The Continent of Gratia

Guide:

1. The Empire of Nicomedia
2. Religion in the Empire and Beyond
3. The Kingdom of Aquittanny
4. The Kingdom of Yeu
5. The Kingdom of West Walbrzych
6. The Republic of East Walbrzych
7. The Chiefdom of Cyrene
8. The Colonial Republic of Epirus
9. Major Characters



The Empire of Nicomedia

"In the known history of mankind, and of the known world, no empire or state has seen as great of an influence on the world. Be it through language, culture, religion, their force of arms, or politics, Nicomedia's influence has been seen from every corner of Gratia and beyond," *A Thorough History of the Continent of Gratia, by Jacques Abel.*

The Empire of Nicomedia, also known as "the Nicomedian Empire", "the Empire", or simply, "Nicomedia", is the largest state on the continent of Gratia in terms of both land size and population. With a population approaching close to 90,000,000 inhabitants, and with urban centers spawning up all throughout the land, it outnumbers every other state on the continent by tens of millions of inhabitants.

History and Expansion, to the Present Day

Its massive land size can be attributed to sheer military might, large population, organized cities, and clever diplomacy. In its earliest days, it used the abundance of silver to the South of the capital to forge mighty weapons, allowing its forces to simply overpower nearby tribes and city-states through the brutal strength of their weapons. Over time, as the Nicomedians claimed more territory along the Barcino River and attained an oceanic port, their beloved capital and homeland swelled in population as the fertile soils of land North of the city found itself teeming with grain and new technologies to feed an ever-growing population. The river itself provided a quick means of travel to the Northern Ocean. As the new Empire grew, it found itself choosing to vassalize other nations in hopes of integrating them slowly, rather than relying on slow, bloody conquests that were growing ever unpopular on the homefront. Around 500 years ago, enslavement of any individual- be they native or foreign- was illegalized as freeman labor began to provide much of the productivity of the Empire's farms and workshops, and as the many slaves of the Empire clamored for emancipation. Public opinion rapidly swung towards abolition as the citizens began to see moral reasons for not supporting future conquests and the institution of slavery. As it stands now, the Empire has not attained any new vassals or waged any wars in 200 years. The administration of such a massive state proves a strong enough battle for its government to handle. The closest thing to expansion that the Empire has dabbled in is the colonization of a previously unreachable large island to the South, which at the end of the day, was largely spurred by pioneers rather than the will of the state. Unfortunately, the current issue of overextension has lead to a drop in quality-of-life as courts, governmental officials, and resources from the edges of the Empire are spread thin.

Governance

The politics of Nicomedia have swung wildly in the last 900 years of its existence, mostly between the National Assembly (a parliamentary body consisting of representatives from all around the Empire) and the imperial seat. In an effort to maintain stability, a compromise has rested in place for the last one-hundred years: the National Assembly of Nicomedia is a democratically elected body that serves as an advisory body for the Emperor/Empress, but the Emperor has the final say on almost everything. The balance of power, here, is still tipped towards the throne, but no one has yet dared to upset it egregiously. Yet. **Empress Korina** is the current ruler, and despite her age and lack of heir, she has been popular among all walks of life throughout the continent due to her kindness and love for all nations, as well as for her constant diligence towards improving the living standards of the Nicomedian peoples. The Empire is organized into provinces, with provinces often representing an ethnic group or was simply a made-up administrative division for the convenience of the throne. Leaders of these provinces are always chosen by the National Assembly, and said leaders (who are often called "magistrates" or "kings/queens") must be life-long residents of the province they rule over.

Culture

The Nicomedian people enjoy the liberty of having many trades, as well as cultural and religious freedom. While the Tarentine language is the standard language of the continent (this language will be represented in English and it will be assumed that almost if not all characters will be fluent speakers), there are over 10 widely-spoken languages within the Empire. Major subcultures include: the nomadic Northern Cyrenians to the Southeast, the Central subculture focused around the capital, the Massilian subculture on the Western border, and the Samnite culture around the massive city of Sammanus- often regarded as the second capital of the Empire. Despite the occasional dispute, most Nicomedians have come to enjoy the diversity and culture of acceptance that has only grown stronger as internal peace has gripped the Empire. Almost all crops in the known world are able to be grown somewhere within Nicomedia's borders, be they mangosteens from Yeu, date trees in the Northern Desert, or apple trees all throughout the temperate North, leading to a varied diet among the residents.

