

The story of The Mad Emperor:

In 1563 6AE, a vengeful Bozjan expatriate named Relm Aroanji — a noted poet, author, and satirist, in his time — created and published a bitter children's tale entitled "The Mad Emperor".

Pronunciation Note: 'Aroanji' is a Bozjan name, not a Far Eastern name. Bozjan names use Serbian phonetics. Serbian 'oa' is pronounced like the 'ow' in English 'row'; Serbian 'r' is briefly and subtly trilled; Serbian letter 'j' is a sound like the 'y' in English 'yo'; and Serbian letter 'i' is like English 'ee'.

Therefore, the intended pronunciation of this name is likely "Uh-rrow-nyee". "Relm", meanwhile, would be similar to English phonetics — like English pronunciation of the word, "realm". The Mad Emperor depicted a distant and unknown Star, ruled by the great "Vectorian Empire", and capitated in the great, and grand, and wondrous, and technologically-advanced city of Vector.

The Vectorian Empire was ruled by a "strange and lordly fool" named Kefka — a man who found humour in horrible things, dressed in ridiculous outfits, and was depicted as being mentally-unstable and unfit to rule.

Nonetheless, everyone around the Emperor Kefka — in fear of his authority, and desperate to improve their own position by currying his favor — bowed, and scraped, and did their very best to obey his crazed and confusing orders, and to appease his every whim.

And that included conquering the entire Star, with the aid of bizarre machines invented from within Emperor Kefka's disturbed mind — a world-wide war that was almost finished by the opening of the tale, as Emperor Kefka's fanatically-loyal armies had fanned out across the Star to seize any territories that were not yet within the Vectorian Empire's domain.

Yet, despite the people's fervent loyalty to his authority, Emperor Kefka's rule was an oppressive one.

He casually-experimented upon his own citizens to develop new weapons and technologies, and he used a horrible machine called the "Light of Judgment" to scour away and destroy anyone, anywhere, that dared in any way to disobey him.

And at the center of the capital city of Vector rose a gigantic, pretentious statue, carved in an elaborate depiction of Emperor Kefka's journey through life and ascension to power — which the Vectorian people gazed upon daily for inspiration and example.

So fervently did the people believe in their great and radiant Emperor, in fact, that the statue came to be called "The Statue of the Gods" — each successive depicted milestone of Emperor Kefka's life being held in awe as representing an ascension to an even-higher state of being.

The "Statue of the Gods" was actually so massive, and towered so high above the land, that it was visible from any point in the entire vast Vectorian Empire — always peering above the horizon, visible to any onlooker, in any location... and causing fearful subjects of the Vectorian Empire to always face it when they whispered hopeful and desperate entreaties to Emperor Kefka for mercy and fortune.

In fact, the machine that released the terrible power of the "Light of Judgment" was built into the pinnacle of the "Statue of the Gods" — causing the people to view its towering stone visage of Emperor Kefka, and his hardships and achievements, with even more fear and awe.

After so-establishing the setting, the story then shifted to discuss the distant land of Doma, which — explained the tale — was the last place on the entire Star that had not yet come under the rule of the Vectorian Empire.

Indeed, through bravery and cleverness, the Domans had achieved a military victory against the troops of the Vectorian armies — an accomplishment previously believed unthinkable and impossible.

...However, Emperor Kefka had deemed that outcome to be "extremely rude", and thus responded by sending his most powerful Magitek machines and machina to vanquish the Domans in an onslaught of steel and artillery.

But again, the Domans outsmarted and destroyed even those fearsome mechanical Vectorian armies.

Bewildered and frustrated, the great Emperor Kefka then proclaimed, "Still alive?! Unbelievable! But I really must insist you die!" — and then used his Light of Judgment to completely-destroy the entire land of Doma, killing everyone — men, women, and children — in but a few minutes of intensely-searing energy, concentrated mercilessly upon the defiant region.

The Mad Emperor then shifted to the interior of the "Phantom Train" — a horrid machine invented by the twisted mind of Emperor Kefka, purposed to collect the souls of those slain in his wars, and carry them peacefully to "the Afterlife"...

...which, in fact, actually meant ferrying them along thousands of miles of tracks, to the great Magitek Factories of Vector... within which, the fallen souls would be destroyed and processed into fuel for the Vectorian Empire's terrible war-machines — an infinite cycle of death and warfare, each feeding the other without end.

And the total destruction of Doma had meant that the Phantom Train was absolutely packed and overloaded with souls destined for the Magitek Factories — which pleased Emperor Kefka mightily, as he had expended enormous amounts of "soulruleum" fuel to burn Doma to ash using the Light of Judgment... after, "Prrrrrobably running it far longer than necessary, I do admit, hehe! But a message needed to be sent — and I didn't want any chance of any inconsiderate survivors!"

The story then became more focused — upon 14 different souls, all trapped upon the Phantom Train as it sped away from the distant land of Doma...

At that moment, the Phantom Train had just finished circling the Star, and Doma was its final destination before returning to the factories of Vector.

And so, the 14 souls came from all manner of places and walks-of-life — including both a Doman ninja and samurai, but also individuals from many other distant places: a wealthy Dalmaskan inventor, a humble Skatayan monk, a mysterious Meracydian shamaness, an enigmatic Hannish performer, a noble Werlyian thief, a treacherous Vectorian knight, an orphaned child from the tribal plains of the distant New World, a bold young Landian artist and her stubborn mage-knight grandfather, a selfish Ul'dahn confidence-man... and even a Moogle and a Sasquatch, who were best of friends, and had died together in defense of their cavernous home in the mountains of Coerthas.

The Phantom Train was filled with hedonistic luxuries that Emperor Kefka's twisted mind had designed into its cars — infinite banquets of sumptuous foods, endless entertainment from dancers and theatre, and unlimited opportunities to gamble, drink, and smoke... all intended to lull the ferried souls into accepting complacency about their miserable end.

And most of the souls aboard the Phantom Train had, indeed, accepted that — resigning themselves to their meaningless deaths, and the impending oblivion of their spirits... seeking to simply enjoy what few pleasures that they still could before their final end.

Indeed, as they traveled, those distracted souls aboard the Phantom Train tried not to even think about the fate that ultimately awaited them — to shut-out and ignore the scenes of death and suffering filling the views all around through the windows of that dark soul-train, as it traveled its world-winding tracks through endless lands reduced to rot and ruin.

However, those 14 noble souls refused to give in to the Phantom Train's simple pleasures and easy distractions — refused to look away from the horrors visible just beyond their windows.

And so they came to find each other aboard the Phantom Train, and in discussion together, they vowed to defy their fate — to refuse to go peacefully to such a meaningless end. They swore that instead, they would fight together — fight to see Emperor Kefka brought to justice.

So they became the Returners — those souls that refused to die without fighting to their very end for a better world, restored to what it once was, before the coming of Kefka and his Empire. So those 14 Returner souls rebelled against the Phantom Train, and fought their way through swarms of its suddenly-furious stewards — who were intent on keeping every last soul orderly and obedient... and onboard.

At last, those 14 souls broke their way out of the train-cars, and made to flee — but then, to their shock, the very Phantom Train itself attacked them.

Indeed, built by Emperor Kefka's cruel hand and conceived from his deranged mind, the machine itself carried a malevolent intelligence — and it would not allow its unwilling passengers to escape.

In fact, the fell machine knew well that it was powered by the very same fuel that would be created from the souls of those that it ferried...

So the 14 brave souls thus battled the malevolent Phantom Train — until its engines broke down and fell apart, and the sinister machine came to a standstill, and was knocked off its tracks — derailing into the dark and vast Forest of the Lost that was located at the heart of the Imperial Continent.

There, all of the trapped souls — suddenly wakened from their lulled stupors — came to their senses, and escaped from the ruined train... gratefully fleeing and fading into their true and proper Afterlife.

