

SKYREALMS of Jorune

Acubon Secrets

By sholari James

The silent and unsettling acubon of Lake Dau-uh-dey are known for their fierceness when defending their territories and their beautiful gems known as coleels. Few regard them as more than eccentric savages but little is actually known about their society and their secrets of the deep.

History

Mystery and the mists of time shroud the origin of the secluded acubon. Acubon are actually descendants of the bio-engineered humans that were brought to Jorune as researchers and their assisting personnel. They were supposed to investigate the sea bed of Jorune. Just like Earth, the crust of Jorune's surface was composed of a thinner layer under the continents. This layer was more easily explored where it was part of the deep-sea bed. Here the strange energy crystals were even more compact and contained more of the strange energy (Isho was at the founding of the Jorune colony unknown to the scientist). The seas of Jorune were also filled with life forms that were even stranger than those wandering the continents.



Originally, the bio-engineered humans were the result of illegal tampering with human genes by unscrupulous nations who in secrecy created highly efficient mining and farming stations in Earth's oceans. By operating fluid filled vessels, these bio-engineered humans could survive and operate under greater water pressures. They could explore and mine the last unknown regions of Earth. When discovered by Terran authorities, the altered humans were granted refugee status and in some instances, were allowed to create their own cities out of the bases that once had been their work facilities.

They were officially referred to as Homo Aquatus and soon proved their worth to the Terran Colony Council. It was natural to include a contingent of Homo Aquatus to explore the seas of Jorune.

Three main research stations were created for the Homo Aquatus on Jorune. NorthSea Station outside the coast of Burdoth (now known as the mysterious Salu city of

Petubah), SouthSea Station in the Kitcharka Sea in south-eastern Drail and Knossos Station in the great inland sea called Lake Dau-Uh-Dey. SouthSea Station was a combined surface station and was destroyed by the shantas in the initial attacks upon the human colonists. The NorthSea Station struggled to stay operational during the first years of the human-shantic war. However, the lack of resources and the small number of inhabitants could not keep it operational and soon the station became a silent, dead town. The Homo Aquatus of the salt-water seas slowly changed and became the salu. Physically and psychologically they stayed the same as their masters had once created them. Just like their normal human cousins they slowly forgot their origins and made a place for themselves on Jorune.

[See *Salu Sailors* essay for more details.]

The Knossos Station was created to explore the great lake, or Inland Sea, called Dau-Uh-Dey by the shantas. The lake had strange mineral deposits and a unique fauna. The station itself was built on and around Clifton Island (Now known as Toktleiti Island). When the shantas attacked the human colony sites around the great lake Knossos was also attacked. The upper parts of the station that were situated on the island were destroyed and large parts of the underwater station were badly damaged. However, most of the Homo Aquatus managed to flee the destruction and into the lake. They returned after the shantas had left the island and tried to salvage what they could in order to survive. Clifton Island was the home of the Homo Aquatus for nearly two centuries. At some stages the survivors tried to locate other humans, but could not travel far over land. They were isolated and soon believed that they were alone. The experimental language of Tikoq took form during these days. It was a language that used words and sounds that could be more easily conveyed in liquid, due to its hard clicking noises. The Homo Aquatus started referring to themselves as the Last Humans or humans of the Aquamon line. This word would over the centuries eventually become: Acubon.

In the second century after the war had started, the shantas found the Acubon survivors and attacked them again. The acubon were once again driven out into Lake Dau-Uh-Dey and settled along its shores and islands. Clifton Island became known as Tekei Island (“Death Island”) and was avoided, as shantas frequently patrolled it.

In 350 PC the Korrin survivors came down from the Dowtrough Mountains and started to settle along Lake Dau-Uh-Dey’s southern shore. Peaceful trade commenced between the two people and the acubon were glad to find that their long lost Hokik (“DryLand cousins”) still existed.

