

## Overview of the Reaches of the Grail Empire.

### **Introduction.**

Your Highness,

As you may be aware the legends of our lands are rare and wondrous to behold. They are also complex and as such it has become the custom to deliver to the current heir of our fair realm all the information he shall need to make any decisions that could arise from affairs of state. This is the first of such documents that yourself shall be treated to, each dealing with an aspect of the lands that you will on day rule. Further it is expected that copies of all but the most secret of information be made available to yourself in order to practice the art of statecraft and the peculiarities of governance of the people. It is also intended that as laid down by King Artos that any decision you make shall be held to scrutiny against that of the current King, with the ramifications laid out as explicitly as possible.

*Jaredd a' duLaque*

Master Jaredd a' duLaque,  
Lorekeeper of the Realm.

## Historical Précis.

Though it pains us to admit so, the Grail Empire has not always stood. Indeed it is a vigorous outgrowth of two distinct cultures and people who have combined to deliver a diverse and beautiful realm for us all to dwell in.

No simple précis can compress all the events of the past into a coherent whole that is the task of a far greater work, however the events depicted here have formed and shaped our world and Empire to degrees that outweigh many of the others. Further the magnitude of these events will not be stressed, as many will place import on some as opposed to others, a task that is left to yourself to decide.

### -542 to 0. Age of Occupation.

Whilst there is evidence to support the theory that the land was occupied even before the Invasion and subsequent Occupation by the Romana tribes of what is now south central Utal. The tribes swiftly settled and subjugated those that already dwelt within the borders of Albia, a task that took them a mere hundred years or so to accomplish. Their level of organisation and administration it must be admitted almost rivals our own, it is they who first developed the network of track ways in Albia and the standardisation of goods and services that we enjoy even to this day. For the next four hundred years Albia entered a period of relative peace, punctuated by external incursions that were violently suppressed.

It was elsewhere where the loose confederation of the Romana was suffering, a new race of peoples had risen, riders in the east sat upon horses that were superior to those that possessed by the Roman themselves, year after year this hoard pressured the central regions until after a fierce struggle the Caran's captured Romana itself.

Finally in -75, they had reached the shores of Albia and assaulted the capital at Eboracus. For a further fifty years they continued to attack whilst the Romana-Albian population resisted, often retreating to the margins of the land to continue to inflict defeat to the invaders.

This all changed with the Battle Camanll, where the alliance of Urt Y'Pendracu overwhelmed the Caran forces who sued for peace. Guided by the wizard Maellyn, Y'Pendracu followed the course of wisdom and offered peace to those who wished it, "*From this day shall all who dwell within my realm be counted as my people. And yea further shall those who stand against us be crushed as one we are strong, as two we are weak.*" And so it was that the peoples were unified.

### -25 to 34. Era of Assimilation.

Though with but two sentences, the land was made whole, the assimilation of two succinct and clear traditions was turbulent. On the one hand there were the native Followers of the Fisher and on the other there existed a polyglot of beliefs of the Caran's. Who possessed a significant pantheon of deities to whom they paid respect. It was through the wonders of Maellyn, who revealed the wisdom the Oracles to us that smoothed the path we now follow. He decreed that all should be worshiped as part of the Fisher, each a fragment of the whole embodied as part of he who gave as the seas, that they acting through the Oracles of the Grail would guide us and show us the way forwards.

### 0 to 123. Age of the Demi-Gods.

King Urt died shortly before his fifty-third season, a man still in his prime but childless, his son being kidnapped shortly after the victory at Camanll. Again it was Maellyn who held the key, it was he who unlocked the writings of the Cromlech of Caerdrydd that proclaimed a warrior would emerge that none could defeat, that they would control lightning and wield a sword that would never rust and would be known by the silver purity of his armour. That summer he appeared, mighty in size and clad in a silver suit of rippling metal, in his right hand he held the Sword of the Lake and in his left he hefted the

Dragonsmouth, from which he delivered death to his enemies over the years. And Maellyn proclaimed him as King Artos, Child of the Grail.

Others followed, each mighty in their splendour. DuLac, wisest of all save Maellyn, keeper of the lores of the land. Pedaver, stout of heart and the wearer of the Helm of Darkness, by which he could see in the blackest of nights. Gwyne, the Courageous, holder of the Sword of Merroc, a blade so fine that it left no trace of its passing. Others too came forth, the Graen Knight, Bursifael and the White Maiden Wyn Y'averre, each excelling in an endeavour and they were called the Demi-Gods as all looked on in awe.

And they did not age.

For a century they fought and guided and stabilised the lands, leading to our present empire. Finally in the year 123, Aelfyd the Crusader was slain in the lands of Emorca, across the Albia Channel, leading the first of the great crusades against the barbarian tribes of the Rinus River.

