The Tien Shan Manuscript

Game Design Outline

High Concept

Why?

- *Role Playing Games provide an opportunity for people to develop a wide range of skills which are critical to exercising leadership across social institutions, from applying their knowledge of history and civilization through basic organizing skills, to developing and implementing complex strategies, exercising operational art, and testing out tactics.*

- *But existing variants, most of which are based on Dungeons and Dragons, are set in a high fantasy world with its own history, social structure, and mythos, making it difficult to construct campaigns which make the best use of this teaching potential.*

What?

- *The Tien Shan Manuscript proposes to solve this problem by creating a variant of this genre that is:*

  - *Situated in a world more or less like our own in its history, social structure, and mythos*

  - *But which allows the possibility of other worlds in order to explore the longue duree consequences of our choices*

 - *Has gameplay and mechanics optimized to teach political strategy, operational art, and tactics.*

How?

- *Complex backstory and game narrative which motivates participants to learn history and theory, strategy, operational art, and tactics.*

- *"Skills and Abilities," "Classes," and "Races" system from D&D translated in such a way as to allow players to try out a range of roles which are politically realistic and which tap into different skills sets and reflect competing ideological orientations.*

- *Game elements, mechanics, and play structured in such a way was to allow implementations which require actual study and research and actual action in the real world.*

For Whom?

- *Serious RPG gamers looking for greater realism and greater respect for the disputed character of the question of how history works, as well those more drawn to historic and contemporary politics than to high fantasy settings.*

- *Social theorists and other social scientists who will be able to run simulations of strategic, operational, and tactical decisions in order to test them.*

- *Teachers at the secondary and college level looking to use games to engage students around challenging concepts or to promote actual real world civic engagement.*

