

THE COMPASS OF TERRESTRIAL DIRECTIONS, VOL. IV

THE SOUTH™



A SETTING
BOOK FOR



THE COMPASS OF TERRESTRIAL DIRECTIONS, VOL. IV

THE SOUTH™

BY MICHAEL KESSLER, JACK NORRIS, DEAN SHOMSHAK,
JOHN SNEAD AND CHRISTINA STILE

CREDITS

Authors: Michael Kessler, Jack Norris, Dean Shomshak, John Snead and Christina Stiles

Comic Scripter: Carl "The Beefcake" Bowen

Developers: John Chambers and Dean Shomshak

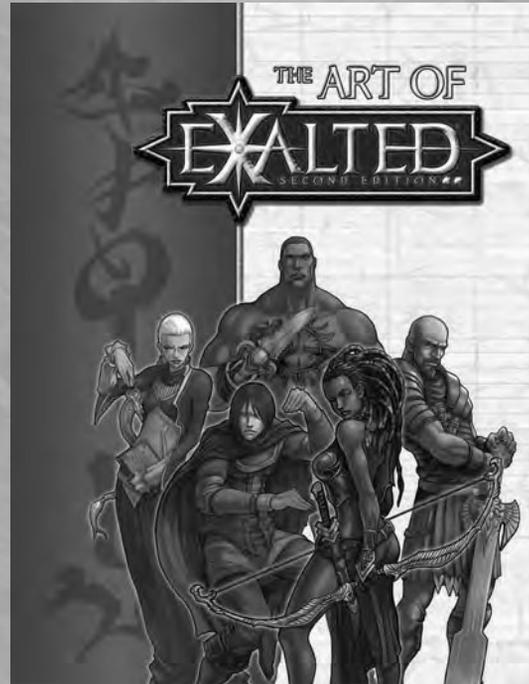
Editor: Carl Bowen

Art Direction and Layout: Brian Glass

Artists: Gordon Benetto, Leanne Buckley, Marian Churchland, Samuel Donato, Andrew Hepworth, Imaginary Friends Studio (with Chester Ocampo.), Jeff Laubenstein, Terry Maranda, Aaron Nakahara, Mark Taduran, UDON (with Steven Cummings, Leo Lingas and Chris Stevens) and Melissa Uran

Cover Art: UDON (with Steven Cummings and Espen Grundetjern)

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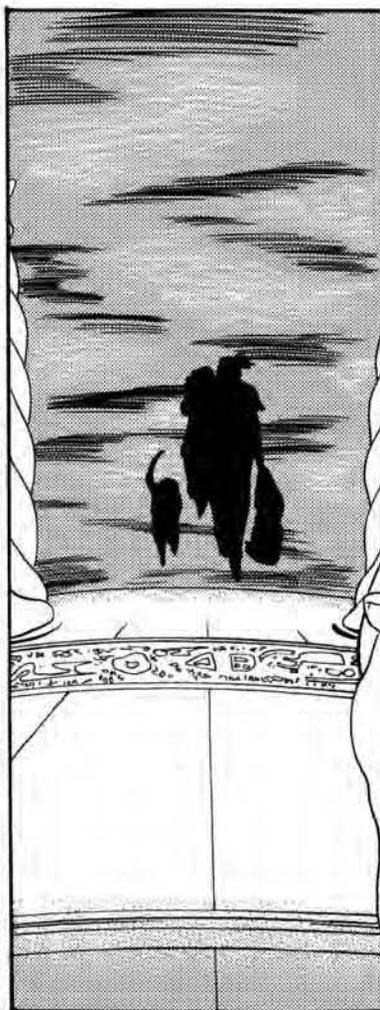


THE COMPASS OF TERRESTRIAL DIRECTIONS, VOL. IV

THE SOUTH™

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WE SCATTERED THE REST OF THE PACK. THESE TWO WERE THE LEADERS. NOW CAN WE STAY? MAYBE GET SOME FOOD AND WATER?



YOU MAY REST HERE, STRANGER, BUT ONLY UNTIL THE STORM PASSES. THEN GET OUT.



INTRODUCTION

*“How is it we have walk’d thro’ fire & yet are not consum’d?
“How is it that all things are chang’d, even as in ancient times?”
—William Blake, Vala, or, The Four Zoas: Night the Ninth*

The South of Creation draws its character from the Elemental Pole of Fire. Only high mountaintops there experience prolonged cold, and its furthest regions are volcanic wastelands too hot for mortal life. The pole’s influence also expresses itself in the heat of spices and the fire of well-cut gems, both of which the South has in abundance. The South is Creation’s treasure-chest, and it knows the fires of greed and ambition that have forged empires and burned them down again. It is a land of magnificent cities amid fertile fields and haunted ruins in barren deserts. This direction of Creation

offers many opportunities for adventure, with staggering rewards for the bold—and staggering loss for the foolish.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The Compass of Terrestrial Directions, Vol. IV—The South is a supplement for the **Exalted** game. It describes the sector of the threshold that feels the influence of Fire. It offers a guide to Creation’s warmest and wealthiest region for Storytellers who want to set a series in the South, and for players to create Southern characters. From the shores



of the Inland Sea to the deep deserts, seven great nations dominate life in the South.

Chapter One: Up from the Ashes recounts the history of the South: the fabulous glories of the Old Realm, the horrors that ended those glories, the painful struggle to build new societies and the challenges that could burn those societies down again.

Chapter Two: Broken Jewel of the South details the region's largest and richest city: Chiaroscuro, a city of glass towers and squalid slums now ruled by the Delzahn, nomad conquerors from the desert. Fragments of the Old Realm's glories survive in Chiaroscuro. Can those glories be built again?

Chapter Three: His Eye Is Always on You describes Paragon, whose immortal autocrat rules through the power of a mighty relic of the Solars. Through sometimes harsh expediencies, the Perfect of Paragon has built an oasis of peace and order. The Age of Sorrows, however, brings new dangers and new choices to Paragon and its absolute monarch.

Chapter Four: Nothing Ever Happens in the Lap offers a guide to the South's dullest, quietest city-state... or so its people fervently hope. Centuries of peaceful submission to the Realm are about to end, though—one way or another. If the Laplanders do not choose their path in the Time of Tumult, many others are ready to choose for them.

Chapter Five: Beyond the Dreams of Avarice describes the city-state of Gem, the Southernmost city of Creation. Mortal greed built a city in a desert—and constantly threatens the city with civil war.

Chapter Six: Five Peoples, One Shame deals with the kingdom of Harborhead. For centuries, the warlike Five Peoples of Harborhead lived in grudging proximity to each other and in humiliated submission to the Realm. As the Realm withdraws its power, will the Five Peoples reach for empire or turn against each other?

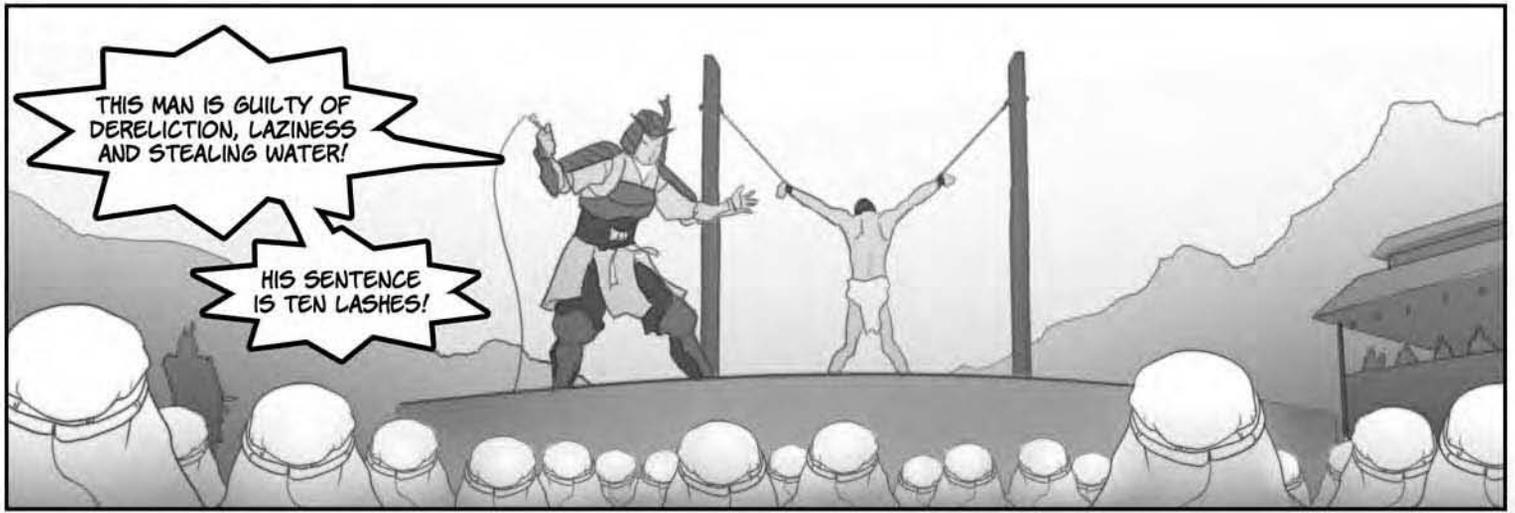
Chapter Seven: Bound by Clock and Caste details Varangia, a confederation of city-states that fits every person into harmonious, predestined roles based on horoscope. Except for the people it doesn't—or people who become too unhappy in their occupations—or whom passion draws into forbidden liaisons—or who hire criminals to help them impersonate a higher caste—or the slaves... This confederation's clockwork society is breaking down.

Chapter Eight: Flowers and Secrets is a guide to An-Teng, a profitable satrapy that seems thoroughly, if not happily, obedient to the Realm. From the Three Princes who rule An-Teng's provinces to the peasants in the rice-fields, however, the Tengese hide much from their overlords. Powerful gods and ancient secrets are at work in An-Teng.

Chapter Nine: Gods and Monsters of the South describes several of the South's leading divinities, including the powerful and political Court of the Orderly Flame. A number of the South's influential Exalts and mortals also appear. The chapter ends with a selection of the strange and powerful creatures that roam the South, from simple animals to a cunning behemoth.



THE SOUTH





CHAPTER ONE UP FROM THE ASHES

The South of Creation fills the space between the Inland Sea and the Elemental Pole of Fire. Two great mountain ranges run along the direction's edges: the Summer Mountains running to the Southeast, and the Fire Mountains, or Firepeaks, to the Southwest. People often consider the strip of land between the Firepeaks and the Great Western Ocean to be part of the South as well, though other folk might argue the point. Some people also include the great Southeastern savannas as part of the South.

Near the coast, the South's mild winters bring gentle rains. Farms rich in wheat and sorghum, dates and olives cover the land. Inland, however, the land rises in arid hills where fertile pockets grow rare. Beyond them lies the Great Southern Desert. Barren mountains and scattered oases dot this vast expanse like islands in an ocean of shifting sand. Few people live in this vast, harsh realm, but some of the oases sustain little towns with mud-brick walls, while fierce

nomads drive their flocks in a constant search for a bit of desert scrub or dried grass.

Bold merchants sail the sand-seas in ships with ski-like runners. A good sand-captain can carry cargo from one side of the Great Southern Desert to another as quickly as a sea-captain could on the waves. Therefore, some caravans trek toward ports *away* from the sea.

Seven great powers dominate the South—eight if you count the Realm, or nine if you include the Guild. The Realm, the Guild and many other folk from distant parts of Creation come to the South in search of metals and spices, incense and gems. They also seek firedust, the natural incendiary and explosive that blows in from the edge of the Wyld.

Few of those who dip into Creation's treasure-chest realize, however, that the wealth they seek is nothing compared to what came before. The modern South rises from the ashes of an incomparably greater past.

IGNITION: PREHISTORY AND THE FIRST AGE

Southern history began ages ago. Before the Primordials raised humanity from the dust, they reared strange citadels for unknown purposes. Humans would later inhabit Dari of the Mists and Chiaroscuro, but the Primordials laid their foundations and imbued them with mysteries. The Dragon Kings likewise walked the South before humanity's birth. When humans first came to the South, they found a land already held by civilizations that were old and strange beyond their comprehension.

Some savants believe that humans first became civilized in the South. Here, humans had to plow and plant and carry water if they would eat. The god Ahlat claims that he personally guided early humans to domesticate cattle, introducing a way of life that still dominates many Southern cultures.

Ahlat's motives were far from altruistic. As the God of Cattle, he desired the increase of the beasts that were his purview... as well as increased sacrifices from the tribes that adopted this new way of life. Ahlat also now claims that he acted in conspiracy with the Unconquered Sun, for by demanding the sacrifice of entire herds, he set the pastoral tribes warring to steal each other's cattle. When the Incarnae rebelled against the Primordials, Ahlat presented the Unconquered Sun with hundreds of tough, cunning and experienced warriors as candidates for Exaltation. The annals of Heaven say that fully a third of the first Solar Exalted came from Ahlat's champions, and an even higher proportion of

the first Dawn Castes, Fire Aspects and Chosen of Battles. Thus did Ahlat become the Southern God of War as well as its God of Cattle, and cattle-raiding has continued in the South ever since.

BLAZE OF GENIUS: THE OLD REALM

The Old Realm created some of its greatest marvels in the South. Amid a western range of low hills, the Solars carved a mighty mountain into the effigy of a meditating monk—or perhaps they raised a statue the size of a mountain. No mortal now knows why, though the Immaculate texts say that Pasiap reared the vast idol to honor self-mastery through meditation. The Exalted claimed Chiaroscuro and expanded it into the largest city in the South, second in Creation only to Meru itself. Dari of the Mists became the capital of a Domain of Stately Order, whose Exalted king and queen imposed perfect harmony through a magical orb and scepter of tremendous power. Perhaps the most spectacular work wrought in the entire South was the direction's capital, High Nyunda—a city held within the interior of an enormous hot-air balloon, a golden globe miles across that flew through the Southern skies.

The greatest work of the Old Realm, however, was the land itself. The Exalted redirected weather patterns and currents of Essence to moderate the Southern heat,





extending the area where humans could live. Through potent sorcery and mighty machines, they commanded rain from the air and bade fountains erupt from the rocks, bringing water to make ancient deserts bloom. Where even these methods could not suffice, they built climate-controlled cities where mortals could stand unharmed amid the fiercest heat. The albino savages called the Dune People preserve tales of one such city, the Pleasure Dome of Xela-Cas, where their ancestors were bred and served as slaves. From the highest towers of the southernmost cities, the inhabitants could sip cool sherbet while they looked across the burning wastes to the Elemental Pole of Fire itself, glowing in the distance.

CRUCIBLE OF REBELLION: THE USURPATION

Such great glories led to correspondingly great destruction when the Dragon-Blooded overthrew the Solar Exalted. The fighting left Chiaroscuro's mile-high Tower of the Sun a puddle of cooling golden glass and cracked many more of the city's famous crystal towers. High Nyunda crashed. Dari of the Mists was abandoned and razed, for not one citizen survived the deaths of its rulers. The streets of Xela-Cas ran red, then the searing winds scoured them clean and buried its pleasure-palaces in sand. In the province of An-Teng the Pale Mistress, its dire goddess-queen of chaos and calamity, knelt before the Dragon-Blooded assassins and hailed them as greater destroyers than she could ever hope to become.

The Terrestrial Exalted (and their Sidereal backers) tried to preserve the magic, technology and spirit pacts that sustained life in the South. They had little success. The gods and elementals that brought cool wind and rain scorned the rebels and withheld their gifts when they could. The Terrestrial Exalted could maintain some of the simpler climate-control engines, but not repair them. Even the Sidereals could not rebuild these triumphs of Twilight Caste genius. Year by year, decade by decade, the South became hotter and drier. The farmlands shrank; the deserts grew; sand covered one abandoned city after another.

The gods of drought and famine walked across the South with each new failure, laughing at the Sidereals who sought to restrain them. Entire nations marched north in a desperate search for food and water, leaving trails of the dead. The most desperate refugees tore at the flesh of the fallen to sate their own hunger and thirst. For the slaves of lost Xela-Cas, such cannibalism became a way of life as they stalked the dunes by night and hid beneath the sand by day.

Other refugees returned to ancient ways as nomads, hunting and gathering what food they could find or grazing herds of cattle, goats, sheep or camels. These new tribes also quickly learned to raid and loot each other, or the remaining settled folk. All across the South, the genteel habits of civilization faded like a mirage in the savage struggle for survival.

BANKED COALS: THE SHOGUNATE

Bereft of the mightiest arts of the Lawgivers, the Dragon-Blooded turned to hard labor and massive civil engineering. So what if they couldn't bend dragon lines of Water Essence to create oases in the desert? They drafted armies of refugees instead and set them digging underground channels to carry precious water from distant mountains. Tens of thousands died in the dark, excavating these qanats, but millions lived (albeit at the edge of starvation) as the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate's overseers doled the precious water to the farms and ranches.

Through such brutal expedients, the Shogunate slowly restored agriculture, industry and order to the South. The Dragon-Blooded could not restore the glories of the Old Realm, but they could prevent the population from starving. (Usually.) The South remained Creation's greatest source of wealth too. Often slaves did the work, but the South still produced spices and metals, firedust and gems. Chiaroscuro once more became the chief port of the South. The Shogunate even established some new cities, such as the refugee colony that grew to become the Lap.

HOLOCAUST: THE GREAT CONTAGION

When the Great Contagion swept out of the East, shipping on the Inland Sea brought the plague to every Southern port at once. The Great Contagion ripped through the teeming port cities. The people who fled the cities in panic unwittingly carried the disease inland to new communities. Within a month, half the South was dead or dying, and the holocaust was only beginning.

Some towns tried to quarantine themselves against the Contagion. Without the rapid magical communications of the Old Realm, though, people usually learned of the plague only when someone who had seen it came and told them... unwittingly bringing the insidious disease with him. Even worse, refugees converged on towns or provinces where rumor said the Contagion had not struck, not knowing they already carried the plague. The desert nomads fared best in the pandemic, retreating into the deep desert with whatever food and water they could carry. Many of them died of hunger and thirst, but they counted it a better death than the eldritch Contagion.

Of course, living in the desert nearest Creation's rim meant that these nomads became the first Southerners to encounter the Fair Folk invasion. The Fair Folk slew at least as many of these barbarians as the Great Contagion would have, and the flood of the Wyld left the survivors no longer quite human.

Although the Great Contagion reduced the Shogunate's legions to a tenth of their former size, they fought heroically against the horde from beyond Creation. The raksha had just reached the Southern coast and engaged the last few legions when the Scarlet Empress mastered the Realm Defense Grid and scourged the invaders from the world.





BLOWING ON THE EMBERS: THE SECOND AGE

For all the damage the South suffered in the Usurpation, the Great Contagion and its aftermath were immeasurably worse. The Contagion and the Fair Folk slew more than 90 percent of *everything*, both human and animal (with local variations in the death toll). After more than seven centuries, the South still has not recovered the population it held before the pestilence.

Plague and war destroyed more than lives as well. Without sufficient people to maintain it, the Shogunate's brute-force irrigation system broke down. Qanats collapsed; silt filled canals; wells were fouled. Once again, the desert took back huge areas of farmland, and entire cities were abandoned. Throughout the Southern interior, sand blows across crumbling walls and towers of cities depopulated by the Contagion. Centuries-dead trees stand as desiccated reminders of vanished oases.

BURNING OUT: THE SEVEN TIGERS

Before Southern folk could pull their lives together, the Shogunate's collapse brought a final spasm of destruction. An alliance of Terrestrial generals and daimyos now remembered as the Seven Tigers saw Creation in ruins and decided to seize it for themselves. They met in the Lap—at the time, probably the least-damaged city in the South—to make their pact and divide Creation into future spheres of influence. Four of the Seven Tigers were themselves based in the South, and that direction bore the brunt of their brief campaign of conquest.

Three of the warlords sacked plague-ravaged cities from An-Teng to what is now Varangia and drafted everyone they caught into an ever-swelling horde. They converged on Chiaroscuro where the fourth had gathered ships and supplies for an attack on the Blessed Isle. The Empress (still unknown to most of Creation) demanded that the Seven Tigers end their conquests and join her in a new empire. The warlords slew her emissaries and returned their severed heads as their response.

Once more, the Empress activated the Realm Defense Grid. Storms of elemental power smashed the armies of the Seven Tigers, establishing the Empress as Creation's sole overlord. But the savage attack completed the damage begun in the Usurpation, leaving Chiaroscuro a glittering ruin of broken towers.

NEW HEARTHES LAID: REBUILDING THE SOUTH

Slowly, the people of the South put their lives together. Refugee camps became villages, then towns and cities. Farmers plowed and planted; shepherds renewed their flocks and ranchers their herds. Nations arose in the wreckage left by plague and war. Some were old provinces of the Shogunate, painfully rebuilding. Others were entirely new.

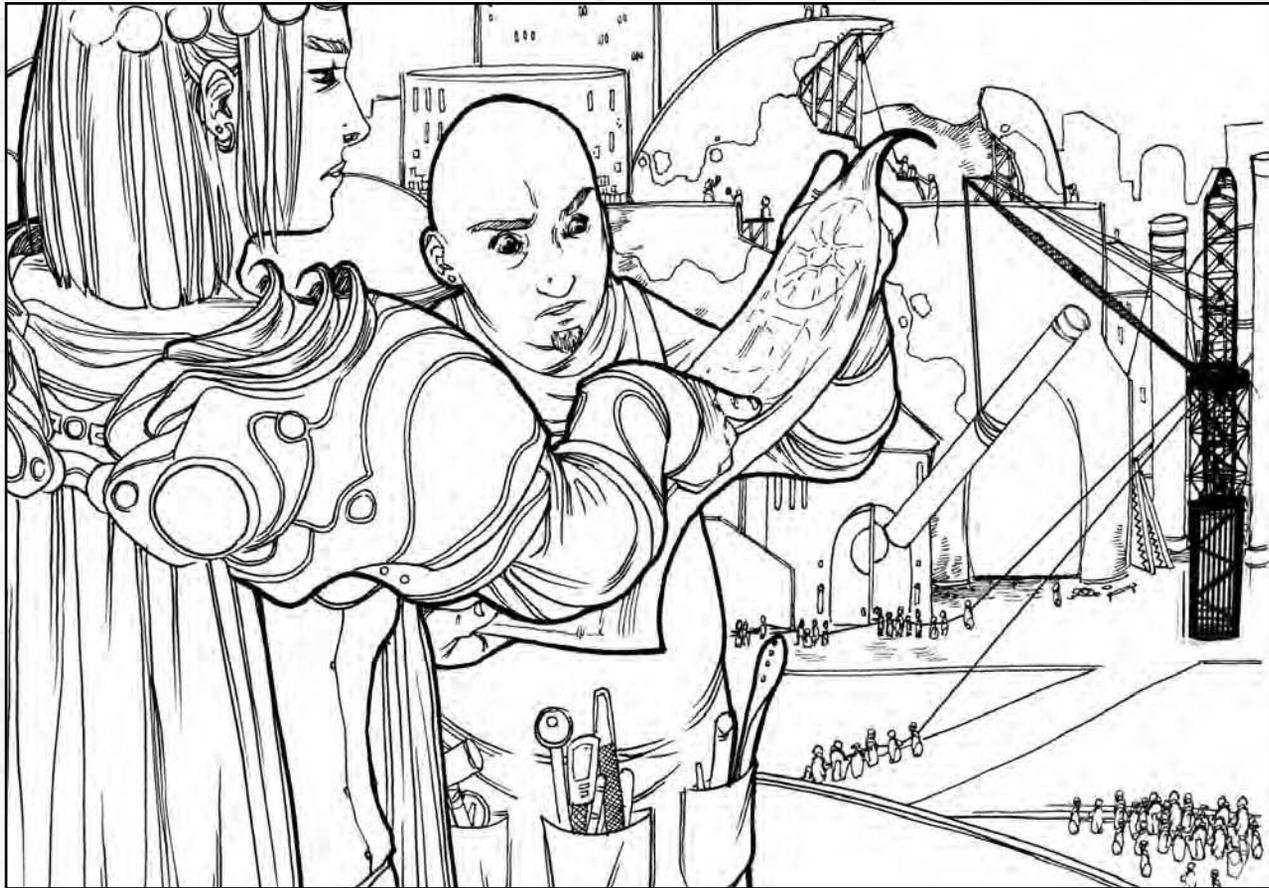
An-Teng, in the Southwest, recovered first. The Tengese had lost most of their population, but so had anyone who could have attacked them. The fertile and well-watered province easily fed the remaining Tengese—and then August Steel Pheasant, one of the Seven Tigers, ravaged the country for men and weapons to turn against the Blessed Isle. The Tengese greeted the nascent Realm's first naval task force as liberators. They cheered as legionnaires dragged August Steel Pheasant's viceroy in chains from her palace.

The good feeling toward the Realm would not last long. Nevertheless, the Realm protected An-Teng from many hazards of the Second Age. When neighboring countries or tribes attacked An-Teng, the Realm's legion in residence beat them back. Occasional peasant revolts or civil wars between An-Teng's nobles caused no greater difficulty for the Realm. An-Teng soon became one of the Realm's most profitable satrapies.

On the other side of the Fire Mountains, the Lap accepted the Realm's hegemony with greater and more enduring enthusiasm. The Seven Tigers had drafted half the city's population. The Laplanders saw the Empress as the one who returned their kinfolk. The Empress also filled out the city's population with refugees from half the South, who blessed her for giving them a safe home. The Lap suffered hungry years as the resettled refugees labored to restore the surrounding farmlands, but rationed food and a lifetime's indenture were better than starving.

Less than a century after the council of the Seven Tigers, the Lap became the site of an equally fateful meeting. Brem Marst, a merchant of the distant Scavenger Lands, found it prudent to spend a year in the Lap while his homeland had itself a war. He met the Counters, a group of merchant-philosophers inspired by bits of ancient lore about how the Old Realm used trade to bind Creation together and defend it from the Wyld. It is debatable how much Marst cared about the metaphysical defense of Creation. What he learned from the Counters, however, enabled him to unite various mercantile concerns in the Scavenger Lands to form the Guild, the richest and most extensive commercial enterprise in Creation.

Ancient lore also played a role in founding the confederation of the Varang City-States. Plague, the Fair Folk and the war of the Seven Tigers utterly destroyed the Shogunater-era cities in this province where four rivers trace threads of green at the desert's edge. The refugees who resettled the river valleys desired stability and predictability over all. They tried to read the future in the stars as a way to control their fate. The rescue of an ancient Dragon King astrologer-savant made this possible. The Varang built their new society around astrology and caste, hoping to fit each person into a perfect, predestined place in society. Becoming tributaries of the Realm was simply the prudent choice. After what happened to the Seven Tigers, the Varang didn't need a horoscope to tell them what would happen if they defied the Empress.



Paragon

The people of the new state of Paragon likewise chose safety over freedom, in the starkest possible manner. In the ruins of Dari, a scavenger found the long-lost Scepter of Peace and Order. He used it to master a small nearby kingdom. The scavenger, now calling himself the Perfect, offered his people protection in exchange for obedience. The Perfect could not provide any special, supernatural defense against bandits, the Fair Folk or other threats, but he could protect people from each other. Everyone who swore fealty to the Perfect knew that he could trust every other subject, for the price of breaking the Perfect's laws was death.

The Perfect's kingdom grew steadily. The Perfect promised peace and order to all who would accept his rule. In the Age of Sorrows, many people decided that was enough. His well-drilled troops captured many of the bandits and nomad raiders who attacked his kingdom, forcing them to swear obedience. The Perfect then sent them out against their former allies. The Perfect's kingdom grew large enough that he could order a new capital city, which he named Paragon. Under the Perfect's skillful leadership, Paragon grew to become a great city. Its population now approaches one million, if it has not exceeded that number already.

The Perfect did not try to rebuild ruined Dari, but another great ruin found a second life. Despite the incredible damage that Chiaroscuro suffered, people never completely abandoned the ravaged city. The blue glass breakwaters of Creation's larg-

est artificial harbor remained intact, if only to shelter small fishing boats. Some of the stumps of ruined towers still held working First Age amenities such as clean running water, Essence-powered lights and Essence-cooled air. Towers that lacked such wonders still offered safety, in that a foe would need to climb several flights of easily defended stairs.

For two centuries, one warlord after another seized the wreck of Chiaroscuro. Many of them hoped to find some working First Age weapon in the ruins; a few succeeded. The last warlord, however, faced a threat for which his crew of thugs was completely unprepared. More than a thousand miles to the South, the three tribes of the Delzahn nomads had sworn fealty to the warrior-prophet Tamas and anointed him Kha-Khan, their King of Kings. Tamas Khan led the Delzahn Horde north to conquer Chiaroscuro and make it the capital of a fledgling empire.

To help rebuild Chiaroscuro, Tamas Khan sought help from the Realm and the Guild. Both thought they could easily master the ignorant desert nomads. Both were proved wrong. Chiaroscuro quickly regained its place as the commercial center of the South.

At the easternmost edge of the South, the barbarians left by the Shogunate's ruin fared much worse. The hills and veldt along the Summer Mountains held a welter of small tribes that constantly made war against each other. In the fourth century after the Contagion, Ahlat sired a daughter named



Blood on the Horn. He gave her the task of conquering all the tribes and uniting them into one kingdom. That kingdom became known as Harborhead. Blood on the Horn's success, however, attracted the notice of the Empress. The Realm conquered Harborhead and slew Blood on the Horn.

Harborhead became one of the Realm's most difficult satrapies. The Five Peoples of Harborhead would not renounce the worship of their divine patron, Ahlat. Time and again, religious fervor set the entire country aflame with rebellion against the Realm. Yet reverence for Ahlat and hatred of the Realm were all that the Five Peoples of Harborhead had in common. When they did not fight the Realm, they raided each other for cattle and slaves. The Realm's garrison constantly had to prop up the native government just to keep the whole system of administration functioning. Whereas docile An-Teng in the Southwest gained a reputation as one of the best postings for a satrap or legion, Harborhead in the Southeast became known as one of the worst.

All six of these nations occupy the South's coastal strip, where ocean winds moderate the heat and winter rains make farming possible (if not easy). The seventh great nation of the South grew apart from the rest, far in the South where oceans of sand lap against volcanic mountains. A prospector named Rankar made the greatest jewel-strike of the Age. His mining-camp grew into a village; the village, into a town; the town, into a city that needed no other explanation than its name: *Gem*. The city grew in fits and spurts, constantly running into the limits of its water and food supplies. But it did grow. With such incredible wealth at stake, people found ways to make *Gem* work, despite the utter absurdity of its location. For a thousand years since the Usurpation, the desert pushed civilization out of the South. With the founding of *Gem*, humanity began to push back.

THE PRESENT

The disappearance of the Empress ignites fresh conflict throughout the South. Every nation faces its own Time of Tumult from a combination of external threats and internal divisions, ambitions and fears. The Realm shows less and less interest in maintaining order in the South, as the Scarlet Dynasty turns its attention inward to the contest for the throne. By the time the Realm attempts to reassert power in the South, the whole direction could be aflame with war.

An-Teng seems to be the most placid power of the South, though appearances deceive. Behind their centuries-old façade of humble subservience to the Realm, the Tengese seethe with resentment. The Tengese lack a focus for their anger, but should someone provide a goal to fight for, they might astound Creation by revealing power hidden since the Usurpation.

Chiaroscuro compounds its power daily as the trade hub for the South and capital of the Delzahn Empire. Ever more people seek their fortune amid the glittering ruins despite—or perhaps because of—the Delzahn Horde's somewhat casual approach to governance. Ironically, Chiaroscuro might face

CRUSADE OF CRYSTAL

The grand sweep of Southern history includes many short-term or localized disturbances. The most spectacular (and short-lived) was perhaps the career of the prophet Ikerre in RY 604. This mortal woman—later identified as a member of the Varangian ruling caste of enlightened mortal astrologer-priests, though all mention of her was later struck from Varangian records—somehow took possession of the vastly powerful artifact called the Eye of Autochthon. Or perhaps, it took possession of her.

In months, Ikerre attracted thousands of followers to her new cult of the Great Maker as she marched through Varangian and Delzahn territory. News of the Eye's reappearance struck terror into savants throughout the south, while monarchs feared what Ikerre would do with her swelling horde of disciples.

Before the Perfect of Paragon, the Empress or other powerful individuals could find a way to wrest the Eye from Ikerre, she led her procession of disciples through the desert South of Chiaroscuro, straight into the Bordermarches of the Wyld. As Ikerre entered Creation's rim, she left a wide swath of the countryside transformed into glittering, sterile quartz. The Eye destroyed many Fair Folk freeholds. When various interested parties finally caught up to Ikerre, however, they found her and all her followers transformed into rock crystal statues.

They did not find the Eye. At least, no Dynast, Lunar Exalt, Sidereal or spirit admits to this. Still, the South was the last known location of one of Creation's most dangerous artifacts. (For more information about the Glittering Desert left by Ikerre's crusade, see **The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. II—The Wyld**, pp. 110–111.)

less of a challenge in the Time of Tumult because the city's Delzahn masters just let it all happen, confident that they can ride the storm of change. The Delzahn face an internal division between city and country tribesmen, however, that could tear their culture apart.

As usual, **Gem** faces the threat of imminent destruction. The city's prodigious wealth makes it a target for equally prodigious ambitions, while its location between volcanic wasteland and barren desert makes life in the city precarious at the best of times. So far, *Gem* has bought its survival by importing food and water, hiring mercenary defenders and staying out of other people's battles. As the Time of Tumult engulfs the South, however, the *Gemfolk* might not enjoy the luxury of remaining neutral much longer.

Harborhead is about to explode. For centuries, the Realm barely held the restive nation in thrall, and barely kept the Harborheadites' tribal rivalries in check. As the Realm's



garrison weakens, the ever-aggressive Harborheadites move toward war. Whether that war is against the Realm, their neighbors or each other, remains to be seen.

The Lap, in contrast wants to stay a peaceful, prosperous satrapy of the Realm. The Laplanders have no ambition and no stomach for war. At least, most of them do not. The city controls two awesome reserves of power, though, that make it a focus for other people's schemes. Whoever controls the rich farmland of the Lap controls the food supply for half the South, including Gem. Whoever can rediscover and reactivate the long-forgotten might of the Last Supplicant of Endless Power controls a weapon almost as potent as the Realm Defense Grid. The Cult of the Illuminated joins the Great Houses of the Realm in wrangling for mastery of the Lap.

Paragon suffers no internal divisions. The Perfect does not permit dissent or rivals for power. As the Realm's power recedes, however, the Perfect seeks the strongest possible position for his own nation in the wars that surely must come. Already he conducts a covert campaign to seize the outlying mines of Gem.

Varangia would also like to escape the Time of Tumult. Its astrology-obsessed citizens want the rest of Creation to leave them alone. The stars themselves tell the Varang that they hope in vain. Not only are they caught between the warlike Harborheadites and the Delzahn, the nation's expanding populations of slaves and outcastes would see the current order overthrown. Try as the Varang might, they—and everyone else—have entered the furnace of war and upheaval. Whether they emerge as something new and better or are consumed to ash is up to fate... and the Exalted.

TIMELINE OF THE SOUTH

RY Event

- 1 The destruction of the Fair Folk armies. The annihilation of the Seven Tigers, incidentally completing the ruin of Chiaroscuro.
- 14 An-Teng submits without a fight to the Empress and the Realm.
- 88 Scavenger Lands merchant Brem Marst encounters First Age mercantile theories in the Lap; genesis of the Guild.
- 133 The astrologer-priest Larn discovers a hibernating Dragon King savant in a First Age ruin.
- 191 The Scepter of Peace and Order is discovered in the ruins of Dari.
- 198 The Scepter's discoverer becomes king of the nation that will become Paragon.
- 211 Tamas Khan leads the Delzahn in conquering Chiaroscuro.
- 226 Alleged death or transfiguration of Tamas Khan.
- 248 Construction of Paragon begins.
- 285 Formal beginning of the Varang Confederation.
- 298 Inauguration of Paragon as the Perfect's new capital city, on schedule and on budget.
- 305 Rankar the prospector has a very lucky strike: founding of Gem.
- 362 Birth of Blood on the Horn, daughter of Ahlat and founder of Harborhead.
- 392 Blood on the Horn makes Kirighast the capital of Harborhead and restores the Fane of the Upswept Horns.
- 409 Overthrow of the last Despot of Rankar the prospector's lineage.
- 416 The Realm invades Harborhead.
- 422 Battle of Hudu Towasi: Mnemon Pardus kills Blood on the Horn; Harborhead surrenders to the Realm.
- 474 First Harborhead rebellion, when the Realm attempts to raze the Fane of the Upswept Horns; suppressed after eight years of fighting.
- 535 Second Harborhead rebellion, when the Realm executes a priest of Ahlat; suppression takes 16 years.
- 581 The Realm withdraws its garrison from An-Teng.
- 583 Sualin, the Diamond Mandarin, invades the "defenseless" An-Teng and is promptly defeated through guerilla resistance and magical weapons.
- 585 The Princes of An-Teng renew their submission to the returning Realm.
- 604 The prophet Ikerre uses the Eye of Autochthon in a crusade against the Wyld.
- 686 Third Harborhead rebellion, when Realm troops interfere in a mass sacrifice of Varangian war captives; exceptionally brutal suppression takes only two years.
- 703 Kolar III mounts a coup to become Despot of Gem.
- 728 Peleps Howdarn discovers the Bent Creek jade deposit.
- 732 The Cult of the Illuminated begins with a Chiaroscuro street-savant's drug trip.
- 763 The Empress vanishes.
- 766 Oshom Kurgaz appointed Leopard of Harborhead after the Realm-ordered assassination of the previous monarch.
- 768 Present day.



I DON'T SEE THE THEATER ANYWHERE. THOSE KIDS MUST'VE BEEN MISTAKEN.



WELL, MAYBE I'M CLOSE. SOMEBODY AROUND HERE MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP.

EXCUSE ME, MADAM...



YES?

OOPS, I'M SO SORRY! I DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING BY THAT. PLEASE FORGIVE ME.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, IDIOT?



NOTHING, I... I'M JUST FROM OUT OF TOWN. LOCAL FASHIONS ARE STILL...

LOOK, YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY NOT A WOMAN, SO I'LL JUST...



WHAT DO YOU MEAN "OBVIOUSLY NOT A WOMAN," FOREIGNER?

YOU APOLOGIZE TO HER RIGHT NOW!



CHAPTER TWO BROKEN JEWEL OF THE SOUTH

Chiaroscuro is the largest city in the South, and only Gem exceeds its wealth. In many ways, Chiaroscuro exemplifies life in the Second Age: a fabulous wreck displaying the glories that Creation has lost. The Exalted built their Chiaroscuro of magically strengthened glass, from the vermillion glass streets to the stained-glass mosaics and windows that adorned homes and shops. Towers of multicolored glass rose dozens or even hundreds of stories. Immense breakwaters of blue glass framed the largest and finest harbor in the South.

The old city lies in ruins now, its towers shattered into shining rubble, but a new Chiaroscuro grows amid the wreckage. Instead of magical carriages, the blood-red streets carry horses, camels and the sedan chairs of the wealthy. Dozens of ships still leave and dock every day in the blue glass harbor, traveling between Chiaroscuro and the rest of Creation. Countless caravans bring other goods by land. Chiaroscuro's population is much reduced from its heights in the Old Realm, but at more than a million souls

it remains the largest city of the South. Its people do not grieve much for the past. The city thrives once more as the hub of Southern commerce. Tens of thousands come every year to seek their fortunes.

If you can make it in Chiaroscuro, its people say, you can make it anywhere. But if you can make it in Chiaroscuro, why would you bother to leave?

HISTORY

Chiaroscuro dates from the ancient days when the Primordials and their Dragon King subjects ruled Creation. Back then, it was a far smaller city, though already featuring towers of glass. After the Primordial War, Chiaroscuro grew rapidly. Two millennia after the Primordial War, the city reached its peak population of 22 million. For the next 1,500 years, Chiaroscuro was the South's largest port and a thriving center of manufacturing and trade.

The Usurpation hit Chiaroscuro especially hard. Several Anathema took refuge in Chiaroscuro's palace of



government, where they fought the combined might of the Dragon-Blooded and their Sidereal allies. Anathema sorcery and the Essence-powered weapons of the usurpers reduced the massive spire to a lake of molten glass and shattered other towers for a mile around it. The mile-wide plain of rippled golden glass remains to this day as a reminder of the terrible energies once unleashed in the city's heart.

Despite this damage, Chiaroscuro remained a vast and populous commercial metropolis during the centuries of the Shogunate. Indeed, shantytowns of squatters from other parts of the South expanded the city still further. Yet the Contagion killed at least nine out of 10 inhabitants, leaving its towers filled with corpses. Many survivors fled in a vain attempt to avoid the plague. People filtered back after the Fair Folk invasion—just in time for the warlords called the Seven Tigers to occupy the city as their mustering-point for invading the Blessed Isle. When the Scarlet Empress turned the Realm Defense Grid against the Seven Tigers, her attack and huge, accompanying earthquakes shattered nearly all of the city's towers and killed all but 10,000 of the remaining inhabitants. The cataclysm left Chiaroscuro a vast charnel house.

Eventually, the ravages of time took care of the dead, and the remnants of civilization returned to Chiaroscuro. A century after the end of the First Age, the population had risen to 40,000 as a small but important port that maintained a thriving trade in First Age artifacts scavenged from the city's ruin. Of course, this importance made the city a target for bandits and warlords, each strongman wresting the city from the one before him.

Two centuries after the end of the First Age, Chiaroscuro was a sparsely inhabited ruin that still consisted of little more than a port, a few caravan depots and encampments of bandits, smugglers and pirates. In RY 211, everything changed when the Delzahn Horde conquered the city. Since then, the Delzahn have helped rebuild Chiaroscuro and have encouraged many others to do the same.

The city remains a glorious ruin and a vivid reminder of how much less the Second Age is than the First. It is also, however, a thriving commercial center that rivals Nexus both in size and in the amount of wealth that flows through its markets and into the pockets of its merchants. The Delzahn's monarch, the Tri-Khan, now rules one of the South's largest, richest and most powerful nations.

GEOGRAPHY

First Age maps of Chiaroscuro show the city as an oval covering more than 300 square miles along the coast. From the air it was said to resemble a multi-colored crab with azure claws. The crab was the oval city, 24 miles wide and 16 miles deep, where buildings rose above crimson streets. Buildings used by the Deliberative were made of golden glass, giving the "crab" a golden crown. Other buildings came in every color of the rainbow, with no reason beyond aesthetics

THE FIELD OF GOLD

The Chiaroscurans call the square mile of rippled golden glass left by the Solars' tower the Field of Gold. The vast bare expanse becomes blazing hot under the Southern sun. By midday, temperatures on the glass expanse reach blistering heat. By late afternoon, the heat deals environmental damage equal to a severe sandstorm (see *Exalted*, p. 131). The Delzahn sometimes use the Field of Gold as a test of courage and endurance, daring each other to run across it later and later in the day.

determining their hues. Beneath the city's foundations lay the sewers, service tunnels and other utilities.

THE HARBOR

The crab's claws were a pair of huge glass breakwaters that enclosed more than 20 square miles of ocean. They were made to endure the worst storms imaginable. The temblors that toppled the rest of Chiaroscuro merely cracked these massive structures. The breakwaters rise more than 20 yards above the waves. Mighty enchantments wrought into the glass itself still protect the harbor from storms, reducing even the worst hurricane to no more than a stiff breeze within the enclosure.

At the tip of each breakwater, a tower rises an additional 100 yards above the top of the wall. At its apex, each tower carries a brilliant Essence beacon consisting of an ox-sized sphere of red jade inlaid with orichalcum wires. Essence antennas embedded in the breakwater still power them, though damage reduces their brilliance. The mechanism that swiveled the lighthouse beams also broke long ago; teams of slaves turn the beacons instead. The beacons can be aimed only across the ocean. On a dark night, sailors can see these beacons for about 20 miles out to sea. (They used to reach 100 miles.) Southern mariners tell many tales of ships lost in stormy seas that suddenly sighted these twin beacons and followed the Bright Eyes of Chiaroscuro to safety.

THE SURROUNDING COUNTRYSIDE

The coastline around Chiaroscuro consists of a wide and fertile stretch of savanna. Winter rains turn the savanna green. By Resplendent Earth, though, the land dries and no rain falls until well into the Season of Air. These rolling plains are home to the Delzahn nomads, who traditionally grazed their horses, goats and camels all across its length and breadth. Within 100 miles of Chiaroscuro, however, the land has been converted to farms that grow food for the million-plus inhabitants of Chiaroscuro. Slaves do most of the work on the large farms, or latifundia, that raise grain or cotton. Small family farms generally raise fruits and vegetables.

Many nomadic Delzahn resent the replacement of the grasslands, but the Tri-Khan's law protects these farmers.

More importantly, so do the urban nobles loyal to the Tri-Khan, as well as the mercenaries the Tri-Khan hires from the Guild. As a result, the nomads raid only those farms whose owners and managers do not deal politely with visiting Delzahn and who do not allow their camels and horses to drink from their wells and graze the stubble of harvested fields. In return, polite farmers benefit from these beasts' manure.

The latifundia continue expanding outward from Chiaroscuro. Tensions rise between farmers and the nomadic Delzahn. The fact that nomadic Delzahn sometimes decide to forsake their herds to become farmers also makes some nomads worry about the future of their tribes.

Inland, the terrain becomes rougher, the winter rains sparser and the waterholes fewer and further between. Here, the Delzahn nomads can graze their herds freely but need greater expanses of open range. The Delzahn Empire has no clear southern boundary. It simply fades into the deep desert about 600 miles inland. Not that the Delzahn want a border. To the nomads' point of view, anywhere they ride is part of their empire, and anyone who doesn't like it had better be strong enough to fight for his land.

THE CITY OUTSKIRTS

Despite the passage of centuries, the borders of Old Chiaroscuro remain well defined. The red-glass streets just *stop* and with them, as does the rubble of broken glass. The outermost hovels of New Chiaroscuro's squatters have reached this limit, and the first farmhouses begin not far beyond, so the city has no clearer a boundary than the Delzahn Empire itself.

The First Age city had no bounding wall and needed none. Shortly after the Delzahn conquered Chiaroscuro, they built sturdy walls from glass rubble and mortar around the largely intact western section of the old city. The Delzahn added another, larger round of walls three centuries later, protecting nearby intact portions of the old city and some of the wealthier and more stable portions of the new city. Since then, the population of Chiaroscuro has more than tripled. Today, most of the inhabited portions of Chiaroscuro lie outside the old Delzahn walls. Wealthy as the city has become, trying to build a wall vast enough to enclose all the outlying slums would still bankrupt the Tri-Khan's government. The Delzahn don't care; the poor can take care of themselves. In any case, the Delzahn expect that their cavalry can annihilate any foe that approaches the city.

Three of the red glass roads extend beyond the old city limits, heading east, south and southwest. Essence antennas embedded in the roads still keep them clear of sand, repair cracks and shield travelers from sandstorms and other harsh weather. Today, the eastern road leads to the Varangian city-state of Talt; the southwestern road leads to Paragon; the third road stretches deep into the Southern interior and eventually connects to a modern road leading to Gem. The Old South Road leads farther into the desert





wastes before damage inflicted by the Fair Folk permits the sand to cover it.

THE OLD CITY

Portions of Old Chiaroscuro remain at least partially intact. Two small areas in the central city suffered only minor damage, and clusters of mostly intact towers reach for the sky. Hundreds of other towers broke and fell, but lower floors remain habitable. In the less damaged regions, the streets remain magically clean and bright as well.

The most prestigious portion of the old city lies on the west side of the harbor, where several dozen of the city's glass towers remain unbroken. A smaller region survives near the center of the city, lying just east of the Field of Gold. Here, a cluster of nine towers remains almost intact, with several half-intact towers around them. Each tower stands between 50 and 200 stories high.

Here dwell the city's merchant princes, Guild factors and the most important Delzahn nobles, amid fantastic Essence-powered luxury—or what Old Realm folk would call the humble decencies of life. The elevators, lights and climate control all still function in these buildings, powered by Essence accumulators built into the walls. At night, the intact towers reveal another lingering marvel of the First Age. During the day, the glass of the towers soaks up the bright sunlight shining down upon this city, releasing it at night. From the lower minarets of each tower, beams of light shine down to the surrounding streets. Each night, too, Essence-winds sweep the streets clean of debris.

Elite thaumaturges (mortal, God-Blooded and even a few outcaste Dragon-Blooded) service the devices that control these functions. On rare occasions, they can even repair similar devices found in other towers. Actually repairing the glass walls of the towers or building new climate control mechanisms, however, is well beyond the ability of even these highly skilled sorcerer-artisans.

Chiaroscuro also holds several hundred broken but still habitable towers, some in clusters and some standing alone amid neighbors utterly destroyed. About a third of these buildings retain working elevators, allowing residents to live 20 or more floors above the street. The upper stories hold the most desirable apartments. A third of the broken towers retain Essence-lighting. A third possess clean running water. A third offer climate control—not always the same third, but about half the towers preserve some sort of First Age convenience. The more utilities a tower-stump offers, the wealthier its inhabitants are.

In buildings where the elevators failed, the most desirable apartments are located on the first few floors. The upper stories become the home of poorer merchants, scribes and skilled artisans. Some inhabitants spend up to half an hour walking down the stairs every morning and longer climbing back in the evening. Others build rickety elevators consisting of a wooden platform, a length of rope, a simple pulley and a counterweight, with perhaps a few husky slaves

SOLID FOUNDATIONS

Why did some towers stand and others fall? The vagaries of the Empress's attack explain much. She concentrated the Realm Defense Grid on neighborhoods where the Seven Tigers concentrated their troops and materiel. Some neighborhoods also suffered greater damage than others in the Usurpation and were left irreparably fragile. The two central clusters of intact towers, however, owe their survival to what they rest upon: the foundations of the *first* Chiaroscuro, laid Ages ago by the Primordials themselves. Even the great earthquakes and the Realm Defense Grid could not shake such handiwork.

Of course, whoever ordained this stability is probably now one of the Demon Princes or Neverborn. But surely, if there were any danger the old Solars would have noticed and negated it. Wouldn't they?

to help with the pulling. Attached to the outsides of the buildings and vulnerable to wind, these devices help residents living on upper floors go up and down more easily.

At least 100,000 of the city's residents live in the old city amidst the partially functional wonders of the First Age. Any Delzahn noble can claim a place in one of the buildings of the old city. Other Delzahn must pay modest rents to the Tri-Khan, while non-Delzahn must possess at least three dots in Resources to live in the upper floors of buildings without elevators and more to live in the more intact and functional towers.

THE NEW CITY

The new city consists of everything built in the Second Age, whether truly new construction or salvaged from the most ruined portions of older structures. New Chiaroscuro holds many different regions, ranging from well-ordered neighborhoods to squalid slums. Unlike the old city, living in the new city is completely free. Acquiring a comfortable dwelling rather than a rude hovel, however, requires either paying someone for a house or building it oneself.

The best and most prosperous neighborhoods feature well-made structures of adobe, with the finest built of fired brick faced with mosaics of colored glass. In many of these districts, clever artisans tapped into functional portions of the city's water supply to provide many houses with running water. Thaumaturges replaced the broken street lamps with ones scavenged from poorer or uninhabited regions. More often, though, the inhabitants make do with mortal artifice, such as street lamps fueled by burning fat or vegetable oil.

Most of New Chiaroscuro, however, consists of mud-brick tenements or hovels built from the broken glass of ruined buildings. Poor folk may also stretch greased canvas across the foundations of ruined towers as a way to keep

out wind and rain. These portions of the new city resemble lingering refugee camps. In many cases, that's precisely what they are. Chiaroscuro welcomes all comers, even squatters, because it still has space for far more people than currently inhabit it. Even a mostly ruined building offers effectively free shelter. For some people, living in a hovel beats their other options or where they lived before.

Not all residents of Chiaroscuro's slums are quite this desperate. Some merely wish to live very cheaply. Some tenements are clean and well managed, and every room has a window of First Age glass (if perhaps oddly shaped). Here live the honest laborers whose humble efforts keep the city functioning.

Other folk seek anonymity. There are few better places to hide in the South than the depths of the new city, where people come and go daily and most are too busy just surviving to worry about each other's secrets.

THE OUT-OF-TOWNERS' QUARTER

A wide region for transients dominates the east side of the harbor. Centuries ago, laborers cleared out the rubble. Now, mud-brick caravansaries stand like islands in a sea of tents. The Guild has a large trading and warehouse compound built entirely from stone and fired brick. This place is also home to all of the Guild personnel who lack the wealth or

SCAVENGERS

Thousands of scavengers scour the ruins and the undercity for items of value. Most scavengers make a meager living by finding and sorting fragments of First Age glass. All of them, however, dream of discovering a working artifact or other wonder. Since all of the easily located items were scavenged centuries ago, the most daring must now venture up into the highest reaches of unstable towers or into the deepest portions of the undercity. Almost all scavengers live and die in poverty, and more than a few simply vanish—killed by an accident, some subterranean beast or a greedy competitor. Still, a few manage to find something of value, from a jade daiklave to a functioning vehicle. Even the least of these wonders brings the individual out of poverty. A very few scavengers go from rags to vast wealth. Of course, greedy merchants sometimes murder careless or naïve scavengers.

power to live in the old city. You can buy every mundane good imaginable at the district's hundred bazaars.

Some travelers come to this portion of the city to trade. Other people seek work in the city. Many come to join the





endless stream of caravans and trading expeditions bound for all corners of the South and ships sailing for all portions of Creation. The nomadic Delzahn form a contingent of their own, riding in to sell cattle and goats, sheep, horses and camels.

In the winter and spring, during the peak trading season, more than 200,000 people dwell in the foreigners' quarter. At least half that number remains there throughout the year. Most residents of this travelers' city eventually depart. The nomads ride back to the desert laden with sugar and salt, ornaments and silk, weapons and armor. The merchants set forth on their caravans. The sailors return to the sea. Some, however, depart for other parts of Chiaroscuro as permanent residents of the South's broken jewel.

THE PLAZA

Near Old Chiaroscuro's eastern edge lies a region a mile wide where the towers suffered complete destruction. Amid the devastation and the huts of squatters, however, rises a small neighborhood of tidy, five-story buildings—just six blocks of them around a modest red-glass plaza. A number of roads extend through the ruins to connect this neighborhood to the Old East Road and the rest of Chiaroscuro. Around the edge of this neighborhood runs a fine gold line in the red streets.

The Chiaroscurans call this neighborhood the Plaza. It does not need distinction from the city's other open spaces. The buildings are of First Age glass, though of Second Age styling. Most buildings have shops on their ground floors, with four stories of comfortable flats above. These apartments remain cool in the fiercest summer heat. Residents enjoy hot and cold running water, walls that dim or glow at a touch and other conveniences.

All of these First Age amenities are broken or mock-ups. They function only through the will and the power of Grandmother Bright, a goddess who would seem far too powerful to claim such a small district as her sphere of influence. (See **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. IV—The Roll of Glorious Divinity I**, pp. 52–54 for Grandmother Bright and how she came to the Plaza.) She looks like a tall, slender and elderly woman with long gray hair, dressed in gold and crimson robes. At night, her skin softly glows. Grandmother Bright is the Plaza's only law. She keeps it safe and keeps the peace among its inhabitants.

Exactly 1,001 living people inhabit the Plaza. At night, exactly 1,001 ghosts walk the streets. By Grandmother Bright's command, none may attack each other. The ghosts can enter the buildings only with a resident's permission. If Grandmother Bright catches anyone attacking the buildings or one of her tenants, with a wave of her hand she transforms the assailant into a faceless, gold-skinned humanoid whom she sets to work sweeping the streets and performing other menial labors. These thralls have no will except to serve Grandmother Bright and no need for sustenance, but they do age and die in time. Only Adamant Circle Counter-

magic or Grandmother Bright herself can undo this curse. People who try to move in without Grandmother Bright's permission merely suffer terrifying hallucinations until they leave. Grandmother Bright's protection applies only within the Plaza neighborhood itself, though. She does not protect residents if they pass beyond the golden line. Nor does she care what her tenants do outside her boundaries. (For instance, one resident is a skilled assassin who simply doesn't accept contracts against other residents).

Grandmother Bright strictly enforces her population limits. She accepts new residents only when an old resident moves out or dies. This restriction includes births. Women cannot conceive within the Plaza; if they become pregnant outside the Plaza, the pregnancy remains suspended indefinitely, advancing only when the woman ventures outside Grandmother Bright's domain. If anyone dies and becomes a ghost, he must leave unless one of the older ghosts departs instead. All replacements, among the living or the dead, must be completed within one day. Despite Grandmother Bright's inflexibility, she has a long line of would-be tenants, both ghost and mortal.

Grandmother Bright often walks about the Plaza, chatting with its residents. She also frequently sits in an elegant red-and-gold pavilion in the Plaza's center, receiving supplicants. The goddess knows a great deal about Chiaroscuro, past and present, and about the First Age. Her petitioners include spies and treasure-hunters as well as savants of First Age lore and would-be tenants. Just to receive a hearing, though, a petitioner must give Grandmother Bright an object of beauty. She prefers old or natural objects to items newly made.

This payment may suffice for minor requests (for instance, translating an Old Realm manuscript or making sure that both sides in a negotiation tell the truth). When a supplicant wants a major favor from Grandmother Bright, however, she demands further payment in the form of a specific object or a unique service. The goddess cares nothing for ordinary riches or favors. She chooses her fee based on the value of the favor and on a supplicant's ability to pay. She often asks petitioners to arrange for third parties to perform tasks. In a recent case, parents who sought their lost child were asked to persuade a minor Delzahn noble to go to the harbor and launch a toy boat carrying five lotus blossoms. In another, she told a scavenger seeking First Age artifacts to persuade a famous duelist to bring her a jade dagger belonging to the Dynastic commander of the Realm's garrison. Naturally, beings with power of their own, such as the Exalted, receive tasks of greater difficulty.

Grandmother Bright's tasks are never as capricious as they seem. Each in some way advances the safety and rebuilding of Chiaroscuro. The well-known case of the missing child and the toy boat, for instance, led to a seaynymph falling in love with the Delzahn noble and bearing him a God-Blooded child. Fewer people know that the child became the famous assassin who bought his apartment in



the Plaza with a pledge of five murders of Grandmother Bright's choice. She has collected on three. Most recently, the assassin used the Dynastic general's white jade dagger to kill the Silken Harlequin, a Fair Folk noble who sought to enthrall leading citizens at her *Pantomime of Dreams*.

THE UNDERCITY

The least known and most dangerous portion of Chiaroscuro is the undercity. During the First Age, a vast network of storm drains, subway tunnels, underground warehouses and workshops stretched beneath the city. Even during this wondrous epoch, however, smugglers, thieves and other criminals used remote and disused sections of the undercity as dens of vice and storehouses for stolen goods. Today the subways no longer run, and most of the factories lie in lost and forgotten ruins. The dens of vice and the storehouses for stolen goods remain.

THE UNDERMARKET

Although no one but a pair of Sidereals with an interest in crime know this fact, the longest-running market in Creation lies beneath the streets of Chiaroscuro. It is most often called the Undermarket, and it has been in continuous operation for more than 4,000 years. During the Contagion, the Undermarket sold stolen (or fake) medicines; in the Fair Folk invasion, a few audacious merchants sold hiding places in nearby tunnels. After the old city's cataclysmic end, the Undermarket was soon back in business selling food and dwindling supplies of First Age goods to the survivors.

The Undermarket occupies an abandoned subway station. Actually, the architect was bribed to place the station deliberately in the wrong location so that it would be abandoned—whereupon, it could become a centrally located illegal market with access to more than a dozen tunnels under the city. Today, the Undermarket consists of an irregularly shaped underground plaza dimly lit by Essence-powered lamps. Four large subway tunnels and three smaller access tunnels connect to the plaza. One subway tunnel leads out to the bay, where the ruin of an ancient glass jetty conceals its terminus. Here, small boats with muffled oars offload contraband brought from ships waiting miles offshore. The smugglers return bearing payments of jade, silver, rare drugs and stolen goods. A number of shops in the Undermarket sell a variety of false-bottomed crates and other containers for those who prefer to smuggle in other ways. The Guild currently enjoys good relations with the Undermarket. An official representative from the local factor works here full time.

The Undermarket also deals in services. A number of assassins sell their services in the Undermarket. Contract thieves, kidnappers, freelance spies and blackmailers also offer their services—or rather, discreet intermediaries offer them on the criminals' behalf, since such individuals often prefer to remain anonymous. Several brothels service clients with unusual tastes. A few offer demons, the walking dead or various hobgoblins. (The raksha proprietor of one offers

herself when the price is right.) Another brothel offers victims that exceptionally wealthy patrons can mutilate or even murder in all manner of creative ways. Some of these victims are thieves caught trying to steal from the Undermarket. Others are paupers who sell themselves in return for generous payments to their families. Most were simply poor people snatched off the streets.

DANGERS IN THE DEPTHS

Some of Chiaroscuro's deepest and most remote underways are exceptionally dangerous. For instance, various subterranean manses once powered the subway system and other amenities. The earthquakes destroyed the manses and various powerful technomagical devices, leaving uncapped demesnes and artificial Wyld pockets. These regions have mutated both animals and a few desperate people who live too near them. Fortunately, these zones of warped and toxic Essence are sufficiently far underground that their effects do not extend to the surface. Explorers can, however, encounter everything from horribly mutated cannibals who now shun the light to large and chitin-covered rats with hands and minds rivaling those of mortals. The most dangerous zones lie under the wealthiest portion of the old city, where Primordial power still saturates the underground.

Some of these creatures have worked to extend the deepest underways. In so doing, they uncovered openings to the cavernous realms inhabited by long-buried forbidden gods (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. IV—The Rolls of Glorious Divinity I*, pp. 69–71). Underfolk and similar monsters from the cavernous depths of Creation have invaded a few of the deepest tunnels of the undercity and present truly eldritch perils to those who venture too far and too deep.

The smugglers and other criminals who use the Undercity know to avoid the regions around the uncapped demesnes and Wyld zones. Unfortunately, this means that brave or desperate scavengers enter such long-shunned locations in search of valuable artifacts. A very few find

GO OR SHUN?

Undercity folk know the weird rat-things make their own blades and bows. A few lucky explorers claim to have seen the creatures' dwellings—twisting tunnels and chambers of masterful but inhuman workmanship. Tales say that if you leave a broken item at certain locations near the creatures' dwellings, with suitable payment (a jug of wine in one version; a silver coin in another; a living human baby in a third), you can return a day later to find the item mended good as new.

No one admits to having tested this rumor, though. Another tale says that later, the rat-creatures sneak out from their labyrinths, find the one who hired them and carry him off to a terrible and unknown doom, leaving not a trace behind.



wonders that make them wealthy. Others return with horrifying stories of terrible monsters and of devoured companions. Many never return at all, for although the chthonic beings shun the light, many dine eagerly upon any mortals they catch underground. Some of the mutants and cavern-spawned horrors recently began wandering further into the upper portions of the undercity.

These problems will continue as long as the buried demesnes remain uncapped and the Wyld zones unpurged, for the twisted or superabundant Essence attracts the horrors that it does not directly create. Assuming anyone could rebuild the long-destroyed manses, doing so would reduce the threats in the undercity. They would also restore power to surviving portions of the subway system, self-repair systems in some of the broken towers or various other utilities in the city above.

ECONOMY, TRADE AND SUSTENANCE

Chiaroscuro has reclaimed its ancient place as the South's largest port and the center for Southern trade. Most aspects of Chiaroscuran life have a commercial aspect.

Goods arrive from as far away as the Haltan Republic, the Skullstone Archipelago or the Haslanti League. Merchants from all across the South send factors to this city so they can be the first to have a chance to purchase these exotic foreign goods. On the land routes, Chiaroscuro lies between the wealth of Harborhead and the Varang City-States, and the mines of Gem and Paragon. Such is the sheer volume of commerce that Dynasts often find it more practical to make deals and exchange cargoes in Chiaroscuro than the Realm itself. (Doing business away from the prying eyes of Thousand Scales bureaucrats is often an added incentive.) The commerce ranges from commonplace bulk goods such as cotton, lumber and slaves to spices, incense, jewels, precious oils and silken veils as fine as cobweb, all the way up to First Age artifacts and gossamer wonders of the Fair Folk.

The Guild is the largest commercial enterprise in Chiaroscuro, but not the only one. Several Delzahn nobles own merchant houses, the largest of which do business on the Guild's scale, at least within Chiaroscuro itself. A number of Dynasts also run banks and trading companies in the city. Over chilled sherbet and honeyed dates, these magnates and nobles engage in the highest of high finance and exchange treasures worth entire cartloads of jade.

All this wealth depends on a reliable supply of food and water. The coast in this region happens to be ideal for growing wheat. The city must still buy enormous quantities of wheat, rice and other staples from An-Teng, the Lap and Varangia, however. The Tri-Kahn himself pays for a weekly dole of grain for the poor. Half of Chiaroscuro gets nervous if the grain-ships do not arrive on time. Delays in the dole have cause memorable food riots.

Middle-class or wealthier people in Chiaroscuro can also afford meat at least once a week, thanks to the Delzahn who still live as nomads. The Tri-Khan faces a genuine

puzzle of resource management, in that expanding farmland means reducing grazing land and the meat supply—which his nobles will not accept. Tri-Khan Yejouj currently tries to sell his nomadic vassals on the idea of letting foreigners sell livestock in Chiaroscuro. If he can persuade them, Guildsmen in Harborhead are ready to organize the largest cattle-drive the Second Age has ever seen... whose success or failure would likely determine whether Yejouj keeps his throne.

Chiaroscuro's water supply depends largely on remnant First Age utilities that pump in and desalinate seawater. People who own a tower-stump with a working water supply often sell access to this vital resource. Unfortunately, every such device that Second Age savants can repair was returned to service long ago. Expanding the city's water supply to keep pace with its population requires technical skills of the ancient Anathema, not to mention rebuilding the subterranean manses. Some chambers in the undercity were turned into great cisterns for storing rainwater. Further from the city, the farmers and the Delzahn both dig wells but have similarly reached the limits of their technical capacity.

The city doesn't just eat and trade, though. Chiaroscuro's artisans practice every mundane craft in the world, and quite a few of the exotic ones. Whether you seek an oxcart or a daiklave, someone in Chiaroscuro can make it for you.

The Delzahn have a monopoly on selling all goods made from First Age glass. Anyone in the city may collect shards of glass or manufacture goods from this material. Only designated merchant-nobles, however, can buy or sell

CHIAROSCURAN GLASS WEAPONS AND ARMOR

A number of industries exploit the broken glass of Chiaroscuro's fallen towers. This material is both harder and lighter than the finest steel. Smaller fragments are good for only ornaments and mosaics, but larger fragments can become weapons and armor. When made into edged or pointed weapons such as swords or spearheads, the weapon has the same traits as an ordinary metal weapon, except that it gains the Piercing tag and has a minimum Strength requirement one dot lower than the comparable metal weapon.

Chiaroscuran glass can be ground and cut but not joined together, so it can be used only to make breastplates, reinforced breastplates, lamellar armor and the plates in a reinforced buff jacket. Such armor made using this glass is exceptional equipment (see **Exalted**, p. 365), reducing both the mobility penalty and the fatigue rating by one. Weapons and armor made from this glass have their Resources cost raised by one dot in the South. Outside the South, it has a cost two dots higher than normal when it is available at all.

their handiwork. These Delzahn nobles in turn sell Chiaroscuran glassware to visiting merchants. While unofficial deals happen regularly, high fines await any merchants who make such deals, while any non-Delzahn selling the glass additionally faces public whipping.

RELIGION AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Like much else about Chiaroscurano, the local religion is a complex mixture of old and new. Grandmother Bright is merely the most powerful god who lives in Chiaroscurano. Several local gods possess significant cults, which the religiously flexible Delzahn have adopted or at least tolerate. Grandmother Bright has the largest cult, for many Chiaroscurans view her as the city's guardian deity.

In addition, the Delzahn cult of the Kha-Khan (see *The Manual of Exalted Power—The Lunars*, p. 75) has spread beyond the Delzahn. Today, Chiaroscurans of all origins worship the Kha-Khan alongside other local and Celestial gods. The cult explicitly names Tamas Khan, King of Kings, as blessed by the Celestial Incarnae, though the Kha-Khan myth does not call him Exalted. Rather, the cult says that Tamas Khan descended from Heaven to lead the Delzahn to glory and returned to Heaven to heal his wounds after a great battle.

FORBIDDEN CULTS

Unfortunately, Chiaroscurano's laissez-faire attitude to religion permits the growth of cults that *don't* live and let live. The Salmalin cult of the demon Sondok has flourished in Chiaroscurano for centuries, though it suffered a setback when its best assassin Exalted as a Lawgiver. Cults of Deathlords, Fair Folk and other dire entities also must remain out of the public eye. When the Tri-Khan decides that a cult *does* threaten the city's order, his purge is ruthless.

Immaculate missionaries did little to reduce these assorted cults. In a city where the grandeur of the Realm lies across the sea and powerful gods live a few blocks away, the Immaculate faith's demand for a religious monopoly didn't get far. Instead, the Chiaroscurans adopted the Immaculate Dragons into their general *mélange* of religion. Today, many inhabitants keep tablets to the Immaculate Dragons next to their small altar to Grandmother Bright, an icon of the Kha-Khan and their shrine to their ancestors. The Kha-Khan cult lists the Immaculate Dragons among the divinities who blessed Tamas Khan.

Indeed, the most characteristic feature of Chiaroscuran faith is its multiplicity. Most residents make at least small





offerings to half a dozen or more deities, changing which deities they honor depending upon what god seems most useful at the moment. The city holds hundreds of shrines, from the Immaculate temple in Old Chiaroscuro from storefront fanes to crude altars in rag-draped hovels. As with most aspects of Chiaroscuran life, people do what works for them, change when something looks like it might work better, and don't much worry what anyone else does if they don't cause trouble.

DELZAHN SHAMANS

The nomadic Delzahn follow a shamanic faith. Their priests deal with whatever small gods the Delzahn encounter in their travels. Immaculate missionaries merely gave the shamans one more stratagem for dealing with spirits. When a spirit won't cooperate, the shamans invoke the authority of the Immaculate Dragons, along with Luna, the Unconquered Sun and Tamas Khan, warning that greater powers in Heaven watch the Terrestrial spirits' deeds. By the same token, the shaman suggests that Heaven may reward spirits who treat the Delzahn well.

Trance plays an important part in Delzahn shamanic rites. The shamans enter a trance by chewing certain herbs and dancing a whirling, leaping dance to the music of flutes and drums. Such a trance is necessary for the shamans' version of the *Spirit Sight* ritual and most other thaumaturgical rituals the shaman knows from the Arts of Elemental Summoning or Spirit Beckoning (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**, pp. 136, 140-141). For shamans who do not know thaumaturgy, the ecstatic dance is simply their mode of exercising their priestly function in prayer (see **Exalted**, p. 132).

GHOSTS AND SHADOWLANDS

Despite the prodigious numbers of people who died in Chiaroscuro (especially in the Contagion), some combination of luck and geomancy kept large shadowlands from forming. Instead, the city contains hundreds of tiny and unstable shadowlands. Most are no larger than the ruined foundations of a single building, and many are only a few paces wide. Nevertheless, ghosts use them to walk from the Underworld onto the streets of Chiaroscuro. In some neighborhoods, ghosts fill the nighttime streets while the living hide indoors behind wards of salt. All of the known shadowlands are similarly warded—but wards decay or are destroyed. Dozens of tiny shadowlands are known only to the ghosts who use them. Local ancestor cults also keep a few shadowlands open but do their best to restrict what ghosts may use them.

A few of these ancestor cults operate in an impressively businesslike fashion, with the living bribing the ghosts not to cause trouble, with further payments to ghosts who help restrain their fellows. In return, when the living members die, they become the recipients of the cult's offerings and help keep the peace between the living and the dead. As

with the living, many of the dead see Chiaroscuro as a refuge from the terrors and oppression of the wider world. Many families burn offerings for their dead relatives. A few of the small shadowlands even hold small markets where the living and the dead can trade.

STRANGE FOLK

Since the start of the Second Age, Chiaroscuro has become a refuge for renegade gods, wandering God-Blooded, outcaste Dragon-Blooded, disreputable thaumaturges, the walking dead, and even a few of the Fair Folk and the Anathema. Chiaroscuro recently became home to at least one Lawgiver, as well as an occasional rest stop for at least two deathknights.

As long as such people abide by most of the local laws and do not draw attention to themselves, the Tri-Khan is happy to let anyone live in Chiaroscuro—though his spies monitor them as best they can. As a result, knowledgeable residents and visitors regularly hire the services of these interesting folk. There is a small but thriving trade in unusual alchemical creations, eccentric blessings and curses, secret Essence enlightenment and a wide variety of similar services. At various points in Chiaroscuro's history, the current Tri-Khan asked some of these beings for favors as a reward for his continued discretion.

On the other hand, Tri-Khans never hesitated to denounce Anathema, Fair Folk or other beings who used their powers to disrupt commerce, massacre citizens or otherwise threaten the Tri-Khans' rule and posture as loyal vassals of the Realm. Such troublemakers soon face the final cohort of resident beings of power: the Realm Garrison, or even a full-fledged Wyld Hunt.

THE DELZAHN NOMADS

Before they conquered Chiaroscuro, the Delzahn consisted of three tribes living on the Plain of Wind-Scattered Bones. They warred against each other as often as they raided outsiders. Their legendary hero-king Tamas Khan united the Delzahn into one people. After the conquest, the newly unified Delzahn divided in two, with one portion ruling and living in Chiaroscuro, and the rest returning to their nomadic ways. To preserve the unity of the Delzahn people, Tamas Khan divided the Delzahn into urban and nomadic cohorts within tribes, rather than between tribes.

Today, the Delzahn make up about a quarter of Chiaroscuro's population. Many urban Delzahn, however, have nomadic cousins, friendships and marriages between city and country Delzahn are common, and Delzahn move between urban and nomadic life whenever they want.

Some nomadic Delzahn resent their urban cousins for their softer life. A few nobles openly defy the Tri-Khan and refuse to honor the ancient, hereditary oaths that bind the tribes together. Yet, many appreciate having Chiaroscuro as a market for their livestock and a place to buy luxuries unavailable on the plains. The Delzahn like to think of

themselves as fierce, hard-riding warriors. Many Delzahn still are. Even the urban Delzahn often have a hard time accepting that as individuals and as a people, they are also now merchants, artisans, savants, clerks and farmers. Whether the Delzahn remain one people and keep their empire may depend on whether they can resolve this split between their self-image and reality.

GOVERNMENT AND NOBILITY

Both the Delzahn government and their military organization are based on hereditary nobility and ties of kinship. Everyone who can trace their descent to Tamas Khan or the tribal leaders at the time of Chiaroscuro's conquest is considered to be noble. All members of these many noble lineages possess special privileges, such as the right to duel, collect taxes and conduct camel or horse races within the borders of the old city. Currently, almost one in six Delzahn are nobles of some degree and so there are more than 40,000 Delzahn nobles living in Chiaroscuro alone. The Tri-Khan refers to all of these nobles as his uncles, cousins or nephews.

The three Delzahn tribes have intermarried so much that tribal membership depends largely on which ancestors a Delzahn decides to honor. The clans and septs, or subclans, within the tribes matter more for daily life. The hereditary leader of a clan holds the rank of khan. Beneath the khans, the orkhans lead septs. To these ancient titles, Tamas Khan added the new titles of pasha (for lesser nobles) and bey (for upper nobles). The actual privileges attending to these ranks can vary widely. Noble Delzahn add their title to their personal names.

