TORG
ETERNITY

Beta Clearance GM's Primer
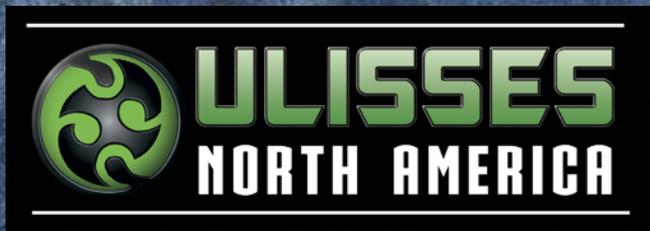
TORG ETERNITY

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Beta Clearance GM Primer

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ULISSES NORTH AMERICA

BETA CLEARANCE: GM'S PRIMER

It's not just the Storm Knights who get a boost when the team reaches Beta Clearance. Things aren't just harder because they'll be facing more powerful foes. The missions they undertake are more noticeable to the opposition as well.

BETA GAMEPLAY

The GM now has a pool of two Possibilities for every player present. These may be spent for *any* foe. Only reality-rated opponents can soak damage, but Ords may use these Possibilities to gain dice on attacks or crucial skill tests. This isn't something they're doing consciously, it's the influence of The Void itself. Reality-rated villains have their own pools of Possibilities as usual, plus full access to the GM's pool. Note that this extra power comes from The Nameless One, but not necessarily the Darkness Devices—they may be totally unaware of the Stormer's activity.

In general, use these Possibilities offensively. Make a miss a potential hit, or push a mediocre attack up into one that's rolling Bonus Dice. Don't be afraid to take on Multi-Attack penalties to put pressure on two to three Storm Knights from a single attack, since the boost from an extra die (minimum 10) is going to offset the penalty and then some.

GAMMA AND BEYOND

Gamma Clearance teams are famous. Such heroes have thwarted the High Lords multiple times. Stories of their victories and sacrifices have spread to every realm and charge countless people with hope and the energy to resist. This fame comes with a price.

The High Lords dispatch teams of "Storm Hunters," elite Stormers with multiple kills and 100 or more XPs of their own. Each team is led by a named Ravagon with just as much experience. One of these hunters may appear during any Setback, and every remaining hunter in the area may arrive during a Setback in a Dramatic Scene!

Forces beyond just the High Lords take direct notice of the heroes' activity at Gamma. Just as Apeiros is the hidden force that grants Possibilities when Storm Knights make clever quips and do things to save Core Earth, The Void now takes a

Players are going to get stronger — don't just increase the threats, increase their responsibility!

direct interest as well. If Glory is played the GM now immediately gains an extra Possibility per hero.

The Void offers other gifts of darkness as well, but those must wait for another time.

ENCOUNTER BOOSTING

It's very likely a group of Storm Knights graduates to Beta Clearance, but the GM still has plenty of adventures designed for Alpha Clearance. Alpha Clearance adventures work fine for Beta Clearance characters with only minor tweaks. The GM's Possibility Pool takes care of most of it, but foes and encounters still geared towards beginning characters may be too easy for experienced veterans.

Whether that's an issue or not depends entirely on the encounter's purpose within the story and the pacing of the adventure overall. Combat encounters are punctuation within the story, often occurring as the concluding set piece of a scene. They might introduce villains, establish a general threat, or be an obstacle the heroes must overcome. Occasionally they crop up just to reinforce a general sense of danger or the feeling of being in the Possibility Wars.

Whether an encounter needs to be modified at all, and how, depends on its purpose and placement. Dramatic Scenes should get the most attention and upgrades. Anything in a Standard Scene might be left alone or resolved quickly just to keep things moving. After all, Storm Knights don't gain Experience from winning fights, they gain Experience for completing Acts—which means getting things done and moving the story forward.

Here's a breakdown of different ways a GM can modify an Alpha Clearance combat encounter for Beta Clearance:

DON'T

Seriously, not every encounter needs to be fair or challenging. Sometimes the heroes just blow through weaker opposition. This is not a waste of time, it's an opportunity to let the Storm Knights show off a little and feel like the powerful individuals they are. This can change the feeling of an encounter from establishing a present danger to establishing why nobody else could undertake the mission, and that's valuable too. It helps answer the question of why the Delphi Council didn't just send some soldiers to handle this job.

There's also a minor paradox at work here. More difficult battles last longer, and thus allow bigger Action Pools, more rolls, and so more chances for Glory which makes later battles easier. Weaker opponents won't last as long, but likewise don't give much time to build an Action Pool, which keeps the Storm Knights relatively in check.

