

Episode 1: Unrest in the Glorious City

Your characters will begin the campaign on the crowded streets of Mazaki City, the center of the Nopo Continent and the oldest city known by the several tribes of Tomishi people who call the Nopo grasslands home. From a small skirmish in the market streets of Mazaki, players will trace a trail of international subterfuge and blackmail through powerful ranks of both Andhuran and Guanxi society. Flying ships and floating islands make way for dark Jade Mines and frontier cities. Players will encounter Moles, Kitsune, and Andhuran royalty on their voyage to uncover the roots of ethnic unrest in Mazaki.

If you are a player, stop reading here. Knowing the ins and outs of a campaign ahead of time will not result in any sexy advantage but instead simply ruin the fun.

The Glorious City (Can Be Read Aloud)

Mazaki, referred to most often on Nopo as the “City,” was once a floating island, miles wide and ornately carved. Before it crumbled apart and slowly settled onto the Great Northern Plain, the survivors atop the island took preparations to protect the most important buildings and structures, keeping the individual motes of rock level to maintain a livable space after the eventual landing. Two hundred years later, the city is a gorgeous collage of old and new designs, the original architecture fit not seamlessly but aesthetically into the contemporary additions.

The Lion Gate opens in the middle of the north-facing wall between two large pieces of cracked mountain that once made up the base of the floating city, each rock carved with the face of a roaring lion almost ten yards tall. The northwest quarter of the city sits atop one of these broken mountain fragments and contains the largest temples and government buildings. The smaller of the two northern rocks, on the eastern wall of the city, contains the baths and the observatory, and looms over the many smithies and engineers that work ceaselessly beneath it.

Two natural springs feed the city, one hot and one cold. Fen Spring forms the chilly Fen Lake, a partially artificial lake built along the inside of the western wall. The other spring, Elishu, fuels the smithies and the baths with its steaming supply. Together, the overflow of both springs form the placid Red River, which babbles southeasterly away from the City, growing into a mighty flood before reaching the Sea.

Background (Here Be The Truth, Sucker)

Ezla Aeran, the daughter of an Andhuran Duke on board a powerful floating fortress, The Great Tessa Rik, has been blackmailing Cardinals in Oerusak to fund widespread unrest and the formation of sleeper cells with Andhuran (particularly Aeran) loyalties in Mazaki City. She hopes to attack the city with her father's fortress and found a new Andhuran nation with her father as king. Simple.

The first Cardinal she targeted was beginning to suspect that her plans were part of a much larger scheme. Ezla had him killed.

She went about blackmailing another Cardinal, but this time she hid her identity by launching the blackmail as though it came from one of the Cardinal's business partners in a jade mining venture. She hoped he would never suspect such a lofty plan behind the actions of a simple Guanxi businessman, and she was right.

If you are Andhuran sympathizers, then this will be a little different. Each scene will have to be augmented, so it might not be easy for the newb GM. However, nothing is all that hard in ***Mazaki No Fantaji*** so fear not!

Rough Factions in the City

“Traditionalists” within Mazaki City wish the values and customs of the City more closely resembled those of the traditional Emishi villages and aim to connect the City more tightly to the cyclical rituals of the plains. These reasons could be religious (loss of spiritual potency and connection to nature), cultural (this is who we are and we cannot lose that identity), aesthetic (the City is messy and crowded), political (the City is corrupt and decentered, in need of direction), or personal (I am from the villages and this way of life is different, strange). Some of these camps would work together, others within even this group would be enemies. They do share an “end game,” though, where Mazaki City grows to follow the traditions of the villages (and, by extension, “the past”). And all share a dislike and distrust of the growing Andhuran influence in the City.

“Aesthetes” are the Mazaki City residents who emulate and admire Andhuran cultural fashions. They do not fear the growing connections between the City and the encroaching nation-states. This particular faction represents a rather naive view of the world, since cultural imperialism is just one step away from sharing economic and political interests, in practice if not in name. In general, Aesthetes are not too concerned with the Kerala (the Andhuran Church) at all.