Nomadic Delzahn measure wealth by the size of their herds. Officially, an orkhan owns all his sept's livestock, but he delegates the herd's care to the families within the sept. The orkhans, in turn, offer everything they own to their khan. In theory, this makes every khan fabulously rich, but tens of thousands of beasts scattered over open range hardly constitute a liquid asset. The Delzahn expect their nobles to flaunt their wealth through silken clothing, gaudy jewels, fine weapons and large retinues. A nomad khan, however, might have no money at all. When he wants to buy something, he pays in cattle or with a ring taken from his finger.

The most powerful nobles—khans and beys—move through Chiaroscuro decked in brilliant jeweled robes, bearing glass scimitars and accompanied by mail-clad bodyguards. Despite many tales, though, most Delzahn nobles are not seasoned warriors whose personal wealth rivals that of the richest Dynast. Most Delzahn nobles have far more modest means. While they might enjoy camel racing or dueling, they

are also just as likely to be bankers or bureaucrats as to be professional soldiers.



THE TRI-KHAN

Tamas Khan bore the title of Kha-Khan, King of Kings. His descendants and successors bear the lesser title of Tri-Khan, king of the three Delzahn tribes, since they rule by hereditary right rather than the direct command of Heaven.

Yejouj Khan, the current monarch, is one of the canniest politicians ever to be Tri-Khan—and that's saying something for a lineage that has played the Realm and the Guild against each other for more than 500 years. Yejouj is in his 50s, though, and

his eldest son and heir Semanos is merely rather bright. Resident Dynasts and Guild factors expect they can manipulate him with far greater ease and more frequent success than they do his father.

BIDDING WARS

Most outsiders encounter nobles as part of business. Some nobles possess the right to collect the rents from foreigners living in a particular tower in the old city. The most famous commercial interaction, however, is with the Delzahn customs agents. All nobles beyond the lowest rank have the right to collect taxes and customs duties from newly arrived visitors. Naturally, every tax collector and customs agent takes a cut of these taxes. Many customs agents would happily pauperize visitors. Every merchant and ship captain, however, has the right to pay her duties to any customs agent she wishes, and then becomes immune from further customs fees. Newcomers to Chiaroscuro can watch several customs agents bargaining with the captain of a wealthy fleet. Prosperous nobles also hire gangs of young toughs to guard various docks or town gates and drive off rival customs agents.

Delzahn civil justice is somewhat similar. Magistrates administer civil courts where the loser of any case must pay the costs of the trial. Individuals who are too poor to pay must sell themselves into a period of indenture to cover these costs. Since half of all of these payments go to the magistrate, this post is a lucrative one. Both parties must agree to see the same magistrate, though, so respected and fair magistrates are in high demand.

RESIDENTS AND THE LAW

The Delzahn are governed by a complex code of tribal honor, but they do not expect non-Delzahn to follow it. (Many Delzahn believe that other folk have no honor.) Instead, Chiaroscuro is governed by a set of laws that are at once lax and draconian. The Delzahn peacekeepers and the occasional mercenary police they hire care little about





brawling or petty theft from anyone who is not either Delzahn or wealthy. Yet they care a great deal about crimes that disrupt commerce or threaten the city, such as arson, selling residents to the Fair Folk, murder of any but the poorest and most despised inhabitants or any threat against the various foreign or local wealthy merchants. Such crimes receive inquiry and punishment that is swift and harsh (if not always accurate).

Nobles administer the Delzahn criminal courts. Here, they work to ensure the safety of the city and to enrich themselves. Typical punishments include fines, public whippings, a fine followed by permanent exile from Chiaroscuro, confiscation of all property followed by exile or enslavement. Only the most heinous acts (including any attack on the Tri-Khan or one of the most powerful nobles) receive a death penalty. In all such cases, executions are held in public as a warning to others.

Some portions of Chiaroscuro are effectively beyond the reach of the law. No one tries to enforce law in the Plaza except for Grandmother Bright. Residents who are wanted for serious crimes may live safely in the Plaza for the rest of their lives, since no one would dare to remove them. The Tri-Khan doesn't like a smartass, however. If a Plaza resident commits a serious crime, he sets shifts of guards to watch the Plaza, waiting for the criminal to depart so that he can be captured and punished.

For very different reasons, the worst portions of the new city are also beyond the law. City guards avoid these slums out of fear or disgust. As a result, Chiaroscuro's poorest residents are free to kill each other for scraps of food or steal each other's meager possessions. In some of the slums, gangs of thugs appoint themselves the neighborhood watch in the sense that they keep out other criminals who would victimize the people. When wanted criminals hide in the slums, few city guards try to find them. Many bounty hunters make their living by searching the sprawling city for anyone that a client will to pay for them to find—unless the targeted person pays more than the original client.

Law is different for Delzahn, since Delzahn cannot legally be either enslaved or summarily killed (outside of duels). Minor crimes are punished by fines, private whipping or loss of status in their clan. Crimes of greater severity result in permanent exile from both Chiaroscuro and their clan. The worst crimes are punished by either fighting a fully armed warrior with only a knife—it's a legal duel—or by being left in the desert with nothing but a loincloth, a small water skin and instructions to leave Delzahn lands forever on pain of death.

WAR AND ADMINISTRATION

In wartime, either the Tri-Khan leads the Delzahn Horde or he appoints a close relative who is also a seasoned warrior to be his war-leader. Then the Tri-Khan or his deputy calls upon bonds of honor, fealty or kinship (as

well as promises of booty) to assemble the various lesser khans with their forces and ride with him. The khans, in turn, muster their subordinate orkhans, with their septs. Nobles who do not lead a clan or sept can nevertheless recruit their own bands of warriors. These recruits tend to be professional soldiers, serving for pay as well as personal loyalty. The war-bands of these pashas and beys give the Tri-Khan an alternative source of troops and officers. When mobilized for war, the Delzahn Horde includes both tribal and professional troops and commanders.

Whether tribal levy or professional soldier, the Delzahn Horde operates in multiples of ten. The smallest unit, the *arban*, began as 10 warriors. Arbans assembled into *jaghuns* ("hundreds"), *minghans* ("thousands") and, if necessary, the *tumen* ("ten thousand"). Jaghuns correspond to septs, minghans to clans and tumens to the three ancestral tribes. Septs and clans are now four to seven times larger than when Tamas Khan ordained this system, however, and so are the jaghuns and minghans of the Delzahn Horde.

The Delzahn military is almost all cavalry, which shapes how it fights wars. The Delzahn don't attempt long campaigns to occupy and pacify territory. They sweep through a territory, killing everyone who gets in their way and taking whatever they can carry off, until no one is willing to fight them any longer. Then they appoint viceroys to collect tribute from the conquered population. Any rebellion brings the Horde back for another sweep through the territory.

DEFENSE

Chiaroscuro is largely indefensible by land: It's just too big. The Delzahn expect their fierce cavalry to annihilate

THEFT AND RESTITUTION

Stealing from anyone within a sept means stealing from the sept's orkhan, which makes the deed an affront to the entire community's honor. Rustling a few cattle or pilfering a jewel can trigger an attack that kills dozens and a feud that lasts generations. Homicide, even by accident, can spark similar retribution if the circumstances seem to challenge the sept's honor. So can rape or other serious crimes.

The orkhan of the criminal's sept can avert these unhappy events by quickly offering restitution: a young, unmarried member of his sept, to marry into the aggrieved orkhan's sept. The bride or groom comes with a modest dowry—or a large one, if the crime seemed especially offensive.

The criminal's orkhan could also simply offer the criminal to his victim's vengeance. That could show weakness, however, or at least a lack of resolve to protect one's own people. Orkhans seldom take this route unless they find a crime especially heinous or disgusting.



PROVERBS OF TAMAS KHAN

A MAN FALLS SEVEN TIMES AND RISES EIGHT TIMES.

WHILE YOUR HORSE IS STRONG, RIDE AND SEE PLACES.

TRUE FRIENDS ARE THE BEST ARMOR.

A HORSE RELEASED CAN BE CAUGHT, A WORD RELEASED NEVER.

THE WATER CARRIER DRINKS NO SLIME.

THE TRUTH TELLER IS WISE TO KEEP ONE FOOT IN THE STIRRUP.

STAY ALIVE AND ONE DAY YOU WILL DRINK FROM A GOLDEN CUP.

IF YOU ARE AFRAID, DON'T DO IT. IF YOU DO IT, DON'T BE AFRAID.



any foe long before that foe reaches Chiaroscuro. The Tri-Khan does emplace some artillery, just in case. Today, a pair of lightning ballistae, a panic projector and three medium implosion bows (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age**, pp. 130–133) sit on the stumps of ruined buildings at the edge of the city. The Tri-Khan's armory also includes a few dozen fire cannon, steam cannon and eruptors (see **Scroll of Kings**, pp. 139–140) that can be moved into position to protect the city, along with a few hundred siege slings, onagers and ballistae (see **Scroll of Kings**, pp. 137–138).

By sea, the Delzahn worry most about protecting the harbor. Each of the two breakwaters carries a gigantic steam cannon that can shoot at ships a mile away. A variety of ballistae and other siege artillery are emplaced to attack any hostile ship that enters the harbor.

DELZAHN CULTURE

The Delzahn make up such a large and powerful tribe that other folk often take them as the model for all Southern nomads. Many aspects of Delzahn culture are indeed common to other folk with similar lifestyles. Many other aspects of Delzahn life are peculiar to their culture, however.

SPORT AND DUELING

Many urban Delzahn honor their nomadic ancestors and kin by traveling out of the city to hunt. Nobles and other wealthy urban Delzahn regularly stage large formal hunts. Dozens of Delzahn—nobles, guards, beaters, trackers and more—ride out on fine-boned horses and sturdy camels to chase sand lions, golden-horned desert antelope or other beasts. These hunts double as military exercises that help keep the excellent Delzahn cavalry well practiced.

All Delzahn love racing. Sometimes urban Delzahn leave the city to race their horses or camels, but a sudden enthusiasm can set a crew of Delzahn galloping down a red-glass street as pedestrians run for their lives.

City and country Delzahn also share an elaborate dueling code. Many of the young men—especially those from noble

houses—watch for any insignificant slight as a chance to flaunt their dueling prowess. Close combat duels take place in a circle quickly scratched on the ground. The Delzahn also enjoy horse archery duels, in which the duelists gallop about shooting at each other. Most duels end at first blood, when one combatant forces the other out of the dueling circle or when one archer marks another with a pigment-coated fowling arrow. Still, accidental death or maiming does happen. Serious duels sparked by jealousy or accusations of dishonor are often intentionally to the death.

Most of Chiaroscuro's folk (Delzahn and otherwise) regard these duels both as an enjoyable spectator sport and as an excellent opportunity for gambling. Non-Delzahn, however, are not exempt from challenge. One may refuse a challenge from a Delzahn commoner at cost of nothing more than honor and hooting laughter. Anyone challenged by a Delzahn noble, however, must either fight or leave Chiaroscuro before the next sunrise.

By dueling etiquette, the challenged person decides what weapon both parties shall use. Blades are traditional; so are archery duels or flame pieces at just within the limit of their range (whoever steps back shows his cowardice). Many young nobles practice with a wide assortment of weapons, though, so a hapless merchant who finds he has *somehow* insulted a noble's lineage cannot escape with a bluff by choosing some exotic armament. He may, however, win points for chutzpah and turn a potentially lethal confrontation into a mild wound and a bit of laughter at his expense.

DELZAHN ATTIRE

When Delzahn travel, both men and women wear loose, white or tan robes to protect them from the sun. In town, for festivals or when entertaining guests, Delzahn wear the finest, most glittering attire they can afford: embroidered robes with brightly-hued sashes and turbans, gold or silver jewelry, gem-crusted daggers and the like.

Unmarried Delzahn girls who want to change this state typically wear gauzy silks designed to flaunt their bodies.



Young or old, Delzahn women always go barefaced. Delzahn tradition says this is because a woman has no honor but her beauty.

Delzahn tradition says that a man's honor, however, consists of his deeds and his ancestors. Men, therefore, wear veils of brightly colored cloth that leave only their eyes visible. Embroidered designs on these veils declare the man's lineage and personal glories to those who know the code.

That's the tradition, at least. Any desert traveler quickly realizes that veils also serve a very practical purpose in keeping dust out of one's mouth and nose. (Hundreds of Delzahn nomads herding thousands of beasts can kick up a lot of dust.) Urban Delzahn men tend to be casual about wearing veils, since they don't need them in the city. It's also useful to see faces when dealing with so many strangers. When urban Delzahn visit their country cousins, though, they resume their veils.

GENDER AND THE DERETH

Differences in attire are only one of many differences between the lives of Delzahn men and women. Like many Southern folk, the Delzahn rigidly divide the roles of men and women. Men receive most of the positions of power and prestige that lie beyond the walls of a family's household. Women control the private lives of the Delzahn. Men can marry multiple women but can acquire only

one wife at a time. Within the family, wives hold rank based on their seniority. Only a khan or a magistrate can give a divorce.

Delzahn tradition gives an alternative to men and women who dislike the roles assigned by birth. If a man wears women's clothing with a special gray sash, the Delzahn acknowledge him as a woman. Likewise, a woman can don men's clothing and a gray sash and be treated as a man. Such people are called Dereth.

The Delzahn regard their Dereth as somewhat odd, but acceptably so. Parents may shake their heads when offspring "take the gray" but chalk it up to Fate or the will of a god, neither of which they are willing to challenge. The Delzahn have jokes about Dereth (and the social complications they cause), but all Delzahn are expected to treat Dereth as members of their chosen gender and refer to them using the appropriate pronoun. Dereth also have a reputation as having a knack for jobs that require them to cross other social boundaries, such as dealing with spirits. Therefore, Delzahn shamans are often Dereth.

Outsiders who don't realize the significance of the gray sash can make dangerous gaffes. Foreigners who mock an effeminate gray-sashed man may be beaten or killed by the Dereth's brothers or lover. Gray-sashed and veiled women do not hesitate to meet insults with a challenge to a duel.

COMING OF AGE

Despite the tradition of women staying home, both male and female Delzahn learn to ride when very young. By age five, the average nomad can control a camel. By adolescence, boys and girls are both competent equestrians. Delzahn come of age when their orkhan decides they can be trusted to own a horse and gives them one. The young nomad then rides out to spend five days alone in the prairie or desert, while the sept moves on. Part of the challenge is to find the sept again. Young men return from their venture with fresh meat from the hunt; young women return with a poem. This is often the moment when nascent Dereth declare what gender they choose.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

As one of Creation's greatest trade hubs, Chiaroscuro has commercial relations with just about everyone. Political and military relations are not so diverse.

Chiaroscuro has been a satrapy of the Realm for five centuries, at least in name, and has held an Imperial garrison for three centuries. Considering the value of its port, Chiaroscuro should be a virtual puppet of the Realm. Yet, Chiaroscuro is a satrapy without a satrap, the Imperial garrison is small, and tribute to the Realm is minor compared to the city's overall wealth. Since Tamas Khan, Delzahn rulers have deftly played the Guild against the Realm and the Great Houses against each other and the Empress. That's why the Realm has a commercial legate and an ambassador in Chiaroscuro, but no satrap. No Great House would risk letting a rival claim such a powerful office in such a crucial location. As a result, Chiaroscuro and the Delzahn Empire retain de facto independence despite their official submission to the Realm.

The Guild is the Delzahn's second great partner and rival. Tamas Khan gave the Guild permission to buy and sell any commodity, including drugs, slaves and First Age artifacts. In return, the Guild made Chiaroscuro its principal hub in the South, second only to Nexus in its worldwide commercial network. Tamas Khan, however, limited the number of bodyguards and other soldiers the Guild could station within the city and kept control of the profitable glass trade through his nobles. So far, the Realm has



reliably blocked attempts by the Guild to repeal these limits and threaten the Delzahn.

Chiaroscuro's neighboring states dread the day when the Delzahn Horde decides to expand its empire even further. The Varang Confederation, for instance, profits greatly by selling grain to Chiaroscuro—but what if the Tri-Khan decides to take instead of buy? Throughout the South, other countries keep tariffs low on Chiaroscuroan goods in hopes the Tri-Khan sees he has more to gain through trade than conquest. Varangia and Paragon sponsor small buffer states between them and the Delzahn. The Tri-Khan, in return, extracts tribute from these countries and from smaller tribes and city-states on other borders.

With the Scarlet Empress gone, Yejou Khan knows that the balance of power must shift throughout the South. He naturally intends to see that the Delzahn gain the strongest position possible. He reconsiders old alliances and reviews his files on the city's more powerful and unusual residents, should either the Realm or the Guild object to his plans—or should returning Lawgivers or anyone else seek to supplant him. On the whole, though, the Delzahn do not fear the building Time of Tumult. They expect to ride the storm of events and emerge, as always, still in the saddle and with a strong hand on the reins.

SAMPLE COMBAT UNITS

For additional sample combat units, see **Scroll of Kings**, pages 24–25. To represent an entire tumen of the Delzahn Horde, use Mansef Jaghun but raise the Magnitude to 9: The Delzahn field only a few sorts of combat units, with Magnitude adjusted to suit the task at hand. Bilshek's Band, described here, is an elite company—an example of Delzahn special forces.

Chiaroscuro also holds a Realm garrison, but it consists of a single dragon of medium infantry that protects important Realm merchants and diplomats. The Imperial Legion Medium Infantry talon on page 68 of **The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. I—The Blessed Isle** can represent talons of these troops; for the whole dragon of 500, raise the Magnitude to 5 and add relays. The garrison also can field a sworn brotherhood of Dragon-Blooded officers. See **Scroll of Kings**, page 124, for an example of such a combat unit.

BILSHEK'S BAND

Description: This jaghun consists of 400 wealthy urban nobles and their retainers, lead by Yejou Khan's first cousin, Bilshek Khan. They can afford glass sabers and other exceptional weapons and armor, flame pieces, a selection





of talismans and battle-enhancing alchemical treatments such as blood-stanching compresses or tiger's heart elixir (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex*, pp. 130–131). Nobles often carry minor artifacts scavenged from Chiaroscuro, such as plasma tongue repeaters or shock pikes (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age*, pp. 75, 76). As one of the royal jaghuns, this is one of the most prestigious of all Delzahn combat units. The Tri-Khan permits it to engage the most dangerous and prestigious foes.

Bilshek himself is a fierce and renowned Dereth warrior (biologically female, legally male). He has Enlightened Essence and has mastered the Golden Exhalation Style of martial arts (see *Scroll of the Monk—The Imperfect Lotus*, p. 4). On top of this, he rides a simhata. Because of Bilshek's fame, almost 100 members of this jaghun are Dereth.

Commanding Officer: Bilshek Khan

Armor Color: Vermilion and Gold

Motto: "Honor of the Tri-Khan! Blood for the Horde!"

General Makeup: 400 heavy cavalry with armor and weapons of Chiaroscuro glass. Most wear glass lamellar armor and carry flame pieces, slashing swords and composite bows.

Overall Quality: Elite

Magnitude: 5

Drill: 3

Close Combat Attack: 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

Ranged Attack: 3 **Ranged Damage:** 3

Endurance: 6 **Might:** 1 **Armor:** 3 (-1 mobility)

Morale: 3

Formation: Bilshek's Band shifts freely between skirmish, relaxed and close formation—whatever offers the greatest tactical advantage at the moment. It is especially noted for splitting up, so that one section appears to flee from the enemy, while actually leading them into an ambush. (Bilshek has two War specialties in dividing combat units.)

For special characters, the jaghun has a God-Blooded Delzahn named Sandu, who functions as Bilshek's second in command. Although Sandu knows Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, he functions as a hero. When Bilshek splits the jaghun, Sandu commands the other half. The jaghun also has five relays, two other Delzahn nobles as backup heroes and two nobles with perfect composite bows who act as sorcerer-snipers.

Chiaroscuro, a Magnitude 5 Dominion

Military: 3 **Government:** 2 **Culture:** 3

Abilities: Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 3, Craft 2, Integrity 3, Investigation 1, Occult 3, Performance 2 (+1 Saber Rattling), Presence 3 (+3 Organized Crime), Stealth 3, War 4 (+3 Massive Cavalry Screen)

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 4

Limit Break: Valor **Current Limit:** 4

Willpower: 9

Bonus Points: 25 **External Bonus Points:** 10

Notes: Chiaroscuro's external bonus points come from treaties with the Realm, the Guild and other Southern nations. They are invested in one dot of Willpower and one dot of War. Its own bonus points are invested in a dot of Willpower, the various specialties, one dot of War, one dot of Integrity, and one dot of Presence. Yejouk Khan is a savant. A number of Chiaroscuro's Exalted residents are sorcerers, but without legitimacy. In Limit Break, the fierce Delzahn Horde attacks any nearby nation that shows weakness.



YOU! I THOUGHT YOU WERE STILL IN DARI.

EXPLAIN? YOU WERE IN YU-SHAN WITH THAT LOU-GOD ADMIRER OF YOURS!

I SAW YOU! YOU ALL BUT SPREAD YOUR LEGS FOR HIM, WHORE!



OF COURSE YOU DID, MY SCARLET WHISPER.

IT WAS YOUR CLEVER SUGGESTION THAT I GO THERE IN PERSON.

HOW CLEVER DO YOU FEEL NOW?

YEEARGH! LET ME EXPLAIN!



I WAS NEGOTIATING, YOU UNBELIEVABLE BASTARD!

I LED THAT DRUNKEN WASTREL ON SO HE'D TELL ME WHAT I WANTED TO KNOW!



HE THINKS HE KNOWS WHERE THE ORB IS HIDDEN.



CHAPTER THREE

HIS EYE IS ALWAYS ON YOU

Paragon is the second-largest city in the South, second only to Chiaroscuro. Paragon's location explains some of its growth. The city occupies a relatively fertile and well-watered section of the Southern coast and has a decent harbor nearby (though nowhere near the scale of Chiaroscuro's). Paragon's greatest asset, however, is its ruler. The self-styled Perfect of Paragon demands absolute obedience to his laws. In return, however, he guarantees absolute peace and order. Just over a million people now accept that bargain.

Paragon is like no other city in Creation. Late-night revelers can walk down the well-lit streets without fear, because the only possible threats could come from children, the insane and the few foreigners who are foolish enough to defy the Perfect's laws. Although Paragon is almost as large as Nexus or Chiaroscuro, life in this city feels completely different. It lacks the undercurrent of danger and menace that travelers expect in other cities. Outlanders find it... creepy. Or maybe it's just the knowledge of why Paragon is different.

As is well known throughout the South, every citizen of Paragon swears loyalty and obedience to the Perfect. When they do so, an eye-shaped sigil of glowing crimson appears on the palm of one hand. For this reason, Paragon is sometimes called the Watchful City. The sigil is likewise carved on every city gate and government building, with the city's motto: *His Eye is Always on You.*

HISTORY

Long ago, the country that now holds Paragon held a different city called Dari of the Mists, which dated all the way back to the ancient days when the Primordials ruled Creation. In the later part of the High First Age, Dari became the heart of the Domain of Stately Order. This province was both a social experiment and an exercise of the vast power and equally vast hubris that overcame many Lawgivers. The two Celestial rulers of Dari, Terrible Bloody Rose and her Lunar consort Shining Ocelot, enchanted their mortal subjects to receive pleasure and good health from obeying

that city's laws—and to suffer pain and death from breaking those laws. They imposed this unnatural state of affairs using a pair of incredibly powerful artifacts, the Orb and Scepter of Peace and Order.

The sheer megalomania of the Domain (and its rulers' lobbying to spread their methods across Creation) made it one of the many reasons for the Usurpation. Most of Dari's inhabitants died in the Usurpation, defending their rulers or as punishment for failing to do so. It's a wonder the city didn't become a shadowland. The Dragon-Blooded razed Dari and never rebuilt it. In part, they acted from sheer horror at Dari's fate; in part, they feared lest anyone find the Scepter or the Orb—for the Dragon-Blooded could not find the two artifacts after they slew Dari's rulers. The usurpers assumed, or at least hoped, that both artifacts would stay buried under the city's rubble and be lost forever. Just to be sure, the Shogunate erected a powerful Essence dome to seal the ruined city away from the outside world. Dari remained sealed against all intrusion until the end of the First Age, when the activation of the Realm Defense Grid shattered the dome.

During the early years of the Second Age, terrifying legends still caused most mortals to avoid the ruins of Dari. In time, however, brave and foolish scavenger lords dared to explore it. In RY 191, a scavenger discovered the Scepter. As a skilled thaumaturge who could channel Essence, the finder discovered how to attune this item and found that he now controlled one of the most powerful artifacts in all of Creation.

The Scepter itself imbued the scavenger with an understanding of its powers. Realizing that he now could become one of the most powerful beings in the Second Age, the scavenger gained the trust of the ruler of a small kingdom a few hundred miles from the ruins of Dari. Gangs of brigands plagued the nascent city-state; spies within the kingdom helped them avoid retribution. The Scepter's bearer offered to solve both problems. Captured bandits and criminals were forced to touch the Scepter and swear to obey the laws of the city and the commands of the ruler. The Perfect-to-be used the oath-bound robbers as agents to uncover the locations and identities of other bandits and the leaders of criminal gangs. These too were soon captured and forced to swear allegiance to this small city-state.

The Scepter's bearer initially considered killing the city's king himself but chose caution and patience instead. Since the scavenger was now immortal and the king wasn't, the Scepter-bearer waited and consolidated his position. Over the years, the scavenger took the most competent and disciplined captives and offering them somewhat more freedom in their oath in return for swearing personal loyalty to him. In short order, the Perfect-to-be had several hundred personal followers and was clearly master of the kingdom. The old ruler did not want to anger either his son or the Perfect and so neglected to name either of them as heir. Instead, as soon as the old king died, the Perfect captured the dead king's son and gave him the choice of death or swearing loyalty. The young man swore loyalty to the Perfect, who has ruled ever since.



THE SCEPTER OF PEACE AND ORDER (ARTIFACT N/A)

This incomparable wonder consists of a five-foot shaft of orichalcum, ending in a ring adorned with various spurs, crescents and Essence-focusing crystals. Attuning to the Scepter requires a commitment of eight motes. The artifact confers several powers on the Perfect:

- The Scepter grants its owner one additional dot each of Stamina, Charisma, Manipulation, Perception, Intelligence and Wits as long as it is attuned, to a maximum of 5. (This is no longer meaningful for the Perfect. In his long life, he has raised all these traits to 5.)
- The Scepter's owner becomes immune to all Emerald and Sapphire Circle sorcery, all Charms that affect perception and all forms of unnatural mental influence.
- The owner soaks both lethal and aggravated damage with his full Stamina.
- An enlightened mortal attuned to the Scepter can access his entire Essence pool without the necessity of spending Willpower.
- All oaths a person makes while touching the Scepter become forever binding. A complex eye-shaped sigil appears on the palm of the oath-swearer, like a faintly glowing scarlet tattoo. No power short of Adamant Circle Countermagic can remove it. Even if the person hacks off the entire limb that bears the sigil, it reappears on her stump.

The Scepter does not remove a person's free will, but it rigidly enforces the oath the person swore. Severe pains radiate from the sigil to wrack the person who broke any of the oaths she swore upon the Scepter. The Scepter's master can calibrate the pain's severity for different oaths and offenses. For minor violations of the oath, the agony ends when the foresworn person confesses her crime to a designated, legitimate authority (in Paragon, a magistrate). For the most serious oaths, however, a foresworn person suffers death. At the moment of the crime, the eye-sigil closes to show her and everyone else that she is doomed. The agony begins in moments, and does not relent until the person dies a few hours later.

To minimize social problems and disruptions of daily life, the Scepter's punishments largely happen out of the public eye. All pain suffered by oath-breakers begins at sunset of the day of the offense. Also, oath-breakers who condemned themselves to death through their actions die only after dark while inside a building. A few oath-breakers try to stay outdoors every night to avoid their fate. Between the pain caused by the sigil and the stresses of life on the streets, these wretched individuals rarely last long. Paragon citizens who see them crouching in doorways and sleeping in gutters shun them.

The short-lived pain for a minor violation of an oath acts as a -1 wound penalty that lasts a few hours. The pain for severe violations inflicts a -2 wound penalty. The pain for a terminal violation inflicts a -4 wound penalty, while it lasts. The victim lives for a number of hours equal to his Stamina. These are Crippling effects. Charms that protect against Crippling effects can protect the person, but for Charm vs. Charm purposes, treat the Scepter-enforced oath as backed by Essence 8 and a dice pool of 16. Punishment is only delayed, however, not cured.

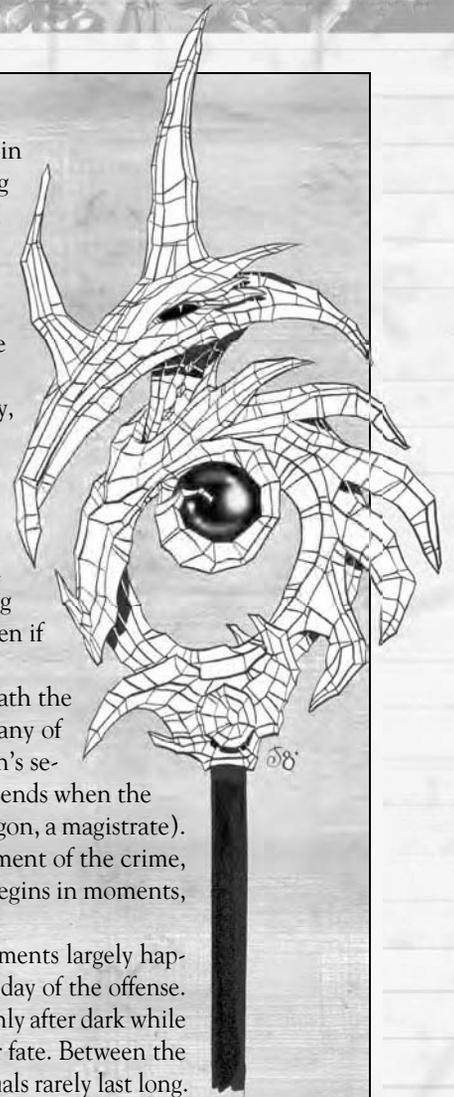
- While holding the Scepter, its master can borrow the senses of anyone marked with its sigil, located anywhere in Creation. This function has no Essence cost and requires no dice rolls. Sigil-bearers, even those who are Exalted, can neither sense nor resist this power. The Scepter's bearer can experience all of a sigil-bearer's senses without the sigil-bearer's knowledge or consent.

For three motes of Essence, the Scepter's bearer can strengthen this connection and actually take over the body of any mortal sigil-bearer, including enlightened mortals (but not Exalted), for up to a scene. The Perfect can possess or tap the senses of only one person at a time, but he can use this borrowed body as easily as his own. The subject of this possession has no memory or awareness of these events.

- While holding the Scepter, its owner can also spend one mote to induce severe pain in any single person who bears the sigil, including Exalted. Jagged black lines radiate from the sigil. This Crippling effect acts as a wound penalty of -2. It lasts a scene, or until the Scepter's owner relents and cancels the effect.

- As long as at least 200 people bear sigils, the person attuned to the Scepter becomes completely immune to all diseases and does not age. He heals one level of lethal damage every three hours and one level of aggravated damage every day.

All of these powers are granted to any Essence-user attuned to the Scepter. A Celestial Exalt who attunes to the Scepter gains even greater powers (see **Dreams of the First Age: Book One—Lands of Creation**, pp. 94-95).





Not long after, the Scarlet Empress took an interest in the new nation growing in the South. The source of the Perfect's power was no secret. Some within the Empress's court advocated wresting the Scepter from the Perfect. The Empress, however, declined. Instead, she offered the Perfect a favored place among her satrapies. The Perfect, no fool, responded with polite caution. After a year of careful diplomacy, the Empress made a rare venture beyond the Blessed Isle to visit the Perfect in person. They spoke privately for five hours, screened by sorcery against eavesdropping. When they emerged—both looking sour—they bore a fully written treaty of alliance.

Fifty years after taking over the country, the Perfect chose the location in his kingdom that offered the most favorable geomancy and laid out a new capital. The new city took 50 years to build. On the exact centennial of his rule, however, the Perfect inaugurated the city of Paragon.

At that time, only 60,000 people lived in the new city. As the population grew, the Perfect drew the plans for new neighborhoods and new circuits of walls. All were completed on significant anniversaries of his reign. Paragon is still growing, with no end in sight.

GEOGRAPHY

Paragon is built near the Southern coast, on a small but deep bay. This section of the South dries quickly away from the sea, with most of the arable land lying within 150 miles of the coast—about the distance where ranges of rugged hills begin. A number of small rivers flow down from those hills, though. These rivers and the winter rains make the coastal strip a fertile land, abundant in olive, date, almond and pistachio trees and large fields of maize, wheat and barley.

More than 150 miles from the coast, the land becomes a sandy desert with low dunes and frequent oases. The dunes become higher and the oases less common the farther South one travels. Anyone traveling more than 400 miles South of Paragon finds a trackless and merciless desert with occasional rocky outcroppings that sometimes contain deposits of valuable metal and gems.

The Perfect rules everything within 200 miles to the east, west and south of Paragon—a respectably sized country, called a “city-state” only because more than half the population lives in Paragon itself. Dozens of small farming towns cluster within 100 miles of Paragon. Their inhabitants have all sworn their loyalty to the Perfect. The Perfect's soldiers patrol this region frequently to protect the villagers from bandits and desert raiders. The outer regions of the Perfect's lands suffer occasional raiding. Any bandits or desert tribes who become too numerous or rapacious, however, can count on being hunted down and forced to swear allegiance to the Perfect at the point of a sword.

THE RUINS OF DARI

The ruins of Dari lie 90 miles West of Paragon and 40 miles inland. Today, nothing remains on the surface except

low fragments of walls amid swaying grasses. As a construct of the Primordials, however, the city's magical nature remains obvious. On sunny days, the wreckage still emanates a fine opalescent mist that fills the valley where the city once lay. The mist is faint enough that it barely obscures vision, but its presence is a reminder that beneath the fertile ground lay both lost wonders and hidden dangers.

The Perfect regularly sends expeditions into Dari to search for artifacts. While scavengers found most of the useful artifacts centuries ago, the Perfect's seekers still occasionally find useful remnants of the Old Realm. Most of these are the sorts of minor conveniences that people in the Old Realm took for granted; Paragon's savant-artisans work to duplicate them, with limited success. On rare occasions, though, the excavators find powerful tools and weapons. These go to the Perfect.

THE ORB OF PEACE AND ORDER

More than anything else in the ruins of Dari, the Perfect seeks the long-lost Orb of Peace and Order (see *Dreams of the First Age: Book One—Lands of Creation*, pp. 94-95). As soon as he attuned to the Scepter, the Perfect knew that it was half of a larger whole. He has sought the Orb ever since. With it, he hopes to increase his power still further. Since the Orb enables the user to reward subjects, even as the Scepter punishes, both artifacts together would make life in Paragon considerably more appealing. In the violent and troubled Age of Sorrows, a land where people gain joy, good health and long life for obeying the law would attract many prospective citizens.

The Orb of Peace and Order is a grapefruit-sized globe of moonsilver, topped with a device of crescents and crystals resembling that on the Perfect's scepter. It remains within Dari, hidden within a deep and ancient Solar tomb built early in the First Age. After the usurping Dragon-Blooded slew Shining Ocelot, his wife, Terrible Bloody Rose, hid the Orb in this tomb before retreating to her palace to set off a doomsday weapon that destroyed her and the remaining Darites, razing her city and slaying most of the attackers.

The Perfect does not know that one individual cannot attune to both the Scepter and the Orb. As a result, if someone finds the Orb, the Perfect would have to share his power with another.

THE NOMADIC TRIBES

Various nomadic tribes live in the deserts inland from Paragon. These nomads enslave outsiders and set them to work farming in the oases that dot this arid land. They also sometimes raid outlying farms and caravans bound to or from Paragon. The Perfect found such conduct objectionable.



As of a century ago, the Perfect's army has subjugated most of the tribes living within 150 miles of Paragon. The Perfect freed the nomads' slaves and made them citizens. The slaves' descendents continue to farm these oases.

The defeated nomads were brought to Paragon and given the choice between death and submission to the Perfect. A great many chose to die, but some of them accepted the Perfect as their master. Their descendants still serve. Every 10 years, the conquered tribes return to Paragon to present their young adults for the Ritual of Subservience. Those few who refuse to serve the Perfect are now exiled from their tribe and from the Perfect's lands.

The nomads who bear the sigil now protect the caravans traveling to or from Paragon and raid the caravans of other cities, returning a portion of their stolen wealth to the Perfect. Some of the more rebellious nomads protest, but most accept their fate, especially because the Perfect lets them keep most of the wealth they acquire through raiding. The nomads also patrol the borders of Paragon and battle the free nomads who live outside Paragon's control.

One small nomadic tribe patrols the ruins of Dari. Its members have orders to capture or slay anyone who tries to explore the ruins without the Perfect's authorization. Naturally, a few scavengers search Dari illegally. In addition to artifacts, they loot the ruins for portable fragments of its eerily luminescent stone, for certain savants pay much for this handiwork of the Primordials themselves. Sometimes the nomads capture scavengers and deliver them to the Perfect. If the scavengers seem at all competent, he gives them a choice of continuing to work in Dari as his oath-bound agents, or becoming human sacrifices as part of a ritual to empower an artifact.

THE FREE NOMADS

The free nomads would never dare to attack Paragon itself, but they raid outlying farms and oases and attack caravans going to and from the city. These nomads regard everyone bearing the Perfect's sigil as their enemy. When they raid caravans going to or from Paragon, they slay everyone bearing the Perfect's sigil but allow the other members of the caravan to live.

Such is the fear of the nomads that they refuse to accept visitors of any sort without first checking everyone's hands. They presume that anyone who bears the Perfect's sigil must be a spy, and kill him. Because of past experiences, these nomads also inspect the hands of any of their own members who returns from scouting duty, since more than a few have been kidnapped and forced to swear allegiance to the Perfect. They understand that they must be both clever and ruthless enough to do almost anything in order to avoid becoming the Perfect's vassals.

THE CITY OF PARAGON

Paragon lies about 12 miles from the coast, where two small rivers join. The natural river-course is gone. Their waters now feed a canal 60 yards wide, leading from the bay to a manmade lake 300 yards wide and 600 yards long, dug next to Paragon itself. Small cargo-laden ships come and go constantly from the lakeside docks. Larger ships dock at the larger quays built along the bay. Eight aqueducts, some more than 100 miles long, detour other streams to supply Paragon with water, and more are in construction.

The city itself follows a rigid rectilinear plan. The inner city is a square bounded by stone walls 10 yards high and 10 yards thick. The main boulevards divide the city in a grid pattern, with the Perfect's huge palace-manse located in the exact center. Four major roads lead from the four huge gates in the city walls to a wide stone paved plaza surrounding the Perfect's palace. Elaborate, abstract mosaics cover both the palace and the plaza.

Paragon long ago expanded beyond its first circuit of walls. A second circuit tripled the city area. The northern extension surrounds the harbor-lake, while the southern extension encloses an identically sized park—Wood countering the lake's Water, preserving the city's geomantic order. The four main roads continue through this section and another set of gates to a third expansion that tripled the city's area again.

Beyond this circuit lie the city's defensive outworks—five circuits of brick bastions, berms and trenches that form a murderous maze. Paragon is full, though. Soon, it must expand beyond its current walls. The Perfect has already begun work on converting the outermost berm into a complete wall that will triple the city's area yet again.

The city has a very orderly, but somewhat stark air about it. The geomantic building codes emphasize right angles and circular forms with long arcades of columns and windows. Much of the populace lives in blocks of identical townhouses. The primary building stones in this region are blackish-green basalt and shining white marble, reinforcing the impression of living inside a textbook rendering of architectural geometry.

Paragon's rather sterile appearance actually serves a purpose. The entire city is a huge work of geomantic engineering. Indeed, Paragon is perhaps the most geomantically perfect city in Creation—more so even than the Varang City-States—and the Perfect's command bars anyone from willfully disturbing the city's precise geomantic structure. The walls, streets and buildings channel Essence toward the central plaza, strengthening the demesne under the Perfect's palace-manse. Then the city's structure draws the Essence out again. The manse's power pumps and purifies the city's water supply, which does much to keep the populace healthy. The Essence also feeds into special fluorescing crystals set on pillars along major streets, to provide street lighting. Paragon is not be one of Creation's prettier cities, but (as

the savants of Paragon say) that's the price of giving a city Essence-powered, First Age conveniences using Second Age materials and methods.

THE PERFECT'S PALACE

The Perfect of Paragon's palace has the shape of a tall stepped pyramid of marble, 70 yards wide at the base and 100 yards high, with many tall but narrow windows. It is also a four-dot Air manse. Originally, this was a steep and rocky tor, a level-2 Air demesne. In the course of building Paragon, the Perfect strengthened the demesne even as he capped it.

The manse's hearthstone is a twice-striking lightning prism (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex*, p. 88). The manse itself has the following powers (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex*, pp. 67–69): Essence Vents (1 point), Magical Conveniences (1 point), Central Control (2 points) and Dangerous Traps (2 points). The manse's remaining points go to powering the city's utilities.

LIFE IN PARAGON

Public and private life merge in Paragon. In other countries, laws require people to enforce them; in Paragon, laws are enforced by citizens' own knowledge of their lawbreaking. Therefore, nothing is truly beyond the reach of the state. If the Perfect ordains a new law, on anything, the Paragonese have no choice but to obey.

THE PERFECT

The Perfect's nigh-limitless power over his subjects makes him the center of Paragonese life. Creation's most absolute monarch wields his power with remarkable restraint, however. Every proposal for a new law receives close examination by a committee of legal savants and a period of public comment before the Perfect makes it official.

By Southern standards, the Perfect's court is almost ascetic. Other monarchs have larger palaces, more concubines, grander feasts and gaudier wardrobes. The Perfect works 12 hours a day on public business and expects his officials to work hard as well.

Some observers find the Perfect too good to be true. How can anyone who wields such autocratic power not be corrupted by it? The Perfect does not claim to be Creation's most compassionate despot, though... merely its most rational. Since his word is literally law—with torture or death the price of disobedience—he must be very careful what he says. If he gives someone a command that contradicts his existing laws, he places a citizen in an impossible dilemma. Passing two laws that contradict could incapacitate the city! And so, the Perfect thinks long and hard before commanding the Paragonese.

TOO PERFECT?

It is possible that more than rational calculation shapes the Perfect's thought. One of the Old Realm's most powerful Lawgivers crafted the Scepter of Peace and Order to impress her megalomania on Creation. The Scepter impressed the knowledge of how to use it upon the nascent Perfect. Maybe it imposed a drive to reconstruct the Domain of Stately Order too. Storytellers must decide for themselves if the Perfect has mastered the Scepter... or vice-versa, implying that the madness of its creator is simply slow to manifest.

CITIZENSHIP

The Perfect divides his subjects into ordinary citizens and nobles. Nobles swear special allegiance to the Perfect and have additional rights, responsibilities and privileges.

Paragon grants citizenship to all who ask, no questions asked about the individual's previous life of any crimes for which they may be wanted elsewhere. Immigrants tend to be poor and desperate, such as war refugees, farmers driven off their land (by bandits, drought or the tax collector) or peasants fleeing cruel landlords.

The Perfect devotes a small portion of Paragon's wealth to caring for the poor. The city's poor receive a small weekly dole of grain, so no citizen ever starves. Doctors must spend half a day every week treating indigent citizens. Unemployed citizens may petition the government for jobs. If an individual shows some useful aptitude beyond a strong back, a magistrate sometimes offers them free training. Few among Paragon's wealthier visitors become citizens, but hundreds of the poor arrive every year. For them, the city's motto holds a promise of safety and comfort.

THE RITUAL OF SUBSERVIENCE

Citizens of Paragon all undergo the Ritual of Subservience. In this ritual, the would-be citizen touches the Scepter of Peace and Order. The Perfect recites the oath that the prospective citizen must obey: obedience to all commands issued by the Perfect or his magistrates; never attempting to harm or work against either the nobles or the Perfect; and adhering to all of the laws of Paragon. When the person accepts the oath, verbally or even mentally, the crimson eye-sigil appears on her palm.

These rituals take no more than three minutes. Up to 20 prospective citizens can swear the oath at once, stretching out their hands to touch the Scepter of Peace and Order. Paragon has grown large enough that the Perfect must spend several hours every week taking the oaths of new citizens. Everyone born in Paragon must swear this oath before they turn 15. Those who refuse must leave the city within a season of their 15th birthday.





FORCED SUBMISSION

The Scepter of Peace and Order will not bind a person whose will is not his own. That does not mean that citizenship is always completely voluntary. Captured enemies of Paragon, from foreign spies to desert raiders, receive a choice: submission or execution on the spot. Some refuse and die. Others choose to serve the Perfect... but they did have free will. Most notably, several desert tribes now serve as the Perfect's spies among the barbarians and his covert raiders against rival states. The Perfect has also turned a number of foreign spies into double agents.

People forced to swear submission do not always receive the oath of citizenship. Captured spies, for instance, must swear to conceal no information that could benefit the Perfect and to obey every command the Perfect gives them, even should he command them to slay their own child. The Perfect seldom demands such monstrous service, but Creation is harsh and his enemies are powerful. The Perfect promised to protect his people, and he keeps that promise without pity or remorse. From bandit chiefs to kings, the last words heard by those who plotted against Paragon have come from men and women they trusted: His eye is always on you.

THE LAWS OF PARAGON

In most ways, Paragon's laws are quite permissive. A citizen can do just about anything that does not harm another citizen's person, property or reputation. For instance, citizens receive great freedom of speech, including the right to make jokes about the Perfect. (During Calibration, the Perfect even holds a contest for the best and most insulting jokes, songs or short plays about himself. The winner gets a small cash prize.)

Laws in Paragon are divided into three categories. Violating minor laws—such as those against littering, petty theft or fraud, public brawling or similar nuisances—merely causes the offender a severe headache for a few hours on the next night. At the end of the night, however, the pain ends and does not return unless the offender commits another offense. Committing a serious crime such as smuggling, grand theft, assault, blackmail or accidental homicide causes a severe and almost incapacitating headache. This lasts until the offender confesses her crime to a magistrate. The pain instantly ceases at this point, but it returns if the offender attempts to avoid the magistrate's punishment in any fashion.

The most serious crimes, such as poisoning wells, committing large-scale arson, disobeying a direct order from the Perfect or committing deliberate homicide that is neither self-defense nor defense of another citizen or Paragon itself, result in a swift, painful and inevitable death. Death occurs





within minutes of the offender going indoors anytime from sunset to sunrise. Those who remain outside to avoid their fate suffer agony every night for the rest of their lives. The only offenders who do not die from committing serious crimes are those who were coerced into committing them through blackmail or other threats. These offenders suffer the agony of committing a serious crime until they confess their crime, the reason for doing it and the identity of the person who coerced them to perform it. Lying to a magistrate, including lies by omission, is always a serious crime.

The Scepter of Peace and Order does not magically know that a citizen committed a crime and levy punishment. The citizen must herself know that she committed a crime. For instance, if a druggist accidentally dispenses a deadly poison instead of a life-saving medicine, she does not instantly know her mistake by the pain of punishment. The pain strikes only once she has reason to believe a patient died because of her. On rare occasions a citizen dies in agony because he accidentally committed a capital offense, such as burning down a block of townhouses. This is sad, but most Paragonese agree that negligence on such a scale must have consequences, especially if innocent people die because of it.

PUNISHMENT AND SLAVERY

Lawbreakers who did not committed a capital crime and who confess to a magistrate immediately cease suffering their sigil-imposed punishment. They must then accept the magistrate's stern judgment. The punishment for many crimes, such as theft or vandalism, is usually a fine of comparable value to whatever the lawbreaker stole or defaced. Serious crimes, such as major assault or all crimes committed against magistrates, result in periods of indentured servitude. These indentures range from six months to seven years, at the end of which the individual is free. Individuals with short indentures are most often sold to citizens as servants. Criminals with indentures of three or more years usually become miners in the hot Southern desert. Luckier convicts—generally those who broke the law by accident—work in city maintenance: cleaning the streets, mending potholes, garbage collection and the like. Some assist with the excavation of Dari.

Paragon's law forbids selling citizens as slaves. Then again, few outlanders would purchase a slave bearing the Perfect's uncanny sigil. The Paragonese may purchase foreign slaves, with the caveat that all slaves must swear allegiance to the Perfect, and slaves all win their freedom five years after their Ritual of Subservience. Paradoxically, while few free residents of Creation wish to move to Paragon, many slaves dream of being sold here since they are guaranteed freedom in five years. Some of the most loyal citizens of Paragon are former slaves who view the sigil on their hand as the visible emblem of their freedom. Many join Paragon's military.

The laws of Paragon forbid masters to mistreat, abuse, mutilate or kill their slaves. After all, every slave is a future citizen. The Perfect does not want his citizens crippled in either mind or body. Some wealthy citizens resent the laws

governing slavery, but many understand that forcing the slaves to swear allegiance to the Perfect makes organized slave revolts impossible. Only suicidal slaves would ever consider killing their masters.

RUNAWAYS AND SLAVE-CATCHERS

Throughout the South, slaves dream of escaping to Paragon. The Perfect asks no questions of would-be citizens. The moment a runaway takes her oath of citizenship, no master would dare take her back. Within several hundred miles of Paragon, every master knows where a runaway will go.

Professional slave-catchers know they must retrieve their prey before they take the Perfect's oath. Most slave-catchers work solo, but a few large companies post agents in Paragon in hopes of capturing runaways before they can reach the Perfect's palace—a final hurdle for a runaway, before the Perfect frees them from all bondage save the oath of citizenship.

NOBLES

The nobles of Paragon serve as intermediaries between the Perfect and the ordinary citizens. They fill diverse positions of authority: magistrates, community leaders, detectives, priests and others. Regardless of their duties, all nobles take the same oath before they reach the age of 15. In some ways, a noble's oath is somewhat less limiting than that given to ordinary citizens, but it constrains them to special obligations as well. Nobles need not obey the orders of any other noble except their own superiors. Also, while they must obey the laws of Paragon, they can break all but the laws against treason or endangering the Perfect, if they do so in the direct service of the Perfect or for the welfare of Paragon. As with all citizens, they must obey all of the Perfect's direct commands.

While most nobles are the children of nobles, all prospective nobles must undergo competitive examinations. Only those who score especially high can become nobles. Every young, would-be noble must also have two parents (or other close relatives) who are citizens or nobles of Paragon, and who swear that they honestly think that this person would make a good noble who would benefit Paragon and the Perfect.

Newcomers to Paragon can also petition to become nobles. Any Dragon-Blood or mortal with enlightened Essence who wishes to become a citizen is automatically granted an interview with the Perfect. If he trusts them, he offers them the oath for becoming a noble.

The most important part of being a noble is that in the course of their duties, they can give orders to the Paragonese that carry almost the same weight as orders issued by the Perfect. Citizens must obey such orders or suffer the consequences. Refusing a direct order of a noble who is performing her office is always a serious crime.



To prevent abuse of their position, all nobles submit regular verbal or written reports of their actions in which they clearly detail any offenses or questionable actions they have committed. Failure to submit these reports is a serious crime. Similarly, nobles who misuse their power for personal gain or to harm or defraud Paragon or the Perfect in any way have also committed a serious crime. Nobles who commit crimes can gain relief from their suffering only by confessing directly to the Perfect. Once they confess their crime, such nobles are usually stripped of their office and forced to take the normal oath of citizenship.

MAGISTRATES AND PRIESTS

All nobles are either magistrates or priests. Magistrates dispense justice in Paragon. Unlike the rest of Creation, criminals typically come to them. At this point, the magistrate selects an appropriate punishment. Penalties range from fines for minor crimes to terms of indentured servitude for more serious offenses.

To prevent favoritism, magistrates may not issue punishments or otherwise pronounce judgment on criminals whom they know well. In addition, all magistrates take an oath to the Perfect to be fair and unbiased in their judgments. Magistrates are well paid and must refuse and report all bribes.

The priests of Paragon deliver religious and moral instruction to the populace, they lead religious services, and they offer comfort and advice to citizens who feel some spiritual or emotional trouble. Some priests train as exorcists who deal with any spirits, ghosts, demons or other supernatural beings who cause problems in Paragon.

Although most citizens feel a measure of awe and even fear for magistrates, many enjoy the company of priests and consider them both useful counselors and protectors against various inhuman threats. Regardless of their particular duties, all nobles wear brightly colored clothing to make them instantly visible. Even though no law commands it, Paragonese etiquette insists that citizens treat all nobles with respect. The presence of a noble typically causes all citizens to be on their best behavior.

In addition to their basic judicial or spiritual duties, nobles often fill other positions of authority that suit their talents. Some become thaumaturge-savants and oversee the crafting of artifacts. Others head Paragon's civil service bureaus, such as the treasury and the division that maintains the aqueducts. All of Paragon's diplomats are nobles.

DRESS CODE

Paragon's oddly colorless appearance extends from the architecture to the garb of the citizens. Ordinary Paragonese can wear whatever finery they desire, as long as it is not brightly colored. Wealthy merchants wear ivory silk, black pearls and white moonstones and jade, just as ordinary citizens wear tan linen with black silk trim. The law allows pale colors and shades of gray, cream and tan, but forbids all bright colors. Offenders suffer pain and then heavy fines.

The dress code does not apply to the Perfect and his magistrates. In public, the Perfect wears cloth-of-gold robes

adorned with silver embroidery, rubies and emeralds. While on duty, magistrates wear brilliant reds, deep blues, vivid greens and other bright hues. The law does not demand such a gaudy display, but it helps citizens recognize them as magistrates—a great convenience for Paragonese who break the law and need a magistrate to hear their confession.

Outlanders who visit Paragon sometimes don't know the dress code (or don't care) and wear colorful clothes. Paragonese might mistake them for magistrates. Any deliberate attempt to impersonate a magistrate is a capital offense for Paragonese, and a serious offense for a visitor. Magistrates normally ask that flamboyantly dressed visitors change their dress while visiting Paragon. Failure to do so after a warning results in expulsion.

THE REASON

Visitors and Paragonese both speculate about this curious law, due to its inconsistency with the Perfect's general disinterest in his subjects' private lives. The most popular suggestions are that it's a quirk of the Perfect's taste, a curse laid upon the city, a curse laid upon the Perfect himself or a means to help lawbreakers find a magistrate to hear their confession.

The actual answer is both simpler and stranger: The Perfect sold the color of the citizens' dress and the exterior of their houses to a Celestial god in return for various favors, including help constructing the city's superb magical workshop.

LEAVING PARAGON

Citizenship can never be rescinded. Both citizens and nobles bear the Perfect's sigil until they die. Citizens and nobles can, however, petition to leave Paragon. After paying a nominal departure fee, the individual is free to leave. Traveling citizens need only continue to obey the laws of Paragon—with respect to citizens of Paragon. The Perfect is not so arrogant as to place himself above Creation's other rulers by insisting that his laws should apply in their domains. Therefore, citizens of Paragon who travel outside of Paragon are not forbidden from lying, cheating, robbing or killing the people of other lands. The oath of citizenship does forbid sigil-bearers from knowingly supplying information to Paragon's enemies or fighting against it in any fashion.

Although very few people know it, the Perfect is happy to have some small portion of his citizens leave Paragon. As long as they remain within Creation, he can easily make use of their senses and even occasionally possess them. The Perfect does the latter only in times of dire need. The ability to place unknowing spies all across Creation from whom he can gain information at any time, however—combined with the potential to turn each wandering citizen into a saboteur or assassin with a moment's concentration—is only one of the means by which the Perfect has retained his power for more than four centuries.

RELIGION AND THE SUPERNATURAL

The Paragonese worship the Perfect. In addition to their other duties, all of the priest-nobles act as priests of the Perfect. The Perfect treats this faith as a just reward for the services he provides to his people. He encourages the Paragonese to treat all religion in the same fashion. Beyond worshipping the Perfect, citizens are free to worship any Celestial deity they choose. The official priests, however, preach that humanity owes nothing to any gods other than payment for the services that they perform for humanity.

While the Perfect also permits all manner of spirit cults, he does not allow the worship of rivals or of creatures that might endanger his city. Worship of demons, Fair Folk, Deathlords or any Exalted is strictly forbidden.

As a vassal of the Realm, the Perfect necessarily supports the Immaculate Order. The Perfect's domain has more than 100 Immaculate shrines of various sizes, with 50 in Paragon itself. The Perfect's own priest-nobles may not preach the Immaculate faith, though, beyond a rote prayer for the Dragons to bless the Perfect. Indeed, the Perfect's cult implicitly disparages Immaculate doctrine by presenting the Perfect—not the Dragon-Blooded—as the ideal for mortals to emulate and admire. As one of the most powerful beings in Creation who is neither an Exalt, a god nor another truly supernatural entity, the Perfect is proud of his humanity. He encourages his citizens to bow their heads to no inhuman creatures.

The Scepter of Peace and Order binds only human or partly human beings to their oaths (including beastmen, Wyld mutants and half-breeds such as the God-Blooded). It does not affect gods, elementals, ghosts, the Fair Folk or other such creatures who are not mortal or human. Therefore, such creatures can never become citizens of Paragon. In fact, the Perfect does not allow inhuman creatures to live in Paragon for more than a month. Specially trained priest-nobles with enlightened Essence carefully watch such beings, with squads of soldiers on hand. In addition, the official priests openly condemn dealing with Fair Folk, ghosts, gods acting outside their official capacity and similar entities in anything but the most careful and distant manner possible.

Similarly, thaumaturges must prove their competence at dealing with such creatures to be licensed to summon elementals, demons or even ghosts. When possible, people who require the service of a supernatural creature are strongly encouraged to hire a sorcerer whenever possible, since doing so guarantees that the being will be safely bound.

The Scepter of Peace and Order *can* bind the Exalted, God-Blooded, Half-Castes and other partly supernatural mortals. They all suffer the same penalties for breaking oaths as anyone else. Therefore, the Perfect welcomes all such people who wish to settle in Paragon. He has no objection to the Exalted moving to Paragon and becoming citizens.

They can become nobles by the same methods as any other citizen. Only a few Terrestrial Exalted have voluntarily become citizens of Paragon, but most of the city's Dragon-Blooded Exalted after they became citizens.

The Perfect's new Minister of the Arts (and propaganda), a woman named Scarlet Whisper, is one such Exalt, though a rumor circulates in Paragon that she is actually one of the Solar Anathema. "What nonsense," both she and the Perfect say to worried Immaculate monks and officers of the Realm's garrison. When the Perfect's assurances are not enough, Scarlet Whisper talks to these individuals and invites them to test her as they will. The Eclipse Caste soon convinces her inquisitors that she is an enlightened mortal of impeccable loyalty to Paragon and the Realm. The Perfect, however, knows the truth.

CITIZENSHIP AND EXALTATION

The Perfect instantly knows the identity and location of any citizen who Exalts. Paragonese who experience Terrestrial Exaltation remain bound by their oaths of citizenship. Taking the Second Breath as a Celestial Exalt, however, wipes away the Scepter's sigil at once. An Exalt could renew her oath of citizenship, though. As with anyone else, if an Exalt cuts off the marked hand, the sigil reappears on the healed stump.

Indeed, the only way to remove the Scepter's mark is through Adamant Circle Countermagic, and each use of the spell removes the mark from only one individual. The Perfect does not know that Solar Circle Sorcery can remove the sigil, since no one has ever used it thus while the Perfect has owned the Scepter.

ENLIGHTENED MORTALS

Most Essence-wielders in Paragon are neither Exalted, supernatural beings nor half-breed offspring of those groups. Rather, they are ordinary mortals who enlightened their Essence through thaumaturgy. The Perfect himself presents an example of how much an enlightened mortal can achieve. Ambitious Paragonese take him as their inspiration.

Any Paragonese can enlighten their Essence if they can present the Perfect's government with a way in which this could benefit the city. Most would-be enlightened mortals follow a five-year course of asceticism and meditation called the Essence Enlightening Sutra (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**, p. 139). Mortals who want to enlighten their Essence quickly can apply for the Perfect or one of the elite thaumaturges among his nobles to perform the ritual of Essential River Channeling (see **Scroll of the Monk**, p. 19). The latter Procedure is somewhat dangerous, for both the subject and the thaumaturge except the Perfect himself (as the Scepter protects him). No other methods for enlightening Essence are legal in Paragon.





Some people enlighten their Essence to make them more effective thaumaturges. Others study Emerald Circle sorcery or supernatural martial arts. Naturally, the Perfect does not leave training in such potent arts to chance. A state-run dojo called the House of Strength teaches a number of Terrestrial martial arts (most notably the Golden Janissary Style, a favorite for exorcist-priests; see **Scroll of the Monk**, pp. 48–50). An academy called the House of Wisdom teaches thaumaturgy and sorcery. A number of licensed private thaumaturges also teach the Arts. The Perfect forbids necromancy. Trying to learn it is a serious offense; casting a necromantic spell is a capital offense.

THAUMATURGY

Paragon truly shines in the realm of thaumaturgy. Several thousand thaumaturges make the city their home, from alchemists to weather-workers. All of them passed examinations and possess licenses that attest to their competence. Wealthy Paragonese carry talismans of health and purchase alchemical preparations to lengthen their life spans and obtain forecasts from astrologers. Weather-workers do their best to counter droughts or storms; specialists in warding and exorcism banish unruly ghosts and spirits from the Perfect's lands. A relatively small number practice the Arts of the Dead, Demon Summoning, Elemental Summoning and Spirit Beckoning. Anyone but a priest-noble, however, must file paperwork explaining why she has a legitimate reason to practice such dangerous Arts. (See Chapter Three of **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex** for a complete description of all Arts of thaumaturgy.)

ARTIFACTS

Paragon is one of the South's major centers for crafting artifacts. Paragon's thaumaturges and artisan-savants regularly create one- and two-dot artifacts, as well as a far smaller number of three-dot artifacts. Artifacts of greater power remain beyond Paragon's capacity (as in the rest of Creation).

PARAGON'S FACTORY MANSE

The far southeastern corner of Paragon holds the second manse located within the city walls. This three-dot Earth manse serves as a Shogunate-style (flawless) workshop dedicated to magitech and the manufacture of simple, non-magitech artifacts. The imposing and sturdy structure is also designed for defense as a fortress. Within it, several hundred artisan-savants (some with enlightened Essence) work to produce a steady stream of talismans and artifact weapons. This factory-manse has existed for almost 250 years. The Perfect built it with the aid of several Celestial gods whom the Perfect paid handsomely for their services.

PARAGON AND CREATION

Paragonese who travel abroad are often shocked to learn how violent and chaotic the rest of Creation is compared to their home country. Nevertheless, Paragon has extensive contact with other lands in the South and beyond. Some contact is peaceful; some, not so much.

TRADE AND TRAVEL

The Perfect welcomes both visitors and merchants. Paragon is an important stop along the lucrative trade route between the Lap and Chiaroscuro. Every year, thousands of merchants travel here, certain that they will find honest shopkeepers and fair (if tough) bargains in a city where they almost never need to worry about crime. Despite the city's popularity with merchants and weary travelers, though, few visitors come to enjoy the city. Fewer still become citizens. All visitors know what price the Paragonese pay for their safety, and most travelers shudder as they look upon the scarlet eyes forever emblazoned on the hands of Paragon's citizens.

The Perfect's law also forbids visitors from spending more than a season in Paragon without becoming citizens. (He makes exceptions for official embassies and a few dozen Guild officials. The law also grants exemptions for serious illness and other extremities.) Near the end of their 84 days of residence, magistrates approach visitors and ask their intentions. Those who agree to become citizens are welcomed; others are told to make arrangements for travel. The sojourners are also forbidden from returning to Paragon for two seasons. Unsurprisingly, magistrates cannot accept bribes or bend the rules to aid especially generous, eloquent or even threatening visitors.

CRIME AND VISITORS

When serious crime happens in Paragon, foreigners probably committed it. While citizens of Paragon who travel to other lands can do whatever they want, as long as they don't betray their city or the Perfect, all citizens are compelled to treat foreigners within Paragon as well as they treat one another. The foreigners, of course, face no such compulsion.

Nevertheless, wise visitors to Paragon only rob, con or assault other foreigners, since the magistrates largely allow outsiders to conduct their own affairs. The magistrates diligently investigate and harshly punish murder, arson or other serious forms of violence, regardless of the target. Crimes against nobles or wealthy citizens are always carefully investigated.

An apprehended criminal faces a variety of possible fates. Guild factors, Dynasts, powerful magical beings and other malefactors who are too well-connected or too personally powerful to turn over to the Perfect's stern justice are immediately exiled and forbidden from returning. For all other foreign criminals, the punishment depends upon their crime.

Any visitor convicted of murder, arson or other exceedingly serious crimes faces execution as a warning to all future visitors. Execution usually takes place in a manner that assists in the creation of an artifact: for instance, impalement by a



Paragon

red-hot dire lance so the weapon may be quenched in the heart's blood of the criminal.

Minor crimes such as petty theft result in fines followed by expulsion from Paragon. Intermediate crimes such as robbery, assault or serious fraud result in the criminal being given a choice: being sold into slavery to the Guild or immediately undergoing the Ritual of Subservience and becoming a citizen, albeit destined to spend the next five years working in a mine. These threats suffice to keep crime by visitors to a relatively low level, especially since most visitors understand that neither their arguments nor their purses can sway any of this city's magistrates.

THE MILITARY

Paragon has a relatively small standing army of 20,000 well-trained and disciplined soldiers. Disobeying any order that is neither treasonous nor obviously foolish counts as a violation of the laws of Paragon. (The degree of suffering depends on the severity of the offense.) Such punishment makes Paragon's army exceptionally well disciplined. It does, however, make military service not as popular as it is in many other countries. To compensate, the Perfect pays his soldiers well and equips them with high quality weapons and armor. Elite units and officers carry various minor talismans, alchemical medicines and other thaumaturgical aids. Terms of service are eight years, after which the soldier receives a

moderate pension. Soldiers who serve two or three terms of service earn correspondingly higher pensions, with additional rewards for extreme heroism. In Paragon, military service primarily appeals to the poor—but also to the ambitious who know they cannot become nobles.

In most ways, Paragon's army resembles that of the Realm, with legions of heavy infantry divided into dragons, wings, talons and so forth. Officers are called scadelords, talonlords, winglords, dragonlords and strategoi (for generals of a legion). Also like the Realm, the higher ranks of the officer's corps can wield Essence. Every winglord, dragonlord or strategos is an enlightened mortal (though the Exalted or God-Blooded are welcome too). To achieve such rank, a mortal officer must volunteer to undergo Essential River Channeling. Paragon's skillful thaumaturges minimize the danger of Essence enlightenment, but command officers still risk death to prove their courage and patriotism.

For Paragon's army, the principal benefit is an officer corps that can wield artifact weapons and armor. A number of officers also study supernatural martial arts. Some of Paragon's deadliest warriors carry handheld concussive Essence cannons or shock pikes, while sturdy chariots carry light implosion bows (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age*, pp. 76, 130, 131). While the total number of such weapons is relatively small, they allow the armies of Paragon to strike their foes with devastating effectiveness.



THE RESERVES

In the event of large-scale military actions, the Perfect can call upon another 200,000 reserve troops of light infantry. These reserves count as regular troops because they are required to train for one day every two weeks. When called for duty, reservists earn the same salary as regular troops. These benefits encourage many to sign up for the reserves who would not be willing to consider the rigors of full-time military service. It helps that the reserves back up the regular army and rarely bear the full brunt of combat. Like the army, terms are eight years, with an age limit of 35 and a maximum limit of two terms.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Paragon exchanges embassies with most countries in the South, as well as the Realm and a few of the larger powers in the Scavenger Lands. Varangia sometimes becomes an ally of convenience, since they both fear expansion by the Delzahn of Chiaroscuro. Paragon has no close allies in the South, though.

THE REALM

Paragon is a satrapy of the Realm, at least in name. It pays a yearly tribute. The immortal Perfect has much in common with the long-lived Terrestrial Exalted. Like the Dynasts, he values stability and tradition. Nevertheless, the Perfect gives regular speeches about the value of mortals and forbids any worship of the Exalted.

The Scarlet Empress disliked the Perfect's beliefs almost as much as his power, especially since that power clearly derives from an artifact created by the Anathema. She found the Perfect useful as a stabilizing influence in the region, however. She also recognized that if the Realm attempted to invade, the Perfect could easily order his entire city to fight to the death in his defense—possibly replacing a prosperous city with a huge shadowland. What's more, no one other than the Perfect understands the full extent of his Scepter's power. The Realm's generals do not wish to start a battle that they fear they might lose.

Instead, the Realm stations a small Imperial garrison in Paragon. The dragon of mortal legionnaires and their Dragon-Blooded officers are some of the few long-term residents of Paragon who do not become citizens. A Dragon-Blooded satrap heads the garrison and the Realm's embassy. The Perfect bluntly tells each new satrap that she won't collect an obol more in tribute than the treaties with the Realm command. Furthermore, while the satrap may offer advice (as may any ambassador), she should not imagine she could command or veto the Perfect's government. Paragon is not a popular post for ambitious Dynasts.

THE GUILD

Paragon welcomes traders from the Guild. The Guild does not love Paragon quite so much. Guild factors can live in Paragon without becoming citizens, but each factor can extend this privilege to at most five personal assistants. The

other members of their staffs are all citizens of Paragon. Also, while local merchants deal honestly with the Guild, the Guild does not regard Paragon as one of its most lucrative ports of call. The Perfect forbids the Guild's most profitable and addictive intoxicants—anything with effects powerful and long-lasting enough to interfere with a citizen's work—and so citizens do not buy them. The local laws regarding slavery reduce the market for this Guild mainstay as well. Wealthy Paragonese constitute an excellent market for various luxuries, though, and the Perfect pays very well for First Age books and artifacts or the rare materials used in crafting artifacts.

GEM

Paragon is currently in an undeclared and partially covert war with Gem. For now, the Perfect is content to send nomadic tribes, spies and raiders against Gem. He hopes to wrest away jewel mines that lie to the east and north of that city. The loyalty of the tribes who serve the Perfect, combined with use of the senses and even the bodies of his spies, has enabled the Perfect to seize several of the outlying mines, significantly increasing Paragon's wealth.

Gem's Despot tries to fight back against these attacks but fears to risk the Realm's wrath by attacking Paragon openly. Instead, mercenaries hired by the Despot now raid caravans going to and from Paragon, in an attempt to weaken the city financially. Now that the Scarlet Empress's absence has become both protracted and obvious, the Perfect realizes that the Realm might be in no position to object to wars in the Threshold. As a result, he is considering open military action against Gem. He also realizes that the Realm might no longer be able to restrain Paragon's neighbors, such as the aggressive Delzahn.

Worse, he fears the Realm cannot stop the Fair Folk, the Deathlords or other inhuman threats—of which the Perfect knows far more than do most of the South's rulers. He does not trust other rulers to recognize the danger or plan a successful response. In his private workroom, the Perfect sketches plans for walls that link demesnes in geomantic barriers across the South, and factory-manses for concussive Essence cannons and daiklaves.

To do all this and defend his city—perhaps even to defend Creation—the Perfect must acquire wealth and resources that dwarf his current assets. He does not merely need Gem's outlying mines; he needs Gem, the greatest source of concentrated wealth in the entire South.

And so, the Perfect slowly prepares his city for war. He knows that this breaks the covenant he gave his people, promising peace and order in exchange for their obedience. He hopes he can gain the wealth of Gem without all-out war, if he can get his Eclipse Caste—sent as a “peace negotiator”—alone with Gem's Despot for an hour. If that stratagem does not work, though, cold logic demands that he risk everything he has built and sacrifice his people's trust, so that Creation may live.

SAMPLE COMBAT UNITS

See *Scroll of Kings*, pages 27–28 for a sample unit of Paragon’s heavy infantry. For reserve and auxiliary troops, use the Imperial Ranged Skirmishers on page 68 of *The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. I—The Blessed Isle*. For one of the Perfect’s bound nomad tribes, use Mansef Jaghun, on page 24 of *Scroll of Kings*.

SPECIAL ADVERSARY SCALE

Description: Even the Perfect does not command enough Essence-wielding soldiers to field them in combat units of significant size. He finds them more useful as officers for his regular army. In emergencies, though—such as Fair Folk attacks, demon eruptions and the like—he can assemble super-elite strike forces consisting entirely of officers. Paragon’s Essence-wielding officers spend one week per season training together for just such emergencies.

The soldiers bring a diverse array of powers and weapons to a battle: supernatural martial arts, thaumaturgical talismans and potions, daiklaves, concussive Essence cannons, spirit Charms (the unit includes a few God-Blooded officers), firedust grenades, you name it. Their commander, Tevis Asrek, is a Fire-pected Dragon-Blood and Paragon’s greatest master of Golden Janissary Style.



Commanding Officer: Strategos Tevis Asrek

Armor Color: Black and silver surcoat over varied armor

Motto: “Paragon Triumphs!”

General Makeup: 50 diverse heavy infantry.

Most wear artifact lamellar armor. The most common weapons are dire lances and shock pikes for ranged combat, and short powerbows, light concussive Essence cannons or plasma tongue repeaters for ranged combat.

Overall Quality: Elite

Magnitude: 2

Drill: 4

Close Combat Attack: 4

Close Combat Damage: 4

Ranged Attack: 4

Ranged Damage: 3

Endurance: 8 **Might:** 3

Armor: 2 (-1 Mobility) **Morale:** 4

Formation: This unit generally operates alone. Considering whom they are gathered to face, conventional troops would just get in the way. These elite soldiers move easily between skirmish, relaxed and close formation, as suits the tactics of the moment. They need no relays. Two other officers can function as heroes to take command if Tevis Asrek falls. The unit’s two sorcerers are literal sorcerers who know a variety of Terrestrial Circle spells.

Paragon, a Magnitude 4 Dominion

Military: 3 **Government:** 2 **Culture:** 3

Abilities: Awareness 2, Bureaucracy 1 (Honest Markets +2), Craft 2 (Public Works +2), Integrity 4, Investigation 3, Occult 3 (Savant Academy +2), Performance 2, Stealth 3, War 3

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 4, Valor 2

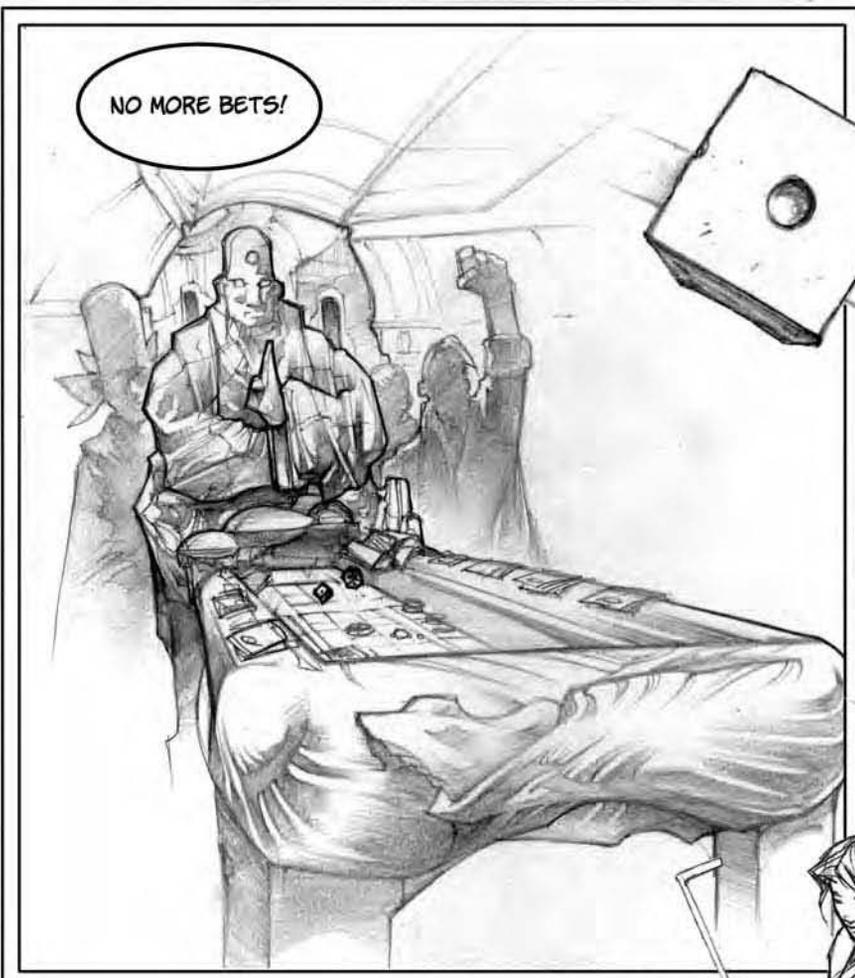
Limit Break: Temperance **Current Limit:** 2

Willpower: 8

Bonus Points: 20 **External Bonus Points:** 12

Notes: The Perfect is a sorcerer with legitimacy. Paragon’s external bonus points come from relationships with the Realm, the Guild and Chiaroscuro. They are invested in a dot of Willpower, the dot of Bureaucracy and the Bureaucracy specialties. Its own bonus points are invested in one dot each of Military, Investigation, Occult and War, and the Craft and Occult specialties.

