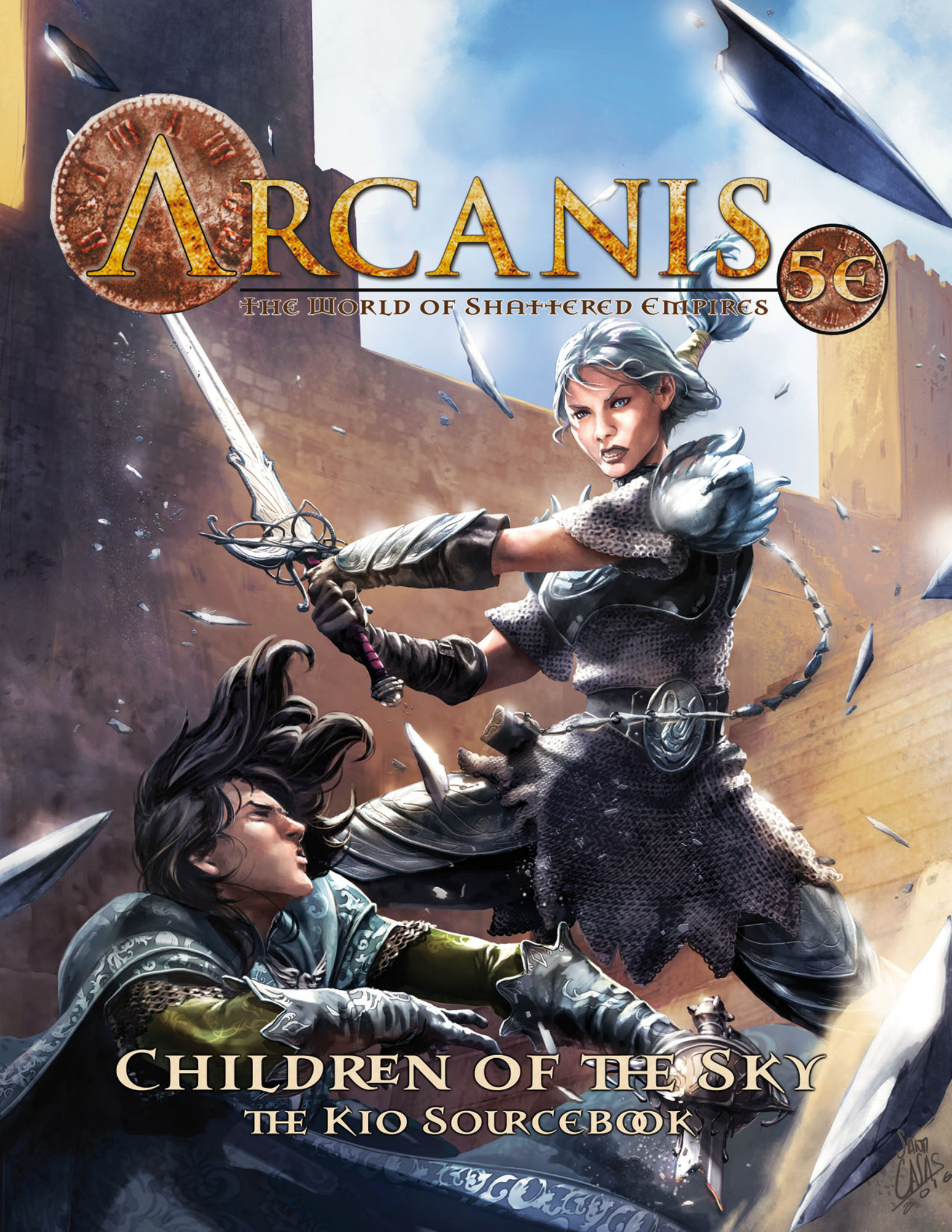




ARCANIS

THE WORLD OF SHATTERED EMPIRES

5€

CHILDREN OF THE SKY
THE KIO SOURCEBOOK

JOHN
CASAS
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A KIO SOURCEBOOK

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CHAPTER ONE: HISTORY OF THE KIO

The first recorded sighting of the kio was during the Shadowed Age, long after the fall of the Imperium of Man. What little is known of their history before this time tells of a great and advanced civilization that traveled across the skies of Arcanis in floating cities or aeries that easily dwarfed the only other known “sky city”, the city of Khafré. With a sense of pride, the kio tell of their success in breaking the bonds that hold others to the earth and journeying about the clouds. These *sky kingdoms* once numbered a score or more and were collectively known as Yhriwhon.

Over time, different political and religious philosophies turned from academic discourse to heated words, which eventually led to a full-blown civil war in the streets of the aeries. The strife tore Kio society apart until finally, the miraculous telluric engines that kept the sky kingdom of Ylliph’kim aloft failed and they crashed in the region now known as Uggur. A radical political group that adopted the banner of a blood red crescent moon as their symbol is believed to have sabotaged the ancient drives. The symbology of the blood-red moon was at one time equated with a myth of the apocalypse.

So it was that in 988 B.I.C., Ylliph’kim, one of the greatest of the Yhriwhon cities, came to roost permanently upon Arcanis, crashing into the Lhauzhyr Mountains, and becoming partially buried beneath tons of stone and soil. Thousands died that day, despite the frantic and heroic efforts of a number of kio master sorcerers. Yet even the massive devastation wrought by the crash landing could not extinguish the religious fervor and blind blood lust that had instigated the disaster in the first place.

The followers of the Crescent Moon used the turmoil and confusion to press their genocidal agenda. Throughout the next handful of years, the surviving kio struggled to salvage or reconstruct what they could of their great culture, they fought off ever more savage attacks by the rebels. Since resources were scarce and ensuring that the most basic necessities of the populace were met proved arduous, the kio leadership realized the futility of their efforts. Much of their ancient history, culture, and knowledge was lost as the fighting between the two camps continued to intensify.

The alliance of the Crescent Moon followers with the indigenous population of bestial humanoids and even darker and loathsome creatures signaled the death knell for the other kio survivors. While some argued that they should remain and fight for their home, others saw that remaining within Ylliph'kim would mean a slow and painful death at the hands of their insane brethren.

The first wave of the exodus struck out towards the east relying upon yellowed and brittle maps that indicated some sort of ocean or body of water in that direction. In what was called the Trail of Blood, over a thousand kio fled their ancient home and struck out for the unknown. Harried along the way by the creatures of Uggur, hundreds sacrificed themselves in valiant, but ultimately suicidal, battles.

On a cold and drizzling spring morning, less than two hundred kio finally emerged from the wilderness, bloodied and starving, and fell into the arms of the undir.

The Undir (circa 987 B.I.C.)

The progenitors of the undir people were a group of nomadic humans who migrated east until coming upon the Corvus River valley. Following the mighty river south, they sporadically settled in the unpopulated regions about the river, eventually reaching the hilly country of what is now the Coryani province of Annonica.

Though the fertile lands of the hills were rich with fish-laden lakes and an abundance of wild game, they were also home to a tribe of cave dwelling savages who practiced cannibalism and worshipped dark and fel powers. Led by powerful creatures known as hags, these primitive men also possessed horrific blood magic that ensorcelled the unsuspecting undir tribesmen, subjecting them to unheard of cruelties.

Preferring to brave the turbulent and storm-tossed waves of the ocean to the south than continue being preyed upon by these cannibalistic savages, the surviving nomads migrated to the lands south in makeshift canoes, pursued

by the demonic tormentors. The songs of the undir tell of some of their number making landfall upon marshy shores, with the foul hill savages biting at their heels, when from about them powerful water spirits rose up to protect them. The water spirits made the very marsh and sea come alive, causing the undir's tormentors to sink into the loamy peat or drown beneath the briny waves. These water spirits were called undines and, in their beneficence, eventually mated with the nomadic tribesmen and created the undir people.

Or so some of the songs say.

The undir's oral history later tells of the time when the kio first appeared out of the west and made themselves known to them. At first, the primitive undir fell to their knees, welcoming the ethereal-appearing pure blood kio as gods. However, it soon became apparent that these beings were quite mortal, many of them succumbing to injuries they sustained during their trek to the sea.



Months passed as the undir nursed the kio survivors to health, this act of kindness eventually forging a bond of friendship between the two peoples. When the fourth and final wave of kio refugees appeared, the undir had enough of a rudimentary knowledge of the kio language that they could communicate with these new arrivals, assuring them that they had found sanctuary and friends in this new land.

The kio soon learned that the undir had their own difficulties with Uggur, who once possessed a grand empire that spanned much of the area from the coast and deep into the interior. Though no longer as formidable force as they once were, the humanoids of Uggur were, for the most part, relegated to the area around the Lhauzhyr Mountains, but still maintained small villages and settlements along the coastal region. With the kio's help, these marauding tribes were slowly but surely rooted out and either sent back into the interior or put to the sword. With the area relatively pacified, the kio began to deal with the reality that their days of living among the clouds were over and that the surface was now their new home. With a sense of resignation, the kio set about laying down their roots in this land.

At first, the kio tried to keep the two peoples separate, wishing to maintain their racial identity. Some were even doubtful that the two races could produce offspring given that, from outward appearances, the kio and the undir were two wholly different species. However, despite the social taboos, some kio took undir as mates and a new kio subspecies came into existence.

The Founding of Whon (968 B.I.C.)

With the undir's help, the kio cleared a viable plot of land and founded the city of Whon in 968 B.I.C. and made it the capital of their fledgling kingdom, Capharra. The frail looking kio worked as none in living memory had; chopping down trees, quarrying and cutting stone, and plowing the land with a ferocity. The aid of the hardier and less technologically advanced undir was indispensable as the kio had never before needed to grow food or hunt other than for sport. Their flying city had provided all. How or where the nourishment came from was never questioned or even given a second thought. For the pure blood kio, this new way of life was a complete paradigm shift from their old. Tasks that were once beneath them became paramount to their survival, while the pursuit of philosophy, art and literature were put aside, as little time was available anything except survival.

