about the Neognosis, but that doesn't mean he isn't influenced by the ever present teachings of the Broken Cross.

He avoids Chroniclers and their inquisitive questions, always afraid to tell something that he wasn't supposed to and accidentally framing himself for something he hasn't done. He accepts the Spitalians and their ceaseless warnings about the Sepsis as a necessary evil, and he comes running to the nearest public hospital at the slightest sign of illness. He considers Scrappers a nuisance, but they keep things together, which makes them bearable at least.

At night he tells his children bedtime stories about the Mother of Ravens, or terrifying tales of African invaders who'll come to steal their mother and sell her into slavery. Most of what he knows is hearsay, underpinned with a healthy amount of prejudice. He's illiterate anyway, therefore he soaks up any news at a local taproom or while shopping at a daily market. He's heard that there is war on the southern frontier, and that the Clans are ruthless, yet he is not afraid of the outcome. He casts his faith into mighty Justitian, trusting that Archot will be able to fend off the savages, as he's done countless times before.

POLITICS

Judges, Chroniclers and Spitalians hold dominion over the Protectorate as a whole, in the same way they rule over Justitian. However, their influence wanes depending on location. While Cathedral City remains independent, situated outside of the Protectorate's borders, the Anabaptists' influence can be felt across the entire Frankan side of the realm.

For a long time the coalition between Cathedral City and the Protectorate was a given. The Spitalians considered the Anabaptists as brothers in arms, and the Judges traded with them for water supplies. The Chroniclers' aversion toward the Broken Cross, nurtured by their age old feud was mostly ignored.

But with the massacre conducted in Rennes three months ago, everything has abruptly changed. The news coming out of Briton is fragmented, and the Spitalians have yet to collect the gist of it all. The fact remains that six hundred members of the Storm Watch were executed in Emissary Yasen's uprising, and the Spital lost one of its major bridgeheads in Franka in the events.

The situation is agonizing. Daily now, delegates of Cathedral City are ordered to travel to Uptown for interrogation. The Spitalians established a task force, dealing with the analysis and full reconstruction of the events. The Anabaptists insist on having had no previous insight, nor that the maneuver was signed off by the Council in Cathedral City. They stick to their story that Yasen acted on his volition and claim that they've lost their brothers in faith on the northwestern coast of Franka to the Demiurge.

The Chroniclers use the momentum to sway the Spitalians over to their cause, and urge them to cut ties with the Broken Cross. Changes can already be felt across the city of Justitian, where Anabaptists have been denied citizenship papers in the past weeks, with appointments at the Office of Locality being cancelled en masse.

The Judges are caught in this conflict completely unprepared. They must mediate between the fronts as they rely on the Anabaptists to secure their borders and supply their troops in Siege. They cannot afford to lose such an important ally in the heat of the moment.

The Promise of the West

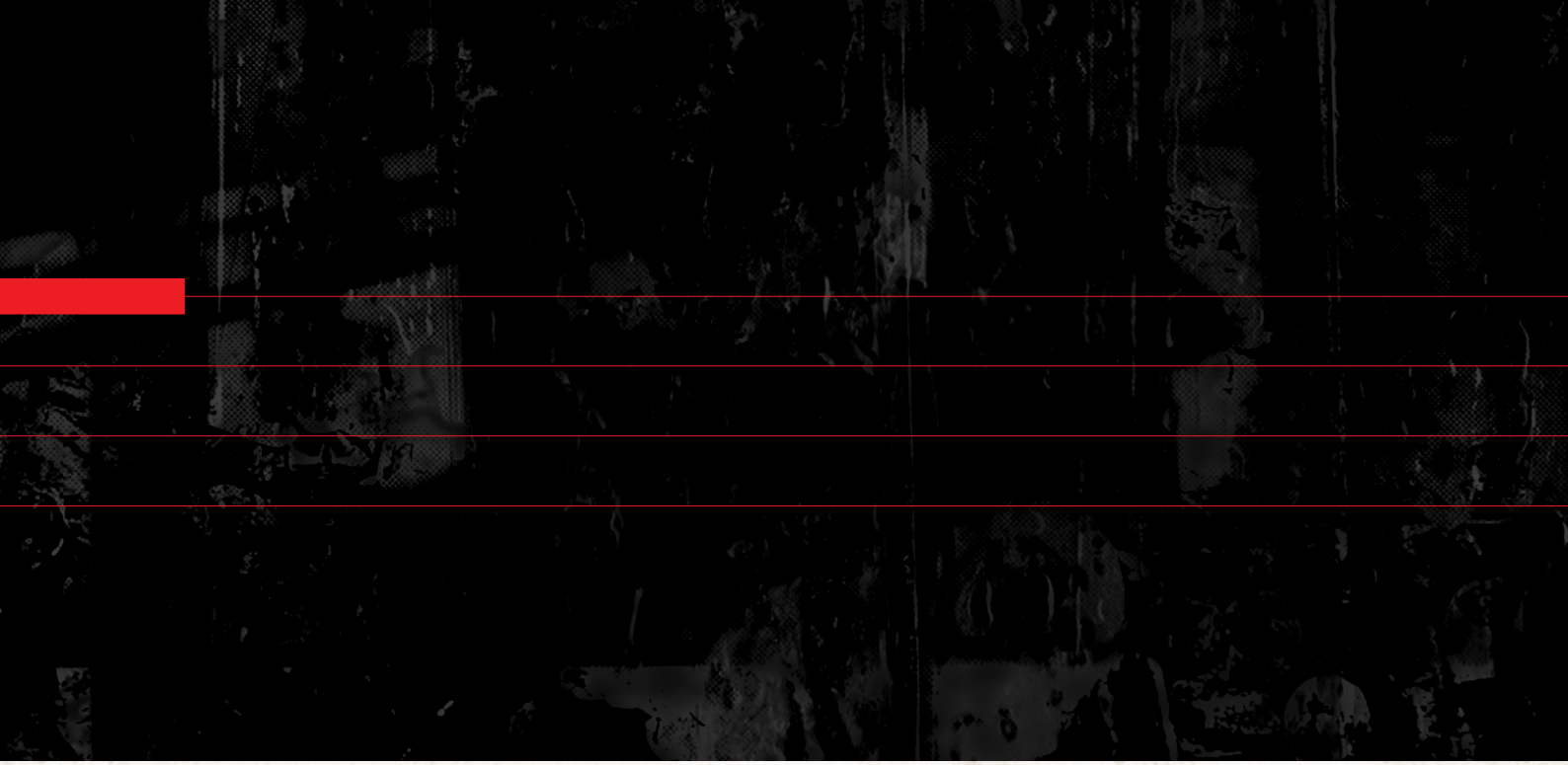
BORN

The kilns of Born burn bright, day in, day out. Especially at night, one can easily use them as a beacon to reach this remote western bordertown. The large forests that once grew beyond the settlement have been chopped clean in recent years, and the foresters working here have had to press deeper and deeper into Frankan territory to acquire fresh wood. Born is a small town, and it lives off the goods it produces, mainly the charcoal which it supplies in large quantities to Justitian for the generation of black powder. Besides that, wood is a commodity that's always in high demand as a construction material across the whole Protectorate. Born's sawmills have profited from the trade for quite some time, but it's much harder for the community to attract new citizens than it is to convert its natural resources into Drafts.

The Judges and Anabaptists divided responsibility for the town's leadership between themselves and established order among the small workforce of roughly two thousand lumberjacks, colliers, and their respective families. Things look peaceful from the outside. The bizarre clay chimneys which once rose from the ground have long been destroyed, the Expatriates dispelled or beheaded, and their drones driven out. When the Spitalians arrived to take core samples from the soil surrounding Born there were barely any traces of Sepsis left. The liberators of this hamlet had been diligent in eliminating all Primer infestations and entirely cleared the area by locating and scorching all remaining spore fields. There wasn't much for the Spitalians to be worried about and so they retreated towards Bassham soon after, leaving the community in the hands of Justitian's law enforcers.

Years of boredom followed. With nothing significant left to do, the Anabaptists stationed here began playing football matches against the resident Judges on the fields that were once controlled by a Pheromancer known as the Fuggarite. Their annual championship attracts the occasional guests who travel from Liqua or Spicafield to witness the spectacle. All of this is in good fun and spirits, helping to paint the picture of an idyllic and industrious settlement, just how the Judiciary likes it.

The lack of Spitalian presence, however, allowed for Born to become a perfect trafficking hub for Burn. A new Flock, calling themselves the Blood Birds, has seeped in unseen and set up shop in Liqua, using its close connection to Born to smuggle Unity into the Protectorate. Their leader, Abbot, is in cahoots with the reemerging Splinter Hawks of Ferropol, supplying his allies with freshly harvested goods. The Blood Birds themselves are a rebellious lot and remain unaligned with the almighty Carrion Birds of Justitian; they more closely resemble a group of guerrilla warriors than the average Apocalyptic operation. It's said they're tied up with the Resistance and have contacts running all the way up to some of the Commandants stationed in Bassham.



SPICAFIELD

Many years ago, the Demiurge beset the tiny community of Arquet, unleashing his spawn, the Pheromancer Diapazon, to twist the minds of the people and entangle them in a neverending trance of fertility. Wherever Diapazon placed his withered hands the soil turned barren and the grain was spoiled. The farmers of Arquet were at his beck and call: infested with spores, and slowly degenerating into Leperos, they lapped up the sap trickling from the Pheromancer's glands, mesmerized by his greatness.

When the Anabaptists stumbled across the village and began to grasp the extent of Diapazon's influence on the entire landscape, they sounded the drums of war. Led by Emissary Zamuel they returned in their hundreds to wage battle against the herald of hell and free the land from his blight. Diapazon fell. Zamuel himself tore the dreadful liver from the Pheromancer's gut and went on to purify the rotten soil, healing the land from the demon's blight. A mass distribution of EX by the Spitalians, followed by a strict monitoring program, allowed the people of Arquet to return to their sanity.

Healthy wheat blossomed on the purged fields and washed the surroundings of Arquet with an ocean of gold. As the Anabaptists were the conquerors they naturally took it unto themselves to rename the liberated town Spicafield and proclaim it as one of their new bridgeheads in Franka. It didn't take long for the Judges to arrive and contest the Anabaptists' ownership. After some deliberation the area fell into Justitian's hands, but jurisdiction remained with the Broken Cross. Within a few years Spicafield reformed and turned into a flourishing agricultural community and a secondary bread basket for the Protectorate, although the crops raised here aren't certified by the Spitalians and therefore may not be sold in Justitian. That doesn't bother the Ascetics on their parcels much: their harvests are indispensable when it comes to supplying Bassham, Born, Liqua, and many other places in the Protectorate.

Nowadays the community is almost homogeneous. The Anabaptists claim rulership over the territory and have converted the majority of the previous population to their faith. The city center features all aspects of their culture, from a chapel in honor of their savior Zamuel and public baptismal fonts, to large burial grounds covered with boulders and broken crosses. Spicafield is imbued with Pneuma, and the Ascetics are as spiritual as they come. They see themselves as the cure for a rotten paradise, and their hard work will replenish the broken Garden of Eden – Zamuel's glorious victory over Diapazon was the guiding light, and they shall follow in his footsteps until their destiny is fulfilled.

But the Anabaptists are unprepared for what's heading their way. Recently there have been unprovoked assaults on the farmsteads: stables on the outskirts set ablaze, abodes ravaged, silos plundered. Reports speak of savages painted with glowing runes attacking at night and taking whatever they can carry. Two families were brutally slaughtered, but only half of the corpses were ever found.

The description of the attackers is causing confusion. The local Judges assume that Phosphorites have somehow managed to circumvent the Protectorate and attack from the west, but a small corps of Preservists stationed in Spicafield knows better. Phosphorites are no cannibals, and the depictions correlate with other sightings documented in a separate altercation, thirty kilometers north. Pictons. Argyre's hellhounds have entered the Protectorate once again in search of Jehammed's Will.

Bassham

Less than twenty years ago, Bassham was nothing more than an insignificant patch of dirt somewhere on the western fringes of the Protectorate. Six hundred souls crowded around a tiny village square, surviving on the meager yields that they wrestled from the hostile Frankan hinterlands, always at the ready to defend themselves against raids by drones or Corpse Eaters. These people were pioneers – born stubborn, bred tough.

Then came the Spitalians. They had spotted the first Ziggurath, forty kilometers inland, and selected Bassham as their observation post. They were eager to learn what was going on within the bizarre mud complex and sent their scouts forward. Not a chance. The Spitalians had to retreat, incapable of penetrating the protective belt drawn around the Ziggurath which was teeming with an unprecedented legion of drones.

A month passed before an army of Anabaptists reached the tiny hamlet. Intoxicated by the Battle of Arquet and their victory against the Pheromancer Diapazon they urged for war declaring their allegiance to the Spitalian cause. Within weeks, Bassham was bursting at the seams. Three thousand Orgiastics and four Famulancer platoons took over the village grounds, digging defensive trenches through the countryside, erecting watchtowers and alarm posts, and steadily encircling the Ziggurath. Supply lines were established to replenish the frontline troops day and night, with messengers speeding back and forth between the trenches and radioing any hostile activity. Nobody had the faintest idea of what was yet to come.

OUT OF NOWHERE

It didn't take long for the Spitalians to understand what they were dealing with. The creature they had made out at the centre of the Ziggurath was nothing less than a Pheromancer King, a hellspawn which they had predicted to exist yet never before encountered. The Noumenon-Vocalizer readings spiked to absurd heights picking up the Aberrant's signature from the ether, forming a tonal sequence which the Spitalians were able to transcribe into a word: Markurant.

Markurant's polity was composed of thousands of drones. A frontal attack was out of the question. The Anabaptists and Spitalians required further assistance. Urgent letters calling for troops were posted to Judgement Hall. If the Righteous Fist would rise to support the operation against the Pheromancer King, Bassham would be included in the Protectorate after the successful destruction of the Ziggurath. Hundreds of square kilometers of fertile land would fall under the aegis of Justitian, expanding the realm westwards and offering new settlement opportunities for the Providers. Archot didn't have to think twice – conquest was in his blood. The Supreme Judge responded by transferring ten cavalry squads from the Protectorate to Bassham as additional firepower for the Spitalians and Anabaptists at the frontlines. At the same time, he issued grain, water, and arms supplies to fortify Bassham into an army camp. Scrappers from Tech-Central were offered steady employment if they joined the war effort and helped with the construction on site. The preparations for an all-out assault were in full swing, and the clocks were aligned to lay siege on the Ziggurath before the end of summer.

FORGED FROM HATE

The first wave of the attack quickly spun out of control. A veteran pack of Orgiastics that was supposed to engage on the southern flank was dragged into a bloody skirmish with Markurant's polity as they attempted to cross a dense swamp area under the cover of night. The warriors of the Broken Cross were torn to shreds by raging drones, agitated into a frenzied trance by the Pheromancer King's alarm pheromones which turned them into fearless adversaries.

Meanwhile, the eastern side suffered another crushing defeat. Torrents of rain had turned a stretch of flatlands into a mud trap. Two cavalry squads were forced to abandon their horses in the heat of battle to save themselves from a sudden pincer movement by the drones. The main army entered from the north, only to find the valley surrounding

the Ziggurath covered in purple mist – a haze so thick that one couldn't see further than an arm's length. The Spitalians and Anabaptists rushed inside, fighting for every meter of solid ground they were able to hold. Spitfires howled within the fog, illuminating the silhouettes of grotesquely deformed Idol Bearers overgrown with tumorlike swellings that exploded into spore clouds upon being struck by a weapon. Drones rushed in from all sides, launching barrages of poisoned arrows at the attackers or dragging them into the muck, cracking their skulls open with rocks. Dozens fell into traps laid out by the drones, their bodies pierced by cruel spikes or dissolving in pools of Pheromancer acid.

But the coalition of Spitalians, Judges, and Anabaptists didn't falter. Storm after storm, Bassham's troops pelted the Ziggurath, drawing the ring closer around Markurant. In the chaos of battle, the Baptist Amos and his Furor Vincent struggled across the North Pass and began climbing the monumental clay fortress. They hacked their way through a forest of bodies, Amos leading the way up, Vincent taking the rearguard.

Markurant appeared on the summit. His laughter bellowed from above as he noticed the two desperate and blood-soaked warriors. With a wave of his hand he forced Amos to throw his sword away and fall to his knees. The Baptist couldn't resist. Immediately, the Pheromancer King raised his arms to conjure a swarm of hornets to sting the intruders to death. The short delay was all that Vincent needed. The Furor rushed past his Baptist and detonated an ozone grenade, disabling Markurant's Phenomena for an instant – long enough for Amos to shake off the spell and reach for his pistol, emptying the entire magazine into Markurant's body. The demon staggered but did not give in. He clenched the Baptist with an iron grip and hurled him down the Ziggurath, his body impacting twenty meters below. As Markurant turned around to meet the second warrior, Vincent opened the valves of his Spitfire and set the Pheromancer King ablaze. The flames licked across his monstrous frame, his skin crumpling into popping blisters, his glands oozing ichor to try and extinguish the carpet of napalm that was burning him alive. His screams echoed from the top, splitting the mud structure of the Ziggurath, until he collapsed into a charred heap of heaving flesh trying to crawl away from his tormentor. Vincent didn't stop. He kept hacking at the Pheromancer King long after he was already dead, tearing off chunks of flesh and flinging them from the summit, baptizing himself with Markurant's blood and lifting his sword in victory. Again and again and again.

FACT SHEET: BASSHAM

CITY: Bassham, Tech-Level III

PROVINCE: Protectorate (Franka)

INHABITANTS: 62,000 / growing rapidly

POPULATION STRUCTURE: Anabaptists / dominant, Judges / dominant, Spitalians / dominant, Resistance / numerous, Scrapper / numerous,

LEADER: Amos, the Baptist

GOVERNING FORCE: Vincent, the Breaker of Bassham

FEATURES: Westernmost customs station and entrypoint into the Protectorate. The Citadel: Massive fortifications, largest war camp of the Anabaptists outside of Cathedral City; Chapel Hill: Hub of daily politics between the Anabaptists and their fellow Cults; The Anvil: Accumulation of Protectorate settlers, waiting to be admitted to populate the western expanses of Bassham; The Sprawl: Refugee quarantine and examination camp, run by the local Spitalians.

TRADE / GOODS: Distillate, quarried rocks and construction materials, handcrafted goods, smitheries, gas masks and filters, swamp survival gear.

CITY GUARD:

- Eight Anabaptist packs, consisting of 100 fighters, along with dozens more unaligned packs. Up to 2,000 Orgiastics could be scrambled within a week in the event of a massed Pheromancer attack
- Six Famulancer platoons under the command of instructor Schiefer
- Judge cavalry squad consisting of fifty Protectors led by Executioner Gorvidal

ARTIFACT TRADE: Limited with few finds, as expeditions west into the Frankan swamps are restricted by the Spitalians

COMMUNICATION: Radio links to Justitian and Cathedral City, weekly food shipments from Spicafield, outriders prepared to rush to Cathedral City in case of an emergency

GLORY

As the toxic vapors dispersed from the valley and the drones scattered to the four winds, the Ziggurath was demolished by the conquerors. Vincent was proclaimed the Breaker of Bassham and made governor of the young and promising province. A wind of enthusiasm gripped the allies, who hadn't even finished counting their losses; they had proven that humanity stood a chance against the greatest evils of the Demiurge. Infused with energy, they went about expanding Bassham and laying the foundation for what the city would grow to become in the following years.

Amos, on the other hand, survived the near-fatal drop with multiple broken ribs, shattered legs, and a pierced lung, and was forced to endure months in the Spitalian quarantine zone, feeding on his hatred. A boy had stolen his glory and disrupted the emanation that had foretold Amos as the righteous champion of this conflict. The Baptist's thoughts were clouded with envy. Leaving Bassham was not an option as his departure could be easily interpreted as defeat, staining his stellar rise to power within his own Cult. Instead, he declared the border town his official seat the moment he was again able to stand on his own legs, and used every opportunity to publicly diminish Vincent's success. When the Sublime Vicarent slew Ganaress in Briton just four years later without losing a single soldier in battle, Amos twisted the incident to label Vincent an unambitious leader lacking vision and ingenuity, banishing him to menial tasks such as teaching packs of Orgiastics how to engage drones in close combat. Vincent, never much of a politician himself, followed the orders, only to find himself supported by unexpected backers in Cathedral City. Trachees, Orphid, and Nuntius voted for Vincent to be accepted into the Council of Emanations in Amos' absence. Moreso, he was promoted to decorate the position of Amos' personal Counselor, in charge of validating and reporting on every one of the Baptist's emanations – a bitter turn of events that infuriated Amos all the more, effectively tying him to the man who ruined his reputation and cut him off from the ultimate success.

INTO THE PRESENT

Time flies; Bassham booms. The remote hamlet of yesteryear turned into a flourishing city and the fastest growing settlement of the entire Protectorate. The main trade route coming from the Alpine Fortress was adjusted to lead directly through its center, flooding the border town with cash collected from sumptuous customs payments. Meanwhile, Providers from the Rubble were lured here by the promise of new land waiting to be settled beyond the borderline. In fact, the soil west of Bassham prominently

featured rich mineral deposits buried underneath a thin layer of sediment and erosion. The Spitalians presumed these nutrient heavy quadrants to be leftovers of continental wildfires which charred the region during the Eshaton, leaving behind a vast stretch of fertile land between Bassham and the Janus Crater ready to be cultivated. The Providers bought into the story and hundreds of families in the Rubble gave up on their ancestral pastures, packed all their belongings onto oxcarts, and migrated in hopes of a brighter future.

The Citadel was erected to honor the Anabaptist saviors, representing a monumental broken cross walling off the city from the west, and swallowing the original settlement of Old Bassham. Above it all, Chapel Hill reigns and is the hub of the city's condensed secular affairs. Enclosed from the rest of the population, Spitalians, Judges, and Anabaptists meet daily to discuss the well-being of the community. That's what the general appearance seems to suggest. In fact, it's really just the Anabaptists who are in charge, offering their allies a piece of the pie to keep them silent and domitable.

The Pantheon serves as the central forum of public debate, and it is here that most governing factors are decided upon, with Amos overseeing that the outcome of these events serves the Anabaptists first and foremost.

REFUGEES

Three months ago all hell broke loose when the initial wave of refugee caravans from Franka rolled in, first in the hundreds, then in the thousands. The Spitalians struggled with the onslaught, trying to contain the masses and apply some form of order. The Sprawl, which had originally been built as a military camp for the doctors, could not withstand the barrage of new arrivals, and the carefully maintained quarantine zone was on the brink of collapse. The Spitalians had to act quickly to redistribute the foreigners, sending individuals who passed the quarantine inspections straight toward Justitian in order to free up space.

The situation is still not under control. As of today, at least 15,000 refugees clog the southern side of Bassham, easily making up a third of the city's population. The three dominant Cults must now work together, establishing intimidation tactics, curfews, checkpoints, and city prohibitions to keep the restless masses at bay. Conflict is brewing, especially amongst the Providers who are stranded all over the district of Lament, barred from settling the western premises they were promised prior to their arrival.

The refugee tsunami brings Bassham closer and closer to a revolt, with sedentary residents condemning the frivolous admission policy, seeing as they have to now compete for food and employment against an uncountable

Amos

One of Amos' best kept secrets is his emanation predicting Markurant's rise. When he spoke before the Council and convinced them of the urgency of sending troops to Bassham, he was uncontested. His visions had always proven accurate before, and there was no doubt that the Baptist was gifted in tracking down the breeding grounds of the Demiurge.

None of his emanations, however, were genuine. Amos took advantage of his connection to the Mother of Ravens, visiting her on every occasion when passing through Justitian, to have her read the Tarot for him. She foretold the birth of Markurant and the Baptist's victory over the Demiurge. It would be the deed necessary for Amos to follow in Rebus' footsteps and lay the groundwork for his rise to the top of the Cult. The Tarot offered insight into a predetermined path, one that would take the Baptist to Parasite and allow him to crush the Demiurge at its root. The prophecy didn't allow for deviation and became the core of his conviction. Amos was certain he couldn't fail, imbued with confidence and empowered by the words of the reverend Mother.

However, the crone gave him a warning. His ascension and transformation into an avatar of Rebus would not be without obstacles. A child would spring forth from an unholy union between a Chronicler and an Anabaptist and tear at the fabric of creation, the Mother of Ravens whispered. The newborn would be the obverse of every one of Amos' accomplishments and defile the Cult's tenets, destroying the Anabaptists at their foundation. Therefore it had to be found and killed, before it was too late.

Amos spent years searching for the child without finding a single trace. Was his future already lost? Was his destiny misaligned during the moment Vincent stole the victory over Markurant from his hands?

Amos visited the hag once more, begging her to reveal the truth to him. The Mother of Ravens grinned at the Baptist writhing before her, asking him how he could be sure that Markurant was truly dead. Amos froze at the thought; he had seen the cadaver with his own eyes, and witnessed the Ziggurath crumbling before him. How could the Pheromancer King not be dead? The hag dismissed Amos with a snarl, reminding him of the fact that fate was malleable like clay and that he'd have a second chance at fulfilling his prophecy. Enraged by the riddles of the Mother of Ravens, the Baptist stormed out of her lair and cut all ties with the crone. Yet he cannot shake off her spell. The revelation of the child that will come to oppose him at the zenith of power gnaws at him day after day. Amos must know.

surge of uprooted people. There simply isn't enough space in Bassham to occupy and provide for these numbers. The food terminals responsible for the distribution of daily rations are swept clean, the grain silos empty, and the water levels of the reservoirs critically low. Shops lie deserted since nobody has money to afford anything. Already, groups of foragers are breaking off in cohorts, travelling west against all warnings of the Spitalians, hunting for wild game and trying to connect the city to remote freshwater sources.

BOTTLENECK

Bassham's major problem: the city produces very little, yet it keeps growing at breakneck speed. No other settlement in the Protectorate has seen such a rapid influx of construction and amplified expansion since the founding days of Justitian, yet it lacks the infrastructure to keep itself sustained. In this unfortunate state Bassham is fully dependent on grain shipments coming from Spicafield to feed its population, and water supplies from Cathedral City to quench the people's thirst. The bargain of rural land ready to be distributed via leases remains unfulfilled. The Spitalians restrict settlers from claiming new parcels anywhere further than five kilometers from the city. The hinterlands still haven't been fully cleared and a series of events have caused them to stay wary. Recently, spotters have seen a spike in drone activity, and the appearance of Expatriates attempting to seed spore fields in Bassham's proximity is alarming.

The pioneer spirit that had once jolted the city forward has ground to a sudden halt. To the Anabaptists who govern Bassham, this isn't necessarily a bad thing. People who are restless and without purpose are highly susceptible to mass conversion, and the Broken Cross likes nothing more than cementing its power with numbers.

ASSERTIONS

Gorvidal, the Head Executioner of Bassham and cousin of Aritha Manteufel, is closely watching the scenario unfolding. A veteran of the war against Markurant, he has witnessed the city's spectacular rise with his own eyes. He attributes the current chaos to the inability of Anabaptists to govern cities, lacking the foresight to establish long term planning beneficial to a prosperous society. How could they possibly know how to do that? Their knowledge of agriculture aside, Anabaptists are an obsessive warrior Cult dabbling in spirituality, rather than politics and economics. The latter has always been the Judges' domain of expertise. In Gorvidal's eyes, the policies enacted by Amos and his Spitalian advisors will damage Bassham in the long run and cause the city to either fall into stasis or implode, creating another hot spot for Judgement Hall to deal with on their ever-growing list of problems.

To enact proper change he must get the Office of Protectorate Affairs involved. Only the foreign administration of the Righteous Fist will be able to turn things around for trouble-ridden Bassham. In his mind, refugees should be assigned as a mandatory labor force for the Providers, allowing the farming communities to erect their farmsteads by the onset of spring. The Spitalians should be shaken from their slumber and called upon to redistribute their forces. Instead of preparing missions of questionable value toward Parasite, their troops would be far better off serving as deployable protection squads, enlarging the settlement perimeter for the farming communities and thereby expanding the amount of available land for cultivation.

At the present point in time, the Anabaptists would be of greater use digging freshwater channels in the west, allowing for irrigation of newly claimed territory, rather than sitting in their Citadel waiting to be called to arms against some encroaching enemy. In Gorvidal's opinion, their religious fervor strikes them with paralysis - once a major threat is defeated, the followers of the Broken Cross tend to waste time waiting for a sign from their God. Unacceptable! A modern society cannot ever lapse into apathy! If Justitian's rise has taught but one thing, progress is the key to unlocking prosperity. The Office of Protectorate Affairs agrees with all points raised by Gorvidal and has sent a delegation of Advocates and Arbiters to Bassham to reshuffle the power structure.

THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE

One man has what it takes to cause a shift in these turbulent times. Beloved by the people, Vincent, the Breaker of Bassham, governor and second in command to Amos, has been pushed to the brink of political insignificance. His glass is always half-empty, his plate always half-eaten. Under Amos, he's been sitting in the sidelines, demoted to tasks far below his rank and skill.

Gorvidal is convinced that Vincent is the right person to initiate a revolution from within. Daily now, the delegation of the Office of Protectorate Affairs besieges the young Counselor at his residence on Chapel Hill, dragging him into somber meetings about Bassham's future. The Arbiters roll out papers and present sheets that supposedly show the city's growth potential over the next five years. Vincent can't read, so he just nods at their explanations. The Judges remain pushy: if he took the responsibility that was bestowed upon him when he struck down Markurant with his bare hands, Judgement Hall would accept him as the rightful leader of Bassham. The Advocates point to a document that bears a red seal, claiming that the Senates signed off on their proposition. Vincent doesn't understand the scope of the affair, but Gorvidal and the delegation assure him that once he's at the top of the food chain, he will be backed by Judgement Hall. Vincent is mesmerized by the prospect of setting things right for his life, and assuming the position he was barred from due to Amos' jaded persona. He also knows that the Baptists in Cathedral City would endorse him in rulership, but to follow through with the regime change he will need to sway the Spitalians to his side.

A QUESTION OF LOYALTY

Nobody has been more torn by the question of loyalty than the Spitalians. A few months ago they witnessed the greatest betrayal in their century old alliance with the Anabaptists. Yasen the Merciful ravaged the city of Rennes, killing hundreds of Famulancers and closing Briton off from the rest of the world. Gorvidal's plans of ousting Amos to replace him with Vincent don't go far enough. From the perspective of the doctors, the Anabaptists have forfeited their right to governance over any city within the Protectorate. Bassham should be overseen by the combined forces of the Spital and the Judiciary, with Anabaptists playing nothing but a defensive role in the development of the city.

Gorvidal doesn't dispel the notion entirely, but the Office of Protectorate Affairs wants to avoid unnecessary friction with Cathedral City at all costs. If anything, Vincent must be positioned as a puppet, surrounded by advisors from Judgement Hall who steer his decisions in the right direction without giving the Anabaptists a reason to doubt his competence.

But how should they get rid of Amos? Gorvidal lets his eyes drift across the Sprawl and its countless refugee tents. Civil war, he says.

Mobilis

The Technodrome must hold! It is the root of civilization. Without electricity the peoples of the Black Lung would be condemned to live in fear of the dark. Any damage sustained to its system is damage sustained to the Protectorate itself! The Cave Bear Ulfir might have uttered similar words, before he was stabbed in the throat 57 times by Shutters who then watched as he choked on his own blood. Perhaps the previous ruler of Mobilis would have provided a more fair distribution of energy across the Protectorate? Well, fuck that! He's dead now, and any discussion about his socialist approach is moot.

Anybody got a conscience to clear? Two rows of Chroniclers silently stare at their feet. Ulfir was a despot, a junk lord, demanding horrendous fees for the energy he controlled, they say. He had to be ousted or Justitian would have run out of fuel. The Chroniclers nod in unison. There ain't nobody around to tell Ulfir's side of the story anyway.

This tiny intermezzo played out exactly seventy-seven years ago. In light of the cascading events that shook the Protectorate afterwards, it's a piece of history that is easily forgotten. Mobilis has been in the hands of the Chroniclers ever since, and they have no intention to let anything about that change. The power generated in this city is what keeps the Cluster operational, Source modules fueled, and E-Cubes charged. Therefore, Mobilis must be protected, secured, and fortified with the best defense protocols the Chroniclers can muster: an entire Hellvetic battalion – mercenaries for hire, paid for with stacks of Drafts fresh from the printer.

POWER SURGE

Mobilis' history is long and shrouded. What can be derived from a rare handful of fragments is that the city was founded as a base camp for the 100s. Cave paintings discovered in the nearby mines show the arrival of the first generation of Sleepers in black cargo trucks and airborne vehicles, followed by hordes of headstrong Palers. The glyphs can be dated back to Clans of unknown origin who had survived the Era of the Beast by hiding in this backwater region. Their interpretation of the events was muddied by superstition, but the Chroniclers who investigated the caves centuries later were able to clearly decipher the connections: Mobilis was one of the main operational centers of Project Tannhäuser, established to allow swift interaction with the peoples of the Black Lung and to teach agriculture and trade to these early tribes. It is unknown whether the ancient Clans once residing in this territory were assimilated by the Sleepers, but the fact that the cave painting tradition abruptly ended speaks in favor of the theory.

Supposedly, the agents of Project Tannäuser restored the damaged coal power plant to an operational level and located the neighboring anthracite deposits. Nobody else at that time would have had the knowledge necessary to do so, but, with the majority of the evidence destroyed, what really happened in those days remains hard to discern. However, some of the structures standing in Mobilis to this day bear the characteristics of an internment camp, their walls and corridors emblazoned with yellow Recombination Group logos which have almost entirely flaked off due to extensive weathering. Much of the architecture consists of container-like buildings, some made of durable plastics, others of strange metal alloys. The Chroniclers claim that such housing was once developed for off-world missions on different planets. "Different planets, eh?" says a Scrapper with a face covered in soot. "How much Burn do they sniff to come up with that shit?"

Whatever the case, these housing pods can still be found throughout the western part of the city, now inhabited by miners working for the Chroniclers. The current residents expanded the pods with more recent additions: outhouses, gangways covered with awnings, and drawbridges connecting the containers into small community hives, each with enough space for several families to share a single facility, using adjacent greenhouses to raise crops. The Chroniclers monitoring the city's population conclude that the original function of these structures was to encourage exactly this form of cooperative behavior.

REIGN OF THE NINEFINGERS

Mobilis was battered during the City Wars. Cultrin's army laid siege on the enclave for weeks, until the invaders cracked the defenses and forged a path into the Terminal Core, slaughtering the Sleepers along with their henchmen. Cultrin wasn't satisfied with the success and ordered that Mobilis be razed, and every memory of it eradicated, but the conflict brewing in the south diverted his attention and parts of the city survived intact. As the forces of Exalt retreated to engage Cathedral City and Noret, a gang of Scrappers called the Ninefingers slipped into Mobilis' cadaver and took over the shattered ruins. Amidst the chaos and ongoing hostilities raging across the Black Lung the Ninefingers had managed to take the high priests of the Mechans hostage, and forced their captives to explain the intricacies of the power plant to them. The Mechans, who had inherited the cauldron city of Nullpellia from their progenitor, understood the functionality of the Technodrome and shared their knowledge while begging for their lives. In vain. The Ninefingers showed no mercy and executed their captives, establishing a regime of intimidation over Mobilis over the years that followed.

Legends tell of the Ninefingers demanding virgin sacrifices in exchange for providing electricity, slaves, and forbidden artifact trade in their domain. Other stories recount the Scrappers plundering Tannhäuser equipment and dismantling it, shipping the pieces off as worthless scrap to Neolibyan traders as far as Genoa and Syracuse. Theirs was a reign of terror, yet they had their backers far and wide. Allegedly, Ulfir, the second or third leader in the Ninefinger line of Cave Bears, supplied the Carrion Birds and Anabaptists with power harvested from the Technodrome. It was clear that the Chroniclers couldn't sit back and watch things continue like this. Budding Justitian required what Mobilis had aplenty, it was just in the wrong hands.

MONOPOLY

The energy collected in Mobilis is essential to the survival of the Cluster and everything the Tech Cult aims to achieve. As such, no price is too high to protect this resource. While the Chroniclers have their own means of power generation in Justitian, these installations mainly serve as backups to bridge potential blackouts. Rulership over Mobilis gives the Chroniclers an edge over anyone competing with them, and they won't allow this monopoly to slip through their insulated fingers.

To ensure the enclave remains uncompromised, a

FACT SHEET: MOBILIS

CITY: Mobilis, Tech-Level III

PROVINCE: Protectorate (Borca)

INHABITANTS: 17,500 / Chronicler census / declining

POPULATION STRUCTURE: Chroniclers / dominant, Scrappers / dominant, Judges / dominant, Clanners (Prison laborers) / numerous, Hellvetics / numerous, Spitalians / present

LEADER: Fragment Apex

GOVERNING FORCE: Executioner Schimanski, in command of the Protectors assigned to the city

FEATURES: Terminal Core: Central district operated by the Chroniclers and their trusted underlings; The Technodrome: Coal power generator; The Flank: Living quarters for the Scrappers of the city; The Trader Hub: Small market on the east side of the city, and the only contact the workers have with the outside world; The Railway: Link between the coal mines and the Technodrome, heavily patrolled

TRADE / GOODS: Power supply, surplus ores and metal extracted from the coal mines, basic commodities, scrap to be turned into spare parts for the Technodrome, information and rumors from across the Protectorate sold at the Trader Hub

CITY GUARD:

- The Hellvetic Battalion: 54 Grenadiers, 18 Sappers, 20 Foragers, 24 Spotters, 24 Medics, led by Corporal Altamira
- Protector garrison consisting of 40 City Judges and Protectors on a 6 month rotation, accompanied by 100 Jurymen
- Extensive Chronicler defense systems, including cameras monitoring every angle of the approach to the city and Stream drones equipped with deafening sonic alarms to scare off any approaching targets

ARTIFACT TRADE: None. Every offer is rerouted to the Central Cluster.

COMMUNICATION: Linked to the Chronicler radio network, direct communication wire to Justitian

massive amount of force and intimidation is required. Judges deployed in Mobilis are known for carrying out their orders with cruelty and resentment. Here, they have no Advocate watchdogs breathing down their neck about the Codex not being correctly upheld, no Assessors who pedantically record their missteps, and no Commissioners to drag them before a tribunal in Judgement Hall. At most they are required to write a monthly report to the Office of Protectorate Affairs proclaiming that everything is proceeding in Justitian's best interest, the streets of Mobilis are being kept safe, and that the residents are conducting their labor in high spirits.

The prison workers sent here to act as additional manpower and support for the miners and Scrappers employed in Mobilis would beg to differ. One wrong look or brash act of defiance leads to cruel public beatings at the hand of the Judges. The Protectors don't shy away from outbursts of violence, but they are not allowed to kill the laborers. The Chroniclers need them to keep the Technodrome supplied with coal. Every man is necessary, although the Chroniclers could care less about civil rights. To them, the clamor of the masses is just as annoying as the one echoing through the streets of Downtown.

However, it's not enough to simply install Judges as overseers. Mobilis lies wedged between Liqua to the north and Cathedral City to the south, two Anabaptist strongholds well known for their insatiable territorial appetite. The dry riverbed of the Rain leads directly past Mobilis' east side and is teeming with Ascetic settlers. If the Broken Cross ever decided to draw a ring around the Chroniclers, they could do so before Justitian would have time to mobilize its armies in response. The Cluster doesn't want to act passive and broadcast weakness. Instead, the Chroniclers hired an entire battalion of Hellvetic soldiers from the Alpine Fortress to secure Mobilis at all times. The cost of such a standing army is astronomical, funneling an enormous flow of revenue and impressive supply shipments towards Hellvetica. The trade agreement is mutually beneficial, allowing the Alpine Fortress access to a stream of exclusive goods and resources otherwise limited to the Protectorate, while also providing the Chroniclers with an additional sense of safety.

All this would have gone unnoticed if it wasn't for the Office of Civil Economics in Uptown discovering the massive spending and bringing the case before the Senates. A quick glance at the numbers made it abundantly clear how wasteful this mass deployment really was, especially in consideration of how desperately Siege requires troops to replenish its borders against the encroaching Clans. Mediators were summoned to appear in Judgement Hall to explain the staggering expenses. The review is ongoing, final words pending.

REDISTRIBUTION

Once the Chroniclers took over, the old power lines were severed and rerouted towards Justitian - everything generated was now solely required to feed the Cluster. During the course of their work, the Agents in charge of installing the new overhead cable system came across a curiosity. In the Depot, Mobilis' main storage and distribution facility, they discovered an underground line snaking southward, which had seemingly been active for decades. The Chroniclers began following the cables, assuming they had simply stumbled upon the remnants of an ancient connection to Cathedral City – the birthplace of their Cult.

They were mistaken. The powerline circumvented the Anabaptist capital and aimed straight toward Noret. The Marauder Gusev appeared to be leeching electricity from Mobilis. How could this be? Who had set this up? There was nobody around that could explain this, so the only rational solution was to cut the link.

Other problems followed shortly after. The main power line leading to Justitian ran north past Liqua, trailing along the fortified road system of the Protectorate. It would've been foolish to let it run cross-country, as it would make an easy target for sabotage. However, the fact that it crossed Liquan territory forced the Chroniclers to siphon off a percentage of their annual production to their rival as a tribute. Yet another obstacle troubled the Chroniclers. The Terminal Core can only operate if it is sufficiently supplied with water, and the only city that can match the demand is Liqua. The Cluster pays horrendous fees year after year to keep the power plant linked to the subterranean pipeline system.

The Chroniclers have been vocal about this situation and raised their concerns in Judgement Hall on multiple occasions, protesting against the extortion. Archot was forced to step in as a mediator and calm the tempers, calling Liqua's ambassador in to negotiate a fixed annual sum to provide Mobilis with water, or else Justitian would tighten the noose around the Water Lords and enforce sanctions. The ambassador caved and signed the contracts without further debate.

INDUSTRIAL

Mobilis shares many similarities with other sectors under Chronicler control. High security systems are installed everywhere around the Terminal Core to keep an eye on the population. Workers must pass the Customs Control Area to begin their work day out in the mines, and check back through on their way home. Every worker is issued a silvery identification card which he must punch into an apparatus upon entering the Flank. Entrance into Terminal Core facilities is prohibited, unless one has been awarded a special

pass identifying them as a mining engineer.

The miners are granted residence in the housing pods, and organize themselves based on their assigned ranks within the labor community. Loaders, putters, and barrow-men are at the bottom of the brotherhood, operating the lorries and mining carts of the railway. Above them are the hewers and drillers who excavate the shafts, and the hurriers who transport the coal to the surface. The mining engineers are at the top, overseeing the worker units and scheduling shifts below ground. Most of them are skilled mathematicians and have roots among the many Scrapper mobs of the Protectorate.

The pay is decent, which attracts both Scavengers from Tech-Central and recently released convicts as day laborers. In Mobilis they can stay anonymous for a while, especially if they have unpaid bills waiting back home in Justitian. Some use the industrial grime of the city as a reset button for their lives: Defilers trying to escape the desolation of the past often wash up in Mobilis, hoping for a new beginning, but they can't expect much if they're tattooed or branded. If their markings are exposed by a local Judge they'll be demoted to punitive labor, cleaning out the latrines of the container buildings or shovelling soot from the coal plant. Nobody can stay here forever. The conditions are harsh, and after a few years in the mines even the most hard-boiled worker faces burnout.

Mobilis doesn't offer entertainment: curfew begins at sunset, and only a handful of commercial buildings sell anything beyond meager stews and flat beer. In contrast to Justitian, the city has no focus on luxury goods of any kind. The Trader Hub is a market designated predominantly for basic commodities, located on the eastern side and separated from the city itself. It is here that the miners can get in touch with the neighboring Ascetics and meet Liquan traders, bartering for a few exotic luxuries or picking up news from all over the Protectorate. When they return to their quarters in the Flank, they're cut off from everything that happens in the world outside - an information embargo initiated by the Chroniclers to keep the workers dead set on their tasks. Any unsettling events discussed in public would just cause unnecessary fuss.

THE RAILWAY

To ensure continuity in supply the Chroniclers collaborated with Manufacturers from Tech-Central to develop the railway, a circular lorry track that feeds the Terminal Core with coal shipments. Once the lorries reach their destination, the cargo is transferred onto conveyor belts that unload it into the pulverizer.

The railway is the most vulnerable spot of the entire operation, which is why constant observation by Judges is required. Protectors and their Jurymen patrol the tracks all day long, checking that the loaders and putters don't fuck anything up. The work is so dull that many of them count the days until their six month shift is over and they get transferred back to Justitian. They miss the Magpies from the Harbor as much as they miss the comfort and relief Downtown offers. But what can you do? Someone's gotta make sure this place stays halfway civilized.

THE HELLVETIC BATTALION

Eight divisions of Grenadiers, armed to the teeth, and Sappers, equipped with heavy duty demolition equipment, twenty Foragers overseeing the distribution of troop supplies, two dozen Spotters, and an equal number of Medics comprise the Hellvetic Battalion deployed to protect Mobilis. This is enough firepower to pulverize pretty much every other medium sized settlement in the entire Protectorate, and it is the largest military encampment of the Hellvetics outside of their zone of influence. Some would call it overkill.

Corporal Altamira is in charge of keeping her army of mercenaries in good spirits. Weekly, she reports back to the Alpine Commission in Justitian's Ambassador Quarter, justifying every expense and undocumented ammunition usage to the resident Subaltern, Bloch. Her soldiers are bored out of their minds from patrolling the hill lines and perimeters surrounding Mobilis. There's nothing going on, no enemy in sight. All of this is a waste of resources. Bloch agrees, but reminds Altamira that this is exactly what the Chroniclers paid for, and that she should just enjoy the leisure time and send her Spotters out on another mission to accurately map the territory.

The Corporal shakes her head in disbelief. Who installed an armchair pencil-pusher like Bloch to manage Hellvetic operations in the Protectorate? Isn't there a desperate need for a changing of the guard in Siege? Wouldn't her Hellvetics be more useful on an actual front line, instead of guarding birch trees? While she tries to keep her officers from developing cabin fever, her Spotters report a strange anomaly they'd come across on one of their forest patrols. When passing through a field of dirt covered megaliths, the Radio Beam Unit's transponder detected a magnetic disturbance. Altamira orders the Sappers to look into the matter and bring some measurement tools along to take soil samples and inspect the rock formations for any unusual subsurface deviations.

A week later, the expedition team returns, having unearthed a mass grave fifteen kilometres west of Mobilis; piles of bones buried six feet underground and coated with radioactive filament, along with grotesquely malformed human skulls. One sediment sample retrieved by the Sappers featured bone splinters fused with crystallized nanites. What in the world are the Chroniclers hiding in this neck of the woods? Altamira is stunned and wants to see the mass grave for herself before deciding on her next steps.

Fingerprints of the Gods

Mobilis keeps its secrets to this very day. What did the Sleepers originally plan to do here? What was their motivation for establishing their base camp in this region, and where did the 100s and their Paler minions come from? Anyone who has studied the splintered history of the Recombination Group knows that there weren't any major bunker systems in the Black Lung. But what's indisputable is that the remaining RG facilities scattered across the city all feature distinct purposes, from supply silos to medical treatment centres, birth shelters, and indoctrination compounds, all prefabricated and ready for use. The original settlement must have taken less than a week to set up.

Fringe scholars among the Chroniclers proclaim that this is where a new mankind was to be created. In fact, some of the interior pictographs found within the ancient housing pods visually depict humans stepping into cylindrical machines and exiting as transparent figures with visible organs and illuminated by some sort of incandescent aura. The Cluster does not approve of such images being circulated. Whenever a new one is revealed workers are tasked to cover up the depiction with tar and paint. Since none of these findings feature essential Stream components, their use is controversial, and the Chroniclers would rather have them disappear than answering uncomfortable questions posed by a confused audience.

BURIED SECRETS

It isn't just the city that is full of traces of ancient technology and bizarre contraptions of the past, the countryside is practically littered with evidence. However, anyone trying to scour the hills surrounding Mobilis for traces of the Bygones does so at their own peril. The Chroniclers don't want trespassers sniffing around, digging up clues that could compromise the modern narrative of the City Wars.

The old caves have been sealed off. In some places the Chroniclers commanded Scrappers to destroy the ancient glyphs with jackhammers. Totem poles which depicted Sleepers embracing the peoples of the Black Lung and ascending with them towards the heavens were chopped down and incinerated. But one can still find relics buried under the soot or hidden in the birch forests dotting the nearby hills. Strange megaliths lie askew in the landscape, caked in dust and obscured by rotting foliage. If they are brushed clean they reveal numerical markers, planetary constellations, passcodes, elemental formulas, and mathematical equations.

A bright mind would be able to interpret some of them as blueprints containing instructions for combustion engines, genetically enhanced wheat, or super-condensed nanofibres. Another rock is engraved with a satellite's orbital path around the Earth, displaying a 1,000 surrounded by four concentric circles. Twenty five years ago, and 120 kilometres southeast, a star crashed onto the city of Nullpellia, destroying large parts of the city and bringing an end to the Taunar ruling caste. When the survivors inspected the molten wreckage at the center of the impact crater they came across four egg-shaped cartridges composed of an indestructible alloy, imprinted with the same symbol. The Pneumancers brought the metallic artifacts back to their temple and enshrined them as a sign of their destiny.

Knowledge appears to be sprinkled in abundance, but it's the kind of knowledge that the Chroniclers viciously keep for themselves. They have tasked the Hellvetics with running routine patrols and clearing any artifact raiders from the forests and caverns in the vicinity; Palers in particular. Anyone spotted off-road is considered a potential threat. If necessary, the Hellvetics have authorization to shoot on sight.

OPERATION: APEX

One creature residing in Mobilis is at least as ominous as every element left behind by the Recombination Group. Fragment Apex, gaunt, gray, and grim, conducts his research from the top of the Technodrome, directing his subservient Agents and Streamers to be the best at their given tasks. Their collective effort buys Apex the time to indulge in what really drives him to be here: Sleepers. He studies them, identifies their patterns, revels in their magnitude and how they were able to fill rooms with their presence. If only he could taste the nectar of their wisdom and experience the world through their ceaseless eyes. But they're gone. The City Wars have forced the last of them into hiding.

Apex scours through the folders of classified data he's been able to restore, investigating the trails left behind by the 100s. All his findings point back to Praha Republika and the ominous "Bunker 16", which has halted all signal transmissions since Chernobog rose from his slumber and ravaged the city. In Apex's mind, there must have been a greater connection between Mobilis and the Archivists of Praha. At least one line of evidence ties the communities together and reveals the exchange of artifacts stolen from the Grindworks during the height of the City Wars. An ancient folio, salvaged by Apex from a defector, affirms interactions taking place between the Spitalians and Mobilis on at least three separate occasions between 2192 and 2245. Were the doctors offering their services and knowledge to the agents of Project Tannhäuser? To what extent, and for what purpose?

The pictographs found in the housing pods illustrate aspects of bioengineering. What were the Spitalians doing in Mobilis? Splicing DNA? Helping the Sleepers create new branches of humans, adapted to the conditions of post-Eshaton Europe? Could this be an explanation for the mutations raging across the savage Clans of southern Borca? The Phosphorites? The Cockroaches? Are they the true descendants of the Recombination Group?

The Desolation of the North

SINDER

A swarm of cruel pigeons circles above Sinder's market square, looking for leftovers. They know there's always something to eat. Down there, next to a red slab, people have laid down bread and fruit to pay homage to the First Judge. This is where the story supposedly begins, where the myth of the Judges was born. It is said that the First spoke his judgement at the crimson colored block of granite and shattered the head of a criminal with a blow of his hammer on that rock.

Sinder thrives on this legend. Throughout the years it has become a place of pilgrimage on the northernmost fringe of the Protectorate. Nobody would give a damn about this backwater if it weren't for this story. Merchants and craftsmen all around the market square make a mint selling devotional paraphernalia and faceless statuettes of the First Judge to the gullible Vagrants on their yearly passage through the bordertown. One can also acquire versions of the Codex, books wrapped in heavy leather and filled with only blank paper. The merchants say that this is intentional. The empty pages are meant to inspire and leave room for interpretation, so one can ponder the First Judge's greatness without being limited by words. Another stall sells embossed bronze coins. The face shows a man with a floppy hat, coat, and hammer, and the rim flashes with one of the typical judicial sayings in Latin. Transient Protectors adore these tokens and collect them like talismans.

Business is good and Sinder keeps marketing its uniqueness with anecdotes of Archot allegedly making the pilgrimage four times during his tenure. The truth is that the Supreme Judge has never even set foot into the settlement, but nobody is really asking.

On the other side of town, Ragnulf, an obese City Judge with an obsession for cats who is in charge of the small community, faces a different set of problems. Reports coming in from the Ice Barrier speak of mammoth sightings on this side of the Reaper's Blow. The Garganti, a nomadic tribe from the east, have made it across the ice sheet and are now heading for the Protectorate. While Ragnulf scrambles to get his people to build fortifications and man the watchtowers, he is completely blind to what's happening behind his back.

A Horde of Palers has covertly infiltrated the outskirts of Sinder. Twenty of them, Solars and Revivers accompanied by a heavily armed Cyclops and an Aspirant, have established a base while looking for the way to enter the Stukov Desert from here. The first name on their kill list was the local Chronicler, Index, who went missing from his Alcove a week ago without a trace. The Horde has siphoned all relevant data from Index's Stream drives and knows about the active RG Dispensers out in the red dust. It is only a matter of time before they move into the Stukov Nomads' territory to locate the caches.

NEWCREST

Kranzler, the Provost of the Preservists, is a heartless veteran who has long since given up on considering other human beings as friends. The only living creatures he has any empathy for are horses. When he stands next to his black mare and runs his gloved hand through the animal's mane, he feels at home.

Newcrest was under the jurisdiction of the Judges for as long as anyone can remember, and it was here that their cavalry supplied itself with the best stallions the Protectorate could muster. Legend has it that those early horses were brought in from the north by the Clans fleeing from the encroaching Ice Barrier, but no corroboration of such events exists.

The Great Cleanse, however, brought a set of radical changes to Newcrest. In a secret deal signed between Rutgar and Kranzler the outpost changed hands and was placed under the direct command of the Preservists. The Judiciary still nominally acquires their mounts from the vast stables, but it's Kranzler's men who now conduct the breeding and training of future generations of horses.

In one fell swoop, they replaced all previous stableboys and hired a host of new workers to expand the fortifications of Newcrest, adding watchtowers to the outpost's perimeter and letting black banners fly across the main gate. Workers are no longer allowed to live off site and must take up residency in Newcrest. In return, they're granted lifetime employment by the Spitalians, free medical care, and housing. Hygienists were ordered to decontaminate the facility and establish a system of waste drainage, while Epigeneticists were tasked to help with the selective breeding of the steeds. Pharmacists developed antibiotics for the colts and vaccinations for the stallions, strengthening the horses against common maladies. Scrappers were brought in to develop better horseshoes and hired as blacksmiths to work within the walls.

Within a year the whole village had been transformed into a militarized warcamp. Four hundred workers are now responsible for approximately 3,000 horses. Among them are trainers who spend their whole day breaking in stallions, and work closely with Preservists and Protectors to teach the animals how to act in battle.

The horses from Newcrest are fabled as remarkable beasts of fury. Kranzler's mouth twitches a rare smile when he hears that. He admires his breed because they resemble what he used to be: impetuous and merciless. And he doesn't keep them to himself. The Preservists of Arnsberg now ride out on Newcrest stallions into a world of grave danger.

Liqua

Where there is water there is power, and where there is power the Chroniclers are never far. Not so much in mighty Liqua, where they are forever barred from entering through the city gates. The hooded freaks can't stand this, of course, which is why they seed the legend of a weak Liqua, a reputation entirely built on lies. They depict the foundation of the city as a stroke of luck amidst the turmoil of the City Wars, spinning a tale of uprooted peoples and refugees who stumbled upon a literal fountain of youth – a settlement site providing them with abundant water supplies. Undeservingly so! In their resentment of Liqua, the Chroniclers paint the ruling Water Lords as ignorant buffoons held on a short leash by their Anabaptist masters, all the while refusing to acknowledge the city's true heritage and belittling its greatness.

As with many of the Cluster's propaganda pieces, nothing about their story is true. Liqua is ancient. It once served as the epicenter of Project Tannhäuser operations across western Borca, in a time when the Chroniclers depended on the help of Sleepers for their own survival. The Cluster is well aware that the city is ripe with secrets that are denied to them.

However, things are even more complicated these days. Liqua is torn apart by internal strife, gripped by a power struggle and signs of a brewing civil war. The Liquans, descendants of the groomed society raised by the agents of Project Tannhäuser, are in direct opposition to the Anabaptists, who initiated a political maneuver ousting the Water Lords and overthrowing the old ways. Between the warring factions sit the Exalters, descendants of a fallen empire forced into an unworthy existence in exile.

LIKE A COMET

It is the year 2173. The Ice Barrier hasn't yet swallowed the wreckage of Bygone Malmö. The Dispensers crack open, awakening the first Cascade. Six hundred elite soldiers rise from cryosleep, their memetic conditioning functioning as if implanted yesterday. They break open the seals of the massive bunker system, and step outside into a hostile future. Together with their army of Guardians, they initiate Phase One of Project Tannhäuser.

The 100s split up into two contingents. Team Pollux ventures south across the salt flats of the retreating Baltic Sea to take "Bunker 16" in Prague and secure the dormant 200's. At the same time, Team Castor crosses the tectonically unstable zone of Denmark and enters the wastes of northern Germany. Their mission: hide amongst the survivors, instigate the development of an agricultural society, establish trade, and locate Exalt.

Spotters map the land. Using salvaged bunker equipment they set up a relay station and broadcast a signal toward Prague; Code Green – operation in full swing. Days later they triangulate a hydrostatic anomaly, probably caused by a groundwater pressure burst. It's a starting point. The Sleepers plant their first base camp, tagged "12/9-17/21-01" and later to be rebranded as Liqua. Then everything goes at lightspeed. Team Castor branches out into multiple smaller units, spreading out in all directions, scouring the ruins for signs of life and searching for suitable settlement opportunities. Members set out for France, others for Britain to gain access to secret caches stored by the Recombination Group and track down the 300s frozen in London. Others stay behind and focus on expanding the current area of influence. Native Clans are subjugated with ease, new ideologies are implanted, and their families are relocated to Liqua to help with the growth and fortification of the enclave.

Meanwhile, in the east, Sociocybernetics make first contact with an occult assembly of Streamers who hide their faces underneath masks and hoods. These self-proclaimed Chroniclers have collected extensive data on the region and its inhabitants and recognize the arriving agents of Project Tannhäuser as powerful remnants of the Bygone age. They offer knowledge in exchange for protection, claiming that their kind is being hunted and lives on the brink of extinction. The Sleepers decide to draw a defensive line around this arcane Cult, thereby gaining ac-

cess to their Cluster, before siphoning every byte of useful intelligence from their new allies. Conclusion: Exalt is in reach - but the 100s are too late. Someone else has already taken the facility and triggered the Grindworks program. There is only one option. Retreat to Liqua and monitor the unfolding events.

Before long, clashes begin. A sect of religious zealots united by the banner of their Messiah Rebus enters Liquan territory from the south, demanding that the city sever its alliance with the Chroniclers. The invaders set fire to the fields and steal plans for a water system. The Liquans fight back, but they're brought to heel by the swarming Anabaptist army. The remaining Sleepers are able to intervene at the last moment, signing a temporary peace treaty with the radical fanatics. It is this ancient paperwork that will become the backbone of much future contention.

TWILIGHT YEARS

Many of the details that make up the history of Liqua are frantic scraps, akin to ramblings written down by manic clairvoyants. Rumors speak of a great collapse of values and betrayals following the Anabaptist invasion, a time generally referred to as Liqua's Twilight. Cyclopean defensive walls were erected to preserve the young city state, and an era of alienation followed. By the time Exalt rose from the ground to become the radiant powerhouse of Borca, Liqua had already been reduced to a mere shadow of its former self. The enclave managed to endure, keeping to its traditions, fiercely guarding its water resources, and replenishing its ranks with the horse peoples that were migrating into Borca from the north, fleeing from the expanding Ice Barrier.

Soon after, the pale ambassadors of Exalt, so called Halos, were sighted at the city gates, calling for tributes in blood. There was a clear shift in perception, a divide breaking the existing society apart; the mood of the Black Lung was lurching toward chaos, and the agents of Project Tannhäuser had suddenly become the hunted as hostilities between Exalt and Liqua began to spiral out of control. Meanwhile, the Cluster, former ally of the Liquan founders, actively worked to seek out and destroy the 100s - utilizing the newly created Shutter program as a means to an end. The city state was forced to act, sacrificing its own leaders for independence. In 2411 the last Sleeper reigning over Liqua was captured by their own people, escorted to the Janus Crater at the edge of Britain, and sold off to Argyre, the rotten Vulture of London.

FACT SHEET: LIQUA

CITY: Liqua, Tech-Level III

PROVINCE: Protectorate (Borca)

INHABITANTS: 89,700 / no census

POPULATION STRUCTURE: Clanners (Exalters, Liquans) / dominant, Anabaptists / dominant, Apocalyptics / dominant, Scrappers / numerous, Neolibyans / present, Scourgers / present

LEADER: No single official leader

GOVERNING FORCE: The Four Water Lords

FEATURES: Concentris: Neutral territory shared by all of the citizens, strict non-violence policy; Axial: Yuma's district, home to the Basilisk, the main water pumping station of Liqua; Gaudica: The entertainment center controlled by Cervex, and site of the Arena, a gladiatorial ring that attracts people from all around; Sacritia: A devout place populated by Orleanna's Ascetics; Neo-Exalt: The Exalter enclave, controlled by Ziphod; The Memetic Walls

TRADE / GOODS: Water pumped across the entirety of West Borca, gambling dens, exotic spices and goods from Africa, Burn

CITY GUARD:

- 6 packs of Orgiastics residing in Gaudica under the command of Furor Cervex, consisting of around 300 warriors
- 50 armed Exalter fighters ready to defend Neo-Exalt, bolstered by 7 well-trained and equipped Halos
- 2,000 Ascetics who will take up arms should Orleanna give the word

ARTIFACT TRADE: Chroniclers are not permitted in the city, however the Exalters pay well for artifacts related to their old home.

COMMUNICATION: The Blue Radio Tower, the ruin of the ancient relay station built by the 100s to transmit across the Reaper's Blow. Currently inoperable due to damage to its circuitry; Secret radio connection from Neo-Exalt to Enceph on an encrypted channel

INTO THE FUTURE

Today. With the end of the City Wars the clock was reset. Exalter refugees fled into Liqua's arms and were welcomed by the indigenous population. It felt like a new beginning, and the Liquans had it all: hermetic walls, abundant water supplies, rich fields, and a history of opposition and autonomy. Better yet, no Chroniclers. Liqua abruptly stood in direct contention to the Cluster as a bulwark of the Northwest, rival to Justitian, a free city that refused to bow to the demands of Judgement Hall. The Water Lords held their own against the advances of the Righteous Fist and aligned themselves with Cathedral City, inviting the Anabaptists into their home.

It didn't take long for the Broken Cross to wrestle control out of the hands of the Liquans and proselytize the population. The Anabaptists showcased ancient treaties that verified their claims to the throne and infiltrated the line of succession. Before they knew it, the honorable Water Lords were turned into puppets on strings, dancing to the tunes whistled by Emissaries who brandished the three-dot tattoo on their furrowed brows. Who was left to oppose the new rulers? The Exalters. As one of the major powers in town, they butted heads with the Anabaptists and enforced a series of edicts to split Liqua up into four sovereign districts, Axial, Gaudica, Sacritia, and Neo-Exalt, each with its own government. A fifth district, Concentris, was declared neutral territory to allow for the various leaders to interact peacefully with one another.

LAWFUL PARADISE

Liqua is green. Lush twines of verdant ivy flow from the walls of buildings, and hedges of vibrant juniper grow along the pathways. People raise crops in the atriums of their houses and on rooftops, while public fountains provide the Liquans with fresh water all year round. There are no citizen restrictions or penalties like in Justitian. Water influences every aspect of the city's culture so vividly that it can even be seen reflected in the architecture. There's not a wall that isn't covered in frescoes of wave patterns, ripple motifs, or concentric circles, and not a street or public square that doesn't feature hydrographic contours. The symbolism is so strong that it quickly becomes imprinted in memory. Memetics at work?

Thermal baths dot the neighborhoods - the mineral rich waters are supposedly beneficial for health, say the Anabaptists. One can easily believe them seeing that the median age of Liqua's population appears to be far older than in other Protectorate cities. Men and women exhibit vigorous features well into their late sixties.

But water is also the crux of Liqua's wealth. More than just Justitian itself, the majority of all settlements in the region depend on Liqua's supplies, either to bolster their own groundwater reserves or because they have no access to the resource at all.

LAWLESS CESSPOOL

Any Advocate worth his title would describe Liqua as a lawless cesspool, devoid of order, human decency, and civil integrity. Their assessment is based entirely on assumptions, as barely any Advocate has ever actually stepped into this realm to see what's going on with their own eyes. For Judges, Chroniclers, and Spitalians, the city of the Water Lords is off-limits. The jurisdiction of the Protectorate doesn't apply here, and the three ruling Cults are rendered powerless.

These statutes were anchored during the annexation of the city into the Protectorate. Archot wanted to see Liqua included within his territory at all costs, and he was willing to grant the city-state liberties that he wouldn't have bequeathed to anyone else. Nobody knows what the true reason for the Supreme Judge's benevolence was. Maybe the decision was made to avoid war, and keep the Anabaptists in Cathedral City pacified? Whatever his motivation, he managed to secure Liqua's resources for Justitian, and in turn created an autonomous enclave within the Judges' zone of control.

Casinos, public gambling, and gladiatorial matches outlawed everywhere else suddenly accumulated in Liqua, criminalized groups found shelter behind its walls, and racketeering flourished. The city attracted a diverse crowd of people, particularly those who were already on bad terms with the Judiciary or the Cluster. These days, there are more Neolibyans operating from Liqua than anywhere else in the entire Protectorate. Apocalyptics flood the streets, dominating the entertainment districts of Gaudica, running their brothels, and selling Burn - albeit in far lesser quantities than prior to the Great Cleanse. The city prospers from free trade and amenities, and merchant princes ship their goods to be sold for big cash on Justitian's Forecourt.

Attempts were made by Protectors to enter the city undercover and keep tabs on any developments, but their camouflage was quickly blown and they were expunged from the city. The Chroniclers weren't any more successful. Currently, at least three Shutters are deployed in the city, monitoring public events and collecting information. But they have to act with extreme care. A few years ago

a cloak-and-dagger mission initiated by the Cluster backfired, and all of their agents were exposed by an Anabaptist going by the name of Orek, the Pious. The hooded freaks paid a horrendous price for the failed infiltration, as Liqua publicly denounced Justitian and threatened to cease its water supplies for a full month unless the Cluster issued an open apology. Only then would the Water Lords release their hostages. The Chroniclers flinched, and tried their best to not lose too much face.

THE FIVE ZONES

Five major districts define modern day Liqua, each distinguishable from the next by the policies of the Water Lord presiding over his part of town. Unlike other cities, Liqua must juggle between four leaders, each with their own distinct motivations and visions of an ideal society.

CONCENTRIS

No weapons or hostilities are allowed in Concentris. The city center must be kept free of all animosity. Anyone who breaks the rules is banned from Liqua, and can never return. The law enforces peaceful and diplomatic behavior, which has caused words to become all the more venomous. Anytime the Water Lords come together to discuss anything related to the future of Liqua or its position within the Protectorate, cynicism and loathing seeps from the mouths of the participants.

The populace, on the other hand, enjoys the tranquil nature of Concentris. All major markets, shops, and public water reserves are located here.

AXIAL

The Water Lord Yuma reigns over Axial, the founding district of Liqua, a place of tradition reaching back to the earliest days of the settlement. The oldest architecture and relics of the influence of Project Tannhäuser can still be witnessed at large. Colossal murals and mosaics adorn the streets, depicting idealized portraits of Gerome Getrell, the mastermind of the Recombination Group. Yuma orders the workers to keep these images in mint condition and fight against their decay. He's a man of orthodoxy, one who appreciates the status quo, and encourages his subjects to search for the true meaning of life by looking into Getrell's eyes.

Yuma controls the Basilisk, the large water tower pumping system that feeds the main aqueduct meandering toward Justitian and the pipelines running to Mobilis - which has made him the richest man in the region. His home is a temple of splendor, decorated with trophies and Bygone wonders, and it is here that he holds sermons for the people of Axial, praising Liqua's ancient heritage and independence. Yuma believes that the Liquans have a responsibility amongst the people of the Black Lung, one that requires them to lead by example and heed the freedom they've been able to acquire through the control of water.

GAUDICA

Furor Cervex, Water Lord of the Anabaptists and generally considered the most moderate of the four rulers of Liqua, found pleasure with the Apocalyptics, inviting the Flocks of the region to settle in Gaudica. Blood Birds, Iron Shrikes, and Fallow Roosters soon followed his call and made their home here, setting up their various establishments and bringing gambling, prostitution and recreational Burn use into town.

But Gaudica offers even more. The Arena is known across the border and attracts visitors from other cities who travel to Liqua to enjoy the blood-drenched battles, with fighters facing off in cage matches against sentenced criminals and captured beasts, or performing staged reenactments and theatrics. These clashes range from harmless show fights to murderous manslaughter, and are the main attraction of the district.

The Scourgers Adabra and Onyia, twin brothers and Kifos, are the melee instructors of the combatants, and sometimes participants themselves. They are beloved by the crowd for their unusual tactics, agility, and dramatic stagecraft, keeping the masses on the edge of their seats.

SACRITIA

Emissary Orleanna has closed off the district of Sacritia against all turbulent influences, protecting the Ascetic settlers of her sovereign domain from the sins of the Demiurge. She frequently wages political assassination campaigns against her fellow competitors Cervex and Ziphod, and sides with Yuma on all matters of inheritance, birthright, and ritual practice.

She believes that the interference by the Exalters is a knife in the back to all Anabaptist progress in the city and demands that Amos pay attention. In fact, she's one of the fiercest supporters of the Baptist, holding him in highest regard and issuing fiery speeches that praise him as the new Messiah. It's a desperate attempt to get Cathedral City's attention. If the leadership of the Anabaptist Cult would endorse her she would be able to extend her influence across other Liquan districts and potentially hamper her rivals.

Sacritia itself is a devout neighborhood of deeply canonical Ascetics who oppose their Orgiastic brothers in all matters of faith. They believe that the Cult must return to its roots and begin its final quest for the four rivers of Eden, or they will be doomed to a life of servitude at the hands of the Demiurge. Liqua's geological water anomaly is seen as proof of their conviction. They use the thermal springs to bottle water and sell it as medicine across the Protectorate, claiming that the inherent healing properties cleanse the soul of evil thoughts.

NEO-EXALT

Ziphod, the Exalter Water Lord and governor of Neo-Exalt, is a sacrosanct high priest, waiting for the absolution of his kin and a chance to lead his people back to the holy

Memetic Walls

It's not clear whether the 100s erected the monument on the northwestern edge of the city or if it is a relic left over from the Bygone age. The scholars and priests of the Exalters have prayed to the eight pitch-black blocks since their arrival here three generations ago. The Chroniclers also know about this obscure place, but they are barred from inspecting the structure and discovering its purpose.

Each block displays the same characteristics: laser cut from a single piece of hematite, the interior facing side is polished and reflective like a dull black mirror. Legends shared among the Exalters claim that the walls speak, but nobody knows when, or why. Many have tried to solve the conundrum of the occult site which has attracted the curiosity of Halos and Sleeper Prophets alike. What's known is that the walls were built with a purpose and that they aren't just some random assortment of rocks.

Exalters who claim to have been embossed in the Grindworks are reported to experience visual stimuli upon entering the sacred site. Some describe having seen the universe reflected in the polished stones, others say that Getrell revealed himself to them, offering insight into the future of mankind. Spectral images flicker across the surface, broadcasting a visual array of cascading rectangular symbols followed by sudden constellations drawn between them, and accompanied by haunting tonal frequencies that cause birds to frantically circle the site. Before anyone can drop to their knees and attempt to scribble down what they just saw, the walls darken and fall silent, keeping the seeker guessing whether the epiphany was real or just an illusion induced by some unexplainable natural phenomenon.

What nobody has found out so far: an Emitter artifact is required to ignite the Memetic Walls as they were intended. However, instead of pointing the artifact vertically into the sky, it must be placed horizontally and brought into perfect alignment with the ominous structure. If the laser beam hits the first surface at the correct angle, it reflects over from wall-to-wall until a sixteen-pointed star is created from the light beam, powering the construction and opening a visual connection port to the Minerva orbiting in space.

land of their ancestors. He only knows Exalt from stories of his childhood, told to him by his aging grandparents whose views of Cultrin's empire were coated by idealization and nostalgia. Ziphod has never travelled south of the Protectorate's border to witness the wreckage of the former golden city-state, or to see the tumultuous and war torn countryside infested with cannibals and savage tribes. Instead, he believes that the Clan Wars are nothing but Chronicler-driven propaganda: fake stories to trap the Exalters in a state of fear and discourage them from reclaiming their territory. This conspiracy theory is widely accepted amongst Ziphod's autochthonic community, and many are eager to commit to a fully fledged exodus.

But for now they are being held back. The time isn't right, say the Halos hiding among the inhabitants of Neo-Exalt. They act as Ziphod's secret advisors, influencing the high priest in his decisions. They're called the Blighted Ones, the Seekers of the True Word, and the Embossed, names given to them by the Exalters who revere them like guardian angels. In fact, some of them have entered the Grindworks on behalf of their Sleeper Prophet Enceph and returned with a different look in their eyes. They have been changed, enlightened by things which cannot be unseen.

ENCEPH

The enigmatic Sleeper Prophet Enceph has made Liqua her refuge for years, directing her Halos to comb the Stukov Desert for remains of broken Dispensers and traces of crystallized nanite clusters, anything that will help her solve the riddle of the Memetic Walls and allow her to receive a sign from Getrell himself. She understands that she is part of a greater plan, one that encompasses her sister Trice and the remaining Free Spirits. Helios' emergence and his attack on Aquitaine were a sign that the hour of reckoning was about to strike. Have all the pieces fallen into place? Is this the moment of retribution for the fall of Exalt? Will the Sleeper Prophets get their revenge and dethrone the Marauders once and for all?

DOG'S END

The wind ceaselessly blasts across the northern plains, accelerated by the downdrafts of the Janus Crater and swirling with salt and dust particles. Nobody enjoys living out here, but Dog's End has a special purpose for Justitian. On the one hand, its mineral deposits allow for quick extraction of salt supplies which are essential for the metropolis, while on the other it functions as a useful outpost to keep Liqua's northern expansions in check, a dry riverbed acting as a borderline to limit the city state from grabbing more territory.

All of the workers in Dog's End are prisoners of war hoping for early pardon. In fact, the Judiciary rewards the excessive labor by halving their punishment. The Judges stationed here, however, are not volunteers. Most of them are proclaimers who have fallen from grace within the Cult and have been transferred to Dog's End as penance for their sins. That doesn't make life for the prisoners any easier. In fact, there is no other labor camp in the Protectorate with as high an escape rate.

Working in the tunnels for an extended period of time is physically excruciating. The air is dry and the vapors seeping from a series of sealed side shafts are highly corrosive. The workers suspect that the mines might have once been used by the Bygones as some sort of waste disposal ground - but the Judges stay silent on this topic, and refuse to distribute maps of the underground expanse to the Spitalians.

Twenty days ago a labyrinth of ancient rust-stained barrels, scrap, and compressed garbage was discovered by a mob of Scrappers, who subsequently began to investigate the subterranean network of shafts and caves after striking a deal with the local Judges. They were scouts for the Cartel and had been on the road for months. Their bones were gnawed at by rheumatism, their cheeks sunken from exhaustion. All they were wishing for was to make a find that would please their Master Bosch. With glowing eyes they walked through the collapsed alleyways, rummaged through corroded containers, and dug in the dust. A foul smell rose and embraced the men, who immediately pulled their homemade gas masks tighter. Something slithered across the floor, hardly visible in the dim light of their torches. A screeching, crackling, snarling noise echoed from one of the caves, and suddenly one member of the group had gone missing. What the fuck was going on?

The mob scrambled in search for their comrade only to find him eviscerated in one of the bleak side tunnels. The Scrappers panicked. With the dead man in tow they fled back to the surface to inform the Judges of the encounter, and to bury their friend.

The next day all seven survivors had fallen sick. They were pale, their lips turning blue, some had lost patches of their hair during sleep while others were covered in blisters, and they were all maddened by hunger. The Judges were shocked at the sight of the Scrappers and acted quickly, rounding them up in one of the warehouses on site to contain a potential outbreak of an unknown sickness. Immediately, they posted a message back to Justitian calling for a Spitalian inspection. But it was already too late. Murderous screams bellowed from the warehouse for days. The Judges and prison workers were forced to listen to the haunting cries as the afflicted killed and devoured each other.

Seventeen days ago the warehouse abruptly fell silent. Nobody dared to open the doors to take a look inside without Spitalian backup nearby. Nervousness and agitation crept through the community and guards were assigned to keep an eye on the building day and night. Fifteen days ago a man sized hole was spotted in the outer cladding of the makeshift prison, apparently created in the early morning hours. Did someone sleep through their shift? The Judges wasted no time on a witch hunt and manned the watchtowers instead, putting Dog's End under lockdown. Nobody gets in, nobody gets out. A dozen musket barrels are ready to aim at any suspicious movement inside the camp.

Thirteen days ago two prisoners disappeared. Only a chewed jawbone and some torn clothing was found at the elevator shaft leading down into the salt mine. The incarcerees are on the brink of all-out mass hysteria, and the Judges refuse to leave their posts.

HARM

Pigshit, pigshit as far as the eye can see. Welcome to Harm, the largest livestock ranch in the entire Protectorate, squatting on the border of the Rubble. This is a place of grace and beauty, if you believe the local pig farmers, as long as you ignore the unbearable stench. That's bullshit, of course, even though there aren't any bulls around.

Let's rewind. As the City Wars came to an end and Justitian steadily rose to become the dominant power in the region, the Harmids, a tight knit family of Providers, settled a day's travel from the young metropolis, founding a tiny village compound that specialized in pig fattening. The Harmids were smart traders, and they were resourceful. They knew that Justitian had no opposition in the Black Lung and foresaw that it would soon grow into a powerhouse in terms of population – a population that would require feeding. Harmid, the patriarch, established countless deals with the Advocate families, drafted contracts signed by the Department of Rural Development, and kept the Hygienists close and the city officials of Uptown closer. His pig farm would produce the meat necessary to supply the Righteous Fist for generations to come. In return, Justitian would be obliged to always buy out a minimum of seventy percent of his annually raised fatstock. The Judges agreed to the terms, unsuspecting of Harmid's long term plans – he was a tycoon in the best sense of the word, one that plotted years ahead and made sure that nobody could trace his funds or compete against his growing empire.

Harmid's investment budget was bolstered by secret deals with the Carrion Birds, who were keen on laundering their drug money through the offsite pig farm. Over the course of just a few years Harm, as the settlement had become known as, exploded. What had initially started out as a moderate farmstead with a couple-hundred hogs and sows, eventually grew into an industrialized battery of pigsties home to several tens of thousands of animals.

Year after year, Harm raised more livestock than Justitian needed, bleeding the Judges' treasury dry due to their contractual obligation. The only way to put an end to exponentially escalating costs was to incorporate Harm into the Protectorate and refinance the annual expenses via heavy taxation. Harmid didn't live to see that happen, but he left a fortune behind for his family, who were now the richest farmers all around and controlled the meat industry of the entire Protectorate along with everywhere across the Black Lung that their products were exported to.

The Judges sensed the enormous clout the Harmids had amassed over time and tried to break up the family business by enacting sanctions, but the heirs stood united and used their contacts with the Carrion Birds to influence the politics of Uptown with bribes and cronyism. In return, the Apocalyptics utilized the pig farms whenever they needed to make corpses disappear.

It seemed as if nothing could damage Harm, until the Jehammedan settlers arrived with their large goat herds in tow. Judgement Hall saw an opportunity to dismantle the pig farmers and issued a public smear campaign, labelling the Harmids as "Barons of Bacon", ordering citizens to buy lamb roast, and using the newly founded Office of Hygienics to release statements detailing the threats of consuming pork. Hygienists set up a booth on the Forecourt where they dropped chunks of raw pig into acidic solvents to showcase the worm infestations carried within the animals. As a result, the price for Harm's livestock went into free fall. The Barons of Bacon had been dethroned by the Jehammedans, who were now offering the long overdue alternative to the local meat supply. Lamb became fashionable across all of Justitian, with the exception of the Cross Quarter. The Anabaptists would rather starve themselves to death than eat something that was raised by the hands of their mortal enemy.

However, just as Harm was about to fade into obscurity, the attack on the Colossus tore through Justitian's midst and branded the Jehammedans as a manic sect of terrorists. Citizens revolted, renouncing their support of the Jehammedan Quarter, and the sales of lamb meat plummeted. The dynasty of the Harmids saw this as their final straw, a chance to come back stronger than ever and reshuffle the meat market in a brand new direction. All they needed was an investor who believed in the age old tradition of their family and would support their limitless ambitions: Bosch.

Cavernis

You need Drafts if you wanna survive, and if you don't know how to make some you'd better find a way to make yourself useful and sharpish, or you'll be grinding dust between a fucked up set of ivories before you know it. Yeah, you're gonna try your luck out in the wastelands? Godspeed, brother, and let me know if you make it past the Cockroaches. Oh, already shitting yourself? Gotcha! Looks like Tech-Central is off-limits for you too, with all that cash you owe the Cartel. Better suit up and pay them bills back, before they come looking for you.

Go grab yourself that shovel over there and check this out. See these stones? This one is pyrite, that blue one is cobalt, and that shiny one with the crystals all over is tungsten. Could you tell 'em apart, if you spotted one? Yeah, them cyber toads pay well for these nuggets. If you can dig through rock and look out for them, you'll be a made man in no time. All you gotta do is get yourself a lantern and some good boots. Here, I'll lend you mine for a fee. Look, across the ridge, see that lil' shack at the edge of the gorge? That's where your mining crew sleeps, once they come back from their shift. They call themselves the Soot Badgers. You go there and introduce yourself, tell 'em Tercio sent you, and explain to 'em you can dig so they don't deck you right away.

No, don't fucking argue with them about the pay! Come to me if you gotta negotiate, but don't bother them with your sob story. They all got their own business to take care of. Just keep your ugly mouth shut and work your ass off, and you'll be in the clear. Trust me. This is your last chance.

THE BLACK GORGE

One could easily mistake Cavernis for an active volcano from afar. Decades of mining activity has piled up into a soaring circular hill line that acts as natural camouflage, giving no visual cues to what's hidden inside. The clouds of heavy smog wafting out and over the rim only accentuate the impression, disguising the scope of the settlement in its entirety. If someone traveled along the road to Sinder for the first time, the city would go unnoticed until they passed Cliffside, which serves as the only regular check-in point for entering Cavernis.

The immediate shift of the panorama is awe-inspiring. Suddenly, a mile wide crater drops off eighty meters into the earth, revealing the gargantuan Strip Mine at the bottom. The noise erupting from the pit is overwhelming: howling generators power a gigantic bucket wheel excavator plowing through the sediment while primitive wooden cranes and chain pulleys dotted along the Gallows reach out over the edge of the cavity, dragging baskets full of lignite deposits up to the surface. Mining crews rush across a spindly walkway system bridging the deep chasm, yelling commands, waving their arms, pointing in all directions, or using ropes to lower food boxes and water canisters to the workers at the base of the dig site.

Welcome to the Black Gorge, also known as the Demiurge's Asshole, Deep Shit Hollow, Colon of the Beast, Buttcrack Haven, Sphincterburgh, and hundreds of other ridiculous names given to it by the Scrappers who make Cavernis their home. They are roughnecks who live dangerous lives, working in the blackest depths of the earth to recover rare minerals and valuable metals under the most perilous conditions. Humor is all they have left. It glues the community together and makes the tough labor all the more bearable.

Justitian has always had strong trade relationships with Cavernis. The assimilation of the mine was but a formality to secure its reserves and profit from their exclusivity. No foreign power could ever be allowed to lay claim to the sulfuric ore hauled from the rocks, one of the key components for the creation of black powder, or the huge variety of cadmium pigments that enrich the colors the Judges use to mark criminal offenders.

Outside of the obvious territorial grab the mining town serves as a linear connection to Sinder in the north and grants access to the unexplored riches of the Stukov Desert. As such, it makes for an excellent upstream resource hub where crucial imports, like glacial ice extracted

from the Ice Barrier, can be stored temporarily. Sounds ideal, right? Well, a colossal anus the size of Cavernis attracts its own colonies of nasty yeast fungi which take more than a set of dirty fingernails to scratch off.

IN FOR A PENNY

The Scrapper coughs his lungs out as he bends over the spade, his eyes bloodshot and his body caked in layers of dirt and grime. It's the first time in days that he's been able to breathe fresh air. He's been mining deep down in the belly of the Black Gorge, hundreds of meters below the surface. With shaky hands he sifts through the dirt of his strainer, inspecting the yield recovered on his foray - two chunks of silicate minerals, and a handful of quartz. He'll need to carry this over to the Appraisal Office in Cliffside for final review, and to collect his pay.

What does Cavernis offer to the Scrappers who expose themselves to such an agonizing grind? For one, steady employment. Chances are that if it wasn't for this place the majority of them would end up as bloody Scavengers on the streets of Justitian. Not every dirt digger has the balls of steel and ironclad guts that make him brave enough to venture out alone into the great wide open and strike upon the find of a lifetime. And it's not like the raging Clan Wars make such endeavors any easier.

Besides, the relatively short travel-time down to the Righteous Fist allows for seasonal recruitment. Scrappers often arrive for three weeks of work followed by a week off in Tech-Central. The leisure time is necessary to avoid cabin fever. While the night market at the bottom of the Strip Mine, run by an offshoot of the Carrion Birds, brings some moderate forms of entertainment, the whole damn town is depleted of women - except for a bunch of ugly tramps that nobody wants to poke with a shit-covered stick. Oftentimes the miners must resort to fucking each other to satisfy their cravings and avoid going completely insane.

At least there's always booze available, no matter where you are in the city. The Cartel runs all the deliveries and imports distillate straight from the Cross Quarter. Workers can barter for flasks at the Appraisal Office if their ingots are too insignificant for the day, letting them at least get hammered after an exhausting sixteen-hour shift.

Food is supplied straight out of the Rubble, predominantly by Providers who set up shop here trying to sell off what they failed to move in Justitian's civic markets. No one would call it high quality, though. Most of the stuff

FACT SHEET: CAVERNIS

CITY: Cavernis, Tech-Level III

PROVINCE: Protectorate (Borca)

INHABITANTS: 12,450 / stagnant

POPULATION STRUCTURE: Scrappers / dominant, Clanners (Defilers, Refugees) / dominant, Apocalyptics / numerous, Judges / present, Spitalians / present

LEADER: Protector Rhonja

GOVERNING FORCE: Officer Brimstone

FEATURES: The Appraisal Office: Central quality control and review center, along with where the Scrappers get their pay; Cliffside: Main trade district; The Planks: Storage district for goods ready to be sent out to market; Fireside: Main Scrapper living quarters; The Night Market: Entertainment strip operated by a few Carrion Birds; The Runestone: Towering block carved with the Glyphs of a litany of mining gangs;

TRADE / GOODS: Sulfuric ore (used in Justitian for production of black powder), mineral pigments needed to enhance the Judges' colors for marking criminals, surplus spoil pulled from the earth, mining equipment, distillate and other alcohols

CITY GUARD:

- Rhonja's squad: 25 Protectors and 20 Vagrants
- Brimstone's crew: a rag tag group of about 100-200 Cartel Thugs scattered across the mining town to keep things in line
- Several dozen Scrapper mining gangs who will put their picks to use in an emergency

ARTIFACT TRADE: Light trade with a small number of finds encountered underground, however anything valuable must go through the Cartel before resale

COMMUNICATION: Regular riders back and forth from Justitian; Scrapper radio link to Tech-Central; High-powered communication relays for transmitting to Scrappers further afield; Encrypted radio frequency for Bosch to contact Brimstone

has the nutritional value of a salty styrofoam panel recovered from the sands of the Stukov Desert.

