

# Orbis

Orbis is an island off of the western coast of mainland Kelestia, east of Jaiman, and northeast of Emer.

## Atlas Details

**Orbis:** [Temperate/Seasonal] Y'nar (Herders/Clan/TL:2)

This is a rainy, windy land of rolling hills and moors, the land in many areas too poor or sodden or rocky for most agriculture.

## Directions

To get to this land from Sel-kai, one would travel along the coast of Silaar (northeastern Emer) angling for the circular sea about the islands of Vog Mur (unless one wanted to avoid that haunted place), and then head straight east across the "Barren Waters" (Hulkanen Arus) to the island region of Orbis.

Sticking to the coast of Silaar is not much better than avoiding Vog Mur, however, since the lost kingdom of Thanor there is even more haunted. Going north of Vog Mur puts one in better range of pirates working from secret hideaways in southern Urulan off the coast of Jaiman.

These routs assume, of course, that there are no essence flows in the way, which there likely are. In short, there is no safe passage to Orbis.

## Map



The A simply marks the land of Orbis on a larger map. The 1 is the site of an opening on the coral road that leads to Emer (which would provide a very safe passage if both ends could be secured).

## Landmark Names

These were generated randomly to represent the names of the landmarks on the map as the local Y'nari refer to them. If the name has no meaning in English, it's an untranslatable word in one of the tribal languages. If it in English, this is the literal transliteration from the local language.

- The western peninsula is the Kiritani Rookery, ending in Moso Point. Most of this area is covered with moors just a few meters above the sea to the north and south, with some low rolling hills in the interior.
- The cluster of islands off of Moso Point are the Dytrar Isles.
- The peninsula that juts out to the northeast is Risehoof Promontory.
- The mountain range on the west coast are the Nassyus Mountains.
- The northern river that leads down from the mountains is the Livecoast Stream (far larger than the name would imply, especially when it gets near the coast).
- The bay that the Livecoast empties into is Birchcatch Bay.
- The valley where the Livecoast begins is quite rugged and referred to as Hogteeth Crag.
- The larger southern river coming down from the Nassyus Mountains, is the Crowlife River. About half way from the mountains to the sea (under the "A") is Tendix Lake.
- Between the two rivers, up against the mountain range (and fed by water coming off it) is the Applehop Fen.
- The bay into which the Crowlife empties is Leekan Bay. The big island in the bay is Kiyr Isle.
- Beyond the two eastern bay areas, there is a strait between Orbis and the region known as Verya, populated by more Y'nari tribes and some forests with Erlini inhabiting them. This waterway is called the Steervirtue Straits.

- The large open area on the south of the island is known as the Roostsank Moors.
- North of the Kiritani Rookery where the Nassys Mountains touch the sea, the mountains drop off precipitously into the sea. The tribes call this the Gaspweather cliffs.
- The Sea off of the Gaspweather cliffs and north of the Kiritani Rookery (part of the Barren Waters) is called the Elivy Sea by the tribes.
- A fairly rugged stretch of coast that lies on eastern portion of the south coast of the island (south of Leekan Bay), is known as the Keckli Coast.
- The waters that lie to the south of Orbis and north of Namar Tol and Iyxia are called The Yearning Depths by the clans of the southern coasts.

## The Sicag

### Organization

The clans of Orbis refer to themselves collectively as the Sicag. The clans have organized themselves together by having a loose council of clan leaders meet regularly for the purposes of organizing defense of the island. No leader is above any other, and in practice this council doesn't get much done, as there is a lot of political infighting that occurs. The council has existed for a very long time, however, and being placed on it carries a lot of power for the leader over their clan. Typically the most prosperous household leader of a clan is selected to be in this role, the thinking being that they know best how to run things, and therefore make decisions for the clan.

### Intertribal Politics

The most common subject of discussion for the council is how to apportion the defense forces of the island (see Military below). Each clan would prefer to have more ships defending their stretches of coast, as the whole island is technically at a state of war with the neighboring clans of Verya over the strait to the east. The Veryan clans have been under pressure from a much more organized feudal state called Isra (consisting of a mostly Lydian population) to their north, which has constantly taken more and more land, forcing the Veryan clans to look elsewhere to graze their Yak herds.