In Limit Break, the population’s forced reverence of the Perfect explodes to a hysterical extreme. The Paragonese try to purge the city of everything that does not serve and glorify the Perfect, from burning foreign books to horse-whipping foreign visitors.



NO MORE BETS!



BALLS!

WHY DID IT HAVE TO BE BALLS? DAMN IT, PLENTIMON! THIS IS YOUR FAULT!



CAREFUL, LORD SATRAP. NOT ALL BAD LUCK COMES FROM PLENTIMON.

HE CAN MAKE SURE YOU HAVE NOTHING ELSE IF YOU ANNOY HIM, THOUGH.

COME NOW, ALORU. AREN'T WE OLD FRIENDS?

PSHHT! WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT IT, STRANGER?



!!!



CHAPTER FOUR NOTHING EVER HAPPENS IN THE LAP

Midway between Paragon and the Firepeaks lies a smiling country of low, rolling hills and prosperous farms. Amid this bucolic splendor rises a statue the size of a mountain, hewn in the shape of a monk seated in meditation. So vast is this statue that its legs support an entire city. The people of the region name the city after its location: the Lap.

The Realm has controlled the Lap practically from the start of the Second Age. Most Laplanders don't mind being a satrapy of the Realm. They like knowing that if anyone attacks them, Imperial legionnaires and Dragon-Blooded heroes will protect them. No one imagines that the Realm would abandon them. The Lap, they tell each other, is too important to the Realm. Any resentment tends to get directed at the Laplanders' own ruling class.

The Laplanders, however, cannot escape the Time of Tumult. The Lap has power—more than it wants and, indeed, more than it knows. The city has become the focus of ambitions beyond the understanding of the complacent Laplanders.

HISTORY

The history of the Lap begins with the construction of the mountain-statue that the Laplanders call the Penitent, or simply the Old Man. Few mortals now remember its original name, the Last Supplicant of Endless Power.

The Solar Deliberative built the Last Supplicant at the height of the Old Realm. It was not merely a monument to the Lawgivers' pride. The Last Supplicant was also a geomantic artifact of awesome power. From the control chamber in the statue's head, a Solar could manipulate Essence throughout the South—bending dragon lines, strengthening or weakening demesnes, even controlling the volcanoes of the Firepeaks to make them erupt or subside on command.

Naturally, it became a tourist attraction. Even in the Age of Splendor, a five-mile-high statue stood out as an amazing achievement. What's more, tremendous auroras of Essence swirled about the Last Supplicant when a Solar used it to adjust the South's geomancy.

A monastery became the first settlement on the statue. Here, enlightened mortals practiced supernatural martial arts as a spiritual discipline to develop their understanding of Essence. The monastery became a minor tourist attraction in its own right, as well as a base camp for pilgrims and sportsmen who wanted to climb the Last Supplicant. With tourists came hotels, snack bars and other facilities of merely secular purpose. In time, a small town grew around the base of the statue.

In the Usurpation, the Sidereals and Dragon-Blooded took great care that no Solar had a chance to activate the Last Supplicant. The Sidereals did not believe a Solar could use the mighty artifact to reverse the Usurpation, but the Last Supplicant could have caused a lot of damage.

Someone else realized this as well. Although the Unconquered Sun turned his face from his fallen Lawgivers, he did not completely abandon Creation. The King of Heaven took enough time from the Games of Divinity to send an agent—Swan Dragon, a highly placed lesser elemental dragon—to deactivate the Last Supplicant. The Unconquered Sun did not want to chance any Lunar, Sidereal or Terrestrial Exalt trying to control its geomantic powers. Such an attempt would fail, for the Solars built the Last Supplicant for their use alone, but the failure could unleash cataclysms throughout the South.

The Last Supplicant remained quiescent through the Shogunate period. The province around it, however, became

a magnet for refugees fleeing the desert's advance. In the first century after the Usurpation, someone noticed that the bowl formed by the statue's legs was both fertile farmland and a very safe place to live. Settlement spread out from the old monastery, until a town appeared. Thus began the Lap. The city reached its current size in less than 200 years.

The Lap suffered its first war in the Shogunate period. During a civil war between Southern daimyos, the Lap emerged as a strategic strongpoint—which meant the daimyos fought over it. The city suffered considerable damage, including the demolition of the old monastery. In the rebuilding, significant remains of the old city were simply buried under a new layer of construction.

The Great Contagion depopulated the Lap as thoroughly as the other Southern cities, but the Lap suffered little physical damage. The statue itself was not so lucky. A sworn brotherhood of Terrestrial Exalted fired powerful Essence weapons at the Last Supplicant's head, trying to blast their way into the control room. They had the same plan as the nascent Scarlet Empress—to rouse a mighty weapon of the Anathema—but achieved nothing more than to cover half of the statue's face with slag.

The Lap suffered far worse damage after the Empress scoured the Fair Folk from Creation. The warlords dubbed the Seven Tigers met at the Lap to plan their conquest of Creation, and they stripped the city bare of people, weapons





and anything that might prove useful in their military campaign. After she destroyed the Seven Tigers, however, the Empress helped the remaining Laplanders return home.

As the Empress extended the Realm's grip on the South, she realized the Lap's full strategic importance. The Lap's farmland could feed her legions, freeing them from the need to forage or depend on other local allies. To this end, she made a variety of choices to bind the Lap firmly to the Realm.

Her first major choice was to invite other refugees to settle in the Lap. The city and its satellite villages had plenty of vacant lodgings. The Empress quickly recruited tens of thousands of people who were grateful to have a home. In return, the Empress demanded total obedience to her program of agricultural labor. The new Laplanders became serfs, albeit well-fed ones.

As the satrapy system developed, the Empress realized that the Lap could become *too* valuable. After the second rebellion by an ambitious satrap, she gave the province three coequal satraps, who became known as the Golden Triumvirate. She also found that as the South became more stable and prosperous, the Laplanders no longer tolerated outright serfdom. As a sop to local pride, she converted the Laplanders' serfdom to a period of indenture. Astute Laplanders realized that they had actually gained little, since many of them never lived long enough to see freedom. Nevertheless, Charm-enhanced Dynastic oratory persuaded most Laplanders that the generous Empress had given them a great boon.

For the last three centuries, the Lap has stayed firmly under Imperial control. The city-state suffered occasional peasant revolts, but always against hated native leaders—never against the Realm. The resident legion consistently crushed invaders, even those led by Fair Folk nobles, God-Blooded warlords or Lunar Anathema. Eventually, invaders stopped coming. As rumors of war spread through other lands, the Lap's leaders and the Realm's strategists both smugly say that the Lap has nothing to fear. Nothing *ever* happens in the Lap!

GEOGRAPHY

The Lap's province extends about 150 miles east to west and north to south, with the Lap itself in the middle. To the north lies the Inland Sea; to the west rise a mass of high hills extending from the Fire Mountains. The line of hills continues along the province's southern border, dividing it from the interior highlands. Lower, gentler hills ripple down to the shore. The small Lap River flows down from the western hills; it is not navigable along any of its length. A number of smaller streams and creeks descend from the southern hills.

The whole province enjoys higher and steadier rainfall than any other land between the Firepeaks and the Summer Mountains, largely due to the power of the Penitent. Savants find that the mighty statue attracts gentle tides of Air, Water and Wood Essence as if it were a subsidiary Pole of Earth, drawing Creation's elements into balance. Summers aren't

as hot and dry around the Lap as in the rest of the South. Autumn storms are less severe. Instead of the South, the province resembles a bit of the Blessed Isle.

The whole country is under cultivation. Fields of maize, squash, potatoes and other grains and vegetables cover most of the country. Even the patches of woods are cultivated for timber, along with stands of peach, pecan and cork-oak. Foresters plant saplings to replace each cut tree. No animals larger or more dangerous than rabbits run wild.

Every 10 or 20 miles, a hilltop bears a village of adobe houses pressed close together, with a few outlying villas and many large barns and brick silos. Most villages in the Lap have names such as Corntassel or Prize Pumpkin. Some carry the names of satraps of long ago, such as Navasha Town. Fat pigs and cattle munch their feed behind low fences. Visitors say the people seem just as somnolent, working steadily in the fields.

THE PENITENT

Towering over the province, visible to all, rises the Penitent. The mighty statue rises almost five miles above the countryside. The stout monk faces northeast—toward the Imperial City, some people say—and sits in the classic pose of meditation, legs crossed, hands folded at the base of his chest with thumbs raised and lightly pressed together. His robe folds about his body, arms and legs, with a broad collar about his neck. Only the monk's head is flawed, with black slag covering half his forehead, one eye and dripping down his nose and cheek. The clouds that collect about the Penitent's head often hide the damage, though, while creeks and waterfalls thread the monk's robes with cascades of silver.

Here, at the Lap itself, is the province's only true wilderness. Soil collects in the folds and furrows of the titanic figure, and trees grow. A whole forest nestles in the vast ledge of the monk's arms. Mountain goats and panthers live on the statue-mountain, while falcons and vultures soar about his head.

The Laplanders know a few paths up the Penitent that don't require ropes and pitons. Now and then, small groups climb the Penitent to hunt in the Arm Forest. Others ascend still higher. People can see hundreds of miles from the shoulders, all the way to the tiny blue crags of the Firepeaks and the wisps of smoke from the chimneys of Paragon. Only skilled mountaineers, however, can climb the Penitent's head to explore the whorled caves of his ears or make the final ascent to the cap of snow on his shaved pate.

Many explorers have sought the way inside the head, where legend says a great treasure awaits. The most popular tales speak of more diamonds than in all of Gem, a secret testament of Pasiap or the home of a wish-granting spirit. Mountaineers from throughout Creation have probed the Penitent's head with no success. Canny Laplanders try not to discourage visitors from abroad, even though they know the latest explorers will find nothing but graffiti left by the



explorers who came before them. After all, the tourists spend money outfitting their expeditions.

THE CITY

The city of the Lap has a population of about 120,000, counting the villages of field hands that cluster around the Penitent as a sort of suburb. The Lap covers every bit of space available on the statue's legs, though. Most buildings are boxes of cream-colored adobe with flat, red tile roofs, crammed together into solid blocks with narrow streets in between. Some buildings are four or five stories tall.

Streets tend to run along the lines of the statue's legs, to stay fairly level. Shorter, steeper cross-streets—or flights of stairs—cut between them. Most streets are quite narrow, so no one except the city guard ever rides, and even wagons are reserved for hauling bulk cargo. People walk or are carried in sedan chairs. Many buildings have rooftop entrances, so people can move about the block without using the crowded streets. Where the statue's surface slopes enough, the streets actually run on top of the buildings of the next layer down; these tend to be the widest streets in the city.

NORTHLEG

The Penitent's north-pointing thigh receives fresh breezes from the sea, making it a popular district for shops, markets and residences of the well-to-do. Since the Lap has no space to spare, the markets and bazaars take place on the flat roofs of the inhabitants' homes and businesses. The Laplanders group all workshops of the same industry together, so one long, narrow block has all the silversmiths, one has all the hatters, one has all the needle-makers, and so on—each with its shared bazaar on the shared rooftop. Northleg also holds most of the Lap's better teahouses and hostels.

EASTLEG

The Penitent's other thigh points east. This district holds the Lap's heavy industries, or at least the smelly ones: forges and smelters, tanners and dyers, renderers and the like. Here, the prevailing winds from the north blow the smoke and smells away from the rest of the city. The people who work at these occupations suffer the misfortune of having to live nearby.

THE FOLD

Warehouses, granaries and tenements dominate the district where the Penitent's shins cross and press together. This is the poorest district of the Lap, inhabited by porters, street-cleaners, the people who winch cargoes up from the ground and other unskilled laborers. Entire families might live in one room of a tenement building. Most of the food grown in the province passes through the Fold, though.

THE LAP PROPER

The small, rather steeply sloping region where the Penitent's legs meet its body is the most exclusive district of the Lap. Its official name is the Lap Proper, but most local folk call it the Crotch. This district holds government buildings, the villas of the wealthiest families (including

WINDMILLS

Dozens of windmills rise above the Lap. The wind blows constantly this high above the ground, making it a highly reliable source of power. Windmills grind grain into flour, crush ore and pump bellows in the smithies, pound leather to soften it, turn winches and perform many other tasks. Nine years ago, the famous Air Aspect savant Cynis Mond, a.k.a. the Windtamer, visited the Lap and hooked Essence accumulators to windmills atop the Lap's palace of government and the Immaculate temple. Those buildings now possess Essence lighting. Each of the triumvirs would like to take the government palace's Essence accumulator, but none of them are savants, and none of them would allow a rival to claim such a prize.

most people from the Realm) and the city's largest temple of the Immaculate Order.

THE VERDANT TRIANGLE

The Penitent's robes collect between his legs to form a triangular valley covering about 65 acres, with steeply sloping walls about 200 feet high. The Laplanders call it the Verdant Triangle and use it as a vineyard and orchard. Sheltered from even the fiercest storms, warmed by sunlight reflected down from the Penitent's torso, summer lingers long in the Verdant Triangle, producing uncommonly sweet and rich fruits and vintages.

CERTAIN URBAN NECESSITIES

The Lap gets its water from the streams that run down the Penitent. Laplanders call this system of channels, reservoirs and aqueducts the Step Fountains. The Crotch receives the water first. The Step Fountains' pipes then flow down each leg. Laplanders prefer to live as close to the Penitent's hips as possible, so they receive the freshest and most abundant water. The people of the Fold receive the water last, before the grimy dregs go to the Verdant Triangle. People in the poorer districts set out rain barrels to collect the runoff from their roofs, though this water is none too clean.

The Lap also has a sewer system—well, more of a network of long, tubular septic tanks, since there usually isn't enough rainwater to flush out the offal. The Lap's single most unpleasant job consists of shoveling the composting excreta out of the sewers. Some of the compost goes into the Verdant Triangle. The rest gets dumped over the outer edge of the Penitent's legs, where more laborers collect it to spread on the fields.

This practice incidentally explains why no one lives less than 200 feet from the base of the Penitent. The wind can blow the effluvium some distance as it descends. It also explains the single oddest phrase that visitors are likely to hear from the locals as they approach the city: "Huh. Looks like it'll be rainin' shit today."

ENTERING THE LAP

The Lap's greatest advantage is also its greatest disadvantage: It's located high on a mountain-sized statue. The lowest part of the city—one of the Penitent's ankles, forming the tail-end of the Fold—is 700 feet above the ground. The lowest habitable areas of the legs are three times that altitude. The first settlers hacked a steep, narrow path up to the Penitent's ankle, and a careful mountaineer could climb some of the folds of the monk's robe. Later, the Shogunate drove three tunnels through the Penitent's legs—one through each ankle, one under the middle of the Fold. These tunnels are each four yards wide and more than a mile long, gradually spiraling upwards. Stout iron gates divide each tunnel into nine sections. The first, last and central sections all can be collapsed in such a way that a besieger would need to clear 100 feet of rubble to pass the section. Most of the time, though, the gates stand open.

After steady ascent, each tunnel ends in the Verdant Triangle. From there, a number of narrow stairs ascend to the city. Most people and cargo, however, ascend the 200 feet in elevators powered by winches, with counterweights to balance the load somewhat. More than 100 such elevators line the walls of the Verdant Triangle.

A LAPLANDER'S LIFE

In most ways, Laplanders live much like everyone else in Creation. They work hard for little reward. They love and hate, raise families and mourn deaths. They treat the spirits with careful respect. Some aspects of Laplander life, however, seem quite bizarre to folk from anywhere else.

INDENTURE

Every Laplander spends most of his life working for the state. This period of forced labor lasts from age 13 to age 43. Before then, children may engage in light work, assisting their parents. For instance, even quite small children can pick bugs off squash vines. For this reason, outsiders often believe that Laplanders begin a 40-year indenture at birth, rather than a 30-year indenture at early adolescence. The difference might not matter much, as early exposure to an occupation plays a role in determining a Laplander's later occupation.

Every Laplander—no exceptions—spends the first five years of indenture in the fields. Local stories attribute this rule to the Empress's husband Rawar, as a way to make sure that the Laplanders' mortal leaders did not grow too distant from their countrymen. (Whether this works is debatable. The memory that children of wealthy Laplanders often carry into later life is the hazing they received from the less privileged.)

At age 18, the now-adult Laplander receives her first work evaluation. For nine in 10 Laplanders, this means continuing their farm labor. Others become artisans, clerks, soldiers and all the other sorts of people that a functioning society needs. Every five years thereafter, Laplanders receive further performance reviews. With good reviews, a Laplander can advance within her occupation. A foot soldier can become a captain; a clerk can become head of an office; a common

farmhand can become a foreman. Rarely, however, does an adult Laplander change occupations completely.

As in the Realm, the Lap uses paper koku and quian, and copper siu and yen. Lap money has no value anywhere else. Only free Laplanders can legally own other forms of money.

REFUSING INDENTURE

At any time, a Laplander can decide she doesn't want to live as a serf anymore. The Lap exiles such malcontents and cuts off the last joint of the little finger. The Lap punishes exiles who try to return by throwing them out of the city. The 2,000-foot drop generally proves fatal.

INDENTURE'S END

A Laplander's 43rd birthday is the happiest day of her life. On that day, she retires from working for the state. If she wants, she never has to work again. The state continues to provide her with living quarters and a modest allowance of Lap scrip based on her occupation and rank when she retired.

Most Laplanders prefer to keep working—only now, higher-ranking people receive their pay in silver. Most Laplanders also continue in the occupation they know. An artisan, however, can now open his own shop, or a merchant can make her own deals. Even a retired farmhand can open a moderately disreputable teahouse or restaurant.

A free Laplander can buy food, clothing and other amenities for relatives who are still indentured. Many Laplander families would be much poorer and hungrier without such donations from parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Only free Laplanders can enter the highest ranks of most occupations. Such elders manage the farms, command the military, arrange contracts between the Lap, other states and the Guild and so on. As such, only these Laplanders truly become wealthy.

Retired Laplanders dominate occupations that the state deems unnecessary and unprofitable. No one spends his indenture as a musician, actor or other sort of entertainer. Priesthood also falls outside the range of state-supported activities (though if a god *personally* demands that the state allow a Laplander to serve as her priest, the Lap's government generally accommodates the spirit.)

Free Laplanders concentrate in the Lap itself. Visitors soon notice that all the shopkeepers and innkeepers, street vendors and minstrels—everyone who runs her own business—is middle-aged or older.

THE ILLICIT ECONOMY

Of course, a lot goes on that the Lap's government never approved. Indentured Laplanders may barter the gifts from their older relatives. Many a Laplander also trades homemade moonshine. Prostitution as a way to gain illicit coin happens all the time. In the Lap itself, whole black-market bordellos operate whose girls and boys officially engage in some other occupation.

Clever Laplanders also forge Lap scrip. This crime carries the death penalty, but the government actually does not spend much time searching for counterfeiters. The quantity is



never large, since few Laplanders possess the skill to print or coin a decent forgery, so the fakes never become a significant drain on the state's profits.

SOCIAL CLIMBING

Although every Laplander spends most of his time indentured to the state, the Lap is far from a classless society. Laplanders who accumulate wealth and high rank after their indenture can arrange for children and grandchildren to leave the fields and receive rapid promotions in land management, the civil service, business and industry. While indentured, children of privilege are limited in the wealth they can gain—at least legally—but they can receive larger and nicer living quarters, more free time and access to luxury goods not available at the state canteens and depots. Most importantly, they leave their indenture already placed and prepared to enter the higher ranks of free Laplanders, get rich and pass the benefits to their own children.

The Lap, therefore, has definite social classes. Most Laplanders stay in the lower class of field hands and other unskilled laborers, generation after generation. A fraction reaches the middle class of artisans, soldiers, foremen and minor government functionaries. A very few enjoy great wealth and power as government ministers, plantation managers and the merchants who trade the Lap's bounty. While

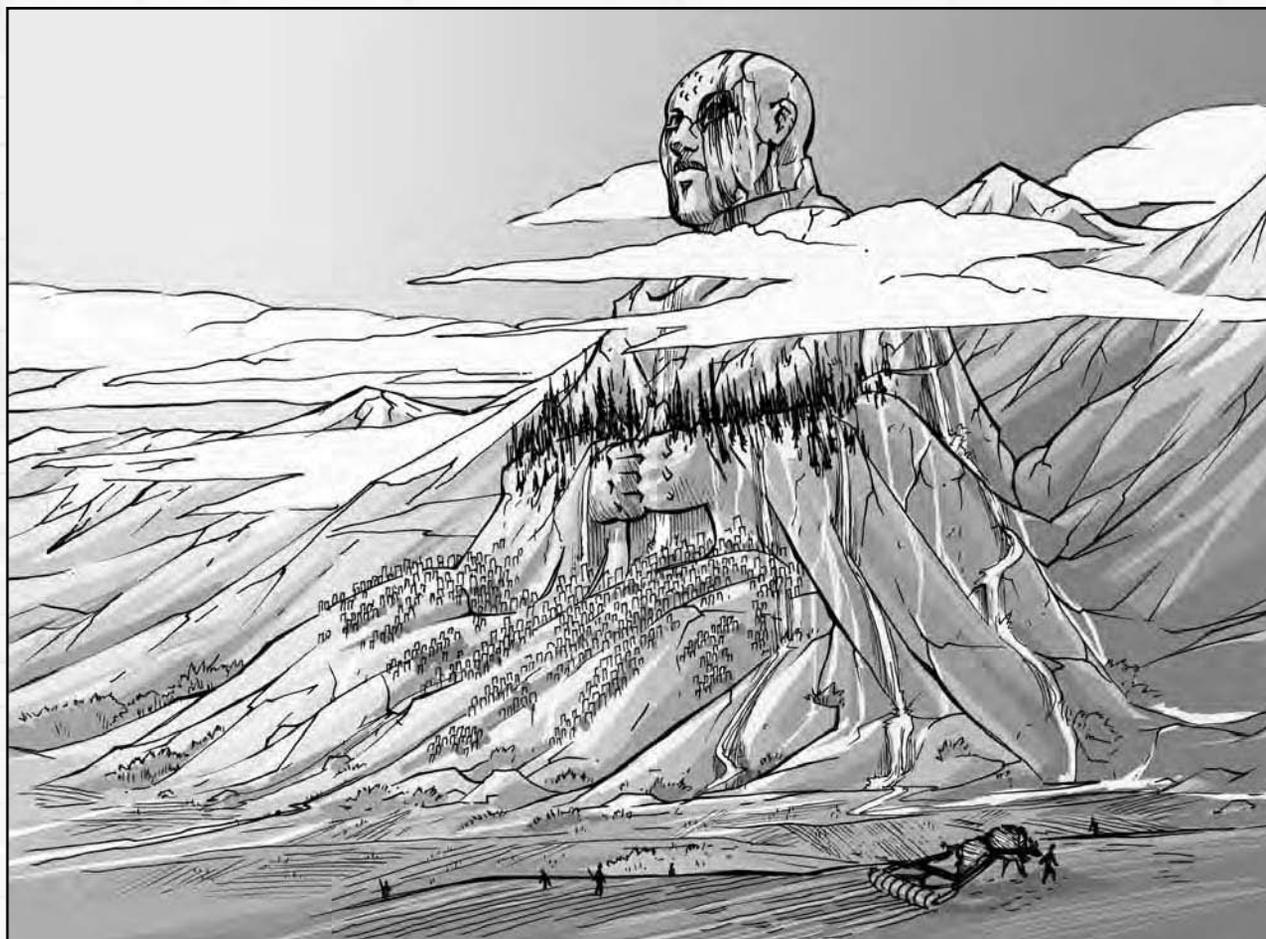
children of the middle class frequently end up as field hands and children of laborers occasionally work their way into the middle class, the upper class is as self-contained as any in Creation. The Lap's leaders reserve for their own offspring any position that could lead to entering the upper class.

AGRICULTURE

Most Laplanders spend their entire lives as farm labor. They gain at least a little pride, however, from working the most productive farmland in Creation. (So local tradition claims, at least. Certainly, the province has few rivals.)

More than fertile soil and a mild climate accounts for this abundance. Lap farms employ technologies that most of Creation forgot after the First Age, such as seed drills, disk harrows and ox-drawn combine harvesters. Laplanders use magic too: a variety of minor artifacts, alchemical fertilizers and thaumaturgical procedures to protect crops from blights and pests and make them grow larger and more nutritious.

The Lap's greatest asset, though, may be the Jade Sickle Academy, located in the village of Wheatsheaf near the base of the Penitent. Laplanders sometimes call it the Scarlet Grange because of its Imperial sponsorship. This school is perhaps the finest agricultural college and research center outside the Blessed Isle (not that it has much competition in the Age of Sorrows). The savants at the Academy study



plant and animal husbandry and train expert farmers to manage the Lap's plantations. Over the three centuries since the Academy began, the savants have bred superior strains of many crops, developed new techniques of pest control and learned a great deal about land management.

The Grange's dominie, Sesus Deron, is himself an alumnus of the House of Ancient Stone, a reform school on the Blessed Isle with a great history of turning young Exalted hell-raisers into skilled and hardworking land managers. Deron stays in contact with the House of Ancient Stone's dominie, giving the Realm an information channel about Lap affairs that most foreign spies miss completely. If anything strange happens in the Lap farmlands, the Scarlet Grange's staff learns about it. Eventually, so does Deron's old teacher. From there, the word can spread through the Scarlet Dynasty.

PRAYER WHEELS OF SEXTES JYLIS (ARTIFACT • OR ••)

The Lap has more than 100 of these artifacts and the Scarlet Grange gradually makes more. Each prayer wheel consists of a yard-high, foot-wide cylinder of porcelain infused with powdered green jade, with copper fittings at each end. The cylinder bears symbols of Sextes Jylis and prayers to the Immaculate Dragon. Every day in which the wheel is spun for at least five hours, all plants within three miles are immune to rusts, smuts and other blights. Smaller versions can protect all the produce stored in a warehouse. Small versions are one-dot artifacts; the larger versions are two-dot artifacts.



GOVERNMENT

The Lap has three distinct centers of state power: the satraps sent from the Realm, a council of powerful land managers and a hereditary king. Of these, the satraps are far and away the strongest and the king is the weakest. Other groups can lobby for favored policies, but they have no official role in government.

THE KING

The Scarlet Empress gave the Lap a king as a sop to local pride. The Lap's monarch has never been more than a figurehead, though—someone to sign proclamations already written, lead parades and take the blame if anything goes wrong. He certainly could not veto the satraps or indeed take any decision that they did not approve.

The current king, Vallish Macotri III, is quite old and in poor health. A year ago, the triumvirs and landholders quietly decided that once King Macotri dies (it can't be long now), they wouldn't bother appointing a successor. Powerless though the king is, the office somewhat complicates government business. Indeed, neither the satraps nor the landholders have bothered to bring King Macotri into any government business for several years now.

King Macotri has two potential heirs: a pair of grandsons, cousins to each other. Vallish Argo is a junior savant at the Jade Sickle Academy. Tever Marsune is a captain in the Lap's native military. Both are young, hardworking and competent at their jobs. To ease the abolition of the monarchy, the satraps and landholders have agreed to murder the two young men as soon as their royal grandfather dies.

THE GOLDEN TRIUMVIRATE

The Empress learned through experience that the Lap presented great temptations to ambitious satraps—if not to outright rebellion, then to running the province as a cash cow for their Great Houses (instead of a cash cow for the Imperial government). Therefore, she gave the Lap three co-equal satraps, forming an office called the Golden Triumvirate. All three of the triumvirs must agree to any official action, making each triumvir a check on the power of the other two.

The Golden Triumvirate rules openly and explicitly, to a degree that rarely occurs among satrapies. The triumvirs write laws, negotiate contracts and treaties, appoint the heads of civil service bureaus and perform many other functions of heads of state. They must approve all laws and all appointments to high office, however. The triumvirs hear any complaints against the Realm or its citizens (and usually dismiss the complaints out of hand). Most importantly, the three satraps assess and collect the Realm's share of the Lap's agricultural produce and profits. No one disputes their assessments, because the Golden Triumvirate also controls the Realm's legion in residence, a military force no Laplander would dare to challenge.



Following her usual practice with the Lap's triumvirs, the Scarlet Empress chose three Dynasts she expected to dislike each other, to reduce the chance of collusion among them. Of course, it does increase the difficulty of getting anything done, and the triumvirs spend much of their time plotting against each other. But so what? Nothing ever happens in the Lap, and a sluggish, divided Triumvirate helps make sure that nothing ever does.



CATHAK SIJIP

The Lap's oldest satrap combines a keen mind and a stubborn streak. Sijip disappoints some within House Cathak by not striving to embezzle more of the Lap's wealth. She has proven herself as the most hardheaded of the triumvirs, however, not supporting any idea or project that she deems il-

logical or a waste of the Lap's funds. Many of the Lap's elite appreciate this care for the nation's resources.

The other two satraps frustrate Sijip with their bickering. Sijip also has far-reaching plans on how to restructure the Lap's labor force and government to make the state more efficient. Indeed, she leads the plan to abolish the monarchy as redundant. If the city is to have a monarch, she believes that that person—herself, ideally—should wield sole power. Sijip intends to break all ties with the Dynasty and rule the city as its queen... and would deal with just about anyone to make this ambition a reality.

RAGARA ALORU

The Lap's second satrap loyally serves the Realm first and his House second... though he does see that House Ragara gets a good share of the Lap's profits. He spent years in the Lap as a merchant, arranging deals for his House. The Empress appointed him as a satrap due to his clever notions about ways to increase the Realm's tax revenues on everything entering or leaving the Lap. Aloru's skill at political economy—and squeezing the most profit from a system—makes him a model satrap and deeply disliked by Lap officials.



Unfortunately, Aloru is also a habitual gambler, and a bad one at that, so his personal fortune waxes and wanes. For this reason, interested parties can often buy his vote. He knows Sijip hates him for this character flaw. She often criticizes him by saying, "Who is it that wishes this done this way, Aloru? Surely not you! How much to change your vote?"



PELEPS TUCHET

The newest member of the Triumvirate is a true puppet of his House. His House elders arranged his appointment purely because they knew he would not develop ambitions of

his own. Tuchet has only moderate skills as an administrator, but enormous skill as a schmoozer. This social chameleon remembers everyone he ever met, and how to present himself as a wonderful friend who agrees with them about everything. On those occasions when the Triumvirate must deal with angry Laplanders, they send Peleps Tuchet to convince everyone that the Realm and the satraps care about them very much, and Things Will Be Done... without committing to any details.

Tuchet fears the finality of decisions, however. When the triumvirs come close to agreement, he often changes his mind or asks for further deliberation. Of course, his vacillation earns him no favor with his counterparts. In fact, he knows that Sijip would gladly strangle him with her bare hands. Already, she has lunged at him several times, only to be pulled back by Aloru. Just thinking about his ability to enrage Sijip makes him smile. He does not fear her in the least. She is but a toy to him, and Aloru is not much better.

THE LANDHOLDER COUNCIL

Laplanders never own much real estate; the nation itself owns the vast plantations. Certain individuals, however, become responsible for managing large tracts of territory and all the people who work that land. As the people who bear chief responsibility for the very reason for the Lap's existence—crops to sell or send to the Realm—these individuals naturally function as the native aristocracy.

The two or three dozen landholders who have the greatest wealth and power form a rudimentary parliament for the Lap. The landholders know that serious defiance would result in their execution by the Realm's garrison, so they merely offer the



satraps a choice between an actively cooperative council and sullen, resentful native intermediaries. The triumvirs permit the landholders enough power that the landholders can see that their own children become great landholders in turn, keeping the wealth and power locked into a few dozen families that the Laplanders call “the Families.”

The Landholder Council cannot create laws by itself, but it frequently suggests laws to the Golden Triumvirate. The landholders also suggest candidates to head the Lap’s civil service—all, ostensibly, as a courtesy to save the satraps’ valuable time. The triumvirs frequently accept the suggestions too. The council has the privilege of appointing its own members, by majority vote among the existing members, so its size varies as landholders die and are replaced.

The landholders hardly present a united front to the triumvirs, though. Individuals and cliques in the council have their own interests and rivalries. A great deal of favor-trading and backbiting goes on at council meetings. Triumvirs quickly learn that their strongest hold over the landholders is their capacity to play one faction against another. The landholder factions all want the power of the Triumvirate on their side, so most of them are willing to act as proxies for one satrap or another in the council’s debates. If a triumvir wants to pursue some project while retaining plausible deniability to the other satraps, it’s easy to talk a landholder into becoming the front man.

THE CIVIL SERVICE

The Lap has an extensive government for a fairly small province, but the government’s chief activity is overseeing everyone’s indenture. After all, one-fifth of the population receives a work evaluation every year. Even with clerks who tend to stamp every citizen’s work record “Satisfactory—Continue in Present Position” without reading it, that’s a lot of records to stamp. Just recording the harvest each season requires thousands of clerks.

Everything except agriculture and managing the labor force tends to receive short shrift. The Lap has a brief, largely commonsense legal code that bans assault, fraud, theft and other crimes against persons and property. Whipping is the usual punishment for anything less severe than murder. Any crime that denies the Lap a person’s labor or that threatens the peace on a large scale, is punished with exile or (for murder or active sedition) throwing from the city walls. Plantation managers dispense justice largely as they see fit, and the field hands have little chance to appeal to judges in the city.

MILITARY AFFAIRS

Through its food surplus, the Lap plays a crucial role in the Realm’s military planning for the South. The Lap

also possesses significant military power of its own. The Lap houses the 12th Imperial Legion and has its own local legion of soldiers called sepoys. Adding to the martial mix, the city’s land-holding magnates support small groups of personal troops—thugs, really. These straw bosses and bullies are tough enough to push around tired farmhands, but they’re worthless for a real fight. Even the poorly trained sepoys scorn them.

The Lap’s greatest military strength, however, is its location. An invader might easily overrun the rest of the province, but it won’t take the Lap itself—not when the soldiers would need to climb at least 700 feet to reach the city, with soldiers dumping rocks, boiling urine or other unpleasantness upon them. The Lap also keeps two to three years of provisions in storage, to wait out a siege. Throughout the South, “starving the Lap” harks back to a proverb about ludicrously futile actions.

THE 12TH LEGION

The Realm values the Lap enough to give the little province its own legion. Other Imperial legions sometimes call the 12th Legion the “Grain Guards,” for they do very little but train, watch the crops grow and occasionally help the local soldiers chase bandits off the farmlands. Still, the 12th is a full-strength legion of 5,000 soldiers, and their officers keep the soldiers prepared for battle should the city ever face attack.

Use the Imperial Legion Medium Infantry and Imperial Ranged Skirmishers on page 68 of **The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. I—The Blessed Isle** as sample troop units for the 12th Legion. The legion uses local troops—the Lap Sepoys—as its auxiliary troops.



CATHAK LETAL

The commanding general of the 12th Legion is a handsome, charming man with a great grasp of military history. He knows much of *The Thousand Correct Actions of the Upright Soldier* by heart. He insists that his troops drill to stay in peak fighting condition. Unfortunately, Cathak Letal possesses a weird anti-genius for field command and politics.

Letal frequently misunderstands others’ motives and capabilities. His military debacles include commanding an entire dragon to its accidental death and losing an entire caravan to a group of bandits whom his soldiers outnumbered five to one.

The head of his House, Cathak Cainan, does not throw away family members or the blood of the Dragons. He thought the Lap was the safest place for his incompetent relative. Just in case, however, Cainan also sent the 12th a group of highly



skilled winglords and dragonlords to make sure the troops have strong and skilled guidance should trouble erupt. They have orders to mutiny and, if necessary, kill Letal should he seem on the verge of creating another military disaster.

THE LAP SEPOYS

The Lap's home-grown legion, called the Lap Sepoys, spend most of their time chasing bandits, guarding caravans (especially along the road to Gem) and escorting government officials. They also serve as the Lap's city guards, breaking up bar fights and chasing prowlers away from shops and warehouses. As such, sepoy learn to use weapons that subdue, such as nets, truncheons and weighted ropes, as well as conventional melee weapons.

The Lap fields 22 talons of sepoy, each numbering 126 soldiers. Each talon divides into five scales of 24 soldiers each. A captain commands each talon and officially answers to the Portreeves' Office, though General Letal can commandeer whole talons of troops at whim. Additionally, the sepoy's leaders defer to commands from any of the 12th Legion's officers. The 12th often sends a scale to aid the sepoy in their efforts against bandits. Such missions supply valuable field training for the troops and command training for the scalelord.

Since the Lap has no shortage of strong, healthy young people, the sepoy can afford to be picky and accept only the best applicants. Sepoy's physical conditioning tends to be excellent. They receive only a few months' basic training in riding, thrown weapons, melee weapons and unarmed combat, however. Additionally, the government does not require a stringent drill schedule, so the sepoy's skills rarely improve with time. The Laplanders believe that if real war comes, the 12th Legion will take the front line. The sepoy can supply backup as archers and slingers, or more likely just stay in the city.

Sepoy who enjoy their job often spend time learning greater martial skills. If they train to the Legions' standards, they can join the 12th and escape indenture. Other sepoy just decide to seek higher pay; learning archery is a sure way to gain a higher pay grade.

THE PORTREEVES' OFFICE

A group consisting of officers called portreeves oversees the Lap Sepoy. Originally, the portreeves were the Lap's gate guards. Now, they command and administer those guards. A general staff of about a dozen retired sepoy captains decides which talons perform what duties, manages the sepoy's budget and arranges for their supplies, and performs the other administrative tasks needed to maintain a professional military. Like the Landholder Council, the Portreeves' Office selects its own members. A sepoy captain needs allies in the office, or on the Landholder Council, if he wants to become a portreeve himself.

The landholders, however, cannot command the sepoy or the portreeves in any way. When landholders try, the senior officer—the Portreeve General—asks the 12th

Legion's general to protest this "civilian involvement in military matters." The Dragon-Blooded commander seldom respects the native troops, but he respects the landholders even less, so he usually supports a fellow soldier against the caprice of civilians.

RELIGION AND THE SUPERNATURAL

The Lap government endorses the Immaculate Order as the province's only legitimate faith. In return, the Immaculate Order endorses the Lap's government as righteously obedient to the Realm and the Scarlet Dynasty. The great temple in the Lap Proper can hold more than 2,000 worshipers at a time. It has a spectacular view over the Verdant Triangle (extolled as making manifest the infinite bounty and benevolence of Sextes Jylis, He That Has Strewn Much Grass and the favorite Immaculate Dragon for Laplanders).

Of course, most of the monks are mortal. Indeed, most are Laplanders who served out their indenture and felt called to devote their remaining years to the Immaculate Dragons. Their leaders, however, are Dragon-Blooded. Most Laplanders consider it an honor that such wise and powerful monks live in their land.

As the central Immaculate temple in the South's most loyal satrapy, the Lap's temple warrants a lama. Laughing Peony oversees Immaculate activities throughout the Southwest. Despite her name, this elderly Wood Aspect takes her job very seriously and is quick to call in Wyld Hunts against Anathema. She has even participated in Wyld Hunts herself, putting her mastery of Wood Dragon Style to effective use. Laughing Peony is a "lost egg" Terrestrial, which she believes gives her special empathy for common folk. She frequently advocates for common Laplanders to the Golden Triumvirate.

Less well known, but the subject of many folk tales, is the sybil Mnemon Kazath. This Earth-aspected ascetic lives high on the Penitent itself, ranging from the Arm Forest up to the shoulders and sometimes meditating atop the Penitent's head, in the same position as the gigantic statue. He scorns Dynastic politics, having renounced them along with other worldly concerns. Ambitious folk seek Kazath on the theory that so wise and holy an Exalt must have divined the Penitent's secrets, but he tells them not to disturb the great artifact.

A good half-dozen deities, Terrestrial and Celestial, make scheduled appearances at the temple to assure Laplanders that all their hopes rest with the Immaculate Dragons and their Chosen. Most of these gods are agricultural deities, such as The Mound's Nourishing Treasure, god of potatoes.

GRANIAS

Granias, Lady of the Lap Lands and Reaper of Harvests, appears as a young woman with orange squash blossoms in her corn-tassel hair and eyes the color of wheat: green in spring and summer, shifting to golden-brown in the autumn. Farmers wear tiny statuettes of her as necklaces or carry fist-sized



idols into the fields with them. They pray to her far more often than the Immaculate Order has approved. In return, Granas not only adds her blessing to the Lap's croplands, she often heals devout field hands of minor ailments and blesses their children to grow up strong and healthy.

The Lady of the Lap made her peace with the Immaculate Order long ago, when a member of the Bronze Faction trapped her and made it clear that her immortal existence could end. Granas appears in the Immaculate temple at the planting and harvest festivals, smiling and saying how the Dragons bless the Lap, the Dynasty and the Realm. She also visits the Scarlet Grange.

But Granas does not forget the insult done to her, and she knows how well the people love her. Granas waits for opportunities to strike back against the Realm, the Dynasty and the Bronze Faction. She knows she is only a Terrestrial god of a small province; she cannot battle such foes. At the crucial time, however, she hopes to aid other foes of the Bronze Faction and see her enemies buried in the Lap's rich soil.

ESSENCE-USERS

As pious Immaculates, the Laplanders accept the Terrestrial Exalted as the only mortals who have a legitimate right to channel Essence. It is only right and proper, they feel, that the Dragon-Blooded dominate their government, their military and their faith. Not only do they live with the Golden Triumvirate, the Realm legion's general and the Immaculate lama and vartabed among them, but other Dragon-Blooded

frequently visit from the Blessed Isle. Truly, the Laplanders have no great need for other Essence-users. When some by-blow of a randy Dynast Exalts, many Laplanders rejoice that one of their own shall go to the Blessed Isle and what they imagine as a life of wealth, power and glory.

AHLAT AND THE LAP

The Immaculate Order despises Ahlat. Nevertheless, the Lap's Immaculates celebrate one holiday in Ahlat's honor. They must. The Dragon-Blooded can push small Terrestrial gods around, but Ahlat defies even the Immaculates' potent Sidereal backers. And so, once a year, the monks lead Laplanders in a celebration of Ahlat... but only in his role as God of Cattle. If they didn't, Ahlat would make sure that no cow lives in Lap territory again. Milkmaids twine garlands of flowers around the horns of a placid steer and feed him grain blessed by a monk. It's harmless, pretty and would make a real Bride of Ahlat see red with rage.

Now and then, liaisons between mortals and local spirits result in God-Blooded Laplanders. The Immaculates discourage such intimate relationships, so these half-breeds are not common. When they occur, they are indentured to the Scarlet Grange to become its elite thaumaturges. If any Fae-Blooded,



Ghost-Blooded or Demon-Blooded Laplanders somehow were born, the Lap authorities would kill them as poisoned fruit from poisoned seeds. All methods by which mortals could enlighten their Essence are strictly forbidden.

THE CULT OF THE ILLUMINATED

The Immaculate monks know that a few Laplanders secretly follow the heretical Cult of the Illuminated. A few years ago, one of the cult's Anathema passed by and killed a pack of hobgoblins that menaced a village. Such deeds impress simple folk and render them susceptible to false prophets.

The monks do not realize how *much* the Cult has spread. The Cult's missionaries not only bring tales of other stories about heroic deeds by the Solar Exalted, they talk about the glories Creation has lost but could have again. Most of all, they talk about a righteous new order in which people don't spend most of their lives as serfs. The Cult of the Illuminated is still very small, but it grows steadily. Many villages hold safe houses. The Cult even reaches into the city—mostly in the tenements of the poor, but a few artisans, clerks and soldiers have joined as well. Hundreds of Laplanders are ready to help a traveling Lawgiver. Should a Laplander become one of the Sun's Chosen, the cultists would take it as a sign that the end of bondage approaches and expect the Solar to carry this out.

REVOLUTION!

Should a Lawgiver attempt to free the Laplanders from their indentures, a few hundred members of the Cult of the Illuminated are ready to fight and die for their sakes. The Solar doesn't even need endorsement by the Cult's central command. The Laplanders take all Solar Exalted as the Cult's shining prophets. The first significant, successful blow against the Golden Triumvirate and the landholders rouses thousands more Laplanders to the Solars' side. A second success tips the province into revolution, with mobs of field hands burning landholder villas and artisans battling the Lap Sepoys for control of the entrance tunnels.

Hitherto, the Golden Triumvirate dealt with revolts by sacrificing the Landholder Council. A revolution backed by Exalted, however, would have to fight every Dragon-Blood in the city and the entire 12th Legion, with a Wyld Hunt on its way as quickly as possible and additional legions following more slowly. The Realm will not let go of the Lap without a major war.

THE MENDICANT

The Immaculate monks also know about a nameless old vagrant whom Laplanders call the Mendicant. Many people think he is a holy man. The Mendicant seems kindly enough most of the time, and his meandering babble sometimes seems to show a bit of spiritual insight as well as sympathy

for mortal travails. When people give him food and treat him kindly, he does small tricks such as making pebbles appear and disappear, or making flames jump from candle to candle. Insults and harassment drive him into screaming fits, but he seems harmless enough. He also makes no effort to lead people away from Immaculate piety.

No one takes the mad Mendicant seriously. At most, they think he is an addled God-Blood of insignificant power. No one realizes that the Mendicant once bore the name of Swan Dragon, revered Censor of the South—not even the Mendicant himself.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

The Lap exists in total submission to the Realm. It has no relationships with anyone else, except as the Realm permits. The Realm takes a large fraction of the Lap's agricultural surplus. The Lap sells the rest, but the Golden Triumvirate must approve every contract. The Realm has a long history of using food from the Lap as a diplomatic weapon, selling cheaply to countries, towns and tribes who defer to the Realm's interests and withholding food from anyone who shows defiance.

Of all the Lap's customers, only Gem escapes this patronizing treatment. The Realm wants Gem's wealth badly enough to give its Despot some leverage. Caravans laden with food take the Diamond Road south and return bearing firedust, jewels, silver and gold. Indeed, more than half of all travelers to or from Gem pass through the Lap. The Diamond Road is the safest route, with the most and best-stocked caravansaries along the way.

COVERT ACTIVITIES

Beyond the Lap's public face of total and unshakable subservience to the Realm, a number of groups act covertly in the Lap. All the Great Houses of the Realm post agents in the Lap, trying to steer more of its wealth their way. Houses Cathak, Peleps and Ragara naturally have an advantage in this, since they supply the three triumvirs.

An-Teng, Paragon, the Delzahn Empire and a number of smaller states keep embassies in the Lap, to facilitate commerce and diplomacy. Paragon's embassy has another role too. The staff includes expert geomancers and at least one enlightened mortal sorcerer. They study the Penitent and watch for any sign of Essence-fueled activity. If anyone activates the Last Supplicant, the Perfect learns of this as quickly as does the Realm, and he implements his own plans to seize the South's most powerful geomantic tool. Even if he can't use it himself, he knows who can... and how to control them.

The Sidereal Bronze and Gold Factions both know everything about the Last Supplicant. Both sides watch closely. Both sides would like to control the Penitent, or at least deny it to the other side. Gold Faction leaders also would like to seize the Lap as a bastion for the Cult of the Illuminated. The Bronze Faction would do just about anything to keep the Lap in the Realm's hands.



At least one Deathlord takes an interest in the Lap as well. Ghostly spies walk the city streets and overhear private schemes. Mortal agents gather information as well and create safe houses for Abyssal operatives who might visit. The First and Forsaken Lion has his eye on the Lap as the strategic key to the Southwest. Arch-sorcerers such as the Mask of Winters recall the arcane power of the Last Supplicant and imagine how to twist its power in dire new ways.

And others? The wise among the Lunar Exalted, the Fair Folk and the lords of Malfeas must surely recognize the power available to whoever rules the Lap. Any attempt to wrest the Lap away from the Realm could force any number of powerful people to advance their own plans.

SECRETS OF THE PENITENT

The return of the Lawgivers could result in the reactivation of the Last Supplicant of Endless Power. Any Solar who takes control of the Penitent immediately becomes a power in the South comparable to the Realm or the Guild. Therefore, several entities who remember the giant statue's true purpose watch the Lap closely—Sidereals of all factions, a few exceptionally learned Dynasts, the First and Forsaken Lion, Ahlat and the Court of the Orderly Flame, among others. Anyone who investigates the Penitent likely finds herself investigated in turn. Her various watchers are also likely to find each other, possibly triggering a many-sided conflict over the mere potential that someone might claim one of Creation's most potent artifacts.

THE CHAKRAS

The Penitent's interior contains six large chambers that correspond loosely to the chakras, or centers of Essence flow in the human body. Five of these chambers correspond to Creation's elements: Earth at the base of the spine, Wood at the pelvis, Water in the gut and navel, Fire at the heart and Air at the larynx. The sixth and largest chamber is the control room for the Last Supplicant, located behind the brow. When a Lawgiver sets the Last Supplicant to work, it draws in Creation's Essence through the five lower chakras and the seventh chakra manifests—the Lotus Chakra of pure soul, opening above the Penitent's head to blaze like a trapped aurora.

Each chakra-chamber exists slightly separated from physical reality, rather like a god's sanctum. To enter the lower chakras, one must find the correct point on the statue (corresponding to the chakra's chief acupuncture point on the human body) and infuse that spot with 15 motes of Essence of the same elemental aspect. A tunnel into the Penitent's interior appears. It lasts for 15 seconds before fading away. The tunnels appear to be hundreds of feet long, but when they fade, they swallow everyone inside them into the chamber. Leaving the chamber requires spending just five motes of properly aspected Essence.

The Essence concentrated within each chakra-chamber is so intense that it can kill mere mortals in seconds. The Es-

sence is an environmental effect (Damage 4L/action, Trauma 4). Possible means of protection include being an elemental of matching aspect, having a matching Terrestrial anima active at the 11+ mote level, or Charms against environmental damage such as Element-Resisting Prana.

The entrance to the Earth chakra is at the base of the Penitent's spine. Dirt has piled up against the Penitent sufficiently that the access point is now 10 feet underground. The palace of the Golden Triumvirate now sits on top of the entrance to the Wood chakra. The entrance to the Water chakra, where the Penitent's navel would be, is 900 feet above that but accessible by climbing along the channels of the Step Fountains. The Fire chakra entrance, a mile and a half up the Penitent, is located right above the tips of the Penitent's thumbs. The Air chakra entrance is under the Penitent's chin.

SWAN DRAGON'S SANCTUM

The Fire chakra has an additional feature. It used to be the sanctum of the lesser elemental dragon Swan Dragon, former Censor of the South. It contains a variety of furnishings and implements of a suitable size for a 100-foot-long dragon, all made from highly durable materials such as jade or orichalcum. Most items were merely personal effects of the Censor, but the sanctum holds several items from Swan Dragon's official paraphernalia that never passed to his successor, Wong Bongorok. If the new Censor obtained these items, he would immediately gain far greater credibility in Yu-Shan and greater authority in Creation.

THE CONTROL CHAMBER

The entrance to the control chamber is located on the mountain-statue's forehead, in the location of an Exalted caste mark. Opening the portal requires infusing 20 motes of Solar Essence into the proper location. Getting out costs five motes. The circle-and-star motif of the Unconquered Sun himself blazes golden on the Penitent's forehead, 50 yards across and bright enough to be seen on the Inland Sea coast. The passage to the control chamber opens in the middle of the symbol.

The control chamber itself is a domed cylinder 100 yards across. Eight ribs of stone cut across the walls and floor, continuing the curve of the ceiling to define a complete sphere. In the center rises a pillar two yards wide, made of all five commingled colors of jade shot with veins of starmetal, moonsilver and orichalcum. Jade-steel rings connected by eight vertical bars form a cage and ladder around the column. The top is slightly dished. From the dome's apex, a narrow spine of mingled magical materials tapers to a point six feet above the pillar.

The tunnel enters one of the bays formed by the eight ribs. The other seven hold desks, shelves of books and memory-crystals, maps of the South showing dragon lines, demesnes and other geomantically important locations, and ordinary conveniences such as a box lined with unmelting ice where the Last Supplicant's operators kept snacks. Only an expert

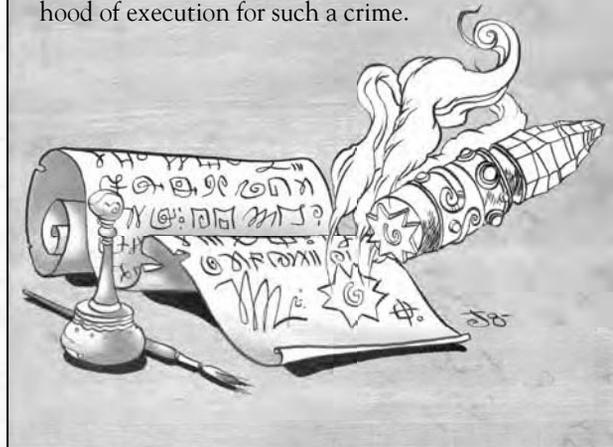


INCARNA SEALS (ARTIFACT •• EACH)

A jade coffer in Swan Dragon's sanctum holds a set of eight seals, each of which marks a document as endorsed by one of the Incarna (including one for Gaia), or to be sent directly to that Incarna's office. They are the only seals that neither magic nor mortal artifice can imitate.

Swan Dragon used these seals to bypass much of Heaven's bureaucracy, and to alert Terrestrial spirits when his missives presented policies from the highest possible level. As such, any document stamped with one of these seals receives the most serious attention from spirits. While a seal does not guarantee that an Incarna personally reads a missive sent to Heaven, the sender knows that at least it reaches the Incarna's immediate deputy, such as Ryzala in the Bureau of Heaven or Nara-O in the Bureau of Destiny.

Each use of a seal costs the user one level of unsoakable, aggravated damage as the seal rips out part of her life-force and fashions it into a mark of Essence. Misuse of these seals to present one's own directives as those of an Incarna is a Celestial offense of maximum severity. Spirits and Exalted alike face a strong likelihood of execution for such a crime.



geomancer could understand most of the information in the chamber, but much of this lore has not been known in Creation since the First Age.

USING THE LAST SUPPLICANT

A Solar Exalt can control the Last Suppliant by sitting atop the pillar in the control room and meditating in the same posture as the Old Man himself—and committing 20 motes to the device. In her mind, the Solar perceives all of Creation within 2,000 miles. All the currents and nexuses of Essence become visible. So do portals to Yu-Shan, Wyld pockets, shadowlands and other locations where Creation intersects with other realms. Concentrating on specific locations to pull useful information from the wash of sensation requires a successful (Perception + Occult) roll for general views on a scale of cities and provinces. The difficulty rises

to 5 for feats such as finding a tiny shadowland in a Chiaroscuro basement.

What the Solar perceives, she can control. The Last Supplicant can move dragon lines, augment or reduce demesnes (and therefore the manses that cap them), and perform other feats of geomantic engineering. As described in **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex** (pp. 52–54), altering a demesne involves a roll of (Intelligence + Occult + [character's Degree in the Art of Geomancy]) at a difficulty of (demesne's desired rating + 3). A demesne's strength can change only one step at a time. Whereas each roll represents one year of mortal labor, however, it represents one *week* of using the Last Supplicant at least five hours per day. A skilled Solar could thus destroy a three-dot demesne (and de-power the manse atop it) in just three weeks.

More ominously, a Solar could perform geomantic sabotage to make a demesne explode. Finding a demesne's geomantic stress-points requires a (Perception + Lore + Geomancy Degree) roll at difficulty 3. Twisting the demesne's Essence so it builds to an explosion calls for the standard geomantic engineering roll, also at difficulty 3. Perhaps fortunately, the Last Supplicant cannot detonate a manse; the Essence flows are too stable. A Solar can, however, target an unstable manse or demesne and repair its Essence flows in a single scene (though the demesne's power drops by one dot).

The Last Supplicant can even control the volcanoes in the Fire Mountains by altering the flows of Earth and Fire Essence. Doing so uses the same geomantic engineering roll and one week of meditation, with the difficulty set by the severity of the desired eruption. A small belch of ash is difficulty 1. A month-long eruption that sends streams of lava for miles is difficulty 5. For difficulty 10, the operator can create a caldera eruption that spreads feet of ash over thousands of miles of the South. Conversely, the operator can also quell eruptions, at the same difficulties.

The notes in the control room mention another possibility that the Solar Deliberative tried only experimentally. If Dragon-Blooded representing all five elements each commit 20 motes to attune to their respective chakras, the Last Supplicant can evoke environmental effects on a scale that only the Realm Defense Grid can surpass—for instance, tornado-strength sandstorms blowing along dragon lines. The five Terrestrial Exalted must be bound to each other

and to the Solar operator by the Sworn Brotherhood Oath or similar magic.

The Last Supplicant might have other powers as well. For instance, Laplanders tell many stories about the Old Man someday waking up and *not being happy* to find his face melted off and a city between his legs. No one presents any evidence that the mountain-statue can move... but few people want to set limits to the wonders of the Old Realm.

Operating the Last Supplicant carries risks. Any geomantic engineering roll that botches results in damage of commensurate scale—demesnes detonated or destroyed, dragon lines twisted to curse entire provinces and the like. This is why the Unconquered Sun had Swan Dragon deactivate the Last Supplicant. Other Exalted can *activate* the Supplicant and use it as a passive Essence-sensing device, but any attempt at geomantic engineering automatically botches.

Anyone who wants to use the Last Supplicant also needs to “unlock” the Essence blocks that Swan Dragon put in place. Since the Unconquered Sun himself designed them, unraveling the Essence blocks calls for an (Intelligence + Occult + Geomancy Degree) roll at difficulty 15... or 5, if you can restore Swan Dragon to sanity and draw on his memories of what he did.

SAMPLE COMBAT UNITS

The 12th Legion conforms to the standard combat units described on pages 68–69 of **The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. I—The Blessed Isle**, though it lacks warstriders. See also **Scroll of Kings**, pages 124–125 for a sample sworn brotherhood of Dragon-Blooded officers and an artillery and combat engineering scale.

See **Scroll of Kings**, pages 29–30, for an example of a typical sepyo talon. The Lap also has one elite talon, the Formidable First, also called the Crimson Talon.

LAP SEPOYS: THE FORMIDABLE FIRST

Description: When caravans or visiting dignitaries require strong protection, they receive an escort from the Formidable First. Soldiers make it in the first talon through their initiative in seeking further training. Their commanding officer, Captain Jolavos, has an unmatched record for killing and routing bandits. General Letal has managed to mortally insult him several times while thinking he was giving compliments.

Commanding Officer: Captain Jolavos





Armor Color: Gilded with a red “1” (in Realm script). The soldiers all have red plumes on their helmets, which alerts would-be bandits that they are dealing with the elite of the local legion.

Motto: “Protect the Profit and the People!” (official); “Bandits run before the red!” (unofficial)

General Makeup: 126 light infantry wearing buff jackets and pot helms. Each scale carries slashing swords, bolas, nunchaku and composite bows; one scale additionally has firewands.

Overall Quality: Elite

Magnitude: 4

Drill: 3

Close Combat Attack: 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

Ranged Attack: 3 **Ranged Damage:** 2

Endurance: 6 **Might:** 0

Armor: 1 (-1 mobility penalty) **Morale:** 3

Formation: Captain Jolavos has War 3; his four subalterns, who can split off scales and command them as heroes, have War 2. Four soldiers with banners act as relays. Since their enemies normally fight in relaxed or skirmish formation, so do sepoys. The First also takes close formation, especially when they manage to herd a troop of bandits to an ambush by the firewand scale.

The Lap, a Magnitude 3 Dominion

Military: 2 **Government:** 3 **Culture:** 2

Abilities: Awareness 3 (Economic Blackmail +2), Bureaucracy 2, Craft 3, Integrity 1, Investigation 1, Occult 1 (Savant Academy +1), Performance 3 (Fool the Populace +1), Presence 2, War 3

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 2, Temperance 3, Valor 2

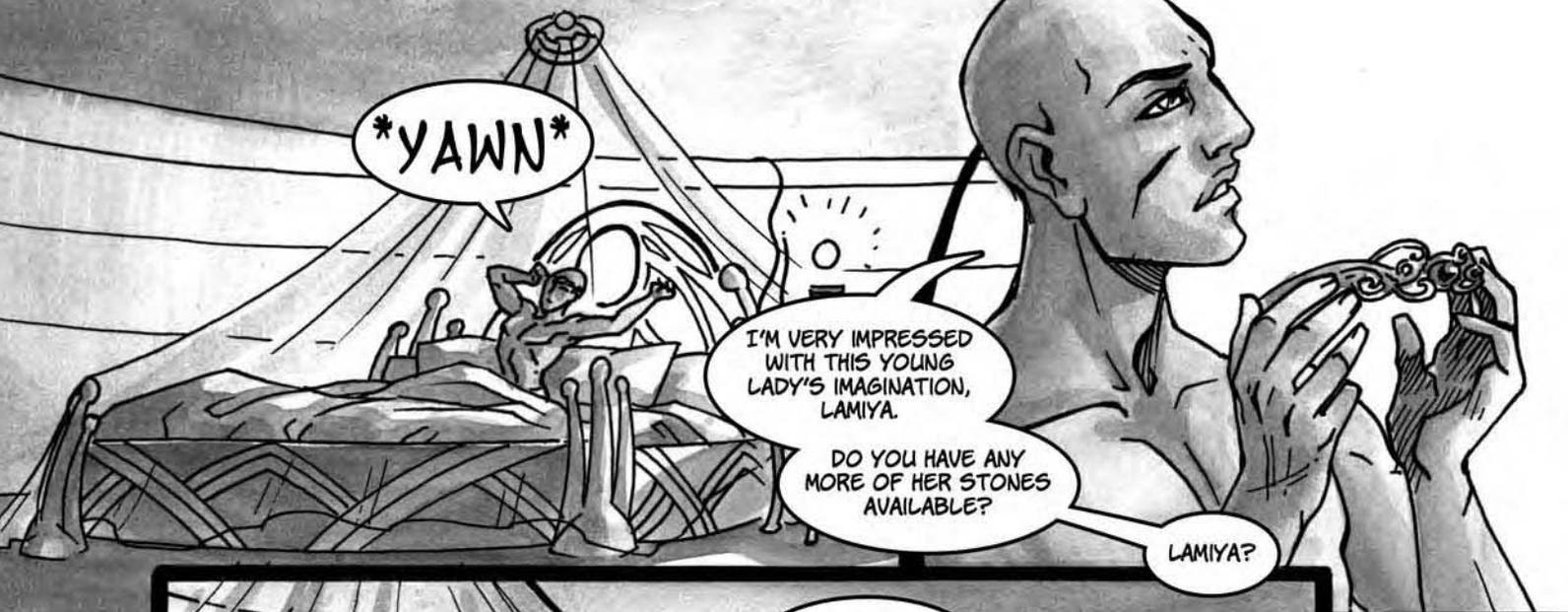
Virtue Flaw: Compassion **Current Limit:** 7

Willpower: 6

Bonus Points: 15 **External Bonus Points:** 9

Notes: The three triumvirs are all savants, though they often work at cross-purposes; Laughing Peony is a sorcerer with legitimacy. The Lap’s external bonus points come entirely from the Realm. They pay for one dot each of War and Military, and the Performance specialty. The Lap’s own bonus points pay for one dot each of Awareness, Craft and Performance, and the Awareness and Occult Specialties.

Working-class Laplanders share a strong sense of common interest, or at least a common grievance at their indentures. Modest, though certain, support in later life is no longer enough for them. In Limit Break, someone goes on strike, which spreads throughout the field hands, artisans, porters and other laborers, paralyzing the Lap. Getting them back to work again, feeding the Realm and the Legions, involves either meeting some of the strikers’ demands or launching a suppression brutal enough to terrify the people into submission.



YAWN

I'M VERY IMPRESSED WITH THIS YOUNG LADY'S IMAGINATION, LAMIYA.

DO YOU HAVE ANY MORE OF HER STONES AVAILABLE?

LAMIYA?



GOOD MORNING, ARALAK CIRCLA. SLEEP WELL?



I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING. I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING. YOU CAN TELL RANKAR THAT.

WHATEVER AUNT BELUSCO TOLD YOU ISN'T TRUE. SHE HATES ME!

KID, RELAX. I'M NOT HERE ON OFFICIAL BUSINESS.

I CAME TO ASK YOU SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR FAMILY. YOUR SISTER, SPECIFICALLY.

MY WHAT? HOW DID YOU KNOW ABOUT HER?

GOOD GODS... HAVE YOU FOUND HER?



CHAPTER FIVE

BEYOND THE DREAMS OF AVARICE

The city-state of Gem has weathered coups, rebellions and the deadly Southern sun. The secrets of its survival are its wealth, location and policies. Copious gemstone deposits enable Gem's hereditary monarch, the Despot, to hire an army of mercenaries to defend it. The city's location makes defense easier. Any attacker would have to traverse volcanic mountains and searing deserts. Even if an army made such a trek, it would need to scale halfway up a mountainside to assault Gem itself, fighting every step of the way. By the same token, however, Gem is too remote to threaten anyone else, which facilitates the city's longstanding policy of non-aggression and neutrality.

Unfortunately, Gem does face danger. The city is *too* rich. Whoever rules Gem controls the wealth of empires. The Gemfolk and the Despot want nothing more than to continue ripping that wealth from the ground. Other folk feel greater ambition and look at Gem with greedy eyes.

HISTORY

Unlike many of Creation's great cities, Gem owes nothing to the First Age. Official histories and popular legend agree that Gem began with a wandering prospector named Rankar, who dared to venture deeper into the volcanic Southern wastes than most of his kind. Rankar got lucky. In an extinct volcano, he found several deposits of precious stones. Cannily, he did not let others know the magnitude of his find—not until he sold enough raw gems to fund his own mining camp. Naturally, other miners came and set up their own camps. Rankar used his head start in wealth to crush his first competitors. He then sold franchises, and his mining camp swiftly grew into a town dubbed Gem. A few mines grew into hundreds as the full magnitude of Rankar's find became clear.

Rankar had another bright idea by selling monopolies in various industries to particular families in his new town. This



tactic made sure that Rankar's cronies assisted him in keeping Gem stable lest they lose their own profitable holdings.

Many miners didn't like how tightly Rankar held control of his growing town. They called him a despot. Rankar never denied it. Rankar's descendants continued his ruthless ways as the first Despots of Gem. In time, the Despots formalized their relations with its allied families by granting titles as Gem's noble houses.

For a century, Rankar's descendants kept control of Gem. Eventually, though, a strong enough coalition of would-be usurpers met a weak enough Despot. The House of Rankar was hunted nearly to extinction.

For several centuries, the new Despots ruled Gem much as the old had. The rulers of the city continued to sell trade monopolies to the various noble houses, while holding the precious stone market with an iron fist. Every few decades, the reigning Despot fell to a coup: sometimes to a noble house, sometimes to his own military commanders. Greedy relatives assassinated many other Despots. There was just too much wealth to gain.

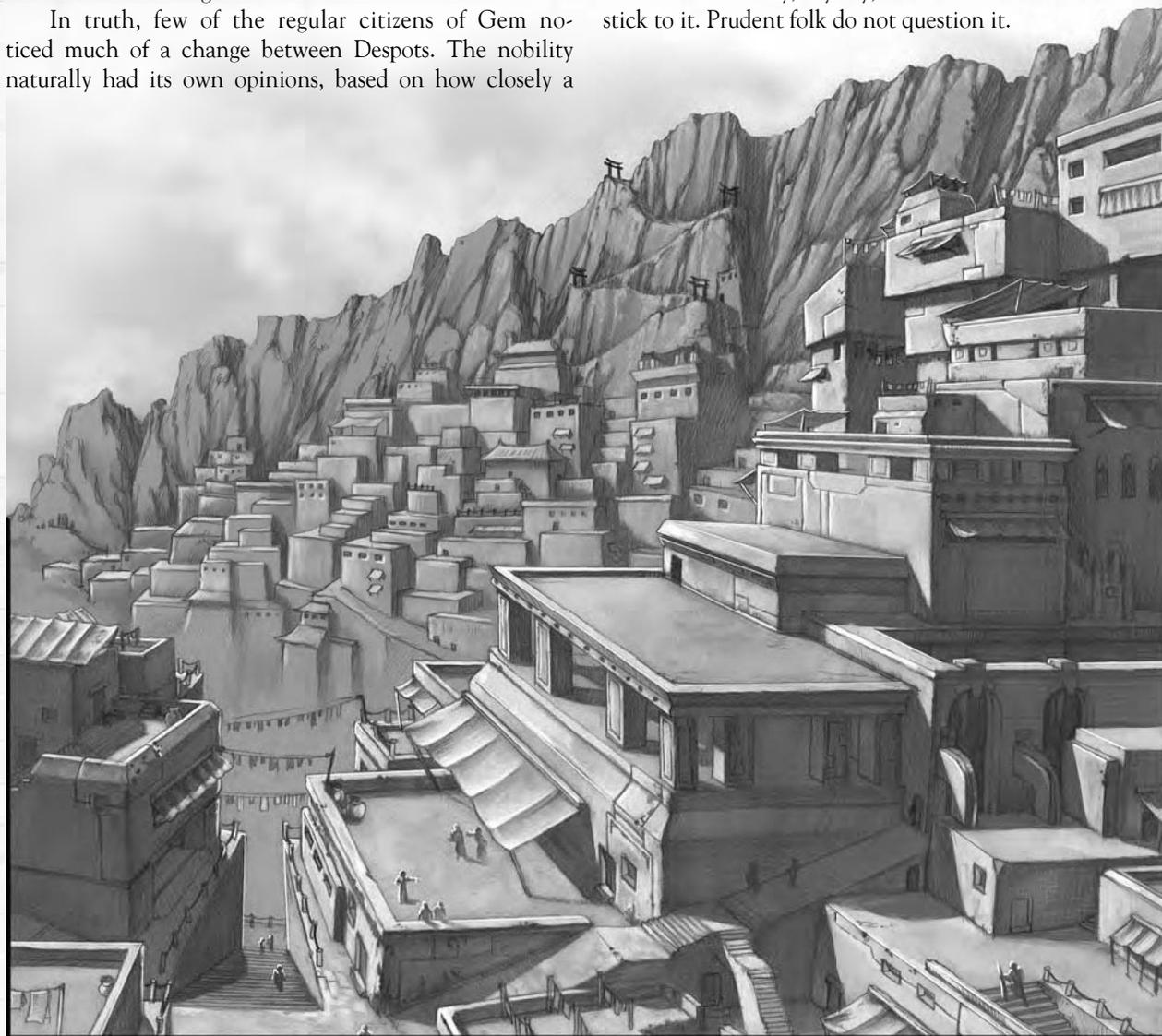
In truth, few of the regular citizens of Gem noticed much of a change between Despots. The nobility naturally had its own opinions, based on how closely a

house was allied to the old regime and what sort of deals the new Despot would cut for loyalty. After a brief period of massacre and reorganization at the upper echelons of society, Gem continued along as always, digging vast wealth from the ground.

The latest coup happened in RY 703 when Winglord Kolar, a second-tier commander in Gem's military, gathered enough allies among fellow officers and noble houses to overthrow the reigning Despot and purge his family. Unlike some usurpers, Kolar III also planned for what to do about his allies. Assassins swiftly murdered most of Kolar's junta before they could try to do the same to him. Many of the assassins then killed each other.

As he consolidated his reign, Kolar III revealed that he was, in fact, descended from the House of Rankar. The long-ago usurpers had missed a few members of the family, and their descendants had worked for centuries to regain their fortune, re-establish themselves in Gem and return the throne to its true and rightful owners.

That's the story, anyway, and Kolar's descendants stick to it. Prudent folk do not question it.





Kolar III reorganized Gem's military to make sure that no one could mount a coup the same way he did. He also passed new laws regarding sedition and increased the number of offenses punishable by death. He cracked down on anyone, particularly the nobility, who sought to take too much power away from his house. By the time his son, Rankar V, took power, the cracks in Gem's power structure were sealed and the rule of the Despot was stronger than ever. Gem continued to grow. Now about a million people live in one of the South's harshest locations.

Kolar's dynasty has outlasted every previous line of Despots except for those of the first Rankar's line. Nonetheless, life in Gem remains much as it has for centuries—a mad scramble for wealth, barely constrained by the harsh laws of an absolute monarch.

THE UNNAMED DESPOTS

When he took power, Kolar III burned all records of the previous dynasty, which was not unusual conduct for a usurper, in Gem or elsewhere. Gem's official histories have been rewritten many times, and the older versions destroyed. Kolar III was a bit more thorough in that he bribed several other monarchs to purge their histories too, making information on previous dynasties a bit difficult to find. Such matters are usually of interest only to historians of the obscure.

Unless some of the old Despot's family survived.

It is possible that Kolar III really did descend from Rankar I. It is just as possible that the Despot he overthrew had relatives who escaped the massacre of their house and now plot to reclaim the throne of Gem. There could indeed be multiple deposed dynasties. These would-be rulers of Gem would need powerful allies to retake the throne. Such plotters could hide anywhere in the South, though if they seriously wish to retake Gem, they would need to live in or near Gem itself.

GEOGRAPHY

Far south of creation's other cities, the Fire Mountains send a massive spur into the heart of the Great Southern Desert. Most of these mighty volcanic peaks are dead or dormant, but every year sees several eruptions that coat Gem's streets with ash and turn the sun a bloody red. Creation's rim is just a few hundred miles away, and hot winds from the Elemental Pole of Fire sometimes blow the edge of the Wyld much closer.

From one side, Gem's mountain—Rankar Peak—presents the façade of a rugged cone, neatly sliced off at the top. From the other side, a vast, ragged crater snarls, revealing how some inconceivable eruption blew out half the mountainside. The city of Gem occupies that huge crater. Rankar

Peak reaches three miles high, but Gem lies only a mile above the mountain's base. The curve of the mountainside leaves most of Gem shaded for most of the day.

From the outside, Gem doesn't look like much. Most of Gem's surface streets are dusty and rarely traveled except during early mornings, late evenings and the cooler months of winter. The buildings are boxes of local thick-walled lava-rock, built to keep out the heat, with only narrow slits for windows.

The true wonder of Gem lies beneath the surface. Lava tunnels twist throughout Rankar Peak; some are eight to 20 yards wide. The most important areas of the city occupy the larger lava tunnels and played-out mines. Glowstones light these underground streets and chambers.

The Despot's Palace is a major feature of the city, both above and below ground. Much of the structure is subterranean, but the surface structure still towers over all other buildings. The palace clings to the crater wall in the spot that receives the most shade through the year. This relative lack of illumination provides a showcase for the glowstones that decorate the outside walls. Statues of former Despots tower over the main palace gate, and throngs of mercenaries and slaves in elaborate ceremonial dress are always present to greet and menace petitioners with a display of the Despot's power.