The acubon that had settled in the eastern parts of the lake after having fled Tekei Island found a vast underwater cave complex that connected the Lake Dau-Uh-Dey to the surrounding hundreds of smaller lakes and waterways in the east. The caves were named Hakatik (“Refuge”) and many of these caves were found to have air filled chambers that could only be reached from the water. The acubon soon realised the value of these natural forts and the protection they provided against the terrible shantic warriors. While the acubon of the western parts of the lake mingled openly with the DryLand humans, the acubon of the eastern regions warned them about the dangers of fraternising with strangers.

In 800 PC, a terrible plague swept through the Korrin settlements. Many of the Korrin perished during these terrible years but it was nothing compared to the plagues that would come in 1200-1700 PC. The terrible disease spread to the acubon as well and affected them terribly. In the initial two years, all acubon west of the Kral Sea died. The survivors fled further into Hakatik and the lake district east of the Kral Sea. It was in these caves that the Manon was found. An entity that would change the acubon forever.

The Manon was an ancient isho creature that had spread through large areas of the cave network. It attracted vast quantities of isho and spawned thousand of worker drones once every century to repair and expand its kilometre long body. Related to the strange Koric Haijica creature of the Glounda Forest, it was a powerful enervor that influenced the entire sho-sen of the area, as well as the flora and fauna of the caves and lakes. Although not intelligent, manipulated its surroundings with its isho, drones and body to ensure its survival. Isho behaves differently in water and travels more easily, enabling the Manon to weave the isho of its watery world in many strange ways. Parts of its body could defend itself independantly by giving of dyssha bolts or even weaving shields. Other stranger phenomena, such as “sleep waters” or confusing signatures, are created by the Manon. The acubon made their homes in or close to its body that filled the many caves and bottoms of lakes. Certain elements of the varying organic mass could be used to create organic bubble domes, chemical light and bone weapons. The larger predatory parasites that lived off the Manon were destroyed by the acubon in order to protect their homes. For some reason the Manon accepted the acubon and a symbiotic relationship started that would last for two millennia. The acubon kept the Manon free from its parasites and the Manon protected them from the larger predators of the lakes.

But the Manon also changed its charge. During the time the acubon settled the lake lands, the moons aligned and the sho-sen brimmed with energy. It was remembered as the Age of Monsters to the rest of humanity. The Manon was extremely active during this period and the newborn children of the acubon became attuned to the sho-sen of their watery world and the Will of the Manon. The ability to interfere with isho discharges from other water creatures and a limited form of signature recognition was evolved by the acubon. The interference ability and the signature recognition abilities only work under water, where the isho is more easily conducted. Acubon cannot mask their signatures or make false signatures. Over the centuries the acubon became more and more removed psychologically from humans due to their contact with the Manon and their new environment. A darker and more sinister religion, revering the natural cycles of Life and Death evolved. It followed the often harsh natural rule of ‘Survival of the Fittest’, but incorporated a number of deities that the acubon worshipped through their shrines and their priests

The changed acubon emerged from their seclusion in 1100 PC to once again trade with the Korrin. The Korrin soon found that their old allies of the lake had changed. They were more quiet and harder to understand. The acubon were easily offended by lack of eye contact and could not understand many of the Korrin ethical laws. The territoriality of the acubon was extreme and often resulted in violence if humans entered their territories. They were no longer human in the mind and some Korrin said that the race known in their legends had been possessed and changed. However, after

a while some trade took place and the acubon and Korrin came to respect each other's territories.

The acubon also cautiously returned to Tekei Island, where they found evidence of their ancestors. The island was free of the eyeless enemies that had pursued the acubon in their legends and now became known as Toktleiti ("Ancestor's Island"). Many towns and sacred temples were erected on the island and in its surrounding waters. The ruins of the original underwater station is still today a holy place for all acubon and the island is off limits to all humans.