With the raising of Whon, the kio culture shifted dramatically. No longer would they soar high above the earth nor would the leisure activities of the past be their principal driving force for the foreseeable future. By founding Whon, some of the kio came to terms with their new reality as a

ground-locked people and decided to embrace this new way of life, but others had a more difficult time of it. These kio saw themselves as an oasis of civilization in an ocean of barbarity and savagery, who were now beset upon all sides by enemies and forced to rut about the ground for nourishment like the dirt eaters they once looked down upon and pitied.

The Tir Betoqi Dwarves (933 B.I.C.)

Long before the arrival of the kio to the Western Lands, the dwarven enclave of Tir Betoq was founded. As the former celestial giants came to grips with their new state of being, vowing to protect their human charges in the hopes of appeasing the God Illiir, the leaders of each dwarven enclave sent out scouts throughout the continent in search of the best place to settle. Besides a suitable environment where they could carve out their underground kingdoms, some also considered places where they could act as a bulwark against threats to the benighted humans.

Centuries had passed when the Tir Betoqi dwarves learned of the amassed bestial savages of Uggur that threatened the humans of the region far to the south. After a long trek, the entire population, carrying with them the beating heartstone gem of their former leader, arrived in the Lhauzhyr Mountains and began the work of centuries in carving out the majestic enclave of Tir Betoq, the City of the Mourners of Glory. During this time, the dwarves sent out envoys to undir, to learn of their ways and inform them of the dwarves' duty to protect them. To the dwarves' surprise, while welcomed by the ever gregarious undir, they rebuffed the notion of the deities of the Pantheon, saying that the spirits of the Ulumai, the group of spirits venerated by the undir, watched over them.

Confused, the dwarves retreated into their enclave and pondered whether these humans, who were obviously touched by some supernatural essence and spurned the Gods, were worthy of their protection. Eventually, it was decided that it was the dwarves' hubris that damned them in the eyes of Illiir. Who were they to decide who should or should not be protected? These undir were human enough and did not deserve to be ground beneath the heel of fel creatures of Uggur. The dwarven elders decided to respect the customs and beliefs of the undir, though they would take the opportunity to enlighten those undir that showed interest to the true faith and beneficence of the human deities. Setting their sights on the present danger of the humanoids ringing them, the dwarves spent the next few centuries learning what they could of these creatures and stopping any invasion of the fertile coastal lands, all without the undir ever realizing the dwarves' sacrifice on their behalf.

The contact between the two races remained cordial and sporadic over the generations, until the dwarves learned of the kio. Their attention turned towards western portions of Uggur and beyond, the exodus from the crashed sky kingdom and their comingling with the undir escaped the dwarves' attention. It was not until the founding of Whon that the Tir Betoqi took notice and sent envoys to investigate. The discovery of these alien looking humanoids interacting with undir in a seamless fashion, drew immediate suspicion among the envoys. The dwarves had come with the promise of friendship and protection and were politely rebuffed, yet here were these spindly, wraith-like creatures being welcomed with open arms.

Whether it was the sting to their pride that nurtured their distrust towards the kio or an actual belief that the kio posed a threat, the dwarves ambushed a trio of kio who were surveying the lands to the north of Whon and led their captives to the dwarven enclave. After a lengthy interrogation, the dwarves determined that the kio were not a malevolent threat to the undir and opened a dialogue with their queen.

For her part, High Kyhm'mé Y'sungme was furious that her people were taken without warning and ordered a retaliatory strike. However, breaking into the mountain enclave of the dwarves proved beyond the kio's capabilities. Instead, a series of skirmishes ensued with the kio ambushing returning scouts and then demanding to exchange their prisoners for those held by the dwarves. Before things could escalate further, King Hudrames called for a truce and traveled to Whon to meet with Y'sungme. After a tense and frank discussion, the two decided it best if their respective people were to keep their distance from one another. The kio would not encroach upon the mountain fastness or the underground realm of the dwarves, and the Tir Betoqi would remove themselves completely from interacting in the affairs of the kio and undir. The cool relations between the two races continued without further incident until the cataclysm that was the Time of Terror.



The Coming of the Val (921 B.I.C.)

Not long into her reign, a group of ship wrecked humans were brought before Y'sungme, among them were three val, the first she had seen. The three, each a captain of one of the grounded vessels, were young, articulate, and handsome, but it was their grey eyes that drew her. The three men, Captains Bendis val'Assanté, Livel val'Borda, and Tamoran val'Sheem, were gracious to their rescuers and equally enchanted by the ethereal beauty of Y'sungme.

While the rest of the castaways were made comfortable in Whon, the three val became the personal guests of the High Kyhm'mé, enjoying all the luxury and splendor the newly constructed palace could offer. The more time she spent with the men, the more Y'sungme became obsessed with the captains. She seduced Tamoran val'Sheem one night in the floating gardens, a park built atop the tallest tower of the palace, reminiscent of those that once dotted the sky kingdom. But the High Kyhm'mé's hunger was not yet sated, and in quick succession, she seduced the other two val and named them all her royal consorts.

This act gravely insulted some of the pure blood kio, some of whom hoped to woo and wed the High Kyhm'mé themselves. The three captains were the target of dueling challenges, and outright assassination attempts, one of which resulted in the death of Tamoran val'Sheem, but not before he sired seven of the twenty-two offspring Y'sungme gave birth to. These children were the first of the val'Sungha line, though the bloodline's numbers would soon swell.



Growing Pains

As the population of the kio and the val'Sungha grew, a natural hierarchical order formed in an almost organic manner. With the seclusion of the pure blood kio, the day-to-day governance of the populace of the kingdom of Capharra came to rest upon the shoulders of the val'Sungha. Unfortunately, the val'Sungha family itself was split as the three bloodlines contested with each other for the right to rule over all the kio populace.

These three bloodlines differentiated themselves by tracing their lineage through that of their paternal progenitors. Those descendants of Bendis val'Assante founded the House of the Swan. The descendants of Livel val'Borda became the House of the Raven, and those descended from Tomoran val'Sheem created the House of the Eagle. Great pains were taken to ensure that the bloodlines between the three did not cross. These mating restrictions were put in place during the coming of age of the second generation of val'Sungha, guaranteeing that all those that descended directly from Y'sungme and her three male consorts would have an undiluted line that could be traced back directly to them.

As the pure blood kio grew less and less interested in the day-to-day affairs of their children and more of them journeying to the Aerie, a wondrous city on top of the highest mountain peak of the Lhauzhyr Mountain Range, as a retreat, the task of governance over the fledging nation was placed on the val'Sungha's shoulders. The fact that the val'Sungha should govern was never questioned, as their superiority over the other kio people was an accepted cultural fact.

Within the val'Sungha family itself, a pecking order had naturally occurred where the children of Y'sungme considered at the apex, but these children did not see themselves as one homogenous group, but rather three separate and very different cousins who shared the same grandmother.

Y'sungme rose to lead the pure blood kio due to necessity and the unparalleled catastrophic situation that had forced them to leave the crash site of their wondrous city and strike out for the unknown. Y'sungme led through strength of personality and a desire to see her people survive this disastrous turn of events. What benefits might come from her taking the reins of leadership had not been her primary concern, but the trappings of power proved to be a tremendous lure to her children's children. It was within this churning turmoil that House Tesstra saw an opportunity to rise above their given station.

The War of the Passions (812 – 810 B.I.C.)

At the time, House Tesstra was a small kio family that dealt with the raising and butchering of animals for consumption. At the time, most of the meat products consumed by the kio were fish, poultry, wild pigs, and a hardy breed of goat that the undir domesticated generations ago. With the population explosion due to the influx of the kio, a more robust breeding and butchering industry was required to meet with the need, a need House Tesstra chose to meet and grow very rich from. This wealth only led to their desire to gain more riches and influence, something they were, ironically, denied due to their chosen profession which was seen as unrefined and 'dirty' work.

Resentment grew within the family and reached the boiling point when the eldest son of the patriarch was not only denied the hand of the daughter of the Tamoran branch of the val'Sungha family, but publicly humiliated for the temerity of the attempt. Tempers flared with the household, but the patriarch, one Rasselijj Tesstra, called for calm and promised that this slight to the family's honor would be paid for a thousand-fold.

Like a master tactician, Rasselijj laid out a strategy where they would use the fractures and pressures already building within kio society to tear down the social order in place and replace it with one where they would be elevated or even placed in a position of power. The complex plan had many moving parts, including blackmail, murder, theft, and even a man-made famine to add stress to the val'Sungha that had taken over the day-to-day governance of Capharra.

High Kyhm'mé Y'sungme had abdicated much of her secular power to Uj'ket val'Sungha, her most beloved great-grandson, as she and the rest of the pure blood kio grew restless and longed for the days of their youth, floating among the clouds in the sky kingdoms. The creation of a new telluric engine was beyond their abilities as that knowledge was lost ages ago, prior to the crash. So, the pure bloods went to the highest mountaintops and there, upon their lofty peaks, built wondrous open aired buildings and temples of marble where they could go and meditate.

The Prince Regent, as Uj'ket val'Sungha was called, while competent was inexperienced and quickly overwhelmed by the famine orchestrated by House Tesstra. The grain food stores were destroyed due to contamination by a parasitic fungus. At the same time, House Tesstra reported that much of their livestock were killed or taken by raiding gar from Uggur.

As the anxiety grew due to food rationing, orchestrated slights against the honor of one or another family increased. Rumors of infidelity, accusations of hoarding among the Houses of the dynatoi, slights and other vulgarities said by one family against another all increased the friction within Whon and Capharra in general. The final nudge that sent everything into a downward spiral was the kidnapping and murder of three children of the Bendis branch of the val'Sungha family, with all evidence pointing to the Tamoran branch. Duels and attacks of vendetta, with other kio families joining one side against the other two branches threatened to rip the fabric of kio society in twain.