UPGRADE THE OPPONENTS

When it's appropriate for a combat to be more challenging, the first thing to tweak is the opponents involved. Don't increase the number of foes, but add a twist to those that are present. There are a few levers for the GM to pull here:

Reality-rated foes. Changing one or two members of a Mob to Stormers significantly increases the challenge. This is an often-ignored aspect of the standard rules. Most types of opponents have a potential one in ten chance to be reality-rated anyway. Thinking cinematically, they "coincidentally" share situations with the Storm Knights more frequently as the stakes go up. If there are more heroes, the odds of one of the villains getting "bumped up" increases, and Beta Clearance can simply add a slightly higher ratio of reality-rated villains. Increasing the number of Possibilities a reality-rated enemy has also increases their threat, though to a lesser degree.

Perks. More skill adds and one or two interesting Perks can completely change how an opponent fights. Leadership Perks are especially nasty for a large Mob since the GM's Possibility Pool can power them. Negation is always challenging for Core Earth Stormers, as is Realm Runner combined with an equipment upgrade as below. Relentless, Sniper, and Trademark Weapon can bring some serious pain. Endurance and Tenacious increase staying power. Each Perk can tell a story, especially combinations that players might otherwise overlook.

Equipment. Better items can make a difference in how Mobs operate as well. Body armor where troops didn't have any before, one or two heavy weapons (or the magical/spiritual equivalent) supporting the squad, or even an armed vehicle can really make an encounter pop. LAW rockets and grenades have the double advantage of really threatening otherwise untouchable characters, and getting used up in the attempt so they don't just make the Storm Knights stronger after the Mob is defeated.

A combination of all three elements is especially effective. Give these Stormers names. Even if they get taken out they're likely to survive to fight again another day. If the Storm Knights opt to execute their fallen foes, remind them of Operation: Eris, where Storm Knights are posing as Stormers to gain intelligence about the High Lords. They may be killing allies.

QUICK COMBAT

If the combat is just for flavor and is a trivial threat to anyone involved, it's also possible to resolve it as a single test. Choose a skill to test against for the combat, and its target is the best foe's usual defense. But here's the trick: each player must select a different skill to test. If the attackers have ranged attacks at all, dodge is a possible skill to test, rolled against the best of the opponents' ranged attack skills.

If the test fails, the character suffers one Wound and draws one Destiny card. The Wound may be Soaked separately if desired. This also counts as a Disconnection roll, so if the character is creating a contradiction, a Mishap results in disconnection and forces reality tests until the character either reconnects or transforms!

If the test succeeds the player should narrate how the use of the skill influenced the battle. A Good success also gains one Destiny card. An Outstanding success also learns details about one of the foe's Perks, Special Abilities, or distinct

agendas if there are any of the above to discover. The character with the highest margin of success is the battle's "MVP" and may describe taking out the most powerful opponent or largest number of foes as part of the skill narration, if desired. Either way it's worth bragging rights for telling tales.

Note that any Destiny cards already in hand may be used for the test—there's no need to build an Action Pool here.

MORE FOES

Alpha Clearance adventures are usually weighted with a certain number of foes depending on how many Storm Knights are present. At Beta Clearance and beyond that kind of "fairness" is no longer necessary. More and more encounters simply list the forces available for the encounter, regardless of how many heroes show up to challenge them.

Increasing the number of villains is the last lever to consider pulling when looking to up the challenge of an encounter, but there are circumstances where it's appropriate. Any time the Storm Knights are dealing with armies or bases filled with guards, the designers usually make excuses to partition those forces out into smaller, more manageable mobs. If it makes more sense for there to be a hundred enemy soldiers at a location…go with it! Trust the heroes to either overcome weight of numbers with superior skills and the Action Pool, or flee if things go badly.

It's not usually a good idea to artificially inflate the numbers present for regular encounters. Save this for when it feels appropriate for a major force to be in the area. Likewise, don't try to follow a formula for how many troops will make for a fair fight—commit to what's correct for the scenario and let the Possibility chips fall where they may.

GENERAL ADVICE

A few pieces of general advice. Most of these apply to Alpha Clearance games just as much as Beta Clearance, but as players and characters both gain experience and mastery, there are a few tricks to keep in mind:

INTEGRATING OTHER REALITIES

As you drop in hints and rumors about what's happening in the other realms, Storm Knights may feel compelled to race home. Remind them that this is a concerted war effort, and the Delphi Council has asked them to help out here and now in the Living Land. Every mission against a High Lord helps your home.

In the meantime, encourage them to enjoy playing a "fish out of water" in the current realm, secure in the knowledge that eventually the Delphi Council will ask the team to help out somewhere else and the group's roles will be reversed.

Alternatively, it's possible to play through each Year One campaign with a different group of Storm Knights, each suited to the realm they're adventuring in. In Year Two there's much more realm-hopping, so your group should choose their favorites from the early campaigns and continue with them. The first year of the war is a special time, where all the cosms are most separate. Enjoy it while it lasts!