Gem's lesser nobles keep less impressive (but still lavish) homes both above and below ground. Like the Despot, they build their homes close to the crater's shaded wall.

The common folk of Gem live according to their means. Mercenaries and merchants can usually afford decent quarters in shady surface areas, or underground in comfortably appointed tunnels. The largest tunnels are divided into streets lined by apartments. The poor find themselves staying in small shacks built in full view of the sun or in cramped lava tubes and mines with little ventilation. The homeless sleep where they can and many die each summer from sun sickness.

THE STONES OF GEM

The mines beneath Gem produce a wide variety of precious stones. Outlying mines, up to several hundred miles from Rankar Peak, produce everything from agates to emeralds. Gem's mines also produce several exotic stones that affect Essence in special ways. These stones occur in other parts of the South (Varangians collect glowstones and firegems, for instance), but Gem's output exceeds all other sources combined. Rankar Peak is certainly the richest source of glowstones ever found. Gem also mines yasal crystals (see **Exalted**, p. 381).

DREAM OPAL

These iridescent green stones record the dreams of people who sleep near them. An acorn-sized stone can hold one dream;





thumb-sized stones can record all the dreams a sleeper experiences in a night. A person who touches the stone experiences the dreams the next time she sleeps, as if they were her own. A waking person can also touch the stone, clear her mind and experience the stored dream as a vivid daydream. A dream opal can replay stored visions indefinitely, until someone performs a special meditation to erase the dreams. The meditation is easily learned with a few hours' practice and a successful Temperance roll.

Cost: Resources ●●● (small stones) to ●●●● (large stones).



FIREGEMS

The farthest reaches of the South produce dimly glowing red-orange crystals that resemble a fire's embers caught in glass. Firegems, also called evercoals, typically range in size from an apricot to a cantaloupe. Firegems produce a little light and considerable heat.

The lowest-quality stones with many fractures are no warmer than a glass of hot tea, while the best can melt silver and heat iron sufficiently to forge it. Firegems are in demand across Creation. (They're expensive, but you never pay for fuel again.) Firegems retain their heat for centuries if not chipped or cracked.

Cost: Resources ●● for a stone capable of comfortably warming a cold room and Resources ●●● for one hot enough to use in a forge. Add one dot to the cost outside the South.

GLOWSTONES



Glowstones are exactly what they sound like: stones that shine with their own light. They generate no heat, which makes them safer than lanterns or torches. Pebble-sized stones shine as brightly as a candle, while fist-sized stones can light a room as brightly as an overcast day. Glowstones keep shining for more than 20

years after they leave the Far South.

Glowstones generally come in red and orange. Scarcer stones that shine white or bright yellow are in higher demand. Glowstones of other colors are very rare and highly prized as novelties. Wealthy people throughout Creation light their homes with glowstones. These crystals also find use in mines and other places where fire would use up too much breathable air, in already overheated areas such as most of the South, or on ships, in libraries or other places where flames are especially dangerous.

Cost: In the South, Resources ● for a dim red stone to Resources ●●● for a room-illuminating white stone, or more for a bright stone of unusual hue. Outside the South, raise costs by one dot.

GOVERNMENT

Gem has a simple government. The Despot's word is law; his powers are whatever he can get away with. A small civil service conveys his dictates to the people, and his mercenary army enforces them. The common people obey.

Noble families wield secondary power through their monopolies on selected commodities or services. They can do whatever the Despot lets *them* get away with.

A prudent Despot consults with the nobles about what they will allow. Prudent nobles take care not to offend the Despot. Therefore, the Despot employs an advisory council of representatives from the various noble houses. The houses pick their own representatives for this council but the Despot can refuse a choice. At this point, the house must choose a new representative unless the rest of the council votes unanimously to accept the original applicant. In the history of Gem, only two representatives have been chosen in this fashion.

The system works when the nobles and the Despot act together as a syndicate to protect their common interest in making gobs of money and shutting out any competition. When nobles turn against each other or the Despot, there's blood in the streets.

Gem's government looks out for the common folk to the extent that it needs people to do all the work. Pursuant to that end, Gem has judges to hold trials and hear disputes. Laws against theft are more severe than those against murder. The laws also make it very easy to start a business and make money. If that's all you care about, Gem is a great place to live. A million Gemfolk or more accept that bargain, and more arrive every year.

THE DESPOT

The current ruler of Gem is Rankar VII. He came to power after his father drank himself to death a decade ago. Rankar is a dark-skinned, black-haired man with a short beard and mustache. His onyx-black eyes and his narrow gaze hint at his capacity for petty cruelty. A lifetime of luxury leaves Rankar soft around the middle, a fact he conceals with expensive robes. He has four wives and countless courtesans, though he has yet to choose an heir from his children, believing he has years left to make such decisions. And if he doesn't... let them fight it out. Rankar is a fair hand with a blade from lessons in his youth, but knows he's not nearly as skilled as his advisors and lackeys claim. He is no stranger to most vices, having a particular fondness for young flesh and dreamstones.

The Despot's greatest strength lies in his keen ability to recognize and utilize the abilities of others. While his intellect and wit are average in many areas, Rankar VII has an incredible eye for talent and great skill at keeping

such individuals loyal and content, as well as a knack for spotting when his lackeys stop being content. From his personal guard to the leaders of his armies, Rankar displays the ability to handpick people with just the right balance of expertise and lack of ambition. Those who display greater aspirations, Rankar VII uses sparingly—and stands ready to follow the example of his wise great-grandfather by executing or assassinating former cronies before they do it to him. Still, he knows that sometimes the people's love serves him better than their fear, so he makes calculated gestures of mercy or generosity.

More than anything, the Despot realizes that his wealth and power depend on keeping his reach commensurate with his grasp. He is far from being the best ruler in Creation, but he is also nowhere near the worst.

THE GEMSTONE TRADE

Within Gem, only the Despot, his family and his duly chosen representatives can sell the precious gems from the city's mines. What's more, anyone who brings precious stones to Gem can sell them only to the Despot's dealers. As a result, the jewel-market of Gem includes amber from the East, coral and pearls from the West, the ice-diamonds of the far North and other stones not found in Gem itself. This monopoly has always made Gem's rulers rich beyond the dreams of avarice.

Everyone in the jewel trade is a slave of the Despot—the miners, the cutters, carvers and polishers, the dealers and all. Miners are slaves for life. Skilled workers who perform their duties well might win freedom after a decade or so, with more or less munificent severance packages (Resources ●●● to ●●●●) depending on the quality of service and the profits the slave generates. As a result, many artisans aspire to become property of the Despot. Freed slave-merchants often find careers as consultants for those wishing to deal with the Despot.

A slave caught stealing from the Despot or conspiring with a buyer to undervalue a sale is put to death. The method of execution varies with infraction. A once-loyal slave palming a small uncut gem might be quickly beheaded. Conversely, a slave-merchant who embezzled a fortune from a glowstone contract with a Realm shipbuilder might be staked out to cook slowly in the sun, along with three generations of his family. Anyone caught trying to buy or sell precious stones illegally also faces harsh punishment. Common fates include some combination of torture, maiming, enslavement or death.

WATER

Gem could not survive without water, and the Despot claims a monopoly on this precious commodity as well. Over Gem's history, Despots have repeatedly struggled to expand

the city's water supply to match the expanding population. Deep wells tap limited supplies of water—not nearly enough for a million people.

In the Season of Water, Gem experiences occasional brief showers. Channels and cisterns carved into Rankar Peak (and every other mountain for 20 miles around) catch this water. Slaves then pump it into barrels for transport to the thirsty city. Desert barbarians often try to steal water, so the Despot sets mercenaries to guard the system during the crucial months.

Much of Gem's water, though, comes from magic. Every year, the Despot hires sorcerers to cast the Terrestrial Circle spell called Water from Stone (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. II—The White Treatise*, p. 68) to fill deeply buried reservoirs.

Gem lacks a citywide system to deliver water. Visitors are sometimes surprised by the lack in one of Creation's richest cities. If anyone wants water, they must buy it from the Despot—or go to small-time, black-market dealers who do things such as pressing water from cactus or distilling it from the city's copious discharge of urine. Some dealers don't distill very carefully.

RENT AND FEES

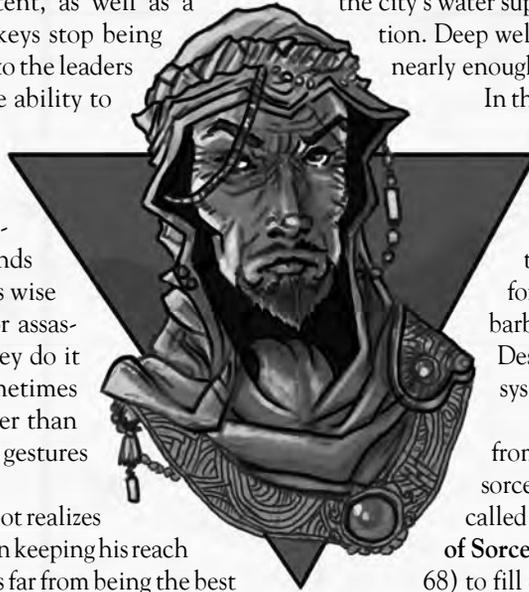
Gem has no taxes, but people who want to buy and sell legally in Gem must pay the Despot a yearly licensing fee based on the value of their business. Anyone who disputes an assessor's valuation of his business may discuss the matter with the Despot, or more likely with a squad of the Despot's heavily armed mercenaries.

Failure to pay licensing and other fees results in punishment that can range from eviction or seizure of assets to the sale of the citizen's family into slavery to cover both the debt and the fines for nonpayment. Since the Despot's judges can set arbitrary fines, families that face debts often sell children at the slave market themselves to pay the Despot in full and on time. Even wealthy citizens do this at times rather than reduce the level of luxury to which they became accustomed.

But... there are no taxes.

NOBLE HOUSES

In addition to the Despot, dozens of other families have risen to prominence in Gem over the centuries. By Despotic decree, each noble house holds total dominion over one aspect of Gem's commerce. Noble houses buy these monopolies from the Despot at great expense and maintain them through annual tributes. Powerful houses have monopolies that encompass the production and sale of luxuries or vital necessities. The minor houses hold sway over small amenities and other, less profitable ventures. The houses squabble,





bicker, ally and feud with each other in a complex game of politics, business and, sometimes, assassination.

This system keeps Gem running without a complex bureaucracy or strong feudal structure. It also makes the exact workings of Gem a mystery to most outsiders. This is completely intentional.

The first Despot of Gem laid down the system of monopolies in an effort to buy off rivals so they wouldn't try to usurp his own monopoly on precious stones. The system survived cycles of usurpation because it gives so much money and power to whoever rules Gem—resources to pay for all the mercenaries, spies and assassins a Despot needs to keep power.

At various times during Gem's history, a noble family fell on such hard times that its interests were absorbed or officially reassigned to a new noble house. These new houses often begin with wealthy commoners who were somehow attached to the industry the old house governed.

Two families can also join through alliance and marriage to achieve a larger power base. This union becomes more likely if the two houses hold industries that complement each other. For example, a house that governs the sale of confectations might marry its heir to a house that deals in spices to form a larger house that holds dominion over both industries. The Despot must approve all such unions, though he seldom refuses. This is due less to generosity and respect for his fellow nobles than because the Despot's agents would sabotage any merger that did not suit the Despot's own interests.

The current heads of Gem's major noble houses are exceptional even for an aristocracy whose rough-and-tumble ways favor the ruthless, bold and competent. They chafe under the Despot's rule a bit more than did many of their ancestors. Gem just isn't big enough for all their ambitions. The city's constricted environment drives the noble houses into infighting, secret alliances and intrigue.

HOUSE ARBANI

House Arbani holds the monopoly on Gem's firewand production. In addition to outfitting Gem's military, the Arbani equip mercenary companies, private armies and smaller states in the South. They also sell to private citizens. Discerning buyers across Creation recognize Arbani firewands as solid, dependable weapons. The Arbani keep the exact manufacturing process a family secret. Stories say it takes years of apprenticeship to master.

The family also deals with firedust refinement, though an allied smaller house, House Petrox, holds the firedust mining monopoly in Gem. The Arbani typically buy both from the Petrox and from various desert tribes so that they do not become too dependent on any one supplier.

House Arbani operates several subterranean factories where workers toil day and night to produce parts and refine raw firedust into usable ammunition. Most of their workers are slaves who learn only one task related to one part of the many that make up a firewand. One slave might forge firewand barrels while another cools them in a special

solution and yet another etches decorative markings and house insignia on the barrel. Skilled artisans then assemble the parts into a functioning firewand, without knowing how the parts were made.

Any slave caught trying to sell or reveal any part of the process can expect death. Given that one Arbani firewand sells for about the cost of the disloyal slave, the family sees this as a cost-effective way to protect trade secrets. Arbani house members or employees who try to undermine family operations are typically reassigned to less vital duties and cut off from family resources and secrets. If they don't get the hint and lead very quiet, loyal lives, they disappear. This code of secrecy has enabled the Arbani to keep their arms-making process secret for generations.

The house's current head is Arbani Halan, a quiet, unassuming man in his late 60s. Halan is slender and dark-skinned, with close-cropped graying hair, a neatly trimmed beard and a receding hairline. His smoky gray eyes gaze out calmly from under his bushy eyebrows. He once faced down a charging austrech without flinching and never seems intimidated and rarely impressed.

Halan himself, however, is quite impressive. He is not only one of the best firewand makers in Creation, he is also one of the greatest mortal marksmen, a skilled hunter and a ruthless businessman. Every serious collector in the South envies Halan's private collection of firewands, flame pieces and similar weapons. His collection of hunting trophies is equally impressive.

Halan's three sons are somewhat less exceptional than their father, all given to excessive whoring, gambling and small-time scheming. As Halan feels his years catching up to him, the old man considers looking for a proper heir in remoter branches of the family, or marrying a suitable young man to one of his daughters and clearing his way as heir by murdering his own sons. Halan holds off on this plan in hopes one of his sons will distinguish himself. Thus far, however, they outdo each other only in feats of debauchery.

...ARBANI MADE THEM EQUAL.

Halan Arbani is one of Creation's few artisans who can craft a superior firewand (of Fine quality)—a secret hitherto known only by Varangian weaponsmiths. He cannot yet adapt the process to the house's factory system. Once he can do so (perhaps with Exalted help), House Arbani claims an even greater share of the South's firewand industry. For now, such a weapon must come from Halan himself as a gift, reward or tribute. He wouldn't debase such a masterpiece by *selling* it.

HOUSE SAHLAK

House Sahlak runs all of the brothels and dream parlors in Gem. It also contracts individual courtesans who pay the house a tithe in exchange for protection and license to



operate within Gem. Most Sahlak brothels and parlors occupy Gem's Red Stone district, a large lava tunnel. Red silk drapes diffuse the glowstone light to give the whole area a dreamlike appearance.

Sahlak brothels cater to all customers. The outskirts of the district hold cheaper, simple operations where one can rent a girl or boy for a few hours. Deeper within Red Stone, the fancier and more exotic establishments allow wealthy customers to purchase pleasures barely imagined by humanity. Encounters with a variety of bound spirits, beasts and strange creatures can be had for a price. Such brothels also feature human courtesans trained in a variety of arts unknown to typical streetwalkers.

Sahlak dream parlors are also popular. Clients can consume hallucinogens and other drugs to lounge in varying degrees of stupor. The greatest attraction, though, are the dream opals bought from the Despot. The Sahlak employ dozens of professional dreamers to keep their selection of dreams varied and interesting. Most patrons seek fantasies of power, passion and wealth but dreams of famous events and religious epiphanies are also popular. For clients with odder tastes, night terrors and dreams of utter ruin are also available. For the right price, a client can even experience the dreams of gods and, perhaps, stranger and darker creatures.

House Sahlak is matriarchal. The head of the house adopts the traditional title of Madame. Numerous Daughters, who may or may not be her actual offspring, assist the Madame. The Sahlaks are invariably striking in appearance and look young well into their later life due to a mix of special drugs and thaumaturgy. Some Sahlaks claim a distant supernatural ancestry as well, though no one offers proof.

Sahlak Janissa, the house's current Madame, is a beautiful woman who appears to be in her mid 30s despite being well over 50. Her amber eyes and red-highlighted raven hair have charmed many patrons to her family's operations. She occasionally takes attractive, powerful or simply very interesting individuals of both sexes as lovers. Her Daughters are all children of such affairs; they oversee a number of house operations. The Daughters all share their mother's beauty, though their appearance varies wildly due to the various fathers.

Gem's rumor mill says that one of Janissa's daughters recently Exalted. The rumors began after a brothel's patron became violent and killed a courtesan. Reportedly, one of the Daughters arrived on the scene and was attacked in turn. Minutes later, the murderer was herself dead and the family hushed up the incident. People who believe the rumor point out that many a Dragon-Blooded Dynast or outcaste has visited Janissa's bed. A few people speculate about stranger possibilities.

Janissa publicly dismisses the rumors but secretly encourages them, hoping it makes others think twice before disrupting her business. To date, Janissa refuses to reveal which of her children was involved in the incident and instead points out that all of her children are more than capable of defending themselves—just like their mother.

HOUSE IBLAN

House Iblan controls the gold and silver trade in Gem, giving it wealth second only to the Despot. The Iblan run all the local gold and silver mines. They mint all of Gem's coinage. The house began with Gem, having operated as miners back when the great Rankar I was simply a prospector who struck it big enough to found his own city. Many nobles in House Iblan have close ties to the Despot and his family. Usually these ties are pleasant and favorable, but some Iblan always feel that they should share power with Rankar—or replace him. No house has lasted so long in Gem without taking the throne.

House Iblan runs a simple and highly profitable operation. Contract miners and slaves mine gold and silver ore. Foreign buyers who want to buy raw ore (for whatever reason) may do so. The house smelts the metal from the ore and sells it to merchants and artisans. The Iblan keep a few tons of gold and silver in reserve at all times, so that they can always meet a client's order. They also employ many smiths and sell silver and gold articles directly to the public.

Iblan's smelting process exploits the area's abundant volcanic heat and sunlight. Astute savants might note that these heat sources are also used to distill gold into orichalcum. To date, the Iblan have never used their lava-vents and mirrors to produce orichalcum, but they might know the process. Regardless, large quantities of gold and silver bring greater profit and attract less attention from powerful Essence-users.

The head of House Iblan is Iblan Bana. Although many Iblan favor extravagance, Bana harks back to her family's mining roots. She is a short plain woman who wears few trappings of her wealth. She wears her gray hair cut short, and the desert sun left her skin leathery and scorched nearly black. She is nearly 100 years old and shows little sign of slowing down.

Bana runs her family with brisk (and brusque) efficiency. This attitude led her and Arbani Halan to strike up a friendship, although their houses have no particular alliance. Rumors link the two romantically, but Bana dismisses them by pointing out that despite his age, Halan is 30 years her junior. Still, many gossips note that both Bana and Halan are in noticeably better spirits in one another's presence. Iblan Bana and Sahlak Janissa just as noticeably dislike each other, even though they are the only two female heads of noble houses in the otherwise patriarchal society of Gem.

HOUSE CIRCLA

Nobles rarely begin life as slaves, but the founder of House Circla achieved this feat five generations ago. The first Circla, named simply Circla, was a gladiator who received his freedom for years of service in the games. Once freed, Circla became a bodyguard to the Despot, then Asbar IV. When Circla was severely wounded saving the Despot's life from an assassination attempt, the Despot elevated him to nobility as a reward.



Now the Circla have a monopoly on all gladiatorial games and training schools in Gem. With the exception of unauthorized and secret fights, they run every spectacle where people pay money to see other people beat and kill each other. Other individuals can own their own gladiators or even hire freemen to fight if they wish—but they must buy a license from House Circla to compete in Gem. Also, no gladiators can train within Gem except at a Circla school.

Circla's games are a varied lot. Basic one-on-one fights set the standard, though gigantic melees, chariot races and fights against various beasts also take place. Now and then, House Circla attempts fabulous stunts such as the "Living Gateway" tournaments where gladiators act as game pieces.

The games and the gladiators who fight in them are divided into circuits. Any fighter not licensed and fighting in one or more of these circuits is a rogue and will be fined, imprisoned and possibly enslaved (if a freeman) or killed (if a slave). The circuits themselves are ranked (from lowest to highest) as Sand, Sun, Stone, Fire and Volcano. In practice, the Volcano circuit is so elite that no mere humans ever last long. Instead beastmen, God-Blooded, various sentient beasts and enlightened mortals compete for the title of Volcano Champion.

House Circla maintains good relations with mercenaries and slavers. They always look for new talent. Most of the slaves trained as gladiators die or suffer maiming in the games, but the Circla make sure to free a number of worthy candidates each year to motivate the rest of their stock. Some of these freed slaves stay with the house as trainers, while others leave to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

Circla Belusco currently leads the House. Unlike other noble houses in Gem, any member of the house by marriage or blood can challenge for leadership when the old leader dies. These contests rarely end in death and they take place privately, though the Despot and a few other honored guests receive invitations. Originally a gladiator and slave himself, Belusco won his freedom through victories in the arena. Shortly thereafter, he won the heart of the former house head's sister and they married. When his brother-in-law died in a training accident, Belusco challenged for leadership of the house and won. That fight gave Belusco a scar that blinded his left eye and marred his otherwise handsome features. Belusco was a fearsome gladiator in his day, having reached the Fire circuit. He keeps his now-graying red hair cut short and stays in fighting shape by sparring with the house's most promising champions. He usually wears a patch over his blind eye.

HOUSE TRASTI

Gambling houses, banks and Gem's larger loan shark operations are the province of House Trasti. This house rivals the Iblan for wealth, having secured dispensation by a past Despot to settle in the city long ago. The Trasti have grown from running dice games for miners to managing lavish casinos known throughout the South. Banking was a

THE SECRET LIVES OF GLADIATORS

The Circla work hard to shut down unlicensed fights. They harshly punish people who run and participate in such games. Kind of. In reality, there are no unauthorized gladiator fights in Gem.

The city has various back-alley blood sports, speakeasy pit fights and the Despot's private death matches. The people who run these games make a big show of operating without Circla approval. In fact, the Circla monitor and even run many of these operations. They take a share of any winnings and scout for talented trainers and fighters.

Why run fake illegal fights? Especially considering what is legal?

The Circla realized long ago that certain people like to defy the rules—and pay extra for their "illicit" activities. In some cases, nobles or wealthy merchants who wouldn't be caught dead at a public match pay a fortune to host extravagant prizefights in their homes. On the lower end of the scale, petty criminals often find that their customers prefer to bet when the nobility isn't nosing around. House Circla obliges these desires and makes a tidy profit... sometimes through blackmail.

Yet, what about those few individuals who run a really unauthorized game? They often find themselves the starring attraction in an upcoming Circla blood sport.

logical extension of their monopoly, given the amounts of cash the house handles.

Trasti casinos stand out as some of Gem's gaudiest spectacles. Lit with glowstones and decorated with marble and silks, silver and gold, the most expensive of these establishments seem like subterranean palaces of some legendary god-king rather than a gambling house. Plentimon of the Dice, God of Gambling (see *The Compass of Terrestrial Directions, Vol. II—The West*, pp. 136–137) visits yearly and looks right at home. Most of the active gamblers among the Gem nobility keep private suites reserved in the Forbidden Chamber, the Trastis' most exclusive casino. At all times, some backroom deal or high-stakes game takes place in these suites.

The Trasti also run small gambling operations. Even the city's bookmakers pay tribute to the Trasti if they know what's good for them. The house deals fairly with the other houses, not letting bettors wager specialty goods that fall under another noble house's control.

The family's current leader, Trasti Gion, recently became head of the house after the death of his father. Gion expands Trasti banking throughout the South and hopes to open casinos as far away as Chiaroscuro. He realizes his plans are bold and dangerous, but he feels compelled to take such risks. In public, Gion claims that his old and complacent family needs shaking up. Privately, he acts because of



a recurring dream he has suffered for the last several years. In this dream, Gem is destroyed in fire and blood and all Gion knows is gone. Gion now expands his influence, either to gain knowledge that might save Gem or to arrange his escape if he cannot.

GEM'S MILITARY

Rankar VII follows the example set down by his great-grandfather, Kolar III. Gem has no standing military. Instead, the Despot hires huge number of mercenaries from a variety of companies. These mercenaries are well paid and rewarded for revealing any attempts to bribe them or lure them into coup plots. The Despot can afford such a huge and varied force, while rivalries among mercenary companies make military coups difficult to execute.

Gem's military posture concentrates on defense. The Despot is filthy rich and lives surrounded by useless desert and useless barbarians. He cares far more about protecting Gem than conquering others. Noble houses generally hire guards against raiders and not offensive forces. Still, Gem's leaders know that often the best defense is to strike first.

In addition to mercenaries, the Despot buys many expensive and powerful weapons, mostly geared toward point defense. If a weapon can be bought at any price, Rankar VII's armory probably includes at least one. In particular, abundant supplies of firedust enable the Despot to ring Gem with all sorts of flame weapons, from land mines to cannon. (See *Scroll of Kings*, pp. 135 and 137–140 for descriptions of such weapons.)

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Gem could not exist if the rest of Creation didn't want what it has. Despite a long tradition of dealing impartially with everyone, Gem has special relationships with a few other countries.

THE REALM

Gem nominally defers to the Realm. Early in Gem's history, the Realm endorsed Rankar's grandson as ruler of a budding city-state in return for yearly tribute. Once in a while, Despots called on Dynasts to deal with problems that exceed the power of mortal arms, such as the great ash devourer march of RY 503. The Realm's waning influence leads Rankar VII to pay his tribute of jewels and firedust late and not in full. To date, the Realm lets these infractions slide.

Both parties know the Realm could still make life very difficult for Gem. Because of this, the Despot often concedes to small alterations in treaties and trade agreements that benefit the Realm in exchange for avoiding any larger demands. He also knows that he dares not push around the Dynasts and patricians resident in Gem, buying precious stones and looking after the interests of their Great Houses.

THE LAP

Gem needs the Lap. Without the Lap's agricultural surplus, Gem could not survive, at least not at its current size. Vast caravans travel between the two city-states, heading



south laden with food and heading north laden with jewels, ingots of copper, tin silver and gold, firedust, asphalt and other products of Creation’s Southern extreme. The Realm’s greatest leverage over the Despot is actually its control of the Lap.

PARAGON

In the last few years, Gem has suffered an upsurge of attacks on its supply caravans and outlying mines. The Despot’s spies recently traced the raids to Paragon. The conflict causes price hikes and shortages in Gem as Paragon pushes to restrict Gem’s imports. It also makes Gem a great place to be a mercenary, as the Despot and various noble houses hire more soldiers to protect their interests and counter-raid against Paragon’s outlying settlements and caravans bound to and from the city-state.

EVERYONE ELSE

Simply put, Gem doesn’t care what most people do—only the quality and quantity of their silver. Gemfolk even deal with the desert barbarians on occasion. Sure, the barbarians raid Gem’s cisterns and caravans, but they also guide prospectors to potential new mines and collect firedust and other treasures of the deep desert. Gem pays the barbarians with food and water; some traders develop extensive contacts among them. Anyone who wants to explore or exploit Creation’s Southern extreme would do well to prepare in Gem.

LIFE IN GEM

Most Gemfolk are not mercenaries, nobles or members of the royal family. The citizens and slaves lead rather less glamorous lives, though such lives offer their own possibilities for excitement.

CITIZENS

Most citizens of Gem work for one noble house or another. Some work as laborers transporting goods to market or harvesting raw materials. Others work in various businesses run by the nobility, from the brothels of the Sahlak to the accounting houses of the Iblan. These workers are paid wages commensurate with their expertise and the demand for their services. Out of these wages a citizen buys the food, lodging and whatever luxuries she can afford.

Most Gemfolk live in relative comfort despite the city’s hostile environment. Most citizens rent homes in well-shaded or underground sections of the city. The wealthier the citizen, the safer and more spacious her home is bound to be.

Wealthy citizens either have slaves or other servants to do much of their housekeeping and shopping, or they can afford to have one or more family members stay at home to mind the house. These citizens usually perform valuable jobs for the richer nobles or themselves belong to minor noble houses. Much of this upper class can afford better security than most, either by hiring personal guards or by pooling resources among neighbors to hire mercenary patrols to scare off thieves.

The lower class in Gem usually lives on the surface in small shacks built from scrounged materials and rubble. These people are generally unskilled laborers who take whatever work they can find. More than a few of these poor end up either homeless or slaves. Sadly, the only chance many of these citizens have for bettering their lot is the birth of a particularly gifted or beautiful child that they can sell to a brothel or at the slave markets.

The homeless in Gem have avoided slavery but cannot even manage the poor living conditions of the lower class. They sleep in whatever shady place they can find and eat whatever they can beg or scrounge. Many homeless die from exposure to the heat in summer months. Few Gemfolk mourn their loss as the corpse patrol collects the bodies.

Most citizens spend their days working, eating and sleeping, only to rise in the evening to repeat the process. Occasional holidays, marriages, funerals and various festivals break the routine from time to time and keep most Gemfolk complacent. Across all social classes, Gemfolk gamble and attend gladiatorial games. Brothels and dream parlors also are common places for social gathering. Dissidents are few, kept in check by the threat of the Despot’s mercenaries.

And yet, many Gemfolk believe they are just one lucky break away from a better life. A slave-miner finds an especially large glowstone—the Despot frees him. A beggar sees a water-barrel unguarded—next day, he’s renting a house. A mercenary guard discovers and foils a robbery—the Despot showers him with silver! There’s *so much money* in Gem, if only one can find a way to get it.

SLAVES

Slavers in Gem make tidy profits. The Despot and other nobles use highly trained slaves in their business dealings. Wealthy citizens buy slaves for house servants. Even some mercenary companies buy slaves for their armies.

The price of a slave in Gem varies widely. A beautiful young slave trained in the arts of love might draw high prices from a noble or one of brothels, while a sickly, half-starved slave with bad teeth is barely worth the cost of holding him for sale.

By law, all slaves in Gem must have proper papers held by their current master. Any slave whose papers cannot be produced upon official request becomes property of the Despot. Most of these slaves are simply resold, though some are freed as an example of the Despot’s largess and humanity.

CULTURAL ATTITUDES

Given Gem’s rather strict split between the royal house, nobility, citizens and slaves, most Gemfolk take a surprisingly open attitude towards social class and outsiders. The upper echelons of society welcome newly elevated nobles and wealthy citizens without snobbery toward “new money.” Lower-class citizens who work hard and know their place receive a certain baseline politeness even from most nobles. Foreigners receive courtesy and respect as long as



they behave themselves and can pay. Two factors produce this open attitude.

First, Gem lives by trade. It is unwise and unprofitable to discriminate against anyone for any reason other than their wealth. The shabby foreigner might actually be a visiting prince with a heavy purse, or that silk-clad fop might be a God-Blooded mercenary working for the Despot.

Second, Gemfolk know how rapidly fortunes can rise and fall. Nobles who cannot pay the Despot's fees for monopoly do not remain nobles. Citizens who cannot pay their rent or business license might end up selling their sons and daughters or even become slaves themselves. Indeed, many families have at least one member who is or was once a slave. Few Gemfolk like to remember this fact, but they cannot ignore it—and this knowledge shades most social relations in Gem. Some rare individuals develop resentment toward those above or below them, but most Gemfolk find it easier to remember their place and not abuse those below them. The artisan you insult today might be the Despot's favorite tomorrow.

MARKETS

Gem lives by trade. The precious stones that give the city its name are only the most celebrated item of commerce. At diverse shops and marketplaces, visitors and locals buy and sell just about everything known in Creation. Most neighborhoods have a local market that sells food, clothing and other necessities. Three centers of trade, however, stand out as the largest or most unusual in Gem.

THE SUNKEN BAZAAR

The Sunken Bazaar is the grandest, largest and easily the most famous marketplace in Gem (and perhaps the whole South). It occupies a huge tunnel beneath Gem, 40 yards wide and over a mile long, with several sizeable tunnels leading off it. Countless glowstones are set in the walls, and large mirrors reflect daylight down long shafts. People of all sorts sell goods of all sorts, from snack carts to sorcerer-engineer contracts and everything in between, turning the Sunken Bazaar into a chaotic, day-and-night whirlwind of wonder.

To make the Bazaar easier to navigate, the Despot divided it into sectors and issues permits to various stall owners. In reality, this arrangement helps only a little since peddlers and pushcart vendors rarely abide by such regulations. Still, one is more likely to find a suitable merchant inside his appointed section than out.

The most important sector of the Sunken Bazaar holds the Despot's own gem dealers. Canopies of brightly hued silk mark their stalls. Other sectors feature bulk goods such as cloth, salt and grain; armorers, blacksmiths, potters and other trades that involve metalworking, fire and heavy tools; foodstuffs, spices, wine and other consumables; drugs, both medicinal and recreational; and luxury goods such as jewelry, perfume, ice (brought at great expense from the North) and the finest silks and brocades. Side-tunnels hold markets for miscellaneous artisans, such as drapers and furniture-makers.

Pickpockets, muggers and other minor criminals present a constant danger, so many merchants hire guards. Some merchants even pool their resources to employ patrols of mercenaries. The wealthier areas of the Sunken Bazaar are somewhat safer as a result, but no area is truly crime-free. The noble houses that sell their wares in the Sunken Bazaar stay near the Despot's gem dealers, since that part of the market is safest... and attracts the wealthiest customers.

THE SUN MARKET

The murderous heat of the South keeps most of Gem's populace off the surface streets during peak daylight hours, where long exposure can kill. Many Gemfolk sleep during this time or stay indoors or underground. This means that in Gem, when shady characters wish to conduct business away from the spying eyes, they do so in the bright of day—in the Sun Market.

Setting up every day and dismantling just before night, the Sun Market is the place to go for all things strange and forbidden. The Despot knows about the market and covertly encourages its operation in exchange for daily tribute in the form of a sales tax. In exchange, the market can operate pretty much as it likes.

The Sun Market moves around Gem. It is always set up on the surface streets and plazas of the city where the heat and glare are worst. Most merchants in the market work in shifts or possess some supernatural means to survive the heat. Nearly everyone in the market wears a variety of sunshades and coverings. These garments not only protect seller and buyer from the sun, but also protect individuals' identities.

Nothing is forbidden in the market. If you have the money and the good or service in question is available, you can buy it or receive directions to a merchant who can procure it. The Sun Market's traders range from one-man peddlers of minor illicit goods to factors of vast smuggling syndicates. Even Rankar VII uses the Sun Market. A small cadre of slave-merchants finds buyers for special gemstones that the Despot doesn't wish others to know about, such as yasal crystals that can hold Second Circle demons.

Since few people stand willingly in Gem's sunlight for long, the most dangerous and exotic sales typically take place in open sunlight. As a result, anyone trying to spy on or prevent such sales is easy to spot. Goods that the sun could damage, such as rare manuscripts or slave stock, are exceptions to this practice. Goods of lesser value or illegality are sold in covered stalls or wagons.

No single organization runs the market. Instead, a secret, nameless alliance of the most powerful and influential sellers occasionally meets to discuss tribute collection, market organization and any important events that might affect business. For example, a coming war might prompt the council to discuss allocating more space to contraband artifact weapons and military drugs. Only the council's members know who is in it. Well, probably.

BRIGHT SUN, DEEP SHADOWS

The name, identity and goals of the Sun Market council are left to the Storyteller's discretion. The council might simply be a collection of profiteers and merchants trying to make a bit of illegal silver. Their organization might have no name or hidden purpose.

Yet, it might be a full-blown secret society. The Sun Market might be only part of a larger plan to use or control Gem for some reason. The whole group might labor under the watchful eye of a powerful being whose motives are hers alone. Detecting and possibly foiling the machinations of such shadowy forces could be the focus of an entire series.

Alternatively, the Sun Market could just be a place to buy really neat stolen stuff.

parade, which it has at times. Unlike the Sunken Bazaar and the Despot's Palace, the Mercenary Market isn't much to look at on its own. The sight of thousands of warriors of various shapes, sizes and areas of expertise more than makes up for the drab décor.

Buyers in this market can go as large or small as they like. Major companies can rent you an entire army for years of service, individual bodyguards you can hire for a night, and all manner of battle-slaves. Smaller companies offer every imaginable military service, from quartermasters to assassins. The Guild offers the largest and most diverse range of mercenaries, and a large fraction of the other companies are actually Guild fronts. Those wishing to hire vast armies or who seek exotic troops might need to shop around to multiple companies or allow a few weeks for a vendor to gather the required forces, but the rich have toppled, defended and built kingdoms at the Mercenary Market of Gem. The Despot's agents shop in this market. Most gladiators who fight and die in Gem are bought, sold and traded here too.

Rankar has issued decrees forbidding the Anathema to use the market, either as buyers or product. This keeps the Realm from poking its nose into Gem's second-most-profitable business. In reality, the Exalted may hire themselves out as mercenary commanders, spies, gladiators or anything else they want—or hire the same. As long as their money is good, Rankar doesn't want to fight people who could destroy him. If Rankar's agents spot a Celestial Exalt in the Mercenary



THE MERCENARY MARKET

The Mercenary Market offers one of the greatest spectacles in Gem. Here buyers from all over the South and beyond come to hire free mercenaries or purchase slave soldiers and gladiators. The market operates with the enthusiastic approval of Rankar VII and most of the noble houses.

The market itself occupies one of the larger lava tubes. The area is large enough to hold several small armies on





Market, they discreetly ask her to *please* conduct her business in the Sun Market, instead. *Especially* if the Exalt wants to sell his services to... say... Rankar himself.

THE GUILD

Roughly half of all mercenaries in Gem belong to the Guild. This accumulation of sell-swords makes the Guild a major military power in Gem. The Despot keeps a watchful eye on the Guild's dealings.

Guild factor **Keen-Eyed Falcon of the West** oversees the Guild's interests in Gem. As part of his business, this former pirate and sailor from the Neck provides the Despot with a variety of forces and recruits new mercenaries and companies for the guild. Since his appointment as the city's factor, the Guild's power and profits have grown considerably. This windfall is due not so much to the former pirate's willingness to manipulate, lie to and cheat anyone and everyone for the sake of wealth and power—that's commonplace in Gem, and not just among the Guild—as to his competence at doing so.

Of course, Keen tries to increase the proportion of the Despot's mercenaries who are loyal to him and not the Despot. Perhaps he just wants increased leverage over the Despot, in order to negotiate still more profitable terms for the Guild. Perhaps he has his eye set on the throne. He wouldn't be the only one.

RELIGION AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Gem holds a variety of temples and shrines, scattered throughout the city. All temples, priests and religious orders operate with the approval of the Despot or not at all. These organizations pay tithes to the Despot in exchange for license to operate and preach within Gem. Despite this restriction, citizens can worship as they please, with a few exceptions.

THE DESPOT AND RELIGION

All legal faiths in Gem must acknowledge the Despot as the divinely chosen ruler of Gem. This does not mean that a cult or church must revere the Despot as a god (though a few suck-ups do so). No, they simply must at least pay lip service to the idea that higher powers endorse the Despot's place as absolute monarch of Gem. Cults that endorse his rule don't have to pay various fees and receive yearly offerings for the priests to sacrifice in the Despot's name—richer offerings than most cults could afford on their own. Priests who call the Despot a living god receive gifts with greater frequency. A number of Terrestrial small gods actively back Gem and the Despot due to the rich offerings they receive in return.

FORBIDDEN CULTS

Since Gem pays tribute to the Realm, the Despot bans Anathema cults within Gem. Rankar knows that allowing such cults would not only draw the wrath of the Realm but would also make it easier for a charismatic Exalt to challenge his authority.

This doesn't mean that such cults don't exist, though. Nevertheless, the standing punishment for Anathema worship is death by exposure. The offending heretics are

staked out in the sun to roast as a lesson to all those who would worship false gods.

The Despot also forbids cults that worship Deathlords or demons, for about the same reasons as worship of the Exalted. Rankar VII has no personal hatred of Demon Princes or undead tyrants, but he recognizes that such entities probably would be bad for him and his city. People caught worshipping such dark powers are executed *immediately* through public strangulation, along with their immediate families. Even suspicion of such activities can ruin most citizens.

Other than these limitations, anything goes for the faithful in Gem. The Despot cares about worldly power and profit. He cares about gods and faith only insofar as they affect his rule.

EXALTED AND OTHER ESSENCE-USERS

Gem's ruling class is human, but the traditional tolerance for supernatural entities results in a few God-Blooded and other half-breeds being born every year. These individuals often find work as mercenaries or highly paid specialists in a variety of fields. The Despot also has a standing invitation for any outcaste Terrestrial Exalted willing to work for him. At least a dozen do so, in various capacities. Rankar watches them closely for any hint of coup plots, but the wheelbarrow-loads of silver he pays them seem to keep them satisfied thus far.

To date, neither the Despot nor any other major power in Gem has employed Celestial Exalted. Rumors of such beings abound, though, usually concerning various charismatic power-brokers, mighty gladiators and other exceptional members of Gem society, such as Keen-Eyed Falcon of the West and various noble house leaders. The Despot secretly tries to recruit a small group of such Exalted for operations against Paragon.

SAMPLE MILITARY UNITS

The sheer number and diversity of the Despot's mercenaries mean that Storytellers can easily take combat units from other places (and other supplements) and rewrite them to fit in Gem. The Ashen Guard is merely one of the larger and better known of Gem's military units.

THE ASHEN GUARD

Description: The Ashen Guard is one of the longest-standing units in Gem. It's actually a remnant of the former army from before Kolar III's coup. The Guard's name comes from a battle fought over a century ago against a raider horde that tried to pillage Gem, using a nearby volcanic eruption to hide their movements. When scouts spotted the approaching horde, the Despot ordered the 23rd Gem Light Infantry Wing to delay the attackers while the city rallied its defenses. In a moment of tactical genius inspired by notorious Dune Folk, the wing's commander ordered his men to bury themselves in the ash that coated the ground around Gem and lie in ambush. Using breathing tubes and periscopes, the soldiers waited until the horde came within

arm's reach before they sprung their trap. The speed and surprise of the attack by screaming soldiers coated head to toe in white-gray ash terrified the barbarians and caused a rout. Upon return to the city, the soldiers' appearance inspired the wing's new name. When Kolar III disbanded Gem's military, he kept the Ashen Guard as a mercenary company.

The Ashen Guard specializes in ambushing raiders and hunting barbarians that venture too close to Gem's territory. The soldiers drill vigorously, and the Despot equips them with various potions, talismans and other minor enchantments to assist them in operations beyond Gem's walls and into the Southern heat. Membership in the Ashen Guard pays well enough for a soldier to retire after eight to 10 years of service. Since the war with Paragon, the Ashen Guard has taken the proactive role of raiding Paragon's patrols and caravans.

The current Ashen Guard stands at just under 300 troops. Unlike most mercenary companies in Gem, many of its soldiers come from Gem itself. Its commander, Captain Nerus Dell, is descended from a survivor of the battle that gave the regiment its name. Captain Dell's two lieutenants are a Northern mercenary called Little Bear and a Gem native and former gladiator called El-Jah Seven Stabs.

Commanding Officer: Captain Nerus Dell



Armor Color: White and light gray armor with ash-colored cloaks.

Motto: "Never fight an enemy when he's ready."

General Makeup: 280 light, mobile infantry wearing lamellar armor and pot helms (wrapped in turbans to keep them cool), armed with one firewand each, 20 charges of fire dust and a bayonet (see *Scroll of Kings*, p. 131; equivalent to a short spear).

Overall Quality: Elite

Magnitude: 4

Drill: 4

Close Combat Attack: 4

Close Combat Damage: 3

Ranged Attack Rating: 4 **Ranged Damage:** 4

Endurance: 7 **Might:** 1 **Armor:** 2 (-2 Mobility)

Morale: 4

Formation: The Ashen Guard typically operates in skirmishing formation, to cover the widest area and attack the largest number of opponents with their short-range firewands. The soldiers try to ambush their foes, beginning the attack with firewands. Captain Dell then splits the unit. Half engages with bayonets while the other half reloads. The Ashen Guard has four relays, two heroes (Little Bear and El-Jah Seven Stabs) and two sorcerers—superb marksmen armed with plasma tongue repeaters (see *The Books of Sorcery*, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age, p. 75).



Gem, a Magnitude 4 Dominion

Military: 4 **Government:** 2 **Culture:** 3

Abilities: Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 3 (Stunning Bribe +2), Craft 3, Integrity 1 (Secret Police +2), Investigation 1, Occult 1 (Binding Agreement +2), Performance 3 (Displays of Wealth +2), Presence 1, Stealth 3 (Targeted Assassination +2), War 3 (Point Defense +2)

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 4, Valor 3

Virtue Flaw: Temperance **Current Limit:** 4

Willpower: 7

Bonus Points: 20 **External Bonus Points:** 12

Notes: Gem's bonus points go to one dot each of Culture, Performance and Stealth, plus the Integrity, Performance, Stealth and War Specialties. Gem's external bonus points come from its connections to the Realm, the Guild, the Lap and a powerful Southern spirit court, the Court of the Orderly Flame. These points pay for one dot each of Military and Bureaucracy, plus the Bureaucracy and Occult Specialties. The Despot, Rankar VII, is a savant.

In Limit Break, the Despot loses control of Gem's greedy factions, and the city suffers a coup attempt. The dominion loses an action and one dot of Government.



HOW DARE YOU SAY THAT, KAJEHA!

YOU FORSWORE YOUR MARRIAGE VOWS JUST LIKE I DID, YOU HYPOCRITE!

THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS, I MADE SOMETHING WORTHWHILE OF MYSELF!



NO. THE DIFFERENCE IS, I'VE DEVOTED MYSELF TO MAKING CREATION BETTER.



ALL YOU'VE DONE IS VOWED TO BURN YOUR OLD LIFE TO ASHES.



STARTING WITH YOU, ANATHEMA!

THESE HERETICS WILL HAVE TO WAIT THEIR TURN!



FINE.



CHAPTER SIX

FIVE PEOPLES, ONE SHAME

The nation of Harborhead occupies the southeastern coast of the Inland Sea, between the Summer Mountains and the Varang City-States. Despite the Harborheadites' fierce pride in their warrior culture and their contempt for slaves, they spent the last four centuries in submission to the Realm and now happily sell each other into bondage. The Scarlet Dynasty viewed Harborhead as a useful and profitable satrapy, despite the people's incorrigible worship of the war-god Ahlat. Harborhead became still more valuable when the largest jade strike in the Second Age took place there. The conquest of Thorns turned Harborhead's capital, Kirighast, into the Realm's largest port in the Southeast. The Realm needs Harborhead as never before.

The turmoil in the Realm, however, weakens the imperial grip on Harborhead at the very time when nationalism rises again among the satrapy's people. The Scarlet Empire's garrison and officers seem at once lax and oppressive, sucking out the nation's wealth but no longer compensating for the deficiencies in native government. Harborhead faces its

own Time of Tumult as old enmities and new discontents converge and escalate toward rebellion and civil war.

HISTORY

The land that became Harborhead was one of many happy, prosperous lands in the Old Realm. Huge farms and ranches spread far south along the edge of the Summer Mountains. Their produce fed teeming conurbations such as Chiaroscuro. Tourism became the province's second industry as wealthy folk from throughout Creation visited to enjoy the warm beaches and forest-clad mountains. After days of sun-soaked recreation, tourists spent their nights reveling in the ballrooms and casinos of the port city of Kirighast.

After the Usurpation, life in the province became a bit less glittering. The ranches and plantations ran on sweat instead of Essence technology. The land dried out. Fewer people had the time or wealth for luxurious vacations in distant lands, though Kirighast remained a leading port on the Inland Sea.



As in the rest of Creation, the Great Contagion ripped through the province. Almost nothing of First Age culture survived. The survivors gathered into tribes and villages. New peoples entered the region from out of the desert or across the mountains. For more than 300 years, the people of Harborhead fought each other. Warlords carved out pocket empires that fell a generation later. Kirighast became a squalid ruin. In these centuries, however, the Five Peoples of Harborhead slowly defined themselves.

In RY 362, the god Ahlat began a plan to end the chaos and build an empire. That year, he took mortal guise to sire a daughter upon one of his priestesses. Many people in the region already worshiped the Southern God of War and Cattle, as stock-raising and war were among their chief activities. The priestess named her God-Blooded daughter Blood on the Horn.

Ahlat's daughter united combat prowess with personal magnetism; her divine blood enhanced both features. She became a feared warlord by age 20. Her army grew with each conquest. To rule her nascent empire, Blood on the Horn divided Harborhead into districts and ordained a rough and ready civil service. She chose Kirighast as her capital and rebuilt its great temple to her father. Whatever their differences, most people in the region revered Ahlat. Blood on the Horn promoted that shared worship as a way to paper over tribal differences and old grievances. In a few decades, Blood on the Horn conquered most of the current nation of Harborhead.

In RY 416, however, several merchants and diplomats from the Realm died in fighting between Harborhead and the still-independent coastal city-state of Ivrore. This tragedy brought the new kingdom to the Empress's notice. She sent six legions and 100 Dynasts to subjugate Harborhead. The war lasted six years as the legions plodded relentlessly after the lighter, quicker Harborhead infantry and cavalry. At last, however, the legions cornered Blood on the Horn and slew her in the Battle of Hudu Towasi. The site now holds a tiny shadowland called the Field of Bloodied Bulls. Harborhead became a vassal of the Realm.

The Realm preserved much of Blood on the Horn's government but installed a puppet monarchy. In the following centuries the Realm provoked (and brutally suppressed) three major rebellions by interfering in Harborheadites' worship of Ahlat. Gradually, however, the Realm's satraps and garrison commanders learned both to exploit and to calm the rivalries between the Five Peoples. Without religious outrage, the Harborheadites could not unite to oppose the Realm. They preferred to fight each other to supply an insatiable slave trade, which the Realm co-opted for its own benefit.

Forty years ago, the Realm explorer Peleps Howdarn discovered jade near the remote village of Bent Creek. Suddenly, Harborhead became much more important to the Realm. The wealth from jade mining spread through the country. It incidentally created a new moneyed class of people who had more in common with each other than with their tribes. Nationalism appeared in Harborhead.

Many tensions rise in Harborhead. The Five Peoples still don't like each other. Great wealth flows into the country from jade and commerce, but very little of it reaches the people of the hinterlands, breeding discontent. The warlike people of Harborhead feel their nation's new wealth and power and itch to conquer their neighbors for slaves, loot and glory. The priesthood of Ahlat eggs them on and loathes the Realm. As the Scarlet Dynasty wrestles over the throne, the Realm no longer acts to force order on the fractious kingdom.

Harborhead is ready to explode.

GEOGRAPHY

The 12 million Harborheadites live in a triangular country about 800 miles wide and 1,600 miles long—which sounds like a lot, but much of Harborhead is near-desert or jungle-clad mountains. Neither region can support a dense population.

In the coastal region, belts of low hills march directly into the sea. Rugged headlands alternate with small bays, with many rocks and reefs offshore. Only Kirighast boasts a harbor suitable for large ships, but the rest of Harborhead's coast is a paradise for smugglers. Between the hilly ridges, woodlands alternate with ranches, farms and villages. This is the most densely populated section of Harborhead, though rains off the sea are erratic and wells often tainted with foul-tasting minerals. At the North end of Harborhead's coast, the hills fade and the land dips into the swampy shadowland called the Bayou of Endless Regret.

Beyond the coast, three distinct provinces run off to the Southeast. The first is the Summer Mountains. These high, rugged mountains catch much of Harborhead's rain. Dense jungle covers their lower slopes and fills the long, narrow valleys between them. Between the yellow fever, the insect parasites, the rot and the steep terrain, few people live in the mountains. The mountains belong to Harborhead largely for lack of other claimants. On the other side of the Summer Mountains, the jungle continues all the way to the Elemental Pole of Wood.

Forest also covers the southern foothills but the Harborheadites can tame these woods. Many slopes and valleys support fruit and nut orchards, while taller trees shade coffee plantations. Much of the best land, however, belongs to wealthy magnates, whether of Harborhead or the Realm. The common Harborheadites make do with small farms farther from the rivers that water the great estates and orchards.

In the lower foothills, the forest gives way to chaparral and scrub, and then to the Southern veldt. In the Season of Water, these savannas become seas of lush grass dotted with acacia trees and baobabs. Then the land dries out and Harborheadites count themselves fortunate if their village has a reliable well or watering hole. Many veldt-folk are nomads, driving their cattle in eternal search for grazing land and water. At the southeastern tip of Harborhead, the streams from the Summer Mountains end in salt pans and arroyos where the veldt shades into the great Southern desert.



Most Harborheadites live in villages. On the coast, these villages tend to be built of stone, while people in the foothills use wood and the veldt-dwellers build in mud brick. Wherever they live, Harborheadites surround their villages with walls of mud brick or thorn-tree branches. Such enclosures are called kraals, whether they enclose homes or cattle. On the plains and lower hills, Harborheadites tend to build clusters of small, round huts. In steeper country, they build pueblos where people climb ladders between the tiers and one layer's roof is the next layer's street. At least a dozen villages have grown into towns (mostly in the coastal area). Only three communities reach the size of actual cities, however.

KIRIGHAST

Harborhead's capital occupies the country's only deep-water port. After centuries of war and rebuilding, very little remains of the city's First Age past. Modern Kirighast has four main divisions: the Old City of the Harborheadites; the Imperial Garrison where most foreigners live; the Street of Palms between them; and an ever-growing shantytown. Two hills, Borosintaba and Inkosintaba, supply Kirighast's two principle landmarks... and a blunt assertion of where true power lies in Harborhead.

OLD KIRIGHAST

The "old city" forms a rounded blob that presses against the harbor. Beige-hued concrete walls 100 feet high, a relic

of the Shogunate, surround the city with gates to the north, west and south. Within lies a maze of large and small streets and close-packed, whitewashed buildings of wood, stone, brick and tile. Few of the truly poor live in the old city, though the very rich prefer to live on the Street of Palms. Docks line the waterfront. Old Kirighast is about eight miles wide in its longest cross-section.

The center of Harborhead's government, the Palace of the Leopard Seat, is built at the foot of the hill Borosintaba. It is, however, neither the largest nor the most important building in Old Kirighast.

THE FANE OF THE UPSWEPT HORNS (FIRE MANSE ●●●●)

At the center of the old city rises Borosintaba, the Bull's Mountain. This hill is a powerful demesne. (It would be even more powerful, but centuries of neglect and erosion weakened the geomantic landscaping from the First Age.) Five winding paths ascend from the main street circling the hill to the Fane at the summit.

As rebuilt by Blood on the Horn (with her divine father's help), the surmounting manse consists of a broad, high platform 1,000 yards long and 400 yards wide, aligned due east and west. Along the perimeter stand 20 altars to Ahlat, each bearing a sourceless eternal flame to flare off the demesne's surplus Essence. Between the altars, 20 garden squares hold trees and





plants transplanted from famous Harborhead battlefields. The temple of Ahlat occupies the center of the platform. To the east and west, fountains with 100 spigots each supply water for ritual bathing before entering the temple, or after Ahlat's bloody rites.

The rectangular temple stands four stories tall, with nine-story square towers at each corner. A pair of massive horns carved from black stone adorns the temple roof. The glazed bricks of the walls form mosaic murals showing Ahlat and his war aurochs and mortal devotees engaged in a mighty cattle-raid against gods, Exalts and other mortals.

Inside, the center of the Fane holds a single four-story chamber that holds the gigantic golden throne and ebony statue of Ahlat. Forty Essence-flame braziers burn sweet incense in the god's honor. Doors to the left lead to the House of Battles, the quarters for Ahlat's priests. To the left, doors lead to the House of Vigilance assigned to the Brides of Ahlat in residence. Behind the statue of Ahlat, a single door leads to the House of the God, four chambers stacked one atop the other that hold the temple treasury, a sacred bedchamber where Brides dedicate themselves to Ahlat and the Fane's hearthroom.

The inferior materials available in the Age of Sorrows, particularly in Harborhead before the discovery of the Bent Creek jade mines, make the massive Fane a geomantically fragile manse. The Fane requires monthly maintenance in the form of hecatombs—sacrifices of 100 cattle to Ahlat—as well as daily offerings of incense, watering the garden squares and yearly replacement of the statue's tasseled kilt and cloak. The manse's structure is no stronger than ordinary stone, brick and wood, while attempts to disrupt its Essence flows are at -1 difficulty. Its hearthstone is a fire-eating rock (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**, p. 95), except that it cannot consume supernatural fires. The temple's high priest has used thaumaturgy to attune to the Fane and its hearthstone. The manse has no other powers.

THE IMPERIAL GARRISON

Five miles North of Old Kirighast, the Realm built its own town. The rectangle of the Imperial Garrison covers 10 square miles and houses 50,000 people, including the 47th Legion. The garrison town has its own water supply and other civic necessities.

Crenellated walls 30 feet high surround the entire city; towers every 150 feet carry heavy ballistae. Massive breakwaters extend into the bay to frame two harbors, one for civilian ships and one for the Realm navy. Each breakwater ends in a thick-walled tower. Inside, massive winches powered by slaves can move iron gates to block the entrance to the harbor. The top of each tower bears a gigantic firedust-powered steam cannon; between them, they can cover the two-mile gap between the towers. (See **Scroll of Kings**, p. 137 and p. 140, for descriptions of ballistae and steam cannon.)

Several Dragon-Bloods own acre or half-acre estates within the garrison's walls. Most homes are far more modest, of course.

The residential districts include everything from handsome urban villas to squalid slave-huts of mud and trash piled up against the town wall. The 47th Legion has its own district of spick-and-span barracks and offices. Other notable locations are the customs house at the harbor, the Immaculate temple built next to the hill of the satrap's palace, an administrative district for the various colonial arms of Realm government, and the Lionhead Academy, a secondary school as good as any in the Realm... for patricians, at least. The Academy possesses all the facilities needed to train young Dragon-Blooded, but the instructors lack the experience needed to supply training equal to that found at the Spiral Academy, the House of Bells or the Realm's other premier schools.

THE IMPERIAL SATRAP'S PALACE (WATER MANSE ••)

At the center of the garrison town rises Inkosintaba, the King's Mountain. A circular double wall, four yards tall and topped with spear-points, surrounds the entire 50-acre estate. Atop the hill, the Imperial satrap's palace looks down on the rest of Kirighast. Like Borosintaba, the King's Mountain is a demesne. When the Realm took Harborhead as a satrapy, the ruined manse atop Inkosintaba was razed and replaced with the satrap's palace. The current satrap, Cathak Voper, holds its hearthstone, a fountain-summoning stone (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**, p. 96). The manse itself produces a constant supply of water for the lush flowerbeds and trees that cover Inkosintaba.

The palace is a sprawling villa built of local white limestone. It stands two stories tall with a balcony all the way around, plus pillars, porticos, stained-glass windows, carved marble and enameled tiles inside and out. Its magnificence just barely slides over the line into gaudiness. Through a construction error, it also stands two and one-half degrees off true alignment to the cardinal directions, and to the lines of the Fane of the Upswept Horns. This unfortunate angle redirects Essence from local dragon lines to create a weak wild demesne within a Kirighast slum.

THE STREET OF PALMS

This broad boulevard runs between Old Kirighast and the Imperial Garrison. The street takes its names from the quadruple row of coconut palms that line each side, with a strip of parkland beyond them. A third layer of shops for luxury goods and villas for rich Harborheadites faces each strip of parkland. The Street of Palms is the most fashionable and expensive part of Kirighast.

THE SHANTYTOWN

The Street of Palms is a river of wealth and elegance. It flows through an urban wasteland of huts built from mud brick, scrap lumber, long grass and whatever other materials the inhabitants can scrounge. Many Harborheadites seek their fortune in the capital; not many of them find it. Kirighast's shantytown holds at least 100,000 day laborers, beggars, ruffians, whores, garbage-pickers and other poor



and desperate folk. Only the drug dealers grow rich. Whole legions' worth of idle young people lounge through the squalor, looking for something to do. Sometimes they riot and the army sweeps through to terrorize the shantytown into sullen submission.

No one, Realm citizen or Harborheadite, knows what to do about the shantytown. In fact, no one knows how so many people survive on (apparently) nothing.

TIRAKTOU

Harborhead's second city is located on the veldt 400 miles southeast of Kirighast. It occupies the site of a Low First Age garrison-city. The Harborheadites rebuilt and replaced all the buildings, but Tiraktou still has its Shogunate system of wells and qanats, giving it the only large, reliable water supply for 100 miles. Tiraktou also retains its military street plan: a square grid two miles wide with main streets running north-south and east-west, intersecting in the central plaza. Whitewashed stone walls 20 feet high and 10 feet wide surround the city. The Shogunate city was meant for at most 50,000 people, but some 200,000 crowd into the city now. Several times a year, various nomad tribes converge on Tiraktou to erect a tent city of another five to ten thousand outside the walls.

Tiraktou's water supply makes it a rare island of agriculture in the veldt, with grain fields and date orchards. The city owes its population and wealth, however, to trade. Every block in the city holds at least one caravansary, a large building with a courtyard, stables, storerooms for goods and food, lodging for travelers and office space for merchants. The owners usually live on the premises.

The Guild uses Tiraktou as a hub for caravans traveling between Harborhead, southern Varangia, the deep-desert tribes and the Fair Folk of the Far South. Other merchants follow the Guild. Tiraktou holds the largest slave mart in Harborhead, where thousands of souls (or soulless leavings of the Fair Folk) are auctioned each day. In Tiraktou's other markets, people buy and sell commodities as commonplace as timber and tents or as exotic as jewelry, spices, fire-dust and raksha treasures. The greatest trade fair extends through Resplendent and Descending Water, when nomads and merchants swell the city's population to 500,000.

The presence of so many travelers leads to a subtler commerce in ideas. Tiraktou surpasses even the capital as a place to meet strangers and hear tales from distant lands. The need for scribes and accountants magnifies the interest in learning. A few decades ago, the city's savants and their students organized an informal university in side-street cafés. A recent fire left some bare ground, and the students and teachers persuaded the city's council of magnates and tribal elders to give them the land. The Tiraktou college now has its first building, with quarters for six teachers and 40 students, four classrooms, a library with 40-some volumes and—not entirely as a sop to local sentiment and religious authorities—a shrine to Ahlat, aligned to face the great Fane in Kirighast. The god himself has not visited, but his deputy Horn of Ink, Overseer

of Cattle, manifested once to give a pep talk and compliment the proud students on their penmanship.

The folk of Tiraktou seldom notice the small Realm garrison built an unobtrusive three miles from town, except to tell each other how much they'd like to see the Realm leave Harborhead. The college students are particularly vocal about this. Tribal loyalties (and, therefore, tribal enmities) are weak in the commercial city, giving nationalist sentiments room to grow. So far, the talk is just talk.

The garrison exists as a hedge against rebellion and to discourage Harborheadites from escalating their constant, low-level slave-taking raids into a full-scale invasion of the Varang City-States. The young commander, Cathak Lioun, knows the locals don't like the garrison's presence. He also knows that his six talons of troops could not defeat an entire city full of rebels. Lioun makes no attempt to win hearts and minds. He keeps a low profile for himself and his troops instead, in hopes that he can avoid inflaming further resentment.

BENT CREEK

Harborhead's third and newest city didn't exist until Peleps Howdarn struck jade four decades ago. Bent Creek, located 600 miles due east of Kirighast in the Summer Mountain foothills, has a population half Harborheadite, half Realm and all fortune-hunter. In this boom town, no one paid much attention to urban planning. Miners and the people who service them built homes, wine shops and warehouses, smithies and brothels anywhere they found convenient across three stream valleys and the ridges between them. Bent Creek has no public buildings, no principle marketplace—no streets, for that matter, just muddy tracks

A few Dragon-Blooded residents made stabs at gentrifying Bent Creek, as absurd as they were valiant. The current distraction over the Realm's succession, however, puts these efforts on hold. A few villas now overlook Bent Creek, but the opera house and city hall seem likely to remain unfinished for some time.

Mob rule governs most affairs in Bent Creek. The lawless crowds serve as judge, jury and city council, deciding the affairs of the day through bravado, bluster and, frequently, fists and weapons. Peleps Howdarn, as nominal colonial governor, gave up trying to control Bent Creek long ago. He has his hands full overseeing the largest jade-mining operation in the South and preventing his employees from smuggling out too much of what they mine. Bent Creek has a highly skilled, motivated and ruthless security force, but it operates only at the mines.

THE JADE MINES

In RY 728, severe rainstorms caused landslides in the Bent Creek region, destroying several villages. Locals found shards of jade in the runoff, sparking the first phase of the jade rush. Peleps Howdarn, an amateur savant of geology, traced this alluvial jade to the mother lode—an entire peak full of jade. The landslides exposed whole boulders of jade, some taller than a man, along with countless pebbles and cobbles of the stuff.



Peleps Howdarn realized he could not possibly hold such a claim. Bypassing his own House, he secretly sent word to the Empress herself and obtained an imperial charter to develop the jade beds in her name. Most of the jade goes directly into imperial coffers, with Howdarn taking a one-half percentage commission. The Leopard Seat receives one percent. Another half percent goes in commissions to various Dynasts who operate mines under lease to Howdarn. Five percent goes for sale in Harborhead to cover expenses, and the mines lose a few more percentages through workers' embezzlement.

The mines now cover 300 acres of high, steep mountainside. Slaves pry out the jade from the rock and carry it to buildings where workers sort, grade and weigh the jade and cut the larger pieces into talents and bars. The finest boulders go intact to the Blessed Isle for master artisans to carve. Only the pebbles, scraps and dust go for sale or for the various commissions. Bent Creek has already produced hundreds of tons of fine green jade, with no end in sight.

Every week, a caravan of jade leaves Bent Creek for Kirighast and the Blessed Isle beyond. More than 100 crack troops, both cavalry and infantry, guard the caravan, with at least five Dragon-Blooded warriors. No one has yet managed to hijack a jade convoy, though not for lack of trying.

So far, neither the Dynastic representatives, the Guild nor the Harborheadites have tried to seize Bent Creek for themselves. As conviction grows that the Empress is gone forever, though, the various faction leaders recognize that Peleps Howdarn lacks the power to hold the jade mines by himself. Peleps Howdarn recognizes this as well. The scheming and deal-making have already begun.

SOCIETY

The people of Harborhead are highly diverse and deeply divided by tribe, livelihood, wealth and geography. For centuries, the Realm held Harborhead together by force; an occupying legion, the satrap's civil service and colonizing landlords held the country together despite the nation's internal fractures. The Harborheadites never had to turn their puppet monarchy into an effective government. Indeed, the Harborheadites had very little in common except a shared reverence for the war-god Ahlat and a shared humiliation at their own subservience.

THE FIVE PEOPLES

Harborheadites call themselves the Five Peoples. The Brakhani, Izhalvi, Krantiri, Shayanti and Totikari each speak their own subtly different dialects of Flametongue, tell different stories and proverbs, and wear different clothing and ornaments. They even look different. Some of the Peoples concentrate in particular sections of Harborhead, but their tribes and villages spread through the entire country.

Each village holds folk of only one People. Villages of other Peoples often dwell within a few days' walk of each other, while individuals may trade or serve together in the national armies, but they feel no love for each other. Villages

of one People might attack villages of any other People for cattle and slaves.

BRAKHANI

The least numerous of the Five Peoples favor the wooded foothills. Some live in the Summer Mountains, where they raise coffee on the lower slopes. The Brakhani tend orchards and grain fields as much as cattle. They have dark chocolate-brown skin. Both men and women often wear their curly black hair down to their shoulders. Brakhani favor caftans of bright fabric adorned with beaded ornaments and brocade.

IZHALVI

The most numerous of the Five Peoples are also the most scattered, with no clear center to their population. Many Izhalvi become wealthy as farmers or artisans. This wealth, with the weak ties between their tribes and villages, makes them favored targets for raiding. The Izhalvi have great reverence for their elders. No Izhalvi can become a leader of their kind without hair whitened by age. Izhalvi have coffee-and-cream skin, almond eyes and long, straight, black hair they wear in thick cords adorned with gold or stone beads. The men wear black kilts, and the women wear black robes.

KRANTIRI

The Krantiri are most numerous in the coastal region. Krantiri leaders who live a thousand miles from the sea still wear ornaments of shell and pearl to show that ancestral connection. Most Harborheadite fisher-folk and pearl-divers are Krantiri, though these folk also farm, raise cattle and work the metals mined in their region. Krantiri tend to be shorter than other Harborheadites, with hair worn short and skin the color of shelled almonds. Due to the humid heat of the coast, Krantiri often wear nothing more than a breechcloth. They are the most fragmented and politically weakest of the Five Peoples. Krantiri might attack other Krantiri villages.

SHAYANTI

Not coincidentally, the wealthiest of the Five Peoples are also the most politically and commercially connected, with the strongest ties between their villages and tribes. Shayanti track their family connections with obsessive detail, knowing their relatives out to the seventh generation, and each family connection imposes well-defined and mutual obligations. While they favor the wooded hills, Shayanti family connections make them the leading merchants of Harborhead; they also do business with the Guild. They are the tallest folk of Harborhead, with mahogany skin and tightly curled hair cropped close to the skin. Shayanti scar their cheeks and shoulders to show their tribal membership and special offices such as priesthood of a particular god.

TOTIKARI

The Totikari are most numerous on the veldt and the most likely to live as nomads. Of all Harborheadites, they depend most upon cattle for their livelihood, and so are the most fervently devoted to Ahlat. Totikari have a fiercely



end up in brothels.

Harborheadites acquire their slaves by raiding their neighbors, whether from the next village or adjacent countries such as Varangia or the desert tribes. They need a constant fresh supply, because Harborhead law and custom does not permit hereditary slavery. A slave's children are born free (and a slave's master must see them raised accordingly). On the one hand, this institution keeps Harborhead in a constant, low-intensity war of each tribe against all others. On the other hand, slaves know that rebellion can bring worse fates than slavery in Harborhead. They could be sold to the Realm or other lands where their children and children's children stay slaves forever... or they could be sold to the Guild and the Fair Folk. The Realm and the Guild buy every slave the Harborheadites care to sell too.

In contrast, all free Harborheadites, male or female, regard themselves as warriors. They learn to use weapons and shields in childhood and stay in practice throughout their entire lives. Once a Harborheadite is captured and receives the brands of slavery on his body, though, he may no longer carry a warrior's weapons on pain of death—a sentence most free Harborheadites stand ready to carry out at once, even against their own kin. Too many Harborheadites own slaves, or want to, for them to tolerate any hint of defiance.

RELIGION AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Despite four centuries of missionary effort, the Immaculate Order makes no headway in Harborhead. Only in Kirighast do a few Harborheadites accept the Immaculate faith—usually as a conscious ploy to curry favor with the Realm garrison. Past attempts by Immaculate monks to shut down the cult of Ahlat resulted only in massive rebellions, to the point where the Empress herself forbade the Order to continue its efforts. Ironically, Immaculate missionaries strengthened the cult of Ahlat still further, by suppressing minor cults of other gods. Instead of placating other gods directly, Harborheadites ask Ahlat to intercede on their behalf.

THE CULT OF AHLAT

Harborheadites worship Ahlat principally as a war god. People who live by raising stock still pray to Ahlat for the health of their herds, of course, but *everyone* prays to Ahlat for victory in battle.

The various aspects of Ahlat's cult all work to reinforce each other. Ahlat's favored sacrifice is the hecatomb, the offering of 100 head of cattle at once. Such an offering could gravely reduce a single tribe's herds to the point they would risk starvation, so a tribe usually attacks other tribes and villages to steal their cattle as offerings to Ahlat. The Bull God rewards the hecatomb, however, with a period of increased fertility among both the sacrificers' community and their herds. In a secondary ritual, the tauroboleum, the priests and warriors bathe in the blood of the sacrificed cattle. Doing so confers greater prowess at combat (represented by

an additional -1 health level), making them better able to survive further cattle raids. The benefits of the hecatomb and tauroboleum last only a few months. A community has an incentive to launch a new cattle-raid as soon as possible in order to renew Ahlat's blessing in an endless cycle of war and sacrifice.

(Both are rituals of thaumaturgy. See *Scroll of Kings*, p. 11, or *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex*, pp. 140–141, for their full effects.)

As well as ordinary priests, Ahlat's cult includes a special order of female virgin warriors, the Brides of Ahlat. They shun marriage to dedicate themselves entirely to war in Ahlat's name. Such highly skilled fanatics greatly enhance a village's odds of a successful cattle-raid—impelling young women in other villages to become Brides of Ahlat as well. As a further benefit, the shared religious devotion of the Brides makes them one of Harborhead's few national institutions, and one of the few forces with the will and the prowess to defy the Realm. Brides of Ahlat led the fight in all three great rebellions, and their ferocity helped convince the Empress that converting the country was too much trouble.

In recent decades, Ahlat's cult gave wealthy Harborheadites a way to gain social prestige. A rich Harborheadite can *buy* cattle for a hecatomb. Such offerings often take place at the Fane of the Upswept Horns in Kirighast, as a way for the donor to attract the attention of the monarch or other influential people. Paying for a hecatomb in the local town or village, however, can raise a rich Harborheadite's standing in that community—maybe enough for people to overlook that his wealth came from dealing with the Realm.

The cult of Ahlat never had a formal hierarchy, but it might be acquiring one. The Fane of the Upswept Horns has long been the most prestigious shrine to the Bull God for being the largest, the richest and the most favored by Ahlat himself. The Fane's high priest, Excellent Ibis, now sends priests to other temples to perform hecatombs with greater pomp and glitter than the smaller shrines can manage by themselves. Excellent Ibis hopes to unify the cult into a national hierarchy centered in Kirighast.

THE UNCONQUERED SUN

The Brakhani and Izhalvi have old traditions about worshiping the Unconquered Sun. The Brakhani revere the Unconquered Sun as the guarantor of order in the spirit world. They do not imagine the Incarna as personally answering prayers; he is too busy overseeing all the other gods. The Izhalvi, however, regard themselves as actual descendants of the Unconquered Sun and Gaia. For many years, they treated this myth as merely a proud story. In the last few decades, however, worship of the Unconquered Sun gained popularity as a way for tribes to bolster their self-image. Priests refurbish old rock-cut shrines to the Unconquered Sun and Gaia found in the foothills and mountains. This faith remains secondary to worship of Ahlat, but some priests now consciously try to cultivate a shared national identity among Izhalvi tribes, the

same way all Harborheadites are united by their worship of Ahlat and rejection of the Immaculate Order.

ESSENCE-USERS

Harborhead produces very few outcaste Dragon-Blooded. When they appear, the realm tends to recruit them into the Legions. Any Celestial Exalted from Harborhead play no visible role in its society.

Most Harborheadite Essence-users are connected to the cult of Ahlat, either as God-Blooded, as priests or as the Brides of Ahlat. The god himself rarely sires God-Blooded offspring in Harborhead. Ahlat's patronage of Harborhead already goes far beyond the limits that Heaven's laws set for Celestial deities; the canny war-god does not give his bureaucratic enemies more charges to lay against him. The god's spiritual minions, the war aurochs, stand in for Ahlat at minor theophanies, and any children *they* sire are their own business. Harborhead sees several offspring from Ahlat's retinue born every year. They usually become great warriors, priests and, in time, chiefs or military commanders. God-Blooded women usually join the Brides of Ahlat.

The Brides and priests of Ahlat include many enlightened mortals. Some of them gained an enlightened Essence as a reward for exceptionally fervent service to the god and his cult. Again, subordinate gods usually bestow this gift in Ahlat's name. The priests and Brides also can enlighten Essence through thaumaturgy, a difficult and dangerous Procedure that sometimes kills its intended recipient and presents dangers to the thaumaturge as well. Thus, the elders (all of high status in their organizations) who can enlighten Essence do so only for Ahlat's most fervent devotees.

