

Ice Peak Isle (Qeovik: Pikalujak)

Geography: This small archipelago lies to the north-east of the Alarius continent, well into the Arctic zone. It is buffeted by the polar winds, with blizzards being a regular weather ‘problem’ (Apocalypse 101). There are only stunted trees, and apart from the ice-plains, most of the rest is tundra, with small amounts of poor arable land. However, there are several hot springs, derived from the volcanic backbone of the island.

Inhabitants: The indigenous people call themselves Qeovik, and are generally rotund, smallish stature, white skin and slanted brown eyes, and short straight black hair. They are prone to piercing their ears and noses and brows with seal bones, using seal grease on their hair and are proud of their prominent canines and sloping foreheads – some anthropologists suspect Orcish DNA as part of their heredity. This may also explain the various ancient orc skulls and prehistoric stone and bone tools found at isolated places on the island.

A small immigrant population of scientists and mining engineers are housed in Atanarjuet, the largest settlement in the Qeovik lands.

Economics: the only industries are fishing, sealing & whaling, obsidian, scientific studies (anthropology, palaeontology, geology and mineral exploration – mainly from Emerald Crown cities of northern Alarius, as well as scholars from as far away as Irisian City States on Artemisia, and Dunor City in Ezrute); and amazingly, religious tourism. Then there is, “In winter, when there’s no fishing, there’s always the f...g”, (Old Qeovik saying).

Government: The Gather, held at Kuk’uq, is where leaders of each community gather annually to thrash out past problems and future policies. The Gatherer, (like a Speaker) is elected by all Qeovik adults for life, but is merely an adjudicator. Otherwise, each community decides its own policies, laws and governance by regular meetings of all adults who wish to attend, and sometimes a vote is needed.

Law-breakers are either fined, confined to home for various periods of time (a very serious punishment where loss of ability to provide for one’s family could be a very real deterrent), and the ultimate punishment is outlawry – reserved for unlawful killing and abuse of hospitality. The last is equivalent to a slow death sentence for most, though a few famous outlaws have lived on in sagas (eg Remmissaga about the outlaw Remmis the Strong, who lived in the northern hills and was famed for his strength and doomed loves).

Hospitality is one of the strongest customs in the region. To not offer shelter to those asking for it lead to shunning by others, to abuse it is one of the two high crimes (see above). This custom is essential in a community oft beset by the vagaries of killing cold weather. Only outlaws could be safely refused hospitality.

Happily, the older custom of Vendetta Law, the belief that most crimes are private

matters between families, which is settled by revenge killing, was abandoned about 200 years ago, and replaced by the weregild system, where each crime was payable by a fine paid to the aggrieved party.

Vendetta justice revolves around the concept of money and/or goods being compensation for the crime. The amount to be paid is negotiable and varies with the status of the victim and the degree of his injury. If the accused cannot pay, the entire family are liable unless they confine the miscreant to home detention.

Religion: The natives worship nature gods of sea, winter, snow, sky, sea animals, the Angilanunuk (massive polar bears), volcanic fire, weather, wind, and as well healing and death. Clan gods are also worshipped with totem poles erected outside their homes to indicate clan. The chief God is Kappiataitok, God of Sky and Sea, supposedly living on Mas-Nuper Isle to the north of Pikalujak, guarding the captive Lerq'kantqm, enemy of the Gods. Kappiataitok's existence is fervently stated by locals, who all have ancestors who have seen him flying overhead on his great white Albatross, Enjaluk, with his Net of Snaring, the magical Kerraviq, used to provide fish schools to the Qeorvik in the summer, and to save endangered people from the terrors of avalanches, cracking sea-ice and massive 'Polar Bears' (the Angilanunuk). The truth behind the legend is a major reason for the anthropologists on the Ice Peak Island.

None are allowed on Mas-Nuper, though – only high ranking Qeorvik shamans can attempt the pilgrimage three times in their life – only five have ever been successful in doing so. The current High Shaman, the female Inguluk (illustrated on map) has made the trip twice, and expects to make her last trip in the next few years (see notes on Mas-Nuper below).

Rituals are held at the sign of first flowers in Spring, and at the first storm of winter. Sacrifices are made of seals and penguins. In times of great and dire danger, a man may offer himself as sacrifice, but this is a rare event, described in detail by Feodor Blithering of Stormwatch in his essay "Religious practices of the barbarian Qeorvik" (Journal of Primitive and Backward Denizens of Nibirum - JPBDN, Vol 34.7, p256-267). There are also interesting speculations about the mysterious Man-Super Isle in the same essay.