#### 5 to 54. The Golden Era.

Of all the achievements that Artos delivered his people, the forging of the peoples into one is possibly the greatest but surely the most visible is his seat of power at our capital, fair Lissel and the citadel that stands at its heart – Calamont. A vast city that has stood for nearly one and a half millennia, designed as a fortress to buttress against any invasion from within or without, a monument to the greatest ruler that the empire has ever been graced with.

This age also saw the codification of the laws of the land, that made the lives of those below fairer and safer, also ensured that the divine right of the Oracles to guide and their will to choose the course of the land was paramount. It was also at this point that the Succession was placed into a codex. For by their nature the Demi-Gods were barren and unable to found lineages. To this end knowing that when he was gone there must be a sound successor, Artos laid that the Oracles would select someone to rule and propagate until such a time as a threat emerged then a High King (now termed Emperor) would emerge to secure the realm from threats.

It was in the year 53, that the first of these threats to our borders emerged, tall dark skinned men, who seemed to call upon the elements themselves to do their bidding came upon us, fifty of them engaged the armed might of the Graillands and slew all before them, stopped only by the combined might of King Artos and his brethren at the banks of Lake Fael. Titanic was the clash and many of the Demi-Gods were slain, King Artos amongst them. His armoured form taken to the centre of the lake by the White Maiden, where her arts of healing would be aided by they who dwelt on a misty isle. Her parting words were that would return in the time of the greatest need.

A year later Maellyn disappeared, feared lost for good.

#### 54 to 123. Era of Consolidation.

After the removal of King Artos, a mortal Knight, Leagrace was selected to found the first dynasty, it was he who furthered the expansion within the borders of Albia and set down the guidelines for conduct, aided by the scholarly DuLac. It was at this point that court functions and names were laid in context, the establishment of the tradition that the Lorekeeper assume the name of DuLac.

He died an old man and his immediate successors, moved to secure the lands further, following the guidance of the Oracles and the Lorekeeper.

#### 123 to 748. Age of Expansion.

The crusade into the lands of the Rinus Tribes became the first of many. Like the Romana beforehand, there was a push into new lands and slowly the less advanced tribes would become assimilated, always with the power structures left mostly intact. With a tribal leader becoming a provincial prefect or a powerful Prince becoming a governor. This was not an overnight accomplishment and there was over the span a fair loss of life, each fairly given to place us where we are today. This is in no part due to the Oracles revealing to a chosen strata of the nobility, the greatest and most trusted aid in the subjugation of the primitives that occupied the Continent of Amorca. In six centuries the borders had been extended many fold, reaching now to the continent we call Orentus, specifically Orentus Minor.

259 to 333. Era of Unification.

There was one boon that smoothed the progress further, the Carans. A people that whilst distinct from those who had been assimilated a century earlier, were still culturally recognisable as being of the same racial stock. The meeting between Sir Qalif and the Caran Algul Kerilla was momentous in almost unassuming as the two sides talked and realised that the differences were markedly limited. It was however at this point that the bedrock of the Empire was laid, with the agreement and eventual combination of the two nascent kingdoms, it was decided that mutual aid would be beneficial and lines of hostility began to blur further. It took eight decades but in 332 the Grail Empire of the Oracles of the Fisher was formed, with the King of Lissel assuming the authority of this realm, marrying the Algil so combining the lines. With King Artos being declared as the Guiding Emperor Spirit.

572 to 583. Era of the Bear.

The Steppelander warlord named the Bear by his people, was one of the most bloody and vicious of those that that over time have opposed the Empire., in eleven years this cunning general managed to not only defy the forward progress of our armies but in several cases managed to roll them back, both in terms of ground and years. For over a decade the resistance continued until the Demi-God Ancasyn defeated the bear in a single combat that lasted the course of a day and night and into the second day before the Bear was finally vanquished. Ancasyn alas died weeks later, the reason was never known.

748 to 1191. The Age of Learning.

Whilst emphasis on learning has always been part of the creed of the Fisher, it was often seen as nothing more than a noble's duty to become learned. Often it was left to the Clergy of the Fisher to act as holders of knowledge and teachers, with craftsmen passing along their arts as time passed. However with the final shape of the Empire reached for now and the myriad milieu of cultures all mixed and swirling within the boundaries, invention and understanding of the world as we know it has increased a thousand, thousand fold. The autographic printer has helped to give us a more educated common man and as such trade has blossomed in return. We now know that there are six wanderers and not five as we had presumed, with Galor being sighted through the new optical devices. The village blacksmith has new techniques at his command to aid him in his work, the carpenter also has new tools to smooth the creation of things and the foundations for exploration into the Lemuras Ocean were placed here. The greatest advances were however made in the field of Phisick and Chirgury

998 to 1001. Era of the Scourging.

In three years almost five million people, nearly a fifth of the total population of the world died under the yoke of the Grey Ague. Families, even villages and towns all died as this dreadful plague erupted deep in the Fossic Peninsula. Trade between the many elements of the Empire spread it quickly through the reaches, leaving a trail of dead wherever it had passed. Even now we do not understand the cause and we may never do so for it so completely reduces the body to the state of nothing. The Demi-God Galor eventually rendered a cure in time to save the rest of humanity.