The Lydians arrived several centuries ago, refugees from further east in Gaalt, fleeing some dark force there that rumor has slowly and inexorably taken over that continent, and now the Northern Kelestia mainland as well (the peoples who are the face of this force are of the pale Quaidu race). In the last century the Lydians have pushed harder and harder on the Veryan clans, as they see this dark force on their doorstep. This, in turn has led the Veryans to raid Orbis, and a couple of clans have even attempted to create holdings for themselves, if unsuccessfully.

The raids get more and more frequent and organized every year, and soon some Veryan clan will land that will likely destroy one of those on Orbis to make space for itself. Worse, some of the Quaidu themselves have been seen landing from the North on Orbis with their hardy Vandaran (Shay-Haid mix) thralls; apparent scouting parties. This cannot be good news. These pressures keep the vying for protection from the ships the main subject of Sicag politics at the council meetings. Even in the clan villages, the most popular pass-time is discussing the war issue, as well as other inter-clan politics. Some are now pushing the leaders to make retaliatory strikes against the Veryan clans to dissuade them from continuing their raids, and a couple of these attacks have been mounted in the past couple of years.

## Clan Politics

As for the clans themselves, feuding between the clans used to be constant, long ago, causing all sorts of instability across the island. For the last century or so, however, the state of war has caused the tribes to be practical in banding together for defense, and so little conflict is tolerated. Still, in some places some of the old bad blood runs very deep, and there are occasional outbreaks of violence. These tend to be on a small-scale, however, and don't tend to upset the balance of things much in the long-run (unlike previous centuries).

Within the clans, the members value their freedom, and outside of following the directions of the clan leader, and not disturbing the spirits, individuals have considerable personal latitude. As there is little in the way of political structure, there is almost no corruption in this culture (conflicts instead tend to take the form of personal dramas).

## Culture

The Sicag value a sense of humor, as a barrier against the otherwise potentially depressing drear dull lands and climate of their island. They are known for their religious artworks, massive murals painted on sewn-together Yak hides. These cannot be bought from them at any price, though a few have been smuggled out back to collectors in places like Sel-kai. The culture also values those who play the Uglatu, an instrument with two strings made of Yak sinew, as their playing is important in their frequent religious festivals.

The Sicag are significantly provincial, and see anybody who doesn't know about their spirits as being a bit worthy of pity. They have heard of the Lords of Orhan, but do not worship them in any way, nor understand their importance, or why anybody would follow them. They are also a fastidiously clean people, bathing sometimes three times a day in some cases (usually during festivals, or when one has to deal with Yaks frequently), and will simply refuse to get near anybody who is not as clean as they are, if they can at all avoid it.

The Sicag religion (see below) tends to cause a lot of mental illness as a side-effect of contact with the spirits; however, they see this as a sort of blessing. This tends to be quite problematic, as these individuals require a lot of attention, which diverts others from their daily routines, and often disrupts individuals' lives. The question of how to deal with these individuals is a political issue for the Sicag, spoken about only second to issues of ongoing war.

## Religion

### Spirits of Orbis

The clans nearly universally follow an animist tradition that centers around the worship of two major spirits named Kebbris and Irdal. Kebbris is a feminine spirit of abundance that helps the herds prosper. Irdal is her male counterpart, who is rather mysterious, delivering guidance on how to avoid the pitfalls of life through dreams. He is seen as aloof, almost pitying the poor mortals of Orbis. Other important spirits include:

- Emmes, a spirit of the summer solstice who also has a nasty winter aspect named Immos.
- Livecoast, the spirit of the Livecoast river, and environs.

- Crowlife, the spirit of the wildlife found in and around the Crowlife river.
- Vapros, a spirit of both diplomacy, and, when that fails, victory. Becoming a much more important spirit.
- Gunione, a feminine spirit of personal strength.
- Xustus, the spirit of oaths.

In addition, the island is populated by many Nymphs (one notorious one named Pajun), and various more inimical spirits of disease and problematic things.

