



CHAPTER ONE OVERVIEW

Naranjan is a beautiful island continent known to sailors who dare to brave the treacherous oceans as a place of hospitality and wealth. Fine spices, beautiful woven silk, and strange books illustrated with all sorts of lascivious foreign artworks are available for sale here, and some enterprising merchants have established a thriving trade with the natives. Naranjan also boasts a strange form of magic that is rare elsewhere in the world.

But some say that despite its beauty, Naranjan is also a terrible place. Not far from the welcoming cities in the area nicknamed the “Spice Coast” lies a kingdom ruled by a repressive emperor who is reputed to be a god walking upon the earth. In that kingdom, warriors use magic to hone their fighting skills, and giant colossi battle on the fields of war. Still farther inland are long-forgotten dwarven cities now

claimed by the forces of darkness, and mountain fastnesses ruled by halflings who routinely expel any outsiders who wander into their realm. Beyond even these remnants of past civilization lie dark and forbidding jungles. In the heart of this arboreal wilderness live bands of cruel elves who would eat travelers as soon as look at them, and terrible snake-people who scheme to rule over all.

Wiser and more cynical heads in the taverns of civilized lands laugh at the naïveté displayed by the sailors who tell these stories. Naranjan is a legend, they insist, or at best these tales are made up to get a few coppers out of drunk and credulous foreigners. No such place does or could exist.

But the stories are true. All of them.

~ THE LAND ~

The islands of Naranjan and Purmal are located near the equator, about a month’s sail south and east of the city of Freeport. Naranjan is the larger of the two islands, stretching 1,000 miles northwest to southeast along its long axis and about 300 miles across its widest point. The gigantic peak of Mt. Vripana dominates its landscape, stretching high into the clouds above the jungle.

To the northeast and southwest of Mt. Vripana, the Mathant range cuts the island in half. The mountains themselves are inhabited by the reclusive and mysterious Rangtsen halflings. The northwest half of the island, where most foreign travelers visit, is the cradle of the Sudarshan Empire. This region is dominated by the Durunda River, which flows from a source near the peak of Mt. Vripana through the Sudarshan lowlands before ending in a delta that feeds into Gitam Bay. Two small peninsulas reach out toward Purmal, the smaller island to the north.

To the southeast of Mt. Vripana lie lands that have remained largely unvisited by dwarf or man. This wild country, dominated by the Amaranda jungle, is home to savage elven tribes that are legendary for their fierceness in battle and their dislike of outsiders. The Srupani mountains stretch across much of this portion of the island. Though far less perilous and impressive than the mountains of the Mathant range, these highlands are not terribly hospitable. Adventurers occasionally travel this portion of the land searching for (and sometimes finding) outposts of the yuan-ti snake cult.

Because it lies across the equator, Naranjan has a very hot and humid climate for most of the year. The lands around the Durunda river delta receive constant irrigation, but the highlands on the far side of Mt. Vripana become very dry in the months following the rainy season.

~ THE PEOPLE ~

Many of the races found elsewhere in the world are common to Naranjan as well. But the peoples of this island continent share a unique cultural heritage—one that touches virtually every inhabitant. Although humans dominate the land today, that was not always so; The human culture there is deeply marked by that which came before.

The elves were the first humanoids to settle Naranjan. Although they are not native to the continent, they arrived here so long ago that no one—not even they—can say when the first elven settlement appeared. Their legends do, however, relate that the serpent folk were already present on the island at that time. The elves settled in the Amaranda

jungle, where they still dwell today, living much as their ancestors did. Unlike the elves of other lands, who tend to be deeply spiritual beings with a rich cultural heritage, the elves of Naranjan live close to nature—so close that their lives tend to be nasty, brutish, and short.

The dwarves came second, and it was they who built Naranjan's second great civilization, the Sudarshan Empire. In its heyday, the empire encompassed all the civilized portions of the island and brought the word of the gods, as recorded in great dwarven religious texts known as the Matyanas, to the younger races that arrived later—the gnomes and the humans. Today, centuries after the fall of their empire, the dwarves dwell in a handful of underground cities that struggle endlessly against the horrors beneath the earth. But even though the original Sudarshan Empire is long gone, it exerted more influence than any other civilization on modern Naranjan, and the former servants of the dwarves still look upon them as elder brothers and treat them with respect.