The cult of Ahlat's thaumaturgy is somewhat limited, though. Few priests or Brides possess full Degrees of thaumaturgy. Priests typically learn Procedures from the Art of Spirit Beckoning, the better to contact their patron's servants (and of course every priest learns to perform the hecatomb and tauroboleum). Senior Brides of Ahlat sometimes learn alchemical formulas for drugs that increase battle prowess or for treating wounds. Thaumaturges from both groups sometimes learn to enchant walkways and other minor talismans that can protect a warrior in battle. (See **Exalted**, p. 379, for walkways and Chapter Three of **The Books of Magic, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex** for many thaumaturgical drugs and religious rites.)

GOVERNMENT

Harborhead's government derives from a blend of tribal custom, Imperial civil service and naked force. It never man-

aged to exert much real control over the country. For more than three centuries, that suited the Realm as well as the Harborheadites. Now, Harborhead's factional tensions and ambitions could tear the country apart.

THE SATRAP

Perhaps the most important person in Harborhead's government isn't in the government at all. The Imperial satrap officially governs Realm citizens and represents the Realm's interests to the monarch. Unofficially, the satrap can veto any law and often writes laws for the monarch to sign. The satrap also provides a convenient excuse whenever a Harborhead official doesn't want to do something. The Harborhead official need only say that the satrap hasn't approved the proposed action and that acting in defiance of the Realm could bring down Imperial wrath.

CATHAK VOPER

The current satrap, Cathak Voper, is a tall, strong man in his late 50s, just entering the long middle age of the Dragon-Blooded. He is an Air Aspect, which shows in the intense blue of his eyes and the deep blue tinge creeping into his dark hair and beard. His brilliant financial acumen matches his deep Immaculate piety; becoming the satrap of a rich tributary was a nigh-inevitable stage of his career. Cathak Voper believes Harborhead's discontent comes from the entrenched corruption in the native administration, which leads to the common folk paying far more in taxes and tribute than they should. He loves the harsh beauty of Harborhead

and admires the native artwork, but often finds the Harborheadites' tribalism, militancy and heresy maddening. Voper soldiers on, determined to carry his Dynast's burden and civilize the savages.

THE LEOPARD SEAT

Harborhead's monarchy is called the Leopard Seat. Blood on the Horn instituted the actual Leopard Seat, a backless chair (much like a camp stool) on a wooden dais, with a canopy over it. Leopard skins cover the chair, steps and canopy. Peacock feathers and golden leopard figurines adorn the canopy's carved wooden pillars. The monarch as an individual is called the Leopard; the Seat is his or her office and ramshackle civil service.

The Reshoom clan, from an Izhalti tribe, held the Leopard Seat for most of the last three centuries. As a legal fiction, the Scarlet Empress acknowledged the Reshoom as very remote relatives, permitting the Leopard to appeal to her as a family favor and permitting the Empress to ignore such requests because no legally binding treaty governed interactions between Harborhead and the Realm. After her



disappearance, however, the reigning Leopard, Reshoom Keshara, started using the fictitious-but-long-recognized connection to pressure Realm interests in Harborhead and even the Deliberative back on the Blessed Isle. Two years ago, Cathak Voper found the situation intolerable and had Keshara poisoned. Voper then told palace officials to choose a new Leopard who came from the Shayanti instead.

The courtiers chose Oshom Kurgaz, a stout, middle-aged former chamberlain. Kurgaz knows he lives only as long as the satrap finds him useful and that the priests of Ahlat, the courtiers of other ethnic factions and his own palace guards all hate him. Despite his regal garb of leopard-skin and gold, Kurgaz sweats, shakes, stammers and generally looks like he's about to drop dead from sheer terror.

DRUMS OF THE LEOPARD SEAT

Harborhead families can appoint a delegate to represent their interests in the Leopard's court. To qualify, the clan must support a large ensemble of professional drummers (a Resources 5 yearly expense), and so these courtiers are called "Drums." Each Drum supposedly speaks for the people of his or her province of Harborhead. In practice, they speak for no one but their own tribe. Drums usually come from long lines of wealthy chiefs, merchants and landlords.

Those who can afford just one or two drummers are called the Lesser Drums. These families take most of the positions in local government such as provincial magistrates, tax collectors and military commanders. Over the years, many Lesser Drum families developed a strong ethic of service, though it's usually service to the tribe first and Harborhead second.

MILITARY MATTERS

Harborhead has no less than six separate armies. Four national armies of 25,000 soldiers each occupy and patrol the coastal country, the eastern and western foothills of the Summer Mountains, and the veldt. A fifth army, 10,000 strong, guards the capital and the area 100 miles around it. The Royal Guard, a body of 15,000 Brides of Ahlat, patrols Old Kirighast, guards the Leopard Seat and stiffens the resolve of regular troops in the eternal border clashes with Varangian troops, desert tribes and assorted bandits.

This enormous military is spread throughout the country in hundreds of mud-brick forts. Harborhead's troops don't train together in large numbers—the satrap doesn't allow it. When Harborheadite troops mass in hundreds or thousands, it must be a rebellion. The Realm's representatives make sure the Legions preserve one of their great advantages over the Harborheadites, their ability to command and control large armies. If Harborhead ever needs to field a large army, the plan is for 47th Legion officers to take overall command.

Yet the six armies represent only a tiny fraction of Harborhead's warriors. Every Harborheadite who isn't a slave considers herself a warrior and knows how to use weapons. When Harborhead rebelled, the Legions found themselves facing not six large armies or several hundred small armies but *thousands* of village militias. Only the Harborheadites' inability to set aside their tribal divisions allowed the legions to win.

Just about every Harborheadite knows how to wield short spears and javelins, knives, short swords (actually machetes, used daily as a tool as well as a weapon), war axes and clubs. For missile weapons, they favor inexpensive, easily made self bows and slings. For defense, they rely on large ox-hide shields (equal to a tower shield) painted with tribal symbols. Few Harborheadites wear armor, as cattle-thieves and slave-raiders need mobility more than defense. Officers and chiefs might wear armor to imitate

the Realm's legions, but they prefer lamellar armor to the Realm's standard reinforced breastplate or reinforced buff jacket. Lamellar armor is cooler and less fatiguing—no small matter in Harborhead's sultry climate.

THE REGIONAL ARMIES

The soldiers of the regional armies train with the common weapons that most Harborheadites already know. They also learn basic camouflage. These soldiers have no uniform except the leopard painted on their ox-hide shields.

The four regional armies each divide into five commanderies of 5,000 soldiers. Each commandery breaks into 25 captaincies of 200 soldiers. At least, captaincies are *supposed* to have 200 soldiers. At every level of command, officers pad the roster with soldiers who don't really exist, so they can pocket the excess salaries. Five of the captaincies operate from a large fort in the center of each district, as backup wherever they're needed.

Platoons of 20 soldiers go on patrols. The whole captaincy mobilizes only to fight bandits or raiders across the border—or, perhaps, to do some raiding themselves. When soldiers get bored or their superiors are slow in paying their salaries (which happens), troops turn bandit or capture victims to sell as slaves.

The Capital Army follows a different arrangement. This army consists of 40 captaincies of 250 soldiers each. These camps serve as the police in and around Kirighast—everything from guarding caravans to breaking up drunken brawls. While captaincies in the hinterland tend to be deeply corrupt and to favor one People, the Capital Army is both ethnically integrated and relatively honest (taking bribes, but not robbing people). Not coincidentally, the Capital Army operates under close scrutiny from both the Leopard Seat and the Realm garrison.



THE ROYAL GUARD

Unlike the national armies, the Royal Guard consists entirely of women. All 15,000 are Brides of Ahlat, organized in three commanderies of 5,000 that further divide into watch-groups of 625. A watch-group subdivides into 25 "Horns of the Bull" with 25 guardswomen each. All three commanderies are based in Kirighast, where they guard the Leopard Seat's palace, the Fane of the Upswept Horns and Old Kirighast. In this capacity, they officially act as part of the Capital Army.

Brides of Ahlat wear a red and black kilt and a cloak with tasseled edges, imitating Ahlat's own. They also wear horned steel caps wrapped in red and black turbans. Harborheadites revere the Brides of Ahlat as exemplars of the nation's warrior ideal. Harborhead's neighbors, especially in Varangia, dread the Brides for their exceptional fighting prowess and truly incredible ferocity. When Brides of Ahlat join a battle, they celebrate a victory by sacrificing captured soldiers to Ahlat and drinking the captives' blood. If Harborhead loses the battle, Brides might sacrifice soldiers from their own side, giving the rest an incentive to fight harder next time.

Women can join the Brides of Ahlat as young as 16. All must be virgins. Each Bride swears an oath to Ahlat, and each one hears the god whisper his acceptance of their fealty and love. While they remain Brides of Ahlat,

the women take no lovers except possibly other Brides (or their god or his war aurochs delegates, per Ahlat's will). Women normally leave the Brides and the Guard at age 27, but Ahlat sometimes invites exceptionally skilled warriors to remain in his service. These senior Brides form the Guard's officer corps.

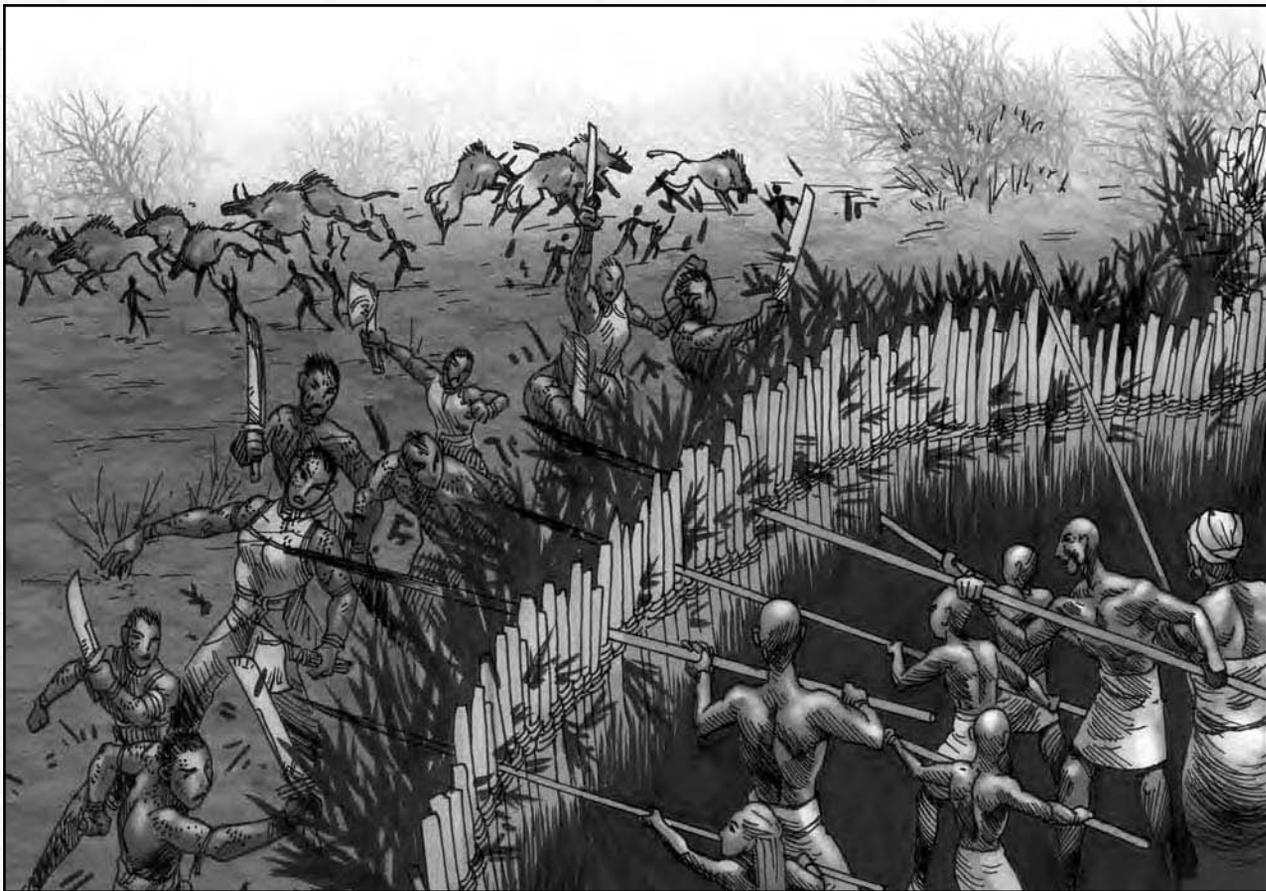
Each of the three Royal Guard commanders and 24 watch-group captains can channel Essence. A few are outcaste Terrestrial Exalted. The rest are God-Blooded or had their Essence enlightened by Ahlat himself. The lieutenants who lead Horns might have enlightened Essence as well, or at least know a bit of military thaumaturgy. It's an important achievement for a Bride who wants to rise further in the organization.

THE COMMON PEOPLE

In Harborhead, very little separates a gang of bandits, a village raiding party or a rogue platoon of soldiers. They have the same weapons, the same tactics and the same skills. Numbers range from one to a few dozen. All three sorts or irregular warriors are ready to attack anyone who seems weaker than them, and relieve them of whatever valuables they carry. Village raiders might additionally seek to murder a few people in another village as part of a family vendetta.

Bandits and raiders try to sneak as close to their victims as they can, then dash out screaming and ululating like maniacs, hoping to startle their victims and so gain an extra

Harborhead





second or two to attack. They strike a few blows—even if you surrender, which is so unexpected in Harborhead that they keep attacking anyway—and then grab what they can and run. They have no interest in fighting to the death. Favorite targets include cowherds, especially children young enough to snatch and sell as slaves, and small groups of travelers.

A village's militia consists of every able-bodied man or woman, including teenagers—and the children and oldsters are ready at least to throw a few rocks or shout insults, if they get the chance. When a village defends itself, the older, younger, maimed or pregnant villagers stay in the kraal to protect the village. They fire arrows and sling stones at whoever comes close enough, or thrust spears out at attackers who try to cut their way through the thorn-bush wall. The rest of the militia charges out to meet the attackers and, they hope, prevent them from making off with too many cattle.

When one village attacks another, the raiders try to kill whoever guards the cattle and drive off the valuable livestock, while most of the fighters await the warriors from the target village. Sometimes one village attacks another to take slaves, instead. In that case, a small force might draw out the target village's militia, then the main force hacks its way into the kraal to capture as many young people as possible.

THE IMPERIAL 47TH LEGION

The 47th Legion has occupied Harborhead for centuries. The legion has its own walled district of barracks and training grounds within the Imperial Garrison. Imperial officers did not covet a Harborhead posting—not until the Bent Creek jade discovery. As Harborhead's value as a satrapy rose, discipline in the 47th sank, for officers paid more attention to collecting an illicit share of the jade than to their duties.

After the Empress disappeared, House Cathak took direct control of the 47th, further enhancing its already strong position in the satrapy. The legion's general, Cathak Lazera, set about whipping the legion back into fighting trim, with excellent results. The legion remains understrength, with only about 3,500 soldiers. Lazera disbanded one heavy infantry and two medium infantry dragons, however, to bring the remaining dragons up to full strength.

The 47th Legion patrols the garrison town as its police force. Detachments travel throughout Harborhead on training exercises, getting to know the land. Just as importantly, they assess the hundreds of native captaincies and commanderies. If Harborhead rebels again, General Lazera wants to know the native troops better than they know themselves. Legion talons also collect tribute directly from Harborhead's provinces, since they find the Leopard Seat unreliable about delivering the Realm's cut of the nation's wealth. Collecting tribute sometimes means battling a village militia, but these battles always end with the village

burned and the survivors taken as slaves, with only minor casualties to the legionnaires.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Harborhead's chief relationship is with the Realm, as a tributary. A few Harborheadites like this arrangement—usually because they profit from it. Most Harborheadites resent it, though they usually care more about grievances against other tribes and villages.

The Varang Confederation is Harborhead's chief enemy and chief victim. Harborheadite forces regularly attack over the border to capture Varangians for slaves. (The Varangians raid back and take slaves in return.) Harborhead borders no other significant nations. To the south lies desert, while the Summer Mountains and the horrific Bayou of Endless Regret hinder any contact with the East.

The Deathlord called Eye and Seven Despairs keeps his stronghold on the other side of the Summer Mountains from Harborhead and has a foothold in the nation itself. As the Prioress of Bloody Sands, the Deathlord claims to be the ghost of Harborhead's hero, Blood on the Horn, returned to the Field of Bloodied Bulls. The Deathlord pushes Harborhead toward war against the Realm and itself but delegates most of the work to one of his deathknights. Cathak Voper knows that some sort of ancestor cult around Blood on the Horn grows in this province of Harborhead and plans to crush it when the other conflicts in the satrapy give him a chance.

SAMPLE COMBAT UNITS

Apart from being short a few dragons of troops, the 47th follows the standard plan for an Imperial legion, as described starting on page 66 of *The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. I—The Blessed Isle*. The sample combat units in that book are all appropriate for the 47th. It even has a single warstrider fang.

Scroll of Kings describes a captaincy of well-drilled Harborhead soldiers (on p. 17) and a complete watchgroup of the Royal Guard (on p. 18). The latter can serve for anything from a Horn to a commandery, by altering its Magnitude.

HARBORHEAD IRREGULAR WING

Description: This could be an entire village militia, a large bandit gang, a nomad tribe's warriors or a badly trained, undisciplined captaincy. Reducing the Magnitude to 1 or 2 turns it into a group of cattle-rustlers; at Magnitude 2 or 3, it's a mob of villagers out to raid another village for slaves. They have no armor beyond their ox-hide shields. They wield a mix of everyday Harborheadite weapons.

All in all, these troops are not very effective. Harborhead has a limitless supply of such irregular fighters, and while their Drill is low, their Morale and basic competence at combat are quite good. Characters who seek a military command in Harborhead most likely begin with troops like this.

Commanding Officer: Varies
Armor Color: Ordinary clothing with an ox-hide shield; skin might be scarified.

Motto: "Ahlat!"

General Makeup: A few hundred Harborheadites armed with spears, clubs or whatever else they have on hand, plus self bows and javelins.

Overall Quality: Average

Magnitude: 4

Drill: 1

Close Combat Attack: 3 **C**l**o**s**e**

Combat Damage: 2

Ranged Attack: 2

Ranged Damage: 2



Endurance: 4 **Might:** 0

Armor: 0 (-2 mobility)

Morale: 3

Formation: The militia's commanding officer is simply a respected local warrior, with four other heroic mortals (possibly Brides of Ahlat) as heroes. These heroes can take command of Magnitude 2 sub-units equal to raiding parties. While the militia stays together, however, it also has four relays that convey messages through their ululations. The militia fights in unordered or skirmish formation.

Harborhead, a Magnitude 6 Dominion

Military: 5 **Government:** 3 **Culture:** 4

Abilities: Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 2 (Colossal Bribe +3), Craft 3, Integrity 2 (Religious Edict +3), Investigation 2, Occult 3 (Divine Patronage +2), Performance 4 (Saber-Rattling +1), Presence 4, Stealth 2, War 3 (Slash-and-Burn Tactics +2)

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 5, Temperance 3, Valor 5

Virtue Flaw: Conviction **Current Limit:** 6

Willpower: 10

Bonus Points: 30 **External Bonus Points:** 18

Notes: Harborhead's bonus points go to its fifth dots of Military, Conviction and Valor, plus a third dot in War and its Integrity, Occult, Performance and War specialties. (Note that while Harborhead has a high value of raw military power, its skill at wielding that power is not especially great.) Harborhead's external bonus points chiefly derive from the Realm garrison, though the Guild contributes as well. Fifteen of these points go to two dots of Government and a dot of Temperance. (Without the satrapy riding herd on the tribes and frequently writing the laws, Harborhead becomes almost ungovernable.) The other three points go to the Bureaucracy specialties. (Even with a fraction of the jade mines' output, the Leopard Seat can offer staggering fortunes in jade.)

Excellent Ibis, High Priest of Ahlat, functions as a sorcerer without legitimacy... though he's working on that. Imperial Satrap Cathak Voper and General Cathak Lazera both function as savants. A number of other Dragon-Blooded and the three commanders of the Royal Guard might also function as savants. The Leopard himself, Oshom Kurgaz, is a useless figurehead pulled this way and that by the satrap and his advisors, the Drums.

Harborhead has *two* possible Limit Breaks, and the Storyteller should not tell players which one she intends to use (or could even choose at random, each time). One possibility is that Harborheadites lose faith in their government and lash out, tribe against tribe, in an orgy of fratricidal slave-taking and cattle-raiding, to the point that the nation nears implosion. Alternatively, the people turn to Ahlat with even greater fanaticism. The Royal Guard, the regular armies and half the countryside join a crusade to conquer all of Harborhead's neighbors and make them submit to Ahlat.

Harborhead

WAH! WAH! WAH!



AW... SHH. SHH. DID WE WAKE YOU UP, LADYBUG?



AREN'T YOU COMING?

HURRY UP. THE PEACEKEEPERS ARE ON THEIR WAY.

WAH! WAH! WAH! WAH! WA-



COMING.



WHAT, AREN'T YOU BRINGING HER?



NO TIME. THE PEACEKEEPERS ARE ON THEIR WAY.



SHE'S NOT MY RESPONSIBILITY ANYMORE.



CHAPTER SEVEN

BOUND BY CLOCK AND CASTE

Varangia consists of seven closely allied city-states and their shared capital of Yane, located in a narrow strip between Harborhead and the Great Southern Desert. The country extends from the shore of the Inland Sea to the far reaches of the South, so all the overland trade between the East and South must pass through Varangia. Each of the eight Varang City-States has a population ranging from 70,000 to 400,000. Individually, each city-state is much smaller and less powerful than great metropolises such as Chiaroscuro or Gem. The Varang confederacy as a whole, though, is as rich and populous as any nation in the South.

The Varang City-States form a true confederation. Each city-state has its own rulers and administration. The seven city-states each then send five delegates, or Wazirs, to the Wizarat in the city of Yane. This ruling council administers anything that the city-states believe affects them as a whole. A common language, calendar, religion and ideology do far more than the council, however, to unite Varangia.

Visitors to Varangia often have difficulty understanding this nation's strange practices. The Varang do nothing to make a visitor's lot easier, for they avoid contact with the outside world. Varangia's wealth and its position astride a major trade route, however, bring the world to their country whether the Varang want it or not. Creation is changing, and the Varang might find that they cannot avoid changing with it. Omens of chaos that Varangian astrologers see in the stars all say the same thing: A Time of Tumult is upon them.

HISTORY

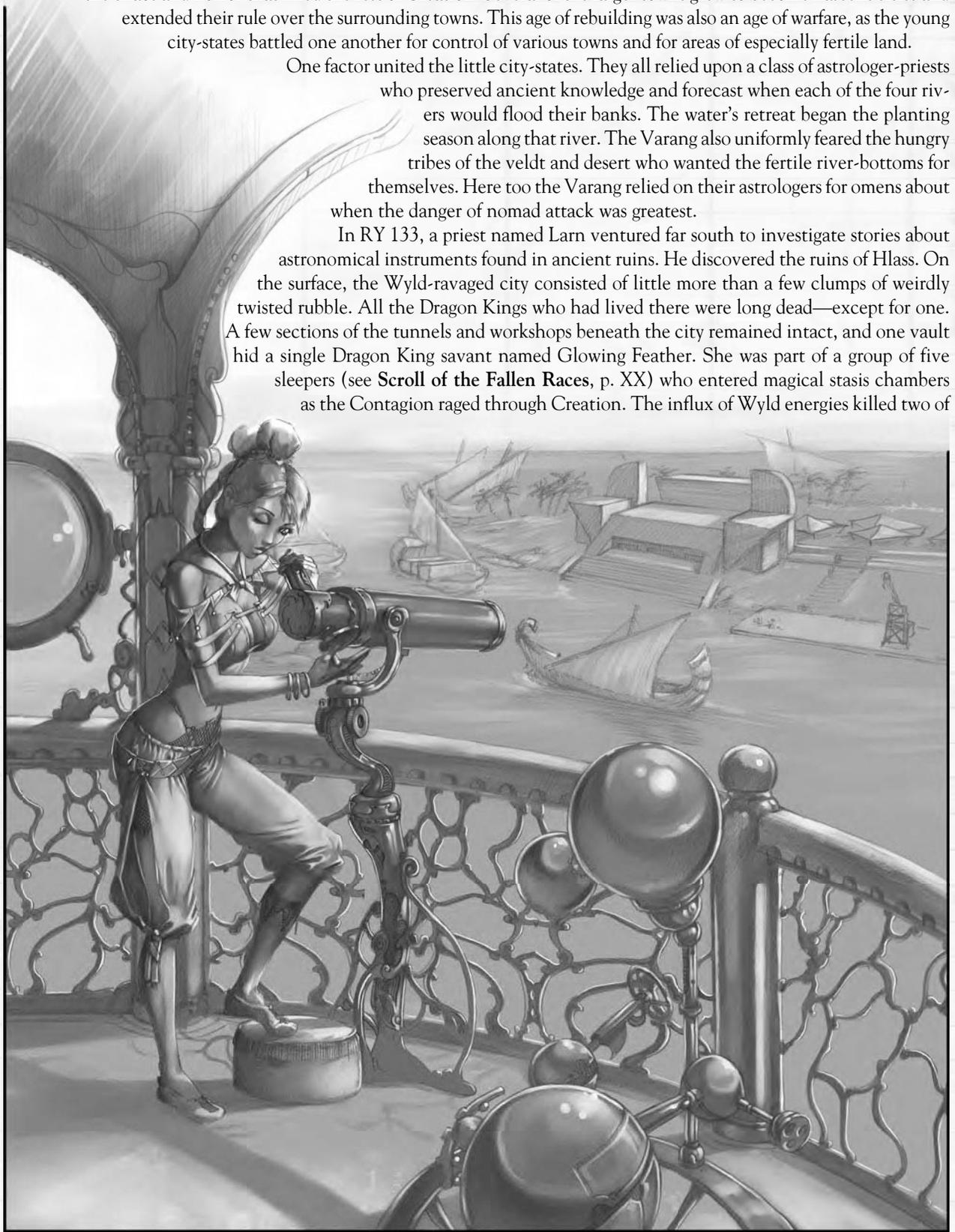
During the First Age, the southern portions of the land that would become Varangia held the Dragon King city of Hlass, a center for astronomy, astrology and the construction of astronomical instruments. Many mortals studied these arts in Hlass, making the entire region famed for its clockwork and other precision mechanics. Unfortunately,

the very fertility and ease of travel along the four river valleys made the region one of the main avenues for the Fair Folk invasion that ended the First Age.

For the first century of the Second Age, the Varang farmed along the banks of their four rivers and did their best to ignore the chaos and horror that filled the rest of Creation. Several of the larger towns grew to become nascent cities and extended their rule over the surrounding towns. This age of rebuilding was also an age of warfare, as the young city-states battled one another for control of various towns and for areas of especially fertile land.

One factor united the little city-states. They all relied upon a class of astrologer-priests who preserved ancient knowledge and forecast when each of the four rivers would flood their banks. The water's retreat began the planting season along that river. The Varang also uniformly feared the hungry tribes of the veldt and desert who wanted the fertile river-bottoms for themselves. Here too the Varang relied on their astrologers for omens about when the danger of nomad attack was greatest.

In RY 133, a priest named Larn ventured far south to investigate stories about astronomical instruments found in ancient ruins. He discovered the ruins of Hlass. On the surface, the Wyld-ravaged city consisted of little more than a few clumps of weirdly twisted rubble. All the Dragon Kings who had lived there were long dead—except for one. A few sections of the tunnels and workshops beneath the city remained intact, and one vault hid a single Dragon King savant named Glowing Feather. She was part of a group of five sleepers (see *Scroll of the Fallen Races*, p. XX) who entered magical stasis chambers as the Contagion raged through Creation. The influx of Wyld energies killed two of





Glowing Feather's companions and damaged the other two stasis chambers, so that she could not safely awaken their occupants. They sleep there still, awaiting someone with greater skill to awaken them. These same chaotic energies also transformed Glowing Feather from a Dragon King in early middle age, to an elderly reptile with no more than two decades of life remaining.

While exploring, Larn accidentally awakened Glowing Feather. The Dragon King found that all the inhabitants of her city were dead and Larn knew nothing of her kind. Glowing Feather feared she was the last of her breed and so turned her attention to the poor and primitive humans living near her. Having seen the end of the First Age, and growing up amidst the stories of the Usurpation, the bitter and despairing Dragon King distrusted both the Exalted and humanity. She saw the Exalted as the cause of the Creation's ruin and humanity as too blind and careless to guide itself. Glowing Feather concluded that struggling against fate and the natural order of Creation was futile. Creation's only hope to avoid horror, war and destruction lay in strict regulation and total submission to fate. Knowing none of this, Larn saw Glowing Feather as a godlike being sent to aid his people and lead them to safety.

Glowing Feather used the last years of her life teaching her knowledge to Larn and other astrologer-priests. These savants, drawn from all seven of the Varang cities, learned the Dragon King language and advanced thaumaturgy, especially astrology and geomancy, and including methods to enlighten their Essence. Instruments salvaged from Hlass helped the priests learn much about constructing sophisticated mechanical devices.

Yet, Glowing Feather also taught her followers to fear and distrust the Exalted and the unrestrained use of Essence. She convinced them that humanity needed to be watched and controlled in order to avoid horrors such as those that ended the First Age. The priests responded by strictly regulating their own use of Essence. The Dragon King's descriptions of the four separate breeds of her species inspired the astrologer-priests to invent a caste system. Glowing Feather died just 19 years after her awakening, but her efforts helped shape the Varang for centuries to come.

Using their newly enlightened Essence and their powerful thaumaturgy, these astrologer-priests gained greater influence in their city-states. Their superior ability to foretell drought, invasions and similar problems proved a great boon. The common people flocked to them. While they made certain that each city-state kept its independence, the priests crafted a new culture that they gradually imposed on the Varang.

A fresh cataclysm gave the Varang a greater impetus toward confederation. In RY 211, the newly unified Delzahn Horde passed through Varangia on its way to Chiaroscuro. The Delzahn scoured the countryside for food as they went and fought each city-state in turn. The Varang realized they needed some form of shared government to mount a defense against common threats. The Delzahn passage also reinforced

the Varangian belief that the rest of Creation held nothing but danger.

By RY 250, Varangia was fully transformed. The inhabitants forgot that they had ever lived in any other fashion. They built their cities according to strict geomantic and astrological principles, and regulated their lives just as carefully. A specially selected ruling caste, the pandits, worked to maintain the clockwork order and precision of Varang life. The Varang built Yane as their shared capital.

Meanwhile, the Realm also noticed Varangia's wealth. The Scarlet Dynasty coveted the land's agricultural and mineral bounty. In return for exceedingly favorable trade terms, Varangia avoided becoming a satrapy and instead became a loyal but isolationist ally.

By limiting their contact with the outside world and holding to the strict rules that regulate their lives, the Varang have prevented their culture from changing much in the last 500 years—or so they think. Yet, the increasing conflict with Harborhead, rebellions among the Djala slaves and growing hostility from Varangia's outcaste population all indicate that this era of stability could soon come to a swift end.

LEGACY OF THE DRAGON KINGS

Those who know how to look at Varangia can see other remnants of Dragon King influence besides their astrology and caste system. The complexity and oddities of Varangian city and building design are partly due to the demands of the skilled Varang geomancers. The triangular blocks of Talt and some of the other odd city plans, however, derive from the inhuman designs of Dragon King cities. Members of the small ruling caste also learn a secret language. (In fact, its very existence is a secret.) This language is a simplified form of the High Holy Speech of the Dragon Kings, and anyone who can read one language can read the other.

GEOGRAPHY

The Varang City-States are doubly blessed. Four rivers run through their land in between arid, stony ridges. None of them are large or deep. For most of the year, only shallow skiffs can sail them, and by the Season of Air they dry to mere trickles. They are very long, though. All four rivers originate in the Summer Mountains. Varangia experiences a winter monsoon, while snow collects in the high peaks despite their proximity to the Elemental Pole of Fire. When these snows melt in the springtime, the rivers flood for a few weeks and cover the land near their banks with rich sediments. Varangia, therefore, consists of four long, narrow strips of fertile land at the desert's edge.

These river valleys also provide easy access to the mineral-rich lands of the Far South. Varangia rivals Gem as a major supplier of fireclay as well as metals and jewels. Many merchants think that dealing with the intricacies



of Varangian culture is a small price to pay for access to Varangia's wealth.

THE RIVERS AND CITY-STATES

The Falucan River occupies Varangia's eastern border, though its headwaters lie in Harborhead. The equally large Jighast flows along the country's western edge. Two smaller rivers, the eastern Hokaj and the western Fakal, run between them. The Jighast is the longest of Varangia's rivers; the Falucan is the shortest, but still more than 800 miles long. East of the Falucan, the veldt of Harborhead rises slowly toward the Summer Mountains. West of the Jighast, a number of small coastal states provide a buffer between Varangia and the Delzahn Empire. Further inland, the great desert laps directly against the Jighast's valley.

The city-states of Kriss, Yane and Talt lie along the coast of the Inland Sea, with Kriss on the nation's western border, Talt near its eastern border and Yane between them. Southeast of Kriss, the city-states of Volat and Tarcha lie along the Jighast. Has-Kan is upriver from Yane along the Hokaj, while Jishal is southeast of Talt along the Falucan. Ulsan, along the Fakal River, lies the farthest southeast of the eight cities. The wild regions in the ridges between Volat and Jishal, and the areas farther southeast, are inhabited only by those tribes of the Djala people who have avoided enslavement by the Varang. The confederacy claims all the territory along the four rivers, all the way to the Summer Mountains. The entire country is about 250 miles wide and 1,200 miles long.

VARANG SOCIETY

Varangia's founders wanted safety, which they saw as stability, predictability and order. They did not seek human happiness—merely contentment, since discontented people make trouble. Varangian astrologers, therefore, try to place each person in his fated role, without the false hope of ambition. Most Varangians do indeed find contentment within their caste and value their planned, restricted society as a barrier against the chaos and danger that plagues the rest of Creation.

Most—but not all.

CASTE

The Varang have little choice in their life's work. Based on the results of *Varangian Casting*, every person is placed in one of 125 castes. Each caste engages in a particular occupation such as farming, carpentry or accounting. No one can ever switch to a different caste, except by expulsion. Individuals who defy caste boundaries and restrictions too often and too openly can be stripped of their place in Varang society and become one of the despised outcastes. Castes themselves are arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, with the ruling caste of astrologer-priests and administrators at the top and especially strenuous, dirty or unhealthy occupations such as miner, tanner or butcher at the bottom.

Apprenticeship in an assigned caste begins between the ages of 10 and 14, depending on the caste. Apprenticeship

VARANG ASTROLOGY

Varang society is built around astrology to a degree that other people find incredible, and no human society surpasses the Varang in this Art. Individuals receive a caste based on their horoscope at birth. The pandits consult the stars before making laws or making war, to see if the auspices are favorable. Merchants seek propitious days for business dealings; family elders arrange marriages based on the birth-charts of prospective brides and grooms. Whenever Varangians wonder, "Is this a good choice?" they consult the stars to see what Destiny has planned. Lesser astrologers—not in the ruling caste—make extra money selling cheaply printed broadsheets providing the best and worst times for various activities in the coming month.

Review the descriptions and rituals in the Art of Astrology, found on page 138 of **Exalted** and pages 132–133 of **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**. Storytellers should assume that Varangians hire an astrologer to perform the most potent and accurate divination they can afford. The single most important ritual, however, is *Varangian Casting*, which, by predicting one Ability for which a child possesses a natural aptitude (i.e., becomes Favored or achieves a 3+ rating), plays a crucial role in assigning a Varangian's caste.

At the Storyteller's option, various factors can increase the difficulty of astrological Procedures. Such is certainly the case for Varangian astrologers, who hate and fear influences that can disrupt their clockwork culture. The difficulty of the rituals used to divine a child's future aptitudes increases by one or even two if a child carries supernatural blood (God-Blooded, Ghost-Blooded and so on), has the Destiny Background (see **Scroll of the Monk**, p. 151–152) or is fated to participate in great events—perhaps including Exaltation. Birth during Calibration also raises the difficulty of astrological rituals by one.

always lasts at least four years. The period of apprenticeship is not set, however, and so the least competent and dedicated members of a profession might remain as apprentices and menial assistants for their entire career.

While the castes are rigid, they are not especially narrow. For instance, different members of the law enforcement caste might walk a beat in the local watch, investigate important crimes as a detective, work as a jailer or manage records and supplies for the city guards as a clerk. The offspring of high-caste parents receive more prestigious occupations within a caste. For example, a magistrate's daughter might design irrigation systems while a miner's son digs the ditches. Birth order additionally plays a role, with the first-born receiving higher-status jobs than offspring born later. Varangians who



demonstrate both skill and dedication in their job can gain greater authority and more prestigious duties, though, such as a stonemason earning the right to create her own designs instead of copying the work of others. Thus does Varangia permit limited, carefully controlled ambition.

HOBBIES

The Varang may practice hobbies that go outside of their caste boundaries, as long as they keep them private. A shopkeeper might write stories as a hobby or even perform short plays with friends who write or act, while an entertainer might craft simple jewelry and give them to her friends and relatives. Showing too much interest in a hobby is suspicious, however. Allowing it to interfere with the individual's family life or profession is a serious social problem. Only during the "Disorder Days" of Calibration may Varangians practice their hobbies in public.

THE DEMANDS OF CASTE

A strict social hierarchy regulates people's conduct and rights, both within castes and between them. Someone in the law enforcement caste who works as a jailer has lower status than a detective who investigates crimes, but both have a higher social status than members of the servant caste. Members of lower castes are expected to treat members of higher castes with respect. Crimes committed against members of a caste higher than the criminal's are more severely punished than identical crimes committed against members of a lower caste.

Each caste has a number of castes that are considered relatively close in status. Contact between members of such castes is considered natural. Typical clusters or similarly ranked castes include peacekeepers and shopkeepers, between artists, skilled artisans and entertainers, and between entertainers, courtesans and spies. Many Varangians have friends, lovers or spouses who belong to one of these closely associated castes rather than their own.

Varang culture frowns on socializing between members of vastly different castes. If a member of the servant caste spent much time with someone in the scholar's caste—except as the scholar's servant—the Varang would regard both individuals as eccentric, perhaps dangerously so. While such friendships are not actually illegal, they inspire disapproving gossip. A hint of anything more than friendship, however, could inspire criminal investigation and possible loss of caste.

Many marriages are arranged astrologically. Wealthy and powerful Varangians may arrange their offspring's marriage within the first few years of a child's life. While astrological marriages carry great prestige, they cannot be undone because the Varang regard them as blessed by fate and the gods. Almost half of all Varangians either cannot afford such marriages (the astrological rituals cost a fair bit) or cannot find an appropriate match. These individuals can divorce and remarry with ease because their marriages are merely secular and not sacred affairs.

A CULTURE IN CODE

The caste system would not function so effectively if people did not know each other's caste—or worse, could lie about their place in society. Varangia's founders, therefore, created a system of tattoos, clothing and architectural ornament to visually represent castes and subcastes. People who know this symbolic system can know a Varangian's occupation at a glance. People who don't know the system find Varang society a mystery.

The complete Varang symbolic system can take years to learn. Characters who are not Varang natives, however, can learn the code of tattoos, dress and architectural ornament as a Lore specialty in Varangian symbolism. (The Varang, of course, find the code perfectly natural because they grew up with it.) Attentive visitors can pick up a bit of the code in a few weeks, though—enough to tell high-caste people from low-caste or outcaste, or to recognize a hostel or teahouse. Fortunately, most Varangians understand that foreigners tend to miss the perfectly obvious information around them. They attribute foreigners' mistakes to mental and moral weakness rather than a conscious desire to give offense.

CASTE TATTOOS

A special symbol uniquely represents each Varang caste. To mark their caste, every Varangian bears a palm-sized tattoo of this symbol at the base of the throat. Attempting to hide or change this tattoo is a serious crime.

Spies and pandits are tattooed with special alchemical inks. The ink used on the pandits has a unique opalescent shimmer, while the ink used by members of the spy caste holds Essence that can be used to change its shape.

CLOTHING

Varangians also represent their caste through an elaborate dress code. Colors, patterns and even details of ornament such as tassels or embroidery can encode specific information about a person's birth order, caste and specific occupation and status within that caste. For instance, only astrologer-priests and other savants wear green tassels on their garments, while only butchers, physicians, soldiers and weaponsmiths wear shirts with red stripes. No occupation (except the military) has a specific uniform, however. Everything *except* the mandatory, coded elements of dress are left to individual choice. One savant might wear dozens of green tassels on a gorgeously embroidered and hooded mantle. Another might place a few on the collar of her blouse.

SPIES AND ACCEPTED DECEPTIONS

Two castes may wear the clothing of other castes: actors and spies. Actors must do so in order to portray characters of another caste, while spies must do so in order to infiltrate every layer of Varangian society. While actors merely provide entertainment, spies constitute an essential part of Varangian social order. The pandits require information about all facets of Varangian society, but the general

Varangian distrust of humanity makes the rulers unwilling simply to accept official reports. Instead, the pandits employ spies to impersonate individuals of all castes and uncover hidden truths.

These operatives watch the activities of important foreigners and individuals suspected of dangerous plots or deviation from caste duty. In addition, spies keep track of the activities, conversations and beliefs of ordinary Varangians. The city-states' governments want regular reports on the mood and concerns of the public and any activities that might somehow disrupt the social order.

Varangian spies also travel throughout the South, though chiefly in Varangia's neighbors. As tensions rise across the South, the Wizarat wants detailed, up-to-date knowledge of activities by leaders of the Delzahn and Harborhead.

ARCHITECTURE

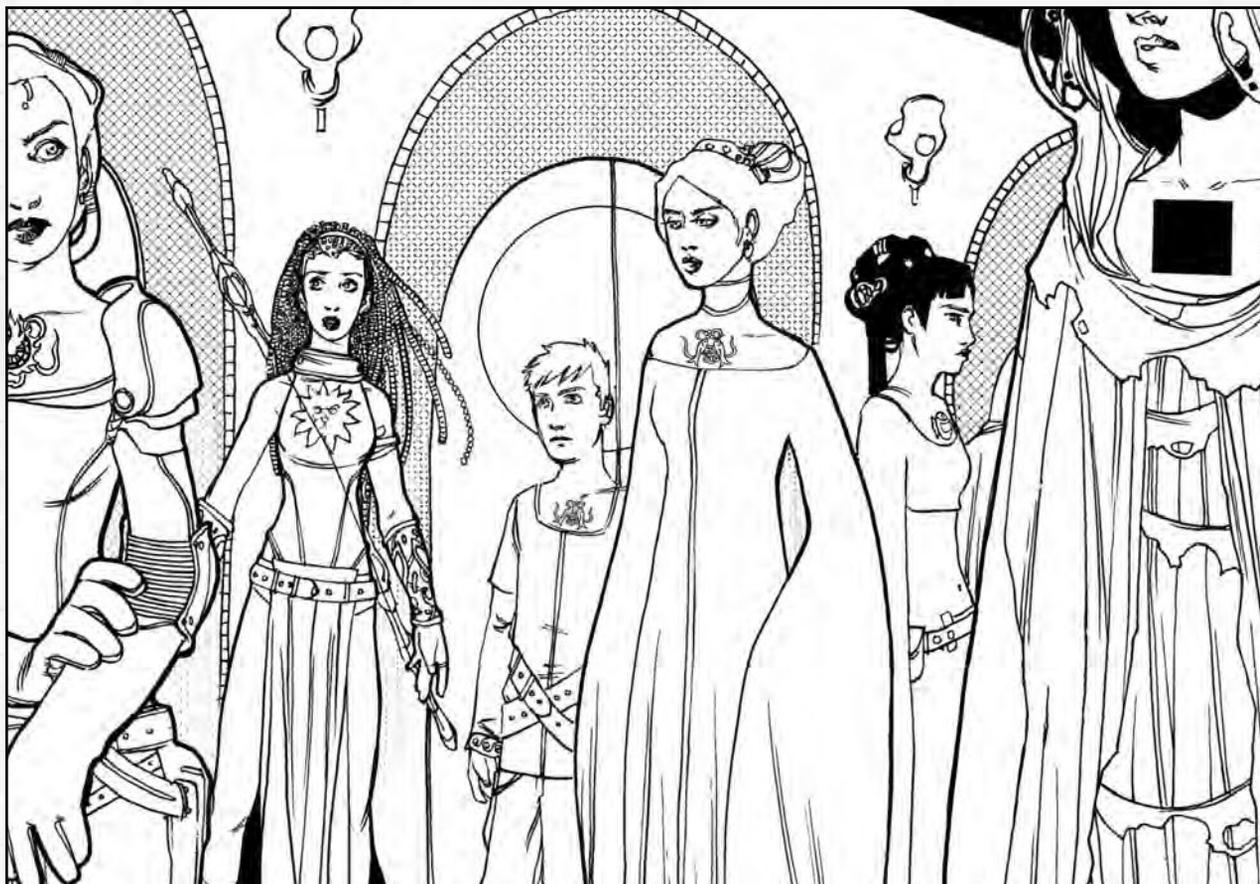
Finally, most Varang buildings reveal their function using brightly colored paint or trim rather than signs. Colors, ornamental moldings and other details correspond to the colors and insignia of Varang castes. Just as butchers all wear bright red shirts or vests with polished steel buttons, butcher shops all have bright red doors with prominent polished steel handles and hinges. Thus do the Varang recognize all common shops at a glance, though newcomers usually must hire guides to avoid becoming completely lost.

SPY TATTOOS (ARTIFACT •)

Varang spies face two problems: They must imitate the tattoos of other castes, and they need some way to prove their true identity as spies instead of being executed as caste impersonators. Varang leaders also want their spies to possess a means of identifying themselves that foreign agents cannot duplicate. About 200 years ago, thaumaturges in the ruling caste developed a special Essence-sensitive spy tattoo that enables those marked with it to duplicate other tattoos.

The alchemical ink of the spy tattoo carries a single stored mote of Essence. By spending a point of Willpower, the spy can alter her multicolored spy tattoo to duplicate any other tattoo of similar size, whether a Varang caste mark or any other tattoo of similar size. Restoring the tattoo's true image costs another Willpower point.

Displaying a spy tattoo proves membership in the spy caste. By Varang law, all law enforcers must aid anyone bearing such a tattoo to the best of their ability. Trying to imitate a spy tattoo is one of the most serious crimes in Varangia. Anyone who did so would be tortured to discover everyone who helped created the fake. Once their interrogators had wrung the imposter of all information, the imposter would be executed in public.





VARANG URBAN PLANNING

Visitors often find Varang cities physically confusing, and not just because none of the buildings have signs. The Varang built each of their cities according to geomantic and astrological principles intended to confer some specific benefit for the city. As a result, each city has a different street plan, some of which occur nowhere else in Creation. The capital, Yane, follows a pattern of 25 radiating avenues that intersect concentric circular boulevards. The Wizardat has its palace of government at the center as a symbolic pole star for Varang society. In the trading city of Kriss, however, the main street forms a hexagonal spiral from the city walls to a large central plaza. The streets of Talt form a grid of equilateral triangles.

As crazed as the street plans seem, they work. Each Varang city carries a permanent geomantic blessing (see *Exalted*, p. 139). In Yane, the relevant traits are Intelligence, Bureaucracy and a specialty in Legislation. As a result, the Wizardat might write bad laws, but never *catastrophically* bad laws. Hypothetical dice rolls for their legislation could never result in a botch. Kriss and Talt both carry geomantic blessings and curses related to commerce. Honest trade negotiations, represented by (Intelligence + Bureaucracy + Commerce specialty) rolls, can never go horribly wrong for either side. Attempts at deceit, however, represented by (Wits + Larceny + Sharp Business Practices specialty) rolls, go spectacularly awry when they fail. Storytellers can assign blessings and curses to other Varang cities as they choose.

CLOCKS AND TIME

The need to record time of birth precisely led the Varang to a wider obsession with time. Every city has at least one large tower where a complex mechanical clock rings the hours on huge bells that can be heard across the city. Wealthy Varangians often carry ornate pocket watches and keep mechanical clocks in their homes. To visitors, such mechanical wonders seem almost magical.

The obsession with timekeeping also produces a concern with punctuality. Anyone who is told to arrive someplace or do something at a certain time had best watch the clock. To the Varang, being more than a quarter-hour late shows disrespect, laziness or stupidity. Varangians try to arrive at their jobs and their social gatherings on time or, if possible, a few minutes early.

Across most of Creation, workdays are fairly vague. Most mortals work from sunrise to sunset or perhaps from sunrise to noon. In the Varang City-States, every business posts its work hours and expects workers to arrive on time if they wish to avoid various demerits or penalties.

DISRUPTIVE INFLUENCES

Much as the Varang might want to live in changeless isolation from the rest of Creation, their country suffers from disruptive elements. Many Varangians realize that they are not as secure as they would like. Few, however, realize the extent to which they have invited in or created the dangers they fear.

FOREIGNERS

The Varang regard all outlanders with a mixture of fascination, fear and contempt. Foreign folk have no caste (or at least no place in the Varangian caste system). Their clothes do not tell who they are or what they do. Outlanders might do anything, *be* anything. They represent intrusions of chaos. The closest analogues in Varang culture are actors and spies.

Varangians who compare foreigners to actors and actresses see them as somewhat dishonest and disreputable, but intriguing as well. Varangians who compare foreigners to spies often see them as outright criminals. In the inexpensive rag-paper novels that are a popular Varangian entertainment, foreigners usually appear as amoral villains who are willing and all too able to act as thieves, spies or assassins for wealthy (but blatantly evil or insane) Varangians.

Unscrupulous Varangians sometimes believe the image and try to hire visiting outlanders to perform legally dubious deeds. Others simply want to hire foreign burglars or assassins on the theory that magistrates cannot later question criminals who have long since left the country.

Where a demand exists, a supply appears. A small but significant number of visitors to the Varang City-States really are freelance spies, robbers and killers in search of work. While such scalawags are rare, every proven instance of a criminal outlander reinforces the general prejudice against foreigners. Most Varangians do not want to have anything to do with outlanders at all.

OUTCASTES

Varang society insists that everyone has an appropriate caste, yet some people don't fit. A person can become outcaste in several ways.

Varangians who fail utterly at their assigned caste or who openly rebel against the strictures of their caste are made outcaste. Sometimes the astrologers fail and assign people to wholly inappropriate work, condemning them to an unhappy life. Contact with foreigners can also make Varangians chafe at their society's restriction. While such people feature prominently in Varang cautionary tales, less than one in 1,000 citizens becomes outcaste through such discontent.

Illicit affairs between people of high and low castes result in both Varangians becoming outcaste. Any offspring between such forbidden unions are outcaste from birth, for Varang ideology says these children literally should not exist.

Heretics and infidels are expelled from the caste structure as well, or may leave it voluntarily. The Cult of the Illuminated, for example, created its first village of believers near Yane. The Wizardat made its members outcaste for believing that Heaven-sent heroes would redeem flawed humanity. Followers of a number of other forbidden cults suffer the same fate, whenever they are found.

Infants become outcaste if an astrologer cannot determine a suitable caste for them. If parents do not record the date and time of their child's birth, a skilled astrologer can reconstruct the child's horoscope using *Reverse Birth Engineering*.



This Procedure also enables Varang authorities to assign castes to orphans and foundlings. Negligent parents must pay for the extra ritual, though, and some cannot afford it. These children become outcaste.

On rare occasions, even the most skilled astrologer cannot find a child's caste. Most astrologers then attempt other rituals (such as *Brighter Star*) to see if this child has some special destiny. Some children, however, have destinies that are intrinsically obscure or hidden.

Some have no caste because they have a touch of supernatural blood or are destined to Exalt or otherwise become the center of great events. Children born during Calibration are also hard to place. Parents often lie about offspring born in this uncanny time, which results in false assessments (at best) or failure (at worst).

Astrologers sometimes lie rather than admit that any chart defeated them. Others admit that they cannot read the child's chart. Honest astrologers call in a colleague to confirm a problem and make their own assessment (though the first astrologer suffers some small disgrace for her incompetence if the second astrologer then interprets the child's natal chart and assigns a caste). If no one can interpret the child's horoscope, the child becomes outcaste.

Most outcastes, however, are the children of other outcastes. Varangian outcastes can hire astrologers to find the castes of their offspring, but outcastes can seldom afford this service. Even if outcaste parents can meet the astrologer's fee, their child is taken from them and fostered to a family of the appropriate caste. Many outcastes cannot bear to renounce their children.

Despite the pandits' efforts to pigeonhole every Varangian into a caste, the number of outcastes has grown steadily over the centuries. By now, fully one in 10 Varangians is actually outcaste—a resentful underclass in a society devoted to stability and contentment.

Varang society barely acknowledges outcastes as people. Outcastes must wear gray or black, and receive a black square as their "caste" tattoo (perhaps blotting out their former caste). They cannot take any respectable work. Some live as day laborers, doing odd jobs for low pay. Outcaste garbage-pickers scavenge dumps for rags they can sell to paper-makers, oddments they can craft into buttons, and the like. Many outcastes take dirty or disgusting jobs such as hauling dung or washing corpses. Outcastes now largely replace the lowest-ranked subcastes of menial labor, since an outcaste can sweep streets or dig ditches for lower pay than a legitimate individual. Outcaste vendors selling snacks, trinkets and other small items from pushcarts have completely replaced the lowest end of the retail caste.

Not a few outcastes become beggars, the cheapest of cheap whores, or petty criminals such as pickpockets or shoplifters. A rare few become freelance spies, assassins, cat burglars or other high-end criminals. They all run great risks, for Varang law punishes outcaste criminals with enslavement. Whenever a crime stumps the authorities, standard procedure

is to round up local outcastes as "the usual suspects" and torture them until someone confesses or implicates someone else. Many ambitious outcastes, however, simply leave the Varang City-States and seek their fortune in a land where no one cares about their horoscope.

SLAVERY

The Varang do not employ slaves as enthusiastically as some cultures do, but they keep a fair number of people in bondage. Varangia has three sources of slaves: the diminutive Djala people, their own outcaste criminals and foreigners. Each variety performs different duties, giving the confederation three distinct forms of slavery. All are considered potential threats to social order but are also considered necessary for the country's prosperity.

The Varang enslave large numbers of the Djala people, whose distinctive black-and-white markings and short stature instantly set them apart from the bronze-skinned Varangians. Expeditions capture Djala from their homeland south of Varangia. Some are sold to the Guild. Most, however, go to the Varang cities.

Only Djala slaves can be kept within Varang cities. There, they work as domestic servants and artisans. The Djala are not a numerous people, so only about one in 50 city residents are Djala slaves. Only the wealthy can own a Djala slave, making ownership a mark of status.

The Varang try to breed their Djala. Ten generations of Djala have lived and died in Varangia, never knowing freedom. These slaves produce few offspring, though, so slavers head south every year to capture more Djala. Most Varangians now believe the entire Djala race is a caste of slaves, predestined for bondage. By law, no Djala can ever be freed.

Among the Varang themselves, only outcastes convicted of crimes can become slaves. Varangians convicted of major, violent crimes such as murder are declared outcaste, then enslaved and sold to the Guild, on condition that they be sold outside Varangia. Varangians who actively rebel against the caste system meet the same fate, with a suggestion that the Guild sell them to the Fair Folk. Enslaved Varangians are forbidden to enter a city for any reason.

Varang who are already outcastes are quite easy to convict of any crime the authorities choose. Their usual fate is enslavement in the mines in the confederation's southern extreme. Many mining slaves are worked to death. Those who labor for 15 years without causing trouble become trusties. They're still slaves and still forbidden to leave the camps, but they receive privileges such as a salary, permission to marry and own a home, and oversight of a gang of other slaves.

The city-states have a high demand for strong-backed foreign slaves who can perform farm labor or work in the mines. Because Varangians distrust foreigners and foreign ideas, however, foreign slaves may not enter Varang cities. Only the masters of large rural estates can own foreign slaves. Also, these slaves may interact only with overseers who are specially trained for pitiless resistance to foreign contamination.

To earn the right to own foreign slaves, landowners must build separate slave quarters, which only the slaves and overseers may enter. Foreign slaves can act as house servants as well as farm labor, but to use them in this fashion, the slave-owners must construct their dwellings in two separate halves. In one half, the slaves prepare food and perform other necessary household chores. The slave-owners live in the other half. Only Djala slaves or overseers may travel between them, and the most fastidious Varangians don't even want to see their overseers. The two halves communicate only through small openings for passing food and spoken or written commands. The slaves and slave owners never set eyes upon one another and know little of the other's lives... leaving clever slaves free to plot in secret.

In the past, the Djala rarely revolted. In the last decade, however, free Djala infiltrated Varang lands—both the cities and the segregated slave quarters of rural estates. Some escaped slaves have joined them in fomenting slave uprisings and escape attempts. The Djala need only a leader with the power and charisma to unite them in a nationwide insurrection, and there's no telling how many other slaves and outcastes would join them.

JACKAL TRIBES

Of all the outcaste, none inspire greater fear than the so-called jackal tribes. Jackal tribesmen are not unique to Varangia. They also come from Harborhead and the eastern

Delzahn Empire. Throughout the Southeast, people fear plague and deformity, even when no real risk of contagion exists. They expel lepers, victims of other incurable diseases and victims of ravaging spirit curses. Having an abundant supply of thaumaturges enables Varangia's ruling caste to heal many of the diseased, but medical alchemy has its limits, and poorer folk cannot afford thaumaturgical cures. Instead, the healthy drive the sick from their towns. Even the other outcastes hurl stones to force them to flee. Tradition holds that these unfortunates must wear a crimson scarf to warn everyone else that they are diseased, accursed, unclean.

Rejected by the rest of humanity, the plague victims gather in bands of their own. Jackal tribes seldom exceed 50 members. Their death rate is high; their birth rate is low. Few children survive long enough to have children of their own. People continue to get sick, though, so the tribes replenish their numbers. Some of them walk, but they prefer to ride. Most jackal tribes make do with horses or camels, but a few bands manage to tame simhatas. Perhaps the onetime steeds of the Lawgivers know more of pity than do humans. Perhaps the jackals are simply braver in facing these dangerous beasts. What have they got to lose?

The jackal tribes gain a measure of revenge simply by approaching other communities. The people set out food or money so the plague-wanderers will go away. They also set out any children who suffer birth defects, for Southeastern folk believe that a harelip, clubfoot or the wrong number of





toes indicate disease or a curse. The jackals take in all these waifs and share everything they receive.

Indeed, the jackals have a strong tradition of hospitality... for other jackals. They despise the healthy as much as they are despised. Small groups of travelers suffer taunts, are spat upon, robbed or even tortured (or killed) if they encounter a larger band of plague-wanderers. A favorite torment, however, is simply to escort such travelers to the nearest village before releasing them. Most communities bar anyone known to have traveled with a jackal tribe (however unwillingly), letting the travelers feel the same hatred and suspicion that the jackals know so well.

On rare occasions, jackal offspring survive without suffering their parents' diseases. The plague-wanderers are ambivalent about these fortunate few. These healthy offspring generally receive the hardest labors and the smallest shares of food, but the band expects them to handle all dealings with normal communities.

Now and then, jackal-bands meet in plague-fairs. They prefer that everyone in a band suffer the same disease. At these fairs, new outcastes transfer to suitable bands. The jackals also trade stories, gewgaws, mounts, weapons and reports of spirits inclined to help them.

The plague-wanderers have surprisingly close relationships with a surprising range and number of small gods. The jackals will do just about anything for a spirit who can prolong their lives and alleviate their symptoms. Not every spirit can gain Charms to help the sick. Enough can, however, that many small gods in the Southeast seek the worship and service of jackal tribes. Some spirits demand extravagant shows of reverence, such as telling the jackals to flagellate themselves or sacrifice fingers, toes or ears. Other spirits ask for treasures to adorn their sanctums, massacres of villagers who offended them, or stranger favors. The jackals do whatever their patrons command, and shamans lead the tribes.

One reward the spirits offer is sexual congress. God-Blooded children stand a much better chance than mere mortals of reaching adulthood among the plague-wanderers. God-Blooded jackals invariably become leaders among their band, whether they look perfectly healthy or so ravaged by disease that no mortal could possibly stay alive.

Jackal tribes seldom establish a set territory, though they might travel a long circuit from spirit to spirit. Because they have so little to lose, they fearlessly venture into First Age ruins, potent demesnes and Wyld zones, whether on missions for their gods or simply hoping to find some loot. For the jackals, mutation by a demesne or the Wyld is just more of the same. As a result of their explorations and tale-swapping, though, the plague-wanderers probably have wider knowledge of the Southeast and its secrets than anyone else.

So far, jackal tribes have never gathered in force... but they wander, shunned but unimpeded, through Varangia and its neighboring countries. If they found a leader who took them beyond petty spite, they might cause a great deal of damage.

THE VARANG STATE

In an effort to make certain that Varang society runs smoothly, the governments of the confederation regulate and monitor all aspects of daily life. This oversight results in relatively large governments for relatively small city-states. The astrologers watch for Varangians from all backgrounds who are born under stars that destine them for the various castes and subcastes of government service. These citizens work in the various bureaus of finance, law enforcement and many others, with the most experienced and politically adept becoming legislators.

THE PANDITS

A child needs a highly auspicious horoscope to enter the ruling caste. When a child's chart is unclear or the astrologer suspects that the child might bear some unusual destiny, the astrologer either performs the *Brighter Star* ritual or finds a more skilled astrologer to do so. Naturally, this ritual is most often performed on children of the higher castes, including the pandits. If this ritual fails, the child receives a caste based on her general aptitudes, as indicated by the basic *Varangian Casting*. (If possible. Ironically, only the lack of a sufficiently skilled astrologer prevented dozens of outcastes with hard-to-interpret horoscopes from becoming pandits.)

When astrologers find a future pandit, they tell the parents of their child's good fortune. The parents receive a generous stipend to raise the child to the age of seven. (The astrologer-priests may instead remove the child immediately if they think the parents are incompetent or immoral, but the parents still receive a cash reward.) Pandit couples then adopt the children.

From age seven onward, young pandits grow up within the palace complex found in each of the Varang cities. Here, the youngsters learn the arts needed to rule Varangia as administrators, magistrates, thaumaturges and priests of the Varang faith. Not all Varang thaumaturges belong to the ruling caste, but all pandits know the Art of Astrology to some degree.

To foster unity and cooperation among the city-states, all young pandits spend their 15th year living in the great palace at Yane. Afterward, they return to their own city-state's palace. When they reach adulthood, each pandit becomes one of the leaders of the city-state in which she was born.

CHILDREN OF THE PANDIT CASTE

The offspring of pandits are guaranteed comfortable positions in whatever caste their horoscope assigns to them, but they are only slightly more likely than anyone else to be born into the pandit caste themselves. Instead, they are fostered at birth to various wealthy families from other prestigious castes. These families never know the specific parents of their adoptive child, and merely telling the child about the adoption incurs a large fine and private whipping.

DIVIDED UNITY

Outsiders treat Varangia as a single nation, which it is to some extent. The inhabitants all speak Flametongue, possess a single currency and share a unique culture based on astrology and their caste system. Each city-state, however, retains many powers for itself. Each one maintains its own military; laws vary slightly from one city-state to another; and the rulers of each city-state are of equal power, with no city-state ruling the rest.

Some foreigners assume that because Yane is the capital, Yane rules the other city-states. Actually, the opposite is true. The seven other cities govern Yane. Every four years, Yane falls under the rule of one other city-state in a regular cycle. Regardless of who is in charge, Yane stays a neutral city where all the Varang may visit or live.

The seven other city-states each send five representatives to the Wizarat. These Wazirs vote on matters that concern all of Varangia. (The first item on any agenda is usually, “Does this affect all of Varangia?”) Each city-state can engage in its own foreign policy, as long as these efforts do not go against directives from the Wizarat—such as no foreigners entering any Varang city-state except Kriss and Talt. Also, each city runs its domestic affairs as the local pandits see fit. The most important exceptions to this autonomy are the laws about religion and caste. The Varang believe that these aspects of their culture bear a divine mandate and no mortal authority can change them.

Wazirs do not serve for life. Each time a city-state’s pandits choose a Wazir, they cast a horoscope not only for who should serve in this office, but for how long. At the end of that time, the other Wazirs jointly cast a horoscope to see if their fellow should continue representing her city and, if so, for how long. If delegates from four different city-states insist upon it, the Wizarat can cast a special horoscope to see if the Loom of Fate has decided that one of their members should leave office early. The stars are remarkably insightful about removing Wazirs who can’t get along with their fellow delegates—they never contradict the majority view.

THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL HARMONY

Every city-state has a Department of Social Harmony as one of its most powerful government bureaus. “The Department” (to Varangians it needs no other name) keeps track of the need for various professions. Based on records and forecasts, these officials increase or decrease the numbers of individuals destined for each caste. Varang astrology reveals only an individual’s general aptitudes; actual caste assignment depends on a host of details within a birth chart. By tweaking the details of how horoscopes determine caste, the Department can place more newborns in one caste or another. Thus does the Department make sure that everyone joins a caste that makes use of their particular talents while meeting the needs of Varang society as a whole. The charts for assigning caste based on horoscope are updated every decade, along with proposals for new castes and subcastes.

Every day, the Department helps young apprentices of every caste find appropriate masters from whom to learn and then appropriate jobs. Much of the Department’s work involves parents who have no friends, acquaintances or contacts in their child’s assigned profession in order to find their child an appropriate apprenticeship.

When someone has trouble with his caste and profession, people around him encourage him to talk to a Department official. This official can arrange additional job training or apprenticeship with a different master. Older Varangians might be offered transfers to different districts if their discontent comes from personal conflicts, or even transfer to a different city-state. Despite all forecasts, city-states sometimes suffer a shortage of a particular profession. The Department can remedy this deficit by offering cash rewards or promotions to workers in other cities. In this manner, the Department strives to keep all Varangians contented with their lot before their unhappiness renders them criminals or outcastes.

OFFICIAL RELIGION

The Varang worship the Loom of Fate, the Five Maidens and (to a much lesser degree) the other gods of the Bureau of Destiny. Since the official cult does not mention Luna or the Unconquered Sun, the Realm tolerates this faith. The Immaculate Order sends a steady stream of missionaries, whom most Varangians politely but firmly ignore—mostly because these missionaries are foreigners who do not belong to the ruling caste. Talt and Kriss both hold licensed Immaculate temples in their foreigners’ quarters, while the Realm’s embassy includes a small, discreet shrine. The official cult has absorbed some of the Immaculate practices, but meditations and prayers are directed toward the Maidens rather than the Dragons.

Within their homes, the Varang are free to worship any entity not innately hostile to the confederation. The state treats such worship like any other hobby. Only pandits can lead public worship of the official cult (or any other). In private, many Varangians worship at home altars to their ancestors or various local or celestial gods.

A few pandits lead public ceremonies to deities who particularly appeal to them. In Kriss, one middle-aged pandit woman is an avid gambler and regularly leads public services to Plentimon of the Dice. Similarly, a young pandit of Ulsan still mourns his dead adoptive mother and now leads a small ancestor cult in Yane. As long as such cults remain controlled by pandits, the state treats them as just a mild eccentricity. Whether public or private, though, the government swiftly punishes anyone caught worshiping demons, Deathlords, Fair Folk or other acknowledged enemies of Creation and Varangia.

The pandits now include the Cult of the Illuminated among the forbidden creeds. Once it seemed like nothing more than a strange outcaste faith, condemned for its manifest heresy of hope and because its prophesied “shining saviors” resembled the Solar Anathema. The Anathema’s return now makes the cult seem deeply dangerous, and not





just to the Realm. Varangia includes a number of other cults long forbidden for political expedience, including a cult that reveres the Unconquered Sun directly. Such cults now must hide more diligently than ever before.

EXALTATION AND ESSENCE-USERS

Despite having a large number of skilled thaumaturges, the Varang restrict Essence use. Part of their distrust comes from the obscurity often found in astrological charts of children destined for Exaltation and those who carry supernatural blood. Such children often become outcastes—and when they come into their power, they have no love of Varangia. What's more, Glowing Feather distrusted all Exalted and imparted her distrust to her mortal disciples. The Dragon King further refused to enlighten the Essence of any but the most devoted and auspiciously born mortals because she feared the consequences if unscrupulous or power-hungry mortals could use the various artifacts she possessed.

The Varang City-States rigidly control Essence enlightenment. The five-year Procedure called the *Essence Enlightening Sutra* (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**, p. 139) is the only lawful method, and only for pandits. Likewise, only pandits can legally learn Master-level Procedures. Unlicensed enlightenment carries the death penalty. Despite this restriction (or perhaps because of this), illicit enlightenment is in high demand in Varangia. Unlicensed thaumaturges with enlightened Essence form an important part of Varangia's criminal underworld.

Now and then, young Varangians Exalt as Dragon-Blooded. The authorities offer all these aberrations to the Realm. Pandits present this abandonment as great honor, but a young Exalt can usually sense the fear and revulsion behind the honeyed words. The pandits fully agree with the Immaculate Order that Celestial Exalted are all Anathema, too dangerous to live. Rumors that at least one outcaste has become a powerful Anathema currently trouble Varang's leaders.

CRIME AND JUSTICE

While Varangia has no official criminal caste, crime is just as common here as in the rest of Creation. Many Varangians supplement their income with various forms of petty crime. Becoming a *professional* criminal, however, is quite a challenge, for all citizens have a caste-ordained occupation that they must practice full-time. That leaves little time for crime.

Clever Varangians find a variety of ways around this problem. Some combine their criminal and official occupation. More than a few professional bodyguards make most of their income by working as leg-breakers for their less savory clients. Similarly, some merchants specialize in selling stolen goods. Other Varangians use a business partner or employer who takes bribes in return for making it seem that the criminal performs his assigned duties. All these dodges share a crucial disadvantage: If caught, the criminal is also guilty of defying the duties of his caste—and breaking caste might carry a worse penalty than the crime itself.

The outcaste, of course, don't need to maintain a respectable façade. They simply need to worry about enslavement and sale to the Guild. Other common punishments include fines, flogging, torture and execution.

ASSASSINATION

Birth order matters a lot in Varang society. An individual's rank in her caste can change if an elder sibling dies before achieving majority. Even in adulthood, the death of an elder sibling sometimes alters wealth and prestige, especially if the older sibling does not yet possess heirs. As a result, assassination is an uncomfortably common pastime in Varangia, especially among the young and ambitious. The murderous and greedy younger sibling is a common villain in Varang stories. While they are less common in reality, Varangia sees no shortage of such individuals.

CASTE BROKERS AND CASTE THIEVES

To the Varang, the most insidious and horrific crimes are those of the caste thieves and the caste brokers who aid them. A clever Varangian could impersonate a person of another caste for a short time by changing her clothing and painting a false tattoo over her real one. Attempting a long-term imposture—or one that stands up to a damp cloth—requires altering the tattoo itself, and that takes significant skill. The so-called “caste brokers” can give clients the tattoo for almost any caste. The finest caste brokers are illicit sorcerers who can permanently alter someone's appearance as well as her tattoo. (See, for instance, the Disguise of the New Face spell on p. 43 of **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. II—The White Treatise**.) Some can even fake the spy caste tattoo. Only the pandit caste is off-limits, because their numbers and identities are too well known (at least to other members of the caste).

Many caste brokers also provide limited training in the dress and duties of the new caste as well as letters of recommendation, travel papers and other supporting documents to help their client fit into their new caste swiftly, easily and without arousing suspicion. Caste thieves sometimes help their clients kill someone of the desired caste and replace them. More than one servant has killed and replaced his master. While the Varang authorities deny the problem, Varangia supports thousands of successful caste thieves. In some cities, more than a dozen caste brokers make an excellent living.

The Varang authorities punish caste brokerage with public execution, starting with flaying the face and burning out the eyes. Caste thieves receive the same punishment unless they reveal the caste brokers who helped them. In such cases, their punishment is reduced to being sold into slavery to the Guild. As a result, caste brokers are exceptionally secretive and regularly move from one city-state to another, changing their names and identities as they go. To avoid recognition, caste brokers strongly encourage most caste thieves to move to another city-state after they change caste. Discovered caste brokers are hunted relentlessly. Often the



Varangian
 Tattoo
 Forgery

Varang authorities hire foreign bounty hunters to pursue and return caste brokers who have fled to other lands.

TATTOO FORGERY

Duplicating or altering the intricate caste tattoos requires a Craft (Air) roll with a difficulty of 3. Duplicating either of the alchemical inks used in pandit tattoos or spy tattoos requires the use of a special alchemical Procedure, *Varangian Tattoo Ink* (2, Wits, 3, one hour).

THE VARANG MILITARY

Each of the seven Varang City-States possesses its own military, since none of the cities would let the rulers of another city-state command their army. Each city-state also predates their union, so the astrologers believe their fates remain distinct and they must see to their own defense. In times of national crisis, however, the Wizarat can coordinate the armies' campaigns. In addition, the seven city-states donate a dragon's worth of troops to Yane every year for the city's defense and for the Wizarat to use as it will. Exactly what sort of troops each city donates depends on an astrological forecast.

Because of their ties to the Realm and their distrust of everything foreign, the Varang are not an expansionist people. Their militaries exist largely to defend their borders and to protect them from pirates and bandits—though as mentioned, expeditions regularly head south to capture Djala

slaves. As fears of Harborhead aggression increase, all seven city-states send troops in a common mission to patrol the nation's eastern border.

The Varang army is approximately 30,000 strong. In wartime, individuals from any caste may volunteer for short terms of military service as long as their horoscopes indicate upcoming military success and so the total Varang army can grow to as large as 150,000. The Varang regular army all count as elite troops, but the volunteer forces are all barely trained green troops.

Varang's militaries concentrate on infantry, with cavalry largely limited to scouting. The nation's technical expertise enables the Varang City-States to equip their troops with some of the finest mundane weapons and armor in regular use. The nation's artisans manufacture every sort of commonplace weapon and armor known in Creation. Varangia also fields large amounts of artillery in battle. All seven armies make extensive use of elephants for armored assaults, as platforms for flamethrowers and other light artillery, and to move heavy artillery.

The confederation has a single navy, though. Only Talt, Kriss and Yane are ports, and the four rivers are sufficiently shallow that river navies make little sense. Unlike the armies, the navy is a creation of the confederation as a whole, it serves the Wizarat directly, and it draws sailors from all eight city-states. The navy uses Yane as its home port.

Varangia's navy does not travel far. It functions chiefly as a coast guard to rescue mariners in trouble and to chase

away pirates. For both functions, the navy shows a real knack for going where it's needed. (Every task force has its own astrologer, of course.) Like the seven armies, the Varangian Navy makes extensive use of ballistae and other artillery—at least the smaller weapons that can fit on a trireme.

VARANGIAN MECHANICAL WEAPONS

Precision mechanics have military applications. Varangian armies use their own version of the crossbow, though it fires metal bullets rather than bolts. (Oddly, no one yet has built an arrow-shooting crossbow, though Varangian armies use large numbers of self bows.) They don't build Lookshy strongbows either (see *Scroll of Kings*, p. 133), but only because these isolationists have never seen this weapon. Varangian engineers could easily duplicate the "secret weapons" of Lookshy and the Haslanti League if they had working examples... and if the conservative pandits accepted such foreign devices.

Varangian armies also use incendiary grenades (the smallest fired from bullet-bows) as well as every sort of artillery, from trebuchets to steam cannon. Astronomical instruments incidentally work very well for targeting cannon and catapults, so Varangia produces some of Creation's best artillerists. See *Scroll of Kings*, pp. 136–140 for details on these weapons.

