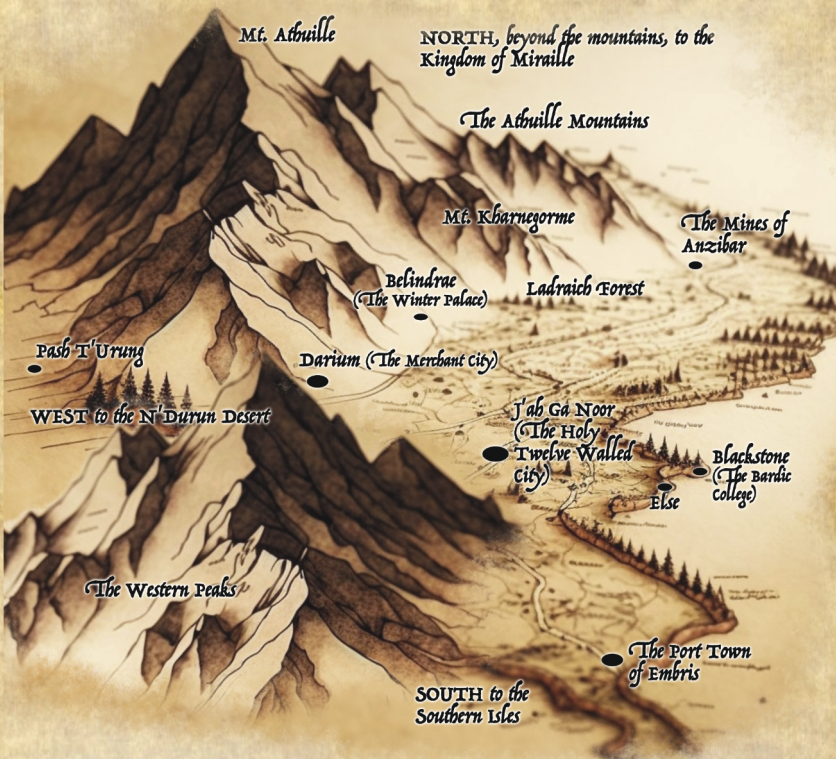


*An introductory treatise on 'the tiles' and
their use in common entertainments across
the continent & isles of Embra*

by Merinna Baletthoras

with illustrations by Himeus Ha'Roon





Mt. Athuille

NORTH, beyond the mountains, to the Kingdom of Miraille

The Athuille Mountains

Mt. Kharnegorne

The Mines of Anzibar

Belindrae (The Winter Palace)

Ladrnich Forest

Pash T'Urung

Darium (The Merchant City)

WEST to the N'Durun Desert

J'ab Ga Noor (The Holy Twelve Walled City)

Blackstone (The Bardic College)

Else

The Western Peaks

The Port Town of Embris

SOUTH to the Southern Isles

A map of the eastern coast of Embra, detailing the Empire of Or

Section 1: The 18 original tiles...



Across the Empire of Or, indeed throughout all the nations of Embra, these 18 unique designs (mirrored to create a set of 36 tiles) are used for a variety of entertainments, parlour games and gambling, and sets can be found in most inns and taverns throughout the realms, along with stacks of dog-eared, ale stained, and well used puzzle cards of various designs.



Originating from the ancient desert tribes of the U'jeld, whose culture blossomed and faded like a heart beat amidst the N'Durun desert, the tiles were known as 'Pu'lkha' (lit. trans. as 'riddled-stone' which when taken in conjunction with their description, based on Arema's Histories [Arema describing them as being 'crystalline lamina shot through with veins of coloured ore' - though none are now extant] justifies and explains this naming). Nowadays, having been culturally appropriated for well over a thousand years, they are known by the Ordish, as riddle-stones, a corruption of this original meaning - the fact that they are used for a variety of puzzles and amusements within Ordish culture making the reason for this corruption entirely obvious.

