

Elmadelian Culture

Written by M

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(Crystalline Spirit by J. Bremer)

To the Masters of Liretika;

As you're aware, I had been sent to Kalu in Draelah to investigate the unnatural occurrence of lightning storms present, and to try and find out more about Vaekaxa. He has a son (around twenty years of age) who is rarely seen, and very little is known about him. Interestingly, no one seems to have much interest in the young man...almost as though he doesn't even exist. His name is Taro.

That aside, there is little I was able to uncover about the nobleman without getting inside either New Keep or the Sanatorium. Neither of which had been possible to infiltrate – the place is locked up as tightly as our own records, including the use of dark mana. I also have my suspicions that the Katzatagyr Seren is beneath the sanatorium. You and I both know what that likely means and would explain the gathering storms.

On the surface, Vaekaxa manages both sides of Kalu incredibly well. Trade is prospering, and the new town in particular has becoming increasingly favourable with the Draelahn Emperor. This troubles me, though I can't with so little information fully explain why. There are small, all black ships worthy of sea voyages being loaded up with a mysterious cargo from the private jetty below the sanatorium. Whatever the cargo is, it never passes through the official docks; and they are clearly being sent further than the mainland and the outlying islands.

Though I myself wasn't able to find out more, I noticed an interesting student of the Old Kalu college seemed to be following the same path. She has found a way inside; and I believe she will soon find her way to Liretika with many answers – if she hasn't already. I believe she will find out the secrets of the sanatorium I have so far been unable to access. Is Suoja still teaching at the college?

I had also felt the presence of Engeline magic in the last few days. Several people, guided by an Astasian fox, have come through the Unelmalin. One of them is Nikita, one of the daughters of the Emperor of Astasi. Her group went straight into Old Kalu college. I don't know why a daughter of the Astasian Emperor has shown up now – however I can't imagine two Emperor's coming together in any way is good for the rest of us. I didn't dare try to make contact, but have since left Kalu to chase down the source of Engeline magic.

I believe there is much more to things than whatever is happening in Kalu, and I hope to find some more answers if I can. I am currently in contact with the Astasian Emperor's eldest daughter, Sefyra; and she has been willing to share plenty of information with me. I will include that which I have so far gathered with this letter – it seems we have more allies than we realised working from the shadows.

There are some words Sefyra mentioned to me that speaks of the coming troubles, especially as the same words were posted around New Kalu. *"The disease is human emotion"*. She is certain they come from her father originally who is quietly trying to suppress artistic expression and freethought. She isn't sure what he is up to yet, but there is a connection with the Draelahn Emperor and whatever is happening in Kalu.

I will hopefully write to you again soon. For now, all the best.
– M.

The Path of the Sykan

– M –

Most of what is known about the new Sykan faith is by word of mouth. It is a strange time where the celestial beings that once walked Sirin have faded to the edges of society and the secret places of the world, and those who shared the world with the Spehirikin are also now long forgotten. The stories that used to be told everywhere barley even exist on page and seem retired to a small section of the Library of Liretika only.

As the various authoritarian figures of the unlemun world fall to corruption, the Sykan faith has started to emerge in the city of Elmadel as people long for the powerful and unbound beings of the ancient world which were never governed by mortals.

While looking to find ways of summoning ancient beings and magical power back into the world, the Sykan faith seems primarily focussed on self-development and empowerment. The careful use of hallucinogens is used to induce dreams and trances believed to open the mind and the “inner eye”. As one aware of the dream realms, elementals and arcane ways; it is fascinating to me that unelmuns do seem to be tapping into the different forms of mana.

Perhaps as the Engeline beings slowly fade from the world, a new form of being will evolve. The bloodlines of Spehirikin that were once concentrated in the dawn of life have become watered down and mixed into the blood of the unlmuns. It isn't impossible to believe that this would allow for even the mundane of this world to evolve from those ancient bloodlines.

