

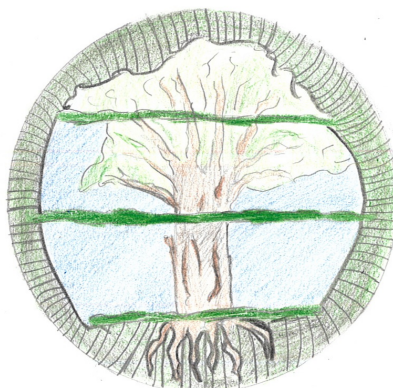
World Book of

Penjara

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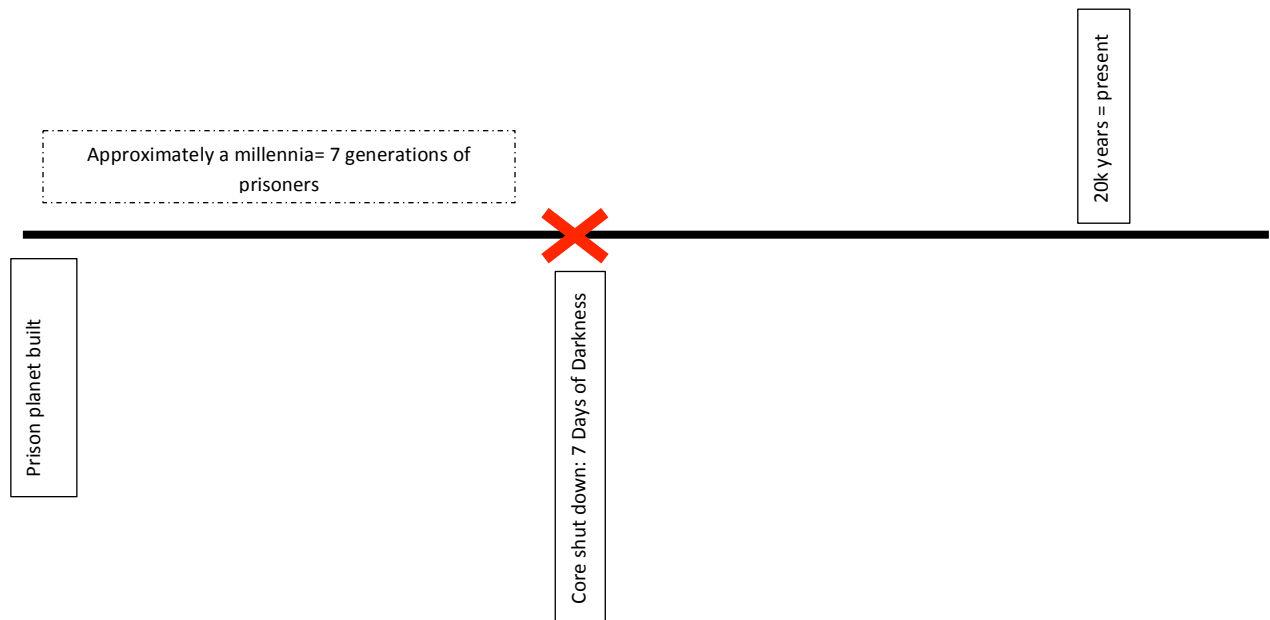
An Introduction To Penjara



**Intercontinental symbol of
Penjara.**

Penjara is an ancient world wrought by the hands of a civilization long since forgotten. From outside, it resembles a barren sphere of little interest. Within, however, is one of the universe's great technological marvels: the shattered remnants of four concentric ringworlds, spinning about an enigmatic inner sphere that provides the world with heat and the strange force that keeps the ring fragments aloft. These floating bands of continents have been claimed by wilderness in the thousands of years since Penjara was forsaken by its builders. The outermost ring has been lost to the ravages of time and system failure, but the inner three are lush with life and civilization, descended from the world's original dwellers. The gun-worshipping Jharo people, imperialistic Sub Sidera nation, and scattered tribes of humanity, feuding theocracies of the bird-like Avai, isolated water-dwelling Nagwaili, scholarchical Vakman beetle-folk, and mysterious biomechanical intelligences descended from the synthetic keepers of the peace on Penjara all live among the rings, coexisting and struggling against one another in equal measure. All continue through their lives not knowing that Penjara began as a prison colony—that they are the descendants of a civilization's least wanted and the wardens put in charge of them, and that things have ceased to be so because those that did not want them did not care enough or no longer existed to restore order to the system that governs Penjara's failures. Now, in this world of the condemned, new life, new civilization, and new history is being born.

