

Introduction to the Hardestaan Empire

*So you want to be a citizen of the Hardestaan Empire?
What's the Empire like?*

Overview of the Empire

The Empire of Hardestaan has occupied a fairly unique position in the annals of the Isles as a kingdom spanning more than one Isle. Through a policy of diplomacy and conquest, the Emperors expanded their control from a single world (Hardestaanos, also called The Heartworld) to fifteen worlds before their encounters with both the Hive and the Void led to their near-ruin, now known as the Sixteen Year Darkness. After the Magus Baranos detonated The Answer and closed the Gates, the Emperors spent several years reconsolidating their control of Hardestaanos and then began cautiously stretching forth their hands again to encompass other worlds. Over a hundred years have now passed since the Sixteen Year Darkness, and the Empire is once again becoming a force to be reckoned with. Nevertheless, the Hardestaani Emperor lives in fear of the time when his scouts will bring news that the Hive or the Void has been encountered in the newest Isle that they've colonized.

Imperial History

The City-States

Hardestaanos was originally the name of an equatorial country in the Isle that now bears its name. It was a warm, lush valley region that sloped down to its coast. Within the valley were a number of city-states who continually warred on one another. Finally, a great king arose in the city-state of Valandor, named Azarandus. He was a great warrior, but also a man who inspired others to love and follow him. He was born to the hereditary throne of Valandor, but, through diplomacy, he soon established himself as the liege-lord of several other rulers as well. When war came, he fought long and hard against his enemies, and, almost to his surprise, he found himself the high king of the Hardestaani City-States. And with this, he was content.

The Three-Hundred Thirty-Three Year Campaign

After his death, Azarandus' sons bickered and argued as to whom would be high king, and the city-states started to fragment. To everyone's surprise, it was his granddaughter, Adramante, who reconsolidated Hardestaanos and led them outside of their valley to begin conquering the rest of the world.

Adramante seemed to embody the same qualities Azarandus had, for she was both a great diplomat and a great warrior. She was also, however, a woman of great vision and ambition who saw the possibility of one person ruling the entire Isle. With the support of the rulers of the individual city-states, she declared herself Empress of Hardestaanos and laid forth to her heirs and advisors the Three-Hundred and Thirty-Three Year Campaign.

This plan would, she told them, bring the entire Isle under the control of Hardestaanos in that amount of time. A series of heirs followed her plans, but few of them stuck to it exactly, so that the campaign lasted over four hundred years, but, ultimately, it led to one of her descendants, a boy-king named Ulakolos, being the first Emperor of all Hardestaan (as he now named the Isle.) Ulakolos was not a great ruler, for he enjoyed the comforts and luxuries of being Emperor without real thought to the ruling of the empire.

The Empire Grows

Ulakolos' son, Adrakolos, was considered a great Emperor, for, under his wise and learned rule, the Empire began to flourish. Feeling that no one person could not be wise enough or have enough time to properly govern all functions of the Empire, he appointed three advisors to help him – Maladaria, his Archon, to help ensure the physical aspects of the Empire's safety and welfare; Olokorios, his Savant, to help govern the mental aspects of the Empire's education and prosperity; and Goriatria, his Hierophant, to help maintain the Empire's spiritual progress and happiness. Under the wise rulership of their Emperor and his three Advisors, the Empire flourished, and, by following this example, Adrakolos and his heirs made the Empire into a fairly happy and prosperous place. The Empire enjoyed a golden age of peace and affluence.

The office of the Archon kept peace and justice throughout the land, putting down malcontented rebels and anti-social criminals where it was needed. The Archon also took responsibility for construction and repair of Imperial facilities, including the roads and government buildings in various cities. The collective body of the Archon's underlings became known as the Archonium.

The office of the Savant took responsibility for education and research. On the one hand, the Savant saw to it that universities and forums were raised where learned people could teach their specialties to eager students, as well as debate each other. The Savant also saw to it that both science and magic were used to seek out new technologies and knowledge. The collective body of the Savant's underlings became known as the Savantium.

The office of the Hierophant sought to understand the spiritual mysteries of existence, eventually realizing the possible existence of other Isles. The Hierophant sought places of deep spiritual reverence where men and women sought to comprehend the very nature of reality. The Hierophant also pondered on the nature of those spirits that seemed to govern their world – the Fates, the Muses, and the Furies. The Hierophant Goriatria was the first to note the Laws of Three and Four. The collective body of the Hierophant's underlings became known as the Hierophantium.

The Isles

After the Hierophantium made public its theory that there was not one world, but many, the Savantium began to see if there was truth to this, and whether or not doors could be opened to these other worlds. The first Gate, created by the scientist Ailiana, was shortly thereafter mimicked with magic. Through some research, it was discovered that these Gates, when created in specific locations and at specific angles and with specific materials, could lead to different worlds. Ailiana coined the phrase Isles to refer to these

differing worlds, for she saw them as islands on a cosmic sea. She was also responsible

for the discovery that only nine Gates could be opened in any one world and for identifying the natural phenomenon of Rifts. Under the guidance of the Empress Savrianna, groups headed by members of the Archonium, the Savantium, and the Hierophantium began exploring these Isles, sometimes finding them inhabited, and sometimes not. These teams, usually made up of three individuals from each consortium, were referred to as Imperial First-In Survey teams. When they were uninhabited, but habitable, permanent gates were established, and groups of colonists would follow the First-In teams, settling the new Isle. When they were already inhabited, diplomacy or warfare would follow, depending on the nature of those they met, with permanent gates established once the Isle was under Imperial control. In this way, Savrianna began expanding her Empire into other worlds. It was a policy that her heirs would continue.

The Hive

When fifteen Isles had been investigated, and nine Isles made up the great Empire of Hardestaan, there was some nervousness on the part of Laarandor, the current Hierophant. He cautioned Osricast, the current Emperor, that the next Isle would be a source of danger for them, for it would be the sixteenth Isle, and therefore, under the Law of Fours, a source of peril. Osricast ignored his Hierophants advice and allowed the Savantium to seek this sixteenth Isle.