For the olive skinned Manzani of the Southern Isles the tiles are known as Oganika - a composite word formed from the basic concepts of:

O-ga: nature, natural, elemental,
fundamental, base, root,
foundation.



niki form, structure, pattern,
arrangement, tile [nika pl.]



though it should be noted that 'nika' has the flavour of being associated with something being imposed upon something else. Thus the meaning of Oganika, which could be literally translated as 'nature's forms', loses a certain something in this direct translation since, in its original sense, it is a juxtaposition of that which is both natural yet formally constrained.

For the common man or woman, the tiles are traditionally made of thick card or thin wooden board, painted with the traditional designs shown, but so popular a pursuit are the games of Riddle or Oganika that some have been known (usually of the aristocracy or merchant class) to have had sets commissioned in a variety of materials - highly polished stone being the most favoured and, if the historians are to be believed, possibly the most authentic.

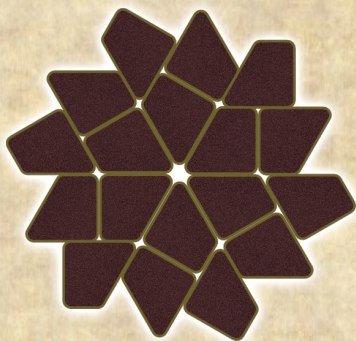


An early 'left-handed' set of ceramic Pu'lkha excavated from a merchant's house in the old quarter of Darium.

In modern parlance, the 18 tiles above are known as 'the left handed set', on account that when placed with their shortest edge uppermost they slope to the left. Traditionally, those that begin their study of the Pu'hlka, Nika or Riddle-Stones do so with this reduced set and a complementary collection of designs (see section 3).

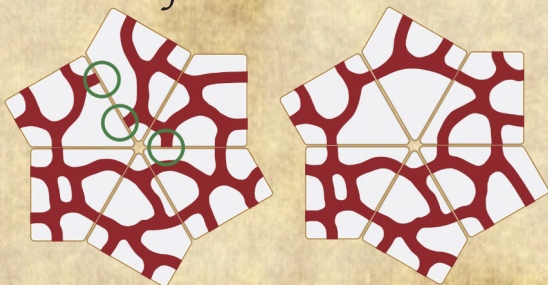
Section 2: Conflict and connectivity

Let us take, by way of example, a classic design which most in Or would be familiar with. Note that it clearly delineates the external geometry of the tile set - i.e. it shows you where tiles should be placed - without telling you where specific tiles are meant to be. E.g.:



With reference to this design, we have 2 example arrangements, which illustrate how 6 tiles could be placed to form the design's central arrangement. Note that the example left hand arrangement has

3 points (circled in green) where the surface design of the tiles does not match up. This arrangement is said to 'exhibit conflict', whilst the one on the right whose surface design matches at all points does NOT exhibit conflict.



In all instances, an acceptable solution to a design is one which does not exhibit conflict, although as we shall see shortly, there are different qualities of solution.

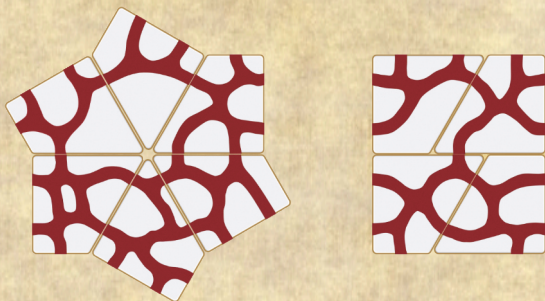
As a basic exercise, carefully place all 18 tiles in a straight line such that the completed row of tiles does not exhibit conflict. For example:



Due to the design of the pieces all correct solutions to this activity will be fully connected. However, this is not necessarily so for all solvable designs.

