

DUST

A Military Academy
Role-Playing Game
set during the
Industrialization

CHAPTER ONE:

Overview

AT A GLANCE

Dust is a world being crafted with a as-yet blurry vision, an ill-defined idea playing through my head and as such is subject to change. The ideas are forming as I write and inconsistencies may still need discovery.

You can help, as usual, with input and ideas, though be aware that not all of them may fit my vision and may need adjustment.

Join me in this adventure, I am excited to make this happen with you.

TIME

The various places of the world have measured time differently during history. The "old world" has managed to mostly settle on a single system for mercantile purposes, one which works on a 12-month calendar with 28 days a month each, based on the Lunar cycle. In the reckoning of the Artucian Calendar it is currently the year 1878 relative to the Saint's Ascension (S.A.).

In the meantime, while the 24 hour days remain the same in the new world reckoning, they still have different calendars.

The O-Chin calendar of the northern new world is based on 16 months of 21 days each, based on their chief divinities and associated fields.

The Yunic Calendar of the middle latitudes is divided into three months based on the status of farming, with the southern new world having set a calendar of 8 months with 42 days each.

„Dust is the name of the planet we're living on, and it's an apt descriptor: A ball of settled dust blown through our solar system at incredible speed that we do not witness ourselves, clinging to the surface of the earth, yet yearning for what lies beyond it. In this age of change we may yet be able to leap off the cliff and fly, soar to the stars and see them with our own eyes. In this age of change, dreams may yet come true.“

– Dr. Eilau Taleis, speech at the Imperial University at Arlgrave

Nearly a hundred years ago the people of Dust were still trapped in the developmental stages of the Renaissance, where artisans plied their craft and nearly everyone was working in the agricultural space in one way or another, be it as independent farming household, tenant farming or subsistence living with only a small percentage working jobs as artisan, craftsmen and similar jobs.

This changed when a series of inventions came out of the Runian Empire, among them first machines used in weaving and toolmaking, setting off a revolution that nobody could have predicted: The first industrial revolution of Dust in the year 1778 (see time ●).

Things changed rapidly from here on out and within a century railways were invented and spread across the world, connecting the far reaches of nations and states, sometimes crossing state lines and connecting even further-away places. The automatic loom and spindle made textile manufacture much easier and became the blueprint for many other professions and inventions.

By the end of the 1830s the world had begun changing properly, with more and more people starting to work in industrial efforts and less and less in agriculture. The shift in population dynamics and income led to a rise in living standards that is keeping up until today, an increase in wages and resulted likewise in a massive population boom as people could more easily afford children and child-care.

All of this could only work due to the advances in chemistry – which arose from and pushed into obscurity the field of alchemy – and medicine. Emland, situated in central Wisteria, was the provider for most of these chemical advances, with Emlanders becoming known for their sharp minds and highly-qualified universities.

Most of the medical advances instead came out of the continent of Izil once they had gotten a better hold of the new techniques, making strides and quickly overtaking the limited advances of the northern continent, a result often attributed to the mindset of the Izil people which tends to focus on the well-being of the community.

Dust, though, is not simply a normal world, for it is encircled by a multi-hued orbital ring system of crystal-line material that has fallen from the skies since time immemorial, always in small chunks and scatterings. Early in recorded history it is already known that the crystal material could be utilized to work wondrous effects, magic as it would become known.

This magic was a wild thing with a high cost attached: Some would spend their life-force, others would become disfigured using it, yet others would slowly turn to crystal. It was a dangerous thing that quickly became relegated to the realm of mystics and religion, for normal people shunned the dangerous material of their own will.

This was different in the “new world”, where - especially in the middle latitudes – an aristocracy was founded around the mystics who used the crystals. Here the nobility made use of it and became centers of power and protection not by force of arms and armies, but by the will of magical powers. This much more exhaustive use led to the “new world” finding ways over time to alleviate and even outright negate the effects of magic on the human body, giving them a distinct leg up on the “old world” when it came to magic.

It was this phenomenon that began the Crystal Science, a field that was focussed on in the Silverkey Republic's Caloon University and led to the kickstarting



of the second industrial revolution. It was Professor Lechman Kalder, still alive today, that managed to stabilize the crystal matter by setting power-channeling wires ● into it, a difficult process he had taken inspiration from in the “new world’s” mago-aristocracy and their ways of dealing with magical fallout.