1184 to 1204. Era of the Sail.

The twenty year span that marks the voyages of Gallistro Hytro is rightfully counted as being amongst the most remarkable slices through our Empires history. It was he who first mapped our boundaries, it was he who proved the validity of the round Ar'al theory and the debunking of the counter-continental thesis simultaneously. If not for this titan then we would be so much poorer for all our knowledge of all other areas. Even today exploration is considered in high esteem.

1191 to 1405. The Age Argent.

Until recently we have been enjoying the longest period of peace in history. Progress is still moving though as we find out more and more about the world around us we realise that very soon we shall know everything there is to know. This period has also seen advances in the social structure, with the emergence of a more mercantile class willing to travel to further trade we are now less reliant on the farmer or common labourer, whilst these still exist as they must to furnish ourselves with the basic vittles of life we are now no longer beholden to them. The standing army has been reduced to a garrison level, no longer are the grand forces of yore required to marshal a generally peaceful and obedient populace. Indeed there has only been on serious rebellion to trouble us and that was quelled with efficiency by the Provincial armies in the Thura Prefecture.

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Whilst a separate consideration, it should be noted within the context of the abbreviated history above that the appearances of the Demi-Gods over the years has lessened. As society moves into a more and more peaceful and knowledgeable state these mighty warriors seem less and less required, we cannot deny their existence, the very rocks carry their passing and we should honour them but the time is now right that we do not base all decisions on the knowledge that they will appear. For that is plainly doubtful.

## Social Précis.

Whilst the social ranking is fairly straightforward it is presented here for completeness. (Please note that the female nomenclature has been omitted to aid structural clarity).

Emperor (High King): The Spirit of King Artos, held in perpetuity until he is reborn. Would be addressed as your August Majesty.

King: The current day to day ruler, holding their position until the return of King Artos as Emperor. They are the eldest heir of the previous monarch, whether male or female. Addressed as Your Majesty, My King.

Marquis: Regional Administrator, often managing vast tracts of territory. Whilst they have semi-autonomy, they are still beholden to the King. Addressed as Your Grace.

Margrave: District Administrator. One for each district in a region, reporting to the Marquis' seat, they comprise a regional council to assist the Marquis with decisions. Addressed as You Exaltedness.

Prefect: County Administrators. Overseen by Margraves and responsible for one twelfth of a District. They are the only ones elected by the populace. They are addressed as Your Honour.

Knight: Knights-Ordinary are either the most immediate administrator of land often ensuring the smooth operation of a town or rarely a group of villages. Alternatively they are considered to be Errant, acting as the regional militia commanders tasked with defending the County that they are in. Very rarely they may be Knights-Regal the Kings personal representatives, beholden to him alone and tasked with maintaining the rights of all people. They are in effect a roving magistrates service and as such can wield immense authority. All Knights are addressed as Sir Knight followed by their name.

These are the ranks of nobility as recognised throughout the Grail Empire. There are other, local designations that may arise, these will be discussed in a separate document.

The Mercantile and common classes whilst more numerous also have a defined structure, dependant on income. The title is usually prepended to the trade or profession and run as follows:

Grandmaster; Master; Honoured; Skilled, if no title is shown then they are considered to be no more than a basic representative of their trade or craft.

Below these are the Commons, this class of people do not usually have any form of title beyond their occupation. Such as Farmer, Labourer and Shepherd. In all probability they being beneath notice will not impinge on Your Highness.

Clerical ranking within the Clergy of the Fisher and the Spirits of the Oracles is obscure. There are only really three levels of initiation, however there are a number of skill titles that they utilise. For the most part you will be expected to deal with the Archimandrite, who is the main representative of the Fisher here on Ar'al. Below are the Mandrites, and the Clerics. It is traditional for the Archimandrite to anoint the King and it will be one of their duties to proclaim the return of the Emperor. The current Archimandrite is named Hafryn.

## **Geographic Overview.**

The Grail Empire occupies nearly three quarters of the total permanent land area of Ar'al. There is but a single landmass, straddling two continents, Amorca and Orentus. Technically there is one continent, with Amorca being nothing more than a large peninsula of the Orenorca super-continent. In addition there are a large number of islands, in an extended archipelago that rings the continents in small clusters.

Ranging from the fertile Albia in the west to the eastern Desert of Deri a vast expanse fully filling the final quarter of the Orentus continent, a dead and lifeless expanse of wind blown sand, the Reaches of the Empire is as varied as the path taken to attain it.

In all told from one border to the other, West to East, the Empire is three thousand leagues in breadth and two thousand in depth. Supporting almost twenty-two million people.

### Albia.

Situated to the west of Amorca, Albia is the largest island that stands off of the continental coast. It is a pleasant land with rolling hills and occasionally inclement weather. At it's heart lies the Forest of the Flaer and the rocky mountains of the lands of the Jous. It is the seat of government, home to the King, administering his empire from Lissel the Capital. It is the sole region not under the care of a Marquis, the King performs this duty himself.