When peacemakers rose to try and defuse the situation before all-out civil war broke out, House Tesstra sabotaged their efforts. A duel between the heads of two of the branches of the val'Sungha was meant to satisfy honor and tamper down the enflamed passions of the kio failed spectacularly. On the morning of the duel, hundreds of supporters of both sides gathered to witness the end of the blood feud, Prince Regent Uj'ket and Valyt of the Tamoran val'Sungha crossed blades in a master exhibition of dueling, with neither able to pierce the defenses of the other for long minutes. With an expertly executed feint, Valyt was able to get past Uj'ket's defenses and cut his opponent's right check. It was a minor cut, looking far worse than it was, but within a few seconds, the Prince Regent fell dead. A stunned hush fell over the crowd as the officiant and the Uj'ket's supporters rushed forward. Accusatory eyes fell upon Valyt, and after his blade was examined, a near undetectable poison was discovered coating the sword. So incensed was the crowd, that they rushed through his entourage and beat Valyt to death.

While Rasselijj silently congratulated his daughter for distracting Valyt's yr'ki, second, so that her brother could poison the blade, the act proved to be his family's undoing. Isgevil of the Livel branch of the val'Sungha knew that his cousin Valyt might be a hot-head, but he was an honorable man who took pride in his skill with the blade and would never stoop to using poison to kill an opponent. Isgevil realized that the kio were under attack by an enemy that knew their ways and were master manipulators and set about to find out their identity.

It took another two seasons before Isgevil tracked down the unseen adversary, but by this time, the kio had fallen upon each other. With armed camps formed and alliances between Houses made that the knowledge appeared too late. Realizing that his own accusations would be seen as an attempt to shift blame away from his own family, Isgevil took the only avenue available to resolve the issue. He trekked up the high escarpment and explained all that had transpired, as well as presenting the evidence he found of a mass conspiracy against the kio as a whole, and the val'Sungha specifically, to the beings who could set things right - Y'sungme and the other pure blood kio.

The pure blood kio returned in mass to see what they had wrought being torn down by their descendants and quickly called all to account. The largest assembly of kio, with representatives from each of the Houses in attendance, filled a great amphitheater and listened while Y'sungme's lilting tones explained the duplicity and depravity of one of their own.

All the members of House Tesstra were hauled before their assembled countrymen and were made to account for their actions. For their crimes, the members of the House were stripped of their privileges, lands, and possessions. The heads of the family were then beheaded by the familial kio swords bestowed to them by Y'sungme many years ago, which was then shattered, with all forbidden from reforging the shards back into blades. The remaining adults' faces were ritually scarred with acid, an ancient practice the kio of the sky kingdoms had inflicted on those that committed the most heinous of crimes, and then banished from the kio lands, never to return under punishment of death.

For the mastermind of the plot Y'sungme reserved the most severe sentence – public torture. For eight hours, Rasselijj underwent the most exquisite torment, never allowed even the respite of unconsciousness. The pure bloods had perfected the art of wreaking the most excruciating sensations on a being, primarily to relieve the ennui that afflicted most of their kind as they floated among the stars. Rasselijj was then allowed to heal only to be taken to the high escarpments of the Lhauzhyr where spikes were driven into his hands and feet and he was left for the predatory avians to dine upon his corrupt flesh.

The Creation of the Modern Kio Nations (810 B.I.C.)

Y'sungme was not yet done with doling out punishment. She and the other pure bloods saw that their offspring needed strict guidance if they were to govern themselves, so the pure bloods enacted reforms in the social order and the political system that mirrored the political system of the sky kingdoms.

First, the vast territories that constituted Capharra were split into three, initially for the three branches of the val'Sungha to govern, though who would rule these lands would change over time. From the northern portions of Capharra were carved out the kingdoms of Pajharo and Bhiharn.

Next, the complex, some would say convoluted, process of ascension to the thrones of the three states was set. The eventual ruler of Capharra would first govern as prince of Bhiharn and subsequently as duke of Pajharo before being able to sit upon the Clawed Throne. The powers of the dynatoi were expanded as a separate entity known as the Royal Courts, one for each of the states, that would advise the current rulers as well as assemble to choose the successors

the throne as the need arose. Heredity ascendance to the throne was never practiced in the sky kingdoms and would not be tolerated in the kio lands on the surface. The only compromise to this is that the rulers must be chosen from within the val'Sungha family. Many other smaller institutions and traditions were outlined, including the web of alliances and patronages of the various kio Houses, where no one family would be entirely beholden to one patron, but have ties to many.

Lastly, Y'sungme designated who would initially govern over Pajharo and Bhiharn and naming the first King of Capharra. After waiting a season to ensure that the reforms instituted were functioning as intended, Y'sungme and the rest of the pure bloods climbed to the aerie confident that they had brought their children back from the precipice.

The Founding of the League of Princes (750 B.I.C.)

For years, the undir trading cities collectively known as the Shadow Towns began forging trade routes with other kio and undir settlements along the coast, the elorii of Entares, and the roaming Chauni tribes as far north of the Sea of Coryan, which at the time was known as the Placid Sea due to its calm waters. More adventurous traders braved crossing the open waters to the north, pursuing old tales of vast lands and riches. The small undir vessels eventually ran across strange foreign ships whose captains were more than happy to trade for the exotic goods they carried. They were escorted into the small port city of Aliegis, and from there discovered the riches of Plexus.

For all their wealth, these undir mercantile endeavors were vulnerable to various threats, such as pirates, Chauni raiders, and others that would plunder their growing riches. Calling upon their old allies, the Shadow Towns proposed a trading alliance to Capharra that grew to encompass Pajharo and Bhiharn, as well as the wild lands of Lhyl-lak-fel (modern-day Lhyllifel). Over the years, the alliance grew prosperous as trade goods passed in and out of its various ports. The trading alliance strengthened and changed as time passed, combining the military and commercial aspects to one resembling a political union or confederation. The rise of the Speculator Princes of Mhrycia, the Shadow Towns, a title recognized by Capharra and other powers, gave this union its name, the League of Princes.



The War of Our Children (328 B.I.C.)

The undir of Lhyl-lak-fel were different from their brethren to the north. These undir were hardened by the constant threat of raiders from Uggur, which at times overwhelmed them, such as when the marauding humanoids occupied their lands for almost two generations before the elorii of Entares, having been persuaded to take the undir as their protectorate, dislodged the gar and their monstrous allies from the land.

Like all undir, those of Lhyl-lak-fel pay homage to the spirits of the Ulumai, but due to the predations of the gar, give special veneration to King Crow, one of the spirits of that pantheon. King Crow, the spirit of war, fury, and vengeance of the Ulumai, demanded much from his supplicants, before he granted them his gifts. Usually his demands consisted of the heads of vanquished foes, usually from another village of undir and less often from other races, though trophies from an especially fearsome gar or kio was worth much more in his eyes.

Many years after previous interventions by the elorii, the gar were becoming increasingly bolder once again. All eyes turned to their king and war chief, Sakulos of Lhosk, to help repel the invaders without the shame of having to call upon

their elorii allies. Sakulos conferred with his dacoï, the undir shamans, who said that King Crow could give the people the power to defeat the gar, but first he required a show of faith.

On the following crescent of the green moon, a time sacred to King Crow, the undir warriors of Lhyl-lak-fel attacked the towns and villages of their brethren in Capharra and Pajharo. During the raids, many undir and several kio were killed and beheaded. Upon returning to Lhosk, the undir showered the altar of King Crow with the trophies, most prized being the elegant heads of the kio. Pleased by this display, King Crow granted Sakulos and a group of his Spears, the traditional name for the king's honor guard, a taste of what he was offering. On the following raid into the kio lands, Sakulos and his guard's body shifted and warped. They grew in size, sprouting black feathers, razor sharp talons, and a terrible needle beak that pierced the heart of many a kio warrior.

The kio were stunned at the attacks, at first believing that the gar had somehow slipped through their defenses, but seeing that neither food, riches, nor captives were taken, merely the grisly heads of the slaughtered townsfolk, they knew that this was not their grisly work. Tracking their attackers back across the frontier and into Lhyl-lak-fel, the kio mounted a punitive attack against these barbaric undir. In an unfortunate turn of events, a group of elorii merchants were in the village at the time and leapt to the defense of their allies. They were quickly overwhelmed by the superior number of trained kio warriors.

Once word reached Seremas, things escalated quickly. The kio and the elorii knew of each other and had even traded goods at the trade port of Mhyr, but relations between the two could be described as indifferent. The elorii knew of the sky kingdoms from the distant past, but interactions between the Yhriwhon and the Eloran Empire were infrequent and tense when they did occur. The elorii were ready to believe the worst of their neighbors to the north and retaliated.

Over the six years that the war raged on, most of the heaviest fighting took place on Lhyl-Lak-fel soil, with Lhosk being sacked multiple times during the bloody conflict. The kio also suffered under the exacting attacks by the elorii, with even the walls of Whon being breached and parts of the city set ablaze. Though the kio attempted an invasion of Seremas, the city was too well defended, and the kio had to settle for razing a few outlying eloran towns. Each attack was countered by an even more vicious strike, with neither the kio nor the elorii ready to sue for peace.

The war would have continued escalating until one side or the other was utterly defeated had it not been for a lone undir dacoï, who finally spoke out. The undir of the north guessed at what was spurring on the attacks by their cousins of the south. They were worshippers of the Ulumai as well, and heard the calls from King Crow, urging them to fight back and honor him as those of Lhyl-lak-fel did. Some

succumbed to and temptation and gave the spirit of war his gruesome due and joined the battle at the side of the kio. After a vision given to her by Mima Aneis, the mother figure in the Ulumai Pantheon, where the once green plains and forests were turned into a blood-soaked graveyard, Anacutt, a dacoï from the Sword Fens, broke her silence and told the kio things that were never shared with them before, the full history and lore of the Ulumai.