Settlements: The only regularly inhabited region is the southwest, the loose confederation of the Qeorvik peoples. The major settlement of about 5,000 is Atanarjuat on the Kaloq river. It is a rather chaotic, but tidy township, and here is the main whaling oil processing plant.

The other, mainly coastal towns all have less than 2000 population each, and some (Umiaktorvik, Kissarviarsuk and Sialuk) have whaling and seal processing staitons. All have fish factories.

The inland town of Kuk'uq on the Arjalinerk river is a major religious centre, and site of the annual Gather (see above).

The village of Tingiyok, situated near a famous 'healing' hot spring, is a growing centre for healing, following several 'miracle' cures over the years. Certainly, its hot mineral waters are very soothing to old, ailing, arthritis-ridden bodies. It is also the traditional home of the High Shaman, the present incumbent being the female Inguluk.

Natural Features: The main natural features are the ice-plains to the north; the scattered hot springs; and the huge Mt Ningakpok, an active volcano; and its moulding of the landscape.

The ice-plains also include the huge Assiminik ice shelf covering the whole of the northern region. Here roam polar bears, many so large that they earn the name of Dire Polar bears. Their furs are coveted both by the natives, and inhabitants of northern Alarius and Doriant. The meat of the bear seems favoured only by the Qeorvik, who have learned to waste nothing.

Colonies of seals, valued for their oilskin furs and meat; and penguins, also used to eat, are scattered throughout the icesheet. The sheet is also covered with dangerous crevices, and the breath-taking Nutarniq Glaciers.

Mt Ningakpok is an ever-smoking volcano, which erupts about every 10 years or so, at differing strengths. It powers all the hot springs in the land, and has given rise to the weird larval formations forming the Siarut Monuments 'downstream' from a river of lava – sometimes a solid track, sometimes a viscous river of molten rock. South of the monument is the bubbling Torngasak lake and river. The water of both is high in sulphur, and dangerous, even fatal, to man or beast.

Points of Interest: The eldritch ice-tower and palace of Keelut-Chulyin, nestled in the ice vale between Mt Ningakpok, Tlate Hiin Peak and the massive Uvluq peak is both a natural and 'man'-made wonder. Few approach it, and they tell of nourishing food and revivifying drink, served by coldly beautiful Ice Alvar women, while spellbound by the alvan male harpists and skalds. Some reappear after being counted for lost over 100 years ago; others never are seen again. These last are the reason visitors to Keelut-Chulyin are very rare in recent times. Only twice have the ice alvar visited the Lands of the Qeorvik – to make complaints and demand for respect if visiting their domain, both at Kuk'uq at the time of the Gather, following the actions of some outlaws (including Remmis the Strong who had fallen in love with one of the Elven maidens).

[Classified information - Not for players]:The legend and truth of Mas-Nuper Isle:

To the north of Pikalujak lies the mysterious Mas-Nuper Isle. Its approach is deadly, surrounded dreaded dire Polar bears, many huge icebergs and rocky outcrops, strong currents and perpetual storms and even blizzards.

Legend has it that the enemy of the Gods has been imprisoned there, the dreaded and evil Lerq'kantq, who transforms into a vampire known as Mas-Nuper, who claims the

souls of evil men.

In fact, the Isle is home to a supernatural being, called indeed Lerq'kantq (known as Lerk Cantik in arcane circles in Alarius, Doriant and beyond). This being was a force for good in the northern regions of Nibirum, appearing as a flying giant clad in blue, with a cloak emblazoned with a red M on it. 'He' saved many from death and brought down corporate criminals all over the northern hemisphere. Alas, one day a cabal of foul sorcerers, the Thexol-Url, (perhaps akin to the Sorcerer-Kings of ancient Helmonte in Artemisia), felled him with the aid of a noose of strange, otherworldly green crystals found in a unique shower of meteorites on what is now called Mas-Nuper isle, and imprisoned on this island in an ice palace/prison ringed by the huge meteoric rocks laced heavily with green crystals.

Only the shamans who make the third visit meet their God, and are told the truth about the comatose Lere'kanta, but are strictly forbidden to tell the truth to anyone. One shaman who told his assistant was fatally struck by lightning along with his unfortunate assistant.

A prophecy goes that he will be rescued by an intrepid beautiful maiden, titled the Isanelol, by a kiss on his frozen lips.

Author's note: Any resemblance to Superman, Clark Kent, Lex Luthor and Lois Lane is purely coincidental.