

North Coast Pilgrimage (Narration)

The north of this region is a desolate place. For most of the year there is no one around, but in summer people make a pilgrimage from inland to be near the sea. They walk along the shore line, right up to the edge, sometimes entering the water itself. They search amongst the rocks and pools. It's difficult to say what they are looking for. People of all ages abandon the usual conventions of dress. They wade into the water, some going deep enough to swim

Their ancestors have built precarious structures which extend beyond the shoreline. These may be temples to the sea - enabling observation of the edge of the world to be conducted in safety. From here the pilgrims encourage their children to explore the shallow waters for life below the surface. This is for ritual purposes only. The creatures they catch are later returned to the sea.

The migration to the coast at this time of year is considerable; the most devout set up camp on the beach itself. People stay for varying lengths of time and sit observing the horizon; maybe waiting for some catastrophic event or the recurrence of a legendary phenomenon.

Some locations are especially significant. They are the focus of congregation for the pilgrims. It is not a solemn experience; there is an atmosphere of levity and enjoyment. Indulgence.

At these locations a range of mechanical devices have been constructed. These simulate the earth's rotation, its orbit of the sun and the rolling and swirling motions of the sea. On these machines the younger pilgrims engage in a symbolic performance of their ability to triumph over elemental forces. This demonstrates their readiness for adulthood. Frenzied screaming is a feature of these ritualized ordeals.

Shrines have been constructed. The pilgrims pay homage to the sea and contemplate the life forms sustained by it. Some of the life forms appear to be at risk and the pilgrims are reminded of their responsibilities. In return for their observance they may find relief for the conscience, or even physical healing.

The pilgrims can purchase votive items and trinkets. Testament to their visit; tokens of their devotion to take away and hold on to until they can return again. They hope for renewal and regeneration. They believe that the sea air is good for them.

And beyond these shrines and rituals: the sea itself, exerting a sort of tidal pull. Each year it draws the pilgrims from inland. They come to walk in its margins or wade in the shallows. They stare out at the horizon. It draws them and it holds them. It's not clear what they are waiting for or looking for or what might happen if they didn't come. But it's always there. It's bigger than they are. Vulnerable and oblivious. Sublime.