The kio were stunned by how little they knew of their allies. They believed that the undir were an unsophisticated and simple folk, chained by lore and superstitions, but now understood that these people trucked with ancient spirits. The Ulumai was made up of benign spirits of the wild or of an archetypal nature, such as the Provider, the Trickster, or the Maternal figure, but it also included an entity known as the Crow King or King Crow to the undir of Lhyl-lak-fel, a spirit of vengeance, blood, and war.

Immediately understanding the travesty that had fallen upon them and the elorii, the kio sued for peace, finding a willing partner in an ancient Ardakene known as Meliros the Lifewarden. The truth of what instigated the war revealed, all hostilities ended, and the two former foes became allied against the true enemy. Sakulos had died the previous season and was succeeded by his young son, Satilik. Recently installed as king, the man had knowledge of the power King Crow had bestowed upon his father and others but had not taken that gift unto himself. It was this that spared his life, as the kio and elorii excoriated the undir and put every adherent of the Crow King, as well as any dacoï that knew the rituals to commune and summon the spirit, to the sword. Altars, relics, and tureens sacred to the spirit or used in its summoning were destroyed. Those too large or unbreakable were buried beneath earth, in trapped filled and guarded crypts.

Those in the north suffered a similar fate, as neither the kio or the elorii were willing to chance a resurgence in the spirit's followers. Within a few months, all traces of the Crow King were expunged from the undir culture. Even the unprecedented act of sending a group of kio into the Spirit Realm to kill the Crow King was attempted, but none of the warriors ever returned to their bodies and the results of their quest was never known.

When the undir protested, saying that they are now defenseless against attacks by the gar of Uggur or other enemies, the kio and the elorii made a solemn vow that they would never need power of a spirit of war, as they would protect them from all threats. The kio would watch over the undir in their lands and grant the towns of Mhrycia protectorate status. For their part, the elorii would do the same for the renamed nation of Lhyllifel, though they would be allowed to remain a part of the League of Princes, for trading purposes.

The Time of Terror (35 B.I.C.)

The kio and the undir had never heard of the Sorcerer-King, Ymandragore, nor of the Myrastian Necromancer Lords and their curse, but just the same, they became victims to the sudden and unexpected tearing of the veil between the Mortal Realm where Arcanis resides and that of the Hells. Countless infernals boiled over into the world, devastating huge swaths of the continent, but in the League of Princes, the attack was more insidious as the initial strike came from demons, insubstantial infernals that wreak havoc by possessing mortal vessels.

The undir shamans, the dacoï, were warned too late by the spirits of the Ulumai and were the first to be forcibly taken over the demons. Due to the practice of allowing the Ulumai spirits to temporarily take over their bodies, the dacoï left themselves open to possession by the malevolent entities. By the time that population at large knew what had occurred, hundreds were dead, and entire villages slaughtered in the most horrific manner possible.

Without any experience in dealing with infernals, the kio's methodology in fighting the creatures were to kill the tormented vessel, but this did nothing to harm the infernal within, making it inconvenienced as it searched for another suitable body to control. When the corporeal infernals appeared on their lands, the kio dealt with them swiftly, as these devils were something they could slay. Unfortunately, this type of infernal was not the most common type to invade, as the demons ran rampant across the region.

With half the League in flames and the number of dead growing daily, aid came from two unexpected sources. The first were the val'Baucisz of Rajhau (located in modern day Eppion), a group marginalized by the kio, but whose connection to Sarish was enough to enable them to bind and exorcise demons, leaving the victim relatively unharmed. Many were willing to set aside the rumored atrocities this val family was purported to have committed upon their undir subjects and welcomed them into their villages, towns, and even the palaces of the kio. Even with their expertise, the val'Baucisz were too few in number and the land too large to safeguard everyone. As the people of the League fought a losing war of attrition against the unending tide of infernals, horns blared in the distance – the Tir Betoqi dwarves had arrived!

Even within their mountain stronghold, the dwarves were besieged by the sudden onslaught of the infernals, but their faith in the God Hurrian and the human pantheon of deities provided the cants that were sufficient to blunt the creatures initial attack and then destroy the infernals. Fearing that the invasion threatened their human charges, the dwarves marched into the Sword Fens of Bhiharn and continued south. Between the cants and martial prowess of the dwarves, the binding rituals of the val'Baucisz, and the

courage exhibited by the undir and kio, the infernal horde was beaten back, an inch at a time.

The pure blood kio in their aerie sanctuaries also weathered the infernal invasion, able to beat off attacks by the foul entities, though they lost a quarter of their population. After cleansing their own lands, the surviving pure bloods descended to aid their progeny, fighting side by side with the dwarves, whom they once knew of as the celestial giants from ancient songs.

Though it took many years to hunt down and root out the demonic entities, the region was eventually declared free of the infernal infestation, though many of the fiends fled into the wilds of Uggur to avoid destruction. A time of rejoicing and rebuilding lay ahead of them, but the people of the League, with the timely aid of allies, survived one of the darkest periods of Arcanis history. One interesting side note: there has never been a dark-kin born of a kio. Some scholars hypothesize that the ethereal essence of the original pure blood kio could not be corrupted by the infernal taint. Others point to the fact that any kio woman despoiled by the fiends ritually killed themselves to wipe clean the perceived blemish to their honor.

The War of Tides (723 – 738 I.C.)

The val'Baucisz of Rajhau were not members of the League of Princes, despite being offered entry after their indispensable aid during the Time of Terror. The nobles of Rajhau, called Jhauts, preferred to avoid political entanglements, valuing their independence and isolation from the rest of the nations of the region. The exception to this policy was trade, as they enjoyed the comforts that their commercial enterprises garnered selling merchandise made by their undir slaves.

The modest riches that flowed into Rajhau's coffers were insufficient to slake the Jhaut nobles' avarice and they increasingly encroached upon the maritime trade routes of Mhrycia, even going so far as to pirate their trading vessels. To further complicate the situation, the Coryani Empire wished to expand their holdings in the Western Lands, as the Shadow Towns' competition with their main port city in the Gulf of Coryan, Plexus, was cutting into their revenue.

Urged by certain patrician nobles, the Empire began to court the val'Baucisz as allies. The val'Baucisz welcomed the Coryani overtures, as they were coupled with generous gifts and opened new markets to their shipping fleet, granting them access to the Corvis River and the many cities along its banks. This period of time was rife with intrigue and conflicts at sea, with each side escalating the tense confrontation. The Coryani-Rajhau alliance combined political pressure with ever higher tariffs, and as a final measure to cripple the Shadow Towns, an embargo on all goods from Mhrycia.

The Speculator-Princes retaliated by financing a group of undir separatists that were working within Rajhau's territory. These rebels, originally from Bhiharn, were sickened by the stories told by escaped undir slaves, who told of unholy and vile rites enacted by the val'Baucisz, as well as the degrading manner in which the undir were treated. The undir rebels sought to overthrow the Jhaut despots and reestablish the undir republic that once flourished there. Mhrycia not only financed the separatists on land, but also supported a large number of pirate and smuggling ships working to overthrow the val'Baucisz.

The plot was uncovered, but while the val'Baucisz demanded an invasion of the Shadow Towns, the Coryani were more cautious and instead authorized a privateer fleet to counter the pirate fleet sailing the water of the Gulf of Coryan. As the years passed, the situation in Rajhau steadily worsened, with the rebels growing bolder with each passing season. Hundreds of slaves escaped to join their ranks. The pirate fleet also enjoyed growth as rogue Altherians, Myrantians, Chauni, and every criminal and scoundrel from around the coastal area signed on.

The val'Baucisz sent emissaries to the Imperial Court and the Senate in Coryan, arguing that the only way to end this was to invade Mhrycia, but the Emperor was wary of getting involved in a war against the unknown might of the kio, as well as possible intervention by the Entaran elorii. To placate their client-king, the Coryani named a well-connected retired centurion, one Ferus Sipulus, as commander of the fleet and the Coryani forces within Rajhau.

Though he had strict orders not to cross over into Mhrycia, the commander did so, burning the village of Dorog to the ground and slaying all the inhabitants. This one act ignited the smoldering conflict into an all-out war, with the undir rebels launching a well-coordinated attack on the city of Rajhau and its outlying settlements, taking its port. The val'Baucisz and other Coryani citizens living in the state either fled their homes or were struck down in the streets.

Commander Sipulus hesitated to call for legionary reinforcements from Plexus, fearing repercussions stemming from his illegal attack. A black deal was struck between Lord Mezgha val'Baucisz, the patriarch of the family, and Sipulus, where he would order the century of legionnaires under his command to evacuate civilians, and the val'Baucisz and his men would ambush them. The massacre would be laid at the feet of the undir separatists leaving the Coryani no choice but to invade.

By the time the Coryani legions arrived, the undir were in full control of the city and the countryside. Promoted to general, Sipulus took command of the three legions and, alongside their val'Baucisz allies, invaded Rajhau, sacked and plundered the city, killing or capturing every undir found within the state's borders. In the handful of years it took to seek out and destroy the pirate and smuggling fleet,

Capharra mobilized the ky'vec, the main body of the three kingdom's military force, and garrisoned the Shadow Towns, outnumbering the legions.

The prince of Bhiharn, using his connections with the val'Mehan family that attended his court, negotiated a peace agreement and defused the standoff. As part of the peace settlement, Mhrycia was required to pay an outrageously large sum annually, and in return, was given Coryani protection and proclaimed a suzerainty state. The Shadow Towns held on to their status as members of the League of Princes, as well as technically being a territory of Lhyllifel. The complex web of political ties and entanglements make the Coryani head's swim, but to kio sensibilities, seems perfectly simple.

