

The Veiled Council of Yzeem



The rulers of the various nations of Aden are well known throughout the Known Lands. Their works before the Darkfall, for those who sat in leadership at that time, were relatively well known during a time of peace, but it is their actions since the cataclysm that have elevated them to positions of celebrity or notoriety, depending upon their disposition and that of those evaluating them. For all who laud King Corben of Arasteen as wise and just and at the same time denounce Lord Urbane of Urbana as a despot and a tyrant, there are others who insist the so-called Iron Tyrant has saved Aden from starvation with his Thunder Trains and that the lord of the Radiant Order is merely envious. The Queen Mother of Kyan, the Dust King of the Rhanate, the Dragon Emperor of Vanora, the High Theocrat of Carraway, the Grand Kazan of the High Steppes... all are well known and loved and hated in equal measures.

But in Yzeem, the lords of a nation rule in anonymity.

The nation of Yzeem is ruled by an ancient body known as the Council of Seven, an organization that reigns with power equal to any monarch but which is divided among seven counselors who must negotiate and agree with one another on any actions taken outside the specific purview of their office. It is not a particularly efficient system, and one that has been rife with corruption at various points in the nation's history, but it is the only form of governance Yzeem has ever known, and as some outsiders have pointed out, the ruthless political environment it has created has often been a very accurate representation of the ruthless mercantile environment that drives Yzeem forward.

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HISTORY

When the Rose Accords were established in Year 1 of the post-war calendar, Yzeem was a land of merchants and farmers. Then as now, most of the nation was desert, but the incredibly fertile lands around the River of Life were abundant as ever and its banks were densely populated by farmers and all those who lived to make their agricultural lifestyle possible. Even in these days, merchants were a powerful force, as most farmers transported their harvests south along the river to the port city of Balaquim, which grew with each passing year, and there sold it to merchants who would see it distributed to a dozen other major ports all throughout the Known Lands. The farmers were paid well for their labor, and were much satisfied. The merchants were paid even better for their brokerage, and they too were satisfied. When the gathering at Rose began, it was a handful of the most powerful and well-regarded merchant princes who pooled their influence to send someone, as Yzeem did not yet exist as a nation, and the merchant princes very much wished to change that. Ultimately, their gambit was successful.

The merchant princes who commanded the most significant influence suddenly found themselves appointed as the ruling body of a new nation, but the citizens of that new nation were not particularly pleased that they had been left out of the process altogether. The new ruling council found themselves facing a potential uprising of indignant farmers before they had even truly established themselves. Because of this, the initial council spent its first few months hammering out painfully intricate laws and systems that rewarded both the farmers and the merchants, enough to make both parties agreeable to continuing under the leadership of the council. This was intensely delicate work, and required the merchant princes turned rulers to utilize their personal wealth to fund the initial nation-building efforts in order to avoid passing that cost on to the citizens. It was their plan, long-term, to begin passing the cost of such things on to the citizens at a later date, when they had become accustomed to the benefits of citizenship and would be more likely to accept its cost. In this manner, the Council of Seven began its leadership of Yzeem with good intentions but somewhat questionable methods.

It was during the eighth century following the Rose Accords that had established Yzeem and the other nations that this council, which had long struggled with corruption, became truly irredeemable. There had been a long series of back-and-forth reforms and corruptions between the powers that be in Balaquim, most notably the Council of Seven, and the influence brokers at Rook's Roost, who would one day devolve into absolute piracy. (For more information on this relationship and the history of Rook's Roost, see Aden Gazette #8.) Unfortunately, the situation degenerated until ultimately, Rook's Roost was ruled by a council of pirate captains, and through a combination of bribery and violent coercion, they could command or at least restrict the activities of the Council of Seven. The entire nation of Yzeem was crippled by criminals at the very highest levels of influence.