Religion

There are three major religions present in the Nicomedian Empire, all of whom, have presence or related faith in the other nations.

Feronianism- a major religion that makes up roughly 40% of the population of the Empire, mostly appealing to the central parts of the Empire and to rural farmers. Their key beliefs come about gods that represent powers of nature and the concerns of individual trades and human activities. For this reason, many of its followers primarily worship only a handful of the multitude of deities (being the ones that align most with their priorities). They primarily worship in temples and hallowed grounds, and their clergy rely on lengthy, textual depictions of the gods.

The books, when combined, make up *the Feronian Scripture.* Gods include Tannasus, the head god, Asonia, the goddess of the sky, Argenion, god of the afterlife, and Heedgardia, the goddess and protector of crops.

Lucianism- literally, “Light-ism” is another major religion that currently accounts for 35% of the population. Unlike Feronianism, Lucianism is monotheistic, believing in a single deity who is seen to love the world and all the people who inhabit it; this deity being depicted in the form of a normal human. This religion is very popular in urban centers and in the frontiers due to its teachings of accepting the poor and forgotten. Light magic is incredibly popular among the followers of this religion, and they often worship in simple houses that depict their god at the front of the home. Their holy text is known, quite bluntly, as *the Holy Texts of Lucianism*, which contains a large amount of cautionary tales and teachings from clergymen/laity of years past.

Jaydite- Jaydite is a religion that centers around the worship of the very Earth- specifically, of nature herself. The Earth itself is not seen as a living deity like in Feronianism or Luciusitism, but rather a precious body meant to be preserved and cared for. This religion is primarily popular among nomads and people who neither live in the cities or farms, but rather the suburbs and towns (and, unsurprisingly, near forested lands). This religion is followed by about 10% of the population of Nicomedia. They lack a combined holy text or a complex system of clergy, relying only on ascetic monks and nuns to preach from sacred grounds in otherwise uninhabited regions.

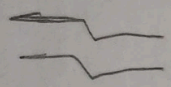
Nonreligion- Religious adherence within the Empire and the entire continent has waxed and waned, but in the current day, roughly the remaining 15% of the public holds no religious affiliation. At times they are looked at with suspicion- wrongfully- but are generally well-accepted into society as anyone else.

Religious Symbols in Gratia

Feronianism

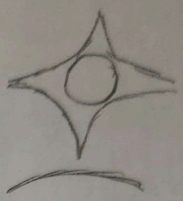


- Arms represent the male and female gods influencing their domains on the human-controlled world.

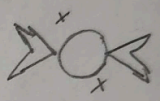


- Feronian symbol of anima magic. Adopted by ancient Illyrians, it represents spirits' powers being channeled

Lucionism



- Represents God's arrival to the Earth and His continual gift of sunshine



- Lucian symbol of light magic. Adopted by northern Aquitines long ago as a symbol of hope in their long winters.

Jaydite



- Doubled palm leaves to remind Jaydites everywhere of the majesty of the jungle and Savannah.



- Jaydite symbol of dark magic. Mother Earth is the light and force of all supernatural, extraordinary forces of nature. She provides and rewards the calm mind that tames the dark.

The Kingdom of Aquittany

"Aquittany remains the greatest balancer of power on Gratia, given that the smaller nation-states can amass little power on their own to challenge the might of the Nicomedian Empire. This state relies heavily on its traditions, much like the aforementioned massive empire, but also prides in its feudal framework, vast forests, and unique culture," *Present-Day Understanding of Gratia, by Jacques Abel.*

Aquittany is the second-largest state in the continent of Gratia, stretching from the Southern Ocean all the way North to the Norman Plains. As the above quote would suggest, it is the second largest nation on the continent, with over 50,000,000 inhabitants. Its western border, not depicted by the map, is with the "End of Earth" Mountain Range, consisting of impassable, wintry peaks.