The self-titled “Priests of Syka” are often ignored by society and considered insane for their ideas of ethereal realms existed alongside the physical realm, and of celestial beings that created the world from a dream. The story of how the world was created is a fantastic work of art spanning many books titled “The Sirin Chronicles” and definitely worth a read, as it would take far too many words to try and include that here, nor could I do the original work any justice.

The Emperor is unable to directly challenge or prosecute the Priests of Syka, as it is well documented throughout history that the Empirical line is descended from the Engels of Vosundelr, and to cause harm to followers of a path which entails His own heritage would cause him more trouble than it would solve. Many people also suspect that his eldest daughter, Sefyra, is an engel re-incarnate, and she has great popularity throughout Elmadel itself, and the whole of Astasi.

There is speculation that the arcane secrets, which are now only known to the Library of Liretika, are actually spread by Sefyra, and it is she who I have travelled to Astasi to find. Though I've yet to meet her, I have discovered that she takes great delight in continually undermining the Emperor in any subtle way she can find. I also suspect the various hallucinogens have been developed by Sefyra who would, if she is truly an Engel, have the inherent esoteric knowledge to create something of such potency.

While those of the Sykan faith are protected to a certain degree by the history of the Engeline line, and by Sefyra herself; any attempt at building shrines and places of worship seem to come to all manner of chaotic ruin and destruction from “unknown”

sources. This doesn't stop the priests from re-building every time however, and their following is growing rapidly with it being whispered about as far away as Nirin.

The image of the wolf has become quite noticeable around the city as the new Sykan faith grows stronger. As the Empirical family name "Leto" means "of the wolf", the wolf has become a symbol of protection, or a ward even, against the unknown assailants. Ancient statues of wolves are throughout all of Astasi, and as with going openly against his lineage, the emperor is compelled to actively protect anything adorning the image of the wolf.

Among the followers of the Sykan faith are the artists, the storytellers, and the scholars; all who refuse to give up their craft and their work. It seems like the faith has become a spiritual home for them as they are displaced from society by the laws slowly encroaching on their freedoms. What might have started out as people desperate for a source of hope and of guidance has grown into a fully-fledge system of belief based upon our ancient world.

While I've previously written about much of what the Sykan faith is now evolving from, I'm intrigued to see how it is perceived from unelmuns who only vaguely understand what Engels could be, and who have never encountered Spehirikin or the wild, untamed magical energies that used to flow freely throughout Sirin.

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Primarily, only beings with celestial blood in their veins will be able to use one of the two forms of mana without any kind of aid, and only engels are able to use both naturally. Historically, unelmuns were never able to utilise either kind of mana, nor could they access the ethereal realms. However, in recent years, and with the help of carefully blended substances and the use of crystals, unelmuns have begun to access the higher powers once associated only with the spehirikin.

Training is usually an instinctive and personal journey for each individual while supervised by a master. This in itself is specific to Elmadel, and the "masters" come from the Guild of Hunters (assassin hunters) which have connections with both Liretika and Tenalue. What is taught to the followers of the Sykan faith is still shrouded and mystery – perhaps as I stay here longer and gain their trust, the priest I have been talking with may tell me more.

Historically, one who studied at Liretika or went to the Academy at Ajae Javi would also be partnered with the master most suited to their individual gifts. Several years would be given to intense focus on the understanding and development of their powers. Alongside that, they would be taught a highly detailed history of Sirin, and the genealogy of the unelmuns and spehirikin beings.

Meditation was utilised to learn and develop their inner self and to isolate their talents within them. This was particularly useful to orphans who came to Ajae Javi at a young age and were unaware of their gifts and powers, and for those whose powers were tied to the ethereal realms which can be accessed through both meditation and intentional lucid dreaming.

It was of paramount importance that the spehirikin learnt mastery of their powers, as abuse and misuse of their powers would lead to corruption of the body and various wasting illnesses that would occur from too much exposure to mana.

I imagine the way of the Sykan faith follows a similar training system, with the addition of hallucinogens being used to open portals within the mind that are a natural part of the spehirikin psyche. I still feel there must be something else. Daemons and demuns, though born from unlemuns, were created within the dreamworld. They were gifted to chosen unlemuns, and their blood was infused with the aura of a specific crystal – which denoted their appearance.