At first, the sixteenth Isle appeared to be ideal. Called Idyll, it was a warm and tropical world, with abundant natural resources, and no native inhabitants. The First-In teams gave it an all-clear status, permanent gates were established, and colonists were sent in. Several years later, however, to the colonists surprise, a Gate opened that was not Imperial in nature. At first, the insect creatures that emerged from them seemed unintelligent and peaceful, then, after some weeks of exploration, they attacked with unparalleled ferocity! The colony was nearly wiped out before a backup Archonium force could be sent from Hardestaan. The Archon's soldiers battled these creatures, which they called the Hive, and slowly forced them back to their gate. They set up a containment perimeter around the Hive's Gate and would not let them out. The Hive occasionally skirmished with the Imperial force, but, on the whole, they were contained.

The Sixteen Years of Darkness

Imperial expansion continued, and it seemed that there was nothing that could stop the Empire from continuing its growth. After all, the Empire had the power of multiple worlds behind it; what could stand against it? It was this arrogance and folly that the Emperor Ulthaniex inherited. When his reign began, twenty-three Isles had been explored, and he wished to make it twenty-seven during his reign, for, under the Law of Threes, twenty-seven is an extremely good number. His Hierophant, Barthanos, cautioned him against this, for there was concern around the twenty-fifth Isle. The office of the Hierophant had begun to see the possibility of a Law of Fives to supplement the Laws of Three and Four. He asked for more time to research before this Twenty-Fifth gate was opened. Ulthaniex promised him more time, but, when a twenty-fourth gate yielded an uninhabitable Isle, Ulthaniex grew impatient and instructed his Savantium to redouble its efforts to discover more Isles. Recalling what had happened with the Hive,

the Archonium and the Hierophantium formed an alliance and entered into rebellion against the Emperor.

The Savantium, finding itself greatly supported by the Emperor, remained loyal, providing him with protection in the form of new weapons and magics. The rebellion was growing in power amongst the people however, who felt that their Emperor was ignoring the lessons taught by the folly of Emperor Osricast. With their support, it seemed likely that the Emperor would be overthrown.

Then, in secret, a member of the Savantium came to the Emperor with the knowledge that the gate to the Twenty-Fifth Isle had been discovered, and that it could be opened at any time. The Emperor traveled to Amarasto, the Isle that this gate had been discovered in, and prepared to escape through it to the new world, if it proved habitable. To his horror, it was not. The twenty-fifth world had been partially devoured by the extradimensional horror known as the Void, and, sensing new warmth and life; the Void flowed into Amarasto, consuming the Emperor and those who controlled the gate. It began expanding out from the gate, consuming all in its path. It corrupted those it allowed to remain in order to have agents to help it through into even more Isles. It grew, and Its hunger grew with It.

In the emergency, Barthanos was made Praetor, a sort of emergency emperor. Under his new instructions, the Archonium, supported by Savantium and Hierophantium alike, combated the slowly growing Void, but found they were unable to defeat it. To make matters worse, the Hive chose this moment to make a concentrated attack on their containers and they began swarming Idyll, conquering and consuming. Before they could be further contained, they began tracing their way back through the permanent gate into other Imperial worlds. Soon, both the Void and the Hive were threatening Hardestaanos itself. This period became known as the Sixteen Years of Darkness.

The Answer

Barthanos had not been idle, however. He had put together and headed a consortium of great wizards and scientists, who constructed a powerful weapon that Barthanos simply called The Answer. He tried, for some time, to decide exactly where to detonate it in order to stop both the Void and the Hive. When word came that the Hive had nearly fought to the gates leading to Hardestaanos, he made a decision. Many people saw him striding through the streets of Imperial Valandor that day, a simple gray box in his arms. Even as the gates started glowing, signaling that the Hive was activating it on the other side, Barthanos stepped into the gate. He detonated The Answer as he stepped through, allowing it to go off in the null-space between the Isles.

The resulting rush of energy caused terrible earthquakes in Hardestaanos and many Hardestaani died that day, but the Heartworld was protected from the invaders. When things settled, the Hardestaani attempted to open their gates to find out what had occurred but they found that no gates worked. Whatever The Answer had done, it had scrambled the very nature of the Isles themselves, jangling the Tapestry at which the Fates were weaving. The Empire was back to being one world, totally cut off from their colonies and leaving many delegations from the races of those other Isles stranded.

A New Beginning

At this time, it was decided that more representation was needed for the people of the Empire. Although an Emperor was chosen by the ancient customs, it was agreed by Emperor and Advisors alike that this Emperor would be advised not only by Archon, Savant, and Hierophant, but by an elected Praetorium, ruled by a Praetor, this office named after Barthanos' assumed title.

The new Empress, Elissoria, decreed that the Emperor or Empress would never completely go heedless of the words of their advisors again, and that the will of the people would be heard as well. In contempt for his foolishness, Emperor Ulthaniex would forever after be recorded as Ulthanex the Idiotic. In respect for what he did, but in pain for his final decision, Barthanos would be renamed Baranos the Answerer.

After much painstaking effort, the Savantium began to discover new Isles again. Cautiously, the Empress Elissoria granted that First-In Survey teams would be sent, but, this time, there would be no permanent gates, especially into the Heartworld itself, in order to prevent the need for another Answer to ever be given. Over the last hundred years, a total of seven more isles have been discovered, with Asylum, the most recent, being the eighth discovered, and, therefore, the ninth Isle. On one hand, there is hope, for nine is three times three, and, therefore, very auspicious under the Law of Threes. On the other hand, there is great nervousness, for nine is also four plus five, and, therefore, potentially bad under the Law of Fours and the Theory of Fives. The tone in the Empire is guarded optimism.

Timeline of the Empire

508 PE Birth of Azarandus the Great.
487 PE Azarandus the Great becomes King of Valandor.
456 PE Azarandus the Great becomes High-King of Hardestaanos.
433 PE Death of High-King Azarandus the Great.
403 PE Adramante the Farseeing claims the Crown. She names herself Empress.
402 PE Empress Adramante the Farseeing outlines the 333 Year Campaign.

