

## ***Zhdant, Before the End***



## END OF DAYS (c. -539 to -531)

In this scenario, the events take place while the **Dzaqtlas** plague is at its height. The world is in the middle of the worst storm it's ever experienced;

**Time: c. -550 to -531**  
**(First Contact to start of**  
**Second Dark Age)**

people are dying by the thousands every day, crops are failing, public services are shutting down as the machinery of civilization grinds to a halt. Panic, chaos, rioting, and increasingly tribal behavior become commonplace as the people fight over the scraps of a dying civilization. Some cities are abandoned; others become walled enclaves in desperate attempts to defend against the silent, merciless killer. This is a "Twilight 2000" scenario.

**Game effects:** The dominant tech level before and during the collapse is roughly TL-7 to TL-8, equivalent to Terra during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Most of it is still in good working condition and will remain so for several years after the Dzaqtlas. However, parts become increasingly scarce and the people able to maintain them are valued as the Dark Age deepens.

**Noble titles** exist for some nations, but are not particularly important. The remnants of an upper class of nobility still exist, but society has collapsed in a functional sense so aside from access to government positions and wealth, Social Status means little.

**Psionics** are known but not ascendant as they are in later Zhodani society; there are no psionist careers available yet. Roll 2D for Psi, but no Talents are available. Any talents your character has are **Latent**; see the **Psionics** chapter for details. Some few may have been fortunate enough to get some tormal training and become **Adepts**.

Career	Roles	Notes
<b>Army</b>	<b>Support</b> <b>Infantry</b> <b>Cavalry</b>	Most nations of Zhdant maintained a professional fighting force before the Dzaqtlas.
<b>Aviator</b>	<b>Commercial</b> <b>Military</b> <b>Spacer</b>	Aviators flew the civil and military airships and Spacers flew the shuttles between Zhdant and Vlepchaki.
<b>Citizen</b>	<b>Corporate</b> <b>Laborer</b> <b>Tradesman</b>	The Citizenry comprised the bulk of the Zhodani people, working the trades, farms and fisheries.
<b>Entertainer</b>	<b>Artist</b> <b>Journalist</b> <b>Performer</b>	The arts have always been important to Zhodani culture; Entertainers often documented the events of the Dzaqtlas.
<b>Government</b>	<b>Administrator</b> <b>Diplomat</b>	Each Zhodani nation had its own civil (or military) government prior to the Dzaqtlas.
<b>Rogue</b>	<b>Thief</b> <b>Enforcer</b> <b>Pirate</b>	Like most human societies, even the Zhodani had a criminal underclass before the Dzaqtlas.
<b>Scholar</b>	<b>Field Researcher</b> <b>Scientist</b> <b>Physician</b>	The elite of the Academic class, Scholars were among the first exposed to the Dzaqtlas.

The cities are empty now, dead, decaying remnants of the old world. When the plague arrived, it struck without warning, a silent, deadly force that killed man, woman, and child with neither mercy nor malice. We were unprepared for such a thing.

We had ascended to great heights and had begun reaching for the stars... our moon, Viepchakl, was naturally our first step into the dark of space beyond. Upon its desolate surface we found, to our delight and surprise, another people like our own Zhdantia neighbors. We called them the Viepchaklts, and we welcomed them to our home.

We had no way to know at the time that it would be our undoing.

When the first deaths began, we were taken by surprise. Both the Aiknavrats and the Viepchaklts began to sicken and die. Our doctors, who had never seen such a thing, were perplexed. Nothing they did seemed to help.

And then the sickness began to spread. First the nurses, then the doctors, then anyone who came in contact with the sick, the dying, and the dead.

In our arrogance and hubris, we reached for the stars, and the gods put us back in our place.

Now the scattered remnants of humanity fight for scraps among the ruins.

**Careers Available** include many of the ones offered in the **Traveller** rules, with modifications noted in the **Characters** section. Most **Skills** can be learned up to TL-7 or 8.

## WASTELAND (c. -520 to -300)

This scenario takes place in the years following the worst of the Dzaqtlas. Millions are dead, and humanity has become a shell of what it once was.

The worst has passed, or so it seems, but the plague remains a constant threat. Psionics is still a curiosity and the connection between survival and talent has not been made. Civilization has fallen and no “civilized” careers should be available. Some people may still be alive who remember the times before.

**Game Effects:** Most pre-collapse technology has broken down from disrepair or misuse. Some smaller equipment may be available and highly prized. Most functioning technology consists of a mixed bag of spare parts cobbled together by artisans whose sole job it is to maintain the remnants of the old world.

**Social status** has little meaning outside the barbarian tribes and survivalist communities that have managed to develop some semblance of stability.

**Psionics** are available, but only under limited circumstances. Most who survived the Dzaqtlas have some Talent, but may not be aware of how to use it intentionally. See the rules for **Latent Talents** in the **Psionics** section. Others may have learned how to use their talents by accident or through trial and error; these become **Wild talents**. In a few rare cases, a psion may have found formal teaching from one of the few remaining bastions of learning or from a mystical community or holy person; these become **Adepts**.