“Sympathizers” are those residents of Mazaki City who want a true and political relationship established with the Andhuran people, finally breaking the backwards-minded ties between the City and the Emishi villages that surround and sustain it. This could take many forms, and the several forms of Sympathizers are not necessarily friendly to each other. Some Sympathizers side with one particular nation-state of Anhdurans, becoming fiercely loyal to that government. Others want Mazaki City to become its own nation-state accepted within the confederacy of Anhduran Court and by the Kerala.

“Conservatives” want Mazaki City to be independent of Anhduran influence but not necessarily obliged to protect Emishi, or more broadly Tomishi, villages in any way. The villages are necessary for the survival of the City, obviously, but they should be considered economic allies more than a shared people. Let the villages do what they will, have what customs they want, so long as the economic machine moves. Conservatives tend to work together and accept the label “Conservative” even among themselves.

“Centralists” want Mazaki City to remain independent of Andhuran and Tomishi “superstitious” influence but still maintain a largely Tomishi identity. Those following this view would like to take just those practices from village life that seem pleasant and quaint, nominally respecting the Tomishi holidays and rituals, without all of the obligations that seem to come with them now. In fact, they hold, the City should become a greater influence on the villages, and the values of the City should spread throughout the plains, “for the edification” of Tomishi people across the continent.

Major Players

Ezla Aeran: Appears first as the moody, waif-like daughter of Duke Aeran. She has paler skin than most Andhurans, lighter even than her brother. Ezla wears white gowns with black and gray speckled feathers at the shoulder, denoting her national pride (The crest of Oerusak is an Osprey holding a Fish). She is emotional and prone to outbursts, usually over Oerusaki politics: She considers her family slighted by the current King due to her father's placement on active military duty instead of within Oerusak where he can lobby for his position among the Court. Ezla considers her Blood Magic powers to be hereditary and proof of her family's lineage as the true royal blood.

Ezla is planning to attack Mazaki City and awaken a sleeper army of Andhuran-Oerusak supporters from within it. The number of supporters is already nearing a thousand, which is the main reason for the increased violence and tensions within the city; the supporters are becoming impatient. The lady is also funding a large project in a remote Emishi village, researching how to lift Mazaki off the ground once more. The project is huge and mostly underground, with several engineers and hundreds of laborers.

When encountered in battle, especially after the death of her father, Ezla is nearly insane with rage. She wears jaded artifacts and a much more sinister, adult outfit: In preparation for when she is Princess of a new Aeran nation seated in Mazaki.

Duke Dezeran Aeran: The charismatic and powerful Duke who now controls the most awesome floating fortress of the Oerusak Andhurans. He is upright and loyal to his country despite his less-than-glamorous position. Although ruling Tessa Rik is a great honor, the post has removed the Duke from within a very successful political contest for dominance on Oerusak. The move was ostensibly a reward for his rising favor, but the Court knows it

was really to keep Dezeran from further influence against the King. He will only fight the party personally if they attack Ezla within the fortress.

Cardinal Talum: A noble figure to some extent, truly pious and committed to his position and the Kerala. He will give the characters whatever information he can and even fund their investigations should they push. Though afraid his dealings with Anáku will become public, his actions are not entirely illegal and more a Church impropriety than a political felony.

Anáku the Mole: A harsh and shrewd businessman living among the Guanxi. Once a powerful warrior against the Guanxi, the Mole now follows the tradition of his people by dealing economically with the Charter Cities and Guanxi privateers. He is a massive creature and still carries his swords regularly. Anáku adorns himself in jewelry and metals of all kinds.