0 ER Emperor Ulakolos the Selfish crowned.

37 ER Emperor Adrakolos the Wise crowned.
39 ER Tests of Worth put into place for future Emperors. First Archon, Savant, and Hierophant named.
237 ER Savant Alianna discovers Gates during reign of Empress Savrianna the Visionary.
661 ER Birth of Osricast the Unwise.
683 ER Crowning of Emperor Osricast the Unwise.
688 ER Gate to Idyll opened.
692 ER The Hive invade Idyll.
694 ER The Hive gate is contained by the Archonium.
810 ER Birth of Baranor the Answerer.
853 ER Gate to the VoidIsles opened. Death of Emperor Ulthanex the Idiotic.
Beginning of the Sixteen Years of Darkness.
869 ER The Answer. Death of Baranor the Answerer. Forming of the Praetori Council.
870 ER Crowning of Empress Elissoria the Hasty.

910 ER Birth of Riekendor the Mapmaker.
928 ER Crowning of Emperor Riekendor the Mapmaker.
968 ER Birth of Issendria the Poet.
998 ER Death of Emperor Riekendor the Mapmaker.
999 ER Crowning of Empress Issendria the Poet. Her advisors are Archon Zuthrias Sedrian (an old general, who was Riekendor's Archon as well), Savant Mythandiar (her older brother), and Hierophant Curunorion Snowhawk (a daylight elf).
1005 ER Present Day.

Government

Overview

An Emperor or Empress, who is chosen by tests of worth, rules the Empire of Hardestaan. The Archon, the Savant, and the Hierophant advise the Emperor or Empress. They are chosen during the same tests as the Emperor. Their individual consortiums advise the Archon, the Savant and the Hierophant in turn, and by the Praetori Council. The Praetori Council is chosen by popular election, and they, in turn, choose their leader by simple vote. Each group has a certain degree of power in their individual bailiwick, but all are ultimately answerable to the Emperor/Empress.

The Emperor or Empress

Originally, the title of Emperor or Empress was intended to be a hereditary title, but, ultimately, the Empire has become something of a meritocracy. When the Emperor passes away, the Tests of Worth are administered. These tests may be taken by anyone who considered themselves worthy of the title, but the most common applicants are the Archon, the Savant, the Hierophant, the Provincial Governors, and the family of the former ruler.

The Emperor or Empress has a great deal of authority, but, after the Sixteen Years of Darkness, the title has definitely been lowered in power. Their main power lies in a sort of "Veto" ability, as, in theory, all are answerable to the Imperial Throne. Ultimately, however, the Emperor or Empress really only has as much power as those loyal to them will allow them to claim. To date, this has not been a problem.

The Archon

The Archon must balance the duties of a general with those of a civic planner. As in the past, the Archon's office is served by the Archonium and is responsible for the physical welfare of the Empire. The Archonium builds and maintains roads and government buildings, marshals a soldiery, conducts warfare when necessary, and keeps the peace.

Although soldiers are most commonly associated with this office, the Archonium is also made up of judges, jailers, sheriffs, and wizards who specialize in the physical arts. During the Tests of Worth, the Archon is chosen as the one who most ably displays physical prowess.

The Savant

The Savant's office is that of the mind. The Savant must be a teacher, researcher, and

student. The Savantium is an Imperial body devoted to learning, education, and research. The Savantium builds and maintains universities, as well as forums for debate and Imperial research facilities.

The Savantium prizes scientists and wizards alike. The office is made up of scientists, those who study mental magicks, philosophers, and thinkers of all stripes. During the Tests of Worth, the Savant is chosen as the one who most ably displays mental prowess.

The Hierophant

The Hierophant must be a philosopher, a student of mysteries, and a mystic. The office is concerned with the spiritual wellbeing of the nation, as well as the Empire's relationships with the spirit world. The Hierophant is most commonly called upon to intervene between the spirits and mortals, while the Hierophant him or her self often ponders upon the Isles' very nature, and its relationship with the Furies, Fates, and Muses.

Healers and Mystics who study the spiritual magicks are most common members of the Hierophant, but it's open to any with a keen interest in the spirituality of the Empire. During the Tests of Worth, the Hierophant is chosen as the one who shows the most spiritual awareness.

The Praetori Council

Members of the Praetori Council are referred to as Councilors and are elected by the people of the Isles. Anyone may become a Praetori Councilor, regardless of skill or profession. The Heartworld is allowed to elect twenty-seven councilors, while worlds that are officially part of the Empire are allowed to elect nine, and colony worlds are allowed to elect three. Because of the Gate situation, however, it is often difficult for other worlds to have their Councilors present. As a result, most Councilors for these outlying worlds remain in Hardestaanos and know what's happening only through reports that they receive. It's sort of a no-win situation.

The Council elects one member who is called the Praetor. The Praetor acts as a chancellor, governing the Council and reporting on its findings directly to the Emperor, the Archon, the Savant, and the Hierophant. The Praetor does not have any more voting power than any other Councilor, but he or she does get the chance to put his or her own personal swing on the information that's provided to the Emperor.

Provincial Governor

Each Imperial Province is presided over by a Governor. This figure is chosen by the Tests of Worth, just as the Emperor is, and chooses three advisors, based on the Tests, who are referred to as the Provincial Archon, the Provincial Savant, and the Provincial Hierophant. The Governor meets with the Praetori Councilors for the Province and reciprocal advice and governmental policy is exchanged. Corruption in the Councilors can be countered, as the Governor can call for a re-election of Councilors every year, if necessary. If all Councilors are unanimous, however, they can call for a re-Testing of the governor, so the two bodies exist in a delicate balance.

Colonial Governor

A Colonial Governor is exactly as described under Provincial Governor, except that they rule a Colony, rather than a Province. Colonies cannot elect as many Councilors to the Praetori Council, so they are often closer with the Governor than Provincial Councilors might be.

What's it like to belong to an Imperial Guild?

For many centuries, now, the Empire of Hardestaan has worked with the great Imperial Guilds to promote harmony in the Empire and the professional development of her citizens. At the order of her Imperial Majesty, Issendria the Poet, I am setting down a series of notes on the structure of the guild system, their rules and structures. It is my hope that this will bring to all Imperial Citizens a sense of understanding of this complex system.