History and Expansion, to the Present Day

This Kingdom originated as one of the many feudal, patchwork states in Western Gratia, mostly centered around the Norman and Provence Rivers. Alaunian dukes, about the same time as the expansion of the Nicomedian Empire, began establishing a professional, military class of knights to defend their land from raiders and to march into other fiefs to expand their borders. These knights were generally well-armored forces with rigorous training, due to the fact that they were a military caste. The quality of their training rivaled the sheer discipline of the Empire's volunteers and conscripts. Soon enough, the Duke of Alauna claimed himself the King of Aquittany, a supposed unified state of all the peoples in the West. Alauna itself was made the seat of this new kingdom. However, with the mighty, pesky Nicomedians charging through much of the continent, the new kings of Aquittany began fighting their wars of expansion with levied peasant armies rather than knights, fearing that a lack of knights within their military caste would allow them to be weakened in a theoretical future invasion by the Empire. Strategic marriages were arranged, with both sons and daughters of Aquittanite monarchs and higher nobles being married to the nobles of remaining fiefs that were not yet part of this new kingdom. The expansion of both the Nicomedian Empire and the Aquittanite Kingdom lead them to have a large, shared border. Around 300 years ago, on-and-off warfare rocked the border for 100 years, and neither side could obtain a clear advantage. The varied forces of the Empire, consisting of well-armored professionals, border militia, nomadic forces, and mercenaries, clashed against the heavy cavalry and mages of Aquittany in the hills of the Western half of the Nicomedian Empire. Neither side gained land from it, and both nations view that period of warfare as an unmitigated disaster. The many garrisoned forts on both sides of the border are a constant reminder of that conflict. A new war almost sprung up again when Aquittanite forces invaded Yeu fifty years ago, a reluctant ally of the Empire. The Empire threatened to enforce the peace, but the Aquittanite

Army soon found itself being defeated in the hot, humid lands of Yeu by their light infantry forces.

Governance

Unlike the volatility of Nicomedian politics, Aquittanite politics and governance have been fairly stable in the course of its existence. The Monarch of Aquittany is the ultimate ruler over the feudal system of the country, but allows a certain amount of autonomy for nobles in "non-critical" regions (a definition that is subject to the monarch themself). In limited ways, peasant assemblies at the lowest level provide governance for villages that have managed to avoid control by nobility. The idea has spread to even lands controlled by nobles, with peasants voicing their concerns at town halls. Whether the sitting lord answers them is generally up in the air. Knighthood today provides a large amount of authority to the monarchy, but in recent decades, there has been a greater acceptance of peasants rising to become knights, largely spurred by the insufficient amount of heavy forces available to Aquittany. **King Hugh of Burdigala** is the sitting monarch of Aquittany. Unlike his main rival, Empress Korinna, his goal has been trying to influence other nations to break them from the diplomatic influence of the Empire. Hugh is an ambitious and calculating monarch, and is seen as the most competent ruler in the continent, despite also being seen as the lesser caring. He is trained to fight; fighting in the style of a Paladin. He is also a supporter of a more open knighthood. Additionally, King Hugh doesn't need to worry himself with the over-extension or domestic issues as much as the Empress. Aquittany is a Luciusite state, and with its population being over 80% of that religion, there are few internal complaints about this. For the remaining 20%, it is a deep, bitter issue they hold against the kingdom.

Culture

Aquittany is significantly less diverse than the Empire is, with most of its population speaking Alaunian or a closely related local dialect. And, due to the influence of Nicomedia, the population does speak Tarentine well (much to the jealousy and rage of Aquittanite monarchs). Despite the aristocratic setup of the kingdom, there exists a great respect for the knighthood, as chivalric codes have become increasingly common, thorough, and standardized in the last few hundred years, turning the previously brigand-like knights into protectors of the innocent. Knights are respected, commonly, as heroes, and those who break their oaths or kill unarmed individuals are often shunned and removed from their position (imprisonment generally following). Religion is of great importance to the Aquittanite peoples, with the Luciusite Churches often advocating for the taking-care of the poorest villages and peasants. In large part, they do. Aquittanite diets often compose of wine and many fruits that grow well in the temperate soil of the nation's center, as well as the luxury of fish in the southernmost border.

The Kingdom of Yeu

"The lands south of the Nicomedian Empire are rich in natural beauty. Truly, with its mighty rainforests, bountiful fields, deep rivers and emerald seas teeming fish, and the light of the Sun beaming down on it, this land shows the wonder of the Creation of God." - *Book of Nature, the Holy Texts of Luciusism.* Author Unknown.

The above provides a fairly accurate assessment of the terrain of the Kingdom of Yeu. It is smaller than its two neighbors by a significant margin, and by land size, is larger than only the divided Walbrzych states. It is, however, the most densely populated, with a population of 30,000,000 people. Many of these people inhabit Yeu's packed cities as much of the country is covered in natural lands.

