

Players' Introduction to Gehennum

The World

Gehennum is on a world slightly larger than Earth, and yet less dense, so that gravity is no higher. It is a planet of low relief: the broad shallow ocean is dotted here and there with islands never larger than Ireland, and rarely as mountainous as Java. Its inhabitants distinguish it from other worlds of their acquaintance as “the World of Isles”.

The circumference of the World of Isles is fifty thousand kilometres. A nautical mile is therefore 2.3 kilometres, and the distance to the horizon from a height of h metres is approximately $4\sqrt{h}$ kilometres.

The Sky

The day is lit by a bright yellow-white sun, much like ours. Its apparent motions define a day of twenty-four hours and a year of 361 days, during which it wanders 18° either side of the celestial equator.

A pale blotched moon, about the same apparent size as the Sun, goes through phases of the usual sort in a month of thirty-two days. A horde of stars decorate the night sky, and coagulate into a milky band that spans the heavens. There is a bright white planet which never strays far from the Sun, and one each of red, blue, and green which range the ecliptic, progressively dimmer and more sluggish.

A strange star or tiny moon called Indarian hangs fixed in the sky, as though it were in geostationary orbit. It has about the same brightness as Venus at its brightest—Indarian can be seen by day if one knows where to look. On one half of the World of Isles it is an indispensable aid

to navigation and a byword of constancy. On the other it is never seen. Indarian seems to shine by its own light: it is never dimmed by eclipse.

Landform, Flora, & Fauna

Although there are arid islands at unfavourable latitudes, and ‘rain shadow’ sides to some larger islands, there are no extensive grasslands anywhere on the World of Isles. Therefore there are no large grasslands fauna. For example, there are no horses, lions, cheetahs, or gazelles. Elephants are of the smaller, ‘Indian’, forest type. The few patches of grassland support only such small animals as gophers, hares, and foxes.

As if to make up for the want of plains fauna, the World of Isles has lavish aquatic fauna, including an amphibious human species and a giant semi-intelligent predatory aquatic lizard, the sea-dragon.

The terrestrial fauna is largely that of the mountainous or wooded parts of Earth, with a few fantastical additions, such as huge, flying, fire-breathing dragons.

Geists

In the World of Isles every item has a spirit. The spirits of the apparently inanimate are called *geists*, and are accorded the reverence usual in an animist culture. People will often address objects unaffectedly, and make offerings to the geist of their houses every day. A sailor never sets out on the water without little offerings to Pontus (geist of the ocean), the particular geists of the waters he will sail on, and his boat. Icons and shrines are everywhere, and nearly every act is accompanied by an invocation or

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placation: before he fells a tree, a woodsman anaesthetises it with opium or bhang.

These rituals are not superstition. The geists are real. They can send or appear in dreams, send omens and oracles. The more powerful ones have some control over their 'bodies', and can even manifest as animals, people, or grotesques. The great geists can work miracles, and will do so for their own purposes or those of their favourites.

Geists who are offended can and do bring bad luck, those who are pleased can do favours, great or small. In general, larger, older, and more obviously numinous things have more powerful geists, things with more apparent character have more active ones. This is why everyone is polite to the wealthy, secretive, generous but temperamental sea. Parsley plants, on the other hand, can usually be treated brusquely.

Sufficiently powerful geists of both sexes occasionally manifest for erotic dalliance, or even affairs more profound. Though they are not fertile among themselves, geists can beget and conceive with people of all races and, apparently, with other animals. The resulting demi-gods are extraordinary, but not supernatural, members of their non-spirit parent's kind. They sometimes enjoy the assistance of their divine parent (see "Miracles").

According to Gehennese tradition, twins always (and in some accounts only) result from a woman conceiving with a geist and an ordinary man in the same night (ovulation). Twins are consequently considered lucky. According to one version, one twin is a demigod and the other ordinary, in another, both are demigods and have two fathers.

The greater geists of an area often receive so much in the way of prayers and sacrifices that temples are needed to house their wealth, and deputies to distribute their largesse. On the other hand, the goodwill of many geists is often essential to a community, and priests must be appointed to make sure that each receives its due, and is not offended. Geists are often flattered with ceremonies, at which the stories of their great deeds and past benevolences are danced out. These ceremonies are often given mythic form, so that their symbolic content co-ordinates the local community. Secret stories, dances, and compacts with geists form local mystery-cults, initiation into which can define membership of the community, adulthood, or status, and thus plays a critical social role.

The geist-cults resemble religion, but unlike true religion most do not address profound questions such as the creation, the purpose of existence, and the immortality of the soul. A few mysteries address such issues, but the geists involved are believed by scholars and other geists to be charlatans. The great religious questions are in Gehennum addressed by ethical philosophies, such as Stoicism, Cynicism, and Metempsychosis. These are not connected with ceremonies, worship, or sacrifice.

As a result of all this, the geists are not considered to have a great deal of moral profundity, and stories of their foibles and sins are not ethically problematic. Relations between communities and geists are on an almost commercial basis, with farmers paying the fields, and fisherfolk the reefs, to give food, and volcanoes threatening to explode if they are not lavished with sacrifices. Except on the island of Thelmond

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(whose geist disapproves), geists sometimes demand human sacrifice as a token of their dominance: it is geistly conspicuous consumption.

Gehennese priests are sometimes favourites of their geists, but usually they are mere civil functionaries, with authority, perhaps, but no miraculous power. Only because they have access to the places where the geist listens for prayers are their prayers any more likely to be answered than those of anyone else. More reliable communication may be had with those geists who attempt to provide oracles, and by specialists in the mystic discipline of spiritualism. The psychic gift of psychometry may operate by receive-only telepathic empathy with geists, but this is not true communication.

Oracles are often approached for counsel, and while they are very far from omniscient, geists can give very good advice in appropriate areas. If an oracle gives a prediction about the future, the geist will make a point of making it come true, often going to great efforts and calling in favours from other geists. If the seeker of the oracle attempts to void it the geist will take that as a challenge, and punish the mortal for presumption.

Exemplars, Ghosts, & the World of Dreams

In the World of Isles the collective unconscious is a spiritual reality. Not only is a set of archetypes inherited, but the details of collective belief (particularly emotionally-charged beliefs) can be written into the World of Dreams, where they are accessible to anyone. For example, if a man's comrades

see him killed, it is quite possible for this to make other people who are emotionally close to him dream of his death in specific detail, or of visiting him in the gloomy Gehennese afterlife, before the news could reach them by ordinary means.

Usually, only the myths and legends of entire peoples make long-term impressions on the World of Dreams, but it is possible for an intense individual impression to last. This is how ghosts are formed: the intense experience of a strong personality (very often the terror which accompanies his or her death) makes a lasting impression in the World of Dreams. His or her loved ones and the witnesses to the event may be racked by dreams of the person and the event, even as long as they live. Since geists can so witness and dream, it is possible for things and places to become haunted.

Another example of the phenomenon is the formation of *exemplars*. A person with a very powerful and pure personality can make a lasting impression in the World of Dreams, linking a concept, character trait, or ruling passion to his or her memories, idiosyncrasies, and self-image. This bundle is called an exemplar. When another person resembles the original personality, he or she will dream frequently of the exemplar. These dreams will reinforce existing similarities and establish new ones. The dreamer will increasingly resemble the exemplar, and by the time he or she is powerful enough to affect the World of Dreams in a lasting way, will resemble the exemplar very greatly. Each of these avatars reinforces the exemplar, and adds the memories of another apparent incarnation.

As the millennia pass, the exemplars grow in power and definition, acquiring

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legends and fame, accumulating the memories of countless avatars. The range of personalities that will be drawn into their spheres of attraction grows, and their avatars increase in number.

The mystic discipline of dreaming enables its practitioners to enter the dreaming state deliberately and remain lucid while dreaming. Such a dreamer can roam the World of Dreams at will, reconnoitring the collective unconscious. Skilled dreamers can take others with them, control the transformations of the dream-world, and enter the dreams of others to give messages and ask questions. Very powerful dreamers can force dreams onto others, or even plunder the memories of dreaming persons.

Miracles

People who can force their minds to correspond with a force of nature or an archetype can focus inner power to work quite impressive miracles. Of course, this is far easier for people whose personalities already correspond to an archetype or natural force. Given that thousands of generations have lived, it is overwhelmingly likely that people have lived before who corresponded in such a way. As these people are the very types that form exemplars or become avatars, in practice anyone who can work miracles is perforce an avatar.