Timeline



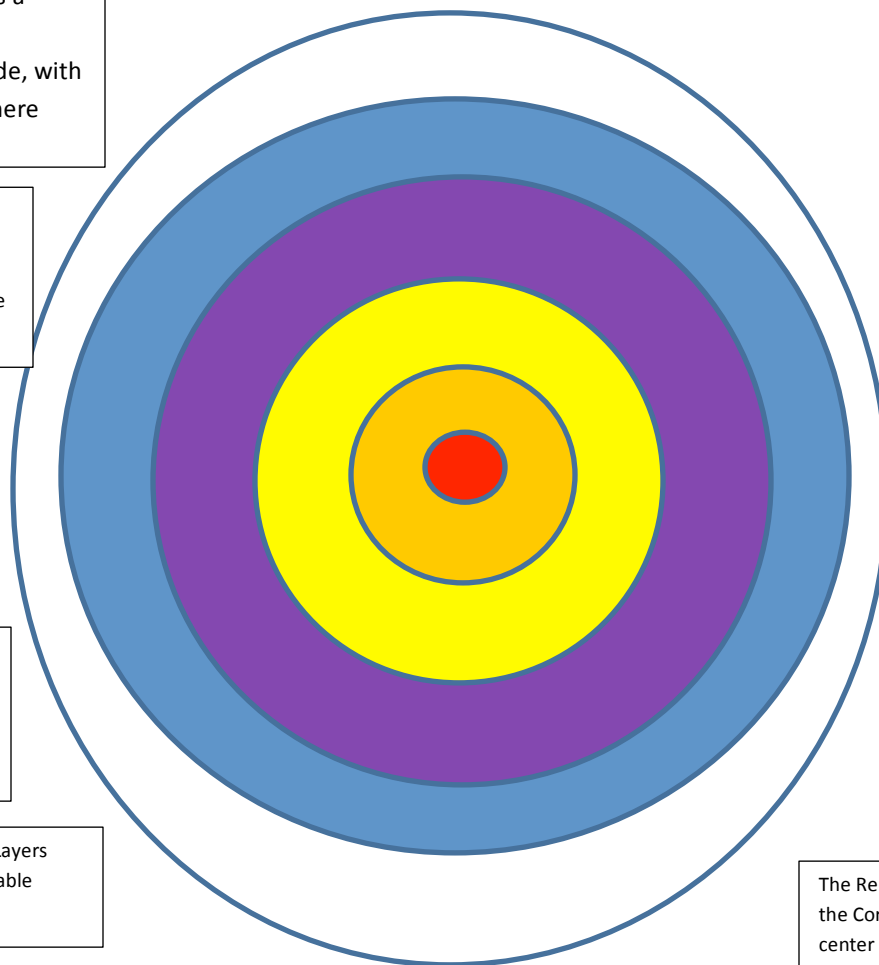
A Guide To The Penjaran Layers

Each Layer or Ring of Penjara is a band of continents held at approximately the same altitude, with the exception of the Outer Sphere and the Core.

Here, white indicates the Outer Sphere, a variation on a theoretical design called a Dyson Sphere—a shell designed to wrap around a star for the purposes of habitation.

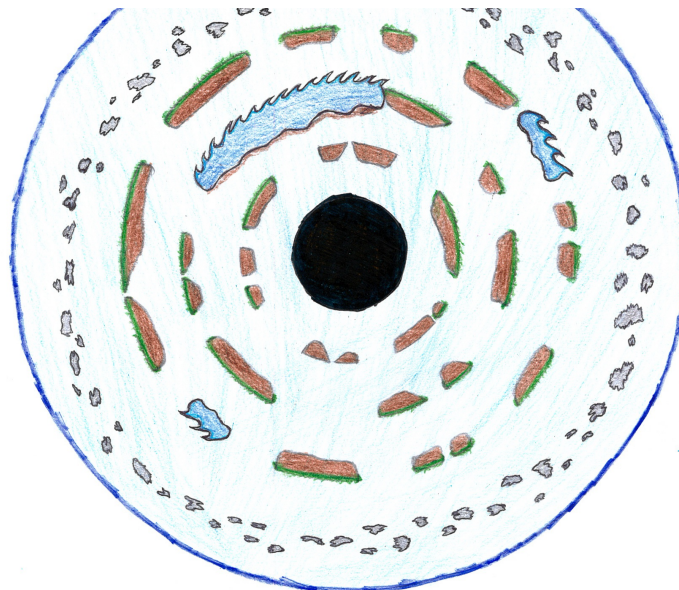
The Blue Layer represents the Outer Ring, also known as the Dead Ring. It did not survive the cataclysmic systems failure that reshaped Penjara into its current state.