Professor Kalder’s experiments made the use of crystals perfectly safe, stable and most of all: predictable. The original wire-channel crystal is still at Caloon University, powering a small lamp since it’s original implementation.

The wire system allowed the safe and predictable extraction of the immense energy-reserves within the crystals and it’s applications multiplied immensely with every year following Kalder’s publication of “The Harnessing of Crystal Power by Wirespool Channeling”, perhaps the most-published academic work in history.

The second industrial revolution was based on crystal power and it took the world by storm even more-so than the first revolution, for the crystals were already present in every country in sizable quantities, even if the production of the Power Wires themselves proved to be costly and problematic.

Over the last 20 years since the invention of the Power Wires by Kalder, Crystal Technology has made incredible steps forward, leading to such advances as powered flight, energy creation, automatic weaponry, ground vehicles and advanced machinery.

While these revolutions have been on-going, there has of course also been the age-old companion to mankind and it’s developments: War. Many were fought in these times, from rebellions and revolutions to wars of conquest and extermination, of colonization and of desperate defense.

The nations of the world become more focussed on their own identities and a general trend towards paternalistic nationalistic states has begun to appear across the world. Yet, at the same time, a counter-movement has begun as well, one wherein the value of human life and the shared burden come first above the wealth of the individual.

States have to walk a careful line now, embracing either ideal without inciting outright war with supporters of the other. The greatest issue, though, is that as always the state has the monopoly on violence and can easily force the hand of history within their realms. If other states can simply accept such, then, is a matter of much discourse and hypothesis....

POWER WIRES

A set of wires put into carved pathways of a crystal, often boring into the core and criss-crossing seemingly randomly over the surface. On close inspection, crystals intended for the same use share the same wire configurations. Power Wires are made of Kalderium, a hard-to-make titanium-steel alloy. Fabricating the alloy requiring a laborious and costly process, originally described in Kalder’s book.

CHAPTER TWO:

History of the Old

BEFORE THE ANCIENT?

Recorded history says little about the times before what is spoken of here. There are occasional oral recordings that have been transcribed in later ages, though these are highly unreliable and subject to a lot of revisionism.

KEEPER OF LORE

History is written by the victors and not by scholars, it is said. This may ring true, though there are two particular groups on Dust which strive to keep bias and revisionism out of their books: The College of Historia in Harmsvelt, located in the far north-east of Wisteria, far-removed from political influence. The second such group are the Jyohej Gangwa in the new world, a militaristic order of wandering historians who seek - out of some religious drive they say - to record all of history as witnessed by themselves and all those who would contribute truthfully. Since the start of the industrial revolution, the Jyohej Gangwa are no longer a rare sight across Wisteria...

SEHNA

Sehna is the collective term for the people living in Sehmland, often considered a friendly and honorable term, as compared to the "Seh", which has a derogatory meaning for the Sehna themselves.

Ancient Times

Long before the modern Artucian calendar's reckoning starts, humans have already made their nations and states, divided themselves into clans and factions. Much of these times is lost or woefully misunderstood, though a few things remain clear: Mankind was spread across all the world and in these times of old we were a largely a society of hunters and gatherers, largely nomadic if limited to certain larger ranges of migration for each "clan" of people.

The details of this time are unnecessary to delve into as yet, though the broad strokes are most-certainly helpful in understanding some of the modern world's structures.

Wisteria

According to the tomes of history it was the people surrounding the Silversea that first started to settle down more permanently in Wisteria itself, forming a new type of society based on agriculture instead of hunting and gathering.

This swing in society is largely attributed to the Wiscori civilization, which also developed some of the first Wisterian written languages and record-keeping systems over their rise to power and ultimately dominance over the Silversea region. The ancient documents carried over from that time are considered the gold standard for works of philosophy and introspective argumentation, providing the original foundation of Wisterian philosophical discourse. It was the Wiscori that originally argued for a democratic form of government, though much different from today's experiments in such governmental forms.