Geists, being nature spirits, often correspond closely enough to forces of nature to perform miracles. Indeed, apart from dreaming, miracles may be the only active ability geists have. Geists will sometimes perform miracles for their favourites, even the specific miracles the favourites ask for. This gives those favourites the appearance of working miracles.

Some very good musicians are able to work limited miracles by the persuasive effect of their songs on geists. This is termed “spellsinging”.

Great Exemplars

Exemplars are very numerous. Ancestors, for example, can be specific exemplars for their families, and historical heroes specific exemplars for particular cities. There are also universal exemplars of no great power.

Some exemplars, on the other hand, correspond closely with cardinal archetypes and powerful emotions. Avatars of these are almost all capable of performing miracles. A rough score of the most important exemplars are briefly discussed below. These often receive a public cult devoted to dancing out their legends, the goal of which is perhaps chiefly social. Unlike geists, exemplars are not impressed by piety, devotion, or sacrifices, and do not do favours for their worshippers.

Acanthe

Exemplar of cunning and political ambition, Acanthe is patron of dowagers. Her symbol is an owl, and her colour is mauve.

Amaranth

Exemplar of erotic and musical passion, Amaranth is patron of lovers, dancers, and wind musicians. His symbol is a rose and his colour is purple-red.

Chansith

Exemplar of curiosity, Chansith is patron of scholars, explorers, and flyers. His

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symbol is a feather, and his colour is sky-blue.

Coppelia

Exemplar of compassion, Coppelia is patron of the healing professions. Her symbol is a dove, and her colour violet.

Foliat

Exemplar of enthusiasm, Foliat is patron of artists, artisans, and inventors. His/her symbol is a flame and his colour is orange.

Goth

Exemplar of joviality, Goth is patron of hosts and publicans and sponsor of the laws of hospitality. His symbol is a duck and his colour is golden-brown.

Heptakhlor

Exemplar of avarice, Heptakhlor is the patron of misers. His symbol is a jackal and his colour is bright green.

Hylas

Exemplar of pugnacity, Hylas is patron of boxers and rebels. His symbol is a bulldog and his colour is dark green.

Jolian

Exemplar of gallantry, Jolian is patron of athletes and swordsmen. His symbol is a lynx and his colour is scarlet.

Khryseis

Exemplar of self-reliance, Khryseis is patron of hunters, sailors, and loners. Her symbol is a dolphin and her colour is indigo.

Lena

Exemplar of maternal love and marital fidelity, Lena is patron of married women, mothers, and cooks. Her symbol is a honey-bee and her colour is pink.

Luciphage

Exemplar of honour and dutifulness, Luciphage is patron of heralds, executioners, and bodyguards, and enforcer of oaths. His symbol is a raven and his colour is black.

Morbius

Exemplar of rage, Morbius is patron of berserkers. His symbol is a shark and his colour is orange.

Persiflex

Exemplar of determination, Persiflex is patron of warriors, archers, and woodsmen. His symbol is a parrot and his colour is dark green.

Regis

Exemplar of benevolence, Regis is patron of rulers, judges, fathers, and married men. His symbol is a date palm and his colour is yellow.

Sialosti

Exemplar of spite, Sialosti is patron of vile intrigue and perverted lust. Her symbol is the belladonna flower, and her colour is puce.

Timeon

Exemplar of self-assurance, Timeon is patron of aristocrats, wrestlers, smiths, lumberjacks, and mahouts. His symbol is a hammer and anvil, and his colour is tawny saffron.

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Vesper

Exemplar of self-discipline, Vesper is patron of ascetics, stoics, and string musicians. Her symbol is Indarian and her colour is white.

Magic

Magic gives access to a suite of supernatural powers quite different in character from miracles. Ordinary persons can manipulate magical forces only using slow and careful symbolical techniques, and even these are unreliable and dangerous.

There are, however, exceedingly rare natural mages, who can control magical forces with much greater facility and reliability, using special techniques. Natural mages are all left-handed, and their talent becomes apparent during puberty, when they are prone to strange delirious illnesses, and when a white streak appears in the hair of each. The talent runs weakly in families, but can show up anywhere.

Magical invocations require the use of the True Tongue. In this nouns are generic True Names, and imperative verbs are magical commands. Magical effects are enhanced by the use of the specific True Name of the target. A person's specific True Name can be divined by a magician who knows him or her well.

Magical operations require elaborate symbolic props, and do not work when the practitioner has any knots or fastenings about his person. Contact with iron will disturb a magician's abilities for hours or days.

There is a field of magic called "necromancy", which deals with life-force and the mind. It is marked by sinister

symbolism, and presents its student with a scale of increasing temptations to do evil. Ultimately, it offers eternal youth— at the price of aging others in ever-increasing amounts. The depredations of necromancers have given general populations a great fear of all magicians, people with white streaks in their hair, left-handers...

Gehennum

Gehennum is an extensive archipelago in the tropical zone, stretching 150 kilometres either side of the equator. It is about 1,500 kilometres from east to west, and includes about 6,000 islands, 880 inhabited.

Gehennum lies over a subduction zone: there are many volcanoes, but much of the islands' material consists of upthrust, folded, and metamorphosed sedimentary rocks. These are now heavily eroded, and present a spectacular, but inconveniently rugged, landscape.

Basalt, limestone, marble, shale, and sandstone are common. Granite and other plutonic rocks are very rare. Minerals include flint, jade, volcanic glass, and some gemstones. Iron and copper ores are rare, other metal ores very much so. But as metals are rare all over the World of Isles, Gehennum is relatively well-endowed with metal ores.

All the islands are surrounded by coral reefs, and this makes the few harbours at which it is possible to get a ship to the shore very valuable.

The fauna and flora of Gehennum are by-and-large equivalent to those of Indochina and the Malay archipelago. There is a diverse tropical rainforest in the coastal zone, with teak forests in the highlands. The

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peaks of the very tall volcanoes stick up above the usual cloud layer, and have an alpine meadow flora succeeded ultimately by ice and snow.

The Gehennese forests abound with wild pigs, small deer, a type of goat, monkeys, gibbons, orang-utans, wild duck, bantams, parrots and other birds. Predators are less numerous, but include tigers, leopards, lynxes, wildcats, wild dogs, serpents and constrictors. The Gehennese forests are also the home of the elephant, found nowhere else.

The alpine regions are frequented by goats, hares, hyraxes, foxes, martens, lynxes, and eagles, among other species.

The domestic animals of Gehennum include the dog, pig, ox, cat, hen, duck, and elephant. Rice is a major crop, and a multitude of fruits and spices, some of them doubtless introduced, are grown in plantations or gathered from the wild. Opium poppy, coca leaf, and bhang (psychoactive hemp) are widely cultivated.

The Climate

Gehennum lies on the equator, and because of its warm shallow seas and the small inclination of the ecliptic, the seasonal trade winds never invade it. As there are no large plateaux to induce monsoons on the World of Isles, Gehennum is plunged into permanent doldrums.

At sea, only fitful winds blow, and if the occasional storms swell into hurricanes, their paths take them well out of the archipelago before they develop their full fury.

Along the coast sea breezes blow from mid-morning to sunset, and land breezes from mid-evening to dawn. These allow sailing vessels to operate along the

coasts, but for trips between any but the closest islands, power is necessary, and this requires magic, miracles, or oars.

Over the littoral land, regular afternoon thunderstorms are the rule, and serain sometimes falls after dusk. Further inland it is a little drier— storms bring rain, but not as frequently or regularly as on the coast. Catabatic winds at night and anabatic in the day extend the regime of the coastal winds, and thus keep the overall humidity high.

One effect of this climatic regime is to keep Gehennum isolated from the rest of the world. Foreigners blow with the sea-wrack into equatorial waters, then drift on the currents to Gehennum, to wash up with the flotsam on the outer beaches. To get away is beyond the means of most— it takes a magician, a miracle, or many rowers to drag a sailing ship out of the intertropical convergence and into the trade winds.

The Gehennese learn much about other lands, and give very little away. In the legends of far countries Gehennum is a mythical land where lost things go, a land of no return.

The People

Three main intelligent species inhabit Gehennum : humans, divers, and flyers.