History and Expansion, to the Present Day

Yeu's history is considerably less focused on expansion than Nicomedia and Aquittany. Originally, Yeuan civilization was founded around many villages and tribes that were settled near the many river deltas and lakes of the country. It is said that Yeu began allowing women to fight in their military many years before the other nations, as this little country struggled with infighting and outside invasion. The country itself is a difficult, incredibly harsh country to fight wars in, with its dense forests and humidity preventing quick troop movements. Yeuan armies have trained to use the defensiveness of the rivers and jungles to protect their nation time and again. This kingdom was, historically, an enemy of both Aquittany and Nicomedia, and was isolated from much of the rest of Gratia due to their border being mostly with Nicomedia. As one might expect, both thrones of those larger nations have tried time and again to annex Yeu as their own territory. Nicomedia gave up its conquests of Yeu about 300 years ago, just before the massive century-long war with Aquittany. Aquittany, however, has persisted to try and colonize their southern neighbor to the modern day… leading Yeu to be a reluctant ally of the Empire in an effort to prevent more bloody wars. Yeu itself relies heavily on light infantry forces, having few armored or mounted forces like the knight-focused military of Aquittany. As such, its alliance with the Empire is done mostly to scare off the pesky Western Kings than of mutual friendship to the Nicomedians. That being said, Yeu's days of isolation are perhaps at its sunset. With its new relations to Walbrzych and Cyrene, and emerging willingness to trade with the Nicomedian Empire, there are very telling signs that Yeu does not want to continue its journey through history alone.

Governance

Yeu is a despotic monarchy without feudal realms or serious subnational units. All provinces in Yeu are strictly for administrative reasons for that reason. The monarchs of Yeu

have a tendency to favor urban development, sustainability, defensive military investment, and generally the least popular, advancing their own religion above the others. Yeuan monarchs are otherwise, generally not ambitious in terms of desiring to expand their state, preferring to focus on internal affairs. And depending on their efficacy, that makes them either very popular or very unpopular. Recent events have not been kind to Yeu's government; with the war against Aquittany about fifty years ago draining the nation's budget, and the death of its king in battle without an heir, a new dynasty had to be established quickly. The Empire's threat to enforce peace gave Yeu the relief it needed to do just that, and with that, the Do dynasty was established; the Do family being a group of literate merchants from the capital. The old king and queen governed as co-rulers, ruling as strict Jaydite leaders. When the current queen was fifteen years old, the king and queen went missing… and the young Tuyet Do became the queen. The young monarch changed her name to **Queen Tuyet Nguyen**, adopting the name "Teresa" as her name to the Nicomedians. She is a fiery, prideful young queen of nineteen years of age. Compared to the aging monarchs of the other nations, she is forced to demonstrate her stubbornness and fortitude in every international meeting in some hope that her rule her seen as legitimate. She is generally seen as an illegitimate ruler by about 60% of the Yeuan population due to being born of a non-royal lineage and due to her Lucuisite faith, a highly unorthodox practice in Yeu. Whispers from the court suggest she changed her name because her parents forced Jaydite beliefs on her despite her conversion to Luciusitism. Tuyet, despite her unpopularity, loves her people immensely, and has attained popularity among fellow Luciusites and the urban workers. She is even more unconventional by being a Mercenary as a soldier.

Culture

The Yeuan language is perhaps the most unique on the continent. It is rather tonal, but uses a Nicomedian writing system due to its ease of use with the pronunciations with the language. The Nicomedian alphabet is accepted by much of Yeuan society because of its lack of complexity, and the Tarentine tongue is widely spoken here, but almost exclusively as a business language. People tend to socialize during the dawn and the sunset due to the heat of the tropical climate in Yeu, and there exists many social standards during visits (that their excitable queen readily ignores). Most Yeuan people are either Jaydite (50%), follow a local faith similar to Feronianism, or are nonreligious, with a very small (about 3%) portion of the population being Luciusite. Religious freedom provided by Queen Tuyet has eased tensions a bit between the different religious groups, and is a saving grace to her reputation. Yeuan food is mostly based around tropical fruit, lighter meats, vegetables, and rice/corn. Due to the mellowness of the cuisine, many in the country enjoy personalizing their food however they wish, such as adding sugar, spices, or pickled vegetables to make it the overall flavor they enjoy most.

The Walbrzycha States

"Though separate by politics, our nation continues to look at each day as a new hope and a new opportunity. Regardless of republic or kingdom ruling us, we should always seek the future with bravery and optimism. There is no other path for us to take," *Liberty Publications, a news source in East Walbrzycha*.