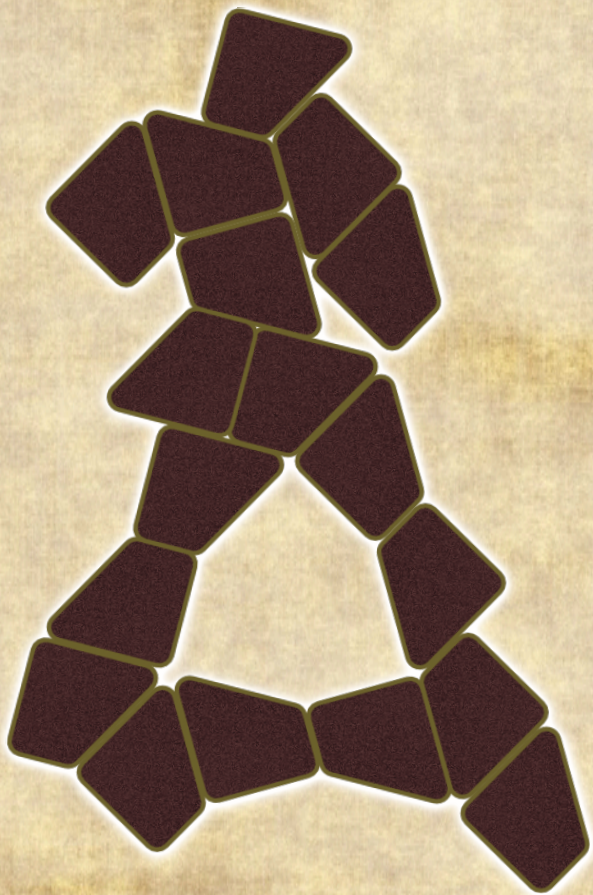
There are 3 different solution types for solvable designs (note, some designs do not have a solution).

Fully connected - A fully connected solution is one such that it is possible to move from any particular piece to any other adjacent piece (that which is edge connected to the piece being considered) by travelling, if not directly, then at most through one other piece. For example:



It may be a good idea to try a design for yourself. You could try the design at the beginning of this section or the following design (overleaf) - famous throughout Or and known as 'The Wayfarer'. It is representative of the travelling bards known as Tellers, members of the Imperial Teller's Guild, who have their headquarters on the main thoroughfare of J'ah Ga Noor, the Empire's capital city. On the following pages are two solutions - neither exhibit conflict but neither would be considered as 'fully connected'.

'The Wayfarer'





Partially Connected -

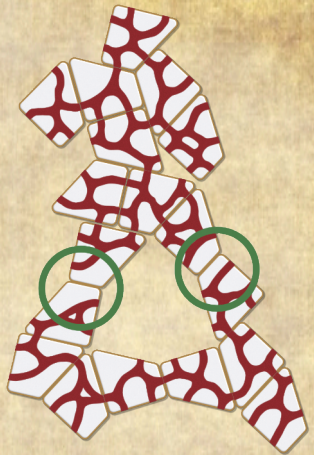
whereby one can trace a connection from any part of the design to any other, but the definition of 'fully connected' is not satisfied.

Note the green circle which highlights a 'fault' which prevents one from moving from one tile to its adjacent partner directly.

Disconnected -

a disconnected design is disjointed, in that it is possible to 'separate' the design into distinct areas.