MISHAPS

Remember, a Mishap (a roll of 1) always fails. No amount of Possibility Energy changes that. The "Second Chance" Destiny card is the only way out, and if it's early in the battle, one may not exist in the Action Pool.

Mishaps can make even a lopsided battle dangerous for either side. Consider the effects of a Mishap when trying to Soak against a deadly attack!

DISCONNECTION

A disconnected Storm Knight is extremely vulnerable. Go ahead and exploit that weakness, especially if the players are complaining that things are too easy. Long Burst or All-Out Attack, and let the Bonus Dice determine the unfortunate hero's fate. Conversely, if the players are new or

having a tough time, look for excuses to prioritize a connected Storm Knight, or prompt the team to make choices to protect their vulnerable member.

TARGETING

The golden rule for targeting with opponents is "spread the love." If a Storm Knight specifically maneuvers to be behind the lines or out of sight, it's warranted (and rewarding) to skip them in favor of active combatants. But anyone actively in the fray should have something target them each round, even if villains must use Multi-Targeting to make that happen.

In general, avoid rolling separate attacks against the same target. Use the best skill (or skill attached to the best damage if desired), and then roll a single Combined Action for everyone contributing to the attack. It's fine to roll separate groups of attackers against different foes. When dealing with a huge Mob it's usually best to roll a single Combined Action with a bonus for every attacker, but with a Multi-Targeting penalty to include each Storm Knight. A single Possibility can boost the entire attack, however a single "Opponent Fails" is a perfect counter in this case, so keep an eye on the Action Pool.

Where foes may double-up rolls is if one or more want to set up the heroes using an Interaction Attack. This wouldn't work if it was done as part of a Multi-Action, as the effects take place simultaneously, so it's acceptable for the two tests to happen separately and in order so the villains can take advantage of their numerical advantage—and the Storm Knights might find a lesser used interaction defense becoming suddenly important!

MOBS

As the number of villains increases it's critical to use the Mob rules from the Torg Eternity Core Rulebook, and Combined Attacks as outlined above, to keep the game from bogging down. A few tricky scenarios can come up when making heavy use of Mobs:

Fatigue: If the villains get a Fatigue result that deals two Shock per enemy, which means one or two individuals are likely to be completely KOed. Consider making this a morale effect, and the KOed

troopers just broke and ran, or tried to and were gunned down by a ruthless superior as a special effect. Just remember the Shock is taken at the end of their turn, not before.

Wounds: By default, if an attack would do enough Wounds to KO an individual attacked, just eliminate the target and don't bother adjusting the Shock total. If four Shock were present, that Shock doesn't go away just because a character was KOed, and likewise you wouldn't add the two or more Shock from the new attack either. It's simpler this way, and works out about the same.

Multi-Targeting: Add the Shock for each target hit. Hitting several with two Shock each is likely to break the Mob's Shock Limit and KO one of them anyway. If Wounds are done, take out the targets and ignore the Shock as above. This keeps things quick and simple.

As an alternative, the GM may disallow Multi-Targeting attacks completely, but if so, then every time the Wound Limit is broken another enemy is removed. The better damage from a single Good hit is roughly equivalent to hitting several targets using Multi-Targeting.

Example: Haggar swings his Impact Hammer (Damage 18) into a group of gospog and gets a Good hit, for 21 damage after the Bonus Die. The gospog are Toughness 8 and get KOed by a single Wound, but Haggar inflicts two, so two gospog are shattered by his mighty blow. If he'd managed to do 23 damage, thanks to a better Bonus Die roll or some other factor, he'd have taken out three of the undead things!

STATISTICS ON THE FLY

Players are clever, so even the most prepared GM may quickly need statistics for an unexpected weapon or vehicle. Sometimes everything needed is close by in the Core Rules. Other times, the GM has to improvise. Here's a few tricks for scaling new items, and also setting the Toughness and Damage for completely original monsters.

Speed is best derived from the Value Chart. Find the value for its cruising speed in MPH on the chart and add 3 to that value. (If you happen to have the KPH handy add 2 instead.)