History and Expansion, to the Present Day

The Walbrzycha peoples began as tribes of hunters from the polar regions of the continent, North of their present-day homeland. These hunters made barely enough to survive, and the harshness of winters in the far North of Gratia prompted many of these hunters to make a daring and desperate expedition to the more temperate lands of the continent. While many passed away on the trip, the Walbrzycha people who made it established their new country in the cold plains of northern Gratia. At the time, it shared no true border with the Nicomedian Empire or the Aquittanite Kingdom, and the people there used the peace to advance their civilization, making great advancements in agriculture and blacksmithing. Their agricultural feats were considered impressive once they established contact with Nicomedia and Aquittany. Their peace would not last as their kingdom found itself attacked on several fronts about 450 years ago by both Nicomedia and Aquittany. The two massive countries, aiming to expand without sparking a war with one another, chose to annex sectors of the Walbrzycha Kingdom, with the west being invaded by Aquittany and the east by Nicomedia. Despite the advantages of long winters, mountain ranges, and dense pine forests, the Walbrzych Army was overwhelmed by the sheer number of forces they faced and the varying tactics each larger state used. After the annexation of each side, cultural influences from both their occupiers began to set in, causing a diversion in beliefs and culture between the two occupied zones. In the West, Luciusite missionaries aggressively converted the previously nonreligious Walbrzycha people to their faith and the Aquittanite monarchs instilled feudal rule on the "collaborative rulers" who ruled their zone. In the East, the people occupied took note of the National Assembly of Nicomedia, and believed that a system like that, taken to a logical extreme, could prove to be a very beneficial style of governance for their state… as soon as independence was attained. Throughout the occupation, resistance groups flared up all about the Walbrzych lands, and their time to repatriate their nation came during the Hundred Year War between their occupying powers. Too focused on fighting the other major state were Nicomedia and Aquittany that it allowed Walbrzych's freedom fighters to take their land back by force. Within 20 years after the start of that major war, West Walbrzych and East Walbrzych were recognized as independent states. It was clear that the culture and political beliefs of each half had shifted too much during the days of occupation… now each Walbrzycha state is forced to build up their lands alone.

Governance

West Walbrzych government is a feudal monarchy with a Luciusite state religion, as per the political influence of Aquittany. However, political thinkers of the nation have suggested a more secular approach to government, as noted by the internal problems that a heavy state faith can cause. With that in mind, recent Walbrzych kings have kept the state religion in-name-only to appease these quite real concerns. For fear of once again being annexed by Aquittany, West Walbrzych has funded large amounts of money into a highly mobile defensive army consisting of light cavalry and archers, as well as mandating the construction of fortresses in the flatland near the Northern Forest. The current ruler, **King Daniel Krol** is considered by most to be a very average ruler. He focuses not on any one subject or matter of importance, but tries to give equal attention to each, often resulting in mediocre results for each solution he comes up with. He has chosen to be acquainted with Empress Korinna as a countermeasure to the threats of King Hugh from Aquittany. For a king, he is also relatively quiet and open-minded.

East Walbrzych is the only full republic on the continent of Gratia, allowing all citizens age 16 and older to vote. It is also the only state on the continent to have a structured constitution. The government is split into parliament and the presidency, with the current president being **President Marta Lis.** Marta faces difficulty ruling the country and has become relatively unpopular, so she has become desperate for re-election. Her allies in parliament insist that her skill as a ruler is growing, but no one is quite certain of that (it is true, however). She takes a relatively isolationist stance, but has offered warm relations with Yeu and Cyrene, in hopes of not falling under sway of the two larger nations. East Walbrzych is a secular country. Its military consists of many pegasus knights, mercenaries, and lance users. Interestingly, despite being a democratically-elected country without a true aristocracy, East Walbrzych still practices a very strict form of knighthood for all soldiers who are not mercenary forces.

While the two states may not agree with one another on matters of political structure, both states do fear annexation from the larger kingdoms. Perhaps one day the two will reunite to become one, united Walbrzych country capable of holding its own? For now, their defenses and diplomacy must hold.

Culture

While slightly varying between each of the two states, there are many similarities in culture. The common language of the peoples here is Walbrzych, which uses a Nicomedian script, as influenced by foreign occupation. Vast celebrations take place during the winter time to keep people excited and happy during the darkness and bitterness of the nation's winter. Most of the people in West Walbrzych are Luciusite or nonreligious, with, unlike Aquittany, religion not being a huge part of life. East Walbrzych has a large mix of each faith and has guaranteed freedom of religion for all citizens. Eastern culture also has a certain media focus, with newspapers and town criers in abundance. Hunted meats, fish from the frozen rivers, and wheat are all huge staples in Walbrzych diets.