IN FOR A POUND

Nothing works without the Cartel. They unofficially govern the mining town at the behest of the Judges. When Justitian annexed Cavernis in 2543 it soon ran into staffing problems: there wasn't enough available manpower for the administration of the miners. Hardly anyone in the Judiciary wanted to move out here and watch a horde of dirty-ass Scrappers do their jobs - Justitian has enough of them already, anyway. Even so, the issues kept mounting and the Scrappers were constantly at each other's throats, putting down conflicting claims over digging rights, revolting every other week, and consistently acting petty, miserable, and disorganized. The bigger Cavernis grew the harder it became to supervise the population. The situation climaxed in the early '70s when Fireside refused to operate the heavy cargo lifts leading into the Strip Mine and production broke down for three full months.

In those days, the Cartel was still just a loose formation of Scrappers without much of a track record. Bosch proposed to the Judiciary that a couple of his boys take the role of Jurymen, and establish order in Cavernis. Ya know, setting up mining rights, dishin' out the occasional slap, examining the yields, and coordinating the work shifts, that kinda stuff. The Judges were relieved. Deals were signed, and some of his Officers promoted to deputy law enforcers. That was all that the Dwarven King needed to get the ball rolling. He had his men occupy the Appraisal Office, which now functions as a customs and inspection center; any mineral recovered from the pits must go through their hands first and be certified for sale. The Cartel pays the mining crews and coordinates the resale of their haul, thereby regulating the pricing value and leveraging the town's revenue stream.

The Cartel Officers have no patience for Scrappers who try to smuggle their payload out of the city and sell it on their own: If one of these crafty buggers gets caught, they're in for a beating they won't forget. If it happens a second time, the Scrapper loses their digging rights and is permanently banned from entering Cavernis. The Officers work hand in hand with the Judges, using the same blend of chemical colors to mark offenders as in Justitian.

This process was instituted so as to not waste Protectors on policing casual infringements. Instead, the Scrappers may enact punishment on behalf of the Judges. The local Protectors only get involved in severe cases. They already have their hands full overseeing the flow of prison workers returning from the Ice Barrier, counting them, locking them up, and signing off on fresh glacial ice and salt container deliveries.

BRIMSTONE

Bosch's man in charge of dealing tough love is a former convict who served fifteen years in the Cleft for armed robbery, manslaughter, and a whole textbook of other crimes he had conducted by the ripe old age of twelve. Brimstone survived six punitive expeditions to the Ice Barrier and was locked up in Dog's End twice. When he was finally released he was sent out with flying colors, having worked his way up to the position of prison warden under direction of the newly appointed Protector Kant.

Bosch had Brimstone recruited right off the street on the day he stepped out of the Cleft. The crude young man went through a swift apprenticeship as a thug before making a name for himself as a successful pit fighter for the Cartel, only to finally rise through the ranks to become Officer of his own chapter. But the streets of Justitian proved to be too hot for Brimstone; his face was well known and he had too many open conflicts with members of the Carrion Birds, many of which he instigated during shared prison time. Cavernis was the perfect match for him - he could run Bosch's offsite mining business and keep the local Scrappers in check, whilst letting dust accumulate on his past.

Like many Officers in Bosch's inner circle Brimstone is ferociously loyal, considering the Dwarven King a mentor and father figure. Not even the closest members of Brimstone's own crew know about the tight connection, as they simply assume that he's the top dog of Cavernis and try not to double-cross him.

INSIDE CAVERNIS

The layout of Cavernis revolves around its Strip Mine. All of the camps and functional parts of the settlement are arranged in a large circle surrounding the gorge, divided into different quarters, and populated by a variety of mining and hauling crews.

Cliffside acts as the pivot for all trade and general clearance. From there one passes over to the Planks, a warehouse district and temporary depot holding goods ready for shipment. The Cartel manages these quarters and has their thugs on every corner, overseeing the orderly transfer of mining freight. Beyond lies Fireside, the main living area for the Scrappers deployed in the mine, which is separated into an upper part for workshops, repair shacks, and meeting halls for the mining crews, followed by a lower section that features additional housing and access to the Night Market, a ramshackle entertainment strip that serves as a gathering spot and supply station. Scrappers clump around the warmth of gaslit lanterns and along the open bars for the exchange of news and after-hours drinking binges.

The Angband Dynasty

What the hell does the Cartel know about minerals and rare earth whatsits? Fuck all. They're just a bunch of degenerates, brutes, extortionists, and mobsters. How are they even capable of analyzing the value of diverse silicates, ores, and metals? Well, they aren't. That's where the Angband Dynasty comes in.

During the final hour of the City Wars a branch of the Exalter Clan settled in the area of modern day Cavernis. Their lineage comprised of explorers, mineral researchers, and geologists who came across rich sediments embedded in the natural soil of the land, and raised a fortified encampment from the grounds to secure their find.

As Justitian came to be and Uptown grew, the Angband dynasty brought their settlement claims before the early Judges and paid fealty to retain their property. Contracts were drafted to keep Justitian supplied with treasures wrestled from the gorge, if the Judges in turn would ensure the Angband's integrity over their territory.

The relationship prospered. As soon as the ink had dried the Angbands returned to work, expanding their mining business and preparing for the next generation to take over. They hired Scrappers who passed through their domain as an additional work force, teaching them how to spot valuable ingots, excavate shafts into the earth, and extract minerals from the ground. Cavernis, as this province came to be called, prospered substantially, attracting new day laborers from across the entire Protectorate who helped expand the city and establish the Strip Mine.

With every year that passed the Angbands became more reclusive, leaving the management of the mining hub in the hands of selected foremen and trustworthy assistants, and only acting as occasional advisors. What nobody knew was that the dynasty had been struck by misfortune. Inbreeding had riddled the family with hereditary diseases; children were born cripples, while adults developed terrible skin and bone deformations that forced them to hide their features behind thick layers of cloth. The whole family tree was rife with untreatable sickness, living in fear of discovery, avoiding Spitalian patrols and public appearances until they entirely vanished from the public eye. Was their condition a result of their Exalter heritage? Were they victims of genetic contamination, or something else entirely?

Unable to conduct their work, they now acted as enigmatic shareholders and transferred all daily operations to the Scrappers. Even after the Judges incorporated the town into the Protectorate, the Angbands sent middlemen and ambassadors to conduct negotiations on their behalf. The Judges didn't care who they were dealing with so long as the flow of goods was not interrupted.

When the Cartel seized control over Cavernis they began tracing back the mine's ownership through archaic property rights and ancient contracts until they suddenly stumbled across the ancient bloodline in their midst that was still lording over the town. Bosch's men were taken by surprise. How had these strangers managed to run a shadow empire for so long?

They summoned the Dwarven King to take a look at the books and set up a secret meeting with members of the Angband dynasty so that Bosch could deliberate with them over land acquisition, mining prospects, and future profit shares. The gathering barely lasted five minutes. Allegedly, Bosch was so disgusted at the sight of their hideous deformations that he couldn't bear to look at them, let alone haggle with them. Instead, he laid out a plan for his Officers to set up a trap. In a covert mission, his men kidnapped the remaining members of the Angband family and locked them up. If they were already capable of staying obfuscated for all these years, nobody would miss them anyway, Bosch snickered.

Now he had access to all of their collective knowledge and documentation, including search quadrants, encyclopedias compiled with details on soil compositions and mineral deposits, and maps featuring cross-sections of all the mineshafts snaking underneath Cavernis. More importantly, within their notes Bosch found clues to Exalt's past, including blueprints of the city's former geography as well as diagrams detailing the entryways into the fabled Grindworks. The Dwarven King knows that he holds a fortune in his hands that the Cluster would kill for. He's already begun funding expeditions into contested territory, paying off Judges to lead Scrappers into the hostile Cockroach infested wastelands and buying off key information that will allow him to conduct future exploits once the Clan Wars have come to a favorable end.

Meanwhile the remaining seven children of the dynasty are spending a life sentence in the garrison, confined to a dungeon in which they slowly succumb to their mortal afflictions. Brimstone makes sure they're fed, and consults them whenever a curious or unknown mineral shows up on his desk.

The Judiciary assumes that the Angbands have either set off to different lands or simply kicked the bucket. Nobody has enough spare time to dig through the dusty folders sitting in the archives of Judgement Hall and follow up on their wellbeing.

MINING CREWS

While some Scrappers in Fireside focus entirely on the manufacturing of mining tools - operating welding shops to make new lanterns, repairing shovels and picks, or specializing in cobbling heavy boots - others work as warehouse packers at the Planks, sorting through cargo and preparing timely shipments. Additionally, Defiler children, prison workers, or refugees are hired as day laborers. The Scrappers are at the top of the food chain; they know their craft and customize their teams based on their instincts. Prison workers are great – if they die, nobody will stop to mourn them. Defiler children are excellent, because they can crawl through narrow tunnels and shafts, and if they die by accident nobody will mourn them either. Refugees often come with their own skillsets, but not every Scrapper is fond of joining forces with complete strangers who don't speak their language, and so prejudice is commonplace. Foreigners are mainly active on the surface, piling up excavated and thoroughly sifted soils, clearing out rubble, and carrying out menial tasks.

The true heroes of Cavernis, however, are the mining crews who operate the bucket wheel excavator or board the elevator shafts at the bottom of the Strip Mine and enter the darkest caverns hundreds of meters beneath the surface. Each crew consists of between twenty and forty members, each bearing their own flavorful name and hand painted rune badge. The Runestone, a massive block of granite sitting in the center of Fireside, is covered with countless glyphs carved by generations of mobs who made their home here. Some of the famous ones include the Gunk Skunks, the Waste Weasels, the Smut Squirrels, the Soot Badgers, the Gopher Gang, the Black Eyed Armadillos, and the Abyss Moles. Friendships forged in a mining crew usually last forever, even after the members disband and move on to follow their own paths.

Admission to work in Cavernis follows a set procedure. Scrappers must apply for a job at the Appraisal Office. After a quick screening and introduction to the basic rules of the trade, the applicant must present himself to one of the well established mining crews over in Fireside. If he appears trustworthy and knows the bare fundamentals of metallurgy he can hope for employment - but there's no guarantee. The crews are picky when it comes to their choice of recruits. They hate blowhards and dipshits with no sense of teamwork. The mining business is a breakneck game and every member of a crew plays a crucial part at all times. If you can't look out for others, you're dead weight. Scrappers who try to enter the chasms alone and dig for minerals by themselves don't last long.

THE STRIP MINE

Chaos and bedlam reigns at the bottom of the Strip Mine. The titanic bucket wheel excavator "Gourmand" tears through the bedrock and shovels its payload by the ton onto the conveyor belt. Dozens of Scrappers collect at the rear, sifting through the soil clods, separating lignite from other minerals that are required for the production of the colors used by the Judges to mark offenders. Nearby, two Village Doctors operate a tiny medical facility and serve as first responders in case of an emergency. Severe injuries caused by rock slides or heavy metal poisoning are frequent maladies among the miners.

In weekly intervals the most daring crews board the elevators taking them deep down into the bowels of Cavernis, where they hunt for rare earth minerals and other crucial deposits that can be sold to the Chroniclers. Some of them go a step further - equipped with magnifiers and portable high-powered microscopes they specialize in searching for impact proxies and superheated ejecta left behind by the Eshaton: nanodiamonds, microspherules, trinitite – anything that could potentially hold a fragment of pure Primer. Similar traces have been discovered by the Spitalians all across Europe, which point back to the asteroids spreading their particulate cargo upon entering Earth's atmosphere prior to impact. Any such material could potentially hold the clue to end mankind's strife, and the Spital buys up such composites without question.

JUDGES FEW, SCRAPPERS MANY

Twenty five Protectors along with a handful of Vagrants keeping control over a town of more than twelve thousand people, the majority of whom are Scrappers with ties to the Cartel? This sounds like a disaster waiting to happen, but Justitian simply does not have the means to deploy reinforcements to Cavernis. The city has to make do with what is available. For squabbles amongst the miners, the Judiciary must rely entirely on the Cartel sorting things out and establishing order. But this is a dangerous political game to play. The more the Cartel entrenches itself in the area, the more influence they gain. This causes ripple effects in the power structure of the Protectorate, with Scrappers losing their respect towards the Judges and carrying such attitudes back to Justitian, where it festers and spreads into far bigger communities.

Protector Rhonja is currently the only voice of authority in town, even though she failed Executioner Harrison on a mission in Justitian's Harbor district and was transferred to Cavernis as a demotion. She's doing everything she can to clear her name and produce something valuable that will redeem her previous misjudgement. Recently, she stumbled upon Brimstone's past and began investigating his connections to Justitian along with his involvement with the Cartel. She knows that there is more to the Officer than meets the eye, but she hasn't quite figured him out yet. She needs more intelligence, potentially from the Carrion Birds who seem to be carrying a few grudges. Brimstone has been informed that Rhonja is trying to dig up dirt on him. He knows that if push comes to shove, he will have to take her out to protect Bosch and avoid the secret history of Cavernis coming to light.

Crisis in the East

THE KLAWEN

To an outside observer the Klawen looks like just another satellite village: tall silo towers, a bulky protective wall, barracks for the local Judges, and a small market at the center. The difference is, you can't just casually walk into this town. Spitalians and Judges patrol the main route, and only allow people who can present a special form issued by the Office of Internal Affairs inside. Traders and Scrappers are told to turn their carts and leave the access road, if they can't produce the required paper. Numerous rumors surround the Klawen. Some claim that nobody actually lives there. All empty facades and whatnot.

So what's all the secrecy about? Several years ago, the Spitalians and Judges collaborated to establish an urban training ground within the Protectorate that would allow them to experiment with techniques of crowd control, hybrid warfare, and engagement in hostile territory. Their eyes landed on the Klawen, an enclave lying in a remote part of the Black Lung far from the main trade arteries. The annexation went swiftly and bloodlessly. The original citizens that populated the area were expropriated and relocated to Siege and other cities across the Protectorate. They were given 48 hours to pack their belongings and move, clearing the town and allowing its foundation to be repurposed. A preselected tenth of the population received an offer to stay behind and serve the new leaders in their operations, enrolling as test subjects for pharmaceutics or signing up as actors for staged conflicts, paid for handsomely by funds directly from Judgement Hall and the Spital.

The Klawen turned into a fake settlement. Freshly promoted Vagrants and young Famulancers are sent here for twelve weeks of intensive combat training from the drill instructors: highly decorated Executioners or Preservists, sometimes accompanied by Hellvetic support. The majority of the houses are empty, the market square is dusty, and the only people outside in the know are the supply traders who deliver food and basic commodities to the Klawen.

The remaining occupants follow strict schedules issued by the Spitalians: setting up roadblocks and ambushes, barricading buildings, or instigating riots. The trainees receive their briefing every morning and must respond to a brewing conflict by collecting intelligence, planning the counterattack, and achieving the daily milestone for their mission, such as arresting a person of interest or resolving a street battle. Melee weapons are padded to avoid serious injuries, and muskets are blank fired with reduced powder charges. Occasionally, Scavengers are hired to develop new training courses, including scrap barriers, traps, and covers for shootouts. Their work is seasonal, and they are kept in the dark about its purpose.

Meanwhile, the Spitalians run a chemical facility in the town center, mixing diverse aerosol compounds and testing their effects on the willing. Pharmacist Tristegger is the head of the experimental warfare unit. He was crucial in developing the gas cartridges utilized by the Judges in the extermination of the Plague Birds and Splinter Hawks, and his arsenals were further deployed during the Great Cleanse.

Tristegger holds the Klawen and its population in an iron grip. He's a man whose prime motivation lies in producing measurable results, and with his main concern being the military effectiveness of his Cult, whether the Spitalians are deployed in the Protectorate or out in the many warzones across Europe.

LEADFIELD

"Leadfield is where one goes to die" was once a famous Scrapper saying in the eastern Black Lung. The ruins were allegedly contaminated, expeditions went missing, and there was barely an ounce of food and water supply for miles around. Stukov Nomad raids and malicious Primer fauna aside, this was a godforsaken and highly dangerous patch of wasteland. Even so, some bold Scrappers ignored all the warnings and advanced through fields of debris and swampy gorges until they found the right place for an encampment in a stretch of inhospitable territory. An abundant trail of heavy metals scattered across the area had guided them to this place. But that wasn't all. Months into their explorations they located a collapsed entryway into a sunken Bygone city, complete with colossal industrial hangars big enough to store several Surge Tanks each. When the Chroniclers got wind of the story they immediately dispatched a Cell to set up an Alcove and enforce control over any artifacts accidentally recovered from the ground.

However, compared to the dangers the Scrappers were exposed to during their diggings, the yield was pathetically low. The underground ruins of Leadfield had been picked clean ages ago. All that remained were empty husks of buried buildings, lifeless corridors, and abandoned storage facilities. The mood of the pioneers shifted entirely when they made another unsettling discovery. A meandering tunnel system of unknown origin extended into the bedrock, filled with human remains: ossified skeletons, shattered skulls, and broken bones.

The Scrappers reported back to the Spitalians in fear of having stumbled across a Spore Beast nest to the west of the Reaper's Blow, but the doctors dismissed the idea. There was no evidence to suggest that these creatures could safely cross the tectonic rift splitting Borca in half. Instead, the doctors pleaded with the Judges to simply absorb the territory and provide safety for the dirt diggers until they came across something newsworthy. Judgement Hall had barely any interest in this part of the Black Lung, but the Cluster insisted and pushed for a similar expansion policy. The Chroniclers did so for a different reason, though. Leadfield's position on the map allowed them to pick up radio transmissions coming from the Needle Towers in the east. More importantly, with a proper emission antenna they'd be able to jam their rivals' frequencies and hamper communication between the Needles. Their lenses fell on a collapsed high rise that was tall enough to support the construction of a relay station and they rallied the Scrappers to help them build the mast.

The Peak, as it was now called, became the main trading hub of the village. New settlers arrived, erecting a small fort, bartering for food, and scanning the landscape for hidden caches. In no time at all the small and prosperous community began to thrive on the outskirts of the Protectorate, attracting traders, arms dealers, and other transients. The people focused on their surface-level prospects and the vast underground hangars along with the strange tunnel system lay forgotten.

Then all hell broke loose. Leadfield was the first city to fall in the Clan Wars. The Cockroaches had abandoned their ancient breeding caves generations ago, in a time when their bloodlines were weak and they had to retreat towards the Reaper's Blow to recover and grow back to full size. But they knew their old caverns and tunnels by heart. The attack was quick and brutal. Warriors poured through the underground network and reached the buried city complex, and from there burrowed toward the surface. The inhabitants were cut down in their sleep. The cannibals invaded their homes, ripping through everything in their path. Men were slaughtered, women were vandalized, children and animals alike were clubbed to death before their bodies were torn to shreds as the Cockroaches feasted on their flesh. A handful of Scrappers tried to barricade themselves inside The Peak to outlast the massacre, but they too were doomed, just like everyone else. There was no escape.

Baleful fumes rise over Leadfield. The area is teeming with Cockroach scouts and warriors. They hide in the ravaged landscape waiting for anyone foolish enough to approach the razed settlement searching for a sign of life.

GESSELN

Five days and nights of grueling march in the direction of the Reaper's Blow, across desolate tundras and battered roads, from one sketchy waypoint to the next, followed only by the sinister howls of roving Gendo packs. The mind is exhausted, the body even more so. "Over there!" the leader calls hoarsely and points through the haze ahead. Two ominous chimneys become visible in the grey fog, spewing black smog toward the low cloud cover. "Gesseln is near!" A moan of relief and salvation shakes the crowd, and everyone pushes onward to reach the gates before nightfall.

For years this remote settlement on the northeastern edge of the Protectorate drew in Scrappers from all walks of life. Nearby they had discovered one of the last preserved artifact veins of Borca. Or so they thought. The dirt diggers were in a gold rush, plowing through the soil, dismantling every Bygone piece of scrap that they were able to wrestle from the ground, thinking they were gonna be rich by the end of the year. Well, the truth was rather sobering. The ruin was full of recyclables, but there wasn't much of actual value that could be sold to the Chroniclers. However, the legend of a potential motherlode remained, and Gesseln grew to accommodate the waves of newcomers and soldiers of fortune trying their luck out here.

Today, the entire community is centered around the Gorgon, a reclaimed refuse incinerator with a still-functioning blast furnace. The Scrappers methodically comb through piles of scrap metal and debris, dragging their yield into the adjacent warehouses. Anything flammable recovered from the dust goes straight into the combustion chamber of the Gorgon and is considered a contribution to the community. A steam engine operates a primeval generator that supplies Gesseln with electricity, while the waste heat is transferred to the quarters where the Scrappers huddle up during cold nights. It gets a little damp in there, but nobody comes here looking for luxuries.

Over time, the border town has become a melting pot for adventurers who are looking for uncontested territory, far from the Cartel's influence. Scrapper workshops and ramshackle bars sprouted around the Gorgon – an area the locals lovingly refer to as the Canteen – where they distill their own moonshine and serve baked hedgehogs and roasted martens for food.

It's clear that Gesseln attracts its own kind of clientele. These settlers aren't the nicest people in anyone's book, gruff, resilient, and foolhardy, but they aren't outlaws or deviants as one would imagine, more like curmudgeons, misanthropes, and general underdogs who preserve the spirit of old Scrapperhood as it was long before the Cartel and the Manufacturers came to power. They shrugged their shoulders when Justitian finally decided to put a new pin on its ever-growing imperial map and declared Gesseln as the next city to be welcomed into the warm belly of the Protectorate. Pragmatism was in their blood. Now and then, when a couple of Protectors roll by to check in on the settlement, the Scrappers trade their homebrew for a few bags of black powder. The Judges know that these men and women are smart enough to manage themselves; they don't need a strict hand, and if anything happens in their midst they'll find their own ways to solve the problem instead of waiting for someone to speak judgement on their behalf.

Things seemed to carry on in their usual way until the outbreak of the Clan Wars. After the successful destruction of Leadfield, the Cockroaches lusted for blood. The hostile encounters were fierce, but the Scrappers were ingenious in their defense and fought back with iron spirits. Boriak, an Alpha Wolf with shaggy black hair and silver teeth, seized the moment and led the counterattack. He had the dirt diggers build crude mortars and kept shelling the lines of the invaders until they retreated beyond the ruins to regroup. However, Gesseln's plea for support from Justitian fell on deaf ears. Judgement Hall refused to send troops and left the Scrappers to their own devices. Boriak raged when he heard that the Judges were giving up on them and in turn renounced his support of the Protectorate, declaring Gesseln's independence. Now the Scrappers have equipped themselves with vast arsenals and are ready to retaliate against the Cockroaches and retake lost sectors. Meanwhile, Boriak has issued a bounty on any Judge entering Gesseln's sovereign territory as payback for Judgement Hall's lack of brotherhood. It remains to be seen how Archot will respond to all this.

CHALK BREACH

Chalk has been a staple of Spitalian medicine for ages. The doctors rub themselves with lime to protect against germs and they dust corpses with the white powder before burying them. In Justitian the construction workers mix it with other minerals to create high-quality mortar - many of the official buildings in Uptown have their facades decorated with carved limestone - while Anabaptists and Providers use it as fertilizer. Therefore, lime is an essential commodity for many of the daily undertakings within the Protectorate.

It didn't take much convincing by the Spitalians before the Judiciary enacted the annexation of the easternmost mining town of Chalk Breach and secured its vast limestone deposits. But, in doing so, the Judges had reached the limits of their expansion. Beyond the borders of the enclave there was only wasteland. Fortifying territory that was so far off the main roads required vast logistics and resources, and even the local Scrappers knew very little about Chalk Breach's immediate surroundings. There were claims of uncharted tunnel systems closer to the Reaper's Blow and occasional Cockroach sightings, but there was never enough manpower to field a major expedition into the hostile landscape. Instead, the Spitalians dug a few defensive trenches around the quarry site and erected a handful of watchtowers in hopes that banners bearing eightfold crosses would deter anyone from attacking. They knew that it would take Justitian days to respond to a sudden assault, if not weeks. This was a major concern, but the harvest of lime was too important to risk leaving it unprotected.

The inhabitants of Chalk Breach, meanwhile, profited immensely from the massive demand. The sudden boom was an opportunity to abandon the farms on which they had struggled to raise tubers and crops for generations and focus entirely on the quarrying business. The farmers tossed aside their rakes and went to crack stone while their fields deteriorated. It was obvious to the Spitalians that this situation would be unsustainable in the long run, as the town lacked the ability to provide for itself. Any perishable goods had to be imported, and only a few months into the operation the doctors were forced to stockpile the campsite with food and water supplies to ensure that the workers would be fed and remain capable of conducting hard labor in these extreme conditions. That was back in 2546. Not much changed for a long while. Man and woman alike toiled all day long to break fist-sized chunks out of the quarry walls and tow them to the grinding mills. A tenth of the mined chalk powder was packed in sacks and exported as mineral fertilizer across the Protectorate. The rest was shoveled into kilns, burnt, and slaked to be sold as premium building lime – two thirds shipped toward Justitian, one third to the Spital.

It lasted until a critical mistake was made. In response to the Clan Wars breaking out all across the borders of the Protectorate Justitian ordered the stationed Protector squad to the front, abandoning the border town and leaving it undefended. The only military force left behind was a single Famulancer corps, less than twenty men strong.

Chalk Breach was swiftly surrounded by Cockroaches who had been laying in wait for the right moment to strike. They detonated the main road leading out of town and trapped the fleeing population inside the quarry, cutting them off from the rest of the world. Then they laid siege to the city. Wave after wave of Winged Ones smashed against the defenses. The Spitalian watchtowers held them back for a while, but it wasn't long before their feeders had burrowed a network of tunnels past the blockade and were able to surface inside the quarry. The Famulancers did their best to repel the attackers, banding together with the workers and briefly turning the tide in their favor, but the success would only last for so long. There was no hope of either escape or resupply. The inhabitants had to make do with the reserves stored at the campsite. Barely enough to hold out for three weeks. Kleever, the Famulancer in command, attempted to appeal to the miners and convince them to stay strong and faithful, assuring them that Justitian would respond soon enough and help them out. He was the first to die. The miners revolted against the doctors and toppled them to get access to the food stores. In their dying breath, they wanted to be in charge of their last supper. That was two months ago. The Cockroaches still surround the area, trying to starve the trapped inhabitants out. How long will Chalk Breach hold out on its own and withstand the onslaught? Nobody knows. The Winged Ones sharpen their bone daggers, and roar their war songs toward the sky. The crisis is reaching its peak.

The Spital

There is a place that defies the tides of time, holding out on its own against the volatile spasms of a terminally afflicted world. It is a place of legend and legacy, forged in the fires of the Eshaton and imbued with the forgotten ideals of the Bygone age. A long day's march from Justitian, at the edge of the eastern Rubble, the Spital rises from the ashen slopes like a mirage – invincible and unforgiving, a lodestar of hope hovering above an infinite desert of decay; the last bastion of mankind.

Endless myths surround this place. Many cities and settlements of the Black Lung have come and gone throughout the centuries, but the Spital outlasted them all – and it will soldier on long after everything else has crumbled to dust. A self-fulfilling prophecy, perpetuated by the unshakable will of the Spitalians who have sworn to protect their home base until their last dying breath.

Preservists whip past on black stallions, rushing out to eradicate hotbeds of blooming Sepsis, wage war against the manifold incarnations of Homo Degenesis, or carry out classified missions of retribution and vengeance. They're followed by platoons of Famulancers marching down the main road. Their destinations: Franka, Hybrispania, Pollen, and the blood-soaked Balkhan. Wherever they go, they must carry the light of salvation and save humanity from the encroaching terrors of the Primer. But no matter where their operations take them, they all have one thing in common. Their careers began here, at the Spital, as Recruits and Orderlies devoted to a life of health, medicine and hygiene, and a vision of Earth cured of its most fatal diseases.

SEVERED HISTORY

Only a handful of Spitalians alive today can fathom that the Cult's core tenets were derived from teachings first developed over five hundred years ago and which endured the holocaust of knowledge that followed in the wake of the Eshaton.

When the great fire of 2370 ravaged through Dr. Kassowitz's Central Registry, countless historical records were lost forever. The early years of the Spital are unrecoverable. What scraps of information survived the blazing inferno speak of an era of darkness, in which the Spitalians hid behind the impregnable walls of their fortress while the masses infected by HIVE died in the millions by the wayside. The virus was unstoppable in its lethality, and only strict confinement would allow the Spital to prevail - a merciless decision that stains the Cult's creed to this day.

Much was later revised under supervision of the Hippocrats. Contrary to the laws of nature, history is not required to reflect objective truth, nor does it demand scientifically provable explanations. It must evoke emotional concepts, which in turn cement the moralistic world view of like-minded individuals and organizations – and thus, in their conservative view, what did not suit could not be true.

Things redacted by the Hippocrats include the Spital's ever-changing alliances and its opportunistic behavior toward neighboring powers. Flexible like a flag in the wind, the Cult switched sides based on the most beneficial outcome, supporting Exalt one day only to betray it the next. But, to avoid the pitfalls of hubris, they refused to align with any of the warring factions of the Black Lung, or engage in the statecraft of a rival Cult. Instead, the Spital adhered to an iron rule of isolationism, fiercely defending its independence through the climax of the City Wars and beyond.

Autarkic by nature, the Spitalians bartered with their neighbors and established trade in exchange for medical therapy. The doctors were known for their aloofness and the people were afraid of them, seeking them out only as a last resort in cases where the tribe's medicine man was unable to find a way to lower the fever, or when the wounds torn by the enemy were so cruel that they required serious treatment. But their service always came with a steep price. The people traveled from remote fringes of the world to offer up hogs, wood, tools, grain, batteries, books, their parcels, and sometimes even their children, just to save a loved one whose life hung in the balance. The Spitalians took it all. In turn they grew even more self-sufficient, expanding

the Appendix to admit more patients without having to ever let them take a step into the Corpus - which is reserved for ill subjects who arrive with bundles of rolled Drafts.

When Justitian began to prosper and became the dominant force of the region, the Spital expanded its influence on the budding metropolis, initiating a series of collaborative policies with the Judges. The reasons for the sudden change of protocol remain unclear, but the relationship has remained stable for decades. Today, Justitian and the Spital are aging lovers entangled in a dreadful waltz, and neither can make a step without the other following along. While both parties consider themselves equals and share similar ambitions concerning the security of the Protectorate, they differ in execution. Where the Judges are focused entirely on the establishment of order in their domain, the Spitalians are only interested in the hygiene of the population.

CIRCLE OF LIFE

Appendix, Corpus, Cor - three sections of the Spital, each requiring their own staff, organization, supplies, checkpoints, regulations, and chain of command. Over the course of an apprenticeship a Recruit will work their way up through all areas of the compound. They will shovel shit from the waste channels and collect dead in the Appendix, sleep and study in the Corpus, train hard, learn, and eventually rise through the ranks to attend one of the many departments of the Cor, contributing to the progress of the research groups and the Cult as a whole - assuming they don't end up being sent to any of the frontlines across Europe first.

Most Spitalians are brought into the fold as children, either born into the Spital or acquired through trade. The Cult prefers its Recruits young and malleable so as to instill them with as much doctrine as possible. After all, time is of the essence: there is only so much ideological programming the hippocampus can absorb before the brain is fully formed. What matters most is that the Recruit understands the hierarchy of the Cult, and navigates all levels of the Spital with ease, thereby assuring that the apparatus never ceases to function.

An entire encyclopedia wouldn't be enough to describe every aspect of the Spital in full detail. History is baked into every seam of the complex and only the Hippocrats have general clearance to access all of the areas of the Cult's headquarters, including the forbidden zones such as

FACT SHEET: THE SPITAL

CITY: The Spital, Tech-Level V

PROVINCE: Protectorate (Borca)

INHABITANTS: 15,000 Spitalians (including Recruits, Orderlies, stationary platoons, student bodies of the Departments, and operating staff) / Slowly declining
◈ Anywhere between 10,000 - 20,000 medical patients housed in the Appendix

POPULATION STRUCTURE: Spitalians / Dominant

LEADER: The eight Consultants

GOVERNING FORCE: The advisory board, consisting of the chairmen and instructors of their respective branches

FEATURES: The Appendix: Hospital outside the walls of the Spital, for the common folk who need their ailments treated; The Corpus: Internal hospital and main area of operations for Famulancers or below. Medical care reserved for patients with Drafts; The Cor: Most intensely guarded area of the Spital, and the domain of the research groups and the Consultants

TRADE / GOODS: The Spitalians will accept almost anything in exchange for medical care. Common tributes include foodstuffs, living or dead animals, building materials, scrap or artifacts, and even children to be turned into Recruits.

CITY GUARD: Ten stationary Famulancer platoons patrolling the Spital's defensive walls, dispersed throughout the Appendix to provide security and first aid, or deployed around the neighboring areas and road systems.

ARTIFACT TRADE: None, Chroniclers are not permitted within the walls of the Spital unless in need of medical assistance. All finds are rerouted to Justitian.

COMMUNICATION: Wired communication links to Justitian, Radio transmitters to Spitalian strongholds further afield, Small cadre of outriders on Newcrest horses for emergencies.

the experimental diagnostics facility, the sealed laboratories, the live specimen holding pens, Dr. Holtz' tract for Epigenetics, or the nursery.

Meanwhile, a whole consortium of instructors and chairmen oversee the departments and report back to their respective Registrars and Consultants. Lower-ranking Spitalians are all too aware of the meetings of the advisory board, as their outcome can be felt immediately afterwards. Everyone involved is in a terrible mood for days on end, with departments reprimanded for their lack of progress, project funds cut, or research groups shut down forever - the results of their experiments sealed until further notice. When the Cor trembles, everyone feels it.

The only thing unaffected by the internal turmoil is the Funnel Road leading to Justitian. Always clogged, it bears the steady flow of goods and passengers travelling between the Righteous Fist and the Spital, flooding the Appendix with waves of invalids and sick people begging for a cure.

On its best days the sprawling district can hold up to 50,000 patients at maximum capacity, but such numbers haven't been seen since the final hours of the City Wars when faceless tribes and uprooted refugees stumbled across the barren plains of the Black Lung in search of a new home.

OUT OF FOCUS

No single man can attempt to lead an organization of such magnitude. While the Cluster relies on algorithms to dispatch Agents to fulfill their tasks, and the Judges run their Cult from top to bottom by employing what is effectively an army of bureaucrats, Spitalian leadership in comparison can only be described as a frazzled, convoluted affair, in which competency often remains unclear.

Eight Consultants determine the weal and woe of the Spital - they send Famulancers into certain death, dictate what the Pharmacists must grow in their incubators, coordinate, set the pace, and steer the Cult toward their dream of the future. Eight Consultants - that's eight opinions, eight individuals with their own hidden agendas, twisted goals, and deeply harbored idiosyncrasies. Eight Consultants, and only one Spital. The result is a cluster of conflicts brewing beneath the surface, ready to detonate at a moment's notice.

However, many of the residing Consultants in office have grown past their prime; they're weak and detached, too old to adapt to a world that is changing at high speeds. Instead of focusing on the dire problems piling up outside the Spital's walls, they spend their time obsessing over experiment manuscripts and test results churned out by some obscure research group. Never before has a Spitalian elite been at the top for so long. Previous generations of-

ten died during critical expeditions or sacrificed their lives in search of new treatment methods, while the current leaders are passive and apathetic at best. Fatigue has settled in. The only things that excite these men and women are fringe theories - they are incapable of seeing the dangers looming on the horizon. They ponder over tidbits from the farthest reaches of the Earth and study age-old reports about possible Leviathanic sightings in Franka rather than laying their eyes on far more pressing matters. Holtz, Szinkowitz, Korghaven, Chesnik, and Janssen are already called the walking dead by many within the consortium. When will they finally abdicate? Power-hungry Registrars already lie in wait to snatch their seats.

Of the eight leading figures, only three remain sharp and capable of initiating innovation: Petrova, Fouquet, and Grunow. But with Petrova stationed in Danzig, and Fouquet changing her headquarters to Montpellier, only Grunow can act in favor of a distinct revision of the Cult's direction. And he does. As the head of the freshly formed research group "Canon", he is effectively in charge of creating a new narrative for the Spital.

RESEARCH GROUPS

Time has seen many research groups come and go. Some were successful and prevailed while others were officially closed down - often because of a lack of available resources and manpower, or if a certain field of study was deemed to require assimilation into the larger body of another group. For decades the most well known research groups of the Spital were divided amongst nine major fields of knowledge and analysis: HIVE, Epigenetics, Pheromantics, Psychovores, Primer, Noumenon, Homo Degenesis, Propaganda, and Prosthetics.

However, recent developments tightened the various schools of thought and forced mergers across the board. The HIVE group led by Consultant Petrova incorporated the Epigenetics faction, while Consultant Fouquet, head of the Primer research group, ordered the absorption of Noumenon, Pheromantics, Homo Degenesis, and Psychovores into its fold.

With the death of former Consultant Gacic, the field of Prosthetics became defunct. His successor, recently appointed Consultant Korghaven, opened a new branch labelled Sanitation instead.

Under Consultant Grunow, Propaganda was rebranded to Canon and actively deals with all internal and external political aspects concerning the Spital's position within the Protectorate. Its members are the most publicly active figures, with Oswald Keszler prominently representing the faction in Justitian.

HIPPOCRATS

Grunow's Hippocrats are the secret police of the Cult. They act as the personified conscience of the Spitalians, upholding the hippocratic oath they all swore to protect. Nobody gets past them.

In the Bygone writings, the hippocratic ideal encompasses all aspects of physical and mental hygiene, personal integrity, prudence, empathy, and analytical thinking.

These principles still apply today, but implementing them Cult-wide is a difficult undertaking. Every Spitalian has internalized daily cleansing as part of their routine, with which the aspect of "physical hygiene" is covered, while "analytical thinking" is a requirement during their clinical apprenticeship, and no Famulancer can progress without it. As for "empathy", a Spitalian either has it - or not.

What remains are "mental hygiene", "integrity", and "prudence". According to the Hippocrats, these three factors are not inherent constants of the human psyche. They're influenced by the subject's environment and opportunities arising along the way, and tend to develop for the worse if kept unchecked. Consequences of such psychological degradation are abuses of power, acts of inhumanity, and in some cases examples of outright sadism; all surefire signs of Apraxia. The only antidote to such a degeneration of values is through absolute control by an ethical and moral authority, an authority that can only be assured by the ceaseless work of the Hippocrats. Their guidelines and regulations are both a beacon and weapon in one.

A WOUND THAT NEVER HEALS

Seeing a Recruit die is tragic. Losing a Famulancer is terrible: years of extensive training wasted, their true potential never to be seen in full bloom. Losing a whole corps is devastating. The Spital is always running out of time, running out of staff, running out of quality. Humanity is doomed, exposed to a painful and prolonged death at the hands of the Primer, and only the doctors see it clearly. While the Consultants may appear unresponsive or indifferent to the threats smoldering on at their doorstep, the instructors, chairmen, and high ranking officials of the organization are not. Feverishly, they struggle to keep the Cult united on all fronts, inspire the platoons, draft new members, and accomplish milestones that bring them closer to the ultimate goal.

All of their efforts are like a drop of water on a hot stove. The massacre of Rennes was a major setback, one that cannot be forgotten until the powers responsible for the heinous crime are brought to justice. However, it's not just acts of betrayal that cripple the Cult, it's a crisis of membership too.

Fewer and fewer candidates make it through the Famulancer matura, and the top positions of the Spital are being bled dry. There are already barely enough Epigeneticists to sustain the next generation of apprentices. It's a structural collapse, a collapse of values and knowledge, a true dark age of the mind. Too many wars, too many hostilities, and too many enemies have cracked the once formidable lines of the eightfold cross. Unstable alliances, corruption, and warfare push the Spitalians over the edge even as they strive for a better world. Therefore, Borca must be protected at all costs. Only a fully sanitized and healthy populace can provide the next generation to suit up in neoprene and face off against the Primer's spawn.

STATE OF WAR

The Spitalians never cared much for the Clans. They considered the wild tribes of southern Borca a mere nuisance so long as Sepsis didn't spread amongst them – in which case they swiftly ignited their fungicide rifles and purged the savages with a barrage of black band.

The Clan Wars are an altogether different scenario. For the first time, the Spital itself is at stake. The Famulancers must now become a phalanx with its speartips targeting fellow humans instead of tearing down grotesquely deformed Aberrants. The moral conflict arising from this is problematic for the doctrine of the Cult. The Hippocrats do their best to dehumanize the enemy and urge the troops to stay strong willed, incessantly preaching about how much is on the line. With Chalk Breach fallen and many border towns under fire the threat of invasion suddenly becomes all too clear, leaving other operations to slow down to a grinding halt. This is not an option.

Preservists are now given the task of training platoons to be defenders of the Protectorate. This in itself is questionable since the combat elites of the Spital are needed on other fronts, leading the charge against violent Archons in Purgare or horribly twisted Residents in Pollen. For now, Kranzler's soldiers follow along, but there is dissent brewing between the Preservists and the Consultants, additionally bolstered by the Provost's political solo moves. The Qabis operation was never officially ratified by the Spital's consortium, while the Great Cleanse bore the characteristics of a publicity stunt; the Consultants don't approve of such military antics.

PLATOONS

Twenty years with the Spitalians. Three stationed within the Appendix, six months at the Cor (just a faint memory), then four years in Purgare, three cold winters in Franka and a little over eight years assigned to a public hospital in Justitian. As a member of a platoon you get around, standing side by side with your comrades. Sometimes it's exciting, other times dangerous – like that one punitive expedition against a Frankan routing hub that claimed over forty lives. The rest of our platoon barely looked healthier than the comrades we had to leave behind in the mud. Awful stuff, but at least it was better than listening to the wailing of the sick for days on end, or sitting in a laboratory counting the hours, waiting for some test tube to turn blue instead of green. The endless gossip, the elitist pissing contests, Epigenetics here, Pharmaceutics there, power games and the pathetic scramble for publications and attention – that's

The Convoy

The ancestors of the modern Spitalians kept their knowledge stored within the data nodes of the Stream, as books had all but gone extinct long before their organization came to be. The few written records that survived the doomsday event eventually went up in flames during the great fire. So much knowledge was irrevocably destroyed, barring the Cult from uncovering its own history. How were they able to survive decades of isolation, locked away in the Southern Ruhr Crisis Center without supplies, without food and electricity, while all of Europe was perishing from HIVE?

One must have access to the Conservatorium to begin digging for clues. Grunow ordered his Hippocrats to build this space in an attempt to decipher the burnt remains recovered from the Central Registry. This unit, led by Grunow's confidant, Chairman Marbod Arensdorff, spent years piecing together a gigantic puzzle. In minute detail, they were able to transcribe sections rescued from the ashes, salvage tarnished folders, and repair melted data carriers, mapping a somewhat comprehensive diagram of the Spitalian Cult that leads back all the way to the founding members of the Crisis Center. Most curious of all, one entry points to: Chairman Dr. Nikolai Gusev, Botanist; Specialization: Embryology; Genetically Adaptive Grain; Cryogenics. How was this overlooked? Gusev, the Marauder? The Ghost of Noret? A Spitalian?

Grunow's team excavated further and discovered ancient delivery slips that showed evidence of frequent interaction between the Spital and unregistered UEO support vessels, tabbed as "The Convoy". The records index cargo deliveries to and from the Spital, encompassing a timeframe of approximately seven years between 2072-2079, and feature medical supply drops, weapon shipments, and freighting of so-called "blue granulate".

However, one file is the most cryptic of all. Labelled "Operation Fornax", it lists tens of thousands of cryogenically frozen embryos, deposited by the Southern Ruhr Crisis Center and relocated to a secret UEO military facility within the perimeter of modern day Noret on January 23rd 2073 - less than two months before the Eshaton. The paper is signed off declaring the cargo as "pure strain isolates".

What is Noret? An arc holding the genetic seed of humanity? Gusev himself, isn't he also known as the Icebreaker, making his way to Danzig to work alongside the HIVE research group? What does Petrova know?

not the life of a Famulancer who belongs to the platoons.

We're out there in the field, far from the Spital. Over at the camp they discuss decisions made by the Consultants, and how the Hippocrats want to investigate the circumstances which led to the storming of this Frankan village. Everyone laughs, only a few show a worried face (fucking newbies!). Food was scarce, and the place full of Leperos; the order to attack would have come anyway, so why wait? We Famulancers are in it together. Our wall of camaraderie is what breaks Hippocrat ideology like a wave hitting a cliff.

Licensed doctors and the Famulancers of the platoons are worlds apart. The competitive pressure within the Spital is high, and those who do not prove themselves daily are considered failures and thus avoided by their peers. Surgeons fight for status and the merits of their profession over the bodies of their patients, while Pharmacists hoard certificates attesting to their abilities only to simultaneously proclaim: "I am above you, my dear sir colleague!"

Such childish tantrums are alien to a platoon. The comrade comes first, one's own interests are placed in the back. Even if most of these Famulancers will never be decorated with a medical rank, their life experience forges them into specialists. In every platoon there is someone who knows how to deal with broken bones or mending severed tendons. Another carries a sack full of medicine, spots gangrene, and knows how to treat necrotic tissue by applying maggots to a festering wound. A third one diagnoses infectious diseases and worm infestations with the confidence of a practiced physician, and is savvy enough to administer the right medication.

After years of missions in foreign lands, the Spitalian statutes allow some Famulancers an emergency examination to be promoted as Field Medics or Surgeons. But even if they pass the test, they have difficulties fitting into their new role. The old comrades show them respect - after all, the shared memories still resonate - but the conversations eventually turn hollow and artificial. Distance settles in. Now you're one of "them". The new colleagues are no better, eyeing the newcomer like an upstart who somehow managed to sneak past the libraries. Even years of hard work will not erase this flaw. What's left for these latecomers? They set off as Village Doctors, escort the platoons, or end up instructing Recruits and Orderlies, who aren't familiar with their past.

Refuge of the Preservists

ARNSBERG

Only a single winding road leads to Arnsberg, roaming through desolate and lonesome terrain. Veils of ashen flakes and gray powder darken the sun. Steel barricades jut from the ground on either side, covered with barbed wire. The rugged hills have been peppered with mines. One wrong step is all it takes to get blown to smithereens. The Fortress is situated at the end of the road, nestled atop a jagged cliff and surrounded by a forest of looming firs and spruces, their branches bare and petrified. In a ditch next to the beaten path lies a rotting Gendo with sunken eyes and fur fluttering in the wind; yellow maggots break out of an open belly wound and crawl from its maw. Not even predators are safe here. As the road ascends toward the Fortress, foreboding totem poles topped with Spitalian crosses rise along the wayside, some of which feature crude carvings such as “Vigilance”, “Vengeance”, and “Victory”.

Arnsberg. This is the headquarters of the Preservists, the tenebrous military order of the Spitalian Cult. The Fortress’ blackened walls hide their true nature. What happens on the inside is unknown to outsiders. No regular doctors are permitted here - not even Hippocrats or Consultants have ever set foot in these halls. First used by the followers of the Old School, it served as a refuge for their remorseless teachings. Throughout the past decades the fortifications were subsequently expanded, and Arnsberg was appointed as the ultimate sanctum of the Preservists.

Indoors: Narrow corridors, large halls, small alcoves. The floors are tiled in checkerboard patterns and spotless, the walls blank and covered with imposing Spitalian banners. Ventilation pipes run along the ceiling, and poorly oiled fans creak. On the ground floor, one weapon exhibit follows the next: Preservists are instructed to collect the arsenals of fallen enemies and put them on display here. Bygone rifles are propped up next to menacing spears, crude chain weapons, and other oddities amassed throughout the ages. Nobody uses these tools of destruction anymore. Each one stands for a battle won, and many also for numerous comrades lost. Life and Death, it’s all the same.

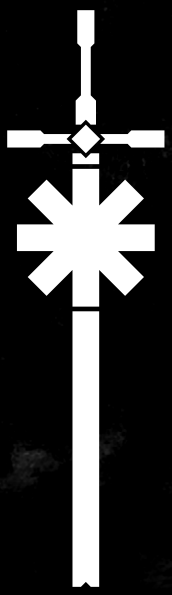
All of the special access areas are reachable via a complex network of claustrophobic corridors, connecting to other parts of the compound like study rooms, archives, libraries, and personal bunks. It takes a regular apprentice six months to simply understand the vastness of the structure and confidently navigate between the lower and upper sections of the mazelike Fortress.

The top floor of the southern wing is reserved for the Provost and the Commando Primes, while the majority of the training facilities are located in the underground vaults, including forges, special rooms for shock and fear drills, gas chambers for toxic exposure, floating tanks for sensory deprivation, meditation quarters, and combat grounds. The northern wing holds padded cells used for ideological indoctrination, sleep deprivation, and teaching counter-interrogation techniques. The trophy room, adjacent to the experimental warfare laboratory, showcases Europe’s largest collection of Homo Degenesis killed in the field, along with a multitude of Psychonautic remains - severed body parts, Dushani tongues, Psychokinetic hearts, mutated Biokinetic limbs, and Pregnoctic eyeballs - all floating in formaldehyde.

The common-use arsenals are locked and sealed. Canisters brimming with chemical warfare agents can only be dispensed following the approval of two separate Commando Primes. This is a security measure. Preservists are trained soldiers, and nobody would doubt that they are skilled enough to deliver a deadly payload to its proper destination. The problem lies in their psyche: it's impossible to predict what would happen if one of them broke the iron fetters of their mental conditioning and ran amok on the compound with a bandolier of black band and mustard gas cartridges at their disposal.

OLD SCHOOL

The official narrative is straightforward. Kranzler destroyed the Old School and purged the wayward doctrine to cleanse the Preservists of past sins. It was a big reset for the organization, moving the soldiers into the limelight



and making their heroic deeds common knowledge.

The real story is far more complex. The Old School ideology was spinning out of control. The psychological experiments conducted on Preservists were outright dangerous, producing human time-bombs that could detonate without a trigger. Hippocrat Grunow led a special unit within the Spital, collecting intelligence on Preservist missions that had gone wrong, including the deaths of innocent bystanders, suicide bombings, and the mental aberrations of several high-ranking Commando Primes. He was compiling a case that would put an end to the entire organization. If it were to go as Grunow hoped, the Preservists would be reintegrated into the Spital under the direct supervision of the Hippocrats and demoted to the position of half-baked royal guards who would have to sign off on every step they take, and get every breath countersigned in triplicate.

The instruments of power sharpened by Grunow could lead to Hippocrats turning up at Arnsberg at a moment's notice. If the Spital got a single look at the Corps' archives everything would be lost: the legacy of the Preservists and their exploits would be mangled in moral discourse and branded as perversities of the mind. The Preservists would at least be criminalized, and potentially entirely disbanded.

Kranzler wouldn't allow for this to happen. He knew that only a radical reform would be able to save the order from being politically and publicly annihilated. The young Commando Prime sided with Grunow, flattering the Hippocrat in his pursuit of the truth. Kranzler himself would turn over the archives of Arnsberg to the Spital if the Consultants would back him up and pronounce him the new Provost.

While Grunow deliberated with the leaders of the Cult over the proposal and received a favorable response, Kranzler formed a corps of assassins to topple the current leadership of the Preservists in a hit-and-run mission, taking out Provost Klasten and all resident Commando Primes as they came to Arnsberg for their annual gathering. Before anyone grasped what was happening Kranzler had declared the end of the Old School era, and the dawn of a new age. All night long he had his men ravage the archives and burn all existing records. To Grunow he reported, with apologies, that while he was able to conduct a purge of all criminal elements within the order, he couldn't stop them from destroying the Preservists' collective history. In a final sentence, he thanked the Hippocrat for supporting him on the path of righteousness.

Now it was time for him to step out in the open. Kranzler was certain that if he managed to create an aura of heroism surrounding the order he would be able to shake off Grunow's future attempts at damaging the Preservists. He relocated to Justitian to forge an alliance with the Judges, had stories of the destruction of the Old School spread among Famulancers and Recruits, and openly proclaimed his order as saviors of mankind. His appearances inspired thousands of men and women to apply at the Spitalian recruitment tents, who wanted nothing more than to follow in Kranzler's footsteps. The Provost had cemented the Preservists as guardian angels in the public eye. Now it would be much harder to root them out.

However, not everyone within the order is siding with the Provost. Many old loyalists of Klasten and the past generations remain hidden in the ranks. They are aware that Kranzler did the right thing to save the Preservists from their doom, but burning the books and wiping out the history of the order went too far. Resentment prevails among many members of the Corps. To be free of moral considerations, as is required for their heinous work, most Preservists look to the deeds of their predecessors and cling to them as a justification for their own obscene actions. Kranzler destroyed the only thing that was meaningful to them: the written documents that proved that the Old School was as cruel and immoral as the new.

In addition, Kranzler is far from cleared. Grunow soon rose to power and was promoted as a Consultant himself. He has never stopped investigating the Old School affair and works closely with his top student, Oswald Keszler, to shed light on the Preservists as a whole.

The Burning South

A235

The Raven Chagall is a man with many faces – shrewd negotiator, master strategist, charismatic daredevil, and pain in the ass. Nobody questions that he's the undisputed ruler of A235, an outlaw settlement planted on the trade route between Cathedral City and Justitian. There are many reasons for that.

For one, his domain is virtually impregnable, sitting on a colossal ruined bridge that leads across a dry river valley. The massive concrete pillars supporting it rise over a hundred meters high to hold up the remains of an ancient Bygone highway that serves as the foundation for the outpost erected on top. Two hydraulic drawbridges connect the main structure with the surrounding hillside. When they're pulled up, there is practically no way to enter the encampment.

Laying siege on the city from the ground is just as futile. The mighty pylons have withstood not only the Eshaton but the following 500 years of weathering and erosion. The artillery shelling required to significantly damage the structure would be immense. Meanwhile, the valley offers no protection to conquerors, instead turning them into sitting ducks who can be killed easily by a hail of rocks hauled at them from above, the immense height turning even the smallest pebble into a murderous projectile.

But Chagall's reputation is owed to more than just the fact that A235 is an impossible nut to crack. The Raven himself bears the title of personal Juryman of the Supreme Judge Archot, a prominent position he received in exchange for joining the Protectorate. This was previously unheard of – an Apocalyptic rising to the top of the food chain, bolstered by the support of Judgement Hall? Many Advocates shook their heads in disbelief when the news broke. Of course, Archot had his reasons. He was irritated by Chagall, but understood that the prospect of attacking the settlement would be far more wasteful than simply showering the Raven with gifts and letting him bask in newfound importance. What the Supreme Judge failed to anticipate: Chagall could never be satisfied. His ambitions were boundless, on par with those of the man sitting in the highest office, therefore loyalty toward the Judiciary was nothing but a temporary state of mind. As long as the Raven was able to milk fat customs payments from traders using the stretch of fortified road network leading through his domain, he was tame. But this wouldn't last forever; that much was clear.

When the Enemoi refugees showed up at Chagall's doorstep begging for asylum, the Raven didn't hesitate before having the drawbridges lowered to allow the Orion to roll into his miniature kingdom. He knew full well how much this gesture would sting the Chroniclers, and it took less than a day for him to be declared public enemy number one, with Shutters swarming out in all directions to find a weak spot in A235's defenses and eliminate the Raven who crossed the line. Chagall can't help but laugh at their petty attempts. He's the one holding the reins and has already begun negotiating with the Anabaptists for protection. Are the Chroniclers really foolish enough to try and oust an established ruler this close to the territory of their nemesis? Good luck! Better watch out for those bidenhanders, they cut through rubber just as easily as meat and bone.

IGNATZ

The vistas of Ignatz are beautiful. Tundra flowers blossom from late May until early September, coloring the sweeping countryside in shades of purple and crimson. Monuments of the Era of the Beast sprout from the landscape; massive stones erected to gain the favor of the blood gods who demanded sacrifice during those times of carnage and despair. Some are overgrown with bright green lichen, while others have been repurposed as waymarkers for Scrappers. The largest is called "the Tombstone" and was engraved by the Judges in 2585 as a symbol of victory.

Back then the Plague Birds were terrorizing the surrounding area, staging a series of relentless assaults on trade caravans, conducting kidnappings, and extorting ransom payments from Justitian. The Judges were powerless, unable to pinpoint the nest of the Apocalyptics who were enjoying the protection of Ignatz' populace. That was until Rutgar, the Chief Protector of Justitian, reviewed the case file. Several weeks later an untraceable radio message broadcast the exact location of the Plague Birds' safe house. Rutgar had all he needed. Two veteran Protector squads were dispatched to eradicate the criminals, utilizing newly developed gas cartridges shipped from the Klawen. The operation was swift and merciless – none of the Apocalyptics survived the mayhem.

In the process Ignatz was ransacked, but rather than enact cruel punishments the Judges instead pardoned the population for their criminal collaboration with the Plague Birds, and offered them the chance to be recast as a model society empowered by harsh laws, backed up by rigid discipline, and imbued by the spirit of the Righteous Fist. The locals agreed, fearful that the Judges might change their mind. A village-wide clean up was initiated. The Judges founded a town hall for Ignatz and brought in prison laborers to build a solid road system dissecting the settlement. Proclaimers were tasked with holding sermons on Sundays and teaching the First Judge's ways to the populace. Farmers were encouraged to certify their turnip and beet harvests in Justitian and sell their goods to the citizens, thereby contributing to the food supply of the metropolis. Within but a short year, the remote backwater hamlet transformed into a prospering community and vanity project for the Judiciary, exhibiting the lasting effects of public reeducation.

All this effort was just a smokescreen for Rutgar, who was operating under an altogether different agenda. Ignatz lay beyond the reach of any Chronicler surveillance and interference by other Cults, which made it a perfect spot for a black site run by his secret elite force, the Black Judges. The old nest of the Plague Birds now serves as a command center for covert operations within the Protectorate, containing arsenals claimed during the City Wars, long distance radio connections, and soundproof torture chambers. The battle room is filled with blueprints of important structures in Justitian, including the Steel Monolith, the Advocate Houses, and Judgement Hall. A special inventory allows the Black Judges to change into a varied assortment of clothes, switch identities, or equip themselves with keys to private rooms which they frequent when carrying out their missions. While the people of Ignatz hurry to pay homage to their saviors, the Black Judges plot assassinations, instigate the toppling of Senators, or act as agent provocateurs on Rutgar's behalf.

Ferropol

A rustle. Withered shrubs sprout along a beaten road that snakes through the roving and sparse hillside. The pavement ahead is loose and brittle, looking like it hasn't been traversed in many years. For a moment there is silence. Suddenly, a gust of wind picks up speed, billowing through the sea of feathery dune grass that has grown all over a dry river bank nearby. The tall stems with their bushy ears sway ominously, as if they're waving to us as we pass. Crows squawk in the distance. Rusted chains swing in the breeze. The wind gets stronger, blowing through hollow pipes that lie scattered around this remote landscape, blanketing the area with a haunting, dissonant melody.

As we reach the peak of the slope we see a red crater rising before us, casting its shadow across a decaying settlement in the valley below. A vista of blackened towers, crumbled city walls, overgrown buildings, sunken rooftops, withered architecture, and desolate fields spreads into the far distance. Everything lies in shambles.

Approaching the battered city gate I am greeted by the figure of a man hanging from a pole. The corpse is missing limbs, and the face was chewed off long ago. Nobody in our group can tell where his allegiances lay. All we know is that we've reached Ferropol, the forgotten city, and that we'd better watch out. Soliyanka says this place was once the offshoot of an empire. Hard to believe. If anything, this is, at best, a rabid shithole – at worst, I don't even want to think about it. Soliyanka points to a collapsed structure sitting at the rim of the crater. "The excavation camp!" she gasps. I nod confidently. That's where we need to go.

FORGOTTEN GLORY

Ferropol's massive forging hammers once struck for Exalt. The city at the foot of the Wupper Crater was the war forge of the metropolis, its weapons plentiful and practical. During its golden age Ferropol's ingenuity became renowned far beyond the borders of Borca, attracting philosophers, chemists, inventors, and master builders alike. They travelled from all corners of the known world to settle here and contribute to the creative forces accumulating within the city walls. They were the brightest minds of their generation – like moths attracted to the city's radiance they gathered in public forums to discuss mankind's future, laying out plans for magnificent endeavors and reaching for the stars. Among them were the tribes Ogota, Gotokai, and Assam, who held the key to the Iron Towers, the sacred foundry of the Steel Masters. In unity with Exalt, Ferropol would lay the groundwork for humanity's rise from the ashes.

None of them knew that they were living on borrowed time. When the news of Exalt's ruin swept across the land, Ferropol trembled in despair. Nobody had anticipated such a disgraceful end to an era, nobody was prepared for the sudden collapse of order. The leaders of Ferropol urged their people to remain calm and civilized in hopes that the turmoil raging across the Black Lung would ebb. Instead, it got a lot worse.

A new power rode into town; hat and hammer were their insignia, and their anthem was conquest. The inhabitants gave their best to fight off the invaders, but without Exalt's protection Ferropol had nothing to oppose them with. The Judges assaulted the city day and night, cornering the population, setting fire to entire neighborhoods, and cutting off all supply lines.

As the enclave began to starve, the Judges captured the figureheads of various institutions and rounded them up in public squares. In the days that followed, the occupying force unleashed cruelty without remorse: Philosophers were humiliated and made to renounce their ideology before the assembly of Judges if they wanted to live. Rebels had their heads shaved and were strapped to horses before they were dragged to their deaths. Patriarchs were brutally executed and their families forced to swallow lethal poison. When the chieftains of the Assam tribe were caught and beheaded in broad daylight, Ferropol's resistance finally crumbled. The Protectors rounded up the remaining Steel Master families and marched them off into slavery. The Judges issued an ultimatum to the remainder

of Ferropol's population – either join them as citizens of Justitian, or flee as far as their legs could carry them. The survivors knew that this was their closing act. The steel hammers fell silent and the city died, robbed of its destiny.

PRISON CAMP

Years later, iron rule returned to Ferropol when the Judges repurposed the abandoned city and turned it into Justitian's first offsite prison camp. The capital of the Protectorate required construction material to accommodate its rapid growth, and the wreckage of Ferropol was abundant and easy to harvest. Day in, day out, merciless Jurymen whipped convicts through the empty streets, commanding them to dismantle the architecture of the city, break blocks of stone into manageable size, dig mortar pits, and cut up metal claddings ready to be shipped out with the next Scrapper caravan towards the booming Tech-Central.

"The long march to Ferropol" became a dreaded metaphor. Convicts sentenced to the prison camp knew what hellish torment awaited them. Far away from the influence of the Righteous Fist and the watchful eye of Judgement Hall the supervising Judges and Jurymen developed atrocious forms of punishment to suppress any sign of mutiny or rebellion.

Prisoners were forced to keep a vow of silence – if they were caught talking to a fellow inmate, their tongue would be sliced off. As a result, the convicts developed a sign language to be able to covertly communicate amongst each other, which ultimately became the Judges' downfall. Slowly but surely, the incarcerees began orchestrating a large scale revolt in plain sight of their wardens, who were too short-sighted to see their own end coming.

APOK THE ONE-EYED

The Raven of Ferropol, Apok the One-Eyed, was the last great leader of the decaying settlement. A brilliant strategist in his day, he knew how to play his game even while wedged between powers far greater than his own.

When he began competing for the Burn trade with the East Wind Flock he clashed several times with the Raven Zhivan, known to have been the Mother of Ravens' favorite son. When the old crone learned about the dispute she called for Apok's head, and it wouldn't be long before members of the Carrion Birds infiltrated Ferropol to take him out. However, Apok knew how to respond. He tore out his own left eye and placed it in a jar of formaldehyde, sending a messenger back to Justitian to present his gift

FACT SHEET: FERROPOL

CITY: Ferropol, Tech-Level III

PROVINCE: Protectorate (Borca)

INHABITANTS: 350 / Slowly rising

POPULATION STRUCTURE: Anabaptists / dominant, Apocalyptics / dominant, Scrappers / present, Chroniclers / unknown

LEADER: Orek, the Pious

GOVERNING FORCE: The Splinter Hawks

FEATURES: Everlast: The Anabaptist enclave; The Citadel of the Splinter Hawks: Heart of the Broiled trade; Eclipse's Alcove; Abandoned Spitalian research base

TRADE / GOODS: Broiled exported to Justitian by the Splinter Hawks, any spare food Everlast can offer, scrap left over from before the Siege of Ferropol

CITY GUARD:

- A dozen Splinter Hawk Battle Crows to protect the Broiled labs led by Pheobe's lieutenant, Varya
- All of Orek's Ascetics know how to handle a sword, flail or pitchfork, and will defend their home at any cost

ARTIFACT TRADE: Minor trade at Eclipse's Alcove, mostly picked clean

COMMUNICATION: Linked to the Chronicler radio network, bi-weekly supply drop for Eclipse's Alcove, occasional riders to and from Justitian or Cathedral City

to the Mother of Ravens. A handwritten note was added, hanging off the jar, reading: "Next time you accuse me of something, stare into my eye and interpret my intent." Allegedly, the Mother of Ravens was impressed by the gesture and asked her son to lay off the rivalry and ignore Apok, so long as he didn't overstep his bounds and try to sell Burn on the streets of Justitian.

Apok had what he wanted: time. He replaced his missing eye with a polished obsidian marble and went about experimenting. He knew that his Flock, the Splinter Hawks, was too insignificant to make a direct impact on the Burn trade. He needed something different. With the help of a wayward Spitalian Pharmacist he was able to develop Broiled and began distributing the liquid drug across the Protectorate. Drafts came flowing in and the Splinter Hawks grew in number. When a prison revolt shook the city in 2581, the stars aligned for Apok. He seized the moment, siding with the incarcerees to overthrow the local Judges and Jurymen. Within days he had enough men at his side to secure all routes leading into Ferropol and lock the city off from the outside world. Over the following years the enclave turned into a drug fortress, while the production of Broiled continued to expand. Apok amassed fortunes and began paying off the local Ascetics to provide the Splinter Hawks with food and alcohol. Meanwhile, he employed Scrappers, Palers, and any other riff-raff that came passing through to distribute Broiled beyond the city borders, offering huge sales margins to collaborators and thereby tying them to his operation.

Four years went by and Apok's name had become a stain in the case files of the Office of Protectorate Affairs. The Judges could do little, unable to penetrate Apok's inner circle – the Raven was paranoid and distrusted everyone. His closest confidants were fiendishly loyal to him, and Apok often requested ridiculous acts of obedience to satisfy his occasional hunches.

Rutgar, the Chief Protector of Justitian, cooked up a plan. Sikorski, one of his Black Judges, branded himself as a murderer and infiltrated Ferropol. For months he worked himself through the existing hierarchy of the Splinter Hawks to gain the Raven's attention. Apok took notice of Sikorski's ambition and promoted him to his side. To ensure the newcomer wasn't a fraud, he demanded that Sikorski cut off his own right hand. The Black Judge didn't hesitate before committing the self-mutilation in front of the entire assembly of the Flock, convincing Apok of his integrity and devotion. From that point forward he was the Raven's confidant, gaining insight into all aspects of

Apok's drug empire. Night after night the Black Judge radioed intelligence to Justitian, where the Protectors began devising the Siege of Ferropol. Two weeks later the trap was sprung. Cavalry battalions smashed into the city and artillery fired into the gates. Gas cartridges poisoned the defenders, while snipers hidden in the hills executed everyone attempting to flee. Within a day, Apok's empire crumbled to dust. He himself is said to have died in a hail of bullets amidst a final shootout in his Broiled lab. Finally, the Judges set fire to everything, closing the last chapter of Ferropol's fall.

GHOST TOWN

What is left of Ferropol today resembles a ghost town. Dunes of red dust cloak the sunken ruins like a sheet of rust, and an eerie silence creeps through the deserted streets. Tumbleweed blows in the wind, and the hinges of old doors screech as they're pushed around by the breeze. However, life has secretly returned to Ferropol. The new settlers are stubborn, refusing to give up what little they have. They endure the deprivations, locked up behind a wooden palisade in a tiny compound they refer to as Everlast. The community is composed of orthodox Ascetics, families who have chosen Ferropol's secluded position in the Protectorate as a refuge for their faith. Their leader, a pious man named Orek, oversees the wellbeing of his people, guiding them through the hardships of life and offering them spiritual absolution.

These pioneers have tirelessly begun reclaiming the fallow fields, clearing areas of rubble and cultivating the old river bed northwest of the settlement. They survive off anything the land provides them, hunting reindeer, catching lemmings, and setting traps for red hares. Orek's people are devout and deeply religious, attempting to restore the city and turn it into a temple of Pneuma, laying the groundwork for other Anabaptists to join them in their effort. Everlast consists of barely three hundred souls, but it is Orek's dream to turn the new settlement into a haven for thousands.

But life out here is dangerous. Justitian is too far away to establish order, and the inhabitants must take matters into their own hands. Robbers and highwaymen targeting Ferropol in hopes of an easy heist can expect no mercy if they're caught. Criminals receive a short process: death by hanging. No Judges, no trial. In recent years this practice has become somewhat of an allegory for Ferropol in general. If you want to dispose of someone, do it here. No one will come looking for the corpse.

The Wupper Crater

A splinter of the asteroid swarm that ushered in the Eshaton broke off from the cluster and slammed into Earth, creating the Wupper Crater and leaving a scar a thousand meters across, atomizing whatever Bygone city originally stood here.

Today, it's the most dominant landmark far and wide. Red clouds waft over the crater's edge whenever the wind passes through the land, blowing iron oxide into the air. A crimson smear hangs in the sky for days like a morbid aurora before the streams carry the dust into the upper regions of the atmosphere and deposit it across the entire Protectorate.

In the early days of Ferropol's settlement, the Spitalians set up an excavation camp on the ridge of the crater, monitoring the Primer's influence on the surrounding landscape. Nothing happened. The Wupper Crater lay dormant and didn't develop a signature of its own, nor did it release any spore cargo to plague the area with Sepsis. The doctors remained suspicious. They had just witnessed the bloom of a Mother spore field in Menden, and believed that similar things could happen here as well. Months passed without any significant observation, until suddenly the Spitalians discovered a new species of Primer fauna. Beetles the size of a palm were burrowing through the crater ashes. Similar specimens were found all around Ferropol in a radius of fifty kilometers. Examination of the bugs proved that they didn't carry spores, yet they congregated all around the Wupper Crater and laid their eggs predominantly in the crater's depression.

The Spitalians never managed to finish their field work. When the Judges took the Steel Masters as slaves and the city lay ruined, the station that had been manned for years was abandoned by the doctors.

FERRITES

The beetles of the Wupper Crater became known to the people of the Protectorate as just another pest they had to occasionally deal with. The Spitalians classified the creatures as Ferrites for their inherent ability to secrete an acid that corrodes iron. The insects pick up the spoil with their mandibles and store it within their exoskeleton until they arrive back at the crater and deposit their cargo. Why the Ferrites are refilling the Wupper Crater with rust is unknown, but it's clear that their ceaseless work is responsible for the red dust storms emerging from Ferropol. During their examinations, the Spitalians discovered hundreds of brood colonies and estimated that thousands more were scattered along the crater's crimson slopes. Attempts to develop a pesticide that would eradicate the bugs failed - the Ferrites adapted to the chemicals faster than they could be deployed.

Another feature that distinguishes them from common insects is the abnormally high concentration of glycerol in their bodies, acting as a form of antifreeze that allows them to survive the Borcan tundra's extraordinarily harsh winters. Additionally, their dark husks absorb even the faintest sunlight, serving as energy cells to keep them active during extended periods without food supply.

CONCLUSIONS

If one is to believe the results of the research team that inspected the Wupper Crater, the Ferrites are programmed to terraform Borca in a similar manner as can be witnessed in other regions of the world, where Aberrants control hives of insects to change the atmosphere of a local biome. However, the Ferrite case appears to be an outlier, as the insects don't seem to be bound to a particular Chakra, nor do they respond to the call of a specific Rapture. As such, the terraforming properties of their behavior are likely ancestral and disconnected from any of the current transmutations initiated by the Primer, like an outdated program running on an upgraded system. Which begs the question: if the program is in fact ancient, what purpose did it have to begin with?

The research on the topic is nebulous, and since the Ferrites have no immediate effect on the distribution of spores throughout the Protectorate the Spitalians resolved their studies for the time being.

BROILED

In his experiments with Burn, Apok made a breakthrough observation: like other insects, Ferrites are attracted to the drug. Nature never acts arbitrarily, he told himself, and examined the infected creatures together with Unkas, a Pharmacist who had been expelled from the ranks of the Spitalians. They discovered that Burn was processed very slowly by the Ferrite's metabolism, passing through the organs and binding itself to the creature's glycerol. If an iron beetle is boiled ten minutes after exposure to Burn, chopped up, and the glycerol distilled from the red pulp, the result is liquid Burn - a substitute deprived of spores and lacking intoxication, but retaining its stimulus phase, albeit weaker than real Burn.

For Apok this was a monumental success. Addicts no longer had to fear the Spitalians lurking around the corner with their mollusks. The drug simply didn't carry active spores that were detectable by regular means, yet it provided similar potency and benefits. Broiled was born. Unkas and Apok went on to establish calculations and estimate ratios. A dose of Broiled - sold by the vial - required the average glycerol extraction of a dozen spore infested Ferrites, which could be achieved with just a single Burn cusp. All they had to do was import the Burn and collect the insects. The cooking and distillation process required the most effort, as it had to be correctly timed with transportation of spores through the Ferrite's body, but Apok didn't shy away from the challenge. He had created a Burn derivative that had the potential to flood Justitian and make him the most powerful drug lord in all of Borca. It was his moment to surpass the Mother of Ravens in infamy.

ECLIPSE

One can't be marching through Ferropol by accident looking for an Alcove to trade their goods. Yet, for unknown reasons, the Chroniclers have deployed Agent Eclipse to this desolate turf. Are the cyber toads hoping for a wonder, some unforeseen find which happens to just fall into their lap at random? Or are they monitoring someone in plain sight? Eclipse doesn't give away much about his agenda. Some days he deals with the occasional Scrapper passing through, others he keeps himself busy restoring the rundown Alcove which is located in Ferropol's godforsaken city center, clearing the red dust off the solar panels and fixing the radio antennae on the rooftop.

Every other week he receives a supply drop. A covered wagon arrives from the south before sunrise and delivers crates packed with modules, cables, and other equipment – material needed to expand and fortify the Alcove.

All this is a front set up to obscure Eclipse's true mission. The Agent is in fact a Fuse working directly for the ominous Scalar Nullify, and the Alcove a base from which he equips his Shutters. They have just one reason for being here - eliminate Orek. Why? Long story! The short version: Orek is an Acheron who went undercover. He has sabotaged numerous large scale Chronicler operations in Liqua, and has been on the Cluster's kill list for quite some time. After successfully hiding his tracks for a couple of years, he reemerged in Ferropol, disguised as the leader of the Ascetic community. He is aware that his face is known, therefore he can't show himself in cities like Mobilis or Justitian where Shutters lie in wait to take him out. Ferropol served as a decent hideout, until Eclipse picked up on the story of the orthodox community and ran his investigations. Now he's just waiting for the right moment to strike. But Orek has holed himself up in Everlast, surrounded by devotees who'd die for their leader. In order to lure the Acheron out of his fortress, Eclipse would need a major distraction.

SPLINTER HAWKS

The celebrations in Uptown lasted for days when the Judges proclaimed that the Splinter Hawks had been annihilated. Senator Rutgar decorated some of his best Protectors with medals for their accomplishment, clapped them on the shoulders, and ordered the archival of the case files. Little did they know that two members of Apok's Flock survived the purge. The Magpie Phoebe, who ran a brothel for Apok in faraway Justitian, along with his renegade Hellvetic bodyguard Gram both escaped the massacre and went underground, licking their wounds and hiding their tracks. Years went by before the duo emerged from the shadows to restore Apok's legacy. With newfound followers they brought the Splinter Hawks back to life and reclaimed the old Citadel in Ferropol, which had lain barren since the siege of the city. Phoebe was still in possession of Apok's Broiled recipe and there had never been a better time to restart production. The Great Cleanse had purged Justitian of its Burn supplies, and the market was ripe to be flushed with a substitute. The Burners were craving a fix and the diluted properties of Broiled made it the perfect asset to be smuggled past the Spitalian searches and checkpoints.

However, to produce Broiled one still needs Burn. Gram established a trafficking operation in Born, allying with the local Blood Birds who specialized in the import of Unity across the Frankan Border, providing the reassembled Splinter Hawks with the base components required to accelerate their plans. Meanwhile, Phoebe rebuilt the old laboratory beneath the Citadel, installing her henchmen to oversee the cooking of Broiled. In Justitian she receives the deliveries coming from Ferropol, sidelining the Carrion Birds and releasing the drug on their turf without paying tribute to the Mother of Ravens. Her game is as reckless as Apok's once was but, contrary to her old mentor and lover, Phoebe has a spy on the inside who informs her of every move the Carrion Birds make.

A more serious issue are the Anabaptists settling in their new outpost. For a long time, Ferropol was a pillaged sinkhole and one could conduct business without attracting attention, but the Ascetics are a nosy bunch and their efforts to reclaim the city and make it an attractive trading port are threatening Phoebe's current affairs. The last thing she needs is Justitian sending out a handful of City Judges as peacekeepers for the growing settlement, who might end up snooping around and challenging her ambitions. She pushes Gram to strike a deal with his old companion Chagall, the Raven and ruler of A235, and convince him of staging a raid on Everlast in an attempt to bully the Ascetics into giving up their pastures. Chagall agrees, but he wants the assault to remain anonymous without any trails pointing back at him. Instead of sending his Apocalyptics he gets the Enemoi involved, who have just taken refuge within his outlaw settlement, paying a favor for a favor. A few weeks have passed and the Custodians of the Enemoi have begun mapping the terrain around Everlast, setting up their attack.

Siege

The siren blares all night long, drowned out only by artillery salvoes fired from the Hellvetic positions on the Flanks above the Chokepoint. A dust storm has been passing through the area, blanketing Siege with a red mist, clogging the generators and causing electrical fluctuations across the city.

It's past 2:00am and the young Vagrants in the Garrison are wide awake, sitting in rows, cleaning their musket barrels, checking their ammo, and gearing up for their next sortie. Sweat pours in rivulets from their terrified features as they chew their lips and bite their fingernails. Some of these soldiers are barely fifteen winters old, and have never before seen battle. Tonight they will stand against the horrors of the wastelands, against Phosphorite shock troops and cannibalistic Cockroach warriors. It is their rite of passage, their admission into a better life. Front service will promote them into higher positions, maybe even turn some of them into City Judges a few years down the line. If they can survive this, they'll be able to survive everything else. The neon bulbs on the ceiling flicker nervously. A lightning bolt must've struck a nearby powerline.

At 2:45am the Executioner storms into the barracks, his face red like a beetroot, his voice coarse and agitated. "This is not a drill!" he screams. The Vagrants are already on their feet rushing toward the Conflux to meet up with the spearhead of the mission. A division of twelve Grenadiers awaits, Harnessed up and with Trailblazers at the ready. They will lead the Vagrants into conflict and ensure their safe return. What a joke. Everyone has seen the empty caskets being shipped back to Justitian. Nobody is safe beyond the Chokepoint.

A FESTERING WOUND

Phosphorescent lights flare up across the horizon. These days, the Clans approach as close as twenty kilometers from Siege in order to mark out the extents of their territory before retreating again. A series of recent victories have toughened their grit and ignited their hatred. Every new dawn is a blatant provocation, spitting in the face of the Protectorate. They're testing the defenders, taunting them, setting large bonfires to entice them and lure them out of their fortress into the open field and into another deathtrap.

The air is charged and stinks of conflict; the anticipation is palpable. Any day now, the commanding officers could issue a marching order to all available troops for a full frontal assault against the invaders from the south. At least that's what the rumors that seep from the saloons and echo through the busy marketplaces say. Everyone's nerves are raw as they stack up on reserves and prepare for the worst. The weapon depots are bursting at the seams with black powder and artillery shells flooding in from the north. The whole damn city has been militarized from top to bottom; every farmer has received instruction on how to shoot and fight for his life. Teenagers are recruited by Judges right off the streets - Vagrant today, war hero tomorrow - while adults are proclaimed as Jurymen by the dozen and outfitted with padded armor and discarded firearms to serve as back up reserves waiting on the sidelines.

Meanwhile the generals of Siege brood in the war room of the Garrison – Executioners, Preservists, Grenadiers, and Furors, all of them – their faces grey as they study the terrain maps and the incoming scout reports that contain sightings of enemy movements, estimates of camp sizes, and approximations of army strength. The figures are terrifying. If they hold but a kernel of truth, Siege faces hostiles numbering in the tens of thousands gathering in a widespread ring along the southern border.

Such vast hordes have never been seen before. It truly looks like a migration of nations, as if the whole world is rising to crush the Protectorate once and for all. The highly decorated men and women in the room understand that a pre-emptive strike against the Clans would border on mass suicide. Even though the Judiciary commands the mightiest cavalry in Europe, and is supported by the best

arsenals the Hellvetics can muster, they're facing down a savage legion of unknown proportions. Instead, Siege must stay fortified until the invaders bleed themselves dry. The current strategy is clear: perpetuate the stalemate for as long as possible and deny progress to the enemy, but do not engage in open warfare or everything will be lost.

UNBREAKABLE PRIDE

Siege must never fall. Siege must never surrender. The city is the cradle of Archot's rise to power, for it was here that he defeated the Krawe Clan in the triumphant battle that proved his brilliance and acumen as a military tactician to the Senates. Without Siege, the Supreme Judge would be nothing. The evidence of Archot's unbreakable pride is visible to this day. A twisted monument towers on Justice Square, erected from the skulls of the fallen Krawe warriors who died here in battle forty years ago. The Judiciary calls this morbid exhibit a cornerstone of the modern Protectorate. Few would dare to publicly disagree.

For a long time the population of Siege prospered from this myth of invincibility. Children were drilled from their very first words to hail the Supreme Judge as their liberator; most of them are now adults and have never experienced a time where Archot did not reside in office. For many, he is the personification of an immortal and benevolent ruler, gifting the lands of Siege to his beloved offspring.

Historically, this stretch of land has always been contested territory, lying in dangerous proximity to the Nullpellian border and at the very edge of the inhospitable wastelands. Out here, staying vigilant is key for survival. Molded by a state of constant tension and alertness, those who make Siege their home have come to terms with the idea that war could wash over them at any moment. They are ready. For them, bumping into a Preservist in an alleyway is nothing extraordinary; they're just as used to it as they are familiar with the polished white armor of the stationed Hellvetics and accustomed to the unparalleled density of mounted Protectors galloping through the streets.

Siegers, as the citizens call themselves, stand united with their patrons and defenders. They believe in the importance of this bordertown and its value for the integrity of the Protectorate. It is no wonder, then, that many of the Supreme Judge's most devoted loyalists come from the ranks of these people. They will work hard to protect their lands, and they will not falter.

FACT SHEET: SIEGE

CITY: Siege, Tech-Level III

PROVINCE: Protectorate (Borca)

INHABITANTS: ca. 67,900 / no census / inflated due to wartime

POPULATION STRUCTURE: Judges / dominant, Spitalians / dominant, Scrappers / dominant, Anabaptists / dominant, Hellvetics / numerous, Apocalyptics / present, Neolibyans / present

LEADER: The War Council, a group of a dozen military leaders from across the Cults, consisting of Executioners, Preservists, Grenadiers, Furors, etc.

GOVERNING FORCE: Centio, the Arbiter

FEATURES: The Chokepoint: Heavily reinforced hydraulic gates leading to the Red Expanse; Bolthammer: The Judges' district, and where the lawmen live when off-shift; The Eastern Wing: District controlled by the Spitalians, and the center of medical services; The Garrison: Last-ditch defense point, and military control hub

TRADE / GOODS: Flax, rye, rapeseed, spices and luxury goods supplied by Neolibyans, liquorice, dyes and pigments, reindeer meat, horns, and furs, surplus military equipment, distillate, beer

CITY GUARD:
Siege is overflowing with combatants made of a mixture of different Cults and affiliated elements.
- 1,500 fully fledged Protectors, along with another 3,500 Vagrants and Jurymen
- Six Famulancer platoons, led by two elite corps of Preservists, totalling 20 members
- 80 Hellvetics, mainly consisting of Grenadiers, Genies, Radio Beam Units, and Sappers
- 25 Anabaptist packs, totalling 500 Orgiastics
- An unknown horde of unaligned bounty hunters

ARTIFACT TRADE: No Chronicler presence

COMMUNICATION: Hellvetic-designed radio uplink to Justitian, Postal riders capable of reaching anywhere in the Protectorate within days

THIS IS THE BORDER!

If there is but one thing Siege stands for, it's the fact that it's the true border of the Protectorate, acting as the symbolic gateway between civilization and barbarism, between utopia and the lawlessness of the wild. Wedged between jagged cliffs like a chunk of meat sitting in the jaws of a starving Gendo, the city is massively reinforced by its natural surroundings and is geographically unconquerable, leaving any attacker at a serious disadvantage.

Out of all the hostile parties in the immediate vicinity, only the Pneumancers command the technology capable of damaging Siege's defenses. So long as they're politically held at bay by Archot, the city itself is not in danger. The Cockroaches and Phosphorites know that they'd gnaw their teeth off trying to break through these walls. A futile effort - they must find other ways around the protective lines, beyond the cliffs and past the landmine-encrusted hills. However strong the city may be, it remains immovable and embedded in the rocky landscape. The Clans understand that mobility is their main advantage, and that circumventing this grand bulwark is the key to entering the Protectorate. That's where they can cause real damage.

THROUGH THE GATES

Siege is a military camp beyond comparison. The entire area is designed to repel large scale attacks, a strategic masterpiece crafted by Justitian's architects of yore. The city blocks are packed tightly together with all major streets converging toward the Conflux, the main battle square and termination point. A set of colossal and cascading hydraulic gates secure the Chokepoint, the sole opening leading to the Red Expanse and the belligerent regions of the south. The security measures allow no negotiation, and a thorough search awaits everyone stepping through this ironclad triple doorway system.

Above the main gate sit the Flanks, two gargantuan stationary artillery batteries installed by the Hellvetics which can launch their payload up to forty kilometers away, provided they have the proper targeting parameters. These defense systems are constantly manned and operated by the Genies and Grenadiers stationed at Siege. On occasion, deafening salvoes are fired to shake up the enemy lines, but the Hellvetics have to be careful: every spent shell must be accounted for and reported to the Alpine Commission in Justitian.

Bolthammer is the Judges' district, taking up the majority of the northwestern side. Makeshift barracks and recently constructed stables, weapon depots, and warehouses for food and supplies dot the neighborhood, interspersed with saloons and taprooms where the stationed troops come together to kill time until they're next on

duty. Famulancers, Anabaptists, Judges, Hellvetics, Scrappers, Apocalyptics, they all appear to get along just fine as long as they share a common enemy. One could easily think that Siege displays a better vision of unity amongst disparate peoples than any other city in the Protectorate. More cynical voices would point out that this might just be due to the lack of Chroniclers in town.

Whatever the case, the troops in Siege have only been transferred here; they're not settling in, and many hope to return to their homes once the Clan Wars are finally over. But there is no end in sight, as more and more combatants arrive every week. The city has effectively doubled in size over the past three years of ongoing conflict, with the majority of all the Protectorate's available forces now pooling in one area. The Siegers were quick to respond to this change of pace. The new credo is: military first, citizens second. Barns and houses were quickly cleared to allow for accommodation, followed by steep discounts for meals and drinks at market stalls throughout the city to supply the defenders of the Protectorate.

The Eastern Wing is predominantly under Spitalian control. Two Preservist corps and six Famulancer platoons are housed here as medical support teams, operating the Military Hospital and patrolling alongside Judges and Hellvetics to collect field experience for missions that will lead them into other, similarly threatening regions across Europe. For the Famulancers this is just part of their training, but the resident Preservists make sure that they preselect individuals who show promising behaviour as potential recruits for their order.