Ordinary Humans

The Gehennese local race of humans are of no great stature: a typical man in his physical prime might be 165cm tall, a woman 155cm. The Gehennese have a great predilection for exercise, however, and tend to a lithe athletic build. Insofar as they compare themselves to foreigners, they pride themselves on their agility and litheness.

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This is not to say that there are not some very large and robust Gehennese.

The Gehennese have skins of a warm, slightly reddish brown, which darkens slightly on long exposure to sunlight (no rare thing). Their hair is black, rather coarse, and varies from straight to very wavy. Curly and frizzy hair are most uncommon.

Gehennese eyes are usually some shade of brown, with the paler russet to topaz shades being thought attractive. Green eyes are most uncommon and are greatly admired.

Divers

Divers are an amphibious species, capable of breathing either water or air, provided that the same fluid fills their lungs (they will 'drown' on land if they cannot cough up the water in their lungs). They tend to a thickset, barrel-chested type, and readily put on a thick layer of subcutaneous fat. The easiest way to tell a diver from human is by his or her cat-like eyes. Divers are capable of interbreeding with humans.

Even with tools and weapons, divers cannot compete with sharks and dolphins as predators. They live as largely reef-bound hunter-gatherers, with a few crops on the smaller islands, but mostly trading fish and shellfish, pearls, shells, murex, and salvage for their land-derived needs. Divers eat and sleep in villages on beaches and small islands, where they are safe from sharks and hypothermia.

Divers need more food than humans, and do not thrive where they must compete on equal terms with them.

Divers in Gehennum have the same range of colouring and such racial characteristics as the ordinary humans.

Flyers

Flyers are a species of short, slight humanoids each with a pair of enormous eagle's wings. An adult flyer may be only 160 cm tall, but he or she will have a wingspan of nearly eight metres. Even when folded, these wings are an enormous encumbrance to their owner, making him or her unable to swim, lie on his or her back, or fit into moderately small places. Flyers lack the muscular strength to beat these monstrosities enough to fly any great distance. On the other hand, flyers can glide and soar for hours without effort.

For the most part the flyers of Gehennum live in the mountains, though a few come down onto the littoral to earn wages as couriers and scouts. Their children, oldsters, and pregnant women live in inaccessible eyries, of which the largest and most famous is Oreopolis, the 'City in the Mountains' on Bethany. Flyers must do a little gardening, but they leave such labour to the landbound among them. Flyers despise work, especially anything agricultural, and prefer to live by their nets and bows.

Flyers have a reputation among the other species for want of honesty and chastity, and for a fact, do seem to seek out unwinged partners for sexual variety. Such unions are never fertile, and marriage between flyers and other folk are not considered possible.

Given the lack of interfertility, it seems odd that Gehennese flyers have the same range of coloration and other racial characteristics as the human Gehennese, but they do. Their feathers are almost always a glossy black, like those of a crow. Flyers from other parts have feathers that tend to match their hair colour.

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Leshy

The Leshy, whose homelands are in Elusium, occasionally visit Gehennum. They are a beautiful and talented race, capable of excelling humans at most endeavours, and are immune from the ravages of age, but they are not very fertile, and tend to become languid as the centuries slip past. Nowadays they are exceedingly rare, most having shifted to the Shee, a mysterious otherworld of bliss, terror, and perpetual Indarian-light. Once they were more common, and they have left traces of their presence over all that face of the World of Isles where Indarian shines.

According to legend one leshy, Alkinous the Last Unborn, survives from that day, forty-six centuries ago, when all the people of the World of Isles awoke, naked and without chattels, free of memories, but having a common language, and let history begin. Some Gehennese philosophers think even the event legendary.

The Leshy are fair-skinned, but tan readily and deeply in the sun. Hair and eyes of all the usual colours may be found among them, except, of course, that their hair does not go white or grey with age. Their skin is always free from blemishes— even their worst scars fade in time— and their hair is as sparsely-distributed as that of a human child.

Half-leshy are known of, and presumably leshy/diver hybrids are possible, but liaisons between leshy and ephemerals are rare (the Leshy do not think well of such affairs) and of low fertility. Half-leshy are very long-lived, but age and die eventually.

Languages

When they awoke on the Eldest of Days, nearly five millennia ago, all the

people of the World of Isles shared a spoken language and a sign language. Since then the spoken language has followed the usual tendency to split up and mutate, producing a family of languages as alike as Earth's Indo-European family, which is to say as diverse as English and Hindi, Spanish and Russian. The sign language, for some reason, has proved less changeable, so that intelligibility has been preserved around the World.

The most important spoken language in Gehennum is Gehennese, which exists in a handful regional dialects and scores of local accents, but is everywhere recognisable and intelligible.

The only other significant spoken language is Elusian, the language of Elusium. This conservative language is spoken by the Leshy, and is a language of scholarship, like Latin in mediæval Europe. It is also the lingua franca of world trade, widely spoken by traders and sailors in nearly every country except Gehennum, which has little international trade.

The sign language is about as powerful and expressive as an Earthly deaf-and-dumb sign language such as Ameslan or Austlan, except for having no alphabetic symbols, and therefore not allowing one to spell out words and proper names. It is commonly understood in Gehennum, being indispensable to soldiers, hunters, dancers, and divers (who cannot vocalise underwater). Most people in the World of Isles gesture as they speak, for emphasis, elucidation, or because they find their speech stifled when they do not. Bad liars sometimes give themselves away by their signs.

There is only one form of writing current on the World of Isles, which was

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invented by the leshy scholar Galen over three thousand years ago. It is alphabetic, and has a cursive form (for writing with a brush or pen) and a capital form (for carving with a chisel).

Technology

Gehennum has technology as advanced as any in the World of Isles. Gehennese galleys are not as seaworthy as the sailing vessels of other countries, but they are better-suited to Gehennum's conditions (see Climate).

For an indication, the Gehennese lay stone as well as the ancient Egyptians, they tunnel and build aqueducts as well as the Classical Greeks. They navigate using an astrolabe and a Pacific-style chart of bamboo strips, shells, pebbles, and pitch. They cast copper, and make bronze with imported tin. They make pattern-welded steel as good as that of mediæval Japan. They make excellent armour out of laminated hemp of a thickness of two centimetres. They make crossbows with a one-stage trigger as good as anything on Earth before Leonardo da Vinci. They write with brushes on papyrus.

Metal is scarce, and so expensive. Flint and obsidian are used for a cutting edge where possible. Timber and bamboo are plentiful, and therefore cheap, and are used rather than stone in most structures. This may make Gehennum look primitive, but that impression is false.

The Economy

Subsistence in Gehennum is based on the cultivation of upland rice in dry fields. Swamp rice is used to exploit otherwise useless land, but farmers are not yet flooding fields to grow wet rice. The fields are

ploughed by ox-drawn ploughs, but fish, fowl, and game are more widely eaten than beef. The Gehennese do not milk their oxen, and would think dairy foods disgusting. Apart from farming, fishing with net and line and hunting with spear and bow are the most common ways of life.

Gehennese society is wealthy, and supports many thinkers and artisans. The wealthy are not yet quite in the way of living off their interest: hunting and fishing for sport and the table are still significant to the economy of a wealthy household.

Trade in specialised products, especially minerals and manufactures, is thriving and respectable, even though traders often engage in a little piracy on the side. Gehennese princes do not consider it a degradation of their station to engage in trade.

Barter is still the most common means of exchange, but money, consisting of special shells and minted metal, is sufficiently well-established that a man lacking other goods need not go without his needs, and is gaining ground. In the advanced Central Isles, all citizens are expected to have or get money to pay their taxes.

The standard unit of value is a five gram bronze coin called an *obol*, which will buy a cooked meal, a man's rations for a day, or a 100 gram iron spit. Six obols are worth one silver *drakhma*. Twenty drakhmas are worth one gold *mina*. A *sequin* (a type of small shell) is worth one tenth of an obol.

Women & the Family

In Gehennum a woman must marry outside her family. She joins her husband's family on marriage, and men rule the families. Marriage is monogamous.

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Although men sometimes keep concubines in addition to their wives, these arrangements are not condoned by society or the law

When a woman marries, her share of her family's wealth is given to her husband as a dowry, and she has no legal control over it. Propertyless, dependent upon their menfolk to protect them from robbery, enslavement, and rape, and generally obliged to marry at the pleasure of the men of their families, Gehennese women are in an invidious position. They have few legal and no political rights.