COMPARATIVE TOUGHNESS AND DAMAGE

Example Toughness	Tough	(Armor)	Example Damage	Damage	AP
Human Non-Combatant	7	0	Bare Hands	7	0
Human Combatant	10	3	Longsword	10	0
Church Police, Heavy Plate	11	4	Longbow	11	0
Motorcycle	12	0	.38 Revolver	12	0
Compact (Small Auto)	13	0	9mm Pistol	13	0
Sedan (Medium Auto)	14	0	.45 Automatic	14	0
Suburban (Heavy Auto)	15	0	.30 Caliber Machinegun	15	2
Humvee (Unarmored)	16	0	.50 Caliber Machinegun	16	2
PBY (Small 2 Engine Plane)	17	0	Landmine	17	0
P-47 Thunderbolt	18	2	Bazooka	18	4
DC3 (Large 2 Engine Plane)	19	2	Claymore Mine	19	0
Mack Truck	20	2	12-Pound Cannon	20	2
Bulldozer	21	2	15-Pound Cannon	21	2
Half-track Transport	22	2	20mm Cannon	22	2
727 (Large 3 Engine Plane)	23	0	25mm Cannon	23	2
747 (Large 4 Engine Plane)	24	0	30mm Cannon	24	2
C5 (Hardy 4 Engine Plane)	25	2	LAW Rocket	25	4
Sherman Tank	26	6	Stinger Missile	26	4
T-34 Tank	27	6	57mm Cannon	27	4
Tiger II Tank	28	8	75mm Cannon	28	6
T-54 Tank	29	8	105mm Cannon	29	6
T-72 Tank	30	10	125mm Cannon	30	10
T-80 Tank	31	10	152mm Cannon	31	10
M1 Advanced Tank	32	10	203mm Cannon	32	10
Modern Warship	33	10	406mm Cannon	33	10

Maneuver Rating can range from –8 to 0. For instance, –8 or –6 represents vehicles that barely turn at all like zeppelins or cargo ships, while –4 is for large tanks or jets like a 747. An MR of –2 is typical of an 'average' automobile or fighter jet, while 0 is reserved for those particularly agile vehicles like motorcycles.

Wounds are usually based on the object's overall mass: 1 Wound for motorcycles to small cars, 2 Wounds for most four-seaters, 3 Wounds for vehicles around 10-25 meters long, 4 Wounds for objects 25 to 50 meters long, and 5 or more Wounds for vehicles that are even bigger. Hardened military designs may be granted an extra Wound.

For Toughness it's easiest to look at the **Comparative Toughness and Damage** chart above and pick the closest fit.

Likewise for new weapons and attacks, judge its offensive power compared to the weapons listed below. Its fine to nudge damage one way or another to account for different performance variables. AP is generally only granted for attacks specifically designed to penetrate thick, modern armor. A higher damage value is more appropriate for a destructive attack that can happen to punch through armor anyway.

Another good test for a damage value is to compare it to the object toughness chart. It should

deal 1-2 damage more than the Toughness of an object it's meant to combat.

Don't go too crazy here. Most powerful attacks should land between 15 and 17 damage, with only rare and significant special attacks delivering more.

Skill Ratings

Here are a few useful ranges for skill values encountered at the different Clearance Levels.

- **Beta:** Most skills are between 16 (weak) and 24 (strong). These may have a significant weakness in one of the Interaction attacks. Experienced Stormers, named Ravagons, and late-planting gospog fit well here.

- **Gamma:** Most skills are between 19 (weak) and 26 (strong). Special Abilities that mitigate Storm Knight's advantages are common. Major Demons, gargantuan monsters, and villains who have a shot at becoming High Lord fit well here.

- **Delta:** Most skills are between 22 (weak) and 28 (strong). Truly outrageous special abilities and defenses are common. This is where most High Lords and legendary creatures like the Carredon fit.

- **Omega:** Most skills are between 25 (weak) and 40 (strong). This is for the Darkness Devices themselves. Beware.

SKILL RATINGS

Rough Competence Level	Skill Total
Poor	6
Competent	8
Skilled	10
Elite	12
Renowned Master	14
Top Tier	16
World Champion	18
Supernaturally Gifted	20

YEAR ONE OVERVIEW
CORE EARTH

Operation Argo is the standing order to discover and recover Eternity Shards, and it has gone very well. Dozens of Shards of different sizes and power have been snatched from the High Lords' clutches, collected, and cataloged for use as war assets. The Delphi Council stores them in one of three main locations, depending on where the shard was retrieved:

Sydney. The main repository for Eternity Shards lies within the Delphi Council's headquarters in Sydney, Australia. The port's shipping facilities are intact, and the continent is free of High Lords so it seemed the most secure location on the planet. Unfortunately, the attack by the strange, potentially infected creature (see Pan-Pacifica below) and subsequent quarantine has hampered the council's ability to move more objects in and out.

Cheyenne Mountain. The provisional government offered the facilities at Cheyenne Mountain for Delphi Council operations, and for storage of Eternity Shards. The United States troops have managed to secure a few themselves, and bring them here for the Delphi teams to research and use. The government considers these items "lent," not given, and require that they remain within the United States' borders. The Delphi Council has protested that their charter allows them to use such items as they see fit, anywhere in the world. Thus far the debate hasn't come to a head.

Budapest. The third main repository for Eternity Shards is the vault system under Omar Bednarczyk's headquarters in Budapest. Valuables of all kinds move through here, mostly in support of refugees and the war effort. It just so happens that some of the trinkets moving around are actually Eternity Shards. The psychics of the Cassandra Division, conveniently also stationed here, have given Argo operatives mysterious tips on several items that turned out useful.