These spirits are mostly of Orhanian origin, but they do not have any truck with their former masters, nor do they promote their worship. The inimical spirits are, in fact, either from Charon, or tainted by the unlife (which otherwise does not yet have much of a hold on Orbis yet).

### **Origin Story**

The story goes that Kebbris saw a need to create a place for the Sicag people, which she had given birth to in the sea. So one day she got her consort Irdall to wade with her into the sea, and cut his head off. It fell into the sea, and became the isle of Orbis. Irdall saw the necessity of this, but begrudges her having taken his head, and is not always good to the Sicag. For an age, the Sicag lived in great prosperity upon Orbis, until one day they cut down Irdall's favorite tree. He's been even more grumpy since then, and this marked the end of the golden age. But it teaches the Sicag that one must have a sense of humor about things, and not let bad events drag one down.

### **Worship of the Spirits**

Worship takes the form of deep, quiet prayers to the spirits on a daily basis (usually with the entire family), and numerous festivals held throughout the year. At the festivals murals are painted, often of the exploits of sailors who have defended Orbis with the help of the spirit Vapros. And, of course, the music of the respected Uglatu players is key in the actual ceremonial rites. Generally the festivals are enjoyed quite a lot by all, despite sometimes not producing very positive effects. The only time drinking is allowed for the Sicag is during festivals, and they often get quite drunk. At other times drinking is seen as inviting in evil spirits, and generally prohibited.

Each spirit has special days, which change over time, but which can be determined by observation of the stars and moons (and tend to correspond somewhat with full or new moons of Orhan). These days mark mythic events that are associated with the spirits, many of which are considered historical fact by the Sicag. Often these have been revelations bestowed by the spirit in question upon the Sicag.

It is on these days that the festivals are held, during which it becomes actually possible to talk with the spirits and make requests or offerings in an interactive manner. Usually the latter, as the spirits of Orbis tend to be rather demanding, instead threatening to take away their blessings if they are not propitiated, or even setting the other bad spirits upon an individual. Outsiders may view festivals (they rarely have outsiders around), but are not encouraged or helped to participate.

### **Clan Positions Relative to Worship**

There are some individuals, who seem to be favored by individual spirits, and during ceremonies on

festival days, these members of the Sicag can on rare occasions get the spirits to give exceptional gifts. This natural affinity can be developed over time, and eventually a handful of such practitioners can be effective with the spirits on a more regular basis.

There is also a caste of storytellers called the Numtakis whose job it is to relate the tales of the spirits to everyone, and ensure that the rituals are known. These folk also take care of the shrines at which the festivals are held (which vary widely in form, but are all adorned with a saffron 21-pointed star somewhere). This care includes spending considerable time and effort taking precautions to ensure that evil spirits do not infest them.

The Numtaki do have a single holy script that they keep amongst themselves, but few can actually read it, instead preferring to learn the stories in an oral tradition. The script is only referred to when it becomes clear that two versions of a particular story have emerged, and there is a need to figure out which is right. As such the script is not really particularly sacrosanct in terms of it being an object. It's words are, however, considered quite holy.

The caste is actually seen as somewhat unproductive, and they generally have a lower than average lifestyle. They tend to have large families, which is supposedly a gift to them from the spirits, and these families tend to rely on their children for support. It is possible to leave or join this caste, but approval is needed from an specific individual who is seen as sort of an overseer of all of the Numtaki caste.

One easy way to spot a Numtaki is to catch one on a full moon of Orhan, as they have a soft glow about them at that time, a result of the essence of the spirits having been absorbed by them over long periods in the shrines. This essence does give the Numtaki a few very minor magical powers, akin to some possessed by spirits. The Sicag tend to see this less as awesome or interesting as merely ideosyncratic.

While not absolutely mandatory from a cultural perspective to worship the spirits, the few who do not are considered foolish, and often ostracized to some extent (in part for fear of being associated with that individual when a spirit decides to make a reprisal against such an individual).