When the Thanterian conquerors arrived in 2200 PC, the acubon soon found themselves under attack. The Thantierians had no respect for the acubon and settled forcefully in their territories along the shores of the Kral peninsula and on smaller islands belonging to acubon families. The acubon struck back as hard as they could and for more than five centuries human ships would be molested or destroyed by acubon. Travelling Lake Dau-Uh-Dey became hazardous. The skirmishes eventually forced the acubon to retreat to the eastern parts of the lake and to the islands around Kask. Toktleiti Island was fiercely defended and never conquered by Hokik. Neither was the Hakatik network ever discovered. Although rapidly losing ground in the conflict, the acubon came out fiercer and more distrusting of its human cousins. They earned a reputation for themselves as fierce and strong fighters that were virtually impossible to follow into the lake.

In 2220 PC a treaty was signed between Carissey and the acubon tribes. The acubon were promised that no humans would enter or lay claim to their eastern territories (which became known as the Lands of the Acubon) or set foot upon the islands in lake Dau-Uh-Dey that the acubon had laid claim to (Toktleiti Island among them). Carissey also promised to aid the acubon if they were ever attacked by Ros Crendorians, Fransei tribes or crugar in the future. This treaty was never truly adhered to by the Khodrens and the acubon have never received any help defending their territories to the east. A truce was established though, and ships could once again sail safely across Lake Dau-Uh-Dey. Acubon slowly started trading with humans again and coleels entered the world trade.

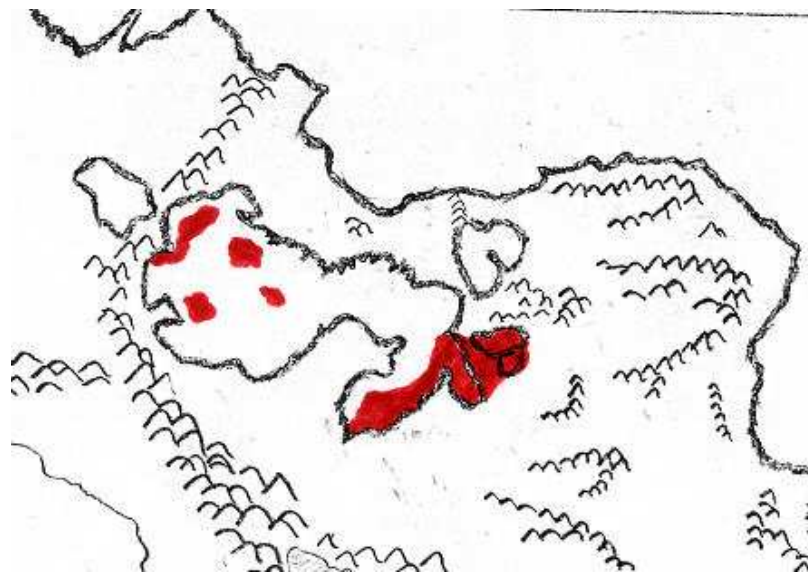
In 2942 PC, an acubon named Tikalit, discovered strange ruins at the bottom of one of the smaller lakes in the eastern parts of the Lands of the Acubon. The ruins served as a tomb for the mighty spirit known as Hi'rrgaur who took Tikalit to be his servant, disciple and senses to the outside world. Tikalit claimed that this god, Hikau as he was named in Tikoq, had arisen and declared himself to be the first priest serving him. Contrary to other priest, Tikalit did not choose silence, but instead travelled among the acubon to spread Hikau's words and his promises of power. Strange artefacts began surfacing and the other acubon saw the evil of Hikau's ways. Some priests were clearly possessed, while others conducted strange experiments upon animals and acubon. As the evil spread, the acubon priests heard the words of their god Tisklir and sent a lone hero into Ros Crendor to seek the Wise Mothers who knew about these things. It was a great sacrifice. Such a long journey meant that the acubon hero would never be able to fully return to the lakes again as his gill glands would be destroyed. The quest was successful and the High Priestess of Ro-Obiss finally heard about the evil of the lakes that arisen in the south and sent a cadre of priestesses to help the acubon. Hikau's power was broken and many of his artefacts stolen or taken by the priestesses when his ruins were attacked. In return for the salvation of the priestesses,