As society is patrilineal, the paternity of any children is very important. This being the case, women are obliged to protect their reputations for fidelity: to be known as 'fast' is a disaster. Men are careful that they are not encumbered with the support of another man's bastards by their wives, sisters, or daughters. This care takes the form of protecting 'their' women from seduction, rape, and scandal. The reputations of 'their' women have become a point of honour for Gehennese men, and in many cases their protection has become oppressive.

In most Gehennese houses, a secure '*gynkeum*' is set aside as a refuge for the women, and is generally guarded as well as the family can afford. Such families as can afford it like to remove the need for their women to go out in public. Certainly, no woman of 'good family' goes out without a guard and chaperone.

The poor can't afford this rubbish. Poor women must work, and can afford no guards. They are less trammelled, but are considered fair game for seduction by wealthy men.

Society & Politics

In the eastern and western extremes of Gehennum society still consists of independent farmers, fishers, and foresters living in tribal groups, led by respected elders.

In the Central Isles, on the other hand, special economic roles, including the ownership of property, have emerged, and neighbouring tribes have coalesced (by a variety of processes) into city-states. Each such coalition owns a swatch of land, usually no more than a man can walk across in a day. Each of these sovereignties makes its own laws by its own processes. There are democracies on the Athenian model, republics on the Roman, military dictatorships, monarchies, mob-backed tyrannies, reigns of terror, meritocracies, oligarchies, timocracies, and almost anything else you can imagine.

The exception is that there are no states ruled by religious institutions. This is because of the Gehennese tradition of the Four Lives.

The Four Lives

A Gehennese citizen's career of public service is expected to fall into four parts, called lives. First there is the Life of the Child, in which the citizen is expected to learn the things he will need to know later. Then there is the Life of the Warrior, in which the citizen is expected to serve the State under arms. Then there is the Life of the Magistrate, in which the citizen helps to govern his community. Finally, in the Life of the Priest, the most respectable citizens represent their fellows to one or more of the many divinities. The Gehennese do not have a career of priesthood. Rather, priesthood is

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the last phase of a political career, a dignified and respected retirement from politics.

In the developed States, especially the ones where there are many candidates for public office, a custom is firming up that sets the ideal length of each of the four lives to twenty years.

“Good Families”

In the larger, more sophisticated States, where the burden of a public official's duties is considerable, only those citizens who have independent means can afford to hold public office. In such states the gentry, the so-called “Good Families”, tend to dominate the government, no matter what the constitution of the State might be. Only in the most radical democracies and the most repressive monarchies are the public officials paid, and in such States the Good Families greatly resent this measure.

So all advanced and powerful Gehennese communities are stratified into a gentry and a class of poor citizens. Such communities also include slaves and a class of *metics*, which includes freed slaves, resident aliens, and the descendants of such folk.

Monarchs

The Gehennese distinguish three types of monarchs. The first, conceived of as possessing a divine quality of majesty, are the supposed descendants of powerful geists. These *anaxoi* are the most respected monarchs.

The second type, distinguished by the title *basileos*, is the *primus inter pares* of a state ruled by a number of families—leading gentry or the royal houses of the State's constituent tribes. Such rulers sometimes have fixed terms in office, and their

successors may be elected by [certain of] the gentry or come from another family than their own.

The third type is the *tyrannos*, a monarch whose title goes back to a revolution or *coup d'état*. *Tyrannoi* include the most popular and least popular of rulers. Some rule their domains by force, others allow free elections of their officers, and pay the elected officials.

Warfare

The city-states of Gehennum are constantly squabbling with one another, and often at war. If one gets a moment of peace, its gentry are likely to go off raiding.

In former times and backward areas, rural gentry with their priceless metal armour and bow-armed tenants and retainers dominated the battlefield. Now that burghers of modest wealth can afford arrow-proof laminate armour the balance of military power is swinging to the middle classes, and the balance of political power with it. In the advanced Central Isles, where extensive tracts of land, especially near the cities, have been cleared for fields, phalanxes of well-drilled middle-class shieldmen with stone-pointed spears dominate the battlefield, and democracy is rampant. Many city-states have found it necessary to make militia service and the possession of appropriate weapons compulsory for all male citizens of warrior age.

Naval battles are rare, and tend to be mere furious *mêlées* between infantry on longship-like pentekonter galleys. Ships armed with rams are a recent innovation of the city of Hospis, and are found only in the Central Isles. Sieges are better conducted, with storm, escalade, mining, and battering

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in wide use. Trebuchets and catapults are common in the Central Isles.

Cities are generally defended by titanic walls of well-laid stone, frequently twenty metres tall, and sometimes taller. These are intended, not only to frustrate escalade and siege towers, but also to exclude raiders using the mystic discipline of heroic leaping, which makes possible a high jump of fifteen metres.

Prisoners taken in war become slaves. Battle prisoners are often sold back to their relatives, effectively being ransomed. When a city is sacked, however, whole families may be taken slave, and are often plundered of the wealth with which they would otherwise ransom their warriors. Captives not redeemed by their families must live out their lives in slavery.

Cities & Buildings

Cities, being originally refuges for rural peoples, have sites chosen for defensibility. Their walls often include uninhabited ground for terrain advantage. Although city life is burgeoning, many landowners still consider their estates their homes, and their city houses refuges in war and places to stay when on business.

As well as a refuge, a community needs a place to meet and do business, public and private. In small and backward cities, there is a single public square, which serves as a marketplace, and assembly ground for the army, an athletics field, public meeting hall, and site for religious services.

A large, advanced city will have a separate market square, a gymnasium for athletics and militia parades, a stadium for races and archery contests, and one or more theatres for assemblies and religious

ceremonies. These facilities may be outside the walls, and will have few structures. The market square and gymnasium will be simple open spaces, with a few shrines and perhaps some thatched arcades for shelter from the sun and rain. The stadium will be a level stretch about 160–200 metres long, maybe with an earthen bank on one side for the spectators. The theatres will be level floors or platforms facing hillsides.

As well as these essential facilities, a city may have a citadel, any number of temples, an aqueduct, a cistern-house, docks, a town hall, a bell-tower, a palace, and many other things.

In Gehennum's climate people often want shelter from the sun and rain, without needing to block cold winds. Where security is not an issue, the Gehennese build light airy structures: pavilions, cloisters, peristyles, and colonnaded arcades. The latter may allow access to shops and public buildings through a back wall, and are a major feature of Gehennese public places.

Only the most important structures are built of stone. Most private residences, even those of the wealthy and the inns and taverns of publicans are built of timber, bamboo, matting and thatch. Among private residences, only the semi-fortified strongholds of [unruly] gentry tend to be built of stone— and fortified residences are forbidden in many well-run States.

Most windows are covered by stout lattices or grilles. In the country, these keep out monkeys, birds, and leopards. In the cities, they keep out burglars and seducers.

Most people combine their residence with their place of business— warehouse or workshop below, residence above. Many houses are guarded by dogs in the courtyards.

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Gehennese houses are sparsely furnished. People sit and sleep on mats on the floor. Tables are portable items a few inches tall. Possessions are kept in decorated chests, which may double as benches, beds, or seats (rich men often sleep on top of their strongboxes). Apart from these, and the screens and writing desks in wealthy homes, there is little furniture.

City Life

The Gehennese rise at dawn, and eat at most a light meal of fruit and tea or coffee before beginning their work. For most women, the first tasks of the day are cleaning and washing, followed by marketing for the day's needs and preparation of the noon meal. Young men of leisure go first to the gymnasium for a morning's exercise, then bathe before lunch. Their elders first take a leisurely bath, then tend to private business and formal visits at home. Poor men labour in the mornings, often aiming to bring their produce or catch to market in time to be bought in the women's pre-noon marketing. They bathe hastily before lunch.

Between lunch and the afternoon rains workers and artisans return to their work, while men of leisure go to the public square to meet friends, transact business, and discuss public affairs. Very different goods and services are on sale at this time than a few hours before. Youths and young men of means, the gentry who expect one day to govern the state, pursue their education in these hours, in formal classes in Scholastics and informal discussions with philosophers. Women fill these hours with spinning, weaving, sewing and such major tasks, which they often perform in groups enlivened by discussion and singing.