## **Coming of Age**

A Sicag comes of age at 18, during which they are put through a day of special rites that are meant to ensure that the individual's spirit is not co-mingled with any bad spirits.

## **Marriage**

Marriage has some slight religious implications in that, like the coming of age rituals, each of the celebrants must again be cleansed. To signify the union, both the bride and groom get tattoos that match (they can decide what they want together). The parents of both also exchange substantial gifts, often of yaks or ships, if they can afford them.

## **Afterlife**

When a Sicag dies, if the spirits look on them beneficially, their spirit is lead to one of several areas in the Spirit Realm that are representative of a corresponding place on Orbis. These vary in level of

comfort, and this is yet another reason that one tries to have the favor of the spirits, to obtain a better place of rest after death. This place can be determined by the living, and ancestors sought for wisdom or knowledge, by going to their place of rest, and performing a complex ritual. Ancestors are not precisely worshipped, but they are honored based on the position they have achieved in the afterlife.

In an attempt to help gain their dead loved one a better place in the afterlife, the Sicag embalm their dead in various complex ways. The body is then left for a considerable time on display, before it is finally burned (once it's clear that the individual has found their place in the otherworld). Not burning a body is seen as inviting it to be inhabited by an evil spirt, and would very much be looked at askance.

## Economy

The Sicag economy is Yaks, all the way down, except for the coastal fishing villages, where ships are the key resource. For the most part wealth is simply a matter of the count of yaks and/or ships that an individual owns. And for the most part, these resources tend to be found mostly in the hands of the leaders of each clan (the wealth itself being thought a sign of their suitability to lead).

Some few of the Sicag know how to find the materials to make bronze and fashion it into tools, but the materials are found in only sparse amounts in the mountains. Most metal is imported from the few Varyan clans who have actual mines, and know how to make iron. This tends to be problematic, given the state of war with those clans, but the trade still goes on.

The only export the island has is manpower, as surplus sons of a family often find work in those same Varyan mines, and other of their industries. These individuals travel home from time to time, and it is through them that the Sicag get most of their trickle of information on the situation between the Varyans and the Israns. Manpower being a valuable asset, the Sicag tend to come out on top in the trading, but this ceases as soon as the war gets hot. This leaves the expatriate workers to have to decide between their jobs, or going home to help defend the island (at which point they are likely to become persona non grata in Varyan territories).

Generally the Sicag are fairly prosperous, having plenty of food and resources between their yaks, seafood, and products from the peat bogs that lie in the low places all over the island. But this situation is gradually changing as the raids from the Varyans become more and more intense.

## Military

The military might of Orbis, meager as it is, consists entirely of their fleet of small, fast sailing vessels that double as fishing craft when not involved in defense. Many volunteer for work on the ships, especially if they cannot find other positions at home. But this doesn't leave the ships manned quite to the extent that they should be, and each clan is obligated to deliver a quota of men to fill out the crews. Each clan has it's own method of selecting who ends up working on the ships, but many involve lottery systems, with the candidates usually selected by the clan leader.

There is a subtle system of ranks onboard these craft, and progression up the chain of command comes by only one means... the sailor must acquit themselves heroically in battle in the eyes of a superior.

To be clear, these ships are not so numerous as the Sicag need, being nowhere enough to ensure that raiders cannot land. Often the only hope is to be able to hear of a landing in time to send the ships to attack the raiders as they leave the island, hoping to sink as many of their ships as possible. In general the Varyans are far more numerous than the Sicag, and just don't have the resources to field enough ships to be effective. Wood alone is at a premium on Orbis, as there are no large forests at all, and the Varyan's refuse to sell any to the Sicag.

## Population

There is one large village on Leekan Bay at the mouth of the Crowlife River known as Morcostu that one might be tempted to call a town. Perhaps if one squinted when looking at it. Otherwise the entire population lives in villages usually found in the vales of the rolling hills that cover the island, or along the coast. Few are literate, as this is simply not a valued skill to the Sicag.

The Sicag number about 48,000, making the island very lightly inhabited. But the amount of land upon which the yaks can be grazed is very limited, which holds the population down substantially, and makes adding any more inhabitants difficult.

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