Decoupled from the rest of the city and set atop a cliff, the Garrison serves as the city's main training ground, armory, and war room, along with functioning as a holding facility for captured enemies. Its walled off construction provides a secondary entrenchment for the defenders of Siege, in the unlikely event that all other barriers have fallen and the Chokepoint gives in during an attack. Every piece of intelligence arriving from the wasteland is analyzed in the Garrison and it is here that the commanders of the Cults come together to plan their objectives, review field reports, count casualties, and issue dispatches back to Justitian to coordinate their actions with the Office of Protectorate Affairs.

BOUNTIFUL

Outside of water, which is piped from Cathedral City, Siege has everything it needs to be a functional society. Its prominent position once turned it into a hub for commerce. Before their demise, the Taunar would send their caravans here to exchange bronze coins and emeralds for

Centio, the Arbiter

It's far from typical for Arbiters to be deployed outside the walls of the Righteous Fist, yet the Office of Protectorate Affairs dispatched Arbiter Centio to function as a meticulous observer for Judgement Hall and deliver unbiased progress reports from the frontline. By definition, Centio is the highest ranking official of the Judiciary in town, thereby wielding the communal power of a governor on par with the Executioners stationed in Siege – none of which makes him any more likeable. Many of the Protectors would love to see the gaunt Advocate hang from the walls of the Chokepoint for his public exhibitions of arrogance and pretension.

But Centio's displays of self-importance only serve to divert from his true purpose. By day he acts as an overly pedantic regulator, with clearance to all mission debriefs at the Garrison, collecting crucial information on squad deployments and security breaches. At night he throws lavish dinners at his estate on Markoff Plaza to establish contact with independent militiamen and hire them as terrorists to be sent into enemy territory with one clear objective in mind: instigate friction with Nullpellia, and drag the Pneumancers into the ongoing conflict.

What sounds like outrageous lunacy is in fact a plan hatched by Centio's backers, who are behind his recent transfer to Siege. There are forces at work in Justitian that want nothing more than to see Archot toppled from his throne. They act in secret, and mask their clandestine agenda behind layers of intrigue and political maneuvering, with ties running back all the way to Uptown, encompassing the Cluster and Senator Laakon. These instigators know that the only way to harm the Supreme Judge is by putting his security policy into question, and by willfully weakening the Protectorate they hope to succeed in dismantling his leadership. Major losses like Chalk Breach, Leadfield, and Wetzlar have already substantially damaged Archot, but with the prolonged stalemate between Siege and the hostile parties south of the border the coup d'état is losing steam. However, if Centio can cause chaos in the domain of the Pneumancers now, the situation might change overnight. All he must do to succeed is pay off a few hazardous crooks to go poke the hornet's nest. Who cares if they die along the way? At least then Centio wouldn't have to pay them for their work.

flax, rye, and rapeseed. The absence of significant Chronicler activity allowed a few Neolibyan Merchants to break into the market, quickly establishing themselves as spice traders and luxury goods suppliers. Dozens of farmsteads in the hinterlands harvest liquorice or produce dye, to be sold along the Nassius public market and all" over Markoff Plaza. Additionally, large herds of reindeer pass through the area on their annual cross-country migration routes and Siegers hunt the animals for their meat, horns, and furs, producing talismans from their bones and coats from their hides.

Besides that, Siege sports an impressive outrider stable, allowing for speedy diplomatic dispatches to be delivered throughout the Protectorate and beyond. This particular postal riding unit is sponsored by the Office of Protectorate Affairs and handles the shipment of tributes and mail to foreign powers across Europe. If Justitian must send an urgent letter to Osman, Wroclaw, or the Alpine Fortress, the mail riders know the way and can make it to their destination in the shortest amount of time possible. For many years the postmen of Siege have been the pride of the people, and are favored by the Judiciary as the messengers of the Supreme Judge.

DUTIES

Troops deployed in Siege carry out a plethora of duties. For one, squads composed of Protectors and Famulancers must secure the far stretching perimeters to the south and east of the city. This task includes disarming and dismantling traps laid out by the enemy, and diverting the shock troops who constantly try to use any opening they can find to breach into Protectorate territory.

However, the Judges are ordered to be cautious and not recklessly pursue retreating enemies into previously uncleared terrain. The Judiciary has already lost countless Protectors to ambushes, and they can't afford to lose more. Therefore, Hellvetics now patrol alongside the squads, acting as heavy fire support and guarding the carts that haul the equipment necessary for constructing new watchtowers along the border. These observation posts are essential to keep an eye on any hostile movements. In case of a sudden attack, communication between the watchtowers is carried out via a flare gun system, informing the rear guard and enabling them to get into position and respond to the immediate threat.

This leads to continuous bloody skirmishes in which the Protectors must attempt to disperse an approaching

Cockroach cohort or Phosphorite vanguard before they can lay waste to caravans, pillage farms, or even kill settlers. The squads must maintain their discipline in the face of these vicious opponents and scatter them from a distance using superior firepower in order to be able to safely fall back and avoid casualties. The Judges have a clear upper hand in this cat and mouse game, as long as they don't enter into close combat. Captured enemies are brought back to Siege as prisoners of war where they're held in the Garrison and tortured for information, with interpreters analyzing the foreign dialects and helping to wring something valuable out of such prisoners before they're publicly executed.

BOUNTY HUNTERS

Not everyone who fights for the future of the Protectorate belongs to a major Cult. There are plenty of men and women who come to Siege stirred up by a deep urge to protect their home, volunteering as scouts, bounty hunters, mercenaries, and trackers. The taprooms are full of daring weekend warriors from places like Liqua, Cavernis, or Ignatz eager to help with the war effort. But it's more than just altruism that lures them here; it's money. Ever since the Judiciary announced a bounty of 400 Drafts per Phosphorite or Cockroach killed, there has been a surge of self-proclaimed renegades flooding the bordertown, ready to chop off heads or hands and collect the ransom at the Garrison. Along come hellbent Scrappers trying to attach themselves to a Judge's operation in hopes of getting access to ruins and search vectors that they wouldn't be able to enter on their own. None of them know what they're in for. So be it.

The Judges don't interfere with these independent militias, instead welcoming them into the fold and letting them do the dirty work. They know full well that every dead Protector causes far more trouble at home than some no-name slugger gone missing in the field. Better to pay out a few hundred Drafts to a bunch of bloodthirsty brutes than risk wasting years of training on a well-rounded Judge, only to lose him to a swarm of cannibals. Every Protector is a meaningful asset that cannot be simply replaced by stuffing another person into a coat and equipping them with a hat and a hammer. These lawmen can read and write, and they've studied the Codex. They're the epitome of what Justitian has created, personified icons of order who mustn't be tossed at the next target and sacrificed like cheap cannon fodder.

CORRUPTION

Who would think that crime can prosper in a city full of law enforcers? Well, it can. With everyone's attention focused on protecting the unstable borderline outside, the inside is left vulnerable and corruption is allowed to fester. The Carrion Birds have set up a handful of makeshift brothels along the main road to Justitian. Tucked away in barns and farmsteads, they serve as adult entertainment saloons for the Judges stationed in Siege. Soldiers need some form of leisure, after all, or they themselves turn into highly aggressive individuals. It will be months, possibly even years, before their service is over and they can return to the arms of their sweethearts and wives. Better to calm their tempers and provide some substitute warmth for their battered souls. The Apocalyptics keep the prices low for the city's defenders, if they in turn go easy on their trafficking routes criss-crossing the Protectorate and keep the Spitalians in the dark. The Judges remain lenient and let transgressions slide more often than not, not paying too much attention to what's happening on the roadside. They're confident that the prostitution business won't do anyone harm.

But Siege has more to offer. It's a great hideout for subjects unable to set foot into the Righteous Fist. Nestor, founder of the Iron Brothers of Toulon, has escaped his pursuers and found refuge inside the city. With twelve of his henchmen and the plundered treasures of the Raider Hamza Abubakar III in tow, he plans on establishing himself as a major player within the Protectorate, aiming to compete against Bosch and the Cartel by copying their business model. Before he can do so, however, he must somehow get rid of all the stolen goods and turn them into Drafts. For now, there aren't many buyers who are interested in the stuff. Justitian's Forecourt would be a far more favorable place to convert it into cash, but Nestor can't just walk in there without risking his head. He needs to recruit a middleman who can make the sales on his behalf. Easier said than done.

BEYOND THE RED EXPANSE

Southern Borca has never been conquered by the Judges and remains largely shrouded in mystery. Many of the old terrain maps from the days of the City Wars are outdated and don't align with more recent cartography. Nullpellia, the ruins of Exalt, and the areas farther afield are cloaked in mystery, and concrete dossiers of the lay of the land are hard to come by. Jagged hills, dark forests, narrow canyons, and overgrown ruins of the Bygone age dominate the countryside, turning any scouting attempts into perilous undertakings. Only a handful of hard-boiled Scrappers are capable of venturing this deep into Clan territory and retrieving crucial knowledge from beyond the Red Expanse.

There lie the chthonic kingdoms of blood, reigned over by mad gods and fearsome deities, and inhabited by ferocious tribes who have shed the patina of civilization and succumbed to their most animalistic urges. Here the hammer loses all meaning and the words of the First Judge fade. This is not the realm of Cults and their ideologies, but a place of unhinged cruelty and ancient grievances, where the Bale Lords of the Phosphorites unearth forbidden weapons from ancient bunker systems, and the hulking Cockroach Kings breed in numbers unseen. What horrors would they unleash if they were to break through Siege and reach the Protectorate?

WETZLAR

When Archot dreams, he dreams big. To him, the south of Borca was a land of untapped opportunity. In his mind's eye he saw the Protectorate extending all the way to the foot of the Alps, following the trade route down to Hellvetica. Wetzlar was supposed to be the first step, the southernmost expansion of the realm and a visionary signal to the Senates of what was yet to come. He willfully ignored that the village enjoyed close trade with Nullpellia, and that its location was just a stone's throw from the kingdom of the mighty Taunar. Who were they to keep him from achieving his dreams?

After a sudden and painful clash with the resident Pneumancer cohort, Wetzlar was sacked and all compromising intelligence surrounding the takeover suppressed by the Office of Protectorate Affairs. Nothing could be permitted to blemish the robes of the newly elected Supreme Judge. The Judges went to business and established their garrison in the city center. Standard construction strategy: watchtowers, reinforced palisades, and barracks on the inside with housing for the necessary administration staff. The population was pacified with promises of a new age; the cattle farmers and peat cutters would enjoy prosperous years and their goods would be certified for sale across the Protectorate. A trading hub was built and caravans shipped Wetzlar's produce out to Justitian week after week, carrying peat, copper, tubers, and beef. The bordertown now acted as a final waystation: the Protectorate ended abruptly beyond the city walls. All that lay to the south was a complicated weave of tribal politics, uncharted Clan territory, and menacing threats that Judgment Hall could not properly interpret. Had the Judges finally dared to reach too far? Possibly.

The stationed Protectors thoroughly patrolled the rugged hillside, scanning the horizon through their field glasses, always on the lookout for signs of campfires in the distance that could give away enemy movements. They ordered the population of Wetzlar to return to their houses by sunset and to always stay alert when working out in the fields. Everyone was in a constant state of alarm, expecting something terrible to happen at any moment. But things remained strangely peaceful. In fact, after the collapse of the Taunar kingdom in 2575 and the upheavals that followed, nobody thought Wetzlar to still be in the crosshairs. The rules became lax, and the local Judges were far more lenient with the restrictions imposed on their citizens, opening the gates for trade and welcoming travelers into the city who brought in a multitude of luxurious goods and foreign entertainment. Apocalyptics arrived to add some variety to the community, and even an entourage of Neolibyan traders settled in the outpost to familiarize themselves with Borcan culture. The Protectorate appeared to be invincible. It was exactly this kind of complacency and self-indulgence that allowed the worst to happen.

When the Mechan shock troops entered they weren't even searched or interrogated at the city gate. They crossed the whole outpost in no time and reached the garrison by noon. The sun was shining brightly and the City Judges, along with their Vagrants, were either dozing or playing cards. None of them were standing guard. The Synthesizers deposited their toxic cargo and detonated the chemical agents from a safe distance, killing all resident Judges in just a single hour. Before the citizens could even begin to fathom what was happening, the Mechans stormed the defenseless enclave, taking hostages, barricading the exits, and occupying strategic points across the city's perimeter. The attackers exhibited as-yet unseen brutality, publicly executing children to force the population to comply. Every citizen of Wetzlar was declared a slave of the new Mechan rulers, branded like farm animals, chained, whipped, and humiliated. To this day, they wait to be liberated. In vain.

LAST EXIT

A listening post planted right on the border of Noret. This is Gusev's realm. The corpse stench of the Marauder wafts across the blasted hill lines. Contorted pines and barren conifers sprout from the ash-powdered sediment. At night the area rattles as if the heavens were crying bones. Intercepted radio transmissions distort into ghoulish chants, gauges spin erratically, and compass needles arbitrarily point to the south.

Assessment: The landscape is depopulated. Any intelligent biological lifeform within a radius of 15 kilometers has been eradicated. Efficiency: 99.999%. Exception: Last Exit, a secret Chronicler outpost situated at the edge of the death zone surrounding the ruined city of Noret. A simple tower construction, planned to be eventually expanded into a relay terminal capable of establishing radio connection to the Cluster. Attention! Last Exit is to be presented to the Judges as a guard station!

Objects of interest: Machine Men, potentially carriers of highly valuable Stream components. Additionally, aerial Renewal units scouring the burnt countryside for intruders. The latter require diversion through the deployment of Stream drones configured to lure them away from Last Exit's location.

Crew: Ten Streamers specialised in high-voltage technology. Tasks: Maintaining the electrical networks, remotely monitoring the AMSUMOs, and establishing contact. Observations: The AMSUMOs are aware of our presence. They easily circumvent our grid of electrical traps, and appear to be able to sense them. Statistical analysis based on a year of observation indicates that the Machine Men approach within hearing distance every 2.71 days and fire off a signal crashing our systems. The read out produces incomprehensible results. We recorded the sounds and sent them back. No effect. Perhaps communication requires a direct Stream uplink? Investigation continues.

The Eternal City

RAID

The drumming at the front door was unbearably loud. Varna rubbed the sleep from her eyes and looked around for Titus, her husband. He wasn't lying next to her. A second hammering jolted her out of the sheets.

"Judges! Open up!"

Fear seeped into Varna's bones. With one leap she jumped from the bed and rushed out of the room to the landing overlooking the living quarters on the first floor. Titus stood at the front door with an axe, ready to mow down the first intruder.

"No!" Varna cried, "They're gonna get you!"

The banging stopped abruptly. Titus stared up at his wife. "Get away! Hide!" he hissed between his teeth.

Suddenly the lock burst with a loud bang and the entire frame groaned as if the foundation of the house was being torn out of its joints. The next moment the door flew off its hinges, dragging a cloud of wood shavings and dust in its wake. Titus charged into the mist, striking aimlessly. A muffled thud escaped from the cloud. The axe head had lodged itself in a heavy shield. Titus was lifted off his feet by a sudden impact, and buried in hail of hammer blows.

Varna could barely make out what was happening in the chaos below. She saw half a dozen shapes flooding through the front door. Judges. One of them noticed her up on the landing. Varna froze.

"Stay where you are, bitch!" he shouted, and stormed up the stairs. Varna grabbed a nearby chair and hurled it down the staircase to stop the attacker, but the Protector slapped the wooden projectile out of his way and kept chasing her.

Varna rushed back into the bedroom. Swiftly, she dove over the bed and huddled under it. With her outstretched arm, she reached for a tin box and pulled it closer. From down there she saw the Judge's boots entering through the doorway. "You cunt!" the Protector growled. A blink of an eye later, he was above her, grasping her by the ankles and dragging her out of the nook.

Varna gathered all her strength and struck him with the tin box. The casket fractured the Judge's cheekbone, shattering his shades and ripping the duster from his face. The contents of the box flew across the room, among them a homemade gun Titus had acquired at the scrapyard. Varna crawled forward, trying to reach for it. The Judge shook his head to regain his focus. He noticed what the woman was trying to do and caught her hand as she was about to close her fingers around the gun's handle. With a merciless jerk he twisted her wrist in the opposite direction until it snapped. Varna howled. She punched the Judge with a left hook, but the Protector didn't even flinch. He let go of her right hand and bashed her across the face with his bolt studded fist. Varna felt her teeth cracking from the swing, her sense of orientation keeling over. The world around her turned muddy and dark. Blood filled her mouth and her jaw was glowing hot.

"We got the other two. You clear, Garret?" She heard another Judge's voice.

"Clear. Snatched the woman. What else have we got?" the Protector on top of her asked, unlatching handcuffs from his belt to chain her up.

"Still raiding. Burglary equipment, no citizen papers, resistance against the Judiciary. They've got some leisure time in the Cleft coming their way."

Now or never. In a last attempt at defiance, Varna

twisted out of the Judge's hold, seized the single loader, aimed, and fired. The self made propellant exploded in her hand and tore off two fingers as the bullet whipped through the Protector's shoulder, followed by the shrapnel of the detonating gun slicing through his face. The blast catapulted the Protector backwards onto the wooden floor. The second Judge tried to toss the bed aside to reach Varna, but she was already up and racing toward the window. She jumped through the glass and hurtled two stories down, crashing into the cobblestone pavement and cracking her shins. A galaxy of shards came raining down around her. Wheezing for breath she rose to her feet, noticing a Vagrant standing guard on the street below. He spotted her immediately.

"You gotta be shitting me!" she heard him scream.

Varna ran, the Vagrant darting after her like an unleashed mad dog. She was only two blocks away from the Knacker's Office. If she could make it to the adjacent Defiler Street, she'd be able to get rid of her pursuer. She bolted through the dark alleys of the Outskirts, toward a small plaza ahead. A bullet whizzed past her head and struck a wall. Varna dodged, scrambled, panicked. The area of the Knacker's Office opened up in front of her. She could see the bridge-ways and ramps leading into the waste channel. Just another hundred feet across the open field and she'd be in safety.

Suddenly, she heard galloping hooves inbound from the right. From the corner of her eye she saw a rider dashing toward her at full speed, swinging a hammer. She tried to duck but the strike hit her square in the chest, shattering her ribcage and rupturing her lungs. Her body was tossed through the air and crumpled to the ground like a broken doll. She groaned in pain, inching forward without direction, gasping for air. Blood was streaming from her nose. The panorama in front of her tilted sideways and her ears rang wildly. She caught a glimpse of the Judge as he was turning his horse. Before she could lift herself up the Vagrant closed in and wrestled her to the floor, pinning her to the cold pavement, elbow to the neck. Black blotches obscured her vision. She had to fight to keep her eyes open.

A loud thud shook her back to reality. The Vagrant jerked and clutched his face, blood spraying from a gaping wound on his forehead. Varna lifted her eyes just in time to see him get struck by another thrown rock. And another. The Vagrant lifted his arms, desperately trying to protect his head from the stone projectiles being flung at him. Behind her a gunshot bellowed through the night, and more clanking and pent up rage swept toward her.

"Lay down your weapons! You're committing high treason!" the Judge yelled from atop his horse, firing a second salvo.

A dozen Defilers came rushing from the waste channel; armed with rocks, iron clubs, and shovels they assaulted the mounted Protector. Next to her, the Vagrant was on his knees, struggling to draw his musket from its holster as he was surrounded from all sides, blow after blow mauling him down.

Varna tried to creep away on all fours from the ensuing skirmish. Out of the dark she saw two women coming for her. Both were scarred, with rows of missing teeth, covered in rags and dirt. They grabbed Varna by her wrists and pulled her off the ground, rushing her toward the waste channel. "You're safe with us!" was the last thing she heard before she blacked out.

THE RIGHTEOUS FIST

Justitian is a beacon amidst shark infested waters. Those who reach the sanctuary of its shoreline can cast their worries into the hands of the Judges, who wrap fatherly arms around the shoulders of the stranded as they lead him through their paradise. It is a safe city. Righteous. Controlled. The separation of powers between Executioners, Arbiters, and the Supreme Judge prevents the abuse of power. The friendly Protectors on the Stallion Streets diligently deal with any criminal problems, while the Advocates lift up the Codex like a protective shield over the citizens of Justitian, defending the inherent wisdom of the book with razor-sharp wits, all while Supreme Judge Archot lays the foundation for this peaceful coexistence with his groundbreaking new laws. Hail to the glorious Justitian! Where else in the wasteland is every human being equal under the law, as an independent individual with basic fundamental rights?

Then the administration in Uptown: a bulwark against decay, built on rock solid reason. The city officials employed there are the most devoted servants of the people. Corruption bounces off their tempered souls, and even though their responsibility weighs heavily on them they stand upright. With a glowing heart and piercing gaze, they move in lockstep toward a new epoch of human evolution.

SECURITY FOR FREEDOM

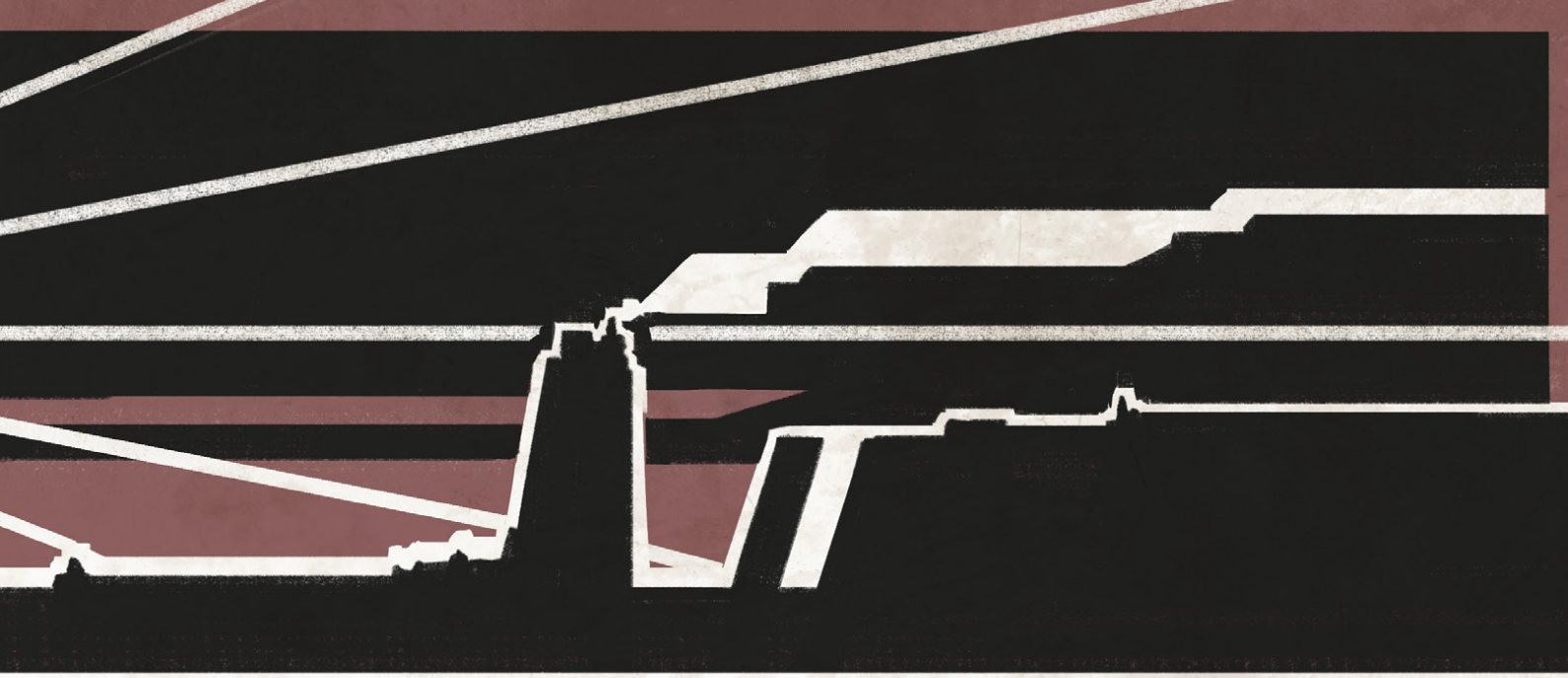
What use is freedom when the Cockroaches surrounding your farm with torches and bloodstained bone daggers greedily wait for their ugly broodmother's war cry? Will you slump down in the dirt with the blade in your chest and think "At least I'm free"? The only thing you're free from is life, idiot!

Rebels and dissidents constantly whine that they are exchanging their freedom for oppression at the gates of Justitian. What they do not understand is that the fundamental rights granted to every fool also come with responsibilities. It is these responsibilities that make living together possible:

I. Abide by the law, II. Obey the Judges, III. Be vigilant and report infringement of the Codex, IV. If you are punished, fulfill the punishment and society will accept you once again. Four simple guidelines that can fit into even the thickest skull.

THE OLD JUDGEDOM

The elementary justice of the First Judge was like a force of nature. Like a billowing thundercloud, he breathed fresh air into the cloying warmth of the summer day with a downpour of cleansing rain. He didn't follow any rules, instead the rules arose from his actions - what a triumph that the founder of the Judges was a wise man, who was



able to draw a line through the commoners' thirst for mob justice and thus separate good from evil. It can't be helped that this borderline was drawn with a hammer instead of a quill. A product of his time, he couldn't afford to care for such sensibilities.

After the First Judge disappeared, no one could assume that his acolytes would follow his footsteps, unified with the noble intentions to complete his work. Surely there were great minds among the early Judges, whether Nassius, Diadochus or Eron Fulmas, who all stood by the young Cult with words of wisdom and advice. However, their instructions were spoken from the head, and lacked the righteous aesthetics of the First, his art of anchoring the law in the fossilised structures of the societies and peoples of the Black Lung. Even so, the times were too dark to wait for an heir to the throne with a genius equal to the founder of their Cult.

Instead, the First's travel journal became a sledgehammer, dispelling the Judges' internal disputes and pointing their way into the future. Once again, the First had proven his foresight. The book, which later became known as the Codex, was a revelation. A holy scripture. It turned the Judgedom into a religion, raised cloak and hat to the guise of righteousness, and ultimately turned the Judges into priests. The confusion of languages within the Judiciary dried up. One Codex - one thought - one man.

PACIFICATION

For a long time, Justitian had only one maxim: Borca today, the whole world tomorrow!

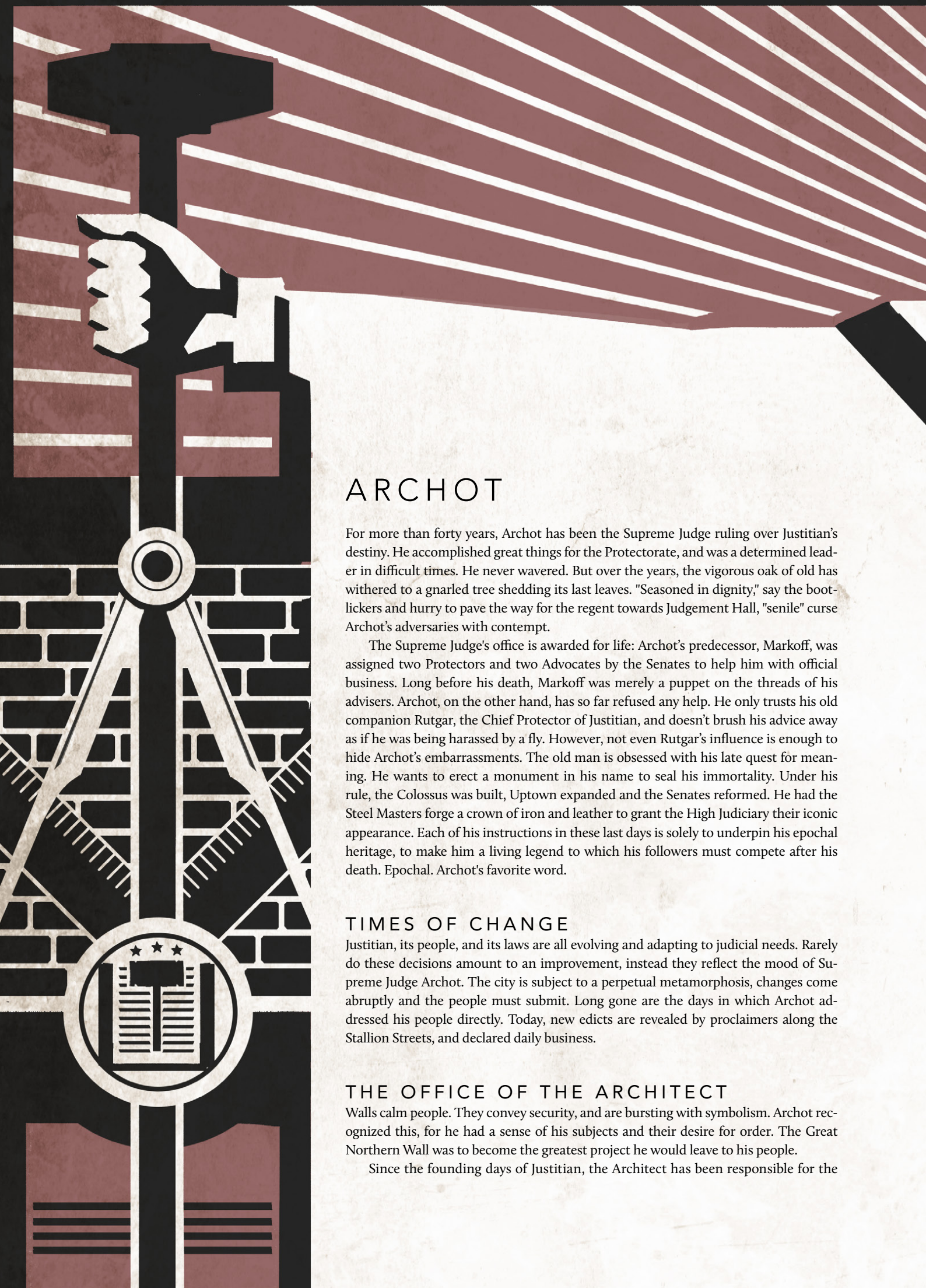
After the fall of Exalt, the minds of the wastelanders were refreshingly empty. The Black Lung was a vast territory full of resources and ripe for conquest. At the same time, the Judges wanted to pacify the flat-headed idiots with their pitchforks before they would be forced to waste precious powder charges on yet another uprising.

The motto was simple. Justitian's future would be decided on the dusty farms of the Rubble and the wastelands of Borca. Squads of Judges rode out to sweep the hunger for independence from the minds of the free peoples of the Black Lung. In rank and file they marched on the farmsteads, red dust on the brim of their hats and their shoulders, musket and hammer in their hands. What more did it take to persuade a stubborn tribal leader to hand his family over to the Protectorate? Village after village, settlement after settlement, all fell under the aegis of Justitian. The peasants quickly realized that without the Judiciary's protection they were at the mercy of lawlessness. As part of the Protectorate, at least they were able to cover themselves in the power of the masses, even if it meant they had to push their old idols into an open fire and renounce their traditions. In return they were allowed to gorge on Justitian's culture, a brew that conveyed meaning and purpose to their empty existences.

Month after month, proclaimers along Justitian's Stallion Streets and marketplaces reported new additions to the city's growing empire. Enemy territory was steadily crushed underfoot. Every man, woman, and cow was counted. Until today.

BLOOD-RED HORIZON

The Protectorate has stalled. The Clans are back. United and stronger than ever they stand along the borders, roaring for revenge and demanding tribute. This time, they won't be turned away. The Judiciary faces an enemy it has underestimated for far too long. The war has lasted for four years. Constantly, Justitian wears out Protectors in the field and struggles to refill the ranks with Jurymen. Every allied Cult is called to assist the Judges. Spitalians, Hellvetics, and Anabaptists all fight on the front line. Chroniclers and Scrappers provide logistical support. Even with this help, the Protectorate cities are drowning in blood. Welcome to the climax of the Clan Wars.



ARCHOT

For more than forty years, Archot has been the Supreme Judge ruling over Justitian's destiny. He accomplished great things for the Protectorate, and was a determined leader in difficult times. He never wavered. But over the years, the vigorous oak of old has withered to a gnarled tree shedding its last leaves. "Seasoned in dignity," say the bootlickers and hurry to pave the way for the regent towards Judgement Hall, "senile" curse Archot's adversaries with contempt.

The Supreme Judge's office is awarded for life: Archot's predecessor, Markoff, was assigned two Protectors and two Advocates by the Senates to help him with official business. Long before his death, Markoff was merely a puppet on the threads of his advisers. Archot, on the other hand, has so far refused any help. He only trusts his old companion Rutgar, the Chief Protector of Justitian, and doesn't brush his advice away as if he was being harassed by a fly. However, not even Rutgar's influence is enough to hide Archot's embarrassments. The old man is obsessed with his late quest for meaning. He wants to erect a monument in his name to seal his immortality. Under his rule, the Colossus was built, Uptown expanded and the Senates reformed. He had the Steel Masters forge a crown of iron and leather to grant the High Judiciary their iconic appearance. Each of his instructions in these last days is solely to underpin his epochal heritage, to make him a living legend to which his followers must compete after his death. Epochal. Archot's favorite word.

TIMES OF CHANGE

Justitian, its people, and its laws are all evolving and adapting to judicial needs. Rarely do these decisions amount to an improvement, instead they reflect the mood of Supreme Judge Archot. The city is subject to a perpetual metamorphosis, changes come abruptly and the people must submit. Long gone are the days in which Archot addressed his people directly. Today, new edicts are revealed by proclaimers along the Stallion Streets, and declared daily business.

THE OFFICE OF THE ARCHITECT

Walls calm people. They convey security, and are bursting with symbolism. Archot recognized this, for he had a sense of his subjects and their desire for order. The Great Northern Wall was to become the greatest project he would leave to his people.

Since the founding days of Justitian, the Architect has been responsible for the

construction of the urban defensive walls. The official title has always been awarded and supervised by the highest-ranking Executioner. Archot changed that. Now the Supreme Judge is the one who appoints the Architect, as often as he needs to. As often as he likes, some Judges complain, because he wants to personally consult with his chosen Architect, all the while imperiously pointing at this and that. Archot is never satisfied. He taps his fingers on walls he wants to be made thicker and decorated with battlements. His desire for monumental aesthetics is now reflected in all recent construction projects in the city.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE COLOSSUS

The massive stone heads of past Judges lining the Judgement Alley had been a thorn in Archot's side since he took office. He saw in his predecessors historical adversaries, who could hardly be fought in death. They were superior to him because they avoided his anger. Archot hated them, feeling their mocking stares whenever he headed for Judgement Hall in the morning.

The Colossus was an act of liberation. For twenty years, the monumental construction depleted city funds and made Justitian groan under the cost. Six times Archot had the half-finished statue destroyed and redesigned. Shortly before the final completion, a Jehammedan terrorist blew up the foundation and brought the statue to collapse. The reconstruction took years due to a lack of building material, but finally, in the summer of 2597, it was time. The Colossus was revealed on Calendar Square, and Archot's image has since towered twenty meters above the sculpted faces of the past. Archot is now magnificently enthroned in Uptown, crushing everyone who enters his shadow into the ground with his gaze.

LUXURY EDICT

The luxury flaunted by the Neolibian Wakili deeply offended Archot. The fact that an Ambassador made Justitian's glory look like a dusty flea market did not sit well with the Supreme Judge. By Archot's decree, the streets and buildings of Uptown have been under constant renovation ever since, and the guesthouses surrounding the Forecourt have expanded their splendor into stunning buildings. Never again will Archot allow himself to be humiliated by a transient merchant prince.

ARTISTIC OFFENSE

To promote the formation of cultural identity and display Justitian's wealth, Archot has surrounded himself with hundreds of self-proclaimed artists who are mainly busy chiselling sculptures of the Supreme Judge and writing heavy verses in his honor. Archot's wisdom is to be captured for the future. The Supreme Judge has long been certain that he, too, will someday shuffle off this mortal coil. What he builds now he leaves for posterity.

However, the majority of citizens are not sufficiently interested. As such, Archot has his idea of culture beaten into the minds of his people. The Chroniclers' megaphones regularly recite Archot's achievements for the Protectorate, and the Judiciary has marketplaces and avenues adorned with statues and busts of significant Advocates. Brass plaques on house walls are inscribed with the names of important citizens.

The idea behind these measures is clear. Those who serve society truthfully and faithfully become immortal in their own way, and are eternalized through art. They merge with the walls of Justitian, thus becoming a part of this living and vibrant city, and their spirit continues to echo long after death.

THE IRON FIST

A mountain of steaming Gendo-shit would stink less than the “truths” offered by the Judges! Justitian is a gargantuan war machine that threatens to devour all of Borca. It inexorably keeps rolling onwards, absorbing aspiring settlements and crushing the spirit of the free peoples. The principle is the same throughout. First come the Protectors, beguiling and making peaceful offers. If one refuses, they return with rattling chains and branding irons, forcibly incorporating what they declare to be their territory. There is no escape.

Those who dare to defend themselves will feel the power of the Righteous Fist and witness its might as it puts on the gauntlet. A gentle slap can no longer be expected. As the Iron Fist, it wrestles everything and everyone into the dust - breaking all spiritual resistance until the memory of freedom has degenerated into nothing but a crippled idea. Deprived of their cultural identity, an agitator has no choice but to accept Justitian's norms as if they were old family traditions. Step by step, a free man becomes a citizen, and in Justitian, citizen is just another word for slave.

CITIZEN

You are only someone if you can prove it. If it has been certified. If your name is on a slip of paper, registered, stamped, filed in a folder, and numbered. Eternally accessible by a public official ravaging through your family history, or worse: a Chronicler correlating the web of links between you and your acquaintances to derive the danger you pose to the city. You are nothing more than a number.

But you’re happy about that. You’ve saved up for a long time and continue to make your contributions. Month after month you pay your taxes, keeping the system alive, cradled in the safety it promises, just as you've been promised that nothing bad will happen to you in the warmth of Justitian's lap. The Protectors will keep an eye on you and your family, ensuring you never suffer. In exchange for your freedom, you may go about your business and keep your miserable fortune for yourself, gaze at Uptown, and sing praise to the Supreme Judge. You are a cog. A screw. A citizen.

Only sometimes, late at night, does your throat tighten as you stare open-mouthed at the ceiling and your churning thoughts keep sleep at bay. When you realize how puny your existence is, that your life counts as little as your death, and that Justitian will continue to flourish even after you have long since fallen to dust. Then suddenly the fear seizes you and the desire to leave something significant behind becomes overwhelming. In the darkness of your chamber your eyes fall on your son, sleeping in the next room. You've looked after him for seventeen winters now, watching him grow into a strong and capable man. Tomorrow you will introduce him to the Judges for a muster, hoping that they will agree to train him and send him to the front. So that he’ll fight on your behalf for the future of the Protectorate and make you unforgettable. Only then will you be able to sleep peacefully with the comfortable lie that you’re an important part of the system held in your heart.

CITIZENSHIP PAPERS

The rise to civic society is cumbersome, but anyone who wants to make it in Justitian will have to take the steps toward Uptown. In order to be able to even make an attempt to climb out of Downtown, a guarantor who can vouch for the applicant is needed. Without one, a prospective citizen wouldn't even be allowed to board the elevator platforms, let alone get an appointment in the Office of Locality.

After payment of the naturalization tax of one hundred and fifty Drafts and an urgent questioning, as well as detailed instruction on the rights and duties of citizenship, the petitioner receives his papers and is officially registered as a citizen of Justitian. A unique file documents the new citizen's residence, land acquisition, law violations, and any outstanding tax debts.

Citizenship papers are valuable. Those who lose them will have to face a hefty fine. If, on the other hand, someone is caught trading with falsified papers, then brutal prison time awaits them in the Cleft.

PRIVILEGES

Citizens enjoy special privileges. They are allowed to live in the so-called civic quarters, specifically the Stukov Quarter, in the Forecourt around the Steel Monolith, along the Outskirts, in the northern part of Tech-Central, and the Neighborhood of the Providers. The wealthiest among them sometimes manage to get hold of a flat in Uptown.

Citizens source their water from the public wells, and buy meat and vegetables from the certified civic markets. They may offer their goods and services in all civic districts, lease market stalls, shops, and warehouses, and acquire property. Citizens are allowed to adjust the prices of their merchandise with an additional twenty percent sales tax that only non-citizens have to pay.

With the help of citizenship papers, they are allowed to travel between Uptown and Downtown to do business.

CIVIL PROFESSIONS

The Judges grant citizenship to all those who play an important role in the city's infrastructure. Among these are the Jurymen, scribes, teachers, translators, and general historians who all preserve and expand Justitians knowledge and cultural power. Architects and urban planners, chemists who mix building materials and paints, as well as master builders are also very popular within the Judiciary.

Archot is particularly affectionate toward painters and musicians as he has chosen them to immortalize him through stonework, pictures, and music. The majority of his artistic entourage are permitted to live and work in the workshops beyond Judgement Hall and are under the personal protection of the Supreme Judge.

Travelling traders and salesmen are essential to keep the food distribution centers well stocked. On the other hand, the Providers who have made a name for themselves as honest farmers, bakers, and brewers can also hope to be granted citizenship. Without them, Justitian would starve and thirst.

Craftsmen like shoemakers, tailors, and carpenters are also quickly accepted into Justitian's civic society. Wagon builders and tinsmiths are considered to be a part of this group, however one can more often find these professionals among the Scrappers in Tech-Central.

GUESTS

Guest is merely a polite expression for a tolerated person. Officially, all inhabitants of Justitian who are not in possession of citizenship papers fall under this designation. Certain amenities are denied to them. They may only settle in the so-called guest quarters: the Harbor district, the Cross Quarter, Tech-Central, and the Jehammedan Quarter. Furthermore, they may not acquire residential property and any trading in the civic quarters is prohibited. Their goods can only be offered on the outer perimeter of Justitian. Should the guests want to move to a different neighborhood, taste better food, or enjoy Justitian's wide variety of goods, they must be prepared to pay a much steeper price.

FESTIVALS IN JUSTITIAN

Feasts and festivals have always been effective. Those who rule with an iron fist and yet show patronage from time to time distract their people from the problems of everyday life and stifle the anger of their slaves before it can become dangerous. Year after year, the Judiciary grants its subjects a handful of days free from work, often accompanied by exuberant celebrations.

THE FIRST DAY

Hail the Protectorate! Since May 5th, 2410, the Judges have enforced law, order, justice, and security within their ever-expanding domain. The day on which the disciples of the First, with the support of the Chroniclers, conquered the Bastion and made it the cornerstone of the future Protectorate has always been considered a holy day. Archot gives a speech on the grandeur of the First Judge and his life's work, and brings selected citizens and Judges to a gathering on Calendar Square. Chosen ones are allowed to shake Archot's hand as they are honored with awards - medals, badges, and trophies. Irrelevant trinkets, which nevertheless attract envious glances from the crowds. High achievers and key players of the city are honored with a loan of a work of art from Justitian's Museum, or are awarded an honorary citizenship for their efforts.

ARCHOT'S BIRTHDAY

The greatest of the Supreme Judges deserves the most memorable celebration of the year. On August 7th, Archot celebrates and gives the citizens and detainees alike a day of leisure to commemorate him. The Judiciary, on the other hand, has to continue its normal work - Archot was never allowed to rest on his own birthday, so neither are his Judges. Sacrifice is a virtue, after all.

The morning is heralded by the boom of artillery salvoes fired aimlessly from Calendar Square toward the horizon. Throughout the day, Archot's birthday speech is aired through the Cluster's loudspeakers within the city - a crackling recording from the year 2587. It begins with Markoff's death and Archot's appointment as Supreme Judge and goes on to recount all of his merits and achievements in a seemingly endless spiel, only to loop around and restart.

When evening falls over the city, Archot has a special spectacle prepared in Uptown. For hours, fireworks shot from the Steel Monolith illuminate the sky above Justitian. This is followed by performances by Borcan showmen in the Odeon who reenact the rise of the Protectorate for Archot's high-ranking guests. The ambassadors present are to see with their naked eye how far the Judges have come with their own strength. Archot's birthday is not just his personal holiday, it's simply a debaucherous display of his power.

THE HARVEST

When the brief warmth of summer loses strength and the cold creeps in, the Harvest festival is near. On the 13th of September, it is time to gather all the members of the family and prepare for the dark season ahead with a lush banquet. The tribal chieftain lets his gaze wander eagerly over dishes covered in food and rubs his hands greedily. A crispy roast of pork looms up between bowls of roasted potatoes and root vegetables, surrounded by varnished tubs of sauces and candied fruit. A particularly good harvest has even allowed them to afford a basket of Jehammedan figs, a rare delicacy for these parts.

For the Providers, the Harvest is the holiest day of the year. Often the preparations begin weeks in advance. The yards are swiped, stables cleaned out, holes in winter clothes mended and hands washed with soap. The whole family puts every saved Draft on the table to make the upcoming feast as opulent as possible. It is also customary for daughters to bring their future groom home during the festivities and introduce them to the head of the family. The spouse must prove himself to the tribe elder as a capable Provider and enrich the feast with his own food, if he wants to win his favor.

On this day no spade tills the farmland, and no scythe cuts through billowing grain - the work rests. Instead, the Providers remember their ancestors, praise the gods of fertility, and reflect upon the hardships of the past year.

The citizens also celebrate the Harvest, but by comparison their festivities are pitifully small.

NIGHT OF QUIET

The Demiurge resides in all things, say the Anabaptists from the Cross Quarter. Those who want to keep their soul pure and escape temptation must part with the shackles of the mundane. The Night of Quiet is a rite of purification. Evil impulses shall go up in flames, wicked desires and sinful thoughts wiped from the soul. On the evening of October 31st, firebowls are lit in which worldly possessions are burned. Ascetics throw memorabilia into the flames and encourage the population to do the same. Even if the majority of people do not follow the Neognosis, many citizens see the ritual as a kind of spiritual cleansing, sometimes even joined by Protectors and Spitalians.

The marketplaces are empty this evening and the guesthouses are barely half full. Part of the ritual involves fasting throughout the night, renouncing distillate and gluttony, and gathering one's troubling thoughts. There is no other time throughout the year when Justitian is as calm and peaceful as on the Night of Quiet. Even the brothels and taverns in the Harbor district see almost no traffic, most already closed by sunset.

Only the Jehammedans refuse to heed the ritual and keep their market stalls and roast joints open for transients and hungry Scrappers looking for a bite to eat.

THE BLACK WEEK

Citizens are required to wear only black for a week in memory of the fallen of the City Wars and those who had to die for the Protectorate to rise. The last week of December each year plays host to solemn processions that lead across the Cemetery of the Judges. Devotional objects and memorabilia are placed all around the mausoleums of fallen Protectors, their tombs are cleaned, torches are lit and songs of war are sung. The boys' choirs of the Advocates accompany the ceremonies.

On the estates of the Advocate families imposing memorial fires are set ablaze. Throughout the week, citizens are urged to throw logs and fuel into the large fire pits to keep the flames from dying down. Neighbors who refuse to abide by this custom are oftentimes categorized as dissidents. Nobody wants to become the target of denunciation for no reason, which is why most of the quarter's inhabitants play along and burn up scraps of fabric, leftover furs, or discarded furniture.

CARNIVAL OF THE SCRAPPERS

On January 11th, the Justitian's Manufacturers take over the city. The master engineers among the Scrappers organize a day long parade of carriages that meanders from the Scavenger Streets in the east of Tech-Central, across the Outskirts, all the way to the Forecourt. Steaming colossi, hydraulic wagons, fire-spitting marvels, and rattling machines roll forward at a walking pace, followed by an ever-growing pack of astonished and shrieking children, who respond with hysterical screams to every rumble of one of those behemoths.

However, the lavishly decorated scrap cars are only part of the carnival. The Scavengers take this opportunity to make fun of the Judges, Spitalians, and Chroniclers alike. On the rooftops of their constructions, welded puppets and bolted caricatures of Justitian's rulers dance all day to the boisterous music of the parade.

The Judges don't like the festivities at all. The carnival is under constant surveillance and the Stallion Streets are always lined with mounted Protectors. Six years ago the show ended with physical altercations and violent riots. Since then, the Protectors have been anything but squeamish. At the slightest infraction the Judges respond with full force and many a drunken delinquent wakes up the next day with a broken nose and a week's worth of labor in the Cleft to work off.

THE PLAGUE DAY

Long ago, the healer dynasties of the Brenni were Justitian's medical backbone. Under the previous Supreme Judge, Markoff, the apothecaries of Brennen were praised and the Plague Day was declared a city-wide holiday in their honor. On the 23rd of February every year, the healers of Brennen offered the destitute population free treatment and discounted medication. Scrappers had rotten teeth removed and warts cut from their flesh, Defilers had their festering wounds cleaned up, and aged Protectors enjoyed the placement of healing stones along their aching bones.

It was a generous gesture full of humanity that was never forgotten, especially among Justitian's Scrappers.

But once the Spitalians had driven the healer dynasties of Brennen into the swamp of poverty, the Plague Day degenerated into insignificance. Anyone who asks for discounted medication at the Spitalian's public hospitals on Plague Day will at best receive a disgruntled frown as they're pushed back out onto the street.

In the Scrapper taverns of Tech-Central, however, shaky old patrons still remember the generosity of the Brenni and keep the memory alive with a glass of distillate.

IRON LAWS

The Judges hold their people on a short leash. In Justitian, their rules are ironclad and those who obey them won't have to cast careful looks over their shoulders and instead can almost feel comfortable amidst their rulers.

Since the majority of the population doesn't have a sufficient grasp of the written language to read the Codex, Judges roar the main commandments at the city gates, along the Stallion Streets, and across marketplaces. The sermon is different from quarter to quarter, the order of the commandments changes and the emphasis is left to the proclaimer himself. All Judges draw from the same Codex, but there are only a few commandments which are consistently and incessantly hammered into the minds of the people.

THE COMMANDMENTS

I

SHOW YOUR FACE!
Disguising the face and concealing the hands are surefire signs that a criminal is hiding his judicial markings. Judges sort hooded suspects from the crowd immediately for review. Only Chroniclers are spared this lengthy procedure.

II

SECURE YOUR WEAPONS, CITIZENS!
Blades and firearms must be wrapped in fabric and secured with leather straps throughout the city. Anyone not part of the Judges, Spitalians, or Chroniclers or who can't produce a special permission on request will be disarmed and have their hands marked with a red cross.

III

HEED THE CURFEW!
After sunset a special permit from the Office of Locality is required to gather in public squares or Stallion Streets. The Protectors thus stop the transfer across the quarter limits in order to prevent hostile parties from entering the territory of their opponents at night.

IV

DO NOT DISPUTE!
Quarrel weakens the community: anyone who argues commits treason against Justitian. However, that doesn't mean that two drunken ruffians are immediately grabbed by the collar and dragged out of the city by a Protector, even if the Advocates would welcome such an approach. For the time being, most Judges are content to calm tempers instead of resorting to violence, but don't rely on it.

V

RELIEVE YOUR CONSCIENCE - REPORT TREASON!
Anyone who witnesses a criminal offense makes himself liable to prosecution if he does not report it. Whether the perpetrator is mother, father, child or a stranger does not matter. Only through joint vigilance can Justitian's security be guaranteed.

VI

KEEP CLEAN!
Follow the Spitalian's instructions. Germs and viruses are humanity's greatest enemy. Those who uphold the hygienic regulations and keep themselves clean, stay healthy - and strengthen Justitian by the power of their health.

VII

LEAVE TO OTHERS WHAT IS THEIRS!
Theft is the most malicious form of infamy. Anyone caught in theft or robbery gets his hands marked by the Judges. Now it is even more important to be careful: anyone caught stealing who already has a mark on their hand will lose it between a block and a hammer.

VIII

DO NOT REENACT!
Anyone pretending to be a Judge without being committed to and accepted by the Cult, who disguises himself with cap and cloak and intentionally fools others, pollutes the legacy of Justitian and as such is sentenced to death.

IX

OUTLAWED!
Those who trade in Burn and bring the taint of Sepsis to Justitian have forfeited their right to life. Burners can be executed by any citizen, anywhere, even out on the dusty streets. The case law of the Codex does not apply to these vile sinners.

Justice

Punishment is an integral part of justice. In Justitian, offenders are convicted based on the severity of their misdeeds. Minor offenses can be punished by mere City Judges on the spot with markings. Capital crimes, however, require the presence of a Protector, as well as an Advocate, to ensure that the verdict is valid and faithfully consistent with the Codex.

MARKINGS

Minor criminals are punished by having the appropriate parts of their body marked with paint. A thief's hands are dyed red, a liar receives a blue strip painted across his mouth. "Show me your hands" is a typical request from retailers in market stalls and inns to verify that the person they are dealing with is an honest business partner.

The Judge's colors used in the process are enriched with secret chemicals. A special blend sourced from Cavernis ensures that a marked person cannot simply wash their hands clean. Depending on the consistency of the mixture, the markings dissolve on their own within 4 to 6 weeks. Once the color tint has finally disappeared, the delinquent is considered to be rehabilitated.

So far, so good. However, if a criminal is caught offending a second time before their markings have faded, the Judges are far less lenient. The hand of a thief is stretched over a Judgement stone and shattered with a hammer blow, a fraud has his upper lip cut off, and a gunman refusing to secure his loaded revolver has his index finger sliced from his hand.

Not all Judges impose their punishments so mercilessly. If the criminal so far has not made much of an appearance, some City Judges deliver justice with grace and instead condemn the marked to punitive labor in the Cleft. The length of prison time depends on the marking itself. Once it fades off, the convict is dismissed.

TATTOO

Not every offender can be deterred by a bit of color and a few weeks of hard labor in the Cleft. Back on the street he swiftly returns to obeying his lower instincts: robbing, stealing, beating, and cheating. Such repeat offenders will receive a far more drastic form of marking upon arrest: the tattoo.

The criminal is inked with a blue stripe from their forehead, down across their nasal bone, and ending at their chin. From now on he is recognizable as a lawless individual to the other citizens, shunned by them and rejected in guesthouses and market stalls. Tattooed persons can be sentenced to hard labor for any insignificant issue and often end up spending months in the Cleft for even the smallest offenses. If they do not have a family to return to, the only thing left for them in Downtown is a life in the Defiler Streets. What's worse, since the laws of the Judges are applied throughout the Protectorate a tattooed offender cannot just flee into another city to start anew. Instead, if they flee, they have to worry that they'll be treated even worse there.

From now on they should keep a low profile, act inconspicuous, obey their superiors, and hide out in the shadows.

TAINT

Capital crimes such as murder, rape, child abuse, and high treason know only one form of jurisprudence: the offender is branded with a red hot iron, leaving the mark of the Judgement hammer scorched on the felon's forehead. These so-called tainted ones can never undo their past crimes. They are forever outcasts of society. Most of them are sentenced to 10-15 years of prison labor in the Cleft, but when their prison time is up their sentence continues. In contrast to the tattooed offenders, nobody is allowed to house a tainted one. Never again will they be permitted to participate in society, to stay in guesthouses overnight, to shop at markets, or even to pursue any work other than collecting corpses in the depths of the city. The Defiler Streets will be their only home until the end of their pathetic lives.

DEATH PENALTY

Nowadays the death penalty is carried out only in exceptional situations, and it is viewed by Judges as a measure of last resort. Extreme cases of excessive violence, terrorism, or Reenactment, however, will result in the public execution of a criminal. The latest and largest mass execution to date occurred during the Great Cleanse, when the Judges rounded up all of the captured members of the East Wind Flock, dragged them by the dozen to the Cleft, and sentenced them to death by hammer. The Spitalians coldly observed the carnage, ensuring all of the bodies accumulated in the bloodbath were burned to ashes.

PUNITIVE LABOR

Anyone who has ever seen the Cleft from the inside understands why punitive labor is nothing to scoff at. The physical hardships that the prisoners are subjected to leave their mark. Labor camp detainees are ordered to carry out heavy duty clean up work at the Crack, breaking rocks and boulders. Others are banished to the Ice Barrier to cut glacial ice, or sent to haul salt in the Stukov Desert, and yet more are condemned to heavy field work out in the Rubble, repairing roads or working in perilous conditions on the Great Northern Wall.

The daily rations are scarce, making hunger a constant companion gnawing at the prisoners' strength. Lack of sleep and illness combine and do their part to leave most of the convicts completely worn out within four weeks before spitting them out like walking skeletons.

JUSTITIAN

THE CITY

Anyone who refers to Justitian must define what part of the huge metropolis he is talking about. Justitian's footprint extends far beyond the city limits, and includes the entire surrounding countryside, along with its population.

THE RUBBLE

The Rubble is by far the largest region of the city, but also the most sparsely populated. In this ring of fat around the metropolis, generations of Providers share the land with the incumbent Ascetics of the Cross Quarter. The Rubble is an agricultural area and breadbasket combined into one. In the south, it borders onto a rich plain full of steppe grasses and pastures.

DOWNTOWN

Downtown is the colossal foundation of Justitian, and the collecting pool for the masses flooding into the metropolis seeking business or entertainment.

Seven sprawling districts dissect Downtown, each divided into sub-districts of its own. These major districts are: the Steel Monolith, the Stukov Quarter, Tech-Central, the Harbor district, the Cross Quarter, the Jehammedan Quarter, and the Neighborhood of the Providers.

UPTOWN

Uptown is the nerve center of all power in the city. Here, the Judges and Chroniclers dictate the fortunes of the Protectorate. Administration offices are located on this plateau, along with the Judgement Hall and the Central Cluster. A dedicated Ambassador Quarter allows the Judges to maintain their alliances with other cities and Cults. Uptown is a high-security zone: only those whom the Judges deem worthy will be admitted.

Even though Justitian is not situated at the geographic center of Borca, the Judges still consider it to be the navel of the modern world. In fact, all of the major trading routes head straight to the metropolis, barely veering off course to capture other towns and settlements. Villages and towns across the region will ship their goods exclusively to Justitian instead of neighboring villages. This is because many of the Protectorate towns specialize in just a handful of trade goods and exports, most of which aren't needed locally but are specifically high in demand in Justitian generating higher sell-offs and profit margins. As such, Justitian has grown to become the central trading hub of Europe over the last century, and Uptown keeps an eye on all goods passing through the city.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Justitian is a sprawling wild growth composed of endless networks of streets, walls, and buildings that will drive any urban planner trying to make sense of it into despair. The city has expanded uncontrollably for two hundred years around its central nucleus: the Cluster. It was from here that the first buildings were erected, and from where it stands that the first roads poked through the original cottage settlement on the Uptown plateau. At that time, Downtown resembled a war camp reserved for the Judges and their horses. They lived among the buildings of the Stukovs and Brenni, camped in front of the Old Fortress, and posted regular watches atop the Bastion to guard the wide plain stretching out all around them.

On well-trodden paths and dusty roads, endless truckloads of building materials were carted around to promote the expansion of the young city. Step by step, Justitian inflated, often unable to cope with the steady influx of newcomers. Once Uptown, upon which the Cluster towered, was locked down, the Scrappers began to congregate in an upstream outpost to the south which was soon baptised as Tech-Central. The old Clans in turn dominated the Stukov Quarter, and built their homes at the foot of the Steel Monolith and the Uptown wall.

The architecture of each layer of this onion-like city construction is a reflection of its time. In the center, the oldest part of the city, the quarried stone buildings of the founding days still sprout from the ground. These monolithic city blocks and houses crowd close together, as if protecting each other from the cold of the tundra. In reality, however, the early urban architects had the idea of a fortress in mind: the narrow streets and back yards were easy to defend if war broke out. The City Wars had left their mark on the people. Today, these winding streets have become a hindrance to the Judges and their duty. Horses can barely be maneuvered in the winding alleys and rough terrain, which is why the cavalry is forced to take the Stallion Streets.

As the city expanded and the founding quarters began to merge with the growing outskirts, the citizens began to beautify their residential areas. Craftsmen and artists built benches along the walls, narrowing the alleys even more, while elsewhere carpenters put pergolas on the rooftops where they gathered their relatives for dinner. Abandoned houses were bought up by wealthy traders, torn down, and redesigned into public spaces - although not without chiseling the patron's name in stone above the entrance.

Clans of Justitian

Justitian has always been a melting pot for Borcan Clans. Anyone speaking of the long-established population of the metropolis, whether citizen or Provider, artisan, artist, healer, or blacksmith, usually refers to those who can trace their ancestral lineage back to the original Clans of the Black Lung.

But nothing is left of their old traditions. For too long they sat cooking in a stock of Justitian's settlement policy, Judicial decrees, and violent reeducation, all forcing them to become citizens instead of remaining true to their identity.

All that remains of their heritage are their surnames: Stukov, Brenni, Krawe, Decker, Sprenger, and the many others that make them stand out on the street. Their stories live on in the fairy tales and legends told in the inns of Justitian around the fireplace in exchange for a glass of distillate. They are tales of powerful warrior peoples who came from the far north, tamed horses, and stamped down paths across the Black Lung. They are tales of hunters catching lightning bolts with their bare hands and driving massive herds of reindeer before them, of mothers who breastfed their children with milk and blood, and of wise men who could banish the fever from the body of a sick person with little more than a stern look.

GREAT CLANS

Without a doubt the largest and most widely distributed Clans within the city limits are the Stukovs and the Brenni, two tribes that had already settled on Justitian's territory long before the Judges arrived and are inextricably interlinked with the population today. Counting heads, the members of the Stukovs are possibly the most numerous still, even if they no longer elect their own chieftains and have fully submitted to the influence of the Judges.

The Providers, in contrast, are not a traditionally homogenous tribe, but instead a large group of peasant families and communities who divide up the Rubble amongst themselves and have a deep understanding of agriculture, plant breeding, and fertility rituals. The so-called Cooperative is a loose alliance of 120 of these families and represents the rights of the farmers to the Senates.

SMALL CLANS

The minor Clans are far more complex and their relatives are distributed in almost all of the social classes of Justitian. Either they proved too hard to eradicate, or they were too useful for the Judiciary to advance their disempowerment.

Since the foundation of Justitian, the Advocate families of Wender, Jungbau, Manteufel, Salvano, and Masek have been influencing the direction of the Judicial Cult. The majority of the members of these five set out on career paths becoming powerful Advocates, or occupy positions as public officials in the city administration.

The Sprenger family on the other hand has traditionally offered its sons and daughters to the Fire Watch. Without the firefighters, it is said, Justitian would have long ago burned to a charred funeral pyre.

EXTINCT CLANS

Not every Clan could be swayed with words. In the early years, the Judges led merciless campaigns of conquest and stopped at nothing in their quest of erecting their very own utopia. In these bloody times, numerous tribes perished, remembered today only as meaningless names in history books.

As such, these Clans are at best useful for increasing the fame of the Judges by decorating themselves in their official events, when the Cult can claim to having annihilated the tribes of Adiki, Deever, and Molkorvai. The Krawe were the last of these formerly great Clans to fade into the passage of time at the beginning of Archot's reign.

FOREIGN CLANS

None can say how many members of foreign Clans have settled in Justitian over the years, only to be absorbed by the growing population. Not every newcomer necessarily pursued the status of citizen, or even remained loyal to the city for their whole life. In Fielding it is typical to cross paths with Harmids, or to run into Liquans in the Cross Quarter. After all, trade between the cities of the Protectorate is flourishing, and Justitian constantly tempts with its wealth and opportunities.

But perhaps the strangest of all of the Clans are the Steel Masters, an enslaved and subjugated extended family who dwell high above the city in the Steel Monolith, supplying the Judge's arsenal of weaponry. Little is known about these so-called "cloud people" in Downtown, not where they come from nor the ancestors they descended from. The Judges don't plan on letting their subjugates in on their secrets, and so all sorts of wild myths surrounding the Steel Monolith and its enigmatic inhabitants run rampant in Justitian.

The Rubble

THE RUBBLE

Upon entering the Rubble, it is only a single day's march until one reaches mighty Justitian. Once upon a time, this region was covered with the shattered cities of the Bygones looming eerily out of the crater ashes. Nothing is left of these ruins. Every block of cement has been cracked, every steel beam melted down, every shard of glass crushed to dust. For centuries the peoples of the Black Lung ravaged this area, pulverising their own history to build new cities from the plundered remains. The Rubble has retained only its name.

After the fall of Exalt, people returned to this area. Judges enforced the recolonization with peasants who were supposed to dig up and plow through this battered strip of soil. The crops grew and so did their families. The peasants were now called Providers, and the fruits of their labor would make the young Justitian prosper.

Now the yellow wheat fields sway against a steel-gray sky. Beaten paths lead past fortified farmhouses and stables that sprout from the landscape like weeds. In the distance, cylindrical silos rise into the air, bristling with the eight-legged cross of the Spitalians. These are fueling stations where farmers of this area receive poisons and pesticides to protect their harvests from vermin.

Along the west route, a towering aqueduct winds from the direction of Cathedral City and joins on the way with pipelines snaking from Liqua toward Justitian. The density of the travellers along this path has been increasing rapidly. Providers drive their trolleys and oxcarts down the dusty roads, mingling with a torrent of traders and hikers. Scrappers with fully loaded carrying rigs prowl through the crowd, throwing nervous glances to the left and right to make sure no one gets too close to their cargo. In between, wounded Protectors ride: veterans of the Clan Wars – shot, emaciated, caked from head to toe in red dust and worn out. They have all chosen the Righteous Fist as the destination of their journey.

PIPELINES

Those who come to Justitian from Liqua are greeted by a dozen colossal water towers that ascend from the barren plain in the southern areas of the Cross Quarter and whose precious contents ensure Justitian's survival. Some of these cisterns have a diameter of more than a hundred paces, and rise thirty meters into the sky. The broken cross is emblazoned on the metal-clad outer hulls, ensuring that every newcomer understands who controls the water supply.

Massive concrete pipelines plow through the ground, branching off to finally fan out in small side arms towards the Rubble and Downtown. At junctions, pressure gauges and shut-off devices are mounted to seal off individual segments in the event of a leak or impact. There are tapping possibilities every hundred steps: fist-sized connection rings for hoses with a screw clamp. Once locked in place, tokens must be inserted to open the valves of this pumping system that were installed by the Chroniclers. These water tokens can be purchased by farmers from a supervising Village Juryman or from the Office of Civil Economics in Uptown. Armed with a handful of tokens, Providers cart empty canisters along, fill them with water, and return with them to their parcels.

BARREN SOIL

What could possibly grow here? The Purgan Ascetic stands with a questioning gaze in the field, running his hands through his frayed hair. He has come all the way to acquire a parcel in the Rubble and spend his twilight years near his fellow Anabaptists. He stares down at the red dust covering the plant bed like a thin veil as it suffocates the seedlings. With his hoe he angrily digs up the soil and examines the ground underneath. In some places it is still frozen. If he wants to till the field here, he will have to drudge until his hands are covered with calluses and his back is crooked from the hardships.

Providers and Ascetics who try their luck in the Rubble have their work cut out for them if they want to try and resist the natural conditions of northern Borca. The wind constantly blows tiny dust particles from the Wupper Crater or the Stukov Desert across the countryside. Fenced reed mats must be positioned and ramparts heaped up to keep the red powder at bay.

In order to reach the fertile soil, the farmers have to dig several meters down. Black topsoil is heaved around in buckets, scattered over the newly created field, and laced with debris to mark out the perimeter of the parcel.

The plants will grow wherever they survive, but most of the time they do this with reluctance and so the Providers have to give them a push with fertilizers. Volcanic ash from the Reaper's Blow is said to work wonders, along with lime, or the human feces that converges at the lower ends of the Defiler Streets. However, since the siege of Chalk Breach and the ensuing riots in the eastern areas of the Protectorate, ash and lime deliveries have become scarce and the reserves are dwindling. That leaves only the massive piles of shit on Justitian's outskirts as the single remaining source of fresh fertilizer.

Pesticides and fungicides distributed by the Spitalians are used to destroy spores and insects - but it's not like the Hygienists have left the Providers any choice here! Either one applies the poison, or their certification is conveniently "lost" along with their parcel.

Year after year, the farmers work to the point of exhaustion. And they are successful: in the summer and late autumn, the stubborn soil pays them back with flax and hemp, tubers, turnips, corn, and wheat.

PARCELS

The Rubble is divided into parcels, which are leased by the Judges to long-established Providers, but also to independent farmers or Anabaptists. The Office of Civil Economics controls all of this process, in plain language: surrender to the bureaucracy, citizens. If a farmer wants to cultivate different plants in his parcel than in the previous harvesting period, he must submit an application for this crop rotation. He is also required to keep a close record of the amounts of insecticides, fungicides, and water consumed, pest infestation, and the onset of budding. Every month, this information is to be submitted to the Office of Civil Economics on specifically distributed standard sheets.

Those who fail to enter their submissions lose their certification and are evicted from their parcel. For the rural population, this harassment is borderline madness. The people here know how to plow a hoe into the ground, sow wheat, and harvest the fruits of the earth, but hardly any among them are numerologists, or have even the most remote grasp of written language. In such cases, the so-called Village Jurymen come forward and offer themselves to the farming families as accountants and lawyers alike.

ALARM SYSTEM

The Rubble is a vast expanse encompassing several thousand square kilometers of space. It is impossible for the Judges to fully supervise the area, therefore they have to rely on the cooperation with the Village Jurymen.

However, in order to be able to react in time to raids occurring on the Funnel Roads or vanguards of Cockroach warriors penetrating the outer limits of the Rubble, the Village Jurymen have been equipped with their very own alarm system. In addition to a signal gun, their equipment includes a palm-sized portable warning module provided to them by the Chroniclers. Once triggered, it radios a silent alarm to the Cluster which the Chroniclers can in turn use to narrow down the quadrant the Juryman is in. The location data is immediately transmitted to Judgement Hall, which in turn dispatches one of its four cavalry squadrons stationed in Rubble to respond to the situation.

EMPHYTEUSIS

In the year 2563 a strange document, entitled "Emphyteusis", appeared in the city books of the Office of Civil Economics. No one could explain the origin of the dry parchment, which was marked with several seals of deceased Supreme Judges, including Nassius himself. The document proved settlement claims for the Cult of the Jehammendans in the southern Rubble. All parcels in a two-kilometer-wide and ten-kilometer-deep corridor belonged accordingly to the kinsmen of Osman. The Judges asked the Cluster to examine the documents, and the Fragment Impulse confirmed their authenticity.

Not even three months later the first Jehammedan settler treks, led by an Iconide named Baruch, reached the southern tip of Justitian. Baruch, for his part, was in pos-

Village Jurymen

On behalf of the Judiciary a chosen Provider, who is in possession of citizenship papers, can be appointed to the position of a Village Juryman to enforce law and order in the Rubble. These human watchdogs have mastered reading, writing and arithmetic, along with learning the basics of the Codex. Their influence is enormous, because the Providers are completely dependent on them. This sets them apart from the crowd, but it does not necessarily make them better people.

Some see themselves as benevolent fathers and mothers, fraternizing with the Providers and being considered welcome guests. If one of these Village Jurymen squeezes through a low door to enter the living quarters during a home visit, a bowl of steaming chicken soup is already waiting for them as a greeting on the table. Sitting with the family, they leaf through the forms, inserting a number here, making a cross there. For such Jurymen, it is a pleasure to see the fear in the eyes of the Providers fade once all matters have been settled.

But of course there are others. Jurymen who take advantage of their position. Jurymen who delight in erecting walls of uncertainty and doubt around their helpless subjects. The Judges could come by for an inspection at any time and notice all of those irregularities, and end up handing the homestead over to any passing vagabond, if the family doesn't shut up. But now, we share a secret, the Juryman whispers as he licks a wet tongue over bulging lips. It's so easy: just a few misspelled forms, and the work of years is at stake. The income is much higher than stated? Where was the surplus sold, where is the profit? The Office of Civil Economics can not afford to show weakness, and so it imposes harsh and definitive penalties should it discover a fraud. The Jurymen know this. And they also know that guilt always falls back on the Providers, because the Jurymen's office is only awarded to the morally flawless citizens of Justitian. Some of these Village Jurymen have made a fortune in this fashion, residing in splendid country houses in Fielding. Donations from grateful Providers have made it possible, they say. It feels so good to be on the right side of the law.

session of a certified copy of the leasehold document. The Judges were taken by surprise, but in the hopes of good trade relations with Osman the newcomers were welcomed and granted the right to settle. No one could have guessed at the time how many latecomers would flood into the new Jehammedan Quarter over the following years. A few dozen families turned into hundreds.

Worse still, the Jehammedan corridor lay exactly on the connection line with Cathedral City. For the resident Anabaptists this settlement policy, approved by Uptown, was a blatant slap in the face. Suddenly, the direct route leading to the stronghold of the Neognosis ran through the territory of their nemesis. To this day, the Broken Cross suspects a conspiracy behind this agreement. Therefore, the Anabaptists adamantly refuse to take the south road, instead using the far longer west route via Liqua to reach Cathedral City. The Jehammedans couldn't care less, because the corridor allows them to drive their goat herds undisturbed to the large pastures on the southern foothills of the Rubble.

There, a boundless, unpopulated plain full of scrub, yellow grasses, and sparkling blue flowers flourishes amidst the wasteland, where the herds can eat their fill. Moss grows in abundance across stoney ruins, bright red lichens fight against the wind, surrounded by dwarven shrubs that tremble with every haze: the tundra has reconquered the land. Only where the Ismaeli trudge day after day do beaten paths wind like dusty veins through the magnificent color scheme of the vegetation

SECRET STASHES

For decades, Justitian was supplied with Burn along various shipping routes criss-crossing the Rubble. Then, suddenly, it was over. The Great Cleanse had purged the largest Burn importer in history, and turned the East Wind Flock into nothing more than a footnote. The traffic subsided, but a handful of the secret stashes in the Rubble remained undetected. Not even the Carrion Birds know of the existence of these depots, which lie hidden somewhere along the Funnel Roads and to this day await discovery. Most of these hiding places were created underground. The entrances can be found in abandoned stables underneath double floors, and the tunnels below are just barely big enough to crawl through on one's stomach. Cusps of Glory, Bion, Unity, and Muse of immeasurable value are sealed down beneath the earth in airtight plastic barrels.

Seasons

The north of Borca knows only two seasons: summer and winter. The vegetation period begins in early May. Temperatures begin to rise rapidly to reach a maximum of about 30 degrees Celsius in August. During summertime, however, thunderstorms or even rain are a rarity, for the Ice Barrier binds the majority of the water. The situation is entirely different when it comes to the soil. In many places in the Protectorate the layer of frost starts to thaw and transforms huge tracts of land into marshy mosses. In the Furrows, west of the Rubble and on the way to Liqua, traders suddenly have to avoid shallow lakes and flooded grasslands so "as to not get stuck with their carts."

From September there will be extreme drops and cold snaps, and by October at the very latest, thermometers will start to creep below zero. The nights are now getting longer and tougher, but the skies stay starry throughout. Although there is a frosty haze in the air, there is no sign of snowfall anywhere. Instead, a low cloud cover usually hangs across the land during the day, casting the ambience into sleepy gray twilight.

WINTER BUZZ

At the first sign of frost, it is time for the farmers to nail up the windows of their homesteads, and to move together with their family and savings into the Neighborhood of the Providers, to Fielding, or the Bottomlands. At this point their work in the Rubble is done. The Funnel Roads are already crammed with homecoming Scrappers who also target Justitian to save themselves from the upcoming cold. Traders block the gates on the Great Northern Wall with their ox carts, the inns are overcrowded, and the city is bursting at the seams. If one has not made preparations and taken care of renting a room on time, they will run around until their feet are bleeding in search of a place to sleep.

In winter, Justitian reaches critical mass. Over a million souls crowd close together to escape the merciless season. As of September, however, the markets are booming. People overload themselves with supplies, buying winter clothing, fuel, and alcohol in spades to shield themselves against the approaching darkness.

SUMMER AWAKENING

Come April, the city is in turmoil. The first rays of sun promise an early beginning to summer and the population lurches into motion. All preparations are made to take advantage of the warm season.

Scrappers erupt in droves in all directions to get to Purgare, Franka, or Pollen, where they imagine undiscovered caches. Ascetics and Providers return to their fields, repair what has broken down over the winter, and sample the soil. Anabaptists leave on a pilgrimage or gather for campaigns to other regions of the world, while the Judiciary replenishes its troops along the front lines.

Within a mere month Justitian hemorrhages almost half of its population. Whole city blocks in Tech-Central are left deserted, and a ghostly silence sweeps through the streets in the Cross Quarter. Only the Stukov Quarter, the Harbor, and the Steel Monolith remain as lively as ever, even though markets and brothels register far less profit during the summer.

FUEL STATIONS

The fueling stations are widely recognizable by their round silo towers covered with a man-sized, red Spitalian cross. Chunky buildings plastered with lime and adjacent watering holes for horses cower below. Orderlies dispense insecticides and fungicides, filling them into canisters with sprayers which are then handed out to the waiting farmers. The name of the Provider, the number of his parcel, and the amount of the chemical are recorded and later correlated with the quality and quantity of the harvest to finally be reconciled with the data in the Offices of Civil Economics and Certification. Even more important than the arrays of documentation are the attempts of the Spital to bind the rural population of Justitian closer to itself. In recent years, a relationship of dependency has arisen that is gradually undermining the sovereignty of the Judges. Senator Laakon is concerned that the Providers may start to assume that the Judiciary may not understand enough about their work to properly govern them.

CERTIFICATION

There are four certification centers in the Rubble. The trails between the parcels all run in a star shape towards the center situated in their area of influence. The Providers drive cattle wagons, laden with grain, flax, and hemp fibers to these hubs, and join the packed stream of people ahead to pursue one of Borca's favourite cultural pastimes: queuing. Everyone here knows the procedure, and everyone understands that grumbling about the wait has never made the line move faster.

When they finally arrive at the large certification hall, they are directed by a Hygienist into a second queue, along with the number for the corresponding unloading zone. Finally the cart can drive up and the harvest can be spread out for inspection. A Spitalian with sweat running in rivulets from his bald head monitors the goings-on with a nervous look and makes sure that no grain accidentally spills across the white border line running along the floor: "Danger of contamination!" he roars hoarsely as he marks off his notebook. Supervising doctors walk past the harvests, checking quantity and weight, taking samples and notes. Providers are summoned with commanding gestures and given special bags to pack their goods. These bags are then sealed by the Hygienists: certified!

Only now may the food be sold on Justitian's markets. On the way out, each farmer receives a cobalt blue piece of paper with the new insecticide and fungicide directions. This slip of paper allows the Providers to visit a fueling station and receive a newly mixed blend of poison there. Goods deemed contaminated or unsuitable by the Spitalians are incinerated directly outside the certification center. The affected farmer receives no compensation; on the contrary, he can expect to lose his parcel to another Provider - one that meets the standards established by the Spitalians.

SEED TESTERS

The Spitalians don't yet know everything about plants, Sepsis, or insects. But they are working hard to crack these last few secrets. For this purpose, they maintain a number of testing fields where the cold and pest resistance of a wide array of plants are probed and optimized. Modified seeds and a special substrate are distributed to the resident Providers. In return, the Spitalians guarantee a full purchase of the harvest - which in turn has made some Providers rich along with turning them into professionals: the seed testers have built greenhouses and their very own laboratories on behalf of the Spitalians, and now the flag of the Spital billows on the defensive walls of their farmsteads.

Poison

The Spitalian's insecticides leave bugs dead on the ground. Their fertilizers accelerate the growth of germs. Their fungicides prevent the Sepsis from poisoning the crops. The fact that the caustic blend of chemicals from the fueling stations could be harmful to humans does not cross most people's minds. Even the Famulancers can't fathom terms such as immunotoxic, reproductive- and fetotoxic, or hepatotoxic. What some farmers notice, however, are the many cases of Tongue numbness, sensory disturbances, dizziness, twitching of the facial muscles, seizures, and paralysis. The livers of these patients are perforated and blackened. The price for the fight against the Primer is high. And the Providers have to pay it all by themselves.

Downtown

DOWNTOWN

Nowhere else in Europe do so many souls live crammed together trapped within a confined space as in Downtown. Hostile Cults divide the territory among themselves, passing each other in broad daylight, loathing and disgust boiling beneath the surface. Anabaptists settle next to Apocalyptics, these in turn alongside Jehammedans and Scrappers, and the gaps in between are filled with the kinsmen of the Clans of the Black Lung.

Only the presence of the Judges keeps this explosive mixture from detonating into all out chaos. United, they form an ironclad front bristling with polished musket barrels as they blanket the city with an army of mounted Protectors, assisted in their efforts by platoons of Famulancers and Preservists all armed to the teeth.

Those who dare to oppose this sheer display of force should no longer consider Justitian as their home, but as their personal hell on Earth. At least that's what the Judges say, and the Chroniclers do everything in their power to make that bold statement a reality.

Nevertheless, Downtown simply cannot be controlled. It is too big, too cluttered, too defiant. It is a hotbed of violence and disorder, of fermenting hatred driven by the greed for power. Within this Moloch, treachery pools on every corner and corrodes the utopia of the Judiciary from its very foundation. In Uptown's shadow, despotism and felony thrives – imbued with an excess of criminal energy, the Carrion Birds and the Cartel subjugate entire city blocks, defy order, exploit loopholes within the system, and pry society apart to advance their goals. For far too long have the Judges been too self-centered and blind to the dangers flourishing at their feet. Now it is too late. The disintegration of Downtown is an unstoppable process – just like the tiniest scratch on the surface of an aluminium hull is sufficient enough for a mere drop of mercury to dig its way into the structure and erode it from the inside out. In their quest for greatness and validation, the Judges have blown the gates to their realm wide open and allowed the Demiurge to slip inside. However, he won't be taking the same door on his way out.

FRACTIONS OF THE POWER STRUCTURE

There's a rumble going through Downtown. Factions have formed from the most unlikely of places to shake the pillars keeping the delicate power structure towering above. Justitian is inundated with enemy brigades, subverted and trapped in one-sided dependencies. The adversaries wait for the first sign of weakness to pounce and seize the moment for themselves

THE CARTEL

The Cartel is Borca's largest Scrapper conglomerate and the most versatile enemy of the Chroniclers. Their Appraisers have poisoned the artifact trade, relentlessly driving the price of scrap higher and higher. Section by section, they have hollowed out Tech-Central and expanded it to become their base of operations. Bosch, Justitian's richest man, is rumored to be the head of all of this - yet no one seems to be in a position to put an end to the machinations of the Dwarven King, nor has anyone been able to pin a single criminal charge on him. Bosch remains a phantom.

MANUFACTURERS

The Manufacturers are made up of the greatest inventors and engineers of Justitian. Valued by the Judiciary beyond compare they are assigned to the most prestigious construction projects in the city because only they have the necessary knowledge of statics and mechanics to be able to make these undertakings a reality.

THE ROPERS

The Ropers have always ensured that traffic between Uptown and Downtown flows uninterrupted. This Scrapper faction has an extraordinary place in the power structure of Justitian. Patronized by the Judges, they enjoy all sorts of amenities that are out of reach to the average Scrapper.

Their citizenship papers grant the Ropers access to any and all of the buildings and equipment in Uptown, including the Steel Monolith. They may even venture near the Cluster for repairs. Their influence is enormous, and the Judges eat from the palms of their hands.

SCAVENGERS

A city like Justitian relies on an army of day laborers to put its plans into action. Before an order is even given, the Scavengers are already waiting in the starting blocks. As trotters, couriers, casual workers, and transient scrap merchants, they fill Justitian's insatiable hunger for cheap labor and services.

THE CARRION BIRDS

The oldest and most influential Flock in all of Europe has nested within the city's limits ever since the metropolis was founded, and has always been involved in its daily affairs. The Harbor is the Flock's ancestral territory, and its brothels and taverns line every winding side street and hidden backyard to this day.

Throughout its history, the Carrion Birds Flock has formed its own offshoots, which in turn grew into independent Flocks as they moved to other areas and claimed new business. For decades the East Wind Flock - a sister of the Carrion Birds - was solely responsible for the import of Burn into Justitian, until they were destroyed in 2595.

The mighty Carrion Birds of old have lost much of their splendor, suffering from an indecisive Raven at its head and a reputation as a clunky behemoth held back by an ailing power structure.

THE DUST RIDERS

At the heart of the Carrion Birds' territory, a Flock of pirates has established their nest and seized the Flotsam, Justitian's largest casino and brothel.

The Dust Riders are composed of Purgan Apocalyptics who have openly renounced the traditions of the Mother of Ravens. Through underhanded treachery, they were able to drive a devastating blow into the Carrion Birds' flank, shaking the Flock to its core, yet remaining unpunished to this day.

The Dust Riders do not fear retribution. They have cemented their claim to power, and now hold all of the cards.

THE OLD CLANS

Entrenched in the no man's land between the Cults, deprived of their identity and crushed by the hammer of the law, the old Clans of the Brenni and Stukov persevere, longing for old glory. Today they may be weakened and lack their chieftains, yet their numbers are legion. Is a fire burning under a fuse sufficient to reignite ancient anger? How long can a whole people live in oppression, before it rises from the dust and screams for freedom?

THE COOPERATIVE

The Cooperative is the largest association of Providers from the Rubble. This farmer's union is led by a stubborn and contentious Provider named Ardon. As a former Village Juryman, he resigned from office to found the Cooperative and defend the inhabitants of the Rubble against the harassment from Uptown. Ardon is the man of the hour, and at his side, powerful allies are gathering: To his right, Elias Ramon, a renegade Village Doctor who opened his public hospital in the Bottomlands for refugees and destitutes. To his left, Wortmann the Heathen, one of Justitian's most feared Arbiters. Together, the three of them step forward to defy both the Judiciary and the Spitalians.

WATER AND POWER

The groundwater levels of Justitian are far too low to supply the metropolis' huge population. To meet the massive demand, the Judges have been stockpiling their reserves for decades. Both water and Anabaptists are traditionally connected with Justitian. As far back as anyone can remember, the city has mainly been supplied by two sources: Cathedral City, and Liqua. The vast water reservoirs are located outside the city center and are connected to massive pipelines, linked to the aqueducts from Liqua and Cathedral City. Citizens get their water at the civic wells by submitting citizenship papers and water tokens, while foreigners must buy their reserves in the markets from certified water traders.

Power, on the other hand, is routed via Mobilis and transmitted by the overhead power lines and accumulators in the Forecourt Alcove, from where the electricity is distributed to the neighboring districts along with Uptown. In addition, the Chroniclers have set up twelve backup generators across both Uptown and Downtown to cushion any fluctuations in current. These hybrid generators boost their performance when not in use, and can provide the city with a full week of emergency power when bottlenecks occur.

Furthermore, the Chroniclers have installed a separate subterranean power turbine connected to the air exhaust of an Exit Level, which they use to steadily refill the Cluster's internal battery modules with Quanta - their own unit of electricity measurement.

The Cluster itself is covered with solar sails on its top level, collecting the energy of the dim Borcan sun to recharge the Cluster's reservoir cells.

Tech-Central powers itself using the Gyrodome. This technical marvel amasses the static energy generated by the Borcan dust storms to accelerate a massive gyroscope resting inside a domelike sphere a dozen meters across to generate enough power to keep the technical hub alive for weeks.

THOSE WHO CAN AFFORD IT

Electricity is an expensive commodity, and anyone who can pay the price will have their apartment or shop connected to the power grid of the Forecourt Alcove. However, only the adjacent districts such as the Stukov Quarter, the Steel Monolith, and Uptown are directly connected to this distribution network. Observers constantly monitor the power lines, ensuring nobody is tapping into the network without permission.

ALTERNATIVES

Portable generators can be found almost everywhere in Justitian. Such improvised devices can be filled with a wide variety of commonly available fuels. Depending on the Tech-Level, many can be fired with Petro or coal in order to produce electricity.

More outrageous models can be refueled with pig manure: thanks to the proximity of Harm and the local pig fattening farms, inexpensive refills are available all over the place. Tech-Central proves its ingenuity once more with its so called "powder generators", which can be ignited with nothing more than a few charges of black powder.

DARK LAYER OF FAT

The majority of the city is clad in pitch darkness during the night, and many in Downtown must illuminate their abodes and shops with other, simpler light sources. Lamps that burn fat, torches, candles, fire pans, and in very rare cases E-Cube powered light cells all provide a blanket of light across many quarters of the city, while streets and backyards are often illuminated with honey-tinted lanterns. Only along the Stallion Streets and in the Forecourt have Chroniclers the erected floodlights with enough watt-hours to chase the night away and turn the streets as bright as day.