In the time that engels walked Sirin and were the rulers of both Kata Jinja and Vosundelr, they were always looked up to and revered for the celestial heritage and magical abilities – and even though the engels of Kata Jinja brought about their own destruction and were destroyed by their own powers, the spehirikin that followed, though of lesser power, were still above unlemuns.

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The Sykajume: Celestial dragons known as ajukaras

Unelma – dreams, life, creation.

Anje – science, medication, transformation

Raketselka – chaos, destruction, death

Sarasan – protection, patience, time

Aetshiran – spirit, wisdom, intuition

Realms of Existence:

Sirin – the physical realm

Unelmalin – Dreamworld (light)

Fethralin – Dreamworld (dark)

Shynasekae – Underworld (realm of the dead)

Liretika – While primarily bound to Sirin, Liretika itself crosses multiple worlds.

Classes of Spehirikin:

Daemons/Demuns – demi-celestial beings born from unlemuns.

Engels – Notable characteristics: Pearlescent skin; white, silver, or pewter hair; glowing eyes – the colour is dependent on their soul.

Jume – Living stars.

(*Kata, Vae, Syka* – *Jume* which have been identified.)

Kaelin – *Daemons* or *demuns* with lesser magical ability that lend themselves to crafting items of profound power instead.

Spehirikin – demi celestial creatures. A broad category covering both *Mejran* and *Talvaen* creatures.

Unelmuns – The mundane mortals of Sirin.

Sub-Classes of Spehirikin:

Mejran – the life born from Tseva; the First Engel created from the Unelmalin.

Associated with new life and creation.

- Daemons – demi-celestial beings of light energy born from unelmuns.
- Wolves
- Syndal

- Trolmaus – highly mischievous mice with hyper-intelligence and magical ability

Talvaen – the life born from Lilin; the Second Engel created from the Fethralin.
Associated with death and destruction.

- Demuns – demi-celestial beings of dark energy born from unelmuns.
- Astasian Foxes
- Butterflies
- Dreamweaver
- Khavinas

For those who take to the “Path of the Sykan”, several guiding principles have come out on how a person should behave, with the first two being more of a mutually agreed and unwritten law that has arisen to directly oppose the Emperor’s impositions against creativity and anything born from emotion.

The freedom of other’s should be respected.

The fight for justice and freedom of speech should always be above the law.

One should always be accountable for their own mistakes.

One’s body is inviolably their own.

One should think and act from compassion and empathy.

One should refrain from wrong speech, and from false speech.

One should refrain from taking any life.

One should refrain from the misuse of substance and sense.

While the taking of life is something the faith advises against, meat is still a huge part of the followers’ lifestyle and diet. Hunting is a sacred and ritualistic experience where they will go out with wolf dogs and embody the spirit of the wolf. The killing must be quick and clean, and whoever made the kill will give thanks to the prey and offer words of guidance for the soul to move on. Reverence is given to the fallen creature from the moment of its death right up until all parts have been used.

[-- *Personal Journal* --]

I finally met with Sefyra Leto after approaching the Grand Master of the Guild of Hunters. She had been waiting for me, and we were able to speak at great lengths about many things regarding Elmadel, not least the emergence of the Sykan faith.

At first glance, she appears as ordinarily mundane as with the rest of her family, and all other unelmuns. Even I was caught out by her careful guise. Henna mixed with indigo to colour her hair which would normally be white, and powder to conceal her skin which is pearlescent (as with all engels). Her body is covered in the garb of her Hunter's uniform, and her eyes are concealed by use of magic, but would normally be a wonderful shade of fuschia - which she revealed to me after our introductions.

Since she was twelve years of age, she has been a student with the Guild of Hunters – an organization that was originally set up by Sefyra's biological mother to counter the attacks from the Vosundelr assassins. Superficially, the Guild of Hunters originally functioned as skilled hunters and mercenaries which would accompany travellers and serve as protection. Beneath the surface, they were highly trained warriors – most of which had studied at either Tenalue or Liretika for variable amounts of time.