FOREIGN RELATIONS AND TRADE

Varangian law is set up to limit contact with the rest of Creation. Varangia trades with Chiaroscuro, but has no treaties with it. The Guild and merchants from Chiaroscuro perform most trade with Varangia. A few dozen trading vessels, however, take Varangian goods to locations as distant as the Lap, Arjuf and Port Calin. The crews on these ships are regularly rotated to minimize the exposure to foreign ideas, and sailors may serve on these trading ventures for only one year out of every five. The sailors come from the Varangian navy, for these trading ventures are actually spy missions.

A well-traveled caravan route between the East and South runs through the city-states of Kriss and Talt. Mer-

chants can use this road if they pay the appropriate duties at the border, but they can trade with the Varang only in Kriss and Talt.

A few passes through the southern reaches of the Summer Mountains lead from the Southeastern savannas to southern Varangia, passing by the little-populated southern tip of Harborhead. These routes are little used so far, but the Guild has negotiated rights to use them and pass through all of Varangia—though contact with the people remains limited to the two trading cities.

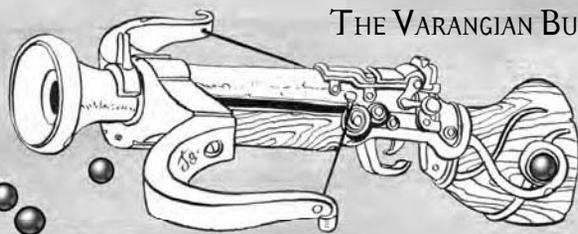
THE TRAVELERS' ROAD

To minimize contact with foreign caravans traveling across this nation, the Varang City-States built a special Travelers' Road running from Kriss to Talt. It does not approach any other Varang cities or towns. Only foreigners and specially licensed government officials may legally travel this road. Travelers must stay at special caravansaries built every 15 miles along the road. Visitors have only the service staff and other travelers for company. The servants at these way stations are all mute and illiterate so they cannot repeat foreign ideas they hear. The house masters' duties include spying on travelers and reporting any unusual or important information to the spies who visit regularly to resupply the caravansaries. The house masters are also regularly interviewed and covertly investigated to make sure that foreign notions have not corrupted them.

THE TRADING CITIES

Of all the Varang City-States, only Talt and Kriss see many foreigners. Their bustling markets deal in goods from throughout Creation. In their large foreigners' districts, outlanders can live without the restrictions of caste. Varangian law forbids foreigners to visit any other cities in the confederation, except for specially authorized representatives from the Realm or the Guild. (Dynasts can go anywhere they want.)

A special subcaste of merchants handles all such foreign commerce; no other Varangians can legally trade with outsiders.



THE VARANGIAN BULLET-BOW

Like a crossbow, a bullet-bow consists of a stock, a curving bowstave and a bowstring drawn back by a lever or crank mechanism. The stock carries a barrel for the bullet, however, with a gap for the string. Certain other details of construction mean that bullet-bows cannot fire crossbow bolts or vice-versa. Built-in iron sights make the bullet-bow easy to use with minimal training,

making this a favored weapon for part-time troops. Rare, exceptional bullet bows have a rifled barrel, providing greater Range and Accuracy.

Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range	Max Strength	Cost*	Tags
5	+0	4L	1	125	—	*	2, B

* Crossbows are available only in Varangia for a cost of ••. Ammunition cost is negligible.



For a small fee, however, many of these authorized merchants act as fronts for other Varangians who want to buy from or sell to outlanders. Such dodges reinforce the image that many Varangians have of Kriss and Talt as cities tainted by dangerous foreign ideas.

GAMBLING

The Varang love gambling. Some Varangians see gambling as revealing destiny or acceptance of fate. Others (perhaps unconsciously) find release from the relentless predictability and control of Varangian life. The former attitude incidentally blurs the line between gambling and fortune-telling, so, despite the prevalence of astrologers, the Varang also patronize a variety of frauds who claim to divine the future using cards, dice, coins and other methods for generating random results.

In Talt and Kriss, gamblers often seek foreign lovers, companions or partners in high-stakes games. They believe the intrinsic unpredictability of outlanders makes them lucky, or at least gives unlucky gamblers a way to change destiny's evident plan. The imagined connection between foreigners and luck makes the two trading cities also the centers for gambling in Varangia, with nearly as many casinos as caravansaries.

RELATIONS WITH THE REALM

Varangia's rulers do their best to avoid foreign diplomatic entanglements, but they also understand that a wealthy, isolated nation could become easy prey for more powerful opponents. As a result, the Varang City-States ally with the Realm. The Realm's merchants receive lower tariffs and border fees than traders from the Threshold. The Varang government also promises to capture any Realm criminals or Anathema who seek refuge in Varangia.

In return for these modest concessions, the Realm stations small garrisons in Talt and Kriss to assist in their defense. An ambassador from the Realm (*not* a satrap) resides in Yane. While Varang's rulers are determined to remain independent from the Realm, they also find their alliance a useful bulwark against other nations. So far, the Realm finds Varangian furedust, jewels, grain and metalwork an adequate return for their alliance. The Realm navy insists on Varangian sextants and other navigational instruments.

RELATIONS WITH HARBORHEAD

Relations between Varangia and Harborhead are complex and touchy. The two

nations share a long border with no natural barriers. The Varang fear the military ambitions of their eastern neighbor. As a result, many Varangian merchants who travel to Harborhead also act as spies. Those who do not are often interviewed by spies when they return.

The disappearance of the Empress increased Varangian fears of Harborhead aggression. Varangian leaders correctly believe that the Realm's power is the major check on Harborheadite ambition. The Wizarat has not yet adopted a unified policy for dealing with Harborhead beyond collecting as much information as possible and forbidding any city-state from openly attacking the Harborheadites. Instead, each of the city-states works out its own policy.

Talt, located a few dozen miles from the border with Harborhead, has regular commerce with that nation. Talt's rulers try to increase the volume of this trade and offer Harborheadite merchants especially good deals, in hopes they can persuade the aggressive Harborheadites that commerce brings greater rewards than invasion.

Other city-states send agents provocateurs who encourage dissidents to rebel against the Realm in hopes of leading the Realm to crush Harborhead. Other spies simply encourage ambitious faction leaders and rebels within Harborhead, in the hopes of keeping that nation busy with a civil war. So far, the latter two efforts yield only minor results. The government of Harborhead has not noticed the infiltrators. A number of city-states (including Jishal and Ulsan) send raiders across the Harborhead border to attack remote villages and capture slaves.

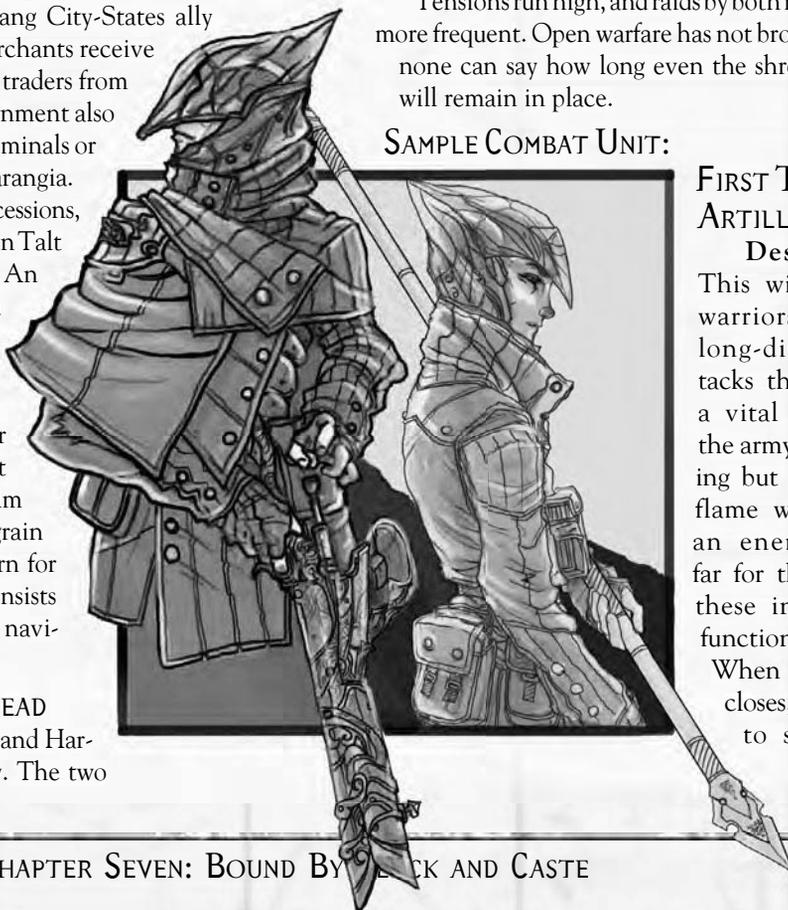
Tensions run high, and raids by both nations grow more frequent. Open warfare has not broken out, but none can say how long even the shreds of peace will remain in place.

SAMPLE COMBAT UNIT:

FIRST TALT ARTILLERY WING

Description:

This wing of 200 warriors provides long-distance attacks that serve as a vital backup to the army's devastating but short-range flame wall. While an enemy is too far for the fusiliers, these infantrymen function as archers. When the enemy closes, they switch to spears and





protect the fusiliers. If necessary, they also protect four pieces of artillery.

See also **Scroll of Kings**, pages 20–21, for another sample combat unit.

Commanding Officer: Winglord Charik

Armor Color: Polished steel and blued steel

Motto: “Talt slays from afar!”

General Makeup: 200 infantry with breastplates, long spears and bullet-bows. Each of the wing’s four talons are also equipped with one horse-drawn light ballista and a war elephant that pulls a heavy steam cannon on a wagon.

Overall Quality: Good

Magnitude: 4

Drill: 4

Close Combat Attack: 2 **Close Combat Damage:** 3
Ranged Combat Attack: 2 **Ranged Combat Damage:** 2
Endurance: 7 **Might:** 0

Armor: 2 (-1 mobility) **Morale:** 3

Formation: This unit operates in combination with a wing of fusiliers. They stay behind the fusiliers and use their bows, ballistae and steam cannon to attack distant targets and attempt to force them to close. The unit fights as a whole and lacks heroes to command subsidiary talons. For special characters, the wing has four relays and four elite artillerists who function as sorcerers. These artillerists usually target the steam cannon against distant foes, then switch to the ballistae as the enemy approaches.

Varangia, a Magnitude 5 Dominion

Military: 3 **Government:** 4 **Culture:** 3

Abilities: Awareness 2 (Anticipate Enemies +3), Bureaucracy 4, Craft 4, Integrity 3 (Secret Police +2), Investigation 3 (Conduct Interviews +2), Occult 2, Performance 1, Presence 1, Stealth 3, War 3 (Secret Weapons +2)

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 2

Limit Break: Conviction **Current Limit:** 5

Willpower: 8

Bonus Points: 25 **External Bonus Points:** 10

Notes: Varangia is a large, wealthy, but relatively isolated confederation of eight city-states. Varangia’s external bonus points come from its alliance with the Realm and are spent on a point of Willpower and a dot of Occult. Its own bonus points are invested in specialties and one dot each of Military, Government, Stealth and War. Conservatism and insistence on doing everything in committee prevent the emergence of savants or sorcerers, with or without legitimacy.

In Limit Break, the rulers become convinced that fate foreordains a new path. Varangia breaks all its old alliances (except with the Realm) and seeks new alliances. The pandits also spend one action reducing one of the dominion’s Attributes through a campaign against the outcastes. This purge may be a paranoid waste of resources, or the outcastes might genuinely be in rebellion—which could, indeed, be one aspect of the Limit Break.

SO THE OLDER MAN SAYS, "A LANTERN? GOOD IDEA, BOY."

"IF I HAD A LANTERN, I COULD FIND MY HORSE AND WE'D RIDE OUT OF HERE."

HAHAHAHA!

AHEM.

HALT RIGHT THERE, IF YOU PLEASE.

WHAT ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO BE?

I'M A CUSTOMS INSPECTOR, SIR. IT IS MY DUTY TO ENSURE THIS PORT'S SAFETY.

RECENTLY, NOTORIOUS LINTHA PIRATES HAVE BEEN SEEN SELLING THEIR WARES HERE.

SATRAP JOR HAS ORDERED ME TO SEE THAT THIS NEVER HAPPENS AGAIN.

NOW, ARE YOU GENTLEMEN - OR ANY OF YOUR CREW - LINTHA PIRATES?

WHO, US?

WHAT KIND OF PIRATES?

GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME. WELCOME TO AN-TENG, GENTLEMEN.



CHAPTER EIGHT

FLOWERS AND SECRETS

The satrapy of An-Teng, between the Fire Mountains and the Great Western Ocean, suffered greatly in the Usurpation because of its loyalty to the Solar Exalted. Then it suffered again in the Great Contagion. An-Teng now seems like a model satrapy: prosperous, placid, utterly subservient to the Realm. And so it is, if you overlook small deviations such as a secret Yozi cult, the people's continued worship of the Golden Lord and the Pale Mistress, and Lintha pirates selling their loot with hardly a pretense of being honest merchants.

The Dynasty does not realize that this soft, submissive country holds many secrets. In the Time of Tumult, the hour approaches when An-Teng reveals its power. How An-Teng will use that power, no one can say, but it is not likely to benefit the Realm.

HISTORY

The mild climate of An-Teng made it a favorite residence and vacation-spot for the Exalted of the Old Realm. The

Chosen of the Incarnae showered blessings on the land and its people. The Solar Deliberative organized the country in a plan that still endures, with separate princes for the high, middle and lowlands. These three nobles answered to a High Queen who represented the nation to the Deliberative.

When the Dragon-Blooded rose in the Usurpation, at least half a dozen Solar Exalted and as many Lunars made their stand in An-Teng. The High Queen, the Three Princes and many of the people supported them, for they knew only the glory and generosity of the Chosen. (Or perhaps that is all the Chosen permitted them to know.) The battles against the usurpers ravaged An-Teng. The victorious Dragon-Blooded slew the royal families of An-Teng and appointed minor nobles in their place. The Tengese learned the lesson that defiance brought death. They planted rice, they bowed to the Dragon-Blooded, and they did not complain.

Through all the Shogunate, the people of An-Teng did as they were told. Yet, the Dragon-Blooded could not convince the Tengese to abandon their national gods, the Golden Lord

and the Pale Mistress. The Tengese bowed, swore obedience, prayed at the fanes of the nascent Immaculate faith... and continued their own ceremonies in secret.

As in the rest of Creation, the Great Contagion slew most of the Tengese. They prayed to the Dragons, the Golden Lord and the Pale Mistress, and were not saved. The Fair Folk touched An-Teng but lightly, however, before the Scarlet Empress scourged them back to the edge of the world.

When the Dragon-Blooded returned to An-Teng, they appointed new princes and told the people to revere the Scarlet Empress as their queen and savior. As always, the Tengese bowed and swore their obedience. Shogunate or Scarlet Empire—it made no difference to them.

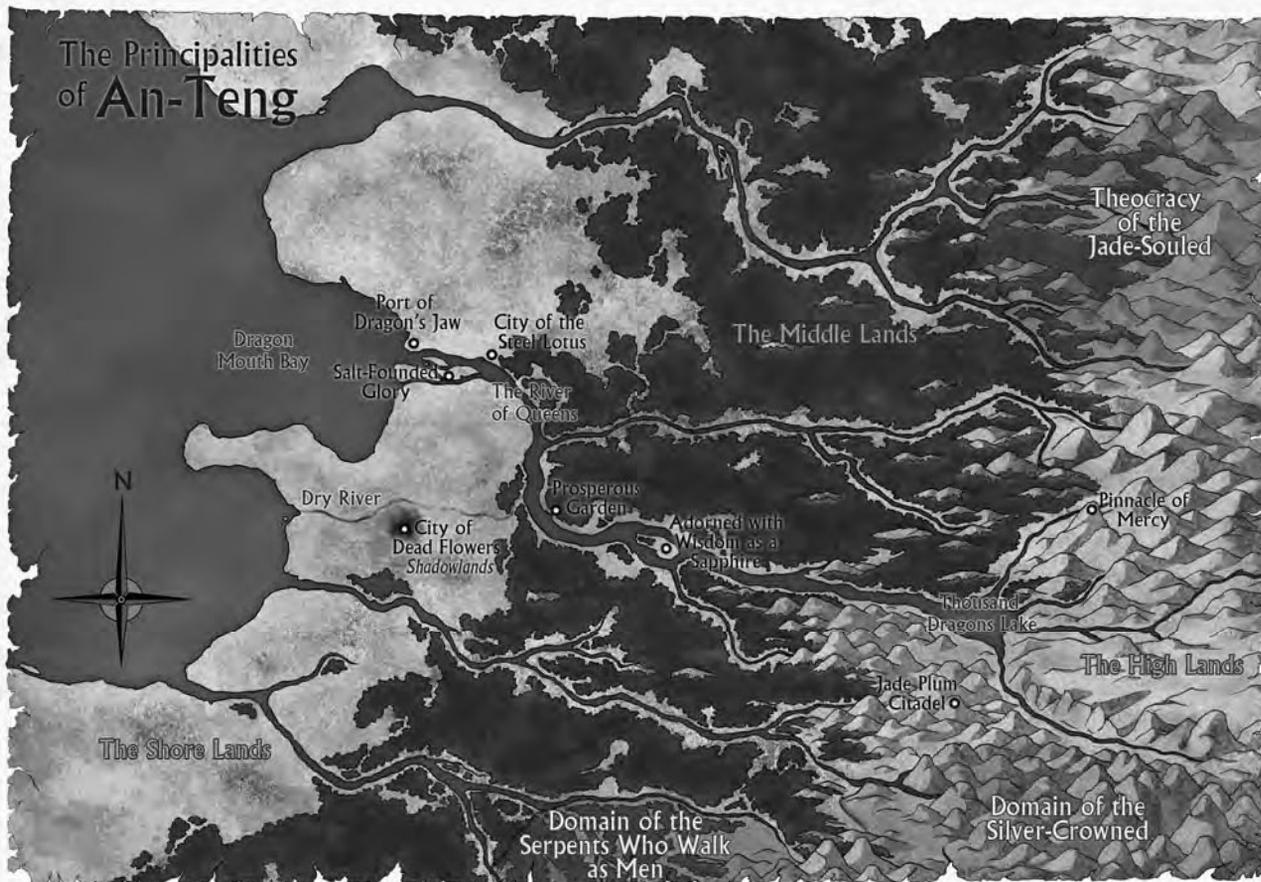
After another five centuries of submission, the Tengese received an unexpected taste of freedom. In RY 578, the Realm went to war against the Anathema Jochim. Three years later, the war became intense enough that the Empress withdrew An-Teng's garrison. A year after that, the seemingly defenseless country was invaded by Sualin, the self-styled Diamond Mandarin of a neighboring kingdom. By RY 584, Sualin was dead and his army in full retreat before elephant-mounted legions that the princes of An-Teng rallied from, apparently, nowhere. For one year after that, the Three Princes ruled their nation as true sovereigns... and then the Anathema Jochim was slain, the great war ended and a Realm fleet sailed into An-Teng's main port. Twenty Dragon-Blooded

called on An-Teng to renew its submission. Faced with the might of the Realm, the princes knelt, and the taste of freedom turned to bitter ashes in Tengese mouths. The few local rebellions did not last long. Once more, the Tengese bowed, and planted rice, and did not complain.

Of late, however, the Tengese grow restive. The Realm takes more and more of their silver, rice and other goods in tribute. Visitors from the Realm, both Exalted and mortal, behave with increasing arrogance, casual cruelty and greed. No one yet has come out and said that the Realm must go, but the people work harder to hide their wealth from the tax collector, knowing that it goes to the Realm. They hide comely sons and daughters when the Dragon-Blooded enter their community, instead of hoping to be rewarded for supplying a pleasing bedmate. They recall the gifts the Celestial Exalted gave them so long ago. They tell stories of the Golden Lord's goodness, and the frightful power of the Pale Mistress... and when some whisper tales of mightier and more dreadful powers that could destroy the lords of the Realm, why, some Tengese listen.

GEOGRAPHY

An-Teng extends about 300 miles north-to-south between the Fire Mountains and the sea. It centers on Dragon's Mouth Bay, where the land's principle waterway, the River of Queens, meets the Great Western Ocean. Many other rivers





flow down from the mountains. Unlike the rest of the South, An-Teng seldom worries about drought. Indeed, flooding is more often a problem. The land further divides into three parallel strips, each with its own distinctive character.

THE HIGH LANDS

The high peaks and foothills of the Fire Mountains form the High Lands. The highest peak, the Pinnacle of Mercy, holds the glittering palace-fortress of the Golden Lord. Tales say that a smaller peak attached to that eminence is actually a great dragon that turned to stone long ago.

This region has the mildest, coolest climate in An-Teng. The High Lands have no cities. Even the High Prince's capital, the Jade Plum Citadel, is merely a good-sized town of 60,000. Half the townsfolk live in the apartment-towers of the Citadel itself. New buildings occupy ancient foundations that suggest the Jade Plum Citadel was once much larger. Only the High Prince's palace still bears a covering of darkly gleaming onyx.

The valleys of small rivers run between the massifs of the Firepeaks; the High Land folk terrace the valley walls for their farms. Several rivers join at Thousand Dragons Lake, whence the River of Queens flows down toward the Middle Lands. Most of the region's commerce happens on the shores of Thousand Dragons Lake.

All of An-Teng's mining takes place in the High Lands. The peaks supply diamonds, rubies, sapphire, topaz, iron and gold—but mostly silver. Everyone in the High Lands can afford a silver earring or bangle. (They believe that wearing silver protects them from evil spirits.) The farms of the High Lands produce fruit, millet, vegetables, spices, betel-nut, hemp and its by-product hashish. Widespread use of the latter two commodities make High Lands folk notably mellow. The High Lands' climate is also ideal for tea, and tea plantations extend for miles along the mountain slopes. The Realm's satrap pressures the region's nobles to extend the plantations at the expense of family farms.

CANALS

An-Teng has more canals than roads. The rivers and rains give plenty of water to fill them. The canals link the rivers to form a grid of waterways throughout the Shore Lands and Middle Lands. Even the High Lands have some canals left from the First Age. Some canals tunnel through mountains or cross valleys on arcades of strong masonry piers that reach more than 100 yards high. A small fraction of An-Teng's population lives on the rivers and canals, spending their lives and making a living by guiding cargo flatboats through the network. Since the canal-folk have no fixed, ancestral abodes, other Tengese do not trust them and tell many rumors about their supposedly strange and sinister customs.

THE MIDDLE LANDS

Below the foothills of the Fire Mountains extends a wide piedmont of low hills, plains and river valleys. Every Season of Water, these valleys flood from heavy rains in the Fire Mountains, and so the valley-folk build their homes on stilts.

The Forest of Compassion, a tongue of the Silent Crescent jungle that forms An-Teng's southern border, fills much of the province. The river valleys, however, are cleared of forest and devoted to intensive cultivation of rice and cotton. Forestry is the third great industry of the Middle Lands. The Tengese move logs using elephants that they capture in the forest and tame. This use of elephants is one of the most distinctive features of An-Teng's culture.

The fourth industry is silk. As the Tengese clear the forest, mulberry plantations take its place. Only wealthy Tengese can afford silken clothing, though. Most of the silk goes to the Realm in tribute or to foreign trade.

As it flows down from the High Lands, the River of Queens meets the city called Adorned with Wisdom as a Sapphire—or just Sapphire, in ordinary speech. This city includes a great deal of Old Realm architecture. Many savants gather in Sapphire, where they run more than a dozen schools. Here, youths from throughout An-Teng enjoy living apart from their all-controlling families. Sometimes they also find time to study subjects such as astronomy, astrology, scientific agronomy, poetry, history, architecture, applied theology, political economy and business administration. Students can learn much more about An-Teng's glorious past than the Scarlet Dynasty might like. Nationalism runs high among the students as a result. Since the Dragon-Blooded who come to Sapphire chiefly consist of visiting savants searching for First Age lore, however, the students often have quite a good impression of the Scarlet Dynasty itself.

Farther downstream, the River of Queens flows through Prosperous Garden, the capital for the Prince of the Middle Lands. In this city of canals, all but the poorest folk cultivate a small garden. Local tradition says that serving vegetables you grew yourself is a fine way to honor guests. The canal-cut fields that extend around the city grow flowers as well as rice and other staples. At a population of 100,000, Prosperous Garden is the largest city in the Middle Lands.

THE SHORE LANDS

An-Teng's final province is a strip along the coast, nowhere more than 100 miles wide. The Shore Lands are extremely flat. Much of the land reaches no more than 10 feet above sea level and consists of flood plains for An-Teng's many rivers, with low hills on the southern shore of Dragon's Mouth Bay.

In the Old Realm, the alluvial soil of the Shore Lands produced five crops a year. It became the most densely populated part of An-Teng. That meant the province suffered the most in the Usurpation. Storms now drive the sea back

OLD REALM MANSES

The Celestial Exalted who lived in An-Teng left the country with many manses, some of them extremely powerful. Naturally, the Dragon-Blooded took over most of them—the ones not destroyed in the fighting, at least. Some they missed, however, due to the manses' unusual locations, such as the manse at the bottom of Thousand Dragons Lake. Other manses were lost in the wake of the Great Contagion, because no one survived who knew about them. In particular, the Forest of Compassion hides several long-forgotten manses—a few of them pristine, others damaged but repairable. The forest also conceals several tombs the Dragon-Blooded built to appease the Celestial Exalted they slew.

through the rivers and canals, poisoning the land with salt and turning waters brackish. Some of the resulting mangrove swamps and bayous are productive enough if you like crawdads, muskrat and alligator, but not much of the Shore Lands are good for farming anymore. Some regions support orchards of persimmon, starfruit and blood oranges. A variety of opium poppy was recently found to grow well in these regions. Shore Land nobles now face pressure to convert their orchards, or the farms of their tenants, into poppy plantations.

Nevertheless, most of An-Teng's trade goes through the Shore Lands, especially at the three port cities on Dragon's Mouth Bay and the River of Queens: Dragon's Jaw, Salt-Founded Glory and the City of the Steel Lotus. A fair bit of smuggling takes place all along the coast too. Small, shallow-draft boats can follow rivers and canals almost anywhere in the Shore Lands, making every village a potential smugglers' port.

Dragon's Jaw sprawls where the main branch of the River of Queens meets Dragon's Mouth Bay. This relatively new city handles most of the bulk cargo going to and from An-Teng. It is quite a rough town, full of sailors, cheap whores, warehouses and low dives. The poor and cast-off frequently come to Dragon's Jaw, hoping to find work on the waterfront. Sometimes they find a berth as apprentice sailors. Sometimes they end up chained in a slaver's hold. The Realm's military garrison, a half-strength legion, operates out of Dragon's Jaw.

Salt-Founded Glory dates back to the Old Realm, though none of the buildings are more than a few centuries old. This capital of the Shore Lands occupies a branch river that splits off the River of Queens. Canals divide the city into blocks and wards. The oldest and most respectable mercantile families all live in Salt-Founded Glory. While Dragon's Jaw handles more cargo, the money all passes through Salt-Founded Glory. The largest and most spectacular buildings are the Shore Prince's palace and a newly enlarged and refurbished Immaculate temple. Compared to the Immaculate shrine, the old temple of the Golden Lord looks a bit shabby.

The City of the Steel Lotus functions as the overall capital of An-Teng and seat of the Realm's satrap. It's built where the River of Queens flows past a low rise, near the border with the Middle Lands. At all times, at least a few dozen Dragon-Blooded live in the city or are passing through, with hundreds of patricians from the Great Houses. The vast wealth these visitors can bestow results in whole neighborhoods of businesses eager to supply them with courtesans, fine dining, jewelry, opulent clothing or whatever else they desire.

At the center of the city rises the Palace of the Threefold Magnificence, all of gilded teak, lapis and mother-of-pearl, with wings for each of the Three Princes. Compared to it, the satrap's residence seems quite modest. The residence, however, is a level-3 Water-aspected manse, while the Palace is just a fancy house. Everyone who's anyone knows that five minutes with Ragara Soras Jor, Satrap of An-Teng, is worth more than an hour with any of the princes.

Between the Royal District and the Market District lie the villas and palaces of various magnates, nobles and Dragon-Blooded. Neighborhoods of shops and middle-class dwellings surround this core of wealth and power. A halo

CITY OF DEAD FLOWERS

The Shore Lands also hold the former capital of An-Teng, the City of Flowers. The battles of the Usurpation caused extensive damage and slew tens of thousands of inhabitants. The Dragon-Blooded tried to prevent shadowland formation by dumping salty sea-mud in the canals. That killed the last of the flowers but the city still became a shadowland. As a final measure, the Shogunate detoured the River of Queens along a canal to its present mouth, more than 100 miles from its original outlet.

After more than a millennium, the broken buildings of the City of Dead Flowers have neither rotted nor sunk into the soggy ground. Stagnant, brackish water still fills the canals. Shrines to the Pale Mistress ring the ruined city, in hopes that she will prevent its evil from spreading. Traveling entertainers perform shadow plays and dances at the border to appease the ghosts.

Some mortals do live in the City of Dead Flowers. Peasants forced off their land or bastards with no family to claim them might move to the shadowland from sheer desperation. Brave (or foolish) folk search the ruins and dicker with ghosts in hopes of finding lost treasures from the Old Realm. Even braver or more foolish people seek knowledge from the ghosts, whether hoping to recover lost science, art and culture or seeking forbidden power for themselves. Shatterer of the Way, a deathknight serving the Deathlord called the First and Forsaken Lion, occupies the ancient Palace of the Lotus at the city center. He seeks to plumb the city's mysteries and claim the shadowland as an outpost for his master.



of slums for common workers (and the poor in search of work) grows steadily. In another several years, the City of the Steel Lotus will surely surpass Salt-Founded Glory as An-Teng's largest city.

SOCIETY AND FAMILY

To the Tengese, people who lack a family are not people (or, rather, are not *Tengese*). They expect every adult to marry and have children, contributing to an extended family that can trace its lineage through centuries—or in rare cases, millennia. In Tengese law and custom, many rights inhere in the family, not the individual. For instance, people don't own land, families do. Elders arrange marriages for the family's benefit, to acquire property, business connections, prestige or other assets—not for love. Of course, elders seldom force marriage on couples who manifestly hate each other.

Tengese custom opens most occupations to both men and women. Women, however, receive certain privileges when it comes to family continuity and property. Men leave the family of their birth and join their wife's family. Men often seem to dominate in running a business or working a farm, but only with the permission of their wives—or more likely, their wives' grandmothers. For instance, a noble might seem to rule his estate as an unchallenged despot, but at a word from his wife, the peasants would throw him out. An-Teng's princes form a limited exception to this rule, but only because the Scarlet Empress is the titular matriarch of the royal family.

Her disappearance leaves the Tengese unsure how the next generation of princes could legitimately take power.

Women receive this privilege because descent is provable only through the female line. Tengese take a fairly casual attitude toward sex (including the genders of the participants), as long as it happens out of the public eye and the family doesn't object. An-Teng both produces and consumes large quantities of maiden tea, however, for the Tengese are deadly serious about the legitimacy of children. A married woman might get away with bearing a child that is not her husband's if her elders don't object and no one else knows about it. An unmarried woman who bears a child, however, brings disgrace upon herself and her family. Wealthy families might hide the birth and leave the baby on an altar to the Pale Mistress, its survival left to fate and the priests of the goddess. Other families might demand the unwed mother kill herself to expiate her shame. If she does not do so, they expel her or kill her themselves. The family may also try to kill the father, if they can identify him.

The unfortunate children, or other Tengese expelled from their families, form the misbegotten—the lowest of the low, spat upon by thieves and beggars. The misbegotten gather in the cities. They have few options. Fallen women can become the lowest class of prostitute or join special brothels (called Those Who Serve the Radiance) that service the most perverse appetites of the Dragon-Blooded. In the great cities, some misbegotten manage to hide their origins and





become dung-haulers, corpse-washers and other unpleasant occupations. Other misbegotten try to form families of their own, which all other Tengese treat with scorn.

The members of an extended family often share their occupation: all rice-farmers, all coopers, all beggars who feign diseases and so on. Some families include two or three occupations, such as a family where the men herd water-buffalo and the women tan hides and make cheese. Tengese who want to take up a new occupation need the permission of their family elders if they want to avoid scandal and expulsion. Success could lead to the entrepreneur breaking off to found a new family—or the whole family switching occupations to batten on one relative’s good fortune. Priesthood is a notable exception, for family elders may not gainsay the will of the gods. Therefore, religion offers a rare outlet for Tengese who want to escape their families.

Outsiders cannot miss An-Teng’s rigid social hierarchy of the royal family, the nobility, commoners and the underclass of criminals, prostitutes and the disgraced. Less obvious are the status differences between families. The old noble families carry more prestige than the newer aristocrats who attained their rank through wealth. Commoner families grade themselves based on wealth, antiquity, the prestige of their occupations, deeds of ancestors and factors that remain wholly obscure to people not born to An-Teng. Marriages happen only between families of similar rank (and often the same occupation). Nobles do not marry commoners, ever.

FOREIGNERS

Sensible Tengese accept that they cannot hold ignorant foreigners to the same standards they expect from their countrymen. Foreigners who at least try to respect Tengese customs can eventually win some degree of acceptance. Tengese shopkeepers stop overcharging them.

A rude foreigner gets nowhere. The Tengese smile at him, nod agreement to whatever the boor says, and devise an excuse to leave or send the foreigner somewhere else. Rich, high-ranking or otherwise powerful and dangerous foreigners are often stonewalled and denied in the guise of deference. “It would be unseemly and a stain upon Your Eminence’s grandeur to be served by one so wretched as this humble one. Please, may Your Very Great Eminence give permission for this humble one to seek someone worthier to assist Your Most Worshipful Eminence...”

The Dragon-Blooded stand above most restrictions. If an Exalt from the Realm wants something, the Tengese give it to her. Like gods, the Exalted are not gainsaid. Like natural disasters, they are endured until they go away. Their bastards are raised as part of the family unless they Exalt, in which case they go to the satrap for training in the Realm.

GOVERNMENT

An-Teng is a confederation of three principalities united under the Realm’s satrap. Each prince holds equal rank and administers his province as he pleases, subject to two vetoes: one from the satrap, and one from the other two

princes acting together. Unspoken (but clearly understood) is the influence of the Three Princes’ older female relatives. Officially, An-Teng has three royal families. Actually, centuries of intermarriage merged the three families into one clan—albeit one with no clear matriarch—and the Three Princes are all cousins.

Beneath the princes come the noble families that rule the towns and own the mines and plantations. An-Teng’s old nobility cultivates pretensions of scholarship (particularly in the Middle Lands, inspired by Sapphire’s scholastic tradition). Sufficiently wealthy merchants can buy noble rank, but they remain parvenus in the estimation of other Tengese.

Each prince appoints 10 judges. Six of these judges permanently reside in various towns or cities. The other four travel a regular circuit through the villages or go where the prince directs them. A judge’s verdict in a trial can be appealed to the prince if a person has some way to reach the prince’s ear. An-Teng’s law has no significant peculiarities. Assault, theft, rape and murder are crimes, the same as just about everywhere else. Civil disputes, however, go to trial only if the grandmothers of the two families cannot negotiate a settlement. This rarely happens, since the Tengese consider it shameful to squabble in public.

IMPORTANT INDIVIDUALS

Prince Laxhander of the Glorious Reign (his own chosen epithet) rules the Shore Lands. The youngest of the Three Princes idolizes the Dragon-Blooded and the Realm, to the point of dropping hints to visiting Dynasts that they may slake their lusts on members of his family. Laxhander hopes that resulting offspring will Exalt and so gain him entrance by proxy to a Great House. Laxhander also devoutly follows the Immaculate Philosophy, promotes the Order and scorns the Golden Lord and Pale Mistress. He spends as much time as possible in the City of the Steel Lotus, currying favor with the satrap. His own mother plans to depose Laxhander as soon as relations with the Realm stabilize.

Prince Kiotaran (no epithet) rules the Middle Lands. He aggressively promotes Prosperous Garden as a trade hub within An-Teng, largely at the insistence of his wife, Golden Slipper. Kiotaran would rather spend his time studying the stars (and has achieved the Adept Degree in the Art of Astrology). Prince Kiotaran also adheres firmly to tradition in his reverence for the Golden Lord and fear of the Pale Mistress. Both deities have large and well-maintained temples in Prosperous Garden, while the Immaculate shrine remains small and poor. Kiotaran also seeks Varangian teachers, texts and instruments to give Sapphire a world-class academy for astrological research.

Prince Josei of Notable Genius at least partly deserves his self-bestowed title thanks to his wide (if scattershot) erudition, including fluency in four languages. The oldest prince shows the least obsequious manner to visiting Dragon-Blooded, though the High Lands also receive the fewest visitors from the Realm. Josei’s wife, Dawning Snow, died last year when



she fell down a flight of stairs. Since no witnesses claim to have seen this accident, Josei suspects foul play and makes forensic inquisition his latest field of study. His daughter, Midnight Pearl, now handles much of the palace administration and wins respect for her quiet competence and ability to keep the peace as well as the account-books.

General Shuri the Scarlet, commander of the garrison at Dragon's Jaw, treats his post in An-Teng as a long-deserved reward. This scion of a minor Ledaal line and former captain in the Vermilion Legion retains both the prodigious appetite for debauchery that got him forced into the military and the combat and command skills that he developed therein. General Shuri officially wields the armed might of the Realm to make sure that An-Teng stays loyal and, if it should become necessary, repel any invasion of the satrapy. Unofficially, House Ledaal bids him to cultivate alliances in An-Teng's mercantile class, assess any mystical assets the country might contain and prevent rival Houses from expanding their influence.

Ragara Soras Jor, Satrap of An-Teng, calculates and collects the Realm's tribute from the Three Princes. He also mediates disputes between them and speaks for the Realm's interests. More precisely, he speaks for *House Ragara's* interests. His House placed Jor in An-Teng with the express purpose of pushing out agents of the other Great Houses. Satrap Jor is at once a smooth negotiator, a shrewd businessman and a ruthless spymaster. He has gone so far as to acquire covert connections with the Lintha Family—all through cutouts, of course, to keep everything deniable. Jor uses the Lintha to harass or murder people who get in his way, while building a list of Lintha he can capture and execute to burnish his credentials as a champion of the Realm's law and order.

Not everything is going Satrap Jor's way, though. He finds General Shuri both clumsy and boorish, but he has years of a head start in lining up deals for his House. Shuri also controls the Realm's entire military presence in An-Teng, which rather limits what Jor can do against him. Jor settles for periodically cutting the garrison's budget (forcing Shuri to waste time either arguing to convince him to restore it or seeking alternative funding) and punishing trivial breaches in procedure and protocol with letters of reprimand (that have never achieved anything in the history of the Realm).

Making matters worse for Jor, the Three Princes sometimes seem bent on conflicts that make no rational sense and profit no one. They expend political (and literal) capital to defend local heresies. When Jor wants to send the legion to subdue breakaway provinces, they obstinately insist he must not—even when his doing so would add to their domains! At times they even manage to place him in politically embarrassing situations, apparently just to prove they can.

Lastly, the more the satrap learns about the Lintha, the more erratic they seem as pawns. Jor thought they were simply vicious, greedy, brutal, cunning pirates and smugglers. Now he realizes they are not like other pirates. The Lintha do not simply want to kill people and take their stuff. They are crazy, *bad crazy*, in ways that Jor finds he doesn't want to understand.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

An-Teng's chief relationship is, of course, with the Realm. Beyond that subservient, tributary role, however, An-Teng interacts with a number of other regional powers.

The Lap trades extensively with An-Teng, though it lies hundreds of miles away on the other side of the Fire Mountains. The two countries grow different foodstuffs. The statue-borne city-state also buys metals from the High Lands. Considering their separation, neither country has the slightest reason to fear the other. An-Teng's rice also finds its way to Southern countries as distant as Chiaroscuro, and the principality receives other Southern goods in return. Heading northwest, An-Teng trades with Wavecrest in a similar manner. Realm merchants or the Guild often act as middlemen for this commerce, taking shares of the profits.

THE LINTHA CONNECTION

Centuries of satraps, legion generals and naval commanders have failed to end one of An-Teng's commercial partnerships. They *know* that Lintha pirate ships frequently dock at Dragon's Jaw (and even sometimes at Salt-Founded Glory). An-Teng's ports receive much of the booty the pirates seize, and An-Teng's merchants fence it so the Lintha (or their agents) can shop in legitimate markets.

The Lintha make only cursory efforts to disguise their ships with false flags and forged registries. Whenever the Realm officials tell the Shore Prince or port authorities to crack down, the Tengese smile, promise strict diligence—and do nothing. When the legion or Water Fleet take matters into their own hands, half the time they find the Lintha ship really does have a “legitimate businessman” of Wavecrest, Chiaroscuro, the Guild or further afield on board, and they just created a diplomatic incident.

The Tengese have no love of pirates in general or the Lintha in particular (and certainly do not endorse the demon pirates' odder customs). As long as An-Teng gives the Lintha a safe place to sell their loot, though, the Lintha don't attack An-Teng.

SPLINTER STATES

An-Teng has a fringe of smaller societies that range from barbarian tribes to statelets splintered from An-Teng itself. Some are outright vassals. Others preserve a show of independence as allies. Still others are hostile but curbed by the threat of retribution from the Realm's resident legion.

THEOCRACY OF THE JADE-SOULED

This province covers about 75 square miles in the northern High Lands. Fifty-some years ago, a group of noble families banded together to declare themselves a theocracy, worshiping the Dragon-Blooded and praying for them to intercede with the Immaculate Dragons. These nobles have little to no experience with the Dragon-Blooded. Their picture of the Scarlet Dynasty comes from Immaculate texts and missionaries.



The Theocracy has no mines or farmlands of any special value, so Prince Josei bides his time. He dares not attack—resident Dynasts might take it as an insult—but he does what he can to isolate the rebel nobles from commerce, hoping to impoverish the splinter state so it collapses on its own. Slender Leaf, the elderly matriarch of the Theocracy, so far fails to interest any Dragon-Blooded in her plan to build a gold-roofed Immaculate monastery or, indeed, simply to bless the Theocracy with a visit.

DWELLING OF THE SERPENTS WHO WALK LIKE MEN

South of the Middle Lands live the descendants of an ancient colony of snakemen. They kept to themselves after the Usurpation, along with the regular humans who also served their Lunar mother. By now, they are far more human than serpent. Rather than beastmen, Tengese think these folk have a touch of divine ancestry.

The nobles of the Serpents Who Walk Like Men are all tall and slim, slit-eyed, with long nails, long, thick hair and scales along their cheeks and the backs of their arms. The serpentine traits make them seem a bit exotic, without compromising their grace and beauty. Commoners merely show slit-eyes and the occasional patch of scales.

The enclave covers some 50 square miles. The Serpents Who Walk Like Men behave even more formally than other Tengese, and without any conspicuous displays of humility.

Their oddest custom is that men and women live apart, in single-sex households. Marriages last only for one year, and only for producing children to continue their race. They receive guests courteously and treat them as visiting nobles, but expect them to observe the same rigid gender separation. Their nobles consider dueling the proper way to avenge any insult to their sensibilities.

DOMAIN OF THE SILVER-CROWNED

This province occupies a bleak and windswept strip of the southern High Lands. After the Usurpation, the Dragon-Blooded gave this land to Lady Ivory Cup on condition that she and her descendants watch for evil influences from the Solar Anathema. That's the story the Silver-Crowned believe, anyway.

Fifteen centuries later, all the people of this little province bleach their hair white to honor their founder. They mine iron, work the fields and train for war in case the Anathema or their servants return. The Domain trades only for the necessities of life; they make jewelry only from steel.

Young adults undergo ferocious tests (with no real divinatory power at all) to determine whether they are fated to betray the land to the Anathema. Those who fail have their throats cut. The Silver-Crowned also kill travelers who cannot show a legitimate reason for their presence, as they might be spies of the Anathema.



No one sees Anathema influence in the Domain of the Silver-Crowned. A shadowland grows near the main village where the Silver-Crowned perform the executions and dump the bodies, however. Ghosts whisper in the night, as ignorant as the living but convinced they are destined to serve an evil power of the Anathema.

CONVENTIONAL MILITARY POWER

Officially, An-Teng has no military and does not need one. It relies on the Realm instead. An-Teng suffers the occasional peasant revolt, outbreak of banditry or even minor invasion from a neighboring country or barbarian tribe, but the Realm garrison easily deals with such small, local disruptions. Legionnaires think of assignment to An-Teng as a paid vacation. Not only does the legion in residence outnumber and overpower any threat it has faced in the Second Age, but dozens of Dragon-Blooded are in the country at all times, whether with the legion or on vacation. On top of this, the Realm's Water Fleet patrols the sea near An-Teng, and battle groups frequently stop at Dragon's Jaw.

Nevertheless, An-Teng has soldiers: the bodyguards of the country's nobles. Each prince has an "army" of bodyguards numbering no more than 500 soldiers. Nobles have 10 to 100 bodyguards, depending on their rank. The guards of the nobility practice combat to protect their masters from bandits and such ilk, but they have little experience fighting in any unit larger than a scale. Their drills are ancient ritual, performed for a show of force rather than the real thing. If necessary, the Three Princes can draft all these bodyguards to form an army, as they did to resist Sualin—the only war An-Teng has fought since the Usurpation.

ARSENAL

Most Tengese have no weapons except the tools they use in everyday life: axes, machetes, knives, scythes, grain-flails and the like. (Such weapons would have lower Accuracy and Damage than the weapons described in **Exalted**, **Scroll of the Monk** or **Scroll of Kings**.) People who *do* own weapons generally use weapons developed from everyday implements, such as chopping swords, nunchaku or polearms. They also have self bows and spears for hunting. The elite bodyguards, however, often carry the unusual weapon called the spread-the-water knife (see **Scroll of the Monk**, p. 157). An-Teng has an ancient, formalized style of combat using this weapon whose practice is considered an indispensable achievement for the upper-class warrior.

An-Teng does not produce firedust weapons or any form of artillery. The country does, however, have a large population of tamed elephants used in forestry, as draft animals and for other purposes. If war did come to An-Teng, the country's Three Princes could recruit hundreds of elephants for a *very* heavy cavalry.

DEFENSE

An-Teng's cities have little fortification: nothing more than berms or stone walls no more than three yards high.

Several cities have canals instead of main streets, though, breaking them into moat-encircled neighborhoods connected by bridges one can easily defend or destroy.

More importantly, perhaps, the people of An-Teng don't like foreigners. They know how to submit to a greater power, but they also know how to obstruct a greater power through sabotage, delay or (in extreme cases) poisonous snakes that somehow find their way into an invading commander's bed or bath. They keep in practice at the expense of foreigners who make themselves particularly obnoxious. An invader would likely find An-Teng easy to conquer but difficult to rule without a cadre of native collaborators.

An-Teng's greatest defenses, however, are hidden. The nation actually has far greater military power than anyone realizes—including the Tengese themselves. All these special assets are connected in some way with the supernatural side of this ancient, god-haunted land.

RELIGION AND THE SUPERNATURAL

For seven centuries, the Immaculate Order has proselytized the people of An-Teng. Every important city or town sports a shrine. The Immaculates enjoy an appearance of success among Tengese who depend on the Realm for their livelihood, such as the sutlers who provision the resident legion. If a community's noble promotes the Immaculate faith, the people worship as they are told. Nevertheless, the Tengese stubbornly persist in worshiping two powerful deities who reside in their country: the Golden Lord and the Pale Mistress.

THE GOLDEN LORD

The Golden Lord lives in a magnificent temple-palace atop the Pinnacle of Mercy, the highest peak in An-Teng. Hundreds of priests attend the Golden Lord and minister to pilgrims. The way is long, hard and dangerous, so would-be pilgrims need courage and unshakable piety.

The Tengese regard the Golden Lord as the god of everything they value: order, decorum, honesty, doing one's duty and justice tempered by compassion. When pious Tengese believe that mortal justice has failed or cannot resolve a dispute, they beg the Golden Lord to render a summary judgement. At least once a decade, the Golden Lord descends from the Pinnacle of Mercy to advise one or another of the princes. Failure to heed his counsel always results in disaster.

While Tengese sacrifice incense and flowers to the Golden Lord in temples adorned with gold and ivory, his priests say the offering he likes best is a life well lived. Any time someone makes a conscious effort to tell the truth, provide an equitable deal or place the good of society above her own, she can dedicate the act to the Golden Lord as a prayer.

THE PALE MISTRESS

An-Teng's second god is the Pale Mistress. This ghastly deity stands for everything opposite to the Golden Lord:



darkness, chaos, selfishness and crime. Where she walks, drought, disease and disaster follow. Her retinue, the dancing horrors called the kaleyī, prey on children and pregnant women. She dwells in an otherworldly network of caves with outlets throughout the Shore Lands. When she walks the night, accompanied by the sound of iron gongs and the gibbers and howls of the kaleyī, the Tengese hide indoors and pray for the Golden Lord to protect them.

Shrines of the Pale Mistress range from sepulchral pagodas of carved ebony, hung with white silk rags, to shacks of driftwood bound together with cords of corpse-hair. In all public shrines, respectable Tengese pray only that the Pale Mistress does *not* walk among them with her gifts of chaos, misery and misfortune. If war brings chaos, misery and misfortune anyway, the Tengese pray for the Pale Mistress to defend her prerogatives and lay her curse on the invaders instead.

In secret, Tengese sometimes pray to the Pale Mistress for boons they cannot legitimately obtain: revenge, the destruction of a rival, the death of a burdensome grandmother, a fortune illicitly obtained. They know that the Pale Mistress grants such requests only in the way that causes the greatest misery for An-Teng. A few Tengese form secret cults of the Pale Mistress and worship her throughout their lives. They regard their eventual fate, to be taken at life's end to caper and howl among the kaleyī, as a reward.

THE SEVEN-STRANDED VINE

The Immaculates know all about Tengese worship of the Golden Lord and the Pale Mistress. They do not know that An-Teng also holds a spreading cult of the Yozi called She Who Lives in Her Name. This cult, the Seven-Stranded Vine, appeals both to the Tengese love of order and to the long-suppressed anger at domination by the Realm. The Yozi's priests tell their followers that She Who Lives in Her Name established the hierarchies of Creation and that through her, the cult can expel the Realm and restore An-Teng to its ancient order, when everyone knew their place. They even promise to restore the ancient royal family with a new High Queen and princes.

While that final claim might seem fantastic (even for the cult of a Demon Prince), it is quite genuine. The leaders of the Seven-Stranded Vine descend from two members of the ancient royal family who escaped the Usurpation. At some point (no mortal now knows), their descendants turned to incest to preserve their bloodline—and to She Who Lives in Her Name.

GHOSTS

On top of everything else, the ancestor cult flourishes in An-Teng. People don't leave their families just because they die. Every family with any pretense of respectability keeps a household shrine where they make small offerings to scrolls or tablets bearing the names of their ancestors. In return, ancestral ghosts do what they can to advise and assist their mortal descendants. Sometimes, this assistance results in centuries-long vendettas as two ghosts continue

their own disputes through their families. Protective ghosts might also try to harass enemies of their descendants, even if the ghosts have no personal grudge.

If a ghost becomes too aggressive, the Tengese call in exorcists. These thaumaturges practice the Art of the Dead (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**, pp. 133–135) and often have their own ancestral ghosts to assist them. If all else fails, the exorcist carefully sends away his own ghostly aides while all children and pregnant women take refuge in the Golden Lord's shrine. The exorcist then invokes the Pale Mistress. As she walks the mortal world, the queen of disorder rends apart any ghost she meets, even dematerialized ones. A ghost must show epic malevolence, however, for the Tengese to accept the Pale Mistress's rampage as the lesser evil.

ESSENCE-USERS

Any Terrestrials who Exalt in An-Teng are presumed to be bastards of visiting Dragon-Blooded. (The presumption is usually accurate.) These youngsters go to the Realm, where a Great House might adopt them or they are raised to join the Legions or the Immaculate Order. The Tengese would consider it inappropriate to have any Dragon-Blooded of their own. To accept Anathema would be unthinkable dangerous, of course—unless said Celestial Exalted led a rebellion endorsed by the Golden Lord.

An-Teng sees a steady trickle of God-Blooded and Ghost-Blooded mortals, though all such unions are scandalous. (They fall outside properly contracted marriages, even if the family accepts the offspring.) God-Blooded are strongly encouraged to join the Golden Lord's priesthood, while Ghost-Blooded have few legitimate occupations beyond priesthood of the Pale Mistress.

The Realm forbids mortal Tengese to enlighten their Essence or ask other beings to grant this boon. Satraps vary in how strictly they insist upon this prohibition. Ragara Soras Jor doesn't care much. Naturally, forbidden cults flout this law. All the leaders of the Seven-Stranded Vine have demonically enlightened Essence and might know sorcery or supernatural martial arts as well as the Art of Demon Summoning (**Exalted**, p. 138 and **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**, pp. 135–136).

SECRET WEAPONS

The Chosen of the Sun and Moon died or fled An-Teng many centuries ago, but they did not leave the land undefended. Each prince of An-Teng possesses one tremendous magical power that his office inherits from the Old Realm. These occult weapons have stayed secret through the Usurpation, the Great Contagion and multiple changes of dynasty. The Realm never took them from An-Teng or even assigned them to different princes. Several times in history, various Dragon-Blooded discovered these treasures and tried to seize them, but they always ended up back in An-Teng and forgotten by everyone else.

The Sidereal Exalted know why. The ancestor sashes, the animal-commanding masks and the shadow puppeteers carry powerful weavings of destiny akin to the Arcane Fate that occludes the Sidereals themselves. The three secrets are placed to defend An-Teng, and the Loom of Fate will keep them in An-Teng. Unweaving these destinies would be difficult, would offend powerful gods and would unpredictably alter destinies throughout the Southwest. Even the most fervent partisans of the Realm in the Bronze Faction fear the consequences of meddling with the three treasures of An-Teng.

ANCESTOR SASH (ARTIFACT ●●●●)

These five sacred sashes each consist of 20 feet of spun orichalcum and Essence-spider silk, embroidered with innumerable tiny gems to form pictures of the Golden Lord and great princes, queens and heroes from the Old Realm. The wearer wraps the sash many times around his waist and over one shoulder. Traditionally, the five most skilled and trusted bodyguards of the Middle Prince wear the sashes and invoke their power to become Elephant-Riding Ghost

Generals. The sashes do not really have anything to do with ghosts, but they do carry the prowess of An-Teng's long-forgotten heroes.

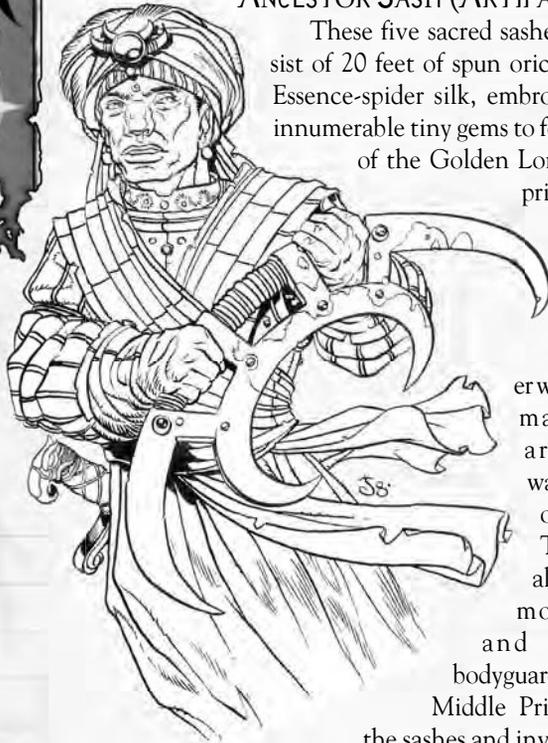
These artifacts work best for un-Exalted mortals. Activating the sash costs a number of Willpower points equal to (4 – wearer's permanent Essence). This number governs many of the sash's benefits. The effects last a full day or until the wearer removes the sash, whichever comes first. The benefits are as follows:

- The wearer's Essence rises to 4. For an Exalted wearer or other Essence-user, calculate her new Essence pool based on this value. An un-Exalted mortal gains a pool of 40 motes, which are all personal Essence, as for a god.
- The wearer's Archery, Athletics, Awareness, Dodge, Integrity, Martial Arts, Melee, Presence, Resistance, Ride, Socialize, Survival, Thrown and War ratings increase by an amount equal to the sash's Willpower cost, to a maximum of 6. The character also gains three (Elephant)

specialties in the Ride Ability, temporarily replacing any other Ride specialties.

- The wearer gains a number of additional -0 and -1 health levels equal to the activation Willpower cost.
- All the wearer's Attributes rise by a value equal to the sash's Willpower cost, to a maximum of 6. The increase in Stamina does not increase the wearer's soak, but...
- The wearer gains additional lethal soak equal to the activation Willpower cost and additional bashing soak of twice that value. This additional soak is added to the wearer's *original* soak totals. The additional soak is considered natural.
- The wearer bleeds, heals and resists disease and poison as an Exalt.
- If the wearer cannot use Charms, she gains the use of the Spirit Charm Principle of Motion and the Lunar Charm First Dexterity Excellency. The wearer can spend a number of motes up to her Valor on the latter Charm.
- The wearer's Motivation temporarily changes to "Defend An-Teng." Wearers often show mannerisms not their own, which are echoes of the personalities of long-dead champions.
- Mortal wearers permanently become heroic mortals, if they were not already. All the other benefits vanish the moment the character doffs the sash.

A character who already has a permanent Essence of 4 or greater gains no benefit from an ancestor sash. Such a character may sacrifice a *dot* of permanent Willpower, however, to invest a portion of her own personality and martial prowess into the sash. Doing so does not appreciably increase a sash's power (they already carry the prowess of many Exalted) but a scene appears on the sash that depicts one of the character's victories in battle.



ANIMAL-COMMANDING MASKS (ARTIFACT ●●●●)

Each of these masks depicts the visage of one of the animals known and respected by the folk of An-Teng: the tiger, the elephant, the ape and several others. Each mask is wrought of bronze, adorned with moonsilver, enamel and jewels.

The Prince of the High Lands loans out the masks of lesser animals to favored nobles but keeps the masks of powerful animals close at hand. The High Prince himself owns the Tiger Lord Mask while his guard commander keeps the Ape Lord Mask. The bearers of the masks are collectively called the Masked Commanders of the Animals.



A mask's wearer can summon and command all animals of the mask's type within 100 miles of his location. The animals regard the Masked Commander as they would a greater animal spirit, readily obeying any command that is not actively suicidal. This power enables the Masked Commanders to assemble mass combat units of animals, though they can find subtler uses as well. (For instance, a horde of monkeys could befoul an army's provisions and baggage.) Wielding this power costs one Willpower point per day.

A Masked Commander can reflexively spend a Willpower point to transform himself into the type of animal the mask depicts. The wearer can do this once per day (or night, if the animal is nocturnal) and stay in the animal's form for a scene. While in animal form, the Masked Commander has the Physical Attributes and related Abilities of the animal or his own, whichever are higher. His Mental and Social Attributes and related Abilities stay the same. Transformed characters can communicate with animals of their type and retain the mask's power of command, though they lose human speech for the duration.

Animal-commanding masks do not affect animal spirits (much less the animal avatars). Such spirits are not intrinsically hostile to Masked Commanders, but they do resent any uses of the masks that result in harm for their type of animal.

SHADOW PUPPETEERS

A few families in the Shore Lands preserve knowledge of a powerful thaumaturgical ritual, handed down from parent to child. Tradition urges them to use their puppet-magic only at the behest of the Shore Prince or the other princes. A powerful, nigh-eternal destiny placed on these families punishes them if they sell their service to anyone else, even as it protects their lineages and their secret. Through shadow plays, these puppeteers send spiritual assassins against the enemies of An-Teng. The ritual comes from the Art of Spirit Beckoning (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**, p. 140). The shadow puppeteers may know other rituals from this art as well, at the Storyteller's option.

Shadow Puppet Murder (3, Intelligence + Performance, 3, 15 minutes): To perform this Procedure, the puppeteers need specially crafted marionettes of the Shore Prince (or whoever directs them), the intended victim and every other person involved in the ceremony, including the puppeteers themselves. Every puppet must be crafted specially and bear an arcane link to the person it represents, such as a bit of hair or spittle. An ancient marionette of featureless black wood stands for the assassin itself.

The rite begins with prayers to the Pale Mistress and the god Wayang, a deputy of the Maiden of Endings. The shadows of the marionettes, cast on a silken screen, play





out the puppeteers receiving their commission and performing a rite to call the assassin. The shadow-assassin travels from the puppeteers' location to the victim. Silhouettes depict locations along the way. The assassin-puppet then clutches the strings of the victim's puppet and uses them as a strangling-cord.

All this happens in reality, just as the puppeteers portray it. The spirit manifests intangibly and travels along the path chosen by the puppeteers. As it approaches the victim, shadows of strings extend from the victim's shadow. The spirit grasps these shadow-strings and strangles the victim's shadow—and the victim feels himself being strangled. An autopsy suggests that a victim died of a heart attack, choked on a bit of food or suffered some other natural death.

The puppeteer's player rolls (Intelligence + Performance), difficulty 3, when the assassin manifests. Multiple puppeteers gain the benefit of limited cooperation (see *Exalted*, p. 125). Each hour thereafter, while the assassin travels, every puppeteer's player must roll (Stamina + Performance), difficulty 2, for their characters to continue the supernaturally fatiguing ritual and maintain control of the assassin. Failing at any of these rolls ends the ritual and sends the assassin-spirit back to its sanctum. Any botch means the spirit is free for one hour to kill as it pleases—preferably the prince who commanded its service, if the spirit can reach him before the hour ends and it must depart Creation.

SHADOW PUPPET ASSASSIN

A shadow puppet assassin looks like a human shadow with no one to cast it as it slides across walls and floors. When it materializes to attack, it peels away from a surface to become a three-dimensional figure, though it looks like a featureless silhouette from every angle. At this moment, the shadows of strings extend from both the spirit and the shadow of its victim, as if both were marionettes. The spirit must come within three yards of its target to attack.

When the assassin-spirit strikes, it gathers the shadow-strings of its victim in its hands and uses them to strangle the target's shadow. As this happens, the victim feels an immaterial garrote around his neck. This combat is resolved as a normal grappling attack, except the spirit and opponent do not need to touch each other. The assassin's strangulation attack inflicts piercing lethal damage. The victim also cannot breathe, which can lead to asphyxiation. (See *Exalted*, p. 130 for rules about holding one's breath.). As the victim struggles, the (Stamina + Resistance) roll against strangulation is difficulty 3. The spirit may also supplement the attack with Charms for even greater effect. Once the victim dies, the assassin dematerializes and returns to its marionette-sanctum, its job complete.

Sanctum: Between evocations, the assassin dwells in a pitch-black room accessed through its marionette. Destroying an assassin's puppet renders its sanctum inaccessible until the puppeteers craft a replacement.

Motivation: Kill

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 6, Stamina 4; Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2; Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 3

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 6, Dodge 5, Integrity 4, Investigation 2, Larceny 4, Martial Arts 4, Presence 2, Stealth 6

Backgrounds: None

Spirit Charms/Special Powers:

Meat of Broken Flesh—The assassin typically adds this Charm to its strangulation attack, to recover some of the Essence it spends.

Essence Plethora (x2)—20 extra motes

Hurry Home—Only to sanctum

Materialize—Costs 40 motes. A shadow puppet assassin cannot materialize in an area where thorough illumination prevents any possibility of shadows. Creating such an area around the spirit forces it to dematerialize. If the assassin can find an area with shadows, though (and has somehow regained enough Essence) is can materialize once more.

Measure the Wind

Paralyze—Whenever a shadow puppet assassin strangles its victim, it spends six motes per action on this Charm. The damage inflicted by the strangulation becomes both a Crippling and Shaping effect. All dice pools for the victim's non-reflexive actions suffer a -2 internal penalty until the spirit's next action, and a slain victim seems to have died from some natural cause. Victims that have a higher Essence than the assassin do not suffer this Charm's effect; neither do characters who are immune to Crippling or Shaping effects. Any target can resist the Charm with a successful (Stamina + Resistance) roll at a -3 external penalty.

Shadow Slide—A dematerialized shadow puppet assassin can move across floors, walls, ceilings or any other surface at its full movement rate, as long as a light source provides shadows without completely illuminating an area.

Silence—Materialized or not, a shadow puppet assassin makes no sound, ever. By spending four motes, it suppresses the victim's ability to cry out for as long as the assassin maintains control of the clinch. The victim can try to make noise by striking or throwing objects, but doing so requires attempting multiple actions, with appropriate penalties both to the roll to control the clinch and the attempt to make noise.

Join Battle: 10

Attacks:

Shadow String Strangle: Speed 6, Accuracy 10, Damage 1L, Parry DV —, Rate 1, Tags P

Soak: 2L/4B

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 7 **Willpower:** 6

Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 70

Other Notes: When dematerialized, a shadow puppet assassin remains faintly visible in Creation, though only as a shadow. Spotting the assassin requires a difficulty 5 (Perception + Awareness) roll that is not reflexive unless the spirit enters a brightly lit area. When the assassin attempts an unexpected attack, the (Wits + Awareness) roll to spot the ambush suffers a -2 external penalty. A dematerialized shadow puppet assassin remains subject to attacks by other immaterial creatures, sorcery, the anima effects of the Exalted and weapons made of the five magical materials.

During the day, a shadow puppet assassin can travel about 10 miles per hour. At night, it travels 20 miles per hour.

SAMPLE COMBAT UNITS

Under normal circumstances, An-Teng has no combat units except the bodyguards of the nobility. If war comes to An-Teng, however, the Three Prince can mobilize large masses of archers mounted on elephants.

NOBLE'S BODYGUARD SCALE

Description: These 60 bodyguards serve a moderately high-ranking noble. They all carry spread-the-water knives with gilded blades. In the event of war, The three Princes gather dozens of these guard units into an army with the same traits except for higher Magnitude.

Commanding Officer: Subahdar Last Emu

Armor Color: Gilded, with noble's mon

Motto: "Halt!"

General Makeup: 56 medium infantry in lamellar armor with wolf's-teeth staves; officers carry spread-the-water knives.

Overall Quality: Average
Magnitude: 2

Drill: 2

Close Combat Attack: 2

Close Combat Damage: 3

Ranged Attack: —

Ranged Damage: —

Endurance: 5 **Might:** 0



Armor: 2 (-2 mobility)

Morale: 3

Formation: The guards fight in relaxed formation, or close formation in palace halls. The subahdar and his assistants are heroic mortals and the assistants are heroes who can take command if needed. The other guards are extras. Gathered in an army, some of the subahdars become heroes and relays.

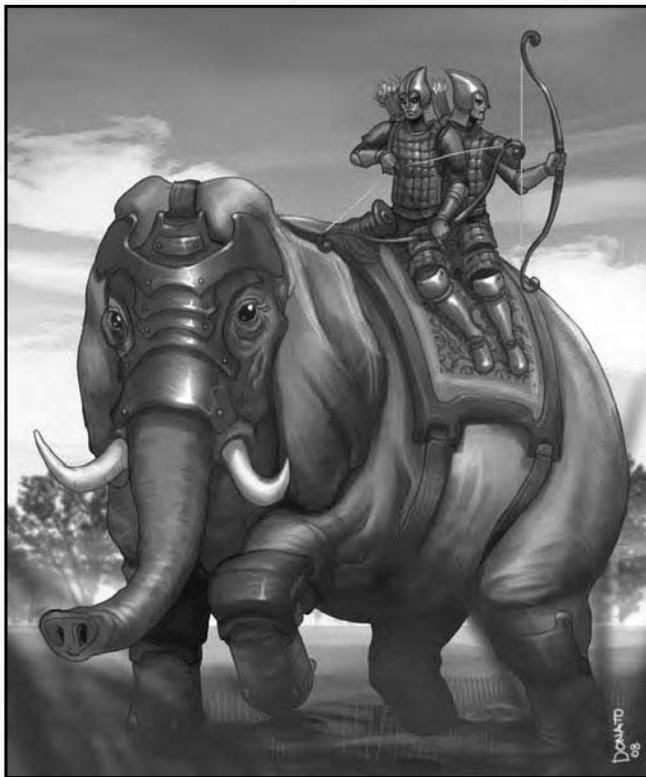
ELEPHANT CAVALRY DRAGON

Description: This cavalry squadron consists of 500 elephants, each carrying three men. One noncombatant guides the elephant while the other two shoot self bows with broadhead arrows. The elephants wear carved wooden headpieces and quilted barding comparable to a buff jacket. The howdah gives the soldiers 50% hard cover; they can be attacked only using weapons with the R tag. The elephants themselves don't attack, they just push their way through anything in their path. This has the effect of a close combat attack, dealing little real damage but enormously disruptive of

enemy formations (hence their high Close Combat Damage). The unit's Endurance, however, is based on the soldiers' Stamina, not the elephants'.

The unit commander, Subahdar Juntao, wears an ancestor sash that turns him into an Elephant-Riding Ghost General with an Essence pool and ridiculously high Attributes and combat Abilities. The Prince of the Middle Lands counts on the strategic genius of the Ghost Generals to make up for the low Magnitude, Drill and combat skill of his troops. This prince can muster several dragons of elephant cavalry.

Commanding Officer: Subahdar Juntao





Armor Color: Plain scarlet

Motto: "Fight for your ancestors, fight for your land!"

General Makeup: One thousand light archers in lamellar armor and pot helmets, armed with self bows; 500 noncombatant drovers and 500 elephants.

Overall Quality: Average

Magnitude: 6

Drill: 1

Close Combat Attack: 2 **Close Combat Damage:** 4

Ranged Attack: 2

Ranged Damage: 2

Endurance: 4 **Might:** 1

Armor: 1 (-1 mobility)

Morale: 3

Formation: The elephants' mass supplies the unit's Might. The elephants cannot manage any formation closer than skirmishing, even under the command of a Ghost General. The soldiers riding the elephants are extras. Unfortunately, the unit has no special characters except its commander and 10 relays. The Elephant-Riding Ghost General's death, or anything that sends the cavalry into rout, sends the elephants blundering through the enemy and An-Teng's army alike—an equal threat to both.

An-Teng, a Magnitude 6 Dominion

Military: 3 **Government:** 4 **Culture:** 4

Abilities: Awareness 5, Bureaucracy 3, Craft 3, Integrity 3 (Tight-Knit Heritage +3), Investigation 3, Occult 2, Performance 3 (Smiling Submission +2), Presence 2, Stealth 5 (Targeted Assassination +2, Sabotage +1), War 2 (Guerilla Defense +3)

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 3, Temperance 5, Valor 2

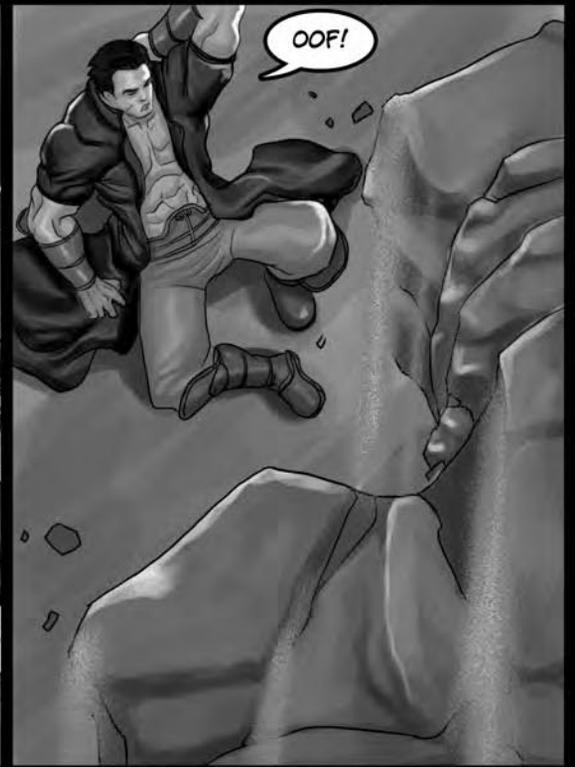
Virtue Flaw: Temperance **Current Limit:** 5

Willpower: 9

Bonus Points: 30 **External Bonus Points:** 18

Notes: An-Teng's bonus points go to a dot of Temperance, a dot each of Bureaucracy, Performance and Stealth, and all its specialties. The dominion's external bonus points come from its ties to the Realm and (to a much lesser degree) the Lintha pirates. These points go to extra dots of Government (the satrap's office), Military (the legion in residence), Awareness (commercial ties supply much of An-Teng's knowledge of the wider world) and Willpower (the princes can call of Realm support to enforce their rule). The three princes, the satrap and the legion general can all act as savants, but An-Teng has no sorcerers.

In Limit Break, An-Teng's long history of patient submission turns pathological. Its people become completely passive, not resisting any outside influence or aggression. Any Charm used to reduce the dominion's traits automatically succeeds. No defense applies.





CHAPTER NINE

GODS AND MONSTERS OF THE SOUTH

In the South, mortals fear the spirits and beasts that lie in wait beneath the searing sands or amidst the jungle's vines and trees. They stand in the blazing sun and pray for survival and protection from the countless dangers just over the next dune or lying in wait in the thicket.

SPIRITS OF THE SOUTH

Myriad gods and elementals live, work and struggle against or alongside humanity throughout the South. This section describes a number of the most important Southern spirits. For more information regarding spirit Charms, see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. IV—The Roll of Glorious Divinity I*.

AHLAT

GOD OF SOUTHERN WAR AND CATTLE

Ahlat, Southern God of War and Cattle, inspires fierce devotion across the great states of the South—and bitter derision among rival gods. Many deities take issue with his

surprising rise in the Celestial Hierarchy and his apparent ambition for even greater power.

Ahlat began his career in the North, when the Incarnae still dwelled on the Blessed Isle and the Primordials kept Yu-Shan for themselves. At this time, Ahlat worked as the small god of mating-fights between bull walruses. His lucky break came when he fought off a minor incursion by the Fair Folk. As a reward, Ahlat was promoted and reassigned as Southern God of Cattle. Later, Ahlat devised an ingenious plan with the local hunting god, Bright Spearpoint: Ahlat secured offerings and prayers from Bright Spearpoint's human subjects in exchange for teaching them to keep permanent herds of cattle. Bright Spearpoint's tribes prospered and both gods received increased prayer... though as centuries passed, the tribes cared less about hunting and more about stock-raising, ultimately leading to Bright Spearpoint's decline. The Southern censor of the time questioned this mingling of business between the Bureau of Nature and that of the Bureau of Humanity, but Ahlat argued convincingly



for the potential of intra-bureau collaboration to increase the net revenue of prayer.

Ahlat's shrewdness, imagination and experience in battle attracted the attention of the Unconquered Sun. As Ahlat tells the story, the Unconquered Sun sought champions to support him in the coming rebellion. Ahlat quickly agreed and devised another cunning plan.

When Ahlat next appeared before his herd-folk shamans and priestesses, he commanded them to sacrifice an entire hecatomb, 100 cattle. None of the little tribes could possibly survive such a loss from their herds. Some refused Ahlat's demand and paid dearly. Some complied and wasted away. A few understood Ahlat's intent—that he did not insist they slaughter their *own* herds—and attacked other tribes to steal their cattle. This new explosion of warfare inspired a variety of innovations. Herd-folk settled in permanent, defensible villages and learned to plant seeds and irrigate—to keep their herds in fenced ranches with renewable food supplies, rather than wandering the countryside. With all these advances came new gods to govern them, all owing their positions more or less to Ahlat, who tithed them all. The Unconquered Sun rewarded Ahlat's efforts by offering him the position of War God of the South. Ahlat accepted, but only if he could retain his position as Cattle God as well.

With war comes heroes, and herein lay the crux of Ahlat's grand plot. He watched the battles that spread across the South and identified the greatest, shrewdest and most valorous heroes. Ahlat recorded their names and passed them to the Unconquered Sun. Many of these warriors became the first Solar Exalted recruits, trained on Ahlat's battlefields.