As for Rajhau, the ruined city was rebuilt and renamed Metra, as the capital of the Coryani Satrapy of Eppion. Though the val'Baucisz were able to regain their lost holdings, their comportment and reputation made them problematic for the Empire. Therefore, Ferus Sipulus was named Satrap to act as a tempering influence over the val'Baucisz nobles.

The Modern Age (1028 I.C.)

Life for the kio and the League in has been quiet for the past few two centuries. Apart from fighting against incursions by the gar of Uggur, pirate raids, and Chauni slavers, the kio have enjoyed an unprecedented period of peace and prosperity.

In Bhiharn, the undir in the Sword Fens have taken up the cause of their forefathers that failed to liberate Rajhau and are spreading sedition and unrest in the northern part of that state. While there have been terrorist attacks on the kio and their holdings, the deaths and collateral damage incurred during these attacks were minimal. With the exception of a small number of militant separatists, the other undir appear to be satisfied with demonstrations and non-violent dissension.

A sudden illness struck down the elderly king of Capharra, who had hoped that Duke Geonay of Pajharo and heir to the throne of Capharra would mature before succeeding him. In his weakened state, he didn't believe there was enough time left for him to do so. Conferring with the cunning Prince Irgar of Bhiharn and other members of the royal court, they put in place a plan to delay Geonay's ascension.

First the Royal Court of Capharra would proclaim that due to his ill-health, a new candidate for the throne of Bhiharn was selected – Trykon val'Sungha, cousin of Duke Geonay. The duke had been chosen as Trykon's antar, a godparent, tutor, manager, and guardian rolled into one, at the boy's birth, an honor he had touted before the noble houses. Young Trykon's instruction was close to complete when his selection was announced. Geonay saw the trap before him. With the added responsibilities of governing a nation, his duties as antar would be extended by years.



Prince Irgar announced that he would not take the throne of Pajharo, as his careful negotiations with the separatists from the Sword Fens were at a critical juncture. This meant that young Trykon would immediately become duke of Pajharo upon Geonay taking the throne. The trap was sprung. Geonay would now be grooming the young man for a position he was woefully unprepared to do and one he was uniquely suited to prepare him for. Now the handful of years became a decade or more before his coronation.

To further infuriate the duke, Gilifae val'Sungha, his 'oh-so-perfect' and self-righteous cousin from the Swan branch of the family, was named Prince-Regent of Capharra. The woman was the knight-commander of the Order of the Yhrki, an all-female knightly order, and had foresworn allegiances to any house or faction. How could she have been chosen? All these thoughts passed in a flash through his mind, but to the royal court all the duke said was *"If that is the King's will, I shall humbly obey"*.

The duke's fascination with all things Coryani had soured many of his possible allies in the royal courts to him. The Coryani had tried, without great success to spread its influence throughout the various parts of the League. In Geonay, they found someone already eager to learn and

mimic their culture and traditions. The fact that he was heir to the throne of Capharra only made him all the more attractive. Geonay and his ward were invited to the capital of the empire, Grand Coryan, where he and Trykon were wined and honored throughout the city. Though this made an impression on the duke, he also saw it for what it was – a way to sway him into the imperial camp. Yet, after all his high praise of their northern neighbors, he found himself cornered again, for he would look like a fool if he were now to warn against them. Chained by his own pride, Geonay returned home a conflicted man.

Current Year 1071 I.C.

With the fiasco of the lost year's tribute and the subsequent downfall of the Coryani-appointed satrap Eppion, the League of Princes, through the Regent-Prince Gilifae, sent a message to Emperor Scipio. This politely written missive explained the lost tribute would be replaced, but this would be the final payment made to the Empire.

As she so diplomatically stated, *"Friends do not demand money from one another and know that the Empire will always have our hand in friendship. We are old allies, ones that have fought and bled for one another, even as recent as your own civil war. Many thousands of League citizens took up arms to defend the Empire and remove the Mad Valinor from the Alabaster Throne. We did not ask for reparations or even a show of gratitude, for friends and allies act when needed without regard for rewards or platitudes."*

When Scipio received the letter, he was furious! With a few pointed words, Regent-Prince Gilifae had trapped him. If he should attack, then he would be seen as ungrateful and uncaring; a man who bleeds the life out of his allies' citizens and then demands money in return. However, with the defection of Toranesta and the Myrantians, as well as the secession of the val'Tensen lands to the north, any further loss of territory would have had more of the Coryani Empire shatter under his watch than under the rule of the insane val'Dellenov emperors. His grasp on power, in the wake of his elder brother's disastrous reign, was tenuous at best. Losing not only an entire region, but the boatload of gold that came in tribute yearly would have him facing assassins at the employ of his political adversaries wishing a change in regime.

Facing an impossible situation, Scipio turned to a source others in his position had gone to when the impossible needs accomplishing – the Dark Hand of the Emperor, the val'Borda. The Scions of Cadic quickly met with the Emperor and after being made aware of the situation, began to plot.

As the wheels within wheels machinations of the val'Borda spun, the political landscape in the League of Princes shifted dramatically. Duke Geonay had been kept off the throne of Capharra for years. Eventually, the young and reckless Trykon's education was deemed complete and Geonay rejoiced, privately of course. He was free of the chains that held him from his destiny. Hours after the celebration, Geonay sent word to Capharra and Gilifae that he was now unencumbered from other obligations and was prepared to ascend to the throne of Capharra immediately.

For her part, Gilifae was relieved. She had only accepted the position at the request of the dying King of Capharra and longed for the simple duties of leading the Order of the Yhrki, an all-female knightly order that forswore all other ties, dedicating itself to the protection of the ideals of the kio as a people, regardless of nationality. The Order was not beholden to any one nation or ruler and worked autonomously throughout the Known Lands in pursuit of kio interests.

On the night that Geonay was crowned king and festivals in his honor were in full swing, the val'Borda's finely laid plans came to fruition. The val'Baucisz of Metra were entertaining a group of lesser Coryani nobles from Salantis by showing them the sights of Metra, when a number of masked rebels fell upon them and in full view of the celebrating crowd, attacked the noble party, crying out, *"Freedom for the League; Death to the Empire!"* The attack was swift, but brutal in its efficiency. Before the peals of horror and calls for the Watch had hung in the air for more than a few seconds, the Coryani citizens and their val'Baucisz hosts' hands had been cut off and their heads affixed upon pikes, just as the original Eppion rebels had done.

Of the attackers, only one was found: a known troublemaker from Metra, his body lying cold upon the outskirts of the city. On cue, the val'Baucisz played their part to perfection. Instead of calling upon the newly-crowned king of Capharra, they beseeched the Coryani for help in putting down this 'bloody rebellion' before all the League was aflame.

By a strange coincidence, five full legions were in Plexus and were on ships heading across the sea to Eppion within the week. King Geonay found himself in a political maelstrom before the throne was even warm. He could no longer call the Coryani friend, as he had been maneuvered into doing so before. Instead, he was forced to swallow his pride and call upon the people of the League to repel the invaders and make their independence clear to the Coryani, once and for all.

Yet the Coryani moved too quickly and unexpectedly for the disunited League. Instead of landing with full force at Metra, the majority of the fleet made lightning raids upon the unsuspecting Shadow Towns of Mhyr, Eejho and Whalka, sandwiching the other cities of Mhyrcia between

them. Though the majority of the citizens in the invaded cities were able to flee into the surrounding thick wilderness, enough were captured and detained to keep the docks open and trade flowing, especially to the Empire.

By the time Capharra managed to assemble their forces, the Coryani had been reinforced and entrenched within Eppion and Mhyrcia. They were then able to meet the Red Dragoons on the fields between Capharra and Pajharo. Lhyllifel attempted to attack the legions from the flanks, but the attacks were uncoordinated. All sides, especially the Lhyllifen army, took losses.

The Lhyllifen army was used to being used as an auxiliary force to the Seremasi, but the elorii were embroiled in a devastating war with the Altherian Republic and then immediately thereafter with the Ssethregoran Empire. While the Seremasi were sympathetic to the plight of their 'little brothers' they could do no more than offer words of encouragement. For the first time, since the founding of the kingdom, the Lhyllifen undir were on their own.

The Lhyllifen forces, while wanting in experience, made up for it in sheer stubbornness and a refusal to bend a knee to a foreign invader. The lessons in warfare were costly, but with each broken bone, their officers and soldiers learned.

During this time, Gilifae and her Order of Yhrki tried desperately to broker peace between the League and the Coryani Empire, yet her overtures were rebuffed by both sides. Fearing the time was fast approaching where her knights might be forcibly conscripted, the Knights of the Order of the Yhrki vanished.

Remaining unseen, under the leadership of Knight-Commander Gilifae, the Order fought a guerilla war against those committing atrocities of war, regardless of which side of the political divide they came from. It's believed the heightened effectiveness of Mhyrcian rebels was due, in large part, to the leadership of a few knights.

The invasion of the League finally came to an end when the elorii of Seremas, their own wars over, threatened to intervene should the Coryani not negotiate a peace treaty in good faith. In exchange for their cessation, the Coryani would retain control, by proxy, of the territories they now held as long as the people living within those borders were given the same rights and freedoms as any other citizen of the Coryani Empire or the League. The Coryani agreed to this and named the val'Baucisz as their proxy governors over Eppion and Mhyrcia. Tribute would continue to be expected, but at a rate that was not ruinous.

For their part, the Shadow Towns of Mhyrcia were eager to just get the amassed Coryani legions out of their cities and return to the business of doing business; they would have happily paid double the demanded tribute to accomplish this.

The undir of Eppion found themselves once again at the tender mercies of the val'Baucisz family. Yet as fearful as they were of what was to come, they pitied the Mhyrcians more so, for they had never known the horror that comes from living under val'Baucisz rule.