Since the organization's inception, membership in the Council of Seven was hereditary, with each member choosing their successor when the time came. In the year 815, one of the Council passed away suddenly in what was a long series of suspected but unproven incidents of foul play. This particular council member had been notoriously resistant to the corruption that had so thoroughly infected the body as a whole, though his hands were hardly clean. When the other councilors looked to his estate to determine who the late leader had selected as his replacement, they were informed that the replacement had indeed been chosen, and had been notified, but at this replacement's wish, would not be identified. The other councilors took this as mere theatrics, a new leader hoping to make a dramatic entrance, and took little note of it. They took much more significant notice when their new colleague arrived at the council chambers wreathed entirely in robes and an all-concealing veil of brilliant green, and continued to refuse to identify himself.

The Green Councilor, as the new member identified himself, stated flatly that the Council of Seven had become hopelessly compromised

and could not, in its current form, possibly hope to truly govern the people of Yzeem. He, then, would do so anonymously to ensure that outsiders could not gain influence over him by threatening him, his family, or his outside interests. The others scoffed at the idea, believing such anonymity impossible to maintain, but soon discovered much to their shock that the previous councilor had spent more than a year preparing for this idea, secretly installing hidden passages and placing powerful enchantments in the council chambers so that it would be possible for someone to come and go without being followed. In fact, it seemed that the dead councilor had spent almost his entire, considerable fortune in achieving this result, so dedicated was he to the idea that the Council of Seven must be reformed. Realizing that it was now possible for the Yzeemite government to function without outside influence, the others listened to the Green Councilor's impassioned speeches urging them to choose just and noble successors and abdicate their positions, an act that would not only aid the people of Yzeem but which would likewise free the councilors themselves from the nets of intrigue and obligation in which they found themselves trapped. Not all listened, of course, but more than might be expected did, and the Green Councilor was soon joined by others, including the Black Councilor, the Yellow Councilor, and the White Councilor. Within a few years, the entire Council of Seven was replaced by anonymous leaders, and the Veiled Council was born.

PRESENT DAY

The Veiled Council, as the Council of Seven is almost universally called now, continues to seat seven leaders who rule over various aspects of life in Yzeemite society. Each of these councilors wears identity-concealing robes of a specific color to ensure that they can fulfill their duties without being targeted by outside influences. There are a myriad of secret passages, entrances, and exits into the council chambers, all of which ensure that the Councilors can come and go from their meetings without being followed or watched. Powerful magic further obfuscates these passages, as well as the council chambers and, to a lesser extent, the councilors themselves. In addition to these arcane defenses, the councilors are protected by a cadre of elite guards known as the justicars, an irreproachable defensive force trained for literally decades before they are ever permitted to actually oversee the councilors in person, ensuring that they and their esoteric arts, both arcane and militant, are loyal and incorruptible. The justicars are among the most iconic warriors of Yzeem, and are regarded throughout the Known Lands, rightly so, as just and deadly combatants.

No system of government is perfect. The fact that the Veiled Council is largely immune to outside influence is not enough to ensure that there is no corruption, not in and of itself. Prior to the Darkfall, the council had been operating under its current parameters for nearly three hundred years, and as with any long-standing political institution, there was corruption. Individual councilors came and went with more interest in their own power and prosperity than in benefiting the people of Yzeem. When the Darkfall happened, however, even the most self-absorbed of the councilors united to protect their people to the best of their ability, throwing resources behind the armed forces to defend their home from the nocturnals and quickly allocating funds and personnel to erect defenses all along the River of Life. The process was not completely successful, and there were many settlements that were lost, but the bloodied and battered people of Yzeem cheered their leaders for the lives they did save even as they wondered how they would endure in this new, difficult life.

Of course, it has been a decade since the Darkfall, and the mind can become accustomed to even the most terrible horrors if given enough time. The people of Yzeem seem to have accepted the new world as it is despite that they may wish for the old days, and with that sense of complacency, there is a hint of corruption that has returned to the politics of the Veiled Council and Yzeem as a whole. There is nothing

The Council of Seven, Rulers of the United Principalities of Yzeem

- ✧ The **BLACK COUNCILOR**, Commander of the United Army
- ✧ The **BLUE COUNCILOR**, Commander of the United Navy
- ✧ The **GREEN COUNCILOR**, Supreme Administrator of the United Principalities
- ✧ The **RED COUNCILOR**, Grand Master of Taxation
- ✧ The **VIOLET COUNCILOR**, High Ambassador to the Known Lands
- ✧ The **WHITE COUNCILOR**, Keeper of Law
- ✧ The **YELLOW COUNCILOR**, Supervisor of the Grand Port of Balaquim

overtly malicious about the actions of the various members, but power struggles between them are becoming more common and more overt, particularly with the more long-standing members, and some who follow such matters regard it as a matter of time before the first open conflict between forces loyal to different councilors make break out within the capital of Balaquim.