The Chiefdom of Cyrene

"We will one day attain full independence from the Nicomedian Empire! Our confederation of peoples must not falter to the Empire and her nomad factions who have joined them… may one day, these plains have winds of freedom stroke across them," an excerpt from an unknown chief's script, roughly 150 years ago.

History and Expansion, to the Modern Day

The Cyrenian people consist of varying nomadic tribes originating in the vast grasslands of the South-Eastern corner of Gratia. Among them consisted tribes formed around their various choice of mounts: the Cloud Tribe ride pegasi, the Hokna Tribe choose wyverns as their mounts, the Anyarn Tribe ride horses, and the Aspetiani Tribe lack mounts and are the only tribe among the four major ones in Cyrene Proper to have permanent settlements. The Cyrenians spent many years as the historical rival of the Nicomedian Empire, with their original domain much larger than their present political boundaries. However, warfare began between them as fringe members of the Cloud Tribe began poking at the urban centers of the Early Empire, thus sparking a bitter back-and-forth between the two countries. Over time, many members of the Hokna and Anyarn peoples began to join forces with the Nicomedians, for a promise at the Empire's greater wealth and development. While largely avoiding being soldiers, there were a few members of the Aspetiani who migrated to the big cities of the Empire's south for much the same reason. With the new nomadic forces under Imperial control, the war was lost to the Cyrenian Confederacy. The people in the northern part of their lands continued living as normal within the newly expanded boundaries of the Empire, and the Northern Cyrenian culture was born. Those who remained in the South were capitulated, leading to the current-day border being established. While legally bound to fight alongside the Empire due to their status as a vassal state, they (understandably) have been less than loyal on more than one occasion, and the Southern-Northern Cyrenian divide has been quite bitter. Southern Cyrenians view the Northern Cyrenians as disloyal traitors, and Northern Cyrenians view the Southern Cyrenians as incredibly stubborn. Although tensions have winded down between the two groups, as well as the governments of Nicomedia and Cyrene, the Southern Cyrenians still clamor for full independence… will it one day come to them?

Governance

As suggested by their history, Cyrene exists as a confederate monarchy. While **King Kuhoa of the Hokna** presides over all the tribes, each of the four tribes exist rather autonomously. Yearly meetings between the four tribes occur at the de facto capital of Hope, a city maintained by the Aspetiani Tribe. By and large, the tribes coexist in peace with one another. King Kuhoa was chosen to be the overall king by one of these very meetings for his experience

and wisdom. He is focused on easing the bitterness between the Northern and Southern peoples, as well as trying to find a way to peacefully remove Cyrene's status as a vassal state, rather than trying to violently revolt against the Empire. Despite the anger many Cyrenians feel for the Empire, his temperance is seen as an example, and has caused many to become much more mellow. Kuhoa himself is Feronian, but he does not force any faith upon Cyrene (this generally being seen as one of the many ways he dreams of harmony on Earth). He also has been busy drafting a new constitution, as influenced by the ideals of East Walbrzych. Militarily, Cyrene has an army consisting of about half cavalry from the three mounted tribes and half infantry from the Aspetiani. Aspetiani forces are very diverse in what troop types they use, but they seldom field heavily armored knights.

Culture

The Cyrenians are, unsurprisingly, diverse. Though, there are common facets among the four tribes. Most of the tribes are Jaydite and greatly appreciate the gifts of the Earth; the Aspetiani, despite being the ones with the built-up settlements, also are spearheading research in safer, more sustainable housing on the continent. To the members of the Cloud, Hokna, and Anyarn Tribes, learning to ride and becoming friends with ones mount is a rite-of-passage. All able-bodied young men and women are not considered adults until they can ride their mount and treat it well. Another tradition in the lives of Cyrenians is to visit a chief of the three other clans at least once in their lifetimes, so as to foster unity between the not-so-different groups in the overall nation. Unlike the other languages, the Cyrenian alphabet is unique, and consists of pictographs as opposed to letters. Like most countries on Gratia, there is an expectation to know how to speak Tarentine, and many do so.