As is the case in so many other lands, humans wield the greatest power on the island today. Most humans in Naranjan live under the iron rule of a restored Sudarshan Empire, one that is even more corrupt and violent than the dwarven empire was at its worst. The rest of the humans live in free city-states along the Spice Coast, providing the hospitality and exotic atmosphere that has made Naranjan so famous in Freeport's taverns. Hard times are coming to the Spice Coast, however, because a showdown between the empire and the remaining free city-states has been brewing for some time.

The gnomes of Naranjan were a splinter sect of the dwarves that evolved over time into an entirely new race. Unlike the

humans, the gnomes rejected much of the social structure imposed upon them by the dwarves. Their religion and society stem from their efforts to reform the Matyanist system, and almost all the modern-day Naranjani gnomes embrace this new faith with a fervent passion. While humans may seek to reform the empire, some of the gnomes want to separate from it and found their own homeland.

The mysterious Rangtsen halflings live in the Mathant mountains. Few humans have ever encountered them, since the forbidding nature of their mountain home discourages all but the most determined travelers. Though much of their territory is forbidden to outsiders, they do not refuse hospitality to those travelers who brave the dangers of the mountains. The Rangtsen halflings absorbed the teachings of the famous human priestess Sujahna, who first brought the knowledge of mental magic to Naranjan, but they chose to use this knowledge in entirely different ways than the humans did. The kingdom of the Rangtsen halflings features many vast monasteries, where initiates study martial arts and seek to transcend the limits of their mortal forms.

The last great race of Naranjan is rarely mentioned except in whispers. The snake folk, also known as the yuan-ti, were already on the island when the first elves came. The yuan-ti and their brethren, the nagas, have steadily worked under the direction of their dark gods to corrupt and weaken Sudarshan society. The Snake Cult has its fangs in every aspect of modern Naranjani life, from the emperor to the merchant trading houses to the elves in the Amaranda jungle. The yuan-ti serve the asuras—the sworn enemies of the gods—and their goal is nothing less than the corruption of as many souls as possible to swell the ranks of the infernal host.

— THE POWER OF THE MIND —

The Sudarshan dwarves built a great kingdom—one based on devotion to the gods and a strict, orderly social system based on a caste structure. Deciding that it was the will of the gods that they introduce their culture to the human barbarians who lived in the lowlands to the north, they added those lands and their peoples to the empire. The dwarves ruled wisely and well for centuries, until the creeping sin of pride infiltrated their leadership and brought them low.

The agent of that defeat was Sujahna, a human priestess whose family's service to the empire had elevated it to the highest of castes—the brahmins. Sujahna rejected the system that had given her so much and set out to wander in search of a higher truth. In the end, she found something that nobody knew existed—a source of magical power derived neither from the will of the gods nor from the forces of the universe, but rather from within an individual soul. This new magic—known to the world as psionics—has shaped Naranjani culture ever since and made Naranjan a place like no other in the world.

After spending a year with the amradha—creatures she found living deep in the jungle—Sujahna combined their leaping movements with the new magic to create a unique

fighting style. Upon returning to the empire, she founded a school to teach what she had learned to others. Sujahna's followers eventually took her teachings far beyond her initial vision, developing several different techniques that blended her new magic with the skills of a warrior. Because these new disciplines involved neither arcane nor divine magic, the dwarven overlords of the empire saw no reason to limit the study of them to brahmins. Thus, the new magic quickly spread through all the castes, becoming the first discipline that was truly common to all levels of Sudarshan culture. The Sujahnist schools, known as ashrams, became centers for resistance against the regime, and eventually the driving force behind the rebellion that brought down the mighty Sudarshan empire.

Today, Sujahnist schools can be found throughout Naranjan. Students challenge one another in the marketplace to see which school teaches a more powerful style. Noble families bribe and cajole masters to create styles unique to them alone, so that they can surprise their enemies in battle. Within the ashrams, however, gurus teach their students that the greatest power comes not from mastery of the sword, but from mastery of the mind.