THE BLACK COUNCILOR

The Black Councilor is among the least talkative of the current membership of the Veiled Council, and it is not uncommon for a meeting to pass without hearing from her. Her duties ensure that she often travels the length of the River of Life to inspect the defenses erected around the settlements and the valuable farmland located there. As such, she is more often seen by the Yzeemites who live outside Balaquim, common folk who might go their entire lives and not see one of the Veiled Council otherwise. This lends a sense of proximity to the people, who identify with the Black Councilor more strongly not only because they have actually seen her in person, but also because they recognize that it is she who is responsible for their continued safety, and her frequent travels are a strong indicator she takes that responsibility seriously. Because of her obvious size, it is generally believed that the Black Councilor is either a jurak or a particularly powerfully-built human woman.

As might be gathered from the description of her activities, the title of the Black Councilor is Commander of the United Army. When the nation of Yzeem was founded, the merchant princes had little hope of forming a true army, and feared that hiring a large number of mercenaries would be seen by the common people as the act of potential tyrants. Instead they went to the city guard of various settlements and offered superior equipment, asking them to work with the council at Balaquim. This was the first vestige of the militia that exists today. Much to the Black Councilor's consternation, Yzeem does not now nor has it ever had an armed force sufficient for anything more than defense; it is one of the commander's fondest wishes to retake Rook's Roost and wipe out the pirate forces that make their home there.

INVOLVEMENT: Not every member of the militia or city guard within Yzeem is a member of the Black Councilor's organization; to consider them thus would cause her organization to vastly outsize all others and would be prohibitively expensive for so many to be paid the wages of a Veiled Council agent. Her representatives work in the hierarchy of the armed forces, and are known as *officers*, although not all officers of the army are members of the Black Councilor's organization. The Black Councilor favors agents who are martial in nature, most often of the fighter, ranger, gunslinger or golemoid classes, but her need for intelligence and logistics means that there are small numbers of individuals with arcane class backgrounds in her service as well, and a small number of more treacherous operatives like rogues.

THE BLUE COUNCILOR

Although the alliances between different members of the Veiled Council are typically of convenience and lack any significant staying power, the alliance between the Black and Blue Councilors is the exception. The two have voted in lockstep almost without exception since the Darkfall took place, and well before then in many respects. This is made all the more atypical by the fact that the current Black Councilor has served on the council for twelve years, and the current Blue Councilor only five. Whatever relationship exists between the former Blue Councilor, now deceased, and his successor is unknown, but clearly their shared respect for the Black Councilor was an important aspect of the transition of power. The Blue Councilor is lithe where her counterpart is muscular, and dexterous where the other is powerful. Her race is unknown, though her melodious voice has caused some to suggest she may be an elf or half-elf. In addition to the constant political alliance between the two, there are many who suspect that the two women are romantically entangled as well, due to the familiar context between them even during the most formal of meetings. Others believe this is mere projection or even a deliberate deception between the two councilors to cause others to misunderstand their alliance.

The Blue Councilor serves as the Commander of the United Navy. This force was once little more than a hodgepodge of merchant marines cobbled together by the original Council of Seven from the ships and crews that they had once hired to escort their merchant vessels through dangerous waters. Over time, as taxes have poured into the treasury of Yzeem with the growing influence of Balaquim over commerce in the Known Lands, the navy has grown significantly until it is one of the more powerful naval forces in the world. Only Arasteen, and more recently Urbana, can rival it. Unfortunately, much of the navy is kept in constant rotation to deal with the ever-present threat of piracy in the southern seas. Like her ally the Black Councilor, the Blue Councilor craves the destruction of Rook's Roost and the breaking of the pirate captains' power, but cannot convince the Veiled Council as a whole to commit to such a resource-heavy proposition until and unless they can guarantee success, which at present they cannot do.