Game Elements
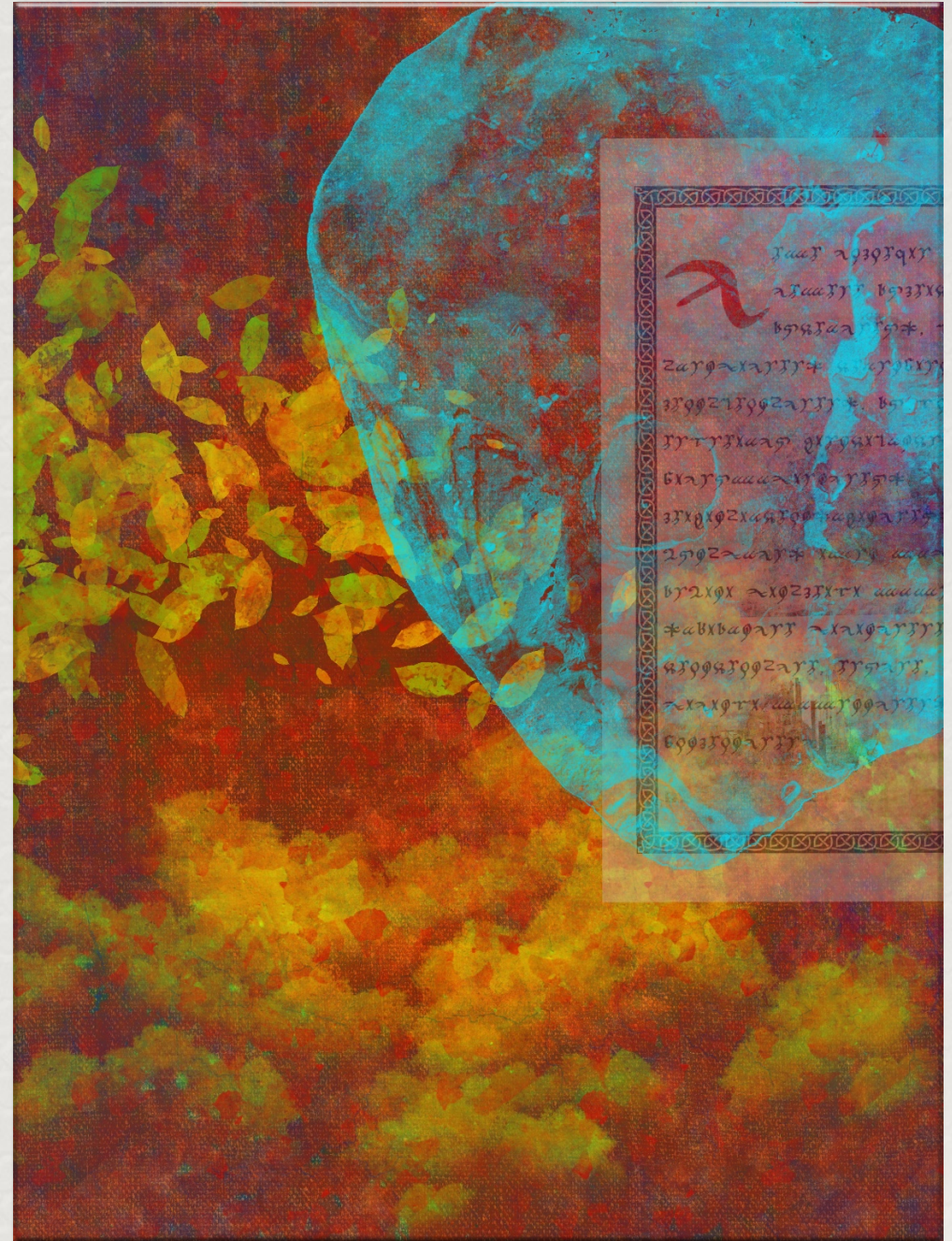
Backstory

Strange mandalas and yantras begin appearing on critical national security networks. Relatively straightforward steganographic analysis resolves the images into a complex, multi-part manuscript. Some of the manuscript seems to consist of ancient philosophical and religious texts, but parts of it are heavily encrypted –even indecipherable– suggesting that they may conceal an important message ...

Salvatore Albatini, the aging dean of Nizhoni College on the border of the Navajo Nation is suddenly dismissed without cause. Cleaning out his office he finds a copy of the same mandala sent from a mysterious address in Goa. As he begins to investigate the manuscript –and his own unexplained dismissal—he finds himself framed for the murder of a local postal inspector he engaged to help trace the manuscript –and then subjected to extraordinary rendition to a prison in Constanta, Romania.

Gloria Toadchine is an FBI Special Agent on leave and serving as Chief of Security at Nizhoni while she cares for her ailing father. She is also a former student and old friend of Salvatore. As she tries to figure out where he has been taken and why he was framed, she is asked to join a high level team code-named Minerva-1 which has been formed to investigate the manuscript. The inquiry leads the team into a complex web involving long-standing land disputes in the Sangre de Christo Mountains centering around access to beyul or hidden sacred valley, a secret revolutionary network called Agent Intellect, a Catholic traditionalist community, and the Russian intelligence services.

Narrative

- *Participants will be able to play a variant of the narrative which unfolds in the underlying novel, modified to allow different outcomes depending on different decisions.*

- *But it will also be possible for participants to develop their own narratives, much like the custom campaigns in D&D.*

Skills and Abilities

- *D&D Strength ==> Power: Organized Money, People, Mana*

- *D&D Dexterity ==> Special Operations: Covertness, other skills tbd*

- *D&D Constitution ==> Remains, but defined in terms of physical training and social support networks*

- *D&D Intelligence ==> Data and intelligence collection/research methods, theoretical mastery, knowledge (physical, biological, historical and civilizational, including ideology, culture, and religion),*

- *D&D Wisdom ==> Strategic, Operational, and Tactical Judgment*

- *D&D Charisma ==> Organizing Skill (individual relational meetings, relationship building, mentoring, deploying), information operations*

Roles

- *D&D Classes become Roles, so as to avoid confusion with the concept of class structure which will be a central theme in the game.*

- *Titles drawn from contemporary political reality (organizer, diplomat, theoretician, scholar, intelligence collector, intelligence analyst, special operator, etc.)*

- *Assigned skill and ability points as in D&D*

Parties

- *D&D Races ==> Parties, to avoid implication that biological race is real and to focus on ideological struggle*

