

PROLOGUE

Imagine a world slightly larger than Earth, and slightly hotter, with two moons and four sister planets, all revolving around a star much like ours. A planet discovered by our star-faring descendants and their alien allies. This is Tékumel.

Its hostile indigenous races conquered and subdued, its poisonous flora all but eradicated, the world becomes a hub for the interstellar commerce of a vast star empire and home to a multitude of species as well as mankind.

Imagine this world engulfed by some unknown – and now unknowable – catastrophe that shifted its system out of normal space and into some sort of other-dimensional rift. In this “Time of Darkness”, as this era is known in legends, cut off from the rest of human-space, their world racked by volcanoes, earthquakes and tidal waves, the remnants of human and alien communities alike struggled to survive. Civilization crashed and began the inexorable plunge into barbarity and despair.

Now imagine the same world renewed: civilization rebuilt from the ground up over the course of some twenty-five millennia as the survivors struggled to get on their feet again. It is an altered world. Much has been lost and the new cultures remember their distant origins only in vague myths and legends. Humanity is the most numerous and powerful of these. Five great empires now sprawl across the surface of the planet Tékumel, interspersed with numerous lesser nations and tribal groups.

Technology is only half-remembered, the current level being roughly equivalent to that of ancient Rome at its height. In its place mankind has learned to harness inter-planar forces to create what we would call magic.

Humanity’s alien allies survive in their enclaves in a similar state, sometimes warring on their human neighbors, sometimes befriending them. And Tékumel’s original inhabitants still exist in their own enclaves, hostile to all the invaders of their home world, biding their time.

The greatest human empire is Tsolyánu, also known as the Empire of the Petal Throne. To the north lies Yán Kór, a land of squabbling city-states and petty overlords, united by the Baron Áld. To the west is Mu’ugalavyá, a militaristic land ruled by a rigid oligarchy. To the east lies Salarvyá, the Ebon Kingdom, ruled by a mad king. To the south is Livyánu, a land of shadow gods and sorcery. Beyond that are the lands of the Shén – a reptilian species originally from Antares; the Empire of Shényu being the greatest of their realms.