Central Europe—and Germany in particular—is feeling the pressure of being surrounded by four invading realities. Cut off and filling with refugees, Germany remains resolute in its defiance.

AYSLE

Angar Uthorion has proved exceptional just by relentlessly and doggedly doing exactly what he was ordered to. His expansion North and East has been costly, but ultimately successful. The Blasted Land has caused some issues, and he's hesitated to put stelae too close to the affected region, for fear of what the corrupted axioms might do to the area or his network. Iceland and Greenland have remained free of Aysle, thanks in part to assistance from the remaining United States and Royal Navies.

The maelstrom bridges remain intact, but the cavern network that facilitated so much of the initial invasion has become unreliable. It's still possible for heroes or villains to navigate the tunnels from one world to another, if perilous and uncommon, so communication is almost completely cut off.

Before this disruption most dwarves and a significant number of elves came through, drawn to different locations in the realm as if called. Now an uneasy alliance exists between the remnants of Core Earth governments and forces in the region and the "Army of Light" that emerged from Aysle to engage Uthorion.

One other new discovery threatens to loosen Uthorion's grip over the realm. An interaction between Core Earth folklore and the magic of Aysle has proven to create Eternity Shards if legends can be reenacted closely enough. This has led to furious research of local fables and several attempts, some successful and some disastrous, to tap into this new source of power.

CYBERPAPACY

The word that comes up the most about the Cyberpacy is "polarizing." After the events of the first year it is evident that Jean Malraux is a High Lord like all the others, but many within his realm and some outside just don't care. He offers peace, health, and safety, and in the terrifying wake of the Possibility Wars, his offer is tempting to the faithful and the cynical alike.

The Cybepapacy's expansion into Brazil shows the model it follows elsewhere. First came a wave of "missionaries" offering prayer, comfort, and supplies to a population suffering from the global effects of the war. After all, many in Brazil wondered how long it would be before the power went out and dinosaurs began appearing in the rainforest. After the first wave came the clinics, powered by talismans and using technology to heal broken bodies. When officials tried to stop the clinics they turned public opinion against the government for putting the war above saving individual lives. The third wave involved the improvement of infrastructure and installation of what would become stelae once connected to the network. Finally, the maelstrom bridge appeared as music played, and then the population didn't have a choice anymore.

Missionaries and clinics are appearing elsewhere, especially where there's a receptive religious population. Most of the High Lords are wary of these expeditions, but Baruk Kaah is especially livid after finding Missionaries within his territory. The truce between the High Lords has held up, so far, but it could be shattered if the Cyberpapacy
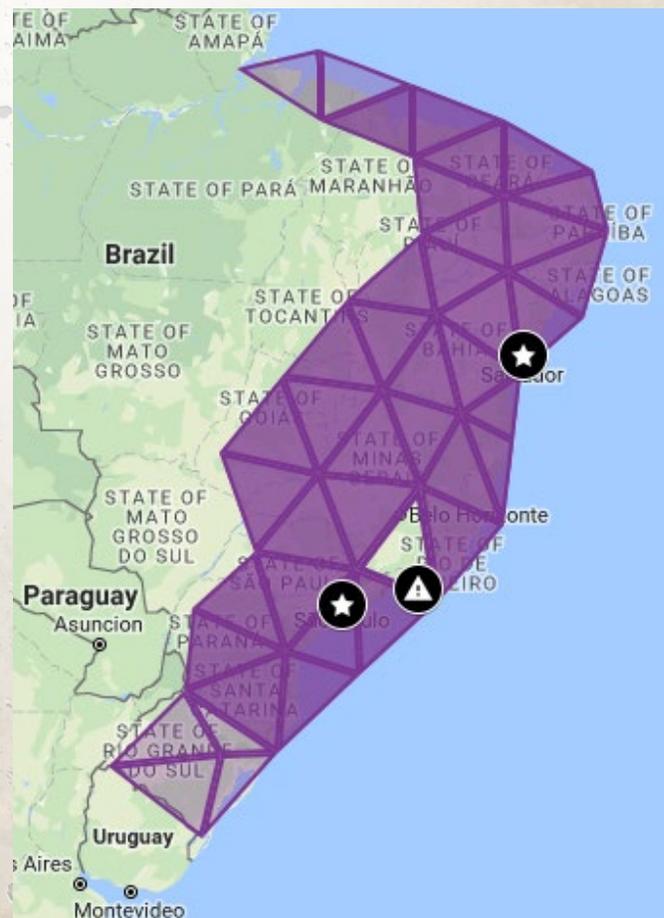
goes too far or its missionaries are slain by other reality raiders. The Delphi Council is searching for ways to make either of these things happen.