The Purple, Yellow, and Blue Layers indicate Penjara's three habitable Rings.



The Red center indicates the Core—the nerve center of Penjara's self-sustaining system and the source of its precious heat.

The Character Of Penjaran Geology And World Structure



As is expected of a world, Penjara experiences gravity that pulls in towards the core. The key exceptions are the shattered Rings, which are kept aloft by what remains of the founders' near- or post-Singularity sciences.

Life forms live on the outside and inside of the continents, but life is concentrated on their exteriors. Entire bizarre ecosystems can be found on the bottom of the continents, but they are rare, as the location is a supremely demanding place to live.

Despite Penjara's size and environmental variation, most plant life is fairly homogenous, as the winds of Penjara are strong and strange and can deliver anything with air-dispersed reproduction anywhere else in the world due to its sheer openness.

The force that keeps the shattered Rings aloft does the same for its waters... for a time. In Penjara, bodies of water open to the rifts between continents will flow out into thin air and hang there, eventually reaching the limits of their continent's suspension and drifting off as waterfalls, in time dispersing into mist and clouds. This contributes to Penjara's strange water cycle and powerful weather.

An entire continental mass on the second ring is composed largely of water, though it is interspersed with small islands of aggregated soil and gigantic floating coral bodies. It is the

home of the Nagwaili people, and its strange nature makes it an isolated and difficult to navigate place.

Each Ring rotates in a different direction, revolving around each other. Though the process is slow, the sheer mass of the objects involved in this rotation means that a collision during an attempted flight to another Ring will in almost every case be fatal.

As was implied earlier, the Rings were once actual, perfectly continuous rings of geometrically precise construction. The initial cataclysm broke the rings into pieces, and the subsequent lack of maintenance has eroded them into more natural forms, though some hints of the old shape of the rings persist—a topic speculated on by many a historian and philosopher.

The Core is an enormous, nondescript perfect sphere of metal to the naked eye. Its actual workings go unseen by all. What is known to some is that it regulates the continued function of Penjara's systems.

The Fourth Layer is entirely barren, ruined by the cataclysm, little more than a ring of dead, gray rocks.

Light And Energy On Penjara

The Outer Sphere of Penjara is a miracle of science, governed by the predetermined computational procedures of the Core. It has a preset cycle of “night” and “day.” Penjara has no “sun” to orbit around—instead, the Outer Sphere's interior radiates moderate light for half the predetermined “day” and is opaque. During the “night” cycle the Outer Sphere becomes translucent, allowing the cosmos beyond to be seen.

Before Penjara's collapse, the Second and Third Rings were designed to cancel out the shadow they cast on the Rings and Core below with a lining of glowing panels. Post-cataclysm, many panels partially or completely failed, and only a precious few still hold their glow to any extent. Some efforts have been made to remedy the situation sense—BMB-crafted plant life designed to radiate light has been seeded on some continents, for example. For the most part, however, life below the First Ring is a life interrupted by darkness. As continents of varying altitudes intersect, the continents above cast gigantic shadows that can swallow the civilizations below in darkness until the continent below is passed over.

Penjara Life



Penjara is populated by a multitude of alien, dangerous, and occasionally sapient life forms. These are but a small sampling.

BMBs (Wardens, Silverlords, 'Bots, Synths, etc.)

BMBs—short for “Biomechanical Beings”—are a form of life unique to Penjara, forming a significant fraction of its ecosystem. Descended from the synthetic wardens of Penjara’s original population, BMBs have progressed from being barely more than machines with a few living parts to truly living creatures who happen to also have mechanical traits inherent to their nature. Though BMB life is shockingly diverse, a few universal traits can be found in them:

1. The ability to grow machinery within their bodies as an ordinary organism grows its own living tissues.
2. Modular organs and consciousness, capable of being exchanged or integrated with compatible life forms.
3. Powerful awareness of internal functions, like the state of organs and adrenaline and hormone levels.

BMB life varies wildly in levels of intelligence and self-awareness from model to model, but those that are commonly interacted with by the rest of civilization tend

to be of human-scale intelligence or greater and tend to closely imitate human form. Whether or not they are “ensouled” is another matter entirely, and a point of great philosophical contention.

