

About Mistrathe Manor

I. Introduction

Nestled in the hills north of Brem, the estate of Baron Leo Druat-Mistrathe serves as base of operations for the mystical Rangers. Aided by the Baron and by the enigmatic figure known as Xestriph, the Rangers navigate the Strata, exploring other worlds and acting on behalf of Viajrie and the Commonwealth.

Mistrathe Manor takes place in a unique steam-age fantasy setting. Reality is in levels, or frequencies, that can differentiate into separate worlds. At the center of the geopolitical multiverse is Viajrie, the dominant power in a far flung interdimensional Commonwealth. Viajrie is ruled by a telepathic King, whose Emissaries are able to communicate with him mentally from any world, or any distance.

The various worlds of the Between can be connected by Gates that transport travelers instantly between places. Above each world is a High Road that is unique to that world, and for those who can access it, a shortcut can be taken, but it can involve risk. Above each High Road there may also be one or more unique Heavens.

The Strata is a lower frequency of reality that does not differentiate into distinct universes, but that be used by some to travel from world to world. An even lower frequency of reality is the Substrata, a labyrinthine layer of infinite caves and tunnels that some can enter via shadows. At the lowest frequency, separated from all other existence by the solid barrier of the Substrata, is the Void. In this empty space are spirits, some of which are prisoners cast into the Void to banish them.

Moving from world to world can be accomplished through the Gates by any traveler. Gates don't usually connect High Roads,

only planes of the Between. Gates are often tended by Gatekeepers, an ancient druidic order with special Gate-related powers

Viajrie is unique as far as anyone in the campaign knows, in that six Gates are known in the world. Though none of these Gates are within the borders of the nation of Viajrie proper, by being centrally located between all of them, Viajrie has vast strategic and economic importance. Passage from one gate to another is difficult without traversing the central Kingdom, so in a very real sense, all roads (including rail) lead to Brem, the Capital.

Assisting the connectivity of the Gates is the Red Rail. Rangers, scouting other worlds, bring back ideas about technology and methods, so that Viajrie has steam-age technology. Trains moving along the Rail, as well as wind- and steam-powered ships moving by sea, make travel within the Commonwealth easy and efficient.

II. A Brief History of the Rangers

Though Viajrie's unique role in the gate connectivity of the known multiverse is obviously very important to her unparalleled dominance in inter-world affairs, another major factor is important: the rise of the Rangers.

In the year 714, Viajrie became the adopted home of a strange otherworldly wizard named Xestriph. This cryptic, seemingly immortal being became the close associate of an eccentric baron who governed one of Viajrie's inner counties, the moors of Mistrathe. Baron Falron Mistrathe was to become the first of the order of Rangers. Somehow, Xestriph was able to impart powers to those ready to accept them, most notably, the ability to move between the Middle Worlds by passing into and navigating through the Strata without the use of the Gates.

These gifted agents became known as Rangers, and moved through the multiverse seeking new ideas and technologies, as well as new ways of looking at reality.

Some Rangers would go renegade, using their powers for criminal and other dishonorable pursuits, but most operated by guidelines set down by Falron in the Old Ranger Code. Operating as a secret order, the Rangers offered their services to the Crown, but due to Falron's progressive, secular ideas, these services were denied to the Church. A faction within the Church, centered within the Office of Inquisition, grew to resent the rumors they heard of the Rangers activities stories of otherworldly spirits and strange disappearances.

After almost 20 years of service to the Crown, the order of Rangers came under direct investigation by the Inquisition. The order was increasingly vilified by certain Priests, and fear of the Rangers' power was nurtured among the people. Eventually, strong anti-Ranger sentiment took hold among many citizens of Viajrie. King Chendr owed much of Viairie's recent prosperity to the activities of the Rangers; however, the Accords that had founded Viajrie had been based on a triumvirate including the King, the Noble Houses, and the Church, and so no official place in the power structure existed for them. By their nature, they were secretive beyond even the Church's proclivity. Part of their credo included keeping the citizens of the Commonwealth, and those of Viajrie in particular, blissfully unaware of the otherworldly threats the Rangers would sometimes be called upon to face.

What happened next was due in large part to a betrayal of Baron Falron by his closest peer among the Rangers. Some would argue that Royf Goijadry was more powerful even than Falron, surpassed only by Xestriph himself. This powerful Ranger had discovered a path to power beyond even that of a

Ranger, a path that could be interfered with by the other members of the Order.