A subtler trend is the schisms forming within the CyberChurch itself. The Inquisition has discovered the Cabal, and is actively trying to destroy it, much to Malraux's displeasure. The Church Police, flooded with new recruits, is becoming more corrupt and secular. The AI of the GodMeeters have kept things mostly under control, but some squads are using hacked or unchipped weapons to dispense "justice" on their own terms. Finally, the Host have stopped taking direct orders from anyone less invested than a Bishop. They acknowledge requests, but the faithful are growing as fearful of the divine beings as the sinners are.

NILE EMPIRE

Year One in the Nile Empire marked Mobius' steady and methodical expansion across the African continent. His nefarious "reality bombs" paved the way for expansion to the South. He had a harder time pushing into the Arabian Peninsula,
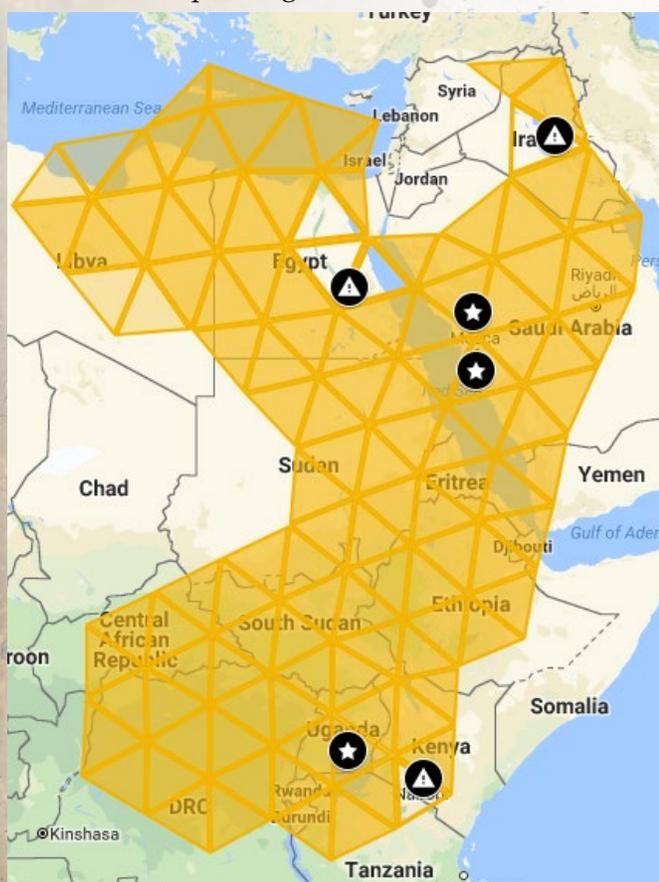
where modern air-power was strong enough to keep his bombers grounded. The advance has ground to a halt as Pharaoh's supply of Eternium, necessary for reality bombs and other weird science devices, became depleted. Mobius has no shortage of schemes for replenishing his supplies or conquering territory without his vaunted bombs.

Within the Empire, crime and betrayal are rampant. Cairo remains the main focus for both, and the insidious Wu Han is losing face due to his inability to reign in the various factions of gangsters and cliques of heroes who battle within the city. Some suspect Mobius himself is encouraging both just to undermine his brilliant but treacherous subordinate.

Where the Nile Empire spreads, ancient temples and tombs are uncovered that seemingly shouldn't exist. They all point to a history where an ancient Egyptian Empire spread out of Africa and ruled Rome, Greece, and Persia as tributaries. This history doesn't match Core Earth or Mobius' native Terra, so archaeologists and treasure hunters from both sides race across every newly opened zone.

ORRORSH

From the outside, it doesn't appear that much is happening in Orrorsh at all. The major boundaries haven't changed much since the first 24 hours. Brave Storm Knights from the Archimedes Division have proven that a high number of the afflicted zones have become Pure Zones. Pure Zones produce less Possibility Energy for a High Lord than a Dominant Zone in the long run, so this is a strange strategy for the Gaunt Man. Surviving explorers have found what amount to "Nightmare Trees" in these Pure Zones, but since Orrorsh's World Laws are already in effect it's unclear what purpose these trees could possibly serve.