Alongside the Wiscori, other civilizations rose to prominence, among them the Emersk Civilization that was located near the northern Wisterian coastline. The Emersk created the rival thought of government to their Wiscori neighbors down south, namely the Emerskian Meritocracy, which predominately argued that rulers should above all be capable and willing to prove it. The vote of the common populus or even a senate would only foster incurably passive politics

and weak leaders, where those of great talent and skill could instead steer the ship of state. The Emerskian Meritocracy proved quickly that the capable would often be just that, though also still human and fallible, hoping to secure power for their kith and kin, leading to an early downfall of such a system.

Nevertheless, the idea of a meritocratic system was recorded - if derisively - by the Wiscori and thus survived into our age today and those before, giving repeated rise to new incarnations of the idea, each placing different limits on their chosen leaders. A few of these were successful for at least some time, though none stood the test of time in full.

Instead the still largely-nomadic clans of eastern Wisteria created the most successful system of government so far, if not the fairest: Rulership of nobility by force of steel and strength. The east, always plagued with an abundance of monstrous creatures, was much more dangerous than the west and thus needed rulers who could provide above all else protection. This led ultimately to the creation of a feudalistic system in which the local rulers would be chosen initially because of their strength, whose titles would pass on to daughters and sons. If those would not prove powerful enough to protect their people, they would die or be deposed, and such is the way of the Eastern Feudalism.

Sehmland

At the time far distant from Wisteria, Sehmland went through a much less intense change of society, since the Sehna ● had already started settling down much earlier due to the limited space for their population to live safely and comfortably.

Instead, the Sehna relied on strongly-built cities, fortified and often placed in remote locations. This made the real cities few and far in between, though every one all the larger for it and all the more imposing considering the construction methods of such an ancient age. These cities, then, provided a nearly impenetrable defense, which most likely also led to the less warlike nature of the Sehna, since attacking and taking



SA'YIBA

Though not in its original state, Sa'Yiba is one of the oldest known Sehna fortress-cities, built on top of a mountain that has been worked on by humans for centuries, perhaps even millenia, carving into it and building on top of plateaus common to the Sehmland mountain ranges.

Much of the buildings in this rendering stem from the middle ages.

a fortress-city was - and even nowadays still largely is - considered a suicide mission. Instead the Sehna focused early on the internal matters more thoroughly, fighting most of their wars in courts and councils and only occasionally in actual warfare.

This is not to say that the Sehna have never developed a proper way of the warrior, since their continent is by default much more dangerous than Wisteria, featuring a particularly high density of dangerous fauna and flora that would seem outright ridiculous to many Wisterians (as seen by the middle ages tome by the name of "The Cursed Continent: Why One Should Never War in Sehmland").

While - as a result - less used to large-scale warfare, the Sehna warriors are considered extremely dangerous and well-trained, especially since the Sehna have always been quick to adapt new technologies from Wisteria or Iziri with indecent haste.

Starting as early as the late antique, Sehna mercenaries have been prized and valued by all who could afford their services.

Throughout the antique age most of the Sehna culture has stayed static or at least stable in its progress.

Iziri

The Iziri have long-since been a very isolationistic people and as such there is quite little known about their own history. What we know from our own recordings speaks of a more advanced civilization that was native here, highly advanced in terms of agriculture and even feats of engineering such as the Great Aqueducts of Eiza ●.

The opening of Iziri occurred only during the early middle ages and the few archeologists that have ventured

there returned with more questions than answers, particularly where the ancient eras of Iziri were concerned.

The few known pieces of information are as follows: A much advanced civilization made the continent its home and they were of an isolationist mindset, never seeking outside contact and - apparently - eliminating envoys from outside places, building a reputation of fearsome danger.

There existed other cultures on Iziri, though only a few approaching even remotely the technological level of the High Izir (a made-up theorized name as the culture itself was never named).

The language written by the High Izir ● is enigmatic at best, resembling no other Iziri (or other) alphabet and remaining entirely undeciphered to this day.

The other cultures at the time have no historic recordings beyond oral traditions, which largely resemble the above-mentioned facts and emphasize the brutal and thorough nature of the High Izir culture, including mention of a few wars of extermination against unruly neighbors. If these stories were created to scare and warn or are indeed a representation of the true history remains to be seen as of yet.

Research into Iziri history is ongoing, with many Wisterian and Sehna scholars flocking to the strange continent in search of clues, often-times still finding unfriendly or outright-hostile native cultures that do not wish to poke into their own dark history yet.