By giving a fanatic wing of the Inquisition the Baron's itinerary, and by exerting his own powers and those of his dark allies, Goijadry laid a trap for his unsuspecting friend. A zealous monk was directed to incite a riot that Baron Falron was unable to escape from, due to a Strata storm that Goijadry had timed to be below that area of the Between in Viajrie. The mob tied and burned at the stake Falron and three other Rangers that day before the Crown could send a contingent to disperse the vigilantes.

Two of the Rangers present did manage to escape that day: Royf Goijadry (who had never given away his complicity to any of the other Rangers), and Barclo Darspice, a relatively recent addition to the Order. Royf then vanished to pursue his mad path to ultimate power, while Barclo tipped off the other Rangers and Xestriph, who withdrew

the Tower of Dreams back into the Strata where none in Viajrie could reach it.

The Rangers, not being immortal, faded from the events of Viajrie over the decades that followed; none could assay the Lens unless it once again occupied the focal point adjacent to Mistrathe Manor. For a few decades, some of the existing Rangers continued to nominally serve the King, but many of the Order felt that the Crown had betrayed them by allowing the Church to launch an investigation into their activities. Many Rangers went to ground, taking up other identities or settling in other worlds.

The Barony of Mistrathe had no recognized heir, and so, after Falron, supervision fell to the say of the House of Nobles. No consensus about what to do with the holding could be reached,

and so it went unoccupied. The Manor was looted over time, and eventually, 50 years later, it was opened as a museum, where press clippings and other memorabilia of the Rangers were accumulated. As to the Rangers themselves, they became part of Viajrien lore, and many grew to consider their powers to be myth rather than history.

Eventually, after more than a hundred years had passed since the death of the last Ranger still loyal to Chendr, a familial connection was established between the heir to the Druat seat on the Council, and the Mistrathe lineage, once thought to have died with Falron. The Druat heir, Leo, took on the mantle of Baron, reclaiming and renovating the Manor, much to the distress of certain fanatical Priests. However, by publicly renouncing any wish to ever wield the powers of a Ranger himself, he avoided most of the widespread controversy surrounding Falron's time as Baron.

After renovating and moving into the Manor (shrewdly keeping a museum operating in part of the house), Leo promptly looked into every hiding place he had learned hints of by being willed the few of his great-granduncle's journals that had survived.

Then, one misty moonless night, the starlight revealed to Leo that, in fact, the Tower had returned, unknown to all. Scaling the stairs to the room at its summit, Leo found Xestriph there with the Lens. True to his commitment, Leo persuaded Xestriph of the importance of a go-between with no direct ties to the power of the Rangers: he never assayed the Lens to become a Ranger himself. It turned out that the Tower would now only appear on moonless nights, when the light was gone, returning to the Strata at first light.

As time has passed, Leo has been recruiting a new breed of

Rangers, more secret yet than the original Order, and more independent from the Crown. A strong mandate (The New Ranger Code) exists for these new Rangers to use their powers only in time of need and in as discreet a manner as possible. The Tower of Dreams is their base in the Strata, and the Manor is their base in Viajrie. The Rangers meet in secret to discuss where they should concentrate their coordinated activities, and what causes they should support.

III. The Nature of Reality in the Game

Rangers each possess one power that sets them apart from other people: they are able to manifest the Veil, through which they can enter the Strata and through it, travel between worlds. Unlike with the Gates, any world can conceivably be reached directly from any other, by traversing the distance between them in the Strata. There, reality's frequencies do not differential into separate worlds, and so, the Strata is adjacent to all worlds.

Below the frequencies of the Strata are the underworlds of the Substrata. These are a vast network of tunnels and caves that sometimes interconnect. Some of these caverns are so vast they are like worlds unto themselves. In the underworlds can be found denizens such as gargoyles and demons. Some in the higher frequencies of the Between and the High Roads can find their way into the underworlds, either through caves, or through the power of shadow walking.

The black emptiness of the Void is separated from the other levels by the barrier of the Substrata. Very few entrances exist there into the underworlds, so that the Void is sometimes used as a place to banish dangerous spirits and other beings. Also in the Void are floating hells and other physical prisons that contain the most powerful of the outcasts.

In the higher frequencies of reality, each world does differentiate from the others around it. These constitute the Between, and each includes its own unique High Road and possibly even its own Heavens or other hyper-spatial frame of reference.