INVOLVEMENT: The Blue Councilor has much the same considerations for her agents that her ally the Black Councilor does, albeit on a naval scale rather than on land. For that reason, while she also favors representatives who utilize martial prowess, she prefers those who have a more dexterous nature, which ensures that specialized fighters and rangers have frequent positions among her ranks, as do rogues, but few golemoids. Thunder scouts are rare but highly valued, and a handful of sorcerers with a focus on water magic hold high positions within her organization. Like her ally, the Blue Councilor's agents are typically referred to as *officers*.

THE GREEN COUNCILOR

If the Veiled Council can be said to have a leader, then it would be the Green Councilor. The Green Councilor is known to be a male elf, based on his voice and longevity, as the individual who first proposed the system of veiled rulership remains in the position three centuries later. Presumably moving well into old age even for an elf, there has been much speculation in recent years that the Green Councilor will soon abdicate his position and select a replacement. When this happens, it is possible the other councilors will move to rearrange the responsibilities of the different members in hopes of one of the more senior among them will take over the Green Councilor's administrative duties. Others have suggested that it is for this precise reason that the Green Councilor still avoids retirement.



The Green Councilor's position on the Veiled Council is Supreme Administrator of the United Principalities. As such, he is tasked with oversight of all activities conducted by the other members of the council. He does not have authority over them, but he can and is expected to report to the council as a whole about anything untoward or even noteworthy that he sees taking place. In the event that he discovers something amiss and presents it to the Veiled Council, a vote can be taken to censure the councilor responsible and even place temporary representatives in place within the accused party's organization to ensure that the practice is corrected. Needless to say, this oversight is not particularly liked by the other members of the council, but thus far everyone has respected the boundaries established when the Council of Seven became the Veiled Council.

INVOLVEMENT: Of all the Veiled Council, the Green Councilor has the most opportunity for player characters to be involved within his organization. The Green Councilor's agents are many and varied, and generally are referred to by the term *administrators*. Because of their patron's role in oversight of the other members of the council, administrators can be involved in any national interest of Yzeem and thus can be of any race or class.

The Justicars of Yzeem

The justicars are an ancient order of arcane warriors whose existence predates the Veiled Council. It was the corruption of the Council of Seven and the selfless attempt at reform carried out by the Green Councilor that won the loyalty of the justicars, who had up until that point kept themselves largely separate from Yzeem society and had more in common with a monastic order from Vanora than any other similar organization. Although their history will be explored in a future work, suffice it to say that the justicars are arcanists who focus their power through martial weapons, specifically ranged weaponry. In the ancient days of Yzeem they used bows or occasionally crossbows, but in modern Aden they use firearms almost exclusively. They are both gifted spellcasters and highly skilled combatants, and are the foremost defenders of the Veiled Council.

Years before the Darkfall, there was a schism within the ranks of the justicars that kept several members of the order at odds with one another for a number of years before the members of the Veiled Council took notice and arbitrated a mediation. The schism was healed, but a dozen or so members of the order who had adhered most strongly to the philosophical side that lost in the mediation chose to accept the ruling, but to exile themselves from Yzeem in order to ensure that no lingering doubts might take root, either in their minds or the minds of others, and cause the schism to develop once again. These exiles made their way into the Known Lands and, in keeping with the precept of their order to teach their methods, established schools in other major cities. In modern Aden, justicar training facilities exist in the cities of Sylfanus, Mekanus, and Shan Ti. These facilities accept very few students and have excruciatingly difficult entrance requirements, but in the wake of the Darkfall, they have no shortage of applicants.

THE RED COUNCILOR



No villains sit upon the Veiled Council, not truly, but the Red Councilor is the closest that the body has to such a title, and for most, he is more than sufficient. The Red Councilor is an exceedingly intimidating figure, with his brilliant crimson robes, constantly surrounded by a private guard of red-clad security that he uses in lieu of the traditional justicar security force. For whatever reason, he seems to relish his reputation, and appears in public far more than any of his comrades except

possibly the Green or Violet Councilors, both of whom tend to meet with the public more often than most. Some believe that he relishes his reputation, while others (typically only the most charitable souls among them) believe that the Red Councilor portrays himself as a necessary evil in order to give the people someone to dislike rather than having them distrust the council as a whole in his place. Given his duties, it does seem likely that he would be loathed above all others regardless, so it is possible that this interpretation may have some degree of legitimacy, but the truth is known only to the Red Councilor himself.