During the afternoon rains people of all classes take light refreshment. Those who have toiled since lunch, and finished their exertions for the day, bathe in preparation for the afternoon's recreations.

Except on farms, the hour or so between the rains and sunset are a time of general leisure. They are the occasion of games, theatrical performances, and religious observances. Workers and artisans taste the pleasures of the gentry: athletics, talk, and public business. The inns open their jars and begin to sell wine, beer, opium, and bhang. Their clients play backgammon, Go, and dominoes.

The second real meal of the day is eaten at sunset. The wealthy may follow it with a symposium (drinking-party), the poor with singing and dancing by firelight in the squares and on beaches, but most nights most people are asleep by eight pm.

The Gehennese month of thirty-two days is split into eight-day weeks by festivals at New Moon, First Quarter, Full Moon, and Third Quarter. These moon-days are general holidays, with militia drill in the mornings and public assemblies, theatrical performances and religious ceremonies in the afternoons. The evenings are marked by gaiety and merry-making.

Gymnastics & Scholastics

The Gehennese ideal is a balanced development of mind and body. Scholastics (rhetoric, dialectic, arithmetic, geometry, and music) and Gymnastics (running, swimming, jumping, archery, javelin-throwing, wrestling, kick-boxing, and war-dances) are considered complements in Gehennese education, no man being complete without both of them.

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Athletics is supposed to fit the citizen for the Life of the Warrior, Scholastics for the Life of the Magistrate. For this reason many States oblige all citizens between the ages of eighteen and twenty to take instruction in gymnastics under publicly-appointed coaches. Democracies and some monarchies also provide for basic training in scholastics for these ephebes, but only those who have already been taught to read and write by their families profit.

The teaching of rhetoric and dialectic involve research, lecturing, and debate on a broad range of topics, from natural history and philosophy to military science and law. Scholastics therefore has a deal of content in addition to its formal curriculum.

The gentry see to it that their sons can write, and often arrange for them to devote their time to gymnastics and scholastics from the age of fifteen. Depending on the family's wealth a boy might have private tutors and coaches, might join classes with a teacher or coach retained by fees, or might be taught and trained by older friends and family connections.

A boy's education might be supervised directly by his father or another relative, or by a state magistrate in charge of education, but often a slave or servant called a 'pedagogue' is employed for this task. In many places, particularly in the leisured classes of the citified states, it is common or even usual for an ephebe to take a young warrior to guide and advise him. This is considered a profound relationship for both mentor and *protégé*, and a very important formative experience. Sexual relations between mentor and protégé are common, and in some parts (particularly on the island of Samarios) expected, lauded, and officially

encouraged. The relationship often lasts beyond the younger man's coming-of-age at twenty, and sometimes continues even when the older man marries.

Costume

In their hot and sweaty climate, the Gehennese wear few and scanty clothes. By our standards, they are very casual about nudity, but in many cities it is improper for a woman to go completely naked, as men often do.

The Gehennese go nude to swim and bathe (which they do in streams and public baths), in most forms of athletic exercise, even at public athletic contests. Nudity is also usual in pursuits that would damage clothes, such as fishing, farm work, and hunting, not to mention cleaning fish and butchering livestock. Smiths wear leather aprons to protect themselves from burns, but no clothes as such.

Nevertheless, nudity is not appropriate to all circumstances. For a rough guide, going nude in Gehennum is like wearing a singlet and shorts in Australian society.

Gehennese clothes are simple. A single garment is the rule, and this is usually made of one piece of uncut cloth. Gehennese clothes are always draped, never tailored.

The single piece of cloth which constitutes a Gehennese suit may be worn in any of a multitude of ways. The simplest garments are sarongs tied around the waist or above the breasts. The scantiest are loincloths tied like a Melanesian *pelau* or an Aztec *maxcatl* (which is wound around the hips and drawn between the legs, with one end hanging down before and one behind). Other variants resemble a Greek *peplos*

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(wrapped around one side of the body, pinned on both shoulders, and girt), a Greek *khlamys* (draped over one shoulder and pinned on the other), and a Roman toga. The most sophisticated is a sleeveless tunic of fine cloth like a Greek *khiton*, originally worn under a cuirass to prevent chafing.

Gehennese, having no pockets, carry their purses on thongs around their necks. Footgear does not exceed the wearing of straw or leather sandals. Broad-brimmed, low-crowned straw hats are sometimes worn outdoors.

The style of wearing of hair in Gehennum can be significant. Girls wear their hair loose or in long braids: putting the hair up at about fifteen is a sign of womanhood. Among men, flowing hair is a sign of status, a claim of prowess. It is worn with a headband, of which the colour and pattern often proclaim status, purpose, or group affiliation. Short hair is worn by men who cannot afford to be encumbered by loose hair, such as labourers and keen wrestlers. Men often cut their hair as a sign of mourning, or when undergoing a rite of passage such as becoming an ephebe at eighteen, coming-of-age at twenty, or resignation from the military at about forty.

In Gehennum the colour of clothes can often have an explicit significance. Purple, for example, is worn at celebrations (especially weddings), black when acting under oath, mauve when mourning, scarlet to signify gallantry. Undyed clothes are for slaves and the very poor.

Music & Dance

Gehennese music is based on five-note scales, like much folk-music around Earth. Major and minor mode are

recognised in each key, the latter used for sad or sombre pieces.

The most common instruments are fipple flutes, essentially the same as an European recorder except for the tuning. There is also family of pipes not unlike the oboe and bassoon family, and also lyres and zithers. By tradition there is an antipathy or tension between wind music (which is supposed to be wild and passionate) and string (which is supposed to be meticulous and serene). This contrast is often exploited in orchestral works.

The Gehennese also use many percussion instruments, like xylophones and tubular bells. Most of these are made of wood or bamboo. Since the tuning of such cannot be adjusted, and as there is no standard pitch, each of these must be specially made to play in a particular ensemble. These arrays, each played by a group of musicians, and perhaps making up one third of an orchestra, are called gamelans.

Dancing is very big in Gehennum, and may be divided into three kinds:

For recreation at parties there are folk dances. These are often very elaborate, and may be very vigorous. Some are for men, some for women, some have parts for both. Mixed dances, although considered daring, are pretty chaste: people of different sex scarcely touch.

Narrative dance, fortified by sign language, is an important dramatic form. It is used at religious ceremonies for performing myths, and there is a great deal of kudos attached to performing a major role at an important ceremony. The Gehennese secular theatre evolved from religious dance, and is in the opera/ballet area of music-drama.

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War-dances are stylised and elaborated weapons drills, like a cross between martial-arts 'forms' and rhythmic gymnastics. They have a part in the teaching of martial skills and the cementation of militia units. They are also danced as a form of exercise, as an exhilarating social performance, and to display suppleness and prowess. War-dances are often taught to girls as well as youths, to make them lithe and fit. Very few students learn any useful fighting ability from war-dances alone.

Art and Literature

The Gehennese do not yet separate art from decoration, of which the most prominent is the woodcarving that decorates pillars, panels, and fascias in their timber-and-thatch houses. Stone buildings (most of which are temples, fortifications, and civic facilities) are often painted with vigorous, brightly-coloured murals as good as anything in Knossos. Relief carving and decorated columns are coming into fashion in the wealthy cities.

Tools, weapons and utensils, especially those made of expensive metals, are often decorated with carving and inlay. Abstract patterns and stylised figures are most usual in such areas. Perhaps the best decorative art in Gehennum is the pottery of the city of Thekla, which is widely traded. Theklan ware is decorated with lively, realistic paintings of mythological incidents and everyday scenes in black glaze on the red-brown earthenware, with touches of white being used by experimental artists. Theklan vessels and (inferior) imitations are displayed in wealthy homes, the first portable works of art.

Gehennese sculptors carve reliefs, and also make statues of timber and stone. The

reliefs, guided by mural composition, are the best of these. The fully round sculptures are marred by stiff poses and poor treatment of facial expression. Statues are used as cult objects in temples: monumental and decorative sculpture are rare.

Gehennese literature is poetry: prose is used only for prosaic writing. Poets are experimenting with new metres and rhyme schemes. New forms, such as love poems and ballads, are joining the traditional hymns and epics. In Borillis a small circle of outstanding poets is evolving the tragedy out of the heroic epic. Literature is progressing by leaps and bounds.