the acubon swore to guard Ros Crendor's south-western border forever against humans. Hikau's main power was taken from him, but his spirit remained. So did his priests and his lies promising power and wealth. Still today his priests worship him and help spread the greed, hatred and malice of Hikau among the acubon. Even if the acubon today shun the dread god Hikau and his priests, they believe that he fills an important role in the cycle of Life and Death and it is not their task to try to destroy him. No acubon will venture to Hikau's Lake and they hope that one day their other gods will fight Hikau or order the acubon to destroy the evil priests.

[Hikau is a lamorri "artificial spirit". See *Lamorri* essay for more details.]

Acubon have always held a low profile during human affairs. Their lives continued as normal through countless conflicts. Their ways and beliefs unchanged. However, during the Civil War of Khodre, the rebels of Northern Khodre negotiated with the acubon and tricked them into siding against Saress Khodre. The rebels made the acubon believe that Saress Khodre's troop movements along the acubon's shores were aimed at taking over the Lands of the Acubon rather than moving against the rebels. The acubon attacked Saress Khodre's troops in their lands and her ships in the Kral Sea. In return Saress Khodre destroyed most of the submerged acubon city of Kralsklorro with an Earth-Tec bomb. The acubon soon understood that they had been tricked and attacked two rebel harbours of northern Khodre, sinking most of the ships of the rebel fleet. This allowed Saress Khodre to move around freely on Lake Dau-Uh-Dey and transport the bulk of her troops unmolested into northern Khodre. Some acubon are still angered by the attack upon Kralsklorro, but most of them have accepted it as Death that was necessary, foretold and part of the great cycle. The Khodrens lost many soldiers while trying to cross the Lands of the Acubon and will not attempt to do this again.

Recently, rumours have reached some of the acubon trading with humans, that a Hikau cult has been set up in Kirlan. Most probably led by acubon Hikau priests it is said to bring great rewards to its followers, but also requires human sacrifices to be sent away to Lake Hikau.



Acubon territories in 3501 PC

Physiology

Acubon have greyish, tough skin and bodies that comfortably can withstand pressures of up to 20 atmospheres (This is roughly equivalent of 200 metres under water). Higher pressures than this prevents the blood from circulating normally and blocks oxygen entering the brain and other vital organs of the acubon. The main protection from the pressure of the deep is the acubon's mass, which is denser with stronger bones, especially the rib cage, than a normal human, its circulatory system and its ability to fill the body cavities while under water (sinuses, ears and lungs mainly). This makes the acubon much heavier on land than in the water but enables it to pump blood only to vital organs while subjected to higher pressures. Certain acubon can handle pressures better than others, depending on size, sex, age and training. Some acubon have supposedly managed to dive as far down as 350 metres.

Acubon skin is also composed in such a way that it minimises heat loss through contact with water, enabling the acubon to live comfortably in temperate to tropical waters.

Acubon eyes have a pocket of air over their irises, enabling them to see under water without refractive distortions. The eyes are large, with big, light sensitive pupils and a coarser surface that protects the eye as well as enables it to receive a maximum amount of light. This trait, along with the ability to better register blue wavelengths of light, enable the acubon to see better under water (where light diminishes fast and blue wavelengths penetrate deepest).

The arms of the acubon are slightly longer and very muscular to improve their propulsion. Their hands and feet are slightly webbed and enlarged. The strong arms make melee weapons as deadly in an acubon's arms as in a boccord's.

Acubon have no nose and only small slits revealing the entrance to their olfactory organ. If this is the result of the changes Jorune has imposed on them is unknown. The acubon sense of smell is weak and actually works best above water.