The Colonial Republic of Epirus

"This country, if it may even referred to as an independent state, remains as a constant reminder on the continent of who is the closest to control of the whole land. Despite being consisted of a 'colonial congress', it is ultimately a dominion of the Empire. Perhaps its abundant resources could one day lead it to become a thriving state?" *Present-Day Understanding of Gratia, by Jacques Abel.*

History and Expansion

Nicomedian settlers first saw this land's soil about 300 years ago, shortly after the onset of the Hundred Year War. With the war damaging some of the lands in the North and Western parts of the Empire, it forced those living in the regions to not just abandon their homes, but also to abandon the mainland of the Empire, fearing an Imperial loss, and the potential mercilessness of Aquittanite Knights. This trend of migration from the war-ravaged and poorer parts of the Empire lead to the settlement of new cities on the large islands South of the Empire itself. These expeditions, however, would not have been successful without the development of vessels that could navigate Southward in the rough waters of the Southern Seas. The colonists who arrived found prolific lands across the islands with the sea teeming with fish, so the population grew quickly. The expedition itself was understanbly expensive, but settlers from around the Empire began to migrate there for inexpensive land and grain. Once the Hundred Year War ended, however, the sitting Emperor sought control over the islands and instituted a friendly Imperial administration and garrison. While allowed to reign with a (rather false sense of) autonomy, much of the island's economy came from selling its resources to the Empire proper. As the economy of Epirus developed over the next two-hundred years, it has become increasingly desirous of independence, but have not chosen to declare it due to a multitude of good emperors taking charge in the last one-hundred years, as well as the ability to vote for the overall National Assembly. The desire for self-rule remains, and it may only take one bad person to sit on the Empire's throne in order for them to declare themselves their own state.

Governance

As suggested by its title and the above quote, Epirus is a republic, of sorts. While not nearly as democratic as East Walbrzych, the local government consists of an imperial-appointed magistrate as an executive and a congress elected by the settlers of the colonies. The current magistrate is **Remus Claudius,** a somewhat distant cousin of the princess of the Empire. He is not close to her, but still, whispers go on that he was appointed to his familial ties rather than for his aptitude. He is loyal to the Empress, but his loyalty is not rock-solid. Like other states experimenting with democratization, Epirus is influenced by the ideals of East Walbrzych. Its

status as an imperial colony prevents them from establishing its own constitution, however. In times of need, Epirus often supplies their local auxilia forces to the mainland.

Culture

In large part, the culture of Epirus is somewhat related to the mainland of the Empire. However, most of the people of Epirus live slow, agrarian lifestyles, and are stereotyped as being more easy-going that the residents of Nicomedia proper. Their accents are notably different, as well. Epirusians generally value freedom and adventure, coming from the vast swaths of unexplored and open lands. There are also non-Nicomedian settlers who live on Epirus, mostly hailing from Yeu or Aspetiani lands. There exists some cultural clash between these groups due to the differences in etiquette, partially fueled by Epirusians' lax nature towards these sorts of things. Compared to the mainland of the Empire, more Epirusians are Jaydite or nonreligious. Beachgoing is a very popular pastime in the region due to the close proximity to shorelines and the long summers of the continents' south.

Major Characters

Manilius Quirinius (protagonist, main lord):

Manilius is a general of 27 years of age, hailing from the town of Massilia on the border of Nicomedia and Aquittany. The Quirinius family was relatively destitute, with Manilius's mother being an inconsistently employed veteran and his father being chronically ill, working as a laborer for other farmers. His older sister fights as a freelance mercenary, and his two younger brothers have tried moving to the city to find work. Upon reaching 20 years of age, Manilius became a gladiator in arenas to fight for money. He quickly formed unorthodox means of fighting, and due to his somewhat small stature, is forced to "fight smarter, not harder." After receiving a somewhat large purse from successful brawls with other gladiators, Manilius traveled to the major city of Sammanus to join the military academy to become a Nicomedian officer. After his four years of officer training, he was appointed as a commanding officer for the capital city's garrison. His experience and competence at fighting bandits and maintaining public order gave him a particular edge in defensive battles. Additionally, his taciturn and genuine conduct made him popular with the members of his forces (if seen as a bit spineless by other COs and certain enlisted men and women). For these reasons, Empress Korinna personally appointed him as a general of the Empire when he was 26 years of age. As storm clouds gather over Gratia, Korinna has entrusted Manilius with the task of meeting with foreign leaders whilst guarding Imperial diplomats from harm as tension brews.