This, in fact, has begun changing in recent years with a few of the modernized Iziri nations officially founding and funding colleges and studies into their own past, a thing which has brought internal conflict to the otherwise calm continent.

HIGH IZIR

Most scholars dislike the "High Izir" name for the culture, instead referring to it as "Lost Izir", implying a less fancy and fantastical image than the original word coined by the now-missing professor Emra Sihmadhi, a leading Sehna historian of the current age.

AQUEDUCTS OF EIZA

Eiza is one of the now-ruined cities of Iziri, an ancient metropolis putting to shame even the greatest fortress-cities of the Sehna. To supply such a burgeoning population (estimated to be around 1.4 million or more at the time), the architects of Eiza constructed a great public work, an aqueduct that spanned the distance from the nearby mountains to the great city itself, a full 197 km.

The Aqueducts are considered one of the world's cultural/historic treasures and greatest works of engineering in the antique.

The Shattering

Typically classified as the time between 217 S.A. and 309 S.A., the Shattering was a turbulent time during which the landscape of Dust would change dramatically. This would be especially true in north-western Wisteria where the Great Wisterian Tear would plunge the entire continent into a war-torn age of strife and disaster.

The Great Wisterian Tear

Thought sounding somewhat quaint nowadays, the Tear describes one of the most Dust-shattering geological events of the last few millenia, seeing the creation of an entirely new continent and water channel in the north.

THE LOST NORTH

With the shifting of the plates, the former Wisterian North ("The Northlands") was suddenly separated by an enormous stretch of water and thrown into chaos. The early historical records show that several cultures existed in the north back then but slowly succumbed to starvation, winter and the aftershocks of the Shattering.

Nowadays many historians and archeologists arrange for expeditions to the Northlands in hopes of uncovering unknown relics and records of elder days, most notably the records of a dying nation known as Rodan, which was at the time the longest-functioning meritocracy found in Wisterian history.

ANZHOG

Anzhog was a little-known god of a east-Wisterian tribal faith, a god of darkness and ash, bringer of the end times. With the clear parallels to the ongoing situation, the faith - known nowadays as the Ulang - spread with virulent efficiency, especially since the faith also featured Acoriah, a goddess foretold to banish Anzhog into his realm of black ash on the "promised day".

During the antique era the Northlands were in fact part of the same continental land-mass as Wisteria. Hoarfrost Bay was a massive inland-ocean and the Countless Fjords were thick sheets of permafrost on the northern taiga.

Records from across the globe point to 217 S.A., specifically the tenth day of the third month, as the start of the Shattering. The most violent earthquake in recorded history swept the entire planet and reshaped the lands. Volcanoes erupted and new ones were created in a single day, often casting entire nations or even continents into a thick cloud of volcanic ash and bitter-cold winters.

The most significant change happened in northern Wisteria, where the entire Northland plate was ripped from the Wisterian plate by geological forces that had been building for millenia. The earth heaved and moved, mountains seemed to topple and a new channel was ripped between the Hoarfrost Bay and the Tempest Sea, while in the east the northern taiga was shredded and turned into an impossibly large number of islands large and small as the oceanic mass of water rushed to fill the void.

Coastlines across the planet shifted with the immense displacement of water and tsunamis wreaked havoc beyond compare. Earthquakes would follow for the next months nearly daily and entire cultures and nations were drowned, extinguished in blanketing ash and bitter winter or the following wars and disease-outbreaks.

All in all, the Wisterian Tear was the most terrifying display of natural powers that was ever seen to this day, and an entire field of science was founded simply to predict and perhaps even prevent another such event in modern times. It is no surprise that during the Shattering and the following years people began to respect nature's strength anew.



Wisteria

The Shattering begins with the aforementioned Great Wisterian Tear. In the northern parts entire cultures vanished into the maw of the torn-apart ocean channel.

Recorded history is scarce during the period immediately after the Shattering, though some written testimony remains, largely speaking of divine punishment, the end of the world and similar dire tidings.

The closest to a coherent and factual recording are the Tomes of Edeirik the Elder, recorded during 218 S.A. up to 234 S.A. as a mostly coherent chronicle of the eastern Wisterian continental tribes. During the sixteen year period his version of the early "Shattering" Edeirik describes the world as "in turmoil" with "the skies blackened by ash and the wrathful gaze of Anzhog" ●.