Though descended from the Engels of Vosundelr, the Emporer of Astasi is completely against mana of any kind – more so than any other previous ruler upon Sirin. Unable to move directly against the remaining refuges of man because of his lineage, he employs the Guild of Assassins to do his bidding. This led Sefyra to re-forming the Guild of Hunters into what it is today to “function as protection for many traders and artisans who seem to be suffering an unusual amount of attention from rivals outside of Elmadel, especially when “travelling from city to city” as she put it.

That Sefyra is willing to cover her appearance is less to do with her father's abhorration of her kind, but more a convenience in that appeasing him allows her to work with the Guild of Hunters. The involvement with Guild, and the freedom to train with one of the Scholars of Liretika has led to Sefyra mastering a great deal of engeline abilities to a degree never seen before; especially when combined with her inherent abilities which also seem to number far higher than any of her ancestors.

They have since become an indispensable part of the economy of Elmdadel – protecting both the trade and the traders, but also in offering a multitude of services catered to the individual's specific requirements. The majority of Elmadel's wealth now comes from the Guild of Hunters, and even many among the palace have resorted to hiring out the Guild in one way or another.

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Much of the day-to-day management of the city is done by Sefyra's husband Deoliaeth, and while they have a somewhat uneasy and tempestuous relationship, they do seem to manage the city between them. Deoliaeth openly deals with the traders around town and founded the Guild of Merchants and the Guild of Artisans, and Sefyra deals quietly in the movement of information throughout the city, having secretly placed several Hunters in each Guild (I believe even Deoliaeth is unaware of this arrangement).

The currency of gold coin and silver denominations keep the physical city turning with various goods moving in and out like clockwork, the real currency is information, and Sefyra has slowly been extending her network further through Sirin. Through the emergence of the Sykan faith, she is able to move various guild associates throughout Sirin with ease. Some travel completely undercover, others as “hired guards”. In this way she is able to acquire even more information, which, most important of all, her father is totally unaware of.

While Elmdadel appears almost utopian to many residents who live comfortable lives, it is on a superficial level only, and they are blissfully unaware of the darker undertow. Subtle law after subtle law is passed out which slowly restricts the liberties of the citizens of Elmdadel, particularly the work of artists and scholars.

Those who create something that might cause the people of Elmdadel to start thinking beyond their daily routines or to question the integrity of authority seem to vanish without a trace. That which can be studied and/or researched is controlled by the Emperor’s government with scholars and academics having to apply for permits directly through them. Anything that could be perceived as connected to spehirikin in any way (even if that was not the intention of the work) is now avoided.

This has however led to a lucrative side business for the Guild of Hunters who have taken on many of the previous scholars and academics and employed them outside of Astasi in some way. These deals are confidential between the individual and the guild, and are based on a mutually beneficial trade-off, usually a transaction that slips unseen through the accounts.

From the network of informants Sefyra has set up around Sirin, it transpires the Emperor has also been making connections abroad, specifically with the Emperor of Draelah who has been tinkering with unelmun genetics and creating a new breed of unelmun that are “enhanced” and totally subservient to the owner.

Of greater concern still is that firearms are now being brought in from Draelah as well. All firearms have been illegal to own throughout Astasi for over ten years after a brutal shooting in Elmdadel almost led to civil unrest. Even the city guards are banned from carrying firearms. Should such a time occur that the guards needed such weapons, only the captain of each unit is licensed to carry one rifle, and they have to go through a strict process of withdrawal through the Guild of Hunters.

Sefyra’s concern is that with an almost totally de-armed state, the Emperor bringing in such weapons, and potentially some unnatural and puppet-like unelmun soldiers, is that He seeks to enforce total control and domination in the not so distant future. Crime has always been very low, and so there are not many laws in place for dealing with criminals – or of a head of state which goes too far against His or Her people.