Commissioner Lady Wunehai: Cold as steel and business-minded. She fought for a decade as a feared general during the Guanxi revolution to earn her Charter, and holds onto the position with tenacity. She wears a sword as a man and dresses in men's clothing, taking up the role of a Xenshen Geiji. Lady Wunehai retains the feminine pronoun and title only because of her nobility, straddling the line to hold a unique and liminal position in society. She is vocally critical of the Guanxi bureaucracy, blaming it for corrupting the noble intentions of her former comrade-in-arms--who now sits in the Imperial Throne--. She is also openly at odds with the Eunuch hierarchy, which she believes to be absolutely redundant. Eunuchs hold no political power in Iron Hill and suffer a great amount of discrimination among even the common and poor.

Miju the Kitsune: Quiet and attentive to the Lady Wunehai, Miju has her own motives but discloses precious few of them. It may be surmised that the Kitsune supports the mining of iron over Jade and so aids the Lady in her attempts to maintain a strong iron market in the Empire and discourage the move to Jade technology. This of course is speculation, but players can expect the Kitsune to behave in line with this theory throughout the current campaign.

Scene 1 - Anhduran Upstarts

The Story

There is rising conflict within the city stemming from growing contact with the Anhduran peoples. This rising tension is felt in Mazaki no more so than in the streets of everyday life. Youths who more phenotypically resemble Anhdurans have taken to violence as well against some of the more traditional elements of town. Prodded perhaps by Anhduran backers from afar, these youths can be found in gangs harassing locals. It is during the Spring Day festival that a local scuffle breaks out. A gang of Anhduran hooligans are

walking a violent boar through town when it bites an elderly man selling yams. A scuffle breaks out as traditionalists begin yelling and shoving the animal. It turns into a full brawl, and the party forms around stopping the violence.

Background (Read Not This Text To Your Players)

Though the Andhurans are destructive to the villages they encounter (and often enslave), the majority of the City's population are now confronted with a shared ethnic past that is troubling older notions of identity among the Tomishi people. It cannot be denied that Mazaki City must have at one time been part of a culture that also spawned the Andhurans. For 20 years now, residents of the City have been conflicted over who they are and where they come from.

Racial thinking is beginning to emerge, a new concept to the Emishi, who until this point recognized only cultural differences between themselves and the Guanxi. What does it mean to start thinking of these vastly different cultures as three "races" now caught in conflict? It is as though a cold war exists between the Emishi and the Andhuran (and the Guanxi to the East).

This is probably not the place for your party to role-play Andhuran "Sympathizers" themselves. Your Andhuran players can be all for a peaceful relationship between the Tomishi and Andhuran cultures. If your player wants to be more controversial, maybe they have interests in establishing an embassy in Mazaki to slowly afford the Andhurans access to the caverns and crypts of the city, around which great curiosity exists within the Church.

Campaign Obstacles:

Rising Tensions (Passive): This Tile represents the growing animosity between Andhuran sympathizers in Mazaki City and more traditional political opinions. It begins at 3DT. Keep track of the Drama this Tile accrues throughout the campaign. Various triggers will take effect as the Drama increases.

They're Watching You (Passive, Facedown): This Tile represents Ezla Aeran's knowledge of the party and what they are doing. Any time the players are overt with their mission and start blurting out in the streets about their investigation, let them know they are attracting unwanted attention. This will also make them reluctant to approach the Duke or Cardinal so obviously. Let this be a free-form Tile. The Drama accrued will trigger various effects as the campaign continues.

Setting the Scene:

Themes:

Old Animosities
Disturbing the Peace
A Day in the Life

Conditions:

High Noon Sun
Bustling Market

Obstacles:

Street Gang: *Armed & Angry*. 6[1]. Begins with 3DT.

Aggressive Boar: *Hoof & Haunches, Tusky (X2)*. 1[3], 1[2]. Begins with 2DT.

Protect the People (Passive): *Crowded Streets*. Begins at 3DT.

Street Bruiser (Facedown): *Head & Shoulders, Carry That Weight, Street Fighter Turbo*. 1[3], 4[1]. Begins with 1DT.