...But the 14 noble Returner souls did not — no, they would not. Not yet! Their fierce and proud wills would not allow it — not until they had seen the terrible Emperor Kefka brought to justice, and deposed.

Thus, under the cover of night, the 14 rebellious souls made their way through the deep and dark Forest of the Lost — winding their way through treacherous paths and fearsome beasts, until reaching the other side, and emerging at the gated edges of the vast Imperial capital city of Vector.

The Imperial Capital Vector was surrounded by massive and imposing walls and Magitek emplacements — but at the city's outermost edges were decrepit slums called "the Zozos", wherein the many wretched individuals deemed too unimportant by the Vectorian Empire were left to scrape out whatever miserable lives that they could, under the ever-watchful gaze of Vectorian authorities.

Through gaps in the walls of the Zozo slums did the 14 brave Returners thus make their way into the otherwise-impenetrable Vector.

And upon arriving into the slums, they were soon greeted by a man named Dadaluma — dressed in the vestments of a monk, including prayer-beads, a bared chest, and a flowing sarouel.

"Good day fine sirs!" said the cheery Dadaluma, "How may I be of service?"

Dadaluma explained that he was a holy-man who, in his meditations, had seen a vision of the 14 Returners's journey.

Pledging sympathy to their cause, he promised to offer blessings in their name — and to help them sneak their way into the heart of Vector.

However, as an ascetic man of the Zozo slums, he was always-hungry... and so he begged the 14 souls for naught in exchange for his aid, but all of the coin and goods that they carried upon their person — that he might dine well for just one night in his life.

Inspired by finding another soul willing to defy Emperor Kefka, the 14 noble souls happily gave up all of the material goods and coin that they still bore upon them, as well as all of the treasures and supplies that they had found during their escape upon the Phantom Train and within the dark and foreboding paths of the Forest of the Lost.

And at the sight of such selfless offerings, Dadaluma smiled, and offered his sincere thanks — accompanied by a humble monastic bow.

Dadaluma then immediately betrayed the Returners to the Vectorian authorities — followed by proclaiming, "Well, I do hate fighting! So I suppose I'd best let you pass!", and stepping aside.

The shocked and angered Returners immediately began to flee — but they were then ambushed and attacked from behind by Dadaluma, who intended to delay them long enough for the soldiers to arrive.

Now forced to fight back, the Returners thus slew the contradictory holy-man, filling them with conflicted feelings...

...nonetheless, they had no time to consider it further — the sound of the heavy, armored boots of Vectorian soldiers could already be heard approaching swiftly from the distance.

Fleeing frantically through the streets of Vector, the Returners eventually found themselves standing before the grand doors of Emperor Kefka's lavish museum and art collection — the Owzer Galleries.

With few other options, the Returners broke into the doors with the aid of their Werlyian thief, and dashed inside... hiding them from the soldiers that soon rushed by on the darkened streets without.

However, as the Returners made their way through the vast halls of the darkened Owzer Galleries, they soon discovered that even the art owned by Emperor Kefka was tainted and corrupt — every piece that they looked upon manifested terrible visions and nightmarish scenes from what seemed at first a beautiful painting.

An idyllic mountainside produced visions of deadly landslides burying villages...

A portrait by candle-light suddenly brought visions of raging fires consuming homes and charring flesh...

A scene of a sunlit cloudy sky filled the mind with howling winds ripping apart settlements and scouring flesh from bone...

A ship upon an ocean suddenly gave the viewer visions of countless souls drowning under endless flooding...

And so on, and on, and on — depictions of machines leading to people writhing in electrocution, a scene of the snowy Vectorian capital leading to frozen corpses piled in bitter winter frosts...

...The Returners did their best not to look at any of the paintings or sculptures, desperate not to have any more horrid visions beset them.

At last, the 14 Returners came to a great-hall filled with the largest and most valuable artworks — and at its center, a portrait of Emperor Kefka's wife and consort, the Lady Lakshmi.

When the Returners gazed upon that humble and elegant portrait, they saw another vision — of a radiant goddess manifesting before their eyes, who promised to aid the 14 noble souls in their crusade to restore beauty to the world.

However, as soon as the Returner souls lowered their guard, the goddess suddenly distorted into a facelessly-masked creature clad in robes of pure darkness — the demon Chadarnook, who was merely using the visage of the goddess as a puppet for his own foul ends.

A vile fiend from another world of darkness, Chadarnook — inexplicably-obsessed with paintings and art — had been drawn to the Returners's Star through the scent of Emperor Kefka's constant foul acts — following the trails of blood that had been shed all across the Star in the process of obtaining Emperor Kefka's various prized artworks.

And there, in the Returners's world, Chadarnook was both oblivious and uncaring as to how his fell presence corrupted all that he touched and inhabited — and he had become especially jealous and possessive of the Lady Lakshmi's portrait.

After observing the Returners wandering through "his" galleries, however, Chadarnook came to think their shining, rebellious souls to be works of art as well... and thus became determined to make paintings of them — by entrapping their souls forever within his demonic canvases.

Thus were the 14 Returners forced to fight back against the obsessive and greedy demon — and, in the process, to tear apart every last piece of art within Emperor Kefka's galleries, in order to expunge the demon's possession.

Eventually, the shrieking and infuriated Chadarnook was left with no art to inhabit — and thus faded away, screaming, back to the fell realm whence he had first been drawn.

In the process, however, the Returners had also been forced to destroy the portrait of Emperor Kefka's consort — and with its loss, the radiant vision of the goddess also faded away... its promises of aid unfulfilled.

However, behind the ruined tatters of the former portrait of Lady Lakshmi, the Returners suddenly saw revealed a secret passage — which they fled into, in an attempt to escape the Vectorian soldiers that had arrived to investigate the commotion heard emanating from within the Owzer Galleries.

The Returners soon discovered that those passages led deep beneath the Imperial Capital City — and emerged within the heart of the capital, near to Emperor Kefka's palace.

Hopeful at their new fortune, the Returners thus steeled themselves to burst forth, and storm the Imperial Palace...

But, upon emerging from the secret tunnels, the 14 Returner souls were horrified to discover that the great city of Vector was no more — all around their startled eyes was naught but smoldering ruin, piled up with endless mountains of twisted scrap, melted metal, buried bodies, and charred machines...

...indeed, all and everything within the Capital was dead and gone.

Emperor Kefka had chosen — against all advice of his Vectorian Imperial Technicians — to proceed with a field-testing of his new, ultimate, perfect war-machina... far too soon before its designers could complete all proper checks and preparations.

Entitled the "Guardian", it was a powerful machine that was envisioned as becoming the protector of the entire Star — keeping every corner of the world safe from the dangers of crime, and war, and gods, and magick... and anything else that might ever endanger a loyal Vectorian servant.

Indeed, the Guardian was a warmachina unlike any other ever created — it could perform any technique, any art, any capability, from any thing that existed anywhere on the entire Star — so vast was its limitless database of knowledge.

And with that unstoppable array of weaponry and tactics, it would protect the Vectorian Empire forevermore, from all possible threats — ushering in an era of perfect peace!

...However, the Guardian went berserk the moment that it was activated — unable to remain stable after its systems attempted to process the infinite knowledge crammed inside its databanks.

It then decided that anyone and anything that was not Emperor Kefka was a danger to the Vectorian Empire — and rampaged across the Imperial Capital, destroying everyone and everything around it... until there was naught left to destroy, and naught remaint of the great Imperial City but a mountain of wreckage, ruin, and death.

Yet, rather than being remorseful nor horrified by that nightmarish outcome, the great Emperor Kefka had merely burst out laughing: "Amazing! Never before have I heard anything more symphonic than a chorus of millions of voices, all screaming in unison!"

