More than just sniffles: the Dzaqtlas Plague and Zhdantia Society

The Dzaqtlas plague was \*the\* singular event that defined Zhdantia history. It was more than just a devastating disease; it was an extinction-level event for two entire species and a near-extinction event for the humans living on Zhdant that completely reset Zhdantia civilization and took a thousand standard years for them to recover from. But why?

Several factors were at work.

First, until then the Zhdantia had no experience with disease apart from the occasional sniffles and opportunistic fungal infections. The native biology was mostly incompatible with their alien microbiome and found little foothold for infection. The Dzaqtlas was something completely new to them, and without the kind of virological medical knowledge that Terran humans developed, they had no framework for understanding it or combatting it.

Second, the Dzaqtlas was deliberately DESIGNED to infect humans. It's possible that it lost some of its potency over the millennia, but even so, an estimated 1/3 of the human population died within a few years - enough to cause the collapse of their developing culture. Cities became walled enclaves in an attempt to stop the plague, but it wasn't enough. Entire communities died, but not before desperate wanderers spread the virus to others.

Third, the virus was a PERSISTENT bioweapon, which meant the dead could still spread it. Think of the worst combination of anthrax and ebola and you begin to get the idea. A retrovirus that keeps its victims alive long enough to transmit to new hosts before they crash and bleed out, and the corpse becomes a vector as well. And so does anything it touches as the virus doesn't die, it becomes a nearly indestructible spore lying in wait for a new host.

It wouldn't be eradicated until the development of psionic healing and awareness, and the rise of first a psionic priesthood of healers, and later a psionic nobility to oversee and PROTECT the communities.

It would lead to the creation of the Tavrchedl, charged at first with the physical health and security of the growing city-states, and now with overseeing the mental health and security of the Consulate at large.

Cleanliness and public rituals related to the same would be very important. Priests and healers would be needed to closely vet any new arrivals for the least sign of dzaqtlas, and ritual cleansing would be a matter of SURVIVAL, not mere religious devotion. Zhdantia cities very likely still have public, communal bath houses, a relic of the Second Dark Age.

The word "baz" (barbarian) probably has a secondary connotation of being unclean.

"Kaz" (civilized) also refers to the development of agriculture (see also Kazdievstial, the harvest festival) but Kazdievl probably also means "clean thoughts" or "healthy thinking".

It also helps explain the general xenophobia of the Zhdantia.