Movement

Justitian's footprint is immense, 18 kilometers as the crow flies between its further extents. In other words, it can take as much as three hours to walk from the Cross Quarter to Tech-Central, assuming one isn't caught in an unforeseen Spitalian security check.

If anyone wants to get from one place to the next without coughing up Drafts, they need strong legs and the endurance to conquer the long distances. For citizens with money and status, however, there are alternatives.

TROTTERS

Some Scavengers prefer to rely on their muscle power instead of their brains. They use sheet metal, wood, leather, wheels, and a harness to weld together two-seated rickshaws to chauffeur paying customers through the various districts of the city. These so-called trotters are arduous brutes, but for 20 Drafts any citizen can book their services for half an hour.

Trotters install clockwork devices made by Manufacturers on their rickshaws which precisely record the passage of time. One turn of the brass hand equals exactly 30 minutes. No trotter can make do without one of these, even if the steep price of 200 Drafts hurts their wallets.

Back on the road: the trotter straps the leather harness to his chest while the customer perches his ass on the wooden cot. The axle groans and the marathon begins. One thing is for sure, with no suspension the ride across the endless cobblestone slopes will be a tough one for the customer. Trotters save their money and invest it to upgrade their rickshaw with rubber-covered spoked wheels and leaf springs, or seat cushions.

Nevertheless, the business is hard work, especially in winter when the streets freeze over and the spikes strapped over the boots refuse to grip. But it is worth it, because the customers crowd for a ride at the city gates and in all of Justitian's public spaces. It has become customary for customers to bargain with each other if only a single trotter is available. The trotter, on the other hand, only waits patiently with a wide grin. Especially when one of the "customers" is a friendly Scavenger in disguise pushing up the price.

COURIERS

In Justitian, a large number of couriers are ready to run paid errands within the city. Moving swiftly, they deliver data carriers to selected Alcoves, documents and sealed evidence to the Judges, medicines from the public hospitals to the Providers, or simply bear letters and messages for their customers.

However, a courier needs to show a client more than just his hands and face to convince them of his honesty. He is required to provide a day pass printed by the Chroniclers, which must be purchased every day at an Alcove. The Vocoder crackles, "Five Drafts", and the Agent holds out his hand. The couriers have no other choice if they want to get their foot in the door of this booming business.

The process is the same everywhere: couriers wait in public places and hold their day pass in the air. A client takes the pass, signs it, hands over the package and reveals the destination. Some people write down the number of the Alcove where the day pass was issued in order to be able to file a complaint if the parcel does not arrive at the destination. Then the courier sprints off.

When he arrives at the recipient, the delivery is transferred and the day pass countersigned. This is important because the Chroniclers will only issue a new pass the next day if the previous one was filled out correctly and no complaints were received. If a courier wants their pockets to be heavy with Drafts in the evenings, they'll have to be quick and able to transport even the largest of loads. Here the Mechanist Sorrow scores far above all others as the only courier in Justitian to own an operational engine-powered buggy, along with having the necessary funds to cover the cost of Petro. All others are dependent on their quick legs, which is why in addition to Scavengers, one can often find orphans from the Outskirts working among the couriers.

CAVALRY

Since the outbreak of the Clan Wars every horse is needed for the war effort. Four years ago the Judiciary passed a new law that criminalized the possession of mounts and carried out a city-wide expropriation of all available horses. They did not even stop at the steeds of the Jehammedans.

Every citizen of Justitian has a role to play in ensuring the safety of the Protectorate. Anyone caught at the city gates in possession of a horse can expect his animal to be confiscated, and to be made to pay a hefty fine.

These days, only Judges and Spitalians are allowed to ride on horseback. The population is dependent on moving on foot. Packed donkeys, mules, and cattle for transporting heavy goods and pulling carts are still allowed, but must be navigated along the designated curbsides of the Stallion Streets.

GUIDES

Many travelers have long paths to walk - Justitian's maze of streets seems endless and inscrutable. If the Judges claim to have an overview of the city, what they really mean is they have a good view of the Stallion Streets. Beyond that, chaos is festering. This is contrasted by specialists who are well versed in their neighborhoods - and can be rewarded for their knowledge.

City guides prowl on travelers at all of the entrances to the city. They have a good eye for who is about to get lost in the tangle - and can afford their services. It is a matter of courtesy that city guides take off their gloves in front of their customers and reveal their faces: one shouldn't follow marked ones into dark alleys.

The guides know all of the inns, kitchens, marketplaces, brothels, and dirt-infested Defiler Streets. For about 10 Drafts, the traveler has the way described to him, for another 20 Drafts the guide will accompany him. This is always advisable, unless the customer can memorise a minute long travel plan peppered with all sorts of barely relevant anecdotes.

THE CLUSTER SPEAKS

Most people have never seen the Cluster, but everyone in Justitian knows its announcements. Downtown is coated with a network of speakers covering almost all of its districts. Power lines wind around masts and roof gables, swinging from there to the next building where a steel collar bundles them into secure group. The cables continue on scaffolding, through boxes of transistors, then to the amplifier: a bottle shaped loudspeaker.

An automated voice intones "The Cluster speaks," and hundreds of speakers across the city transmit the message. As a matter of fact, the Cluster announces the most important issues of the day, and regulates the daily life of the citizens. Urgent announcements often are repeated many times throughout:

I "Citizens, return to your homes. The day has ended." This order is to announce the evening curfew, beginning at 10pm. After that, the Stallion Streets are considered closed until they open in the early morning hours, at 6am.

II "Citizens, celebrate Archot's day of birth." Holidays in Justitian are always announced by the Cluster, even if the reclusive Chroniclers rarely participate in the festivities.

III "Citizens, clear the streets." This announcement is issued when a cavalry squadron of Protectors rushes in to respond to unrest in a part of the city. The Cluster names the Stallion Street, to ensure that traffic elsewhere in the city isn't disturbed.

IV "Citizens, do not loiter in the area." Unannounced public meetings and gatherings in Justitian are prohibited. As such, the Chroniclers keep watch to ensure there are no such congregations or mass protests.

V "Citizens, there are enemies in the system. Find them. Report them." This warning is delivered against spies and public enemies, aiming to increase the vigilance of the citizens and make them informants to aid the Judges in rooting out the infiltrators.

VI "Citizens, arm yourselves and man the walls." This announcement has become a rarity: nowadays it would only be used in a desperate defense if Justitian were to come under siege.

If a district or row of houses has behaved in an exemplary fashion, crackling melodies from Bygone days sound from the loudspeaker masts lining the nearby streets. The citizens stop and look up, tears forming in their eyes to the sound of the buzzing megaphones. Even the most hard-boiled son of a bitch will put away the knife they just used to clean out the dirt under their fingernails in order to listen devoutly to the soaring tunes. The Cluster's network is comprehensive and accompanies people everywhere in the city. Everywhere except Tech-Central. For years the Chroniclers have been unable to put their speaker system into operation in this district. As soon as the Agents erect a new mast, the Cartel dismantles it again overnight and sells the disassembled parts back to them as scrap the next day.

On dry winter days, the system can fail in places. The transformer stations start to grumble, then blue flashes of light dance over the cables and the power supply to a section breaks away. An uneasy silence suddenly falls over the uncoupled area. The white background noise ebbs, and the inhabitants send fearful looks at the transmission towers. Have the Chroniclers finally abandoned the city? Was there an attack on Uptown? Only when the relays begin clicking and crackling, and energy once again flows through the cables, does the mantle of uncertainty fall away. The Chroniclers are back on the side of the citizens, and the Cluster will show them all the way.

STALLION STREETS

Paved streets sixty paces in width dissect Justitian. Straight like a dart they cut through the neighborhoods, undeterred like rays of light beaming through absolute darkness. The city is forced to adapt to the Stallion Streets, not the other way around, because they secure the Judges' control over their turf. At full gallop, Judges race along the Stallion Streets in force on the backs of their horses, finding the fastest possible route to spots of riot and unrest.

Citizens are not allowed to clog the Stallion Streets. They must move along the curbside of the streets and keep the central strip clear under all circumstances. Should one want to get to the other side, they must pay attention to a signal from the Cluster loudspeakers, which allow turning every two hundred meters. A rattling beep indicates that the path is cleared, giving the pedestrians two minutes to cross to the opposite side of the street. The traffic signal is calibrated to a six-minute interval, but whenever the speakers fail in winter hours of chaos ensue, until proclaimers are dispatched to try and manage an orderly transfer using nothing but a flag and a whistle.

All Stallion Streets bear the names of important Supreme Judges to aid orientation. They are also considered prime real-estate for shops, soup kitchens, bakeries, repair workshops, and Alcoves. Any citizen managing to open a business along a Stallion Street will never need to worry about passing customers.

THE PEACE WALK

Justitian's winding streets are a problem. While the Protectors can race on horseback down the Stallion Streets to hotspots, their mounts swiftly turn into a hindrance when a chase leads deep into a labyrinthine quarter. As such, under the Supreme Judge Markoff the construction of the Peace Walk was initiated, and subsequently expanded upon by Archot.

The Peace Walk is an intricate network of observation platforms and watchtowers built on stilts above the rooftops of the city. A seemingly endless web of transitions and overhead crossings made from corrugated plate, steel cables, or suspension bridges connect each watchtower with the next. Judges patrol the Peace Walk, keeping a watch on the convoluted streets and squares beneath them, and take advantage of shortcuts inaccessible on the ground when hunting down criminals. In addition, the towers offer excellent sniping positions for skilled Protectors.

The Peace Walk can only be reached by hanging ladders anchored to the walls of houses, which must be unlocked with a special piston to allow for an ascent. Only the Judges have any business being on the Peace Walk. According to the Codex, entering the platforms illegally is considered a minor offense and results in the marking of a subjects forehead – a sign of stupidity and disobedience.

However, the Peace Walk does not serve solely to monitor the streets below. Citizens are forbidden to close their curtains during the day to allow the Judges to look into an apartment at any time. The Peace Walk does not yet cover the entire city, only along the Forecourt and in the Stukov Quarter is the construction phase complete and the network of watchtowers tightly knitted. Other neighborhoods are planned to follow, but Justitian is growing faster than the Judges can fill their ranks with young Protectors and the Clan Wars are doing their utmost to bleed the Cult dry. Completely staffing the Peace Walk seems logistically impossible, and so the steel cable often serves as a clothesline, and many a thief gains access to his victims from above by taking deserted segments of the walkways.

BREMEN

ENTRY

Long ago, one could enter Downtown through any number of entrances and gain access to the city proper in various ways. Today it is different. Mounted Protectors patrol the Funnel Roads, following the crowds before they even reach the city and randomly probing travelers for verification.

When they finally enter Justitian and pass the city gates, the river of people is split into busy rapids as they are herded onwards to different sections.

The Spitalians and Judges divide the task between themselves, looking for any suspicious movements or cargo.

Nowadays, it has become almost impossible to get into the metropolis without submitting to the searches. The only method is to take the Defiler Streets. The sewage system of the city runs to the north, west, and south, and no one monitors Justitian's cesspits. If one has to get into the city unseen, they'll have to make peace with the idea of crawling through an endless stream of shit.

SLUICES

The Spitalians assert their influence in Justitian, and the city submits to their Hygienic Regulations. At all city gates, and at all intersections where the Stallion Streets meet, one will find the decontamination sluices installed by the Hygienists. Channels are gouged into the pavement that run the entire width of a Stallion Street and are filled with biting disinfectant.

The Spitalians say the solution kills all spores. That's why Famulancers stand at the ready and ensure that every pedestrian walks through the channels and submerges the soles of their shoes into the shallow pools. Hygienists also pluck people from the stream at random and examine them on the spot. "Open your mouth, show your palms, spit in this bottle" is the most common demand. If a sample of saliva doesn't discolor when treated with a special solution, the detained person may continue on his way.

To make sure that carts can pass through the channels, young Recruits stand by to lay out wedges to allow for the wheels to pass over the sluice. In the evenings the channels are sealed off with metal sheets and emptied, only to be unlocked in the morning and filled up again. However, in some districts, gangs of children keep causing problems. While some of them distract the guards in neoprene by playing with their belts or demanding to know the function of a Splayer, others use bottles and goat bladders to steal the disinfectant solution. Later, the kids can be found in a cramped backyard in the Outskirts or Tech-Central, where they inhale the fumes until their eyes glaze over.

SECURITY CHECKS

The Great Cleanse brought about far-reaching changes. Not only are the Scrappers forced to gather around burning barrels in the harsh winters to provide the warmth that Bion used to give them, it's impossible to walk the streets of Justitian these days without running into a patrolling Famulancer squad along the way.

For the former Burner this means only one thing: eyes to the ground and hurry out of sight. The doctors are everywhere. Back in the day, one could at least feel safe around the public wells and exchange venomous jokes about whether a Spitalian's balls are more soft like shriveled potatoes or hard like a Judge's musket shot. Other jibes revolved around the alleged sexually transmitted diseases carried by the medical Cult's females, or what they really used their Splayers for. Heartfelt laughter was a common thing. It washed the people's fear from their hearts and tore the Spitalians from their throne, for a brief moment. Now the doctors patrol the wells, taking water samples and ordering the people to piss into bottles. The times have changed. Today, security checks can happen anywhere

The Judges are just about as bad as the Spitalians. Like hawks they gaze down from the backs of their horses, hunting for suspects in the crowd. If they spot a victim, they give their sign. Moments later, the person is surrounded by Protectors and pushed to the curbside of the road. Surname? Papers? Ancestry? If the suspect doesn't speak Borcan, he is stripped and his belongings are thoroughly searched. All clear, now buzz off!

Anyone who thinks he is out of the woods just because he has managed to avoid the Judges and Spitalians is sorely mistaken. The Cluster tasks the so-called Observers to carry out random sampling on marketplaces and streets. These Chroniclers check citizenship papers and compare the data with information stored in the Stream. If inconsistencies arise, the Observers call the Judges.

Sometimes, on dark nights, tiny red lights flit across the sky. Most people think of them as shooting stars, but the Scrappers know better. The Cluster regularly deploys surveillance drones to measure every quadrant of the city from a safe distance and to probe the situation on the ground. Trust, but verify!

Hygienic Regulations

The 15th of July 2571 was a historic day for the Spital. The Cult had prevailed before the Senates and declared that the Hygienic Regulations were to be made a part of the daily routine. In the same breath, the Judges had been made responsible for maintaining Justitian's new laws.

The negotiations were arduous, for the Spital had forced the Judiciary to make a decision that tied a noose around its own neck. Should Justitian fail to enforce the regulations, the Spital would withdraw from the Protectorate and deny its services to the city's residents.

The Judges agreed. Archot wanted to avoid another typhoid wave like the one that ran rampant under Supreme Judge Markoff at any cost. The Spitalians in turn saw in the imposed regulations a gift for the people: rules that would turn a fermenting epidemic hotspot into a germ-free utopia.

In the same year, the Office of Hygienics was called into existence and moved into its own designated building in Uptown. Today Elliot Heilkamp, one of the leading architects of the Great Cleanse, monitors Justitian's health care and steadily extends the regulations and their grip on society. In all public places, Famulancers recite the new decrees for the inhabitants, and the Judges nod along in agreement.

Splayer and Judgement hammer work together to force the people to obey the rules, just as parents drag their children kicking and screaming into a bathhouse. They'll get used to it eventually. They have no choice.

PURITY IS HEALTH!

Every citizen has a duty to keep his home, his yard, his property, his cattle, his clothes, and his body clean. Purity is a virtue and its absence is a sin.

BRING OUT THE DEAD!

Week after week, the Defilers' wheelbarrows rattle across the neighborhoods as they collect the dead and deliver them to the Spitalians at the Knacker's Office. All collected corpses are autopsied as a precaution, even if the cause of death is visible to the naked eye. Are the organs discolored or deformed? Does white fluff grow on the lungs or in the esophagus? Young Recruits often get their first experience with a scalpel in this process. In addition, smears are taken to detect any germ or spore infestation. The corpses then end up in the funeral zones, while their clothes land in the Paper Factory in Uptown to be recycled.

PLAGUE PROTECTION = REPORT

Epidemics can only be combated if they are recognized early. Because of this, any and all illnesses that break out in Justitian must be reported to the Spitalians. No exceptions!

PROTECT JUSTITIAN'S CROPS!

The Spital provides insecticides and chemical fertilizers that the Providers must spray across their fields in the Rubble. This is not a request. Anyone who refuses to comply, and fails to pick up his ration of poisons week after week, can expect to be expropriated from his parcel.

MOTHERS,
REGISTER YOUR CHILDREN!

There is strict birth control in Justitian. Spitalians look for pregnant women and escort them to a nearby public hospital for examination. All in the name of Hygienics, of course. There, their place of residence and identities are recorded, and from that point onward they'll have to face regular uninvited Spitalian checkups until the pregnancy is over. Once the child is born, further examinations follow. Does the newborn exhibit external characteristics that are different from his peers? Does the mother have family members associated with Burn, or was a relative possibly a Leperos? Hereditary diseases? If the interest of the Spitalians is aroused, suspicious children are bought and sent to the Spital. Nobody knows what happens to them after that.

SEPSIS IS DEATH!

The Primer is omnipresent. Its odor is sickly and sweet as its snakes into the most remote corners of Europe. Why stop at Justitian? Burn is the distribution vector of the Sepsis. Even though the trafficking of the drug was smashed, the danger is not yet under control. The Spitalians can never be too careful. They examine dead bugs and flies that collect in the casing of insect lamps for spore residues, along with their regular inspections of the Rubble. Everywhere they watch over the integrity of this territory. The current conclusion: this piece of land is secure. But every citizen has to join the fight against the Primer, if they care about preserving what is left of humanity.

NO SEED WITHOUT CERTIFICATE!

Water, grain, meat, fertilizer, farmland - all of these can be carriers of spores and germs, and as such must be tested. Bored out of his mind, the Spitalian takes his sample, comparing the result with the data collected on a spreadsheet half a meter long. Monotonous work that erodes the mind of a Hygienist, yet causes the Provider to break out in a sweat. If he does not get the certificate, the hardships of a long year were worth nothing.

KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN!

He who violates the Hygienic Regulations, not only endangers himself, but the lives of all of the people of Justitian. In order to protect oneself from the stupidity of others, any offense that takes place out of sight of the medical Cult must be reported. Anyone who keeps a crime quiet is also guilty, and has made themselves a servant of the Primer.

PUBLIC HOSPITALS

"Public Hospital" is a fanciful term for a two story concrete block with quarantine chambers, a tiled operating room - resembling a slaughterhouse for cattle - and an attached security office for the residing Surgeon. Almost every district of Downtown features one of these Spitalian bases, but only citizens with valid papers are treated here. If everyone in the city swarmed to one of these places every time they had a tickle in their throat, the doctors would be overwhelmed and completely ineffective. As such, everyone else is referred to the Spital, with its Appendix far more sufficiently equipped to handle a large viral outbreak.

Every morning at exactly 6:00am the metal shutters on the doors rattle open, allowing anyone in urgent need of care to shuffle inside. Immediately through the entrance is a spartan reception area, with bare walls only occasionally occupied by public health information - posters informing citizens of the need to maintain cleanliness, or the latest updates to the Hygienic Regulations. A tired Orderly sits behind a desk, ready and waiting to receive any arrivals. In a lazy voice he demands to see their citizenship papers, and checks them for their validity. If everything is in order, he asks a list of basic questions to narrow down the required treatment: Are you in pain? Have you thrown up? What are your other symptoms? The Orderly relays this information to the Famulancers waiting in the backrooms and sends the citizen through. The corridors are just as barren as the waiting area and lead the patient to an office where he is given cursory attention and treatment. Most of the time the solution is simply "Suck it up, you'll get better in a few days." Most of the time, that's good enough.

The actual function of the Public Hospitals is invisible from the outside. They serve as field camps for the Famulancers and Recruits stationed in Justitian, and are where the Spital's troops are housed while performing their duties in the metropolis. Most patients would never suspect it because the barracks are often located in an adjoining outbuilding whose entrance lies in a nearby backyard. This precautionary measure is important, say the Spitalians, to demilitarise the Cult's public perception.

The barracks are cramped with barely enough bunks to accommodate all of the troops assigned to them; the Spitalians stationed there often have to set up sleeping shifts, or huddle together two-to-a-bed. There is a basic washing facility, and a well stocked medicine cabinet to ensure hygiene is maintained. Finally, the armory is managed by a single Famulancer designated as the quartermaster, who is responsible for recording every Splayer and Mollusk that is checked out, and verifying that any equipment returning from patrol is kept in a suitably clean and operational state.

THE STRONGEST IS NEVER STRONG ENOUGH
TO BE ALWAYS THE MASTER,
UNLESS HE TRANSFORMS
STRENGTH INTO RIGHT,
AND OBEDIENCE INTO DUTY.

[ROUSSEAU]

ALCOVES

Forty Alcoves are scattered across Downtown. They can be found along the Stallion Streets, on marketplaces, or hidden deep within obfuscated courtyards and back alleys. They all serve primarily to reduce the traffic clogging the Central Exchange at the Forecourt and disperse it across the entire urban area. However, unlike the Central Exchange, these regular Alcoves are significantly smaller and specialize in just one type of service such as currency exchange, E-Cube recharging, data and cache analysis, long distance communication within the Protectorate, scrap purchase, or the sale of day passes and licenses.

High-ranking Chroniclers will rarely be found in such places. While Streamers stick to the Forecourt and Uptown, the Alcoves are usually staffed with Agents and Bits. The work here corresponds to a selection phase within the Cult, in which Chroniclers displaying social competence can prove themselves. If they succeed in building up relationships of trust with Justitian's civil society, they will later be appointed as Servants. As a member of this group, and acting on behalf of the Cult's Paradigmas, they form the gateway between the Chroniclers and the people.

Of course, the Cartel is aware that the Alcoves on the periphery are far less secure than the Central Exchange in the Forecourt. Therefore, the Appraisers often lay in wait near these Alcoves to catch passing Scrappers and convince them to instead bargain with the Cartel.

In particular, the Alcoves in the Outskirts and Tech-Central have become the targets of regular robberies, allegedly conducted by Scrapper gangs. The Judges are known to crack down mercilessly on such cases, but they are understaffed and often don't make it to the scene of the crime in time to prevent the robbery. Even if they succeed in tracking the culprits back to Tech-Central, the thieves will disappear forever into the mountain of scrap. It never crosses the minds of the Judges that they may not be dealing with Scrappers at all.

CENSUS

Citizens in Justitian are required to report births to the appropriate Offices. The children can then be categorised and registered. The Spitalians give the parents citizenship papers prepared by the Office of Locality, while the information on the child's gender, name, size, etc. migrates into the Cluster's databases.

Once every year, the Observers swarm the city to conduct a census that also includes all adults. Citizens are required to respond to an endless barrage of questions - often meaningless to anyone except the Chroniclers. The information gathered through this survey feeds the internal data nodes of the Stream, from where it is extrapolated and analyzed as part of the Cluster's attempt to discover the reality formula.

Acquisition

Citizenship papers must be presented alongside every purchase in Justitian. If they are not shown, then a 20 percent non-citizen tax is added to their purchase. This rule always applies to those trying to stock up in the civic markets, or seeking shelter in certified pubs and taverns. Those who ply their trade in the guest quarters on the outer perimeter of the city, or move into a dwelling there, can generally avoid this extra charge unless they come across a pedantic merchant or landlord who demands to see them.

TRADING HUBS

Out in the wastelands, you'll wear out one pair of boots after another just to find a dealer with a bullet casing fitting your rifle or offering good winter coats. Even the march from one watering hole to the next is a tour de force. Everything is spread far apart. Therefore, people are drawn to cities, like information was once drawn to the pulsating data nodes of the Stream. Within the city, everything is bundled close together: doctors, traders, public wells, while within the Stream they take the form of Agent systems, Stream shops, and information bases.

Now, Justitian has grown to a gargantuan scale. If there was only one marketplace, the inhabitants would rush head over heels to gain a residence near the central square. The Stream node would be overloaded, its calculations outsourced. The large congestion would have to be broken down into a network of subsystems. These would exchange information with each other on broadband data links - the Stallion Streets. The Chroniclers always have an explanation for everything, even if it's not one that everyone can understand.

However, the telltale signs of the Stream's inherent principles can be seen in their urban planning. Each district has its own central market, the size of which is proportional to the population and importance of the area. Each market has its own Alcove, forming the interface between the Cluster and the people. Traders who want to offer their goods in one of these trading hubs queue up to purchase a license in the Alcove. If he is a foreigner, he can only buy up to a single day's license and must renew it the next morning. Citizens have the right to weekly, monthly, and yearly licenses, but the cost must be settled entirely in advance in order to hold a claim on their booth.

Foreign food traders are forbidden to sell their goods in marketplaces in the civic districts. They have to settle for the margins of Justitian, for the civic markets are under the protection of the Judiciary and are primarily used as food distribution centers for the inhabitants. The flow of goods from the foreign traders can't be consistently checked and is therefore declared unacceptable for the citizens.

If artifacts are offered for sale anywhere in the city, the Chroniclers have right of first refusal. Half an hour before the markets have even opened, the masked figures begin inspecting the stands to evaluate what's on display. However, the Cartel already has its Appraisers in position.

PRICING

On the markets of Justitian, goods with a Tech Level of I-III are readily available and are offered at the list price. The largest part of the city is essentially a Tech III city. The Steel Monolith and Tech-Central, however, are designated as Tech IV areas, and only Uptown meets the requirements for Tech Level V.

All goods with Tech V must be released for sale by the Chroniclers. If the Chroniclers declare interest in an artifact, the price is not negotiated upon as usual in the market stalls, but set at 50% of its list value. If the merchant refuses to sell his goods to the Chroniclers on these terms, their daily license is withdrawn.

Prices for staple foods such as tubers and corn are established by the Codex. 100 grams of any of these are available on the civic markets for 5 Drafts. However, luxuries such as fruits or various stimulating roots are not subject to a fixed price. In the foreign markets and in certified guesthouses, prices between 20-60 Drafts per meal are to be expected.

BLACK MARKET

The black market flourishes: uncertified food and water, weapons, poisons, chemicals, forged citizenship papers, artifacts - anyone can get anything in Justitian, if they know where to look. Both the Carrion Birds and the Cartel deploy their own networks of strawmen, suppliers, and watchdogs who provide the people, citizens and foreigners alike, with goods that don't show up anywhere else in the economic chain.

Anyone wanting to gain access to these hidden markets must find their way into the network. Secret sales locations and displays change position every week and are protected by bouncers and passwords. Counterfeiters from the Carrion Birds have specialised in copying the sealed bags used for harvest certification, selling them on to Providers who smuggle their crops past the searches and into the city. Citizenship papers are also in high demand, mostly those which belonged to the dead and have been overwritten in careful detail. Judges on the street will often not bother to compare the data written on the forged papers with the information stored at the Office of Locality. The only thing one has to look out for are the Observers, as they are able to send a query to the Static Stream on the spot in order to check the validity of the papers against their database.

SAFE ISLANDS

Chroniclers abhor violence and avoid physical altercation. They rely on the Judges to tear through an angry mob before the situation escalates and becomes dangerous to them, but it often isn't that easy. Precious minutes may pass before the Protectors can respond to a revolt in which the Chroniclers are at the mercy of their attackers' fury.

Anyone who can't make it to the safety of an Alcove in time to barricade themselves and raise the alarm is dependent on the safe islands dotting the city. These unique escape zones stand on all the squares where the Stallion Streets intersect. The constructions are similar across the entire cityscape: eight pylons as broad as a man form a circle around a shallow pit ten steps in diameter. A circular platform four meters wide floats above, held suspended in mid-air by massive chains anchored to the pylons. A small ramp leads across the pit to the island that itself is surrounded by cables and copper coils. A switchboard sits in the middle of the platform. An escaping Chronicler can couple his Source module to the ports embedded within, and initiate the security protocol to charge the safe island. Tens of thousands of volts pulsate to the tune of hundreds of amperes of current through the chain links of the platform's fencing. Anyone who touches them without being electrically isolated will burn up in wild convulsions, while flickering blue discharge flashes dance over his body.

The Chronicler on the platform remains protected as if inside a Faraday cage. At least in theory. Because the coils along the fence, which build up the deadly charge, are outdated and have been charred black around many of the safe islands. Instead, the Chroniclers hope that the mere myth of the destructive power of these constructs will provide the necessary deterrent.

SEVERITIES SHOULD BE DEALT OUT ALL AT ONCE,
SO THAT THE SUDDENNESS
MAY GIVE LESS OFFENSE;
BENEFITS OUGHT TO BE HANDED OUGHT
DROP BY DROP,
SO THAT THEY MAY BE RELISHED THE MORE.

[MACHIAVELLI]

THE PUBLIC WELLS

A Judge leans against the Water House's enclosure wall, casually resting on his right leg. The slate roof over him blocks the sun. "It's fucking cold," he thinks, rubbing his hands together. A boy comes running over, his face bright red. The Judge can't tell whether it's from the cold, excitement, or fear. Doesn't matter anyway. The little gremlin fumbles a piece of paper from his vest pocket, before starting to carefully unfold it. His tongue pokes from the corner of his mouth from the sheer effort needed to not tear the paper apart. The Judge, dying a thousand deaths from the incessant boredom, pulls the brim of his hat lower to give the kid a stern look. He's almost there. Maybe he's a little stupid? There, finally! With a radiant smile, the boy presents his citizenship papers. The Judge spins his finger around, indicating that the papers are held upside down. The only response is a quizzical look. He doesn't understand, of course. Doesn't matter anyway.

The Judge clicks his tongue, takes a step to the side, and unlocks the portal. The boy cautiously steps past the guard into the dark interior. Inside, water burbles quietly from a copper fountain. A large tub encloses the central pumping system and collects the extracted water. The boy dips his bucket deep into the cool well and screws the lid on top. Finished. The Judge is already waiting at the entrance, motioning with a raised thumb that the boy ought to scram.

Water Houses. Each sub-district contains at least one of these cisterns. The architectural style of these buildings is the same everywhere. Heavy bricks pile up to form a windowless, circular construction that spans thirty steps in width and rises fifteen meters into the air. Embrasures are situated directly below the metal-studded roof gable.

A cast-iron gate blocks the entrance. Standing guard in front of it are Jurymen or City Judges. No admission is allowed without citizenship papers, as the Water Houses exclusively supply the citizens of Justitian. In addition to the marketplaces and taverns, they are the central hubs of social life. It is here that the girls who have just endured

their first periods meet boys whose upper lips display the first, barest hints of curly fluff and fall in love with each other. Neighbors exchange gossip, cheat on their wife with the cute Provider next door, bitch about their rulers in Uptown, or pass the time with a quick game of chess. The daily fetching of water is a ritual that binds the people of a district together. Even the Judges and Jurymen who are on watch inevitably become a part of the social coexistence, and are sometimes even invited as witnesses when childhood sweethearts from the Water House tumble into an early marriage.

In stark contrast to those in the civic districts, the Water Houses in the guest quarters are anything but inviting. The Judges here leave no doubt that the water is held back or distributed at their will. At least four Protectors squat under the roofs of each of these menacing buildings, looking grimly through the embrasures to the district beyond. Additionally, the entrance is secured from the inside with massive steel bolts. Guests are not allowed in here. If they want to buy water, they have to push a container through a hatch in the gate. A bundle of Drafts better be in there as well, otherwise the bucket is kicked out without a word of explanation.

The Water House in the Stukov Quarter was installed by the Chroniclers, and is rumored to be the central shaft. Supposedly it reaches down to even the lowest waterways. Carved bars marked in the well's brickwork allow the Chroniclers to take exact measurements of the water levels underneath Justitian. For years now, the water gauge has been at an all time low. Some of the underground caverns are already walkable, with water levels barely at knee height. Justitian is drying up. Worse still, intruders could rappel down through another Water House and gain access to the Exit Levels - a secret passage system below the metropolis, only accessible to the Chroniclers. For the Cluster, this would equate to the biggest disaster possible, which is why the Judges have been instructed to keep all Water Houses under constant guard.

The Fire Watch needs You!

Without the Fire Watch, Justitian would likely not exist in its current form. They are the city's vanguard in the fight against the forces of nature and its raging fires. They are the heroes of the city. Wherever they appear in their uniforms, salutes and cheers go up from the citizens. But there aren't enough firefighters in Justitian. The city is expanding faster than the Fire Watch can be staffed. As such, volunteers are always welcome.

Anyone introducing himself to a fire chief is first tested for physical fitness, beginning with an endurance run through the neighborhood. The breastplate weighs like lead on the rookie's shoulders, making each step a heroic feat of labor. If he perseveres, he's then challenged to enter the thick fumes of a smoking bunker. Hair on the forearms start to smolder, and the lungs will combust within three minutes of exposure to the glowing air. No one can survive in there for longer than that. After two minutes, the applicant has passed the test, rushing from the bunker and jumping headlong into a tin tub full of water - the Fire Watch keeps itself stocked with healing pastes, and the rookie will need them now more than ever.

Now, the real training begins. First, the novice learns to repair and maintain the pumps. Once he can explain all of its functions to the fire chief and answer his questions to a safe level, he may call himself a linebacker. Next he is assigned to an attack squad and put on shift service. He moves out together with the other firefighters, operating the pumps or breaking into burning houses with the help of his axe. He also has to take care of the drinks, which isn't very difficult because he only has to squeeze the fire hose water from the cistern through a filter. The water supply itself is provided by the Judges: every week, Uptown releases hundreds of gallons of water for the Fire Watch.

Only after a linebacker has been accepted by his attack squad will he be truly included in the family of the firefighters. Anyone who cannot get along with the group, plays the lone wolf, or acts unreliable represents a danger and should try to make it in another district. Or better yet, give up altogether. There is only one guiding principle among the firefighters: if the team doesn't like the new guy, he's got to go. No ifs, no buts. In this line of work, you have to be able to rely on your comrades with every fiber of your being.

Finally, the highest honorary title is Officer. Those who bear it have saved the majority of their attack squad's singed asses more than once.

A rookie earns five Drafts every day, a

linebacker makes 20 and a firefighter finally gets 50 Drafts. Additionally, daily food rations are included in the service of the Fire Watch and all linebackers are immediately granted citizenship status.

SALT CONTAINERS

The water provided by the Judiciary isn't enough to supply a city the size of Justitian. The Judges say the water is too precious to be wasted on fire, and Uptown adamantly refuses to increase the Fire Watch's access to firefighting water. Instead, an edict was issued ordering that fires be contained with dust and salt. After all, the Stukov Desert is full of it, and it barely costs anything.

Promptly, a message was sent to the Cleft that supervising Protector Kant should mobilise punitive workers to haul salt from up north. This drudgery has been going on for years now. Thousands of tons of Stukov salt are mined from beyond Sinder and transported by the truckload back to Justitian. Everywhere in the city, silos and containers dot the neighborhoods, rising high into the air, filled to the brim with cargo to provide a reserve in case of a major fire.

FORCE PROJECTION

If the lack of water available to properly cover the city wasn't enough, the Fire Watch is faced with another problem as Justitian continues to sprawl across the Borcan wasteland - manpower. Even with all of the benefits that come with membership in the organization their numbers remain too small to maintain effective coverage across every district.

No one in the Judiciary listens to their requests for more manpower, though - "Just get on with it, already!" The only option is to spread their meager forces thinner and thinner, dividing the city up into two dozen sections each covered by a single squad of twenty men.

In addition, there are several groups held in reserve, ready to rush to the site of any emergency should it grow too large for a single squad to contain. At the current distribution each member of the Fire Watch is directly responsible for the lives of thousands of people on average, a ratio which climbs to tens of thousands when they are assigned to packed districts like Tech-Central. If a fire were to break out in that tangled mass, it is doubtful even the entire Fire Watch working together could make a difference. If the Fire Watch had to bear this burden alone, they would crumble from the pressure of responsibility. Luckily, the Ropers lend their aid to the organisation, providing both logistical support and repair for the heavily used firefighting equipment.

A JUDGE'S LIFE

It sounds so enticing: slide on a heavy coat, put on a floppy hat, shoulder a hammer, and smash criminals' teeth in. On top of that, a horse, free food, solid pay, citizenship papers, access to Uptown, and the respect of a whole people tossed in. Who wouldn't want to take the path of the Protector and stand side by side with fellow believers at the head of Justitian?

For many children and teenagers, it is a dream. But most of the population simply don't consider the downsides of a Judge's life. City Judges and Protectors are in constant danger of being exposed and having their name and residence left in the hands of criminals eager to take revenge on the officer of the law for a past punishment. In such cases, the Judge himself is rarely in the crosshairs. Instead, the helpless wife, the adolescent son, the aging father, or the parental court become targets, for many a Judge hails from the people they lord over today: they come from all over the Protectorate, from the families of Providers, or the Clans of Justitian, and often have possessions in Downtown as well. This alone puts the relatives of a Protector in mortal danger.

Duster and mirrored shades, hat and coat, all of this is disguise and camouflage to shield the Protectors who keep Justitian in order from the reprisals that threaten them when their identities are circulated. For this reason alone, it is common for the Judiciary to place native Judges in other cities for service, and instead fill their ranks in the metropolitan area with fresh blood from the many settlements of the Protectorate.

For Executioners, the situation is far more difficult. Many of them have amassed infamy in the wastelands and Justitian - their name is no longer a secret, and they are recognised everywhere, even on the open road. There is only one solution for them. The Judiciary allows the family members of Executioners to settle in Uptown, to protect them from revenge.

FRONT SERVICE

Anyone who thinks that the law enforcement in Justitian are doing badly hasn't yet spoken to the Judges on the front lines. Protectors assigned to secure the borders ride towards a dangerous and uncertain future. Service on the front lasts for one year. The Judge patrols alongside the Spitalians in open terrain, razes hostile Clans to ash, secures unknown territory, guards watchtowers, and keeps supply routes open. Hunting petty criminals sounds like child's play compared to the madness lurking south of Siege. Better to die in the field than fall alive into the hands of a Cockroach cohort.

Returning veterans are often war-torn, severely wounded, and burnt out. When they return to their duty in Justitian, the time at the front weighs heavily on their souls. Some have lost comrades in the field, but others lost their humanity. The latter become unscrupulous and cold blooded representatives of their Cult when they carry out their duty, upholding the Codex with an iron fist and forgetting the very meaning of the word mercy.

REENACTMENT

For a long time, Reenactment was considered a minor crime. Offenders had their foreheads marked, and were assigned to heavy labour in the Cleft. Weeks later they were free once more.

However, this lenient sentencing is over. Senator Laakon passed a new law imposing a death sentence on Reenactors. The venerable Senator saw the work of the entire Judiciary soiled by liars and criminals disguising themselves as Judges and bringing shame to the Cult in a most foul manner. How could a Provider look up to a City Judge in awe if they can't be sure that they aren't dealing with a masked criminal? How can the Protectors who depend entirely on their squadmates go about their work when corrupt subjects can undermine the safety of their unit?

Today, anyone masking themselves in the dress of a Judge and mimicking a Protector or acting as an Advocate without being chosen as a member by the Judiciary has either lost their mind or simply has a death wish. Such imposters can only expect the most brutal of punishments. Convicted Reenactors are stretched between horses and ripped apart. Others are thrown into cages hanging from the Uptown wall with their arms and legs snapped, leaving them to starve to death on public display.

PROCLAIMERS

The Judges embody the law. In fact, they are the law. Can they ever be wrong in their counsel and their decisions? Or are their actions always legal under the governance of the legislative, judicial, and executive powers, and simply become the law in the very moment in which they come to pass? This is what the Judges declare to the people as they

lean forward, both hands resting firmly on their hammer. In rank and file, they appear like a pack of predators that has already discovered their next meal of fleeing convicts. Intimidation is a powerful weapon that requires far less effort than shattering a thief's hand with a Judgement hammer, or heating the branding iron over a fire.

Still, the question remains: are Judges above the law? What about those Judges who loudly yell the rules of the Codex over the heads of the passersby? Saliva sticks to the corners of their mouths, and their throats are hoarse, is there not a hint of fear in their tone as well? The answer is obvious to anyone who belongs to the Cult, because these so-called proclaimers are guilty. Guilty of arbitrariness, of being unfaithful to the Codex, of fratricide, of laziness.

The people know nothing of this. The proclaimers are to be treated with the same respect as the mounted Protector in the Outskirts, the watchman at the Water House, and the Advocate laden with heavy documents. Anyone who acts violently against a proclaimer will endure the full power of the Righteous Fist in retaliation. Even those within the Judiciary will not publicly defame one of their own. The Cult must appear united before its people, even if there is internal strife brewing and fronts hardening. However, once a convicted Judge returns to the barracks he faces a wall of rejection rising in front of him. Friends will refuse to sit with him during meals, and in the presence of venerable Judges he is forbidden to speak. The Cult demands that he reads the Codex from sundown to midnight to purify his mind. The next morning, he is to take position along the Stallion Streets once again and recite the wisdom he formerly spat on.

How is a Judge convicted? All it requires is a suspicion. Usually, a complaint from a citizen is enough for a note to be sent to the Office of Internal Affairs. The presiding Commissioner instructs an Assessor to observe the accused for a few days to gather evidence. If the suspicions are confirmed, a High Judge is notified and summons both the Assessor and his target. The accused presents his own defense, while the Assessor acts as a prosecutor. If, during the hearing, infidelity towards the Codex becomes evident, the High Judge closes the process with a conviction. For minor to moderate offenses, the Judge will serve as a proclaimer for a period of a few days to a couple of months. Only in extremely serious cases can he expect to be entirely exiled from the Judiciary.

CAMARADERIE

Nobody wants to be demoted to a proclaimer in view of their own comrades. Protectors rely on each other to save each other's lives and watch each other's backs. To betray this trust and in doing so dishonor the members of one's unit is considered a treasonous act, which is why Protectors often turn a blind eye to their comrades breaking away from the Codex. However, within the safety of a squad, corruption festers. One hand washes the other, after all, and anyone who has not been ratted out by his crew won't snitch on anyone else.

A fine was overinflated and the profit found its way into your pocket? Happens all the time! Made some arrangements with the Apocalyptics for a free visit to their brothels? Nobody saw anything! Cashed in on hush money from the Cartel to leave an alleged venue for a pit fight unreported? A man's gotta eat!

VIOLENT CRIMES

Murder and manslaughter are an epidemic in Justitian. Last year alone the city recorded more than 700 murders. Sometimes only the crime scene is discovered, with no sign of the corresponding corpse. Only days later do the bodies appear in the Defiler Streets, or are stumbled upon buried under a thin layer of dust out in the Rubble. Many of the bodies are never found.

In murder cases, the Office of Internal Affairs takes charge of the investigation. A Commissioner claims the case for himself and examines the crime scene to gather initial evidence. Following this, he appoints an Executioner and an Assessor to assist him in his task to unearth further evidence or pursue independent leads. In the meantime, the Commissioner collects all of the data in his office and broods over the crime. Commissioners have far reaching powers in Uptown. They can request video surveillance from the Cluster and sift through the data recorded at the Office of Locality. Bit by bit, they try to reconstruct the crime and pick up the killer's trail. Once they have identified a suspect, a squad of Protectors rides out to find the person of interest and bring them to the Cleft for interrogation. The work of the Commissioners is essential for the conviction of violent crimes, but the Office of Internal Affairs cannot even attempt to solve all of the vast number of murder cases, leaving more than half of them unpunished.

STEEL MONOLITH
Tech IV

DISTRICTS:
The Forecourt; The Steel Monolith; The Cleft

POPULATION:
Stable: ca. 90,000

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY:
Very high

FOOD SUPPLY:
Very high

RESIDENT CULTS:
Spitalians, Chroniclers, Hellvetics, Judges, Clanners, Scrappers

IMPORTANT AREAS:
Central Exchange; Elevator Platforms; Sorrow's Workshop; Stables

STEEL MONOLITH

Dawn breaks. The sun's faint glow pierces through the dense cloud cover. A single ray of light races diagonally across the vast expanse of the Borcan tundra from east to west, squeezing past the Steel Monolith and the Uptown wall to illuminate the Forecourt for a few hours.

People have already gathered here by the thousands. Junk dealers, Providers, and merchants jostling close to their market stalls. Breaths freeze in the morning chill, and most prepare for the hard day ahead with two deep sips of distillate to warm their bones. The Forecourt is Justitian's axis of life, the center of the city and Europe's largest marketplace. The entire world rotates around this triangular square in the shadow of the Steel Monolith, and it is this place with which all the clockworks of the Protectorate align.

Within a heartbeat, turmoil breaks out. Two hostile merchant families have collided and are trying to bash each other's skulls in. The women are tearing at each other's hair, while the children are clawing into one another like starving rats. A shot thunders aimlessly towards the sky, whipping the agitated mob apart. Protectors on towering steeds gallop in to separate the warring factions, while a youthful Advocate already scurries through the ranks to ask for any witnesses of the altercation. Not an instant later, an electric gong echoes across the Forecourt. The megaphone speakers jump to life across the entire square and the Cluster speaks: "Citizens! Today is the 27th day in the first month of the year 2598. The Alcove is open." Suddenly, blue headlights flash on the front of a huge building on the northern flank of the Forecourt and the whirring of dozens of rattling generators mingles with the morning air.

THE FORECOURT

Once, all roads led to Exalt. Now, they all lead to Justitian and converge at one point in the heart of the city: the Forecourt. Narrow alleys wind their way through seemingly endless rows of market stalls, where tens of thousands of traders and buyers besiege each other every day, haggling over every single item presented.

The smells coming from the soup kitchens and roast joints are overwhelming and intoxicate the senses. Bubbling stews here, sizzling pork lard there, roasted chestnuts, root vegetables, stewed veal strips, and grilled lamb meat in between. Scrappers beckon the cooks with Drafts for refills in their scraped-clean tin plates, fattening themselves up for the harsh winter time. In between, day laborers struggle to maneuver their supplies of goods through the crowds. The displays need to be restocked and one loses precious minutes being stuck in the scrum. In a nearby market alley the traffic comes to a sudden jam. A donkey has collapsed from exhaustion, and the merchant's entire load of wares has been scattered across the floor. In a panic, the man tries to protect his goods from the thieving children covering it like flies, drawing the attention of a unit of Protectors celebrating the end of their nightshift with a round of honey brandy. Originally, they had been looking forward to a round of well-deserved shut-eye in the barracks, but now they have to intervene to help some merchant and his fucking donkey.

At another corner of the Forecourt, a small group of Neolibyan pioneers stand out from the stream of visitors. With curious eyes, they pass through the alleys in search of unusual treasures or works of art and empty out entire stalls whenever they make a discovery.

During peak hours, in the morning and in the afternoon, the Forecourt turns into a vestibule of hell. Progressing through the crowds becomes a feat of labor on its own. The waiting lines that form move tormentingly slow. Pack animals block any hope of progress and it's impossible to avoid stepping in garbage and shit. The Peace Walk meanders above all of this and covers the entire Forecourt. From up here, the Judges keep an eye on the area and can intervene in case of a riot brewing.

When the evening finally arrives the stream of visitors drifts away in all directions and the Defilers take over the

Forecourt. Armed with shovels and brooms they swipe away the dirt of the day and clean the market alleys for the next morning.

THE ELEVATOR PLATFORMS

The only way up to the plateau is located at the tip of the Forecourt, where one can reach the elevator platforms. These two hydraulic marvels coordinate the flow of traffic between Uptown and Downtown, each of which having a payload capacity of over twenty tons: enough to carry the two hundred and fifty passengers who can cram onto a platform at the same time.

However, in order to board the platforms at all, one has to submit to the correct procedure. To sort through the rush all passengers must acquire an elevator token for 5 Drafts, queue up in the winding lines at the security gates, and show their valid citizenship papers. If they don't have papers, they need a guarantor who can vouch for them. Judges, Chroniclers, and Spitalians are exempt from this entire ordeal and are waved through, while all others have to walk through the installed metal detectors. Backpacks and panniers are ransacked by the Judges at random. If anyone has weapons on their person they must be handed over now and can be picked up later upon presentation of a valid token. The tokens should not be lost under any circumstances, because they are required to enter the platform on the way back down.

Once this access barrier has been overcome, the passengers congregate on the platform. A Roper runs along the security grid and blocks the entrance with a chain. He gives the mechanic in the control cockpit a hand signal clearing the elevator for ascent. A sudden jerk shakes those on the platform as colossal gears roar beneath their feet and bolted metal plates vibrate from the forces released.

The climb is a steep sixty meters upwards, and the bustle in the Forecourt gradually blurs into the colorless porridge of a fractured anthill far below.

SORROW'S WORKSHOP

The best courier in Justitian has her workshop in the city's central marketplace. Of course. Where else?

A small gate on the east side leads into a compound surrounded by barricades and barbed wire fence. Why the security measures? Sorrow stores precious Petro in her workshop and has to try and keep thieves away. The black gold is a rarity in Borca and hardly available anywhere in the city. She herself sources her supply from a pertinent trader who many only know as the African. How she can manage to cover the horrendous cost of the Petro is questionable at best, but it makes no sense to bother Sorrow about it: she is constantly booked out and has no time for explanations. She has long since ceased to accept assignments herself and has instead tasked two of her mechanics to take care of receiving the parcels and filling out the corresponding day passes.

Central Exchange

The Forecourt Alcove, also called Central Exchange in the common vernacular, is legendary. The Cluster served the Chroniclers as a fortress to entrench themselves against their enemies, while the Alcove at the foot of the Uptown plateau fulfilled its purpose as an upstream trading post and their bridge to the outside world. It was here that the first Drafts were issued, and it is here that the unstoppable rise of the Cult began when they first started to trade in artifacts and information, in doing so igniting Europe's economy for centuries to come. The Alcove is older than the Stukovs, the Judiciary, and even Justitian itself, and without this trading hub the entire Cult of the Scrappers would possibly not even exist.

In addition to its traditional role as an analysis center for artifacts, the Forecourt Alcove now also serves as a bank. Citizens pay their taxes to the Chroniclers. The cash boxes in turn are sorted, then taken by Protectors all the way to Judgement Hall where they are finally redistributed by Arbiters and delivered to the Uptown Offices. Any citizens who report tax fraud receive tax breaks themselves as a reward.

The Alcove has always been located in the same place, but its dimensions have grown over the centuries to adapt to the needs of the proliferating population. Like a colossal monster from another time, the fortified warehouse sits enthroned in the northwest tip of the Forecourt. Blue neon lights simulating barcodes flicker above the entrances where Judges and Chroniclers stand guard together, regulating admissions.

Inside the Alcove, the air is motionless. Static discharges hiss through the muggy chamber. Everything clicks and crackles. The Scrappers crowd with their dusty finds in front of the secured barrier to have their trading goods analyzed. They are all here hoping to exchange possible artifacts for hard cash, or to secure information about a theoretical cache. A dirt digger arrives at the barrier and places his find into a metal tray. Behind the bars, the Agents take the offered object for appraisal purposes and confer, while the Scrapper awaits the bid and chews on his gaping lips. Why do they take so long? The Agents want to make sure and call after Deselect, the supervising Chronicler, via the Alcove's Intercom.

The contours of a fat legless maggot suddenly peel out of a dark corner of the warehouse. Tethered in a corset of chains, the ugly Chronicler floats through the hall and descends on a windlass to inspect the artifact. He yells in disgust, "garbage" without paying any more attention to the object.

The Scrapper at the barrier feels his heart drop out of his chest. He was so convinced he had found something of value that he had placed all of his hopes in the object. The Agents do not care about his anguish, and buzz him off with a: "Scrap. No deal!"

CODENAMES

A young City Judge steps down from the Peace Walk to a backyard, less than one hundred yards from the Central Exchange. Security check. His steps cause the rats nesting in the trash heaps of the dark alley to scatter. The Judge spits his tobacco leaf on the floor and looks around. Nothing suspicious. Only a strip of fresh white paint drips down from a wall ledge. With a heave, the Judge pushes a rotten piece of wood aside to get a better look. A marking in large letters hides behind it: QUICKSTART.

He can't work out the meaning, as he runs his finger across the white paint. Still wet. Maybe fifteen minutes old, by his reckoning. He jots it down in his notebook. One last look around. No one here, he realises in surprise, but this won't be the last message he'll find that day.

For years, there have been recorded discoveries of such wall markings in alleys and backyards in the immediate vicinity of the Forecourt. STRINGER, CRAWLER, TORRENT, CIPHER, GATEWAY and many others of this kind have already been identified.

The Judges suspect these inscriptions are the codenames of Chroniclers, but they do not understand the context. What are they for, why are they being splashed on these walls, and who is putting them there?

The Cluster refuses to comment, and denies any link between the writings and the Cult.

The Cleft

Crammed between the Steel Monolith and the Uptown plateau lies Justitian's labor camp. A blackened prison wall topped by spiked iron spears and barbed wire fences off the territory and keeps prying eyes away. Bunker-like watchtowers rise at strategic points along the wall. At night, the floodlights ignite to soak the courtyard in bright white. No one thinks of escape here.

Newcomers are instead greeted by a cynical lettering at the main gate: "Carpe Diem" is written here even though most inmates hardly understand the meaning behind it. Welcome to the Cleft.

Inside, elongated barracks with flat gabled roofs line up in rows. The windows resemble tiny loopholes at best, and the walls are whitewashed with chalk. A shrill whistle sounds, and the doors on the narrow sides fly open. Ragged figures rush to the rendezvous point in front of the buildings and gang up for the morning roll call. They all carry the markings of the Judges: the Scrapper with the dark circles under his eyes and the white stubble of beard standing in the first row has a blue line running from the forehead down to his chin - the sign of a repeat offender. In the row behind him, the girl with the matted hair displays glowing red hands. She was probably caught stealing something from a trader's display. Many of the detainees here are outlaws but not felons.

Therefore, society gives them a chance: they are allowed to abolish their guilt in the Cleft and thereby help Justitian grow to greatness. Day after day they haul rocks out of the Crack, shovel dust from the roads, dig wells, and do as they are commanded by bored Judges. At night they return to the Cleft, pass through the entrance portal, gather for the last time on the square in front of their barracks, let themselves be counted, and finally sink into their meager berths.

Gregor Kant is the overseer of the labor camp, and one of the most polarising personalities in the city. The Judiciary loves him, the people hate him. Through humiliation and discipline he intends to forge these incarcerated criminals into better human beings. There are hardly any disturbances in the Cleft these days, but hardly any spark of life either. Those who end up here should console themselves that they would have fared far worse in the Defiler Streets.

For Scrappers who have never left Borca and never seen an operational car, Sorrow's buggy is the main attraction. With watering mouths they jostle at the fence to catch the merest glimpse of the processes taking place inside the workshop. Every oil change and tire pressure measurement causes them to gasp loudly and break out into wild discussions. Everyone here would give an arm and a leg to ride in such a Bygone vehicle just once in their lifetime.

However, only the most affluent of customers can afford Sorrow's services and are allowed to enter the site at all. Allegedly, not only the Patriarchs of the Advocate families stroll in and out of the compound, but the Ambassador of Tripol is also supposedly a recurring visitor, a patron that Sorrow requires to keep her business running. As such, she is smeared by the vilest of defamations by those who are envious of her success, as they openly call her the African's slut. The insults merely bounce off of Sorrow's balanced temper. She is aware of her special position, and the value of her courier services in Justitian. The little hate she earns in return won't do her any harm: just part of doing business.

STABLES

Towards the east, the Forecourt stinks of horse droppings and wet hay. All horses in use by the Judiciary are held in large paddocks on the Forecourt. These riding stables serve as a collective camp for the stallions available to the cavalry, and it is here that the Protectors claim their mounts early in the morning for their daily duties.

Each rider is assigned his own animal. If a Judge comes along with a stubborn stallion who can neither be tamed nor broken in, the animal will be sent back to Newcrest for riding training and the rider will be provided with a substitute horse.

Throughout the day, stable boys are busy distributing food deliveries for the horses, clearing out the stalls and caring for the animals. Ropers walk in and out of the paddocks and unload freshly ordered supplies of new horseshoes and bridles from the Steel Monolith. Horseflies the size of a man's thumb speed through the musty air of the stables, leading the Spitalians to constantly complain about keeping the paddocks within the city limits. But they have no business here: when it comes down to the defense of Justitian, it is up to the Judiciary alone to make the calls. Those

dome-headed assholes will just have to deal with it. No matter how much they talk about spores, germs, and illnesses, the Judges won't allow anyone to mess with their horses.

APPEARANCES

Nowhere in Justitian is the concentration of people greater than around the Forecourt, and the density of mounted Protectors is just as high here. Anyone who dares to cause trouble in the area should be sure to dress warm, because the Judges will counter any form of uprising and violence with a dose of correspondingly cold cruelty. To the Judges this marketplace is the node of the city, their main source of income, and a showpiece. Justitian's utopia must always be visible and reflected by the Forecourt's appearance, regardless of whether other parts of Downtown are on the verge of rotting away from inside.

In order to maintain the image of Justitian's greatness, the Judges are constantly scaring off unpleasant characters, removing filthy rag-pickers, and dragging drunken thugs into custody. While a blind eye might be turned towards the scum in other neighborhoods, the Protectors in the markets are anything but squeamish and will strike at the slightest hint of quarrelsome or antisocial behaviour.

THE UPTOWN WALL

Directly ahead, the Uptown wall rises sixty meters into the air. A colossal construction dotted with perforations along its concrete surface and speckled with openings, from which a mix of dirty broth and condensate trickles down incessantly. In summer the water evaporates to leave behind rusty red stripes that blend with dust, while in winter icicles form, which are detonated by prison workers so they do not break off and accidentally kill someone.

Once upon a time there were huge signs on the Uptown wall proclaiming to everyone who owned the plateau. Rectangular shadows the size of a Surge Tank and ruptured steel pins that protrude from the wall of the plateau in many places testify to this ancient legacy, but the inscriptions on the plates have never been transcribed.

The Steel Monolith

The boy with the harelip tugs steadily at his mother's skirt. She struggles to ignore her son, instead digging through the pile of potatoes in the market display, trying to separate the rotten from the healthy. There are never enough Drafts available to supplement the weekly shopping. Just as she's about to start haggling with the Provider over the price, her boy starts to pluck and pull at her clothing again. With her head almost glowing in frustration, she whirls around with an angry hiss, "What the hell is wrong with you, Alef?"

Alef gives no answer, gazing upwards with eyes wide with fear and mouth hanging open. "Can the Steel Monolith fall on our heads?" he asks with a childish lisp. The woman, completely overburdened by the question, has no idea how to answer other than to give her son a slap in the face, the smack resounding in the packed market.

"Stop dreaming, you idiot!" she screams as she drags her child back home by his hand.

The monumental landmark of Justitian, and the patron saint of the entire district, towers ninety meters above the endless sea of dirty houses. The main tower constantly spits fire and belches black clouds of smoke. Goods are pulled up from the Forecourt on cranes and winches, swaying back and forth on steel cables through the air until they reach the unloading platform at the crown of the Monolith.

This is the Steel Monolith, Justitian's Arms Factory and the most important building in all of Downtown. Nowhere else has promoted the rise of the Judiciary more, for it is here that the Judges' entire armament is produced: from muskets, cannons, propellants, and explosives to hammers, bridles for horses, horseshoes, chains, and the crowns the Senators bear on their heads. A private tailor even manufactures the heavy leather coats and armored vests worn by the Protectors.

Behind all this bustle are the ominous Steel Masters, a Clan inhabiting the Monolith and kindling the fires of the forges. Throughout Downtown little is known about these strangers, except that they call themselves "Cloud Dwellers" and divide themselves into the families Ogota and Gotokai.

Originally, the Steel Monolith was called the Bastion. In Justitian's early years, thousands of punitive laborers were assigned to construct the arms factory on top of the crown. Hundreds plummeted from the transport gondolas spanning the gap between Monolith and Uptown, crashing through roofs or smashing into the pavement. They all gave their lives for Justitians invincibility.

THE AERIAL RAILWAY

All faces on the Forecourt turn toward the sky when the aerial railway lurches far above the heads of visitors and travels from Uptown all the way over to the Steel Monolith. The floating gondola made of rust and tin always makes for a good spectacle.

Ever since the founding of the city the people of Downtown have been fascinated by the technical marvels Uptown has to offer. However, ordinary mortals will never get the chance to soar over the people below. It is exclusively reserved for Judges and Ropers. While the former conduct their checkups on the Steel Masters, the latter operate the gondola and ensure safe passage while also transporting iron planks, barrels full of sulfur and other chemicals, as well as weapons and ammunition.

When special occasions call for it, Archot boards the aerial railway with select guests to show off the Steel Monolith's interior, taking a moment to demonstrate Justitian's supremacy in the world.

AESHMA'S IRONWORKS

Anyone who's hunting for metal goods at the foot of the Steel Monolith inevitably encounters Aeshma's Ironworks. The Manufacturer is an enterprising woman, Scrapper through and through, and trades in the very finest metal wares. The Ironworks specializes in the recycling of scrap metals, as dozens of workers roll out tin sheets, cut steel, and rid iron of rust. The goods are sorted on pallets and fastened with chains to finally reach the Monolith via a loader crane for further processing.

THE POWDER MILL

The powder mill connects to the Steel Monolith at its very base. Here is where the black powder for the Judiciary's firearms are produced. The Knacker's Office in the Outskirts provides the saltpetre, which is extracted from the Defiler Streets. Simultaneously, the sulfur supplies excavated in Cavernis and the crates of charcoal from Born converge, ready to be mixed.

Ropers and Steel Masters operate the powder mill, while the Judges monitor the process, seal the powder kegs, move them into storage, or release them for resale. Justitian produces far more black powder than it can ever shoot, and the Judiciary has long since turned the surplus into another source of income. Today anyone can acquire even finest black powder on every street corner at half price: 1 Draft per gram.

THE CROWN

Up here, it smells of sulfur and smoke, the elixir of life of the Steel Masters.

Liquid iron pours out of the blast furnace and is distributed through a network of cooling channels. Every gust of wind causes the viscous mass to glow. Sparks fly, as the air chars the nostrils. For a few minutes, the Steel Monolith shines in an infernal orange and spews flames like an erupting volcano.

The crown is the heart of the Monolith. In the main forge, workers rush from one workstation to the next, lowering glowing steel weapons into water basins, polishing musket barrels, engraving rifle butts, and making lead bullets.

Everything is in bustling locomotion and each Steel Master knows his commands, laying in wait for his call while maintaining the orderly process at his station. Coordination and precision determine the daily routine and regulate the mass production of the judicial arsenals.

The Steel Masters

They came from far away. On their seemingly endless journey they saw everything: scorched lands and sunken continents, blasted ruins, fields covered in ashes, dead seas, and basalt rock formations that poured out into the ocean. But nowhere did they encounter other people.

They were forced to settle along the shorelines, sometimes for only a few years before the resources of the area were exhausted and they set sail once again to find the nearest bay that could feed them for a while. Seasons passed and their skiffs became their homes. In this fleet of generation ships they floated across the waves and took from the ocean what they needed in order to survive.

At some point, they reached a strait at the tip of Africa where they slipped past gargantuan icebergs and managed to enter foreign waters. They pursued the coastline northward, but many months would pass before they ventured ashore.

Then, in 2306 the time had come. The thirteen barges landed on the west coast of Franka and the families entered mainland Europe. Nobody knew the strangers, and neither did they recognise anyone familiar. But to the families, who had spent more than a century on their ships, a new world opened up.

They set out to explore the foreign land and its inhabitants. A handful of their tribes moved to Saint-Brieuc, mingling with the local Scrappers. Years later, they would come to be called Salt Wolves and Mud Crabs. Other families moved south, where it is said they made their way to the southern coast to cross the Mediterranean Sea and reach Africa. Three families traveled east, towards the rising sun. Their names were Ogota, Assam, and Gotokai.

Once in Borca, they came across a thriving enclave called Ferropol, an emerging weapons factory under the rule of Exalt, a city full of visionary people with daring ideas. The rulers of Ferropol welcomed the traveling families like old friends. They exchanged knowledge and eventually coronated them as the Steel Masters, granting them the fire of their forges to allow for Exalt's power to shine. The Steel Masters had finally found their new home. Their craft was sought after and they were courted. Side by side with the elders they sat at the council table and negotiated the fortunes of the realm. It was a golden age.

DOWNFALL

Out of nowhere, the City Wars befell the Black Lung and death followed on baleful wings. Within merely a couple of weeks, the entire region turned into a slaughterhouse and drowned in rivers of blood. Ferropol bided its time, hoping to escape unscathed. But then the haze of pestilence blew through the streets and the news that the warlord Cultrin had abandoned his army leaked. Death bells rang night after night. Panic was followed by shock, then bitter despair.

It was not long before a new power rode into Ferropol. On heavy steeds, and wrapped in cloaks, they conquered Exalt's weapons factory. The Steel Masters fought back, but the newcomers were unstoppable. They called themselves Judges and they had come to hold their court of vengeance. In one fell swoop, they captured the Assam tribe and executed all of their chieftains in public. The remaining families were threatened with the same fate if they did not submit to the rule of the Judges.

With their heads bowed the Ogota and Gotokai stepped out of their refuge. The very next instant they were in chains. The Judges rounded up all the Steel Masters and marched them in a long line northeast, heading for their new capital, Justitian, which thrived in the shadow of Exalt's demise.

NEW BEGINNINGS

From then on, the Steel Masters were slaves to the Judiciary. They were banished to the Bastion and ordered to rebuild the arms factories of Ferropol atop its crown. Thus, the Steel Monolith was born and the fate of the three families finally sealed. The Assam went extinct first. Bereft of their chieftains the tribe withered, the men became infertile and the genetic material dried up. Only the Ogota and Gotokai remained.

The Judges were worried. They wanted to make sure that the other two families didn't fade into history with the passage of time at all costs, and so they decided to artificially keep their slaves alive. The Steel Masters should lack for nothing within in their prison, neither food nor clothing nor pleasure. They were allowed to preserve their traditions and improve their skills. They were allowed to exchange knowledge with Ropers, obtain books and manuscripts, open laboratories, and research new formulas. But Downtown was denied to them. Never would they be allowed to mingle with the people, instead they had to endure a secret existence.

TODAY

About four hundred Steel Masters inhabit the Monolith. They are the remnants of the third generation of the Ogota and Gotokai. The families are aligned behind Grand Masters, whose entire purpose is to help the Judiciary in fulfilling its expansionist fantasies. They are the source of the Cult's raw power. But their blood has become weak and hereditary diseases plague the youngest offspring.

Worse still, there is a divide that has recently broken the community in two. An argument has estranged the families of the Ogota and Gotokai and the chieftains are no longer willing to talk to each other. A whole series of projects that can only be accomplished in united collaboration between the two families have already been abandoned.

The Judges are infuriated by what they see as a petty dispute. Arbiters are sent to the Steel Monolith in droves to settle the argument, but the two Grand Masters remain resolute and adamantly refuse to come to

the negotiation table. This mutual back and forth of accusations and blemished honor has been going on for well over a year now. It is only a matter of time before the Judges lose their temper and resort to more forceful methods to put an end to the squabbling.

STRUCTURE

The family structures of Ogota and Goto-kai are almost identical. At the top of every family there is a Grand Master. He is the direct descendant of the founder and always the oldest of his Clan. Only death can relieve him of his office. If he dies, the eldest son takes his place. The Grand Master preserves the traditions of the family: the children must be taught the ancient writings, these patterns of lines and dots, applied with broad brushstrokes, are the last thing that the Steel Masters were able to salvage from their past into the present; In addition, the daily routine is determined by numerous rituals. Every day at sunset during the milk tea ceremony the family comes together to recover from the exertions of the day and to prepare for the long work night ahead. Thick fumes, smelling of tree resin, fill the prayer room, while the first family members spread their reed mats and immerse themselves in the prayers. In the background, next to the water boiler and the small tea shelf, the reliquary shrines in which the bones of past Grand Masters are kept are lined up in a row. Each shrine is a work of art, made from stainless steel and interlaced with golden threads winding up towards a point topped with a gold-plated ball. Allegedly, the individual sections symbolize the five elements: water, earth, fire, air, and ether

Even though the Steel Masters count the pearls of their prayer chains every morning, and practice inner retreat, their faith in their formerly numerous gods has faded with the passage of time: all that remains is a mystical world full of elemental powers and spirits. They consider fire to be a servant with a tempestuous nature, one that cannot be subdued without air and water: angered within the forge by the bellows, the flames transform into demons, which in turn make the iron submissive, before they are expelled again in the cooling basin. In the past, the earth was considered the best friend of the Steel Masters, for it gave birth to the ore from which they formed the steel. The endless ocean they once sailed on their long journey, however, lost its importance. Today, only the oldest Steel Masters remember this legendary crossing of the waters.

Since their imprisonment in the Steel Monolith, they have come closer to the sky and its clouds than ever before, and the aerial spirits became their constant companions. To keep them favorable, the Steel Masters set up wind chimes and collect bird feathers from which they make talismans in hopes that the spirits of the air will one day have mercy and lift their most faithful followers from their shackles on Earth.

STUKOV QUARTER

STUKOV QUARTER
Tech III

DISTRICTS:
Brennen

POPULATION:
Stable: ca. 220,000

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY:
Medium

FOOD SUPPLY:
High

RESIDENT CULTS:
Spitalians, Chroniclers, Judges, Clanners, Scrappers

IMPORTANT AREAS:
The Old Fortress; The Garamond; The Hypogeum; The Great Northern Wall

Justitian's origin is sealed within the seams of ancient brickwork, hidden deep within the foundations of the Stukov Quarter. Long before the Judges and Chroniclers formed their alliance, the territory of Justitian belonged to the Clans of the Black Lung. They named themselves after their heroic leaders and forefathers who had called their Clans to this rural patch of land and claimed it for themselves. Their names were Stukov, Brenni, Deever, Adiki, and Krawe, and they prayed to the spirits that live beyond the horizon. Their way of life, however, was incompatible with the emerging Cult of the Judges. Initially, when the Judges claimed the Bastion, their relationship was still a peaceful one. But the entitlement grew. As time marched on, the founding district transformed and was brought to heel. Today, it is almost exclusively inhabited by citizens of Justitian.

A gust of enforced peace drifts through the streets, past the shops open until late in the evening and the people strolling around kindly greeting each other. In large squares the statues and stone sculptures conjure up imagery of the citizens of yore. It's quiet. Uncomfortably quiet. Jurymen play chess with their comrades at a small tavern facing the plaza. They look up in confusion as a delegation of Advocates rushes down the street, armed with folded documents and heavy books. They are the Manteufels. In single file they stride towards a brewery at the next intersection, where they will spend the next few hours entrenched in discussions over obsolete paragraphs in the Codex and how to revise them. The people of this district subject themselves to their honorable neighbors, as the Advocates are in control of Downtown and the Stukov Quarter is not just their territory but their ministry of chosen affairs.

THE OLD FORTRESS

Nowadays, little remains of Stukov's splendor. Only the Old Fortress is still enthroned in the center of the district, jutting forward like a relic of a time long past, incapable of adapting to the constant modernization of the city around it. Defiantly, the fortress sits on the banks like a stubborn child refusing to grow up, like a distant memory that no one wants to reflect on.

Its footprint is still the size of the original Stukov settlement. Once upon a time the chieftains led a bloody civil war against the mounted invaders from behind these walls, but they failed to repel them. The Judges were able to conquer the Fortress. For a while, they used it as a war camp until it was graciously passed back into the hands of the Quarter's residents decades later, who have been desperately trying to breathe new life into the site ever since.

Several entrances secured with rusted portcullises lead into the narrow compound. Alleys snake their way up the small hill, over to the watchtowers and battlements. The houses are carved from rough granite and coated with blooming red lichen, with stubborn ivy entangling the brickwork.

Three main buildings divide the Old Fortress and are surrounded by a multitude of adjoining side wings and warehouses. Finally, in the town hall, they come together from all across the Quarter: the oldest of the Stukovs and the eldest of the Brenni, men and women on their deathbeds refusing to forget the times when their parents and grandparents were still counted amongst the free peoples. Their larger-than-life leaders who once navigated their Clans through a tumultuous history, and were able to protect them from the ruthlessness of their new rulers, have long since faded away into the past. All that remains are these leaderless descendants.

The fossilized men and withered women in the meeting room pass around their tea cups, sharing pastries, digging through faded memorabilia and wallowing in self-pity.

"Where is our pride?" croaks one eyed Trevil of the Brenni. Everyone in the gathering finds an excuse to look away, or clear their throat. No one here can think how to instigate a rebellion, and even if they could, they lack the weapons or resources to fuel an uprising. But that won't stop them from romanticising the idea.

“We could sway the Anabaptists over to our side!” says white haired Gilda, from the Stukovs.

"Anabaptists be damned, I’d take the Scrappers over yet another Orgiastic gang forcing us into mass baptism! No thanks!" gasps the frail Matjus, his walking cane waving wildly through the air. This keeps going for hours, until the withered gathering becomes too tired to remember where the discussion is going, and instead simply starts regurgitating the same tired topics from the beginning. As long as Justitian's Clans are represented by this narcoleptic council of geriatric grandmothers and fathers, the Judges have no need to fear the outbreak of a civil revolt in the Stukov Quarter.

GUILDS

If there is one thing the Stukov Quarter has a surplus of, it’s artisans. Dozens of guildhouses cling to the base of the Old Fortress, specialising in the production of all kinds of commodities. Tailors, shoemakers, wagon-builders, perfume distillers, cartographers, glassblowers, and many others all huddle close together, wall to wall. If a guild can establish itself in this area, among the relentless competition and search for recognition common amongst the craftsmen, then it is considered very successful. The guilds regularly celebrate themselves, exhibiting their latest creations every Sunday in front of their shops in hopes of collecting orders from the passing population. Spitalians rummage around in the stands, acquiring goods for the Spital, while the Judges come along to buy toys for their children or hire a carpenter to make furniture for their homestead out in the Rubble.

Even the Hellvetics can be found wandering through, rubbing their eyes in disbelief as they scoff at the displays full of meaningless knicknacks. A true soldier needs little more than his Trailblazer and the armor he wears on his body. Everything mundane chains a man to his belongings, making him vulnerable. Those who have nothing, want for nothing. Nobody should be surprised that the Hellvetic model of austerity has not yet become a functional life formula for expansionist societies. The walking Harnesses are just as dependent on Justitian’s exports as anyone else, but it feels good to consider oneself in the right. Cultivating the militarily imposed asceticism of the Cult brings a moral superiority of its own.

SELF-CONFIDENCE

Other than Tech-Central, the Stukov Quarter makes up the largest and most populated region of Justitian in terms of area. Stretching over the northern part of the city, it has now completely swallowed up the nearby district of Brennen. Even though the resident population is made of a mix of various Clans, most of the inhabitants are proud owners of citizenship papers. They count themselves among the beneficiaries of the policies enacted from Uptown, enjoy-

Stories

The Stukov Quarter comes alive through its legends and myths. Anyone trying to learn something about the people settles down in one of the large guest taverns and listens in to tales from returning reindeer hunters or old druids, who pull the audience under their spell in the light of smoldering logs and blazing fire pans.

These performances are part of a long tradition, and although many of them are nothing more than fictitious parables, they sometimes include anecdotes and interesting set pieces from the history of the great city.

One popular narrative tells of the Supreme Judge Lithor, who was accused of high treason and sentenced to public execution after his trial. Lithor was condemned to jump from the walls of Uptown: sixty meters straight down. But instead of a painful death, the traitor miraculously survived the fall, shattering only his legs and hips. The incident was touted by the Advocates as a sign of his innocence, and it was soon followed by an official pardon. Lithor survived for another four years after his recovery and served as a crippled consultant to his successor, Wenkmann.

Another story tells of a boy who fell into the central shaft of the Stukov public well and survived. A major rescue operation was initiated, Protectors and the Fire Watch assembled, waiting to rappel down below to recover the child, but found themselves blocked by Chroniclers at the entrance to the Water House. Refusing to explain themselves, they denied the rescue squad the opportunity to make the descent. Three days later, the child suddenly appeared in the Cross Quarter and was quickly brought back to his parents by the Anabaptists. The boy was visibly startled and confused by his experience, and couldn't give any solid explanation about how he escaped from the well shaft. The only indication that anything had happened to the boy were two red marks on his temples. The mysterious story reached the Spitalians in Uptown, and the Hippocrat Oswald Keszler personally decided to look into the matter and uncover the child's memories via hypnosis. However, it was not to be. On the day of the scheduled examination at a public hospital, a bucking stallion burst out into the middle of the street, trampling the boy to death.

ing the comfort of all of the amenities Justitian has to offer. There are rarely any riots or violent outbursts in the Stukov Quarter: the Peace Walk is well stocked, Jurymen control the public wells and keep a night watch over the neighborhood, while the Advocate Houses lend the entire Quarter its own little feeling of grandeur.

On public holidays, the streets and squares are flooded with vibrant life. Citizens organise sports competitions between rivaling streets, the breweries hand out free mugs of beer, and head-strong youths gather in gangs to intimidate Scrapper children or make fun of passing Defilers. Sometimes the insults spewed on such occasions turn into fist fights, but in comparison to the mass brawls that regularly erupt in the Harbor or in the Outskirts these encounters are hardly worth writing home about; the youngest generation of Stukov's children is striving to discover their own self-confidence and carve out their own little place in the heart of Justitian.

THE GARAMOND

The Garamond is the oldest inn in Justitian, and it wears this title with pride. Allegedly, within these venerable walls Supreme Judges broke bread, Advocates redrafted the fundamental passages of the Codex, and legendary Executioners rested their heads. No one can really tell how much of this hearsay is true. Adalia, the landlord, is an old fogey who intentionally mixes fairy tale with truth to spin her own yarn and entertain her guests for a little while.

Located on the north side of the Old Fortress, the Garamond is reserved for members of high society with a generous budget. One night will cost 100 Drafts for a bed alone before even considering the cost of a meal. But it is worth it. The inn employs four Frankan cooks, who each deliver on their promise of serving exquisite food, beer, distillate, root brandy, honey wine, and the finest herbal liqueurs from Brennen which all help to comfort the excessive prices. However, more important than the food is the chance to brush shoulders with the Advocates. Many of the families send their heralds to argue over Codex passages in the Garamond's halls, making arrangements or voicing mutual threats. Anyone looking for a way in pays the extortionate costs, takes a seat at the bar, and waits for the Advocates and their scribes to appear. A well placed round of brandy or wine and one will be recognised by the regulars as a generous patron. Such rituals are important. Anyone who disrespects the Advocates will find many doors slamming shut before them. In addition to the Judges, many of the family members who are active in the public sector also can be found in their entourage. Impressing the public

servant of the Office of Locality with an act of courtesy, may lead to her remembering the gesture later on, making it easier to acquire citizenship papers. If a small gift finds its way into the bloated hands of the examiner from the Office of Civil Economics, one will have less to fear when the time comes to certify the harvest. What's that? A form has disappeared? Ah well, happens all the time, with so many forms it's impossible to keep track of them all!

Other than the amenities of the bed, alcohol, good food, and access to the Advocate families, people are driven to this place because of the storytellers. Every evening, after the sun has set, a show begins in front of the crackling log fire. A local man appears before the assembled guests, telling stories, rumors, legends, and myths that all took place in Justitian or the Protectorate. Some of these narratives stretch far back into the past, others are rooted in current affairs. After a few hours, the haunting is over, and the guests toss their Drafts into a bowl to reward the narrator for his performance.

THE HOUSE OF MAPS

The House of Maps can be recognized from afar by its bright red walls, sticking out of the colorless neighborhood like a fly agaric surrounded by a forest of rotten tree trunks. The south wall of the building is adorned by a bronze plaque more than six paces in length. A huge map of the Protectorate showing its largest extents up to the year 2585 has been etched into the metal. This is just one of the many masterpieces of the Scrapper who inhabits the House of Maps, almost always referred to as the Cartographer by the people of this district.

Neighbors consider the reclusive scholar to be a quirky contemporary, who can't hold a conversation about anything other than dried up river patterns, cratered landscapes, or political borders. Even so, everyone is aware of his life's work, for the Cartographer is a historian keeping the memory of the legendary Stukov, the founder of the Clan, alive by any means necessary.

Anyone entering the atrium of the House of Maps will immediately understand what that means. The garden is decorated with busts of Stukov hewn from a variety of rocks that can only be found in the Black Lung. In dozens of pots, hundreds of species of shrubs, lichens, and ferns flourish, that otherwise survive exclusively in the Borcan tundra.

The cool rooms on the ground floor of the three-storey building are home to a museum filled with bizarre exhibits. One wall is covered in jewelry, flint chains, and bone daggers and spears - objects which are otherwise found only clutched by the broodmothers of the Cockroach Clan. Next to them stands the emerald stone crown of an Allfather of the Taunar - a Clan that once ruled over Nullpellia in the south before being extinguished almost thirty years ago. Next up are the dusty bones of a Stukov Nomad, a denizen of the great salt desert in the north, which lead to a damaged radio exhibit collected from an Enemoi scout. This is followed by Gendo skulls painted with Scrapper runes, rusty children's toys belonging to a Liquan Exalter, and a series of framed Most Wanted posters from different decades listing rewards that were offered for the heads of these fugitive criminals. The most famous of these being the Bear Brothers, the Hellvetic deserter Gram, as well as the siblings Adabra and Onyia from the Cult of the Scourgers.

One thing becomes obvious during the visit. The Cartographer is an obsessive man collecting every piece of memorabilia that the Black Lung has to offer, no matter how profane its origin. In order to supply this pedantic collection, he must have an almost inexhaustible source of Drafts at his disposal with which he finances expeditions, acquires map fragments and testimonials, and collects cultural assets from across the entire region. Nothing seems to be left to chance, and each exhibit is analyzed in detail and lovingly restored to come closer to his one true goal: assembling a Borcan Encyclopedia featuring all of the indigenous Clans, flora, fauna, and geographic anomalies of the ancient land.

A patriotic endeavor of gargantuan proportions that will put every other such project that came before it to shame.

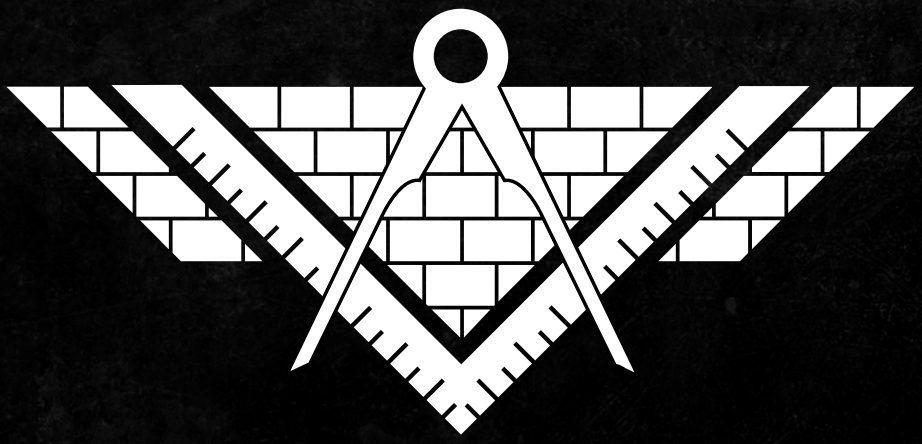
THE HYPOGEUM

A group of punitive workers lines up in front of the double-door cargo hatch on the back wall of the Hypogeum. The foreman: three-point tattoo, blue line across the mouth, Orgiastic - possibly quarreled with the Judges once too often. He makes a gesture to the convict at the very back of the train: Jehammedan tattoos, red forehead, Ismaeli - possibly defied the Judges once too often.

The Ismaeli loosens the anchoring of a retaining chain and a single block of ice weighing several tons slips down from the wing of the heavy duty sleigh. Armed with iron bars the other convicts maneuver the square slab of glacier ice over a ramp of smooth-cut wooden logs until it reaches the hatch, tilts forward, and thunders into the basement vault of the Hypogeum below. Done! The foreman whistles and with a circling hand movement he signals to prepare the next slab for discharge.

Ice is important. It cools perishable foods, refreshes citizens in summer, and preserves corpses. The Hypogeum in the Stukov Quarter is the main warehouse for all deliveries hauled by the prisoners from the Ice Barrier. In the barrel shaped underground vault with a capacity of thousands of cubic meters, the ice blocks are chiseled into smaller units before being resold.

Here Spitalians buy their loads for the Knacker's Office and Protectors procure ice for the cold storage that lies hidden in the Cemetery of the Judiciary. On sweltering days in August, the children of the neighborhood queue up in front of the Hypogeum and beg Stavanger, the overseer, to hire them as volunteers cutting ice.



The Great Northern Wall

The Great Northern Wall is something special. Once it was Archot's obsession. The Supreme Judge wanted to seal off Justitian, and grant the city a fortification worthy of its splendor.

A wall designed to cover the entire city perimeter was contracted. It was supposed to be insurmountable and able to withstand any army. The promises were great, the urge for action even greater. It was only after laying the foundation stones and fencing off the northern side of the Stukov Quarter that the first murmur arose. The workers lagged behind and couldn't cope with the exponential growth of the city. Justitian was sprawling rampant in all directions, and all the anchor points and milestones that were set in place for the construction of the barricade were obsolete after just a few months.

Archot demanded a faster construction phase, but in the second year after his call, the workers ran out of building material. Cavernis, Leadfield, and Chalk Breach were all unable to provide enough brickwork to guarantee the progress of the project. Archot grew furious. He swiftly decreed that Tech-Central also had to support the construction of the Great Northern Wall with metal scrap. After all, the security of the entire city was ultimately dependant on the completion of this monumental work of architecture!

A third year passed, and it became clear that the wall had long since lost all of its logic. During inspections of the construction site, it became evident that the chief Architect had taken shortcuts to appease Archot. The masonry was perforated in many places, lined with cavities and voids, and entire stages of the wall were fragile or held together by barely adequate building material. Even worse, Scrappers were living within the wall. Scavengers had taken up residence within several sections during the second construction phase and had chosen the building site as their new domicile. In some places, they secretly skimmed away building materials just to resell them elsewhere on the site.

The Great Northern Wall was nothing but a towering mockery, and the first disgrace in the Supreme Judge's hitherto immaculate career. He would never recover from it, and the Great Northern Wall marked the turning point of his stellar rise to power.

The project was cancelled. In front of the Senates, Archot explained that the concept of a defensive wall no longer seemed to be a valid undertaking, for Justitian was undoubtedly the mightiest power on the entire continent and did not have to fear nor hide from any foreign power.

All other wall projects in the city ground to a halt. Today, the remains of the southern wall rise like a gnawed skeleton on the foothills of the Outskirts and the Guest Quarter, visually separating the underlying Jehammedan Quarter from the rest of the city. The only function this bulwark still provides is to ensure entry control, and to search the Jehammedan merchants entering the city center.

The eastern ramparts reflect the bleak megalomania of the Judiciary, as whole areas have been torn down and reused by Scrappers, who use the debris to expand their dwellings in Tech-Central.

Brennen

The streets are paved, the stone houses three-stories tall, the heavy doors sealed with black tar. Cast-iron rings and handrails jut from the walls, the so-called plague handles which the sick and hopeless clung onto over a century ago.

Long ago, Brennen was the healer district of Justitian. The dentists, surgeons, and pharmacists living here were respected people, and they were rich. Mosaic images and faded portraits made of blue shards and turquoise pebbles decorate the stone lanes of the neighborhood, pointing to the honorable members of the old healer dynasties. Frescoes intertwine along the walls, and names have been carved in door arches. They were advertising and signposts alike.

Then came the Spitalians. At the time a typhoid wave was running wild among the population, and thousands shaken by fever and pain desperately dragged their frail bodies to Brennen. The healers managed to lower the fever and fight the nausea, but curing the hellish disease was beyond their capabilities. The Spitalians needed just two weeks. In Justitian's main squares and markets, they gave out beads of a brown mass wrapped in paper, ten to each inhabitant. The Judges issued a decree that each citizen, under penalty of punishment, was to swallow one bead of the medicine per day. Justitian obeyed. The typhoid epidemic was defeated, and so were the old healers.