- One convicted of murder is sentenced to life in prison. If proven guilty, they will be given the death sentence.
- One convicted of assault and/or abuse of another will be sentenced to life in prison. If proven guilty, they will be stoned publicly.
- Petty crimes are usually dealt with by use of variable fines and/or unpaid work throughout the city.

– Family Life –

Within the Empirical line, inheritance went historically by the eldest spehirikin offspring regardless of gender (though there was a preference towards the females taking the lead, as they were more likely to produce further spherikin heirs).

Since polygamy has always been an accepted part of life in Astasi, the law dictating ascendancy to the empire has always been granted to the eldest legitimate child of the first wife. Should one of the siblings from the same wife, or of later wives, wish to claim the crown, they would have to participate in a one-to-one duel. Since the legitimate successor was usually spehirikin, there weren't many that would take such an opponent on. The ancient history of the Assassin's Guild interwoven with the first engels of Vosundelr no doubt account for many uprisings being snuffed out before they go anywhere.

As less and less spehirkin were born into the empirical line, it eventually transitioned into inheritance through the eldest child – regardless of whether or not a spehirkin child was born into the family later. When the present Emperor took to the throne, he passed a law which made it so the first-born male would inherit the throne. So while Sefyra was his first born child – and also of spehirkin blood – she was passed over for the throne when Otso jr. was born fifteen years later.

Within the more general population, polygamy still happens, though is far less common; with most marriages being monogynous. Of all the areas of law within Elmadel, and of Astasi, the laws concerning marriage are of far greater importance to the residents.

Previous long standing laws regarding marriage: -

- A prenuptial contract would be written up and signed by all marital partners before a legal representative. This was important to avoiding any complications regarding inheritance, specifically when more than two people were married. Should further partners be taken, the contract would be adjusted appropriately before the appropriate witnesses.
- Partners who are not married into the family have no rights or claim to the family and its estate.

Several new laws were brought in ten years ago after a scandalous affair led to the two largest families of Elmadel resorted to open war in the streets and almost tipped the city in local war as a result of the various family's entanglements with each other:

- All partners entering a marriage agreement must be previously un-married.
- One who has been divorced and separated from the original marital family may, under the discretion of the new marital family and legal representative take a new partner – so long as they have officially left the previous marital family and the severance was officially witnessed and signed off.
- One who has been widowed can take a new partner; again, so long as they have officially left the previous marital family and the severance was officially witnessed and signed off.
- Marital partners are limited to only four marital partners.

When it comes to the care and housing of children when dealing with divorce and/or re-marriage: -

- Both sons and daughters age twelve and under will stay with the mother

- Between the age of thirteen and fifteen, sons may go to stay with the father if they so chose
- At age eighteen, both daughters and sons are legally adults and have total autonomy over where they live.
- In the case of divorce due to infidelity, the offending party will lose all access to any offspring automatically.

A dowry is required from all marital partners to become a part of the family estate, with ten percent of the total wealth being claimed by the crown. Monitored by Deoliaeth; where land or property taken in by the crown is put to use for the residents of Elamdel in some way – usually a tenant agreement for an agreed amount of time.

While the specifics of the dowry are down to the agreement of those getting engaged, it is generally expected that the value would be around thirty percent of the individual's wealth. Infidelity is massively frowned upon in all of Astasi, and especially so in Elmadel. While extra-marital partners are as much accepted as officialised marriages, these partners are usually only taken on at the consent and agreement of all involved. Should someone seek a divorce due to infidelity, the offender will lose the entirety of the dowry, and oftentimes far more. They will also find themselves the absolute shame of the city for the rest of their lives and also lose all connections with their lineal family.

As there wasn't a restriction on marital partners in the past, the steep cost of the dowry and the taxation served to both limit partners and provide a lucrative extra income to the state.

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A celebration which is unique to Elmadel is the "Unmaejong" celebration at a child's first birthday. As well as the usual celebrations of life with any birthday, this one starts with the child being seated in front of various items, and the first item they reach for would signify the life path they will take:

- A brush – Artist
- A book – Scholar
- Money – Entrepreneur
- Jewellery – Artisan
- Wheat sheaths – Farmer
- (Seasonal) herbs – Healer
- Sea shell – Voyager
- Military insignia – a soldier

The terms for each item or only basic signifiers, with each individual item having much more interpretation than listed. It is an uncanny form of divination which seems to be 98% true with each child. The addition of the military insignia is a recent addition of the last twenty years, since a recognised military has come into existence.