### Rinus.

This the second oldest region is one of the most varied. Similar to Albia in the west, this steadily alters the further to the east you move, until by the time you reach the Valec Regional border there is a sprawling plain that provides the bulk of the food for the Empire. Towards the north, there is steady decrease in temperature as the Paral mountains of the north reach skywards. To the south the temperature increases and such delicacies as grapes and olives become to be grown. It is administered by Marquis Wealand.

### Valec.

As mentioned above, Valec is the main food producing area of the empire, though not the only one. With a broad, flat plain that to the north becomes rich steppes, suited to the growth of cattle and sheep. Cereal crops are predominantly grown within the wide flat central belt but around the vast Lake Turang a wide selection of root crops are grown. To the south is a small stretch of forest that snakes down towards the rich fishing grounds of the Metaran Ocean. The Traditional birth place of the Fisher. The eastern edge is marked by the wide range of mountains called The World Spine. Marquessa DuQuey is responsible for this region.

### Spines Expanse.

The furthest inhabited element of the Empire, with The World Spine on one side and the Desert of Deri on the other is a thin strip of mineral rich land. Here is the bulk of the iron and copper mining is performed as is that of the precious metals. It is here that the Rose Gold that signifies royal blood is extracted. Whilst more arid than Valec, there are areas of production of crops and a small steppe remnant is to the north. Southwards however, where a small range of mountains jut upwards on a large peninsula can be found the most alien of environments. Lashed daily for months on end by numerous, heavy rain bursts it is a lush world of large trees and exotic plants and animals. For the most part this has not been explored greatly. The Spines Expanse is governed by Marquis Mayler.

### Office of the Isles.

Whilst not a contiguous territory as such, the Office of the Isles tends to the needs of those that live upon the various islands that are abundant at the edges of our domain . The Office was created to fill the obvious need for administration of the small, almost independent colonies that have occurred. In general these islets and rocky outcroppings, follow the general climate of their mainland regions. However there can be some considerable differences. Considered the most demanding of the Regions it is currently without a Marquis due to the incumbents' recent death.

## **Currency and Trade.**

Due to the internal nature of the empire, where regions and even districts are vastly different a healthy internal trade has arisen. To facilitate this a standardised system of weights and measures have originated, as has a universal currency.

### Dry Measure.

The basis is the Grail Ounce (Goz)  
One Grail Pound (Glb) = 15Goz  
One Grail Grossweight (Gwt) = 20Glb  
One Grail Millennialweight (GMwt) = 50Gwt

### Liquid Measure.

Based on the Gillel, traditionally one sip of the Grail.  
One Geal = 7 Gillels  
One Gyl = 14 Geals  
One Gall = 28 Gyls  
One Grail = 56 Galls

### Distance.

The Knuckle (kn) is considered standard for Distance.  
One Hemi-Pace (hp) = 5kn  
One Pace (Pa) = 2hp  
One Furlength (Fl) = 150Pa  
One League = 225Fl

### Duration.

The smallest division of Time as decreed by the Oracles is the Second.

1 Minute = 100 seconds  
1 Hour = 100 Minutes  
1 Day = 10 Hours  
1 Week = 10 Days  
(1 Month = 5 weeks)  
1 Season = 10 Weeks  
(1 Year = 4 Seasons)  
1 Decade = 10 Years  
1 Century = 10 Decades  
1 Millennial = 10 Centuries.

### Currency.

Over the centuries, the currency has evolved into a unified system, though there are still in places local values in use. These and their conversion calculus will be discussed elsewhere. Electrum is a naturally occurring alloy of Gold and Silver found in the World Spine. The largest unit is the Bar a one Grail Pound Heptagonal casting of Electrum. All coins are heptagonal in shape.

1 Bar = 10 Shards  
1 Shard = 10 Clusters  
1 Cluster = 10 Fragments  
1 Fragment = 10 Slivers

1 Sliver = 10 Grains.

All coins are milled and stamped with the image of the King on one side, weights are checked periodically and any that are found to be inexact are removed and recast.

Trade throughout the empire is facilitated by an extensive network of roads, rivers and canals, in addition to the ocean routes that naturally exist. It is possible to transport from one part of the empire to the other in a matter of weeks via this network many of the required resources, since despite cleanly divided levels of resources and populations each region is capable of supporting itself for a period of time. Enough to ameliorate such disasters as drought and pestilence and to allow for transfer of any stored surpluses.

Currently the Empire is making a profit.

## Calendar

The Ar'al Calendar is based roughly on the movements of Hela through the sky. It consists of a Year that is four hundred days in length, with weeks consisting of ten days each. The seasons are Vernus, Sumara, Autumnus and Wynter.

The week begins with Grail, the holy day of the Fisher. The rest of the week are named for the Demi-Gods:

Artos, Y'averre, DuLac, Pedaver, Gwyne, Graen, Bursifael, Aelfyd and Leagrace. The latter honoured as being the first to follow in the steps of King Artos.