Few hands still clutch the plague handles nowadays, instead most of the patients go to public hospitals or head directly to the Spital. The dynasties of old, meanwhile, fell apart - some pharmacists were discovered poisoned with a swollen face and a blue tongue on the floor of their apothecary. Suicide was rampant among the chiefs of the Brenni, who would rather face death than a life of poverty and insignificance. Their apprentices applied with the Spitalians and were admitted as Orderlies. Others fled to the Anabaptists, converting to the Neognosis and hoping to begin anew after ascending to the ranks of the Elysians.

For some time Brennen appeared orphaned and was considered a cursed place. The few Brenni who endured fired up their distilleries once more in a desperate attempt to close the hole in their budgets with the sale of alcohol: even if they didn't smear it on their wounds, people could still drink the stuff. From the impoverished figures of yesteryear new families arose that specialised in brewery. Their products now fuel the generators, along with the souls, of the Scrappers and Providers all across Downtown.

Today, Brennen's liqueurs are proclaimed as Justitian's cultural heritage and are especially favored by the Protectors. In the evening, the cavalry squadrons stationed in the Rubble return to the counters of Brennen and have their glasses filled with cumin spirits, honey brandy, and wheat beer.

BITTERSWEET VANITY

Six Stallion Streets intersect in the old town center of Brennen, forming a sprawling parade ground named after the late Supreme Judge Markoff. Stone columns and statues of famous Executioners line the square. Once a year, the Protectors claim the plaza for their large cavalry marches. The demonstration is an impressive showcase of everything the Judiciary's military might has to offer.

It begins along the Archot Stallion Street, which leads in a direct line from the Forecourt to the Markoff Plaza, and is completely cleared for the occasion. Travelers have to stick to side roads and take long detours in order to reach their destinations in other neighborhoods that day. When Archot's military band opens the march, the thunderous fanfares can be heard for miles around. On the roofs along the Stallion Street, Providers stand ready to shower the galloping Protectors in a rain of blue cornflowers as they pass by below. People lean out the windows in the hope of glimpsing the parade, cheerfully waving at Justitian's forces. Finally, the army floods into the Markoff Plaza, where the riders repeatedly circle the roundabout to the reverb of hundreds of rifle volleys, before they split into smaller units and break off along one of the six Stallion Streets leading toward the Rubble.

For the Brenni, the parade in the heart of their district is a macabre display of judicial vanity. Under Markoff the Clan was a respected part of society, and it was the healer dynasties who stood by the Protectors to care for their wounds years ago. Now, the Judiciary marches side-by-side with the Spitalians, trampling all of the old alliances.

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

With its multitude of hidden backyards and covered alleyways, Brennen offers protection to a whole range of charlatans and medicine men that still practice ancient methods and alternative medicine. However, it is the neighborhood's eccentric women who make up this group; even more than the male population of the Brenni, they are filled with knowledge of curative pastes, oil massages, hot stone healing, meditation, placebo remedies, and a variety of herbal extracts whose function is beyond the reach of any serious physician.

Although the dynasties of old may have perished, hidden within the secret laboratories and barricaded pharmacies lurks a distorted remnant of Brennen's past greatness, still available to a selection of private customers.

There are always people who would much prefer not to appear in the public hospitals. An Apocalyptic covered with deep gashes and carrying a handful of Burn cusps in his luggage or a heavily wounded Cartel Thug can hardly expect fair treatment from a Spitalian. And to whom should a Burner, who hasn't been able to get his hands on a fresh fix since

the Great Cleanse, turn?

The muddleheaded healers of Brennen are their only option. Under the counter of their murky apothecaries, homemade drugs which provide distraction for a few hours are sold. Elsewhere, a brutally beaten Magpie who defied her pimp with her loud mouth once too often is patched up. Especially on Plague Day, old Scrappers crawl back to Brennen in the hope of hunting down opiates, morphine, or some crude remedy for their onset of gout. Brennen is alive, but Justitian is barely aware of the secretive activity within.

FOREIGN LORE

From where did the Brenni acquire their knowledge of medicinal herbs, chemicals, and medicine, which is so similar in so many places to the doctrines of the Ascetics and Elysians that it partially overlaps?

According to legends told only in the circles of the oldest Brenni, the founder of the Clan, Brennus, set out in ancient times to reach the mythical city of Noret. He returned after nine years, having not aged a day but with eyes that couldn't stop blinking from the knowledge that was revealed to him there.

Brennus assembled a pharmacy in a mad fit of energy, building a test laboratory from copper kettles, glass tubes, steel flasks, and plastic dishes, processing recipes that he had rescued from Noret and brought back to Justitian.

He kept much of his knowledge hidden, and only allowed his closest confidants access to his secrets. When one of the tribal elders dared to insult Brennus and questioned his abilities, the founder had a mortally ill Scrapper brought forth to prove his healing powers. Brennus placed a dull black staff on the dying man's chest. With each passing hour, those present watched the spirits return to the Scrappers limbs, until he was able to push himself up by his own strength, completely healed of his afflictions. Those present besieged Brennus, demanding answers for this display of divine power. The Clan founder answered calmly: in Noret, he drank from the waters of Paradise, and now looked at the world through different eyes.

Forty winters were to pass before Brennus' blessed time at the age of 109 years. His body was buried along with his laboratory, his records, and the strange black staff in a crypt somewhere in Brennen. With the founding of Justitian new urban areas covered the old settlement and the streets were demolished and built over, meaning that today no one remembers the location of the burial ground

The first healer dynasties that followed his death were unable to grasp Brennus' formulas in their entirety. After his demise, the apothecary's teachings became contaminated with humbug and nonsense, and the magic he knew how to tame faded forever.

The five Houses

Uptown may be the Judges' powerhouse, but it is Downtown where the laws are forged. Down here, in this bubbling cauldron of civil society and tradition, the authority of the Advocates reigns supreme. Five families have been managing the destiny of Justitian since the city's very inception and are indispensable to this patchwork population.

Their ancestral lineages date back to the dawn of the Judiciary, and since that time they have influenced the development of the Protectorate in all areas of mutual coexistence. They appoint Arbiters and Commissioners, patronize High Judges, and decide who ascends to the Senates. They manage the Offices, structure laws, delete unpopular paragraphs, or add new ones. They breathe life into the Codex, and if a passage doesn't suit their tastes it is wiped out with a mere flick of the wrist to be replaced with a more precise, and pleasing, interpretation of the legislature. They support Supreme Judges, or bring them down to elevate their own patriarchs into the highest office and cement their social heritage.

Political intrigue has come to dictate their existence: internal power struggles are conducted with bitter deceit and fought on the basis of legal changes, prohibitions, and vetoes.

Marriage is a ceremonial weapon used by the Houses to weaken their own rivals or strengthen their ranks. Anyone trying to achieve success as an Advocate in Justitian will be forced to share blood and semen with the families and submit to their surnames. If the aspirant refuses, he will miserably fail the Arbital examinations and spend the entirety of his existence in Judgement Hall, tediously copying outdated drafts of the Codex.

Only a few independents can escape this maelstrom of familial connections, jurisprudence, and patronage and manage to reach the top through their own efforts. These loners, however, have made lifelong enemies: the Houses will not forgive such impudence. Anyone who thinks that the ideas the military power of Justitian imprints on its citizens are conjured from thin air has fundamentally misunderstood the soul of the Judiciary. What the Advocates decree, the Protectors carry out.

HOUSE MASEK

In Downtown, everyone knows the saying "The Maseks breed like rabbits!" In purely mathematical terms, this statement is true. With over three hundred family members, along with an extended court of about two hundred servants, they make up the largest of all the Advocate Houses.

Their conservative influence has the greatest impact on the legal landscape in the Stukov Quarter, as the Maseks eagerly proclaim themselves the defenders of the founding district. Their estate lies just a stone's throw from the Forecourt, amidst Stukov's heirs, and they pride themselves on keeping their finger on the pulse of the people.

Once every year the Maseks open the doors to their Forum, allowing the common people to listen to the big debates over bill proposals and see for themselves how much blood, sweat, and tears must be poured into a new law before it can be called watertight and applicable.

The spectacle is led by Advocates. A selected Masek underdog must defend a questionable bill against the targeted assaults of the Patriarch and the assembled Arbiters. Like a pack of hungry Gendos, the attackers lunge at the Advocate and mangle his arguments before the gathered audience. It's a slaughterhouse, venom and mischief dripping from every little mocking remark.

Those who withstand this mental torture with powerful rhetoric and mental acuity have passed the test, and may submit their draft to the Senate on the following day in hope that it will find its way into the Codex.

HOUSE SALVANO

The estate of the Salvanos resembles a massive temple from another era. It rises imperiously above all surrounding buildings in the neighborhood to show everyone its sublime face.

The main entrance is lined with two man-sized stone heads, depictions of the late Patriarchs Rema and Semper Salvano, who once both served as Supreme Judges and are considered to be pioneers of the expansive Salvano dynasty.

Emiel Salvano, today's head of the family, is a highly ambitious Advocate. Everyone of rank and name converges on his property. He regularly receives the Abrami Council, the Cooperative, the old tribesmen from the Stukov Quarter, and the Emissaries from the Cross Quarter. Even Bosch's armored carriage has been sighted on the site.

Out of the five Houses, the Salvanos are considered to be the most powerful and influential, even though they don't often highlight this exposed and unique position. They know how to distract attentive eyes from their work, allowing them to focus on the essentials: climbing to the office of Supreme Judge once more.

HOUSE MANTEUFEL

House Manteufel is like a palazzo. Aritha, the Matriarch, seems to be particularly infatuated with Purgare. The frescoes coating the walls of the house are filigree marble carvings, and a verdigris mosaic adorns the floor of the atrium with portraits of the House's past leaders.

Contrary to other Houses, the Manteufel family knows how to throw their nets out to the farthest reaches of Europe. Ambassadors from Franka and Purgare are seen here just as often as the representatives from towns in the Protectorate who reside as guests in Uptown's Ambassador Quarter. The reason is easily explained. Since the days of Nassius' reign, the Manteufels have controlled the Office of Protectorate Affairs. In simple Borcan, this

means they are in charge of Justitian's war machine. Frontline service, troop deployment, border security, and expansion are part of the daily business of this Office. In this place, the cause of subjugating regions and peoples is carried out, and potential human sacrifices are counterbalanced with the interests of the Protectorate.

HOUSE JUNGBAU

The Jungbaus were once efficient, but the youngest generation of the family has lost a sizable chunk of their once vast power. Dozens of its members failed the Advocate's exams and were rejected by the Cult of Judges. Instead, they ended up in the city administration and positioned themselves as officials.

However, in this post they are nothing more than an executive power: they control few votes in the Senate and only occasionally participate in the development of new laws. Today, the Jungbaus are considered broken and have been robbed of all glory. The last Arbiter of the family even married a Salvano, and was assimilated by the rival House.

HOUSE WENDER

The Wenders teeter on the edge of the abyss. Ever since Patriarch Tristan's early death, an internal dispute over the succession to the throne has driven the House into decline. The three eldest daughters married into the Salvanos, leaving the once venerable House to disintegrate into a heap of shambles: hordes of greedy nephews and grandchildren all fighting a fierce war over the family's ancestral home.

For decades the Wenders maintained good relationships with the Anabaptists, but the Cult failed due to its own design and never managed to develop any political weight of its own in the city: a catastrophic investment for the Wenders. Meanwhile, both sides of the agreement have grown displeased with unfulfilled promises, and the fronts have steadily hardened.

SCHOOLS

Unlike the Neolybian-dominated enclaves in southern Europe, Justitian has neither public schools nor its own university. Knowledge is held in the hands of a few powerful parties and is not given away voluntarily.

Anyone who wants their children to go far in this civil society must inevitably hand them over to the Advocates. Only here can the adolescents gain access to forums, educational institutions, and high quality tutors. For the Advocate families, these children are a gift as they fill their dwindling ranks with fresh blood. In this way, the transferred children are simply incorporated into the existing family. The brats will forget where they came from in a few years, anyway.

THE HARBOR
Tech III

DISTRICTS:
The Eastside; The Bottomlands; The Guest Quarter

POPULATION:
Unstable: ca. 160,000

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY:
Low

FOOD SUPPLY:
Medium

RESIDENT CULTS:
Clanners, Scrappers, Apocalyptics

IMPORTANT AREAS:
The Flotsam; Hector's Taverns; The Amaranth; The Driftwood

THE HARBOR

The Harbor has always been here. It has been here since the days of the Bygones who reigned over the rivers and seas, moved the sun and the moon, crossed oceans on ships the size of cities, and travelled the universe with the power of their minds alone. However, this golden age has passed into oblivion, and the paradise of old has given way to a grim new age. Today, the Harbor bears a new face - one that is mangy, rotten, greasy, humid, wicked, and sinful.

In the early days of Justitian, the Harbor lay far away from the core of the original settlement. No one could have guessed at the time that the metropolis would ever become so sprawling that this district would one day lie within the city proper.

The streets keep moving until well past midnight. Between the endless taverns and brothels, lonely suitors roam in search of excitement while gambling Advocates, wasted Scrappers, and former Burners cavort wildly. The latter have been eaten away by the thrumming memories of their once favorite drug - like emaciated jackals in a corpse-field, they desperately hunt for a new dealer in the hopes of finding a new fix.

But the Harbor is much more than just an entertainment center. There are swathes of lawlessness in the district that are sparsely monitored by the Judges, and many opposing parties know exactly how to take advantage of such carelessness. For example, the pack of agitated Orgiastic thugs, ready to march over from the Cross Quarter to turn the Harbor upside down in search for enemy Jehammedans. They may have left their swords at home, but their gloves are tightly padded with quartz sand and studded with shards and rivets. Tonight, they will see blood flow...

SPLIT RELATIONS

The Judges have a far more complicated relationship with the Apocalyptics than it might appear at first glance. They know that the migratory birds are capable of providing the people something that the Judiciary cannot: pleasure. A city the size of Justitian can not possibly be forced to sit still on its shriveled balls. As a matter of principle, the Judges have no problem with prostitution per se - on the one hand they make up part of the clientele, while on the other hand sex has always been considered an instrument of power. And so at night, under the cover of darkness, the Protectors set off for the Harbor to escort Magpies back to Uptown, whose services are exceptionally well suited to force stubborn ambassadors into submissive sexual dependency or to keep whining Steel Masters pacified. At dawn, the women are picked up and shipped with the first load of passengers on the elevator platforms back to Downtown.

But what about all of the crimes the Apocalyptics commit? Why do the Judges not crack down on this trade with an iron fist? A wall surrounding the entire Office of Internal Affairs could be made from nothing more than the paper used in the case files concerning the Carrion Birds and the other Protectorate Flocks!

The answer to this is sobering, because this form of judicial collection mania is based on reciprocity. Carrion Birds deal with information about Advocates, Protectors, and Executioners. If the identity of an obnoxiously troublesome law enforcement officer is revealed, and his place of residence is determined, the Carrion Birds will send out a small present. An uninvolved courier at the Harbor receives an inconspicuous package that he is ordered to deliver to a farmstead out in the Rubble. On weekdays, the Provider lives there in complete solitude, as her husband follows his duties in the city as a man of the law. The lonely woman receives the delivery and shakes it softly in pleasant anticipation. It rattles! Immediately, she makes herself comfortable on the porch in front of her house and carefully opens the packaging, expecting to find a small gift of affection from her husband inside. She freezes as she sees the contents - 32 bloodstained teeth rolling around inside. Who did they belong to? No one knows. But the warning to her husband

to stay out of the Carrion Birds' affairs in the future could not be more obvious. Such attempts at intimidation are the order of the day in Justitian. The Judges are often forced to stay away from the backers of the Apocalyptics, and instead just focus on rinsing out the Carrion Birds' middlemen and informants. This condition has created an equilibrium in which both sides besiege and threaten one another but shy away from more radical courses of action, for the consequences would be unpredictable.

PARALYSIS

When the Spitalians speak of Apocalyptics, their vocabulary literally overflows with contempt. It is obvious to the doctors that the migratory birds are carrying the Sepsis to Borca. In the Spital, behind closed doors, the Apocalyptics are blamed for every evil in the world. Even the bloom of the Menden Mother spore field is attributed to the work of the Flocks, although there has never been even a shred of proof for the claim.

The Great Cleanse was just the beginning. If it were up to them, the Spitalians would storm the Harbor tomorrow, round up all resident Apocalyptics, and drown them in fire - but things are not that easy. Even if the doctors believe otherwise, the Spitalians are by no means above the law and such an attempt would be akin to mass murder. The Judges know how to prevent this sort of purge. As such, the hardliners among the eggheads are called back to Judgement Hall and reprimanded once more: if there isn't any Burn to be found on the Apocalyptics, they are to be treated just the same as any other innocent person!

The Chroniclers, on the other hand, face off against the Apocalyptics in a stalemate. The Nest of the Carrion Birds is hidden in the Underground, and a handful of breakthroughs have connected it to the Cluster's Exit Level.

Both parties know they cannot let the other betray their secrets. The Chroniclers can't allow anyone to discover their secret passageways, while the Carrion Birds aren't interested in having their subterranean hideouts unearthed. Officially, both sides are silent and simply ignore each other as much as possible to defuse the situation, and avoid a potential escalation.

TURF WAR

Scrappers and Apocalyptics tend to have good relationships. What the migratory birds can't acquire from the Chroniclers they get from the Scrappers, and vice versa. However, if one takes a closer look at Justitian's bottom layers, a crack in this liaison becomes visible: the Carrion Birds and the Cartel are competitors in the criminal business. Black markets, gambling, racketeering, predatory extortion, and assassinations are all carried out on both sides. There are only a few fields left where these two criminal powerhouses don't step on each other's toes.

The affair is tense: only a few skirmishes in a tentative turf war. However, it has long been clear to Bosch that his ambitions lie beyond Tech-Central. The Dwarven King has no interest in ceding potential markets to adversaries without a fight. Every day he examines the developments in the Harbor, searching for potential traitors in the ranks of the Carrion Birds who can be bribed or hunting for rival Flocks who can be promoted and supported from the shadows. Every little thorn he can drive into the flank of the Mother of Raven's henchmen brings him closer to achieving his goal.

Operation: Archetype

The Observers and Streamers who enter the Harbor know only one mission: the calculation of the reality formula. They work in secret, travelling unseen through their Exits: B-2, B-2/2, and B-3.

The Fragment Radius steers the analysis programs and initiates the monitoring protocol. The Observers in the field attempt to establish contacts with the local Apocalyptics and engage knowledge exchanges. The Cluster has granted clearance to negotiate with the migratory birds, in return for hard data on their Tarot. Radius pays a high price for this information transfer, feeding the Carrion Birds with crucial tips from Uptown: when does the Office of Internal Affairs plan a raid on the Eastside, which persons of interest have a Judge on their tail, which black market is considered unsafe.

Radius controls this secret Cluster cell, from which the reality analyst Generation also hails. Together they explore the Archetype symbols that crystalised from the extrapolation of the amassed personal data of Justitian's citizens within the Stream's databases, which were revealed to match the archaic glyphs on the cards of the Apocalyptic Tarot.

The Chroniclers in Radius' cell see a global context in this coincidence, the understanding of which will bring the revival of the Stream within reach.

Chessboxing

In the last ten years, a new type of sport has come to rule the Harbor. Chessboxing unites both physical and mental skirmish into one single discipline. The principle is simple: if one wants to be victorious in a duel and rake in the bets for themselves, they'll need to bring brawns, toughness, and stamina to the table.

Two opponents play chess against each other at the side of a circular boxing ring. Each chess round lasts exactly six minutes, before a gong sounds and the fighters pummel each other in the ring for three minutes. Kicks, bites, elbows, headbutts, clutches, and wrestling are forbidden: only fists are allowed. For this purpose, special gloves with exposed fingertips are used to allow the fighters to move their pieces on the board.

A match is played until one of the fighters gives up from exhaustion, a chess game is decided by a checkmate, or one of the fighters goes down for a ten-second knockout in the ring.

The stakes in chessboxing are at the lower end. Winners can acquire between 200 and 300 Drafts during a nocturnal match. Among other things, this is due to the current lack of fixed championships being formed. The fights are usually spontaneous and are rarely advertised beyond the boundaries of the quarter. The Judges turn a blind eye on the chessboxing; the clashes may be violent but they are by no means deadly in nature, like the banned pit fights.

RULES: Chessboxing is an endurance sport. Each Combat Round is played as normal, however each Round lasts (1) minute. From the third Combat Round onwards, a roll of BOD+Stamina (3) is needed at the beginning of each Combat Round to not collapse from exhaustion. Up to (3) Ego Points can be spent on this roll, (1) Success per Point.

Chess rounds call for the Players to roll a Combination of PSY+Cunning and INT+Focus against each other. This is a Complex roll, with an interval of (1) minute. The first Player to accumulate (10) Successes over his opponent wins with a checkmate. A Player cannot roll more dice than he has Ego Points remaining.

THE FLOTSAM

The huge casino ship resembles a fortress. A single, heavily guarded bridge leads over to the barge. Suddenly, a Scourger blocks the path. In the name of the Demiurge, what is an African doing on the ship? The towering colossus with the blue UAO helmet waves the guest aside to pat him down and ensure the safety of the ship. All clear!

Those who overcome this first shock now enter the lobby with the other patrons, breathing air impregnated with anise and incense. Citizens from the Stukov Quarter can be seen here next to Village Jurymen who have acquired wealth in the Rubble and Scrappers who want to put their meager savings on the right numbers. No doubt they are all hoping for the jackpot, but in the Flotsam you never really win. You lose your soul.

The girls at the game tables are so overwhelmingly beautiful. When your gaze locks onto them, it's like you've been infected with rabies. The only desire burning in your brain stem is to caress their delicate bodies and join in a carnal embrace in their bunks. You want to give them everything: money, love, attention - all just to feel their warmth, smell their breath, taste the salt on their skin for just a little longer. How unforgettable they are, glittering jewels whose sparkle will twist your mind forever.

No suitor has ever left the Flotsam and has not feasted on the memories for nights on end. Later, in the darkness of his marriage bed he'll look over at his wife, old and withered, snoring beside him, while he longs for the life he tasted in the Flotsam. He dreams of nothing but mature breasts and young hips, and curses his own dull existence. His home is a deserted wasteland. The air of his bedroom stinks of old farts and cold sweat. He would give anything to be back on the ship, where worry has no meaning, where a single lustful gaze can intoxicate the heart for hours, days, or even weeks.

LORDS OF TIME

Today the Dust Riders are in command of the Flotsam. A Flock from Purgare, pirates, from the Mediterranean - where the hell is that? Most Borcans have never set foot beyond the Alps, and to them open waters are nothing but a myth. But the Dust Riders are real.

Tolomei, the self-proclaimed Pelican of the Flock, can be seen striding through the ship's gambling hall. Hired guards flank the man with the shaved scalp. He greets his guests personally, giving everyone a heartbeat of his time. The new rulers are presenting themselves in the best light in an attempt to mark their distinction from the Carrion Birds, who used the casino ship as their headquarters for generations. No one knows how the pirates managed to steal this trophy from under the eyes of the most powerful Flock in all of Europe and establish a hoard right in the middle of enemy territory. Undoubtedly they have made mortal enemies in the Harbor: the Carrion Birds will not rest until the Flotsam is back in their cold hands.

The Dust Riders are lords of time: hours pass in the Flotsam in a flash. Before you know it, morning light filters through the window shutters and the pale light burns the retina. The moaning of women drifting from the private cabins has given way to the snoring of drunken suitors, curing their intoxication by sleeping on the Flotsam's carpeted floors. The Scourger steps through the ranks once more, waking the last guests with a nudge of his rifle's barrel, kindly asking them to see the cashier on their way out.

If one doesn't have enough Drafts in their pockets to settle their bill, they have to scramble to regain their composure, visit Tolomei in his cabin, and beg the Pelican to write down their debts until the next visit. If the freeloader can't leave behind an adequate deposit as a sign of his credibility, he must prepare for an extremely uncomfortable expulsion. One last time, he is forcefully reminded that he has exactly twelve hours left to raise the money for his unpaid bills, or else he shouldn't dare to show his face here again.

Trotters wait beyond the bridge. The few who still have any money left are advised to invest in one of these human draft horses to get back home. Those with empty pockets take to their heels and race against time. From now on, every minute counts.

STAKES

Gambling takes place on the lower levels of the Flotsam.

Along with an array of card and dice games and dozens of roulette wheels in which the profits are primarily focused on Drafts, more martial and profane bets can be made in a separate booth next door: illicit weapons and ammunition.

A Dust Rider named Vulco shows up here from time to time to accept challengers. At a counter, he sets up his game that he calls Go. Vulco only bets goods, never Drafts, but what he offers is undeniably impressive: Trailblazer ammunition, grenades, ornate blades, chemical weapons, Neolibyan Balancers, Scourger masks, fragmented Psychonaut remains, EX, Burn, and ancient artifacts. However, the challenger must put something equally valuable on the line, or there is no match.

Vulco talks very little. Often he pays no attention to the game whatsoever, as if he knows every move by heart. Instead, he simply stares incessantly through the hatch, out into the dark Harbor basin, letting out occasional sighs. Three moves later, the challenger is defeated and Vulco rakes in the entire wager. No Mercy.

Anyone accusing him of fraud or losing control of their temper should be careful. Before the angry challenger even knows what's happening, a knife flashes in the corner of his eye before disappearing again in the dark corners of the room. A quick, but effective, warning that Vulco's bodyguard, Vadim, is always in control of the situation down here.

NO MAN'S LAND

The Flotsam is a lawless no man's land. Enter at your own risk. The Dust Riders enforce their own rules. It is unthinkable that the Judges would even attempt a raid on the ship. From the top deck, the entire dry dock can be observed. The only access to the ship is via the drawbridge, which can easily be pulled up in case of Protector squads gathering nearby.

While patrols on top of the ship are permitted, and singular Judges may board the barge at any time, navigating the twisting corridors on their own would bring even the most astute Assessor to their knees. The Dust Riders don't do anything to jeopardize their position in the Harbor, and simply bide their time.

They know that as long as they cooperate with the Judges and maintain peaceful relations with Justitian's generals, they have nothing to fear from the Carrion Birds.

The Eastside

Two old Protectors lie naked in their guest room on the third floor of some nameless joint. Their bellies are bloated, their faces puffy and excited. An hour ago they swallowed some so-called aphrodisiacs from Franka, and now they wait in vain for the effects. Again and again they kiss, rubbing each other's cocks. Not even a twitch. The stuff shows no effect.

Embittered, the younger man curses and leans out the window, bare chested. Puffing away at his last rolled tobacco leaf, he watches the neighborhood spreading out beneath him. Crooked houses with candlelight in the windows, plaster peeling from the walls, roofs bending over in shame. Everything is withering. Everything is dying. The Judge looks down at his aged hands split by furrows, his skin dry and cracked, his palms covered with calluses. His waning body is just a metaphor for the sorry state of the Eastside.

Anyone landing in this district has severed his ties with Justitian's vision of a utopian civilisation, and either belongs to a discarded model of a modern age, or is driven by appetites for which there is no place in civic society.

The language of the Judges has a broad vocabulary to designate such undesirables - perverse idol worshippers, wayward bullets, blinded ones - and the Eastside is like a magnetic pole inescapably attracting all of these deviants. Those who just want to fuck a cripple mix with those who once witnessed the call of the Chakras' ether their endless hunger for Burn now determining every facet of their existence.

The Eastside has truly earned its miserable reputation. Four years ago, Burn was sold on every street corner. The East Wind Flocks' dealers had divided the territory into sectors using a sophisticated system of reconnaissance troops, messengers, and suppliers. The Judges were powerless. The dealers avoided raids through an array of early warning systems. Children's gangs and Defilers kept watch on the Stallion Streets and the bridges leading across the Defiler Streets. Bribed couriers and city guides warned the dealers ahead of time about any suspicious cavalry squadron movements, giving them a head start to dissolve in all directions.

The Preservists changed everything. During the Great Cleanse, Provost Kranzler personally oversaw the logistics of the operation's bloody and final climax. Units attacked in broad daylight, often in disguise. Preservists camouflaged as Defilers infiltrated the district and coordinated the Protectors via radio. An unstoppable wave of pent-up wrath spilled through the district and eradicated the evil at the very root. The streets ran red with blood, and the East Wind Flock was no more.

To date, the Carrion Birds have not recovered from the loss of its supplier. They lurk in the shadows, licking their wounds. Their biggest source of income has collapsed, and they have been robbed of the Flotsam. Rivals now seep into their ancestral territory to nest on the scorched and bloodstained earth

HARVEST OF SOULS

When Justitian was merely an infant, the Carrion Birds were already here. Their Woodpeckers ripped open tunnels deep into both the entrails of the young city and the minds of its inhabitants. The Mother of Ravens stalks like a gaunt demon through many urban legends, woven into Justitian's very soul.

Parents tell their children tales of the migratory birds to make them docile, "The Mother of Ravens roams the streets at night to devour children up too late!" they warn their scions with worried expressions.

In reality, the Storks buy orphaned children out of the Defiler Streets at dawn, from destitute Scrappers or impoverished Providers, instructing them in pickpocketing and teaching them diversionary tactics. Smuggling, slavery, contract killing - the Carrion Birds are part of the game. They operate the most sought after brothels, and their fighters are consistently at the top places of the pit fights. All of that done while hiding from the Judges in the homes of accomplices or deep within their Nest, in the Underground of the city.

The offspring of the Mother of Ravens are the most influential Flock in all of Borca, if not the largest in the land of the Crow, and their own offshoots and sister Flocks are spread across all of Europe. The Judges estimate in numerous files that they have over 3,000 members. However, the Chroniclers predict that number to be three times higher, including swarm movements and fractal clumping in their extrapolations which can only be explained by a wide branch of cross-connections to other Flocks.

And so the Woodpeckers only grin maliciously as delegations of Protectors rummage through their taverns and brothels, before having to retreat empty handed. The Protectors may mark and brand the backers and suppliers of the Carrion Birds, but they rarely reach anyone of importance.

"This can't go on forever!" Kerber curses in the office of Justitian's chief Protector, spitting angrily into a copper bowl on his desk. Rutgar raises his eyebrows in bored anticipation of the upcoming monologue from his hotheaded Executioner. "A single fucking error brought down the East Wind Flock, it's only a matter of time until the Carrion Birds make a mistake too!"

Kerber, this meat ball with a pea brain, has no idea what he's talking about, Rutgar thinks to himself as he lets this diatribe pass through one ear and out the other. Generations of Judges have ground down their teeth in an attempt to crack the Carrion Birds - and their bones can be visited today in the mausoleums lining the Cemetery of the Judiciary.

SMUGGLER'S DEN

The Eastside's contradictory name confuses newcomers, as the area in fact lies to the west of the city. This bizarre naming convention is due to the Anabaptists from the Cross Quarter who baptised the nameless district beyond the Harbor basin from their perspective. As such, the Eastside became the commonly adopted term for this shabby place with no official name in the city books.

Protectors never patrol alone here - too dangerous. Instead, ideally, six riders per squad should work together, at least one of whom must be equipped with a radio to call for reinforcements in case of an emergency.

Even after the upheavals of recent years, the Eastside remains a popular smuggling den. Countless informants among the residents help the Apocalyptics with their business. They are tied to the Carrion Birds, either through debt or by blackmail. For every Apocalyptic known by name, the Judges file dozens of records for people who are considered potential supporters.

Fake walls and storage cabinets hide secret doors in hidden basement shafts. Behind the doors, narrow tunnels lead deeper down to breakthroughs into the Underground. Smuggled goods are transported on primitive lorries through an uncharted tunnel system with connecting branches extending all the way out into the Rubble. In some places, the nest of the Carrion Birds overlaps with side-arms and channels that lead to the Defiler Streets. These shafts are particularly well secured by armed Carrion Birds, as they are considered the biggest weak spot of their subterranean empire.

EAVESDROPPER

Protectors that enter the Eastside on reconnaissance missions are equipped with Eavesdroppers. Designed by the Chroniclers, these monitoring devices have a built-in recorder and a sub-vocalizer, and fit into any coat pocket. If the receiving dish is pressed against a wall, it can record muffled discussions from the room beyond and copy them to its tape. The device can capture dialogues even if only vowels can be picked up. The speech decoding program replaces the missing consonants, and will provide an understandable end result 80% of the time.

These spy gadgets are in unsurprisingly high demand on the black market. Both the Cartel and the Carrion Birds, as well as other dodgy characters, will offer up to 5,000 Drafts for a functional Eavesdropper. Manufacturers can copy the design of the device, but they don't know how to crack the speech analysis. As such, copies are sold for 400 Drafts.

Hector's Taverns

Hector, the Woodpecker of the Carrion Birds and the official face of the Flock, is the landlord of two dozen taverns and brothels in the Harbor district. The majority of these properties are spread over the Eastside and the northern Bottomlands and, in most cases, can only be accessed by having solid contacts in the Harbor. Few of these joints can be recognized from the outside for what they really are. Wanderers must at least be familiar with the symbolism of the Apocalyptics to get to these places on their own. City guides offer a far better option, ensuring that the disoriented guest doesn't accidentally turn into the wrong alley and burst in on an in-progress smuggler deal.

INVICTUS

The Invictus is frequented by veterans who gather at the long counter to exchange life stories, while the Magpies wiggle their breasts and asses in front of them and pick up Drafts from the counter along the way. Clanking music roars from a screeching box in the back of the tavern, casting the place into an unpleasant soundscape - however, it at least lets one talk without anybody listening in.

Above all, the Invictus is visited by experienced Protectors, Orgiastics, and Hellvetics, serving as a place to exchange Cult-internal information that can only be passed on in person. The fact that one gets served naked food for the eyes is an additional bonus for the seasoned gentlemen.

THE DARKROOM

Weapons and clothing are both removed in the Darkroom's foyer. This is where the thrill takes over. An Apocalyptic leads the naked guest to a steel bunker door, unlocks it, and points down the stairs to a gloomy dungeon. The guest can barely see the first five steps of the staircase ahead, and has to cling to the railing to safely arrive at the bottom. Behind him, the bunker door slams into the lock with a hollow thunk. From now on, darkness reigns supreme, and the moaning of dozens of bodies swells from the blackness. None of the guests knows who fucks who, or what, and therein lies the special kick for the visitors. All of a sudden, one feels unfamiliar hands covering their body, a wet tongue pushing into their mouth, and the guest is carried away by a vortex of pleasure. Many visitors swear that the experience can only be surpassed through the additional intoxication of Unity.

Time and again there are deaths in the Darkroom. Whether by accident or by design matters not to the Apocalyptics. They already have their hands full disposing of the body and burning the guest's clothes in time.

DIORAMA

Nowhere else in Justitian can a view of the city be gained like in the Diorama. The taproom features a faithful three-dimensional replica of Justitian in small scale. It is said that the Cartographer created this piece of artwork, before Hector purchased it for his tavern. A local city guide takes a small fee to talk about the different city quarters and districts, telling short anecdotes from Justitian's tumultuous two-hundred year history and explaining the balance of power between Uptown, Downtown, and the resident Cults.

The bar is stocked with a variety of local alcoholic beverages, along with a stockpile of imported luxury goods. Tobacco leaves and honey from Franka, or Ratluk: gelatinous sweets flavored with orange water from the Balkhan that are traded in the Diorama along with rare crystals, gems, and jewelry from across the world.

NIDHOGG

Anyone descending into the Nidhogg does so to measure his prowess. The windowless saloon in a dingy backyard leads down into a dimly lit basement. Before the assembled company, bizarre tests of courage are held against bets of hard cash. A Scrapper picks up a fully feasted Armored Snail, holding it in his bare fist. Scorching pain digs through his nerves as the digestive juices of the snail break through the top layer of skin and cause severe acid burns, even as frost coats the hand. The standing record is a minute. No one makes it past that.

Every evening brings a new challenge - swallowing a Stukov Scorpion's poison, or holding a revolver to the temple with one bullet in the cylinder - the foolishness of which borders of suicidal. However, the players come anyway. Many of them are Defilers and Scrappers with nothing left to lose anymore, while other times it's highly indebted contemporaries who need to get their hands on a pile of cash before dawn to satisfy a Cartel Officer. The Nidhogg gives these desperate creatures one last chance to save themselves from misery and play with their own health and life in exchange for a quick Draft.

LIAH LIAH

Suitors line up outside the brothel waiting for admission, for behind these heavily guarded steel doors lie the best whores in the city. The twins Liah and Liah are known as the main attraction, and are commonly considered the most beautiful women among the Carrion Birds.

50 Drafts are needed to just pass through the door, but sexual services are far more expensive, starting at 150 Drafts for half an hour and with no upper limit. Anyone who can't shell out that kind of money is immediately kicked out of the door again.

The Liah Liah doesn't need to care for its customers, as it's always filled to the brim anyway, fueled by the legends surrounding the brothel. Allied Ravens send their Magpies into apprenticeship here to learn how to extract information from their suitors, and make men dependent on them even as they pull Drafts from their pockets.

THE CROWBAR

At the Crowbar, migratory birds of the various Flocks of the Protectorate and other re-

gions meet to coordinate with the Carrion Birds. Only those who know the password and bring tributes for the Mother of Ravens are allowed entry. Hector himself presides over the negotiations, taking the floor on his Flock's behalf.

The Ravens in attendance divide up territory, share secret information about hideouts and Burn caches in the wastelands, and hope to win the favor of the Mother of Ravens in return. Tensions between rivals are moderated by the Carrion Birds. As a moral authority, they mediate between warring parties and try to calm the stormy waters.

If their input fails to yield results, an arena on the lower floor serves as a means for the leaders to put an end to their displeasures in a bloody duel. However, the bout is not fought by the Ravens themselves. Instead, they appoint their best Battle Crow to defend the honor their Flock. Two Crows enter. One Crow leaves.

IN MEMORIAM

Descending two floors, guests pass through a long hall with walls covered in tapestries from Pollen - said to be spun from Husk Spider silk. They depict effigies of a hideous woman with ash-black skin cowering between the ruins, screaming.

Anyone who has ever crossed the molten landscapes east of the Reaper's Blow will know this portrait. It is a depiction of the Wretched Hag, Pollen's oldest legend.

However, the visitors to In Memoriam are not here to inspect the mythical figure, but instead because of the sunken cinema hall that the Carrion Birds were able to unearth and set in motion with the support of some capable Scrappers from Tech-Central. So far, this place is reserved for special guests only. The selection of images and films is limited to flickering fragments and washed-out depictions projected onto the massive screen in a silent and ghostlike manner, but the sublime experience captivates the audience and brings tears to their eyes. They have never felt closer to the Bygones than this moment.

The Amaranth

The Amaranth lies hidden on an empty side street. Among locals in the Eastside, this den of vice is considered a haunted place.

The reception room for the suitors to loiter in is gloomy and barren, and an eldritch draft filters through the air. It smells rotten, and the men looking after the women working here stink at least as much as the damp furniture. A one-armed innkeeper serves the haggard figures slouched at the bar, refilling their glasses with the most disgusting moonshine, on the house, to keep them occupied until the girls arrive.

The Magpies working here are far too young, but are already worn out: dark circles under their eyes and bruises along their arms shimmering a painful purple. Many of them are children of Defilers who have joined the Apocalyptics to make their way from the lowest circle of hell to merely the second lowest.

In the Amaranth, they at least have a little money left after selling their bodies, even if they have to pass on three quarters of their income to the mistress of the house to be allowed to whore themselves out in her brothel. But for the clientele to pay at all, they must indulge in every imaginable humiliation.

For the girls, there is no way out. In Justitian they are barely tolerated. In the eyes of the Judiciary they are considered as guests. To the merciless Protector picking them up on a Stallion Street they only have the value of a prison worker, at best.

OLD BEDFELLOWS

Allegedly, the Amaranth belongs to neither the Carrion Birds or the Dust Riders. An unknown Flock runs this business, calling themselves the Splinter Hawks. No one in the district can make heads or tails of this group, or their leader Phoebe.

However, anyone capable of rummaging in the legends of the Protectorate will inevitably pick up on a connection leading back to Ferropol. The Splinter Hawks are said to be the remnants of the Flock of Apok the Raven, who once ruled as a drug lord over Exalt's abandoned arms factory to the southwest.

But this link is now over thirteen years old. Is the name of the Flock pure coincidence, or is there something more to this?

Bottomlands

Anyone wandering aimlessly in Justitian will soon wash ashore in the Bottomlands. This chaotic patch of earth is an anchorage of futility - faceless refugees from Franka, scattered members of forgotten Clans, lost Brenni, degenerate Jehammedans, renegade Apocalyptics, Scrappers with debts to the Cartel, drug addicted Spitalians, gambling obsessed Protectors - they all sink into the soil of the Bottomlands and choose this place as their new haven.

However, it is a rotting haven, because year after year the sediment on which it was built lowers further. The subsoil is soaked, basements flooded, broken pipelines meandering away underneath. Groundwater collects in cavities and drops the foundations into the mud. Over the decades, most of the buildings in the Bottomlands have grown together into a single, solid block of flats whose colossal weight pushes the district even deeper into the ground.

Wedged between the Cross Quarter, the Harbor basin, Brennen, and the Guest Quarter, the area of the Bottomlands amounts to just four square kilometers. Nevertheless, an estimated 50,000 people are packed in here close together. In fact, there are no longer any open roads and yards, as the houses and apartments have grown on top of each other to turn the district into a beehive that cannot be overseen from the outside.

The streets are lit with torches and lanterns. Daylight and fresh air are foreign words in the Bottomlands, and so are electricity, clean water, and food. The roads are so narrow that ox-carts get stuck between the walls of houses, while in other places no two people can pass through a corridor at the same time. The road network is confusing, made worse by the lowered terrain. Anyone trying to find their way around must take notice of the numerous markings. Arrows serve as signposts, pointing through the labyrinth of floors and dwellings stacked on top of each other. The deeper into the complex one penetrates, the more bizarre the conditions become. Greasy taverns suddenly line up out of nowhere, while next door people sleep underneath a covered lane, using the last of their belongings as a makeshift bed. A crazed Burner smashes his head against a corrugated iron wall at the next intersection, leaving a trail of blood on the rusted metal, while behind him naked children covered in filth from head to toe rush after a tire, squealing in a cacophony of different languages and dialects.

"The Bottomlands are like quicksand. Once you're in, there's no way out." wheezes the cross-eyed stranger, appearing from the shadows next to you, begging for alms.

PREDATORS

Volatile quartermasters, many of them serving as Jurymen, make a mint renting rooms to transients and refugees - for extortionate fees, of course. The crumbling structures, abandoned and left behind from the last season, are haphazardly repurposed as every last Draft the newcomers still have is leeched away from them.

If there is no money left after the hardships of their perilous escape, they have to sleep in the corridors and lanes of the Bottomlands until they find work in Justitian. The Jurymen accept only paying customers. Anyone who defies them, whether man, woman, or child, is beaten by the quartermasters until they cower in pain and fear.

The Judges know nothing of these proceedings. They're already running low on manpower, and as such entrusted the Bottomlands to their faithful Jurymen to ensure law and order. However, the order has long since degenerated into brutal tyranny. Those who disobey the quartermasters or don't pay rent on time will be forced to perform the most demeaning tasks. The Jurymen don't shy away from any sort of cruelty to enforce their regime: abusing women, dragging men before City Judges and framing them for crimes they did not commit, and selling refugee children to the Apocalyptics in the Harbor.

Every few weeks a delegation of Protectors inspects the Bottomlands to get a gist of the situation at hand. The quartermasters put up a brave facade, getting the refugees to line up in rank and file and proclaim just how well they're doing in the Bottomlands, and how much the Jurymen pay attention to their welfare. For such lies, they receive a month rent-free.

REFUGEES

Justitian is drowning in an unforeseen tsunami of refugees spilling from Franka and overflowing the country. The people flee - from the Gauntlet, from the madness taking place in Briton, from the civil war on the Southern Coast, from the Pheromancer Kings in the heart of the country, from the swarms, the swamps, the drones - Franka is falling apart, and in the process the country is hemorrhaging its population.

In the last three months alone, between October 2597 to January 2598, as many as 70,000 border crossings were recorded from refugees at the westernmost and initial reception point of Bassham, and the stream isn't slowing down.

Those who make it through the Spitalian quarantine zone are free to travel the Protectorate. Bassham is barely able to take in refugees, and has been diverting newcomers to Justitian for months now, all of whom flock to the Bottomlands and inflate the district to a critical size.

Meanwhile, they lack for everything here. There is no drinking water, no functioning food supply, the markets are dominated by the Jurymen or Apocalyptics who both control prices, there is no electricity, and no work. The refugees are forced to go peddling as day laborers, and run the risk of colliding with the Scavengers from Tech-Central who have claimed this as their business area since its origin.

MERCY

Hidden deep in the heart of the Bottomlands is the public hospital of Elias Ramon, the heroic doctor of Justitian who defied his own Cult to take in refugees and the homeless. Against the will of the Spital, without registration, without certification, and against all previous agreements.

Ramon is playing with fire, and his Cult wants to see him burn for his betrayal. Public hospitals are intended exclusively for citizens - to sell medicine without thinking, and to provide sick people care free of charge contradicts all of the Cult's principles. But the Spitalians cannot reach him. Hundreds of refugees crowd around on the grounds of his hospital, meat shields protecting the renegade Village Doctor from retaliation. For the lost souls of the Bottomlands, Elias is their messiah, and they would happily give up their lives to protect him.

However, this situation is a temporary game. The Office of Hygienics can no longer stand by and watch this debacle without losing face. A face that still feeds off its success during the Great Cleanse...

INTERFERENCE

The Chroniclers are concerned with a completely different problem. Exit B-3 lies inside the Bottomlands, and the wild growth of recent years, the erosion of the sediment, and the weight of the area have all already damaged the underlying Exit Level. A similar fate to the Crack looms ahead, the entire city block at risk of collapsing and exposing the Underground.

Two Streamers were sent out to investigate the Exit and formulate a prognosis. Riptide and Influx secured the access, and have since ordered prying eyes to avoid the area. However, during their mission the two Streamers discovered an unforeseen radio anomaly. A dead spot has formed in the Bottomlands, interfering with the Cluster network and completely absorbing all radio messages in a bubble one kilometer wide. Until now, the Cluster had no idea of this blank field. Panic seized the Fragments: they know a Needle recently entered the city. Could he be responsible for the interference? Or is it something else? Worse, how can the enemies of the Chroniclers be located in this muted zone, when they can operate invisibly and escape the Cluster's all-seeing eye?

Reconnaissance drones are of little use, as the majority of the Bottomlands is covered and screened from above. The Chroniclers need agents on the ground to keep an eye on the area and protect their secret passages.

The Guest Quarter

Hold there, stranger. Where are you coming from, Mobilis? Liqua? Cavernis? What's your surname? Have you ever been to Justitian? Do you know our laws? No? I thought not. What's that on your forehead, what're those stains from? That's not a three-dot tattoo, right? If it is, over there is the road to the Cross Quarter, you're better off there.

Oh, you're not an Ascetic? Which street did you take to get here? The trade route from Purgare? Well, well, and no one gave you anything on the way here, right? No Burn, or anything like that?

Woah, take it easy, I'm not accusing you of anything! You have to understand, we have to be careful here. Come on, you know what I'm talking about! Cockroaches, Phosporites, and, uh, what were they called, Exalters! Or, maybe even Palers! No, you're definitely not one of those, I saw that right away, but I'll still have to search your backpack.

What's up with your dialect? Why's it so broken? What do you mean, you refuse to make a statement? What's up with you, you've got nothing to be scared of. Where's your home? Do you have no origin, no mother, no father?

Hey, calm down, I don't want to argue with you! I just want you to understand that I need answers, or I can't let you pass! Listen, I'll tell you one more time! Put your arms down and stop making those wild gestures already. What the hell did I just tell you? Let go of, me - back off! Argh, fuck, Bredinger here, I need a squad to assist at the south gate, we have a problematic guest… You idiot, you had to let this get out of hand!

HOSPITALITY

Any idiot can arrive somehow, sometime, and somewhere. It doesn't take herculean mental effort or an extraordinary charisma to make friends for a night or two. After a week in a stranger's apartment, however, no one remains a welcome guest unless they have enough Drafts to be sympathetic to their stubborn host. This is exactly the purpose for which the Guest Quarter exists. Justitian's pride and the first port of call for anyone with more money in their pockets than they need to live their miserable lives. A reservoir for self-proclaimed heralds, mediocre adventurers, half-baked merchants, transient Balkhani, and frustrated ambassadors denied access to a residence in Uptown.

Anyone choosing the Guest Quarter as a refuge wants one thing above all: to distinguish oneself from the asocial creatures in the Bottomlands and, if possible, to call a good bed his own. In addition, he wants to eat properly - oat bran, lamb, and salad.

If it's in the budget, a glass of Caspar & Morvin for digestion. If there are more Drafts available, then a whore for the night ahead - but beware, the Guest Quarter serves up only the dregs with sagging tits and fat legs. Depending on the hour of the night, and the amount of alcohol consumed, their beauty is of little concern anyway so long as the old lady listens with one ear to the concerns of her customer while taking care of the satisfaction of his carnal needs.

BETWEEN WORLDS

The sedentary residents of the Guest Quarter have become accustomed to the constant influx of guests and strangers, and have familiarized themselves with the situation. Many of these long-established residents are citizens who helped to build the Guest Quarter. Originally, this district was to receive all of the Judiciary's guests who have strayed into Justitian. Today it is obvious that the district is far too small and does not have the capacity to meet the onslaught. The Moloch draws people in like the Defiler Streets draw flies.

The citizens do not care. They take advantage of the situation and sell their goods with overpriced margins, collect non-citizen taxes for room rental and food, and stuff their bags with cash. The ignorance of the newcomers is also exploited by others. City guides can be found on every street corner to explain the city to visitors and trotters offer sightseeing tours through the Stukov Quarter all the way up to the Forecourt.

In the midst of this, the Protectors have their hands full spotting new faces in the crowd and waving them aside for a search.

Although the rush in the Guest Quarter causes disorder and every guest house is filled with an incomprehensible mix of languages, the district is still popular with travelers. Small, manageable, like a village nestled in the middle of the big city, it offers a starting point for those seeking to reach the top in Justitian.

When summer breaks, the streets are lined with tables. Until late in the evening, traders and travelers from all parts of the world come together to play, exchange ideas, and find common ground.

THE DRIFTWOOD

The largest inn of the district offers space for hundreds of guests across its five floors. The rooms are reminiscent of large dormitories, each with twenty hard straw mattresses on the ground. In the stagnant air, sleep is a restless endeavor with one eye kept peeled all night as the roommates try to keep watch on their belongings and scare off thieves.

The breakfast room offers little more than long wooden benches, hot oatmeal, filtered water, flatbread, and a bowl of oil. No banquet, but enough to start the day. This is when the Apocalyptics arrive at the Driftwood. Carrion Birds sit down next to the travelers at the tables and question them about their goods. Should something catch their interest, the Apocalyptic winks and points in the direction of a staircase behind the counter that leads into a basement two stories below.

Down here is a hidden black market for exotic goods, stolen gear, and looted equipment that could never legally reach Justitian's official market stalls. Here is where one can find damaged helmets and Harnesses from Hellvetics that passed away in some godforsaken part of Territorial Region IV, Jehammedan sabers, emptied Source modules, discarded Chronicler suits, assault rifles from Hybrispania, and artifacts that shouldn't fall into the hands of either the Cartel or the Chroniclers. In addition, one encounters Discordant poisons milked from multi-limbed membrane creatures, Fingers of Anubis, and the fluorescent blood of fallen Biokinetics.

But who would dare to buy such illegal goods? Preservists. Kranzler's men enter the sales room in disguise and buy everything on display. Under the scrutinous gaze of their Cult, the illegal stock is brought to Arnsberg and stored. It doesn't bother the Preservists one bit that this behaviour is in direct contradiction to the Cult's ideology. The Primer can only be fought if its powers are seized and exploited. In this war, any means is justified.

Meanwhile, the Carrion Birds monitor the sales and claim a quarter of the selling price from the traders. In return, they ensure that the Judges don't conduct any sudden or unforeseen raids.

PALERS

There's a rumbling beneath the Guest Quarter. Exit C-3 was conquered several years ago by a Horde of Palers who have fortified themselves in the Underground while they plan a full-on assault on the Cluster. Because of the zone's occupation, the Chroniclers have lost access to the Guest Quarter, along with two important data nodes.

The Palers in turn use this Exit to reach the surface world. Since resources are scarce in the underground warzone, they are dependent on theft. In the dead of night their Phantoms break out to steal food and feed the Horde.

They must be cautious, as their archenemies are swarming the district and a single wrong move calls a Shutter to the scene. As such, the Phantoms push into the nearby Jehammedan Quarter or out into the Rubble to scrounge up some meat. At dawn they scurry back through the shadows towards the Exit and crawl underground before the merciless sun drowns the city with its burning light. The Horde, on the other hand, has now been supplied, and can hold out for another week or two: devoting themselves to putting the Cluster's defense mechanisms out of action.

DEFILER STREETS

DEFILER STREETS
Tech I

DISTRICTS:
None

POPULATION:
Unstable: 5,000; based on estimations

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY:
None

FOOD SUPPLY:
None

RESIDENT CULTS:
None

IMPORTANT AREAS:
The Knacker's Office

The redheaded Defiler crawls through the feces-covered canal passing below one of the city's many public toilets. With a stick he pokes around in the shit, searching for any treasure a drunkard may have dropped into the muck. Suddenly, loud screams break out above him. Male voices barking curses at each other. The Defiler hears the sound of muffled cries and bangs. Through a crack in the wooden ceiling, he can make out two silhouettes striking each other. With a dull thud, one of the figures collapses on the floor, howling in pain for a brief moment, before being cut off by the rattle of his last breath. A discomforting silence follows. Warm blood drips down onto the Defiler's face. Terrified, he pushes himself against the wall of the canal, holding his breath, the only sound his racing heart which threatens to leap out of his chest. The silence is broken as he hears footsteps moving hurriedly away from the crime scene.

That's his chance. He claws along the canal wall and heaves himself up to unbolt the lock of the latrine pit. One last jolt and he crawls through the hatch. He immediately sees the body: long hair, crooked nose, twisted eyes, splayed arms, and a blood-soaked knife in his throat.

The Defiler crouches over the stranger's corpse and starts to dig through his pockets. The meager yield: sixteen Drafts and a dirty silver medallion. However, the dead man's boots are more promising - well preserved, no holes in the soles. The Defiler's hand grips the knife's handle, yanking the bloodied blade from the wound and wiping it on his rags. Good steel! He's taken what he needs, and he has little time left before the Judges arrive. Time to go back to the canal, and then away from here!

LIFE IN THE DIRT

Without proper drainage, a city the size of Justitian would quickly sink up to its neck in refuse. Sometimes, that very situation happens. The stench blowing over the metropolis on a hot summer's day makes the citizens gag and vomit. The Defilers have little time to eliminate the dirt and are fully dependent on the help of the Spitalians. Their faces hidden behind gas masks, the Famulancers deliver truckloads of lime to the Defiler Streets, while Defilers and convicts shovel tons of the white powder into the canals to mask the pungent odor. Even this ordeal brings barely any salvation. If only it would rain.

Three channels, each several miles long, slice Downtown into different sectors. The northern channel separates the Harbor from the Stukov Quarter, the western channel splits the Steel Monolith from Tech Central, while the southern channel runs straight through the Jehammedan Quarter. Each one of these main arteries is over a hundred paces wide, and dug twenty meters lower than the rest of Justitian's road network. Stone bridges and pedestrian overpasses stitch the separated quarters together, going over the Defiler Streets

The three canals are in turn fed by tens of thousands of tributaries and side branches passing beneath the neighbourhoods to connect to the Defiler Streets. However, the only water these canals carry is a tiny trickle - and as anyone who approaches this poisonous, diseased broth without a face mask will soon realise, it is far from pure.

Those who can afford it try to get an apartment with an outhouse directly connected to the canals. Other city dwellers have no choice but to carry their loaded pisspots to the Defiler Streets at dawn and empty them over the edge, along with any of their collected garbage at the same time. Below, a sea of rats has already started swarming out of the trash to greedily inspect the fresh delivery.

The first Defilers reach their territory. Equipped with wide shovels and spades they sweep up the dirt and ma-

neuver it to the brown brook gurgling in the middle of the street. Once a month, the sublime moment arrives. The bulkheads of the three large water reservoirs at the ends of the Defiler Streets are opened to flush out the main canals. Triumphantly the water thunders through the channel, digging through feces, garbage, debris, and dirt, mixing it all together. Shouts echo through the streets as more flushing basins are unbolted, joining the main flow. All of the tributaries unite into a single roaring current, rejuvenating the specter of millions of excrements for one last time before they're washed out of the city.

The Defiler Streets terminate to the north, west, and south of Justitian. The water seeps into the ashes and dust dunes, and the shits are first powdered dry and then finally swallowed up by the dust. The Providers swear that the soil here is exceptional at growing certain types of tubers. Armed with shovels and buckets, they search for the buried nuggets, haul them back to their parcels, and distribute them across their slice.

DAILY BUSINESS

Anyone who needs to take a dump in the middle of the city, will find a public toilet every other dead-end in Downtown. A long wooden bench with half a dozen holes spans a small sidearm of a Defiler Street. Men and women are equals here, sitting side by side on the thunderbox and keeping up their conversations. Shame is uncommon. Instead, the intimate time shared is used to exchange news.

Many of these shithouses are additionally adorned with a myriad of wall messages, both critical and meaningless. During their defecation in an alley, those who are capable of reading can inform themselves on the latest rumors and news related to the city and the Protectorate. Guest houses hire orphans to scribble the addresses of their sleeping quarters on the walls, whores leave their names and directions to their brothels, traders advertise with drawings of their goods and the name of the marketplace where they can be found. Others enjoy turning announcements by Judges and Chroniclers into filthy poetry, or scrawl crude images of male and female genitalia all over the walls.

For the Office of Hygienics, these shithouses are the root of all evil. Once a month, Hygienists in sealed suits and armed with buckets of chlorine stalk through these city toilets and disinfect everything.

Meanwhile, the Defilers have discovered a new gap in the market: they collect rags that in turn can be bought from them at the entrance to a toilet for 1 Draft, which one can use to swipe their arse clean before dropping them into the pit below. Once the rags have run out, the Defiler fishes them out of the canal again, collects them in a bucket, and rushes to the next Stallion Street nearby. There he waits until the Spitalians are busy with a routine search and the coast is clear. Now it's time to hurry: dunk the filthy scraps of fabric into the disinfection sluices and wash them clean as quickly as possible before the Spitalians notice anything. The following day, the Defiler stands yet again in front of the public toilets and offers his fresh towels with a smile.

DEFILERS

Life wedged in the asscrack of the fallen giant is simply a slow spiral of decay. Down at the bottom, there is rarely a way back up. Branded as antisocial dregs, and banished from Justitian's society, the Defilers can only rely on themselves to ensure their survival. From this necessity, a subculture of its own has formed over the years in which so-called families divide the Defiler Streets into districts where they control all of the waste or work alongside the Knacker's Office.

Some families specialise in composting garbage, others in producing saltpetre, while others focus on the disposal of corpses or hunting for rats, cats, or other vermin.

Most of the Defilers families follow a legendary matron, a Defiler herself, who is said to have survived more than three decades in the Defiler Streets in which she has been able to learn everything about the recycling of rubbish. Among them are Ulna, who had all of her teeth knocked out by the Judges, the blind Karga, perceiving the world through scent alone, old Melanis, said to only give birth to cripples, or Barshket, who supposedly is so fat that she can't even climb out of her canal.

Newcomers are welcomed by these families and quickly introduced to the life of the Defilers. The sooner they find their way, the higher the chances of survival: loners rarely last long. Despite all the hardships and pitiful conditions down here, Justitian's cesspit offers a form of freedom that people in the city above can only dream of. Only when everything is lost, you have nothing left to lose.

However, the desolate environment in the Defiler Streets attracts the ire of the worried Spitalians, who never cease to warn of every epidemic imaginable. The Office of Hygienics is always on the brink of filling the channels with rubble and dust to completely seal them off, but the Judges dismiss such drastic action with a variety of arguments: both the saltpetre and fertilizer extraction are essential components for the preservation of the supermetropolis.

The Knacker's Office

The Spitalians stand guard. Pinched eyes, wrinkled noses - it's their first year in Justitian, part of their Famulancer training. They hate it. They keep rubbing menthol paste into their nostrils, incessantly trying to numb the smell of decay, while others in the regiment simply refuse to even take off their gas masks.

They inspect the Knackers navigating their hearses on the grounds of the Knacker's Office with disgust as they drag the rigid, naked bodies from the wagons. Someone is always dying in Justitian: over in the Cleft from the hardships of the labor camp, in Tech-Central from starvation, in the Harbor from murder, and in the Cross Quarter from alcohol poisoning. The Defilers always have their hands full, and the Knacker's Office never stands still, because every corpse must be examined. Whether it's spore infestation, germs, viruses, whatever.

It is only after the Spitalians have sliced the dead into pieces that they're handed over to the Knackers for further processing: turning the corpses into products. They boil the fat from their bodies to create soap, crush the bones into mortar, fashion shaved hair into wigs or dental floss, and extract gelatin from tendons, cartilage, and connective tissue. The entire person is utilised. It's been like that for ages. On the border to the Outskirts, where the Knacker's Office stands today, there once used to be a large burial ground. However, as the city sprawled out over the land, the entire area was put up for settlement and built over. Nowadays, almost no one can afford the horrendous sums for a funeral near the city limits. Anyone who wishes to pay his last respects to his deceased parents will have to bury them somewhere out in the Rubble in the dead of night. Everyone else hands their dead to the Knacker's Office.

The Judges are the only ones who consistently bury their dead in the Cemetery of the Judiciary: a tradition that has become a thorn in the Spitalians' side. They would like to reassure themselves and autopsy the bodies of Protectors or Advocates in the same fashion as any other city dweller.

Never, Archot yells, slamming his palm on a table. So long as he still breathes, no doctor will cut open an honorable Judge's belly to rummage through the entrails. Time that he stops breathing, think the Spitalians.

KNACKERS

The Knacker's Office may be under the Spitalians' supervision, but the processing of corpses and animal carcasses is carried out by the local Knackers. Among the Defilers this job is something of a distinction, because Knackers receive free food and are allowed to sleep in the common rooms of the Office.

In order to visually distinguish themselves from other Defilers they wear black robes adorned with a white-painted skull and crossbones on their back.

SALPETRE

Hundreds of thousands of tons of shit flow into the Defiler Streets year after year. From the reaction of lime and the nitrate-rich urine and feces from millions of humans and animals, nitric acid is formed. Brown gold - at least, that's what the Defilers call this foul mixture. Mixed with potash, the fecal matter is piled up along the large banks of the Knacker's Office and left to thoroughly dry.

At a later point in time, the Knackers wash these hills to collect the calcium carbonate that has been formed. From the solution containing the salt, saltpetre is extracted through a process of evaporation and boiling. After several cycles of this recrystallization, the compound reaches the desired degree of purity and is finally shipped to the powder mill for further mixing.

TECH-CENTRAL

TECH-CENTRAL
Tech IV

DISTRICTS:
Outskirts; The Tent City; Scavenger Street; The Crack

POPULATION:
Unstable: ca. 340,000 in winter, approx. 100,000 in summer

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY:
High

FOOD SUPPLY:
Low

RESIDENT CULTS:
Clanners; Scrappers

IMPORTANT AREAS:
The Badger's Burrow; The Pipe; The Manufactories; The Gyrodome; The Sarcophagus; The Scrapyards; Bosch's Estate

Here's one lesson to be learnt right away: Tech-Central has no beginning and no end, no above and no below. The district follows no logic, nor can its true dimensions be comprehended from the outside. Ladders and stairways branch out in erratic formations, leading across grotesque canyons made of corrugated metal and oxidized scrap, connected by creaking bridges and walkways. One moment you enter a secluded atrium to take a glimpse at the sun flashing down from the sky, only to get lost in a murky tunnel system a few steps later. The whole damn place is a burrow: secondary tunnels and side arms sprout in all directions, granting access to dwellings in which Scrappers live on top of each other by the dozen, working, eating, sleeping, and fucking.

Runes scratched into the walls are the only form of orientation. A wide array of colorful arrows point to workshops and grocery stores across different floors, all connected by rattling cable winches that lead from dark storage shafts up to lonesome observation platforms several stories above ground.

Every section squeaks, wheezes, and roars in its own distinct melody - boilers groan with their last breath, generators grunt like dying cattle, steam clouds obscure vision, and unbearably loud sounds echo through narrow alleyways. The crackling static in the air raises one's neck hairs while electrical discharges zap through the haze, chased by a hollow buzz of ceaseless white noise creeping through the ear canals. Nothing makes sense in this maze, and anyone who doesn't call this neighborhood their home will inevitably get lost in it. For Tech-Central is the realm of the Scrappers. Here only their rules apply, and all attempts by the Judiciary and the Cluster to pacify this district and squeeze it into custody of Justitian's law and order have failed miserably. Tech-Central cannot be controlled. Tech-Central controls you.

SCRAPPERLANDS

Tech-Central clogs up almost a third of Downtown, making it the largest and most densely populated district in the city. It is Bosch's stronghold and the home of Borca's Bravest; at least, that's what the resident Scrappers like to call themselves in all their complacency. But they have all sorts of reasons for such arrogance, for what they have accomplished in this territory is unparalleled in all of Europe.

Once, this patch of earth was nothing more than a desolate outpost, far away from the city proper. When Scrappers travelled to northern Borca to haggle with the Chroniclers, they stayed overnight, connected with other Scrappers, exchanged ideas, and unloaded cartloads of worthless junk, summer after summer. With each following year the number of dirt diggers grew, and so did their leftovers. In the beginning, Tech-Central resembled a crooked tent city covered in dirt, but before long a forest of tin huts rose from the senseless array. Just a few decades later the former outpost had given way to an infinite landscape of trash and scrap: a booming district in which all the metal of the Bygone world seemed to confluate.

Today, Tech-Central is a masterpiece, a self-sufficient sector within Justitian's borders, whose metamorphosis is far from over. With every onset of winter there are turnovers: large areas are torn down and rebuilt, workshops change owners, junkyards overflow with construction materials and must relocate to adjacent areas, new shafts are excavated, and dwellings are connected with underground tunnel systems. This never-ending activity has perforated and hollowed out the foundation of Tech-Central, linking entire sections to form a single interconnected habitat which the Scrappers lovingly named the Badger's Burrow.

THE BADGER'S BURROW

A window flies open and a Scrapper girl with jug ears wearing yellow welding goggles peeks out. She coughs up her soul as she empties her chamber pot onto the streets. The load of shit and piss splashes onto the pavement of corrugated iron and slowly seeps through a gutter system nearby, dripping to the next floor below. Nobody cares.

Anyone who thinks the surface world of Tech-Central

Day in the Life of a Scrapper

YOUTH

Your time is now! Your bones are still young, and even if they break they heal quickly and will be harder than before. You have to trust yourself. Everyone out there just wants your best, and what they mean by that is they want the best of you without ever rewarding you in return. Turn the tables! Take what is useful from your Badger and move on as soon as you no longer need him. He'll never lead you to the discovery of your life, but instead take it from you and spend the Drafts he owes you on cheap whores and overpriced Burn.

Learn to distrust anyone who makes promises, because each promise is only worth as much as your gullibility. The world is made up of lies, and the sooner you recognize them the sooner you feel the knife approaching from behind. Suspicion is a virtue: therefore, memorize the Runes and mark your territory, expand your search quadrant, and always remember the faces of your enemies.

Time is your best friend: when you grow up one day and are full of sap, your foes will be old and frail rotting in their beds. Then you can settle the score with them!

EAT!

You have to put some meat on. Down here along the hips and on your lower back. When it comes to your stomach, it needs to bulge as much as possible. Why do you think the Chroniclers don't go hunting for artifacts themselves? Look at them! Frail and skinny as they are, they wouldn't survive for two weeks out in the wastelands.

If you're smart, you spend 70% of your Drafts on food. Eat! Even if you are full, eat! Every kilo you gain in weight today puts you through a week of starvation in the great wide open. But you gotta be clever about what you put in your mouth. Make sure to buy fat milk from the Jehammedans and as much flour as possible from the Anabaptists. Bread, bread, bread - as much as you can swallow, even if it grinds down your teeth and they become dull. Don't spend your savings on fruits and vegetables, that's not gonna do you no good. Instead: meat, potatoes, heavy tubers, yoghurt, cream, and cheese.

During winter you have to gorge on food as much as you can. Don't be an idiot like all the others and waste energy on things you don't need. If you want to fuck, be economical about it! More than once a week and you're burning fat that you'll be missing next summer. Also, don't you dare fall in love! Those who are hopelessly devoted to a woman don't eat enough. You'll get nothing done in the upcoming year if you aimlessly scatter your juice. Be aware of this: there ain't no woman out there that needs you more than you need yourself when you're on your own.

Alcohol is good. Empty calories, but you'll gain mass if you drink every night. If the hangover kills you in the morning, counter it with a sip of distillate.

The most important thing last; let others do the work for you. Summer is coming and you'll have to endure months without food. Any useless movement you make during winter shortens your life by a few hours. Don't be anybody's fool! Instead, order your Mice around to run errands for you across the city and don't exhaust your energy on anything.

IN OLD AGE

It starts with the scabies. It has nested between your toes and the itching is driving you insane. Under the armpits and on the rump you scrape off your skin, night after night. You blink twice before you recognize someone and your breath smells like garbage. You rot, a little more every day. Your joints hurt, especially the knees, and you wheeze when you just have to tie your shoes. You've grown old.

It would be better to take your savings and open a workshop instead of trying your meager luck again out in the wastelands. It would surely be your last march into the unknown. If fate hasn't chosen you by now to make a big find, then your next breakneck attempt will also result in nothing. Resign yourself: your big chance has been wasted.

Now is the time to share your knowledge with others and make profit from it. Train Mice and teach them to survive on their own, thereby collecting rewards from the wealth of your experience. What they turn over in revenue they must share with you, and if they are useless, kick them out! A Mouse that can't support itself and doesn't make you any money is a waste of your precious time.

Offer your services and make sure that your customers can rely on you. If they have faith that you are a fairly honest buck, they'll come back and give you more work. Still, you need to be careful about who you do business with. The masked freaks are no allies, and the baldies are just as bad. Take the side of those who have as much to lose as you do. A rat cannot betray you without biting its own tail.

is a convoluted mess has yet to set foot in the Badger's Burrow. An unseen vista of tunnels meanders two stories beneath the main street levels, its winding corridors soaked in neon light with sketchy workshops at every corner flanked by stores and repair shops lined up next to spare parts sellers and electricity suppliers. The Scrappers residing in the Badger's Burrow belong to the sedentary core of the city. Most of them are aged Mechanists who wouldn't survive the hardships of another long journey into the wastelands. Next to the regulars, transient hawkers have established themselves to supply the residents with most of their basic needs, even if the profits here are far lower than what they could earn on the Forecourt. However, most of them lack a sales license, and the Badger's Burrow offers them excellent cover to sell their goods.

All entry points are under surveillance by the Cartel. Via a complex tubing system, tappings can be used to issue warnings throughout the Burrow. Tock-tock. The air is clear. Tock-Tock-Tock. Judges on the move. Tick-tock-tick. Chroniclers monitoring.

How many outlaws, deserters, and other dodgy characters have found shelter in the Burrow over the years is unknown. The fact is that not even the inhabitants really know the tunnel system to its fullest extent. Large sections often lay idle for extended periods of time only to be suddenly claimed by a horde of new arrivals. The newcomers settle in place for a few months before summer drives them back out into the wasteland and leaves the sector deserted once more.

The Judges hate patrolling down here. Bereft of their horses they are outnumbered by grumpy dirt diggers, who are all the more reluctant to comply when ordered around in their own home. If there are any raids, Uptown must deploy several squads of Protectors into the Burrow at the same time to keep control of the situation, and not risk violent escalations. If such manpower cannot be supplied, the Judges are simply forced to limit their operations to targeting specific individuals in Tech-Central's street level world.

THE PIPE

The Pipe is the best-known Scrapper joint in all of Tech-Central, and somewhat of an institution. It is considered an integral part of the Badger's Burrow and since its establishment has attracted its own distinct clientele. The pub itself is nothing more than a repurposed concrete

pipe that can accommodate a maximum of 20 guests, only windows and an entrance have been milled into its rigid shape to allow entry.

Packed together tightly on the inside, visitors now get their money's worth. Nafta, the owner of the Pipe, cooks every evening for just a handful of guests who were able to secure one of the coveted spots in good time. But it's not his culinary skills that are the reason for the rush, rather the goods he uses in the process. Nafta only cooks with ingredients that other city dwellers either declare as waste or wouldn't even recognize as food.

His tricks are ready for the stage: when he holds a porous stone overgrown with red lichen over a pan and sprinkles it with a transparent chemical, woodlice suddenly patter out and drop into the sizzling fat below.

Elsewhere, he reaches into a woven basket and pulls out a handful of oversized locusts collected in Franka, sautées them in oil, tosses them around, and finally covers them with moss and all kinds of spices. He processes marinated rat and cat meat into skewers and grills the tough fibers until they are tender and melt in the mouth.

Nafta's fashionable display of cooking skills is by no means a sign that Scrappers in Justitian have suddenly started to indulge in culinary culture. On the contrary, Nafta teaches his guests how to survive in the wilderness. He explains in detail the origin of each shrub berry, shows off edible insects and arachnids, and informs those present how to find food in the wastelands. His recipes are valued by countless Scrappers who are facing a long journey ahead into rough terrain.

THE SARCOPHAGUS

Luxury is a foreign word in the Sarcophagus. Those who reside here can count themselves among the living dead of Justitian. An endless battery of bunk beds lies hidden deep within the Badger's Burrow, and serves as a first berth for Scrappers returning from the wastelands without a permanent home in the urban area. The hall itself resembles a massive crypt, a remnant of a Bygone parking garage that sank into the earth during the upheavals of the Eshaton and was completely gutted after its rediscovery. More than 3,000 sleeping bunks are now available in this cavernous grave, densely packed across five floors of frigid concrete.

Each bunk is but two meters wide and just one meter high and deep. Anyone with some Drafts left in their pocket goes out and gets a handful of iron bars at the local junkyard, welding them into a grid that can be attached to the outside of the bunk. If more money is available, the Scrapper must invest in a padlock to secure their belongings from thieving fingers during the day.

Within the Sarcophagus the air doesn't move. A single ventilation shaft provides just enough oxygen to supply the crypt, but the damp heat that accumulates in the straw mattresses is an excellent breeding ground for all kinds of parasites. If one didn't catch any bugs and lice in the wasteland, they have them now.

The Cartel operates the Sarcophagus. It is one of Bosch's gifts to the community and his Cult brothers who weren't blessed with luck. Cartel Thugs at the entrance charge 1 Draft a day from Scrappers who come to rest their bones, payable one week in advance. Newcomers have no choice. At least they can store their valuables and look around for work in the city while the sun is up.

MANUFACTORIES

Outside, finally! A breath of fresh air mixes with a hint of Petro. At least it's more bearable out here in the east of Tech-Central than in the musty basements of the Badger's Burrow. This area in particular is under the influence of the Manufacturers, the most respected inventors and engineers of Justitian. They are the intellectual spearhead among the Scrappers of Downtown and their achievements have earned them the benevolence of the Judiciary, as well as fame and honor.

Those who succeed in landing an apprenticeship with one of the resident Manufacturers will have access to knowledge, technology, and craftsmanship that isn't available anywhere else. It is considered the greatest achievement amongst Scrappers to be handpicked to join the ranks of these revered master builders.

One can already tell that this part of town is run with a different set of rules. The cobblestone streets are stainless. Mice run around with broomsticks and sweep the pavement. Others collect rubbish and repair the gutters.

The workshops of the Manufacturers themselves stand out in both shape and color from the chaotic drab of Tech-Central. The walls are painted with indigo and the doors and portals are adorned with bright yellow warning signs. Every portal of a manufactory resembles a delicate piece of clockwork. Dozens of cylindrical safety pistons and gears mesh with each other, interlocking and sealing the workshop shut. The effort serves as a deterrent. Any burglar would lose interest at the front door and look for an easier target.

The Manufacturers are happy that such tactics work, because these workshops are their sanctuaries and under no circumstances may they be desecrated. Here they collect the wonders of the Bygone age, experiment with electricity and conductors, create machines and Marvels, design generators, and study the composition of various objects. They are tinkerers, obsessed with the laws of physics and their limitless possibilities for application. The only thing that excites them more than their own experiments is the spirit of competition. Manufacturers try to outsmart their rivals with every new creation, and they hold annual conventions to prove their genius to one another. None of them, however, have ever beaten the master builder himself: Bumblebee.

Scrapyards

Anyone who says that Tech-Central is reminiscent of a colossal dumpster turned upside down is by no means exaggerating. Four massive scrapyards are located in the district and form the different anchor points of the Scrappers' coexistence. These places function as daily markets and warehouses in one, and every Scrapper who relies on material, be it to weld a safe locker for his night storage, balance out their carrying rig, or otherwise equip themselves for a long trip, does their shopping here.

THE PUBLIC SCRAPYARD

Any debris that gets compiled in other neighborhoods will sooner or later end up in Tech-Central. If a shop in the Stukov Quarter is left abandoned or a house is torn down, the building material gets carted to the Public Scrapyard, where it is broken down into its components, shredded, sorted, upgraded, and released for resale.

Citizens from all walks of life stop by to stock up on the recycled rubble. Providers come looking for plastic tarps to protect their plots from dust storms, Anabaptists rummage around for copper and steel to lay new pipelines and craft broken crosses, while Jehammedans haggle over construction materials to repair the caustic pools of their Tannery. They all require large amounts of building material and cheap scrap metal to keep their businesses running, and such products are traded here en masse.

Furthermore, the Public Scrapyard helps the dirt diggers establish contacts with the rest of Justitian's population, communicate with clients about their projects on site, and offer themselves as day laborers or inspectors in the same breath.

THE GRAND SCRAP MARKET

Every Scrapper has to rely on his peers at some point. That is why the Grand Scrap Market exists: an endless spare parts warehouse and repair workshop in one. Regardless of whether a Marvel jams while loading, a carrying rig has become unstable, boots have to be studded with steel caps, or the filter of a gas mask no longer works, one will find a specialist for everything here. The market itself is a treasure trove of exotic weapons, ammunition, rare spare parts, special screws, wires, nuts, and all sorts of things for which the Cluster has no use and therefore discards.

Young Scrappers demonstrate their skills on the spot and present prototypes of their newly constructed Marvels. Manufacturers scurry the stands and examine the inventions, always looking for fresh talents for their workshops. If a technical innovation is found to be interesting, the Manufacturers gather around the object and bombard the young inventor with a hailstorm of technical questions. If the Scrapper is able to withstand the verbiage and respond satisfactorily, the Manufacturers bargain among themselves who may invite the potential prodigy to their workshop the following day.

THE CARTEL SCRAPYARD

If Tech-Central has but one place of budding civilization on display, it must be the Cartel Scrapyard. Recruiters sneak around between skewed booths, crumbling pubs and run-down dive bars, looking for potential fresh meat on behalf of the Cartel.

The game is always the same. A glass or two of distillate on the house, a casual chat, and a few helpful tips for the newcomer to find their way around Justitian. To all questions like, "Where can I sleep for free?", "Where can I get food?", or "Where can I find good hookers?", the recruiters have a suitable answer ready. Sometimes they hand the youngster a few Drafts - pocket money to have a little fun on their first night out and about.

A few days later, the recruiters are already negotiating with the newcomers at a completely different level. Job offers are whispered and participation in illegal business is agreed upon. Physically competent Scrappers are hired as thugs and ordered to take care of the extortion of protection money, while their emaciated contemporaries, on the other hand, are sent on patrols or to collect information.

But that's not all. The Cartel Scrapyard is teeming with Officers. They run their own booths and have established themselves as money lenders. They offer extortionate loans, and those who fail to pay their debts on time are at fault and caught in a network of liabilities and blackmail, dragging them deeper and deeper into the Cartel's criminal abysses.

While most Scrappers are welcome in this area, Ropers are better off not being seen here. They are hated by the Cartel and viewed as traitors. Anyone who partners themselves with both Judges and Chroniclers has forfeited their right to respect in the community of dirt diggers.

JUNK HILL

Tech-Central doesn't connect to a Defiler Street of its own. Therefore, all garbage and trash ends up on Junk Hill. Originally this heap of rubbish was a depression, but it has long since overflown and now the residents simply pack on top what no longer fits in below. The whole area is teeming with rats. A kick against any metal frame jutting from the pile is enough to agitate the critters and make them shoot out of the debris. Now the Scrapper kids strike and kill the vermin with targeted shots from their self-made slingshots. Zap-zap, and a meager dinner is caught.

Junk Hill has little else to offer. Only the poorest Scrappers and Defilers orbit around its base searching for leftovers or bones that can be gnawed clean. One of them has picked up a dry lemon peel and is desperately trying to suck it out, rubbing it over his gums in an attempt to clean his yellow teeth.

Intervention

Even if Tech-Central remains uncontrollable, the Judges and Chroniclers have no choice but to show off their presence to at least tame the neighborhood. With the help of the Spitalians, the usual searches are conducted and basic regulations are maintained, but in contrast to other areas of the city there is little support from the population and far less opportunity for retreat in the event of a violent outburst. The deployed troops must be careful and keep their backs clear, otherwise there is a high risk of falling into a trap.

The Pack, a group of twelve vicious and militant Anabaptists who gather as Jurymen behind High Judge Laika, are easily the most hated task force in all of Tech-Central, albeit also the most successful one. They deploy fear tactics such as random searches and raids, have excellent local knowledge, and maneuver swiftly through the rough terrain.

Despite their reputation, their effectiveness declines in the winter months as the influx of Scrappers becomes too high - even the most cowardly dirt digger will stand up to a Judge when he's got hundreds of his fellows behind him. Therefore, the Judiciary now predominantly conducts purges during summer time, when the district is the least populated. A regiment of 20 cavalry squads is sent in to clean the area, arresting subjects, hunting down Cartel Officers, and interrogating persons of interest.

However, these mass invasions are still only able to scrape the surface; the thundering hooves of the horses are audible minutes ahead of their arrival, giving the Cartel's paid agents plenty of time to send warnings back to their superiors and allow any truly important figures to dive under the earth into the Badger's Burrow until the danger has passed. The Judges will drag low-level thugs back to the Cleft and pat themselves on the back for a job well done, but their real targets will barely notice the loss.

THE GYRODOME

Bumblebee, the greatest engineer among the Manufacturers, supplied his district with a gift which was also his first masterpiece: the Gyrodome. Decades ago he constructed this Marvel and conquered his rival Mechkovski in a legendary duel, thereby laying the foundation for the movement from which the Manufacturers would arise. Bumblebee's invention still stands on the Grand Scrap Market to this day, generating the majority of the freely available electricity in Tech-Central.

How does it work? All generators operate on the principle that magnetic fields moving through a coiled wire will generate a charge. Most do this by spinning an internal rotor, passing powerful magnets through a field using steam turbines or controlled Petro detonations. However, the Gyrodome, a massive sphere elevated high above the ground and encased in a protective hull of scrap metal and corrugated iron, is a device that turns these principles on its head.

The dust storms crossing Borca often crackle with static discharges, the fine sand particles brushing against each other in the chaotic weather fluctuations building up tremendous friction, which is often unleashed as powerful lightning strikes. Most of these strikes are dissipated on lightning rods put in place by Chroniclers, or simply arc through the air. The Scrappers instead take advantage of the magnetic fields churning in the soup of static electricity. As a dust storm passes over Justitian, hundreds of thousands of coils of copper wiring wrapped around the Gyrodome's hull begin to hum with electricity, lights flickering as power surges through the connections and wires.

If this was the only way to generate power for the Scrappers, then the lights, drills, saws, and welding torches could only be on during a storm and would be lifeless in calm weather. To avert this, Bumblebee designed a unique storage system. When a storm generates its power, the majority of the charge is used to set the massive iron gyroscope within the Gyrodome into motion. A dozen meters across, the metal disc spins faster and faster until the very ground below shakes from tiny oscillations of its frame. This wheel can spin for weeks on end before the miniscule friction of its precisely designed bearings will bring it to a lurching halt.

When more power is needed and no storms are present to provide it, the operators lower a huge, supercon-

ducting magnet salvaged decades ago until it is barely a finger's breadth from the surface of the reactor's spinning disc. The disc passes through the magnet's field, and charge begins to crackle from the wires surrounding the Gyrodome. Tech-Central can keep itself powered independently in this fashion, so long as a dust storm passes by about every other week.

Today, the Gyrodome functions as the centerpoint of the Grand Scrap Market and has spawned countless stalls where customers can reload E-Cubes or recharge smaller artifacts.

POWDER GENERATORS

Scrappers are inventive, and those who don't leech energy from the Gyrodome use other means to create electricity. If there is one thing that Justitian has in abundance, it is surplus black powder. Whether tossed aside by the Steel Masters for not being up to their rigorous standards and thereby offered for resale at the Powder Mill, or simply mixed in back alleys and sold on for a few quick Drafts, black powder chokes the streets. Some enterprising Scrappers have turned this to their advantage, and designed unique powder generators. Resembling an oil barrel with a musket's frame jammed into its side, these generators are undeniably crude, but effective.

A black powder charge is loaded into the breech of the gun, slammed into place, and fired. Inside the barrel, a loud rattle begins as the flywheel of the generator is pushed into motion by the explosion of the powder. Another charge is loaded and fired, as a flickering light on the generator's casing indicates that the process is working. This is repeated three or four times, depending on the size of the charge, until the flywheel is reliably spinning.

Finally, cables are connected to the output lines and the generator starts pumping out electricity, capable of operating for a few minutes until the mechanism slows to a grinding stop. In this state, more speed - and therefore power - can be added by firing more charges. This runs the risk of caking the internal coils in sooty residue, rendering the generator useless until it is cleaned by a Scrapper confident in his ability to dig around in the heart of a barrel potentially filled with unexploded gunpowder.

The Head Collector

The myth of the Head Collector is alive in Tech-Central, even though he hasn't taken another victim in years. The theories surrounding his true identity and motives vary wildly. The most frequent story told among Scrappers claims that the Head Collector is the codename for a secret operation initiated by the Chroniclers in an attempt to destabilize the population of the Scrapper district, thereby increasing the presence of Judges to be deployed on the turf.

The Judges, in turn, believe that the phantom is synonymous with an escalating territorial conflict waged between Officers of the different chapters of the Cartel. A task force of Advocates that has looked into the case files claims that neither theory is true, in fact, stating that the Head Collector is nothing but an urban myth, seeded by the Cartel to incite fear of a rampant mass murderer on the loose amongst Justitian's population.

Still others question all existing theories and look for connections between the dead. Some assume that all victims found so far must have had some sort of a family relationship, others again question the validity of such conclusions and see revenge as the overriding motive. But revenge for what? Nobody can give a comprehensive answer, nor are there any tangible connections between the dead.

What's clear: all victims were Scrappers, yet only a handful were based in Justitian while others travelled here from faraway regions such as Pollen or Franka. A few years ago the Judiciary decided to put the files on ice. With the Head Collector laying low in recent years, the urge to discover the truth has slowly died off. Only a handful of Protectors working on the fringes of the case still believe that the killer is out there, waiting for the right moment to strike again. They want to be prepared.

Pit fights

A barrage of jabs and crosses robs Ghiron of his senses. He pulls his arms up tight to protect his face. Useless. Blood glues his eyelids together and sweat blurs his vision. He can't see shit. A murderous hook to the ribs punches the air out of his lungs. Ghiron feels the bones crack in his chest. Cruel fingernails scrape skin off his flesh. His knees give way. He tumbles forward. A savage kick to the hip finally brings him to the ground.

His opponent is already above him and shoves an elbow into Ghiron's larynx. Bit by bit the world is getting dimmer and darker. Ghiron gurgles, writhes. His mouth is foaming with anger. With his left hand he manages to grasp his attacker's matted dreadlocks. A panicked jerk pulls the opponent's head aside and exposes the throat. A wicked thorn flashes in Ghiron's right glove. Mercilessly, he slams it into the attacker's neck, twisting and yanking it out again. Blood gushes from the wound and sprays all over the dusty floor.