Career	Roles	Notes
Barbarian	Tribesman Scout Warrior	As civilization fell, people banded together into tribes and communities for survival.
Drifter	Scavenger Wanderer Hunter	Drifters are survivalists making their own way in the world.
Entertainer	Artist Journalist Performer	Artists, diarists and actors document the events of the Dzaqtlas and bring news and stories to communities.
Commoner	Farmer Tradesman Fisherman	The common folk (zhant’ad) continue to work the land and rebuild civilization.
Government	Administrator Diplomat	Most enclaves have some form of organized government, even if it’s a local council.
Rogue	Thief Enforcer Pirate	The criminal element remains, though there’s little distinction between them and most other people.
Scholar	Historian Researcher Plague Doctor	Scholars obsessed with recording or recovering the Old World. Physicians become wandering Plague Doctors.

I remembered, coming to the Machine Shop with my grandfather years ago. It had been filled then, as it was now, with the hulking forms of the 'machines'. Back then they hummed with power, smelling of ozone and hot metal and the oily smells of cutting fluid and coolant. People worked on and around them, a dance of careful but intense activity, in the bright light from the fixtures on the ceiling far above. Carts full of raw material came in, and ones with finished articles got pushed away, full of wonders. I wanted to be one of the machinists, making the things that made the World work.

But I found different interests later, and went off to study, things that no longer matter since the Dzaqtlas wrecked the World. Some of the things from the Machine Shop helped people go to Viepchakl, and everyone was amazed by what was found there. They praised my family for helping it come to pass, a wonder in an age of true wonders. I studied marketing and resource allocation, and thus I helped the articles made in the Machine Shop become available for even grander projects.

Then the Dzaqtlas came, from some said Gods made angry by our violation of 'Holy Viepchakl.' Others said the travelers who'd gone to Viepchakl brought the Dzaqtlas back with them. It killed off all the little funny winged Qiknavrats, and the eerily similar Viepchaklats found there, and then it began to consume the People. Soon thereafter people came to curse the name of my family, Yotlkemetnad, the Machinists, for helping to bring the Dzaqtlas down upon us.

"Old man," the 'King' said, poking me with the barrel of his rifle. "Old man, pay attention! Where are the tools?"

I wanted to say, All around you, you uncouth fool, but he would just have his thugs slap me again. "Over there, in that room to the side. Files, cutters, hammers, riveters, hand tools, gauges." I sighed. "The raw material is past that room, in the bay to the side. Tube stock, bar stock, sheet metal, chain, wire, cable. Steel, aluminum, titanium, plastic. All your so-called smiths will ever need, for weapons or what you would have them make."

The 'smiths' who'd come with us to this dark, dusty cavern, now dark and half-buried in the debris from collapsed buildings, ran over to the riches and then began exclaiming in joy. Miserable ziefraffenqienad, these baz gangsters, I thought. Ignorant children of the Dzaqtlas who had done as much to break the World That Was as the Dzaqtlas itself had, once unleashed upon it.

"Your grandchildren will live, Old man. Though like you they will ever serve us. For I am King, and what we have found here will ensure My rule over these lands forever!" His maniacal laughter echoed through the darkened space like the call of a death-bird.

## RISING EMPIRE (c. -250 to -50)

After a few centuries of suffering, death and chaos, humanity begins to make the connection between surviving the plague and having psionic talents. The Noble classes begin exerting control again, mostly in the Western Dleqiats region. This young and developing empire, with its growing psionic priesthood and noble ruling class, has begun sending out emissaries and merchants to open trade routes and spread healing and news of the New Order to the blighted lands beyond the Western forests. In the wilderness, mad cultists, wanderers, warlords, and roving bands of raiders rule. It is a time of high adventure when psionics are ascending in power and influence.

**Game Effects:** Society has managed to crawl back from the worst, rising to the equivalent of the Renaissance Era of Europe after the Terran Dark age. After a few centuries of suffering, death and chaos, humanity begins to make the connection between surviving the plague and having psionic talents. The Noble classes begin exerting control again, mostly in the Western Dleqiats region. This young and developing empire, with its growing psionic priesthood and noble ruling class, has begun sending out emissaries and merchants to open trade routes and spread healing and news of the New Order to the blighted lands beyond the Western forests. In the wilderness, mad cultists, wanderers, warlords, and roving bands of raiders rule. It is a time of high adventure when psionics are ascending in power and influence

**Game Effects:** Society has managed to crawl back from the worst, rising to the equivalent of the Renaissance Era of Europe after the Terran Dark ages. The remnants of the old technology remain are either non-functional or have been maintained for centuries by mechanics and alchemists who zealously guard their secrets and pass them down through the generations.