Playing the Scene:

Street Gang: This is a rather straightforward Tile. The gang members fight until all the damage is taken, but this does not have to represent killing them. If an Attack deals [2] at once, ask the attacker if he or she wishes to kill one of the members or just maim two of them. If they do kill, add 1DT to the **Rising Tensions** Obstacle for each time they do so after the fight is over.

- If the party kills any of the members or the **Boar**, flip the **Street Bruiser** Tile.

Aggressive Boar: If the Boar suffers its [3] without dying, it will surrender.

Protect the People (Passive): This Tile is technically optional. But the rewards for completing it are great. Several citizens are caught up in the middle of the skirmish, as no room really clears for the fighters. The Tile will roll Moves against a Difficulty of 5.

- If the Tile reaches 5DT: Room clears for the fighters after several bodies are slain. Let the players know that there was a massacre in the streets that they are somewhat complicit in. Add 2DT to **Rising Tensions**.
- If the Tile reaches 0DT: Let the players know they have saved anyone from dying in the midst of the skirmish. Immediately create the “People’s Choice” and “Golden Rule” Themes and remove 1DT from **Rising Tensions**.

Street Bruiser (Facedown): A large fighter, old and burly, steps up to the scuffle and

cracks his knuckles. He looks at the smaller people with the love of violence in his eye and jumps in.

- This Tile comes into play only if the **Boar** or any member of the **Gang** is killed.
- He will fight until dead. Because he was a bit of a known rogue, his death will not affect the **Rising Tensions** tally.

Conclusions & Consequences:

Somehow, each member of the party feels invested enough for the group to stick together to find out what happened. If you need to, you can make each character lose something important during the skirmish: Maybe a loved one went missing when a few of the gang took off as the fight started, maybe other members of the gang stole an object, maybe the player broke an oath in the fight and needs to do some follow-up to save their honor, etc.

Scene 2: Among the Elders

Story

After the skirmish, the party is brought to court along with any surviving opponents for a trial. The court is not in the major justice building but a side court used for lesser incidents. Though things seem rather informal and insignificant, a large crowd representing various important factions in town has gathered. While the small trial exists ostensibly to ascertain who the aggressors were in the fight earlier in the day, it seems the larger issue at stake is why this kind of violence is escalating in frequency and degree.

Is it aberrant behavior, or organized terrorism by an Andhuran backer? Is the problem predominantly affecting youth of a particular district, or are they just the ones most likely to be noticed acting this way? Does this foreshadow open war, something Mazaki City has never seen in two hundred years of settlement in the Nopo Plains?

Background

After the trial, a small group of Tomishi traditionalists asks the group to investigate the floating city-state of Oerusak. These Elders represent old residents of the City who still maintain the ways of the villages as best they can within the shimmering walls of Mazaki. These traditionalists can offer vast resources from within the City and are not concerned with the precise political persuasions of the party (though, they would be loathe to hire true Sympathizers).

- Emishi are likely to accept such a quest to protect Mazaki.
- Andhurans are likely to accept such a quest to defend Andhuran dignity and put an end to false accusations against the city-states themselves.
- Guanxi are likely to accept such a quest to weaken Andhuran-Mazaki relations or just to dig up dirt or tactical information on either side that can be helpful to whatever agenda the player has within the Guanxi machine-state.

Players are given two pieces of evidence by the Traditionalists: A receipt for weapons signed by a Cardinal of Oerusak, and a Guanxi signet ring of unknown ownership. These were not found on the hooligans from the market but have been in the possession of the Traditionalists for a while. They are adamant that the party is the best shot they have of finding out the truth.

Setting the Scene:

Themes:

Uneasy Days Ahead
Behind Every Door...

Conditions:

The Walls Have Ears

Obstacles:

Trial (Passive): *Another Day in Paradise*. Begins at 3DT.

Contract (Passive): *Keeping the Customer Satisfied*. Begins at 0DT.