Since then, Ahlat has enjoyed glorious victories and endured frustrating periods of peace. In the Great Contagion, he labored mightily to preserve cattle through the Great Contagion, and he personally led the South's war gods against the Fair Folk invasion. As the Empress subdued the nations of the South, however, the scale and scope of wars steadily declined. Ahlat continues to foment minor battles in regions where the Realm has little presence, but he often finds himself idle.

While Ahlat does not ignore his duties, he finds abundant time for other interests. Parties and pointless celebrations constantly fill his massive palace in Yu-Shan. He has taken several thousand mortal wives, the Brides of Ahlat, and as many short-time lovers in Yu-Shan, earning a reputation as an incorrigible wanton. As patron of cattle husbandry, he has introduced dozens of new breeds throughout Creation. Social infighting against the many deities who hold grudges against him kills a bit more time.

With the disappearance of the Empress, Ahlat knows that his period of boredom has ended. The South will see glorious wars again—not raids for cattle, but great battles for the wealth of Gem, the Lap's cropland and the artifice of Varangia. An-Teng and Harborhead will surely rebel against the Realm, and the Delzahn ride to war again.

But Ahlat also hears whispers of stranger wars brewing: of a dead general mustering ghostly legions in the Underworld and the opening of gates long shut. Ahlat realizes, with mingled fear and delight, that the wars he plans for mortals might be nothing more than a new training-field to prepare Exalted champions for greater foes.

Harborhead has become the greatest center of Ahlat's cult, but he is worshiped throughout the South. Although most Southern warriors pray to Ahlat, he favors the elite female champions who pledge themselves to him as his virgin brides. He might grant an Endowment of combat prowess to a warrior who sacrifices a cow to him before a battle, but he couples it with a Scourge set to punish a warrior who squanders Ahlat's blessing through cowardice.

Ahlat always appears as a tall, muscular, ebon-skinned man with the head, horns and hooves of a black bull. He wears a short kilt and a long, black-and-red cape adorned with thousands of tassels. He carries a spear of black wood and blood-red metal, and a bow of lion bone and gold. Ahlat's boisterous (and sometimes crudely sensual) manner conceals the sharp mind of one of Heaven's most skillful bureaucratic infighters.

Sanctum: Ahlat lives in the Palace of the Golden Sahel in Yu-Shan. The Palace consists of several ornate halls adorned with memorabilia from thousands of battles. It has rooms for 10,000 guests and dozens of huge feast halls, as well as thousands of acres of savanna with pockets of wild jungles, forested hills and high, arid plateaus. A heavily guarded pen near the center of the estate holds the Golden Cattle of the Unconquered Sun, bred by Ahlat to honor his patron and fed on Peaches of Immortality.

Motivation: To promote war in the South and to secure the South's autonomy from Realm rule

Attributes: Strength 12, Dexterity 7, Stamina 10; Charisma 7, Manipulation 7, Appearance 6; Perception 6, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 2, Temperance 3, Valor 5

Abilities: Archery 7, Athletics 5, Awareness 6, Bureaucracy 6 (Bribery +1), Craft (Fate) 3, Dodge 7, Integrity 6, Investigation 4, Larceny 2, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: Flametongue, High Realm, Low Realm, Riverspeak, Southern Barbarian Tongues) 5, Lore 4 (Cattle +3), Martial Arts 7, Melee 7, Occult 4, Performance 5 (Party-Hearty Boor +3), Presence 5 (Intimidation +2), Resistance 5, Socialize 4, Survival 5, Thrown 5 (Spear +2, Javelin +1), War 8 (Southern Military History +3)

Backgrounds: Allies (War Aurochs) 5, Backing (Celestial Bureaucracy) 5, Celestial Manse 4, Contacts (in Heaven) 5, Cult 5, Followers (Various Servants and Warriors) 5, Influence 4, Salary 5

Charms:

Amethyst Awareness

Creation of Perfection—Effects limited to those concerning battle, martial prowess or raising cattle.



Divine Decree—Ahlat can make decrees of Power Level 3 or less regarding his spheres of influence.

Domain Manipulation Scenario—Initiating war between adjacent armies or commanders (for six motes, both must be within 70 yards of Ahlat)

Endowment—By spending 18 motes of Essence and a point of Willpower, Ahlat can grant two dots of Strength, Valor, Archery, Melee or Martial Arts (pick one), in addition to an extra 5L/5B of soak. The effects last only for the duration of one battle. Ahlat reserves this for mortals who sacrifice to him and have shown courage and prowess befitting a hero. He does not so assist the Exalted, who already bear greater gifts.

Essence Plethora (x2)—20 extra motes

Geas—Ahlat may use this Charm on only one individual at a time.

Hand of Destiny—Ahlat can determine the outcome of any battle in the South by his decree, provided all factions are of Southern origin. Doing so violates Heaven's laws and the prerogatives of the Division of Battles in the Bureau of Destiny, but Ahlat can do this if he chooses.

Hurry Home—For five motes, Ahlat can immediately transport himself to any of his shrines, any battlefield or cattle-herd in the South or anywhere in Creation that people fight over cattle. In Yu-Shan, he can return instantly to the Palace of the Golden Sahel.

Materialize—Costs 80 motes

Measure the Wind—Ahlat always surveys the participants of battles that interest him. He can identify by name, parentage and birthplace any Southern-born warrior in the midst of battle.

Melodious Diagnostic Report—Ahlat thrives on efficient collection and use of the prayers and rituals of his worshipers. He is very attentive to even slight fluctuations in the intake of power and, as such, closely monitors devotion levels on a weekly basis (or more, if major impediments arise).

Ox Body Technique (x7)

Principle of Motion—Ahlat typically keeps nine extra actions reserved.

Regalia of Authority—Ahlat may at times appear at the end of a battle to deliver his judgment or critique. When he does so, he uses this Charm to command attention and respect from all. These appearances sometimes devolve into impromptu banquets in Ahlat's honor, with champions of both armies vying to serve him.

Reserve of Will (x3)

Scourge—Ahlat may remove two dots of Strength, Valor, Archery, Melee or Martial Arts in addition to 5L/5B of soak (resulting in a minimum of 1L/1B). He typically reserves this Charm to punish warriors who show uncharacteristic cowardice or treachery to their commanders.

Sense Domain—Ahlat can instantly know the location of all battles of over 500 participants currently taking place in the South.

Signet of Authority—Ahlat may grant a commander a tasseled cloak resembling his own, marking her as the god's deputy and leading in his name.

Symbol of Invincible Authority—Ahlat may use this Charm to walk unharmed through any ongoing battle of over 100 participants.

First (Ability) Excellency—Archery, Dodge, Melee, Thrown, War

Second (Ability) Excellency—Archery, Dodge, Melee, Thrown, War

Third (Ability) Excellency—Archery, Dodge, Melee, Thrown, War

Infinite (Ability) Mastery—War

Divine (Ability) Subordination—Bureaucracy, Dodge, Integrity, Investigation

Spells: Ivory Orchid Pavilion, Rolling Earth Carpet, Sapphire Countermagic, Travel Without Distance, Whirlwind of Fate

Join Battle: 11

Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 15, Damage 12B, Parry DV 8, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 14, Damage 15B, Parry DV 6, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 14, Damage 12B, Parry DV —, Rate 1, Tags C,N,P

Spear (Bloodspike): Speed 4, Accuracy 20, Damage 24L/27L, Parry DV 10, Rate 2, Tags 2,L,R,T

Spear (Bloodspike), Thrown: Speed 4, Accuracy 20, Damage 24L, Range 150, Rate 1

Lion Bone Bow (Glad of War): Speed 5, Accuracy 20, Damage 18L*, Range 1 mile, Rate 2

*Ahlat's bow adds four dice of damage (bashing or lethal) to any arrow fired from it; Ahlat typically uses broadhead arrows, but uses other types if he sees the need.

Soak: 35L/35B (Tasseled Cloak, +30L/25B, 15L/12B Hardness)

Health Levels: -0/-1 x 13/-2 x 12/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 11 **Willpower:** 9

Essence: 7 **Essence Pool:** 135

Other Notes: Victims of Ahlat's spear bleed profusely, losing one health level every 10 ticks until the wound is bandaged. Ahlat's tasseled cloak acts as potent armor. The tassels also carry the memories and courage of thousands of warriors. Any attempt to attack Ahlat must overcome this sheer concentration of Valor. The attacker's player must succeed at a Valor roll each action to make an attack, at difficulty 1 for spell and missile attacks, difficulty 2 for hand-to-hand combat.

THE GOLDEN LORD

The Golden Lord is the patron of An-Teng, ensuring order and justice through the deep-rooted customs he instilled among the people and by overseeing the Three Princes. He is famed of old as a supremely even-handed judge and benefactor of those seeking justice. Petitioners come both from An-Teng and from distant lands.

Long ago, the Unconquered Sun appointed the Golden Lord as Heaven's sanctioned arbiter and judge of the Solar



Exalted. While the Golden Lord saw few Lawgivers after the Usurpation, he still holds this title and honors his duty. He welcomes the return of the Solar Exalted and stands ready to serve once more to resolve their disputes.

The Golden Lord dwells in a palace atop the Pinnacle of Mercy, the highest peak in An-Teng. Anyone may attempt the perilous journey to the god's palace to ask his aid in settling disputes or righting injustices beyond the reach of mortal courts. The Golden Lord always hears such requests personally and usually delivers swift and fair judgments. When cases involve beings beyond his jurisdiction (such as the highest-ranking gods), the Golden Lord offers his best advice on how to seek succor from those with sufficient authority—such as the Unconquered Sun himself.

Such is the Golden Lord's reputation for fairness that many gods who exceed his power nevertheless request his judgments. Since he is still a Celestial god (despite living in Creation), the Golden Lord undergoes periodic audits—at his own insistence. These audits always report his conduct as impeccable.

The Golden Lord does his best to grant honest petitioners what they seek, whether arbitration of a dispute or redress of injustice. He prefers to rely on moral authority and the power of truth; for instance, revealing the true perpetrator of a crime and how to obtain incontrovertible evidence of guilt. On rare occasions, he grants supernatural gifts that enable a petitioner to redress a grievance. Somewhat more often, petitioners learn that *they* are in the wrong. Wise men and gods humbly accept this judgment and ask how they can atone. When foolish petitioners attempt to defy or deceive the Golden Lord, their corpses appear in his temple by Thousand Dragons Lake.

Despite the Golden Lord's interest in justice and right rule for An-Teng, his hands are somewhat tied with regard to the Pale Mistress. His priests can protect individuals from her mission to bring chaos, misery and woe, but he cannot officially interfere.

The Golden Lord rarely engages in battle. Only a direct threat to An-Teng, the Unconquered Sun or Creation itself can rouse him from his throne. So roused, he pursues victory without fear. He rides into battle on the back of Mighty-in-Battle, the Elephant Avatar and the Golden Lord's friend and companion. No power in Creation can ambush him, and his panoply of war has few equals.

The Golden Lord appears as a Tengese man standing eight feet tall, middle aged but fit, dressed in golden robes. He bears a formidable golden scepter, the Mother of Princes, whose form the Three Princes' scepters imitate. In battle he becomes as tall as the trees, adorned in golden bamboo armor. He wields a sword of brilliant white light and bears a golden shield forged in the likeness of the sun.

Sanctum: The Golden Lord's fortified palace-temple is open to anyone who can reach it and honestly seeks the god's judgment. Celestial lions guard it; hundreds of minor spirits and priests form the service staff. The palace contains several

hundred prayer alcoves and enough comfortable sleeping cells for the staff and as many petitioners and visiting holy men as necessary. No one within the Pinnacle of Mercy may commit any violent act. To attempt such acts results in unendurable pangs of pain and eternal banishment from the temple.

Motivation: To ensure justice and order in An-Teng; to serve the Unconquered Sun by guiding the Solar Exalted
Attributes: Strength 12, Dexterity 10, Stamina 10; Charisma 7, Manipulation 8, Appearance 6; Perception 7, Intelligence 7, Wits 6

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 4, Valor 4

Abilities: Archery 8, Athletics 6, Awareness 6, Bureaucracy 8 (Law +2), Dodge 6, Integrity 8, Investigation 7 (Reconstructing Events +2), Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: Flametongue, High Realm, Riverspeak, Seatongue) 4, Lore 6 (An Teng +2, Solar Exalted +1), Martial Arts 8, Medicine 5, Melee 8, Occult 5, Presence 8 (Interrogation +2), Resistance 5, Ride 6 (Elephant +2), Sail 5, Socialize 6, Survival 5, War 5

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Backing (Celestial Bureaucracy) 5, Contacts (Celestial Bureaucracy) 5, Contacts (Creation) 3, Cult 4, Followers 5, Influence 4, Manse 5, Salary 5

Charms:

Amethyst Awareness

Chrysalis of Preservation

Destiny Sponsorship—Costs 10 motes. Heaven and Fate protect Creation's wisest and most incorruptible judge. The Golden Lord receives an additional 12L/12B soak as long as he hears every sincere petitioner and renders judgment to the best of his ability. What's more, beings whose Essence is less than 8 suffer a -12 internal penalty to rolls normally opposed by the Golden Lord's Resistance, Integrity or Dodge, if they try to prevent the Golden Lord from uncovering the truth or seeing justice done.

Divine Decree—The Golden Lord's pronouncements regarding justice have the force of Celestial Law and cannot be contravened. His sentences always carry the weight of this Charm, and thus never fail to be carried out. He may use this Charm to banish the unjust from An-Teng.

Domain Manipulation Scenario—The Golden Lord can cause parties to act in accord with his own sense of justice. He uses this Charm to enforce his arbitration, so no one backs out of an agreement later. For 12 motes and one Willpower, he can also reinstate true justice in a community by causing all corrupt officials to confess their misdeeds and pledge, on their lives, to stay honest in the future.

Endowment—The Golden Lord may grant two additional dots of Wits, Integrity and Investigation in addition to Presence 6 and a golden mantle resembling his Signet of Authority. He gives this boon to Lawgivers and favored judges who visit his abode to pray for wisdom and impress him with their devotion to justice.

Essence Plethora (x2)—20 extra motes



Hand of Destiny—When the Golden Lord is sufficiently impressed by an individual's guilt or innocence, he makes certain that judgments against them are carried out properly.

Hurry Home—The Golden Lord can instantly transport himself to his palace at the Pinnacle of Mercy, to any of his temples or to any courtroom in Creation.

Materialize—Costs 85 motes

Measure the Wind—The Golden Lord needs to know if entities exceed him in power or jurisdiction.

Ox-Body Technique (x8)

Plague of Menaces—Unjust judgments that come to the Golden Lord's attention incur his wrath. This usually takes the form of the offending judge's house being infested with rats or other vermin. The truly villainous, however, he renders to the Pale Mistress.

Principle of Motion—The Golden Lord can reserve up to nine actions.

Signet of Authority—The Golden Lord can grace his underlings with a golden mantle and his official signet ring when on official business in Yu-Shan or Creation.

Symbol of Invincible Authority—This Charm renders the Golden Lord effectively immune to all social combat attacks for the duration of the scene.

Touch of Eternity—Mortal rulers and judges who sufficiently impress the Golden Lord enough for him to wish to preserve their rule might receive a special blessing. After an oath of fealty to the concept of justice, the target ages at half the normal rate and gains an additional permanent dot of Stamina.

Touch of Saturn—When the Golden Lord strikes the unjust, his blow inflicts Crippling damage.

First (Ability) Excellency—Archery, Awareness, Bureaucracy, Integrity, Investigation, Lore, Martial Arts, Melee, Socialize

Second (Ability) Excellency—Archery, Awareness, Bureaucracy, Integrity, Investigation, Lore, Martial Arts, Melee, Socialize

Third (Ability) Excellency—Archery, Awareness, Bureaucracy, Integrity, Investigation, Lore, Martial Arts, Melee, Socialize

Divine (Ability) Subordination—Awareness, Bureaucracy, Integrity, Investigation, Lore, Resistance, Socialize

Join Battle: 12

Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 19, Damage 12B, Parry DV 10, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 18, Damage 15B, Parry DV 8, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 18, Damage 12B, Parry DV —, Rate 1, Tags C,N,P

Daiklave (Radiant Blade): Speed 5, Accuracy 21, Damage 18L, Parry DV 10, Rate 3

Scepter (Mother of Princes): Speed 5, Accuracy 19, Damage 28B/4, Parry DV 10, Rate 2, Tags O,P

Bow of Mercy: Speed 6, Accuracy 19, Damage 15L, Rate 3, Range Special, Tags 2,B

Soak: 34L/39B (Robes of Office/Splendid Golden Armor, +17L/17B, Hardness 11L/11B; Destiny Sponsorship, +12L/12B)

Health Levels: -0/-1x13/-2x13/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 12 **Willpower:** 9

Essence: 8 **Essence Pool:** 145

Other Notes: The Golden Lord's panoply has the following special properties:

The Bow of Mercy creates its own arrows of golden light when the Golden Lord draws its string. These arrows can strike any target the Golden Lord can see, whether directly





or through Charms or other means, with no range penalties. For anyone else, it acts as a long powerbow with no unique powers.

Invincible Truth, the Golden Lord's target shield, is itself indestructible. Carrying it raises the Golden Lord's Parry and Dodge DVs against hand-to-hand or ranged attacks by 12. For anyone else, it is merely an orichalcum shield with no mobility penalty.

Mother of Princes, the Golden Lord's scepter, acts as a gore-maul but has no special powers.

The Radiant Blade, the Golden Lord's daiklave, compels opponents to cease combat. When the blade strikes a foe, that creature's player rolls Willpower at a difficulty equal to half the number of damage levels suffered from the blow. Failing the role means the combatant lays down his arms and refuses to fight any longer. Resisting this Total Control effect costs four Willpower. The target is not compelled to obey or serve the Golden Lord in any other way, though.

The Splendid Golden Armor of the Golden Lord offers defense equal to orichalcum superheavy plate; for the Golden Lord, it has no mobility penalty or fatigue value. The Golden Lord can also transform the armor into his official robes and back again as reflexive actions.

THE PALE MISTRESS

The Pale Mistress is a Terrestrial deity charged with bringing pain and misery to the people of An-Teng. Where the Golden Lord strives for all that is best in the hearts of men, the Pale Mistress represents all that is sick and terrible. The people's woe feeds her power—especially when Tengese inflict it on each other. Unlike the Golden Lord, however, the Pale Mistress was born of An-Teng and cannot ever leave it.

The Tengese offer the Pale Mistress prayers and sacrifices out of fear. Their ceremonies implore her to walk alone, to bypass their villages and to let them dream free of nightmares. The Tengese know she is a god, and a necessary one, but this knowledge gives scant comfort to her victims.

Private petitioners call on the Pale Mistress only to destroy. She devours those calling upon her for any other reason. For her aid, she demands one price: disorder. To summon her is to invite disease, strife, death or worse upon you, your family, your village, your nation. When they die, mortals who pledged themselves to the Pale Mistress become kaley, the Hungry Dancers, who caper about her feet as she spreads terror throughout An-Teng.

When the Pale Mistress walks the shores of An-Teng by moonlight, she manifests as a massive, grotesque thing, 30 feet tall, with matted, white hair that hides all her face except her fanged, drooling mouth. Her breasts dangle nearly to the ground, as do her clawed hands. She may also appear as an old, toothless crone, a young, beautiful blind woman or a wounded, sickly dog. All forms have white hair, which leads most Tengese to consider this trait a particularly bad omen. The clangor of iron gongs always accompanies her monstrous form.

The Pale Mistress always assumes her monstrous form when engaged in combat and always seeks the most painful and fearsome deaths for her enemies. She dematerializes if she senses that she does not have the upper hand. Those who best her in combat regret their victory, as the Pale Mistress haunts such unfortunate champions forever, cursing them, their families and their friends with every misfortune she can devise.

The dire goddess serves Luna by displaying the Changing Lady's most terrible aspects, even as the Golden Lord shows Creation the justice of the Unconquered Sun. This connection grants the Pale Mistress a modicum of protection from other gods. While she despises the Golden Lord, the Pale Mistress recognizes his authority and prostrates herself in his presence. Neither she nor her creatures can enter temples or other grounds consecrated to the Golden Lord—or even cross a line of oil blessed by one of that god's priests.

Sanctum: The Pale Mistress holds court in a labyrinthine complex of lightless sea caves all along the shores of An-Teng, where she and her kaley minions hide from the Unconquered Sun and the Golden Lord. Here she also keeps the corpses of her victims, which rise as zombies to attack trespassers. The caves have no furnishings to speak of—just darkness and rot.

Motivation: To bring pain and misery to the people of An-Teng

Attributes: Strength 9, Dexterity 8, Stamina 12; Charisma 6, Manipulation 6, Appearance 0; Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 6

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 4

Abilities: Athletics 5, Awareness 6 (Join Battle +2), Dodge 4, Integrity 6, Investigation 5, Larceny 5, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: Flametongue, High Realm, Low Realm, Seatongue) 4, Lore 7 (An-Teng Geography +1, An-Teng Historical Crimes +2), Martial Arts 8, Occult 7, Performance 3 (Grotesque Displays +3), Presence 6 (Intimidation +2), Resistance 5, Stealth 6, Survival 4 (Tracking +3)

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts (in Creation) 4, Cult 3, Followers 4, Influence 3, Manse 4

Spirit Charms:

Banish—The Pale Mistress can expel anyone from her sanctum.

Capture—The Pale Mistress can pull anyone who walks An-Teng's shore into her sanctum.

Divine Decree—The Pale Mistress uses this Charm with impunity at low Power Levels (1–3) to inflict misery on the Tengese. She hesitates to use higher levels of the decree, for fear of attracting the Golden Lord's attention. As such, she uses higher levels only when she's certain that it falls within her purview to do so.

Domain Manipulation Scenario—All-Encompassing. For 17 motes and two Willpower, the Pale Mistress can inflict any sort of natural misfortune on regions of An-Teng: drought or



floods (the Charm incorporates Weather Control effects), disease, blighted crops, swarms of vermin and the like. She can also inflict social evils, making people greedier, more quarrelsome or otherwise less harmonious. Though she could not inspire a civil war (unless the Tengese already felt great anger and discontent), she might inspire peasants to revolt against a hated noble, or otherwise tip susceptible people into acts they know are wrong.

Dreamscape—The Pale Mistress inflicts visions of grief, terror or horror.

Emergency Prayer Relocation—The Pale Mistress can reach anyone who prays to her (though she cannot leave An-Teng). She uses this Charm on the rare occasions when exorcists invoke her, or to reach the evil people who seek to pact with her.

Endowment—The goddess can grant two dots each of Larceny and Stealth to criminals and fiends.

Essence Plethora (x3)—30 extra motes

Geas—Used on those who seek favors from her, to set tasks whose completion cause woe and anguish.

Hurry Home—The Pale Mistress can travel instantly to her sea caves or her shrines.

Materialize—Costs 75 motes

Measure the Wind

Ox-Body Technique (x7)

Plague of Menaces—The Pale Mistress makes use of all five standard plagues, setting any of them against those who offend her.

Principle of Motion—The Pale Mistress typically stores eight extra actions.

Scourge—The Pale Mistress can remove up to two dots of any Virtue.

Spirit-Cutting—The Pale Mistress' attacks can affect dematerialized creatures. This does not cost her Essence.

Subtle Whisper—The Pale Mistress inspires utter terror, the cause of which her victim cannot perceive.

Tracking—The Pale Mistress can follow anyone she has blessed or cursed, wherever they go in An-Teng.

First (Ability) Excellency—Awareness, Integrity, Investigation, Larceny, Performance, Presence, Stealth

Second (Ability) Excellency—Awareness, Integrity, Investigation, Larceny, Performance, Presence, Stealth

Divine (Ability) Subordination—Awareness, Integrity, Presence, Stealth

Join Battle: 14

Attacks:

Bite: Speed 6, Accuracy 17, Damage 24L, Parry DV 7, Rate 1

Claw: Speed 5, Accuracy 18, Damage 18L, Parry DV 9, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 16, Damage 9B, Parry DV —, Rate 1, Tags C,N,P

Soak: 26L/32B (Blubbery Hide, +20L/20B)

Health Levels: -0/-1 x 12/-2 x 11/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 10 **Willpower:** 8

Essence: 7 **Essence Pool:** 140

Other Notes: Survivors of the Pale Mistress's bite suffer a curse that seems like a wasting disease. These wounds do not heal naturally—only Solar Circle sorcery, gods of the fifth rank or the Golden Lord can reverse the damage. The disease does not affect gods of the fourth and fifth rank, Lunar Exalted and other creatures who were immune to Shaping effects at the time of their wounding. For every day that the wounds go untreated, they fester further and the victim suffers one level of lethal damage. If the wounds cannot be exorcised in time, the victim dies and rises immediately thereafter as a kaley. At that point, no power except the Incarnae or the Golden Lord can reverse this condition.

WONG BONGEROK

CENSOR OF THE SOUTH,

LESSER ELEMENTAL DRAGON OF FIRE

Following the chaos of the Great Contagion, the Celestial Bureaucracy could not find the great Censor of the South, Swan Dragon. Wong Bongerok, a seasoned political player in Yu-Shan, lacked experience in Creation but boasted an encyclopedic knowledge of celestial law. His superiors in the Bureau of Heaven thought that Wong Bongerok would serve temporarily then move to a more suitable bureau when Swan Dragon returned. The new censor was glad to be finally recognized and looked forward to further glories.

The first century of Wong Bongerok's appointment disappointed everyone. Swan Dragon had been a beloved figure in the South, both a military hero against the Fair Folk and a wise and fair officer of the court. When Wong Bongerok performed audits, Terrestrial gods complained about his failure to understand local conditions, especially in the wake of the Contagion. By the time these complaints trickled into Yu-Shan, however, years had passed and many gods had forgotten about Wong Bongerok's appointment. Thinking that the complaints must be about one of Swan Dragon's deputies, they sent the complaints back to the censor. Wong Bongerok thus suffered double anger, from the lack of recognition and the complaint itself.

Bongerok eventually decided that enough was enough. Since apparently he could not live up to the legendary Swan Dragon, he would exploit the confusion in Heaven and the South to fill his coffers and build his own power. If no one would respect his authority, he would make everyone pay for what only a censor could give them: protection from the law.

Since then, Wong Bongerok has established tight control over many spirit courts in the South, while paying lip service to his superiors and conspiring with powerful celestial beings. The list of his "customers" ranges from great gods such as Amoth City-Smiter (from whom he extracts a handsome bribe to cover up flagrant violations of Celestial law), to local fly-by-night strongman spirits looking to extort a few obols before moving on to their next racket.

The Censor of the South has not been entirely circumspect in hiding his activities, counting on Heaven's own bureaucratic sloth and corruption to hide his deeds.



In Creation, however, Wong Bongerok has gained a wide circle of supporters, spies and lackeys through bribery, blackmail and intimidation. Any complaints about him end up back in his hands, resulting in terrible retribution. As such, the censor can insert himself into whatever business he feels could benefit him, while sinking the prospects of anyone who gets in his way. Whenever he discovers any wrongdoing worthy of audit, he offers the offender a choice between months, perhaps years of testimony, paperwork and fines, (plus demerits in the Bureau of Heaven)—or timely, modest payments. Few spirits refuse the proposition. The censor never asks for more than the spirit can afford, and he always honors the deal.

In Yu-Shan, Wong Bongerok enjoys few honors in accord with his office—certainly not as many as he feels he deserves. In 700-plus years since his appointment, many functionaries in the Bureau of Heaven still send missives addressed to Swan Dragon, Censor of the South. Some spirits greet Bongerok as “Swan Dragon’s deputy, I suppose.” Wong Bongerok did not know Swan Dragon, but he now loathes his memory.

Bongerok justifies his corruption to himself through the perpetually denied requests for greater funding from Heaven. Indeed, he’s rather proud of his creativity in playing the unbelievably poor hand he was dealt. A lesser spirit, he considers, would never have lasted as long as he has. Bongerok has enjoyed such success that he no longer seeks further promotion. Indeed, he would do anything to prevent anyone, including (especially!) the great Swan Dragon, from claiming his position. He faces no danger of this, however. Despite how corrupt he has become, Bongerok has taken care to fulfill every duty that Heaven remembers to place on him.

Wong Bongerok’s everyday form is that of a grossly fat, hairless, red-robed man with eyes in his palms and a light corona of blue fire emanating from his skin. In battle, he resumes his dragon form: a brilliant orange lizard with a long green fin running from the crest of his head to the poisonous stinger at the tip of his tail. An entourage of sycophants, mercenaries, concubines and secretaries usually accompanies him, along with the celestial lions, lion dogs and scarab guardians entailed by his office (though in only half their proper numbers due to budget shortfalls).

Sanctum: Wong Bongerok lives in his manse of Khorbat Prantil, formerly the home of Swan Dragon, located deep in the desert 2,000 miles south of Paragon. All of the libraries, dojos and conservatories have been removed for the sake of the new censor’s renovations. Presently the mansion seems more like a brothel than the home of an important official.

Motivation: To preserve his position and eliminate his political enemies

Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 4, Stamina 10; Charisma 5, Manipulation 6, Appearance 4; Perception 4, Intelligence 7, Wits 6

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 4

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 6, Bureaucracy 4 (Bending Rules +1, Bribery +2), Dodge 4, Integrity 5, Investigation 4 (Reconstructing Events +3), Larceny 7, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: Flametongue, High Realm, Low Realm, Riverspeak, Seatongue) 5, Lore 3 (Celestial Law +3), Martial Arts 4, Occult 4 (Southern Spirit Courts +2), Performance 6 (Irritating Harangue +2), Presence 6 (Intimidation +2), Resistance 3, Socialize 4 (Bald-Faced Lying +3), Stealth 5

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Backing (Celestial Bureaucracy) 4, Celestial Manse 3, Connections (Bureau of Heaven) 3, Connections (Outlaws) 3, Connections (Southern Threshold) 3, Followers 3, Influence 4, Manse 4, Salary 3

Spirit Charms:

Calculated Order of Immediate Action—Wong Bongerok can create the necessities for a formal audit anywhere, any time.

Capture—The censor may consign anyone arrested or found guilty in an audit to a prison with walls of basalt and bars of crystal and flame. He is not free to imprison just anyone: He needs legal (if not righteous) warrants for arrest or imprisonment. Bongerok’s prison is part of his sanctum, a spiritual extension of his manse in the Southern desert.

Dematerialize—Costs 75 motes

Essence Plethora (x2)—20 extra motes

Hurry Home—Wong Bongerok can instantly travel to his sanctum or to any Fire Court in Creation.

Impromptu Messenger—Through any flame in the South

Measure the Wind

Natural Elemental Powers—Wong Bongerok has all the powers that are natural to elementals (see **Exalted**, p. 302). The censor’s Dragon’s Suspire takes the form of a spray of flaming, oily liquid. It is far more powerful than usual for elementals.

Principle of Motion—Wong Bongerok typically has eight banked actions.

Reserve of Will (x5)

Sense Domain—All-Encompassing. Wong Bongerok’s domain consists of Southern spirits and the element of fire. With this Charm, he can attempt to learn the location of any Southern spirit, which requires success at a (Perception + Awareness) roll with two bonus successes, and a difficulty of the spirit’s Essence. For 10 motes and 2 Willpower, Bongerok can look out of every flame in the South. Noticing a particular person or other subject of interest to the censor requires the same roll, with a difficulty set by the Storyteller based on the specificity of what Bongerok seeks. (If he looks for “people trading jewels” the difficulty would be only 1; if he seeks a specific person, the difficulty is 5.)

Shapechange—The censor uses this Charm to assume his humanoid form. He can return to his true, dragon form as a reflexive action at no Essence cost.

Tracking—The censor can find anyone or anything he has blessed, cursed or simply “tagged” by committing a mote to them.



Sorcery Spells: Burning Eyes of the Offender, Death of Obsidian Butterflies, Demon of the First Circle, Emerald Countermagic, Internal Flame, The Ravenous Fire, Summon Elemental.

Join Battle: 12

Attacks:

Bite: Speed 5, Accuracy 12, Damage 16L, Parry DV 6, Rate 1

Claw: Speed 4, Accuracy 11, Damage 12L, Parry DV 10, Rate 3

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 10, Damage 7B, Parry DV —, Rate 1, Tags C,N,P

Tail Sting: Speed 6, Accuracy 12, Damage 22L + poison*, Parry DV 8, Rate 1

Dragon's Suspire: Speed 6, Accuracy 12**, Damage 16L, Range 40, Rate 1

*Wong Bongerok's Venom: Damage 8L, Toxicity 4, Penalty -5

**This attack fills an area four yards in diameter, centered wherever Bongerok aims it. The attack cannot be blocked, only dodged.

Soak: 5L/10B (human); 23L/28B (Dragon hide, 18L/18B)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 8 **Willpower:** 8

Essence: 7 **Essence Pool:** 130

Other Notes: Wong Bongerok does not hesitate to offer or solicit a bribe as a way to avoid a fight. If the viciously corrupt censor must pay a bribe, however, the one who threatened him becomes his enemy thereafter. Bongerok harasses his foes through his spiritual, political and criminal connections—anything from hiring brigands to raid and burn an enemy's home, to threatening a character's spiritual allies with a rigged audit.

THE COURT OF THE ORDERLY FLAME

The Orderly Flame rose from the ashes of the Flame Council, a First Age fellowship that sought a Celestial mandate to unify Creation's elemental fire courts under their leadership. The vagaries of Celestial politics, however, prevented the Flame Council from achieving its goal. Many of the Council's leaders died battling the Fair Folk, including the Council's friend and sponsor Swan Dragon, famed Censor of the South. The surviving members disbanded.

A few elementals, however, would not let the Flame Council's aspirations die. Chief among these was Lusa Seragon, a wealthy, ancient ifrit, former member of the Flame Council, and one of Swan Dragon's greatest friends. He knew that the elemental courts would never gain the Celestial Bureaucracy's respect just because they demanded it. Seragon called together like-minded elementals to create a new organization devoted to Swan Dragon's ideals. Seragon argued that Creation's fire courts should present the Celestial Bureaucracy with a *fait accompli*—a confederation so powerful and effective that Heaven would have to

support it. And if Heaven did not, his proposed alliance would work on its own to rebuild and reform Creation. So began the Court of the Orderly Flame.

Soon afterward, the Bureau of Heaven named a new Censor of the South. Wong Bongerok spurned the Orderly Flame's invitation of membership. Instead, he ordered an investigation, alleging that the Court illegally sought to assume the role of censors. Bongerok tried to bribe and bully the Orderly Flame's members into becoming his stooges and informants, without much success. Even though Bongerok wielded little influence in Yu-Shan, he got his injunctions against the Orderly Flame ratified, effectively killing any hope of their gaining a Celestial Mandate. Most mortal communities and Terrestrial gods pay little attention to Celestial condemnations, however, and the Orderly Flame soldiered on.

Over the centuries, the Court gained a mixed reputation among spirits and mortals alike. On one hand, many people admire how the Court often takes the lead in suppressing the Fair Folk, demon cults and the restless dead. The Orderly Flame also assists communities stricken by drought, famine, war or plague. As neutral hosts and arbiters, the elementals provide a political alternative to Realm hegemony and a commercial alternative to the Guild. On the other hand, the Orderly Flame acts covertly—but not always covertly enough—against fire courts and mortal governments that violate its standards of justice. Tales circulate about espionage, blackmail, supernatural compulsion and even assassination. Even the people who admire the Orderly Flame recognize that it and its members are not impartial. They have interests of their own, and are not kind to those who get in their way. Whether the Court of the Orderly Flame is righteous or merely self-righteous depends very much on one's point of view.

STRUCTURE AND PRACTICE

Over the centuries, the Court of the Orderly Flame has become Creation's most prominent and powerful fire court. More precisely, the Orderly Flame is a syndicate of fire courts that act together to pursue common interests. Membership is limited to fire elementals and their God-Blooded progeny.

Three officers lead the Orderly Flame. The Ulema handles most diplomatic relations with gods and other elementals, and at least tries to represent the Orderly Flame to Yu-Shan. Murantru Ota, a garda bird of exceptional power, fills this office. The First Archon leads all public operations and diplomacy with mortals. Lusa Seragon acts as First Archon, placing his prodigious wealth at the Court's service. The Intelligencer masterminds all secret operations. Ulito Swan, the last surviving daughter of Swan Dragon, performs this duty with ruthless enthusiasm.

Beneath the First Archon, the four Superintendents of the Fires administer the Orderly Flame's activities in the four directions of the threshold. Naturally, the Orderly Flame is strongest in the South but has gained adherents in the



East, West and North as well. The Court advises member fire courts when necessary and reviews monthly reports on all major activities. Superintendents usually live and work in Lusa Seragon's palace and enjoy the comforts therein.

The leaders of local fire courts can become Pyric Ministers who direct the Orderly Flame's embassies to humanity. In addition to managing the proper ordering of the local dragon lines of Fire Essence, they become the Orderly Flame's public face in places where this is possible. Pyric Ministers set the local fire court's policies and mediate interactions with their region's mortals, striving to act as ombudsman to both sides. They refer difficult and important negotiations to Lusa Seragon himself, who invites the participants to his palace.

The Orderly Flame devotes much of its effort to diplomacy. The Court explicitly seeks closer relations between mortals and spirits, with treaties to bind all sides. Only through such law, members say, can everyone achieve what they want in a just and equitable manner. The elemental diplomats do not ask for worship or other favors in return.

In some regions, the Orderly Flame sponsors public embassies where mortals can present their concerns or arrange contracts with local elementals. The Orderly Flame encourages local fire elementals to use their embassies as a way to become visible and accepted participants in mortal communities.

Embassies also function as safe houses for the Orderly Flame's spies—and the Court has many secret embassies in places where the Court is not welcome. In the South, the Orderly Flame has spies in every major city except Paragon. Always facing the danger of discovery, Orderly Flame spies pose as bureaucrats, city guard officers, savants, servants, criminals or whatever is required to collect information and put it to use.

The Orderly Flame prefers to persuade through reason and enlightened self-interest. When such methods fail, its members sometimes turn to dirty tricks, from threatening to release embarrassing private information to outright assassination. The Orderly Flame does not harm the innocent to punish its enemies... but it accepts collateral misfortune. If executing a politically connected slave-dealer leaves his children destitute, so be it. The operative might find the children a comfortable new home—or might write them off as necessary sacrifices for the greater good. After all, Creation is full of poor orphans, and the Orderly Flame cannot care for them all.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Orderly Flame has public embassies in Gem, Chiaroscuro and several other large Southern cities. It has secret embassies in Harborhead, An-Teng and other places where the Realm wields great power. The Realm opposes the Court of the Orderly Flame as a threat to its own interests. Dozens of Pyric Ministers and their staffs have been hunted down and executed. Ulito Swan, the Orderly Flame's Intelligencer, regularly mounts secret operations opposing the Realm's colonial efforts in Southern coastal cities. The Court has no presence on the Blessed Isle itself, or in Paragon.

The Orderly Flame has recruited many fire courts in the South, such as the Vogelhan Judges, a panel of ifrit legal theorists who dwell deep in the Great Southern Desert. The Court of the Wintermonat, who pledged his subterranean court near Rubylak to the Court, is one of the more distant affiliates. Some fire courts in the East seek the Orderly Flame's help in their endless wars against the Kings of the Wood, but the Orderly Flame prefers to avoid fighting other kinds of elementals. They see such activity as self-defeating and giving mortals a bad image of all elementals.

Many courts reject the Orderly Flame's presumption, however. For example, the Red Tables of Ragoly Aglde, a massive, highly organized fire court west of Arjuf on the Blessed Isle conspires with Immaculate monks and other fire courts to oppose the Orderly Flame's efforts throughout Creation. Other fire courts, such as the Red Volkan Ledge, southwest of Gem, and the Court of the Burning Maxator, south of Diamond Hearth, thus far remain neutral.

Wong Bongerok, however, remains the Orderly Flame's most ardent foe. He blames the Court for much of the opposition he faces in Creation and in Yu-Shan. His agents frequently try to disrupt and discredit public embassies and expose the hidden embassies and fire courts to the Realm and other foes. Known Pyric Ministers suffer frequent audits. While the Orderly Flame takes pains not to violate Celestial law (or at least not get caught), Bongerok still has the power to make the Court's mission very difficult. If his operating budget were higher, he would surely become more of a threat.

LUSA SERAGON

Lusa Seragon, a legendary ifrit entrepreneur and sifu, is the Orderly Flame's First Archon. He finances the Orderly Flame's operations and presides over its main court in his private palace. As a personal friend of Swan Dragon, Seragon was one of the last to see the censor before he disappeared into the Wyld.

Seragon believes that many of Creation's troubles stem from the neglect of the Terrestrial spirit courts. If the Celestial Bureaucracy would properly respect and administer these courts, he reasons, the Terrestrial gods and elementals would implement the will of Heaven. In return, mortals would properly respect the spirits and reward them with prayer. Creation is the wellspring from which all wealth and power springs, he says. To disparage its caretakers can only result in deprivation and weakness from mortals to Incarnae.

This ancient and powerful ifrit stands 10 feet tall, with polished bronze skin, a firm mouth and well-coifed blue-black hair. He speaks calmly, even in times of strife. His greatest weapon, the Lambent Fire Gourd, hangs from the silver chain that ties his stately robes.

Lusa Seragon is the most cool-headed of the Orderly Flame's leaders. As such, he acts as the court's chief diplomat. Seragon can negotiate with spirits and mortals who disgust him, for the sake of achieving the Orderly Flame's goals.

Seragon carries no blade and needs none. He knows many spirit Charms that other ifrit cannot learn. His martial



arts prowess is legendary throughout the South, though he teaches only the Orderly Flame's members. Seragon is also one of the wealthiest individuals in the South, with financial interests in almost every major city. His total fortune defies calculation.

Summoning: As an elder of the South's preeminent fire court, Lusa Seragon has the right to respond to a summoning by sending a lesser ifrit in his place.

Motivation: To unify Creation's fire courts

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4; Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 5; Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 3, Temperance 5, Valor 3

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 5, Dodge 4, Integrity 5, Investigation 4, Linguistics (Native: Flametongue; Others: High Holy Speech, High Realm, Low Realm, Old Realm, Riverspeak) 5, Lore 4, Martial Arts 5, Medicine 3, Performance 4, Presence 5, Resistance 3, Sail 3 (Sand Ship +2), Socialize 4, Stealth 3, Survival 2, War 2

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Artifact (Lambent Fire Gourd) 5, Backing 5, Contacts 5, Face 3, Influence 4, Manse 4, Resources 5

Charms and Powers:

Unless otherwise described here, Lusa Seragon has all the elemental powers and spirit Charms of a standard ifrit, as described on pages 119–120 of **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. IV—The Roll of Glorious Divinity I**.

Dematerialize—Costs 75 motes

Essence Plethora (x2)—20 extra motes

Fire Dragon's Embrace—Lusa Seragon can render a mortal immune to heat and fire for one scene, as if the person used Element-Resisting Prana (see **Exalted**, p. 210). By spending a Willpower point, Seragon extends the blessing to a group of people for an extended period (as described on p. 145 of **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. IV—The Roll of Glorious Divinity I**). He typically allocates the six points of extended effect to a Magnitude 2 group for a full season. In this manner, he can send a troop of miners into the most extreme Southern environments after gems—even into erupting volcanoes, if need be. To Seragon's distress, however, the fiery Essence infusing his employees makes them emotional and impulsive, reducing their Temperance by one.

Geas—Seragon can bind targets to perform tasks of his choosing. Doing so involves a normal social attack, but if it succeeds, the target suffers potentially lethal debilitation if he does not devote his life to the task. Normally, the ifrit reserves his Geas as a security measure for brave volunteers, so that cunning enemies of the Orderly Flame cannot sway them from their missions. Now and then, though, Seragon binds enemies to very long but harmless tasks, such as copying every volume of *The Tale of Sethra's Daughters* by hand, to prevent their interference in the Orderly Flame's activities.

Ox-Body Technique (x3)

Reserve of Will (x2)

Stoke the Flame—Seragon can instill a powerful drive to honesty and propriety; the ifrit must attempt a Performance-based social attack to direct this Emotion effect at a particular goal, but his player gains five bonus successes to the roll. Success results in five scenes' worth of building an Intimacy to the goal set by Seragon. Every affected person also must spend the next scene acting on this new desire for honesty and propriety, unless they spend five points of Willpower. Seragon typically reserves this potent effect for diplomatic or commercial meetings where emotions run especially high.

Words of Power—Seragon can stun foes with his burning words of scorn. This requires a successful (Manipulation + Valor) roll and deals three levels of bashing damage, plus one die of bashing damage per threshold success; only natural soak applies to this damage. For the next 12 ticks after taking damage, a target suffers an internal penalty to all actions, equal to the number of levels of damage sustained.

Supernatural Martial Arts:

Art of Meditative Discussion: All Charms (see **Scroll of the Monk—The Imperfect Lotus**, pp. 18–20)

Snake Style: All Charms

Join Battle: 8

Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 11, Damage 4B, Parry DV 6, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 7B, Parry DV 4, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 10, Damage 4B, Parry DV —, Rate 1, Tags C,N,P

Lambent Fire Gourd: Speed 4, Accuracy 15, Damage 18L*, Range 1,000, Rate 1

Soak: 17L/29B (Lambent Fire Gourd, 15L/25B)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 7 **Willpower:** 10

Essence: 5 **Essence Pool:** 120

Cost to Dematerialize: 75

Other Notes: Only a person with Willpower 10 can open the Lambent Fire Gourd, and doing so costs three Willpower points. Once opened, the gourd erupts in a prodigious blast of liquid fire and burning swords, 1,000 yards long and 10 yards wide. All Fairfolk or Wyld-tainted creatures in the area suffer the attack at the indicated Accuracy; the attack cannot be parried, only dodged. Other creatures suffer no harm. The gourd also releases thousands of need fires (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. IV—The Roll of Glorious Divinity I**, pp. 121–122) that run amok, burning everything they can reach except for whatever the owner specifically tells them to spare. They remain free for a number of minutes equal to (owner's Willpower + Permanent Essence) before they return to the gourd. Each additional minute costs the wielder 20 motes and one Willpower point. Closing the gourd early costs an additional three Willpower. The Lambent Fire Gourd can be opened again only once the moon makes

THE PALACE OF THE UNSEEN

Lusa Seragon lives at the Palace of the Unseen, once the hideaway of an Exalted savant of the First Age. This opulent palace-manse carries a Greater Veil of Shadows (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**, p. 76) that renders it invisible to anyone who isn't attuned to it. All of the Orderly Flame's high-ranking members attune to the manse. Inside the veil, the palace is revealed as a sprawling complex of flame-tipped scoria ornamented with gold. A lake of liquid fire surrounds the complex of living quarters, library, laboratories, training facilities and hangar for flying craft. The palace-manse also radiates supernatural heat. As long as they stay inside, any creature that is not aspected to fire (or protected by Charms such as *Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit*) suffers a -2 internal penalty to dice pools due to extreme discomfort. The Orderly Flame maintains a security force here of about 2,000 minor fire elementals. If the need arises, Seragon can call many more from allied fire courts.

a complete cycle of phases. The gourd's owner radiates a constant fiery glow that provides 15L/25B soak. Seragon cannot fully control the effects of the gourd, so he uses it only in dire situations.

MURANTRU OTA

Murantru Ota, a prominent garda bird, is Ulema of the Orderly Flame. He conceives much of its long-term vision and designs its propaganda aimed at other spirit courts.

During the First Age, Ota was the Dawn Rhoodra, or leader of the Red Volkan Ledge, then the most powerful fire court in Creation. When he abandoned that post for the Orderly Flame, many loyal garda birds followed him, decimating the Ledge's membership. The current Dawn Rhoodra, Banatokh Wol, refuses to speak to Ota for abandoning the Ledge for an ifrit's pipe dream.

Ota shares Lusa Seragon's desire to see a single Celestially sanctioned and respected fire court, much like the Court of the Wind Masters, though he recognizes this as a long-term goal. In pursuit of the Bureau of Heaven's support, Ota has gained many minor allies in the Bureau. Lately, however, Ota feels like a fool, as no one with real influence in Heaven seems to care about the Orderly Flame or its goals. Ota blames Wong BongeroK for these Celestial snubs. The garda despises the Censor of the South and considers him a villain long due for a comeuppance. He would spare no opportunity to shame BongeroK before the Celestial Bureaucracy.

Indeed, if Ota can finally prove that Wong BongeroK caused some great harm to the Orderly Flame, he and his closest allies (mostly other garda birds) would try to murder the censor, and damn the consequences. Murantru Ota takes a black-and-white view of Creation and morality.

He despises forbearance in the face of evil for the sake of mere personal safety. He brushes aside reminders that not everyone can return from death as garda birds can.

Murantru Ota is an ancient garda bird with angular features and a serious countenance. Like other birds, he has a purple-and-gold "emperor" form resembling a peacock and a flaming silver, pheasant-like "empress" form. In both of these forms he wears a silver and golden half-mask. In his third, phoenix form Ota becomes a maelstrom of blue and orange fire bearing six jagged, flaming swords.

Summoning: As the leader of the Court of the Orderly Flame, Murantru Ota has the right to send garda birds of lesser rank in his place if summoned.

Motivation: To secure the support of the Celestial Bureaucracy for the Orderly Flame

Attributes: Strength 4 (*Phoenix* 6), Dexterity 6, Stamina 6; Charisma 4, Manipulation 3 (*Phoenix* 2), Appearance 5; Perception 4, Intelligence 5 (*Phoenix* 3), Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 5

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 3, Dodge 5, Integrity 5, Linguistics (Native: *Flametongue*; Others: *High Holy Speech, Old Realm, High Realm*) 3, Lore 5, Martial Arts 3, Melee 0 (*Phoenix* 6), Occult 5, Presence 5 (Intimidation +3), Resistance 3, Socialize 3, Stealth -3, War 4

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Backing 5, Contacts 3, Influence 4

Charms and Powers:

Unless otherwise described here, Murantru Ota has all the elemental powers and spirit Charms of a standard garda bird, as described on pages 117–119 of **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. IV—The Roll of Glorious Divinity I**.

Dematerialize—Costs 75 motes

Divine Prerogative—Ota punishes not only crimes against himself, but those against the Orderly Flame as well.

Mind-Knife Sacrament—Considering how Ota uses this Charm, targets are usually restrained. Ota has no interest in enhancing foes of the Orderly Flame—only in peeling down their minds to leave them unwilling or unable to oppose the court.

Signet of Authority—Ota grants a feather of heatless, purple flame that bears his name written in Old Realm. This token confers authority over lesser elementals in the Court of the Orderly Flame.

First (Ability) Excellency—Melee, Presence

Third (Ability) Excellency—Awareness, Lore, Occult, Presence

Join Battle: 8

Attacks:

Emperor and Empress Forms:

Claw: Speed 4, Accuracy 10, Damage 7L (Empress +2 Fire), Parry DV 5, Rate 3

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 9, Damage 4B, Parry DV —, Rate 1, Tags C,N,P

Arc of Flame: Speed 6, Accuracy 10, Damage 4L, Range 10, Rate 1



Phoenix Form:

Double-Edged Khanda of the Invincible Chakkar: Speed 4, Accuracy 17, Damage 13L (+2 Fire), Parry DV 7, Rate 3

Soak:

Emperor: 3L/6B

Empress: 5L/8B; 9L/12B vs. fire (Halo of Flame, 2L/2B; 6L/6B vs. Fire)

Phoenix: 11L/16B; 15L/20B vs. fire (Halo of Flame, 2L/2B; 6L/6B vs. fire) (Lamellar armor, 6L/8B, -2 mobility penalty)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Dodge DV: 9 **Willpower:** 9

Essence: 6 **Essence Pool:** 105

Other Notes: In any form, Murantru Ota may fly at full movement speed. Landscape Travel may increase the speed.

In empress and phoenix forms, Ota sets fire to any combustible material touched, and absorbs fire elemental damage per Blessed Fire Body (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. IV—The Roll of Glorious Divinity I**, pp. 163–164).

Due to blazing plumage, Ota takes a -3 penalty to Stealth rolls.

Murantru Ota's straight sword, Double-Edged Khanda of the Invincible Chakkar, is an extension of his own being. It is the result of achieving a legendary state of enlightenment among fire elementals and represents his deep understanding of the deepest mysteries of fire. It affords him an Accuracy bonus equal to his highest Virtue.

ULITO SWAN

Thirty-one years before the Great Contagion, Swan Dragon's daughter Ulito was born of a mortal woman in what is now Harborhead. Even as a child, Ulito showed her pedigree through battle instincts and mediating judgment. As a young woman, she saw a trio of Fair Folk slay her mother and sister before her eyes. Ulito killed the murderers but has hated all raksha ever since. Her hatred only grew after her father apparently fell battling the Fair Folk invasion.

Soon after being named censor, Wong Bongerok claimed Swan Dragon's homes in Creation and Yu-Shan with a few strokes of his pen, eliminating any birthright that might have gone to Ulito. He could not stop the God-Blooded woman's own ascension to divinity, however, or prevent her from joining friends of her father in the Court of the Orderly Flame. Neither can he prevent Ulito from visiting Yu-Shan on official business for the Court, though she endures scorn for her half-mortal ancestry. Ulito's complaints against Wong Bongerok for the return of Swan Dragon's estate go nowhere, as functionaries claim to have no knowledge of Wong Bongerok or his expropriation of her father's property.

Ulito Swan is now the Orderly Flame's Intelligencer, leading its extensive spy network. She operates from Chiaroscuro, in a subterranean complex full of First Age surveillance and communication devices. Ulito and the Orderly Flame have figured out how to use some of these

artifacts but many remain mysterious. While the Orderly Flame has a public embassy in Chiaroscuro, only she, Chiaroscuro's Pyric Minister and a few other high-ranking members of the Court know about the complex. The Tri-Khan certainly does not, despite the Court's alliance with him to minimize the Realm's influence.

The Orderly Flame's spy network watches for enemies (of the Court and of Creation as a whole), collects intelligence on anyone who seems influential, observes the Realm's movements in the region and assembles allies to sabotage their further occupation. Ulito carries out her duties to the exclusion of all leisure. When she is not training agents, planning missions or acting in the field, Ulito experiments on the First Age devices in her headquarters, reads dossiers and practices her combat skills. She thinks of Lusa Seragon as a surrogate father but has few friends. She thinks of the wise wanderer Dozima Wokish as a friend and ally, not realizing that she knows only a false identity he constructed for that purpose.

Ulito Swan despises the Realm's exploitation of the South. While she has orders to eschew murder and other terrorist techniques except in extreme cases, Ulito freely manufactures scandals, bribes subordinates, steals payrolls and otherwise hinders the Realm's satraps, generals and colonial administrations. She has little greater love for the Celestial Bureaucracy, the Guild or any other organizations that she perceives as corrupt and evil. She hates Wong Bongerok, who has robbed her of her father's legacy, and the Fair Folk, who robbed her of his love. She will accept any reasonable proposal to fight them.

In her natural form, Ulito Swan has a snow-white, feathered face and head, and two short, golden horns. She knows many shapechanging Charms, however, and usually takes the shape of tall, slender woman with dusky skin, large round eyes and fiery-red, ankle-length hair.

Motivation: To rid the world of corruption

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4; Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 5; Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 5, Temperance 3, Valor 4

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 3, Dodge 4, Integrity 3, Investigation 5, Larceny 4, Linguistics (Native: Flametongue; Others: High Realm, Low Realm, Old Realm) 3, Lore 4, Martial Arts 4, Melee 5 (Rapier +2), Occult 3 (Spirit Courts +2), Performance 3, Presence 4, Resistance 3, Ride 3, Sail 3 (Sand Ship +2), Socialize 3, Stealth 4, Survival 3, Thrown 2, War 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Artifact (Five-Fire Stone) 4, Artifact (Widow's Shawl) 4, Artifact (Subtle Pin of Jade and Fury) 3, Backing 3, Contacts 2, Influence 3, Manse 2, Mentor 3, Resources 4

Spirit Charms and Powers:

Affinity Fire Control—Ulito can control ambient fire for a variety of purposes. Each application requires separate

use of this Charm, but the effects last a scene and she can use the Charm as many times as she wants, for a different application each time.

- **Fire Immunity:** Ulito wraps flames around her in an immaterial suit of armor that protects her from other fire. She gains +4L/4B soak against fire-based attacks, and +4 to Resistance rolls against fire-based environmental effects.

- **Ordered Flame Weapon:** Ulito bids the flames to cling to her blade, fists or other weapon. This adds +4L to attacks using that weapon (and turns a weapon's bashing damage lethal).

Cloak of Scales—At will, Ulito Swan can cover her body with dragon-scales that rise in a feather-like crest on her head. This increases her natural soak. It does not cost Essence.

Dematerialize—Costs 65 motes

Elemental Expression—Ulito can use this innate power to control existing sources of fire. By committing up to four motes, she can spread the flames into an environmental hazard (damage 4L/minute, Trauma 2L). She could also add up to +4L to the damage of a pre-existing fire-based elemental effect (as long as she didn't create it herself) and add the L tag to the Trauma. Finally, Ulito can reduce a flame effect's damage by up to 4L. The effects last as long as Ulito stays nearby and keeps the motes committed.

Elemental Rejuvenation—When Ulito contacts natural flames, she can take a Speed 3, -2 DV action to heal one level of damage or recover one mote of Essence.

Hoodwink—Ulito can distract the senses of other creatures so they have difficulty taking any meaningful action.

Loom Stride—Ulito can vanish in a flicker of flame and ride the currents of Fire Essence woven throughout Creation.

Measure the Wind—Ulito does not hesitate to spend a mere mote to evaluate anyone who shows some hint of supernatural power.

Principle of Motion—Ulito can keep up to nine extra actions banked.

Shapechange—For 7 motes, Ulito Swan can take any female, humanoid form for the next scene. She can remain in her two favored forms indefinitely.

Tracking—Ulito can follow and locate anything or anyone to which she has committed a mote of Essence.

Join Battle: 9

Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 3B, Parry DV 6, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 9, Damage 6B, Parry DV 4, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 9, Damage 3B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

Rapier (Subtle Pin of Jade and Fury): Speed 4, Accuracy 16, Damage 7L, Parry DV 8, Rate 3

Soak: 11L/18B (Cloak of Scales, 3L/6B; Widow's Shawl, 6L/8B or 10L/16B against Fair Folk)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap



Dodge DV: 7 Willpower: 9
Essence: 4 Essence Pool: 80 (85)
Committed Essence: 5

Other Notes: Ulito Swan owns a number of potent artifacts: The Five Fire Stone (Artifact 4) is an assassination device that looks like a small red pebble with fine golden veins. It costs one mote to attune. Its owner may hide it on her victim's person, then activate it at any time by uttering a command word and paying another five motes. The stone then erupts in unearthly fire that harms only the chosen victim, inflicting 25L damage. After the explosion, the stone returns to normal and may be retrieved and reused.

The Subtle Pin of Jade and Fury (Artifact 3) is a slender rapier of yellow jade. In most ways, it duplicates a reaper daiklave, but grants +4 Defense. A mortal can also "attune" to the blade for a scene by spending a Willpower point.

The Widow's Shawl (Artifact 4) looks like an ordinary lace shawl, except for a slight glitter of hair-thin moonsilver and soulsteel threads. Once per day, Ulito Swan may cast the Widow's Shawl around her. The Shawl grows and spreads over the area like immaterial cobwebs, centered on its owner. It affects an area 50 yards in diameter for every five motes spent. All Fair Folk in the affected area suffer -2 to all dice pools for the entire scene and must pay double mote cost for Charms.

SWAN DRAGON

LEGENDARY LOST CENSOR,
LESSER ELEMENTAL DRAGON OF FIRE

For 345 years in the Low First Age, Swan Dragon served as the Censor of the South. This optimist and visionary up-

INTELLIGENCE HEADQUARTERS

Ulito Swan's Intelligence Headquarters occupies an underground bunker beneath Chiaroscuro. Reaching it requires traversing several levels of sewers and tunnels. Gaining uninvited access is no easy task—it has but one entrance, guarded by several ifrit. Many other elementals work inside the bunker. The installation consists of several large, immaculately clean chambers full of various First Age devices, many of them broken or simply unexplained. One device, the Flamescrier (Artifact 3, Repair 3), emulates the Charm called Voices on the Wind (see *The Manual of Exalted Power—The Dragon-Blooded*, p. 131), except that its operator can hear only those conversations that take place near fire, as if she herself occupied the flame's location. For three motes, the operator can eavesdrop on words spoken within (listener's Essence x 100) feet. Each additional mote spent increases the range by 10 feet. The operator must specify a particular person as a target. A common ploy is to plant an operative, posing as a servant, in a meeting of important people. The spy makes sure that the room contains at least one lit candle—if necessary, hiding one within an opaque shield.

held the virtues of justice, fairness and reason in a land where strength, savagery and exploitation were often the rule. He was celebrated both in Yu-Shan and in Creation as one of the most effective and wisest censors the South had ever seen. During the Great Contagion, however, Swan Dragon disappeared while fighting the Fair Folk. His loss devastated his friends and allies. Many ventured into the desert and the Wyld in search of Swan Dragon, but no one ever found him. By now, most of Swan Dragon's old allies and foes think he is dead.

They are wrong. Swan Dragon lives and has returned to the South... sort of.

The clique of raksha nobles who called themselves the Rain Princes captured Swan Dragon. They held him in the Deep Wyld and tortured him for centuries until his mind broke and he forgot who he was. Recently, the Rain Princes found it amusing to release him. Swan Dragon wandered for years until he reached a place he unconsciously recognized as home: the hills near the Lap. Instead of a magnificent flame-dragon, he manifests as an old man in dirty robes. Sometimes he enters the city and strolls the streets.

The Laplanders think that the scruffy wanderer is a peculiar holy man, and possibly God-Blooded. Lacking a name for him, they call him the Mendicant (following the same pattern as the Penitent). Mild slights can throw the Mendicant into spluttering but harmless rage. He rewards people who give him alms with interesting tricks and sleights of hand. People who particularly please the holy wanderer receive a small pillow of light, cottony matter. If stroked and cuddled, the pillow opens eyes and a small mouth and coos at its owner. The Mendicant calls these creatures tamashi. So far, none of the Lap's authorities consider the Mendicant important enough to find and question him.

The Mendicant speaks in a muddle of nonsense, riddles and curious anecdotes about people and places forgotten for centuries, mixed with anachronistic legalese. Sometimes he holds one-sided conversations with the Penitent. Sometimes when he finds a mud puddle, he finger-paints squiggly designs (that no one recognizes as bureaucratic phrases in Old Realm, done in the hand of a master calligrapher). He seems amiable,

TAMASHI

Every week, tamashi shed a layer of lightweight fabric. After two months, the pillow's owner has enough to fashion a garment that soaks 12L/12B fire damage—but any physical lethal damage destroys it. Swan Dragon's rage, however, is focused through the tamashi, regardless of each pillow's location. Whenever the Mendicant has a temper tantrum, one tamashi explodes to deal 10 dice of lethal fire damage to everyone within five yards. Those wearing the tamashi-fabric garments are unharmed. As yet, the Lap Sepoys have not connected fatal fires in the Lap to people who were kind (perhaps many months before) to the mad old Mendicant.



unless someone tries to push him around or persistently argues with him. When this happens, his eyes glow with a fiery orange light and flames flicker at his nostrils and at the ends of his whiskers and hair. He flees at any mention of the Fair Folk.

No Laplander yet has seriously threatened Swan Dragon. Anyone who does is in for a shock as the Mendicant turns into a swan and flies away, trailing flames in his wake. If anyone wounds Swan Dragon, flames of gold and purple erupt around him and points of flame whip through the sky as the Mendicant becomes a 100-foot-long dragon covered in white scales. In this form, Swan Dragon's madness cannot be contained. He lashes out at any attacker with his Dragon's Suspire, claws, bite and tail. When everyone who threatens him is dead or has fled, he flies away, eventually returning to the form of a man, recalling nothing of the incident.

Swan Dragon has forgotten many of his former Charms, though he uses a few of them by instinct. If Swan Dragon somehow regains his sanity, he regains all his Charms and summons his sword, Shurtimu Ji. He also remembers how to enter his sanctum in the Penitent, how to access the Penitent's control room and how to reactivate the mighty artifact.

Summoning: Swan Dragon cannot be summoned. His exposure to the Wyld has obscured his destiny and his location in Creation, such that normal summoning magic does not affect him.

Sanctum: The onetime censor no longer remembers either his official palace in the deep desert (now held by Wong BongeroK) or his private sanctum within the heart-chakra of the Penitent.

Motivation: Swan Dragon has no coherent motivation. He wanders, he babbles, he does not permit himself to remember his torment-filled past.

Attributes: Strength 2/7*, Dexterity 4, Stamina 10; Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3; Perception 5, Intelligence 6, Wits 1/6*

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 1/5, Temperance 1/3, Valor 4

Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 5, Bureaucracy 1/7*, Dodge 4, Integrity 1/5*, Investigation 1/5*, Larceny 1 (Sleight of Hand +3), Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: Flametongue, High Realm, Riverspeak, Seatongue, Skytongue) 5 (Official Documents +3*), Lore 1/5* (First Age +2), Martial Arts 3, Melee 1/7*, Occult 5, Performance 1/6*, Presence 3/5*, Resistance 4, Socialize 2/5*, Stealth 4, War 1/5*

* All numbers after the slash are for Swan Dragon restored to sanity or (for Strength) in his dragon form.

Backgrounds: None at present. He used to have a wide assortment of allies, artifacts, contacts and followers, plus a manse, significant backing (as Censor of the South) and a high salary. Restoring his sanity would return some of the allies, contacts and followers, as well as Artifact 3 (a starmetal grand daiklave), but many Backgrounds inhered in Swan Dragon's role as censor. Recovering them would involve deposing Wong BongeroK.

Charms and Powers:

Affinity Fire Control—Swan Dragon can control eight barrels of flame. Amnesiac as he is, he knows only how to make

small flames do simple tricks such as jumping from lamp to lamp or jiggling in time to a song. These little tricks cost only one mote, however.

Dematerialize—Costs 85 motes

Essence Bite—When rage drives Swan Dragon into his draconic form, he spends 20 motes to cloak himself in white-hot flame. This fire deals four levels of aggravated damage to anyone or anything that strikes or is touched by Swan Dragon. The flaming aura lasts a full scene.

Essence Plethora (x3)—30 extra motes (Solar Essence given to him by the Unconquered Sun)

Host of Spirits—Creating a tamashi costs Swan Dragon 3 motes, and he never creates more than one a time. Tamashi have no meaningful traits except Essence 1, Appearance 3 and Performance 3 (to coo and be cute).

Natural Elemental Powers—Swan Dragon has all the powers that are natural to elementals, even if he doesn't know about them. Swan Dragon's Suspire is exceptionally powerful.

Occluded Essence—Charms and sorcery cannot locate Swan Dragon. Attempts to locate him using the Loom of Fate now suffer a -5 external penalty due to Swan Dragon's long sojourn in the Deep Wyld and the damage to his identity. Essence-perceiving Charms such as Measure the Wind or All-Encompassing Sorcerer's Sight reveal that his Essence is elemental and fire-aspected, but muddled. (He could be a God-Blooded mortal...) Recognizing the true power of his broken Essence requires at least five threshold successes on a suitable Perception roll.

Ox-Body Technique (x4)

Shapechange—Changing from dragon to human or swan forms cost 5 motes. Resuming dragon form does not cost any Essence.

Sane Swan Dragon's Charms:

Bane Weapon—With this Charm, Swan Dragon makes all his attacks deal aggravated damage against Fair Folk who aspect themselves toward water—a manifestation of his deep hatred against the Rain Princes.

Measure the Wind—Swan Dragon sensibly evaluates potential foes, and woe betide anyone whose Essence carries the taint of the raksha. His hatred of them will last forever.

Portal—While within 200 miles of the Penitent, Swan Dragon can open a portal to his sanctum in the statue's heart chakra. He can open a portal into Khorbat Prantil from the same distance, which will come as an unpleasant surprise to its current resident, Wong BongeroK.

Principle of Motion—Swan Dragon can hold up to nine extra actions in reserve.

Regalia of Authority—By spending 10 motes and a Willpower point, Swan Dragon can evoke a glowing, transparent white mantle around himself that could be feathers or flames, and the eight-pointed star-and-circle mandala of the Unconquered Sun burns golden on his brow. Faced with such overwhelming Celestial authority, all creatures of Essence 8 or less kneel in submission and instantly gain an Intimacy of reverence and obedience to the censor. Anyone whose



Dodge MDV does not exceed Swan Dragon's Temperance suffers a Servitude effect to obey any command Swan Dragon gives; this costs three Willpower to resist.

Reserve of Will (x8)

Shurtimu Ji—No matter where in Creation Swan Dragon's grand daiklave, Shurtimu Ji, has gone, he can call it back to himself for eight motes and one Willpower.

Stoke the Flame—Swan Dragon can inspire groups of people either to seek justice and order, or simply to think clearly and honestly about whatever social situation is currently under discussion. This requires a social Performance attack designed to arouse these emotional states, if the targets are not already willing. For already-willing or successfully influenced people, Stoke the Flame can act as three scenes spent building an Intimacy to the goal set by Swan Dragon, either of justice or reaching a rational solution to a problem. What's more, everyone must spend the rest of the scene working towards that goal. Resisting costs three Willpower.

First (Ability) Excellency—Awareness, Bureaucracy, Investigation, Lore, Performance

Infinite (Ability) Mastery—Bureaucracy

Third (Ability) Excellency—Dodge, Melee, War

Divine (Ability) Subordination—Bureaucracy, Investigation, Presence. Swan Dragon must announce himself as Censor of the South, and that he's conducting an official investigation.

Derangements

Amnesia Deformity—Swan Dragon cannot remember his identity and has trouble remembering even things he has done yesterday.

Join Battle: 6/11*

Attacks:

Insane Human Form:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 8, Damage 2B, Parry DV 5, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 5B, Parry DV 3, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 7, Damage 2B, Parry DV —, Rate 1, Tags C,N,P

Sane Human Form:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 8, Damage 7B, Parry DV 5, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 10B, Parry DV 3, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 7, Damage 7B, Parry DV —, Rate 1, Tags C,N,P

Grand Daiklave (Shurtimu Ji): Speed 5, Accuracy 13, Damage 19L/4, Parry DV 6, Rate 2, Tags 2,O,P,R

Dragon Form:

Dragon Bite: Speed 6, Accuracy 14, Damage 18L, Parry DV 4, Rate 1

Dragon Claw: Speed 5, Accuracy 15, Damage 15L, Parry DV 6, Rate 3

Dragon Tail: Speed 5, Accuracy 16, Damage 18B, Parry DV 5, Rate 3

Dragon's Suspire: Speed 5, Accuracy 11, Damage 22L, Range 10, Rate 1

Soak: 5L/10B (human) or 13L/26B (Dragon Hide, 8L/16B; Hardness 10L/10B) (dragon)

Health Levels: -0/-1x10/-2x9/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 8 **Willpower:** 9

Essence: 8 **Essence Pool:** 155

Other Notes: Swan Dragon's Suspire is a spray of liquid fire 10 yards long and two yards wide. Everyone in the area suffers the attack at the given Accuracy. It cannot be parried, only dodged.

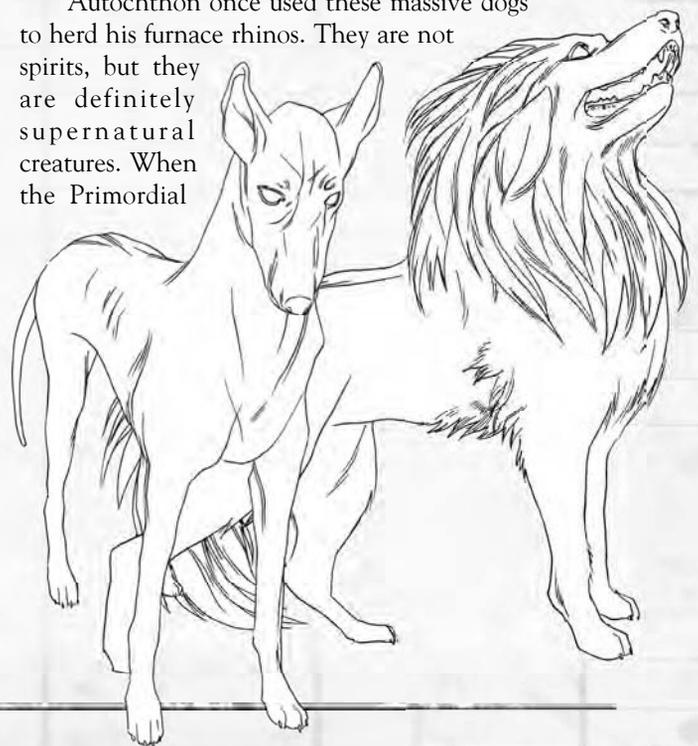
Shurtimu Ji is a starmetal grand daiklave. Since Swan Dragon is neither a Sidereal, a member of the Bureau of Destiny nor specially blessed by the Maidens, he cannot use the weapon's magical material bonus.

MINIONS

A number of the South's powerful gods command hosts of lesser entities—not necessarily gods, but supernatural creatures of notable power.

HOUNDS OF AUTOCHTHON

Autochthon once used these massive dogs to herd his furnace rhinos. They are not spirits, but they are definitely supernatural creatures. When the Primordial



THE SEARCH FOR SWAN DRAGON

While his friends might have given up hope of Swan Dragon's return, a few beings still covertly search for Swan Dragon. Wun Ja, Director of the Bureau of Humanity, never forgot the former censor and still hopes to find him. Swan Dragon's legendary silver tongue and influence could provide her the key to unite the South against the Realm. She quietly encourages the Sidereal Dozima Wokish in his own search, anonymously sending him any clues or rumors she uncovers. Wun Ja arranged Wokish's first contact with the Orderly Flame and hopes that they can find Swan Dragon together, wherever he is.

departed Creation, he left his hounds behind. The pack once consisted of 25 hounds—five for each magical material—but less than half remain. Sometimes the whole pack appears to assist in battles against great threats from the Wyld; other times, solitary dogs or pairs appear.

Hounds of Autochthon look like giant dogs, standing 10 feet at the shoulder. Beyond that, each breed has a different appearance. Despite legends, only their eyes are actually made of their associated magical material. They do not need to eat, for Creation's Essence sustains them. Unfortunately, they cannot be bred with mundane dogs.

Sun Dogs resemble mastiffs with tan coats, lion-like manes and glittering golden eyes. Their resilient skin emits a golden glow, while a sun dog's howl can be heard for miles.

Moon dogs have lean builds, dappled silver-gray coats and whip-like tails. They run with great speed and move with quicksilver grace in combat.

Jadehounds, or stone dogs, are smaller than the other breeds (only nine feet at the shoulder) but are exceptionally agile. Their thick coats are variegated black, white, red, blue and green.

Starhounds have thick, blue-gray coats but are seldom seen—they instinctively know how to be where other creatures fail to look. They likewise show an uncanny skill at biting where they can deal the most damage.

Nighthounds look like sun dogs except for their ebony fur and gleaming black eyes. These silent killers never bark, howl or whine, no matter how great their pain, and their bite carries an eldritch chill.

No power in Creation can domesticate Autochthon's hounds. The power used to create them guarantees their escape from any restraint. These cunning supernatural beasts escape most mundane means of capture within minutes. Even the most powerful Charms, spells or artifacts cannot hold them forever. At most, they may consent to associate with other defenders of Creation—for a time.

