

Xenothon and Demydice

These two small islands are nominally independent entities, the small nation of the republic of Xenothon and Demydice; but for practical purposes, they are client states of Aladousis, the small fiercely independent island nation to their north, who has signed a defence pact with them.

The citizenry (both sexes) elects a Mayor every five years, coinciding with the quinquennial Proteus Festival, consisting of games and artistic contests. All persons born on the island are citizens, plus all those who have 15 years permanent residence. The elections are held in the open squares of each of the major towns (Xenothon and Demydice), by a show of hands.

The Proteus Festival is a very important event, and contestants from all around Artemisia attend to compete and watch the games. This of course provides much prized income to the small nation. Events include gymnastics, wrestling, boxing, running, sword duels, discus, various jumps, a sail race, and contests in poetry, drama and oratory, as well as sculpture and painting. There are nightly street parades, almost continual food and wine booths, and dancing and singing. The whole event is a 15 day duration. At the finale, five contestants are crowned Champions (Track and Field, Fighting, Sailing, Art and Drama) and presented with a silver fillet fashioned in the likeness of seaweed as a crown, a purse full of gold coins, and a large rock to lay on the Palomedes Cairn (see below).

After the festivities end, the Mayoral elections are held, and of course is influenced by the flamboyance and success of the Games, the degree of inebriation of the voters, and the expenditure on gifts to citizens.

Each year in addition to the Proteus Festival, the islands hold a sailing race in which contestant sail around both islands in a figure of eight course. Most of the City States, Aladousis and Helmonte all send contestants.

Finally, the Origin Series is held, where two teams of 10 men, one from each island, made up of those actually born on their respective island, face off on a large field to play the rather boisterous, sometimes violent, game of Kalathipodion (Foot basket). The aim is to put a round ball through hoops at the opposite end of the field, by kicking, throwing or any other means. Tackling, punching and kicking opponents are all allowed – a real free-for-all. The series of five games is passionately watched by the whole island and often the fighting on the field is mirrored by the spectators. Needless to say, betting on the outcome, both of Kalathipodion and the contests of the Proteus Festival, is rife, and in fact encouraged by the local government, who rakes in a percentage of the gambling stakes.

The religion is of the same Olympian tradition as the rest of south and west Artemisia, but with greater emphasis on the sea Gods – Poseidon and Amphitrite (known as Mother of the Sea), and Proteus and Thetis. Dolphins and whales are sacred, and inviolate. Those who harm such creatures are banished from the islands and their property forfeited. Foreigners are flogged, then imprisoned until they pay a very steep fine. The islands are not really interested in jailing people – too expensive, so fines and banishment are the usual punishments for any crime, with death by drowning reserved for rapists and murderers.

Settlements

- **Xenothon:** The large town on the northernmost island of the same name. It has a population of approximately 10,000, and the main industries are fishing, boat building and tourism. It also houses the Mayor's residence. There is a large forum where citizens can meet to discuss issues, vote on laws and even on banishment of wrongdoers.
- **Demydice:** The large town on the southernmost island of the same name. The population of approximately 8,500 is engaged in fishing, netmaking and herb cultivation, as well as tourism. The Council chambers are placed in this town, thus keeping the balance between the two islands of government business. It also has a forum for the same purpose as Xenothon.
- **Demelza:** A small village of about 500 Aeifa (elves) who engage in herb cultivation and preparation. These herbs are powerful medical agents which are sold for many times their worth to traders from around southern Artemisia. Unfortunately, the industry has been plagued recently by fake products of no medicinal properties being sold to unwary traders, and this is causing a headache to the authorities, who are seeing a rapid decline in revenue from tariffs on the herbs.