- *Full range of basic historical and contemporary party types available.*

- *Participants can also create their on parties within limits.*

Characters/Game Master

- *Skills and Abilities, Roles, and Parties frame a basic character; participants can add a backstory and other characteristics as in D&D*

- *Unlike D&D there will be a stock of Non-Player Characters with whom participants may interact in various settings and campaigns and who play a central role in the narrative and backstory.*

- *One player will serve as Game Master, a role which requires the ability to teach the disciplines being cultivated by the game.*

Terrain and Maps

- *The various quests and campaigns which make up the core narrative will provide a definite terrain defined in terms ecosystem, technology, economic system, political structure, and culture. These maps will also include a built environment with special features such as hidden sanctuaries, markets, lodges, etc.*

- *Game masters can also create their own terrain for specific quests and campaigns.*

Dice

- *Same system as D&D*

- *Adds element of chance within bounds*

Assets

- *Multiple currencies will exist across different terrains with their value and fungibility varying considerably from one terrain to another reflecting the reality of competing economies and economic systems.*

- *Goods and services: Players will be able to buy and sell goods and services using any in game currency that the buyer will accept.*

- *Artifacts: There will be various artifacts possession of which increases cultural capital or perhaps other character capacities.*

Gameplay/ Mechanics
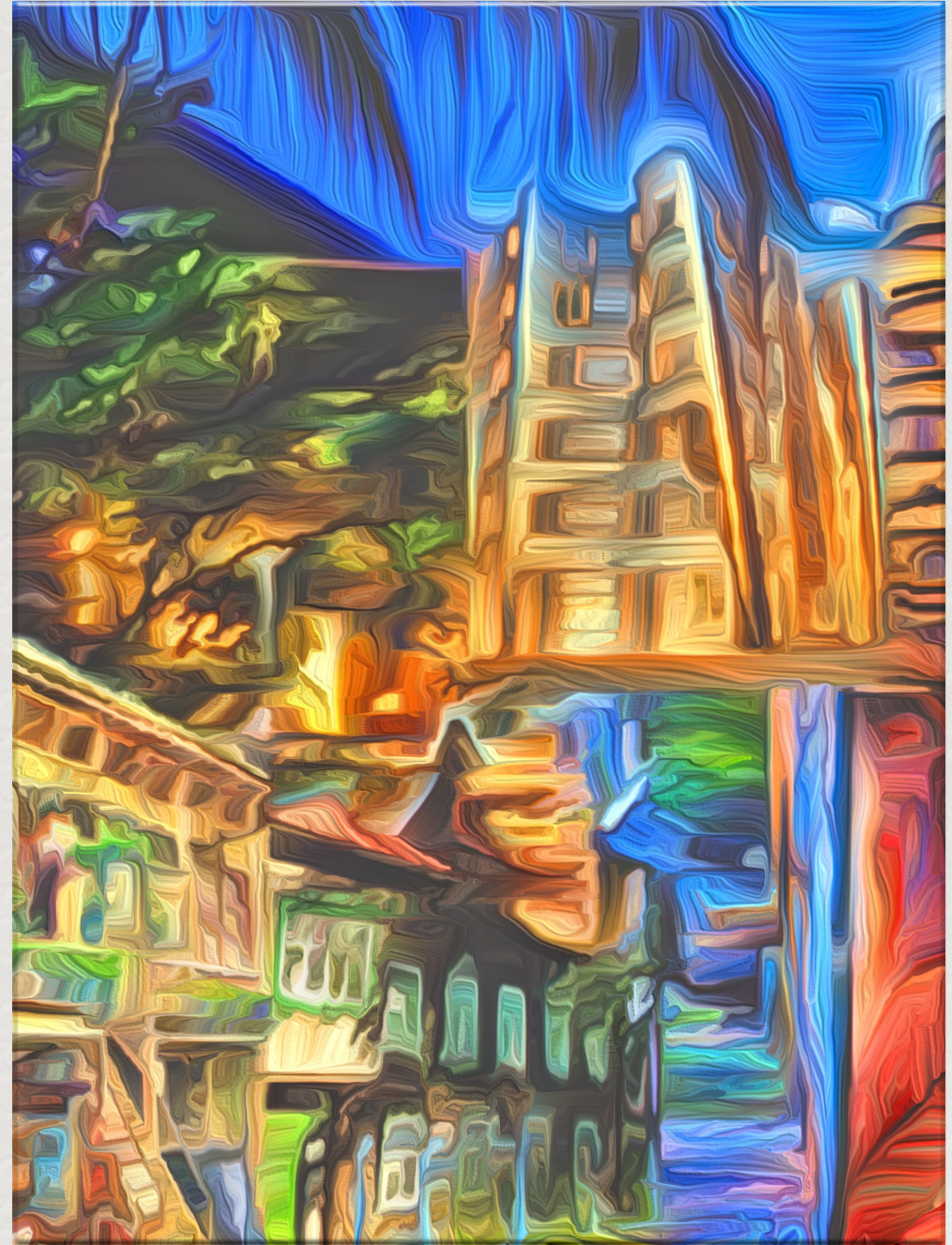
Basic Gameplay

- *The basic gameplay will be similar to that in other RPGs, and will center around quests or missions. In the table top version these will be assigned by the Game Master. In board and online versions there will be various quest trees for characters with specific roles and party affiliations.*

- *The key difference will be that these missions will be focused on cultivate key political skills, including research and scholarship (data collection, analysis, and interpretation), organizing (relationship building, mentoring, deploying), and praxis (strategic, operational, and tactical).*

- *Points will be assigned to both characters and parties which will lead to advancement to higher levels for characters and a measure of power for parties.*

Scoring Mechanisms for Characters

- *Points for*

  - *Data collected or artifacts discovered, with value multiplier*

  - *Analysis completed, with value multiplier*

  - *Interpretations completed, with value multiplier*

  - *Currency accumulated*

  - *Number, depth, and level of relationships*

  - *Victory in various actions*

  - *Cultural Capital and monetary value points for artifacts.*

Scoring Mechanism for Parties

- *Calculated separately for each game and across the game universe.*

- *Points for*

    - *Terrain controlled, with multiplier for resources, location, or other economic value.*