Motivation: To serve the enigmatic goals left by Autochthon
Attributes: Strength 10, Dexterity 3, Stamina 10, Charisma 2, Manipulation 1, Appearance 3; Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 4

Abilities: Athletics 3 (Running +1), Awareness 5 (Spot Ambush +1), Dodge 3, Integrity 3, Martial Arts 4, Presence 2 (Intimidation +3), Resistance 3, Stealth 3 (Ambush +2, Hide in Plain Sight +1), Survival +4 (Tracking +3)

Special Abilities:

Inevitable Escape—Given time, Hounds of Autochthon can chew through any chain, dig out of any pit or escape from any pen or trap. Even magical bindings or prisons fail in time, often with no sign of how the hound got out. If it becomes relevant in play, roll the beast's Willpower on regular increments. The hound escapes after five successes. Roll daily for mundane means of restraint (if the hound

cannot simply break out with an ordinary feat of strength or attack); weekly, for extraordinary fetters such as a jade-steel cage, or those employing simple Charms, artifacts, thaumaturgy or Terrestrial Circle sorcery; and monthly for powerful artifacts or sorcery. Even N/A artifacts, entities of comparable power or throwing a hound into Elsewhere merely extend the time scale to years.

Regeneration—These supernatural beasts heal one level of lethal damage every 15 minutes. They heal aggravated damage at the same rate that Exalted heal lethal damage.

Sense Intrusions—Hounds of Autochthon sometimes know when forces of the Wyld or (less often) Malfeas or the Underworld launch assaults into Creation, or when ancient seals are about to be broken. Even the wisest gods and savants don't know how, but considering who made them, they might receive warnings directly from the Loom of Fate.

Supernatural Senses—Hounds' senses are equivalent to a permanent All-Encompassing Sorcerer's Sight. Hounds of Autochthon are supernatural trackers.

Wyld Resistance—Hostile environments, of Creation or the Wyld, cannot harm these hounds. Effectively, they permanently carry the benefits of Integrity-Protecting Prana and Element-Resisting Prana (see **Exalted**, pp. 199 and 210). They are incidentally immune to non-supernatural diseases and poisons.

Join Battle: 9

Attacks:

Bite: Speed 6, Accuracy 6, Damage 11L, Parry DV 3, Rate 1
Claw: Speed 5, Accuracy 8, Damage 10L, Parry DV 4, Rate 2

Soak: 10L/20B (Supernatural Armored Skin, +5L/10B)

Health Levels: -0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 6 **Willpower:** 7

Essence: 6

Other Notes: Each breed has certain advantages over the basic template:

Sun Dogs are Dexterity 4 (raise all attack Accuracy and Defense values by one, and raise Dodge DV by one), and have +5L/5B soak.

Moon Dogs move double the normal distances with their Move and Dash actions, and have a +2 bonus to their Dodge DV.

Jadehound attacks are all at -1 Speed (Speed 5 for bite, Speed 4 for claw).

Starhound attacks deal two additional dice of lethal damage, while Stealth rolls for them receive a +2 internal bonus.

Nighthounds have +5L/5B soak. If a nighthound inflicts any damage with its bite, its victim loses three motes of Essence.

KALEYI

These pathetic creatures are the remains of mortals who promised themselves to the Pale Mistress. Whatever they sought, the Pale Mistress took them—usually through a wasting disease and madness—and transformed them into creatures neither living nor dead, not mortal, bestial or divine.





Kaleyi appear as monkey-like mockeries of their former selves, with shriveled flesh and bent, twisted bodies. Their clothes soon become torn and soiled rags. They moan and grunt and howl in unceasingly agony. Kaleyi grind their teeth to points and grow their nails into long, hard claws, with which they all eventually tear out their own eyes. While they usually stay close to the Pale Mistress, kaleyi sometimes wander off and hunt in ravenous packs from five to 20, killing many innocents, sometimes murdering and destroying entire villages.

Kaleyi avoid light, which they can, somehow, *smell*. Direct contact with sunlight renders them brittle enough to be destroyed with a single blow. They cannot, under any circumstances, enter ground consecrated to the Golden Lord.

Motivation: To cause death and destruction for the glory of the Pale Mistress

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4; Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1; Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 1, Valor 3

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 4, Dodge 2, Martial Arts 4, Resistance 2, Stealth 3, Survival 3

Supernatural Powers:

Dematerialize—Kaleyi are naturally material, but can dematerialize to enter a spirit's sanctum. This is the only circumstance in which they can dematerialize, and they become material the moment they enter the sanctum's otherspace. Performing this feat costs the kaleyi 35 motes. Leaving a sanctum for the material world does not cost motes.

Invulnerability of the Damned—Kaleyi take no damage from bashing attacks, however great. These mad creatures cannot be subdued, only slain. Sunlight, however, removes their entire soak. In this condition, lethal or bashing damage easily destroys them.

Septic Claws—Wounds inflicted by a kaleyi's filthy claws become inflamed, taking twice as long to heal unless medical Charms or thaumaturgy are used to assist the healing.

Supernatural Scents—A kaleyi's supernaturally keen sense of smell enables it to perceive every detail of its surroundings, including invisible or dematerialized entities.

Join Battle: 6

Attacks:

Claw: Speed 5, Accuracy 8, Damage 6L, Parry DV 4, Rate 2

Soak: 4L



Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 3 **Willpower:** 6

Essence: 1 **Essence Pool:** 40

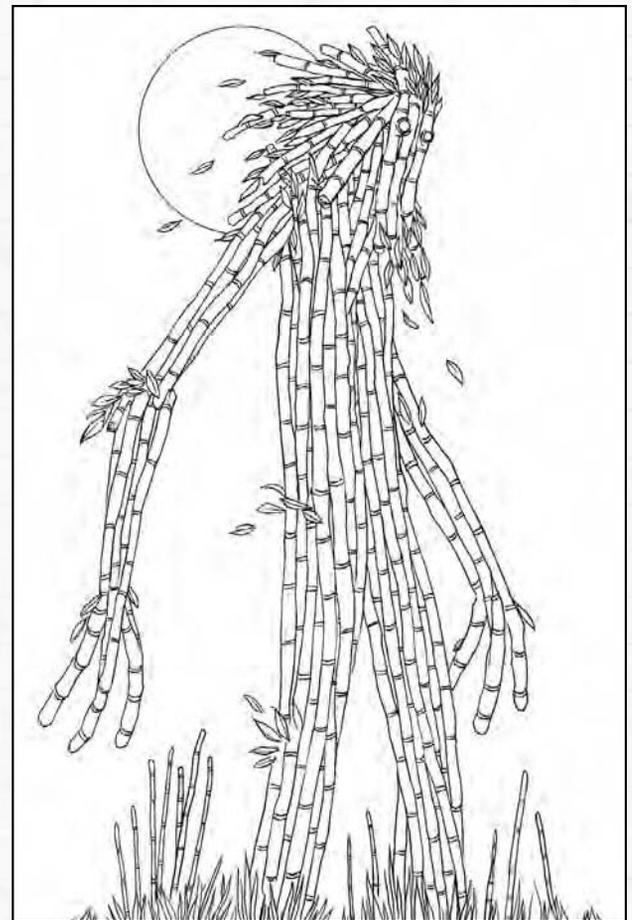
Other Notes: None

WALKERS AMONG THE TREES

The Tengese believe the Pale Mistress causes miscarriages by whispering disease into the ears of sleeping pregnant women. To protect their unborn children, pregnant women sleep with scented silk in their ears—if they can afford it—but this does not always work and sometimes the woman forgets. In the Middle Lands, women bury their stillborn amongst the bamboo trees in the Forest of Compassion, where they hope the Pale Mistress cannot find it. The Tengese further say that if a seed from the great trees

takes root in the grave, a walker among the trees will sprout from the ground on the next moonless night.

Walkers among the trees are 50-foot-tall manlike figures of living bamboo, with hair and beards of bamboo shoots.



Possessed by the spirit of the unborn, walkers are drawn to their mortal parents' homes, to watch over them by night. Walkers take vengeance on anyone whom their child-minds perceive as attacking or insulting their mothers: a tax collector taking his tithe, a husband arguing with his wife, other children perceived as "stealing" the mother's affection...

These creatures are unwitting tools of the Pale Mistress. She catches the lower soul of the stillborn (even the Pale Mistress dares not interfere with the reincarnation of higher souls) and shapes it into an elemental. She sends the walkers to inflict further woe on those already grieving. Most walkers never realize this. A few, unable to bear the knowledge that their existence is a vicious trick, burn themselves to ash—though they might take a forest or a village with them.

Motivation: To watch over their "mother" and punish any who would do her harm

Attributes: Strength 10, Dexterity 4, Stamina 12; Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1; Perception 6, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 2, Temperance 1, Valor 3

Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Martial Arts 4, Presence 3, Resistance 5, Survival 4, Thrown 4

Spirit Charms:

Dematerialize—Costs 40 motes

Essence Plethora (x2)—20 extra motes

Landscape Hide—A walker can merge with a bamboo grove as a way to escape detection and harm.

Landscape Travel—A walker can double its running speed for a scene.

One with the Wood—Costs three motes. For one scene, the walker can locate and identify the species of any living creature or materialized spirit in the forest. It can recognize individuals it has met before (including its "mother"). When using this ability the walker becomes a supernatural tracker, as if using the Tracking Charm.

Ox-Body Technique (x2)

Roots Run Deep—For 10 motes, a stationary walker can send roots burrowing through the earth up to 20 feet, attacking nearby structures but not individual creatures. The walker inflicts 10 dice of piercing, bashing damage

every miscellaneous action (see **Exalted**, pp. 153–154, for rules about attacking inanimate objects). This Charm's effects last a full scene.

Tree Fortitude—For three motes, the walker reflexively strengthens its woody body so that for the rest of its action, it soaks lethal damage with its full Stamina. Its body stiffens, however, reducing its Dexterity by two for the rest of its action as well.

Woodland Stride—Costs six motes. For the rest of the scene, the walker can move silently and leave no evidence of its passing. Attempts to track the walker suffer a -3 external penalty.

Join Battle: 7

Attacks:

Smash: Speed 5, Accuracy 8, Damage 12B, Parry DV 5, Rate 2

Thrown Boulder: Speed 6, Accuracy 8, Damage 16B, Range 100, Rate 1

Soak: 16L/24B (Bark Hide +10L/12B, Hardness 4L/6B)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 3

Willpower: 6

Essence: 2

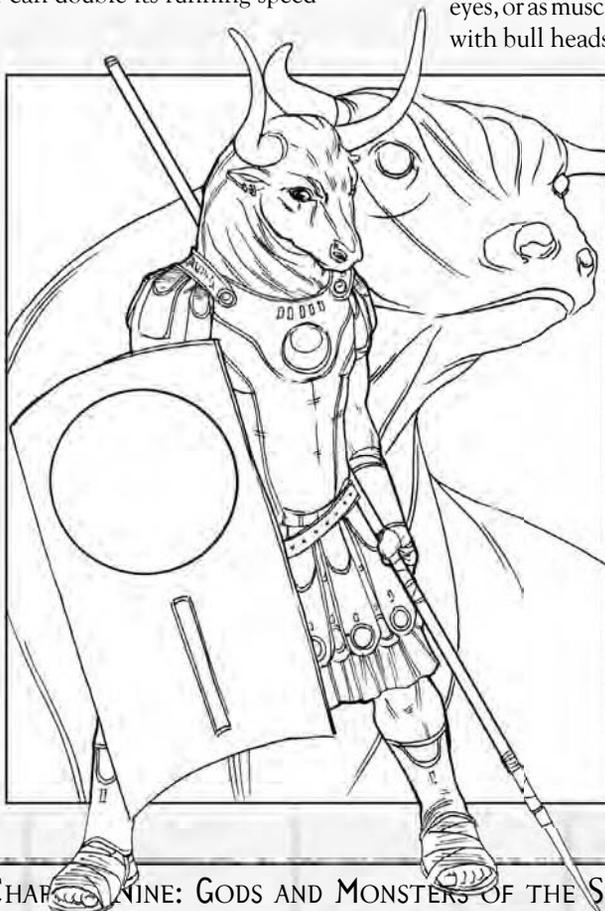
Essence Pool: 70

Other Notes: Walkers among the trees attack either with huge wooden fists or by throwing boulders, logs or other convenient large items. In the latter case, damage varies depending on what the walker has available. The listed damage is an upper limit.

WAR AUROCHS OF AHLAT

These fierce and loyal servants of Ahlat appear as massive, black aurochs—a kind of wild cattle—with blood-red eyes, or as muscular, dark-skinned men and women with bull heads. In either form, they have golden horns and hooves. These spirits wield fine golden spears, bull-hide shields and bows while in humanoid form, and wear artifact breastplates.

Ahlat sends war aurochs to fight on his behalf. Sometimes they aid other spirits in battle or, rarely, favored mortals. These gods hate cravens, however, and cut down allies who flee from a battle. The brave receive a strange reward. Following great battles, Ahlat sends his aurochs to devour the bodies of dead heroes. In this manner, the war aurochs absorb the mortal's memories. The war aurochs, in turn, sequesters these memories in a tuft of hair that Ahlat plucks and turns into another tassel for his cloak. Mortals have long misunderstood the war aurochs'





actions, leading to a widespread but quite false myth that war aurochs are themselves slain warriors raised to minor godhood by Ahlat.

Sanctum: War aurochs dwell with Ahlat in his golden palace.

Motivation: To do Ahlat's bidding

Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 4, Stamina 8; Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1; Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 1, Valor 4

Abilities: Archery 5, Athletics 2, Awareness 4, Dodge 2, Integrity 4, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: Flametongue) 1, Martial Arts 5, Melee 5, Occult 1, Presence 3, Resistance 4, Stealth 2, Survival 2, War 4

Backgrounds: Allies (Fellow War Aurochs) 3, Artifact 1, Backing (Ahlat) 5, Influence 1

Spirit Charms:

Call—Contact other war aurochs and Ahlat himself.

Landscape Travel—Adds one die to Dexterity rolls associated with charging in battle. Effects stack to a maximum of three extra dice.

Memory Mirror—Effects limited to memories of military and strategic knowledge.

Materialize—Costs 50 motes

Principle of Motion—A war aurochs generally has seven actions banked.

Shapechange—Humanoid to aurochs only.

Join Battle: 7

Attacks:

Gore: Speed 5, Accuracy 9, Damage 15L, Parry DV 5, Rate 1

Aurochs Fine Spear: Speed 5, Accuracy 11, Damage 12L/15L, Parry DV 6, Rate 2, Tags 2,L,R

Aurochs Composite Bow: Speed 4, Accuracy 13, Damage 10L*, Range 250, Rate 3, Tags 2,B

* War aurochs generally use broadhead arrows.

Soak: 11L/12B (Spiritual Breastplate, +6L/4B, Hardness 2L/2B)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 5 **Willpower:** 7

Essence: 3 **Essence Pool:** 65

Other Notes: Only war aurochs, gods with Essence 3 or higher, or the Celestial Exalted can wield war aurochs bows and spears. Mortals, lesser gods, God-Blooded, Fair Folk and Terrestrial Exalted who try to use these weapons in battle find they always miss. No danger, however great, can deter a war aurochs from trying to retrieve the weapons of fallen comrades.

HEROES OF THE SOUTH

The warriors and political players of the South have all made their mark on history, or will do so. They could become allies or adversaries for those crossing their paths.

CELESTIAL EXALTED

The Celestial Exalted are the South's greatest heroes. Once again, the Lawgivers shape the destiny of nations, and the other Exalted—many of them far older and more experienced—pray that they know what they're doing.

SCARLET WHISPER

To the rest of Creation, Scarlet Whisper is Paragon's Minister of the Arts. A few people in Paragon know she is the Perfect's chief propagandist and diplomatic envoy. Almost no one knows that she is a Lawgiver. (Those few besides the Perfect who do know are sworn to secrecy, on pain of death.)

Scarlet Whisper was born and raised in Paragon. She feels complete loyalty to the Perfect and takes him as her model for how to wield great power. Scarlet Whisper voluntarily renewed her citizen's oath after her Exaltation and welcomed the new duties the Perfect gave her. While Scarlet Whisper has gained friends among other Exalted, she refuses their requests that she join them as freelance do-gooders. She believes she serves Creation best by helping the Perfect.

Before Exaltation, Scarlet Whisper was merely a local author. As Minister of the Arts, she now oversees all artistic production in Paragon. The Perfect does not personally care much for the arts, but he created this position as a subtle venue for propaganda and espionage. A poem, play or novel, written or rewritten by Scarlet Whisper, can insinuate specific ideas into the populace. Since the campaign against Gem began, Paragon's drama and literature have gained a

TASSELS OF AHLAT (ARTIFACT •)

Mortals and Exalts can pray for Ahlat to loan them the tassel of a particular fallen warrior. The War God occasionally grants these prayers in exchange for deeds of exceptional courage, performed in Ahlat's name (for instance, stealing an entire herd of cattle from a dangerous enemy and sacrificing them to Ahlat). Ahlat assigns the quest through a dream. If the warrior succeeds, she wakes the day after its completion with the tassel in her hand. Failing the quest results in cursing through the Scourge Charm.

Holding one of Ahlat's tassels grants access to all of the dead hero's memories. In addition to factual and biographical information, the tassel's owner gains a +1 bonus to two of the following: Archery, Martial Arts, Melee, Thrown or War (to a maximum of 5). Characters with less than three dots of Conviction who make frequent use of a tassel might start to mistake the heroes' memories for their own. Such a character who exhausts her Willpower points forgets her own identity and believes she is the dead hero until she recovers at least one Willpower point.

newly martial streak. More importantly, Scarlet Whisper travels to Paragon's neighbors to slip the Perfect's messages into *their* minds.

Scarlet Whisper keenly feels the differences between her life and the lives of her fellow citizens, however, especially her family and friends. While she takes pride in her position, she finds it difficult to maintain old friendships or develop new ones. She hardly sees her parents and siblings at all. It would be too easy to tell them something that placed them in danger. This leaves the Perfect as her only confidante. She sees the Perfect steering Paragon in a frightening new direction that contradicts her idealistic view of her city, and him—and her greatest fear is that he's *right*. They do have disagreements, and sometimes her frustrations boil out and she weeps and rages for hours before anyone can soothe her. One such eruption ended with her sharing the Perfect's bed, a development with which neither person is entirely comfortable.

Scarlet Whisper is a young woman, having just begun her twenty-third year. She has a slight build, pale, freckled skin and a penetrating stare. She catches her bright red hair in a jeweled headband. Beneath her red-and-blue official robes, she wears an orichalcum chain shirt and paired short daiklaves. She's needed them once or twice, on missions abroad or to defend herself against foes of Paragon who infiltrate the city.

Caste: Eclipse

Anima Banner: A flickering golden halo that slowly coalesces into a crowned sun with the Perfect's sigil in the center.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3; Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3; Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 3, Valor 1

Abilities: *Awareness 4, *Bureaucracy 3, Dodge 3, *Integrity 2, Investigation 2, *Linguistics (Native: Flametongue; Others: High Realm, Low Realm, Old Realm, Riverspeak) 4, Lore 2 (Classic Literature +1), Martial Arts 1, *Melee 3, *Performance 3, *Presence 3, *Ride 1, *Socialize 4

* Caste or Favored Ability

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Artifact (Orichalcum Short Daiklaves) 2, Artifact (Orichalcum Chain Shirt) 1, Contacts 3, Liege (The Perfect of Paragon) 4, Resources 2

Charms: First Bureaucracy Excellency; First Melee Excellency; First Presence Excellency; First Socialize Excellency; Gathering the Congregation; Hungry Tiger Technique; Letter-Within-a-Letter Technique; Mastery of Small Manners; One Weapon, Two Blows; Sagacious Reading of Intent; Second Linguistics Excellency; Speed the Wheels; Taboo-Inflicting Diatribe; Twisted Words Technique; Whirling Brush Method; Wild Revelry Approach; Wise-Eyed Courtier Method

Join Battle: 8

Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 4, Damage 2B, Parry DV 3, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 3, Damage 5B, Parry DV 1, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 3, Damage 2B, Parry DV —, Rate 1, Tags C,N,P

Orichalcum Short Daiklaves (The Ivory Guardians): Speed 4, Accuracy 11, Damage 6L, Parry DV 4, Rate 3

Soak: 9L/8B (Orichalcum Chain Shirt, +7L/5B, Hardness 3L/3B)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 5 **Willpower:** 6

Essence: 3

Personal Essence: 15

Peripheral Essence: 28 (36)

Committed Essence: 8

Other Notes: The Liege Back-

ground normally applies to deathknights (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Abysals**, p. 98) but it is the most

accurate way to represent Scarlet Whisper's relationship to her sovereign. The

Perfect may loan her artifacts, hearthstones, soldiers or whatever else

she needs for a mission, as well as extending a fat expense account and granting a

high place in his government. In return, Scarlet Whisper has little time for anything except her duties.

Scarlet Whisper's suffers a Temperance-based Virtue flaw, *Dramatic Hysteria*. Her Limit Break condition is

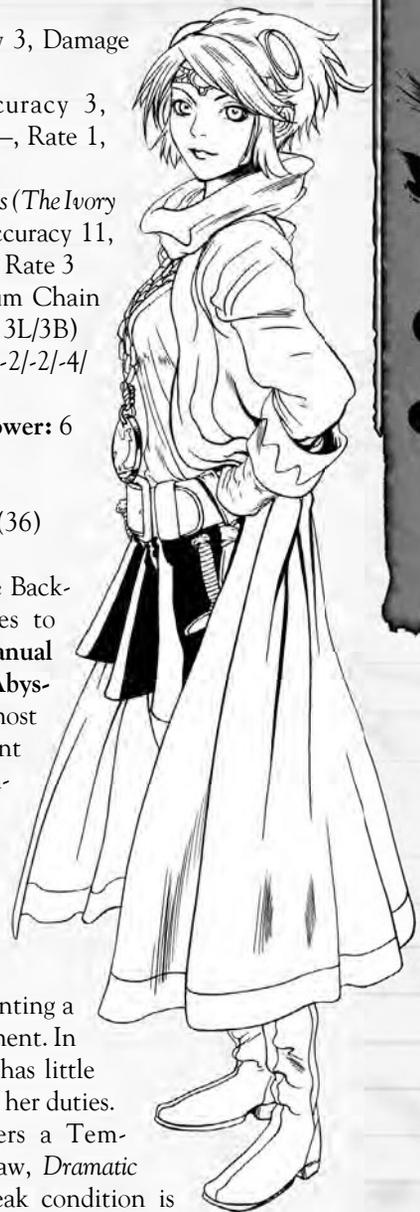
to face contradictory obligations, such as

between her family, her official duties, the need for deceit and her artist's desire to explore and reveal the human condition. A Limit Break results in a loud emotional collapse; otherwise, this flaw resembles *Overindulgence* (see **Exalted**, p. 105).

DOZIMA WOKISH

Dozima Wokish is a Sidereal Exalt of the Gold Faction. He travels throughout the South in various guises in service to the Convention of Fire. Wokish has no true home, apart from a modest dwelling in Yu-Shan that he seldom visits.

Wokish was born of a poor family in the Lap 315 years ago but spirited away before his Exaltation to begin his training. Nazri, Chair of the Convention of Fire, became an early mentor. Wokish still works frequently for the Fire Convention but he has worked for just about every convention at one point or other. He sympathizes with the Gold



Faction but has not joined because he thinks the Cult of the Illuminated project is playing with a very dangerous fire.

As befits a Chosen of Secrets, Wokish studies many subjects. He especially loves learning the minutia of mortal life in the South's many cultures; he hopes to visit and experience them all. Within the Bureau of Destiny, he has built a reputation as a particular expert on certain powerful, long-running destinies woven through the South.

Wokish has many duties in the South. He exposes demon cults and Fair Folk infiltration. E-Naluna, head of the Bureau of Heaven's Division of War, has him understanding orders to ease political tensions and stifle major outbreaks of war. This mission has led to several indirect conflicts with Ahlat and his allies. The Gold Faction sets him to contact and evaluate newly Exalted Solars and Lunars.

On his own time, Wokish investigates Wong Bongerok's career in response to complaints of corruption lodged by Ahlat, Jewel of Prosperity, the Court of the Orderly Flame and several other parties. After 37 years, Wokish has amassed abundant evidence of the censor's malfeasance.

So far, his reports go unnoticed. The pattern spiders reject his petitions to intercede in Bongerok's destiny with cryptic notes reading, "Interdivision interference—not suitable" or simply, "Impossible at this time." The investigation has proven quite fruitful as a means to gather general intelligence on the region, however. Many small gods and elementals want to vent about Wong Bongerok, and Wokish then steers the conversation to the doings of other spirits. As such, he is an expert on the spirits courts of the South.

Wokish does not speak of the reason behind his inquiries into Wong Bongerok (and various other projects). Quietly, he seeks information about Swan Dragon, former Censor of the South who disappeared into the Wyld during the Great Contagion. In his first visit to the Loom of Fate, Wokish had a vision of himself fighting side by side with Swan Dragon against a foe of indescribable darkness and chaos. He found that Swan Dragon's fate-strand splintered and faded away during the Contagion but does not end and does not reappear.

His research into Swan Dragon led him to the Court of the Orderly Flame, which

he assists occasionally when their aims coincide. The project is purely a personal one, however, and Wokish has told no one about his vision, knowing that not everyone in the South would rejoice at Swan Dragon's return.

Dozima Wokish is a gentle-faced, bespectacled man of average height and indeterminate age, with short, tonsured black hair. He wears simple robes, often going hooded, and walks with his serpent-sting staff. He travels under several identities, including Jojrish the Rider (an itinerant savant) and Mida Kozi (a poor monk who is an expert in desert fauna).

Caste: Chosen of Secrets

Anima Banner: A twinkling, sap-green glow

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3; Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3; Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 2

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, *Bureaucracy 4, Craft (Fate) 3, *Dodge 4, Integrity 2, *Investigation 4 (Archives +2), *Larceny 5, *Linguistics (Native: Flametongue; Others: High Realm, Low Realm, Old Realm, Southern Tribal Tongues) 4 (Calligraphy +1), *Lore 4 (Southern Cultures +3), *Martial Arts 5 (Serpent-Sting Staff +1), Melee 4, *Occult 2, Performance 3, Presence 2, Resistance 2, Ride 1, Socialize 3, *Stealth 4, Survival 2 (Desert +2)

* Auspicious or Favored Ability

Backgrounds: Acquaintances 4, Allies 3, Artifact (Woeful Reckoning) 3, Artifact (Starmetal Reinforced Buff Jacket) 2, Backing (Division of Secrets) 2, Backing (Convention of Fire) 2, Celestial Manse 1, Connections (An-Teng) 1, Connections (Chiaroscuro) 3, Connections (Gem) 2, Connections (Harborhead) 2, Connections (The Lap) 3, Connections (Varangia) 2, Connections (Southern Barbarian Tribes) 1, Salary 2, Savant 3, Sifu 2

Charms: Absence, Auspicious Prospects for Battles, Auspicious Prospects for Secrets, Avoidance Kata, Avoiding the Truth Technique, Blinding the Boar, Conning Chaos Technique, Dream Confiscation Approach, Duck Fate, Embracing Life Method, Efficient Secretary Technique, Fateful Investigation Excellency, Favorable Inflection Procedure, First Investigation Excellency, First Larceny Excellency, First Linguistics Excellency, First Lore Excellency, First Martial Arts Excellency, Gift of a Broken Mask, Harmony of Blows, Impeding the Flow, Incite Decorum, Mark of Exaltation, Masque of the Uncanny, Methodology of Secrets, Name-Pilfering Practice, Of Secrets Yet Untold, Of the Shape of the World, Of Things Desired and Feared, Of Truths Best Unspoken, Ox-Body Technique, Preservation of Resolve, Prior Warning, Research Assistant Invocation, Second Awareness Excellency, Second Bureaucracy Excellency, Second Dodge Excellency, Second Socialize Excellency, Second Stealth Excellency, Serenity in Blood, Sidereal Shell Games, Soft Presence Practice, Third Investigation Excellency, Third Stealth Excellency, Thought-Swiping Distraction, Trouble-Reduction Strategy, Underling Invisibility Practice, Wise Choice



Martial Arts:

Violet Bier of Sorrows Style: All Charms

Prismatic Arrangement of Creation Style: Air Aspect Ways, Demesne Emulation Practice, Five Jade Fury, Flickering Moonsilver Approach, Orichalcum Sheathing Stance, Spell-Shattering Palm, Water Aspect Ways

Colleges: The Guardians 4, The Key 2, The Mask 2, The Sword 2, The Treasure Trove 3

Join Battle: 8

Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 2B, Parry DV 6, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 9, Damage 5B, Parry DV 4, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 9, Damage 2B (P), Parry DV —, Rate 1, Tags C,N,P

Starmetal Serpent-Sting Staff (Woeful Reckoning): Speed 5, Accuracy 11, Damage 15B, Parry DV 7, Rate 3, Tags M,P

Soak: 9L/13B (Starmetal Reinforced Buff Jacket, +7L/10B, Hardness 6L/6B, -1 mobility penalty)

Health Levels: -0/-0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 6 (5 with armor) **Willpower:** 7

Essence: 4

Personal Essence: 15 **Peripheral Essence:** 35 (43)

Committed Essence: 8

Other Notes: Dozima Wokish's serpent-sting staff has a starmetal serpent's head on each end. Any hit with four or more successes indicates that the serpent has bitten the target, inflicting a further die of lethal damage. After such a hit, the next attack on the same target becomes unblockable, as per the Charm Unobstructed Blow.

Woeful Reckoning is otherwise a standard serpent-sting staff with the starmetal magical material bonus.

Note that because of Wokish's starmetal reinforced buff jacket, all attacks upon him have their damage roll reduced by one success. Also, the Charms of his supernatural martial arts do not function if he is wearing armor.



TERRESTRIAL EXALTED

Of all the Dragon-Blooded in the South, the most influential are surely the satraps and legion commanders sent by the Realm. Storytellers can use General Lazera and Satrap Jor as examples of these powerful luminaries.

CATHAK LAZERA, GENERAL OF THE 47TH LEGION

Order, discipline and martial prowess in service to the Realm rule the life of General Cathak Lazera. He demands that everyone under his command share these values. At age 163, he has served in dozens of campaigns all over Creation and possesses an encyclopedic knowledge of military matters. When he took over the 47th Legion five years ago, he found it sunk in sloth and ineptitude. He court-martialed the former senior officers, personally beheaded the former general and instituted strict drill and discipline. Within weeks, he made the 47th battle-worthy again. General Lazera now commands one of the Realm's best legions.

While General Lazera knows that the Harborheadites feel greater discontent, he believes that a strong public presence by the clearly superior Imperial legion can prevent outright rebellion. Public parades and military exercises occur weekly to leave no doubt

that the 47th is the strongest military power in the country. Most Harborheadites disgust General Lazera with their heresy, their sullen resistance to the Realm and their eternal tribal raids and vendettas.

Cathak Lazera is also aware that members of other Great Houses seek to undermine House Cathak's authority in Harborhead. Nevertheless, he gives officers from other Great Houses a chance to prove their loyalty to the legion and the Realm. Any officer who shows more interest

in serving her House than her general gets sent to a cousin in Greyfalls (see **The Compass of Terrestrial Directions, Vol. I—The Scavenger Lands, Chapter Six.**)

Cathak Lazera is a strong, stocky man in middle age who wears his hair somewhat long but swept-back from his broad, heavy-browed face. A prominent scar crosses one eye. The General always goes uniformed, at times even armored, if



participating in significant maneuvers. An entourage of officers surrounds him while he's on duty.

Motivation: To keep his troops in fighting trim, the natives in line and the Realm in charge

Aspect: Fire

Anima Banner: A white lion with a mane of red flames and a roar like a bonfire.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4; Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2; Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 4

Abilities: Archery 3, *Athletics 4, *Awareness 5, Bureaucracy 3, *Dodge 5, Integrity 2, Investigation 3, Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Others: Flametongue, Low Realm, Riverspeak) 3, Lore 3 (Military History +3), Martial Arts 3, Medicine 2, *Melee 5 (Daiklaves +1), Performance 1, *Presence 4, Resistance 4, Ride 3, Sail 1, *Socialize 3, Stealth 3, Survival 4, *Thrown 4, *War 4 (Rally Troops +2)

* Aspect or Favored Ability

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Artifact (Jade Articulated Plate) 4, Artifact (Jade Daiklave) 2, Artifact (Jade Short Powerbow) 2, Backing (House Cathak) 3, Breeding 2, Connections (Benevolent and Knowledgeable Office of Native Affairs) 4, Command 5, Manse 4, Manse 2, Manse 2, Resources 3, Retainers 4

Charms: Aura of Invulnerability, Blazing Courageous Swordsmen Inspiration, Cipher Missive, Craft Icon, Dragonfly Finds Mate, Dragon-Graced Arrow, Dragon-Graced Weapon, Dragon-Seared Battlefield, Elemental Concentration Trance, Enfolded in the Dragon's Wings, First Archery Excellency, First Awareness Excellency, First Linguistics Excellency, First Martial Arts Excellency, First Melee Excellency, First Presence Excellency, First Thrown Excellency, First War Excellency, Ghost-Fire Blade, Glowing Coal Radiance, Language-Learning Ritual, Loyal Weapon, Ox-Body Technique (x2), Persistent Hornet Attack, Phantom-Warrior Horde, Poisoned Tongue Technique, Ramparts of Obedient Earth, Refining the Inner Blade, Safety Among Enemies, Second Dodge Excellency, Second Resistance Excellency, Terrestrial Archery Reinforcement, Terrestrial Melee Reinforcement, Terrestrial Thrown Reinforcement, Terrestrial War Reinforcement, Third War Excellency, Threshing Floor Technique, Tireless Footfalls Cadence, Warlord's Convocation, Whirlwind Shield Form, Wind-Carried Words Technique

Join Battle: 9

Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 4B, Parry DV 4, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 6, Damage 7B, Parry DV 2, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 6, Damage 4B, Parry DV —, Rate 1, Tags C,N,P

Jade Daiklave: Speed 4, Accuracy 12, Damage 11L, Parry DV 6, Rate 3

Jade Short Powerbow: Speed 5, Accuracy 8, Damage 6L, Range 300, Rate 2, Tags 2,B

Javelin: Speed 4, Accuracy 9, Damage 7L, Parry DV 5, Rate 2, Tags T

Javelin, Thrown: Speed 4, Accuracy 8, Damage 7L, Range 30, Rate 2, Tags P

Soak: 14L/18B (Jade articulated plate, +12L/14B, 8L/8B Hardness)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 6 **Willpower:** 8

Essence: 4

Personal Essence: 14 **Peripheral Essence:** 20 (35)

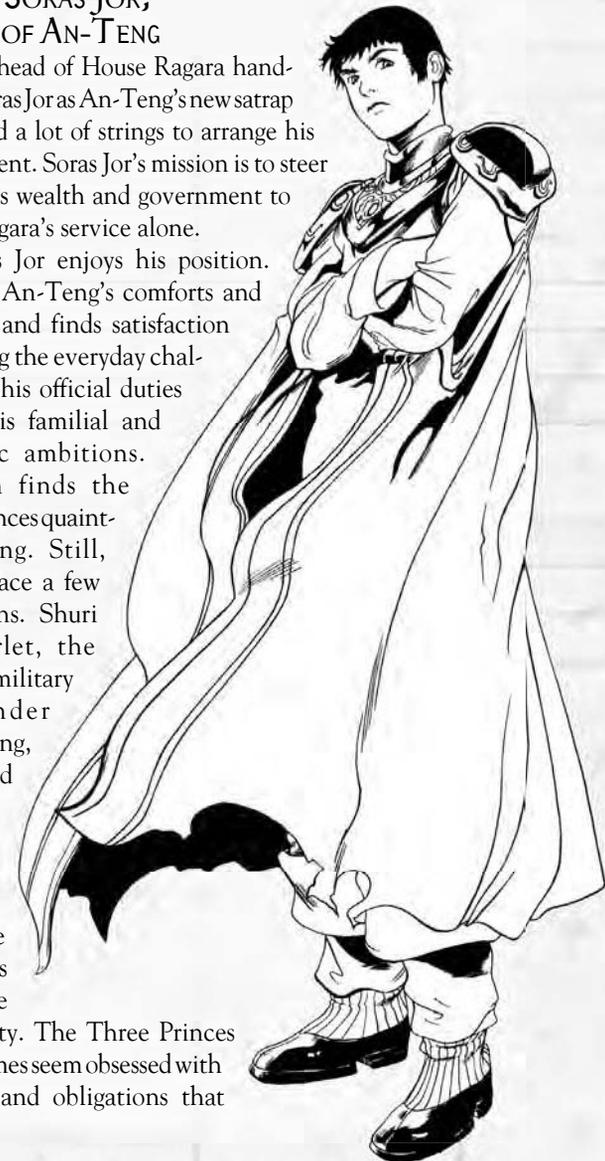
Committed Essence: 15

Other Notes: General Lazera has three hearthstones, one from a Cathak estate on the Blessed Isle and two from Harborhead manses commandeered by the Realm: a seacalm gemstone, a jewel of the hungry fire and a gemstone of surface thoughts (see **Exalted**, pp. 382–383). The traits for his daiklave include the weapon's magical material bonus.

RAGARA SORAS JOR, SATRAP OF AN-TENG

The head of House Ragara hand-picked Soras Joras An-Teng's newsatrap and pulled a lot of strings to arrange his appointment. Soras Jor's mission is to steer An-Teng's wealth and government to House Ragara's service alone.

Soras Jor enjoys his position. He loves An-Teng's comforts and pleasures and finds satisfaction in bending the everyday challenges of his official duties toward his familial and economic ambitions. He even finds the Three Princes quaintly amusing. Still, he does face a few frustrations. Shuri the Scarlet, the ranking military commander in An-Teng, has a head start in insinuating House Ledaal into the region's mercantile community. The Three Princes each at times seem obsessed with conflicts and obligations that



make no sense and profit no one. His Lintha pawns seem more unreliable by the week, as Jor learns more about their demented customs. But surely, he just needs to find the right strings of fear and greed to turn them all into puppets, dancing as House Ragara wills. Ragara Soras Jor has no time for silly native cults and superstitions and does not believe they can genuinely trump political and economic interest.

Ragara Soras Jor is a tall, sallow-faced man in his early 40s, with a prominent nose, a firm set to his mouth and short, black hair. He wears white robes embroidered with gold and gems. Jor possesses a jade daiklave, though he does not carry it regularly. He has powerful connections in An-Teng and the Realm and can summon a great deal of aid if the need arises—even without the local Realm garrison.

Motivation: To serve House Ragara, utilizing the benefits of his official position

Aspect: Air

Anima Banner: Transparent ice crystals swirling around him in precise alignments.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2; Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2; Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Virtues:

Compassion 2, Conviction 2, Temperance 3, Valor 2

Abilities:

Archery 1, *Awareness 4,

*Bureaucracy 5, Dodge 3, Integrity 2, Investigation 4, Larceny 3,

*Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Others: Flametongue, Low Realm, Old Realm, Seatongue) 4, *Lore 4 (Political Economy +2), Martial Arts 3, Medicine 1, Melee 3 (Daiklave +2),

*Occult 2, Performance 2, Presence 3 (Interrogation +1), Ride 1, Resistance 2, *Socialize 4 (Discern Motivation +1),

War 1

* Aspect or Favored Ability

Backgrounds: Artifact (Jade Daiklave) 2, Artifact (Silken Armor) 2, Backing (House Ragara) 4, Breeding 2, Connections (Thousand Scales) 3, Connections (The Guild) 2, Connections (The Lintha Family) 1, Family 3, Influence 2, Manse 3, Mentor 3, Reputation 3, Resources 5

Charms: All-Encompassing Earth Sense, Auspicious First Meeting Attitude, Benevolent Master's Blessing, Bestow the Saffron Mantle, Brother-Against-Brother Insinuation, Cipher Missive, Confluence of Savant Thought, Craft Icon, Distraction of the Babbling Brook, Dragon-Graced Weapon, Drowning in Negotiation Style, Elemental Bolt Attack, Elemental Burst Technique, Elemental Con-



centration Trance, Eternal Mind Meditation, Feeling the Dragon's Bones, Finding the Water's Depth, First Awareness Excellency, First Bureaucracy Excellency, First Investigation Excellency, First Linguistics Excellency, First Lore Excellency, First Presence Excellency, First Socialize Excellency, Friend-to-All-Nations Attitude, Geese-Flying-South Administration, Language-Learning Ritual, Poisoned Tongue Technique, Second Dodge Excellency, Second Integrity Excellency, Terrestrial Bureaucracy Reinforcement, Testing the Waters, Third Socialize Excellency, Thoughtful Gift Technique, Thrashing Carp Serenade, Unsleeping Earth Meditation, Voice of Mastery, Warm-Faced Seduction Style, Wind-Carried Words Technique

Join Battle: 7

Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 2B, Parry DV 4, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 6, Damage 5B, Parry DV 2, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 6, Damage 2B, Parry DV —, Rate 1, Tags C,N,P

White Jade Daiklave (The Auditor): Speed 4, Accuracy 11, Damage 9L, Parry DV 5, Rate 3

Soak: 6L/5B (Silken armor robes, +5L/3B)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 5 **Willpower:** 7

Essence: 4

Personal Essence: 13 **Peripheral Essence:** 24 (31)

Committed Essence: 7

Other Notes: Satrap Jor's white robes are actually silken armor (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex*, p. 159). The traits for his daiklave include its jade magical material bonus. He holds the hearthstone of his manse-residence, a freedom stone (see *Exalted*, p. 383).

MORTALS

Not everyone important in the South is a spirit or Exalted. Some movers and shakers are simply mortals with extraordinary skills.

THE PERFECT OF PARAGON

The ageless god-king of Paragon came to power through his discovery of a mighty artifact, the Scepter of Peace and Order. As the Perfect of Paragon, he has been a stern but pragmatic ruler. Those who try to disrupt the safety and prosperity of Paragon—or the stability of the Perfect's rule—meet a quick, unceremonious end out of the public eye. The Perfect does not tempt fate with grand gestures or melodramatic public claims.

For a man who has lived in the public eye as one of Creation's



most potent monarchs, though, the Perfect is personally an enigma. Members of his court find him affable in private, but not inclined to talk about himself. He accepts the humor of others but never makes jokes. His concubines find him kindly enough, and when they age, they generally move into civil service positions—the Perfect likes intelligent companions. His children respect him but do not know him despite the hour a day he spends with them. No one describes him as cruel... just utterly ruthless in preserving and promoting his city.

Over the centuries, the Perfect has gained the forced loyalty of many sifus, savants and sorcerers, who have imparted their expertise to him. He no longer relies exclusively on the Scepter. The Perfect recognizes, however, that he attained great power through chance, and that keeping his power requires hard work and great care. He can never let the rule of Paragon be about his own ego. He does not permit himself to care about anything save peace, order and the hard necessities of survival in the Age of Sorrows.

Creation's most powerful mortal has a real chip on his shoulder concerning the Incarnae's Chosen, however. The Perfect tries to hide his satisfaction when Exalts admit they need his help (or at least his cooperation), and his anger when the shoe is on the other foot. He does not always succeed. The return of the Solars prods the Perfect to a new, galling question: *Why not him?* Hasn't he earned it? As a Twilight Caste, he'd be... perfect. Scarlet Whisper now realizes that she must manage the Perfect's emotions as carefully as he sometimes manages hers. Their relationship grows steadily more complicated.

The Perfect appears as a man of indeterminate age with ash-blond hair, sometimes seeming middle aged, with tired eyes, other times having almost boyish looks. His features do not change, however, just others' perception of them. He dresses in cloth of gold set with jewels. A diadem set with great jewel-like lenses adorns his brow. Golden pauldrons connected by a pectoral of more jewel-disks cross his shoulders. The effect is, perhaps coincidentally, reminiscent of a yoke. He carries his golden scepter wherever he goes.

Motivation: To preserve order and maintain his rule

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5; Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3; Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 5, Valor 2

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 5, Bureaucracy 4, Craft (Air) 5 (Scribing Talismans +2, Precision Instruments +1), Craft (Earth) 4 (Manses +2, Urban Planning +1), Craft (Fire) 3, Craft (Magitech) 4, Craft (Water) 3, Craft (Wood) 2, Dodge 3, Integrity 5, Investigation 4, Linguistics (Native: Flametongue; Others: High Realm, Low Realm, Old Realm, Riverspeak) 4, Lore 5 (History +2), Martial Arts 5 (Clubs +3), Occult 5 (Thaumaturgy +3), Performance 4 (Public Speaking +2), Presence 4 (Rational Persuasion +2), Socialize 3, War 2 (Political Strategy +2, Economic Strategy +1)

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Artifact (Scepter of Peace and Order) N/A, Artifact (Silken Armor) 2, Backing 5, Connections (Guild) 3, Cult 4, Followers 5, Influence 4, Manse 4, Manse 2, Resources 5

Martial Arts:

Jade Mountain Style—All Charms (see **Scroll of the Monk**, pp. 53–55)

Terrestrial Hero Style—All Charms (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Dragon-Blooded**, pp. 191–193)

White Veil Style—All Charms (see **Scroll of the Monk**, pp. 61–63)

Spells: Calling the Stalwart Servitor, Commanding Presence of Fire, Death of Obsidian Butterflies, Demon of the First Circle, Disguise of the New Face, Droning Suggestion, Emerald Circle Banishment, Emerald Countermagic, The Eye and the Mouth, Fugue of Truth, Incantation of Spiritual Discretion, Infallible Messenger, Invulnerable Skin of Bronze, Peacock Shadow Eyes, Private Plaza of Downcast Eyes, Purifying Flames, Raising the Earth's Bones, Ritual of Elemental Empowerment, Stormwind Rider, Summon Elemental, Theft of Memory

Thaumaturgy:

The Art of Alchemy—Master degree, all Procedures

The Art of Astrology—Adept degree, all Procedures

The Art of Enchantment—Master degree, all Procedures

The Art of Geomancy—Master degree, all Procedures

The Art of Warding and Exorcism—Master degree, all Procedures

Join Battle: 10

Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 3B, Parry DV 6, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 9, Damage 6B, Parry DV 4, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 9, Damage 3B, Parry DV —, Rate 1, Tags C,N,P

Scepter of Peace and Order: Speed 5, Accuracy 13, Damage 8B, Parry DV 5, Rate 2

Soak: 5A/10L/8B (Robes of office, 5L/3B)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 5 **Willpower:** 8

Essence: 3 **Essence Pool:** 23 (30)

Committed Essence: 7

Other Notes: The Perfect is an enlightened mortal and, as such, has access to an Essence pool and supernatural martial arts Charms. His robes have an underlayer of silken armor (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**, p. 159).

The Scepter of Peace and Order enables him to access his entire Essence pool without the need to spend Willpower. Oaths made while touching the Perfect's orichalcum scepter are forever binding. Those bound are marked with an eye-shaped sigil that cannot be removed by any known means, including sorcery. See page 36 for the scepter's other powers. Wielded as a weapon, the scepter is simply a club.





YASURBO, SHAYANTI DRUM

Yasurbo is the eldest son of a tribal chief and the most prominent Shayanti among the Drums of the Leopard Seat. Family and tribal connections placed him in Harborhead's royal council; his own skills made him Harborhead's Minister for Foreign Relations. He meets regularly with Harborhead's titular monarch, Oshom Kurgaz, and the nation's real master, Satrap Cathak Voper.

Both men consider him dutiful and obedient, rational and honest, even if they often must reject Yasurbo's plans to shift the borders with Varangia or expand the nation south or across the Summer Mountains.

His official position places Yasurbo in frequent contact with diplomats and traders from all over the South. He has arranged many profitable trade agreements for Harborhead... more precisely, for the Shayanti. His favoritism in this regard is far from secret. Less obvious is that many Shayanti chiefs and traders owe Yasurbo favors, and he encourages them to think of themselves as part of a wider Shayanti nation. Yasurbo does much to incite petty jealousies and instigate strife between the Shayanti and other tribes, especially the Izhalvi.

He finds this message of ethnic solidarity and revenge plays very well among young, poor Shayanti of Kirighast's shantytowns. These young men left their tribal villages anyway, and Yasurbo offers them a new identity and new pride. Yasurbo now has a gang of several thousand armed supporters whom he can order to riot on command or terrorize local Izhalvi. Yasurbo intends to rule Harborhead, or at least whatever's left after the civil war he plans to start.

Yasurbo is a tall, rather handsome Shayanti man in his mid-30s, with mahogany skin and close-cropped, tightly curled hair. Like most Shayanti, scar-patterns of lines and dots on his cheeks and shoulders tell his tribe and family place as the chief's eldest son. He looks equally dignified

and comfortable in traditional chief's costume or the robes of a Realm gentleman. When he expects trouble (or just wants to look warlike), he wears a chain shirt and carries an ox-hide shield blazoned with a traditional Shayanti symbol, with an axe and bow slung at his back. His bow is a family heirloom, and famous in Harborhead history.

Motivation: To gain power through ethnic strife

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3; Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3; Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 3

Abilities: Archery 2 (Long Bow +2), Athletics 2, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 4 (Bribery +2), Dodge 3, Integrity 3, Investigation 1, Linguistics (Native: Flametongue; Others: High Realm) 1, Lore 2 (Harborhead Geography +1, Historical Grievances +2), Martial Arts 3, Melee 3 (Axe and Shield +1), Performance 3 (Rabble-Rousing +2), Presence 4, Socialize 4 (Lying +2), Stealth 2, Survival 2, Thrown 2, War 2 (Urban Insurgency +2)

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Backing (The Leopard Seat) 4, Contacts 4, Followers 4, Influence 4, Resources 4

Join Battle: 8

Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 2B, Parry DV 4, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 6, Damage 5B, Parry DV 2, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 6, Damage 2B, Parry DV —, Rate 1, Tags C,N,P

Axe: Speed 4, Accuracy 8, Damage 7L, Parry DV 2, Rate 2
 Exceptional Long Bow: Speed 5, Accuracy 9, Damage 4L*, Range 250, Rate 3, Tags 2,B

* Assumes use of broadhead arrows.

Soak: 3L/4B (Chain shirt, +3L/1B, fatigue value 1)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 3 (4 with ox-hide target shield) **Willpower:** 6

Essence: 1

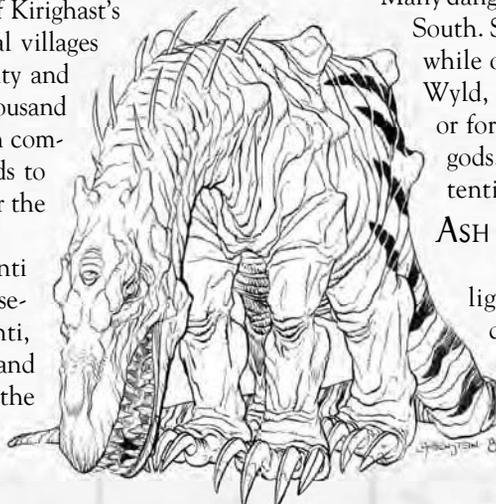
Other Notes: None

BEASTS OF THE SOUTH

Many dangerous creatures live in the South. Some are entirely natural, while others are products of the Wyld, survivors of bygone ages or forgotten inventions of lost gods. A few creatures are potentially useful.

ASH DEVOURER

These three-eyed, intelligent lizards live in the desert sands. They devour minerals and gems deep underground. Adult ash devourers stand six feet



high at the shoulder, with mouths full of crystalline teeth. Their scales are white and gray with streaks of red and orange. This color fades as they age, eventually bleaching white in the sun. Ash devourers have scorching hot skin and can set any flammable thing on fire with slaps of their tails.

Ash devourers live for hundreds of years. A long-lost nation of Dragon Kings created their ancestors as a slave race to clear Southern scrubland. Ash devourers now live in secluded groups of a dozen or so amidst the desert dunes, subsisting on minerals found beneath the sand. At times, though, they must eat the charred remains of plant matter. Ash devourers seldom discriminate between ashes of nimbleweeds and ashes of wooden huts and kraals, except for the taste.

Some ash devourers ally with spirit courts and speak in broken Old Realm, in addition to various Flametongue dialects. These creatures have very little regard for humans, whom they regard as a servitor race as they once were. The oldest ash devourers remember tales of the Solar Exalted, though, whom they still revere. Should ash devourers recognize a Lawgiver as such, they might offer her prayers (as the ash devourers have little regard for their own gods, who are weak and offer them little protection). They require bribes of ash-food or significant favors in return, though, to become true allies (per the Allies Background).

BANGI CRAWLER AND BANGI FLY

Bangi crawlers live in the forests of An-Teng's High Lands. They resemble dark green centipedes, five to six feet long, with venomous saliva (Damage 4L, Toxicity 4, Penalty paralysis/-3).

The poison takes effect immediately when the crawler bites, or three minutes after merely touching the venom.

A failed Resistance roll results in total paralysis as well as the listed damage. Successful resistance merely inflicts the -3 penalty.

These creatures move quickly on hundreds of tiny legs. The rear segment of a crawler's body carries bright golden, eye-like spots designed to attract prey (such as tree striders). This segment is a poison sac that quickly paralyzes and kills all but the largest and hardest predators biting into it—equal to four simultaneous doses of their venom.

Bangi crawlers subsist solely on the poisonous flowers of the bangi vine, until they reach the time for metamorphosis. After the bangi crawler paralyzes and swallows a human-sized victim (or equivalent mass of smaller creatures) it climbs a tree, clings to the trunk and becomes a pupa with a hard, dark brown shell. In 10 weeks, the creature emerges

transformed into a bangi fly, one of the most beautiful and deadly creatures in the High Lands of An-Teng.

The bangi fly has a four-foot-long, black-and-green body with a seven-foot wingspan of scintillating colors. Bangi flies just out of the cocoon eat voraciously, attacking anything that moves (excepting bangi crawlers or other bangi flies). They disable their prey with powerful mandibles and the same poison as their larval counterparts. Bangi flies live for over a decade and mate annually.

The Tengese believe that one can see a single vision of one's future in the scintillating wings of the bangi fly. This belief results in many deaths of people who tested this legend. Nevertheless, a few Tengese claim to have succeeded.

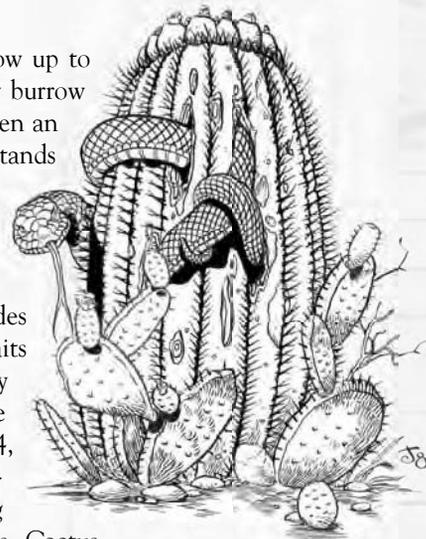
CACTUS SNAKE

These snakes grow up to three feet long. They burrow into desert cacti. When an animal (or person) stands next to the cactus, the serpent lashes out to bite while its tail remains lodged in the plant. It then hides in the cactus and waits for its venom to liquefy the victim (Damage 9L/minute, Toxicity 4, Penalty -3). The victim's disintegrating body feeds the cactus. Cactus snakes live throughout the Southern deserts.

Cactus snakes cannot survive long except in the moist flesh of cacti. For short times, however, they can burrow into trees, fence posts, walls or cadavers. Their venom dissolves wood, making it valuable to thieves who use it (carefully!) in their break-ins.

DESERT BASILISC

Desert basiliscs live in constant solitude, for they hate and try to kill all other living things, even their own kind. Should two desert basiliscs meet, they fight to the death—which makes their reproduction a great mystery. Desert basiliscs follow their prey anywhere, even into cities. The Wyld-addled beasts have a serpent's body but the



head, legs, wings and iridescent purple hue of a peacock. They cannot fly (despite their wings), but they run swiftly. A thin corona of flame surrounds a desert basilisc and burns anything touching it. A red stone fixed in the creature's head is the source of this effect.

Desert basiliscs are only semi-intelligent, though some live long enough to recognize a few spoken words. Tales from the Old Realm mention the Exalted taming desert basiliscs, but not how to do this. A desert basilisc has an Essence of 2, but no Essence pool.

COAT OF FLAME

While the desert basilisc's coat of flame is active, anyone touching the beast suffers two dice of lethal damage for every five ticks of contact. This is not an environmental effect; it penetrates a creature's soak, but not Hardness. This power remains active as long as the red stone remains fixed in the beast's forehead. The stone can be removed and used like a hearthstone, resulting in a similar, though less potent, effect on the user (+1L damage, added to anima banner damage if worn by a Fire-aspected Terrestrial Exalt). The individual using the stone becomes immune to the coat of flame powers of his own and other basilisc stones. Note that these stones are not true hearthstones and do not have any of a hearthstone's normal properties.



FURNACE RHINO

Autochthon's living refineries still graze mineral fields in the Southern desert, particularly in the hills east of Gem. They resemble mundane rhinoceroses, though larger, standing seven to eight feet high with bodies 12 to 15 feet long. A furnace rhino's folded, platelike hide has a metallic gleam, though, and its nose bears two massive horns placed side by side. Their bodies radiate searing heat. A furnace rhino has an Essence of 3, but no Essence pool.

Furnace rhinos feed on rocks (and scrap metal, if they encounter it). They extract trace amounts of the five magical materials and concentrate them in their horns, while mundane metals strengthen their hides. Intrepid hunters seek furnace rhinos for their horns, but these beasts are hard to damage. Even coming within two yards of a furnace rhino exposes the hunter to heat equal to that of a bonfire (see *Exalted*, p. 131). Furnace rhinos also have the temperament of furnace rhinos. A furnace rhino's horn contains just enough of a magical material to count as a weapon of that substance, and the rhino's attack gains an appropriate bonus as if the rhino were an Exalt of the proper type. (Jade is the most frequent substance in a furnace rhino's horn, followed by orichalcum with moonsilver a distant third. Starmetal is nigh unheard of, and these creatures refuse to consume even the tiniest trace of soulsteel.)

Every part of a furnace rhino counts as a special substance, suitable for use in crafting artifacts. Butchering the red-hot cadaver is difficult and dangerous. Once cooled, the body becomes a solid lump of mingled minerals and metals, weighing many tons.

GOSHUN

The denizens of Chiaroscuro's undercity fear the goshun, creatures that live in the deepest tunnels beneath the city. The goshun are large, rat-like creatures, three to four feet tall when standing upright, with tiny, human-like hands and chitinous shells on their torsos. They can see perfectly in the dark. Only they and a few high-ranking gods could know



EIGHT-TAILED MOLE HOUND

During the Shogunate, the Dragon-Blooded bred these beasts to hunt the Dune People. Now they run wild. The creatures resemble large wolves with eight tails and thick, armor-like plates on their bodies. Eight-tailed mole hounds hunt in packs of 10 to 20, tunneling through the desert with uncanny speed. They do not hesitate to attack vagabonds, caravan stragglers and other humans.

Eight-tailed mole hounds burrow through sand or loose soil as quickly as they run on the surface. (They cannot tunnel through any material with a lethal soak of 1 or higher.) They also have superior strategic instincts, coordinating their attacks and surrounding targets to counter a foe's DV.





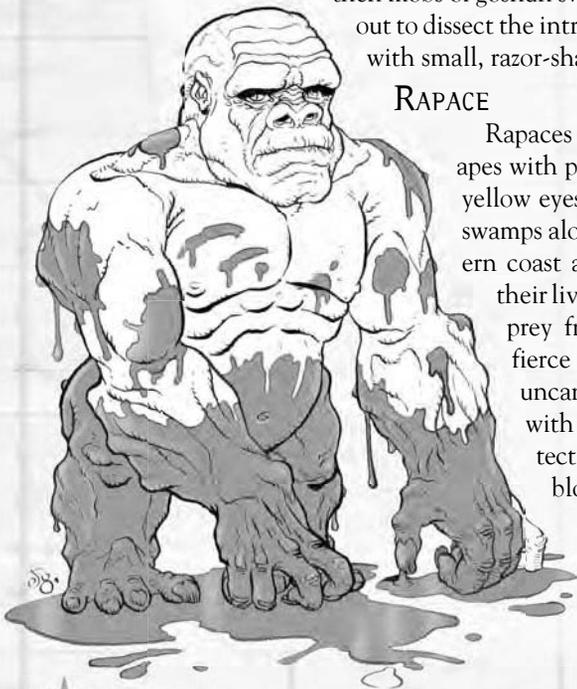
their origin. Perhaps a buried and Wyld-poisoned demesne spawned them. Perhaps they come from the deep caverns where the Primordials banished their rejected experiments. Mortals certainly do not know, for few mortals survive encounters with the goshun.

The goshun are intelligent and are remarkable builders and artisans. Rank in their society depends on skill. All goshun have at least three dots in at least one Craft. The greatest artisans of their kind rule from the Alotha Seats, seven thrones of jade hidden in the deepest chambers of their territory. Goshun live in tunnels and chambers hewn from the living rock and scribed with complex abstract designs. Teams of goshun can sculpt a precise likeness of whatever they want in minutes.

Goshun subsist mainly on fungi and insects raised in subterranean farms. They avoid contact with other creatures. Their militia watches for anyone who comes too near their home—and while most of their tunnels are too small for humans to traverse, they have taken over some long-abandoned sections of the undercity that were shaped by other hands. When lost or unwary humans stray into their territory, the goshun shoot them down with dozens of tiny arrows, then mobs of goshun swarm out to dissect the intruder with small, razor-sharp blades.

RAPACE

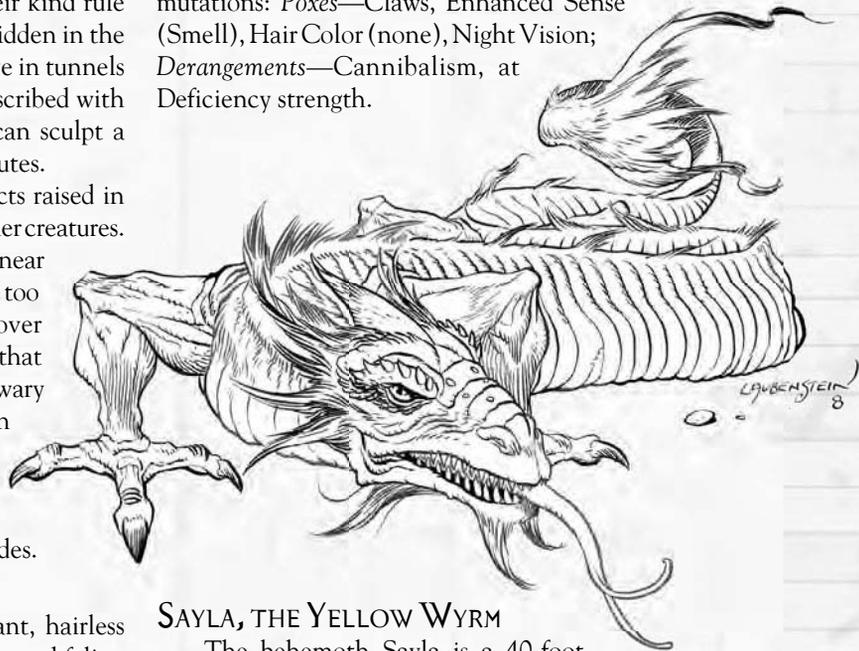
Rapaces are giant, hairless apes with pale skin and feline yellow eyes. They live in the swamps along the Southwestern coast and spend most of their lives in trees, hunting prey from above. These fierce creatures have an uncanny sense of smell, with which they can detect the slightest hint of blood in the air from a distance of miles. They also see in the dark.



The scent of blood drives rapaces to hunt. They quickly find the dead or dying creature and slaughter both it and anything else nearby, such as a human hunter. Rapaces prefer to eat meat but can survive on fruits and roots. In times of true famine, rapaces do not balk at eating the weakest of their kind for the survival of the clan.

Rapaces have primitive minds and are easily awed by obvious displays of supernatural power, or even impressive mundane feats. While they possess some tactical cunning and can form simple plans, they have no true language or tool use.

Rapaces can interbreed with humans, and do so if given the opportunity. Children with rapace blood are more or less human, with little to no hair on their bodies, yellowish eyes, pointed teeth and claws and a tendency toward bloodlust. Such children raised as part of a rapace clan have the developmental limitations of their rapace parent. Human societies usually kill half-rapace children, but if they were allowed to live they would be mortals with the following Wyld mutations: *Poxes*—Claws, Enhanced Sense (Smell), Hair Color (none), Night Vision; *Derangements*—Cannibalism, at Deficiency strength.



SAYLA, THE YELLOW WYRM

The behemoth Sayla is a 40-foot serpentine lizard with yellow scales. It has lived in a labyrinth of tunnels near the Southern Bordermarches since the First Age. Here it guards an immense cache of yasal crystals (see *Exalted*, p. 381). Various spirit courts send minor spirits to help the Yellow Wurm keep these crystals out of mortal hands. Other spirits serve because they fell under Sayla's power. Lastly, innumerable hungry ghosts—chiefly of yasal-hunters—wail and roam through the tunnels. Sayla can command them all. She has an Essence of 9 and an Essence pool of 135 motes.

The Yellow Wurm attacks with yasal claws and fangs, as well as the Charms of spirits she trapped within them. Above ground, she usually takes to the skies, diving to attack and then flying out of reach again. In the air, she



moves and dashes at twice her ground rate. Few enemies outwit the cunning behemoth. She does leave her abode for short periods to attend to business at spirit courts but otherwise does not take unnecessary chances with her crystal hoard.

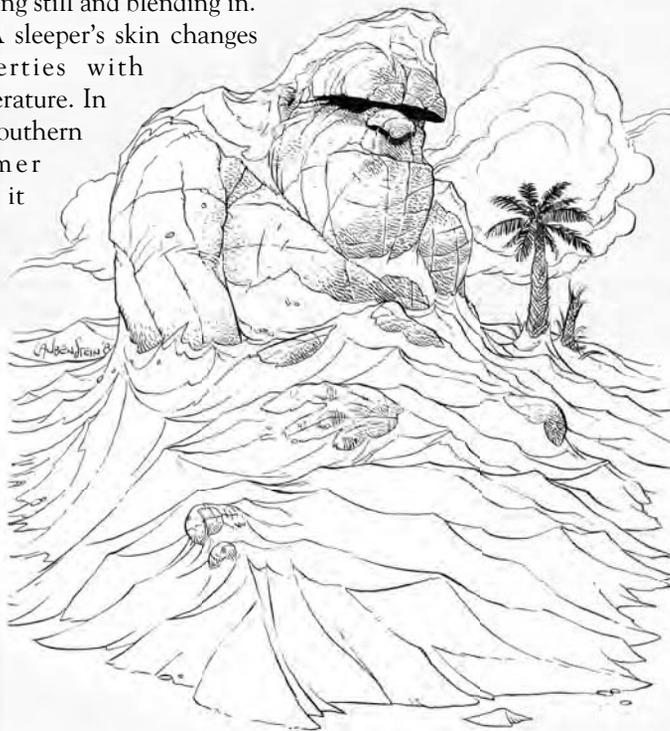
CLAWS OF YASAL

The Yellow Wurm's claws and teeth share the yasal's power to entrap spirits including ghosts and demons. If Sayla touches a spirit with tooth or claw, she can spend one Willpower to capture the spirit. Each of her 12 claws can hold one spirit of Essence 3 or less. Her fangs can hold spirits whose maximum Essence ranges from 2 to 5 (depending on the tooth's size). Sayla can communicate with the imprisoned spirits and use any of their Charms. The spirits must accede to Sayla but usually grant her the use of their Charms in exchange for eventual release. As such, Sayla always has access to any number of various Charms. She can release entrapped spirits whenever she likes.

SLEEPER IN THE SAND

Despite looking a bit like gorillas, sleepers in the sand are cold-blooded, egg-laying creatures. They also stand up to nine yards tall. Their rock-like skin, normally light brown, can change color to blend into their surroundings. This camouflage grants three bonus dice to Stealth rolls based on standing still and blending in.

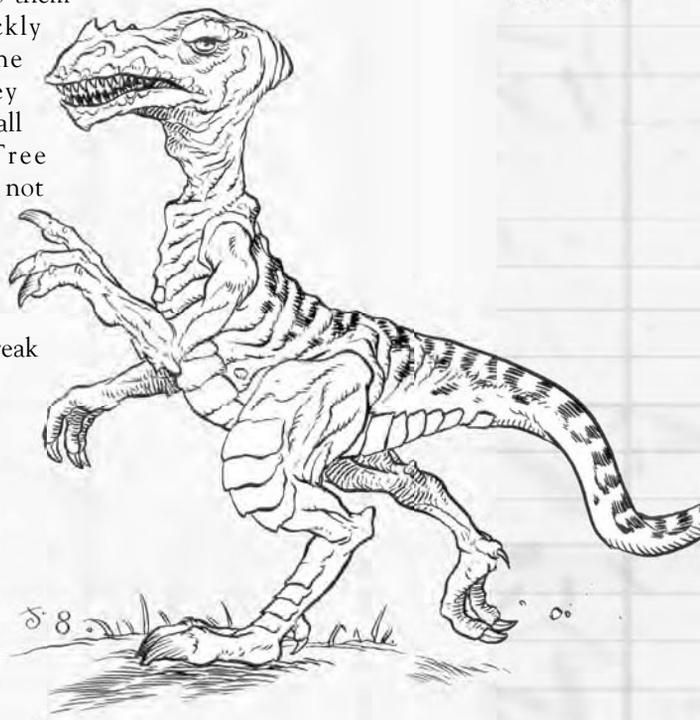
A sleeper's skin changes properties with temperature. In full Southern summer heat, it



becomes pliable, permitting the sleeper to move freely (if slowly). When their surroundings cool (as at night or the Southern winter), their skin stiffens. A sleeper's mind is most agile in the heat as well. The creatures' name comes from their habit of digging into the sand at night, to rouse as the desert sun warms them in the morning. Lighting a fire on a sleeper can awaken it prematurely and violently—not angry but deeply confused. At night or in the Season of Water, reduce a sleeper's Dexterity and Intelligence by one. In the Season of Fire, raise its Dexterity by one. They are completely immune to fire.

TREE STRIDER

These creatures are small, tree-dwelling versions of the common claw strider, four feet high at the shoulder and 12 feet long, with long claws and a ferocious bite. Though too small to ride, they can be domesticated and trained as hunting beasts. Tree striders live in the mountain forests of An-Teng's High Lands. Their gripping claws and powerful legs help them move quickly through the trees. They hunt in small groups. Tree striders do not commonly prey on humans, but they will attack the weak or sleeping.



Name	Str/Dex/Sta	Per/Int/ Wits/Will	Health Levels	Attack (Spd/Acc/Dmg/Rate)	Dodge DV/Soak
Ash Devourer	9/4/8	3/2/3/6	-0x2/-1x2/-2x2/-4/I	Bite: 6/6/12L/1, Tail: 6/6/7L/1, Trample: 7/5/8L/1	3/4L/8B
Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Dodge 3, Investigation 3, Integrity 2, Linguistics 2, Martial Arts 4, Presence 4, Resistance 3, Stealth 3, Survival 4					
Bangi Crawler	4/3/4	2/1/2/4	-0x2/-1x2/-2x2/-4/I	Bite: 6/6/3L*/2	2/2L/4B
Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Dodge 1, Investigation 1, Integrity 1, Martial Arts 2 (Bite +1), Presence 1, Resistance 2, Stealth 5, Survival 4					
Bangi Fly	3/4/4	3/2/3/5	-0/-1x2/-2x2/-4/I	Bite: 5/8/5L*/2	4/2L/4B
Abilities: Athletics 3 (Fly +2), Awareness 4, Dodge 4, Investigation 2, Integrity 2, Martial Arts 2 (Bite +2), Presence 2, Resistance 2, Stealth 4, Survival 4					
Cactus Snake	1/5/2	3/1/3/3	-0x/-1x2/-2/-4/I	Bite: 4/8/1L*/1	4/1L/2B
Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Dodge 4, Investigation 2, Integrity 3, Martial Arts 3, Presence 1, Resistance 2, Stealth 5, Survival 4					
Desert Basilisc	3/4/4	2/1/4/5	-0/-1x3/-2x2/-4/I	Bite: 4/7/5L+flame*/1, Claw: 4/6/6L+flame*/2	3/2L/4B
Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Dodge 2, Investigation 2, Integrity 3, Martial Arts 4, Presence 2, Resistance 2, Stealth 1, Survival 3					
Eight-Tailed Mole Hound	5/4/4	3/1/4/6	-0x/-1x2/-2x2/-4/I	Bite: 5/6/7L/2	3/2L/4B
Abilities: Athletics 5, Awareness 4, Dodge 3, Investigation 3, Integrity 2, Martial Arts 2, Presence 3, Resistance 3, Stealth 4, Survival 3 (Tracking +3)					
Furnace Rhino	8/3/9	2/1/2/4	-0x4/-1x5/-2x5/ -4x2/I	Gore: 6/6/18L/1, Trample: 7/8/12L/2	2/12L/20B
Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Dodge 1, Investigation 1, Integrity 3, Martial Arts 3 (Trample +2), Presence 2, Resistance 5, Stealth 1, Survival 4					
Goshun (soldier)	2/4/3	4/2/3/5	-0/-1/-1/-2/-4/I	Knife: 5/8/4L/2, Tiny Bow: 6/7/2L (P)/2	4(5)/3L/6B
Abilities: Archery 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Craft (Earth) 3, Dodge 4 (Enclosed Space +2), Integrity 1, Martial Arts 2, Melee 3, Presence 2, Resistance 3, Stealth 5, Survival 3, War 2					
Note: All attacks on goshun are at +1 difficulty, as if the creatures have the Wyld mutation <i>Small</i> .					
Rapace	4/4/4	4/2/1/4	-0/-1x2/-2x2/-4/I	Bite: 6/6/4L/1, Punch: 5/8/4B/3	3/2L/4B
Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 4, Dodge 3, Investigation 3, Integrity 2, Martial Arts 3, Medicine 1, Presence 2, Resistance 3, Stealth 4, Survival 5					
Sayla	12/4/9	4/4/5/9	-0x6/-1x8/-2x8/ -4x3/I	Bite: 6/11/17L/1, Claw: 5/12/14L*/2	4/12L/20B
Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 3 (Negotiate +2), Dodge 5, Investigation 4, Integrity 5, Lore 4, Martial Arts 5, Occult 4, Presence 5 (Intimidation +4), Resistance 4, Stealth 1, Survival 4					
Sleeper in the Sand	7/2/5	2/1/2/3	-0x2/-1x5/-2x5/-4/I	Punch: 6/6/7L/2	2/9L/12B
Abilities: Athletics 1, Awareness 2, Dodge 2, Investigation 2, Integrity 3, Martial Arts 3, Presence 2, Resistance 5, Stealth 2, Survival 5					
Tree Strider	4/5/5	3/1/4/7	-0/-1x2/-2x2/-4/I	Bite: 5/10/6L/1, Claw: 4/12/4L/3	4/3L/9B
Abilities: Athletics 5 (Brachiation +3), Awareness 3 (Sharp Sight +1, Track +1), Dodge 4, Investigation 2, Integrity 3, Martial Arts 4, Presence 2 (Intimidation +2), Resistance 2, Stealth 4 (Ambush +2, Hide in Plain Sight +2), Survival 3					

* See text for details.

The South is a land of stark contrasts. Its coasts are some of the most fertile in Creation, while its blasted interior supports little life. Its tribal peoples place great value on freedom, but many of its nations live under the yolk of Realm satraps or local dictators, trading freedom for security. It's a land of vast mineral wealth, but little of that wealth benefits the people who need it. Will the returned Lawgivers set things right, or will the lures of luxury, power and wealth the South offers lead them to maintain the status quo for their own benefit?

The fourth of five Terrestrial Direction books devoted to fleshing out the bare bones of Creation presented in the **Exalted** core book, this book includes the following:

- Details of Chiaroscuro, Paragon and the many other Southern nations
- Mass combat stats for the myriad of Southern powers
- Traits for the South's native gods and beasts



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