Places

Asthmara

Built on an isthmus in northern Bethany, Asthmara is famous for the paved road, 2 km long, over which ships are dragged on rollers by elephants, to avoid a long sea journey. Asthmara is blessed with two good harbours.

Asthmara is officially a democracy, but officials are not paid, so the gentry dominate the government. Asthmara is leader of a modest league of nearby cities, of which the efforts are directed against piracy. The geist of Asthmara is patron of their Isthmian games, held every two years, and open to all.

The badge of Asthmara is an eagle.

Bethan

Bethan is a warlike and xenophobic community, devoted to conquering and ruling its neighbours. Bethan has a complicated and inscrutable government, but is essentially ruled by a hawkish military tradition, which no-one could defy.

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Bethanians are noted for taciturnity and mistrust of learning. Foreigners are not invited to their games, and they only go to games when they have a strong chance of winning.

Bethan is devoted to the geist of a large iron meteorite. Its badge is a fist.

Borillis

An oligarchic *anaxy* on northern Samarios, Borillis is leader of a league of mutual defence by monarchical states against the Samariotian League. Borillis is famous for the skills and morale of its soldiers, and is the place of origin of many highly-regarded war-dances. Borillis is also noted for bards, heroic verse, and mercenary generals.

The badge of Borillis is an elephant, of its league, a coiled serpent.

Elmis

Elmis is a remote but fast-growing colony at the mouth of the Eurotas river, in eastern Bethany. It was founded by exiles from the formation of Samariopolis, has since been swollen by other exiles and refugees, and is noted for its wildness. Elmis is famous for the alluvial gems and gold found in the Eurotas sands and sold there.

Elmis, a democracy controlled by its gentry, is devoted to the conquest and development of the vast Eurotas basin, now very backward.

The geist of the Eurotas is much revered in Elmis, and there is a vigorous cult of Helios (the geist of the Sun) who here is surnamed "*Pankrator*" ("All-ruling"). These two geists take it in turns to receive the honour of the biennial local games.

The badge of Elmis is a solar disc.

Harmon

A major city on the west end of Kaplan, Harmon is noted for its beautiful harbour and fine fleet. It is a major port for sea-dragon hunting, and major exporter of sea-dragon oil and leather. It also has control of a number of iron mines, but its ironworks are not as extensive or skilful as those of Skyra.

Harmon is ruled by an hereditary tyrant, with a tendency to appoint councillors and officers on the basis of personal favour. Foreign policy is inconstant: Harmon is involved in a virtually defunct League of Western Kaplan (set up by the previous tyrant "to counter Skyran expansionism"), a simmering dispute over coastal fishing with the *anaxos* of Souvenir, and with devious plots to counter the expansion of Thekla on Thelmond and in the islands between Thelmond and Kaplan.

Harmon holds games every year at the opening of the northern sea-dragon season. These are dedicated to Pontus (geist of the Ocean), and give pride of place to a dragon-hunting-boat race. The geist of Kaplan also receives a major cult.

The badge of Harmon is a dragon.

Hospis

A progressive principedom on northern Samarios, Hospis is an important member of the League of Borillis. It contributes an excellent harbour and the services of the most powerful navy in Gehennum. The *anaxos* of Hospis allows his subjects to elect his councillors and officers, and pays salaries to those elected. Hospians are known for their easy ways. Their rowers are the best, and their troops are versatile and adaptable, if not unusually skilled.

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The badge of Hospis is an open hand.

Oreopolis

A city of perhaps five thousand flyers in the inaccessible mountains of Bethany, Oreopolis is perched on a number of adjacent peaks, each sporting tall houses and terraced gardens. Its government is pretty laid back: each 'eyrie' is laxly ruled by magistrates chosen by co-option.

Oreopolis was founded by Cassander, an avatar of Timeon with a vision of civilisation and dignity for his fellow flyers. His heir is the 'lord of Cassander's peak' and de facto tyrant of Oreopolis.

Periander

Periander, on the eastern end of Thelmond, is a wealthy, civilised city with an excellent harbour. Although it is a vigorous moderate democracy, Periander is opposed to the Samariotian League, and is trying to maintain an alliance of cities on Basiliskos, Apris, and the eastern end of Thelmond to resist Samariopolitan expansion. Western members of this alliance are becoming unreliable, as they become increasingly concerned about Thekla.

Periander has an annual Amphiktionic games with dragon-boat racing, dedicated to Pontus (geist of the ocean), at the opening of the southern sea dragon season. It also has a decennial Games of Periander, dedicated to the geist of the city but open to all.

The badge of Periander is a leopard.

Samariopolis

The largest city in Gehennum, Samarios was founded by amalgamation of the cities of the Mennon valley, which

moved together to a new site a century ago. This city is noted for its grandiose structures and black basalt walls.

Samariopolis has the largest army in Gehennum, of which the elite is its famous *Aotos* (Sacred Band) of homosexual couples. Samariopolis is a populist tyranny, and completely dominates the Samariosian League, a supposed alliance of democracies. Samariopolis uses League funds to sponsor democratic subversion, then induces the resulting revolutionary states to join the League and pay tribute.

Samariopolis holds a League Games every five years, open to citizens of all League members. The patron of the Games, city, and League is the geist of Mount Samars, a volcano, who demands a sacrifice of ten youths and ten maidens every fifth year. Captives are the usual sacrifices.

The badge of Samarios and its League is a stylised picture of Mount Samars.

Skyra

Skyra, on the eastern end of Kaplan, is an advanced, sophisticated city of civilised and unwarlike disposition. The government is an *anaxy* with a gentry sufficiently powerful that the *anaxos* must take care of who he offends when he appoints his council and officers.

Skyra has a number of iron mines, and the best smiths of Gehennum are among its citizens. It is noted for the reek of forges, the ringing of anvils, and the haze of charcoal-burning in its mountains.

The geist of Kaplan is revered in Skyra, but the triennial games (open to all) are devoted to Timeon, who has a magnificent temple. Wrestling is emphasised

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at these games, and Skyra often produces notable wrestlers.

Skyra weakly supports the League of Borillis, of which it is formally a member. It is also the de facto leader of a sleepy little League of Eastern Kaplan,

The badge of Skyra is a teak tree.

Thekla

Thekla is a powerful *anaxy* near the middle of Thelmond. It dominates a complicated league-cum-hegemony with free and subject members. Thekla has an awesome harbour, intimidating citadel and thirty-metre white limestone walls, but its reputation is marred by the cheap equipment of its hordes of poor hoplites.

The crack unit of the Theklan army is a regiment of homosexual couples set up to imitate of the Sacred Band of Samariopolis.

Thekla's foreign policy is dictated by a grandiose scheme to conquer Gehennum and stamp out human sacrifice. At the moment it is expanding mostly at the expense of the backward states and outright savages of western Thelmond. Its single-minded pursuit of domination is, however, giving pause to the western members of Periander's league.

Thekla reveres and is sponsored by the geist of the island of Thelmond, to whom its games (held every seven years, and open to citizens of all members of its hegemony) are dedicated. The tribal mystery cult, on the other hand, reveres the (female) geist of the city.

The badge of Thekla is a tiger's face.

The Archaic Period

The situation described above is one possible version of Gehennum, distinguished as the 'Archaic Period'. Its political

fragmentation, frequent wars, relatively open social structure, and susceptibility to dragons and other great monsters make for a certain style of adventure. Player characters, being free to leave a state they don't like, or to flee a ruler whom they offend, tend to be rather independent, and to treat sovereigns with a touch of equality. It is also possible for adventures to feature extraordinary states of affairs in out-of-the-way places, and for communities to have no-one to turn to but player character wanderers.

The Classical Period (setting of the first playtest campaign) and the Decadent Period provide somewhat different settings, suited to different types of adventures.

The Classical Period

The Classical Period is about two centuries after the Archaic Period. Thekla has succeeded in conquering Gehennum (though the fall of Bethan is within living memory). The resulting Empire is ruled by the successors of the *anaxoi* of Thekla through a central bureaucracy and local *epistopoi* of forty compact prefectures (each including several former states).

The Classical Period requires a more subtle type of play: Gehennum is politically united, so player characters cannot so trivially flee lawsuits and political enemies. It is suited to adventures which revolve around either more personal issues or political intrigues like those of *The Three Musketeers*.

