The Dzaqtlas Adventure

A Supplement for Traveller set in the Zhodani Second Dark Age

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  Dlolpliki, Zhdant

Front cover reverse

*The Dzaqtlas Adventure*

*A Traveller Adventure Supplement*

*For adventures in the Zhodani Second Dark Age*

Jeff Kazmierski

In assocaition with

The men and women of the Zhdantia Language and Cultural Institute

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The Zhdantia Language and Cultural Institute

Contents

[*DZAQTLAS!* 1](#_Toc116680648)

[Timeline of the Dzaqtlas Era 3](#_Toc116680649)

[Zhodani CHARACTERS 5](#_Toc116680650)

[Initial character creation 5](#_Toc116680651)

[Social Status 5](#_Toc116680652)

[Psionics: 6](#_Toc116680653)

[Homeworld: 6](#_Toc116680654)

[Zhdant of the Dzaqtlas Era 7](#_Toc116680655)

*DZAQṪAS*

# *DZAQTLAS!*

A picture containing building, outdoor, ground, old

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*The cities are empty now, dead and 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.*

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

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

Of all the historical events that shaped Zhdantia culture in its nearly 300,000 year history, few rival the plague event known as the **Dzaqtlas (**DZAQṪAS), which brought about the end of the first Industrial Age.

A picture containing linedrawing

Description automatically generatedPrior to the **Dzaqtlas**, Zhdant was home to not one but two sapient species, the offshoot of humaniti that would later become known as *Nad Zhdotlas*, and a non-human species known as the *Chirpers* or **Qiknavrats**, as the humans of Zhdant called them.

The **Qiknavrats** (QIKNAṼAṮ), like the Zhdantia humans, had long been known to be alien to Zhdant. While their actual history was unknown at the time, they were, in fact, a regressed offshoot of another non-human species called the *Droyne,* themselves descendents of a long-dead species of creatures known only as the *Ancients.* The **Qiknavrats** were discovered on Zhdant’s smaller continent, Qiknavra, and in the succeeding centuries, the humans of Zhdant traded and occasionally made war with them and both species prospered.

The cultural and technological exchanges between the two species brought unprecedented advancement and growth. The humans had technology to trade; the Chirpers had a unique skill that fascinated and intrigued the humans – psionics. Though to the technologically focused humans this new skill was little more than amusing parlor tricks, it would later become critical to their survival.

By c. Imperial year -7980 (-550 by the Zhdantia calendar, about 3500 BCE), when Terran humans were still discovering bronze tools, Zhdantia humans and their Qiknavrats friends took their first steps into space. Orbital flights soon became routine, and exploration of Zhdant’s moon **Viepchakl** (VĪPĈAḰ) had begun. To their surprise and mutual delight, the explorers discovered another species of *Chirper* living on Viepchakl, whom they named the **Viepchaklts** (VĪPĈAḰṮ), or *People of Viepchakl*. Intercultural exchanges began between the three species, with representatives of both **Qiknavrats** and **Viepchaklts** visiting each other’s home planet.

Unfortunately, unknown to all three peoples, the Viepchakl explorations unleashed an ancient, long-dormant biological weapon left behind thousands of years earlier. Within a few years the entire Chirper population of both worlds was extinct and nearly two-thirds of the human population was dead.

The **Dzaqtlas**, as the plague would be called, erased nearly all the technological and socio-economic gains of the previous millennia. Because of their alien biology, neither the Zhdantia nor the Chirpers had any prior experience with serious diseases. Medical technology was underdeveloped due to the lack of necessity. As a result, human civilization on Zhdant reverted to barbarism as entire cities were emptied in a futile attempt to avoid the plague’s effects. For the next thousand years Zhdant experienced a Second Dark Age during which the population slowly recovered.

It is not clearly known when psionics rose to prominence, but it is likely that it played a role in the recovery. At some point during the Second Dark Age, some tribes or kingdoms discovered that certain psionically adept individuals could resist the effects of the **Dzaqtlas**, which had remained dormant years later. Others could use their mysterious power to heal others. Eventually the western kingdoms of Dleqiats began embracing psionic healers and other psionic adepts and using them to expand their influence and power. A code of ethics and service like the Terran code of Chivarly was developed – the **Tavrziansh** (TAṼZĨNŚ), or *Morality’s Path* that defines Zhdantia culture even today.

The empire building through psionic development and moral guidance enabled the newly emergent Zhdantia society to recover and prosper again, and within a few hundred years of the end of the Second Dark Age, Zhdantia humans had once again achieved space flight and began returning to Viepchakl and beyond[[1]](#footnote-1).

This supplement will cover how to create characters for play during the time of the Zhdantia Second Dark Age. You will need a copy of both the Mongoose Traveller core rules and *Mongoose Alien Module 4: Zhodani*. A copy of *Beginning Zdetl* published by the Zhdantia Language and Cultural Institute may be useful but is not necessary.