Guild History

Originally, the guilds were simple organizations of craftsmen gathering together to share best practices, protect the traditions of their trade, and barter needed materials between each other. As time went on, they began to formalize their organization and to gain in power. Despite their growing authority, they remained largely ignored by the Imperial Throne until the Guild Wars of 451, when the Armoursmith's Guild withheld armor from Imperial soldiers to force the Empire to yield them concessions. Although this ended very bloodily for both sides, it also demonstrated the powers the guilds could bring to bear. Under advice from the Savantium, the Imperial Throne entered into negotiations with the Guilds, fully cementing them under Imperial Rule. From that day forward, the Mercenaries Guild was adopted into the Archonium, the Mercantile Guild was adopted into the Savantium, and the Mage's Guild was adopted into the Hierophantium. Cassano de Scola became the first **Agent-in-Extraordinary** to the Imperial Throne. These agents who purposefully balance their pursuits amongst matters physical, mental and spiritual, act as go-betweens amongst the various guilds and the Imperial Throne, helping to smooth matters and end conflicts.

Guild Structure

Each Guild is divided into 9 unions, as follows:

Mages Guild

- 1 Alchemist's Union
- 2 Anthropologist's Union
- 3 Herbalist's Union
- 4 Psionacist's Union
- 5 Scholar's Union
- 6 Seer's Union
- 7 Spellcrafter's Union
- 8 Technoanalyst's Union
- 9 Terraformer's Union

Mercenaries Guild

- 1 Assassin's Union
- 2 Attache's Union
- 3 Communication Union
- 4 Enforcer's Union
- 5 Guardsman's Union
- 6 Hunter's Union
- 7 Military Union
- 8 Special Ops Union
- 9 Bodyguard's Union

Merchants Guild

- 1 Acquisitor's Union
- 2 Armoursmith's Union
- 3 Artisan's Union
- 4 Geologist's Union
- 5 Guncrafter's Union
- 6 Metallurgist's Union
- 7 Tanner's Union
- 8 Toolcrafter's Union
- 9 Weaponsmith's Union

In ideal circumstances, the leadership of the guild is organized following the model of Imperial rule. At the top of the Guild is the **Guildmaster**, who is either appointed by the previous, retiring Guildmaster or else elected by a simple majority vote if the previous head is unable to name a successor. The Guildmaster is responsible for the overall wellbeing of the guild, and, if the guild fails, it is the Guildmaster who will answer for it, whether it is to the Hardestaan branches of the guild, or else to the Praetori Council.

Under the Guildmaster are three advisors that mirror the structure of the Praetori Council. The **Guardian** is responsible for all matters that affect the guild's physical structure, including upkeep, protection, and management of money and resources. The Guardian is supported in turn by the **Custode**, the **Treasurer**, and the **Quartermaster**. The Custode administers the upkeep of guild grounds and tools, the Treasurer tracks guild funds, and the quartermaster tracks guild resources.

The **Prelate** handles matters of the spirit, and is responsible for all spiritual matters, ritual castings and issues of protocol and diplomacy. The Rector, the Ritemaster and the Punctilion aid the Prelate. The Rector gives advice on matters of conscience and the eidolae, the Ritemaster makes sure all rituals are performed properly, and the Punctilion makes certain rules and protocols are properly followed.

Matters of creativity and theory are under the aegis of the **Docent**. The Docent handles mental matters, advances new theories and methods, and keeps up to date with developments in other Guildhouses and makes sure this information is shared. The Phrenist, the Advocate and the Auditor aid the Docent. The Phrenist handles all matters

of psionics, the Advocate makes certain new theories are given proper investigation, and the Auditor travels to other guildhalls and brings back best practices.

Guild Laws

Cassano de Scola, as the first Agent-in-Extraordinary to the Imperial Throne, helped the guilds codify a set of nine rules that the guilds operate under. These rules are grouped into three sets of three based on the virtues of Loyalty, Dedication, and Respect. They are considered as ranked in order of importance, starting at the top and working one's way down.

Loyalty

1. Loyalty to Empire. As Imperially chartered and supported guilds, the Imperial Guilds are expected to have the good of the Empire as their highest ideal.
2. Loyalty to Guild. If one is to help one's guild thrive, one must show loyalty to one's guild above all other agencies. A guildsman who does not help his guild could help it best by removing himself from it.
3. Loyalty to Hierarchy. The officers of the Guild cannot operate without the loyalty of the guildsmen. The guildsmen are expected to support their officers.

An interesting aside to this is that it is expected that these loyalties will be treated in this order. If one feels that an order from the guild's officers is detrimental to the guild, then one must disobey one's officers and possibly seek to have them removed. Conversely, if one feels that the overall actions of one's guild are somehow detrimental to the Empire at large, then it is one's Imperial Duty to defy one's guild, possibly to the extent of alerting the Archonium to possible acts of treason.

Dedication

1. Dedication to Guild Obligation. This is the rule under which guild dues and duties are generally lumped. One is expected to do one's work and pay one's dues.
2. Dedication to Guild Sovereignty. One is expected to keep all secrets of guild techniques within the guild and not teach them to those outside the guild.
3. Dedication to Guild Success. If guildsmen are not committed to the guild's overall success, then the guild cannot hope to stand.

The rules of dedication are believed to fall in logical order. If one pays one's dues, does one's work, and protects the guild's trade, then success should be assured.

Respect

1. Respect to Those Above. One is expected to show respect to one's officers, as well as to the nobility of the Empire and any duly elected representatives of the Empire.
2. Respect to Each Other. A guild with feuding in its ranks cannot hope to achieve anything. It is best to embrace each other as cousins-in-craft.

3. Respect to Appearances. Regardless of what goes on behind closed doors, appearing as if one respects one's guild heads and fellows guildsmen in public is the best policy. Otherwise, the guild appears fractious and divided.

This last rule causes a lot of debate, but it is essentially considered to be an extension of the family etiquette of the Empire: one can criticize one's family in private all one wishes, but one should not do so in public, or one brings one's family shame. Likewise, someone who complains of a guildsman to another member of a guild shouldn't expect commiseration. They should expect the guildsman to solidly defend a fellow member of the guild.

As a curious historical note, on Cassano's deathbed, he was asked what principle he had followed as regards to personal success and his own experiences with the guilds. He smiled a sly smile well known to his friends and croaked out, "If you want to get to the top, start at the bottom and work your way up." Some were dismayed that his last words were such a straightforward homily. Others, however, believe that what he meant was that, if one wishes to gain personal success, one should reverse the rules of the guilds and follow them. This rather treasonous idea would place appearances as the most important rule and loyalty to the Empire as the least important. Needless to say, no Imperial Guild would ever sanction such a scurrilous idea.