Reveling quietly in the dark, sable majesty evoked by their name, the val'Baucisz see themselves as intrepid arcanists and conquering warrior princes among less daring men not fit to rule beside them, let alone over them. Even with their dwindling numbers, the scions of the valinor Mish, the Shadow of Sarish, find themselves the provincial governors of Eppion and Mhyrcia where they rule in the name of the Coryani Empire. Their rule over the undir populace goes beyond the proverbial iron fist and is the stuff of nightmares. Word of their atrocities has reached the Empire. While it has always been their position that the val'Baucisz are free to do what they please so long as it stays within their borders, it is prudent on occasion to not let things go completely unchecked. Even the 'terror hounds' of the Western Lands must be reminded who their master is on occasion.

The Coryani are no fools. They cannot afford another Alphaeus Jona; the nepotistic, ego-driven Satrap that turned Eppion and the rest of the League of Princes upside down over a chain of events that started with the missing annual tribute to the Emperor. The Senate, through the val'Borda family of Plexus, appointed Solumel Kaipra as the new Satrap. Solumel is a very prosperous and cunning full blooded undir Merchant Prince that was exiled from Metra and, who along with his family, was purged from Eppion when the val'Baucisz regained their footing after the Tribute debacle. Given no real choice in the matter, Solumel Kaipra has taken the position seriously, returning as a 'prodigal son' as a way to make life better for his people.

Solumel Kaipra has no real power outside of barking the occasional orders to the scoffing val'Baucisz, who have a firm control of Metra's military. To counteract this, the val'Borda has wisely put the entire Legion of the Watchful Hunter at his disposal. Thus, Solumel Kaipra must rely on the legion, and the val'Borda, to keep him in power. As the val'Baucisz have a new symbol of hatred to turn their attention to, the undir finally find relief from their daily toil and hardship, and the legion's general knows he will be richly rewarded by his family once their tour of duty is over.

This naturally does not sit well with the current provincial governors. Ladioce V, the val'Baucisz patriarch and current imperial archon, who is seething that his rule has been usurped by a lowly undir, let alone one that his family personally had culled and drinks himself into a fury.

King Geonay blames his turn of fortune on his hated cousin Gilifae and her knights. He argues that had she stood by them and added the power of her Order to his, then the Coryani could have been routed on more than one occasion. Decrying her and all of her Order as traitors to not only Capharra, but to the kio people at large, he stripped her rank as knight-commander of the Order of the Yhrki. In addition, he condemned all the knights of the order in absentia as traitors, with a kill-on-sight order throughout the League.

Many cannot and will not believe the accusations leveled against Gilifae, but have not pushed against the declaration, as she and her order have vanished and their whereabouts remain unknown.

For now, the League is quiet once more, but it would take little to plunge the region into another bloody conflict, either amongst themselves, with invaders from the Coryani Empire, or even from the humanoids of Uggur amassing to the south.





CHAPTER TWO: THE KIO RACE

THE KIO RACE

When discussing the kio, one must remember that the one most commonly encountered are actually a hybrid of the species. The parent species of the kio is referred to by outsiders as the *true* or *pure blood* kio, though it should be noted that their hybrid kin refer to them simply as *Ymari'enon*, or the *progenitors*.

The Pure Blood Kio

Pure blood kio are never seen roaming the streets of Capharra or Pajharo except for the rare occasion of a coronation or the holiday known as the Renewal of the Blood. They once lived alongside their progeny, but retired centuries ago to reside on top of the highest mountain peak of the Lhauzhyr Mountain Range in a wondrous city known as the Aerie. How they spend their time, or even how large of a population

of pure bloods exist is unknown beyond rumor, conjecture, and baseless speculation. The last recorded sighting of pure blood was during the ascension of Geonay to the throne of Capharra when three, one male and two females, were present, ostensibly to give their blessings.

The pure bloods are described as ethereally beautiful, with pale white skin that appears almost luminescent. Their skin emits a faint glow, making it seem as if their entire body were surrounded by a halo of light. Even without this inner light, physically they are an imposing people. Standing an average of seven feet in height and slender to the point of seeming 'willowy', many outsiders mistake their slight build for weakness. Tales abound of their strength, such as a recent story where a child was caught beneath an overturned wagon. A pure blood attending the coronation flung the vehicle off of the child as one would swat aside an insect.

Most pure bloods have long, pale hair of bleached bone white, silver, or a light golden blonde color. Oddly enough, they also have silvery grey eyes a few shades lighter than those

of any val family, including the val'Sungha. These eyes are large, far larger than any other known humanoid, yet they complement the pure blood's features, rather than detract from them or making them seem odd. Pure bloods also cannot grow facial hair, except for eyebrows, a trait handed down to all their mixed blood progeny.

Another point where the kio and the val'Sungha diverge from the pure blood norm is in their lifespan. All branches of the kio race are long-lived, but the pure bloods are said to live so long that they are thought to be immortal. While an exaggeration, the pure bloods tend to measure their lives in centuries rather than years; not immortality by definition, but close enough to blur the meaning.

The most credible story as to what the pure bloods do during their sometimes centuries-long absences is that they spend their time in some sort of trance. Centuries ago, during the height of Coryani power, a group of inquisitors from the Mother Church traveled to the Western Lands to root out any heresy connected with elemental worship. During time spent with the King of Capharra, one of the inquisitors slipped away unnoticed to better uncover anything that the official tour might have neglected to reveal. Delving deeper and deeper into the lower levels of the Capharran castle, inquisitor Torm val'Assanté found a polished steel door that seemed out of place in the otherwise stone cut passages. Gripping his holy symbol tightly, he felt the power of his faith and Illiir flow warmly throughout his body. Emboldened, he opened the odd door and entered the chamber beyond.

When he was found hours later, gibbering in a corner back on the upper floors of the castle, all that could be understood from him was that the chamber was filled with floating bodies of the 'old ones' and that when he disturbed their rest, he "*fell into their eyes.*" Further investigation could not find the polished silver door nor any sign of a chamber containing these 'old ones.' The King's only explanation was that "*travel for some men slowly unhinges the mind*" and left it at that. Inquisitor Torm spent the rest of the visit unable to sleep and tormented by what he had seen. These terrors finally ceased when on the voyage back across the Lauriol Sea, the inquisitor threw himself overboard in full armor and presumably drowned somewhere off the Annonican coast.

The Kio

The kio-human hybrids are the most populous of the kio races and are those most commonly met in the League of Princes and abroad. This hybrid occurred centuries ago, not too long after the pure blood kio first appeared in the Western Lands, during the Shadowed Age, circa 980 B.I.C.

At that time, the Western Lands were a pristine wilderness, unspoiled and lush with life. The only known people of the area were the undir, a race of humans whose cultural philosophy mandated that they live in harmony with nature

and not bend it to their will. Theirs was a hunter-gatherer society with small population centers clustered about the coastline of the Lauriol Sea.

The appearance of kio caused quite a stir in the undir society, but luckily their first contact proved to be a peaceful one, as the undir helped the pure bloods acclimate to life on the surface of the world. Over time, the nascent friendship between the two people grew from polite neighbors, to trading partners, to eventually strong allies. Though the kio never fully integrated the undir into their society, they did treat their short-lived friends as an older and wiser brother would a weaker and disadvantaged younger sibling.

Try as they might to keep their two races free of any 'blood entanglements,' nature will have its way, and the small true blood kio population received an infusion of fresh blood from amorous trysts with the younger and more adventurous of the undir. Shortly thereafter, the first kio-human hybrid was born.

This new sub-race of the kio still had a longer life span when compared to the undir, but far shorter than the near-immortal pure bloods. They were also much smaller than their kio progenitors, with males standing on average just shy of six feet. They also inherited their human parent's thicker and more robust form, though they are still considered slim and athletic by human standards. Most of these hybrid kio have golden hair and light eyes, which range in color from sky blue to dark green, and like the pure blood kio, do not have the ability to grow facial hair besides eyebrows.

One interesting trait inherited from their pure blood progenitors is *perfect balance*. Kio tend to be able to keep their footing in even the most treacherous ground. While not supernatural in nature, and thus not infallible, kio are able to perform feats of acrobatics with seemingly facile style. This trait has earned the kio a reputation for poise and grace, unequaled by any other race, except perhaps the elorii.

Interestingly, this new hybrid race always bred true, meaning not only that two hybrid-kio parents would always have hybrid-kio children, but also when a hybrid-kio mated with a human, the offspring would always be a hybrid-kio. In a relatively short period of time, the race stabilized and became a dominant species.

These hybrid-kio organize themselves into complex systems of families and marriage alliances, making the study of kio heredity a daunting effort. Within the kio nations, its territories and protectorates, the kio families arrange themselves into greater families known as *Houses*. Some of these houses hold great power and influence and have representatives in the royal courts of each of the three kio nations. Other families enjoy more limited power as Guild Houses, while others have very localized or negligible influence. Some of the more influential kio families are detailed below.

House Aflastel

House Aflastel is the youngest of the greater families and has yet to make their mark on the court. Freynillia Aflastel, a master architect responsible for many of the beautiful buildings of Whon, was welcomed to the royal court less than a century ago, elevating her entire house in the process. Without royal ties built over generations, they are at a disadvantage in the royal courts, but as a new potential source of power, House Aflastel is also in the enviable position of being fought over by would-be allies. Though many expected them to make political blunders, thus far the house, still led by the now-ancient Freynillia, has cannily played their political suitors against each other. This had led many to suspect the House may become major players in another century or two.