Sites of Interest

- ***Justina Keep:*** This is a ruined keep left over from when the islanders had to defend themselves against pirates – a menace eradicated by the navies of the City States, Aladousis and Helmonte in a most unusual show of united purpose. It is little visited due to its forbidding appearance and the swampy ground and malodourous vegetation surrounding it. In reality, it is the lair of an undead wraith (see below).
- ***Herakles Fingers:*** Five huge monoliths, carved to look like long thin fingers, are named thus after the hero Herakles who is reputed to have strangled the evil centaur, Khiron, who had made off with the hero's wife. (this is NOT the canon myth from Terra). Whenever a rainbow appears emanating from one of the pillars, a small goblinoid critter emerges and makes itself at home in a home. In return for food and clothing, the critter (called a lepirokoros) will keep the house tidy and the yard productive with fruit and vegetables.
- ***Khiron's Tomb:*** A central henge, surrounded by a circle of trees whose branches form a canopy over the site, and a fence between the trunks. The body of Khiron is supposed to lie here, under a heavy stones so he cannot rise again to trouble the islanders. But of course, this was in vain, and the centaur is now the wraith inhabiting the dungeons below Justina Keep. And nearly every year, on the eve of the Winter Solstice, a woman is abducted and sexually abused before her body is found dashed against the rocks of the island, or in a few cases, turned into lesser wraiths themselves, who list for the bodies of young men and boys. The mystery of these abductions has never been solved, though a few men have been falsely blamed and subsequently executed.
- ***Caves of Thetis:*** These are a marvel, and common tourist attraction. Each grotto is filled with sparkling limestone stalactites, stalagmites, columns and shawls, but the limestone is also impregnated with flecks of mica that shine

with different iridescent colours when light is cast upon them. Some of the caves also have glow worms which make a nocturnal visit to the caves a marvel that few ever forget. And occasionally, a sea nymph (naiad) will appear to delighted tourists. Again, this is another source of income to the island, as they can only be accessed from the sea, requiring hiring of a boat, and a tax payment to the government.

- ***Temple of Amphitrite:*** A beautiful Temple honouring the Mother of the Sea, Poseidon's wife, Amphitrite. At the beginning of each fishing season, in late winter, the fishing fleet is blessed by the priestesses. And every now and then, a group of naiads will appear as well – foretelling a most munificent bounty from the sea.
- ***Lost Sisyphos:*** This gigantic statue of a bearded giant holding aloft a sword is of unknown age, origin or even what it represents. It is called Lost Sisyphos because everyone who tries to climb it mysteriously falls back into the ocean below just before reaching the top. This is due to an undetectable force field placed there by the builders of an ancient civilization whose monuments are largely destroyed or sunken beneath the waves. Of course, present day inhabitants do not know about the force field of the origin of the Statue, but love getting tourists to climb it and watch them fall into the sea below. Sometimes, there is a tragic accident if the climb is performed at low tide and the climber lands on sharp rocks rather than the ocean. Ouch!!
- ***Palomedes Cairn:*** A large cairn, named after the legendary first Champion of the Proteus Festival, is fixed to these rocks. Each Festival, the five champions of the Festival row out to the cairn to place a rock each on the ever-growing monument.
- ***Hades Forecourt:*** A large cave, going deep into the depths of the island, the entrance of which is often obstructed by fiery red thorn bushes which regrow quickly, no matter how many times they are cleared – even salting the ground does not stop them. The caves are also a wonder of limestone formations, but they do dive deep into the earth, below the ocean bed, and reputed lead into the Dark Deeps Below the Earth, where evil denizens of great power hold sway, but where also great treasure is thought to lie. So of course, every year, foolhardy 'adventurers' venture into the cave. Some never return, others return shaken to their core, and a few others return laden with gold and gems – which of course keeps fools venturing into the depths. The locals steer well clear, but as always, there is a tax to enter, the caves, as well as documents to sign indemnifying the government for any unhappy outcomes.
- ***Helios Light:*** A tall lighthouse, with accommodation for a keeper and his family, lights the rocks below, and warns shipping of the danger of submerged reefs. However, in the past, an infamous lightkeeper, Jasonos, kept his light off when certain ships containing goods of much worth passed by, and the subsequent wreck made him rich until he was informed against by his estranged and better wife, Medea. His punishment, for the devastation he had caused, along with the murders of many seamen, was to be tied to a rock and drowned as the tide came in. Medea was so bitter that she also cast her own children to the rocks below, then fled. Where she resides now is not known, but the loss

of a child is often referred to as Medea's Curse. The ill-gotten gains of Jasonos have never been fully accounted for. In reality, there is much treasure hidden in caverns beneath the lighthouse, but the entry to these was inadvertently sealed by the next Keeper who was concerned by water leakage through the 'hole' in the floor.

- ***Wreck of the Kythera:*** This was the last ship wrecked by Jasonos, and it is now the watery home to exotic fish and sea life, and a few mermaids/sirens who like nothing better to sing to passing ships and laugh as sex-starved sailors dive into the waters. Very few of these come to harm, a few are drowned, and even fewer become the favoured consort to the sirens for a brief but ecstatic period of their short lives. Two have survived this experience, and forever pine for the unbelievable sensual feelings they experienced with the sirens. There is no treasure left here – divers, and the sirens removed it all a few generations ago.