Deciding that it was a "delightfully surprising" outcome, Emperor Kefka then raised a pedestal for himself high above the wreckage — dancing gleefully upon his personal pile of rubble, uplifted to stand high above the land, beside the gigantic and towering statues carved in his honor... and all floating deep within the churning black smoke rising from Vector's ruins.

From such a dark new throne, he gazed down to admire his newly-wrought "work"...

Indeed, Emperor Kefka soon declared the wreckage wrought of those millions of lives by the crazed Guardian to be, "a wondrous new form of sculpture — a delightful testament to the meaninglessness of existence!"

Suddenly beginning to think himself a god above consequence, and the world his mere plaything, Emperor Kefka became excited: "More! More! I wish to see more! I will destroy everything! I will turn this entire Star into a grand monument to non-existence!"

...and so Emperor Kefka began to wield the Light of Judgment indiscriminately, to impulsively and randomly destroy all life and all things on the Returners's world — for no reason other than to watch the wreckage accumulate, and create more "monumental sculptures of nothingness"... —meanwhile — far below Emperor Kefka's new towering throne of smoke, wreckage, and ruin — the Guardian suddenly detected the presence of the 14 Returner souls... and immediately readied its infinitely-aware weapons-systems.

So the Returners were forced to confront the Mad Emperor's most perfect war-machine...

...Through a bitter and painful battle, the Returners managed to disable the nearly-invincible Guardian — after enduring hundreds of different entities and tactics, deployed at dizzying and overwhelming speeds...

But their victory would come at great cost to themselves, and many of those battered souls did barely survive the battle...

Exhausted and reeling, the anger and vengeance that the Returners felt over Emperor Kefka's injustices gave them the strength to continue onward — and so they found it within themselves to rise from their brutal battle with the Guardian, and climb the long and gruesome ascent up Emperor Kefka's gigantic tower of wreckage, scrap, and corpses — their fierce souls intent on bringing justice to their Star by dethroning the Mad Emperor.

And after fighting through many great hardships and malevolent obstacles that the Mad Emperor sent down upon them during their ascent, those few surviving Returner souls made it to the very top of Emperor Kefka's morbid tower — pulling themselves up and upon his twisted

new throne, floating before the massive and narcissistic statues towering in his image and honor, amidst the smoke and darkness above the ruined Capital.

There, the brave and heroic Returner souls at last confronted the mad Emperor Kefka... —but Emperor Kefka's power was hopelessly-vast, and after an all-too-brief struggle, the Mad Emperor's vast magickal technologies crushed-utterly every last one of the 14 Returner souls.

Simultaneously both gloating and indignant, the great Emperor Kefka sneered down at the broken bodies before him: "Fools! Idiots! And... er... fools! I wield the greatest power in existence! Next to me, you are insects — no! Microbes upon the feet of insects! —No, wait! — Dirt, stuck to the microbes, stuck to the insects... stuck to the bottom of my boots! —No, no! The dirt that's stuck to the bottom of that dirt! —Yes! Ah, ha ha ha!"

...Realising that the Star would now sink into an eternal, twisted darkness, beholden to the whims of a madman now become a horrible ruler without mercy nor morality... the broken, exhausted, defeated Returners called out desperately to any who might hear them — prayed fervently for succor, salvation, or deliverance, from wherever it might somehow arrive...

...But in their moment of need, none came to the 14 brave souls's aid.

All the remaining survivors of the ruined Star, fearful of Emperor Kefka's mighty power, merely turned their faces away, and pretended not to notice the struggle... hoping that, at least, the Mad Emperor would not come for them with his searing Light of Judgment...

...But then, a few tiny hearts upon the Returners's vast star did stir.

And the guilt of their cowardice finally weighted too heavy... and they turned their eyes to the great Statue of the Gods on the horizon, and the horrid wreckage that now towered beside it...

...and they at last did find it within their hearts to defy the Mad Emperor, and pray for the safety and empowerment of the Returners.

And once they began to pray, they realised how good it felt to shed their fears, and defy the madman ruling the land — and so they prayed harder.

They prayed with all of their hearts.

And those prayers drifted to the top of Emperor Kefka's twisted throne, and combined with the prayers of the exhausted and defeated Returners...

...and something miraculous occurred: a great light began to shine down over the Mad Emperor's twisted pedestal, parting the blackened clouds of smoke.

And at last, those 14 heroic souls felt hope begin to stir in their hearts — felt hope that their prayed-for salvation had at last arrived.

...Alas, there were no more gods left in that world — at Emperor Kefka's behest, the twisted machines of the Vectorian Empire had long ago slain them all.

And so, the closest thing to a god that still remained upon the scarred and broken Star was Emperor Kefka himself — and thus was it he who received all of the prayers sent.

The light shining down upon the throne of ruin was thus emanating from the Mad Emperor himself — as he was now becoming not merely a madman worshiped by the ignorant and desperate as a god... but rather a true god, in body and soul — parasitically and ravenously consuming all of the final prayers, hopes, and dreams of those few who had still dared to fight on.

"Oh! I am filled with a new and glorious purpose!", exclaimed a pleasantly-surprised Emperor Kefka — as the glowing light suffused him ever-more intensely.

"Glory Be... me!"

...he then burst out laughing.

And when the blinding light finally faded, Emperor Kefka had ascended to a godly form, radiating a twisted and searing light that burnt the skin and blinded the eyes — a naked and terrible creature of sickly, blackened skin, with visage twisted permanently into a snarling and cruel laugh, and a disturbing mixture of birdlike and batlike wings sprouting haphazardly from his back — evoking the image of a hideous angel.

"Life... hope... dreams..." he mused, as he descended from his heavenly ascension, savoring every last hopeful prayer that he supped upon.

"...Where do they come from? And where do they go?", he pondered sincerely, as more prayers continued to drift up to him.

...but then his maddened and hideous face turned into an irritated scowl:

"...Ah, but it doesn't matter! All such things are meaningless... and I shall destroy them all!"

The new Radiant Emperor-God Kefka then obliterated the would-be heroes with a wave of his hand — unleashing fell and horrible magicks and technologies alike that none could ever hope to stand against or endure.

And as the last of the Returner souls was eradicated, and began to fade away, Radiant Emperor-God Kefka laughed cruelly, and proclaimed, "Yes! Yes, good! Embrace your destruction — it is the inevitable fate of every last thing that will ever exist!"

The last surviving Returner soul was the Meracydian shamaness... and before fading away from the Star forever, she used the last of her strength to defiantly state: "Perhaps that is so! But other people will always rebuild, and new lives will always be born!"

She struggled to her feet: "That things end is not what matters... it is that each that exists feels a reason and a meaning to its existence whilst it still does. That is what gives the experience of life a meaning all its own, up to the very end... regardless of what comes after."

"And in that process, we pass on new meaning to those who come later... and together, united, we then pass that meaning on down even further, through the endless histories of our people, our lands, and our Star.... and into our blood, our memories, and our descendants."

"No matter how many die, nor how much falls to ruin, that chain of existence still continues — it always has, which is why I stand here today, defying you. And it is that great overall meaning that we all contribute to, which cannot be truly lost — no matter how many fade, no matter how many are forgotten..."

"And so life will always have meaning! As long as those who believe in that truth, continue to struggle to preserve and uplift it!"

Radiant Emperor-God Kefka — having laid down on his side and begun to nap through her speech — finally snorted awake... and merely laughed, then declared:

"Oh please... how sickening. You sound like a cheap self-help booklet."

"Don't you see? Time will destroy every last one of those things that you speak of, as well. Always, destruction and decay will win. Bloodlines will break, as the last living heir dies unwed. Records will be lost to war and ruin. People will cease to remain enough to rebuild, and abandonment will follow. History proves me correct — in every case, in every place!"