Various Objectives: (see below)

Playing the Scene:

This can be a distended and ambient Scene, just a few Tiles on the table that direct role-playing and investigating on the part of the party. You do not need to take official turns or be as intense as you would during combat. Let the Tiles coach and coax the players along, but keep their ideas the driving force of the game. Give the players opportunities to escalate the **Rising Tensions** and **They're Watching You** Obstacles... just enough rope to hang themselves with, as it were.

Trial: This is a small court held before a Market District judge. The room is boisterous, and plenty of old rivalries are being played out amidst the discussion of the events from earlier in the day.

- If the **Trial** reaches 5DT, the players are found guilty of public endangerment. Their acts of heroism are mentioned by those in attendance, and they are sentenced to private labor. A wealthy citizen, the owner of the largest Mazaki stables, asks to take the penalty of labor for the City's interest. You are released

under his care, whereupon he takes you to the stables for three days' labor (see Goat Herding Encounter below).

- If the **Trail** reaches 0, the players have argued their case and are let go.

Contract: This Obstacle will tie the party to a rather tidy, easily comprehended mission: Get to the bottom of the violence in Mazaki City. Whenever the players learn "significant" nuggets of news AND get word back to the Traditionalists, add DT to this Tile. What counts as "significant," you ask? Well, for now that is up to you. You've read the background information. In each upcoming Episode, we will offer you bullet points of facts that will help heroes piece things together. Of course, sometimes players will have information they do not want to give the Traditionalist elders. That is up to them. But, the Drama amassed on this Tile can be used to access the Traditionalists' resources. Need an airship? Need supplies? Need authority as emissaries from Mazaki City? It only comes with pleasing the bosses and gaining Drama. Upcoming Episodes will also give you hints to what this Tile can open up to the characters. Extra Encounters are key places to gain bonuses in this regard as well.

- Any time the players speak too openly about the Traditionalists who hired them or any formal attempts to investigate Oerusak, add 1DT to the **They're Watching You** Obstacle.

Various Objectives: Maybe the party members have other objectives in town as well: Find artifacts? Hide intentions? Get hired? Impress Council? Investigate violence on their own? Etc. Find a way to please them all and keep them connected as a party. They will need travel equipment. If money is not an option, a low profile and speediness still are.

(!) REMEMBER: Put the role-playing where you want it! You don't HAVE to roll anything ever. These Obstacles are just gamist puzzles that can be used to thwart simple ideas and add levels of chance. You can push and pull, stack or sap, Drama wherever you want. Forgo a roll, add or remove a Tile at will. It's your game, and the mechanics are there to *aid* storytelling, not dictate it.

Potential Objectives:

Say the players come up with the idea to pose as Emishi shaman who want to learn about Andhuran religion from members of the Kerala. This will be their entrance to Oerusak. That would be fun to role-play... But it was their *first* idea. Isn't it fun to have a little failure? Force them into their second or third plan? Won't the plans just get *more* interesting as players are called upon to be more creative?

- We turn these little plans into challenges or “saves” of a kind. If the player rolling against the Obstacle ever loses an Attack roll, the entire plan fails. Only clashing or winning can keep the plan or scam alive. This mechanic is VERY useful for keeping role-playing lively and meaningful: It isn’t just up to the whim of the storyteller whether or not your retort is smooth enough.

Posing as Emishi Holymen: *Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing*. [2], 4[1]. The [2] represents collecting the gear needed to pull-off the look. Each [1] represents learning a trick or quote that will make the facade convincing. This is a smart disguise that can be dropped at will.

Getting Hired as Merchants Guards/Laborers: *Muscle for Hire*. 2[1] per player to pass the quick interview and appear trustworthy. Not a difficult plan to start, but traveling as laborers requires... doing labor. Characters will have less freedom and may have to be useful in the merchant’s caravan.