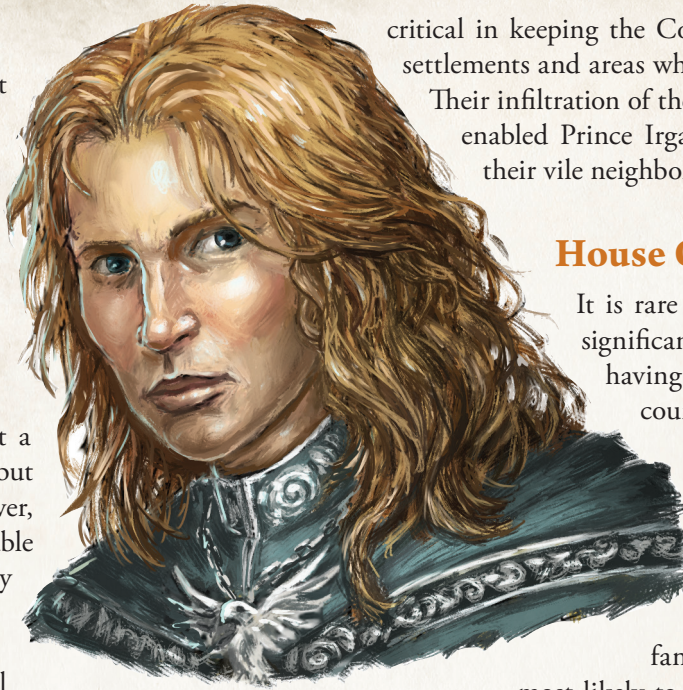
House Cetergis

House Cetergis has been at the forefront of the Capharran military since time immemorial, and they are the traditional keepers of the giant eagles that serve as mounts for the famed Kio Sky Knights. They have a reputation as the most adventurous and courageous of all the houses, and also claim to produce the finest duelists ever to wield a kio sword. Though several duelists from other families dispute that claim. Still, they can count an impressive number of dueling victories in their ancient lineage. They have a long generational feud with House Suvaan, which has caused a great deal of chaos throughout kio history. No one can remember how the dispute started, but the reason has long since ceased being as important as the victory.

House Fallania

Though they tend to avoid cities and barely maintain a presence in court, House Fallania is nevertheless afforded a great deal of respect. Those of House Fallania work closely with the val'Sungha of the Raven, performing those acts necessary to promote the goals of that family, as well as propagating their reputation of being master manipulators. Contrary to the rumors spread by their detractors, the members of House Fallania are not assassins, although they will perform such duties if required. Instead, House Fallania are infiltrators, saboteurs, and agent provocateurs sowing seeds of doubt and discontent within the households, armies, or enemy nations. Their campaigns of disinformation were

critical in keeping the Coryani legions marching to settlements and areas where they were not required. Their infiltration of the val'Baucisz household has enabled Prince Irgar to be one step ahead of their vile neighbors.



House Ghikir

It is rare for a lesser family to gain significant power, but despite not having a seat within the royal court of Capharra, House Ghikir nonetheless peddles influence in the Western Lands through their vast stores of wealth. They are quite possibly the wealthiest of the kio families, or least they are the most likely to flaunt their wealth openly.

This wealth primarily comes from their interests in the Shadow Towns, and they have been the pre-eminent kio family in Mhyrcia since the Coryani recognized the nation. Many from House Ghikir have been Speculator-Princes, including Armenna Ghikir, current Speculator-Prince of Mhun. Recently they have tried to use their wealth to buy greater prominence in Capharra, something that has been actively resisted by those within the royal court.

House Mathiji

The bulk of House Mathiji resides in Bhiharn, where they exert considerable influence over the court in the capital of Liveh. They are patroned by the val'Sungha of the Raven, and favored as spies and advisors, particularly by Prince Irgar val'Sungha. Alone of the greater houses, House Mathiji has sought close ties with the undir of the Sword Fens. This has met with limited success, for the rebellious undir are suspicious of any kio. These attempts, in turn, have harmed the house's reputation in court, as other kio suspect them of manipulating rebellion to their own ends. Thus far they have been protected from reprisals by Prince Irgar, who insists things would be worse without House Mathiji's diplomatic channels.

House N'sai

One of the oldest Kio Houses, House N'sai has several mercantile holdings and clients that serve to give them a monopoly on certain staple goods. They use this control to manipulate the costs of goods like salt and other spices throughout the League of Princes and beyond. With the recent Coryani invasion and the return of the val'Baucisz as a regional power, they have withdrawn their holdings from Eppion and minimized their substantial capital from the rest of the Shadow Towns.

The head of House N'sai is the elderly Jhyn'kyar N'sai, is a cunning diplomat and close confidant to the past three rulers of Capharra. Jhyn'kyar is held in high esteem by many of the kio of Capharra for both his proximity to the throne as well as successfully completing the sacred warrior path of the Vyhkiarn (see pg. XX). During the reign of King Mornir, a pirate fleet was raiding the trade routes along the Gulf of Coryan with impunity. When Jhyn'kyar's youngest brother was lost along with the rest of the crew at the hands of this pirate, he set himself upon the path of the Vyhkiarn. Jhyn'kyar swore to destroy this pirate captain and his fleet. Against this vow he bargained his life, the shattering of his familial kio blade, and the life of his newborn daughter. Jhyn'kyar's discovery that the pirate fleet raiding the seas was but a lone ship from the Ymandragoran Black Fleet did not deter nor stop him from sending it and its infernal crew to the bottom of the Lauriol Sea.

Due no doubt to Jhyn'kyar's famed actions, King Geonay has tasked House N'sai with capturing the renegade members of the Order of the Yhrki alive to face trial and execution for their actions. Jhyn'kyar's seven daughters, led by his eldest Lyric'ri, followed their father's example and set themselves upon the path of the Vyhkiarn, vowing to bring Gilifae and the rest to justice.

House Phiresten

One of the oldest and most respected houses, House Phiresten are the self-proclaimed keepers of kio tradition and culture. They are often painted as behind the times, as they can be relied upon to oppose anything new or foreign in court. To House Phiresten, however, this resistance is not mindless, but merely cautious, for kio culture is beautiful and wonderful, and the last thing any kio wants is to lose their identity beneath the onrushing tide of the undir and Coryani. No house has been more esteemed in kio history, save perhaps the val'Sungha, and none besides the val'Sungha can boast of so many leaders of the people. Privately, and only amongst themselves, the conservatism of House Phiresten extends to a distaste for the val'Sungha, for what are they but dilutions of kio purity with valinoric blood?

While most kio have an interest in the progenitors, House Phiresten is the most active in seeking ancient lore and artifacts from the sky-kingdom of Ylliph'kim. Explorers and seekers of ancient knowledge, such as members of the Emerald Society, are supported by this house in excavating and exploring the ruins of the crash site. The Followers of the Azure Way are not welcomed by this house, since members of that society were found trying to smuggle artifacts out of the region.

House Suvaan

House Suvaan built their sizable power-base through the byzantine guild system of Capharra. If House Phiresten is the backbone of kio culture, House Suvaan is the muscle, and the two houses have often collaborated in endeavors. While Phiresten claims to act in defense of kio tradition, Suvaan acts on behalf of the kio themselves, and they have on occasion championed reforms that they feel will uplift the kio and protect the court from the Coryani, the undir, and other foreigners. It is commonly believed that without their influence over the guilds all labor in Capharra and its protectorates would grind to a halt, a belief they encourage. They tell a dozen different contradictory stories for why they feud with House Cetergis, but their dedication to the feud is undeniable.

The head of House Suvaan, Maithe Suvaan, has a special hatred for the val'Baucisz of Eppion, wishing to have them eradicated from the face of Arcanis, or at minimum, from the Western Lands. Every representative of this house in the three royal courts is instructed to end any address with the phrase, *"the val'Baucisz must be driven into the sea"*, a phrase heard so many times over the years that it has become to mean something that reoccurs without fail, like the sun setting in the west.

House Tesstra

Since the dissolution of their house and banishment of their members, House Tesstra faded from memory and largely remained a topic of academic discussion until a few years ago when their House symbol, a sparrow with its wings outstretched flying upward, was found painted in blood in the manor house of a val'Sungha lord. The entire household, including servants were found flayed to ribbons, their bodies seemingly cut by dozens of blades. Since then, similar murders have occurred throughout the kio lands and beyond, but no witnesses have ever come forth and the killer or killers remain unknown and at large.

The perpetrators are the descendants of House Tesstra who, contrary to the edict that disbanded their House, remained together as they fled into the wilds of Uggur. Before fleeing, members of the family gathered the shards of their shattered kio swords and eventually, unable to reforge the blades, wove the eternally razor-sharp pieces into whips with which they have become frighteningly proficient. Like the scarring their ancestors received at the hands of their pure blood progenitors, they ritually scar their faces upon reaching adulthood and wrap them in bandages, giving them a decidedly nightmarish and malevolent appearance.

After centuries in exile in the wilds beyond Uggur, the kio of House Tesstra have returned to exact their revenge upon the rest of their kind. During their years of exile, the clan learned many foul and unholy rites, consorted with unclean

spirits, and perfected their mastery over the steel whip, their signature weapon. The murders perpetrated thus far are the first stage of a campaign of terror that the House elders are preparing to unleash upon their hated, and unsuspecting, cousins, with their ultimate goal being the overthrow and destruction of the val'Sungha, finishing what their ancestors began centuries ago.

The val'Sungha

One of the most prominent traits humans and kio share is their insatiable curiosity of knowing what lies 'beyond the horizon.' It is this trait that led four Coryani ships, laden with trade goods and armed with ancient texts whose veracity and reliability was questionable, to cross the Lauriol Sea and venture into the unexplored western lands. Their texts were copies of copies of mariner logs from the time of the Imperium of Man and spoke of "*other men*" and the exotic goods and crafts that they had to trade.

Captained by four vals, the ships sailed out from the port city of Plexus and crossed the glittering depths. Unfortunately, the seas were particularly turbulent that year, and one of the ships sank with all hands, while the other three were smashed on the shoals off the coast of modern Mhyr. Among the few survivors were the three living captains who were quickly brought before the High Kyhm'mé, a pure blood kio by the name of Y'sungme.