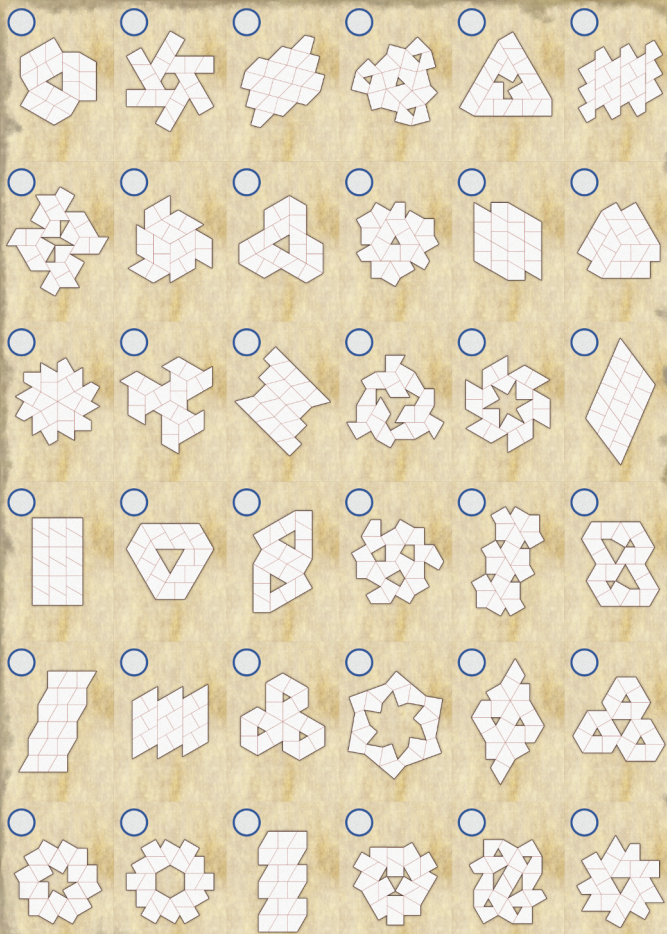
Note the green circles highlight the separation of the design into two distinct areas - an upper portion and a lower portion.



In all instances a fully connected solution is deemed superior. Perhaps you can find one...

Section 3: Basic Designs

As can be seen and explored, there are a multiplicity of ways in which the tiles can be connected giving rise to a profusion of designs. Naturally our minds tend towards symmetry and so designs exhibiting 2-fold, 3-fold and 6-fold symmetry are usually the first ones formed creatively through play. The antiquated puzzle cloths that many Ordish still have tucked away in cupboards or drawers, passed down from previous generations bear testament to this and represent a typical starting point for a novice to the tiles. These 'riddle-clothes' are still on occasion brought out into the light as a means to entertain a curious child and the designs upon them without exception are formed from a single handed sub set of the 36 tiles (generally the 18 left-handed set - though why there is a particular bias towards this handedness is unknown). A facsimile of one of these cloths has been produced as part of this treatise and displays a set of abstract designs typically found on examples of this kind along with dice & counter markers to illustrate the way in which the cloths initially evolved to be utilised for play between two 'challengers', before ultimately transforming into the game known by the Ordish as 'Crossing the Field', or in Miraille, the northern kingdom, as 'Cou-zo' (lit. 'combat' or 'battle').



*A Pu'lkha cloth exhibiting 36
basic designs - all left handed.*

Section 4: 'Cou-zo'

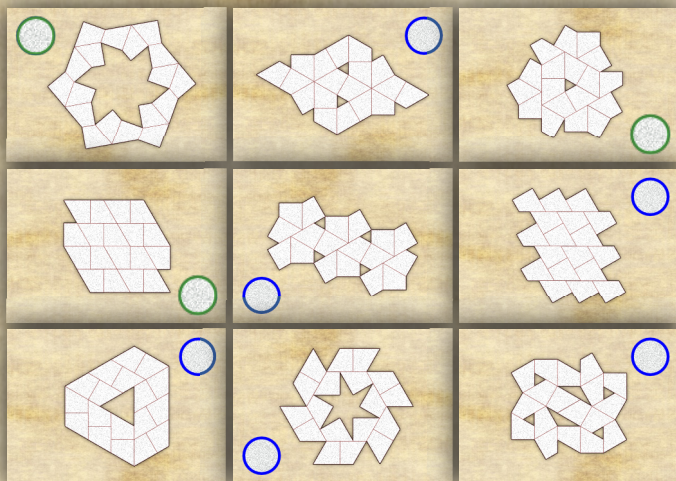
The game of Cou-zo is based on an empty 5 by 5 grid or 'field' * where each cell is the same size as the 36 cards that form the card deck. Each card has the same but mirrored chiral design on either side of its faces, traditionally marked with a blue ring for a left-handed design and a green for a right-handed one.