Tame the Boar From the Street Fight: *Pearls Before Swine, Hogwash*. 2[2]. Anyone feel up to gaining a familiar? If you spared the life of the boar, it will be sentenced to death in the butcher’s shop near the market. Your players could take some time as the “victims” of the fight to gain ownership of the offending animal.

These are just suggestions. Your players can explore Mazaki City as much or as little as they want. Keep in mind, the longer they linger in town, the more they will be triggering the **Rising Tensions** and **They’re Watching You** Obstacles.

Consequences & Conclusions:

The Scene officially (whatever that means) ends when the party sets off for Oerusak. They will have the weapons receipt and the signet ring in hand and maybe a small group of minions as well. They can form their own travel party or go undercover within a pre-existing group of travelers (merchants, Church acolytes, ambassadors, entertainers, etc.).

EXTRA ENCOUNTERS

Sleeper Cells in Mazaki

There would be various other groups of hooligans mucking about Mazaki City as well. A strong number of these would be part of Ezla’s plan and beginning to get restless waiting for the promised revolution. A hefty band of brawlers may look like the following:

Obstacles:

Political Rogues (X2 Tiles): *Young Dudes, Carry the News*. 1[2], 2[1].

Jaded Zealot: *Inglorious Bastard, Green with Envy*. Powers: Jaded (Deals [1] to Attacker whenever he suffers [2] or more). 1[2], 2[1].

Dog-Master: *Gets a Little Hairy, Keeps Dirt Under His Nails*. Powers: Canine Tactics (can roll a Move to swap 1DT from *both* **Canine** Tiles to any ally).

Cantankerous Canine (X2 Tiles): *Dog Bites Man, Toothy*. Powers: Instinct (Can generate 2DT+ on Clash). 3[1].

- From such an encounter, the party may learn that a good number of the upstarts tend to support Oerusak more so than the other two Andhuran nation-states, and a few members may even reference “the Duke.” Add a DT to the **Contract** Obstacle.
- Players can gain Themes such as “Cleaning up the Streets” and “Flushing Out the Rats.”

On the Road to Oerusak

Traveling to Oerusak could be quite dangerous for a small party of wayfarers. Larger parties would require larger predators to make the encounter dramatic. Well, why not just plan a large encounter and let players flee if things get too hot?

Obstacles:

Grassland Terrasaur: *Apexing Predator, Knife-Jaw, Titan of the Plains*. Powers: Roar (can roll a Move against a Difficulty of 5 to DT- all mammal hearers), Bite-n-Toss (any [2] or [3] the Terrasaur deals also causes DT- with an ensuing fling). [3], [2], 5[1]. Begins at 3DT.

Spined Reptiles (2-3X Tiles): A group of two or three speedy, bipedal carnivores

approximately 4' tall at the shoulder. *Ravenous Runners*. Powers: Flying Spines (can expend 2DT to fire spines from body that deal [1] to nearby targets). 1[2], 2[1]. Each Begins at 2DT.

Goat Herding

Ipona, the horse-master of Mazaki City, is generally unimpressed with the “volunteers” who show up at the stables near Fox-Hawk Gate. She is a gruff but affectionate tender of

horses, who manages the stables fairly and expertly. If the players lose the trial, they will be cast into Ipona's care for three full days of labor: Goats have escaped from nearby pens and are running amok in the horse pasture! If players decide to work at goat herding willingly, they may be able to "rent" some horses and supplies from Ipona to aid in their journey.

- After the encounter, why not give a **Goat Familiar** to each character? Goat: *Manners of a Goat*. 2[1]. This goat will take separate turns in combat. While attacking might land the poor animal in hot water, the goats would be experts at causing commotion, setting up Conditions and making Moves to help the party.

Themes:

Stubborn as a Mule
Pride Cometh Before the Fall

Obstacles:

Wrangling Goats: *Manners of a Goat*. Powers: Slippery Buggers (The Obstacle replenishes a [1] each round). 6[1].