Technology

Technology has advanced remarkably since the Archaic Period, with the invention of glass, lenses, concrete, clocks, ultrahigh carbon steel (damascus steel), distillation, and gunpowder. The gunpowder is only

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used in rockets and fireworks, experimental cannon having failed because of humidity problems. Apart from the lack of firearms, technology is on a par with Earth's European Renaissance.

Gehennum is still at or near the forefront of technology in the World of Isles.

The Economy

The economy is now based on the cultivation of swamp rice in flooded paddies. In Gehennum's seasonless climate, paddies will produce a crop every 112 days, including the necessary period of fallow. The value of floodable land has skyrocketed, food has become plentiful, and the population is burgeoning.

Landowners have become very wealthy, and their wealth has summoned forth a large and prosperous class of traders, artisans, and manufacturers. Gehennum has become an urban culture with a sophisticated cash economy.

An interesting side effect of the spread of paddyfields is that ducks have largely replaced hens. Also, frogs and fish are encouraged to breed in the water, and are netted for food when the paddies are drained.

Overfishing of oysters and murex have made pearls and purple scarce and expensive.

Women & the Family

The remarkable contributions of Aspasia (courtesan, raconteuse, educator, and inventor of the novel) have recently had a dramatic effect on the position of women. The recognition of female intellect has made men turn to women for company. Integrated parties are now more common

than stag dinners, and the ball and *soirée* are emerging to rival the symposium. Now a beautiful and witty wife is as great a credit as a fertile and virtuous one.

Progressive men now encourage their daughters to meet eligible suitors at dances and parties, and allow them some choice as to who they will marry. Although the law still makes the dowry the property of the husband, usage is beginning to reserve the income from it to the woman, and some men even allow their wives to manage their own dowries.

Opposing these tendencies, men are still fervent in avoiding the support of other men's bastards, and live as much as ever in fear of being cuckolded. Social mores have as a consequence become complex and subtle, and among the idle and gossipy urban rich very much so. As much as anything else, the danger of slaves' gossip forces all families to adhere to chaperonage and other measures designed to guarantee female chastity.

During this period, men marry earlier (at 21-30, rather than 25-35), and women later (late teens rather than 15-16), and the mystique of male homosexuality is at its nadir.

Society & Politics

Gehennum is now the empire of the royal house of Thekla. The descendants of former monarchs have become hereditary nobles with greater or less wealth, more or less prestige, and the titles *kyrion* ('lord'), *anaxos*, and *kreion* ('duke'). They have been joined in these ranks by certain servants of the empire elevated by legislative act. These nobles make up the *Gerousia* (Senate), which acts as supreme court and the upper house of legislature. The privilege of nobility

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is to be immune to trial except by the *Gerousia*, and extends to members of the *Gerousia* and their wives and children.

Executive government is in the hands of the *Hegemon* (Emperor) and his *Boule* (Council), which consists of six chief servants (usually noblemen). These are the *Khrysophylax* (Treasurer), the *Angelos* (Herald), the Imperial Court Mage, the *Polemarkh* (Marshal), the *Anakrites* (Chancellor), and the *Hierarkh* (Primate). Each heads a department of official secretaries, assistant secretaries, and clerks, based at Thekla. In addition, the *Polemarkh* commands the armed forces, the *Anakrites* all imperial magistrates, and the *Hierarkh*, all priests.

For the purposes of imperial government, Gehennum is divided into forty *episkopies* (prefectures). Each is administrated by an *Episkopos* (Prefect) reporting to the *Anakrites*, who is assisted by a Superintendent Fiscal (who reports to the *Khrysophylax*), and supported by a *tagma* (brigade) of troops (whose commander reports to the *Polemarkh*). The *episkopoi* are usually local nobles or relatives of the *hegemon*.

Imperial projects are executed, and the Emperor's Peace enforced, by salaried *krites* and their lictors. Prominent landowners in the country are appointed *hypokrites* to assist in keeping the peace.

In what was perhaps a move calculated to diminish the powers of the nobles, all cities have been granted democratic charters by the Emperor, although the decision as to whether or not to salary public officials is up to the towns themselves, as is the extent of citizenship and the franchise. When the Emperor wishes to make a law, he summons a representative

of each chartered city to make up the *Apella*, the lower house of legislature.

Metics are not distinguished by imperial law, but by the laws of the cities. Those with political ambition move to those cities with easy citizenship qualifications or attempt to win the favour of the voters in cities prone to admit individuals by plebiscite.

Most slaves are born into the ownership of the families who will own them until they die or are freed. Warfare which would legally enslave more people is very rare, but children are sometimes illegally kidnapped into slavery. A certain number of slaves are imported, but on the whole slaves are not very common, and are usually employed as personal servants rather than in agriculture and industry.

Warfare

Gehennum has no neighbours that might attack it, or that the Emperor might attempt to annex. But the militia tradition, combined with democratic feeling and the local influence of the nobles makes rebellion so likely that the imperial government finds it necessary to maintain forty-three *tagmai* (each of twenty-five hundred men). The troops help to keep the peace and to collect taxes, and provide lictors to the imperial legates, but still, 107,500 men is a lot in a population of twenty million.

One *tagma* is stationed in each *episkopy*, and an additional three are kept in the presence of the *hegemon*. These last three include a brigade of archers (the *Toxeuma*) and two brigades of guards infantry—the *Aotos* (Sacred Band of Thekla) and the *Nike* (elite troops commanded by noblemen).

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Each brigade contains 1500 heavy infantry and 1000 light infantry. The heavy infantry are trained to fight in phalanx in the open and as individual warriors in the forests. They are equipped with spears and huge shields, and carry swords, maces, or axes for close work. The light infantry are trained to protect the wings of the phalanx, and are equipped with bucklers, javelins, and axes, maces, or swords.

Naval warfare techniques improved enormously during the amalgamation of Gehennum. The core of the imperial navy is now a fleet ram-galleys with three banks of oars, with double and single-banked galleys as escorts and cruisers. Ramming and ballista-fire now settle naval engagements, and blockade is a viable strategy.

In addition to the imperial forces there are the local militias, perhaps two million trained and organised troops. Militia service is now largely a social event with a little light street-patrolling, but it is still compulsory either to serve or pay shield-money, so most citizens own arms and drill weekly. The militias have a low proportion of heavy infantry compared to the regulars, but still...

The militias are perforce very much under the influence of the people who hold social authority in their areas: the nobles and the city governments. But the Emperor collects the shield-money of those who opt not to serve—a potential source of strife.

Cities & Buildings

Economic development has allowed cities to grow enormously. Most have filled in the vacant space within their walls, many have spilled suburbs out into the farmland beyond their defences. A few—Thekla, Samariopolis, Elmis—have grown into huge

bustling metropolises with hundreds of thousands of inhabitants.

There has been a flood of colonisation from the Central Isles to Western Thelmond and Eastern Bethany, and many new cities have been founded. Most of these have been cleverly planned on rectilinear grids, with roadways at least three and up to five metres wide. They have spacious public facilities, grand new public buildings, and offer a very different style from the crabbed, cramped old cities of the core.

In most cities the public amenities have been considerably improved. There are shrines and stone arcades in many market-squares. Theatres have been improved by earthworks, and many have stone benches for the audience. Now it is usual for a major theatre to have a permanent stage and a '*skenion*' wall behind it. Seating has been provided at most stadiums, at least near the finishing post, and in some cases an embankment has been built so that spectators can watch from both sides. Many cities have had their water supply improved by the provision of an aqueduct to bring water to public cistern-houses in the cities. Most cities also feature covered sewers.

Building in stone has become much more common, even some private houses being made of limestone and marble. As the price of land within the cities has become very high, multi-storey buildings have become common. Sometimes the first two or three storeys are of stone, and the upper storeys of wood, bamboo, and thatch. It is usual that the ground floor of a private building will house shops and workshops, and the upper storeys residences. A common pattern is for the owner of a building to live on the first floor, conduct his business in, or

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let out, the shops below, and to let the upper storeys as tenements to the tenants of his shops or others. People who want whole buildings and their grounds to themselves mostly live in the suburbs.

Costume

The only significant change in costume since the Archaic Period has been that it is now fashionable for men to wear their hair close-cropped after the age of eighteen. Youngsters sometime cut their hair to seem more mature.