What were the Isles that comprised the Empire and which ones are part of the Empire now?

The Old Empire

Overview

The Empire, in its heyday, ruled over fifteen Isles, including Hardestaanos, was at war or in diplomatic relations with three more Isles, and knew of six others that were uninhabitable. When the seventh uninhabitable world, a world mostly consumed by the Void, was discovered, it nearly destroyed them. This section will describe the Empire and the known Isles at the time that Emperor Ulthanex the Idiotic, including those that were uninhabitable or uncontrolled by the Empire.

Hardestaanos

Also known as the Heartworld, Hardestaanos is, of course, the Heart of the Empire. It is a pleasant Isle, with little seasonal variance, placid seas, and, in its youth, an abundance of natural resources. It is mostly made up of islands, separated either by narrow sea-lanes or wide, rolling oceans. Its polar caps are not frozen, though they are significantly cooler than other areas, and its equatorial regions are extremely tropical. Although the Isle itself was fairly placid, small-scale skirmishes were very common in the time of King Azarandus. He, however, began the larger-scale conquests that ultimately led to the Empire becoming a multiple-Isle-spanning government.

Ships and shipbuilding form the spine of the Heartworld's transportation system,

although the Archonium has also covered the larger landmasses in fine roads. At this point, the Empire has exhausted most of Hardestaanos' resources to the point where it *needs* more Isles in order to survive. This might serve to explain Empress Elissoria's willingness to endanger matters by reopening the gates.

Faerindae (Faerine)

The Isle known as Faerine is remarkable primarily as the homeland of the various species of elves. Imperial surveys have evaluated Faerine as a world of advanced geological age and moderate axial tilt. This has resulted in a moderate climate and a landscape dominated by rich oceans. Notice regarding the lack of mountainous regions has caused speculation that this is due to a natural erosion pattern indicating support for the believed geological age of the world and some concern for its continued ability to support its population. If this is true, then Faerine is a slowly dying world. The indigenous population, made up of various species of what have been termed 'elves', inhabits the single, large landmass just above the equatorial line. Faerine was the first Isle discovered by the Empire, and, though there were some small clashes at first, it joined the Empire willingly as its first Province. Faerine is also remarkable in that it is one of the worlds which was part of the Old Empire and which is also part of the Current Empire.

Mistymere

The world of Mistymere seemed ideal for people to inhabit, but, strangely, none did, until the Empire discovered it. It was a world of majestic, soaring mountains with pools of strange silvery water that cascaded down miles of mountain peak to become mist below, giving the world its name. It was thoroughly inhabited and explored by Imperial forces that discovered that, curiously, it had no oceans. The water table was entirely made up of the cascades from the peaks and their rivers and great lakes. It remains designated as the Third Isle of the Old Empire.

Maelstrom

The fourth world was designated as Maelstrom, for it was constantly besieged by whirlwinds and tidal waves. It seemed to have great wide oceans, with fewer landmasses, and the storms that tore and scoured the land seemed to make all colonization impossible. The ferocity of the storms made it impossible for the Survey team to determine if the world was round, flat, amorphous or any other shape. Nevertheless, although no settlers were ever left on Maelstrom, First-In Survey teams did mine the seemingly bottomless seas for natural resources.

Despair

The bleak terrain of Despair was a cause for some sadness and concern for the Empire. Two uninhabitable worlds in a row suggested that perhaps they were doomed to find no more worlds that could be made part of the Imperial body. Despair was said to be made up entirely of fire and volcanic ash, with rivers of lava and the sky darkened into Eternal Night by the constant eruptions of stark volcanoes. It is the Fifth World of the Old Empire.

Tynara

Tynara is a place of cold and wind, for the most part, and its white and distant sun,

looking more like an oversized star, gives little warmth to those who live there. Geothermal energy, escaping from vents in deep canyons, give rise to the almost underground civilization of the pale humans known as the Sevilean Mahrandor. The Sevilean have adapted to the lack of magic on Tynara by mastering technology. They fight with energy weapons and mental powers, and they have converted geothermal energy to electricity, using this to power their small, cell-like cities. Despite their technological aspects, they maintain great respect and love for their spiritual powers. They eagerly embraced the Empire, seeking escape from the bleakness of their life. It is the Sixth Isle of the Old Empire.

Burr Tthok

Burr Tthok is an extremely turbulent world, subject to severe atmospheric conditions and a slightly higher gravity. Chains of mountains cutting across turbulent small seas dominate the surface of the planet. Burr Tthok has 3 small moons that cause variable tidal conditions and contribute to the frequent storms. The mountains are constantly swept with high winds and driving rains. Originally thought to be uninhabitable by the Empire when it was first discovered; as its rocky soil did not seem capable of sustaining life, further exploration found that farmable land and, indeed, small farms, seemed to exist at the bottom of certain canyons and ravines. Eventually, the First-In teams exploring it discovered the reclusive inhabitants, the people the Empire know as the Cyndir, the Tthun and Mandret. Almost the entire mantle of this Isle is warrened with the delving of the stone-folk. Many Cyndir go their whole lives without seeing the light of the sun, and they seem quite content with this. Burr Tthok has two major bits of interest. Firstly, it is the only other world (with Faerine) to be a part of both the old and the New Empire, and, secondly, it is the only Isle to discover Hardestaanos, instead of the other way around, thanks to the magic and inventions of the Mandret. It is designated as the Seventh Isle of the Old Empire.

Hjorsten

Like many of the Isles their discovered at this time, the Empire worried, at first, that this cold and icy world, with its seemingly endless winters and brief summers, could not be inhabited by humans. To their surprise, they soon met the inhabitants of the Eighth Isle, a cold people called the Volsungr, bold barbarian warrior tribes that follow their spirit totems. The Volsungr live a bleak life, full of clan wars and ice storms that bring a frozen death. Perhaps because of their ferocity in eking out an existence, they have repeatedly (and successfully) repelled both the diplomatic overtures and the invading armies of the Empire. They claim to serve powers native to their world, including a male version of the Furies, and they revere the Fates as the Norns. The Muses seem almost completely alien to them.