The game is for two players with each player taking either the left-handed tile set or the right-handed tile set and attempting to complete puzzles, claim cards as their own, and ultimately complete a pathway from one side of the grid to the other, whilst blocking or halting the progress of their opponent.

*Though different sized fields are known to be adopted in different cultures and locations: for example a 6x6 field is a preference when playing in the western city of Dariium.

The set up requires a board or cloth with the cells of the empty field displayed. Each player takes a set of 5 double sided markers and a sixth larger 'base' marker. The cards are spread out, flipped, re-stacked and shuffled and then a 3 by 3 grid of cards is dealt out from the top of the deck which is set to one-side.



Players may only attempt designs which exhibit their coloured mark but may use counters to flip and hold cards thereby preventing their opponent from attempting them. Once a design has been successfully completed the player places it in a position of their choosing upon the battle field using their base marker to distinguish their camp.

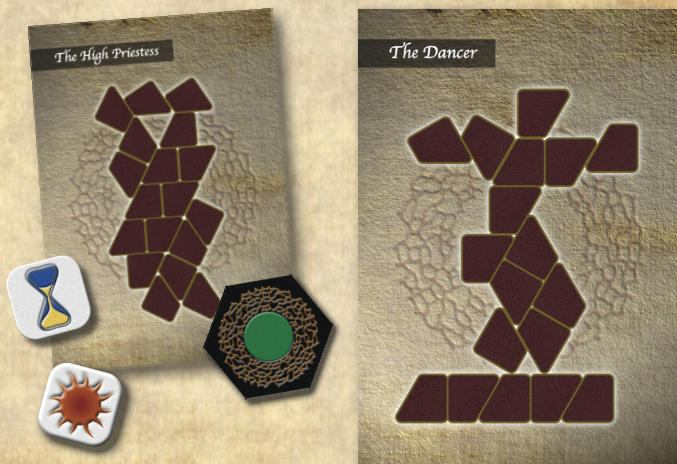
Markers may be placed on marker points on the cards to 'guard' adjacent spaces upon the board, preventing the opponent from playing there, so careful consideration has to be given as to the orientation of the cards when they are placed into the field.

Although the aim is to complete a pathway across the field it is possible to win by other means. Since the pathway must contain somewhere within it the base marker, then it is possible for a player to surround their opponent's base marker card, thereby preventing them from being able to win.

Section 5: Figurative Designs - Riddle:Teller

Riddle:Teller is a unique and fascinating oratorical endeavour which is recognised as the jewel of Ordish culture. We shall not digress too much for a thorough treatment of the art form can be found in 'The Teller's Handbook', which details its history and evolution, from the time of Galg la Moa - first Empress of Or and founding patron of the Teller's Guild (whose portrait adorns the cover of this treatise) - to that of the present day. However, it is useful and interesting to briefly explain the notion of Riddle:Teller and to bring forth examples of the type of designs used throughout which form its foundation and allow for a free flowing interactive and responsive narrative.

Teller is traditionally played in its simplest and most original form by three people: The Quester, The Teller and The Fate (also known as 'The Wind' or 'The Mirror' depending upon which region of Embra one hails from). It involves a prodigious amount of skill on behalf of the Teller and utilises dice and counters, and on occasion has been known to sport a sideline in bets and gambling. Although there is a recognised set of designs (known as 'the Canon' - of which there are over 120 entries), all of which use only the left-handed set, each Teller brings their own individual designs and style to this deck, and thus Tellers can gain great prestige and reputation, not only for their oratorical skills but also for their creative contribution to the art.