"Entropy, nothingness, non-existence... these are the only actual truths, the only dead ends towards which all things — all life, all hopes, all dreams — are inevitably drawn, to be crushed under the will of those universal and ruling forces that bring glorious destruction in their wake."

"And you, too, shall in the end be forsaken by all of your hopes and dreams — and enjoy the unfulfillment of being a part of this great inevitability."

—and then the Radiant Emperor-God Kefka wielded his divine powers, and tore apart the last of the Returner souls — banishing her spirit to the same oblivion and non-existence as all others. And with that, the Returners's world fell silent — consumed forever-after in a horrible, shining, radiant darkness, as the Mad Emperor-God danced in the hellish heavens far above it all — eternally alone, upon his throne of wreckage and bone.

And so ended the final passage of Relm Aroanji's The Mad Emperor.

Analysis:

Amongst the many writings of the world, there are always those which are too tangled, dense, and complex in purpose and intent to be readily-accessible to the common man, yet are still considered works of significant quality and great labor: those writings doomed to forever be the darling of scholars, intellectuals, nobility, the wealthy, and the learned... and all-but-unknown to everyone else.

Such has been the fate of Relm Aroanji's *The Mad Emperor*. Within the Garlean Empire, it was summarily-banned — if some accounts are to be trusted, within literally hours of its first publication.

And in the wider Three Continents, it found almost no fertile audience within which to take root.

To Resistance fighters, it was far too long, dense, and abstract for their strained and exhausted minds to have any patience for.

To children, it was far too long, dry, philosophical, and subtle — boring them, more than anything.

Amongst common adults, it was simultaneously both ridiculous, and yet also far too literary and dense — neither something that they could take seriously, nor something that they could enjoy reading for pleasure... if they even read at all, that is.

And *The Mad Emperor's* long, winding, detail-rich passages and frequent philosophical digressions certainly did not lend itself well to being read aloud to, nor performed for, an audience.

Thus did *The Mad Emperor* ultimately only find purchase amongst literary critics, scholars of literature, nobles with an excess of patience and time for leisure, and so forth — who almost all eventually came to admire it deeply.

And so *The Mad Emperor* became nearly an instant classic, and has remaint required reading in countless literature, analysis, politick, writing, and philosophy courses in such places as Sharlayan, Thavnair, and the Ishgardian Scholasticates... but also remains, paradoxically, so obscure as to be nearly-unknown amongst anyone outside the most bespectacled academic circles, even to the very present day.

Amongst scholars of literature, however, *The Mad Emperor* is considered a work of art — one of the most vicious, detailed, and textured works of critical literature and satire ever published.

To fully understand The Mad Emperor, one must understand much of the rich context surrounding and underpinning it.

Relm Aroanji was a Bozjan. And given the unique hardships of their history, Bozjans have always had a rich legacy of critical and satirical literature — the nature of the nation's tumultuous past lending it well to scathing self-deprecating humour and merciless criticism of cultural leaders and institutions.

Indeed, enshrouded within the veil of sharply-written literature or speech, merciless critical commentaries on the society or public figures have a rich history of being not just accepted, but admired and appreciated within Bozjan culture.

As such, when Relm Aroanji — a well-bred, well-educated intellectual of Bozja's former upper nobility, schooled and come-of-age in a time before the Garlean conquest — grew old enough to leave his native home and seek a freer place to ply his chosen art of writing, he found great appreciation for his excellent literary skills and sharp Bozjan wit amongst the intellectual audiences of the various countries that he traveled amongst in his years: Radz-at-Han, Dalmasca, Ul'dah, Hingashi, Sharlayan Colony, and so on...

But in time, Relm would return to his native Bozja, after receiving a direct and formal invitation from Emperor Solus zos Galvus himself — a long-time admirer of Aroanji's work — to help chair and expand a cultural enrichment and literary education program in Bozja Citadel and surrounding settlements, part of continual attempt to improve the still-dismal literacy and arts scores amongst Bozja's historically-lowest classes.

Promised freedom of speech and immunity from prosecution, Aroanji grudgingly accepted — believing that the chance to educate a new generation of Bozjans in proper literary capability and appreciation — and in the process, surreptitiously-instill enlightened and rebellious principles within them — to be well worth his time...

So it was by pure chance that Aroanji was in the process of establishing a new literature program in a rural settlement of Bozja on the day that the Lunar Transmitter test occurred — and that Aroanji had the opportunity for something few on the Star survived experiencing: watching with confusion, and then disbelief, as a piercing light sliced down from a vivid red glimmer in the sky above, and the distant Bozja Citadel simply vanished from sight within a great and catastrophic detonation of blinding light...

At the time, other eyewitnesses report Relm suddenly staring upwards at the sky, as if deeply-confused — presumably searching for the source of the light — and then abruptly clutching his head, whilst seeming distracted, and failing to respond to others's inquiries.

...Some minutes later, Aroanji apparently recovered. But from that day forth, he was reportedly never the same: his once sharp, but wryly-playful and self-aware, wit became quickly replaced by something far more bitter and angry — apparently becoming a deeply-more melancholic person almost overnight, with his later writings taking a sharp turn towards dark, cold, and bitter underlying sentiments expressing a sense of futility about all life, all works, and all efforts.

It was difficult to ascertain the man's true feelings or influences, however, because after that day, Relm would apparently only rarely speak about his personal thoughts, nor explain much of his literary intentions — not in interviews, nor even to close friends.

But those commenting on his works critically could clearly see a dividing line in his tone and style that began shortly after witnessing the near-total eradication of his people and nation. Which — quite understandably — was presumed to have had a profound effect upon the man, and to be the obvious explanation for his rapidly-changing philosophies that tilted abruptly towards a tendency to depict all institutions built by Man, even the most ancient or beautiful, as being ultimately fleeting and fragile things — doomed to inevitably be meaninglessly brushed away by some cruel event or other, no matter how much soul and care was poured into their creation.

Yet Aroanji also, clearly, had other motivations behind *The Mad Emperor* — in particular, anger... and great deals of it. He was well-known to have nursed a bitter hatred towards the Garlean Empire for what occurred in Bozja, as well as the scientists and Emperor that had authorised it all to occur.

But the depth Aroanji's sentiments went beyond the superficial feelings of shock and upset that most observers who learnt of Bozja would usually feel — because Relm, as a far-traveled and worldly writer and intellectual, had accumulated over the course of his life a great deal of connections amongst the spies and memberships of the various Provincial Resistance movements.

As such, Relm was aware of — far more than the average reader or commoner — a great deal of ostensibly-secret details about the true happenings within the Garlean Empire, its laboratories, its militaries, and its Imperial Court... and how those had influenced what truly occurred at Bozja Citadel.

Thus, Relm was privy to many rumoured and whispered details that would powerfully-shape *The Mad Emperor* — details that that would simultaneously be hopelessly-obscure and impenetrable to more casual outside audiences, further impairing the work's ability to have widespread appeal.

Indeed, even to the very present day, scholars continue to unravel new notes of subtle satire and commentary within *The Mad Emperor* whenever new leaks of sensitive Garlean information filter out through loose-lips in the Eorzean Alliance intelligence networks — attesting to just how many secretive details the well-connected Aroanji truly was privy to.

As such, The Mad Emperor was more than just Relm Aroanji's furious, anguished, bitter expression of his own feelings about what befell Bozja — it was also an intentionally-scathing and exposing commentary about the lurid details that he knew to be lurking everywhere just under the carefully-constructed surface of the Garlean Empire.

Aroanji's true purpose and intention with The Mad Emperor has long been debated — as the man was infamously-averse to speaking clearly about such topics when asked directly. As such, the debate has long been oft-heated and intense, and may never be truly settled.

Some see The Mad Emperor as a work of emotional catharsis — venting anger at those Aroanji blamed for the Bozja "incident".

Others see it as a call to arms — attempting to inspire Provincial subjects to rise up and fight against the evils oppressing them.