Madrazha

The steaming jungle world found as the Ninth Isle was discovered to also be inhabited, but this time, by a wide variety of peoples. Humans lived in it, with deep brown skin and black or red hair, calling themselves the Mazari, but there were also tribes of lizardfolk who built great pyramids in the middle of the lush jungles. Savage tribes of orcfolk called the gorogol were encountered here, dressed in the skins of great reptiles, decorated with fangs and claws. This Isle marks the first time the Empire met with orcfolk, but, sadly,

not the last. The Mazari gladly entered into pacts with the Empire, and they fought the lizardfolk and the gorogol.

Mileas

The Tenth Isle was called Mileas, and, at first, the Empire made diplomatic relations with a spider-like folk called the Arachine they found there. To their horror, however, they soon found that the Arachine were blood-drinking slavers who had been committing genocide against the humans that had been the Isle's masters. The Empire chose to free these people, who called themselves the Traberck. These grim and stone-skinned folk make good allies to the rest of the Empire, but there remains a palpable anger around them. The Traberck were one of the few peoples who were not at all saddened when their homeworld was lost to The Answer.

Tinarok

Several cultures of humans make their homes in Tinarok, a small, cool world with craggy coasts. The most numerous by far are the Caledor, known by some as the Highlanders. They rule the cool northern territories of their continent, and they seem content to do so. The Gaelenar rule the western lands, jovial and courteous. The Cymri rule the southeastern third, with their lilting voices and pleasant manners. The Caledor revere the Furies most strongly, and the Gaelenar pay their homage to the Muses, while the philosophical Cymri follow the ways of the Fates. These people are jointly ruled by the Ardari Council, which is made up of three chiefs from each land. Tinarok is the Eleventh Isle.

Amarasto

In some ways, Amarasto is a gentle twin to Maelstrom. Although there are only small, scattered archipelagoes of islands, and deep, great, wide oceans, the storms seem much fewer and much milder. The people of Amarasto have theorized that their Isle, the Twelfth, was once a normal world, for they sometimes find wood, seemingly ripped up from antediluvian underwater forests. They use these trunks to build ships, which sail across the oceans. Some groups of ships have linked together to form vast ship-cities that sail as the wind and water carry them across the face of their world.

Core

The Thirteenth World is one of the strangest that has been discovered. At first, the First-In Survey team assumed they were in tunnels, but, slowly, they came to realize that they were inside a vast artificial world floating in nothingness. This technological world was, eerily, empty, and the Savantium suspected it was a world which was once linked to the Hive and which has been emptied of life. Whole hydroponics stations have been reactivated and are used by the colonists of Core, who took up rooms in the abandoned cabins and set up sophisticated defense and surveillance systems to protect them from whatever took the last inhabitants.

Bleak

Made up of vast needles of sharp rock with only a few thin-aired plateaus to provide a place to build, this world was uninhabited and it was decided to allow the Fourteenth Isle to remain so.

Sharadar

The Fifteenth Isle seemed deserted, and the Survey team wondered if they discovered a new Core, when the inhabitants began to communicate with them. These people, the Psiphans, were creatures that had evolved beyond the Physical plane and existed as wholly Mental and Spiritual entities. They were friendly enough, although they could not physically aid the Colonists, but this world became oft visited by Savantium and Hierophantium members who spoke with the Psiphans to discuss theories and ideas. Unfortunately, the Psiphans could not leave their Isle due to their nature, and it is unknown what this people's fate is, given the activities of the Hive and Void.

Idyll

In many ways, Idyll reminded the First-In team of Mistymere. It seemed perfect for humans to inhabit, but none seemed to dwell there. Its rolling hills were perfect for farming, and its longer warm seasons allowed for more crops to mature. It was a perfect breadbasket for the Empire, until the coming of the Hivegate. After the war with the Hive, Idyll was no longer seen as perfect. Although the Hivegate was contained, the losses the Empire sustained were high, and they were leery of losing so much again. It remained an Imperial Province, but settling there was not encouraged. Ultimately, the Sixteenth world was overrun by the Hive during the Sixteen Years of Darkness.

Aelryth

The eternally dark nightworld of Aelryth is one with a strange relationship with the Empire. Although officially the Seventeenth world was made part of the Empire, its inhabitants all seemed to have different opinions about what that meant. The most numerous and psionically powerful people, the Sicrasleinn, welcomed Imperial organization openly, while their less influential counterparts, the Crosklavi, seemed more interested in escaping to other Imperial worlds or getting Imperial aid for their own political struggles. While these two races dominated the small series of islands that are Aelryth's only habitable regions, there were others present as well who did not seem to understand or show interest in Imperial citizenship. Ultimately many of the Crosklavi fled Aelryth despite the pain they suffered from the sunlit lands of other worlds, while only a handful of the Sicrasleinn accepted invitations to explore other Isles. It is believed that some of the other natives of Aelryth may have escaped before the Isle was lost, but they were not numerous. The fate of Aelryth remains uncertain.

Lycaenum

This crystal world was declared uninhabitable by the First-In Survey team, for it has no good sun, no soil, and no way to obviously make foodstuffs. All this, combined with the fact that technology does not work there seemed to make it useless. The Imperial Chroniclers, however, claimed this world as their own, and they used their strange knowledge to store information in the crystal matrices there, making the Eighteenth Isle a sort of giant record of all history. All members of the Chroniclers carry a crystal from this Isle with them, which they claim allows them to transmit information back to Lycaenum.

Fang

When the Empire found the Nineteenth world, they were distressed to find that orckind seemed to teem and multiply over its twilit surface. The orcs, who are divided into many, many tribes, claim that Fang is their Homeworld, and it seems a hard fact to dispute. At the time of the Answer, the Empire was still nominally at war with Fang, so little is known of it. It was known to be mountainous and inhospitable, which might explain the orcs desire to move to other worlds.

Aerie

The Twentieth World is not a planet at all, seemingly, but a strange and vast cloudscape, made up of many layers. It has been theorized that it is a gas giant, but this has yet to be proven. Graceful birdfolk called the K'kree lived in delicate fairytale castles in the semisolid clouds, flying from place to place. Curiously, the K'kree seemed to revere those elves they met and claimed that they were watching over the castles until their rulers, whom the elves apparently resembled, returned. Several elves moved here and were treated like kings. Sadly, no K'kree are currently reported to exist within the Empire, and it is feared that this graceful folk may be extinct.