Appendix i

Mini Khaliljian Dictionary

Daemun – demi-celestial beings born from unelmuns with manakalu

Demun – demi-celestial beings born from unelmuns with manajadu

Engels – celestial beings created by Unelma and Anje. Engels can only be born from the Engeline line

Engeline – descended from Engels, or of Engel magic

Fethralin – dark energy dreamworld

Jadu – dark

Jume – living star, also known as soul stars

Kata – celestial fox

Kalu - light

Katzatagyr – a word with dual meaning: “doom” and “destiny” . Also the name of a soul-forged sword.

Katzatagyr Seren – A jagged, iridescent black crystal formed after the binding of Raketselka by use of Katzatagyr. The soul of Raketselka is kept within the crystal, and it is thought the blue iridescence comes from her affiliation with lightening.

Mana - magic

Mejran – Beings descended from Tseva (first Engel created from the Unelmalin)

Shyna Sekae – Lit. “Silver Death” , the realm of the dead.

Spehirikin – “Spehir” was the first name for Sirin

Syka(n) – of/from “Syka”

Talvaen – Beings descended from Lilin (second Engel created from the Fethralin)

Unelmalin – light energy dreamworld

Unelmun – mortal being, no celestial heritage or magical ability.

Unmaejong – Path of Fate

Vae – Shadow

Vijala – Soul tree

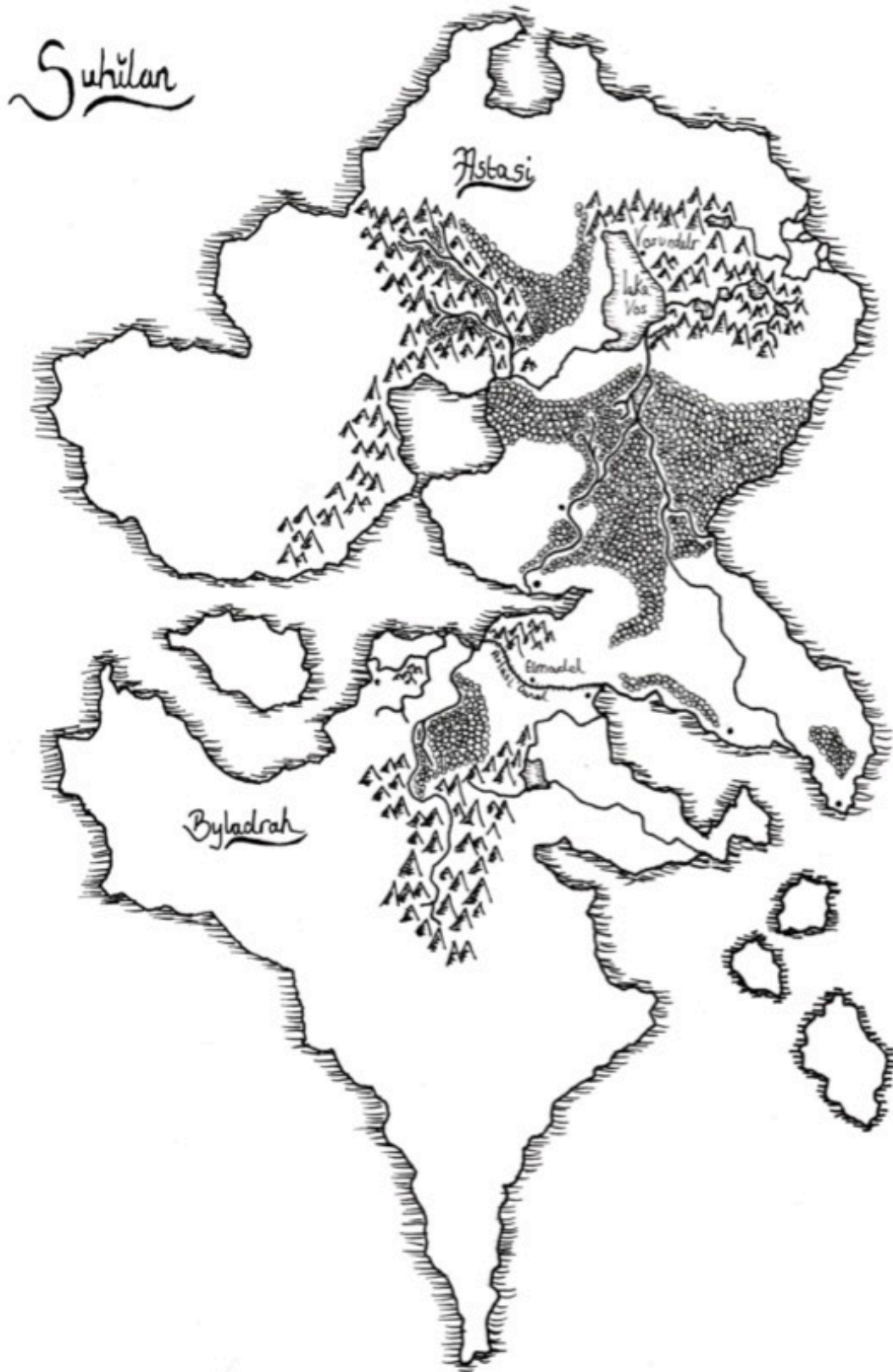
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-un – reference to something “of a dream” , or fated