—*BMB Civilization*: A significant division of sapient BMBs are close approximations of human beings in physical appearance and mental construction. They are found throughout the Rings, interspersed among many societies, sometimes serving crucial roles and sometimes the targets of racism and paranoia.



Penjaran Flora

Penjara’s plant life is uniquely adapted to the world’s unusual circumstances. On the First Ring, the living ring that lies closest to the Outer Sphere, plant life is plentiful and most like that of Earth’s, though they tend to have powerful, interconnected root systems that reach far deeper into the earth than those of most terrestrial plants. This is a holdover from Penjara’s days of ecological engineering, and was intended to help maintain the Rings’ structural integrity—without them, Penjara would have crumbled into a heap during the cataclysm, rather than just shattering. As such, you’ll find the maze-like root systems of Penjara’s flora anywhere you go.

The Second Ring is similarly flush with flora, but at this point the more limited availability of light has driven local plant life into new and dangerous forms in order to survive. Parasitic and carnivorous plants are common on the Second Ring, and rightly feared.

The First Ring, being closest to the Core and most removed from the Outer Sphere’s light, is perpetually hot and the least well-lit of the Rings, its continents frequently falling into the shadows cast by unlit continents hanging above. As such, plant life is sparser and

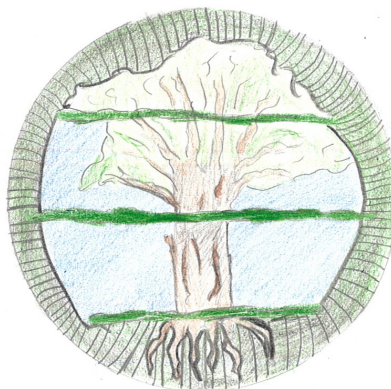
hardier, generally stumpy, surly, and unpalatable. Most cannot even spare the energy to be devious hunters or infectors—the most clever Darwinian advantage they can afford is tight-knit symbiosis. Many continents of the First Ring are covered in a sparse webbing of flora, clinging to one another for dear life.

Here is a smattering of flora from across the Rings

Parasitus: A unique species adapted to feed off of the more mechanical power sources found in some BMBs. They forcibly integrate themselves into a BMB's body, sapping the power of their secondary systems until they can be excised or their life cycle is complete. In times of scarcity, they enter a state of suspended animation, sealing themselves inside their petals. In times of open sunlight, they open completely and display a parasitically acquired BMB trait—rather than leaves, they have living, hyper-efficient solar panels.

Sol Aucupe: These flowering plants keep pace with the intermittent light of the lower rings by dragging, striding, or scuttling across the ground on a modified root system.

Pacem: A species of tree with only one known individual on record, older than most societies in Penjara. This titan of a tree occupies the better part of three continents across the three habitable rings—spending much of its time in stasis until each of the three segments are brought into alignment by the annual conjunction of the Rings. At this point the Pacem erupts into an amazing display of life, flowering, budding, and fruiting with countless multicolored bodies. The spectacular nature of this event has ingrained itself into every culture of Penjara, and as such the day of Blooming is celebrated as a day of peace in an ordinarily tense, strife-ridden world.



Cataphractos: a tree covered in armored plates that seal up during dark intervals to conserve energy. In times of famine, the Cataphractos is a prized thing to have around, as they may be prized open by a village's strongest and their nutrient-rich inner body can be shared among all.

Dead Man's Hand: a predatory vine that preys on large animals.

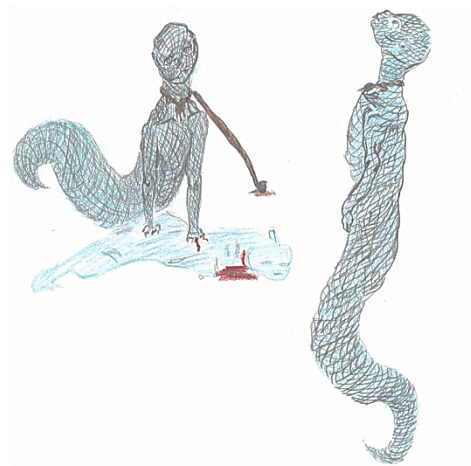
Flower Tree: Renowned for their dextrous roots and the sheer utility of its existence. The core of each tree's singular flower is similar to cotton during its bud stage, and can be used for clothing. Its seeds are palatable to most creatures. Upon fertility, the core of the flower turns a vibrant yellow to attract nocturnal pollinating birds. Its trunk can be used as firewood that releases colored smoke when burning—dedicated cultivators breed them to produce new shades and variations of smoke, used in some forms of art, cooking, and perfumery.