All realms suffered from the aftershocks and death and disease were everywhere. The weather began playing havoc entirely, the skies being blanketed for nearly half a year with dark clouds that let through little light but carried great thunderstorms.

The coastal and mountainous regions were hit the hardest, which is perhaps the reason we have such concise writings from the eastern plains-people but little from the more settled western realms. Coastal regions suffered repeated floods, tsunamis and erosion or break-away of strips of land, sometimes going so far that entire cities were swallowed by the oceans and seas, especially along the western coastline of Wisteria.

The mountainous regions on the other hand suffered from massive avalanches that could wipe out entire



cities and rearrange mountain-ranges in their entirety in a way that was never seen before. Many mountainous regions became peppered with new volcanoes as the geological stresses of the Shattering sought a valve to unleash their energies.

The final result for Wisteria was a rearranging of the landscapes, most coastlines (even if only by a little) and the formation of the Northlands as their own “continent” apart from Wisteria.

For the humans on Wisteria the final result was much worse, since entire fields were destroyed or could not flourish due to the lack of light and the choking ever-present ash. Famine followed quickly as well, partially because the dead could not be buried fast enough and the air itself becoming unhealthy.

Of course man would not let it remain at that calamity and wars were quickly beginning to flare up as old enemies found weakness to pounce on, nations plundered others to steal what little food was left and displaced populations sought refuge and found none without raising their own weapons.

The calamitous effects are too many and too poorly understood or tracked even in the works of Edeirik for modern minds to really grasp it all.

Sehmland

To the Sehna the Shattering was perhaps nearly equally disastrous as to the Wisterians, as the Sehna tended to build their fortress-cities on mountains and in defensible valleys, where open attacks would be suicidal or at least extremely costly to any attackers.

With the earth-shattering geological calamity rolling over Dust itself, many cities suffered tremendous damage, with entire districts ripped off the mountain and sliding down in a deadly avalanche or the valley-cities simply being buried underneath unthinkable quantities of stone and gravel. Other cities were simply blown apart by volcanic forces suddenly burning through mountain-tops, simply vanishing nations in a single blink of the eye.

Sehna recordings are more coherent than Wisterian ones of the time, though, and while the damage to the Sehna at large was incredible, their more cooperative cultural stylings helped mitigate problems much faster than the people of Wisteria could hope for.

Displaced populations were assimilated if they would work and adapt, others fled to the jungles and deserts of the continent to rebuild there in a different way to prevent another geological catastrophe that would topple mountain-cities as it had once before.

The biggest known shift of Sehmland geography due to the Shattering was the “southern migration of titans” as a stone tablet names it, describing the underlying giants beneath the mountains down south rising up and moving away from their brethren into exile a few hundred kilometers apart.

This most likely refers to the southern-most mountain range, which was split off from the northern range during the Shattering. This hypothesis is cemented by the sizable number of ruins in the southern mountains found by modern scholars and explorers.

Iziri

Iziri remains a mystery at this time-frame, particularly with the complete disappearance of the High Iziri culture some time during the Shattering, most likely due to falling victim to the Shattering’s many effects.

At least one of the theorized main-locations of the High Iziri culture places their capital in Unzi Bay on the eastern side of the continent.

Little else is known besides some oral traditions mentioning legends of a great and nearly world-ending collapse that was survived only by the grace of the great leaders and heroes of the time, though details are unsurprisingly rare.

DESERT DWELLERS

Some time following the Shattering various groups of Sehna refugees decided to attempt a change to their tendency to build on mountains, instead seeking out newly-changed rivers of the western coast and its arid lands and settling there, apart from the potential avalanches that had wiped out their friends and families.

These Desert Sehna began to diverge from their mountainous kin over time, becoming more open and welcoming to strangers and initiating the first cross-continental trade in the Old World by building up a maritime tradition of coastal vessels and sending out exploratory parties, ultimately locating Wisteria and the Crossing Islands that had split off during the Shattering, as well as the two paths to the south, and thus the New World as it would later be termed. Contact to the new world was scarce even as the Wisterian-Sehna connection grew and became a valuable trade route for exotic goods and the flow of ideas.