    - *Currency and other fungible assets accumulated*

    - *Population supporting the Party, reflected in election results*

    - *Institutional terrain controlled*

    - *Cultural Capital*

Technology/Business Model/Development
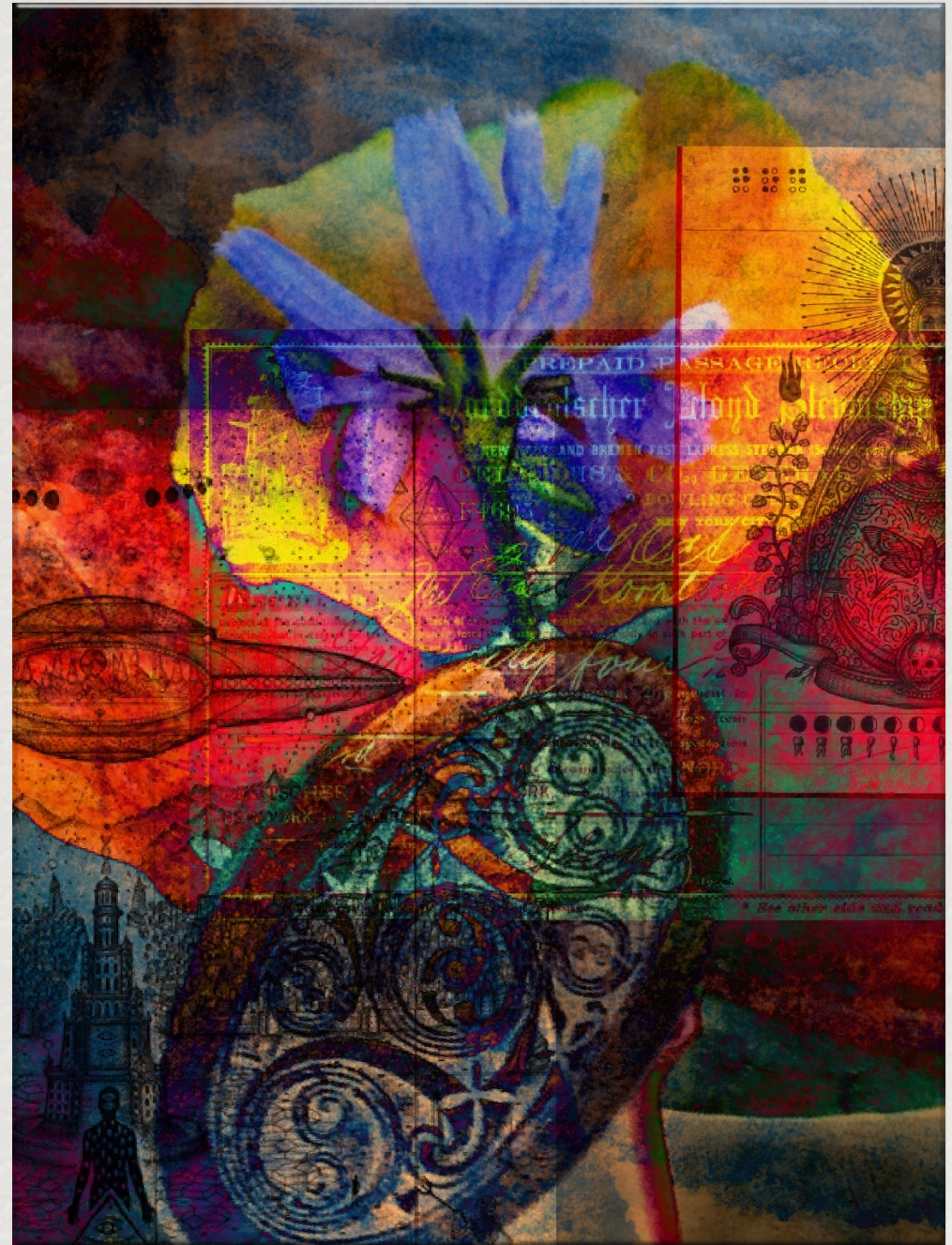
Possible Versions/Stages

- *Tabletop*

- *Cross Platform ARG*

Table Top

- *Modeled closely on D&D*

- *Begins as a "mod" or translation and gradually adapted to its teaching purpose.*

- *Assets needed to play game will closely parallel D&D*

Cross Platform ARG

- *ARG operating across real world and online platforms*

- *Requires real world actions and interactions*

- *Combine online participation and moderation with elements drawn from subscription box products, mysterious letter games, etc.*

- *Highest quality original art in historic styles or extrapolating magic realist/ fantasy styles*

- *Licensed historical/world music and new compositions*

- *Run off of website and auxiliary platforms like discussion boards, courseware, etc.*

Team: What We Have

* *Anthony Mansueto, who is responsible for the concept, has the ability to specify the the basic elements and design the theory based rule sets. He will also engage investors, team members, and partners.*

Team: What We Need

- *Game Design Lead and Level Designers who build out the elements and game play.*

- *Creative Lead and Team to develop Art and Music*

- *Business Lead and Team, including at least one person with experience pricing out the various assets we need to build the game and pitching to investors and securing funding.*

Terms

- *This is a large, complex project. It will take a lot of people, with a lot of knowledge and a lot of money.*

- *Participation is speculative. While we may eventually be able to offer salaried positions, right now participation will be in return for promised equity.*

Funding

- *Year One: Table Top Development and Full Design Document for for Cross Platform ARG $100,000*

- *Year Two: Table Top production and marketing, and Cross Platform ARG Development: $1.37 million to support development, which includes support for a staff of 6.25 FTE working remotely most of the time, as well as equipment, software, operating costs, and early stage promotion as well as a 25% contingency fund.*

- *Year Three and Beyond: Development, Publishing and Marketing: ~$10 million anually.*