Penjaran Fauna

Morphics: A model of BMB that can shift into other fauna or flora. Although it can shift into a panoply of other forms, telling signs of a shifter persist: their shifted texture will not be correct and they are completely symmetrical.

Cular: Resembling an uncanny fusion of kangaroo, monkey, and goat, with distressingly human facial features, these creatures are prized by keepers of exotic pets for their fascinating appearance and playful, mischievous nature.

Allats: A rare tamable animal used for hunting by the Nagwaili, resembling a scaled, earless cat with a serpentine lower half. They are supreme predators.



Kepting: A small carnivorous invertebrate, resembling an overdesigned crab, that gathers in huge, murderous swarms. They are renowned for their monstrous, unending hunger and their astounding capabilities for camouflage. Forest species are easily confused with lumps of bark, while the waste-dwelling varieties are almost perfectly translucent and when on the move resemble heat haze.

Gliders: A small omnivorous creature that lives in the foliage hanging from the underside of the continents. They hang upside down in the continents' roots. It is a source of food for many carnivores and desperate peasants. Their size varies between that of a mouse to a middling cat.

Feathered mouse: Similar to a field mouse, it relies primarily on its senses of hearing and touch. It is capable of leaping long distances. It is endowed with a beak specialized for eating grubs, insects, and seeds.

Tombo-Tori : Resembles a dreadful mashup of a bird and a dragonfly. It feeds primarily on the seeds of Flower Trees. Their nests hang from vines, roots, etc. It is roughly the size of a sparrow, and flies in a flock of 10-30 individuals.



Glowdib: A slimy creature resembling a hairless, streamlined cat no bigger than a human thumb that gives off a golden bioluminescence. Glowdibs are cave-dwelling bacteriophages. They represent luck and serenity to many cultures.

Struggler: A fish endowed with specialized fins that allow it to fly short distances in the open air that much of Penjara's water bleeds off into.

Mōt: A long-legged raccoon-like creature with the social role of a domestic dog. It is used in war and hunting.

Darah: A large vampire bat the size of a large cat, capable of flight and a knuckle-borne high-speed lope that is frightening to behold. They live in flocks and feed on most things that bleed, especially Avai.

Percikan: A horse-sized turtle with lighter than air gas synthesized in specialized chambers within its shell that it ignites by striking their armored back legs together, allowing rocket-propelled flight. Sometimes ridden by trained professionals, the very desperate, the hopelessly unwary, and complete morons.

Shima Worm: A giant worm that feeds on the soil of continental debris, pupates, and upon maturation mimics an island. In its final stage of life it attracts flying animals to nest on its digestive surface.

Bil: A frog the size of a well-fed sheep, cultivated for its meat. Bil gestate in the protective confines of a species of giant bromeliads, also called Bil.

Teramoth: A dog-sized tentacular invertebrate that lives underground and creates a network of tunnels with its face-mounted bone drill in search of decaying organic materials to eat.

Effect Grub: A specialized BMB species model. It is a grub as long as a human hand. They carry a titanic payload of nanomachines in their edible flesh, activated upon ingestion. The potential effects of a grub are many and vast—some will get you high, some will get you dead, and some may just turn you into a grotesque mockery of your original species, possibly with laser eyes.



Vivi-Pod: A specialized BMB species model, technically neither plant, animal, or machine. It resembles a stalk made of bone and plastic with jointed tentacular root-pipes that funnel dead matter into its Synthesis Chamber—a translucent, permeable semi-sphere at its top in which the dead matter is “reverse digested” and converted into a stew of living matter in constant

flux. The desperate or pragmatic use the products of a Vivi-Pod as a food source.