The most unique of the acubon's organs, are the gill glands on either side of the neck. These process water flowing through them 20 times more efficiently than a normal terran fish. It is this organ that allows acubon to stay under water indefinitely. Acubon can however also use their lungs and normally spend 30% of their lives above water. It is the lungs that allow them to use their vocal cords and communicate properly with each other. If the lungs are not used in a week's time they will be weak when breathing again. Lungs and vocal cords can degenerate if not used regularly. The unnatural acubon gills are even more susceptible to damage. After more than 10 hours without fresh water submersion, the gills start deteriorating. It is the fine blood vessels that extract oxygen from the water that dies, making the gills less effective or useless. More than 5 days without submersion will destroy the gill glands totally. These organs do not regenerate. The worst punishment an acubon can suffer is to have his gill glands destroyed. It is an irreversible and extreme form of banishment from their world.

Language

Acubon have developed a language called Tikoq. This uses the harder sounds such as clicks, gulps, moans and phonemes such as K, T, I, P etc, that travel easier in water. Very few people know or bother to learn Tikoq. Tikoq still requires air to be spoken,

which must be brought down under water in the acubon's lungs. Conversations are therefore hard under water and in high pressures virtually impossible, as the acubon must empty its lungs in order not to have its rib cage crushed. Simple sounds for warnings and attention are therefore used. Most acubon wear a necklace of bone or metal around their necks or on their spears, with which they can create complex knocking messages that travel far underwater.

Tikoq can be expressed in writing and then with the Tikoq hole system than enables them to read with their fingers even in total darkness. The silent priests of the acubon are the most frequent users of this script, which the acubon guard jealously.

Society

Acubon society is primitive and on a Stone Age level compared to humans. The only acubon that are normally encountered by khodrens are equipped with various simple weapons grafted out of stone or bone. The acubon sometimes trade with humans for metal weapons, but these do not last long in the water. Their ships are fast but simple and their coastal communities always small. Important communities are hidden in caves accessible only from the lake or totally under water in great spheres containing air (see Tekeels). Swimming down to a hidden acubon dwelling of this kind is remarkable experience, as the tekeels are lighted with neekitl (see below) and attract all kinds of fish from the lake.

Most acubon communities contain five to ten acubon families, sometimes referred to as tribes by hokik. These families consist of 10 to 40 individuals. All families must have at least one present marital tie to the currently twenty families residing in Hakatik. In this way the acubon remain as one great family, whose territories will forever be maintained and overseen by those closest to the Manon life force.

Every family is ruled by their Elders who obtain this status through age and maturity. They undergo a special ceremony to show the family that they have transcended to this status and tattoo their bodies with the ink from the Firmene jelly fish.

The village hunters (most of the men) are led by a Chief. The chief is in charge of the dividing of meat, co-ordinated hunts and any war-efforts that might be necessary. He still answers to the Elders when it comes to making decisions about the families future, disputes or trade with other families or races.

The priests serve the shrines and listen carefully to the bidding of the gods, helping the acubon interpret the changes around them, forwarding their prayers and performing the tasks sometimes given to them by their gods. Hidden under the surface of every land community lies five shrines devoted to the acubon gods (Hikau not included). These are often tended to by one or more priests and have to be underwater. A community without the five shrines is doomed to perish.

Religion

The acubon believe in a great unchangeable cycle of Life and Death. This cycle is not predetermined but necessary and is required in order for the world to keep on functioning. In order for new Life to be created there must be Death. The age-old concept of 'Survival of the fittest' or 'Eat or be Eaten' is very true for the acubon way of seeing life. Acubon live for the moment and take what they can from the world

around them before the world, inevitably, takes them. It might be because of this approach to life that acubon society has not risen to higher or more sophisticated levels. Acubon also show a for humans, repulsive reluctance or apathy to help their injured or sick, as Death is a necessary evil, a balance that must not be disrupted. Acubon however also believe in deities that serve this great cycle of Life and Death. These deities ensure that the cycle is maintained and remains unbroken. They will right wrongs. In this way they may even spread Death in order for Life to exist. The gods are merely seen as superior predators or herders that sometimes consume or help the acubon. The acubon in return benefit from the gods by eating their minions or creations (fish, plants etc) or receiving direct help in the form of tool making knowledge etc. Acubon believe that the Manon spawned them, just like all other life forms, into the world and that it is their duty to guard this creator of Life.