Each world of the Between is represented as a plane in the Strata, and each location in that world corresponds to a point on that plane. This plane, when the Veil is manifested, is opened up for beings and objects to be translated into the Strata, or from the Strata back to the Between. Ordinarily, only a mind that has been attuned to the sub-dimensional qualities of lower frequencies of reality can perceive the Veil even when it is manifested, unless something actually passes through it, from or into the Strata.

Most traffic into and out of the High Road is through more permanent Doors that have been opened to the Between, but there are those with the ability to find other ways in.

The peoples of Viajrie know about the Gates, and about the High Roads. The existence of the Strata and other frequencies of reality had only been speculated about until the arrival of the Rangers.

Most scientific thought about the nature of reality has offered a model that presents the High Road as being nearer to the Heavens, and so at a higher elevation on a map, perhaps in the hills. By cutting across this rough terrain, travelers avoid the longer way around. The Between in this model is presented as the elevations that are above sea level, but not at a high elevation; in other words, habitable land. Below the waterline are the Strata, where those with the proper means can navigate to other lands. And of course, the Substrata are the bedrock underneath it all through which many of the frequencies of

reality can be reached. The Void is like the hollowed-out center of this "planet", an inescapable prison.

Recently, another perspective has been offered by thinkers who have noticed a correlation between the frequency of reality one occupies and the rate at which one moves through space. In the High Road, distances traveled will be much less than those traveled in the Between, implying that perhaps the commonly accepted model is backwards, and that, in fact, the frequencies of reality are like concentric spheres; accordingly, this model has the Heavens at the center, the High Roads on the inside, the Between in the middle, the Strata outside of that, followed by the Substrata and finally, the Void on the outside. This model is supported by the experience of Rangers, who report that moving through the Strata along the Veil is much slower than moving through the Between to cover the same distance. Of course, the advantage of moving along the Veil is that a Ranger can bypass barriers in the Between.

IV. The History of Viajrie

The plains and hills of what is today known as Viajrie had been inhabited for thousands of years by nomadic tribes and transitory small agrarian cultures. Kingdoms eventually arose nearby each of the Gates, and grew prosperous through trade with other worlds. The great distance between the Gates in the world kept all but the most determined travelers from making the trek from one Gate to another. Adding to this danger was the unpredictability and wildness of the region of Viajrie, where small fragile kingdoms and nomadic tribes were in constant competition with one-another for territorial rights. This wildness was at times fomented and fostered by the various Gate Kingdoms, since each enjoyed the buffer this region offered between them and the other principalities of that time.

About a thousand years before the founding of the Commonwealth, missionaries and religious exiles from several worlds created a walled community on a hill in the middle of the plains, resisting attacks by warlike nomadic tribes. This community would come to be known as Treminvastry, and was the repository for much metaphysical and pseudo-scientific knowledge hoarded by an alliance of monastic orders representing exiled sects from three distinct religions: The Knowledge Seekers, The Wisdom Seekers, and the Truth Seekers. A Triumvirate from these Ministries ruled over all aspects of Treminvastian life. By virtue of their accumulated secrets, the Priests of Treminvastry kept their city secure against invasion from the tribes and kingdoms in the region.

Of great assistance in this was the existence of a Door to the High Road that exists in Treminvastry, discovered by the Priests who founded the city. Part of the city in fact exists on the other side of the Door, guarded by three Angels against attack from that sector. This alliance between the Three and the priests made all but the most daring would-be conquerors stay far away from the city as it grew and prospered. Also helping Treminvastian Priests were their keen negotiating skills.

Often, strong leaders in the area would seek advice and knowledge from the Priests in return for assurances of continued security. So adept were the Treminvastian Priests, that the city has only been besieged twice in its history, and never successfully.

Of all the kingdoms that arose with the aid of Treminvastian secrets and advice, one

surpassed by far anything the Priests could have envisioned. Viajriens trace their ancestry back to the Viaj tribe of nomadic hunter/gatherers. They had been displaced from their original

habitat by drought, and wandered for generations before semi-settling in the region now known as Viajrie. Two of the five Great Houses date back to that time.