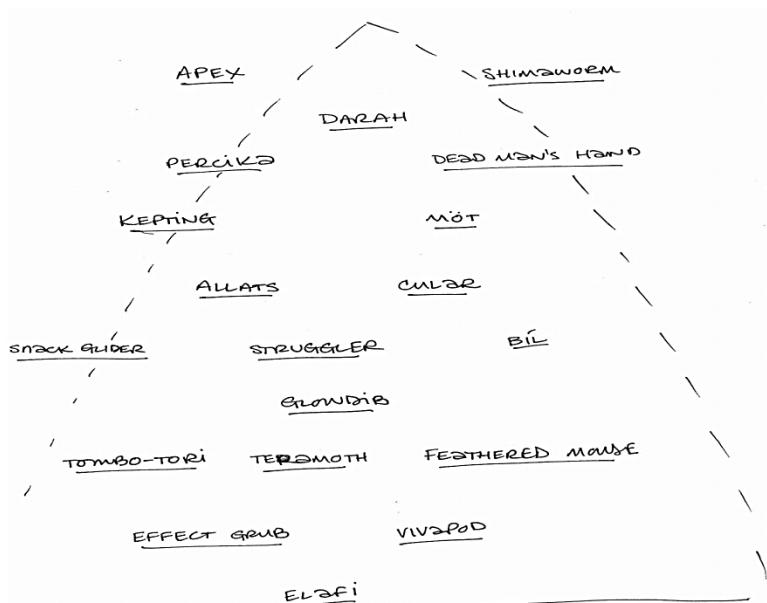


Apex: a powerful BMB predator with twin appetite cycles—one for standard food intake, and another for parts replacement. While only possessing the specialized intelligence of a top-class hunter, it is capable of advanced surgical procedures for the purposes of extracting and re-integrating parts.



Elafi: A water-dweller that resembles the boneless, translucent outline of a deer wrought from the skin of a bubble. In truth, it is an exceedingly simple creature—a fine layer of cells held together by surface tension.

Pyramid Of Life



People Of Penjara

Penjara is home to five sapient species: Humanity, the Avai, the Nagwaili, the Vakman, and Wardens (a common term for human-approximate BMBs). Each of these species is divided into many factions and struggling cultures, and all strive to coexist in the closed space of Penjara.

The *Jahros* are a human culture descended from the slave caste of the old Sub Sideran empire. Their history began when an enigmatic man known to history as Jahro liberated them by teaching them the forgotten way of the gun, reviving a technology that had been unknown to the rest of the world for thousands of years. Now, they worship Jahro as their savior, and enshrine gunslinging as a holy rite. They are an aggressive people, hardened by the harsh wastes of the First Ring, still enraged at their treatment, and as such they resent stratified civilization of any sort.



Sub Sidera is a militaristic human nation native to the Third Ring. Their proximity to the unobstructed night sky has instilled in them a spiritual fixation on the stars, using the number and grouping of stars upon birth to determine the importance of a newborn's role in society. Warriors are highly prized among the Sub Sidera, their ranks filled by the most favored by the stars. A Sub Sideran warrior's greatest point of pride is his or her kill count, and they will go to great lengths to ensure that the merit of their kills is recorded. In the nation's early days, the Sub Sideran nation had access to vast natural resources, but over the course of their wasteful military expansion they've expended the natural resources of their home continent.



The *Avai* are a variably anthropomorphic species descended from birds native to the Third Ring. All Avai possess wings and birdlike traits of one sort or another, but the degree to which features of human and bird blend and the particular bird species evoked is different for each individual—some are winged folk with feather-lined bodies, some have harsh beaks and vibrant crests, and some are simply gigantic birds with a few person bits tacked on here and there. The largest Avai civilization is a group of 7 warring city-states, each built around preserving and building a patron god. These “gods” are in fact first and second generation BMBs of immense power, heavily modified from their original frames, and the ancient tensions and power struggles of their early days are what fuel the warfare between the city-states. Each city-state’s patron lives in an opulent shrine/palace located at the center of the city. Upon the death of a “God,” an event that has taken place six times thus far, its city-state disbands and its citizens become wandering vagabonds known as the Godless. The Godless live in stalactites on the underside of the Avai “home continent” that have been hollowed out for habitation, and are not allowed to be seen on the surface of the ring from whence they came. 2nd- or 3rd-generation Godless often become accustomed to this way of life, and even if they migrate to another continent may take residence on its underside purely for tradition’s sake. The Avai have advanced architecture and are claustrophobic by nature. Homes within city-states are essentially apartments with a

landing porch at every window. Avai society in the city-states is matrilineal, and as such, only women are required to join the military.

The only force thus far that can reliably unite Avai of separate city-states is a Sub Sideran skirmish team—the Avai’s powers of flight anger the Sub Siderans, as they feel that the Avai have in some way stolen the Sub Sideran right to be closest to the stars. In the meantime, the Avai are just as guilty of conducting legally iffy “hunting ventures” into the Nagwaili continent, which has resulted in mounting political tension.