Ghiron has no choice - he must win, otherwise he won't survive. He pushes his opponent off to the side, rolls forward and lands above him, taking the upper hand. With his entire weight he pins the other man to the ground, immobilizing him, locking his arms and torso to the floor of the arena. Ghiron pants from exhaustion. He stares into the piercing blue eyes of the enemy who is struggling to get up. Suddenly, he hears his name thrumming in the background. Dozens of throats cheer him on, and Ghiron must do what he does best. He smashes his forehead into the opponent's face. Once. Then another time. Sounds of a bursting nasal bone mix with moans of agony. One more headbutt. Ghiron feels the opponent give.

That's the opportunity. Instantly, he mounts his victim, sitting on his chest, knees over the arms. His fists hammer against the inferior's skull, raining down blow after blow, until his knuckles fracture. The enemy's blue eyes drown in a soup of blood, scrubs of cracked skin, and torn hair. Ghiron growls like an unchained beast, devoured by anger, pounding and beating until there is nothing left of his opponent's face but a shattered skull spurting viscous liquids. He grunts with the very last drop of his strength. He won. Prize: his life.

CLOSED SOCIETY

A barren staircase leads down into a moist basement. The sound of a spluttering generator operating the light coils is drowned out by the buzz of voices echoing through this underground arena. There are about two hundred guests gathering around. Murmurs fill the air; the tension is palpable, and the stakes are high. Cartel Thugs run between the rows of onlookers and push them back in line. Everyone wants to get the best view of the pit at the center of the arena. Carrion Birds are among the guests, and so are the Officers of the Cartel. Even a Preservist hides in the audience. Final bets are called out, before someone gives a shrill whistle and the whole assembly immediately falls silent. The lights are on the pit. Two men the size of mammoths enter the blood drenched battle ground. Seconds later, they are at each other's throats in a brawl to the death.

Pit fights are outlawed across all of Justitian, yet the Cartel keeps running this deadly competition. Everyone who's in on it has some connection to the Cartel, one way or another. The guests are screened and preselected, and entry to these forbidden matches is only available through secret passwords issued by the Cartel's Bookie, Buto, who is known as the grand organizer of the events.

During fighting season, the location of the matches changes on a weekly basis, thereby avoiding sudden raids by Judges. The attending guests hail from committed circles, and everyone knows everybody else so that the secrecy of the duels can be maintained. They also come with a lot of money; no other form of gambling yields larger profits and the allure of winning on a big bet is overwhelming.

Besides the betting business and the incredible profit margins, the pit fights serve another purpose altogether. Some would go so far as to classify them as proxy wars between the Carrion Birds and the Cartel, since both parties flood the upper tiers with homegrown champions and use the matches to settle Downtown's territorial conflicts amongst each other. The victims of such bloody affairs are mostly Defilers or other nameless riffraff from the wasteland, lured into the competition with promises of riches and fame. The champions dominating the pit fights, on the other hand, are iconic individuals with sonorous names, bred and cultivated by the opposing factions. Some are bribed into the bloody business, others kidnapped and enslaved, some held in cages hidden in the Badger's Burrow, while others participate as independents.

Throughout the last twenty years a multitude of these underground heroes have risen to fame and renown, like Bashir, the Stukov Nomad, Leshka, Bride of the Cockroaches, and Umion, Son of the Demiurge. Portraits of these past and present champions are etched into copper cards and reproduced in small print runs with enormous collector's value among the Scrappers of Tech-Central.

NO RULES

Pit fights are raw and carnal, often fought to the death. There are no rules, and the only goal is to overpower and kill the competitor with bare hands. Pit fighters are allowed to step down from a match before it begins, but once they're in the arena they have no choice but to fight. However, it is common for even matchups to result in a draw due to both competitors becoming exhausted. As such, the Cartel now supplies fighters with a glove that features an inlaid thorn, allowing for deadly open palm strikes to deliver a killing blow. The crowd is paying for blood, after all.

ORIGINS

The Judges banished the bloody spectacle ages ago. Originally, the pit fights were a tradition of the people of the Black Lung. It was a well accepted method for Champions of different Clans to stand against one another and divide their territories and hunting grounds through a duel to the death. When the Judges rose to power, they went after these archaic traditions in an attempt to establish the order of the Codex. The pit fights vanished for many decades, until the Cartel rediscovered the ritualistic custom and transformed it into a sport and gambling event, turning it into one of their most prosperous income streams.

THE CARTEL

Hold on, wait a minute! Are you fucking with me, pal? You're trying to tell me you're gonna run to the Judges to file a complaint? Are you dense? What are you gonna do when they ask you for your sales license, you moron? You got none!

Now come over here and lemme explain a few things. You went over to Dipper's booth the other day for a loan. One hundred Drafts, remember? You were told to bring the money back by today, with another fifty on top. That was the agreement, correct? No, don't gimme that shit, you "weren't sure", and you "didn't see the bigger picture", I've heard enough of that. I know when a rat is lying, and I warn you not to do that to me, buddy boy! Listen, I came walking here all the way from the Cartel's Scrapyard to do my job and collect the money, so you'd better settle the bill right now before I need to remind you of who you're dealing with.

What? You got family with the Judges? Get outta here! Who're you trying to fool, lad, I got all the info on you. You're a nobody. You came down here to Tech-Central because you fucked up with the Carrion Birds, you little shit. You thought if you'd snuggle up with us, you'd be safe, buddy boy. Ain't nobody safe who ain't loyal. Look, when we told you we'd offer you protection, we explained you'd have to pay for that, didn't we? And all you did was nod your head like a wimp, and agree to all the terms. Then we gave you some cash upfront so you could run your business, and now you're sobbing around like a bitch feeling mistreated? You're scum! We're your family, shithead, you don't sell us out to nobody, you don't threaten us with them Judges, understood?

Alright, now show me what you got! What's that, fifteen Drafts? Are you out of your fucking mind? Where's the zero at the end of that figure? Argh, will you stop your whining already? It's only your fucking ear I'm cutting off, you piece of shit. Just gimme the money, and it's over! Gimme the fucking money! Oh, here we go, that's only another fifty missing. Ok listen, patch up that ear buddy boy and get back to work. Tomorrow I'll find you here and it will be seventy-five, alright? You hear me? Yeah, thought so! I can look right into your fucking brain through that bloody earhole of yours. Ain't much in there!

BORCA'S BRAVEST

For a long time, the Cartel was considered the laughing stock of Scrapper society. A bunch of passed-by wannabes aiming to dismantle the omnipotent economics of the Chroniclers and the lawful objectives of the Judges. What delusions of grandeur!

No one scoffs at the Cartel anymore. Justitian's largest criminal organization has more political pull than anyone ever thought possible. Bosch's ridiculous gang of yesteryear is now an unrivaled network of criminal henchmen and unionized mobsters, committed and loyal to the bone, hard to weed out and quick to replenish their ranks with new recruits. Whenever the Cluster or Judiciary tries to cut the sprouts of this sprawling network, new chapters form overnight.

The decentralization of the Cartel is its most powerful asset. No traces ever lead back to Bosch himself. In fact, Bosch hates meetings of any kind. He never communicates with more than three people at the time, if at all, when assigning jobs, of which one conversational partner is always left in the dark and fed with wrong information. That way, the Cartel can single out leaks quickly.

Bosch's network responds to ideas, the Dwarven King never issues assignments or commands directly. He drops a potential objective during a discussion and allows the chapters to deduce the actual plan, thereby keeping plausible deniability at all times. This technique has fractured the Cartel into a myriad of splinter groups led by independent Officers who all pay a cut of their profits back to Bosch, cementing his power.

THE ESTATE OF BOSCH

The richest man in all of Justitian is a phantom. He resides outside the city walls to the east of Tech-Central. It is the only natural elevation far and wide and Bosch is enthroned up there in a manor house which resembles a stone-walled village. Grim guard towers bristling with machine guns rise into the sky, and the stationed gunmen keep an eye on the single access road at all times. Nobody gets onto the estate unless they are invited, or they can fall back on a division of Grenadiers and Sappers to violently lay siege on the compound.

But it wouldn't escalate like that: Bosch has the money to keep his enemies at bay while the Judiciary eats from the palm of his hand. No one knows how many Advocates and citizens are truly indebted to him. Only Bosch does, or better yet Buto, the oversized accountant who manages every aspect of his finances.

The people that Bosch receives on his estate are supplicants. They all want something from him. He listens, invests here, supports there, lends money for a favor that he will later demand to be paid off to his benefit. His decisions fundamentally revolve around one thing: harming the Chroniclers, driving rusty iron splinters under their fingernails, containing their influence and strengthening the Cartel in return. This is the motivation behind all of Bosch's actions. Is the Dwarven King driven by spite and scorn? Oh, hell yes. He abhors the cyber toads more than anything, and he'd stop at nothing to deface them in public. All of his actions aim at weakening the economic infrastructure of the Chroniclers, which has put him at the top of the Cluster's kill list.

Bosch knows this, of course, and wants to be prepared for the worst. Therefore he spends his fortunes and buys up reserves, be it food, ammunition, or Petro. His estate is a prepper's dream come true, the basements stacked, the arsenals fully equipped, and the guards ready. Should there be any sign of danger Bosch and his people can hole up for months until their last bullet is spent.

THE COMPOUND

A rail network connects the different areas of Bosch's estate. Bosch drives through his compound in an armored lorry, passing silo towers chock full of corn and warehouses piled to the brim with Petro barrels. Several workshops scattered across the estate focus on black powder processing for explosives, or developing Marvels which can be tested at Bosch's own shooting range.

In the south of the estate, Bosch had the workers erect a private zoo. The Dwarven King loves to impress his guests, but he enjoys tying them up in uncomfortable knots of unspoken agreements even more. Advocates and Uptown officials are his favorite targets. When these spokesmen of communal politics enter the estate and stroll around the gardens, Bosch takes the time to guide their spoiled brats through his animal exhibition. Behind iron bars, creatures from all over Europe and Africa growl at the visitors. These strange animals, some of which don't even have a name, are Bosch's favorite part of his collection. He loves the bears, and the boars, and he is always eager to show off the monkeys and beavers, comparing both to the Scrappers in all kinds of crude and humorous ways.

Once the tour comes to an end, he has the children loaded up with sweets and toys, or offers them a ride in his lorry. They all adore Uncle Bosch, and keep repeating it to their parents forever after.

UNATTAINABLE

All plans developed by the Cluster to damage Bosch have so far come to nothing. Shutters went missing in action. Judges were called off of investigations. Magpies hired to seduce and later murder him in bed failed on all levels; Bosch is asexual. Genitals disgust him and he didn't fall for any of the bait.

Bosch loves telling jokes with no punchline to track down traitors in his own ranks. Anyone who laughs at these senseless flat gags is suspicious, and only Bosch's closest confidants are in the know. On top of that, the Cartel's entire vocabulary is riddled with codewords that often feature two opposite meanings. Assignments can only be understood if one knows the entire context of a conversation, otherwise the information is misleading and points at nonsensical results.

When Bosch leaves his estate, he only does so in an armored horse carriage with a dozen of his best Cartel Thugs in tow. The coachman isn't allowed to steer the car away from the Stallion Streets, to avoid the risk of ambushes, and when Bosch wants to visit a guesthouse his entourage searches the place thoroughly before paving the way for the Dwarven King to step out and get seated. The owners of the guesthouses play along. They know Bosch's generosity: if they treat him and his crew well they can make a month's worth of profit in a single night.

SCAVENGER STREET

It's way too warm. Everyone in the neighborhood feels it. Nobody moves. The air clogs up in the alleys and dust obscures the view. Breathing alone is a real drudgery. Suddenly, a woman's cry cuts through the lull. A half-naked Scrapper hurries out onto Scavenger Street, her curls fiery red and her right eye swollen. Her expression is filled with panic. A Scavenger follows right behind her, his upper body bare, sweaty, and his face contorted with anger.

"You bitch!" he roars as if shaken by rabies. "What've you done with our Burn?"

The woman scrambles to the other side of the street and tries to get to safety behind a row of rusty barrels, but her furious lover breaks through the obstacle without any effort. Cursing wildly, he kicks the barrels out of the way and tries to smack his lover with a punch to the face, but he's too drunk to catch her. His blows fire aimlessly through the air as he stumbles forward, catches his balance, and hurtles back around in the direction of his victim to attack her again.

"You cunt! I promised you that I'd take us through the summer, you miserable whore! Why'd you have to get laid by a damn Judge?" the Scavenger screams like a maniac. His head is bright red and swollen, and the veins press through the skin on his neck. A jealous frenzy has robbed him of his mind. The woman has had enough. She reaches for a loose wooden beam on the ground, yanks it upward at a straight angle and smashes her lover's nasal bone with a lucky hit.

The hothead goes down like a wet sack. A small fountain of blood gushes from his face. He doesn't move. The Scrapper throws the wooden beam in the dust and finally pulls the half-torn leather shirt up to cover her bare chest. Meanwhile, a crowd of Scavengers has gathered around to witness the spectacle. After a brief moment of silence, they break out in cheers and applaud the heroine of the day, catcalling and complimenting her grit as she tries to make it out of there before her former lover comes back to his senses. Fucking hell, hot days are rough.

STRAIGHT LIKE A DIE

A single Stallion Street dissects Tech-Central into North and South. Originally named after Supreme Judge Fulmas, today it is only referred to as Scavenger Street. Rows of shabby houses, tiny workshops, day markets, and open podiums line both sides of the street. Commonly, this area is known for its transient day laborers: Scrappers for hire who will work any job so long as it brings in some food or Drafts to get through the week. Every morning these independent Scrappers stand along the curbside, waiting for Judges to ride past calling out construction sites in and around Justitian that require immediate help. Foremen come all the way from Cavernis to look for miners, pig farmers from Harm search from Scrappers who can handle manure deliveries, and Anabaptists hire welders to fix some broken pipelines out in the Rubble. Scavenger Street is a vast employment market and a way for Scrappers to get accustomed with the city and the surrounding areas of the Protectorate.

Scavengers who don't land jobs often band together and go on forays into the nearby wastelands, or aim toward the Stukov Desert, in hopes that travelling together will improve their chances of survival.

The Crack

The Crack is fenced off by cast concrete formwork, crowned with barbed wire, and surrounded by barriers of polished steel spikes. The area is buzzing with Hellvetics and Chroniclers. Four Sentinels in full Heavy Duty Armor securing the perimeter are the main attraction. Clad in white Harnesses and powered by howling servo-motors, they stand two and a half meters tall and every step they take is like an earthquake. They are tasked with guarding this unfortunate area which collapsed under its own weight three years ago.

The sad record of that day: 364 dead, 1788 severely injured. It is the most recent urban catastrophe in Justitian's history. For weeks, the smell of putrefaction hung above the gaping hole of the sunken district. During the event, Chroniclers blocked the way for rescue workers and chased onlookers away with a barrage of thundering cacophonies from their loudspeaker systems. The Fire Watch was barred from entering the Crack, being told it was too dangerous to go down there.

After a month of standstill, Genie troops requested from Hellvetica reached the death zone. On behalf of the Cluster they barricaded the entire site. The walls for the security rampart were poured out of cement in Tech-Central and brought into position by the Hellvetics. After three months, the Crack was completely sealed off from the outside world.

The Judges demanded the hole to be excavated and to be rebuilt quickly. Archot issued an edict that offered Scavengers who helped with the reconstruction the prospect of citizenship, but his efforts were thwarted by the Chroniclers. Scavengers were not tolerated on the premises. Only Hellvetics and Scrappers who had undergone extensive screening in Cluster Level 1 were allowed to enter the construction site. Nobody understood why, but the Chroniclers were adamant. They presented a new plan to the Senates, featuring a step by step reconstruction across several years, to avoid the possibility of damaging any of the subterranean water lines. To ensure the safety of the perimeter, it would require special personnel that had to be selected by hand. The Judges signed off on the proposal, and the Chroniclers have been in charge ever since.

Lately, a single symbol keeps popping up, smeared across the Crack's concrete walls at night. It says "Veritas" – a word in Bygone Latin. The Chroniclers pay poor Scavengers for the removal, yet the writing appears in other areas week after week. The Sentinels have yet to catch the muckraker responsible for the ominous writings.

AFTER ALL, WE BROUGHT NOTHING WITH US
WHEN WE CAME INTO THE WORLD,
AND WE CAN'T TAKE ANYTHING
WITH US WHEN WE LEAVE IT.

[TIMOTHY 6:7]

GANGS OF CHILDREN

When the icy haze of winter sweeps across the wasteland and the lips turn blue, the Scrappers hurry back to Justitian. Once there, the weary dirt digger huddles tight together with his peers beneath a pile of rags, sharing warmth, getting close physically if not emotionally. When spring arrives, the woman crawls out into the light, wraps her hands around the man's waist, strokes the greasy hair from his face, and whispers "Until next year." She still thinks that's true. They both wrap themselves in their clothes, shouldering their backpacks or strapping their carrying rigs across their frames before setting off. The man looks her in the eye once more to memorize her face: in the lonely weeks and months in the uncharted territories or beneath the shattered ruins of the Bygones, her visage will be his light and fire in the darkness, until the flame finally begins to die down.

She, on the other hand, will have to remember him for far longer as she bears the burden of their reckless passion: pregnancy is hell on earth for a Scrapper. She is slow, can no longer squeeze through tight gaps, and is always short of breath. The hunger becomes overwhelming. Motherly instinct competes with the inborn desire to survive. Many cannot bear the pain any longer, wrenching the unborn child from their belly with a bent wire, burying it in a pile of rubble, and continuing on as usual. Others make it through the worst and try and get by with the newborn at their side. However, they never turn to the father - even if they could find him somewhere in Justitian's endless maze of alleyways, he'd probably have another woman hanging off his arm. The mother would never be able to compete against a rival lover. She is on her own. Some become desperate and gift their children to the Judges, others sell them to the Apocalyptics. Still more leave the trembling and whimpering bundle to the grace of their gods: wrapped in rags, the child is left behind on an abandoned parcel in the Rubble or on the filthy ground of Tech-Central. However, there is no god waiting to show mercy - instead, the Defilers will care for the baby. In the years to come they will be like a family to the orphan, laughing and crying with them. Later they will explain that the city dwellers should never be trusted, and they should be stolen from to survive and to make up for the injustice they have forced upon the Defilers.

And so the child gangs of the Defilers descend like a swarm of locusts upon the market stalls, stealing bread and meat from the displays or bundles of Drafts from the citizen's pockets in a flurry of motion, only to disappear in the crowds the very next instant. Every day, Judges drag more lice-infested children across the Stallion Streets to smack them into the dust beyond the city gates. Their faces and hands are already shining in a crimson red from previous markings, but only the most merciless Judges would decide to smash a child's hand in public. Exile is the only remaining solution to get rid of these pests, but for the children this punishment is nothing more than a hollow phrase. Where would they go? Somehow, they always return to the city and their families in the Defiler Streets, and are already back in Downtown causing trouble the next day.

Outskirts

The Outskirts once lay far away from the original city center. Here in the barrens, outcasts settled between the old burial grounds of the Stukovs and the Brenni. Throughout the years, Justitian expanded and gobbled up this former rural patch, before releasing the land for urbanization and thereby laying the groundwork for the melting pot of ideas that it would later become.

Today, the Outskirts are the most mixed and versatile district in all of Downtown by far. Its central position, jammed between Tech-Central, the Steel Monolith, and the Jehammedan Quarter, draws a wide array of inhabitants from different backgrounds and all walks of life. Famulancers take their lunch break next to Scrappers who in turn move into houses belonging to Neolibyan Scribes who take residence in Uptown's Ambassador Quarter. Judges buy apartments here to avoid both the stressful Forecourt and the crusty Stukov Quarter. It is Justitian's fillet piece, merging rich and poor, citizens and guests, Cults and Clans.

LEGENDS

The Outskirts are full of urban legends. Dead people supposedly stroll through the alleys at night. Immortals are said to live among the natives, people whose facial features are still in full bloom after forty years. Others claim the spirits of the fallen Stukovs and Brenni have seeped into the architecture, and one can hear their breath piercing through the veil of the afterlife. Most of the hearsay is utter nonsense, yet the storytellers of the district aren't shy of asking for a few Drafts to embellish their spooky yarn.

The huge population of Defilers roaming the streets adds to the haunted flavor. Both the Knacker's Office and a major Defiler Street are situated in the Outskirts, which explains the traffic.

MIXED CULTURE

The mixture of newcomers, locals, homeowners, and transients has created a hotspot of interaction that is unique in all of Justitian. While the major city quarters all fall under the sway of one local power or

another, the Outskirts have remained largely autonomous. Ropers have settled in the neighborhood for generations. They don't mingle with the Scrappers of Tech-Central. Next to them reside the families of the Fire Watch, in their large townhouses. Squeezed in between are small markets, crammed into tiny alleyways. Toymakers working for the African have set up shop here and sell their creations to passing Judges on their way home from work.

Across a small bridge, leading over one of the waste channels, one can reach the Circus of Flaws, one of the Outskirts' most absurd attractions. The Circus features an exhibition of physical malformations; people of all genders and ages riddled with grotesque deformities can be studied by a paying audience. Spitalians often bring their youngest Recruits to the Circus to explain the various conditions and showcase the drastic results of hereditary diseases, inbreeding, and genetic mutation. The Recruits gawk in awe and disgust at the humans draped and exposed behind glass walls.

Nobody knows who brought the collection of blemished specimens together. The Circus is run by two Scrappers who charge the entry fee, but they claim they've been hired to do their job by a middleman. Investigations into the matter have led nowhere. The city books don't even show any citizen actually putting a deposit down for the premise.

THE ORPHANAGE

The parentless children of Justitian often face the worst fates. Some are sold to Apocalyptics and raised as thieves, while others wander the streets until Judges mark them and lock them up in the Cleft. Those who survive such hardships later end up in the Defiler Streets and the cycle of violence and abuse takes its course. Not many live to see their early teens. Some simply disappear forever. Others get kidnapped from the waste channels and are sold back into slavery to the Cartel, where they are raised as future pit fighters.

Only a handful of orphans manage to reach the safe banks of Joerdis' orphanage and are taken in and protected by the Scrapper. Joerdis herself is possibly the most famous resident Scrapper of the Outskirts. She has saved countless children from an early death on the vicious streets of Justitian, and gained recognition for her efforts far and wide. She's a fighter, a lioness who cares for her pups with all her being. If there is but one good soul left in Downtown, then it must be Joerdis. At least, that's how the saying goes. Her orphanage is a vast warehouse, consisting of several buildings and adjacent wings surrounded by fences, and features a sprawling yard where the children can play and romp around, their laughter echoing from the walls and travelling several blocks. In summer, Joerdis sits outside with her children all day long, sewing clothes, organizing repairs, and cooking stews over an open fire.

Pregnant Scrappers come to Joerdis to get her help during birth. She works as a midwife and helps the women through the act of labor. Most of them escape the orphanage as soon as they can stand on their own feet, leaving their offspring behind for Joerdis to take care of. She doesn't mind. She loves the newborns the most.

THE AFRICAN CONNECTION

If there is anyone who stands to profit from the chaotic patchwork of cultures that arises in the Outskirts, it's Dewe, the African. The ambitious Neolibyan immediately marked the district as an easily exploitable area when he first came to the city two decades ago, and since then his foothold has only grown stronger. It all started with a small tailor shop, operated by a Stukov named Ashlin who was supported by a couple of brats from Joerdis' Orphanage, paid in the form of a bowl of broth every evening. To this day the shop pumps out cheap, simple items of clothing made in only a few specific sizes - if you want it altered, go somewhere else! Despite the lacking customer service, Ashlin's business has remained steadily profitable over the years, and has even been able to buy a set of rudimentary sewing machines from the Scrappers in Tech-Central in order to churn out more product.

The African's ambitions in the area didn't stop at a mere clothing shop, however: the location was perfect for the mass storage of his goods collected from across the city. Land was relatively cheap, although it still left his pockets feeling uncomfortably empty, and the Forecourt with its swelling masses of customers waiting to be plundered was close by. As such, Dewe has several warehouses in the district constantly staffed with hired Scrappers or Stukovs who are tasked with organising and sorting through the wide variety of goods that fall under the aegis of the African's entrepreneurial interests. They, in turn, oversee an armada of Scavengers responsible for running back and forth between the Outskirts and the Forecourt with nothing more than a crude sled to drag behind them, responding to the day's purchases and hauling in demand goods to where they're needed most. Booth 25 is running low on clothes? Get another shipment out there! What do you mean 18 is out of toys, it was restocked just an hour ago! No, don't go yell at him, just get him more already dammit!

THE BOTTOM FEEDER

The Outskirts are Justitian's vertical slice, with every social stratum represented in those who pass through the district, whether they are on their way to another part of the sprawling city or here to stay. For the landlord of the Bottom Feeder, a man named Ignio, this situation presented an opportunity. By positioning himself at the right spot, and attracting the right clientele to his guesthouse, he could absorb information from all across the city and sell it on. There are plenty of people who want to find out what's going on in Justitian, and the Bottom Feeder is where they can buy that info, for a price.

Ignio also uses the proximity of the Defiler Streets to his advantage, having established underhanded deals with the Matrons. The outlaws flock to the back door of the taproom every evening, where one of the cooks offers the leftovers from the day. In exchange, Ignio gets to hear everything the Defilers have seen throughout the week; a body has been fished out of a Defiler Street over in the Stukov Quarter, the Spitalians have been getting antsy at the sluice along the Diadochus Stallion Street, and another dozen citizens were made Jurymen yesterday. Useful half-knowledge, worth its price.

The Tent City

You ain't from here! You don't speak our language! Get lost! Piss off! The mood is heated: Scrappers who are not from Borca are unwelcome guests in Tech-Central. The Cartel makes sure of that. Bosch has a penchant for Scrappers from his home country. He doesn't like dirt diggers from other regions of the world. Those who do not understand Borcan and are not familiar with the customs of Downtown are suspicious to him and can fuck off for all it's worth. Therefore, he deploys thugs to harass foreigners as soon as they enter the city gates. The newcomers are driven back out and displaced to the southern tip of Tech-Central, into the tent city.

Here the new arrivals bundle up according to the Culture they hail from. Three large campsites exist: one for Pollners, one for Purgans, and another for droves of African Scrappers.

Spitalian platoons frequent the Funnel Roads that lead from the Spital to Justitian and run straight through the tent city. They are wary of such a collection of undocumented transients, considering the extraordinary potential for explosive riots. In order to preemptively showcase strength and determination, units consisting of ten Famulancers each branch off from their platoons and carry out random searches in the tent city. Without warning, they burst into the dirty tents, ransack belongings, take saliva samples, and examine the sick for spore infestation.

It should come as no surprise that this approach is not met with a calm response. Oftentimes, these raids escalate into hostile outbursts of anger, and wild brawls ensue between the opposing groups. There are injuries on both sides and the Spitalians have to withdraw and wait for Protectors to serve as reinforcements. However, since the majority of the Scrappers living here are unregistered riffraff, it is easy for the assailants to disappear in the bustle and escape their due punishment.

Worse than the clashes with the Spitalians are the situations in which hostile camps attack one another and enter the territory of the opposing group to settle outstanding scores. The most famous of all of the mass brawls in Justitan's recent history happened a year ago, when the African and Purgan camps began to clash over a dispute that started in Syracuse and was finally put out of the way. Hundreds of Scrappers went into battle with crowbars and iron rods, kicking and bashing each other for almost an hour. It took all of Justitian's cavalry to put a halt to the unrest. Since then, the tent city has been staffed with additional patrols of Jurymen.

NEIGHBORHOOD OF THE PROVIDERS

NEIGHBORHOOD OF THE PROVIDERS
Tech II

DISTRICTS:
Fielding

POPULATION:
Stable: ca. 38,000

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY:
None

FOOD SUPPLY:
High

RESIDENT CULTS:
Spitalians; Judges; Clanners; Anabaptists

IMPORTANT AREAS:
Cemetary of the Judges

Far out. Justitian is but a shadowy colossus that shimmers through the morning haze. Small reed fences and plastic tarps separate the meager parcels from the farmsteads and stables. Silos and fuel stations protrude from the sea of wheat like oversized pinheads punched into the soil by some long forgotten gods. A large windmill creaks in the vicinity, breaking the silence of the open terrain.

Thriba bundles the ears of wheat and fastens them with a wire loop. Exhausted, she looks up, wiping the sweat from her brow and tossing her braids over her shoulders. Then she spots the riders. Spitalians. Thriba curses under her breath. Not again, she thinks. The eggheads were on their farm just a week ago to inspect the crops.

In a few quick steps she hurries over to the barn to alert her husband. He nods, aware of the tiring procedures they'll have to endure over the next few hours. Firmly, the couple steps out before the riders and unfolds their citizenship papers. "We're citizens." Thriba protests. "We've settled here for fifteen years. You certified our crops just the other day! This farm is clean!"

The Spitalians look at each other in confusion, then back at the Providers. "We're not here for your crops, woman." one says, leaning out of his saddle. "You must submit your farmland for seed testing. We require your cooperation. This form explains the procedures." He waves a green sheet through the air. Thriba tilts her head, eyeing her husband for an explanation. He keeps shrugging his shoulders, not knowing what any of this is about. "This should suffice for now." the rider says, tossing a bundle of Drafts down to them. Thriba stares in shock. She's never seen so much money.

SALT OF THE EARTH

North of Justitian's bustling Downtown lies the Neighborhood of the Providers, the oldest farming community of the city, which has been in use since the turn of the century. Technically a part of the Rubble, yet close enough to be considered an outlier of the city proper, the Neighborhood is counted as one of the seven major city districts. The majority of the population trace their lineage back to the earliest rural settlers deposited here by the Judiciary during the Great Relocation some five generations ago. These families, commonly called dynasties, are still heavily intertwined with the city's leadership, profiting from close affiliations to city officials and Advocate families alike.

While citizenship becomes a scarcity out in the Rubble itself, the majority of Providers living in the Neighborhood are legitimate citizens who've proven their worth to Justitian for many decades. They're considered the salt of the earth, the bakers, butchers, and millers who are the first in line to supply the civic markets with certified crops and meat, delivering their cargo every morning into the Stukov Quarter, the Forecourt, and even all the way to Uptown. Many of these dynasties have made their personal sacrifice to Justitian in sweat and blood. The latter comes in the form of children gifted to the Judiciary to be raised as Protectors, or married into the Five Houses to strengthen the Advocate bloodlines.

The Neighborhood lacks a clear border, and its outer edge flows seamlessly into the territory of the greater Rubble. The main difference, however, is in the high land value of the Neighborhood due to its direct connection to the civic markets, a fact which is reflected in exorbitant downpayments for farmland leases and requires the local Providers to be highly effective in turning over revenue with their harvest. Just one failed certification can result in bankruptcy and the confiscation of property.

VILLAGE LIFE

The inhabitants of the Neighborhood live in small village conglomerates of several connected farmsteads, each of which forms a microscopic community of its own. The Providers help each other out with tools, draft animals, and essential supplies, organize water distribution, or collect money to hire Scrappers for repairs of damaged farm equipment. The communities know that they must be considerate of how they invest their funds, and plan far in advance. Therefore it is better to have several patriarchs at the table who can throw their collective experience into the mix and make meaningful decisions that will be beneficial for all of the families within the conglomerate.

Sometimes these communities harbor a rare Protector among their ranks who saved up years worth of salary to afford a farmhouse for his wife and children, where he knows they'll reside in peaceful surroundings while he's out on his monthly shift trudging through Downtown's vice. These Protectors have seen the darkest side of Justitian and know what could happen to their loved ones if their identities were to become known. Better to hide them away in the open fields of the Neighborhood, as far away from potential danger as possible.

The close proximity to the city brings the Neighborhood under constant scrutiny by the Spitalians, who observe and control the nearby fields like hawks, erecting fueling stations and pesticide boilers for the local farmers and upholding the Hygienic Regulations with bureaucratic perfection. When they patrol the Funnel Roads on their horsebacks and come riding onto the Provider properties, the tension is palpable. Many of the older generations remember the days before the Spitalians marched into Uptown with their decrees and shake their head in disbelief over the harassment that has rained down on the community since then. Was it really that bad before? Are all these inspections truly necessary, or is it just another stick thrown into the spokes of the oxcart to finally break the axle? Many would love to see some sort of payback, some grassroots upheaval that puts the Spitalians back in line, and tells them enough is enough - a farmer's union, defending the civil rights of the Providers. A Cooperative.

THE GHOST OF UNITY

Ardon couldn't watch the absurdities decreed by Uptown any longer, couldn't bear to see his fellow Village Jurymen stuffing their pockets and stealing their way to the top of the food chain by ruining Provider families with false advice and wicked methods of extortion. The Neighborhood of the Providers was his home, the Rubble his territory. He had been a butcher all his life, long before he was made the Village Juryman of his own quadrant. As he went about his assignments, he uncovered corruption everywhere. Out

Neutral Soil

The fire in the hearth was about to die down. The abode had soaked up all the warmth, and the leftovers of the dinner were littering the table. Galvia stuffed her cheeks with bread and drowned it with a sip of chicken stock. She was fighting with the lump of loaf stuck in her throat, pummeling her chest so she could gobble it down in one go. She hadn't been this hungry in a while.

"Are you done yet?" her father asked, huddled in a thick fur blanket, sitting across from her in a mighty wooden chair with his feet up on a stool.

"Please! Help me out! Just this one time." Galvia smacked her lips, wiping them clean with her sleeve.

"Just look at yourself for once, would you?" he said with grumbling disappointment. "You're a disgrace. Look at your hair, and your outfit. If your mother saw you like this, she'd be turning in her grave."

"Stop it!" she demanded. "It's my life, my choice. You have to accept that I'm not your little daughter anymore!"

Her father rumbled like a distant thunderstorm. "I will never accept that you whore yourself out at the Harbor and that you throw away your life! We didn't raise you like this! I should have whooped some sense into you when you were young, but I didn't do it because your mother said so. See what it got her?" he rambled like a waterfall.

Galvia didn't listen. Instead she kept gorging on the food, downing another bowl of stew. "It's just this one thing I'm asking from you. Don't be so stubborn!" she clamoured, rolling her eyes. "Don't be the same uptight jerk you've been all your life. I need to stash my cargo here. Just for a few days!"

Her father sank into the chair and drew the blanket tight around his shoulders. With old eyes he examined his child, disenchanted at what had become of her. Yet he couldn't deny the love and affection he still felt, even though it was buried somewhere in the deep recesses of his memory. Life as a Provider was hard enough. Realizing that there would be no heir to the family after he was gone broke his heart. There was nothing left for him to do in this world, except to despise his very existence and look back at a life full of loss. The only choice he had was to either give in to her demands, or to abandon his daughter once and for all.

"It's Burn, isn't it?" he asked.

Galvia avoided his gaze. She barely nodded, nervously bouncing her knee.

"I'll give you three days." he said. "If you're not back by then, I'll throw the entire stash into the fire. Understood?"

A smile crossed Galvia's face, and she gave a sigh of relief. "I knew I could count on you."

Slowly he rose from his chair and walked over to the hearth, watching the crackling embers. "No. This is my last favor. You pick it up in three days. After that, you won't be my daughter anymore."

here, away from the watchful eyes of even the most honorable Advocate, the local Providers were at the mercy of unscrupulous Jurymen and bribable Spitalians.

These people required a frontman, a representative who'd collect their worries and speak with their voice, who'd call the Judiciary and the Offices out for the rotten and unethical practices they had brought over their own farming community - the very backbone of Justitian's wealth and growth. Without the Providers nothing would function. Justitian, the giant, would stumble and fall within a week's time, just as Exalt did one hundred years prior.

How could Uptown not see its own fallacy? Was everyone up there drunk and high on fumes from the Paper Factory? Ardon no longer cared to construct excuses for their failures. Instead, he drew a banner featuring a crossed sickle and butcher's knife, surrounded by a crest of wheat ears. He raised the red flag on the roof of his house and called the village elders for a meeting. Ardon was no politician. His hands were meaty, his movements stiff, but what he had to say resonated with everyone in the room. The Providers had to fight back. The only reason the Judiciary and the Spitalians were able to impose their nonsensical laws was because they could target the Providers as individuals directly. However, if they were a coalition they'd be able to rip the reins from the hands of the Judges and raise their voice as one. Then the Providers would make the demands, and Justitian would either follow or starve to death.

The Cooperative was born. Ardon's vision spread like wildfire across the Rubble and lured the patriarchs out of their slumber. In the months to come, family after family signed the membership manifesto and joined the movement. Today, over 120 Provider families follow the cause and the Cooperative continues to grow, attracting supporters from all walks of life.

But Ardon is treading a fine line. His provocative behavior hasn't gone unnoticed and he's already been declared persona non grata by the rulers of Uptown. It's only a matter of time before the forces clash. The Judiciary cannot allow for a single man to spit in their face in public and get away with it.

Cemetery of the Judges

Callum, Doria, and Vedrick descended the bold stairs in silence, choking on their tears. As they followed the procession, they passed the immortalized stone features of the Judges of yore, the founders of the mighty Protectorate who had given their lives in glorious battles and fought for the greater good of mankind. Just like their comrade Phinn - killed by a phosphorus bomb during a sortie against the approaching savages at the border. None of his squadmates had ever seen a body so ravaged and distorted; their comrade was cooked alive before their eyes, and they could do nothing to save him.

They had escorted his casket all the way back from Siege and returned his remains to his family, so he could be laid to rest among all the others who had fallen, shedding their lives for Justitian's future. As they approached Phinn's final resting place, the Advocate choir raised their voices to sing the Ode to the First Judge, as was due in such reverent moments. The three squadmates took their hats off, listened to the salutation salvoes fired into the morning sky, and watched as the body wrapped in bandages was lifted from the coffin and pushed into a nook in the wall. Phinn's father was there, weeping as he placed a square tombstone over the nook and sealed the gaps with beeswax.

A murmur went through the crowd, heavy sighs followed by faint sobbing. The comrades knew that Phinn had left behind a wife and two sons who would have to look out for themselves now. As they stood there, trapped in thought, the mason began chiseling the tombstone, letter for letter, until the epitaph was finished: Phinn Wollmar; 2570-2598; Died facing the enemy.

LAST FAREWELL

De mortuis nil nisi bonum – Of the dead, speak nothing but good. In the language of the Judiciary, heroism translates into dedicating one's life to Justitian. Anyone who once wore a coat, hat, and hammer, and swore their oath to the Righteous Fist deserves a funeral at the Cemetery of the Judges. Vagrant or Advocate, Executioner or Arbiter, the last honor must be given to everyone whose name is registered in Judgement Hall.

The Cemetery of the Judges is the most sacred of sites. Judges from across the entire Protectorate have been put to rest here, the dates of their deaths carved into the tombstones reaching all the way back to the early 25th century.

The area is vast, and the majority of the structure is situated underground. Broad stairways lead into a cavernous graveyard, hewn from the barren rock. Small passages open up towards side sections, featuring epitaphs or lists of names of fallen Judges whose bodies were never recovered or who weren't meaningful enough to be displayed in larger than life portraits. Those can only be found at the intersections, exposed as intimidating stone busts protruding from the brickwork, their furrowed features an idealization of the figures who lie buried here. Even in death the Cult holds watch over the ones who passed. This idea is deeply ingrained in the mentality of the Judges, and with it comes the commemoration of every man and woman who devoted their time on earth to the spirit of Justitian.

Never would the Judiciary allow anyone to defile their ancestry or dare to cut open the bodies of a deceased member for purposes of examination. No Judge may ever end up in the Knacker's Office to be processed into soap. This practice has grown to become the biggest conflict and point of contention between the Judges and their Spitalian allies. For the doctors the situation is clear as day. Any Judge could be a potential carrier of Sepsis, and burying a spore infested corpse into soil could risk the growth of a spore field - a catastrophe that cannot be treated with mere religious devotion.

Relentlessly, the Office of Hygienics batters Judgement Hall with requests to open all corpses for autopsy, to allow for clarity. The Judiciary doesn't give an inch. Archot is the mightiest proponent of the burial tradition and even in the Senates the demands issued by the Spitalians fall on deaf ears.

ADMINISTRATION

"Every Judge must return to their home soil" is a famous saying told in the Barracks. For a long time this rang true. Protectors who were killed on foreign missions were shipped back to Justitian, and the burial ceremony was administered by the Advocate Houses in collaboration with the Office of Internal Affairs. A stonemason was selected from among the artists employed by Judgement Hall, and ordered to create a burial nook along with a tombstone in preparation for the sepulture. If the Judge was an important figurehead of the Judiciary, such as a high ranking Arbiter or a Senator, a Mausoleum was excavated in the Cemetery to memorialize their achievements, and capped with a romanticized portrait of the deceased.

However, the Clan Wars have changed everything. Judges now go missing in the field, their bodies razed and eaten by cannibals, and the caskets shipped back home are empty. The situation has become so dire that Chief Protector Rutgar has sent an urgent letter as a warning to the commanding Executioners in Siege, demanding they do their utmost to recover lost Protectors. After all, they are Justitian's legacy.

THE COLD STORAGE OF DR. MASUR

The Judges don't like having their cases compromised by letting the Spitalians sniff around dead bodies. The Commissioners at the Office of Internal Affairs don't trust the regular autopsy reports coming out of the Knacker's Office. They know full well that the Famulancers employed there predominantly focus on spore infestation and overseeing the processing of corpses. They aren't trained in solving criminal cases, and there is always a chance of critical information leaking to the public.

Hidden deep within the Cemetery of

the Judges lies the cold storage of Doctor Masur, a renegade Spitalian under the protection of the Office of Internal Affairs. He is the Judiciary's ace when they must conduct secret autopsies away from the Spitalians' meddlings. The gaunt coroner has his reasons for hiding from his Cult. The Judges don't ask questions. Instead, they make sure that Masur is taken care of and that he lacks for nothing. Four Protectors are ordered to watch over the man, who is of immense value to the Commissioners in Uptown and has helped them to uncover heinous crimes on multiple occasions.

The cold storage is hidden behind a double door inside one of the Mausoleums. Beyond lies a vault separated into a laboratory, personal rooms, and a cooling chamber where the corpses rest on ice blocks hauled over from the Hypogeum. Masur is a specialist, and his eye for the dead is keen. Nobody would question his authority.

HEAT SIGNATURE

The Cluster has mapped the entire Cemetery of the Judges with surveillance drones and devised a heat map for the area. The Streamers who are in charge of the operation cannot explain the steep temperature drop in one specific sector, which doesn't correspond with any of the nearby thermal readings.

They don't know that they've accidentally stumbled across Doctor Masur's cold storage. Instead they attribute the anomaly to a potential enclave within the subsoil of the Cemetery. This wouldn't be a problem per se, if the graveyard wasn't in direct proximity to the Cluster itself. Studying their calculations, the thermal anomaly is localized exactly at the same depth as Level 4, which means it is flush with the Cluster's Exit Level. If one were to dig in a straight line for half a mile, they would pierce the Cluster's exterior hull. If this insight wasn't alarming enough, the news of a Needle stalking through Justitian's Underground is another reason to investigate the Cemetery.

However, this is nigh-on impossible, since there is only a single entrance into the subterranean complex which is heavily guarded by Protectors. The Cemetery is only open to the public during the Black Week, and even then a Chronicler marching between Advocates would raise suspicion. The Streamers need to bribe a different group of operatives, disguising themselves as Judges, into trying to locate the cold spot. Some of the Streamers are convinced they've uncovered the Needle's hideout. But the mission is perilous - if it fails, chances are that they will attract the Needle's attention, and lose their agents on the ground. Even worse, Reenactment is punishable by the death sentence. If the operatives are caught, there will be no mercy.

Fielding

Fielding is an upscale farming district. No other description could be more fitting. The population is a rich blend of upper-middle class citizens, such as Providers that own successful farming estates or Harmids who've raked in a fortune with their pig fattening business. Among them live the offshoots of the Sprenger family, highly decorated Ropers, and wealthy Elysians running herbal pharmacies. Fancy country houses line the streets, and the cobblestone pathways are always swept clean. The inhabitants want to keep it this way. Most of them are loyalists and follow Uptown's orders without question. Trapped in their conservative bubble, they maintain the status quo that allowed them to rise to prominence.

Amidst this suburban miasma the master bakers and brewers make their home, those who have come to dominate the markets in the civic districts with their goods and whose product quality was recognized by the Judiciary as the finest achievement of Justitian's eating and drinking culture. These guilds attach great importance to their traditions and guard their craft and recipes from their competitors.

But Fielding stinks of bourgeois misery - infested by corrupt Village Jurymen who cheated their way to the top surrounded by willful minions doing their bidding. Next to them settle high class citizens and officials, whose connections run all the way to Uptown. Nestled away from the prying eyes of the Advocate families, Fielding blossoms and bristles from nepotism and partisanship. However, the powers that be are careful not to attract the attention of the Righteous Fist.

Most of the money that flows into the district is reinvested into businesses located outside of Justitian's zone of influence. The Jurymen deploy their own lackeys to acquire land outside of Bassham, and plant gossip among the Providers of the Rubble that there are rich soils to be claimed in the areas of reconquered Franka. They coax long established Provider families into leasing their property off to the Jurymen in exchange for much more promising prospects west of the Protectorate. A villainous ploy that makes use of the Providers' lack of knowledge concerning the swarm infested hinterlands of Franka. The farmers are fooled into believing that they'll be better off if they resettle, leaving behind land that they previously owned for generations in the hands of these Jurymen. A week later, the new owners go about releasing the property for a much higher price to the next Provider in line wanting to try their luck in the Rubble.

This nefarious reshuffling of parcel ownership has been going on for years, with Village Jurymen slowly turning into large scale landlords, subdividing entire quadrants into overpriced sectors and bleeding upstart Providers dry of their savings.

BEAUTY CONTEST

One of the greatest festivities of Fielding is the annual beauty contest that serves as a marriage market for the bachelors streaming in from all across Downtown. Parents drag their dolled-up fifteen-year-old daughters out of the Rubble to show them off as future brides. The dresses are cut low leaving the shoulders free and exposing any cleavage, hair is braided and sits tightly against the head, noses are powdered with chalk, cheeks are brushed with red dust, and lips are smeared with candle wax to make them glossy and full. If the Provider family can afford it, they even buy sandals for the girls. In rank and file the girls stand before an audience of adult men who weigh them up like predators. They're told by their parents not to speak too much, but smile and nod often when they're being asked questions. Each of the girls is allowed to say her name and speak for three minutes about where she's from and what food she likes before the negotiations begin.

The parents parading their girls here are dirt poor, and don't have enough Drafts to bring even themselves through the winter, let alone their children. They chew their dirty fingernails in desperation, hoping that one of the wealthy Jurymen will find their daughter appealing enough and offer to take her as a bride, thereby paying a hefty compensation to the family. The haggling between parents and future husbands often lasts for hours, until a final price is agreed upon and a wedding contract between the parties is sealed.

A week later, after filing all the appropriate forms at the Office of Locality, the groom will order an oxcart and drive out to the Rubble for the local marriage ceremony. The next morning he'll pack whatever meager belongings the girl owns onto the cart and head back to Justitian, where their new life as a married couple awaits. Many of these arranged marriages fail to last.

THE SANATORIUM

Not every soul is carved from stone, nor can every mind withstand the chaos of war. When a Judge grows old, their body turns frail and their spirit slowly says farewell to the world. It would be ignominious to chase them off into the wasteland and continue on with business as usual. After all, they have served Justitian for a lifetime.

Blessed are such elderly Arbiters who can retire to die in dignity within the walls of their Advocate family's estate, provided that the descendants are willing to endure their faint wheezing, coughing, and lack of articulation. Witnessing the quiet decay of a family member is not a particularly blissful revelation, as it reminds everyone living under the same roof of their own mortality.

But what about a Judge whose family has long been buried six feet under, or some wounded veteran returning from the front only to find his patch of land leased out to a neighboring Provider while his wife packed up and ran off with another man? They are lost, with no home to return to.

For such mortals there is only one place in Justitian that can offer them final grace.

The Sanatorium rests on the remote

outer fringes of Fielding. The property is secured by a high wall, and guarded by Spitalians. Beyond, there is a garden of serene beauty in which the sealed off members of the Judiciary spend their waning days on Earth, with a cascading fountain made from copper and brass and fueled by a pipeline running from the Cross Quarter up north serving as a backdrop. Half blind, half deaf, and lost in thought, the old Judges sit along the concrete benches playing imported board games from Liqua, reminiscing in slow motion about their lives. Anesthesiologists supervise a host of Orderlies checking up on the decrepit patients, carrying them to the outhouse, bringing them food, clothing them against the cold, or guiding them back to their beds once playtime is over.

This is how the Judges pay their last respects to the most loyal and acclaimed members of the Cult, allowing them to vegetate alongside their fellow comrades, closed off from society and under protection of the Sanatorium until the day they perish.

It was the Spitalians who brought the idea of a Sanatorium before the Senates several years ago and had it approved by Uptown. The Judiciary enjoyed the prospect of having a space that honors the moribund seniors of their ranks. However, the Sanatorium was never intended for a purely altruistic purpose. The Spitalians knew what they were doing, and the last thing they'd be concerned with is wasting resources on a rival Cult if there was no benefit to be gained.

The Anesthesiologists employed here follow orders directly issued by Keszler himself. Their mission: build up trust, and draw as much crucial information from the withering Judges in their final weeks as possible. Keszler himself visits the Sanatorium at regular intervals to get an idea of the state of the fading Advocates and Executioners, and to collect the testimonies of the dying. The Hippocrat sits by their deathbed explaining in detail what happens in death, how their bodies dissolve into atoms to form pure energy, how their lives are extinguished yet the memory of their deeds remains forever after. There is no flattery in his words, instead he attempts to empower them to face the finality of it all with courage. Then he urges them to confess, for every memory they hold needs to be told and recorded, or it will dissipate into nothing. This is his offer of absolution for their sins.

As they recount their lives Keszler takes notes, word for word, avowal after avowal.

In this fashion, the top Hippocrat has been able to assemble a catalogue of intelligence and cross-connections that resembles a vertical slice through the history of the Judges, as well as the inner workings of the Cult, including compromising material on many of its figureheads. Keszler keeps this diary safe, and will make use of it once all the pieces are in place.

CROSS QUARTER

CROSS QUARTER
Tech III

DISTRICTS:
None

POPULATION:
Unstable: ca. 75,000 in winter, approx. 42,000 in summer

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY:
Low

FOOD SUPPLY:
High

RESIDENT CULTS:
Clanners; Anabaptists

IMPORTANT AREAS:
Cross Square; Saint Zamuel; Banding Hill;

Ascetics hurry along all over Cross Square, sweeping tables, compiling towers of flatbread, stirring up cauldrons of steaming root soup, and rolling in kegs topped off with filtered water. The rush attracts a rapidly swelling crowd of spectators, among them Defilers, Scavengers, and freshly released prison workers who stand in line next to emaciated Provider families and clean shaven Orgiastics. All of them are eagerly waiting for the massive turbine at the top of Saint Zamuel to strike twelve o'clock. That's when the Feeding of the Thousand commences, a religious ceremony that draws visitors from all across Downtown and is repeated every Sunday. Throughout the day, the Cross Quarter shares its food and water surplus with the poor, the disabled, the faithful, and the friends of the Cult.

The Ascetics could just turn a blind eye and serve the people some wine or distillate at least, the Orgiastics in the back rows groan. After all, it's best to cleanse the Demiurge from your body with a good old sip of root schnapps. The scarred warriors laugh, their humor as coarse as the booze they drink to flush the dirt from their skulls.

Late into the afternoon Cross Square brims with people. Elysians stalk the crowd of destitutes who are stuffing their bellies until they can no longer breathe. For many, it was their first filling meal in weeks. The Elysians want to make sure everyone is well nourished and comfortable before they begin their proselytization. This is the Anabaptist way of recruitment: come to the Brotherhood, be fed, drink and forget, let the Pneuma pass through you, lay off your worries, and stay for a while. Tomorrow you could be one of us, and be sated forever after.

OVER THE EDGE

The Cross Quarter lies on the western edge of Justitian, beyond the Harbor basin, tucked away from the civic neighborhoods. It squats there by itself like a long forgotten half brother who isn't allowed to play with the rest of the family. It's dusty out here, yet pious, and one can feel as if they were suddenly transplanted into a different world, venturing from crime-infested Downtown into a spiritual inverse dimension.

The architecture deviates immensely – no Stallion Streets, instead, the buildings are neatly packed together, arranged along winding arcs that follow the layout of an imaginary broken cross if one were to look at the district from above. Everything in the neighborhood appears to be centralized, ordered, orbiting around the circular boulevards or growing radially away from them. Nothing even hints at Justitian's convoluted city planning and labyrinthine construction techniques. The houses and atriums feature a distinct Purgan influence, standing three to four stories tall, the outer walls thick and glazed with dust colored mortar while the windows are narrow slits keeping the interior warm in winter and cool during the summer. The streets themselves are covered with paving stones and public fountains can be found on every corner.

One will hardly ever run into mounted Protectors galloping through the neighborhood. Orgiastics have taken their place and march through the district in small packs, taking on the role of a city militia. Many of them are war veterans who've seen terrifying conflicts in their lifetime. Keeping law and order among their religious brethren is a cakewalk for these reckless soldiers.

The theoretical autonomy granted to the Cross Quarter is a misconception. Everyone in their right mind feels the pressure exerted upon them by Uptown. The Anabaptists are tolerated guests in a city they do not control, a situation that is rather unusual for a Cult that prefers to exhibit dominance in all political matters.

POLITICAL POWDERKEG

Anabaptists have been established among the population of Downtown for a long time. The Ascetics are recognized as brothers of the Providers, sharing their wealth of knowledge about agriculture with their neighbors from the Rubble. Furthermore, the Cult is appreciated for the resources it provides; from fresh water to rich crop imports, the Cross Quarter's contribution to Justitian's well-being is enormous and undeniable. But this relationship is built on fragile agreements.

The history of the Cross Quarter is a troubled one. If things would be as the Chroniclers demand, the district wouldn't even exist. The Cluster has gone all-out in its attempt to demolish the Anabaptists' reputation and played every dirty trick in the book to keep the Cult from spreading, gaining followers, or securing a foothold in the city's politics. The Chroniclers went so far as to request the quarter be annulled from the city books, and its location redacted from any official maps. But all of their efforts were in vain. Neither the Judges nor the Spitalians could be swayed by the Chroniclers, both perceiving the Broken Cross as a natural accomplice of the Protectorate – an ally with flaws, but an ally nonetheless.

It was the Anabaptists who stood against Cultrin's armies during the City Wars, who conquered the city of Arquet and freed it from Diapazon's spell, and it was them who fought on the front line against the Pheromancer King Markurant. They've acted as warriors and mercenaries, helping the Spitalians on their expeditions into the furthest reaches of Pollen and to the southernmost tip of Purgare. Even today they march along the borders of the Protectorate, lifting their bidenhanders against the encroaching armies of Cockroaches and Phosphorites. Such historical contributions cannot simply be erased, and even the Cluster had to reluctantly admit that without the water supplies provided by the Anabaptists, Justitian's growth would've stalled decades ago. If the Chroniclers could not drive the Anabaptists out, they would at least damage them politically. The Cross Quarter has been restricted from becoming a civic district for the time being, and the animosity remains tangible.

Fragment Modus' peace mission was supposed to bring an end to the quarrel and compile the parameters to put the centuries old feud which has turned Chroniclers and Anabaptists into mortal enemies to rest, but until Cathedral City delivers the archives stolen from the Chroniclers four hundred years ago mistrust and suspicion will prevail on both sides.

A WORLD OF ANGER

Few other Cults have suffered defeats in recent years like the Anabaptists. One of their eight leaders, the Baptist Altair, was murdered in cold blood in his very stronghold and there is no replacement in sight for the empty seat left behind by his demise. The Cult's holdings along the Eden Route have fallen into Bergamo's hands, and the direct connection between Borca and the Neognostic territories of the Adriatic Basin has been severed. With customs now heavily taxed, their Lombardi rivals are able to stuff their pockets with money from Cathedral City's warchest.

Years prior, the catastrophic failure of the Wachsman-Lacroix expedition drove the remaining Anabaptists away from the Southern Coast of Franka into an exodus towards northwestern Briton. Yet, even after their spectacular defeat of Ganaress, the Cult once again collapsed upon itself; led into isolationism by the vicious preacher and agitator Yasen the Merciful. The Frankan refuge is lost, territorial supremacy crumbles, and aggressive splinter groups assemble to break away from the Cult's main body. The Baptists themselves are entangled in strife, battling over the cadaver of their once vigorous Cult, wrestling with the Council of Emanations over which direction to take.

As if all of the infighting wasn't enough, the massacre of Rennes has torn a rift through the once unshakable alliance with the Spitalians. The doctors are in shock over what happened in Briton and they demand answers, a response that even the Anabaptists themselves cannot offer. The relationship is fatally damaged and the Chroniclers know how to use this moment to sow even more discord. Only the Judges remain on the side of the accused, however this is moreso because they are pragmatic about their dealings with Cathedral City rather than out of some deep

loyalty. If they sense weakness in the ranks of the Anabaptists' leadership, they will respond as they always have: conquest. This may not be the right moment to ponder such strategies, with the majority of Justitian's forces being occupied at a different front, but should the tides turn in favor of the Judiciary during the Clan Wars the Righteous Fist will rear its head toward a new target and make its claims. Peacefully first, forcefully second.

WATER EQUALS POWER

The pride of the Anabaptists is concentrated in the capital water towers that surround the Cross Quarter like a squadron of titanic sentinels. These colossal domes require a definition of their own when it comes to sheer volume and scale. Some of these reservoirs are so enormous that they could hide an entire city block within their frame. Millions of liters of filtered water from Cathedral City and Liqua collect in each of these cisterns which serve as the main supply for the fields in the Rubble, or are diverted via piping systems toward Downtown's civic districts to feed public outlets.

The Anabaptists are bossy waterlords. They label their most precious good with the iconography of their religion. Every canister of water sold on the markets bears a stencil of the broken cross, ensuring certified quality approved by the Office of Hygienics. This monopoly has its effect on the public perception of the Anabaptists, with children being constantly exposed to religious imagery and associating water as a gift from the Neognosis, thereby making them prone to conversion at a later age.

The Paradigmas in the Cluster sense the subliminal conditioning as corrosive to society, and dispatch Servants to conduct their duties of reeducation. The Agents are tasked with explaining to children that water does in fact come out of the ground, and doesn't spring from some magical source in Cathedral City. Some stand guard at the public wells themselves, reciting lengthy monologues that Justitian has its own water reserves, albeit restricted for people with proper citizenship. If one just follows the path of order and righteousness, and registers at the Office of Locality, they'll never have to worry about being supplied with water. The brainwashing is a blatant attempt to control the narrative and steer the superstitious and uneducated populace away from the alluring temptation of a Neognostic worldview.

SEASONAL TROUBLE

The Cross Quarter swells and collapses on a yearly basis in a similar manner to Tech-Central, although on a much smaller scale. Wintertime drives the Ascetics out of the Rubble and restricts travel over vast distances. Similarly, the Orgiastics are forced to end their campaigns and stay alongside their brothers in faith, locked into one place. While the Ascetics use the dark season to embrace their faith and evaluate their accomplishments across the past year, the Orgiastics rather quickly get antsy sitting around in one place. They thirst for excess, altercation, and sex.

The Harbor offers what they are looking for. They rove about in small packs, barging into the taverns, gorging on alcohol, picking fights with the locals, and wasting their money on whores. The Judges crack down on them with the same ruthlessness as they'd do with any other subjects crossing the line. Especially in winter, they cannot afford to show leniency as the city becomes jam packed with transients and tiny arguments often escalate into violent outbursts. The Orgiastics are known for their drunken boldness, and Protectors must resort to locking the delinquents up in the Cleft for a week of hard labor around the city to bring them back to senses.

While the Judges manage to maintain control over smaller incidents and bar brawls, a far bigger issue arises in situations where Anabaptists and Jehammedans meet along the Stallion Streets or in the civic neighborhoods. The tension of such events is palpable, and one insult fired into the hostile camp can draw an entire street into a bloody riot. In such cases, Cluster and Judiciary must work hand in hand to regain order and split the warring parties apart before the situation turns into a massacre. The loudspeaker systems emit shrieking alarms and troublemakers are mercilessly hunted down, marked, and thrown into the Cleft by the dozen. Punishment: one month at the Ice Barrier.

Operation: Monochrome

Via Exit A-3 Chroniclers enter the Cross Quarter unseen. They act as Agents of Fragment Monochrome, conducting a study of utter importance. They monitor Anabaptist children who display special cognitive abilities, are skilled in arithmetics, or appear capable of solving complex puzzles.

If Monochrome's Agents locate a promising child they go about framing the prodigy for an easily falsified crime they haven't committed, such as multiple accounts of theft. The Agents use their contacts with the local City Judges to mark such a child repeatedly, until there are enough crimes piling up that the only reasonable punishment is to send them to the Cleft. The parents protest in panic and anger, thrashing around, insulting Judges and Agents alike who arrive to pick up the alleged criminal at their home. Weeks later, the parents receive a falsified death certificate stating that their child died of exhaustion during a punitive expedition.

Meanwhile, in a secret facility of the Cluster, the child is held captive and forcefully indoctrinated into the Cult. This operation serves two purposes: firstly, to strip the Anabaptists of any promising prodigies - a retaliation mission that aims at hitting the enemy at their very foundation - and secondly to raise them as potential future infiltrators. Fragment Monochrome doesn't want to rely on Modus' peace mission, which hasn't yet yielded the anticipated results. This is his Plan B.

Contrary to all other Chroniclers, the abducted children get to keep their three dot tattoos and are hidden from the other members of the Cult in plain sight. The Fragment tutors them personally, setting up a secret identity for them as Bits who only register in the Cluster's mainframe via their fingerprint and eye scan. Even Fragment Alias wouldn't be able to find a corresponding entry to this secret cell.

CROSS SQUARE

The anchor of all worldly affairs is Cross Square, a wide and sprawling market at the heart of the district. It serves as a holy site for congregation, public announcements, baptisms, and other openly exhibited rituals that define this community of the faithful.

The morning hasn't yet turned grey when the Ascetics arrive and light the fire pans all over Cross Square. In the acrid wind they crowd around the embers, the faces weary, hardened, and marked by the burdens of everyday life. To them, deprivation is surrender, and surrender requires iron discipline. Life is hardship, and one mustn't falter when hunger strikes nor give in to the dark thoughts of despair that wrestle the minds of good men into the dust.

Their challenge is to resist the deepest urges, to defy the greatest discomfort, to rise above others and be a shining example of detriment. Where there is faith, the barren soil is forgiving – where there is brotherhood, the community is prosperous.

They look at their brethren, the Orgiastics, taken away by rampant excess, flushed out into a world of vice and depravity. Yes, they too are required to uphold their discipline. It is not easy for them to stay in line, as every Anabaptist is prone to become a victim of temptation, stranded on the rotten cadaver of Paradise searching for meaning and a life beyond the realms of misfortune. It is the Ascetics' calling to offer the Orgiastics solace, as it is their task to cleanse the garden of its filth, to dispel the evil which nests between the nooks of the gravel, and to raise strong stems from the earthen realm. God's commandment requires them to sharpen their skills as the gardeners of Eden, demands them to resist the deception of the Demiurge and keep their hearts free of sin.

The Ascetics take their mission seriously. With arms open wide they welcome everyone who wants to join the ranks of the Anabaptists as a Touched One, leading the newcomers to a large pool filled with frigid water. Once the baptism is completed the new recruit takes his place on a nearby grandstand, where his septum is pierced and his forehead tattooed in public. The screams are quite unsettling when a whole Provider family converts to the Neognosis and has all their infants marked, one after the other. Elysians wait nearby to check the freshly inked and make sure the wounds don't fester.

Once the ceremony is over, the Touched One receives a spade and is admitted to a large community house where he can sleep until he finds an abode of his own. From now on, the Brotherhood will assign him to duties and guide him through the teachings of the Cult, until he becomes self-sufficient enough to claim his own parcel in the Rubble.

CHURCH OF SAINT ZAMUEL

Originally, Saint Zamuel was just called Cross Church, a humble name given by a humble community that didn't try to emphasize any overbearing spirituality. The early Ascetics heading for Justitian were trying to avoid drawing attention. They wanted a place that would serve as a retreat for their faith, not a boisterous building that could be seen as an attempt to exhibit territorial claims. But in the tumultuous decades of the 26th century, the Cult amassed fame and fortune across the Protectorate. Money from the water trade accumulated in the district and attracted powerful guests from all over Europe who wanted to inspect this new precinct. Baptists suddenly walked along the dusty paths of the Cross Quarter, blessing their followers. The Ascetics felt ashamed of admitting their reverend guests to a musty wooden church.

Then came the Battle of Arquet and the war hero, Emissary Zamuel, decided to set up a permanent residence in the Cross Quarter. Soon after, the Emissary became the political figurehead of the settlement, and the representative for all of Cathedral City's affairs. Good years followed, and the populace wanted to showcase their gratefulness to Zamuel by erecting a new church in his name.

This monumental piece of architecture, the Church of Saint Zamuel, is an impressive feat constructed in collaboration with and using the ingenuity of the Manufacturers from Tech-Central. The main tower is crowned by a colossal turbine engine that was retrieved from the Stukov Desert and retrofitted into the vault structure to resemble a massive broken cross, while the outer walls were embellished with a veil of brass panels granting the entryway an aura of magnificence. The cylinder block within the turbine spins around its own axis on an interval of one hour, opening the shutter valves for the turbine to suck in air and release a ghostly howl of Pneuma that echoes across the neighborhood. The clock regulates life in the district, and the Ascetics attune their day to its sounds. Those who do not belong to the Cult but have their living quarters in the district must learn to ignore the incessant hourly droning or they'll forever suffer from bad sleep.

THE EMISSARY

Zamuel nominally still governs his district, but these days dementia claims his mind as he slowly drifts out of this world. With more than 96 winters on his back the Emissary is the oldest member of the community, maybe even in all of Justitian. Long ago, his leadership was passed on to a group of advisors who speak in the collective name of Cathedral City. Zamuel himself has nothing but a representative function and is required only to sign off on the negotiations with his seal, often unable to even follow the topics of the discussion.

The people of the Cross Quarter revere the Emissary, despite his rapid decay. To them he's a living icon and possibly the greatest war hero of their age. Many have grown up listening to marvelous stories about his perilous campaigns and breakneck battles across Europe. The fact that such a legendary figure resides among their ranks is considered a blessing. Therefore, the people of the district do what they can to show their affection toward Emissary Zamuel, showering the old man with baskets full of food and leaving presents at the footsteps of his church, doing what they can to sweeten his remaining days on Earth. When he passes, they all will mourn.

BANDING HILL

The only elevation far and wide is Banding Hill. The name sounds a little out of place, as the elevation is so insignificant that a snarky observer might as well call it an overstatement. To the Orgiastics living all around it the name feels about right. They revel in things that ring pompous and militaristic, and therefore consider Banding Hill an adequate home.

Many of the Orgiastics settling in the Cross Quarter are reserve troops from Pollen, Purgare, or Franka. For years they've been shuffled around the map by Cathedral City and deployed wherever the Cult needed to see them next. On their campaigns they amassed fame and renown, and some fought alongside each other in different conflicts at the far edges of the Earth only to reunite here once again.

The packs bear distinct names, paint their own banners, and follow their unique set of rules. Over time they have developed uncommon battle tactics to deal with Psychonauts or the human enemies of the Cult, which they share amongst each other on Banding Hill.

Some were entrenched in merciless skirmishes against demonic Psychokinetics in southern Purgare, others survived expeditions toward the Maw or into the wicked wilderness of Pollen. Several stood against the Jehammedans at Queribus or in the Adriatic Basin. Many of the packmasters are revered Furors or heroic Orgiastics who've led their packs through hell and back, and defiantly spat into the face of the Demiurge whenever he reared his ugly head. The names of the packs are engraved on the boltstone, a large monolith standing on Banding Hill. Among the many who passed Justitian on their long journeys were the Reckoners, the Awakened, the Crimson Twins, the Maw Rakers, the League of Nox, and the Rotten Few. Legendary warriors of a putrid Paradise.

Many of them are not sedentary, instead roving around from place to place, year after year, serving as militiamen, mercenaries, or warriors wherever someone in power requires muscle for protection. The Cross Quarter is a transitional phase for them, where they can replenish their equipment, stack up on supplies, and impregnate a few broads along the way.

Besides just being here for entertainment and leisure, the packs also serve as tradesmen, bringing back unusual treasures from their campaigns. Board games from far away Franka, strong liquors, mammoth furs, or even Spore Beast skin. Next to the more mundane goods the packs secretly deal with Psychonautic remains, exchanging Firefly for Lard Light, or Blazing Ichor for Soulburst.

Banding Hill is a makeshift resort: small barracks serve the different packs as a place of rest and recovery. From here they venture out to Brennen to stack up on local liquors, or aim straight for the Harbor to try themselves in a match of chessboxing. They need to kill time until they find some purpose to draw them back out of the city.

THE ATTENTION HORSE

Imagine a place where stupidity reigns supreme, a place far from the humorless stare of a Protector just doing his duty trying to maintain order. A place where every jackass can come together to spit on Justitian's history and its achievements. Well, such a place exists. In a side alley just off Banding Hill one can find a joint called "The Attention Horse." Get it? Devious word play on the outside, senseless banter on the inside. The guests who hang out here come from all walks of life. They claim to be at the intellectual forefront of the Protectorate, the firestarters of a brand new day, tirelessly envisioning what the world could look like if it weren't for all of its problems and restrictions.

Everything is an easy solution to them: if the Spitalians would just deal with the Psychonauts one wouldn't have to worry about Sepsis, and if the Hellvetics would just fire off their reserve ammo and knock the Neolibyans from their Surge Tanks the whole African problem would be dealt with.

It goes like this, night after night. They envision easy solutions for an overly complex world, gorging on their own feeling of righteousness and claiming to be the only ones capable of seeing the bigger picture. To them every problem is a nail, and they consider themselves to be the hammer. It doesn't matter that they have almost no experience putting their words into measurable action. If anyone dares to contradict their view of the world they turn into an agitated flock of overfed roosters, aimlessly trying to pick out the eyes of those who put them in question yet lacking the ability to fly high enough to even reach the brow of the contender.

"Let's talk it over at the Attention Horse!" has become a tongue in cheek remark among the people of the Cross Quarter when they must acknowledge that an argument is moot and any further effort spent on trying to bring one's point across will result in a headache. How this place still keeps its doors open, despite its terrible reputation, is beyond anyone's understanding. "Shit attracts shit!" say the Orgiastics with field experience in Franka, laughing as they recall large swarm sightings hovering over elephantine Pheromancer droppings discovered in the swamps.

Heretics

Mankind is doomed, and there is no escape. As the Pneuma fades and the last breath of life is exhaled, the final conclusion arrives: the Demiurge has won. His nettles worm through the earth and break through its crust, pulsating, spiraling, reaching for the stars and devouring the sun. The air stinks of poison and black waters rise. It is the end.

No faithful Anabaptist would dare to utter such words and paint a future so grim and baleful. Before they knew it the Council of Emanations would declare such apocalyptic visions as heresy, and have the deviant transported to Severinus in chains for an unforgettable rendezvous with the Sisters of Grace. But in Justitian, far from Cathedral City's stern gaze, an unruly cell has taken root that renounces the Pneuma and swears allegiance to the Demiurge. The Scions of Nihil have gathered behind the teachings of Tenkrit, an Elysian who cast off his belief in saving humanity. He claims the four rivers of Paradise have dried up and nothing stands in the way of final annihilation. Everything the Anabaptists once fought for is hopelessly condemned to madness. According to the Scions, those who do not repent and immediately take the side of the great Deceiver will be forever lost.

The Scions form a tight knit circle of thirty followers who have fallen to the sway of Tenkrit's sermons. Together they dug out an underground chapel to honor the Demiurge and admit new members. In a bakery, two side streets away from Banding Hill, a cellar staircase leads down into a vault where the dough for the bread is drawn. While the customers buy flatbreads decorated with caraway, sesame, and cornflowers upstairs, the Scions push a large cupboard trolley laden with bread dough aside to enter the Chapel of the Demiurge through a hatch below. Flickering candle light illuminates the gloomy and soundproof basement. Condensed water forms rivulets and flows through notches in the walls that are adorned with heretical imagery: the Demiurge devours the world and the Baptists are caught in the final battle as rivers of cockroaches drip from the mouths of the Council of Emanations. The Demiurge's bloodhounds, the Aberrants, crack Rebus' bones in half and grind the Neognosis to dust.

Tenkrit's followers eagerly prepare for the end. They want to be on the side of the winner. Therefore they've smuggled Burn into Cross Quarter and celebrate with orgies in the chapel, in hopes the Demiurge will spring from their unholy unity and spare them all.

JEHAMMEDAN QUARTER

JEHAMMEDAN QUARTER
Tech III

DISTRICTS:
None

POPULATION:
Stable: ca. 45,000

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY:
Low

FOOD SUPPLY:
High

RESIDENT CULTS:
Clanners; Scrappers; Jehammedans

IMPORTANT AREAS:
House of Communion; House of War; The Bath House; The Tanneries; The Butcheries; The Planetarium

5:00 am. The rest of Justitian is trapped in deep slumber. Only the Jehammedan Quarter is already on its feet and calling its residents to the morning prayer. The drowsy Ismaeli stumble onto the large square in front of the House of Communion and drop to their knees, row after row. The Iconide in charge of the communion steps out before the assembly, dressed in garbs of fiery scarlet. A soft hum travels from his curly beard, echoing across the square, and the young Ismaeli join the murmur of the sacred prayer song.

As if in slow motion the Iconide leans forward, his palms touching the dusty floor before him. Suddenly his feet come off the ground and circle upwards until his legs are straight in the air. The Iconide performs a handstand to look at the world from a different perspective, in a manner similar to what Jehammed once did. The Ismaeli must follow along and conduct the same exercise. Anyone who fails the routine will be condemned to carry water that day. The young men desperately raise themselves off the floor and try to hold the unnatural position. Thirty seconds stretch to what feels like an eternity, elbows and shoulders tremble, torsos arch, and legs sway back and forth like reeds in the wind. In the background one of the teenagers crashes to the ground and knocks two older guys down with him. The whole square breaks out in snorts and giggles. Even the Iconide has to give up his handstand howling with laughter. He waves the clumsy boy and his two elders aside and pats their shoulders, going off on a tangent explaining that they've attracted Jehammed's attention, and have therefore been chosen to spend the day with grateful deeds. With a grin, he hands them the canisters to make their way to the nearest public well.

HOUR OF WRATH

Everyone travelling to Justitian on the Funnel Road from Liqua passes a small customs station along the roadside. Judges on horseback divide the streams of travellers. Passengers with their citizen papers held high above their heads are ordered to take a shortcut through the Guest Quarter, while all other arrivals must enter the city through the Jehammedan Quarter and prepare for a preemptive shake down at the south gate. The southern wall serves as a barrier. Grim City Judges monitor the flow of passengers from the battlements, their musket barrels blazing in the bloom of the late afternoon.

The searches here are strict and the mood is tense. Since the Jehammedan Quarter was placed under lockdown, traversing into the northern sections of Downtown has become a chore. Abrami clog the south gate with their goat herds and truckloads of goods trying to make it to other districts in time and open their market booths. Progress is slow and cumbersome. The crowd is brimming with frustration, and verbal threats bark through the air. The Abrami are visibly upset. With unflattering gestures, they yell curses at the supervising Judges.

The peoples' anger leaves the Protectors cold. Dispassionately, they pass glowing tobacco stubs around and blow blue mist from their nostrils. Every now and then one of them fires a blank shot in the air, to remind the flood of passengers of who's in charge. It seems that here at the south gate they have the situation under control.

However, things change quickly once they enter the Jehammedan Quarter proper. Separated from Downtown by the southern wall, the once prosperous district has gradually turned into a ghetto. The culture imported by the Jehammedans does not mix with that of Justitian; it remains homogeneous, a microcosm that is foreign to the Judiciary, one that they can neither fully comprehend nor trust.

Special Lockdown Decrees

CONSTITUTUM: April 10th, 2586
The High Judiciary hereby decrees the following orders to be imposed on the Jehammedan Quarter and its peoples.

◈ No public gatherings past 8:00 pm. The curfew must be upheld at all times. Only food markets displaying a special permit from the Office of Civil Economics are allowed to sell their goods until midnight.

◈ Citizenship applications are suspended until further notice. Only individuals who are of crucial value to the prosperity of Justitian are exempt from this ban.

◈ Jehammedans are prohibited from acquiring sales licenses at the Alcoves for selling goods in Uptown.

◈ Jehammedans cannot be recommended for service as Jurymen.

◈ The Abrami Council is required to establish civil order in the district by distributing its resources toward deployment of a neighborhood watch, which must report crimes and felonies to the local Protectors at the south gate.

◈ Jehammedans are to present their tattoos clearly and visibly for any search and identify themselves as members of their Cult at all times.

◈ As per the Spital's request, uncertified burials are forbidden. Corpses must be handed over to the Knacker's Office without exception.

ADDENDUM: 28th June, 2586

◈ Taxes for reparations are raised by five percent, and must be delivered by the Abrami Council to the Central Exchange at the beginning of each month.

◈ The settlement policy is revised and pending pasture leases are annulled. Acquisition of new land for expansion is prohibited. New settlers are restricted to the common designated areas.

GHETTO

If one follows the logic of the High Judiciary, Jehammedans are terrorists. Every last one of them. There is little proof for that outside of the single attack against the Colossus that shook the city in 2586. To this day, nobody knows what Neomi Hagari's true intentions were. Did she have backers? Where did the explosives come from? How was it possible for her to go undetected through all the regular security checks?

In the aftermath of the event the Office of Internal Affairs spent weeks piecing together a timeline leading up to the incident. Neomi's husband was put under arrest and interrogated in the Cleft, while her six children were taken to Uptown to be examined by Oswald Keszler. The results of the investigations were dissatisfying. There were no traces of interference or manipulation, everything pointed toward religious fervor born of a deep hatred for the Judiciary. In the end, Archot didn't care for the final report. He had already had his swift retaliation carried out when Saint Gideon was assassinated in the streets and put on public display as a warning to all Jehammedans residing in the city.

The lockdown decrees that followed were nothing but the second wave of vindictiveness. The Supreme Judge showed off his power on a large scale, without having to fear consequences as Osman was too far away to intervene. The inhabitants of the quarter were made to suffer as a direct result of their religious affiliation with the terrorist. Over time, the Judicial lockdown eroded the faith of the residents and caused a divide between the quarter and the rest of Justitian.

Life as it had been before was cut down by a substantial margin and the merciless rules are still in place, with no end in sight.

LOST GLAMOR

As one walks through the neighborhood the current state of the Jehammedan Quarter rather quickly becomes evident. Building projects lie abandoned, and large areas designated for construction resemble barren plots without purpose. The majority of the houses aren't taller than one or two stories, and only in the areas of original settlement can the faded beauty and distinct flavor of the district still be understood.

The nomadic lifestyle of the Jehammedans inspired the architecture here: tent-like structures, light and tall, all held in place by interlocking wooden beams that can be collapsed or opened with ease, allowing for air to circulate freely throughout the buildings. The Spitalians appreciated the engineering style of the early settlers, and applauded the Jehammedans for their self-imposed hygienic regime. Contrary to the Cross Quarter or Tech-Central they had no difficulties finding common agreements with the populace, having to teach them very little about cleanli-

Memories

I remember exactly how my mother took me down to the Jehammedan Quarter on Sundays back then. I was very young at that time - my father still had his successful tailoring shop close to the Old Fortress, and we had more money.

My mother loved to shop with the Jehammedans. She always said that the goods were made with a lot more love and craftsmanship than the stuff we could acquire in the Stukov Quarter. I didn't understand much of it, but I was taken with the Abrami that we often visited. He always took the time to explain various things to me. He showed me how to layer golden leaves on a vase and how to squeeze caraway seeds into a fresh bread dough before placing it in the oven for baking. Sometimes he twirled a ram or a Gendo out of a simple leather cord and tied the little piece of art around my neck like a talisman.

My mother laughed a lot back then, even if we both hardly understood the dialect of the new settlers. They spoke broken East Borcan, or Balkhan dialects that none of us had ever heard before.

Together with the Abrami we drank spiced tea, talked, and marveled when he added a strange powder into the brazier during his prayer to make the flames hiss skyward and turn blue.

Years later I learned that my mother had an affair with that Abrami, and that I was just the excuse she needed to drop out from my father's tailoring shop on Sundays.

After my father passed away my mother tried to keep his business alive, but she failed miserably in her attempts. She had always been a bit clumsy and therefore used too much material, sewed seams incorrectly, and wore out her tools. The customers stayed away, and the business gradually dried up. Ashamed of having no more money to spend she avoided treading into the Jehammedan Quarter, as she could no longer afford the junk she loved so dearly.

At 19 I was hired as a Vagrant by a City Judge from my neighborhood. I memorized my first lines of the Codex and swore my oath to the Judiciary on Calendar Square. I still recall precisely how everyone who got sworn in on that day was anticipating the completion of the Colossus.

Two years later, the terrorist blew herself up at the foot of the statue. I remember my mother weeping terribly and refusing to believe that the Jehammedans were responsible for any of it. I explained to her at the time that there were good and bad people in all camps, regardless of their ideology, but my support could not calm her.

When I was finally allowed to take my Vagrant exams, my Protector assigned me to my first turf for duty. As a City Judge I was tasked with providing security in the Jehammedan Quarter. Some things seem predetermined.

I hadn't visited the neighborhood since I was a child and when I returned everything was suddenly foreign to me. The mood had changed. The Ismaeli eyed me with disgust, while the Abrami paid no attention and looked past me as if I were a ghost. The smells of the old days were gone. Now it stank of anger, blood, and hate. The colorful district of yore had become a ghetto, whether by the hand of the Judiciary's decrees or not.

It was only possible to speak to the Hagari. The women were worried and questioned me on whether Uptown would take further measures to isolate the quarter even more, or if they could hope for a normalization of the situation. I was unable to give a satisfactory answer and instead bought a few jars of menthol paste from them. I had missed the aroma for many years, and it reminded me of better days when the Jehammedan Quarter was still shining brightly in the sunlight of a long forgotten Sunday.

ness and sanitation. The core of the Jehammedan Quarter retained its shine, and it is here on the large squares in front of the House of Communion and the House of War that the community comes together to pray and exchange stories, while the many families trade their goods amongst each other.

These days, cohesion is more important than ever. The tribal society of Jehammedans is tightly knit: everyone knows everybody. Within their enclave at the southern tip of mighty Justitian they have preserved their traditions and maintained their loyalty to the Last Prophet. Large gatherings are common throughout the day, starting with the morning communion where the teenage Ismaeli pray and practice yoga together. Meanwhile, youthful Hagari crowd along the banks of the Defiler Streets, washing their hair, sharing the latest gossip, and discussing the prettiest boys of the neighborhood.

At sunrise the Jehammedan market opens, which specializes in imports that can't be found in other districts of the city, be it foreign spices and expensive garments, artistic metalwork and jewelry, gold and silverware, or exquisite works of carpentry. While most of the booths are manned by local Abrami, the Hagari spend their day working as an affordable labor force for the industrious citizens of Justitian who hire them out for all kinds of jobs that require both a steady hand and a conscientious mind: weaving carpets, rolling tobacco leaves, or dyeing fabrics with colorful ornaments.

The Bath House

Jehammedans are clean. It's one of their life principles. Only within a stainless body can a strong spirit prosper. The Bath House is the epitome of the Cult's devotion to purity. Run by an Ismaeli barber who goes by the name of Fatim, this place has risen to become one of the most frequented public spots in all of Justitian, and not just for the Jehammedans.

Everyone who can afford it lines up during the weekend to spend a few relaxing hours submerged in teal green water, smelling the perfumed candles and snoozing to the melody of clanking wind chimes. The large pools are deep enough to allow for swimming, something that is otherwise impossible in the Black Lung, a region covered with dry lakes and dusty river beds. It's a wonder that none of the guests have drowned yet.

New arrivals are advised to drop their masks and idiosyncrasies at the door. Once they're naked, they're all the same. Cult, ideology, wealth, affiliation; it all fades in the musty haze of the Bath House. Visitors use the intimate atmosphere to share compromising rumors and cut business deals they otherwise wouldn't openly agree to, while Apocalyptics send their Magpies into the Bath House to tease and flirt with potential customers, leaving their whereabouts in the Harbor as a sweet whisper in the ear. While anyone can enter the large public pools, there is a special section of the Bath House that is designated for Jehammedan women only. No Abrami in their right mind would allow for their wives and daughters to mix with the rest of Justitian's populace and be defiled by the rabid looks of some greasy Advocate or fetid Scrapper.

But the venue doesn't just serve for bathing and relief or the exchange of information alone. An entire section is dedicated to health care. Fatim and his many assistants cut hair, trim beards, file fingernails, and pull bad teeth. Whenever there is an important Advocate family wedding to be attended, the Bath House bursts at the seams with guests who want to bring themselves to order, at least for this one unique occasion.

CONVERSION

Jehammed's word must travel to the ears of the heathen. This isn't a recommendation. It's natural law. Conversion is something the Ismaeli conduct with relative ease. With their trimmed beards, plucked eyebrows, and unstained clothes they stick out from the filthy regulars of Downtown. Next to dirt-covered Scrappers and Anabaptists coated in grime and dust, the Ismaeli carry themselves with an aura of dignity. Girls turn their heads as they stroll by, having never seen a man that pays so much attention to their skin and hairdo. For the girls of the Stukov Quarter, Brennen, and the Outskirts, a young Jehammedan seems like a wonderful catch. The downside? There ain't no catch if the girl doesn't convert, as the Last Prophet forbids marriages with heathens.

For the Ismaeli, however, marriage is essential to rise in status. Conversion is a great deed in the eyes of Jehammed, and a newlywed man is suddenly considered a fully fledged Abrami, earning his very own form of freedom as a well respected member of the tribe. Slowly, the Jehammedans have gone about infiltrating Justitian's society from within. Weddings are now taking place all over the city with young women renouncing their heritage and fleeing into the arms of an exotic Jehammedan lover. A few months later, they're walking across the market squares of the neighborhood with swollen bellies, Abrami wishing them luck that they'll be blessed with an army of sons and daughters. In the shadow of the lockdown, the quarter has grown exponentially, registering the highest birth rate at the Office of Hygienics for the twelfth year in a row.

All of this calls for the attention of prospective husbands who are simply left out. Anabaptists, Scrappers, Clanners, they all loathe the young Jehammedans, calling them troublemakers and womanizers, warning every woman they come across to not fall into a trap. The incessantly spewed vitriol, however, makes the Ismaeli all the more attractive to the young girls, who project a plethora of expectations onto their dashing love interests and dream of being welcomed into a large family that will take care of them forever after.

While the fantasy may be true to some extent, they will eventually face the finality of their decision after a few years of delay as they're forced to herd a bunch of whiny brats, work murderous shifts to support the family financially, and shut up whenever they utter an opinion – all while having to endure the presence of a second wife at the side of their husband.

Soon they will realize that they have trustworthy friendships only amongst other women who share the same fate and that they're better off just grinning and bearing it, as there is no option to file for divorce. Should one of these converts try to leave her husband she'll be branded a Delilah, and her children will be taken away from her. The Abrami Council always sides in favor of the Ismaeli and the woman will be cast out from the community forever. Most of these freshly converted brides must swallow their pride and shoulder the burden they've brought upon themselves. If one decides to flee the society anyway, her former husband will just go about trying to find himself a new wife, thereby dragging the next convert into the Cult.

FRACTURED LEADERSHIP

The Jehammedan Quarter has undergone a radical shift in leadership in recent years. Since its inception the Abrami Council was in charge of guiding the community, represented by the Iconide Baruch at the top who served as the Cult's spokesman and dealt with the Judges, collected favors, and established sensible relations.

However, Baruch has lost the massive political influence he once had. He was held responsible for the Colossus incident and publicly ostracized. Judgment Hall claimed it was due to his leniency that a threat like the terrorist attack could brew in the midst of his community. With Baruch's fall the Abrami Council was silenced and its word became meaningless outside of the Jehammedan Quarter.

