

# The Astral Sea

The vast stretch of open space that separates the four plates of Simuhay. While there are small islands dotted throughout - some of which are just large enough to have their own small atmospheres and biomes - the Astral Sea is largely empty. Due to this, traversal through the Astral Sea is extremely difficult. It is possible to hop between the sparse islands, but larger scale travel requires a flying vessel of some sort. Despite this, there are still a few major places of note within it.

Interestingly, the Astral Sea's presence as a divider between the plates was not always a given. A long time ago, the four plates used to be connected to each other and the Astral Sea only surrounded Simuhay's outer border. The events of the Mana's Ascension led to the shattering of the world that split it into the plates, which subsequently drifted apart, allowing the Astral Sea to fill the spaces between.

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# Helios

A large, bustling city located on an archipelago in the Astral Sea between the plates of Avistym and Flostym, built into and around large and mostly preserved ruins of a society that came before. The primary island containing the city is divided into two halves, the Dawn and Dusk districts, while agricultural needs are handled on the outer islands. Many of the buildings within the city bear patterns akin to circuitry, known as “mana channels.”

Helios, being in the Astral Sea, has no sun or moon; instead, a radiant, protective light shines from the Sol Sanctum, a tall and majestic tower near the city center with a half dome of uneven construction at its base. Instead of traditional day and night, Helios observes Kindling when the tower shines with light, and Quietus when the light is hidden away. Despite the darkness, Quietus is when the city comes alive, as festivities are held in a different section of Helios at the end of each day.

As would be expected of a city in the Astral Sea, it has dedicated infrastructure for flying vessels. A large and well staffed port is the main gateway into the city, with signals to guide ships in and an ever ready crew of workers to help them dock.

The population of Helios is primarily made up of Solarians, the people of the sun. It was once also home to the birdlike Frelians, but the species has been considered unwelcome in the city for some time. A leftover clutch of Frelian eggs, however, previously grew into a young thieves guild beneath the city, joined by some Arathans who fell onto Helios after the Cleaving. Most all of the Frelian children opted to escape the city 20 years ago when traveling adventurers provided the opportunity, while some of the Arathans chose to remain behind. More recently, the Meridian Faith has been newly introducing avian Solarians to the public of Helios, now making up nearly a sixth of the city's total population.

# The Mana Wail

The Mana Wail is less of a destination and more of a blight upon the Astral Sea. It is a traveling storm cloud that roams the Astral Sea seemingly at random. Its unpredictable travel paths mean that encountering it is often a dire risk, even when one's route through the Astral Sea appears to be all clear. Spending any amount of time inside of it will reveal it to be filled with a never-ending onslaught of terrifying beasts, which form from the storm and cannot truly be killed, only dispersed temporarily until the storm reforms them.

It was noted by Bescal of the Frellian Seekers that the Mana Wail 'chased' their kind at several points in their long journey around the Astral Sea - whether this was purely evocative and figurative language, or very intentional word choice, remains to be seen.

The Troubadour Kjoll, and his band of Nabatan companions, were forced to survive several encounters with the Mana Wail before they were safely rescued by Helios's Stormchasers. On their last such battle, Andante observed a startling moment of clarity from one of the storm's beasts in its death throes, as a soul trapped within begged for freedom to no avail.

# Caeloraan Temple

A temple found within the Astral Sea, which depicts the legend of how Simuhay came to be in its current state, as well as where each species came from. Multiple murals are present.

On the outside is a mural depicting the ascension of the Mana and the fracturing of Simuhay, and the ominous presence of the Fae's progenitor trying to enter the material plane - but being blocked by the Collective.

Within the temple itself was a small Heart of the World that seemed to exude a large amount of fresh water. Additionally, more murals were present depicting the Four Primordials and the beings they made - including the Lycians and Arathans, despite all the teachings of the Arathans. Additionally, a mural depicts many of the inhabitants of this world fleeing through a strange, lens-like object to what appeared to be the Old World.

The temple is extremely suffused with magic, and those with magical talent are at risk of having their magic overload and lash back - up to and including inflicting Mana Sickness, as Xena learned firsthand.

"I never want to go back here." - Excerpt from Xena's second journal.

# The Genesis Kiln

A device created by the Caeloraan, motivated by the destruction of their civilization, to open pathways to worlds unsundered by the Mana's ascension. The Genesis Kiln was used to great and terrible effect - it did indeed create portals to unknown realms, but those portals welcomed in unfathomable horrors, and the Kiln's creators were ultimately forced to seal it shut to protect what little remained. According to history passed down by the Solarians, the Caeloraan were subsequently afflicted with a blood curse that ensured one dangerous beast would always be among their number. Kjoll's group of Nabatan adventurers stumbled upon the Kiln, finding it open to a nightmarish realm, and managed to once again seal its portals shut.

Murals within the Genesis Kiln, as well as cautionary recordings left by the Caeloraan, depict Lycians, Arathans, and Nabatans departing through the portal before the project was abandoned. Thus, while the Caeloraan's creation ended in tragedy, it also allowed an entire second world to flourish anew.

# Recordings from the Genesis Kiln's entrance

When the Mana ascended to their divine forms, they viewed the moon with contempt- as their final mortal act as a collective, seeing themselves as bright as the stars in the heavens that guide moorless sailors at sea, they gifted the small moon a personality- a mind.. As if in exchange for their own.

Kaia, the goddess of gentle moonlight, felt the scorn of those who brought her into being.. And she wept. Where Mana lifted themselves to the distant heavens, Kaia's tears fell to the earth- and from those tears, the Caeloraan were born. Inheritors of the realm that the Firstborn left behind, they themselves felt connected to the stars.. Reverent but wary, it was by the graciousness of their goddess' pale light that they could peer into the realm inhabited by those who ascended. The Caeloraan, magic beasts of their own sort, contrasted the ones born of Astaroth's will in embracing their mortality. They gave thanks to the land, the winds, the sea.. They connected with the people born of ordinary things, and shared their knowledge.

[cycle through images of different species, antfolk, mothfolk, avali, rats, avians, nabatans]

The damage the Mana did to their home was not well understood, however, and the land itself began to fray and unravel. The world began to change and split apart, and countless souls were separated from the mainland- adrift in the astral sea, to realms we may never again cross.. And with this forced isolation, came great loss. Our families, splintered- our nations reduced to villages. Without enough people for prayer, Kaia could not sustain her life.. The moon itself shattered anew, and with the loss of her gifts, we suffered. The realms we named Avistym, Flostym, Wyrmsnym and Kiristym became harsh and unusual in their own ways- unstable.. Unlivable. In our desperation, the Caeloraan worked to create a machine to attempt to bridge the impassable gap between worlds, to jump the distance of the great expanse of the Astral Sea. That device lies ahead- The Genesis Kiln. May it serve as a grim reminder to all who see it. And may the door remain closed, evermore.