The position of Red Councilor comes with the title Grand Master of Taxation, an incredibly important and influential role on the council as well as throughout Yzeem in general. Despite this, however, the Red Councilor has obvious designs on the only member of the council who commands greater influence, and seems to crave the position of Supreme Administrator of the United Principalities, currently held by the Green Councilor. Many believe that it is this obvious avarice that has prevented the Green Councilor from retiring, as he prefers to wait until the Red Councilor, who is believed to be human, is forced to retire first. In the interim, the Red Councilor is responsible for determining the appropriate rate of taxes throughout the nation of Yzeem, for farmers and merchants alike, overseeing their collection, and transferring them safely to the treasury in Balaquim. His favor is heavily courted by merchants of all sort, both legitimate and corrupt, in hopes of gaining more profitable tax rates for their particular class of merchant, sub-class, or even type of goods being sold.

INVOLVEMENT: Loyalty is by far the most valued trait to the Red Councilor, far more so than anything else. Second only to loyalty is cunning. His organization is full of agents, known generally as *collectors*, who are fiercely loyal and do not question orders. Only those who are cunning, most often rogues or arcanists of various types, can ascend beyond the rank and file within his agents. His lieutenants are almost exclusively powerful arcanists, most often sorcerers or magi, but others exist as well. Whenever Balaquim is attacked, whether by pirates, nocturnals, or some other enemy, the Red Councilor makes certain that his agents are seen acting in defense of the city.

THE VIOLET COUNCILOR



Much like the Green Councilor, the Violet Councilor is extremely well regarded by native Yzeemites, with the exception of the most ardent and zealous converts to foreign faiths, and this latter fact is due only to her necessary oversight of those faiths. The Violet Councilor is believed to be a faerkin due to her diminutive size, although her serene demeanor belies many of the negative stereotypes commonly levied against that race. She is a close associate of the White Councilor, and the two of them often regard themselves as the custodians of Yzeemite culture. This can and has placed them at odds with the more stable alliance between the Black and Blue Councilors, but there is no animosity between any of the four women; they each seem to understand that their duties must take precedence over matters of personal preference or simple political posturing.

The position of Violet Councilor holds the title High Ambassador to the Known Lands, but this is not an all-inclusive description of her actual duties. She is responsible for the embassies Yzeem maintains in other nations as well as overseeing those embassies other nations maintain in Balquim, but she is also responsible for the presence of foreign faiths in Yzeem, the most common of which are the Radiant Path, the Church of All Saints, and the Way of the Ten Beasts, although there are others. Because these faiths originated outside of Yzeem, and as such are products of foreign cultures, the Veiled Council believes that they must be carefully observed to determine if their ongoing influence could have an adverse effect on the native culture of Yzeem. As such, all shrines or temples devoted to faiths that originate from beyond Yzeem's borders are monitored by the Violet Councilor and her agents. Some, particularly those from nations whose theologies are being scrutinized,

find this overly controlling and invasive, but to the Veiled Council, it is merely a means of ensuring that the stability of Yzeem is not threatened, and they have rarely if ever in their centuries-long history taken any steps to censure individuals or individuals.

INVOLVEMENT: The Violet Councilor's role as both a diplomat and overseer of foreign religions and their influence on Yzeemite culture makes her a well-known figure throughout the nation, and her agents, *ambassadors*, are generally well liked. They rarely if ever demand anything of their kinsmen and strive to be courteous and accommodating to foreigners at all times. They are also responsible for maintaining any and all embassies that the Veiled Council maintains on behalf of Yzeem in other nations, which is normally a pretext for ensuring that their commercial interests are respected. The Violet Councilor currently maintains embassies in Vanora, Arasteen, and Urbana, with one being discussed for Synthica. Because of the dual role that ambassadors play, the Violet Councilor prefers to recruit individuals with a diplomatic nature and a strong spiritual side, including clerics, thaumaturses, and even the occasional monk or paladin among her agents.