At first, the Viaj tribe was mostly peaceful, and continued its nomadic lifestyle in the land between the River Oihoo and the Anumesh Marshes, wandering and living between the small fluid kingdoms and other tribes. After five generations, under the leadership of the Chieftain Lenyc, the Tribe discovered a wandering route, based on the seasons and on the activities or other nearby tribes and kingdoms, known as the Safe Route. Parts of this route still exist along the Outer Ring on the Red Rail around Brem. The Safe Route (with modifications as needed based on circumstances) allowed the Viaj to thrive and prosper.

When the Route took them through more populated areas, they would act as a large traveling gypsy caravan, carnival, circus and bazaar. Many of the tribe would change into local clothes and cultivate the appearance of people native to the region, to build popular support for their entertainments and foreign indulgences. Their numbers swelled so much over the following ten generations that many of the Viaj people actually left to be assimilated by the various Cultures along the Route, and their reputation for wit and resourcefulness spread throughout the region.

For many years, a kingdom had been emerging in the swamps of Anumesh with a particularly adept sorceress as its Queen, Viturn. This ambitious and preternatural woman saw a great future for herself and her growing Anumesh Empire, a future that could only be realized if her dark god of the underworld, Anshaga, could convert and subjugate the people in the region. Treminvastry stood as Viturn's only obstacle in her quest to unify the region between the Gates, and then to reach out to the

Gate Kingdoms, bringing even more worlds under the shadow of Anshaga.

Viturn's first siege was long and powerfully executed, both from the Between and the High Road, where much of her power was held. Her forces are still the only attacking troops ever to set foot within the walls of the city. It looked like she would take Treminvastry, when late in the battle, a band of heroes from southern kingdoms, who owed much to the Priests, arrived and turned the tide. These brave souls died to a man when they fought outside the walls of the city, gaining time for the great Beast of Elromane to be lured into the midst of the Anumesh. When Viturn the Conqueror failed in her attempt to capture Treminvastry, and her own son died riding a dragon into battle against the Triune of Angels in the High Road, she was crushed and bitter.

She reacted by cultivating a fervor of genocidal rage among her Clerics and armies, leading to the slaughter of tens of thousands of practitioners of Treminvastrian faith wherever she found them. Then, she turned her gaze towards the Viaj, many of who had Treminvastrian sympathies, and some who even practiced as minor priests of the religion. First, she targeted those who had settled in nearby regions, even those who did not subscribe to the faith. In the coming years, she widened her extermination efforts, eventually harassing the Viaj along the Safe Route whenever it came within 500 miles of the swamp.

Still, she was not satisfied; to her the Viaj were the symbol of what she could not have - the city and secrets of Treminvastry. Sending out larger and larger expeditionary forces, she began to hunt the nomadic Tribe wherever they wandered. Her blind evil crusade would have all-but wiped out the Viaj, had not the Priests of Treminvastry brought together old alliances from the kingdoms to the south to rally with the Viaj and fight against

Viturn's threatened genocide. The Anumesh were pushed back almost all the way to their swamp, but they could not be completely defeated, and their forces regrouped, as Viturn brought in reinforcements from the underworlds.

After some early setbacks, stemming from the surprise they experienced at having anyone dare to challenge their ascendance, the overwhelming force of the Anumesh forces began to build up and push back the allied forces to the south. Eventually, even with the help from the southern kingdoms, The Great War against the armies of of Anumesh looked like a foregone conclusion. In the Between, Viturn was so powerful that she was bringing in aerial reinforcements from other worlds now, gargoyles and even some demons. The Great Powers of the High Road were subjected to assaults from creatures of adjacent worlds as well as from the depths of the Hells and the Underworlds.

Through this, Treminvastry built stronger walls and defenses, and also sent out diplomatic missions to the Gate Kingdoms to the south and the west, hoping to find aid from another sector. The Gate Kingdoms themselves were reluctant to get involved, but they did offer asylum to priests and others as they arrived (this was unusual at the time). One such mission hired a ship (the Black Star) and her Captain Eremorion to take them through the Wymoudri Gate.

After many strange and interesting adventures, the ship was lost at sea in a storm, and the priest Cerarpine was the only survivor. Cerarpine was found floating on wreckage of the Black Star, by an aquatic race of advanced amphibious creatures called the Werde. The Priest was nurtured back to health on an island, where he eventually underwent a procedure that conveyed to him the ability to communicate with the Werde people telepathically.

One of the Werde in particular was fascinated by the stories Cerparine revealed about his home world. Wegua Werde was unusual for his race, in that he felt great curiosity and affinity for the strange places his kind had never seen, and he wanted to travel to other worlds to see them for himself.