Career	Roles	Notes
Barbarian	<i>Tribesman</i> <i>Scout</i> <i>Warrior</i>	The barbaric tribes have become more organized.
Commoner	<i>Farmer</i> <i>Tradesman</i> <i>Fisherman</i>	Commoners continue their traditional roles, feeding the community and producing new goods and services.
Drifter	<i>Scavenger</i> <i>Wanderer</i> <i>Hunter</i>	Drifters are survivalists making their own way in the world.
Entertainer	<i>Artist</i> <i>Journalist</i> <i>Performer</i>	Entertainers still wander the wasteland telling stories, but now they are accompanied by official guards
Government	<i>Administrator</i> <i>Diplomat</i> <i>Priesthood</i>	Organized governments have developed the beginnings of a psionic <i>Priesthood</i> .
Rogue	<i>Thief</i> <i>Enforcer</i> <i>Pirate</i>	Anyone who resists authority becomes branded a criminal and possibly cast out from the community.
Scholar	<i>Historian</i> <i>Researcher</i> <i>Healer</i>	Scholars and research become formally absorbed into the growing Empires. Plague Doctors become <i>Healers</i> .

**Social Status** is important again with the rise of a new class of nobility in Western Dleqiats, though socially there is no link yet between nobility and psionics. It is possible for a commoner to have high psionic ability and even be selected for the ranks of the priesthood. Among barbaric tribes and survivalist enclaves, social status determines one's position within the community as usual.

**Psionics** are ascendant in this scenario. Roll 2D and apply the DM for Psi; on 8+ the character is noticed by either the priesthood and becomes one of the **Dlenchiepr** if from a civilized region, or a **Shaman** if from a barbaric (baz) community. **Priests** and **Shamans** each have a special Skill table they may use during generation. Otherwise, the character's talents become **Latent** until activated at the referee's discretion.

WE LEFT DLOPLIKI AT SUNRISE ON THE THIRD DAY OF VRJENSTIAL, THIRTY IN ALL, SIX ACOLYTES EACH WITH THREE INITIATES, AND A RETINUE OF WARRIORS AND HUNTERS ON A MISSION TO BRING THE WORD TO THE LOST.

THE VIEPCHAKLSTIAL FESTIVAL WAS INCREDIBLE AS USUAL, AN ECSTATIC CELEBRATION OF LIGHT AND MUSIC, DRINKING AND SEX. FOR THE PEOPLE, A RELEASE OF PENT-UP EMOTION AND ENERGY; FOR US A LAST CHANCE TO CUT LOOSE BEFORE THE HARD WORK BEGAN.

OUR PILGRIMAGE WOULD TAKE US ACROSS FROM THE WESTERN COAST ACROSS THE DLEQJATS MOUNTAINS, THEN WEST TOWARD THE HARDEST PART OF THE JOURNEY, THE WESTERN DESERT. FIVE THOUSAND KILOMETERS OF UNFORGIVING VOLCANIC SAND, BROKEN ONLY BY RUGGED MOUNTAINS AND BRACKISH, TOXIC INLAND SEAS. A VAST, ENDLESS WASTELAND POPULATED ONLY BY DANGEROUS BEASTS AND MARAUDING BARBARIAN TRIBES. AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT THE SCOUTS WHO'D RETURNED FROM IT SAID. WE THOUGHT THEY WERE EXAGGERATING, MAKING UP STORIES TO SCARE THE NEW KIDS. WE SHOULD HAVE LISTENED.

WE SPENT THE FIRST WEEKS FOLLOWING ONE CARAVAN AFTER ANOTHER ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS, STAYING IN VILLAGES AND TOWNS ALONG THE WAY. SOMETIMES WE CAMPED OUT IN RUINS. THE CRUMBLING TEMPLES OF THE ANCIENT VIEPCHAKLASHTIE EMPIRE STILL PROVIDED ADEQUATE SHELTER AND SOMETIMES WATER.

THEN WE MET THE DESERT. ON THE FIRST NIGHT WE WERE SET UPON BY RAIDERS. THEY SLIPPED PAST OUR WATCH LIKE GHOSTS, SLAUGHTERING US IN OUR SLEEP. ZHRPR AND I WOKE AND TOOK UP ARMS, TOO LATE. THEY CUT HER DOWN IN FRONT OF ME. I TOOK THE FLAT OF AN AXE TO THE HEAD AND AS I WAS GOING DOWN THE BIGGEST ONE STOOD OVER ME.

"LEAVE THIS ONE ALIVE. SHE WILL TELL HER PEOPLE WHAT HAPPENED HERE." HE GRABBED MY HAIR, PULLED MY HEAD BACK. "GO. CRAWL BACK TO YOUR 'EMPIRE.' IF YOU CAN."

WHEN I WOKE NEXT I WAS ALONE. ZHRPR'S BODY LAY NEXT TO ME IN A POOL OF BLOOD.

I WON'T BE GOING BACK. TAVRIANZH, DUTY, DEMANDS IT. AND I WILL HAVE MY REVENGE.