In general both Vernus and Autumnus are pleasant times, neither reaching the extremes of cold or heat that can be experienced across the realm in Sumara and Wynter. However due to the sheer size of the Empire this is but a guideline as many areas can be stifling hot, such as the Spines Expanse or insufferable cold as is experienced in the far north of any of the regions.

The months, which are considered now to be anachronistic, are as follows:

Wynter: Barren, Clear.

Vernus: Sowing, Nurture.

Sumara: Watcher, Ripening.

Autumnus: Reaping, Fallow.

### Holidays.

There are across the Empire a number of observed holidays, many of which are local to the area. There are a number of Imperial Holidays that are observed across the realm.

Barren 1 – Day of the Grail, marks the passing of a new year.

Nurture 37 – Day of Remembrance, traditional date of the loss of King Artos.

Sumara 14 – King's Day, the current birth date of the King.

Reaping 43 – Day of the Harvest Home.

Fallow 25 – Maellyn's Feast. A Day of giving of presents and reflection on the past.

It is traditional that only essential business is carried out on these dates, in respect of what they represent.

## **Dress and Behaviour.**

Despite the natural diversity of the peoples of the Grail Empire, there is a near singular uniformity in the way we dress and behave. This has evolved more as an outgrowth of function than any real imposition, a Knight is still a Knight whether he is in Albia or on one of the Isles and as such it must be shown that he is such. It also follows that a carpenter is but a carpenter and again this must be shown, as this is the order of things. That is not to say that there is total conformity. A Knight in Albia who attends court at Lissel may have a more ornate appearance than his counterpart in Valec.

### The Lords.

It is a common mistake that all lords and ladies wear armour continuously. This is not practical and the favoured attire is that of comfortable if well appointed clothing suitable to the correct rank. The Kings clothing is demarked by the use of gold fur trim, those of the Marquis' by silver fur trim and Margraves by copper fur trim. Prefects are denoted by plain, white, linen trim threaded through with copper thread. There is no real distinction in clothing between genders however it is customary that on state occasions and official business of the realm that the correct distinction be made.

The men wear, velvet or silk tunics, with an outer singlet and hose made of soft dyed leather. The ladies of court wear velvet brocade dresses that cover themselves entirely, these are completed by soft shoes or boots for both genders.

For the most formal of occasions the King wears the rare robes of state, fashioned from Samite.

### The Knights.

The Knights are the symbol of the King in all their roles and as such they are often found armoured, even when not required to do so. Knights Ordinary will usually wear a plain cuirass, with markers for their region and occasionally a pair of armoured boots and gauntlets. Both Knights-Errant and Knights-Regal are expected to wear the full armour of their office, consisting of a Cuirass, Full Helm, Vambrace, Pauldrons and Greaves. The sole difference between these two classes are that a Knight's-Errant Pauldrons are coloured red against the gilded Pauldrons of a Knight-Regal.

### The Merchants.

Whilst it is regrettable, the prosperous merchant class likes to show how prosperous they really are and as such can at times sport such clothing as to be nearly as fine as that of the King himself. The garb used however is markedly different in form. Traditionally within the Merchants themselves as opposed to the crafters, the favoured raiment is that of the manteau, an all enveloping combination of cloak and robe, belted at the waist and with the small diamond of rank adorning the cuffs of the sleeves.

Craftsmen are more diverse, though they often wear heavy cotton or rarely leather smocks to protect them whilst working. When outside of the work place they will often wear hose and doublet. Again with the copper braid markings of their relative status. Depending on circumstances leather boots or the increasingly popular half-boots are worn.

### The Commons.

The commons simply dress for comfort in homespun linen and cotton shifts and kirtles. They are white, off white or in some rare exceptions brown of colour. There are a few exceptions, those on a few islands, whose main occupation is the raising of some of the finest sheep in the empire wear a deep red wool, clothing. This is also prized by those of other stations for its fine quality and rich colour, it is often utilised in the creation of cloaks.

### Clergy of the Fisher.

The majority of those who are Clergy of the Fisher, prefer plain simple robes of either black or grey wool when amongst the faithful, the cuffs coloured to indicate their function. For more formal times, both the Archimandrite and Mandrites are allowed to wear silk or even samite robes, emblazoned with the device of the Fisher upon them.

On state occasions the Archimandrite also wears the Mitre of the Oracles, the last remaining artefact of DuLac.

### Social Interaction.

Despite the seeming inexorable alteration of society to accommodate the merchant princes and their assorted fellows the codes of behaviour are still as relevant now as they were in the day of King Artos.

The first major element that must be stressed at this juncture is that gender should not be seen as a bar to rank or power. The Demi-Gods themselves made no distinction and over the years the tradition has been upheld, despite a number of sound arguments that a more natural order of things be adhered to.