General Manilius is 5'6" and weighs 125 pounds. He has light green hair and gray eyes, and has a medium complexion. His armor is rather irregular, with him carrying a medium round shield, yet a single shoulder guard, and an Archer's chest protection/vambraces. As stated above, this young general is rather meek for a man of his station. While competent as a planner and is clever, he lacks the aura of authority needed to fully effectively command the armies he controls. His meekness can sometimes hurt troop morale, which causes him to doubt his abilities as a commander. Manilius's time at the capital has lead him to become friends with the Empress and the residents of Empire's namesake city.

Kornelia Schmidt (deuteragonist):

Kornelia is a commanding officer from the town of Anhalt in northern Nicomedia. The Schmidt family was a family of middling origins, owning a shop that sold all sorts of goods and curia. Disliking the drab life of a town's shopkeeper, Kornelia moved to Sammanus become a CO for the Empire at the local academy, similar to Manilius. Her fighting style is standard of many Imperial COs: supportive, while boasting the use of both swords and anima magic, allowing them versatility and a very painful toolset to use against the axe-wielders commonly found in the disorganized armies of brigands. Even still, Kornelia frequently tries to overpower her foes with brute strength and accurate strikes. She quickly found herself as a versatile leader,

capable of shifting between offense and defense. Unlike Manilius, her commanding and deep voice allows her to instill confidence in her troops (and provide some fear into less brave members of opposing armies). After being sent on leave, she took up residence in a different province from her own hometown, but quickly found herself disgruntled with the local magistrate. Since then, she's tried to pen to the National Assembly to have the magistrate removed.

Kornelia is 5'11" and 190 pounds. She is 28 years old. She has long, dark red hair with brown eyes. Her complexion is fair. Her dress is still quite standard for female commanders: having baggy pants, chainmail armor, a long trenchcoat, and heavy boots. Kornelia enjoys shopping for clothes, however, and owns several capes of differing color. Despite her tendency to be bossy and mildly cantankerous, she firmly believes that everything should be taken in moderation… except for shopping and partying after victorious battles. Kornelia is also a capable administrator, being incredibly meticulous and having an uncanny memory.

Lucilia Claudius (Princess of Nicomedia):

Lucilia is Manilius's best friend from childhood, coming from the same town of Massilia. The Claudius family was regarded as the most destitute family among the residents of the town, having nothing but their hut, clothes on their backs, and sky-high daydreams of one day escaping their situation to do something truly grand. Manilius and Lucilia went to school together, and they laughed about their unusual family lives as Manilius gave what little money he had to make sure that she was able to eat dinner after school ended. When she was about 10 years of age, a border skirmish flared up near Massilia, and a few rogue knights from Aquittany attacked Massilia. Her parents were killed during the brawl. While those knights who attacked Massilia were dismissed and subsequently imprisoned for their actions (in part, as a move to maintain the tense and awkward peace between Nicomedia and Aquittany), it left an undeniable scar on Lucilia. She promised to live to the fullest for her parents from then-on-out, and would let no goal be unattainable. If it could be achieved, she reasoned, she would accomplish it. Lucilia was taken into the local orphanage, and did nothing but study for schoolwork (and talk to Manilius), quickly rising to be the top student of her class. At 18 years of age, she submitted an application to a university and earned a degree in law with a near-perfect GPA and full scholarship, and soon after, joined the military academy. In all battle simulations as a commander, she handily beat out all her peers with her incredible competence at offense, and her outspokenness got her the attention of Empress Korinna. Lucilia's aptitude at law, military matters, and ability to conquer all tasks with an absolutely unrelenting iron will inspired the Empress. Lucilia's love for Nicomedians, ultimately, convinced the childless and aging Korinna to name Lucilia the Princess of Nicomedia. The dreams of the Claudius family had come true. As princess, with her best friend as a defensive general, she holds many ambitions for the future of the continent. One feeling hasn't ever slipped from her mind, however…

Lucilia is 5’6” (Manilius’s height) and 140 pounds. She has long, dark blue hair and gold-colored eyes. The princess is pale-skinned. She’s frequently considered beautiful. Lucilia wears a long dress that is surprisingly not ornate, but has slits for open movement, given that she fights as a Swordmaster. Lucilia is quite talkative and has a ridiculously strong work ethic. Her pride, too, in unmatched. This princess’s temper is not something to be trifled with, since, she is emotional all around, but seldom shows fear. Her favorite quote is, “those who are brave know that fear exists, but will act in every way to manage it.”