Wegua was also concerned by a side effect their treatments had caused in Cerparine. In addition to selective telepathy, the Priest should have been granted a much slower aging process, allowing him to live many times the lifespan of an ordinary human. Unfortunately, it turned out that his cells had already progressed too far along the normal development curve of a maturing human, and could not handle the stress of the treatments. His body was essentially rejecting the treatments, causing an increasing deterioration of his cells. Cerparine and Wegue Werde then theorized that the procedure, if undertaken by a preadolescent human, would not be rejected. Before the route back to the Wymoudri Gate could be discovered, Cerparine died of

cellular degradation, but not before beginning writing down the story of his travels in a chronicle, the Cerparinad.

His friend, Wegua Werde, resolved to discover the way back to Viajrie and complete Cerparine's quest. Three years after the Priest's death, he used a telepathically attuned emissary bird to finally detect the location of the Gate. Travelling to it and through to the world beyond he left the Werde never to return. Once through the Gate, Wegua Werde quickly made contact with some fishermen on the sea of zjui, some of who took him to be the incarnation of the god of the sea, based on his amphibian appearance, and the book he carried was taken to be sent from the Heavens as a holy work. The fishermen saw to it that Wegua was taken through a southern route to Treminvastry (for the northern route had fallen under the

control of Viturn and her Anumesh armies).

At first, some priests were skeptical of Wegua Werde, and of the contents of the Cerparinad - which Wegua had finished on behalf of his friend - and thought it could be a trick by Viturn. Then, the High Priestess of Truth used her power to discern the creature's honest intent. The Robes of Cerparine were then interred in the Tombs under Treminvastry, and the book accepted as a historical account. Wegua could not speak, but he had learned to write in the Common script from Cerparine, and eventually built a relationship of mutual respect with certain Priests, especially those of Knowledge, for they sought better maps and information about the worlds beyond the Gates.

Meanwhile, the allied forces of the Viaj and the Southern Kingdoms were pushed until the Anumesh forces were threatening to encircle Treminvastry once again. In communicating with Wegua, one Priest, Plercures, realized that the powers of the Werde could be of aid in the resistance against Viturn's evil crusade. A Great Council was convened, and Wegua was assisted in putting together the facilities he would need to implement the Werding procedure on humans as he had Cerparine. This time, suitable prodigies were considered, based on their youth and the promise for leadership they showed.

One girl was chosen and underwent the Werding, to become the first Monarch of Viajrie, Mirieden, daughter of the Viaj Chieftan, Larodin. This promising child would not physically age past the age of 11, but her life expectancy would be extended five-fold, and she would be granted the telepathic abilities of the Werde. The Viaj and the Kings of the South all swore fealty to Queen Mirieden, and the Council began choosing Emissaries from all the Allies to be trained for her service. These Emissaries were permanently imprinted to the Queen, so that

she could focus her attention on any one of them, allowing telepathic contact from any distance, and across any expanse of the Strata between worlds. Using the Emissaries, Allied forces gained tactical advantages over the Anumesh that slowly began turning the tide of the war. Mirieden also displayed growing ability as a benevolent but determined ruler, unifying all three Southern Kingdoms along with the Viaj into a new nation.

Based on the ascendant nature of the Viaj's role in the the Alliance, Viajrie was created, by the Accords of 723 BC. Based on a Triumvirate of political power - The Crown, the Church and the Council of Noble Houses - Viajrie still retains political autonomy to this day Eventually, after Viturn's armies had been driven back into the swamp, the sorceress queen departed the world in favor of another, and her nation was subsumed by Viajrie over time. It would take another 200 years and three wars for the new nation to solidify her borders. Under the rule of the Werded Kings, Viajrie had risen to prominence as a major power, both militarily and economically. Travelers from one gate to another found passage through Viajrie much faster and easier than trying to take a more circuitous route. Under the Kings, Viajrie had certain advantages that kept her from being conquered by any of the Gate Kingdoms, and after 200 years, she had stabilized her borders and won concessions from all the neighboring principalities that strengthened her independence.

For 500 years after that, Viajrie prospered and became wealthy, due to an alliance between the Crown in Brem and the Church in Treminvastry, and to the central connection she offered to commerce between worlds. The stage had been set for the coming of the Rangers.