Bozanst is a name shared by a religion of Penjara, the human theocracy that practices it, and the continent it dominates on the Third Ring. They are the most powerful of the Core-Worship religions of Penjara, idolizing it as an all-seeing, all-knowing, theoretically omnipotent guardian. The dominant myth governing Bozanst culture tells that in the early days of the Bozanst nation-cult, an attempt was made to build a bridging structure that connected all the rings to the Core, in order to better worship it. According to the legend, this act was in fact a naïve violation of the sanctity of the Core. This mythic collapse instilled the belief in the Bozanst that life in the lower two levels is fundamentally sacrilegious and perpetually angers the core. They attempt to appease their god through beautification of

the geography and ecology by, among other things, channeling rivers and cultivating force-bred and aggressively shaped flora and fauna.



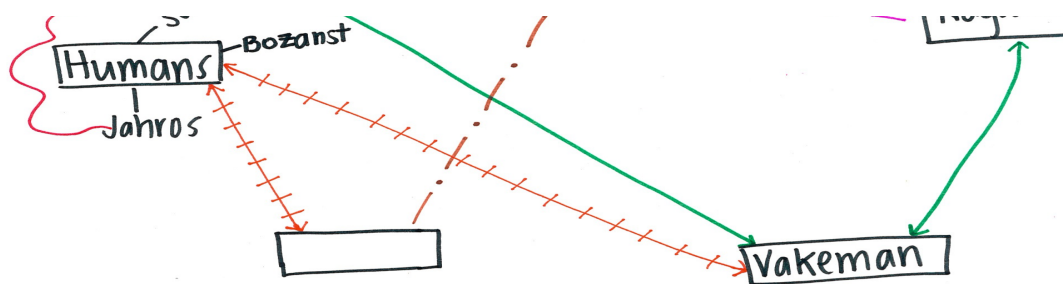
The Nagwaili are a humanoid tribal society, distinguished by obvious amphibious traits—the typical Nagwaili has pronounced webbing between the fingers and toes, minimal body hair, prominent gills, and a trio of spiny fins stretching from the edge of the forehead to the base of the neck. Due to their preference for the water and the scarcity of large open bodies of the stuff, the Nagwaili are an isolationist culture, with only its outliers venturing into the rest of the world with any regularity. They are the sole native culture of Penjara’s “ocean continent,” and as such have exclusive command of its lush resources. The rare soil of the Nagwaili homeland is precious fertilizer, being entirely derived from the decomposing life within the continent’s waters, and as such is one of the few things that the greater Nagwaili population is willing to receive visitors for, as the soil can be traded to the agriculture-poor for vast riches. As the Vakman are the Nagwaili’s chief buyers, and have a preexisting trade alliance with and re-sell some of their purchases to the Sub Sidera, the Sub Sidera maintain an unofficial “understanding” with the Nagwaili, and will side in their favor in the event of a political upset involving them.



Vakman resemble six-foot beetles. They are capable of using any of their limbs as arms and legs interchangeably. Of all the sentient species of Penjara, the Vakman have the most fine-tuned senses of smell and taste, which has spurred their development of superior chemical technologies. The dominant Vakman culture is the Scholarchy, a highly regimented society created for the support of a class of elite scholar-warriors. The majority of the Scholarchy's population is in fact composed of indentured servants, wage slaves, and apprentices, dedicated towards maintaining the upper class' infrastructure and needs. They are kept from the public eye, and as such the common belief is that Vakman strongholds are secluded bastions of knowledge and quiet. The Vakman scientific nobility spend their ample free time in service to the dogma that drives their society—the dogma of survivalism. The Scholarchy's religion/philosophy of life dictates that the Vakman are a creation of a supreme deity of tactics, warfare, and ingenuity, and that all life is in fact part of an extended experiment enacted by the gods that requires periods of apocalyptic war. As such, the stated purpose of the Scholarchy is to develop and stockpile all the weapons and resources that the Vakman will need to survive the next "All War." However, at the moment they are perfectly willing to maintain relations with the other cultures of Penjara, even if they believe that in time they'll all be at each other's throats. The Sub Siderans supply the Vakman with new technologies for supporting their upper class (mostly slavemasters and agricultural technologies) in exchange for a few of the Vakman's secrets of chemistry and biology. This connection and the general practices of the Vakman have enraged the Jahros, and have resulted in a few trans-Ring skirmishes already. The Scholarchy has enclaves distributed across the First and Second Rings.