Secondly, whilst over the years quite a number of obvious differences have been pointed out time and time again amongst the peoples of the Empire, rarely has outright hostility occurred since about the third century. We are a homogenous people, a direct, lineal descendant of the culture that arose from the first turbulent years following the Caran surrender to Y'Pendracu. This had led to a curious collection of talented people who express themselves throughout the whole of society, more recently allowing for a certain fluidity of movement within strata and even occasionally between.

It is laid out in the Book of the Fisher that everyone is a strand in a plan that started with the creation of the seas by the Fisher and will end when the embers of Hela finally flare into the dark between the stars. To this end people are born and reborn to the function that best suits them. A Nobel to rule, a Knight to enforce that rule. The Commons to support all else and more recently the Merchants to trade. With the Clergy of the Fisher to guide and honour their Patron through the Spirits of the Oracles. Thus it is natural for the King to be King and someone who is but a humble Farmer to be so, each has his task and in the eyes of the Fisher each is important.

This does not mean that a Farmer is an equal of a King. One rules by the divine right given to him over the rest of the populace to aid and protect but he is still far their superior for it as it is he who has been chosen to perform that task. Thus etiquette between the classes has evolved to reflect that there are differences as decreed by the Fisher and that these must be reinforced to keep our world running.

For a fuller discussion of this topic please see *Arusta Portentus'* treatise but in summation in a court of argument if there is equal value to the evidence and the reasons given then they who hold the greater responsibility in the eyes of the Fisher is right.

Tradition also dictates that in all matters spiritual the Clergy of the Fisher hold sway, though occasionally this has not been enforced.

## Religious Précis.

The official Faith of the Empire is that of the Fisher. A unified religion that was brought to the shores of Albia by the Romana invasion two thousand years ago.

Over the years the core belief system, that the being known as the Fisher provides for all and guides us in matters of spiritual enlightenment as expressed through the Oracles of the Spirits. This is a synthesis of the original beliefs of the Romana and the Caran, mainly the incorporation of the veneration of spirits as agents of the Fisher himself and has been so since just prior to the emergence of King Artos.

Whilst the main devotions and practices do surround the Fisher as a singular entity there are many shrines and springs dedicated to an aspect Spirit. It is not uncommon throughout the Empire to find that a specific section of the population in a certain area will also pay homage to one of these spirits, either to aid such things as the crops and ensuring that good weather prevails or that the catch of fish will be as good as last year. It is not unusual to find a church raised to the Fisher to contain one of these springs or even a constructed side chapel, in order to better worship those that are locally held as important.

The clerics' prime duty is to care for the people, to provide solace and to aid them with the sermons of his faith. To this end they preach of the Endless Shores, a place of tranquillity and solitude that allows for a reflection on this and past lives before being able to move on back into the world to once again, after a period of rest – commensurate with the amount of reflection required – to take up the challenge on this humble plane of existence. Or if they so prefer to enter unto oblivion, the place where weary souls are free to find release and renewal as something new.

It is with some regret that despite our best efforts, rumours of witchcraft and unholy works do still permeate the commons and is sadly the one last real bastion of bigotry to remain. Young girls, are still often burned for displaying 'ill-disposed' powers or other manifestations of darkness. Thus it is one of the primary tasks of the Knight-Errant to help eradicate this poor, mistaken and outmoded element of the modern world.

### The Cultus of the Blessêd Return.

There is but one serious aberration that remains in the Empire regarding matters of faith. Though often declared as heretical and oft times been the recipient of chastisement from the crown over the centuries. The Cultus of the Blessêd Return is a semi-secret group of dissidents who state that the Fisher is in fact the incarnation of King Artos and that when he returns to aid the Empire in its direst moment hour he will sweep aside all the articles of the realm and right all the injustices. Setting aside the King, not just until the emergency is over but for all time. They believe that he is the true instrument of the Fisher and that the Oracles are false counsel who have restricted the growth of the empire by constricting it in such an unnatural manner as to enforce the Divine Right to rule of the King.

These idealists are a serious threat to the realm, as evinced by the sporadic riots they have engineered in outlying places. The destruction of libraries and in on case a hanging of a Prefect. As such they are often suppressed and indeed for a while they appear to have been eradicated. Recently we have had the fortune to learn that those who act in the open are but a shell for an inner cabal, previously nothing of which we knew nothing about. A most worrying turn that has cast a shadow over the last few commons revolts.

## **The Cauldron Born.**

The Demi-Gods, or as they referred to themselves as – The Cauldron Born – are amongst the mightiest heroes of history and of Myth and Legend.

That they did exist and may yet still one day exist again is beyond doubt. That they wielded powers beyond those of any mortal cannot be denied, to do so would be to deny the very basis of our Empire.. That is the one simple fact, without these titanic figures throughout the ages we would be in such a changed world as it to be almost unrecognisable, even to the most erudite scholars of our age, testing the skills even of Maellyn and DuLac themselves. Upon their breastplates was emblazoned the image of an hourglass.