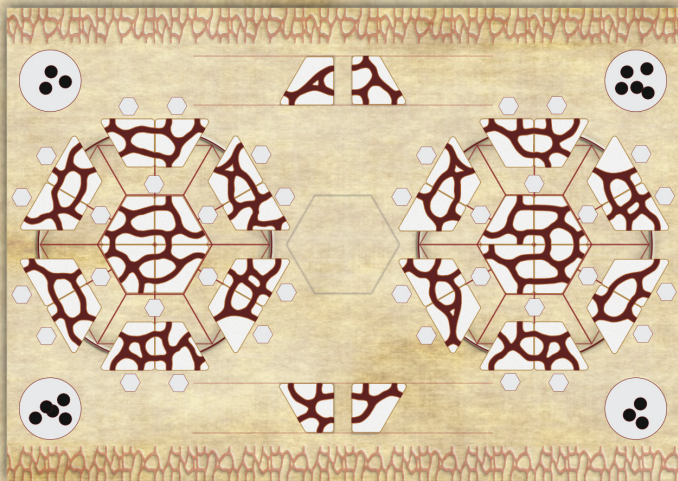
'Time's Dice', 'Fate's Dice' and example puzzle cards & counter from the storytelling game Riddle:Teller

Section 6: The Dualing Houses of J'ah Ga Noor



The capital of the Ordish Empire, J'ah Ga Noor - the holy twelve-walled city known by some as the Rose of Embra: of the nine noble houses, five commit to the nurturing of Dualists and are known because of this as the 'Dualing Houses'.

The game of Dual is a skilled and sophisticated endeavour in which 2 players compete to complete a Hex16 by the manipulation and exchange of tiles between themselves, played out on a 'dualing board'.



There is much prestige given to master players and the dedication and commitment to becoming a master and to developing players into such is a formidable and time consuming task.

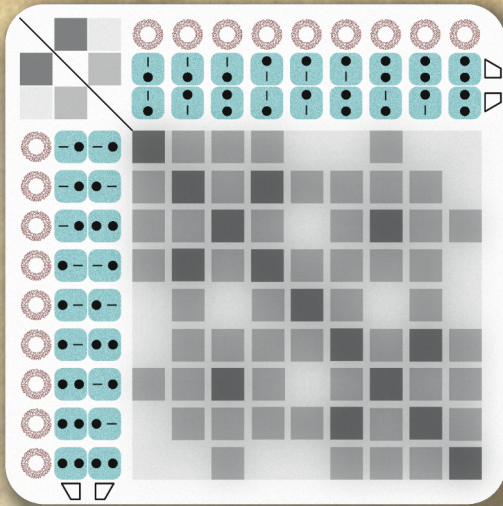
Although Dual is in of itself a complete game, there are other subsidiary practices which initiates are trained up on which can be played as games themselves, one of which - Hex16 - is detailed in a separate treatise.

Section 7: Embrisian Hex

*'Gambling is to a sailor's soul
As the wind is to the sea
Oh give me a purse of coins for hex
And happy I shall be.'*

The city port of Embris (pr. Om-Bree), located on the southern coast of Or, is a melting pot of cultures. Nicians, Mirailliāns, Manzani, Ordish - even Ki'Ma the chalk skinned tribes from the remotest reaches of the Southern Isles - all can be seen mingling in the bars and inns. And where there is drinking, there is gambling; and where there is gambling there is Embrisian Hex.

Embrisian Hex is a subtle game of balanced uncertainty for 2 players - although the crowd it draws can be considerable. Each player starts with 18 'coins' and the aim of the game, by a combination of wagering and skill with the Pu'hilka, is to gain a score of 108. Wagers are made on the basis of tiles drawn at random from an initial full complement. Dependent upon the round, differing sets of tiles are drawn and in each instance the round proceeds to a test of skill set against a timer.

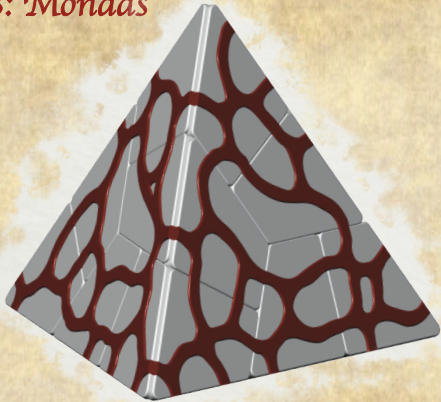


A typical 'wager board' used for Embrisian Hex.