THE WHITE COUNCILOR

Law-abiding citizens of Yzeem love the White Councilor and regard her as the defender of their civilization. It may be the Black Councilor whose efforts see their homes kept safe from outsiders, but it is the White Councilor who keeps them safe from those among their ranks who have stooped so low as to prey upon their kinsmen. While the White Councilor is greatly respected and admired, it would not be accurate to say that she is beloved, for her demeanor is not one that engenders affection. She is precise and exacting in her words and questions, and very detached from any display of emotion other than the occasional bout of righteous indignation at particularly egregious incidents of the law being disrespected or the people of Yzeem being victimized. She is also very scholarly due to the nature of her duties, and when possible she pays visits to the various learning institutions found within Balaquim in order to ensure that the next generation of her countrymen are receiving the most robust, thorough education possible.

The White Councilor is the Keeper of Law, the simplest title for what is possibly the most wide-reaching duty afforded to a member of the Veiled Council. While the Red Councilor's duties as taxation overseer cover the entirety of the nation, much as hers do, the White Councilor is also responsible for maintaining the body of laws that govern the nation, updating them as necessary, applying them in an almost infinite variety of cases, and administering them justly, all while determining what cases, if any, warrant further consideration after being settled at a lower level of authority than her own individual attention. The White Councilor has missed more sessions of the Veiled Council than any other member except the Yellow Councilor, who can go weeks without attending during monsoon season, all due to her constant effort to review as many cases as possible and ensure that the actions being taken on her authority are, in her educated opinion, just.

INVOLVEMENT: The White Councilor has numerous agents, present in large numbers in Balaquim but found in every settlement of any significant size throughout Yzeem. These agents are known as *magistrates*, and oversee law enforcement throughout the nation. Most have hired subordinates who do not technically serve the White Councilor, known as marshals or constables, but when justice must be meted out, it is always a direct servant of hers who does the sentencing, to ensure that those who pass judgement are well versed in the law and its just application.

THE YELLOW COUNCILOR

The sunrise-bright robes of the Yellow Councilor and her representatives are a constant sight in the sprawling docks of Balaquim's massive port, and though they are the source of much consternation among visiting merchants, the stability that they represent is much appreciated even if few would ever voice such appreciation. The Councilor himself is on the docks almost daily, although protected by a vigilant unit of justicars, and often meets with some of the most influential captains himself, even conducting firsthand inspections on rare occasions. Those captains who disdain the notion of courting the favor of the Red Councilor find the Yellow Councilor a much more approachable, reasonable man, one who will listen to rational arguments and respond accordingly rather than merely favoring those who stoop to sycophantic lows in order to gain that which they desire.

The position of Yellow Councilor holds the title of Supervisor of the Grand Port of Balaquim, and is possibly the most culturally influential member of the Veiled Council after the Green Councilor or perhaps the Violet Councilor. Certainly, none of the other councilors are as aggressively overworked as the Yellow Councilor. He is believed to be an elf, or at least an arcanist of some sort, because he often goes entire days without sleep, working around the clock to ensure that Balaquim continues to function at maximum efficiency. While the Red Councilor determines tax rates that affect the various merchants who ply their trade in Balaquim, and the White Councilor is responsible for the laws that govern the transactions generating those taxes, it is the Yellow Councilor and his organization that oversees the port directly, and as such has what is doubtless the most daunting logistical challenge of any being in the nation. To his tremendous credit, he maintains an incredible degree of efficiency in the port and ensures that literally hundreds of arriving and departing ships are granted berths, inspected, and permitted to unload and disembark in a timely manner. There are many captains who grouse about the regulations and the inflexibility of those who wear the yellow robes, but none can doubt their skill.

INVOLVEMENT: The agents of the Yellow Councilor, known as *inspectors*, are most likely unsuitable for most player characters and campaigns, because their duties are centered around the port at Balaquim and rarely take them outside the city itself. Investigatory skills are the most prized trait among the Yellow Councilor's agents, and as such he employs large numbers of intelligent individuals who have practical uses for their skills, including alchemists, investigators (obviously), and even a handful of bards.



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