Others, a cautionary tale — about the sheer futility of resisting the Garlean Empire's might.

Still others, a nihilistic exploration of despair — about the meaninglessness of everything built by Man, no matter how honored or beloved, and the futility of every attempt to truly accomplish anything, no matter if you be Imperial, subject, or free.

And others, the opposite — an attempt to encourage the Bozjan people not to abandon their culture and their home to despair, no matter how much horror was visited upon it — to fight and rebuild, no matter how much or how often it is destroyed.

...And many more interpretations besides.

Indeed, to this day, The Mad Emperor remains one of the most complex works of literature known to scholars of the Three Continents, at least in terms of how deeply the debates rage about the true intention of its many rich, difficult, and densely-woven details — with every reading seeming to expose another finely-pointed thread that Aroanji subtly wove into nearly every last sentence of the dense and florid prose, and every new critical examination producing another equally-convincing — yet completely-contradictory — analysis of what Aroanji's true intentions and meanings may have been.

Nonetheless, something that all critics and commentators can comfortably agree about is that The Mad Emperor was certainly intended to be read and interpreted far more deeply than the obvious surface-level tale of a strange, fantastic adventure in a mysterious "other Star". And, as well, that The Mad Emperor is clearly not actually intended to be a "children's tale" — merely framed like one, for the sake of literary effect and method.

Some speculate that Aroanji structured The Mad Emperor in the way that he did — as a surreal, otherworldly journey of abstract characters, encountering all manner of bizarre and fantastic situations without equivalent on Hydaelyn — in order to attempt to slip the work past Imperial content review boards, that his bitingly-scathing mockery and deconstruction of the Garlean

society, ideals, and regime might be published within the very heartland of those that he now held such newfound contempt for.

However, the depth of Aroanji's fury and resentment seem to have undone him on that front — many of the analogies and metaphors ultimately being far too blatant. Indeed, in many cases, Aroanji even directly-reuses names from the real world.

It should be understood, however, that such decisions were certainly not for lack of literary skill nor creative capability — rather, it seems to have resulted from Aroanji holding such anger towards the Garlean Empire that he was simply unwilling to obscure his intentions any further: he so stubbornly wanted to ensure that no one could possibly misunderstand his intended meanings, metaphors, and politickal analogues that he favored blunt and blatant representations over his typically far more abstract style.

Yet in intentionally making his targets so obvious, Aroanji also unavoidably made the intent of his work too obvious, by far — and so The Mad Emperor was swiftly banned without exception over the entirety of the Garlean Empire... undermining a large portion of his original intent for writing it to begin with: stirring up the sentiments of both Garlean pureborn and subjects alike.

Thus, ultimately, The Mad Emperor — a work that Aroanji labored relentlessly upon, with nearly no rest or sleep, whilst essentially locked inside a Hannish inn-chamber, for well over 12 months — despite such immense inpouring of his heart, mind, soul, and energy... would ultimately see Aroanji little to no widespread acknowledgement nor success when first published — finding only limited distribution within the most obscure specialty bookstores in the most affluent or eccentric districts of wealthy and learned locales such Ul'dah, Radz-at-Han, and Sharlayan City.

Over subsequent years, however — as more and more such individuals of the intelligentsia began to chew, discuss, and debate their way through the incredibly-dense tangles of meaning and metaphor that filled The Mad Emperor from cover to cover — appreciation for the work would slowly grow... ultimately earning Relm Aroanji much widely-held respect and acclaim — but only long after the Bozja "incident" had occurred, and thus undermining much of Aroanji's initial intent to call attention to the atrocity, raise immediate ire far and wide, and ignite self-aware criticism and embarrassment within the Garlean society.

The Mad Emperor would, however, ultimately serve a purpose that would be extremely-vexing to Emperor Solus zos Galvus — for its effects would lie beyond the reach of his ability to censure, censor, or ban it: keeping the memory, debate, and discussion about the Bozja "incident" alive and inflamed even decades after the initial event.

Indeed, The Mad Emperor would become one of many factors that would work — amongst the scholars and learned of the free lands of the Three Continents — to constantly-undermine Garlean attempts to downplay and bury attention about the "incident" in the lands outside the Empire's borders, and thus potently contribute to keeping the immense diplomatic, domestic,

scientific, militaristic, and nationalistic embarrassment of the Bozja "incident" alive and well far and long beyond the Garlean regime's most sincere preferences to the contrary.

To fully-understand and analyse the details that Relm Aroanji wove into *The Mad Emperor*, one needs to know a great deal of background about Bozjan language, culture, and the author's personal sensibilities and philosophies.

Especially, a great deal of the subtle and scathing humour and criticism in *The Mad Emperor* is lost upon readers unfamiliar with the native Bozjan tongue — and as such, whilst *The Mad Emperor* was immediately and greatly popular amongst Bozjan expatriate intellectuals... outside of that small minority, much of its subtler aspects were lost entirely.

For example, the Bozjan native language equivalent for 'emperor' is "keka".

As such, whilst many audiences assumed that "Emperor Kefka" was merely Aroanji simplistically and obviously recasting the balatro Cefca in an absurdist juxtaposition as Emperor by modifying two letters into a homophone, it was actually an intentional blending of "keka" and "Cefca" to produce Aroanji's actual intent — fusing Emperor Solus zos Galvus and the mad balatro Cefca cen Palaso into a single entity.

And this blended intent was especially clear in how Aroanji was heard to pronounce "Kefka" at readings of *The Mad Emperor* — intentionally placing a notably-Bozjan accent upon the "Ke" and the "ka" vowels, despite his otherwise-impeccable ability to pronounce the Eorzean, Hannish, and Garlean languages that he was also fluent in.

This represented Aroanji's bitter satirical perception that Emperor Solus and Cefca were, in his words in a later commentary, "essentially the same individual — like two mirrors placed side-by-side, with one different only in being far more distracting and decorated".

Indeed, according to Aroanji, "the only difference" that he saw between Emperor Solus and the late Cefca was that, "the balatro had the courage to state his beliefs and intentions openly".

As such, Aroanji's intentions with "Emperor Kefka" were to depict what he believed to be, "a story in which an Emperor actually revealed his true heart for all to see, without the careful covering of that elegant black coat that he so loves to hide inside — a story in which a bloodthirsty madman was not granted an aire of false dignity and culture just because of the outward representation that he cleverly chose to wrap his true nature within".

And the "keka-Cefca" blending was apparently so immediately-obvious to native speakers of Bozjan that — even amongst those who had never read *The Mad Emperor* — the intentional "accidental phonetic misspelling" of 'Kefka' would proliferate suspiciously amongst Bozjan documents and textbooks over the ensuing decades — which would, in turn, apparently continue to rankle and infuriate Emperor Solus for the remainder of his life.

In another example, the Bozjan word for 'corrupt; dark' is "dada", and 'purity; light' is "luma".

Thus, the name "Dadaluma" is, to Bozjan ears, an instant and comical oxymoronic contradiction — and thus matches the character of a man professing to be of the highest moral purity (a holy monk), whilst, just under the surface, actually being no different than any other hungry, greedy animal — which continues a recurring theme that Aroanji weaved throughout *The Mad Emperor*: individuals that profess one thing outwardly, whilst being something else entirely underneath the surface.

Indeed, the attire described by Aroanji upon Dadaluma was clearly an intentional mockery of the traditional dress of the Bozjan monks of the remote Verdant Path monastery — a group of ascetic Bozjan martial-arts masters who were, to even a Bozjan commoner, intuitively-symbolic of ultimate purity and a life of discipline, without vice nor sin (at least, during pre-Imperial Bozjan culture, before the Verdant Path was subverted).