Despite this the appearance of the Cauldron Born has over time become less and less frequent, a testament to the wisdom of the Oracles and their guidance of the King in his appointed task. There is one event that must still be reconciled, the return of King Artos as Emperor, as stated during the time of our greatest test. This is a repeated theme, King Artos himself laid down a procedure by which this was to occur and the White Maiden Wyn Y'Averre's proclamation that once finally healed of his wounds he would return to the lands of men to aid us. This as yet has not happened and many sages and other learned men wonder what could, in this period of unadulterated peace force such an emergence. All the known inhabitable world has been found and explored, there is nothing living in the Desert of Deri and no other masses of land have been discovered, excepting the frigid pole that hovers some hundred leagues to the North of Orenorca. There is nothing that warrants any return. Yet it must occur.

Many have speculated this, many have claimed that the event has already happened and that it has been resolved in such a way that we never knew of it's occurrence. There are others who argue that the strangers defeated on the shores of Lake Fael will return and that only the Emperor will be able to defeat their might. Another thought is that there will be a final rebellion, aimed at unseating the rightfully ordained hierarchy, so carefully balanced over the years. Or that a natural disaster will strike. All these are but speculations upon the wind and until, or not the Emperor returns we cannot know.

## The False Emperor.

Within the last two centuries a new tale, spread by itinerant Gleemen, has emerged. One without any way of checking its veracity but one which is popular amongst the unlettered and superstitious.

It comprises of a recital of a supposed lost tome of knowledge that contains all the past, present and future – the Property of Maellyn himself and a powerful artefact. It reputedly details that in addition to the real Emperor returning to claim what is rightfully his, there will be a False Emperor who will state that they are responding to the final battle and that they would only be discovered by the revelation in a marked fashion of a curse that reveals their true identity. Curiously in the last twenty years an addition has arisen. Turning the False Emperor into the method by which the Emperor is revealed, changing certain defeat into victory as they fight side by side. This is reproduced below for your perusal.

And unto you I say how shall we know the Emperor?  
By his demeanour and his charity and his prowess I say!  
But beware of the falsity, of the one who will beguile.  
One whose tongue shall be as honeyed as the hive and hold such a sting.  
One who shall be fair and even as the sun.  
And how shall ye know this Falsity from Truth?  
By the curse laid upon them from the Fisher.  
Revealed in the light of morning, for all to see.  
Standing defeated as dawn breaks.  
Snatched by the Endless Shores,,  
To rescue the rightful King.

## Coda.

We hope that your highness has found this summation of use. Though it may seem long and drawn out it is merely a foretaste of what is required to run an Empire that encompasses the world. Decisions will not come easy and whilst this is but the first step, it is the first of many that must be made. We cannot hope in one such document to encompass everything, there are indeed many things left out or glossed over that will become clear as your studies progress. You are encouraged to think and question your instructors, a closed mind is one that is closed forever and one which is less agile. We know you have been chosen to be who you are, do not fail yourself or the faith the Fisher has in you.

*JDL.*

*27. Ripening. 1406*

## False hopes, real dreams.

The signal tripped an alert, silent, deep within the earth. Then with deliberate logical precision it was interpreted and acted upon. **They are here. External level insufficient to combat expected arrival. Initiate sequencing.**

\*\*\*\*\*

He sat and listened to the report. It was the same as the day before and the day before that. There was a scaled invasion of his realm. An absurdity but the reports were insistent and now one of his own Knights had returned, travel stained and combat weary. It was true, an unknown race was nibbling at the Empire, peeling small chunks away, pinning his forces in place. DuLaque, leaned across and spoke quietly to him, "Majesty, we need to reinforce the Spines Expanse, losing that part of the Empire will cripple any further defence efforts." The King nodded in acknowledgement.

"Marquis Wealand, Marquessa DuQuey, are your knights ready to move?" The two nodded, "Very well, Marquessa, you will supplement the forces in the Spines Expanse, Marquis," he paused as he considered a moment his next words, knowing that the two before him were not the best of friends, "You will move two thirds of your forces to act as a further buffer this side of the World Spine." He looked sternly at them, "I will move my forces towards and into Rinus, in case elements decide to take a hand. May the Fisher guide us all."

The pair bowed and left, walking backwards until they crossed a simple chalk line. The King sank into his throne, he was at war and it felt bitter.

\*\*\*\*\*

He strode from the room and waited until he was deep within his quarters before letting slip a small smile. It had begun. In less than a year they would be here and then the final end game would begin. An end game in something that had been ongoing for over three thousand years, a climax that would be all the more satisfying as he turned a pawn, he laughed, a king at that, against his opponent.

The memory was crisp and clear, the morning near the lake, he and the rest of his platoon had tracked them to this, the last resting place of those he sought. It was easy, the primitives were weak and their weapons crude and barely effective against his kind and they were mown like the hava plant. They did not trouble him or the others of his detachment. Thousands died before them and he did not care.