Music & Dance

Dancing-parties, or balls, are now a very common amusement, and mixed dances are the rule at these. Dances for mixed couples have emerged among the under-classes and been taken up by the upper classes. They are considered *risqué*, and staid families will not allow unmarried daughters to take part.

Art & Literature

In the Classical Period art is at the very zenith of beauty and proportion. Statues are well-composed in three dimensions, with supple, life-like poses and convincing features. Sculpture now widely used in monumental and decorative art. Fresco, polychrome, and wax paintings adorn many walls, and painted screens have joined the still-improving painted pottery as portable artworks. So also have miniature sculptures cast in bronze by the lost-wax process.

In art, however, grace and beauty are considered more important than likeness, so all art tends to be idealised.

Prose fiction has been invented, with the publication of the first novel by Aspasia, a courtesan and scholastics teacher. Many people consider it newfangled, but

awareness of prose style is rising and literature is improving.

The Civil War [optional]

In 4792 Emperor Aristarkes died, leaving his signet (sign of office) to Hyrkanthes, his third but eldest living son. After ascertaining that most of the nobles were against this proceeding, Regikhord (son of Aristarkes' late eldest son) raised a rebellion in 4793. Hyrkanthes had the support of the army and most of the cities, and soon drove Regikhord's army to the northern extreme of Bethany, where they held at the walls of Asthmara.

Angered by a raid on his lands, the previously insignificant *anaxos* Jasper of Souvenir raised two brigades of troops, gave them unconventional equipment, and taught them unconventional drill. He quickly conquered Kaplan, landed on Thelmond, defeated two armies, and laid siege to Thekla.

The threat to Thekla forced Hyrkanthes to leave Asthmara merely beleaguered, and bring his army to Thelmond. He met Jasper near Orio in mid 4797, and in the ensuing battle Jasper's '*Melankreuthes*' wiped out the *Nike* and killed Hyrkanthes. As a result of a tactically inconclusive battle, Regikhord won the war.

Regikhord & Jasper [optional]

Emperor Regikhord cultivates the image of a merry monarch, and sponsors art and drama with an open hand. Despite this, he is very unpopular, because the nobles resent his high-handed treatment of them, and the commons sympathise with his estranged wife (Lesterra of the Blessed Isles), who is imprisoned on the remote island of Morglay. Regikhord has not been able to

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get a tax Bill through the *Apella* or *Gerousia* since the year after the war. He lives on shield-money, rent from palatinate estates, and the income of a silver mine under Mount Taygetus. Regikhord is spending most of his money building a vast palace outside Thekla.

Regikhord's heir-presumptive is his sixteen-year-old daughter Lysandra, banished with her mother. Unless the Emperor reconciles with the Empress, or obtains a divorce from the *Gerousia* and remarries, no legitimate son is going to be born. So everyone expects that Lysandra will inherit, and that her husband or guardian will rule as regent.

Regikhord's prime minister and chief crony is his *khryophylax*, Kartiphon, but his regime depends rather on his *polemarkh*, Jasper of Souvenir. Jasper *Anaxos* has conducted thorough purges of the government, the military, and the Senate, and thus earned a terrible reputation. Feared, respected, and obeyed more widely than the Emperor, Jasper and his private army keep the regime on its feet.

Jasper's wife and most of his children were killed when Hyrkanthes' forces raided Souvenir. His vast estates will be inherited by his sole surviving daughter, Aylise, aged fifteen.

The Decadent Period

The Decadent Period is about two centuries after the Classical Period. The Emperor and the Senate have been relegated to purely ceremonial functions, and the reins of the central government are in the hands of an hereditary *Polemarkh*. While the House of Souvenir was seizing power in Thekla, the *episkopoi* of the various *episkopies* took the opportunity to expand their

authority and independence. The *episkopacies* are now hereditary, and their *episkopies* are practically autonomous.

In this version of Gehennum social groups are paramount, and for them the stakes are high and single lives cheap. Adventures will feature the efforts of player characters to gain status in their groups and their efforts on behalf of the group. Duty to group and superiors, and responsibility for dependents, will loom large. It is a murky world of spies, assassins, traitors, and paladins, to rank with Frank Herbert's Dune or mediæval Japan.

Technology

Windmills, watermills, telescopes, and clocks are more widespread than in the Classical Period, but technology has not produced any actual innovations. Despite this, Gehennum is still at the forefront of technology.

The Economy

The main changes have been the growth of large estates at the expense of the forest, and the gradual consolidation under labour-hiring landowners of the former multitude of freeholds. Hillsides with inclines of up to 20° have been terraced for paddy-fields, and divers guard commercial beds of murex and pearl oyster.

Society & Politics

Society is now rigidly stratified, almost divided into castes. At the top are the *Hegemon* and the nobles, hedged around with mystique and taboos that effectually insulate them from politics and power. Their incomes are immense, and they hold important-sounding posts at court, but they are political and social ciphers. The House

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of Souvenir is unique: it holds the office of *Polemarkh*, controls the imperial government, and provides the *episkopos* of Thekla. Daughters of the House of Souvenir often marry sons of the Emperors.

Next down are the ruling families of the prefectures, locked in a perpetual struggle with one another and the House of Souvenir for land and prestige.

Next are the gentry, the 'good families', who support the *episkopoi* and receive leases on land and titles in return. Then the prosperous merchants and craftsmen who flourish in the cities and concern themselves with local government. Then there are journeymen, labourers, and peasants, and finally, slaves.

Although a pretence of democracy is carried out in the cities, the politics that really matter are those of the *Polemarkh* and the *episkopoi*. The *polemarkhs* exert themselves to recover central government, the *episkopoi* collaborate only enough to frustrate this aim—all in the name of the *Hegemon*. In the pauses of the great game, the *episkopoi* contend among themselves for territory.

Warfare

Central government is sufficiently weak that *episkopoi* of adjacent prefectures can make open war (albeit for brief periods), and powerful families can conduct feuds with battalion-size skirmishes. Mercenaries and bands of personal or family retainers are usually the troops involved, as the local militias are rarely politically reliable enough.

Each *episkopos* keeps a band of retainers of good family, and rewards them with magistracies and leases upon retirement. These retainers act as political hatchet-men and errand-boys during their

warrior years, and afterwards act to bind the gentry and their dependents to the *episkopoi*.

On a smaller scale, *krites* and other senior officials, and great landowners also maintain bands of military retainers.

Cities & Buildings

Cities have grown still further, and any fortifications will have been concentrated on defending the *episkopos*, his local deputies, and their garrisons from riot. The result is huge sprawls of suburbs with the ancient fortress-cities in the middle.

Temples, shrines, monuments, and all sorts of buildings in stone have accumulated in the cities. Most theatres now have elaborate marble bleachers and *skenions*, most gymnasiums are surrounded by marble walls and sport baths, covered tracks, statues, trophy-houses, schoolrooms and shrines. Most market-places are completely surrounded by peristyle arcades. Most stadia have stone bleachers on both sides of the track, many of them covered. The old bath-houses are now luxurious complexes offering refreshments, massage, barbers' services, entertainments, and countless other personal services. They are often adorned with marble and sculpture.

City Life

City life remains much the same except that men of leisure may now spend the whole morning at the baths or bath/gymnasium complexes. It is also much more usual than it has been formerly for men of position to live on their country estates, cementing relations with their tenants against military need.

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Costume

The long hair of the Archaic Period has come back, now an even more explicit statement of prowess and pride. Only men prepared to defend their presumption wear their hair uncut and flowing. Men with less claim to prowess, or less desire to demonstrate it, may wear their hair at any length down to about the shoulder-blades. The cropped hair of the Classical Period is fashionable at Thekla and in the Army, and is elsewhere considered the mark of a supporter of the Marshal.

Music & Dance

Couples dancing is now *de rigueur*.

Art & Literature

Gehennese art is now less obsessed with beauty and proportion: it strives from realism or the conveyance of emotion more than ideal beauty. Also, it attempts more often to show figures in states of arrested motion, rather than the formal and languid poses of Archaic and Classical art.

Paintings on moveable panels and hangings are now common, and a market has emerged for trade in art. Another innovation has been the casting of life-sized bronze statues.

Architecture is not up to the standards of the Classical Period. There is some excellent engineering in Decadent architecture, but the form and decoration tend to gaudiness and baroque, even rococo, frivolity.

Literature, too, has deteriorated. Writing is now elaborate and affected, with little of the vigour of the Classical Period.