# Timeline of the Dzaqtlas Era

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Imperial Year | Zhodani Year | Event |
| -302,000 | -392316 | Ancients arrive on Zhdant with proto-Zhodani humans. |
| -300,000 | -389659 | Extensive development of Qiknavra by Ancients |
| -299,700 | -389260 | Final War results in devastation of Zhdant. |
| -280,000 | -363085 | Nuclear winter follows; beginning of First Ice Age. |
| -275,000 | -356441 | End of First Ice Age. |
| -260,000 | -336511 | Nomadic tribes of human hunter-gatherers range across Dleqiats. |
| -250,000 | -323224 | Huts, fishing developed. |
| -240,000 | -309937 | *Nad zhdatl* emergent on northern Dleqiats. |
| -200,000 | -256788 | *Nad vlastebr* emerges on southern Dleqiats. *Qiknavrats* rediscover agriculture. |
| -150,000 | -190353 | Human races clash: interbreeding creates *Nad zhdotlas.* |
| -100,000 | -123918 | Qiknavrats establish two large, static empires on Qiknavra. |
| -80,000 | -97344 | Second Ice Age begins. |
| -40,000 | -44195 | Second Ice Age ends. |
| -30,000 | -30908 | Animal herding and breeding. |
| -24,000 | -22936 | Special domesticated breeds emerge. |
| -18,000 | -14964 | *Nad zhdotlas* develops agriculture and fishing. |
| -17,000 | -13635 | Zhodani Iron Age. *Viepchaklashtie* Empire founded. |
| -15,000 | -10978 | *Viepchaklashtie* Empire at its peak. |
| -13,000 | -8320 | *Viepchaklashtie* Empire collapses. Beginning of First Dark Age. |
| -9000 | -3006 | Rise of noble classes and feudalism. |
| -8590 | -2461 | End of First Dark Age. Beginning of first Age of Enlightenment. |
| -8550 | -2408 | Invention of the printing press. |
| -8540 | -2394 | Ocean trade. Discovery of Qiknavra. |
| -8530 | -2381 | First Zhodani contact with *Qiknavrats.* |
| -8500 | -2341 | Invention of movable type |
| -8300 | -2075 | Development of elementary psionics. |
| -8200 | -1943 | First Industrial Revolution. |
| -8000 | -1677 | Warfare between Dleqiats and Qiknavra. |
| -7980 | -1650 | Uneasy peace between the continents. |
| -7959 | -1622 | First orbital space exploration. |
| -7,950 | -1610 | First expedition to Viepchakl. |
| -7,949 | -1609 | Viepchakl base. First contact with Viepchaklts. |
| -7,948 | -1608 | First meeting between *Qiknavrats* and *Viepchaklts.* |
| -7,945 | -1604 | Beginning of the *Dzaqtlas*. |
| -7,940 | -1597 | Second Dark Age begins |
| -7,920 | -1571 | Rise of the *Dlenchiepr* empire on Western Dleqiats. Noble houses begin incorporating psionicists as part of their retinue. |
| *-7,800* | ***-1411*** | ***Present Day.*** |
| -6,800 | -82 | Recovery. Rise of psionics. |
| -6,738 | 1 | First Teqozdievl. |

*ŽANTĨ* *NADO*

# *Zhodani* *CHARACTERS*

Zhodani characters of the Second Dark Age follow generally the same procedures as for Zhodani characters of the “modern” *Traveller* era, but with several crucial differences that will be outlined in this section.

The most important difference that experienced players will notice is that Social Status and Psionics are not necessarily connected. The psionic Nobility has not yet ascended to prominence during this era, and many who would be considered “proles” or **zhant’ad** in the modern era can be psionically strong and conversely, the Nobility includes many non-psionic individuals.

# Initial character creation

Seven characteristics should be generated randomly for all Zhodani characters:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Strength | Measures physical prowess |
| Dexterity | Manual dexterity and agility |
| Endurance | Toughness and physical stamina |
| Intelligence | Ability to reason and solve problems |
| Education | The highest level of formal schooling attained |
| Social Status | How high you’ve risen in society |
| Psi | Psionic strength |

These are determined randomly by rolling standard six-sided dice, referred to here as “D” (2D = two six sided dice) and taking the sum of the results. The usual method is to roll each characteristic in order.

You may also use one of the following alternatives:

**2D, player-assigned**: roll in the usual way but place the values where you want them.

**3D, drop low values**: roll 3D instead of 2D and use the highest two results for each characteristic.

**1D + 6**: if you want a more heroic game, where the characters are all “above average”, this produces starting stats ranging from 7 to 12

**High Psi**: Roll the first six on 2D as usual but roll Psi at 1D+6 to guarantee a high level of ability. This is well suited to campaigns that focus on psionic abilities.

There is no “official” way to roll up a character, however; how it’s done is between the player and the referee.