The gods of the acubon are:

Manon	God of Creation and the Navel of the World. It is from Manon that all life is woven and set free to roam the world. Some of this life crawls upon the land, some of it stays in Kiti'kil (Birthing Sea/Lake Dau-Uh-Dey). According to acubon legends, Manon created the acubon to serve it. Only the priest
Sekitl	God of the Deep and master of the waves, currents and winds. God of the Foundation Elements.
Pak'tak	God of the Inner Fire (isho), weaver of light and Bringer of Rage. God of the Elements of Change.
Ketlik	God of Dark Waters and master of all beasts that roam the dark, deeps of Kiti'kil. Lord of Death and deliverer of punishment to those that break the cycle by cheating death.
Tisklir	God of Wisdom and Lore. Possessor of ancient knowledge and the history. He grants certain, worthy acubon with the skills of crafting or invaluable knowledge at certain times. Guards the holy unwritten Laws of the World and details about the cycle of Life and Death.
Hikau	God of Evil, Lies and Meaningless Death. Changer and Perverter of Life. Challenger of the Manon. Avoided by all acubon except his sinister priests and not worshipped in any shrine. Said to reside in the shunned Hikau Lake to the east.

The gods are served by priests, who interpret life around acubon society and the needs of the cycle of Life and death. The gods may speak to the priests directly, demanding them to act in a way that will preserve the cycle. At other times the priests will see changes around them and look for disruptions of the cycle. The priests have devoted their lives to the acubon gods and have given up use of their lungs (except for Hikau's priests). They simply cannot survive above water.

Since the priests have lost use of their lungs, their vocal cords have equally degenerated. Thus they are always silent. But they spread many important scripts, written in the tikoq runes and often relay their demands through complex signals, known and feared by most acubon. It is not uncommon for the priests to have greater

signature recognition and interference abilities than other acubon. If this is due to their never ending submersion in water is unknown. The priests have also been known to use coleels and other acubon artefacts in mysterious and often uncanny ways.

Priests have the right to demand sacrifices in the form of food, goods, prisoners or even other acubon if that is what the gods desire. Their power is great, as is the acubon belief that everything is part of the inevitable and important cycle of Life and Death. Hokik often see the priests demands and actions as chaotic and insane. The acubon however understand that the cycle is very complex and that the actions taken by their priests are not always understood. However, the acubon priests very rarely meddle in politics or interfere with the trade between acubon and hokik.

The Secrets

In Hakatik, in the lakes or from the Manon, the acubon learnt how to make many wondrous items. They guard these secrets jealously, sharing them only on rare occasions with outsiders.

Among these are the coleel that is created by the Manon. These beautiful gems seem to have multiple layers of glistening or shimmering creamy clouds. Legends say that their beauty can bewitch a beholder and steal his will. The acubon trade coleels for other hokik goods that they cannot produce themselves. Humans find the coleels very beautiful but do not see their true potential. Acubon priests use the coleels to predict the future by peering into its mists. They are ceremoniously linkd to the moon Tra and have some slight Deflective dysha abilities. The priests have also learnt that when superior quality coleels are wet and above the surface, their shine may enthrall and hypnotise onlookers.

The tikeel is an organic bubble of air that slowly collects oxygen from the surrounding water and swells with breathable air. Tikeel are mostly basketball sized, but may be grown into house size if treated carefully. If grown deep under water the air will be compressed and can last longer. A normal human using an average sized Tikeel can survive an hour underwater.

Neekitl are rods or balls that glow strongly if water is rushed forcefully through them (shaking them underwater).

Tekotl are poisonous rapiers created from the stinger of the Harrigare creature of the caves.