-ikin – reference to physical world

-alin – reference to ethereal world

Appendix ii
[incomplete] map of Suhilan (by J. Bremer)



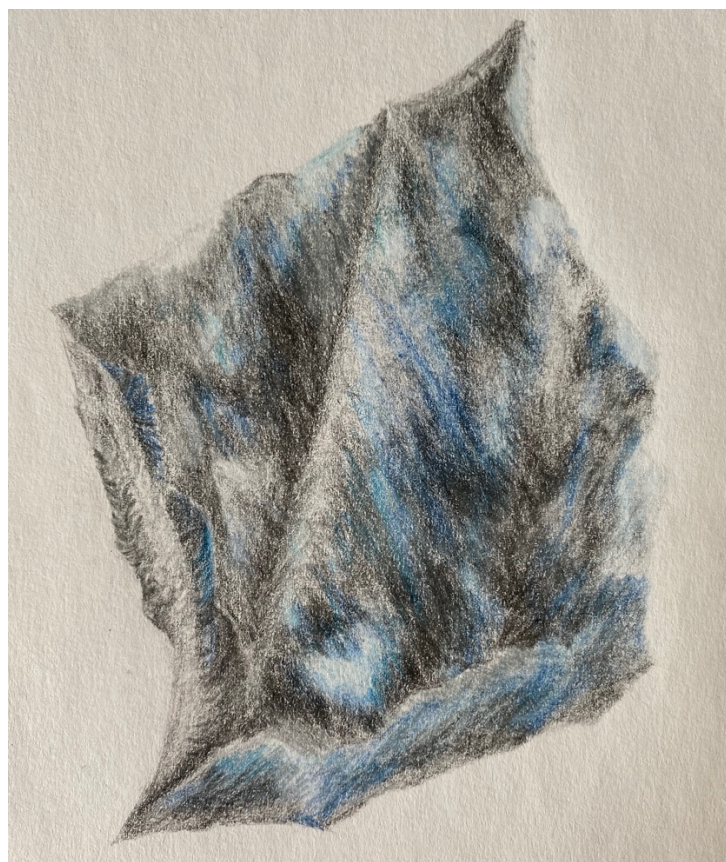
Appendix iii
Vijala Tree artwork (by J. Bremer)



Appendix iv
Crystal Illustrations (by J. Bremer)



Lehka Vijala Crystal



The Katzatagyr Seren