Regardless of the method chosen, the values assigned confer *modifiers* to die rolls against those characteristics, as shown below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Value | Dice Modifier |
| 0 | -3 |
| 1 – 2 | -2 |
| 3 – 5 | -1 |
| 6 – 8 | +0 |
| 9 – 11 | +1 |
| 12 - 14 | +2 |
| 15 | +3 |

## Social Status

During the Second Dark Age, Zhodani society has not yet become as highly structured, stratified as we know it in the Charted Space era. During these early years, nobility is not tied to Psionic talents and most titles of nobility are still inherited. However, among some communities, notably, the western feudal kingdoms, the beginnings of a society based on psionic talent are emerging. Characters with high Social Standing are considered part of the *Nobility.* At this point in Zhdantia history, psionic ability and social status are not yet connected; a character may have high Psi but be from low background, and a noble character may have little or no psionic talent. In any case, high Social Standing confers a title of nobility.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Social Standing | Title | Zdetl | |
| 11 | Aspirant | Pranatl | ṔANAṪ |
| 12 | Wellborn | Jdistebr | JDISTEḄ |
| 13 | Highborn | Viestlas | VĪSṪAS |
| 14 | Noble Born | Zhobrtlasche | ŹOḄṪASĈE |
| 15 | Princely Born | Preblshienchiashav | ṔEḂŚĪNĈĨŚAV |

## Psionics:

Nearly everyone who survived the Dzaqtlas has some measure of psionic ability, but not all to the same level. All characters roll 2D for Psionic strength (optionally, 6+1D for higher powered games). Then, roll 8+ on 2D + DMs based on Psi talent and the learning DMs below for each talent known. All characters regardless of SOC may learn Psionic talents.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Talent** | **Learning DM** |
| **Telepathy** | **+4** |
| Clairvoyance | +3 |
| Telekinesis | +2 |
| **Awareness** | **+1** |
| Teleportation | +0 |
| Psychic Transfer | -1 |
| Empathic Healing | -1 |
| Machine Symbiosis | -1 |
| Blocking | -2 |
| **Healing** | **-2** |
| Mimic | -2 |
| Teleprojection | -3 |
| Precognition | -6 |
| Per talent already learned | -1 |

For example, a character with Psi-10 gets a +1 for natural talent plus the Learning DM for the Discipline desired. The first talents to check for should always be Awareness, Healing, and Telepathy. All talents begin at skill level 0.

Any of the talents listed can be learned except for Machine Symbiosis, which requires actual working machines and computers to be useful. This should be learned only because of some unusual life event or luck.

Characters with Psi-9 or higher and who are from the civilized Eastern Dleqiats Empire automatically become *Dlenchiepr* (ḊENĈĪṖ), The Chosen, and are part of a noble’s retinue as Priests, Healers, or Agents. Agents are either Bringers of the Word – the *Tozjabr* (TOZJAḄ) - or Guardians of the Word – *Tavrchedl* (TAṼĈEḊ).

Barbarians (baz) with high Psi talent can become shamans, holy men and women, seers, fortune tellers, or charlatans.

## Homeworld:

All characters are, of course, born on the Zhodan homeworld of Zhdant. Zhdant of the Dzaqtlas era is very different from the world of the Third Imperium period. Remnants of the old and lost technology can still be found in the howling wasteland, but such items are rare and often in states of extreme disrepair.

Characters are either from one of the kingdoms of Western *Dleqiats* (Kaznad, KAZNAD) or Drifters (Baz, BAZ). Players may choose their background, or it may be assigned, depending on the campaign style.

The map and table on the next page show how Zhdant was changed by the Dzaqtlas.

## Zhdant of the Dzaqtlas Era

Shape

Description automatically generated

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Pre-Dzaqtlas Zhdant | C654878-7 | Ag, An | Population: appx. 2x108 human, 1x107 chirper |
| Post-Dzaqtlas Zhdant | X654778-3 | An | Population: appx. 4x107 human, chirpers extinct |

## Pre-Dzaqtlas Zhdant

Before the Dzaqtlas plague, Zhdant had achieved technology equivalent to that of mid-20th century Terra, but thousands of years earlier. While Terran civilization had barely reached the early Iron Age, the Zhodani were launching satellites into orbit and planning trips to their moon, Viepchakl.

Viepchakl had long been a source of inspiration for the Zhodani – its thin atmosphere produced easily-observed storms across its barren surface, and the red light of Pliebr gave it a pinkish hue that inspired romantic poetry and songs for milennia before.

The deserts of Dleqiats, the main continent, had been opened by rail and air routes and the Zhodani had begun to exploit the vast mineral wealth contained within.

The moon, naturally, was the next frontier.

## Post-Dzaqtlas Zhdant

1. Mongoose Traveller Alien Module 4: Zhodani, pp. 57-61 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)