Fifteen stood upon the shore, spread wide within an arc and they were calm as the dawn's light struck them. The sign of infinity upon their breasts. He snarled and charged forth, ignoring the efforts of the native savages.

And like a tide upon a cliff he and his crew recoiled as they crashed into the Cauldron Born. In the first exchange as lightning and fire and water and wind flickered and fractured the very weft of the world as controlled forces slithered and entwined with each other. And the Demi-Gods stood and closed once more.

He felt pain, each and every stroke upon his crew he felt. Each termination he experienced as they fought. Three for each one of them he lost and more. This was not the odds he wished for and even as the 'king' fell to a rapidly changing swing of a blade he knew he they were doomed and he turned and fled. Activating the one thing they could not know about he slunk away and watched as the remainder died, their blood running into the lake.

Time snapped forth and he smiled again. Time was his ally, others from his world were close, less than a year away, nearing the end of their journey, soon the foes would be overwhelmed and not even the best efforts of the 'Oracles' could prevail. The Empire would be divided, weaker than he could ever have hoped. Now all that remained was the inevitable response. The return of the Emperor and those who would accompany him. Even there he was prepared, a riposte started centuries ago, a blow already landed to remove that annoyance before it ever arrived and all it would take was a simple show of trickery. Superstition was very useful.

\*\*\*\*\*

**\*\*\*Sequencing Error\*\*\*. Abort process... abort failed. Realign sequence, stabilising. XY Held but recessive XX present. Stability of 80% attained... Sufficient. Initiate RNA skill insertion.**

\*\*\*\*\*

The tall, handsome figure rode forwards towards the City. The yellow-red of setting Hela, rippling colour over his armoured form, deepening the golden breastplate into opalescent fire. The gates were closing but held for his passage before they met with a sturdy thump behind him. People in the streets, returning home paid more than a glance and gasped as they saw his face and then the device upon his chest. He continued towards the Citadel, Calamont, the image etched indelibly in his mind. The vast gilded iron gates swung open at his approach, silently as if waiting. He dismounted and began to walk towards the throne room.

There was an expectant hush, the King was seated with two figures standing, one either side. On the left was the Lorekeeper, shown by his garb. So much like the original, on the other red faced and breathing deeply was someone that was not readily identified.

The figure stood at the correct spot and waited.

"Welcome to Lissel," began the King, "we are honoured by the presence of a Demi-God." He paused, "I presume the situation is desperate for one such as yourself to come." Though even his voice held a questioning tone.

"I am Arian," began the black haired Cauldron Born "and this is your darkest day. An ancient foe will strike upon the Plains of Stonehenge at the first light of Hela."

The man on the right looked towards the King who nodded, "You claim to be the Emperor?"

"If I must," responded Arian.

The Lorekeeper then spoke, "Then a tent will be made available for you, for our armies are already near the Henge, one league distant. We know of the threat and have acted accordingly in anticipation of your arrival."

The King smiled, "It is settled, but tonight we shall feast in your honour!"

\*\*\*\*\*

He sat and read the readings a thin-lipped smile came forth. A curse was all that was required and fate had delivered it readily into his hands. The feasting would begin soon and he had just enough time to create the method of discrediting the inhuman warrior below and taking the day without hardly a fight. Even on such as that below, conversing with the King could stand against two hundred of his kind, not without the help of the primitives and their weapons. He had even countered the influences of those Oracles enough to make the inhabitants of this planet still almost useless to their task.

He sat back in his chair and waited.

\*\*\*\*\*

The screams were bloodcurdling. A mixture of anguish, surprise and loss. The men came running to the tent and froze as they saw the two guards looking inside, horror written across their faces. Inside the screams continues, even as the other commanders approach and looked on into the lamp lit interior and they blanched. The Demi-God writhed and seemed almost fluid as they watched, sliding from male to something then female then back again, all the while agonised by the process. Others came and watched and then left, white faced and sick to the stomach, slowly rumours flew through the camp, "cursed", "False Emperor", "doomed" in hushed and fearful whispers. Knights and commons alike stood worried, the prophecy was true and they resolved to leave, even as the form settled back to the man who was Arian. In a city of tents alone, exhausted.

\*\*\*\*\*

The King listened impassively, "You are certain?"

"Yes Your Majesty, we witnessed it ourselves and will swear on the bones of the Fisher it is true."

"Then we are lost, pull as much of the armies back here to Lissel, we shall see how long we can hold. abandon the Henge." He commanded then slowly he rose and left, a look of haunted melancholia in his eyes.

All eyes followed him but behind one pair was a simple thought, "Yes you are lost, there will be no Emperor and soon you will be but as cattle."

\*\*\*\*\*

He fought. It was what he was created to do. Wearied by the night and without any help he was overwhelmed. They did not kill him.

"This is one of the most sacred of your holy places. It is fitting that you shall be sacrificed here on this central stone."

He struggled against his bonds even as the sharp knife flashed towards his breastplate-covered chest.

Then there was light.