Parch

Three suns hang low and sullen over the dry deserts of Parch and harsh patches of seemingly artificially radioactive hell-lands echo their radiation on the Twenty-First World's surface. Needless to say, it didn't take long for the First-In team to declare this world uninhabitable. Explorations, however, suggested that there had been civilizations there many years in the past. Sadly, its mysteries may now be gone forever.

Varikiis

It is unknown what the world of Varikiis was like in its youth, but, now, the entire planet has been covered by a vast urban sprawl. The inhabitants grow their food artificially, mostly refining them to pastes that are taken in capsules, or if possible taken intravenously, for the human inhabitants of Varikiis spend almost their entire existences logged into the Global Communications System known as the Grid. In this artificial world, which mostly exists on a Mental Plane, they can look like anything, do anything, and, in fact, BE anything they wish. The Twenty-Second world is now ruled by massive Artificial Intelligences who, in fact, appear in the Grid as huge, sprawling Dragons. The Dragons were in Diplomatic relations with the Empire when the Answer happened.

Niemas

Of all the worlds that were cut off from the Heartworld, it can be said that no people mourn the loss of their homeworld than those who lived in Niemas. These people, called the Gypsies, Bedouins, and Nomads, quest endlessly for their lost home. They describe their world as a beautiful place, full of lush warm forests and hot, sweeping, jewel-like deserts, with wide, rolling oceans to be explored, and tropical islands to be discovered. Niemas was the Twenty-Third Isle, and it was not fully explored by First-In team, so little is known of it, save what the People of the Blood tell us.

Cruel

The Isle called Cruel was only briefly known of in Imperial lore. It was discovered during the reign of Ulthanex the Idiotic, and it is only known that it was considered uninhabitable. The little information that the Savantium gathered suggested that it was a frozen world, as cold at its warmest as the polar caps of most other Isles. If there were inhabitants, it seems unlikely that they would've found the rest of the Empire comfortable, and vice-versa.

Folly

The twenty-fifth Isle was dominated by the Void, and nothing is known of its climate or geography. There were no survivors of the team of savants that accompanied Ulthanex to his doom. In Imperial lore, it has simply been denoted as Ulthanex's Folly, or just Folly.

The Reborn Empire

Overview

The Empire now knows of nine worlds that it is connected to, including Hardestaanos. Of those worlds, one is uninhabitable, two are in diplomatic relations, three are provinces, and two are colonies, all presided over by Hardestaanos itself. This section will describe these worlds, including their relations to the Empire.

Hardestaanos

Of course, the Heartworld is still the most key element of the Empire as the place of its birth and the heart of its government. As time has continued, the Empire developed more of its Heartworld into city, which means that its natural resources have been greatly depleted. The Answer was a very hard thing for the Empire to deal with, for, while it ended the attacks of the Hive and the Void, it also cut off the Empire from the resources it so desperately needed to survive. This need is one of the reasons the Empire has struggled forward as it has.

Kwaelon / Hirokumi

The Second World of the Reborn Empire is a very intriguing one. The entire world has been discovered to be on the back of a vast Tortoise who swims along across a cosmic ocean. The lands of the Second World are torn by war between two great Empires, while a third faction remains carefully neutral. The Kingdom of Fu Lan (who call their Isle Kwaelon) have mastered the magicks and martial arts of the Spiritual path and are led by a Philosopher-King with his army of warriors, known as the Brass Men. They find themselves at war with the Empire of Narakuma, led by the Emperor of the Crescent Moon. He and his samurai, who have mastered the Physical ways, call their world Hirokumi. Meanwhile the peaceful monks of the path of Hai Du Lac continue their mastery of the ways of the Mind. Until one clear victor arises, the Empire continues a wait-and-see policy.

Faerindae (Faerine)

The Second Isle of the Old Empire is the Third Isle of the Reborn Empire. Little has changed in Faerine, and it seems that, other than a skirmish with warriors of the Hive, they escaped the doom that seemed likely to engulf them.

Constantius

The Fourth Isle of the Reborn Empire is the world of Constantius. Balanced, as the Heartworld itself is, between magic and science, the Constantinians are a fairly peaceful people, enjoying the fruits of what moderately advanced science and magic can bring. Steam-driven railways bring gold, jewels, and magickal treasures from the far reaches of the Constantine Kingdom to the Faerie Queen, a supposedly immortal sorceress who is never seen unmasked by her people. It is assumed that this immortality is false, and that different people of similar build have all been the Queen, using the mask to project the image of immortality. This convention is accepted by the Constantinians. The Kingdom is currently in Diplomatic Relations with the Empire.

Ta’abu-djeser

The fifth Isle is the desert world of Ta’abu-djeser. Vast oceans of sand stretch beneath its triple white suns, covering most of this hot, arid Isle and broken by the occasional jagged spine of one of its long chains of mountain ranges. Running along the tallest string of mountains called the Hemhayet is a deep trench counter bordered by cliffs and sand dunes. This is the Sebakem Oasis, an opulent river valley winding almost a mile below the desert floor and stretching nearly 300 miles in length. The Sebakem Oasis is home to the Kingdom of Tabudjir, and its shining white and gold capitol city Iunu is ruled by their God-King, whom they call Nebsarah. The Tabuji people have two main societal classes; the warrior/worker caste called the Mesurah and the artisan/scribe caste called the Hebeteru. The Tabuji welcomed the Imperial representatives openly, treating them to feasts and festivals. They seem to regard the use of gates as a divine power and therefore regarded the First-In team as divine messengers. The Nebsarah welcomed Imperial Provincial status for Tabudjir and political relations and trade with the Tabuji were quickly established. An Imperial holding was granted north of Iunu for colonization, and many of the Tabuji both moved to the colony and began to travel between Isles. However, not all of Ta’abu-djser’s native population was pleased with the Imperial presence. The nomadic desert people called the Khaseti seem indifferent to Imperial citizenship, though intrigued by using the Gates. The real problem lies with the mountain tribes called Kerimedu, or stormspeakers. They are extremely xenophobic and highly aggressive towards off-world intruders. While the Tabuji are welcoming, relocation to this Isle is permitted only with caution, as the constant threat of war with the Kerimedu is a real danger. Intriguingly, this is one of a rare group of worlds where neither magic nor technology hold sway, but, rather, the mastery of psionics is the key to power.