Thus, to subsequently depict so obviously-dressed a monk as a lying, cheating, treacherous, greedy, self-serving thief and manipulator would have been immediately-striking to any Bozjan reader — causing said reader to instantly see the character as far more interesting and symbolic than most non-Bozjan readers would ever be expected to be able to react.

And that met Aroanji's intended metaphorical purpose — to mock what he perceived as the intense hypocrisy of various high-ranking Garlean officials, Legati, scientists, administrators, and politicians of the day: professing lofty and noble ideals and goals, whilst ultimately still betraying the people that they ruled over at a moment's whim, and always ensuring first and foremost that they remained in the good graces of His Radiance — at any moral cost, and usually whilst also accepting all manner of casual bribes along the way.

In Aroanji's satirical eyes, Garlean figures like Senators, Governors, and Legati seemed to be held in similar "untouchably-respected" regard as the reclusive holy-men of Bozja's Verdant Path — despite the Garlean "wise men", in blunt contrast, hardly living lives that actually reflected the ideals that they supposedly and constantly espoused and championed. As for "zozo", this is an Elezen word meaning something like, "stupid fool" — and it is considered quite insulting. Certainly not appropriate for anything close to polite company in Elezen-dominant regions such as Ishgard or Gridania.

Thus, the "Zozo Slums" was a scathing commentary by Aroanji about the hypocrisy of the Garlean Empire conquering nations to "enlighten" and "uplift" them, whilst actually often plunging the people into deeper poverty and hardship, or clumsily-replacing once-healthy societal structures with a significantly-more dysfunctional Garlean substitute.

As well, the fact that "Dadaluma" — representing Garlean "wise men" — lived in "The Zozos", was... hardly a coincidence on Aroanji's part.

As for the word "owzer", that is very difficult to translate easily into Eorzean...

In Bozjan colloquial language, "owzer" was a well-known slang term meaning something like,

"a man who is successful and respected, despite everyone knowing that he's actually not very skilled at all, and just lied, cheated, manoeuvred, bluffed, or fooled his way along, until he got into a good position. But even though everyone knows that, no one says anything now, nor holds him accountable, because he has achieved too much wealth and influence to now be worth risking the consequences of confronting or insulting him. And so he begins to, in practise, be regarded just as well as someone who legitimately-earnt success".

Indeed, in the fiercely-stratified Bozjan society that existed prior to the Garlean conquest, "owzer" was a word slung around very often amongst the lower classes — especially targeted at those born low who wormed their way into a higher social position through all manner of means deemed traitorous or unsavory to their former lower-born brethren.

Thus, the "Owzer Galleries" would have immediately come across as hilarious to Bozjan ears — certainly not the sort of combination that would ever be seen upon a real, prestigious location such as an art-gallery.

And that was Aroanji's exact intention — to highlight what he viewed as the infuriating insult, and churlish irony, of Emperor Solus zos Galvus making proud and lavish private and public galleries out of the priceless artworks and artifacts pilfered and looted from an hundred conquered peoples and nations, and feigning that such "appreciation" made him a "cultured individual" — rather than little more than a low-born impostor, thug, and thief.

Meanwhile, "Chadarnook" is a pseudo-Thavnairian word invented by Aroanji — 'chadar' meaning "moon", and 'nukh' meaning "possessor, owner, infiltrator". But Aroanji uniquely combined them into a compound not encountered in the actual Hannish tongue.

Thus, 'Chadarnook' would mean something like, "Moon-Possessor" — with an intended ambiguity of meaning any of, "he who possesses [owns] the moon", "he who possesses others [and comes from the moon]", and "he who is possessed by the moon".

Thus, whilst Chadarnook's maniacal obsession with stealing and corrupting art was a clear mockery of Emperor Solus zos Galvus's professed "cultured appreciation of the arts" whilst constantly looting and stealing from those he conquered, the name "Chadarnook" itself suggested something more complex: a reference to the Lunar Transmitter events in Bozja.

That is, Bozja — represented by the innocent and pure "Goddess" — was enslaved and possessed by the "Moon-Possessor": the Garlean Empire that "owned" Dalamud, the Garlean Empire "possessed by" its hunger for the power of Dalamud, and the Garlean Empire that "possessed" others in the name of trying to control Dalamud.

This was Aroanji's subtle attempt to spread knowledge of the truth behind Bozja, without saying so too blatantly — as to not risk exposing outright his knowledge of the deeper details behind the incident.

But unfortunately, it was so subtle as to be lost on nearly all audiences — until years later, when the aftermath of the METEOR Project would lay to light more clearly what had occurred in Bozja Citadel.

As for Aroanji's usage of the "Lady Lakshmi", this is another interesting choice.

It seems that Aroanji felt — for one reason or another — that using the Bozjan warrior-goddess Gunnhildr for the painting would not have met his satirical or literary needs.

Perhaps he considered it too blatant — representing Bozja itself with its actual, literal goddess. Or perhaps he considered it too awkward — that placing a Bozjan goddess in "Emperor Kefka's" galleries as his consort would disturb the immersion of a surreal journey within another world.

Thus, Aroanji likely wanted something "Gunnhildr-adjacent" — a similar goddess, that would not be so-obviously the Bozjan goddess, and would be less disruptive to the surreal, otherworldly quality that he hoped to give the world of the Returners.

As for the specific choice of the Ananta goddess, it is important to remember that long and deep ties of cultural exchange existed between the cultures of Ala Mhigo and the Near East, due to the centuries of the Eorzean-Near Eastern trading-routes. As such, the Ananta and Ala Mhigans were influenced by Near Eastern cultural aspects, especially Dalmaskan and Hannish — and vise-versa.

As well, Aroanji — through his privileged sources within the Resistance spy networks — was privy to the classified information about what Legatus van Baelsar and the XIVth Legion had encountered in the western badlands of Gyr Abania.

Thus, it is very likely that Aroanji very intentionally chose the "goddess" that he did — not just to infuriate the Garlean Empire by teasing such details publicly, but also as another layer of metaphor and satire: the demon Chadarnook (representing Emperor Solus's base and brutish appetites, disguised as culture and refinement) obsessively-possesses Lakshmi (a little-known beast-man god), who inhabits a portrait of the Imperial Consort — representing the Garlean Empire's curious tendency to indirectly-create the very Eikons that they seek to destroy, through the unrest and destabilisation that their fanatical and uncompromising activities bring to the regions that they invade.

That is to say, on the surface, the Emperor is "married" to an elegant noblewoman (Garlean ideals). But under the surface, he secretly actually lusts after an exotic goddess (the Eikons that Garlemald's fanatic and obsessive conquests produce — which Aroanji suggests here is almost as if they are attracted to the very thing that they so proclaim to hate).

As for other non-Bozjan words...

The Empire of "Vector" was clearly-intended as a bitter quintuple-meaning.

In basic concept, a vector represents something moving forward in a specific direction with force — a symbol of the Empire's inexorable outward advance.

In engineering, a vector is a common mathematical tool for analysing mechanics — thus evocative of the Empire's obsession with technology and machinistry.

And the arrows that represent a vector in calculations are similar to the simplistic, geometric symbol of the Imperial banner. Yet rather than being unified in an inward-turning linked chain, a vector is turned outward and away from its source — thus evoking a comical Garlean flag that "points out" instead of being chained... and thus, symbolically-representing Aroanji's perception of the Empire as a sham of unity that actually disguises immense internal dischord and disarray.

As well, "Vector" could be interpreted as a false, pseudo-Garlean construction of "vex" and the stem "-tor" — that is, "one who vexes and inflames".

But at the same time, the word 'vector' can also refer to a parasitic or verminous organism that carries and spreads disease — and thus it also formed an obviously, yet somehow also subtly, pointed commentary about Aroanji's actual opinion of the Garlean Empire and its activities. For another example, the blatantly-titled "Guardian" — using an Eorzean word whose many senses and subtleties Aroanji felt fit more ideally than any specific Bozjan word — was meant to symbolise the Garlean Empire's obsession with attempting to surgically-excise and absorb those aspects of conquered cultures that it deemed useful for war or technology.