On an operational level, most of the Delphi Council's efforts in the area revolve around the rescue of refugees from the affected area. Over a billion people lived in the affected zones, and just under half a million have managed to escape in the first year. Although that represents a fraction of the population, it's still a crushing number for already stressed relief organizations. Worse, there are rumors of "infected" refugees bringing horror
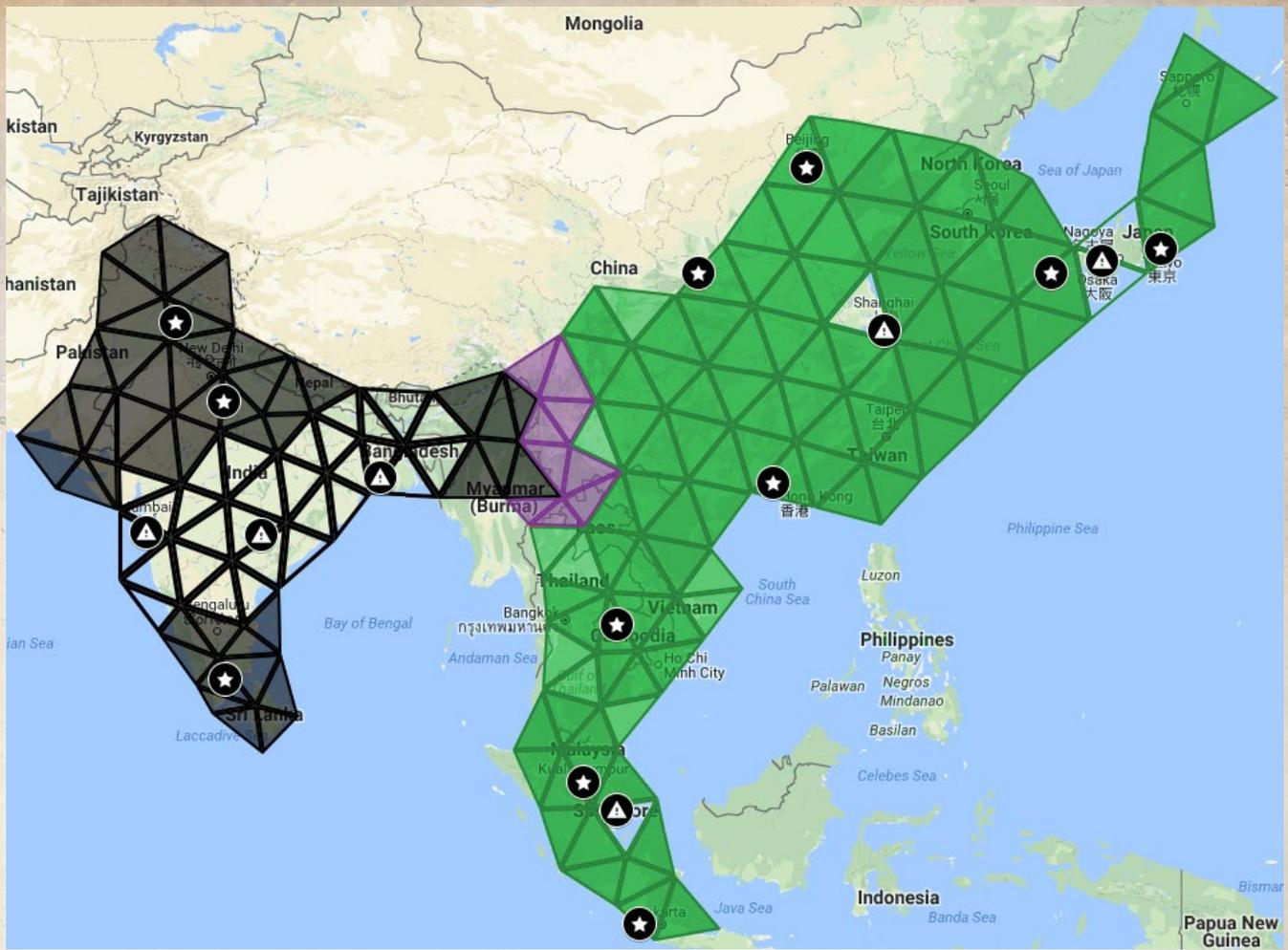
with them wherever they go. No proof exists, but the chance of refugees becoming monsters has been enough for most nations that might be able to support survivors from India to ban them instead.

The national government of India has completely collapsed due to the never-ending nightmare of Orrorsh. Regional governments are picking up the slack, usually with only limited or sporadic communication with the outside world. Outside of hardpoints, communities are usually tightly knit villages that have erected protective walls and spiritual defenses. Strangers are seldom welcome in such places.

Over the course of the first year the tide of Victorians increased, then slowed to a halt. The last of these reported that the days were becoming shorter on Gaia, leading to a general sense of panic. The first of the Victorians to come were bold veterans following the Gaunt Man to defeat him. The last to come were more like rats fleeing

a sinking ship. There was an abortive attempt to reinstate a national government—with the Victorians in charge, of course—but when that failed they set about building walled towns of their own.

PAN-PACIFICA

The situation in Pan-Pacifica has steadily degraded over the first year of the war. The Infected have mutated more rapidly than any measure Kanawa Corporation can deploy to contain them. Fear of the Contagion spreading led to strict embargoes outside the affected regions, which likewise served to strengthen the ties of the nations within. Traveling into Pan-Pacifica is difficult thanks to bureaucracy and mistrust, but leaving the area is almost impossible. Delphi Council operatives generally have to sneak in and out like spies, and small sympathetic networks have sprung up to support these comings and goings.