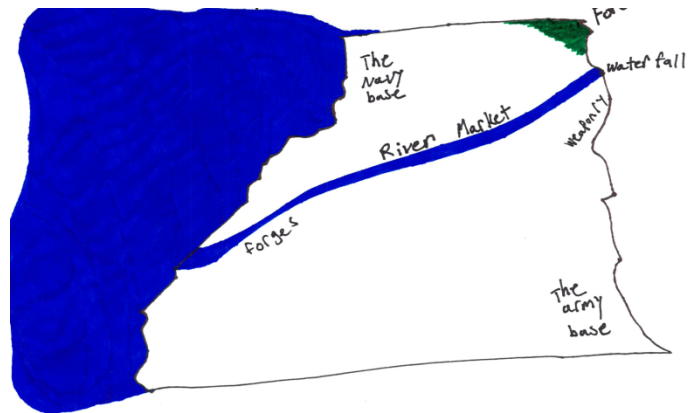


Relations Between People of Penjara

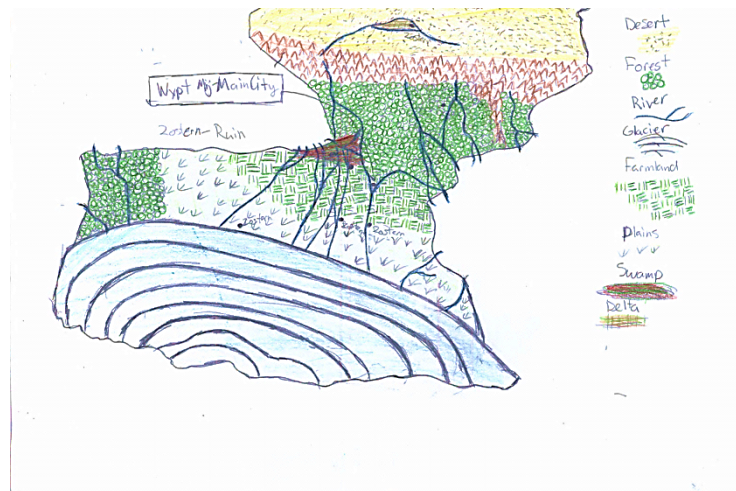


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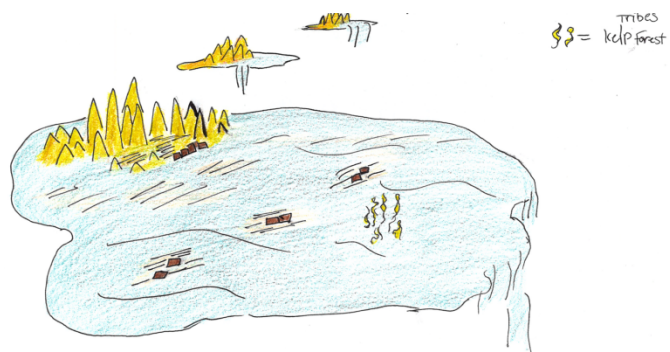
Examples of Continents of Penjara



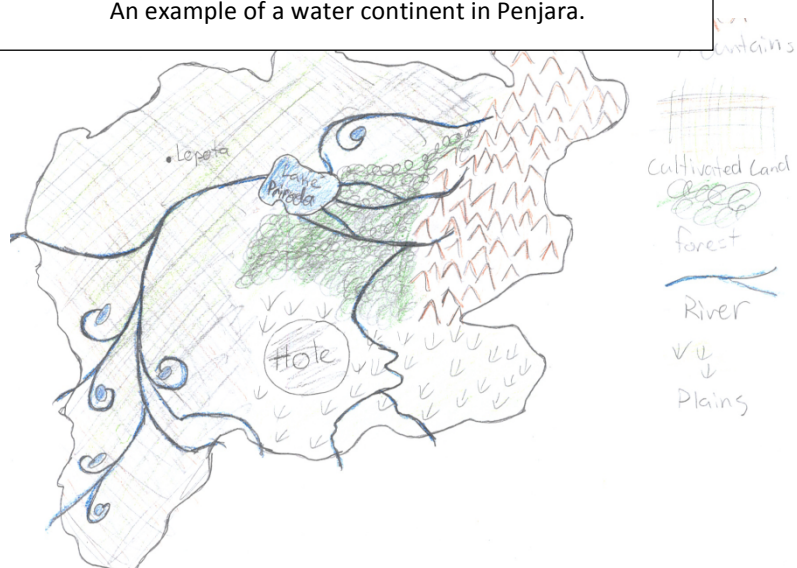
The continent of Sub Sidera



The cosmopolitan continent of Wypt Mij that is located in the middle of the second ring.



An example of a water continent in Penjara.



The continent of Bozant.