The game is further complicated by a set of cards from which players may draw depending upon luck. The cards can then be played at various instances throughout the game in an attempt to influence play and affect outcome.

The rules and stages of Embrisian Hex would require a treatise in itself and so we shall not dwell on this here but shall move on to a final examination of what are considered to be the most difficult and by all accounts the most original tests of skill that have been devised for the tiles.

Section 8: Monads

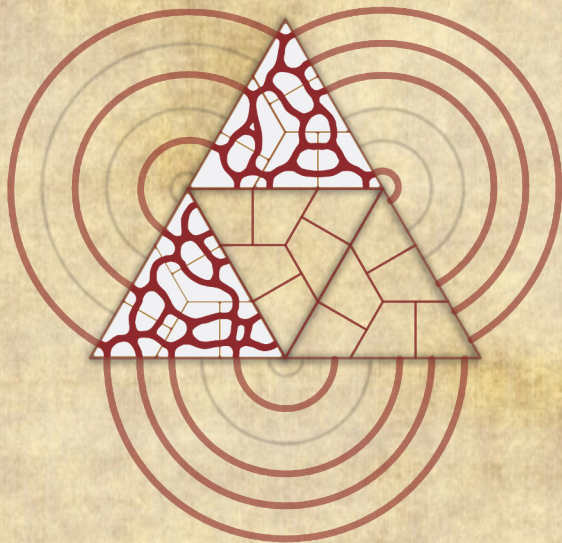


Monads, if the studies of antiquity are correct, were the original U'jeldic puzzles associated with the Pu'hilka.

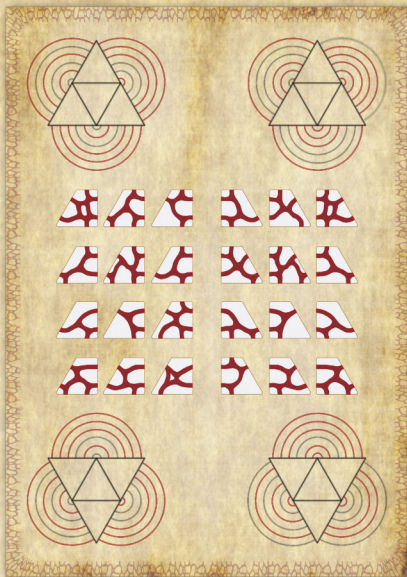
In essence, any large equilateral triangle, constructed in a manner so that it can be partitioned into 4 smaller equilateral triangles can be folded up into a pyramid. What is important to note, however, is that such a folding requires an edge symmetry so that when folded, the completed 'Monad' exhibits no conflict along any of its edges.

Any solution for this Monad, by virtue of the triangles already present, must have side connections as illustrated by the 2 additional sets of semi circular bands shown. Note: it is traditional to include all 6 bands on each side, with those not

showing a connection displayed as thinner and greyed out.



With a little consideration, one may be able to perceive how every Monad can take four distinct solution forms, since if one starts from the completed object it is possible to imagine placing the Monad on any of its four faces and then cutting from the upper vertex down along its 3 exposed side lengths before opening it out. Thus every Monad has 4 associated diagrams with corresponding connection bands for each pair of sides. It is not unknown for this information to form the basis of a puzzle (with or without a set of specified tiles).



As has been mentioned, little is known about the U'jeld and their culture, lost as it has been to the sands and ravishes of antiquity, but that they have bequeathed to us this fascinating puzzle can only be considered a blessing.

Having covered and conveyed to the reader the major entertainments and usage of the tiles across Or and Embra then we shall draw this short treatise to a close. If the reader has found anything of interest to arouse their curiosity then the author would entreat them to continue the endeavours of their studies and perhaps seek out the different

forms of entertainment and participate in them.



*The city quarter of Be'ru Tar
- home of the Teller's Guild*