Internally the Abrami Council is still in charge, albeit weakened by two new figureheads who have arrived in the quarter. Carmel, the grand-niece of Gileabod Ruben Abraham, was sent to take over the dealings with the Judges and establish a new order among the Jehammedans living in the diaspora. The Abrami Council is anything but pleased at being berated by a young woman, but her noble heritage grants Carmel full authority. Baruch himself, who has been essential to the growth of the Quarter ever since the arrival of the first settlers some thirty years ago, has been outclassed by the upstart and reduced to the marginal position of a political consultant.

But there is another power that has appeared in town, one of a much more mystical and revered nature, and only spoken of with utmost care and respect. Naraka, a Herald of Aries, has taken the House of War as his refuge.

HOUSE OF COMMUNION

Throughout its existence a human soul is exposed to the onslaught of vile sin and terrible temptation. Just look at the Anabaptists and how far they have fallen with their obscene lifestyle, drinking like fish, binging like dogs, and mating like pigs. They can never be saved.

It is up to every single follower of Jehammed to keep their spirits immaculate, to not succumb to the allure of gluttony, and to dispel all vice from within, for only then can they be chosen to join the Last Prophet on his journey through the stars.

The House of Communion is a place of contemplation, one where physical and mental strength are molded into shape. It serves the district as a town hall and anchor of worldly affairs, and it is here that the Abrami Council

gathers to discuss all municipal developments within the quarter. This dignified group is composed of the 32 remaining founding fathers of the Jehammedan Quarter, who once led their plentiful families from East Borca and the Balkhan following the call of the Iconide Baruch.

The Council are the eldest, their beards white like snow, their hairless scalps riddled with sun spots. They've ruled over their tribes and watched their herd prosper for over three decades. Many of them will soon pass onto the other side. They've been disgruntled by the steep decline of the quarter since the Colossus incident, yet to this day, they see no responsibility to condemn the attack. Many even share the opinion that the Judiciary had it comin', one way or another, and that the Judges should fear Osman's strength and seek to improve the relations instead of worsening them. Baruch, who has to mediate between the Council and the Judiciary, is trapped between the hardliners of his Cult and the hawks of Uptown. Neither side gives.

When the Abrami Council isn't tied up in political debate, it serves as a court of justice for the people of the quarter, mediating between families, ending quarrels, and giving advice in the form of the teachings of Jehammed. The law spoken here has no relevance to the Judges. They'll still go about hunting down any criminal offender, be it Ismaeli or Abrami, mark him, and throw him in the Cleft, no matter how loudly the Council claims in protest that the case has already been settled before the eyes of the Last Prophet.

HOUSE OF WAR

The entrance smells of war and anger. Ram skulls are studded on wooden poles. A Voice of Jehammed wrapped in red and golden robes paces the bones and sprinkles them with tree sap. Then she lights a match and sets the skulls ablaze, blue flames licking from the empty eye sockets. The air is crackling. A bald warrior with a mighty beard steps in front of the building and places a war horn to his mouth. The blaring tune that follows calls all Swords of Jehammed to return for a gathering.

Inside, the atmosphere is tense. A populated House of War is synonymous with brooding violence. The Swords have had enough of being mistreated, confined to the quarter like cattle. They burn for the Arianoi to give them a sign, to tell them what to do. Naraka, the Herald of Aries, speaks to the audience, explaining that their time has come, that the Will of the Last Prophet is on its way to Justitian, and that once it floods the streets Jehammed's command will thunder loud and clear. He advises the Swords to keep their minds sharp and prepare for battle, for the maelstrom of vengeance will soon come to pass. Within the walls of this condemned city, the Last Prophet will test his disciples, and forge their souls in preparation for their final journey. Those who remain steadfast and pure will be taken by Naraka to Baikonur. The Swords nod in anticipation. They understand their task. They must watch for any sign of the Will, and report back to Aries' herald.

THE BUTCHERIES

While there are dozens of small and certified butchers in Fielding and the Stukov Quarter, united under the banners of the Cooperative and selling their meats on the civic markets, the Butcheries located in the Jehammedan Quarter process animals on a much larger scale.

The Butcheries resemble a small town in and of itself. Simple living quarters along with a separate bathhouse for the butchers are flanked by a battery of stables and slaughterhouses. Jehammed prescribes that one must avoid the blood of the animals, for it carries the frenzy. Therefore, the carcasses are still warm when hung upside down from the hooks. The blood runs out of cuts on the neck and trickles through floor grates into the pits below, where it's bound with lime and tossed into the waste pits at the end of the southbound Defiler Street. Spitalians take records and supervise the process to ensure it is in accordance with the Hygienic Regulations.

Meanwhile, the slaughtered animals are skinned, chopped to pieces, and processed into meat skewers. The fresh skins are shipped directly to the Tanneries, while the meat is stored in the cold basement waiting for the street chefs to pick it up, grill it at their booths, and serve it with root vegetables and dark bread.

Contrary to the Tanneries where the Jehammedans employ Defilers, Scavengers, and other Clanners as helpers, work at the Butcheries is only permitted to be done by Ismaeli and Abrami. Tradition has it that heathens may never spoil what Jehammedans put in their mouths.

THE TANNERIES

Toward the edge of the district where the Jehammedan Quarter fades into the Borcan plains lie the Tanneries, the largest industrial complex this side of the southern wall. The fumes coming from the compound are so noxious they make even the most hard boiled Scavenger gag. When the complex was first founded it lay far enough away from the core of the settlement for it to not be a concern, but the sprawling Jehammedan Quarter eventually engulfed it over time.

However terrible the odors are, the Tanneries are the main origin of the community's wealth and income. There are few resources as valued in Justitian as leather. It's used by shoemakers in the Old Fortress to make boots, the Steel Masters order it in bulk as material for coats, hats, and armored vests for the Protectors, and pretty much every other market sells leatherware as a basic commodity.

While the Tanneries focus on the production of leather and rawhide, the vast complex is now sprouting dozens of small workshops that specialize in manufacturing all kinds of leather goods to be sold across the various trading hubs of Justitian. From winter coats to waterskins, bags, sandals, scabbards, and belts, any regular product can be acquired here at retail price. Certified traders rummage through the displays and buy cartloads of stock, importing it to Downtown or shipping it to a neighboring Protectorate city. Jehammedan leather is in high demand everywhere.

The Planetarium

Outside. The Jehammedan Quarter can only be recognized by its shadowy silhouette and the honey-colored lights flickering in the windows. A footpath leads through the stubble grass up to a remote hill. At the top a circular building made of interlocking wooden struts surrounding a core of polished stone has been erected, isolated from the rest of the city. This is the Planetarium. To understand Jehammed's instructions, one must search for answers among the stars.

For the religious elite of the Jehammedan Quarter this observatory is a secret temple of their collective faith. The Judges have no clue what the building is used for. Those in the know, however, utilize it for the most sacred rituals of their community. Naraka calls his followers out here at night to provide insight into the journey that was foretold by the Last Prophet before his demise. He points at the star map that covers the ceiling of the dome like structure, tracing the hard path the chosen ones will have to take once the day of the great departure arrives.

Only the most astute and faithful among the Jehammedans will be selected, while those who failed the Last Prophet in life will be culled from the herd. It is Naraka's way of reminding the attendees present that he is the personified judge of their mortal deeds. If they falter, Jehammed will witness their lack of faith through Naraka's eyes and abandon them.

He then places a lamb atop the altar to slaughter it before everyone's eyes. As the life gushes from the animal, Naraka takes off the helmet and smears it with the fresh blood. A lamb must die before it can be reborn as a ram, a parable that should make clear that one must be ready to sacrifice themselves for the greater cause.

The Palers in Exit C-3 watch the Planetarium with care. One of the Horde's operatives has detected the near-field caused by Naraka's helmet. They don't yet understand the Arianoi's motivation, but they are convinced that there is intelligence to be gained from analyzing the star map if they somehow managed to make it inside...

Uptown

UPTOWN
Tech V

DISTRICTS:
The Central Cluster; Ambassador Quarter

POPULATION:
Stable: ca. 67,000

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY:
High

FOOD SUPPLY:
High

RESIDENT CULTS:
Spitalians; Chroniclers; Hellvetics; Judges; Clanners; Neolibyans; Anabaptists

IMPORTANT AREAS:
Calendar Square; Judgement Hall; The Offices; The Radio Tower

UPTOWN

It all started up here. Hundreds of years ago, this ravaged plateau rose out of a field of rubble and debris stretching endlessly toward the horizon. In this ocean of shattered Bygone vanity it stood like a monument frozen in time, towering over the plains of northern Borca. The way up was murderous, but it was easy to defend. When the Chroniclers fortified it, it became impenetrable, and after their exodus from Cathedral City they would turn the plateau into their new headquarters.

Time flew by and the Chroniclers invited the Judges to settle next to them. Slaves and prison workers hauled construction materials up the steep cliff to establish the settlements, laying the foundation for what would come to be called Uptown. Offices, barracks, majestic boulevards, and living quarters for important citizens followed. Uptown expanded, transforming into a centralized hub of condensed political power and ultimately becoming a symbol of oppression.

Its splendor was erected to subdue any covetous thoughts, and choke the rebellious spirit of any ambassador who sets foot atop the plateau. Whoever comes here should witness the grandeur of unity between the Chroniclers and the Judges, shaken to the core by the realization that they'll never achieve anything similar in a dozen lifetimes. When such heralds are escorted down Judgement Alley and brought to their residence in the Ambassador Quarter, their egos melt with every step. Before long they dream about playing a role in this apparatus, accepting every humiliating deal and vow of secrecy in order to feel as if they belong to a select society. But they never will. Sedated by a false sense of importance, they sell out the people and traditions waiting for them back home.

CALENDAR SQUARE

The air is so much fresher up here than in Downtown. The low cloud cover paints the sky a drab gray. A sudden jolt goes through the elevator platform as it smacks into the docking bay. The security chains rattle and people pour out onto Calendar Square.

Observers monitor every new arrival, while Protectors randomly pick passengers for additional screening. There's no clamor and ranting like in the Forecourt. Everyone follows along unquestioningly. They know the drill. Welcome to the maximum security zone of Uptown.

Past the check up, the whole area teems with movement. A platoon of Famulancers marches in lockstep from Judgement Hall towards the square with their Splayers held high, black banners with the eightfold cross flying in the wind. Judges set off from the Barracks and Streamers hurry for the Cluster. Behind them, ambassadors, merchants, and city officials rush to their designated places to begin their day. The Colossus rises and casts its mighty shadow across the square. Those who walk through it in the morning hours are gripped by the icy chill of power. Archot's punishing gaze is on all of them.

The rough stone tablets that line the square are engraved with historical events and dates. The history of the Protectorate is laid out across the pavement for anyone who can decipher the signs. City guides can acquire day passes and accompany rich citizens on their forays, explaining the various historical carvings.

At lunchtime the Square buzzes with market booths offering all kinds of specialties for the people of the district. Brenni set up kegs and pour alcohol for the city officials, Providers sell baked goods, warm stews, all sorts of flavored chestnuts, toffee apples, and flatbreads stuffed with goat cheese. Lunch hour is when the Advocates of the different Offices meet up to exchange their ideas, when Famulancers and Protectors discuss problematic districts in Downtown, and when Streamers instruct Hellvetic Grenadiers on how to secure the Uptown perimeter in the most efficient manner.

LIFE IN UPTOWN

Uptown is prime real estate. Those who snag a place up here can count themselves amongst Justitian's elite. Here live the high ranking Executioners and their families side by side with the Arbiters, Assessors, and Commissioners, as well as the Protectors in training. Next to them reside the wealthiest merchants and city officials who clawed their way to the top of the food chain. The artists and architects employed by the Judiciary populate the streets, strolling past Senators and their respective entourages. Uptown is their fortress, a place aloof and distant, far away from the problems of Downtown. There are no brawls in the streets and no murders. Theft doesn't exist. It is peaceful and safe, exhibiting all the features of the utopia the Judges had always envisioned. The fact that this condition can only be maintained through vigilance, mass surveillance, and excessive control does not cross anyone's mind. The inhabitants of Uptown accept that their privilege can only be upheld by sacrificing their right to privacy and personal freedom.

MAXIMUM SECURITY

Uptown is covered in the invisible web of a mechanical spider that never shows its face, yet everyone knows that its node is hidden in the Central Cluster. In Downtown, the Peace Walk allows the Judges to spy into the houses and monitor the streets. The citizens can sense they're being watched. But the Judges are still creatures made of flesh and blood, who can't see you when you look the other way and can't hear you when you lower your voice. One can't rely on such tactics in Uptown.

Steel ropes and guide rails span across the boulevards. Lidless robotic eyes hang from them, creeping steadily from one end of a guide rail to the next. Suddenly, with the howling of an internal servo motor, they flip around and stare at you. Buttons rotate around the optics, adjusting to the depth of field, the glass eye in the center transforming from a murky gray into a reflection-free black: the Chroniclers see you now.

Stream drones are omnipresent as they whizz across the sky, recording the flow of pedestrians below, searching for irregularities. The Chroniclers maneuvering these drones have the images transmitted in real time to their Opticalizers, from where the data is fed into the Static Stream for future analysis.

Another variant of these monitoring gadgets lurks behind thick glass on the corners of houses and is locked in place. It is precisely these contraptions that are said to make children age and wither and rob women of beauty.

"Incorrect assumption!" the hooded Chronicler rattles through his Vocoder as he unscrews the faceplate of the stationary camera and wipes the lens clean of dead moths with his finger. Superstition among the populace is common, and many a Provider who visits Uptown in hopes of acquiring a citizenship loads himself up with talismans and blessings from the elders as he hurries past the Chroniclers' sensors with a bowed head, dodging the optical lenses of the security cameras. Fast, fast! The Judges welcome this: traffic in Uptown flows quickly through the streets.

JUDGEMENT ALLEY

A large boulevard dissects Uptown in a straight line, leading from Calendar Square all the way down to Judgement Hall. It seems like an eternity ago that the bones of Supreme Judge Markoff, wrapped in linen, along with his Codex were walled into the final stone head sitting at the entry of Judgement Alley. Archot observed the burial ceremony and signaled to the prison workers who had been washed and brushed for the occasion that they should put the keystone in the monument already and call it a day. In the following years after Markoff's demise he'd come here often to stare into the eyes of his predecessor. The stone head was an imperious effigy, embossed with a frowning gaze. Was Markoff judging him in death? What about the other Supreme Judges that were buried along the vast boulevard? Archot blinked at all of them with suspicion. They were his rivals, unconquerable in death.

Twenty-three of these massive stone heads stand in a row along Judgement Alley, twenty-three success stories of Supreme Judges who had risen above their peers, imposed their law on the Codex, and expanded the realm by their will and ideals, thereby leaving their mark in the history of Justitian. Archot would one day have to join this exclusive lineup. A meager stone head for the greatest Supreme Judge, the one who fought off the Clan threat, annihilated the Krawe, allied with the Spitalians, and ordered the construction of the Great Northern Wall. One in twenty four. That wasn't appropriate for his accomplishments.

Archot considered Calendar Square a waste of space, wide, open, and bereft of significance and magnitude. He would put himself before all other Supreme Judges, eternalized by a monument that was worthy of his glory. The Colossus was his triumph. However, the stone heads remained, and they are fundamental to the pride of the Judiciary. Each of them features brass plaques inscribed with

Supreme Judges

THE FIRST (2381-2409)
- Disappeared

GARWALD (JUSTUS I) (2410)
- Murdered by his successor

NASSIUS (2410-2423)
- Died of old age

REMA SALVANO (2423-2430)
- Died in warfare

DIADOCHUS (2430-2438)
- Ousted by Wenkmann

LITHOR (2438)
- Publicly executed

WENKMANN (JUSTUS II) (2438-2448)
- Died of old age

TRIBUS MANTEUFEL (2448-2451)
- Commited suicide

ALEXEJ MASEK (2451-2456)
- Died in warfare

ERON FULMAS (2456-2468)
- Died in warfare

NINIVER JUNGBAU (2468-2472)
- Died of old age

FLORENTIN, THE HASTY (2472)
- Expelled from office

SEMPER SALVANO (2472-2483)
- Died in the Stukov civil war

MIEL, THE OLDER (2483-2487)
- Murdered by his son

MIEL, THE YOUNGER (2487-2496)
- Exiled

BELAV SILVIAN (2496-2508)
- Died of old age

KERTELL (JUSTUS III) (2508-2513)
- Assassinated by Patrius

FREIMENGER, THE ELUCID (2513-2520)
- Died during the conquest of the Black Lung

SIMONEK (2520-2522)
- Poisoned

PATRIUS (JUSTUS IV) (2522-2526)
- Died in warfare

HARTWAEGER (2526-2532)
- Died of disease

ULFTHOR (2532-2539)
- Died during the conquest of the Black Lung

MARKOFF (2539-2558)
- Died of old age

ARCHOT (JUSTUS V) (2558-2598)
- Longest reigning Supreme Judge in office

the laws that were implemented by the Supreme Judges entombed along the boulevard, along with a lengthy description of their lives and cause of death. Vagrants are forced to study each of these past leaders and expected to be able to recite their achievements in their sleep. For the Advocates belonging to the Five Houses the exhibition of legendary members of their dynasties is both a reminder of their own greatness as well as a feral sting in their flank. One day they'll reclaim the highest office and coronate one of their own to lead Justitian once more.

THE FIRST STONE HEAD

Right where Judgement Alley meets with the open courtyard in front of Judgement Hall rests the first of the stone heads, depicting the mythical founder of the Cult. The icon is featureless, the outline of the crude masonry barely resembling a head. No image of the First Judge exists that would allow for proper representation, and the High Judiciary doesn't allow for an imaginary portrayal, considering such an attempt an act akin to blasphemy.

Instead, the lack of a face must be understood as a blank canvas upon which any interpretation of personal achievement can be projected. The First Judge is to be perceived as a metaphor for greatness, ambition, and what a single individual can accomplish in their lifetime. It is no wonder that this stone head is the most frequented among young Protectors. To them, the glory of the founder is a guiding light for their own path ahead. However, in the years to come they will begin to grasp that their dreams and aspirations to do good are thwarted by ceaseless infighting, power struggles, and layers upon layers of political intrigue. They will learn to deal with the manipulations of the Cluster and the pressure exerted by the Spitalians. As they wade through the pitfalls of modern Judgedom, even the most diligent lawkeeper will eventually be left jaded and disillusioned.

Some Protectors dream about going back to the roots, back to where it all began. A glimpse at this stone head is a reminder of how things used to be: simple, a man and his hammer, law spoken by instinct, justice and punishment brought down swiftly upon the outlaws. No infighting, no interference by the Advocates, no bending of the law, and no corruption. To them, the First Judge is a symbol of purity - to the hardliners among the Arbiters who defend the fuzziness of the latest Codex iteration, along with its manifold interpretations, such idealization is a hallmark of naivety. Some go even so far as to blame the divide running through the Senates on the revered founder himself. Treacherous words full of resentment, which they would never utter in public.

JUDGEMENT HALL

Shortly before sunrise an artillery blast tears through the silence of Uptown, fired eastbound without a solid target. A salute to Archot - all hail the Supreme Judge. Before the vapor of the cannon's shell wafts from the plaza the heart of Justitian has already jumped into motion. Jurymen hurry to swipe the pavement in front of Judgement Hall clean prior to the arrival of the first entourage of Advocates. Ceremonial fires are lit in the braziers between the tall columns, and the massive gates swing wide open. A High Judge steps out, Codex in one hand, hammer in the other. "Per Aspera ad Astra!" he proclaims proudly; the Judiciary's aphorism, fittingly chiseled in large letters above the main entrance of the majestic building. It has been the unifying maxim of the Cult, the one Latin phrase every Vagrant must learn on their first day.

This is Judgement Hall after all. The Judges' seat of power and the confluence of all political life of the city. This sanctuary of the law has stood here for a hundred years, since the day the Chroniclers invited the Judges to Uptown, erected by a faceless labor force of slaves and prisoners of war who died in spades during its construction process. But that's too much history. Let's focus on the present.

The air drifting through the gargantuan hallway is crisp like a Borcan winter night. One's breath turns into clouds as we pass underneath two massive bronze statues flanking the walls, representing two men in Judges' robes, one clutching the Codex, the other leaning on a hammer: Arbiter and Executioner, the dichotomy of the Cult's very spirit.

Beyond the corridor lies the main reception. A vast mural carved into a rough slab of granite rises across the back wall. It features the First Judge as a central figure pacifying the peoples of the Black Lung with Codex and hammer. The radiance of it all is overwhelming. City Judges scurry along to attend their meetings, while Advocates aim toward the Scriptorium to attend the first lectures held by the resident High Judges. Light squeezes through the towering arch windows adorned with ornate stained glass illustrating the virtues of Judgedom and representing the deadly sins of the outlaws who defy the idea of a common utopia, and who must be brought to heel. Every detail of the architecture reeks of propaganda, a megalomaniacal display of power serving only to diminish a human's soul and extinguish its persona. What is identity anyway? Aren't we all the same before the law?

Stairways lead toward the different sections of Judgement Hall: the floor, where the Senates gather for their daily conference, and the lush atrium, which serves as a retreat for private conversations between officials of the High Judiciary. The archives are located in the basement, and require special permission in order to gain entry. The applicant must be able to prove that his request is made in good faith and that he must access older Codex versions to validate a new annotation or to study a historical case file in order to adapt the previous ruling to a similar situation.

It is the duty of the Supreme Judge to take up residence in Judgement Hall. His private rooms, along with accommodation for his personal staff, take up the majority of the West Wing. Artists carry drawings and drafts for new statues to Archot's chambers, followed by tailors and shoemakers from the Old Fortress who personally deliver the latest robes and attire for the most important man in all of Justitian.

On the other side of Judgement Hall lies the East Wing, featuring the office of the Chief Protector, Rutgar, along with bunks for all the Protectors assigned to guard duty this month. The East Wing has direct access to the rooftop with its mounted cannons, mortars, and stationary howitzers which make up the majority of Judgement Hall's defense systems. They've never been used beyond the morning salute and the announcement salvo during Archot's birthday, yet they're carefully maintained. The East Wing also features a separate arsenal, disconnected from the main one in the Judicial Barracks, in case of an emergency.

ADMISSION

Congratulations! You made it to the top. Get ready to peel your eyes and pinch yourself. What better feeling there is than witnessing what oppression looks like, condensed into a single building of granite and grandeur. You can't get inside if you don't belong here. Entry is only granted to members of the Judiciary, and designated Chroniclers and Spitalians. Anyone who wants to breach the main gate needs a special permit issued at the Office of Internal Affairs, or an invitation from any of the powers in charge.

Observers and Hippocrats are allowed onto the premises and can be joined by their accomplices after a thorough screening at the front desk. Weapons are forbidden, and any means of recording is prohibited unless one belongs to the Cluster's Observers. Fingerprints are mandatory as well as showing some form of localization. Citizenship papers are preferred, yet any proof of diplomatic status can also warrant entry. Ambassadors must present their appeal before the Senates and get it approved, to make a pledge in front of the Supreme Judge.

THE SENATES

Anyone daring to attend a conference of the Senates will quickly learn the true meaning of boredom. The yearly concession auction in Tripol appears like a jubilant rave in comparison to the encrusted hearings conducted on the floor of the venerable Judgement Hall. Two hostile camps sit opposite of each other, entrenched in bitter warfare over the most petty of subjects. One assembly unites behind Senator Laakon, the other behind Rutgar, while Archot the Supreme Judge sits in the middle atop the high chair of his office and mediates between them. What follows is a three-hour long barrage of arguments and counters fired relentlessly from one camp over to the other. Each speaker has put together more talking points for the day than he needs for the entire discussion. Quotes and annotations are dropped and thrown around as if they were going out of fashion, strawman arguments follow manipulative rhetoric, statements are bent out of context, revoked, or purposefully interpreted wrong to sully the opponent's line of defense and triumph over them by exposing them as frauds. It's a verbal slaughterhouse with bile dripping from the tongues of the assembly, every word as venomous as a Stukov Scorpion's stinger.

The Scribes hurry to stenograph all interactions, filling sheet after sheet, calling for ink refills for their quills. But the parties remain hardened, without anything being decided. After the first hour even the Observers yawn at the sight of these intermezzos. Archot leans drowsily on his fist, his face sagging lower and lower. Rutgar's gaze wanders across those present, counting his enemies, deducing their motivations and monitoring their facial expressions. He knows how to spot a mortal enemy in the midst of the crowd. Oswald Keszler, the Spitalian Hippocrat, watches the spectacle and scribbles down a note for every lapsus and stuttering deviation. Generation, the envoy of the Chroniclers, records even the faintest breath of a speaker during the meeting for later analysis.

The clock strikes twelve and nothing is resolved. Outraged, Laakon's disciples gather up their papers and blitz toward Calendar Square to collect their thoughts over lunch, while Rutgar's followers sweep out of the room to conduct their business. Only Archot remains in his chair and asks for the essentials to be summarized into a digestible format, while his eyes wander tiredly across the abandoned seats. The solutions are more unclear than ever.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF PROTECTOR

Rutgar's office is located in the East Wing of Judgement Hall. The frigid gangway leading down to the Chief Pro-

tector's premises smells of heavy Frankan tobacco. Rutgar smokes like a chimney. The interior of the office is a mess. Hundreds of case files litter the floors and desks, wanted posters plaster the walls, and unread field reports clog the shelves. A series of medals, trophies, and emblems collected over the past decades lines the south wall, caked in dust or buried under worn out clothes and vests.

The soaring window consists of shatterproof glass with a yellow tint, and gives a direct view over to the Central Cluster. From here, Rutgar has a keen eye on his competitors. As the Chief Protector of Justitian he must be able to access any danger that could harm the Supreme Judge, and he knows that dealing with the Chroniclers translates to inviting trouble into your house.

Rutgar rarely leaves his office these days. He's become more reclusive with age, and prefers to invite people over to his residence instead of meeting them elsewhere. When guests are over, they tend to get lost in all the little details of the office. Rutgar had the Ropers install a massive fish tank, exhibiting a wonderful collection of aquatic animals that he enjoys studying for hours at a time. Next to all the work-related notes strewn around, a peculiar bust featuring his deceased second wife Vela stands on his work desk, surrounded by a small wreath of dried cornflowers. Those who knew her in life remember the small woman as funny and cheerful, strong-willed and with a heart of gold. She passed away some twenty years ago, and Rutgar never cared to find company after that.

Instead he devoted himself to his work and his work alone. As the balancer of power, all Protectors are guided by his word. He's Justitian's ultimate strategist and general of the Protectorate's armed forces. On Rutgar's order squads assemble and Protectors man the guard towers, conduct raids, or ride against the enemy. The Office of Internal Affairs reports straight back to him, and he has the power to veto any decision of the Commissioners stationed there. Additionally, he can overrule orders made in the Office of Protectorate Affairs if they would prove dangerous to the safety of Justitian. With but the snap of his finger Rutgar can change the course of the city's politics and steer them in a different direction. Even though it is Archot who makes global decisions before the Senates, most of them are aligned with his Chief Protector.

EQUILIBRIUM

Archot and Rutgar share history. They've been next to one another for what seems like an eternity, and it is whispered they've known each other from before the days of Archot's

rise to power. The two men's lives have been intertwined over the course of four decades, and as much as Rutgar keeps all external threats away from the Supreme Judge, Archot in turn assures that his Chief Protector doesn't have to face internal struggle. Are they friends? Possibly. As much as one can be friends with another man after a lifetime of loyalty, clandestine affairs, collective secrets, cover ups, and mutually beneficial lies. Both depend on one another, and thereby maintain the other's power without cancelling them out. Rutgar has never coveted Archot's position, nor did the Supreme Judge ever suspect that the Chief Protector had sinister motives. Each of them fulfills their role without hollowing out the foundation on which their equilibrium was built.

If there is but one difference between the two: Archot withers away while Rutgar is still in formidable shape, mentally as well as physically.

THE MUSEUM

Behold the wonders of the Bygone age, see the miracles of a time forever lost, remains of ingenuity beyond the comprehension of today. This is where we came from, this is what we once were. What struck us down? Depravity, as the Anabaptists claim, or conflict, as it is in our blood? Was the Eshaton a punitive measure for our very existence and are our lives in this moment simply defiled by the sins of our ancestors? Is all of our suffering due to the failures of those who came before us? Is it perhaps that life on Earth resembles prison time in the Cleft: one should bear the hardships for there is freedom at the end of the line, and one day society will embrace our ravaged bodies back into its midst?

You really enjoy pondering such philosophical questions? Well then, the Museum of the Judiciary is the place for you to wallow and find like-minded daydreamers, the spineless maggots who can't get an honest day of work in before losing themselves in contemplation of conjuring a life they'll never live. Go ahead, milk those reveries of grandiose revelations, feel like you're meant to uncover some finite truth. You know what? The truth doesn't need you. It's better off not being discovered.

What's this Museum about, you ask? Sleepers? Of course not! The Chroniclers would've confiscated any valuable information by now and established one of their information embargoes, and you'd be sitting here decrypting passcodes for the rest of the night.

No, the Museum is about different relics, those that were plundered by the Judges during their conquests across Borca. Art, literature, sheet music, statues, engineering tools, and weapons. Anything remotely resembling the idea of Bygone culture was salvaged and dragged into this exhibition. It is an archive of forgotten eminence. One room features the shell of a jet fighter's wing retrieved from the Stukov Desert. Next to it stand instruments behind glass: cellos, flutes, and oboes dug from the silt of the Black Lung and carefully restored. In another room there are paintings of unrivaled mastery, one depicting a father clutching his dead son, who is bleeding from a vicious head wound - the eyes of the parent widened in terror allowing a gaze into the turmoil of the soul. Another illustration features a giant with a maddening stare as he bites off the head and limbs of a tiny human screaming in desperation. Then follows a statue of pure tragedy: a man entangled in a fight against two monstrous serpents, struggling to keep their venomous fangs away from his two teenage sons, sacrificing his life for his offspring.

The Museum is only accessible upon invitation. Senator Jelinek is the master curator of the exhibition, and he hires artists to restore the unique artworks collected over the past hundred years. While Archot doesn't appreciate the past as much as the future, he is fond of having a place that can hold all the gifts and tributes that the cities of the Protectorate have turned over to the Judiciary. If he must rid himself of annoying deputies and diplomats, he sends them on a tour through the Museum. Kranzler, the Provost of the Preservists, enjoys strolling through the collection every other week, lost in thought, searching for music sheets to acquire for his private collection.

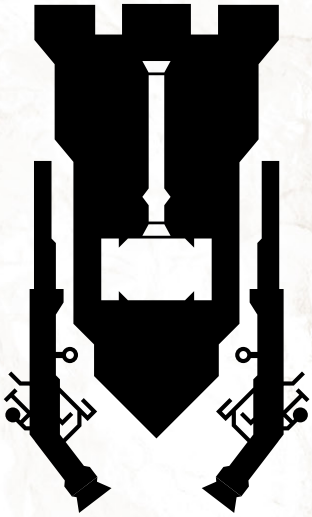
THE ODEON

Whenever Archot needs to impress guests, or imprint the idea of Justitian's magnitude onto a foreign power, he invites them to the Odeon, a special open theater west of Judgement Hall. It serves as a grandstand of glory for the Judiciary's rise to power. The plays performed here, a mixture of boastful poems, expressive dance, and other theatrics, are laced with propaganda and bias. The actors and directors are servants with no ambition to offend their patrons. Normal people would call them sycophants and bootlickers. Their only drive is to satisfy Archot in his desire to overwhelm the spectators with the epochal vision of himself.

While the majority of dramas focus on the Supreme Judge, from his heroic defense of Siege and the triumph over the Krawe Clan to the consolidation of the High Judiciary and the alliance with the Spital, there are other pieces that glorify the origin story of the Cult. The most popular, titled "The First", retells the legend of the Founder amidst the bloody chaos of the Black Lung, and depicts the first punishment conducted in Sinder that went on to become the most defining moment in the Judges' history.

Other plays detail Nassius and his dominion over Garwald, recounting the early years of the Judges as a rugged band of fifty men against the hostility of an entire world. Then comes the ascension of the Salvanos, with Rema tying the Advocate families to the highest office and Semper leading the Judges through the darkest hour of the City Wars before ultimately dying in the Stukov civil war that followed. Whatever show is scheduled at the Odeon for the week, its main function is to awe the viewers and present the Judiciary as a monolithic entity that can hold back any force by sheer will and unity.

The message is clear: do not dare to defy our demands, do not conspire against us, do not seek to insult us or ally with our enemies, or we will come for you without mercy, as the Iron Fist.



THE BARRACKS

Darkened walls, guard towers with floodlights, entry into the courtyard only allowed if one belongs to the Judges. Inside: six main buildings, five for the troops, one for weapons, equipment, and utilities, with an adjacent canteen.

Protectors on duty live in the Judicial Barracks. Shifts consist of three weeks on, one week off for recovery and leisure. While Judges can rent rooms or acquire private property anywhere in Downtown or the Rubble, when they are on call they must return to Uptown. Squad officers oversee the daily schedules in alignment with the Office of Internal Affairs, and assign squads to different turfs across the many districts of Justitian and its outer premises.

One shouldn't search for luxury here. As a serviceman of the law a fledgling Vagrant is entitled only to a bunk which he shares with his squadmates, smelling their farts and stinky boots every night, a water tub, and the common mirror. A horn comb is at his disposal to straighten his greasy hair and untangle his beard. The young men and women in the Barracks are Protectors in training. In a few years they will be expected to wrestle criminals to the ground and to mark thieves with purifying red colors. The apprenticeship is rough. Roll call is at 5:30 am in the courtyard. The Vagrants are shooed through several stages of physical education before being divided into smaller units for extended demonstrations. Athletic prowess is crucial, health and fitness must be maintained, therefore regular check ups by the Spitalians are commonplace. Established Protectors share their fighting strategies with the newcomers, along with exercises in hand to hand combat and endurance building routines.

At 9:00am, City Judges pick up the Vagrants for duties in Downtown, where they learn the foundations of the Codex on the job. The day ends with swollen feet and studies of the law, before tiredness drags them into the realm of dreams.

On Saturdays Rutgar joins the troops in the early morning hours. He teaches various crackdown techniques and methods of de-escalation. The Vagrants gawk in awe at their honorable instructor, pounding him with questions of legendary operations like the extermination of the Plague Birds, the Fall of Ferropol, and the Great Cleanse. Rutgar is amused by the curiosity and shares tiny anecdotes without ever giving away the full extent of the events. The Protectors look up to the Old Wolf. To them, he is a shining example of virtue and justness, a beacon in an ugly world that has lost all meaning and every measure of respect.

Since the outbreak of the Clan Wars the Barracks have opened their facilities for workshops conducted by the allies of the Judiciary. Throughout the month, Preservists and Hellvetics stationed in Justitian come to spar with the Protectors and exchange their knowledge of warfare. The atmosphere is humble and friendly. Everyone knows what it means to be deployed against a common enemy and lose comrades in battle.

MILITARY PROWESS

Justitian's armed forces consist of 17,900 Protectors, of which only twenty percent are assigned to service the city itself on any given day. The rest of the military is spread across the Rubble, throughout the dozens of Protectorate cities, and along the frontlines on the southern border. However, nobody ever gets to learn this number. The Judges don't like to play with open cards, and the ongoing Clan Wars have already torn large swathes into their ranks, killing hundreds and leaving the Judiciary scrambling for potential replacements. Also, the prospective clout is sugarcoated as it includes Vagrants and City Judges alike, most of which don't have enough combat experience to be deployed in areas like the Harbor or Tech-Central, even less against a brood of bloodthirsty Cockroaches.

Staffing the defenses with Jurymen has become the most common stratagem to keep up appearances and feign numerical superiority within the city limits, but such patchwork is eroding the trust of the populace and watering down the bonds among the Protector squads. Who wants to put their life in the hands of someone whose loyalty to the cause can hardly be tested?

The fact of the matter is that the Protectors can't be everywhere, and with their numbers thinning the corrosive powers of Downtown begin to take notice and use the momentum to further their sinister ploys.

The Offices

Uptown is known for its surreal bureaucracy, a temple district devoted to paperwork, multicolored forms, case files, folder systems, stamps, and charcoal copies. A fierce warrior who bested beast and barbarian alike would faint at the sheer sight of this cyclopean apparatus installed to control, subdue, demoralize, and harass the soul of everyone brave enough to mutter a pledge.

You want something from the city? Better get your papers sorted. Make sure they're valid and that you've settled your taxes right, or you can prepare for a marathon of appointments, rushing from one department to the next, only to be ignored, marginalized, and told to come back another day.

Anyone who wants to achieve anything in Justitian must prepare to run the gauntlet or they will be barred from their ambitions forever, be it citizenship, acquisition of real-estate, permission of sale, or marriage of a childhood sweetheart.

Politics are conducted in the Offices, and it is here that the future of Justitian and Borca is decided upon before such proposals are brought over to Judgement Hall to receive their signature of approval from the Senates.

It is also here that Archot cures his wounded vanity. According to the luxury edict every Office building must now be encased in polished limestone, covered in stucco, and display frescoes of the Judiciary's achievements.

Scaffolding clings to the buildings and winch cranes sway in the wind as slabs of slate and ornate limestone are pulled toward the gables and rooftops. A battalion of workers marches across the avenue in lockstep. Two rows, no talking allowed. A Protector on a black horse rides at the rear, musket sitting in the crook of his arm. Probably not even loaded. Another Protector on foot leads the entourage and roars a string of orders, followed by a barrage of insults. Every damn day.

OFFICE OF HYGIENICS

The ominous building lacks any windows, the walls are chalked up and the red Spitalian cross is painted accurately, two stories tall, above the main entrance. Just how Elliot Heilkamp likes it. He's Justitian's Chief Hygienist and reports from his position back to the Spital.

The enforcement of the Hygienic Regulations, the Great Cleanse, the daily distribution of toxins and fungicides to the Providers, supervision and certification of harvests, it all originates here. The populace abhors this place. It stands for Spitalian complacency and aloofness.

But the Office of Hygienics doesn't care for protest. All it cares for is putting measures in place to save the Protectorate from turning into a Sepsis infested hellhole like neighboring Franka. Additionally, a city the size of Justitian is the perfect breeding ground for a pandemic to break out and jump across all neighboring cities, thereby threatening the Spital and all that is left of Borcan civilization. That must never happen. Therefore, the Office is authorized to conduct random sampling of citizens, install the disinfection sluices across Downtown, and impose strict birth control. Citizens who don't comply and disregard the Hygienic Regulations can be charged with horrendous fines, loss of citizenship and confiscation of property being just examples of the penalties imposed by the Spitalians on anyone who doesn't abide by their laws.

Foreigners from different Cultures and regions who enter the Protectorate and apply for citizenship must be prepared for a full body examination at the Office of Hygienics before they can attempt to register at the Office of Locality. Strip down butt-naked in front of the Hygienists and get ready for smear tests, followed by inquisitive questions about exposure to Burn and Sepsis, travel routes prior to arrival in Justitian, contacts with Apocalyptics, and anything else the auditors deem necessary to assure themselves of one's health and cleanliness. Condition: Sterile; No Hazard. With their seal of ratification on a salmon-colored sheet of paper they may now go forth to make their other rendezvous in Uptown.

OFFICE OF LOCALITY

Every citizen has an anecdote to tell about the Office of Locality, and it's rarely a flattering one. They've all been through the hoops and machinations of this judicial branch that decides if a subject is worthy of citizenship or not. Traditionally the Office has always been managed by the Jungbaus, and even today the majority of the employed officials belong to this Advocate family, albeit not as members of the Cult of Judges.

Locality means exactly one thing: you belong here, your status is approved, you are a number that keeps the system alive and therefore you're a profitable asset. Your meager existence can be evaluated mathematically as well as categorically, as in how much property you own, what business you have, and who you are married to.

This cumulative data serves as vital information to the Judiciary. Locality means that disorderly individuals can be triangulated based on their domicile, their employment, and the relationships they've formed. Citizens have a much harder time keeping a low profile than guests who never register. On the other hand, citizenship is a must on all levels of civic interaction. It is factually impossible to own real-estate, acquire a profitable business license, marry anyone, or adopt a child without the right paperwork.

Oh, you want to object to the cutback of your civic liberties? Good for you! As you turn around, the Protectors guarding the Office of Locality wait to escort you back to the elevator platform, the warrantor who vouched for you on the way up is now barred from vouching for you again, and your name is held for the record to ex-

empt you from future Juryman duties. You screwed up. Come back in a year once the ban is lifted from your file.

OFFICE OF CERTIFICATION

So, you had this great idea: You wanted to make real money and build a small empire by importing Frankan tobacco leaves from the Rhône swamps and selling them as rolled cigarillos on the Forecourt. You already had a name for your brand in mind, La Bayonnette, sold in small tin boxes of twenty smokes a pop. Pricepoint: 7 Drafts per box. You had a Scrapper in Tech-Central weld two thousand boxes in advance, at the cost of 1 Draft per unit. Then you hired three Hagari down in the Jehammedan Quarter to roll the damn leaves which you brought all the way from the swamp, coming in at another 1 Draft per unit of twenty, dry storage of the leaves included. You lost an approximate Draft of production cost per box hauling the cargo across the Alps with your ox-cart, but that's fine since you split the customs fees with a fellow merchant on your way to Justitian.

Now it's time to get a market booth and make a fat profit of 4 Drafts per box sold. If you can get rid of the whole stock in the first week, you'll be raking in a whopping 8,000 Drafts!

Wait! You got no certification for the luxury goods. You must apply for the correct forms first. The woman at the counter of the Office of Certification looks at you as if she's staring at a donkey. You try to explain yourself, how you paid all this money upfront to initiate production, but she cuts you off mid-sentence. The Spitalians must inspect the tobacco and declare it free of Sepsis before it can be released to the market. She hands you a mint green form with an order to apply for an appointment at the Office of Hygienics. You can't believe your ears. She continues without paying attention to your hysteric panting. Once your goods are approved by the Spitalians, you must apply for citizenship at the Office of Locality if you want to rent a market booth on the Forecourt. Your jaw drops, and you shake your head in disbelief. You want to reach out and choke the official in front of you but she points out that once you cover your localization tax, there is the certification tax which needs to be paid upfront on your prospective revenue during your first month of business, along with the lease for the booth. You rage on the inside, fantasizing about throwing your tin boxes at her, all two thousand of them.

Welcome to the Office of Certification. You got anything to sell? You'd better be prepared to get it certified. The Office is subordinate to the Spitalians, and controls perishable goods released for the civic markets in their favor. It is managed by Timokles of the Wender Advocate family. With the demise of the Wender dynasty, the members of the family have lost major holdings in Uptown and cling to their last remains of significance

like a mortally wounded soldier to the sheets of his deathbed. Timokles defends the honor of his family with his last breath, which turns the process of certification into one of the most pedantic measures traders and entrepreneurs can face upon arrival in Justitian.

OFFICE OF CULTURE

Senator Jelinek is a man of taste. At least that's what he likes to think of himself in his position at the helm of the Office of Culture. He was installed there by Archot, and his self-importance has grown ever since.

But what power does a man at the head of the Office of Culture wield? A lot. Jelinek is responsible for upholding the luxury edict and the citywide display of judicial art, statues, and propaganda. Every Most Wanted poster comes out of his office, and gets multiplied ten thousandfold at the Paper Factory, which he has full control over. There's a Judge who wants his name eternalized as a street name in Downtown? Jelinek writes the corresponding permission. A plaza in the Stukov District needs to be adorned with the bust of a famous scion of the Masek family? Jelinek signs off on the blueprint. Judgement Alley requires refurbishment? Jelinek skims the budget of his department and sends a request to the Cleft for the prison laborers to arrive in Uptown the next day, ready for work.

The Senator understands how to deal with the vanities of his contemporaries. The Judges are a Cult that loves to commemorate itself, in death as much as in life. The artists and architects employed by his office have all been handpicked by Archot, and Jelinek oversees that they do their job right. If a poet composes unflattering verses, he has to justify himself before the Senator and his commission. The same goes for troublemakers in Downtown who sully the name of the Judiciary with accusatory pamphlets and banter. Such crapshooters are visited a few days later by a friendly City Judge and escorted to Uptown for serious interrogation. If such individuals can't prove their innocence, they're sent to the Office of Locality where they have their citizenship revoked immediately and without exception. Jelinek hates people who shit where they sleep.

OFFICE OF CIVIL ECONOMICS

The Office of Civil Economics is so gargantuan that it could gobble up all other Offices of Uptown under its roof. It is not surprising, then, that it cannot be managed by one family alone. Instead the Maseks, Salvanos, and Manteufels divide the leadership of the separate branches amongst one another, fighting over budgetary restrictions in each of their assigned fields of duty. It's all about money, as the Office of Civil Economics deals with the entirety of the Protectorate's finances that get redistributed here by the Senates and are then subdivided to trickle down to all other departments.

The Department for Rural Development oversees the land and parcels leased out to the Provider families, issues requests for specific crop imports to restock the food distribution centers across all the civic markets, and coordinates its efforts with the Offices of Hygienics and Certification to ensure quality products for the citizens of Justitian. It holds Providers accountable to the standards of certification and can foreclose a farm if the leaseholder repeatedly fails to produce the minimum required harvest yield for the year. The Village Jurymen who enforce the law out in the Rubble all report back to this department.

Meanwhile, the Department for Urban Development declares which areas in Downtown are for sale, settlement, or reconstruction. It lays out plans for Stallion Streets, plazas, and open markets, fences off areas that need to be torn down and rebuilt according to the new directives signed off by the Senates, and oversees the development of the Peace Walk. Besides that, the officials deal with the Anabaptists, regulating the fees for water supply, the construction of additional pipelines, and the expansion of the Defiler Streets to accommodate the exponential growth of the city.

The Department of Taxes and Duties works hand in hand with the Central Exchange on the Forecourt, collecting all paid citizen tax as well as the tributes remunerated by the Protectorate cities which are delivered to Uptown by assigned treasurers. The officials have access to the business records stored at the Office of Certification, and can issue random inspections across all registered shops and markets to ensure merchants are conducting their business conscientiously, and in accordance with their tax declaration.

Additionally, the department issues all payslips for Judges working in Uptown. A yellow slip features the payroll for service to the Judiciary and can be picked up at the end of each month at the respective counter. The waiting lines are always clogged, so the department must hire additional couriers to deliver stacks of payslips to the Barracks or designated addresses in Downtown, ensuring everyone gets their salary on time. Once issued, Protectors and Arbiters alike must venture to the Central Exchange or any other Alcove to turn the payslip into Drafts.

OFFICE OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

Casper Salvano is driven by the urge to appease his brother-in-law Emiel, no matter the cost. He doesn't realize that he's merely a puppet clenched between the fangs of the Patriarch, and that he was installed to satisfy Emiel's greed and lust for power. Nepotism positioned him at the spearhead of the office, but Casper is blind to

this reality. He hasn't visited Downtown in years. He doesn't have to. Emiel keeps him occupied, feeding him exquisite goods from the Forecourt and letters with instructions. Caspar is to shut up and divert any and all inquiries by the resident Commissioners into Salvano business.

Prophylactically he is supposed to focus on dirt that can be dug up about Emiel's rivals in command: Archot, Rutgar, Laakon, Jelinek, preferably Aritha Manteufel, and whoever else Casper can shed light upon. The young official does his best to satisfy the order from below, feeding the Patriarch with weekly dispatches.

Meanwhile, a floor below Casper's bureau, the Commissioners storm the conference room with case files on murder, corruption, extortion, and human trafficking. Like hawks they soar through witness reports and evidence alike, piecing together puzzle after puzzle, until they get a grasp of the crime at hand. Got Dr. Masur's autopsy file? Yes! The reported hour of death doesn't correspond with the fractures on the victim's skull! As the Commissioners sift through all the available data and scramble their Assessors to scour Downtown for more hands on intel, someone burns files in the basement. Corruption, distortion of the law, abuse of power, all kinds of documentation that would be ill-received and show questionable behavior on the side of the Judiciary need to disappear before the Commissioners on the third floor get wind of them and begin to dig into the files.

Lauro, the filemaster of the Office, has been paid off by Utrecht under direct orders from the Chief Protector's office to make compromising testimonies disappear for good. Lauro, who's been a Protector all his life until his weary bones couldn't serve him any longer, is a loyal supporter of Rutgar's way of doing things. In return, the Old Wolf has taken care of Lauro's family in Fielding. Both his wife and his two daughters will have nothing to worry about once Lauro passes on to the other side, as his Mausoleum in the Cemetery of the Judges is already paid for.

OFFICE OF PROTECTORATE AFFAIRS

The Protectorate is a vast territory that requires an enormous amount of manpower to be kept in check, and the Judiciary must field its forces with care. It must know where to deploy troops to display strength, and where to ease the reins to allow for other fronts to be replenished.

The Office of Protectorate Affairs does just that. It serves as Justitian's foreign ministry and general military command centre. Every decision related to the expansion of the realm and conquest of property and land, as well as declarations of war, are cooked up within the walls of this building. The Office organizes raids in the surrounding area, defines the annexation policy, and conducts negotiations with city leaders and ambassadors alike to define which localities should be incorporated.

Dispatches from the entire Protectorate flow together here, where they are reformatted for the Senates and brought before Archot, who in turn hands the dossiers over to the Chief Protector to make a final decision. The Supreme Judge has more important things to do than to deal with some backwater swamp south of Wetzlar crying for help.

Traditionally, the Office of Protectorate Affairs has always been in the hands of the Manteufel family, who have pushed for the inflation of the Judges' sphere of influence since the early years of Justitian's rise. Their profession requires foresight and the ability to project shortages of important resources. For this purpose, the Office relies on additional intelligence and calculations provided by the Cluster, and aligns its policies with the Chroniclers. In the past this growth was a measurable factor with the Judges making progress year after year, but with the outbreak of the Clan Wars the Office's campaigning has come to a grinding halt. The decrees of the day are to secure the border against the encroaching Clans and drive the savages back. Therefore the officials must now shift the Protectors around on the map, drawing them out of Bassham and Born and back over to Siege to hold the lines.

But the Office is faced with bad publicity. With so many Protectors never returning from the front, the city now has to deal with an ever growing number of widows and broken families along with orphaned children previously unaccounted for. The invincibility of Justitian is put into question loud and clear, attracting the anger of the Chief Protector who expects the officials to get the situation back under control. Easier said than done. Daily now, deceased notes from Siege arrive at the Office, listing the names of Protectors who've gone missing in the field. The coffins buried in the Cemetery of the Judges are empty, and the widows are clamoring, calling for retribution, demanding that the Judiciary wakes up and settles the score with the Cockroaches and Phosphorites once and for all.

However, that would require an all out shift of priorities and the consolidation of all available forces of the entire Protectorate and its bordering allies, such as Cathedral City. A tremendous undertaking that could only be achieved with a leader strong enough to unite the Cults. In the eyes of the Manteufels, Archot has fallen from grace. After forty years at the top, faith in the ruler's ability to still make meaningful decisions has eroded in many. They'd rather support an uprising that catapults Senator Laakon into the office of Supreme Judge, and reshuffle the cards.

PAPER FACTORY

The Judiciary burns through paper quicker than a Surge Tank through its Petro reserves. One shouldn't be astonished, then, that the largest industrial complex of Uptown is the Paper Factory. Slotted in between Judgement Hall, the Offices, and the Ambassador Quarter, it rises like a pantheon above all neighboring structures, spewing white clouds from its central chimney and fogging up the area with a bluish haze.

Workers rush into the plant as soon as the shrill alarm bell calls for them. What's the big deal? Look at it holistically: what black powder is to the Protectors in the wasteland, paper is to the Advocates in their Offices. Both decide the outcome of wars. Without either resource, the entire military apparatus of Justitian would collapse and open the door far and wide for crime to seep in. Bureaucracy tames the people, written rules regulate them, give them a feeling of comfort and belonging. They don't have to question what's written, since most of them can't even read. It is enough for them to know that it's filed on a paper somewhere, taking the burden of free thought off their shoulders and cementing their belief in the system.

Weapons and ammunition are produced by the Steel Masters, but where does the paper come from? The Advocates over at the offices know the noise of the rattling carts arriving from the Knacker's Office every Monday morning all too well. Defilers working as rag collectors haul mountains of clothes stripped off of corpses toward the Paper Factory. A large iron hatch opens on the south side of the area where the Defilers go about unloading their stinking cargo.

But let's dial back a bit and have one of the workers explain the paper production to us.

The raw materials are rags, towels, sheets, and old ropes, he says, and leads us down to the basement. Two laborers stand next to the basement stairs and catch the sacks thrown down from above by the Defilers, passing them over to a workbench. The sacks are then cut open and the contents spread out across large racks. The rags smell of urine, sweat, and blood, and are encrusted with dirt. There's a reason the deliveries happen on Mondays, our guide says: it's over the weekend that most drink themselves to death or get stabbed in the Harbor. He grins. We're not smiling back.

Anyways, the battalion of workers doesn't seem to be bothered by the stench, instead they sort the clothes by color and fabric and stuff them into large containers.

Our guide hollers at us and directs us further along. A wave of heat wafts from a room as we pass. "Careful! Boiler room for the steam engine!" the guide in front of us grunts. We arrive at a flight of stairs. From there we trudge into a long hall that is divided into several open work stations. The first one is dominated by a pitch black machine with nose-pieces, ladders, and passages akin to an armored personnel carrier bereft of a protective hull. "The V-belt has broken off and it has to be raised and readjusted. Otherwise our ears will burst." Our guide laughs at his joke that isn't one.

Now he points to a cast iron bulkhead on the machine that is about twice as wide as it is high. He pulls at a handle so that we can take a look inside. Spacious. Like a queen sized bed dissected by rotating blades. "The machine cuts the rags and fibres!" he yells, pointing at crates filled with scraps of cloth stacked next to the machine.

The guide nods and rushes us on to the next area of the facility, a gangway of corrugated iron leading across large pools filled with white foam and bubbles. Workers armed with long sticks rake through the milky waves. It smells of lye, and our eyes burn. "The rags get washed

here. Afterwards they shovel the stuff over there into the septic tank." he explains, as he disappears in a cloud of steam ahead. We want to believe him.

We end up at a machine that appears similar to the first one. But that is by no means the case, as we will find out: "The swollen rags are further broken down into fibres in this stamping mill. Once the drainage is pushed open, pure paper pulp pours out into tubs over there." Alright, off into the next area.

One worker grabs a large sieve hanging from the wall, and shows it to us: a fine mesh with a removable edge, presumably copper - and as big as a single sheet of paper.

"A razor-thin layer of sludge is scooped from the top. The sheet is then slapped onto a belt and moved into a press to drain it."

From there we enter a spacious hall with a dry breeze and a strong draft going through. Lines are stretched across the entire length of the room with tens of thousands of sheets of paper swaying in the circulating air. "The drying room." our guide announces proudly as we walk past the aisles. "Writing paper must additionally be glued and pressed so that the ink doesn't run." Finally, we've reached the end of the tour, but the guide still doesn't want to let us go. Well, maybe we should just press a few Drafts into his outstretched palm, already!

PRINT PRODUCTION

Adjacent to the Paper Factory is the printing facility of the Judiciary. This partition is under management of the Office of Culture and oversees the creation of all sorts of presswork, from wanted posters to lithographs depicting important Executioners, special Codex editions, manifestos, pre-printed forms, and even a newspaper titled "The Righteous Hammer".

A select group of writers go about composing articles for this weekly periodical, aiming to appease the distinct clientele of Uptown capable of reading. While one can find copies of the newspaper on a few market stalls on the Forecourt, nobody in Downtown really cares about the press. The Righteous Hammer publishes highbrow hit pieces that target larger problems of immigration and jurisdiction, or underhanded attacks against the Protectors such as uncovering excessive use of force or false interpretations of the Codex, thereby playing into the hand of the Advocates.

In essence, the newspaper is nothing but a propaganda bulletin, serving as a tool to drive a wedge between the legislative and executive branch of the Judiciary. Anyone with an ounce of common sense would call these "journalists" for what they are: intellectual pyromaniacs surrounded by fire hazards.

Ambassador Quarter

We've reached the easternmost edge of the Uptown plateau. An entire district lies hidden, enclosed by a wall, locking the resident ambassadors inside just as much as it protects them. It is idyllic here, and lullingly calm. Archot enjoys being a patronizing host who shows off Justitian from its best side when he wants to forge alliances with other Cults. This can easily be understood if one looks around this neighborhood that is a reflection of the Supreme Judge's wealth and kindness.

Uptown's finest architects devise the layout of the embassies, while Ascetics and Providers are hired as gardeners, planting trees, cutting bushes, and beautifying the quarter with serene walkways. Leftover statues, not needed in other places, are hauled into the Ambassador Quarter to be displayed along the paths, monuments of past Executioners and famous Arbiters who worked in service of Justitian ages ago. They act as a tiny reminder for the local diplomats of who they're dealing with, and that their business in Justitian falls under scrutiny of their hosts. Should they dare to step out of line, they'll forfeit their right to this tranquil paradise and will be sent home empty-handed. The Judiciary can't stand belligerent and ungrateful guests. Don't you know? Justitian was built upon the principles of peace and security. Don't ever dare to question history again, fool!

DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY

Ambassadors enjoy diplomatic immunity during their stay in the city. This is guaranteed by the High Judiciary and cannot be overridden by anyone, no matter how many times the Cluster tries to veto it. The immunity grants safe passage for the ambassadors and means they cannot be susceptible to any lawsuits of prosecution, so long as they do not attempt to spy, incite revolts, commit felonies, or in any other way attempt to damage the political landscape of Justitian. During their time as ambassadors they are in direct communication with Judgement Hall, and their position is to ensure that the relationship between the Righteous Fist and its allies is maintained, if not improved.

TRIPOL'S CHANCERY

The Neolibyans paid for their embassy themselves. They had the original building designated for their residence demolished and rebuilt Tripol's Chancery to reflect the splendor of Africa. White marble was ordered all the way from Purgare to adorn the walls, Manufacturers were hired to install a fountain in the garden and weld the fences surrounding the embassy, while Jehammedans were called upon to embellish the interior frescoes with gold leaf and draft the furniture.

The residence of Ambassador Wakili now stands as the most flamboyant building of the entire quarter, outclassing all others. Archot considered the staggering display of wealth a personal attack, and established the luxury edict as a response to repair his shattered ego.

Since then, the Chancery has become one of the most important buildings in the quarter. Envoys from Montpellier, Genoa, Bergamo, and Liqua walk in and out of the palace, trying to strike deals with Ambassador Wakili that will prove profitable for their operations back home, thereby circumventing trade deals that might be beneficial for Justitian. The Chroniclers are shell-shocked by such deceitful tactics, aligning their spy equipment toward the Chancery to collect every shred of evidence they can filter out of the conversations behind closed doors.

MINISTRY OF THE BROKEN CROSS

The fact that there even is an embassy for the Anabaptists is only due to the Judges' persistence. The Chroniclers tried to protest against it for as long as they could, but Justitian's growth was dependent on Cathedral City's water supply, and with the emergence of the Cross Quarter there was no way to deny the Anabaptists admission to Uptown any longer. Whenever Cathedral City sends one of their Counselors to Justitian to negotiate its own independence or sign treaties to provide the Protectorate with water, the delegations reside in the Ministry of the Broken Cross. However, in recent months, the Counselors have been busy with far more important politics, specifically smoothing the waves that were caused in Yasen's uprising in Briton and the massacre that unfolded in Rennes. Everyone in the room knows that the alliance with the Spitalians hangs by a thread, and it requires tact and sure instinct for the situation to not escalate into an all out conflict.

KRANZLER'S VILLA

Kranzler's Villa was constructed to withstand an artillery shelling. The monolithic building resembles a bunker more than it resembles a home, and serves as the domicile of the Provost of the Preservists when he resides in Justitian. Kranzler enjoys the company of twelve handpicked Preservists who live under the same roof. These men and women are elite soldiers, collected from the best cadres Arnsberg had to offer. They protect the Villa with their life, or swarm out all across Downtown to do Kranzler's bidding.

Kranzler is a general. He is interested in bonds and treaties that reach across vast distances and territories to consolidate his operations. When he arranges meetings with other ambassadors, it is always with a concrete plan in mind that must yield considerable benefit for humanity's struggle against the forces of the Primer.

THE ALPINE COMMISSION

The Alpine Commision is as austere as its ambassador. Subaltern Bloch doesn't like pompous gardens. A field of black gravel and square flower pots with red tundra shrubs, cut into rectangular shape, are enough to appease him. Along with his two adjutants, he spends his time in boredom, locked into a position as the permanent representative of Hellvetica, which has garnered him much laughter and snarky remarks from fellow soldiers stationed in

Downtown. Bloch hates it up here.

The only thing the Alpine Commission is good for is to reload the depowered Heavy Duty Harnesses deployed for reconstruction at the Crack. Outside of that, the Subaltern is a stranger trapped in a strange land. While he admires the Preservists, he can't stand the Chroniclers and Judges. However, that doesn't keep them from pestering him with requests to be relayed to Hellvetica asking for Grenadier divisions to be dispatched to the Protectorate to help secure the border and fight off the Clan invasion. In his function he has to negotiate with the parties and establish the fees for the maneuver of mercenaries, a rough ordeal that gnaws at his very soul. Bloch used to be a soldier himself, now he's a pencil-pusher, and there's no way out of this mess.

THE LIQUAN EMBASSY

The fact that Liqua remains an independent enclave within the borders of the Protectorate, yet enjoys all the amenities and protection thereof, irks many. The Chroniclers in particular, who've been barred from the city, are furious that the Anabaptists were given a secondary agency in Uptown, installing an envoy of the Water Lords who in turn just reports back to the Broken Cross.

Pherxies, in his function as the Liquan herald, doesn't care for the fuss the Cluster has with his hometown. He's far more interested in conducting his investigations into Tech-Central. As an Exalter, Pherxies traces his heritage back to the original refugees who fled to Liqua during the City Wars. Like many of his elders he searches for a way for his people to reclaim their lost golden empire. To do so, he finances Scrapper expeditions that dare to cross Cockroach infested territory and bring back useful intelligence. All that matters to him is information on the status of the Grindworks, and if the facility can be brought back to operational levels. In case of a victory by the Judiciary against the savage Clans of the south, Pherxies will inform his people that the coast is clear to resettle their ancient stronghold.

THE NULLPELLIAN DELEGATE

Luren, Herald of the Pneumancers, is a troublemaker and an embarrassment to the proud Clan he hails from. His residence resembles a whorehouse, with Magpies being escorted in and out every hour of the day and Brenni carrying caskets of liquor inside to appease the tall warrior who loves to throw money around like others do their dirty underwear.

The Pneumancer is under heavy surveillance by Protectors who have to make sure he doesn't commit accidental suicide and ruin the peace treaty that has been in place between Justitian and Nullpellia for quite some time now. However, Luren is a social disaster on all levels imaginable, and even the best efforts put in place by the Judiciary can't stop the man's self-destructive rampage.

THE CENTRAL CLUSTER

Uptown's magnificent splendor abruptly transforms into harrowing gloom as one arrives at the Central Cluster. Solar sails peek out of the mechanical disarray, arranging themselves into the optimal position to catch the angle of the fading Borcan sunlight. Automated gun turrets gyrate around in targeting mode, their thermal sensors scanning the surroundings for trespassers. Deadly high voltage current buzzes through the electric fence system surrounding the Cluster, occasionally sparking when a bird lands on it by accident. Computerized facial recognition software adjusts the surveillance cameras to anyone approaching the entry gates, correlating the readout with all available data stored in the Static Stream to run a random selection program and dispatch an Agent who must intercept the guest at the entrance. Jitter, the closest available Chronicler not occupied with a solid task, receives the signal and steps onto a magnetized platform that delivers him to the security barrier in mere minutes. Jitter's Interfacer displays all relevant information ahead of time: Citizen - 422,376 - ArTy-07 // Handle: Cole // Align: Ropers.

The guest nods through the fence. Jitter registers the colloquial gesture as unthreatening and presses a button to release the locking mechanism of the gate for the young Scrapper to step inside.

"Business?" Jitter asks. "Radio Tower maintenance" is the reply. The Agent invites the Scrapper to join him atop the platform. He enters a string of commands into his Interfacer and the vehicle springs into motion, rushing them toward the specified destination.

The Cluster's surface level is the only thing other mortals will ever get to see of it. Below lies a realm that belongs to the Chroniclers alone. It is their sanctuary, their holiest shrine on Earth, and has been their haven ever since the Anabaptists drove them out of Cathedral City. What happens on the sublevels of the Cluster never reaches the outside. It is a world shrouded in mystery and numerology, masks and keywords, and forbidden to anyone who doesn't belong to the Cult.

DARK ASCENSION

The Cluster is the most ancient part of Justitian, anchored within the wreckage of Uptown since the very beginning: a Bygone remnant spared by the finality of the Eshaton. In fact, the entire plateau was once a super-colossal Maglev cargo terminal containing hangars stretching across multiple floors, storage and repair facilities, transshipment hubs, and connection ports for passengers travelling to destinations across all of Europe.

When the nascent Chroniclers first arrived here they discovered a decaying and perforated structure, riddled with holes and openings and filled with unstable sections that were on the brink of collapse. The sheer size of the foundation was immense, and pockmarked with cavernous fissures on all faces that would allow enemies to slip into its underbelly. It was too dangerous for the Chronicler refugees to leave these cracks open and unprotected. They knew they had to secure their new headquarters to deter intruders and encase the exposed interior of the plateau against a view from the outside, but they could barely attempt to do so alone. The early Scrappers settling in Tech-Central became crucial to the fortification. The Chroniclers hired the dirt diggers to clad the plateau in a hull of scrap and sheet metal so thick and impenetrable that the gargantuan feat took generations to complete. The Scrappers of those long forgotten days had no sense of belonging and no use for written history. They were a disorganized bunch of loners going about their work, and were paid by the Chroniclers with information on search quadrants, maps, and electricity, caring very little for what the hooded freaks were trying to enclose behind these cyclopean walls.

Seasons came and went and knowledge of the truth within the plateau was lost. One hundred years after the Chroniclers had claimed their new domain, nothing remained that could reveal Uptown's pre-Eshatological origin. To the majority of Justitian's populace today, this is how it's always been.

MANIFESTATION

Not even their closest allies, the Judges, can estimate how many Chroniclers there are. Deep underneath Justitian's topsoil the Underground connects to the Cluster via secret Exits, allowing Agents and Mediators to travel into the sanctum without ever having to board the elevator platforms to reach Uptown. In the same manner, Streamers can be deployed all over the city, never to be seen placing a foot on Judgement Alley.

Additionally, masks are part of the Cult's identity. Many of the Cluster's operatives only take them off in the safety of an Alcove, and spotting the same Chronicler twice requires one to memorize the unique parts of their outfit: something only few citizens would dare to do. Staring at a Chronicler is synonymous with asking for trouble. Nobody in their right mind is eager to attract their attention and provoke a sudden interrogation.

A special Exit established solely for cargo deliveries inbound to the Cluster is located in Downtown, hidden in a warehouse adjacent to an Alcove. The Agents stationed here receive shipments which are then transported via the 2nd Highway to the Cluster's docking station. All of this happens in plain sight, yet without attracting anyone's attention. Silently the Chroniclers skulk about Justitian, monitoring and interacting with the civilization they've fostered, enforcing a regime of surveillance all while cloaking themselves in a shroud of secrecy.

SYNERGY

Chroniclers never have to go looking for work; it always finds them first. Life in the Cluster is modulated according to an omnipresent set of rules and parameters which must be adhered to at all times. These automated algorithms were developed by the Fragments, and constantly run scripts that assign Cult members to their duties in the compound. Every Chronicler who scans their barcode at an entry port thereby logs into the system as an available unit, ready to be given a task. Focusing toward the completion of a task is awarded with upgrades to one's personal Score: Achievement unlocked, access to a new Level granted.

The algorithm can also combine several units into a Cell by assembling Chroniclers of different ranks to work together, or order individual Bits and Agents to carry out duties across Justitian which can be read from any of the plentiful interface terminals strewn throughout the Cluster, or in the Alcoves around Downtown. The name of an Agent and their assignment flares up in massive amber-colored lettering, annotated with numerals indicating the urgency of the matter. The calculations prioritize what Level a specific Agent must attend to, what information they must feed into the Stream, which Alcove is required to be staffed, or which vector must be released as a search quadrant to the Scrappers. The prewritten programs are considered infallible, and questioning their purpose is looked

The Radio Tower

The steel structure of the Radio Tower is visible from afar, jutting over a hundred meters into the sky, taller than the Steel Monolith yet nowhere near as imposing or dominant. Situated at the very edge of the Cluster, the tower serves as the Chroniclers' main communication rig across the Protectorate and all of Borca. Its significance is without question. With the help of the megawatt antenna the Chroniclers are able to independently ping their Alcoves, deliver classified correspondence all the way to the Alpine Fortress, or intercept any suspicious transmissions sent out by enemies of the Cult. The tower maintains the safety of the Cluster and must be kept operational at all costs.

But this is problematic in and of itself. The technical delicacy of its construction, and the sheer height of the structure, requires professionals capable of operating under such perilous conditions. A task that can only be handled by Scrappers; Ropers, to be exact. Armed with bolt cutters and soldering irons they enter the premises to maintain the tower, replace broken solar panels and satellite dishes, anchor steel cables to stabilize it against potential earthquakes, or repair damage sustained via passing dust storms. Their work is under constant surveillance by Observers; drones buzz past their heads as they climb the soaring antenna, recording every move they make. Ropers are obliged to take a vow of secrecy to be permitted entry into the Cluster. Anybody else would call it gag order. They are only allowed to speak about their assignments while on site, or they forfeit their right of passage.

When the Ropers are not occupied patching up the fragile crown of the antenna they must slide down into the cavities of the girder frame beneath the Radio Tower's concrete base, and enter a narrow bunker with an edge length of a mere five meters. Whoever designed this space never calculated that it would ever have to be manned by anyone taller than five feet. That, or he was simply a sadist.

Down here lies the radio call center: a wild assembly of circuitry smacked into the walls and covered with green LEDs flickering like fireflies in the dark. The light strips can be activated by entering a command sequence into the keyboards along the desks, but the passcodes are kept secret in the same manner as the exact position of the electronics network and its multiple branches.

The floor is covered with sheet metal, and every step within the crammed interior echoes like a gong strike. If one lifts a set of plates aside, they stare directly into the main service shaft of the Cluster. Wiring harnesses and ladders disappear in the darkness of the seemingly bottomless pit. Ropers who've seen the abyss with their own eyes assume that the path leads all the way to a secret part of the Cluster, which is unknown to outsiders.

upon as an act of blasphemy. During all synergies between different Cult members, communication must be reduced to a bare minimum. Passionate interactions such as heated debates, bouts of anger, or excessive displays of excitement are unwelcome and are considered surefire signs of emotional instability, often leading to reductions in Score.

AFFILIATION

Archot must go. This is an unspoken credo among the disciples of the Cluster. The Judges have turned into a bureaucratic behemoth, and the man at the helm of the Cult is the target of all of their contempt. He represents weakness in leadership, and the Chroniclers cannot tolerate such openly displayed flaws. His quirks and erratic mood swings erode the trust upon which all commonality was built. Long ago, the coalition between Judges and Chroniclers laid the groundwork for Justitian's prosperity: one Cult agile and ambitious, ready to take on the world; the other cunning and resourceful, willing to do whatever it took to entrench itself in a state of security. The Judges and Chroniclers were made for each other.

One hundred years into the halcyon relationship and the parties now act like an estranged couple, having grown distant in both aspiration and spirit. The Chroniclers are losing their formerly well-maintained grip on the Judges, being openly called into question by the Senates and Chief Protector Rutgar, who defies the Cluster's demands at every possible occasion, restricting Observers, vetoing established protocols, and positioning himself as an outright federal adversary. The Chroniclers are fully aware of the influence the Chief Protector holds over Archot, and know that replacing the Supreme Judge would only solve one part of the problem. It will take far more political maneuvering to steer the Senates back towards a more collaborative, and therefore favorable, entity.

To achieve this goal the Cluster has entered into a clandestine alliance with Senator Laakon, whom they support as a candidate for the highest office. The Chroniclers have to act as inconspicuous as possible so as to not raise accusations of dabbling in the affairs of the High Judiciary, but they have already begun feeding Laakon every piece of dirt they have been able to unearth on Rutgar and Archot, strengthening the Senator with top secret leaks and thereby granting him the tools needed to topple the leadership.

Operation: Enemoi

Not everyone who knows how to tame the Stream is necessarily a Chronicler, although the Cluster would never admit such a truth. The Palers are considered mortal enemies, yet they only grasp the Stream's magnitude on an instinctual level, not an intellectual one. It takes a different kind of adversary to spike the Chroniclers' frustration to extreme heights. For the past hundred years the Enemoi have stolen important components from under their noses and retrofitted them into their Convoy, which has essentially been turned into a mobile Cluster of its own.

The Chroniclers have set about trying to collect all available intel on this rival Clan and stop them dead in their tracks, but their efforts so far have been to no avail. Everytime the Cluster attempts to triangulate an Enemoi base the hostiles vanish into thin air before the Shutters can retaliate. Someone seems to be warning them ahead of time, leaving room for the Enemoi to disperse and then regroup in secret. The only plausible assumption is that the Clan maintains its headquarters in the forbidden city of Noret, deep within the domain of the Marauder Gusev, allowing them to remain invisible. But how is this possible? What makes the Enemoi so valuable that the rotting ruler of Noret would admit them into his haven? What game is Gusev playing?

Aspera has willingly supported the Chroniclers in the past, and shared secrets with the Cult. Gusev, on the other hand, stood against the forces of Exalt and has helped the Spitalians on several occasions throughout history. Both Marauders are in direct opposition of Project Tannhäuser, at least their actions seem to speak as clear as day. Why would one of them go ahead and harbor the enemies of the Chroniclers, knowing full well how damaging the Enemoi's raids are to the Cluster's progress?

Fragment Omicron sensed that there was more to the story than the Chroniclers were aware of. With a small unit of four Streamers he ventured out on a mission to uncover the truth behind the Clan, its origins, and its backer. Omicron's Cell searched along the trade route connecting the Protectorate with the Alpine Fortress for clues on the Enemoi's movement patterns. A few months ago they finally discovered a trace. In the southern hinterlands of Noret they found a camouflaged Bygone access road leading straight into the valley of the forbidden city, strangely omitted from all available maps stored in the Static Stream.

Omicron reported their breakthrough to Last Exit. The Streamers stationed in the outpost were ordered to divert the attention of the AMSUMOs so Omicron's Cell could slip through the defense perimeter and enter a land from which no Chronicler has ever returned. After a day's crawl through the death zone they encountered a settlement that seemed to have been populated for many decades. Yet Omicron was too late. The secluded hideout had been burnt to the ground and abandoned by the Enemoi. Together with his Streamers Omicron searched the premises for evidence, but the operation was aborted as soon as the first surveillance drones appeared in the sky. The Cell retreated immediately to avoid clashes with the AMSUMO patrols.

Two weeks later, Omicron received notice that one of the Enemoi trucks was spotted within Protectorate territory and that the Clan had allegedly taken shelter in A235, a border town controlled by the Raven Chagall. Something wasn't right. What had caused the hostiles to leave their covert and secure stronghold in exchange for admission into the Protectorate? Did a fallout with Gusev force them to flee?

Omicron doesn't know for sure yet, but he is convinced that the Enemoi will require fuel if they want to remain operational. One of their best kept secrets has always been the combustible allowing them to mobilize their mighty vehicles. Were they previously supplied by the Marauder? If that's the case they will need to strike a deal with a new patron, and the only Cult that could help them now are the Neolibyans.

The Fragment is certain that monitoring all African traders entering the Protectorate is key to incapacitating the Enemoi. Better yet: if Ambassador Wakili was terminated, the majority of Neolibyan fuel traders would lose their sales licenses and protection from Tripol's Chancery, thereby drastically limiting the availability of Petro. This is Omicron's chance to pin the Clan down, once and for all.

INFILTRATION

In its four hundred years of existence, the Cluster has been exposed to countless threats that nearly brought the Cult to the brink of extinction. Long before the Chroniclers enjoyed the protection of the Judiciary, they were prone to attacks by zealous Anabaptists and ravenous Clans, or worse, infiltration. In the founding years, Sleepers nested within their ranks, sowing discord among the Streamers, climbing the hierarchies, manipulating the early Fragments, exterminating progress, and diverting the Cult's attention from its primary objective. In the shadow of the infiltration the 100s faced no opposition to their ploys and could erect the power bases of Project Tannhäuser across the Black Lung unseen.

It wasn't until the Marauder Aspera guided the Chroniclers' attention toward the enemy within that the Cult was able to rid themselves of the infestation. In response to the revelation the Cluster initiated the Shutter program and conducted a merciless purge amongst its members, singling out Sleepers and disposing of them in a stealth war that lasted almost three generations. One after another the infiltrators were unmasked until every last Sleeper in their midst had been turned over to Aspera, who devoured them all.

But the dire events of the Cult's turbulent history have left the Chroniclers in a constant state of paranoia, as they see enemies behind every corner and enact defense protocols at the slightest hint of a threat. With vast amounts of resources funneled toward keeping the Cluster secure from future infiltration, its main ambition, the goal of restarting the Stream and cracking the 2^16 phenomenon, has become secondary in recent years. The current Fragments in power seem to be especially obsessed with keeping the status quo instead of steering the Cult back towards its original agenda; a baseline that is considered visionless by many Streamers and Mediators in the lower echelons. They share the fear that a schism like the Needle Tower disaster could repeat itself in the current political landscape, and urge for a reevaluation of the Cult's core tenet. Yet their warnings fall on deaf ears. The enemies surrounding the Cluster are still manifold, and only joint vigilance can protect the sanctum from doom and damnation.

THE SHUTTER PROGRAM

All accumulated data on each Chronicler is evaluated by active Streambots and skimmed for irregularities. The Agent's Archetype is correlated with their Score and their experience in the field, along with any variables that could predict inconsistencies in their performance. The program runs diagnostics and projects a statistical chance of a subject going rogue, marking their profile in the Static Stream with a classified registry which can only be reviewed by a Paradigma in possession of the correct access code. Bits who attract attention through their unusual behavior and fail to comply after receiving a warning must submit themselves to a screening at the indoctrination facility on Level 2. Paradigmas probe a subject for personality errors, and are responsible for setting a wayward Agent back on track. Sessions include assessment of the psychometric stability of the Cultist: do they suffer from accumulated stress, suppressed frustration, sexual inhibitions, or other conclusive mental deviations that could potentially turn them into a threat to other operatives?

The Paradigma must evaluate what measures have to be put in place for the Agent to adjust their aberrations. Demotion is often used as a form of punishment, with Chroniclers being assigned to remote backwater Alcoves or barred from accessing Static Stream partitions they previously held keys to. If an operative doesn't show corrections in their pattern of conduct, the Paradigma resorts to a different form of disciplinary action. The Chronicler's Score is labelled with an obscured index listing all defaults, emitting an impulse prompting a Fuse to inspect the file, with the option of setting it to zero or hiding the Score entirely.

Option 1: The Chronicler is eliminated at the next possible opportunity, leaving not a single trace that could reveal their identity. The barcode is sliced from their forehead, while the naked corpse disappears in the Defiler Streets or is buried in the Rubble.

Option 2: A new Shutter is born. On the surface, everything stays the same. The Shutter acts and responds like a regular Chronicler, going about his shifts conscientiously and following his daily routine. If he is sent on an operation, his Score is manually shadowed, his regular assignments are distributed to other available units, and he disappears from the Cluster's data stream. His secret identity is unknown to anyone but his backers. A separate profile log pools mission debriefs, geolocators for sanctioned technology and arsenals, and connection ports to communicate with other Shutters. From this point forward he sinks deeper and deeper into a parallel reality of covert operations, until his Score has been overwritten so many times that his Bios becomes virtually invisible to his own Cult. Throughout the decades the Shutter program has spawned its own hierarchies, initiation rites, passwords, and codified terminologies that allow these operatives to exist unseen amongst their other Cult brethren.

This process has been ongoing since the initiation of the program itself, making it factually impossible for anyone to know who governs these secret operatives today. Even the Fragments can only guess at the identities of the Scalars who deploy the Cluster's shadow army from the top.

THE FRACTAL REALITY FORMULA

Fate. It has been the singular unifying principle of the Chroniclers since the inception of the Cult. They are destined by fate to uncover the truth, to complete the mystery of the 2^16 phenomenon and unravel the machinations of how the world came to an end. Over the centuries their collective efforts have been condensed into a fractal reality formula that combines past and present events into an ongoing computation in an attempt to predict the outcome of the future.

The entire processing capacity of the Static Stream is required to run the calculations, thus allowing glitches to be foreseen and deterred before they can damage the integrity of the system. A whole armada of Streamers devote their lives to feeding the Cluster with all of the relevant data necessary to keep the arithmetic going. Strings of numbers coagulate into fractal pus clogging the servers, offering glimpses into scintillating theorems of universal geometry similar to staring into the Eye of God, until a meltdown or blackout brings the entire operation to a sudden crash. While the redundant generators strain to reboot the servers, the Chroniclers in front of their dead monitors rub their eyes, trying to recount the vital quintessence of what they've just witnessed, hastily scribbling down log entries to be reviewed and pondered over for many years to come.

The Archetype calculation was the Chroniclers' biggest achievement to date, assigning a personality pattern to every citizen ever recorded within the Cluster's database. From this vast pool of data, more marginal predictions about a subject's behaviour and future actions can be deduced when properly correlated against a web of his daily interactions. But for the forecast to be precise it must be continuously updated with new information, which is where the Observers deployed across Justitian come into play. Their relentless recordings and data feeds are the fuel required to keep the fractal reality formula running, until the day comes where a critical mass of intelligence reveals fate itself.

THE SIXTEEN FRAGMENTS

The core of the Cluster is shaped by the will of the Fragments. In the hierarchy of the Chroniclers they're revered as nigh omnipotent beings who have sifted through the

magnificence of the Stream and drank its knowledge. Everyone on the inside knows them, and all have heard them speak, yet only a handful have ever seen them in the flesh. Hidden in the depths of the Cluster they only rise when the occasion is meaningful enough, or the situation has become too dire to leave the directive in the hands of their subordinates. If the Cult was a religion, the Fragments would be its high priests. Every single one of their announcements is analyzed for its inherent wisdom, and treasured for its profound meaning. To object to them is to challenge the divinity of the Stream itself.

16 were lost on their way to East Borca and became Needles. 16 died in the hellfire of Aquitaine. Only 16 remain. Some of the most prominent include Impulse, Radius, Maker, Alias, Monochrome, and Zeitgeist. They have fashioned Justitian to be a reflection of their crystallized equations, a climax of interconnected blips in an endless ocean of cascading statistics. Their unrestricted access to all partitions of the Static Stream has made it possible for them to wield powers beyond imagination. But their work is not done yet. They seek the path to restore the Stream to its old glory, so that it will once again flow freely and illuminate mankind. Many of them hypothesize that, shortly before its death, the Stream gained a consciousness of its own as a result of the 2^16 virus and that the singularity it attained in that moment forced it to collapse from the burden of infinite knowledge. Therefore, restarting the Stream is analogous to placing a defibrillator to the Heart of God and jolting him back to life - a mission so grandiose that it can only be accomplished by the most brilliant of human minds.

However, not all of the Fragments are active in Justitian. Some follow alternate designs, and frequently use the Exits to disappear into the wastelands. Apex is known to operate from Mobilis and Omicron is leading a retaliation mission against the Enemoi, while Modus is locked in Cathedral City trying to gain access to the lost archives in response to the ongoing peace negotiations with the Anabaptists. The criterion for the success of each operation is under the authority of the individual Fragments. Rarely do they act in unison toward a singular goal, instead, many of their pursuits contribute to the greater whole.

Levels

The Cluster's composition encompasses seven Levels stretching from top to bottom. Each upgrade in Score reveals a new partition and allows a Chronicler to dive deeper toward the epicenter at the core. Every Chronicler's progress through the hierarchy of the Cult is laced with discoveries. Whenever they feel like they've unearthed some finite truth a new portal opens, inviting them to explore further. Not even the Fragments can be certain that they know everything that happens within their realm.

LEVEL 1: THE TERMINAL

The magnetic rails on which trains once traversed across Europe are long gone, the concrete pylons crumbled to dust centuries ago. Only the terminal survived and served as the Cluster's foundation. Its surface level covers the entire northern flank of Uptown, which is also what commoners normally refer to when they speak of the Cluster.

Level 1 is the prime gateway for Chroniclers to interact with members of other Cults who are allowed to enter the premises under specific conditions, stripped of their weapons, and placed under constant observation. Additionally, the cargo terminal fulfils a role as a recruitment and training base. The carefully selected applicants screened here are only ever going to witness this section, similar to most Bits who are limited by their Score from entering other sectors of the compound.

Wherever one looks, large image boards and display panels flash with obscure number sequences, occasionally interrupted by a Streamer broadcast, ordering the Agents to assemble for a new task in a designated area of the Cluster. The numerous operational Maglev-wagons have been dismantled and their interiors repurposed. Now they are used as mobile interface ports and offices for the Chroniclers deployed here. Some of them function as testing facilities, featuring a multitude of logical puzzles and augmented systems inside. The wagons can be remote-controlled to drive autonomously across the entire terminal and rearrange themselves into mini-Clusters if required, especially when all of the members of a Cell need to work together and must be provided with additional processing power and utilities to conduct their operations.

LEVEL 2: THE HANGAR

Four Exits lead into the substructure of Uptown, the so-called hangar, consisting of gargantuan halls that once served the purpose of a major transshipment hub for goods being distributed across a multitude of locations all over the Bygone world. Magnetic heavy duty cranes hang from the ceiling of Level 2, acting as pulleys for the countless salvaged freight containers below which have been rearranged to divide the hanger into rectangular sections, each focusing solely on one field of activity such as administration, data analysis, estimation, or indoctrination. This is where the bulk of Agents operate, or retreat for rest and recovery.

A labyrinth of open galleries, floors, and staircases crisscrosses the hangar, with some areas only accessible by boarding internal elevator platforms attached to the main girder piles of the vast depot. Up there reside the Paradigmas, overseeing the buzz of their brethren.

In a separate compartment tucked away from the noise and activity one can locate the Cluster's sleeping facilities. Hundreds of hexagonal tubes are stacked in a comb-like system along the walls; their interiors drenched in blue light and able to accommodate a single Chronicler each. The combs themselves can be locked from the inside and are soundproof, providing Agents a hideout to escape from the overwhelming bedlam of the hangar for a few hours.

LEVEL 3: THE NETWORK

Enter the network. All daily updates are broadcasted here simultaneously. Observers send their readouts from Downtown into the network while surveillance drones and cameras installed in Uptown deliver their feeds for immediate assessment.

It's a ceaseless bombardment of information, dictating the measures implemented by the Chroniclers and forcing them to survey their next steps. Only if all meaningful options are revealed, can logistics be put in place to counteract and govern a splintered society such as Justitian. Do the Judges work in favor of the Cluster? Are the Spitalians trying to enforce their grip on Uptown? Is the Cartel conspiring against members of its own organization? Can potential traitors be narrowed down, and manipulated to act beneficially towards the Cluster's agenda?

Mediators run these operations, executing predictions of the non-linear outcomes of any current event, brokering on whether the Cluster must intervene or if the acquired intelligence can be archived as junk.

The evaluation process conducted in this think tank is mentally excruciating, bordering in scale on a never ending chess game that features millions of pieces and billions of possibilities. Therefore, the Mediators must frequently retreat to the meditation vault to sanitize their thoughts. A metal clad chamber covered in monitors displaying only static white noise serves as a sanctuary of the mind. Chroniclers enter the vault to experience sensory deprivation, and cleanse themselves from preconceptions they've fostered while searching for illumination to their most urgent problems.

LEVEL 4: THE CONCLAVE

The conclave is located on Level 4 and sits flush with the Exit Level leading directly into the tunnel system of the 2nd Highway. This section is the Cluster's most exposed and vulnerable flank and therefore is heavily guarded by a complex arrangement of security sluices and triple door portals used to seal off the docking station from the High-

way itself. Even in the case of a direct assault on the Exit Level, the conclave could stay operational so long as the hull isn't breached or the portals otherwise compromised.