In Aroanji's perspective, the Garlean Empire's cold and ruthless manner of doing so led them to achieve only ever-increasing dissonance, not assimilation.

That is to say, by discarding all of the other rich cultural contexts and aspects that surrounded and developed alongside each such "stolen" tradition, the Garlean Empire always failed to understand a given art truly and fully — thus creating only a hollow imitation of the practice, which in turn could not ever actually be anything like the true form that they had subjugated and attempted to imitate.

Thus, Aroanji wished to imply that the Garlean Empire only proliferated an ever-increasing array of fundamentally-incomplete and "defective" techniques, which Aroanji believed actually served to weaken, rather than strengthen, their overall prowess — represented by the Guardian going mad whilst trying to understand and process all of its stolen arts and techniques.

Yet, to remain in-keeping with the world that he attempted to create for The Mad Emperor, Aroanji represented such concepts by having the Guardian synthesize a wide variety of fanciful and ridiculous creatures and monsters — on the surface, simple absurdities that were appropriate for a children's tale: such as a violent talking octopus royalty, airships with grinning faces, giant golems filled with forbidden books, and many more whimsical inventions of Aroanji's mind... although Aroanji supposedly based all of them on things that he had actually encountered or learnt-about in his worldly travels.

However, that vast variety was ultimately meant to be a metaphor for the many different stolen and assimilated techniques of the many conquered provinces and peoples preyed upon by the ravenous — yet somehow still so ignorant, in Aroanji's eyes — Garlean Empire.

As for the thousands of other non-linguistic literary details of The Mad Emperor... they are simply legion, and so dense and many as to be an entire scholarly specialty within the Sharlayan Studium's Department of Letters and Literatures. And so, to discuss them all in any truly-appropriate detail is a task far beyond the scope of this historical examination of the Garlean Empire and its people and cultures.

However, a brief sampling of some relevant and commonly-accepted observations can be offered:

The Statue of the Gods represented Aroanji's disgust with the manner in which Emperor Solus zos Galvus was venerated by the Garlean Empire: whilst Emperor Solus claimed to have done all life's his work in order to uplift the Garlean people, Aroanji's bitter and piercing eye instead perceived the man as having done it all just to uplift himself — and that Solus was truly concerned not with the fate of the Garlean race, as he so constantly-professed, but rather, with ensuring that his own pompous and bloated legacy was remembered just exactly as his rapidly-aging self obsessively wanted it to be.

Likewise, the fact that Emperor "Kefka's" life achievements were immortalised in a grand and pretentious stone statue symbolised how unimpressed Aroanji's seething perspective was towards Emperor Solus's own achievements.

That is to say, the tale of a man's life-achievements being carved into a permanent and unchanging stone statue represented Aroanji's belief that Emperor Solus had done several bold and impressive things early in his life — and then complacently-relied on those "immortalised" achievements to prop-up his decidedly-mediocre outcomes for of all his subsequent decades, carried entirely from there by the brilliance and achievements of everyone else around him.

Hence, Aroanji believed that a frozen, unchanging, narcissistic edifice to a man's early life history, towering ridiculously-tall over the Empire of "Vector", was a well-fit match indeed for how Aroanji's mercilessly-critical perspective perceived the life and identity of Solus zos Galvus. Likewise, the fearsome "Light of Judgment" was Aroanji's symbolism for Emperor Solus's ability to ruin the life of anyone, anywhere, within the Garlean Empire, with but a word from his lips and a gesture from his gloved hands — all without ever having to so much as rise from his throne.

Thus, the searing Light of Judgment's ever-searching eye was akin to the Palamecian, and the burning Light itself was akin to the crushing consequences that a snap of Emperor Solus's fingers could instantly motivate... even thousands of miles away.

And, of course, it also effectively-represented the swift Garlean Magitek airships's ability to rapidly arrive to any side of the Three Continents, and deliver fearsome and inescapable vengeance to any who dared attempt defiance.

As for the presence of "Doma", critics and scholars continue, to the very present day, to debate why Aroanji chose to center the beginning of The Mad Emperor in that location — a Province which, at the time of the tale's writing, had been entirely well-behaved... its King Kaien Rijin even surrendering voluntarily to Imperial rule, in stark contrast to the defiant but pyrrhic victories depicted in The Mad Emperor.

One school of thought is that Doma's initial resistance was amongst the most creative and impressive of any invaded territory — invoking everything from Kami, to Auspices, to foreign Samurai mercenaries, to clockwork soldiers, to Shinobi, to shikigami, to barricading off the Dairyu Moon Gates with geomantic magicks...

...and thus, despite Doma's ultimate submission, that nation still stuck in Aroanji's mind as the most diverse, determined, and fantastical tale of resistance to Garlean conquest that he had heard.

Another school of thought is that Aroanji intended surrealism and irony — depicting, as the nation that made the great sacrifice within the parallel world of The Mad Emperor, what was — in reality — one of the least-destructive conquests in Hydaelynian Imperial history,

A third — and little-respected — school of thought, which developed only in very recent years, is that Aroanji somehow divined the future before penning The Mad Emperor — seeming to eerily-foretell, 15 years prior to the actual event, Doma's eventual complete-destruction for its defiance.

...most dignified scholars, however, are prone to roll their eyes and snicker, should this theory ever be broached in a serious academic context.

Ultimately, because Relm Aroanji quite-pointedly never commented on this particular aspect of The Mad Emperor, scholars are left no choice but to continue to debate — seemingly without any hope of ever being able to establish a truly conclusive conclusion as to why Aroanji chose to depict Doma as he did in his work.

As for the "Phantom Train"... that represented, at least in part, Aroanji's perception that the Garlean Empire did not merely conquer its Provinces, but rather, took the subject's very souls away — in the sense of crushing and stamping out their freedoms, their hopes, their lives, their beliefs, their practises, and their very culture... converting its aans into hopeless automatons, working in menial labor and tasks to support the Garlean Empire's war-machine — whilst desperately opiating themselves in their limited free time with whatever simple few pleasures their Garlean overlords still allowed them.

And so, Aroanji saw those who resigned themselves to Garlean rule as being like souls trapped upon the rigid tracks and enclosed cars of the Phantom Train — growing more and more

benumbed with each passing moment, even as they were being driven ever-closer to the very oblivion of their spirits.

And as to the destruction of "Vector" through a recklessly-hasty weapons-test gone awry, followed by the Emperor "Kefka" showing neither remorse nor concern about the results — but rather, morbid amusement and fascination, and then vowing to continue making more such disasters... well, this is all rather-blatantly a metaphor for Bozja Citadel.

And the monument built from the wreckage and corpses, upon which "Emperor Kefka" danced, was Aroanji's symbolism for Emperor Solus's ruthless willingness to continue building upon the data gained from the atrocity in Bozja Province — a pattern that Aroanji perceived as having been occurring since the earliest days of the Garleans under Solus Galvus's rule: "progress at any cost, raising up his great throne upon an ever-increasing mountain of ruins and bodies". And regarding "Emperor Kefka's" final ascent into a horrible, twisted, monstrosly-angelic "god" — the "Radiant Emperor-God Kefka" — this was a representation of Aroanji's perception of a bitterly-ironic parallel between the Garlean people's blind, awe-struck admiration and obedience of "His Radiance" (Glory Be!), and the zealous practises of worship that the "savages" demonstrated for their own gods — which the Garleans were so (in Aroanji's eyes, ironically) disgusted by, and intent upon stamping-out.

Indeed, Aroanji perceived Emperor Solus to, in a sense, be just as "empowered" by the Garleans's own form of "prayer": blind and unquestioning obedience and celebration of one single man.