Systril

When the Imperial First-In Survey team arrived on Systril, the Sixth Isle of the Reborn Empire, they saw no intelligent life, and they set up a small outpost. The inhabitants of this world reacted badly to the intrusion and a second team was soon sent in to salvage what they could of the first team’s mission. They ultimately discovered that this lush, beautiful world was entirely alive, and that its various animals were capable of taking

near human forms – the Anima. So far, the Empire gently considers this a colony, but they're not sure what role it will take in their long-term destiny.

Inferno

The Seventh Isle of the Reborn Empire greatly resembles Despair, the Fifth Isle of the Old Empire. It is a hot, volcanic place, considered uninhabitable by the Imperial First-In Survey teams. We may never know whether those two worlds were one and the same.

Burr Tthok

Only one of three worlds (including Hardestaanos) to be a part of both the Old Empire and the Reborn Empire, the homeworld of the Tthun and Mandret is the Eighth Isle of the Reborn Empire. Unlike Faerine however, they suffered greatly in their war with the Hive. Apparently a very large number of the insect warriors entered Burr Tthok and the Tthun were hard-pressed to deal with them, cut off from the rest of the empire. The Cyndir as a whole have grown somewhat bitter about what they view as the Empire's desertion of them, and, although officially they have returned as a Province of the Empire, they still grumble a bit, with an eye towards greater independence.

Asylum

Little is known, as yet, about the Empire's latest colony. Time will tell whether its discovery will lead to the good or the ill.

What are the beliefs of the Empire?

The Numerology of Goriatria and Baranos

Overview

Goriatria was the first Hierophant of the Empire, appointed by Emperor Adrakolos the Wise in 39 ER after passing the Tests of Worth and being judged the greatest in the spiritual ways. She is said to have possessed a keen sense of the spiritual mysteries, and she researched long and hard as well as meditated upon these matters. It is even said that she was able to communicate, in some way, with the High Spirits. From her teachings, we gain the Laws of Threes and Fours and our modern concept of Death.

Baranos, called the Answerer, was the magus who detonated the Answer in 869 ER, thus saving the Heartworld from the ravaging of the Hive and the Void. Amongst his many accomplishments was a definition of the Enumeration - the system of numerology that is used today to plan Imperial Strategy.

The Law of Threes

"The Universe is divided on a tripartite line. All things may ultimately be broken down on an axis of three: Physical, Mental, and Spiritual."

This axiom, set down by Goriatria, is key to the Enumeration. Her original Enumeration, then, is as follows:

- 1. Unity. The Self.**
- 2. Division. Chaos.**
- 3. Balance. Order.**

She postulated that, as all things could be divided into threes, things based on the number three were the most ordered and complete. She included humanity in this state, for they were, during her time, the only race known with certainty to possess a physical, mental, and spiritual being.

The Law of Fours

"When an item and being somehow comes to possess a fourth aspect, such as a divided mind, gained through madness, it causes the chaos of two to rebound in upon itself. As a result, conflict is sure to follow."

Her second axiom, then, is the basis for the following Enumeration:

- 1. Unity. The Self.**
- 2. Division. Chaos.**
- 3. Balance. Order.**
- 4. Chaos redoubled. Conflict.**

This Enumeration was the cause for the concerns of Laarandor, the Hierophant at the time of Emperor Osricast the Unwise. Osricast ignored his advice and moved hastily to colonize Idyll, a policy that cost the Empire dearly when that world was invaded by the Hive. It should be noted, also, that the Hive appear to be the first entities we have encountered based on the principle of Four (as they possess both a normal mind and a group mind), and, therefore, a creature we will likely always be in conflict with.

The Theory of Fives

Armed with the knowledge that the numbers one through four possessed particular significance, Baranos the Answerer, during his time as Hierophant, desired to determine what significance the number five might possess. His first idea was to look at the Isles that had been discovered as fifth, tenth, fifteenth, and twentieth. Despair was certainly not a pleasant beginning as the fifth world, and the stark world of Mileas as the tenth world did not seem to bode well either. Sharadar did not seem bad, but Baranos pondered whether or not the Law of Threes might have tempered it. Aerie, also, did not seem to bode ill, but there was the disconcerting fact that there seemed to be no actual planet near Aerie - simply a cloudscape.

Baranos, through magickal experiments, came to the conclusion that Five might represent a sort of magickal Entropy, or Hunger. When the Empire seemed on the verge of opening a Gate to the twenty-fifth world, Baranos cautioned the Emperor Ulthanex to allow for a much longer period of study through the portals. The Emperor, however, laughed off Baranos' concerns, ultimately causing the schism in the Imperial government and the coming of the Void into the Isles of the Empire. Baranos became convinced that Five was the number of Entropy and Destruction, and that the Void was somehow an Entity based on a principle of Five, though he was never able to find a way to prove this.

The Enumeration

During the research of The Answer, Baranos' side project was to work on a new Enumeration, building on the work of Goriatria. His new Enumeration was as follows:

- 1. Unity. The Self.**
- 2. Division. Chaos.**
- 3. Balance. Order.**
- 4. Chaos redoubled. Conflict.**
- 5. Entropy. Destruction.**

With this model established, he theorized out further.

6. Harmony. Good Fortune.

As a doubled three, or Chaos tempered by Order, six seemed to suggest good luck and a harmonious way.

7. Great Change.

As the sum of three and four, seven seemed a sort of neutral state. As Order meeting Chaos, Baranos theorized it meant great changes, though not necessarily good or bad, or perhaps both.

8. Ill Fortune.

Chaos times Chaos times Chaos. It seemed obviously to bode ill.

9. A number of great power, for good or for ill.

Nine on one hand was Balance times Balance. On the other hand, it was also the sum of Conflict and Destruction. Baranos felt that nine was the most potent of numbers, but that its presence might be for good or for ill.

This whole concept, the Enumeration up to Nine, is seriously looked at by most Imperials before making any significant decisions. Asylum's place as the ninth Isle of the Reborn Empire, therefore, is considered of great significance. Many are watching to see whether its fortune be good or ill.