However, this section doesn't just allow Chroniclers to board the underground railway platforms and engage in different areas of Downtown. The conclave is where the Streamers conglomerate to decide upon the future of the Cult, stage large scale operations, monitor Sleeper activity, and analyze sections of the Static Stream. From here they cast a net across Europe, pinpointing the movement patterns of Needles, tracking Neolibyan advances toward the Alps, or cracking encoded radio transmissions intercepted from the Alpine Fortress.

LEVEL 5: THE MAINFRAME

Those who want to understand the machine must live within it instead of crawling along its hull like an insignificant insect waiting to be crushed by a change of atmosphere. The mainframe is the lair of the 16 Fragments, from where they observe all available knowledge and steer mankind's future. The most supreme aspects of the Cluster seem to come to life in this place. Fragments travel through their demesne standing atop hovering discs or seated in floating chairs, accessing towering switchboards, pressing a single button to enlighten gigantic image walls revealing all life in Justitian down to the pores of a single inhabitant.

Augmented systems arrange themselves to their every beck and call. Holographic maps hang suspended in mid air, pulled into rotation by the merest gesture of a passing Fragment, accumulating data and spiralling through a violent array of colors indicating the threat level of a suspected cache somewhere in the depths of Pollen. Tesla coils hum in the background spewing blue lightning bolts towards the ceiling, crackling with unbound energy only barely controlled by the masters of this otherworldly domain. Here they submerge themselves in a maelstrom of fractals and orbiting data blips, myriads of calculations that transcend the comprehensible, in their restless search for the ultimate truth hidden within the Stream. If one were to cast a superstitious commoner from the Rubble into the mainframe the spectacle would force the witness into cardiac arrest. The radiance of the Fragments is too overwhelming to be perceived by the untrained eye.

LEVEL 6: THE INVENTORY

Where do all the treasures go once they are bought off at the Central Exchange? A Cult that's been in charge of the artifact trade for a period of four hundred years is bound to have amassed a fortune at this point. The inventory, located on Level 6, is proof of that. Buried away at the bottom of the Cluster lies a hidden archive of immeasurable value, accessible only by Chroniclers whose Score is 60 and above.

Artifacts, relics of the Eshaton and the City Wars, circuit boards, weapons, and data fragments: everything the Chroniclers have managed to wrestle away from the grubby hands of Scrappers and wastelanders found its way down into this sepulchre. Many of the valuables collected here have never been analyzed to begin with – there are just too many of them. Most, however, are registered, organized by age and origin, and locked away for later inspection. From severed AMSUMO limbs to Emitter pulsors, Deepfakes, and Memorial devices: one could equip a whole army with the caches stacked away here.

LEVEL 7: THE ORB

The final Level is a tomb of monumental dimensions, located over sixty meters below the foundations of Uptown, excavated and reinforced by the Chroniclers during the darkest hour of the Cult, long before the peoples of the Black Lung even came into existence. What the Bygones used this place for is lost to history. The structure resembles a dome of unfathomable proportions, with cables and wires snaking along the walls, to finally converge toward a central object which the Fragments only refer to as the Orb. This is the central server of the Cluster, the marvel that allows the Chroniclers to tap into the Static Stream and glimpse at the hermetic wonders of the mirror realm.

The air blowing through the dome is moist and frigid. The primary cooling duct of the 2nd Highway branches off to keep the Orb from overheating. Occasionally, condensation clouds waft from the sphere-like construction and flashes crack, travelling across its frame, casting the entire tomb in a grotesque twilight. The endless droning of the server numbs the senses, and in some instances the humming sounds as if the Orb was stammering words echoing through the haze. Is this a sign of the Stream regaining consciousness? Some Fragments believe so, and lie in the wait for days at a time to receive a frequency that they can declare as impeccable proof.

The majority of energy delivered from Mobilis gets burnt up to keep the computational capacity of the Orb unbroken, thereby granting access to the Static Stream across the entire Cluster.

But for the Fragments, the Orb is more than just a server. It is their final destination. If one of them dies, their remains are offered as a sacrifice to the machine. The corpse is tossed into a central shaft, where it is devoured by the reactor-like heat emitted by the Orb's core, releasing the Fragment's mind to become one with the Stream.

Underground

EXIT LEVEL

Deep beneath the sprawl of Justitian lies a subterranean world cloaked from the eyes of the oblivious citizens scurrying through the metropolis above, rushing after the petty aims of their fleeting lives.

Down here crawl the Chroniclers - the invisible, undetectable masters of this foreign realm which they seized an eternity ago. A formidable Bygone tunnel system meanders through the bedrock connecting all of Justitian's districts, equipped with rails and magnetized platforms allowing the agents of the Cluster to rush from one part of the city to the next at unthinkable speed. Within minutes they can access every important area of Downtown, appear out of nowhere, conduct their operations, and vanish without a trace.

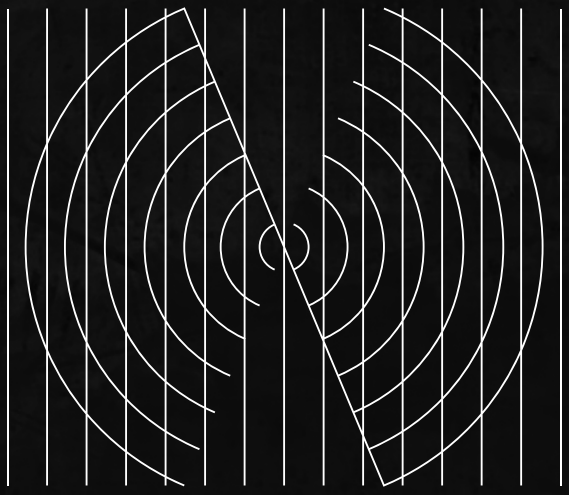
The Exit Level is their most viciously kept secret, granting them the ability to monitor and control every aspect of society. While Judges dominate the streets of the surface world, Chroniclers are the uncontested rulers of their covert domain. At least, they used to be. For the first time in history their classified backdoor is facing the risk of exposure. The Crack has created openings into this cavernous nervous system, which must be kept from public knowledge at all costs. On the other side of the city, Palers have infiltrated Exit C-3 and turned the tunnels into an occupied warzone. In Tech-Central the continuous expansion of the Badger's Burrow threatens to intersect with the 3rd Highway. Never before have the Chroniclers had to cover up so many potential leaks, and work so feverishly to prevent the worst from happening: enemies reaching the sacred halls of the Cluster itself.

TUNNEL VISION

The Chroniclers divide the footprint of Justitian into a grid of quadrants nine square kilometres each, naming them after positions that are reminiscent of a chess board: the letters run along the horizontal axis, while the vertical axis bears the numerals. The top left sector - home to Fielding, the northern Cross Quarter, and beyond - is referred to as A-2, while the southernmost to the right, encompassing southern Tech-Central and the Tent City, is labeled F-4.

Decades ago, the Chroniclers equipped each of these quadrants with at least one so-called Exit; unique installations, the majority of which are concealed with double door systems and obscured behind two-way mirrors and fake walls, while others are hidden in plain sight, disguised as keyless bunker doors or ramshackle store fronts. Every such Exit boasts a refined portal system: a highly sophisticated mechanical door made of thick steel and studded with serrated bolt locks, sturdy enough to withstand a bomb blast and masked with some mundane cover. A stainless black glass surface embedded within the portal's frame serves as a scanner. If a Chronicler places their barcode against it, the entryway unlocks with a hiss of depressurization, revealing a fluorescent tube ten meters long that slopes down into a murky twilight. Ancient staircases and rusty ladders lead dozens of meters deeper into the entrails of Justitian until one reaches the interconnected tunnel world below ground.

When a Chronicler uses an Exit, their barcode scan is transmitted to the Cluster to create a match with the corresponding Bios. The Chroniclers observe anyone who frequents their hidden gateways at all times, and security cameras record everyone slipping in and out of the portals. Mandatory control is a necessity.



HIGHWAYS

The Exit Level lies six stories deep, blanketed by the sediment of the Eshaton and five hundred years of erosion. Not even the Judges have the faintest idea of its existence, and any unfortunate souls who found their way down here by accident were eliminated and disposed of by agents of the Cluster. Conclusion: Knowledge is power; therefore it mustn't be shared.

Two major subway lines act as the central arteries of the Exit Level. These massive tunnels have been cleared of debris and are equipped with rails that can be traversed by boarding magnetized platforms installed by the Chroniclers. Occasionally, surveillance drones hover through here, pinpointing their search lasers at every rat scurrying through the hallways. Objective: Locate intruders; report breaches; issue extermination protocols. The integrity of the Underground must be maintained at all times.

However, this is easier said than done. The Exit Level is a wild, sprawling growth of hundreds of kilometers of serpentine corridors and tunnel networks. It would require an army of thousands to secure every corner at all times. An impossible task, even for the omniscient Chroniclers. To add to the complexity, the 2nd and the 3rd Highway are disconnected from one another, accessible only by bridging a snaking side tunnel leading through Exit D-2/4, which is generally considered the weakest point of the entire system. In the unlikely scenario of an assault on this Exit, the connection port to the 3rd Highway would be compromised. Solution: expand the tunnel network; create additional gateways.

This process is ongoing. Nearly all of the secondary tunnels branching out in different directions are younger additions to the main Highway lines, most of them barely more than a narrow shaft with reinforcement grids bolted to the crumbling walls and brushed with concrete. Some of these passages are so tight that no two Agents can fit through at the same time. In other places the unfinished excavation simply drops off into a dead end. Trying to navigate through here without a proper map system is nearly impossible.

NODES AND WIRETAPS

A multitude of nodes and wiretaps have been installed across the entire Exit Level, serving as remote charging stations for Chroniclers to power their Source modules or replenish the E-Cubes in their Shockers. Agents who work undercover can reload their equipment here without having to enter an Alcove above ground. A scanning device, similar to the ones found at the portals, is used for clearance. The system checks the Bios of the Chronicler and correlates the request with his current assignment. If the program runs a match and the operation requires assistance, the node releases the charge. The downside: the program cannot read out covert operations. Shutters requiring supplies must attempt to manually ping a Fuse through a subnet to top-off their arsenals with Quanta.

Most wiretaps, on the other hand, consist of delicate recording devices connected to an Interfacer. The contraption is set up in place for as long as an Observer is monitoring citizens within a specific sector. Readouts are only available temporarily before the data is transferred to the Cluster and archived. The devices can be inspected by anyone with the correct passcode via the attached Interfacer. A typical listing features an input about a casual citizen who is being shadowed, displaying his six-digit citizen number, corresponding Archetype, name, and his occupation or alignment toward a Cult.

Exits

A-2: Exit in Fielding, a stone's throw away from the Sanatorium. The portal is hidden underneath a hatch covered by a crop silo.

A-3: Main Exit for all operations conducted in the Cross Quarter. Accessed through a double door in the boiler room of a local distillery.

B-1: Exit hidden in an abandoned construction site of the Great Northern Wall.

B-2: Double door system hiding an Exit in the basement of an infamous whore house, allegedly belonging to the Carrion Birds.

B-2/2: Access to the Exit Level through a ventilation shaft, connected to the bookkeeping room of a chessboxing arena.

B-3: Exit under threat of collapse, hidden deep within the bowels of the sinking Bottomlands.

C-2: Portal hidden behind a two-way mirror in a fake backroom of a public tavern commonly frequented by Advocates.

C-2/2: Exit hidden in the foundation of a crumbling tower of the Old Fortress' outer defense wall.

C-3: Occupied War Zone. Three separate entry ports through an abandoned building complex at the edge of the adjacent Defiler Street. Beware of Palers!

C-3/2: Monitoring Exit, located at the bottom of an old storage building within the Manteufel estate.

C-4: Portal system established within the sub-structure of the southern wall. Entry through a gutter system close by.

C-5: Jehammedan surveillance Exit, tucked away in a stable for goats. Accessible via a secret hatch in the wooden floor covered with straw mats.

D-1: House Masek observation facility, located at the base of the guardhouse at the front gate of the estate. Portal covered by a sliding rifle shelf.

D-1/2: Central Exit elevator shaft leading to Cluster Level 1, connecting the conclave with the cargo terminal.

D-2: Outer perimeter Exit for quick access to the Cluster's electric fence system.

D-2/2: Exit for monitoring the Office of Locality, hidden behind a secretly installed camera contraption.

D-2/3: Quick Exit for Observers to rush to Calendar Square, accessible through an ancient water drainage in the Uptown plateau.

D-2/4: Exit into the Steel Monolith and most important section of the Exit Level, serving as the only connection port between the 2nd and the 3rd Highways. Heavily guarded.

D-2/5: Hidden portal, covered behind a fake wall at the outer fringes of the Cleft. Allows entry into the labor camp.

D-3: Exit concealed within the hull of the Defiler Street water reservoir. Can only be operated after drainage.

D-4: Outskirts Exit, resembling a featureless bunker door at the backside of a deserted tool shed, with the corresponding scanner embedded into the building's wooden frame.

D-5: Former wasteland Exit, now overbuilt. Used by Agents returning from covert missions in the Protectorate unseen.

E-1: Central freight elevator platform and main Exit into the hangar of Level 2. Direct connection to all sublevels of the Cluster. Requires an all-area clearance to operate.

E-1/2: Radio Tower Exit, linked via a shaft with the radio control bunker.

E-2/2: Formerly a secret access into the Salvano estate through a portal system that was installed into the walls surrounding the compound. The Exit, along with all of its data nodes, is now inaccessible due to the Crack blocking the pathway.

E-2/3: A portal disguised as a stamping machine set up in the drying room of the Paper Factory and tucked away behind towering paper racks.

E-2/4: Ambassador Quarter monitoring Exit. Portal hidden in the basement of a vacant villa.

E-3: Shutter Exit. Encrypted portal disguised as a fake Mechanist workshop. The Scrapper operating the Exit is a disabled Shutter himself.

E-4: Tech-Central fail-safe Exit, located in an Alcove with a direct connection to the adjacent Stallion Street, serving as a quick retreat back into the bowels of the city for any operatives in the area.

E-4/2: Secret cache for sanctioned weapon resupply. Accessible only by Shutters. Exit docks into an empty fermentation tank.

F-3: Exit into a demolished Manufactory which has lain forsaken for decades. No trespassing!

F-3/2: Cartel infiltration Exit, obscured by a bunker door without keyholes. Requires remarkable knowledge of the surroundings to be spotted amongst all the surrounding trash.

F-4: Barely used Exit hidden in a public outhouse at the edge of the Tent City. Only accessed as a last resort.

THE SENTINEL

Chroniclers are paranoid, and not without reason. The centuries they've spent at the top of the technological food chain have garnered them more enemies than anyone can count. Therefore, they must secure their sanctuary against any and all threats, issuing defense protocols to deal with potential intruders or hostile invasions targeting the Exit Level. Some serve as simple warnings and deterrents to keep Carrion Birds out, who could easily access the tunnel system via bridgeheads connecting to their nest, while others target specific enemies such as the Palers, who sabotage data nodes and deal surprise attacks against Chroniclers traversing the subterranean pathways.

Severe cases require a straightforward response. The Cluster's most effective weapon of retribution is Kriegsmaschine6, a fully reconstructed AMSUMO unit pieced together from numerous salvaged parts and brought back to life in a collaborative effort by the Fragments. Imbued with a rebooted Existence, reprogrammed with updated sentinel parameters, and equipped with a wide array of hellish arsenals, Kriegsmaschine6 patrols the Exit Level, protecting Chroniclers against ambushes or clearing mines laid by the Palers.

Multiple times, the occupants of C-3 have failed in their efforts to short-circuit Kriegsmaschine6 or lure the combat robot into a trap. The AMSUMO was formatted to engage at the slightest attempt made to send its systems haywire. The Palers learned their lesson. They stay away from the patrol routes of Kriegsmaschine6.

PROFILE: KRIEGSMASCHINE6

INITIATIVE: 12D+2S / N/A Ego Points
SPECIALTY: INS+Perception 8D, BOD+Force 12D+2S, Immune to EMP attacks
ATTACK: Arm-mounted Minigun, Projectiles 9D, Distance 30/100m, Belt fed, Damage 10, Salvos (15);
Hellfire Cannon, Projectiles 9D, Distance 10/20, Damage 12, Area Damage (45°), Fire Hazardous;
Tesla Barrier, Automatically hits one person within range per Round, Distance 3, Damage 2, Dazed (9),
Thunder Strike, Special
DEFENSE: Passive 3 (optimized movement patterns)
Melee active (Parry), Melee 9D
Ranged Combat active (-)
Cannot be influenced mentally or socially
MOVEMENT: 10m
ARMOR: AMSUMO casing, Armor 8, Massive (10)
CONDITION: 40 (Structure: 8)

DEFENSE PROTOCOLS

ELECTRIFIED RAILS

The walls begin to hum with energy, and lightning arcs between exposed surfaces. Kriegsmaschine6 turns a 50m stretch of the Underground into a death trap, discharging its capacitor banks into the steel shell of the tunnel network. Anyone touching the floor or walls directly without some form of insulation begins to take (5) Ego Damage every Round as the charge surges into them. For every (15) Ego Damage, they additionally suffer (1) Trauma. The electrification can be maintained for (5) Rounds before the AMSUMO's capacitors are emptied, and must be recharged over (3) Rounds.

MAGNETIC FIELD MANIPULATION

By running a precisely calibrated electric current through the metallic surfaces of the Underground tunnels, it is possible to turn them into powerful electromagnets. Metallic weapons are dragged to the ground, and taking a step in steel armor becomes an almost impossible task. Anyone holding or wearing metal objects in the tunnels must succeed in a BOD+Force (4) test in order to move, and their movement speed is reduced by half. However, the AMSUMO is also affected, and cannot move while the protocol is engaged.

DISPERSION GAS

A loud hiss is the only warning that is given before the toxic cloud begins to fill the tunnel, choking anyone within (20) m who breathes in the colorless gas without a filter. The poison has Potency (3), and causes a penalty of -3D to all Actions for (3) Rounds before dispersing.

MONOFILAMENT LAUNCHERS

Deployed from small openings in the AMSUMO's legs, the Monofilament Launchers are a series of fist-sized steel spheres that quickly begin to arrange themselves throughout the tunnels, using small magnetic fields to climb the side walls of the Underground until they are properly positioned around its perimeter. At this point, tiny puffs of gas are emitted from one of their faces. It looks like nothing has happened, but the Underground has now been turned into a death trap. The small spheres have locked themselves to the wall and launched a wire across to the

opposite side. These wires are monofilaments - consisting of a single strand of atoms bonded together, able to slice through almost any material with ease. They are nearly impossible to see in the dark tunnel, requiring an INS+Perception (8) roll, and if someone walks into them they will immediately take (2) Trauma Damage, cutting through any Armor rating less than (8).

GREENEYES

A light on the faceplate of the AMSUMO flashes green for an instant, before anyone looking feels their face erupt into pain. Kriegsmaschine6 is equipped with a directed kilowatt laser emitter built into its skull, which uses a sophisticated targeting mechanism to detect and aim for the eyes of the unit's enemies. Anyone who does not immediately look away from the beam or close their eyes, by succeeding in a PSY+Reaction (2) roll, loses (3) Ego Points and (3) Flesh Wounds as their retinas start to burn. The laser switches targets once per Round, and does so automatically.

TESLA BARRIER

Through a series of modifications and improvements the bioreactor of Kriegsmaschine6 has been upgraded to the point that a small city could be operated using its output. However, the Cluster has a different use for the excess energy. The AMSUMO was upgraded with a massive Tesla coil attached to its back, extending above its head, which is charged with the overflow power in combat. The coil arcs out towards anyone who approaches the unit, delivering a powerful electric shock and creating a deafening thunderclap. In desperate situations the unit fills the space around itself with a neon blue conductive gas before electrifying the coil, dealing (2) Trauma Damage to anything within (3) meters of it. However, afterwards it must recharge the system, and the Tesla Barrier shuts down for (5) Rounds, rendering Kriegsmaschine6 unable to use any of its Defense Protocols until it is operational again.

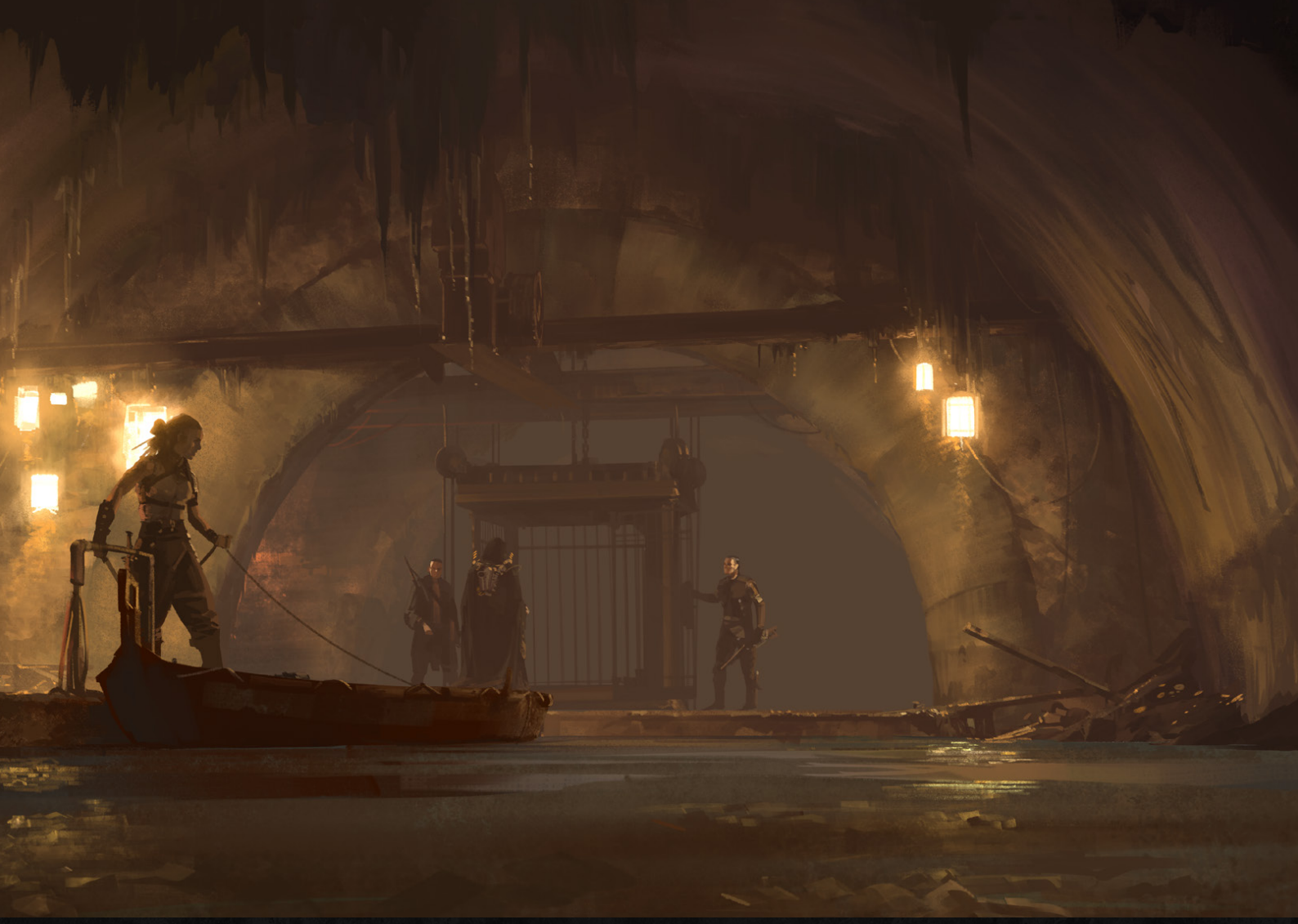
While the Tesla Barrier is the unit's last-ditch defense, it is also a weak point. If targeted using an Aimed Attack with a Difficulty increase of (4) and dealt more than (8) Damage in a single Round, the coil becomes unstable and the chaotic magnetic fields tear it apart. It explodes, dealing (4) Structure Damage to the AMSUMO and disabling its Defense Protocols.

NEST OF THE CARRION BIRDS

For decades the Flotsam was the most profitable business in the hands of the Carrion Birds. When they lost their casino to the Dust Riders many competitors believed that they had also lost their headquarters, and would ultimately fade into obscurity.

"Madness!" the Mother of Ravens cackles, her features twisting into the grimace of a mummy. She didn't survive this immortal ordeal because she basked in the light of the obvious. The true nest of the Carrion Birds, her lair, is located in a Bygone sewer network deep beneath the Chroniclers' Exit Level, protected from Judges and other spies by a labyrinth of shafts and secret passages. It's a crude and sprawling dungeon: primitive glyph paintings adorn the walls, large areas are covered by carpets of mushrooms and lichen, rats that have grown to the size of raccoons splash through the sewage, and other critters fester in the nooks and crannies, from olms and bats to translucent spiders and colonies of pale woodlice.

The many canals criss-crossing this soggy domain carry brackish waste water, black like tar and overwhelming in its pungent stench. Carrion Birds who arrive at this place to receive their Mother's instructions or bring her gifts navigate the damp realm on small canoes to get across the flooded sections. Nobody would be crazy enough to swim through the toxic soup. The light sources illuminating the waterways are sparse and gloomy, consisting of ancient mining lanterns hanging off the walls



or torches barely exposing some narrow gateway. Many times throughout the past hundred years Chroniclers have accidentally laid open an entry into the nest of the Carrion Birds when excavating a secondary connection for a new Exit. In some areas, the two realms are separated by nothing more than a two-meter-thick reinforced concrete wall. Anyone equipped with a jackhammer would get to the other side in less than twenty minutes. Both parties know about this weakness, and purposefully stay out of each other's affairs. The Chroniclers' don't want information on their subway network to become public knowledge, nor do the Carrion Birds desire to give away their secret hideout. Time to shut up and move on.

Does anybody know the true extent of the nest? Probably not - except for the Mother of Ravens herself, who has made it her home for over a century. The reasons for her departure from the surface world can only be speculated about. Nobody among the Carrion Birds would be boisterous enough to assume what motives the mythical leader of the Apocalyptics holds. Those who know about her lair are her most loyal servants and greatest beneficiaries, enjoying the privilege of having earned the hag's trust and reaping her wisdom in return. Never would they dare to meddle in her endeavors or question her purpose. While the majority of her Flock is busy making the Harbor their base of operations, those who know their way down into the lair belong to a prodigious inner circle.

But it's not just Apocalyptics who are admitted to address her. Throughout history the Mother of Ravens has received many guests from different Cults, Anabaptists and Chroniclers alike, and some, like the Baptist Amos or the Fragment Impulse, became recurring visitors. What dragged these men into her web, and what prophecies they uncovered, remains unknown.

THE LAIR

The lair belongs to the Mother of Ravens alone, and is her private refuge, only accessible by stepping into a rusty cage and being lowered down a shaft via a pulley system. Whether she is willing to receive any given guest, however, can only be determined by calling upon her name. This is just one of the many small oddities that she has acquired in old age. As the call for her echoes down the shaft the minutes that follow stretch into eternity. Then, suddenly, the ancient crone rolls out of a mountain of fetid pillows that are at least as clammy and cold as her heart. She croaks her answer into the darkness, every word a sign of fate. Blessed are those who may now step before her.

The cage goes down a hole that measures twenty paces in diameter and drops off thirty meters into murky twilight. The descent into the abyss is accompanied by the sound of screeching pulley chains, and metal pipes protruding from the walls nudge the primitive elevator around until it docks into a socket with a loud thud, shaking the passenger inside to the bones. Water drizzles from above, creating a monotonous symphony as the droplets hit the roof plate of the cage. A musty and cadaverous smell rises from a mountain of damp carpets strewn around the floor at the bottom of the shaft. Some of them must've been lying down here for decades, slowly dissolving into puddles of sodden fabric.

For the reverend leader of the Carrion Birds, they are fragments of her own history, part of another time. Just like the memorabilia of her past lovers tied to a multitude of long threads hanging from the blackened walls: finger bones, hair, golden rings, and other curiosities - for the Mother of Ravens, every object is associated with a name and a face. The same goes for the many crania of infant children morbidly displayed around the demesne. All of them were offspring of the Mother of Ravens, labeled unworthy and discarded as they failed to exhibit the features she was hoping for. She slaughtered them all, feasted on their flesh, and kept the skulls as tokens.

The base of the shaft is the centre of the lair, where the Mother receives her visitors, yet only her family members are permitted to venture further. Several man-sized concrete tunnels branch off into side sections, connecting to other parts of the structure via ladders and handrails. What lies beyond is forbidden to anyone who is not of her blood.

JOSHUA'S LABORATORY

Only the direct descendants of the Mother of Ravens, along with a handful of her most worthy followers – or those she has sentenced to death – have ever met her son, Joshua. His hideout is what the Carrion Birds generally refer to as the laboratory, a tucked away part of the nest that can only be reached by boarding the elevator and being pulled up towards an opening in the wall of the shaft, some fifteen meters above the Mother of Raven's lair. On her command, Battle Crows at the top crank the levers of the pulley system and the cage swings upward wildly until it snaps into place, locked into a boarding bracket that allows entry into the lab. A slithering tube leads into the secret compartment, the walls taking on a smooth and disgustingly organic appearance. Red arteries grow along the grooves of the brickwork, pulsating and collecting condensed water that seeps from the stones. The unnatural fleshy mesh shivers and convulses when touched, sending tiny ripples through the tunnel ahead, responding to any irritation like the intestinal wall of a giant colon.

The light coming from the shaft barely illuminates the first few steps. A few meters further and pitch black darkness reigns supreme. The floor is sticky; every step resounding with a wet smack. Suddenly, the alien gateway twists to the right, and blue dots flare up in the distance. The contours become blurry, revealing abstract silhouettes without volume, until one gets closer and the blue drenches everything, radiating from countless mason jars littering the plasmic interior. A look around reveals other jars positioned on wooden desks and broken shelves, the furniture covered with the same fleshy goo as the entrance tunnel. The glass jars, on the other hand, are stainless, some of them open and only half full, the fluorescent light emitted by the strange blue liquid immediately recognizable to an Aberrant hunter for what it is: Firefly; the blood of a Biokinetic.

Human faces are strapped over some of the glass jars, distorted grimaces of pure horror with tufts of hair hanging from the stitched scalps, trapped expressions reminiscent of a piece of wet cloth floating atop the waves of the open sea. Some of them grin, welcoming every intruder into Joshua's laboratory and serving as a harrowing vision of what happens to those whom the Mother of Ravens condemns to death. The victims are skinned and flayed, their remains turned into masks or second skins for other Carrion Birds, their organs harvested and transplanted into wounded Battle Crows, their cartilage serving as replacements for shattered joints, and their bones carved into crude weapons or morbid jewelry of any kind.

In the center of the laboratory is the butcher's block where the unfortunates are chopped into pieces, surrounded by a wild array of buckets stuffed with organs

or filled to the brim with fresh blood. Sharp cutting tools hang above the steel table like filleting cutlery of a gourmet chef, each blade sharpened and ready to be used on the next victim. The metal knives clink softly in the draft from the entryway, until the somber moment is torn apart by a sudden rattle as if a horde of snakes had been stirred up from their slumber. Seconds later, a pair of hollow eyes pierce the darkness, followed by the outline of a gaunt figure rising eight feet tall, held in place by dozens of chains anchored into the wall, allowing the creature to move freely within the lab yet restricting it from ever leaving its prison.

Joshua snarls a deep hiss, his chest heaving, the skin folds on his back billowing to release his plague, but there is none. Insects are forbidden to him. He howls in anger and pulls at the coils that restrain his growth – manacles driven through his bones, vices perforating his joints: occult measures to inhibit his shapeshifting powers.

There is no escape for him this time, and so his feeble mind reverts back to the conditioned tasks which he's been programmed to do. Lazily, he unscrews an empty glass jar and splits open the veins of his forearm, squeezing out phosphorescent blood from his wrist. "More light!" he grunts, his voice reverberating like the canon of a choir dropping through several octaves. Joshua hates this prison, scorns the barrel vault that surrounds and shields him from the frequency of the supreme consciousness. He can hear his Chakra throbbing, but the tunes cannot penetrate the dead soil all around. He must ignite the inanimate stones with life – the fleshy overgrowth that carpets all parts of the laboratory is nothing but an inflated part of Joshua's exposed epidermis, growing to become a heightened sensory apparatus for the Biokinetic so that he can soak up the ether's rhythm and amplify his response.

Deep within the laboratory, a large membrane spun by Joshua closes off a private section into which he retreats to cocoon and recover from his otherworldly activities. When his Mother demands it, he pierces the skin-like opening and carries the crone that gave birth to him into the womb he created to replenish her lifespan on Earth with the energy he controls.

THE BIRDCAGE

Those who defy the word of the Mother of Ravens play a most dangerous game. Whenever conflict arises among the Carrion Birds, she acts as the ultimate arbiter, steering her followers back on track and punishing those who violate her laws. Not every misstep is egregious enough to be sentenced to death at the hands of her son Joshua. In some cases, she will cast an offender into the birdcage, a spacious underground prison where traitors are held and tortured until their resistance is broken entirely. Some of these wayward souls are kept ad infinitum, undergoing continuous humiliation until their personality has been pulverized and they are released as lobotomized zombies, unable to think for themselves and dancing to every beck and call of their mother.

Others serve their remaining time as meatbags for Carrion Birds practicing their skills in close combat in anticipation of an upcoming pit fight. Living targets, ready to be abused at the behest of their captor. Mercy is a foreign word in the birdcage. Those who end up here have only themselves to blame.

THE TRIBUTE CHAMBER

All Apocalyptics who know of the Mother of Ravens, including those who have never met her, are familiar with her obsession for gifts and tributes. It is one of the Cult's most deeply ingrained customs to shower the mythical founder with presents and let her take part in the success of individual Flocks. The nature of the ritual is unclear, and a foreign Raven stepping into her lair for the first time can only guess at what his gift should look like. What does the hag want? Drafts? Artifacts? Or some mundane tassel that satisfies her curiosity? Nobody would be able to give a straight answer. The Mother of Ravens changes her affection towards gifts from day to day. What seemed to please her during one incident, she might consider an insult during the next.

Part of the game is to make the right assumption, as she has been known to express excitement over a cheap toy doll sewn together from leather and horsehair, as much as she's shown interest in weapons capable of melting a man from the inside out. There is no clear pattern to any of it. Some of her children even suspect that she has no interest in the presents at all, and upholds the ritual to unsettle visitors. Nevertheless, anyone wishing to win a favor from her will have to try their best to impress her.

The senseless array of gifts she has received throughout her endless lifespan is hidden in the tribute chamber. The passage is forbidden even to her sons. They will only be able to solve the mystery of what is stored inside once the ancient crone has finally crumbled to dust. A few already rub their greedy hands in anticipation of the treasures they suspect to be hidden within. Legend has it that the tribute chamber is illuminated by an image wall of Bygone design, and that the hag disappears in there to speak to someone who is at least as timeless as herself.

OCCUPIED WAR ZONE

Everyone in Justitian has at some point picked up the myth of the Mother of Ravens. Her baleful breath billowed through the epochs of the city, extinguishing her opponents and intoxicating her lovers. Her deeds inspired the yarn spun amongst the Providers, from where it seeped into the minds of the citizens and flourished into urban legends, bordering on the supernatural: An immortal crone stalks the city at night feasting on little children, devouring them to grant herself eternal life. Her powers vary vastly depending on the source of the storyteller, from the ability to transform into a murder of crows to being able to reap the soul of a human being. Records of her appearances accumulate as long byte chains in the archives of the Central Cluster, clouded by speculation about her origin, her goals, and her true age. She is not a creature that can be overlooked if one takes any interest in the city's history. The Palers were extremely curious, for any intelligence they were able to unearth about her had one specific quality: she had the format of a God.

For years, solitary Revivers arrived in the city following her enigmatic trace. They hid in the Outskirts and Tech-Central, or went undercover throughout the Protectorate, searching for clues on her whereabouts and entrances into her lair. But the massive Chronicler presence forced them to operate in secret, and denied them the ability to join forces with their brethren without attracting attention. They were stuck, unable to make significant progress, until in 2596 a Demagogue arrived to show them the path toward success. Within weeks, Vesna consolidated the dispersed Cult members and merged them with the Horde under her command, sharing her vision of the future with her newly formed battalion. A day later, Vesna's Horde stormed Exit C-3 and drove the Chroniclers into the night with howling salvoes of submachine gunfire. The invaders had to act quickly, and plugged into the Cluster's network. Two minutes and thirty-five seconds passed before the data torrent dried up. The Cluster had reacted to the hacking attempt in time, but the Palers had what they needed: a complete map of Justitian's Underground with a breakdown of the Cluster's internal Level structure. The situation was heated - any moment now the Chroniclers could retaliate.

The Horde rushed to disconnect the entire sector from the 3rd Highway, and established an occupied warzone. The Revivers fortified the entryways with cast concrete bulwarks and mined the area, while Solars dragged in portable generators stolen from the Scrappers and flooded Exit C-3 with electricity. At the same time, Cyclopes continued smashing into the Cluster's firewall, trying to damage the security system in an attempt to keep the Fragments on edge. Not even a week later, the entire section was sealed off like a fortress, and the Horde deflected incoming counter attacks with ease.

The Chroniclers simply had no adequate response to the assault, nor were they able to muster the forces it would take to wrestle the Exit back out of the hands of the invaders. The Fragments offered a ceasefire and abandoned the sector entirely, in hopes that the Palers would eventually run out of resources and be forced to leave the occupied territory on their own.

But that was never their plan. Vesna's Horde had followed a clear mission from the instant they had left the Heistos Bunker behind. Together they inspected the seized maps of the Exit Level. Pale fingers scurried across the illuminated Interfacer displays, pointing at nodes and pathways, drawing conclusions about the Chroniclers' subterranean realm. Some things didn't add up. Secondary tunnels and rooms appeared to have been displaced, and were unreachable via the corridors that were under Paler control. The maps seemed to be incomplete or outdated. Kreda, a Cyclops reporting to Vesna herself, slapped a Sunburst against his belly, his beady eyes twitching nervously: "The Gods have blurred their tracks." he mumbled. Vesna agreed. The Horde was stranded and without direction.

CHANGE OF PLANS

The Chroniclers clearly have what Vesna's Horde is looking for: information on the location of the bunkers buried in the Protectorate as well as intelligence on the Mother of Ravens. Since they so jealously hoard their knowledge, it must be taken from them by force, which translates into Paler lingo as: assault the Cluster, acquire all data necessary to locate the Gods, and burn the hooded freaks alive. After all, weren't they responsible for Exalt's fall?

Vesna understands that a full frontal attack borders on suicide. The Cluster is too well equipped to be taken out by a Horde of ninety Palers. It will require far more effort to weaken the defense system, so she keeps pinging Bunkers scattered across the Balkhan and Hybrispania, asking for resupply and additional firepower. But what the Horde lacks in clout, it makes up in conviction. The Demagogue sends her scouts into the Chronicler infested zones of the

Exit Level to scan the surroundings and validate the seized maps. On their forays, the Palers have stumbled upon secret breaches leading into the nest of the Carrion Birds and made first contact with the Apocalyptics. When they report back to Vesna, they emphasize the memetic markers which can be found all over the Bygone sewer network. Is this a sign? Are there Sleepers biding their time down here, waiting for the Horde to redeem them? If so, they must be cunning and powerful, capable of pulling the strings and holding out on their own for decades. Judges, Spitalians, Chroniclers, they'd all be nothing but their puppets. Their network would be vast and their pawns would be seated in important positions across the whole city. Even if just one of them survived, it would be enough for a revolution. Just one. "Mother of Ravens." Kreda whispers. Vesna nods. They finally have a trail.

STALEMATE

More than two years have passed since the siege of C-3. The damn Paler rats haven't run out of supplies. They established themselves as the undisputed rulers of the occupied warzone, pestering the Cluster with hacking attempts, laying siege on other Exits connected to the 3rd Highway, and ambushing Chroniclers traversing the Underground. Again and again, they have overridden nodes to recharge their equipment with Quanta, laid out deadly traps, or sabotaged wiretaps. The Chroniclers are fuming, yet they're unable to smoke the Palers out. The stalemate is ongoing, and every analysis run by the Fragments on how to reconquer their Exit and rid themselves of the Horde amounts to massive casualties.

The other side doesn't necessarily fare any better. Food is scarce, and being outgunned by the masked freaks is crushing to their morale. Only the faith in their Gods keeps the Horde tied together. Until, suddenly, the Palers manage to intercept several alarming Cluster transmissions coded as red alerts, calling for all operatives to immediately respond to an unforeseen breach into the Exit Level. A Needle has entered the Underground of Justitian. His name: Corium. His agenda: Unknown.

Vesna senses that this is the chance she has been waiting for, and orders her scouts to make contact with the newcomer. If she can join forces with an arch-nemesis of the Cluster, the situation will surely turn in her favor.

Dark Omens

BITTER END

"Get out!" Rutgar's commanding snarl was unmistakable and viciously impatient. Two boyish men jumped from the bed, their privates wrapped in sheets, blushing as they bolted for the door. The Chief Protector held his breath until he could no longer hear their bare feet tapping on the cold marble of the adjacent hallway. Then he exhaled a long, sharp tune, while the corners of his mouth lowered with disgust. Before him, an indistinct shape rolled around on the bed, covered by blankets and furs.

"You again!" Archot shied away from revealing his face.

The low winter sun seeped through a gap in the dark leather curtains, catching dust motes as they drifted through the Supreme Judge's spacious bedroom. Rutgar's eyes followed the miniscule flakes tumbling through the air to their point of origin: a vanity stained with white makeup powder. It took him no effort to conclude that Archot was in a terrible mood, if he hadn't even allowed the cleaners to tidy up his personal chamber. "It's almost 11 o'clock, you should get your lazy frame out of bed." Rutgar taunted, tracing his finger across the wooden shelf, drawing the name of his deceased wife on the powdery countertop.

"I hate walking!" Archot croaked from his bed, his reply muffled by three layers of thick bed covers.

"You've been telling me that for twenty years. Come on old man, saddle up!"

The Supreme Judge curled up like a defiant child, drawing the sheets over his head, growling petulantly. "I refuse! I just want to lie here and die!" he protested.

Rutgar frowned. The same drama week after week – ad infinitum. With his glove he wiped the white dust off the vanity, erasing Vela's name for good. He looked on as the powder wafted through the air, hit by a stray ray of light breaking through the windows. Lost in thought he began counting circulating particles. When he reached twelve, he suddenly slammed his fist on the vanity in a loud display of force.

"Enough! It's Sunday, and you will walk! It will do you no harm! Or should I get the eggheads in here to check up on you first?"

Archot sat up in bed at once, rigid like a musket barrel. "Damn you, keep those bald creeps away from me at all times! They're terrible people! I don't wanna be around any of them!"

"You have to move! At least a little bit. Even the Spitalians say so. You don't want me to appoint a doctor to follow you around all day long?" Rutgar urged, poking, and signed his threat with a chuckle. A patient smile violated his otherwise stoic features.

Archot coughed at the thought, raising his hand to shake off the proposal. "Never! The only one of them I can stand is the ambassador – the Provost… what's his name again?"

"Kranzler."

"That guy! He has stamina. He would've made a great Chief Protector if…"

"If I was dead?" Rutgar laughed.

"No, if you had taken on the position of Supreme Judge, once and for all!" Archot snapped, finally rising from his bed.

"I never coveted your seat."

"I never said you did. But what if I died tomorrow? Who would be taking care of this mess?" Archot did his best to provoke an emotional reaction from his closest confidant.

"You're not gonna die if you keep going for walks, like I've been telling you." Rutgar's jab was sincere, leaving very little room for doubt.

Archot sucked in a gallon of air, before uttering a reply.

"Rutgar, you're not listening."

Rutgar didn't need to. He saw what was important: Archot had lost weight again – in the last month alone he must have shed another ten pounds; ribs visibly pushed through the Supreme Judge's nightgown, and his collar bones were protruding from his shoulders. Anyone seeing him like this would easily mistake him for a walking cadaver. But Archot did not mind. Instead, he strode toward the vanity like an emaciated stork, taking in his reflection in the great mirror that hung from the wall. With one swift motion, he burrowed two fingers into a jar of zinc paste and smeared the opaque cream across his face, flattening the furrows that criss-crossed his features. "I'd love some strawberries right now."

"There aren't any strawberries in November."

"I know. But do you remember how they tasted when we were younger?" Archot's question was aloof, dripping with nostalgia, and verbalized without purpose.

Rutgar lowered his head, reading the theatrics of his superior in minute detail. "Different times. I can have the cooks bring up oat bran with strawberry jam."

"I'd rather eat vomit. I'm not hungry anyway. Don't fret. We should go out and shoot something. A reindeer, perhaps?" Archot took aim with an invisible rifle and made shooting noises.

"You haven't shot a rifle since we were in the field together, some four decades ago." Rutgar was unable to hide his amusement. Archot was all over himself today.

The Supreme Judge acknowledged the Chief Protector's objection with raised eyebrows and continued to color his eyelids with velvet eyeshadow. Rutgar didn't hesitate any longer and placed a honey-colored vial on the vanity. Archot inspected the liquid with curiosity, but avoided touching the tiny bottle.

"Poison." Rutgar said calmly. "I got it from a contractor in Brennen. Highly potent stuff – but I had him mix it so that the flavor is sweet and comforting. There's a hint of anise in there, along with elderberry and rosehip. The drugs will give you a final rush, you count up to thirty and it's all over."

Archot remained silent, only cocking his head, his eyes moving between the vial and the face of his Chief Protector, searching for explanations.

Rutgar continued without delay. "Be in charge of your death as much as you were in charge of your life. Don't allow them to catch you alive. You know that they will torture you, vandalize your body, tear the robes off your shoulders in an attempt to embarrass you. In your final hour, they will stop at nothing to expose you as weak and frail, to diminish and humiliate you."

Archot cleared his dry throat, pricking his ears to follow the explanations of his eternal friend and advisor.

"They can only kill you if they kill your legacy." Rutgar said, twisting the vial on its axis, leaving a circle in the white powder on the vanity. He exhaled, a low, inaudible hiss. "They will want to see you beg for your life. Suffer. Confess." Slowly, he lifted his eyes to meet Archot's. "Die with a smile on your face."

Both men fell silent, staring at each other as the minutes passed. "Keep it with you. You'll know when to take it." Rutgar said, his voice cracking, as he offered the vial to Archot. The Supreme Judge closed his gnarled fingers around the glass, gripping the gift firmly with both hands.

"We should go for a walk now, Rutgar. Sunday hasn't ended yet."

MOST WANTED

For generations, the Black Lung has been a breeding ground for outlaws, criminals, violent gangs, and merciless brigands. They fester on the outskirts of civilization, plundering, raping, and killing their way to glory, until the Judges wipe them off the face of the Earth. Some of these groups survive their inevitable reckoning and go into hiding, finding shelter in the blooming cities of the Protectorate and switching identities to cover their tracks. However, their legends remain public knowledge, and their wanted posters litter the garrison walls of every other Judge outpost, their faces iconic and their names imprinted into common vernacular. The bounties placed on their heads would make a Provider rich overnight, and the tales surrounding each individual or group are filled with hearsay and speculation, leaving endless room for interpretation on their whereabouts and areas of operation. To find one of these felons and bring them to justice would only open the door for a new criminal to move up in the hierarchy and take their place. To keep track of emerging felons, new and old, the Judges keep their Most Wanted list up to date at all times.

GRAM

The Hellvetic deserter Gram remains a phantom, and is suspected to be the only survivor of the purge of Ferropol. Formerly the bodyguard of one of the most notorious crime lords of the Protectorate, the mercenary for hire has since all-but vanished from the public eye – although stories of his appearances in the western part of the Protectorate surface every other month. His base of operations is unknown, as he seems to be changing locations frequently, and there are at least three separate surveillance recordings from the Technodrome that depict Gram appearing in the city of Mobilis. His visage is public knowledge and large posters of his mugshot can be found all over Justitian and its neighboring cities.

WANTED FOR: Drug manufacturing and distribution, terrorism, extortion, murder, conspiracy against the Judiciary, human trafficking, civil unrest

BOUNTY: 35,000 CD

KASUS MERCATOR

The wealthy merchant Kasus has caused a ripple in recent years. The Chroniclers accuse the man, operating from the independent city of Liqua, of being one of the biggest black market artifact traders and of conspiring with the Neolibyans. Allegations range from shipping artifacts out of Borca and into Purgare to hiring foreign Scrapper gangs to dig in Neolibyan territory and splitting the finds with the Africans. What the Chroniclers don't know is that Kasus is backed by Yuma, the Water Lord of Axial, and acts as his relic collector-in-chief.

WANTED FOR: Illegal artifact trade with the Neolibyans

BOUNTY: 25,000 CD

KARGONOGH

Kargonogh was the figurehead of the Reformists, a tight knit group of radical Protectors who plotted to overthrow the collective power of the Advocate Houses and revolutionize Judgedom as a whole. In 2591 their cell was uncovered and their covert rebellion quelled. The majority of the Reformists were sentenced to death by hanging, however, Kargonogh was warned in time and escaped in the heat of the moment, having since disappeared from the limelight. A native of Franka, Kargonogh is suspected to be hiding in the western reaches of the Protectorate under the protection of local Resistance bands that provide cover for the fugitive Executioner.

WANTED FOR: High treason

BOUNTY: 20,000 CD

ADABRA & ONYIA

Ruthless Scourger assassins, or just noble gladiator instructors wrongfully accused? The twins Adabra and Onyia who reside in Gaudica, Liqua's entertainment district, have amassed infamy in recent years, and are under heavy surveillance by both the Chroniclers and the Judges. As long as they enjoy the protection of the Water Lord Cervex they have little to fear, but should they step out of their safe house, muskets will take aim and Shockers will spark to life. Several sources have confirmed that the pair work hand-in-hand with some of the ruthless Apocalyptic

Flocks of the northwestern Protectorate and supply these terror groups and country militias with weapons smuggled into Borca by Neolibyan contractors.
WANTED FOR: Assassination, Chronicler intervention, sheltering enemies of the Protectorate, illegal arms deals
BOUNTY: 15,000 CD each

THE BEAR BROTHERS

In a not too distant past, the outlaws commonly referred to as the Bear Brothers kept the Protectorate in awe. The three Cave Bears were feared by the lawmakers – and beloved by the peoples – of the Black Lung. Abundant legends circulated about the physical prowess of each of the siblings and their alleged feats of strength, as well as their astonishing raids on outposts throughout the Protectorate. About a decade ago, however, the stories ceased, and the Bear Brothers vanished.

First, Blacksmith, the youngest, was eliminated after the Chroniclers imposed an embargo on him for distributing fake Drafts in the Protectorate. Eisenhauer, the second, was suddenly spotted in Franka, where he aided the Scrapper uprising against the Neolibyan ruler of Toulon. Rumors of his death have now been circulating for well over a year. Steelbeam, the last remaining Cave Bear, was sighted several times along the trade route to Hellvetica and is said to have taken refuge in Tech-Central among his kin. What brought him back to Justitian is a mystery.
WANTED FOR: Circulation of fake Drafts, murder, civil unrest, robbery
BOUNTY: 15,000 CD each

THE SHREW

The Shrew is an imposter who claims that she is a relative of Bosch himself, and that she acts on behalf of the Cartel. The Dwarven King is incensed that anyone would even dare to seed such a preposterous lie, and has used his contacts with the Salvano family to place the Shrew on the Judges' Most Wanted list. Meanwhile, Sinder and the hamlets of the north occasionally suffer from heists by the Shrew and her Scrapper mob. Petty crimes: a robbed trader here, a plundered caravan there, nothing that would justify the high bounty, which has led some to believe that there might be a kernel of truth to the Shrew's proclaimed origin story. Allegedly, she hides with her comrades somewhere on the outer perimeter of the Stukov Desert, in the realm of the native Nomads.
WANTED FOR: Armed robbery, resistance against the Judiciary, illegal artifact trade
BOUNTY: 10,000 CD

MAUPERTUIS

An indigenous Frankan, and the youngest addition to the Judges' Most Wanted list, Maupertuis entered the Protectorate during the ongoing refugee crisis. Known as a rebel and intellectual firebrand, he's been distributing pamphlets and initiating secret meetings with local tribesmen, promoting ideas of democracy and civil uprising all across the Black Lung. Branded by the Judges as one of most dangerous fugitive minds, he is infamous for his intuitive knack for numbers and ruthless debating skills, making him both a highly successful gambler and razor-sharp negotiator.
WANTED FOR: Armed robbery, resistance against the Judiciary, civil unrest
BOUNTY: 10,000 CD

STEPPENWOLF

The rugged Steppenwolf, a mysterious Scrapper hailing from Pollen, arrived in the Protectorate three years ago and began a spree of organized assaults against Famulancer patrols, claiming that Spitalians had kidnapped his son and taken him to Borca. Nobody can figure out the validity of the story, but one rumor has blossomed among the Famulancers stationed in Justitian, claiming that Steppenwolf's son is a Biokinetic child, captured and transferred to the Spital for examination. The Judges aren't really concerned with Steppenwolf's current track record, though. One more angry Scrapper running amok makes no difference, as long as he doesn't murder anyone – which explains the meager bounty on his head.
WANTED FOR: Organized assault and battery, resistance against the Spitalians
BOUNTY: 1,000 CD

Cockroaches

CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST

Eat or be eaten! Kill or be killed! Grow, conquer, devour! Blood is our milk! Flesh is our desire! Breed! Breed! Breed! Consume our enemies, nourish our endless hunger with their marrow, soak up their spirit, and gorge on their remains.

The totems have risen to show the Cockroach tribes the path of destiny, to lead them to their final harvest as they swallow the world and feast on the cadaver of the Protectorate. Like a hive, they follow their most primeval instincts amplified a thousandfold. No critical thinking will stop them on their rampage, as the tribes have fully succumbed to their animalistic urges. Their unity with the Phosphorites has ignited the flames of revenge, and their time in exile was spent breeding new colonies. Now, their swarms are more massive than ever. The hissing and grunting of the mature warriors merges with the cries of thousands of newborns. A cacophony of screams, indistinguishable from rolling thunder bellowing across the plains. A new generation is born to split the realm of the Hammer Men asunder.

Cockroaches operate in broods with sizes ranging from 30 to 400 individuals. Several hundred of these broods roam the south of Borca, hugging the Reaper's Blow or spreading throughout Exalt's former territory. When many broods unite, they form a tribe aligned by a totem of destruction. The three known tribes are the Winged Ones, the Sphingids, and the Weavers, distinguishable from one another only by the colors and patterns that cover their bare flesh. Together, they make up the bulk of the forces arrayed against Justitian in the Clan Wars, and what they lack in strategy they make up for in terrifying numbers.

FEEDERS

These runts act as the basic supply force keeping their brood fed and watered. They roam the land, hunting animals and weaker humans to provide their people with a meal, wielding nothing but primitive weapons they have scrounged from their prey. If they are unsuccessful in their missions, then their own bodies will provide a suitable substitute.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 4D/ 8 Ego Points
ATTACK: Spear, Melee 5D, Distance 2m, Damage 6
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Dodge), Melee 5D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 6D; Mental 4D
SPECIAL: INS+Survival 6D, AGI+Stealth 4D
MOVEMENT: 8m
ARMOR: Flimsy rags, Armor 0
CONDITION: 6 (Trauma: 4)
TACTICS: Feign death / Traps

Feeders are unlikely to engage in a fight. Instead, they will try to run away and hide in an attempt to evade pursuit, or play dead if they are desperate - they gain a +2D bonus to AGI+Stealth when attempting to do so.

Their main method of hunting is trap based, using a poison created from a variety of mosses growing in the underground caves the Cockroaches nest in. The traps require an INS+Perception (4) roll to detect and deal (4) Damage with the Poisoned Quality (5C, (-5) Flesh Wounds per Round, Triggers on BOD+Toughness reduce Potency). The Feeders will only ever attack a target already weakened by the traps, whether human or animal.

SWARMERS

Swarmers behave as scouts moving ahead of a main force of a Cockroach brood, directing them around environmental hazards or choosing the most suitable path. They venture far into enemy territory for days at a time, capable of expertly blending with the terrain to avoid being spotted by any Judges patrolling on the borders of the Protectorate. They perfectly imitate natural sounds of the environment, from distant thunder and gushing waters to animals and birds, capable of fooling even the most cunning of hunters. Often they work with the Feeders to lure unsuspecting prey to their sudden doom.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 6D/10 Ego Points
ATTACK: Mace, Melee 5D, Distance 1m, Damage 7, Blunt; Slingshot, Projectiles 5D, Distance 5/15m, Damage 5, Blunt
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Dodge), Melee 5D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 6D; Mental 4D
SPECIAL: PSY+Deception 8D, INS+Orienteering 7D, INS+Survival 6D, AGI+Stealth 8D
MOVEMENT: 7m
ARMOR: Human-leather clothing, Armor 1
CONDITION: 10 (Trauma: 4)
TACTICS: Night ambush

Creeping across the darkened wastelands of Borca in the dead of night, the Swarmers act in groups of between three and six, communicating with each other with chirps, snuffles, grunts, and howls. Anyone listening to them must first succeed in an INS+Perception (4) roll to realise the sounds are coming from a human source, and succeed a second INS+Perception (4) roll to interpret their meaning.

The Swarmers never engage in a frontal assault, instead snaring a single target away from enemy lines with distractions and false alarms before ambushing it with superior numbers.

WARRIORS

The mightiest Cockroaches of a brood are its Warriors, fearlessly charging towards any target in sight. Their claws and knives are chiseled from the bones of their slain enemies, and their teeth are razor sharp fangs, gleaming from their bared open mouths. The Cockroach Warriors are all but unstoppable in close combat, wreaking havoc on their enemies through diversion, demoralisation, and overwhelming force.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 7D/12 Ego Points
ATTACK: Bone sword, Melee 7D (6D with shield), Distance 1m, Damage 9, Gruesome (1);
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active 7D (8D with shield) ; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 6D; Mental 4D
SPECIAL: PSY+Domination 6D, BOD+Stamina 7D, INS+Perception 8D
MOVEMENT: 7m
ARMOR: None
CONDITION: 16 (Trauma: 7)
TACTICS: Overwhelming swarm

If there is one resource that the Cockroaches have in abundance, it is body mass. Every engagement sees dozens of Warriors thrown into battle and their only combat tactic is the most basic one possible - sheer advantage in numbers.

It matters little if enemies fire at them from range, as there will still be enough of them left to club everyone to death after crossing the distance.

Sometimes the Warriors will leave their enemies beaten, and not kill them right away - screams of anguish are far more demoralizing to their opponents then the silence of a rotting corpse. If a target is captured alive, its torment is drawn out, before the body is dismembered to serve as food supply for the brood.

BROODMOTHERS

Deep in the underground dens the Cockroaches call home, the Broodmothers lay sedentary in large chambers, attended by their children and doing nothing but breeding, eating, and sleeping for months on end. Their elephantine frames are morbidly swollen, tailor made for producing more of their spawn; every Broodmother gives birth to a multitude of new Cockroaches per year.

Whenever their brood is in danger they heave their gargantuan bodies to the surface to act as the spiritual guides and shamans of their children, whipping them into a savage frenzy in battle.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 6D/14 Ego Points
ATTACK: Body Slam, 7D, Distance 1m, Damage 8; Hold and Choke, 4D, Distance 1m, Dazed (3/Round), Target rolls a Conflict of BOD+Force or BOD+Brawl to escape
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Block), Brawl 7D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 5D; Mental 6D
SPECIAL: CHA+Leadership 10D
MOVEMENT: 3m
ARMOR: Layers of fat, Armor 2
CONDITION: 18 (Trauma: 9)
TACTICS: Breeder

Any time a Broodmother faces an attack, a veritable horde of brats, surrounding her like an asteroid belt, come to her defence. When a fight erupts she makes a CHA+Leadership (2) roll; for every Trigger, one of her litter summons up its courage to join the fight. She adds +1D to her Active Defense rolls and (+1) to her Passive Defense for every one of them helping her. A direct attack against one of her spawn (Difficulty 3) kills it instantly.

Broodmothers are the core of the Cockroach Clan, and their brethren will do anything to protect them. Other Cockroaches have no Ego limit when defending their Broodmothers.

COCKROACH KINGS

Approximately every hundredth Cockroach child features the same genetic mutation. Their bodies lack the ability to produce myostatin, the protein necessary for keeping muscle growth under control. These so-called Cockroach Kings are Herculean colossi, the epitome of the Clan equipped with unnatural resilience and strength far beyond normal human capacities. However, their unique mutation causes them to be in a constant energy deficit, meaning they must feed as much as possible to stay active. Furthermore, they suffer from a dramatically shortened life cycle, rarely growing older than 30 years. At the age of twelve they're already considered full grown adults, while at 20 they tower a hulking eight feet tall.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 8D/16 Ego Points
ATTACK: Iron Club, Melee 9D, Distance 2m, Damage 14, Blunt, Impact (3T), Area Damage (180°)
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Block), Melee 9D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 3D; Mental 3D
SPECIAL: BOD+Force 12+1S, BOD+Toughness 12 BOD+Stamina 12
MOVEMENT: 10m
ARMOR: Painted flesh, Armor 1, Terrifying (2)
CONDITION: 24 (Trauma: 8)
TACTICS: Obliterate

Cockroach Kings are fiendish creatures driven by bestial cunning. Warfare and carnage agitates them, and arouses them sexually. The sight of blood incites their primal instinct, and sends them into a rampaging frenzy, charging forward into the thickest part of the enemy lines and haphazardly swiping with their club. Every Round in combat, a King makes an Attack against everything in front of him in a (2)m radius, including other Cockroaches.

When a King slays an important enemy, such as an Executioner or a Preservist, he immediately sets about devouring them to absorb their power. By ripping a chunk of flesh from the corpse and consuming it, he instantly regains (5) Ego Points and forces every one of his opponents to make a Mental Defense against a Difficulty of (4). If they fail, they lose (5) Ego.

Once a battle is over, the King must copulate. The urge is so overwhelming that he cannot control himself, raping whatever is in sight, men, women, animals, even corpses. When he reaches climax, he is struck by an impulsive craving to feast on human flesh to satisfy his overburdened central nervous system, or else collapse from mental and physical fatigue.

Phosphorites

BALE FIRE

The Bale Lords recall the longest night, when the phosphorous runes were the only light left to illuminate the dying world, when the Clan was forged by the elders and implanted with the seed of everlasting fire. The glowing runes have always been right, guiding the Phosphorites through the ages. Their divine calendar foretold it all: the falling star, the war of succession, and the sacred rebirth of their peoples. When the Bale Lords whispered that the searing white flame would turn into a blazing inferno, the Clan knew the day of reckoning had come. They would rise from the ashes and lead the other fallen tribes on a rightful crusade to reclaim the motherland from which they had been banished centuries ago.

The sacred icons, inscribed on emerald tablets, have been taken from the tombs of the elders and brought into sunlight. They serve as the arrow pointing the Phosphorites back to their place of origin, the land of the monoliths and birch groves between dry riverbeds, to a sacred site they recall like a distant echo within their genetic code. The Cockroaches are too imperfect to hear this call, but they hail from the same tree of life. Bound in blood, they will break the walls of their enemies, lay ruin to their cities, hunt down the false gods of thunder and lightning who betrayed the elders of the Phosphorites, and sacrifice them on their altars. The longest night shall return, and the light of the white phosphorus will be the only beacon left. All that is left to do is to bring their misguided brothers, the Pneumancers, into the fold and make peace. Then, the sons and daughters of Nullpellia will reign forever.

IRRADIATORS

Rumbling drums sound over the din of battle, thumping out a pattern. One resounding thud calls out a response. A glowing green projectile arcs through the sky, leaving an incandescent trail behind it. The sound of a shattering shell cracks across the battlefield, before a roiling cloud of bright vapor surges out, dousing the area with toxic phosphorus smog. Anyone caught in the ghostly haze feels the burn of their eyes before their sizzling skin begins to boil. Once the screams of terror fill the air, the smoke reaches the lungs and begins to corrode the victim from the inside. If the gods are merciful, death will come quickly.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 5D/10 Ego Points
ATTACK: Phosphorus Mortar, Projectiles 8D, Distance 150/600m, Damage 8, Fire Hazardous, Deviation, Cloud (3m, 3 Rounds), -4D when firing at less than 50m range; Knife, Melee 6D, Distance 1m, Damage 4, Smooth Running (2T)
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Dodge), Mobility 5D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 5D; Mental 6D
SPECIAL: INT+Science 5D, INS+Orienteering 9D, INS+Perception 8D
MOVEMENT: 4m
ARMOR: Torn and faded uniforms, Armor 1
CONDITION: 10 (Trauma: 5)
TACTICS: Support from a distance

The Irradiators are crucial to the combat strategy of the Phosphorites: softening up targets before the front line warriors charge in, and ensuring that the battlefield is completely covered in toxic smog to provide cover from long range fire. The green smoke gives a (+2) bonus to Passive Defense against ranged attacks for everyone inside it. Each mortar is crewed by a team of three: one to load the shells into the barrel, one to aim the weapon, and an observer to call out corrections and wind directions. Each trio is a well oiled machine who have trained together for years - and will all die together if caught by the enemy. Operating the mortar with less than the full complement incurs a penalty of -2D to attacks.

SACRIFICERS

Their eyes shine with madness, reflecting the glowing light of the phosphorus runes painted on their bodies. The Sacrificers are heroes, born to lead the charge and give their lives in battle. They have been exalted by the elders with the gift of endless rage, fueling them as they charge into enemy lines, the sacred markings on their flesh burning into their skin but whipping up their fury. Another day in safety means nothing to a Sacrificer, but to die in bloodshed is a surefire way to secure access to the great beyond and be welcomed into the purifying kingdom of white radiance.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 7D/ 8 Ego Points
ATTACK: Bone Knuckledusters, Brawl 9D, Distance 1m, Damage 5, Blunt
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Block), Brawl 6D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 7D; Mental 10D
SPECIAL: Ignores Trauma penalties up to (-4D)
MOVEMENT: 9m
ARMOR: Light cloth armor, Armor 1, Terrifying (2)
CONDITION: 14 (Trauma: 8)
TACTICS: Charge

Once a Sacrificer launches into battle, there is nothing that can stop him. Consumed by manic rage they are unable to act rationally and will almost certainly fight to the last drop of blood.

As a last resort, the Sacrificers carry a pair of pouches filled with phosphorus in their fists, the volatile chemical barely held stable while inside the lined leather bag. When the frenzy overcomes them and pain turns into a distant memory, they clench their fists tightly so the dust puffs out and instantly sets itself ablaze, adding the Fire Hazardous Quality to their melee attacks, but also causing the Sacrificer to take (3) Fire Damage per Round. In this completely primal state of mind they feel nothing but a suicidal urge to harm their opponent. The burning sensation of their melting hands pushes them onward - they regain (1) Ego Point per Round when suffering from Fire Damage.

HEART EATERS

As the spiritual leaders of the Clan the Heart Eaters heed the sacred calendar of the Phosphorites and perform the rituals of divination to guide their people towards the longest night. With their tongues they taste the change of weather, with their hands they feel the warmth of the land, and with their heart they listen to the whispers of the forsaken elders. But they had to pay a toll for their wisdom. To grasp the magnitude of the blissful kingdom they had to stare into the blaze of the white phosphorus until it blinded them forever.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 8D/18 Ego Points
ATTACK: Ceremonial Phosphorescent Dagger, Melee 2D, Damage 4, Smooth Running (3T), Fire Hazardous
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Dodge), Mobility 2D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 2D; Mental 8D
SPECIAL: CHA+Leadership 11D, PSY+Faith 8D, INS+Perception 0D
MOVEMENT: 5m
ARMOR: Ceremonial armor, Armor 2, Terrifying (3)
CONDITION: 12 (Trauma: 7)
TACTICS: Ceremonial leadership

Phosphorites rely on the wisdom of their blind shamans, that's why two Sacrificers are given the honor of being a Heart Eater's personal bodyguard. They act as his eyes and his main method of defense - he adds +1D to all Defense rolls and (+1) to Passive Defense for each one still alive, but if both of them die then his movement drops to 1m.

The Heart Eater's role in combat is to be a symbol of the beaming power of the Phosphorites, revealing the outcome of a battle to them like an augur, sharing his wisdom and agitating his tribe with his visions from beyond. If he recites the most sacred chants of the emerald tablets and calls upon his brethren to smite down the enemy in the name of the elders, he attempts a PSY+Faith (4) roll. If he succeeds, every Phosphorite warrior around him adds +1D per Trigger to any Attack rolls.

BALE LORDS

Bale Lords are identified at birth by flecks of faintly flickering green in their eyes, and from then on are separated from the other children of the Clan to become something far more grand than a mere warrior. They were blessed with a gift, granted to them by the elders before they left the womb: immunity to the blistering hell of biological weapons and poisonous gas salvaged from the ancient metal caves the Phosphorites once crawled from. Their bodies are savagely reformed, shrugging off the effects of all but the most brutal of toxins.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 10D/18 Ego Points
ATTACK: Phosphorous Launcher, Projectiles 7D, Distance 4/16m, Damage 9, Mag. 4, Fire Hazardous; Battle Claws, Brawl 10D, Distance 1m, Damage 7, Smooth Running (2T), Gruesome (2)
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Block), Brawl 10D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 4D; Mental 7D
SPECIAL: Phosphore Spitter: In melee, a Bale Lord can swallow phosphorus powder and spit it into their enemy's eyes, dealing (5) Flesh Wounds of Damage.
MOVEMENT: 6m
ARMOR: Ceramic battle armor, Armor 3, Terrifying (4)
CONDITION: 16 (Trauma: 7)
TACTICS: Immunity

The savage genetic defect of the Bale Lords makes them resistant to all of the Phosphorites' chemical horrors. Their breath is fire, when they spit fumes of glaring white flames into the faces of their enemies, and they take no damage from exposure to the phosphorus. Their immunity is an incredible advantage, as they can enter directly into the acidic smoke clouds laid down by the mortar bombardment of the Irradiators to engage wounded and panicking opponents up close. A Bale Lord always aims to bring down the leader of the enemy force and take their heart or head as a trophy for the Heart Eaters, thereby striking terror into the ranks of their foes and leaving them to scatter in all directions - easy prey.

Mechans

COLLATERAL

They have lost their kingdom, their people, their power, and their legacy. Toppled by their own slaves, the Mechans have been cast into insignificance. However, the heirs of the Mechanist won't rest until they have restored the old ways. Nullpellia may have been wrestled from their ice-cold grip, but Wetzlar represents a new beginning. From the ashes of this bordertown they will rebuild their priesthood and spread their faith anew. With the subjugated populace already at their beck and call, terror will be an adequate tool for quelling resistance and stomping out rebellion. After all, rulership is the Mechans' birthright; only they understand the true wisdom left behind by the great Jewgeny Kagarast. The other Clans are blind, unable to distill the true meaning of their heritage and lacking the intellect to grasp the mystery of their collective past.

When the star fell on Nullpelia, it carried four metal eggs foretold by the Mechanist to contain the testimony of the rightful ascension of his disciples. The Pneumancers recovered the treasure first and desecrated it with their oily hands, hiding it in their own mockery of a temple. This betrayal will never be forgotten, but before the Mechans can strike down their former brothers and deal a killing blow they must secure their new base of operations and transform Wetzlar into a cauldron city, following the ancient engineering principles and blueprints left behind by the Mechanist. The Synthesizers of the Mechans know that time is of the essence, and that the ongoing chaos of the Clan Wars will only be able to mask their operations for so long. They must act now, and open the valves so the Freon can flow free once more.

MISSIONARIES

The Missionaries carry the divine truth of their Clan out from their stronghold of Wetzlar across the entire Ramein region, astonishing the primitive people of the land with acts that any Chronicler would dismiss for the petty, insignificant tricks they are. However, even they can't dismiss the sermons of the Missionaries, which speak of a time when the Chroniclers stole the Clan's ancient knowledge and cast them out into darkness. The Mechans will one day return to take revenge for the theft of their legacy, but first, they must convert the sleeping masses to their venerable ideology.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 4D/8 Ego Points
ATTACK: Freon Emitter, Projectiles 6D, Distance 3m, Damage 1D, Piercing (5)
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Duck and cover!), Mobility 5D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 5D; Mental 5D
SPECIAL: PSY+Domination 7D, INT+Artifact Lore 5D
MOVEMENT: 4m
ARMOR: Elaborate metallic suit and armor combination, Armor 1
CONDITION: 8 (Trauma: 4)
TACTICS: Battlefield disruption

The main goal of the Missionaries is to gather intelligence and inspire reverence, and they will do anything to avoid being dragged into combat. Their modified Nullpellian suits are stunning feats of engineering and equipped with sophisticated vocal disruptors that play distorted recordings of their enemies back at them, forcing them to succeed a Mental Defense (Difficulty (3)) or take -1D to all Actions.

These are a last resort, though; they'd much rather defuse a confrontation by asserting their place as technological deities who deserve nothing but the fear and adoration of the helpless savages. They gain +2D to PSY+Domination when interacting with Clans who are at Tech Level III or below.

DISCIPLES

The Freon tanks integrated into their suits release a chilling hiss as the Disciples aim their rifles and prepare to fire. With a pull of the trigger, a blue bow wave of frost blasts from the barrel, crystallizing the very air itself as it surges towards their opponents. The Disciples make up the main troopers of the Clan, equipped with the deadly Freon ray guns that give the Mechans their reputation. In spite of their intimidating appearance and superior weaponry, Disciples are poorly trained. Faced with any real sort of opposition, they'd rather retreat and regroup in the safety of one of their subterranean outposts.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 7D/8 Ego Points
ATTACK: Freon Ray Gun, Projectiles 7D, Distance 10m, Damage 5, Piercing (5), Area Damage (45°), Terrifying (2), Reduces movement of organic targets by (2)m
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Block), Melee 4D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 4D; Mental 3D
SPECIAL: INT+Engineering 6D, Radio Jammers (Disables radio communications within 100m)
MOVEMENT: 5m
ARMOR: Armored bodysuit, Armor 2
CONDITION: 10 (Trauma: 5)
TACTICS: Hit and run / Sabotage

A network of ancient tunnels runs beneath the Ramein region, sprawling sewer systems and rail passages left abandoned for centuries. They are abandoned no more. The Mechans have made them their home, and the Disciples hurry through them on their missions. In this uncharted neck of the woods the soldiers of the Clan can appear out of nowhere, rushing from hidden entrances to engage in quick hit and run attacks, heavily damaging their foes with the freezing blasts of their Freon guns before disappearing within the blink of an eye.

Each strike is precisely targeted to eliminate enemy leaders or ruin key equipment: the Disciples gain +2D to INT+Engineering when attempting to sabotage any form of electronics.

SYNTHESIZERS

Synthesizers handle the lifeblood of the Clan, responsible for producing the Freon supply and handling the wide variety of chemical warfare agents the Mechans have recovered from the Bygone bunkers of Nullpellia. Synthesizers focus on acts of terror, sabotaging road networks, setting off synthetic bombs, laying out traps, and kidnapping key figures. Their strategy is one-dimensional, but undeniably effective. They rely on causing panic, forcing enemies to make irrational decisions, thereby winning the upper hand. Free of all moral considerations or conscience, they deploy cruel acts of arbitrary violence to shatter the will of anyone who dares to oppose them.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 4D/16 Ego Points
ATTACK: Combat Knife, Melee 4D, Distance 1m, Damage 4, Smooth Running (2T)
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Parry), Brawl 4D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 5D; Mental 8D
SPECIAL: CHA+Leadership 8D, INT+Science 8D, PSY+Domination 7D
MOVEMENT: 6m
ARMOR: Elaborate Nullpellian robes, Armor 1, First Impression (+2D)
CONDITION: 8 (Trauma: 4)
TACTICS: Remote control

Synthesizers are far too valuable to risk their lives on the front lines, and instead they direct their fellow Mechans from a distance. By communicating through radio links embedded in suits and observing through portable cameras implanted in the helmets of Missionaries, Synthesizers can monitor the remote fringes of the Ramein region and empower their Disciples with inspiration and direction - any Mechan acting under their guidance adds +2D to any Mental Defenses they must roll. The Synthesisers make the major calls on the battlefield, and will signal a retreat if they see things are going poorly.

ANOINTERS

A network of cables criss-crosses the industrial rubber suit, leading from a heavy back-mounted tank to a massive weapon anchored to the arm. The Anointers have been chosen to carry this sacred armor and wield heavy Freon Cannons, firing bursts of supercooled gas far more deadly than the typical payload due to a pre-cooler located in the gun's body. The Anoiters represent the apex of the Mechan Clan and the deadliest warriors among their ranks. Only a dozen of these elaborate Bygone power suits salvaged by the Mechans from their hidden underground armories still exist, bolstering a wearer against any imaginable environmental hazard.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 6D/12 Ego Points
ATTACK: Freon Cannon, Projectiles 4D, Distance 10m, Damage 10, Piercing (7), Area Damage (45°), Panic (2), Reduces movement of organic targets by (2)m
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Evade), Mobility 4D; Ranged Combat active Mobility 4D; Mental 6D
SPECIAL: BOD+Stamina 7D, INT+Science 6D
MOVEMENT: 4m
ARMOR: Anointed armor, Armor 7, Fire Resistant (7), Terrifying (2), Insulated, Sealed (+4S), Actuated Limbs (Increases wearer's BOD+Force to 10D)
CONDITION: 12 (Trauma: 6)
TACTICS: Heavy weapons

The Bygone armored suits and Freon Cannons used by the Anointers have the capacity to completely devastate the battlefield, but they are only deployed in the most dire situations. Too many of the revered artifacts were lost in the early days of the conflict against the Pneumancers, and they cannot be recovered.

As such, the Anointers only enter battle surrounded by at least six Disciples, forming a menacing tactical team capable of breaking through vulnerable locations scouted by the Missionaries, or taking out sensitive targets preselected by the Synthesizers. Every member of the elite group is well aware of the power and value of the holy armor and embedded weapon, and each of them would lay down their lives in an instant to ensure that it makes it back to their brethren.

Enemoi

NORET'S CHILDREN

The pure strain isolates rescued by Gusev survived the Eshaton, stored away in Bunker 12, the vast cooling chamber of Noret's underground industrial complex. Whenever it was required, the Marauder replenished the dwindling ranks of the original "Convoy" by cracking the seals of the gestation unit and delivering a new child into this dying world.

Raised by his decomposing hands, these Enemoi acted as the Marauder's eyes and ears, his messengers and soldiers. Noret was their homestead, safe, free, a haven they could retreat to after the Chroniclers outlawed the Clan and began hunting them down. The forbidden city was their paradise, where Gusev instructed his progeny in the history of the world, taught them the secrets of the Bygone age, and made them the sacred guardians of his realm. Then came the great outage. The ancient powerline running from Mobilis was cut, and Noret's automated facilities fell silent. The production of blue granulate ceased, and the prosperous Elysian gardens that Gusev had planted and cultivated withered to dust. Finally, the cooling chambers began to defrost.

Desperately, the Enemoi searched for a solution to save their father's idyllic kingdom, but there was none. Noret was isolated and doomed. There was only one solution. Exodus. The Clan divided its last reserves, loaded the pure strain isolates into the Fornax, and splintered. The crew of the Orion entered the Protectorate to divert the attention of the Cluster by feigning a hostile attack. The ruse, orchestrated by Gusev, gives the Enemoi the time to cross the Alps with their remaining trucks and reach Danzig in order to deliver their most precious cargo to Consultant Petrova. They travel toward a new beginning.

INTRUDERS

Information is power, and acquiring and exploiting it is key for a Clan's survival in the ruined world. The Enemoi may be able to trade for some fleeting news when their Convoy halts near a village, but this trickle of outdated data is inadequate for their requirements. They need eyes and ears closer to the source, deeply embedded within the ranks of the Cults, observing every troop deployment and reporting on every secretive meeting of high ranking members. This is the task of the Intruders, operatives who have been given the task of infiltrating their Clan's enemies and reporting what they see back to the Convoy. They are on their own, and can't expect any backup, but their mastery of both social and electronic espionage allows them to blend in with all but the most exclusive groups. Only the Chroniclers and Hellvetics have resisted their efforts, for now, but it's only a matter of time before an Enemoi agent reaches the Cluster.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 7D/12 Ego Points
ATTACK: Silenced Pistol, Projectiles 8D, Distance 15/40m, Mag. 8, Damage 9, Camo (4C)
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Dodge), Mobility 7D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 7D;
Mental 6D
SPECIAL: AGI+Stealth 8D, CHA+Conduct 7D, PSY+Deception 9D, INT+Engineering 8D
MOVEMENT: 6m
ARMOR: Concealed body armor, Armor 3, Camo (3C)
CONDITION: 10 (Trauma: 6)
TACTICS: Subnet

With operatives scattered across Borca, reporting back to the Convoy is no easy task. If the Intruders were to broadcast the signal themselves, it would require each of them to carry a high-powered, easily traceable, radio. Instead, they piggyback on the communications network linking Chronicler Alcoves across the region, using carefully tuned frequencies to escape detection by the Cluster. However, a close inspection by a Hellvetic Radio Beam Unit would reveal the phantom signals. As such, the Intruders must choose their transmission times carefully.

CUSTODIANS

The Custodians form the core of a crew's combat strength, making up for their small numbers with near-unparalleled training and firepower. Their assault rifles match the Hellvetics' Trailblazer in lethal capacity, and their accuracy would leave many of the austere Alpine troops in the dust. However, the Enemoi simply lack the manpower to actively seek out and engage their enemies, and a drawn out conflict would end their people through attrition alone, without any means to replenish their ranks. Instead, the Custodians are almost exclusively a defensive force, only initiating combat in the most dire of circumstances, when all other options have been exhausted, or when they are absolutely sure it will end in victory.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 9D/12 Ego Points
ATTACK: Equalizer, Projectiles 11D, Distance 30/120m, Mag. 20, Damage 10, Smooth Running (3T)
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Evade), Mobility 7D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 7D;
Mental 9D
SPECIAL: INS+Perception 9D, INT+Engineering 7D, PSY+Cunning 10D
MOVEMENT: 6m
ARMOR: Battle armor, Armor 4, Bulletproof (6)
CONDITION: 12 (Trauma: 5)
TACTICS: Long range superiority

While they are powerful in all spheres of engagement, physical or virtual, the Custodians can't take the risk of getting up close and personal with their opponents. When a cohort of Clanners engages them, screaming and waving sharpened sticks and bones, they stay at a safe distance and pick them off with precisely aimed shots.

When the Chroniclers try to hack into the Enemoi subnet from their puppeted corpse of the Stream, they run into an endless tunnel of proxy terminals where their viral cascades are steadily torn apart. For the Custodians, the most critical aspect of battlefield superiority is a well fortified and secure position - an axiom they inherited from their ancient instructor, Gusev himself.

SILENCERS

Throughout the years, acting as Gusev's unit of retaliation, the Silencers have carried out missions of assassination in hostile territory. Whether their targets are Chroniclers or Judges matters not to them. What is more important is to get in and out unscathed, and leave no trace of Enemoi activity. Better the blame falls on some Apocalyptic scum than to sully the reputation of Noret's children. Silencers separate from the main crew and freely assume the identity of wastelanders to divert attention and go unnoticed. Among the millions of souls of the Black Lung they act like an invisible blip, never picked up by any of the Cluster's many tools of surveillance.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 2D/16 Ego Points
ATTACK: Whisper Rifle, Projectiles 12D, Distance 100/400m, Mag. 1, Damage 14, Sensitive, Piercing (4), Armor Piercing
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Dodge), Mobility 6D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 6D; Mental 10D
SPECIAL: AGI+Stealth 9D, INS+Perception 9D, Hawkeye 2, Quick Eye 1
MOVEMENT: 3m
ARMOR: Ghillie suit, Armor 1, Camo (4C)
CONDITION: 8 (Trauma: 5)
TACTICS: Execution

Silencers endure years of training to carry out their task with the utmost precision and efficiency, and they are only deployed when a situation is becoming so critical that a single missed shot would yield catastrophic results.

Savage Clan leaders whipping up their people into a frenzy against the Enemoi, Shutters preparing to launch raids on the Convoy or its crews, Special Detachment commandos creeping through the underbrush: these are the targets the Silencers are tasked with terminating. Their rifles are silent and well-tuned, requiring an INS+Perception (5) roll to hear from a distance and reducing the penalty for long distance shots to -2D.

GUARDIANS

Guardians hold the line against all forms of assault. They are the protectors of the Convoy and the leaders of their crew. Each truck has only one Guardian, who can only ever be replaced following their death. These men and women are considered Gusev's chosen ones, and are the only Enemoi allowed to speak to the Marauder in person. They follow his words of advice and act as generals on his behalf. Their vow of loyalty is to the Convoy, and their only aim in life is the survival of their people. If one of them fails, the entire Clan will stumble and fall.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 6D/10 Ego Points
ATTACK: Emplaced Machine Gun, Projectiles 8D, Distance 50/200m, Belt fed, Damage 11, Salvoes (8);
Shrapnel Grenade, Projectiles 7D, Distance 10/40, Damage 12, Gruesome (3), Deviation, Thunder Strike, Explosive
DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Parry), Melee 6D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 6D; Mental 9D
SPECIAL: INT+Artifact Lore 8D, INT+Science 8D, INT+Engineering 7D, CHA+Leadership 9D
MOVEMENT: 5m
ARMOR: Guardian suit, Armor 3, Bulletproof (6), Massive (6), First Impression (+1D)
CONDITION: 14 (Trauma: 6)
TACTICS: Last ditch defense

If the enemy is within firing range of the Guardians, the situation is already desperate enough to permit them to use overwhelming force. They use devastating machine guns to lay down lethal carpets of fire on everything that moves in their sightline, only stopping when there is nothing left standing in their path. The volume of bullets they are capable of pelting at their enemies can cut through even trees or steel barriers. The Guardians are also responsible for the electronic defense of the Convoy, maintaining powerful countermeasure systems to disrupt Stream Drones and Resets, or intercepting and jamming Alcove communications.

The End

INFORMATION

1. JUDGEMENT HALL
2. JUDGEMENT ALLEY
3. JUDGE BARRACKS
4. MUSEUM
5. ODEON
6. PAPER FACTORY
7. THE OFFICES
8. THE COLOSSUS
9. CALENDAR SQUARE
10. THE CENTRAL CLUSTER
11. RADIO TOWER
12. AERIAL RAILWAY
13. THE FORECOURT
14. CENTRAL EXCHANGE
15. THE HOUSE OF MAPS
16. HYPOGEUM
17. KNACKER'S OFFICE
18. SCAVENGER STREET
19. THE PUBLIC SCRAPYARD
20. THE MANUFACTORIES
21. CARTEL SCRAPYARD
22. THE GRAND SCRAP MARKET
23. THE JUNKHILL
24. THE BATH HOUSE
25. THE TANNERIES
26. THE BUTCHERIES
27. THE PLANETARIUM
28. CROSS SQUARE
29. CHURCH OF SAINT ZAMUEL
30. BANDING HILL
31. SANATORIUM

A. HOUSE MASEK
B. HOUSE WENDER
C. HOUSE MANTEUFEL
D. HOUSE SALVANO
E. HOUSE JUNGBAU
F. THE OLD FORTRESS
G. THE FLOTSAM
H. HOUSE OF SAINT ZAMUEL
I. THE ORPHANAGE
J. BADGER'S BURROW
K. THE ESTATE OF BOSCH

0 1,000M 2,000M 3,000M

JUSTITIAN I
THE RIGHTEOUS FIST
2598 AD
ROAD TO HARM
CEMETERY OF THE JUDGES
THE GREAT NORTHERN WALL
AMBASSADOR QUARTER
UPTOWN
UPTOWN WALLS
THE CRACK
ROAD TO CHALK BREACH
STEEL MONOLITH
THE CLEFT
TECH-CENTRAL
POLLEN SCRAPPERS' CAMP
OUTSKIRTS
ROAD TO THE SPITAL
PURGAN SCRAPPERS' CAMP
JEHAMMEDAN QUARTER
AFRICAN SCRAPPERS' CAMP
PASTURES

DURA LEX, SED LEX