In fact, Relm Aroanji stated quite openly, in his later memoirs and commentaries, that he made "The Radiant Emperor-God Kefka" so disturbing and hideous precisely because Aroanji perceived Emperor Solus zos Galvus as a far more twisted, terrible, and destructive force upon the Star than any "Eikon" could ever hope to be — and with just the same arrogant self-perceptions of importance, divinity, and supremacy as "Eikons" were supposedly said to comport themselves... and the same ravenous, infinitely-destructive, insatiable hungers.

That is to say, in Aroanji's words, "If the Garleans were so concerned about having the power to strike down destructive false-gods, then they should first and foremost have looked inward — and considered putting a bullet into the chest of that monster disguised as a man that they so willingly continued to allow sit upon their filthy throne for some fifty years".

...And for all that has been said here — it is truly only the most rudimentary and sophomoric surface-level glance at the depths of analysis and exploration which scholarly specialists in the collected works of Relm Aroanji have established over the nearly 20 years, now, since The Mad Emperor was first published — a sprawling field of examination and insight which continues to multiply and unfurl ever-wider and deeper with each passing year... especially around the time that Studium Theses come due for deadline.

If you wish to explore more yourself beyond the scope of this Garlean historical encyclopedia, then please do consider contacting the Sharlayan Academic Archives Office, and requesting more information on the topic — several basic primers, such as Professor Basildere's "Facts

and Mythology: A Study of The Mad Emperor's Genesis of New Myth From True History", are often freely-available to be loaned-out to interested foreign barbarians in exchange for a minimal deposit fee.

Impact:

In 1563 6AE, despite so many laws, crackdowns, bans, contraband-enforcements, prosecutions, threats, Social Wellness Bureau efforts, et al — an increasingly-vexed Emperor Solus zos Galvus continued to struggle with stamping-out his people's infuriatingly-persistent curiosity about the mysterious work called "The Mad Emperor".

And for some reason, that curiosity was especially-potent amongst the commoner Garleans — who had taken to scandalously whispering about The Mad Emperor with the same stubborn persistence as giggling schoolchildren passing notes whilst an instructor lectures.

Now, most of their ideas were ridiculously-wrong, as rumours begat rumours begat rumours, and the idea of what "The Mad Emperor " was steadily-evolved, from one teller to the next, into something more and more absurdly-scandalous, and more and more removed from the true work.

But such distortions only served to make the chatter spread faster — indeed, the more that the mysterious "The Mad Emperor" began to seem to the Garlean commoners to be some horridly-forbidden thing of utter reprehensibility... the more strongly those same lowborn Garlean citizens seemed to be taken by a secretive urge to know even more about it.

And so, after a while, "The Mad Emperor" was being imagined to be all sorts of vividly-fabulous things by the fertile minds of Garlean commoners — including...

...a savage-penned ritual-booklet that depicted Emperor Solus as the Lord of the Seventh Hell, with elaborate instructions for how to use the blood of Garlean infants and a harvest-sickle focus to invoke and bind lesser demons of the Eorzean Hells to serve the summoner as a source of power...

...an elaborate handbook for building and constructing a personal weapon of mass destruction powered by moonlight, written in a cipher that was merely disguised as a novel...

...a book of recipes for the flesh of Eorzean chocobos, secretly-written by Emperor Solus himself as an obsessive revenge for the LABINA NIVIS motorcade incident... (Where his carriage was inexplicably filled with thousands of Chocobo feathers.)

...and a lurid erotic novel depicting an explicitly-descriptive affair between Emperor Solus zos Galvus and a beast-woman Bozjan Queen.

...What was it about the idea — or perhaps just the title — of that damnable denarius-rag, that seemed to so exasperatingly-hypnotise his citizens — motivating so much more continuous curiosity than typical banned works?!

Usually, a decree was a decree — his subjects simply accepted it, without fuss or question.

But for The Mad Emperor... it seemed like the topic simply refused to die, no matter how much Emperor Solus attempted to have the final word about it... or threaten consequences for it... or enforce consequences for it...

...indeed, the harder that the Social Wellness Bureau and Garlean courts-of-law attempted to crack down upon knowledge of The Mad Emperor, the more the speculation, curiosity, gossip, and attempts to secretly smuggle-in a copy of the damned thing, all only seemed to intensify further...

In 1564 6AE, In a brazen attempt to circumvent the absolute ban upon all discussions and materials related to The Mad Emperor, Principal of the Majestic Imperial Theatre Company, Jenomis cen Lexentale, attempted to present multiple plays which were, essentially, The Mad Emperor... just wth all the names and settings conspicuously-modified.

...Well, each showing would last for only one night — because it would be shut down the next morning by the stubborn enforcers of the Social Wellness Bureau.

Unfortunately, that tactic by the Solusian regime quickly backfired — once that pattern became clear, each show began being cheekily-billed by Jenomis and the Majestic as a "once-in-a-lifetime showing!"... and thus, eager Garlean connoisseurs of the finer arts and buzzing, excited commoners alike began to sell-out each and every new version of The Mad Emperor certainly not The Mad Emperor that the Majestic Theatre performed — the humble theatre's space being packed to bursting, and most shows becoming "standing room only".

...which, of course, only spread attention and whispers even faster and further — as even Garlean commonfolk were perfectly-intelligent enough to begin making a game of trying to figure out which character in a Majestic play corresponded to which character in the original The Mad Emperor.

And so the showings cycled in and out at rapid pace — each new banning being replaced by Jenomis's tireless pen within a week's time... for though the changes might seem obvious, Jenomis's obsessive need for perfection would make him take time to carefully-research each new "version".

For example, there was the Majestic's showing of *The Crazyed Satrap*, in which a madman rules from the Meghaduta atop Radz-at-Han, conquering the world with an army of alchemically-enhanced beasts, and punishing dissent with a deadly light called, "The Serpent's Gaze".

Then there was *The Touched Sultana*, in which a diminutive madwoman rules from atop Ul'dah's Gold Court — here, depicted as a literal tower of gold, spiraling into the heavens — after conquering the Star with army of vicious Mammets, and destroying any dissent by slamming down a massive weapon of pure gold known as, "The Golden Hammer".

Next came *The Maniacal Speaker*, in which a crazed Sharlayan Councilor takes control of his people in a coup of the Ekklesia, and rules from atop the Rostra via increasingly-contradictory and oppressive legislation — ultimately conquering the Star using an army of vicious Familiars, surgically-enhanced with Automaton components... and silencing any resistance using a deadly weapon called, "Nyunkrepf's Despair", which could teleport anyone, anywhere in the world, into bottomless pits that extended deep below The Maniacal Speaker's domain.

A week later was shown *The Scatty Admiral*, which tells the tale of a wild pirate queen who wins the Lominsan Trident after allying with the Kobolds and using an army of their machines to gain absolute advantage and destroy all of her opponents's ships. She then rules from atop the Mizzenmast with increasing oppression, using Kobold-enhanced ships to conquer all the Star, and a device called "Titan's Belch" to send targeted eruptions of Mount O'Ghomoro to destroy any location upon the Star that dares defy her.

Finally came *The Lunatic Khagan*, in which a Hotgo Khan — who had painted his face in all the colors of the rainbow at once, suggesting his complete-madness and instability of emotion — seized the Dawn Throne in the Naadam, using an army of luridly-painted chuluu... and then used the tribes he commanded to conquer the Star, and enforce worship of the Moon upon all, using the deadly power of an invocation called, "The Light of Nhaama".

All such satirical reinventions were considered both scandalous and hilarious by the audiences that packed into the Majestic Theatre to view them — indeed, it is said that even the Imperial Guard and Social Wellness Bureau agents monitoring the performances were caught breaking their stoic expressions and trying to hide their laughter constantly throughout each performance.