Over the first year, more and more evidence linking Ryuchi Kanawa with the initial outbreak of the Contagion was uncovered. Accusations were delayed by the Kanawa media machine, but eventually the story broke. At the end of the year Ryuchi is a fugitive on the run, and the Delphi Council, Corporations, and Shadow Syndicates are all racing to find him. Rumors abound that he's been captured or killed on three separate occasions, but he remains at large. His sister Reiko has taken over direct leadership of Kanawa Corporation and dedicated her efforts to redeeming her business by solving the problems Ryuchi created.

The biggest news from the region, literally, is the path the mutation of the Contagion is following. The abnormal specimens have grown steadily larger over the year. The biggest recorded was 30 meters in height, but the trend of increasing biomass doesn't seem to be leveling off. The most horrifying property of these larger "Abnormals" is they exert a kind of psychic control over other Infected near them. The controlled jiangshi overrun artillery that might harm the larger "Node" beast or swarm in its wake to exploit destroyed containment walls.

One of these larger Infected swam as far as Australia and did significant damage to Sydney before it was repulsed. No outbreak of Infected has occurred, but the city is still under quarantine.
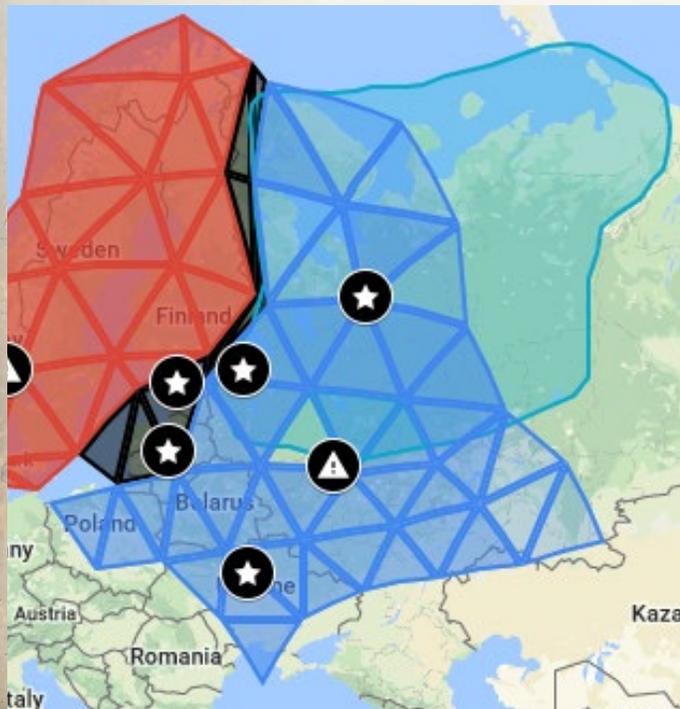
THARKOLD

The first year of Tharkold's occupation has proved as chaotic and tumultuous as the opening months. High Lord Kranod spent the first six months hoarding power, enjoying the spoils of war, and blithely ignoring the Gaunt Man's demands that he take a firmer reign over his realm. Kranod held back resources preparing for an inevitable power struggle. Unfortunately for him, when his enemies moved his Darkness Device, Malgest withheld that very same energy, leaving Kranod to fight and fall on his own.

Two Dukes led the coup—Duke "Wolf" Volkov (the President of Russia, and the only human Duke) and Duke Thratchen, one of Kranod's longest-surviving rivals. It was Kranod's own thrall Jezrael who landed the killing blow, leading her to claim his Dukedom for herself. In the aftermath all three tried to claim the title of High Lord, but Malgest has yet to accept any of them. It hungers for Possibility Energy, and has promised each of the three its loyalty if they can claim the most energy.

Tharkold has expanded more in the last 30 days than it has during the rest of the war. The Wolf is pushing Southwest with a combination of backroom diplomacy and brutal reprisals when negotiations fail. The United Nations have condemned Volkov's tactics and are voting to declare Russia a compromised nation, but that vote hasn't happened yet. Jezrael is attacking South and East without subtlety or mercy—and if The Wolf's supposed allies engage her then so much the better. Thratchen has been concentrating on the Blasted Lands to the North. The population is lower there so it seems a losing strategy, but he's been recruiting heavily from the raiders and misfits who dwell there for some greater purpose.

Canny observers believe something significant has happened in Tharkold's home Cosm as well. Technodemons still come through the maelstrom bridge in numbers, but thralls are scarce. The realm of Tharkold seems poised to either collapse into civil war or fall in line under a single, powerful leader and become perhaps the largest threat to Core Earth, but no one knows which or when.