Y'sungme became enamored, some would say obsessed, with the three val males. She would say that "*their grey eyes would haunt my dreams*" and that "*their blood called to me*". Possessing an inhuman beauty that few of the other kio could rival, Y'sungme seduced the val'Sheem captain first and enamored the val'Assanté and val'Borda soon thereafter. Though not as long-lived as their bewitching mate, the val captains were able to remain relatively healthy and virile for many decades and begat many children with Y'sungme. To their surprise, instead of their children possessing the traits of their own valinoric bloodline, their progeny rather expressed a mixture of their own bloodline and an entirely new set of powers.

One of the captains, Livel val'Borda, fancied himself a scholar and wrote a treatise in his twilight years about the new val brood that had just been born into the world. He remarked how, in the twenty-two children born to Y'sungme, not one had been born a 'normal' kio and possessed a combination of the traits of their progenitors, both the pure bloods and the val.

The one trait inherited from their val fathers was their unique power of the mind. Like all other val, the val'Sungha are born with the potential to become psionically 'awakened'. This latent psionic ability was

rumored to be possessed by the pure blood kio, as well, but this supposition was quickly quashed by the val'Sungha, stating that in all the years since their arrival on the surface, no record exists describing a pure blood exhibiting this ability. If true, then this explains why the val'Sungha is the only val family that does not have a unique and dedicated discipline of psionics, because not enough time has passed to properly develop one.

This progeny was the first generation of val'Sungha, a derivation of their mother's name. As they reached maturity and mated with other pure blood kio or the kio-human hybrids, approximately half of the offspring continued to exhibit the traits of the val'Sungha, while the other half of those who had a kio-human hybrid parent had none of their cousins' miraculous abilities.

Before she retired from public life, Y'sungme remarked as she looked deeply into the eyes of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren that "*the grey eyes no longer haunted me*", and with a rare smile, she ascended into the sacred aerie where the pure blood kio would go to rest.



The val'Sungha bloodline proved to be as strong as any other val family in existence. Not only could they pass on their bloodline to the next generation, but no val family could ever subsume their bloodline. In other words, no matter what val family would mate with a val'Sungha, or a human-hybrid kio for that matter, the offspring would either be a val'Sungha or a kio.

Those descendants of Bendis val'Assante founded the House of the Swan. The descendants of Livel val'Borda became the House of the Raven. And those descended from Tomoran val'Sheem created the House of the Eagle. The val'Sungha have the grey eyes of their val fore-fathers, with different color hair, depending on their branch of the family. Those of the Eagle branch have dirty-blond hair, those of the Raven tend towards darker hair color, such as a darker shade of brown, while the val'Sungha of the Swan have white or platinum blond hair.

The val'Sungha are just as tall as their kio cousins, averaging approximately six feet. They are also slender, athletic, and, like their pure blood ancestors, bereft of the ability to grow facial hair besides eyebrows. The val'Sungha tend to have a life span equal to that of any average val, approximately eighty to one-hundred years.

While often categorized as one of the lesser val families, those that do so are often ignorant as to the history of the val'Sungha. The categorization originally referred to the val families that held power and great swaths of land during the Imperium of Man and nothing to do with the potency of the bloodline. Those that had minimal wealth, influence, and secular power within the Imperium were classified as a lesser family.

The intricate family lines of kio heredity are notoriously difficult to follow, and this is only slightly less true for the val'Sungha family. Nevertheless, they manage to divide themselves according to their blood lineage, tracing themselves back to one of the three original val families that served as their progenitors. Certainly, the three branches of the val'Sungha family bear far more resemblance to each other than to their supposed Coryani ancestors. Nevertheless, the kio accept the three branches of the family as fact, and each branch is given a seat among the great houses in the royal courts, and more power besides, for only val'Sungha can sit on the thrones of Capharra, Pajharo, and Bhiharn.

House of the Eagle

The val'Sheem are known for their beauty and seduction, but the descendants of Tomoran val'Sheem among the val'Sungha, are known for their courage and derring-do. Traditionally, the leader of the famed Kio Sky Knights is a member from the House of the Eagle, and val'Sungha from this branch of the family are most likely to enter military service. Trykhon val'Sungha, Duke of Pajharo, is of this line, and as commander of the Red Dragoons has won great fame for his family and inspired a new generation eager for combat. Those who do not care for regimented life often become adventurers, and there are more val'Sungha of the Eagle adventuring in foreign lands than from any other house. It is rarer for them to enter politics, and they are the least influential in the royal courts, but Duke Trykhon's example has led to a rise in Eagle political power in Pajharo.



House of the Raven

Among the kio, “*Speaking like a Raven*” is slang for speaking falsely and shows the prevailing opinion of this branch of the family. This is not a fair assessment for the val’Sungha branch of the House of the Raven, who often show as much nobility and honor as their cousins, but it may be considered wise to suspect any who claim descent from Livel val’Borda. The Ravens are prized as cunning advisors and feared as dangerous masterminds. Their reputation is such that even val’Mehan come, at great expense, to their familial stronghold in Bhiharn to learn the ways of rhetoric. Prince Irgar val’Sungha of Bhiharn, of the House of the Raven, is third in line to the throne, and has been for a great deal of his long life. He continually refuses the honor of advancement, preferring instead to build up his House’s fortunes in the city of Liveh. This is a mystery to other kio, who wonder why anyone would want to stay among the rebellious undir of the Sword Fens. The Ravens have a strong presence in the courts of Capharra and Pajharo, second only to the Swan, and near-total control of the court of Bhiharn. On the surface they appear to be the least likely to become adventurers, preferring to act through agents, but many kio speculate that members of this branch of the val’Sungha family are sent on secret and shadowy assignments beyond the borders of the League of Princes.

House of the Swan

The Swan banner flies over those val’Sungha who claim descent from Bendis val’Assanté. By far the most politically influential branch of the val’Sungha, a significant majority of Kings of Capharra have been of the House of the Swan, including King Geonay. Whether by training or familial inclination, those of the Swan are renowned for their political acumen, their rhetorical elegance, and their wisdom in command. It is no surprise that this branch of the val’Sungha family is the most prominent within the court of Capharra and exerts considerable influence in royal courts of Pajharo and Bhiharn. Outside the kio nations, they are rarer and are more likely to send agents to foreign lands in their stead, though they maintain a tradition of chivalry and knighthood that has given rise to some prominent adventurers. The Swan’s fortunes have fallen of late due to the unpopularity of King Geonay, which has tempted some of the younger scions of the House to grumble against their elders. Most, however, maintain solidarity in public, even if in private they long for the days when Gilifae was Prince-Regent.

Kio Names

Kio names are difficult for outsiders to pronounce. The kion language is immensely complicated, with many sounds not found in Coryani-derived languages. The language includes variations of meaning based on context, inflection, and differences of pitch, speed, and volume. Even among the kio, where fluency in the language is mandatory, perfect pronunciation is considered an art reserved for exceptional speakers.

Because of this, transcribing kio names into Coryani letters is all but impossible. Many scholars have tried various additions of consonants to denote particular inflections, but this makes the words all but illegible to non-scholars. In this text, the simplified version of the language, as put forth by Altherian linguists, is used. Accurate pronunciation suffers, but ease of reading is improved. To the kio, this butchering of their native tongue is insulting, and they reserve their derision for those uncultured enough to require its usage.

As a general rule, the letters “g” and “c” are hard in kion, though there are exceptions. Most proper names begin with a breathy syllable, the initial sound accompanied by a soft puff of air from the throat. In other texts, this is often denoted with consonant-h pairs, but here these are largely omitted except where traditional. Kio names rarely begin with vowels other than “a”, “i” or “y”.

Kio names are unisex, and tend to be beautiful, melodic, and multisyllabic. Many f, g, a, and l sounds are heard throughout. With very few exceptions kio are proud of their fealty to a house and use their house name as a surname.

Example names: Alfiga, Cetosabalfan, Fillagame, Gahirig, Ingaffat, Mifrages, Palajasig, Sigiganan, Walagnif, Valagrogis, Ygaalem



CHAPTER THREE: THE CULTURE OF THE KIO

CUSTOMS AND CULTURE

Since their arrival upon the surface of Arcanis, the culture of the kio has slowly changed and evolved to meet the demands of their new home. The introduction of several new sub-races to their bloodline precipitated changes in how they interacted with others as well as within their own species. Though a few customs still exist unchanged since the days of the Sky Kingdoms, the kio adapted many ancient traditions to better serve them in their new home. To outsiders, the kio appear aloof and regal in their bearing and conduct. Their observance of formality and precise social etiquette appears to border on obsession to outsiders, but in their passionate outbursts, feelings of love, and acts of heroism, they brandish their common ancestry with humanity.

Kio culture is complex and there are many differences from the other cultures found in the Known Lands. From their byzantine political system of vows, pledges, and favors to their unique religious views, the kio lifestyle and customs are a cause of consternation and confusion to those unaccustomed to their ways.

Antar

An *antar* is a godparent, tutor, manager, and guardian rolled into one. Among the kio, it is a solemn position, worthy of great respect, but carrying great responsibility.

When a kio reaches young adulthood, and begins to take on adult responsibilities, they, or more likely their family, might seek out an antar. There are professional tutors and mentors among the kio, but these are not antars. Antars enter freely into the position often out of love for the family of their charge and often in the solemn kio tradition of repaying a debt of honor. The antar is the young kio's constant companion,

educating them in the complexities of kio tradition and culture, philosophy, rhetoric, politics, finance, combat, and anything else their charge might require. Depending on their skills, the antar may tutor the charge personally or arrange for tutelage from others at their own expense and under their supervision. The antar also act as managers of their charge's responsibilities until the charge is sufficiently educated to act wisely on their own and may assume the political titles and positions of their charge until that time.

This is an all-consuming responsibility, and the antar is expected to give up all other obligations until their charge comes into their own. A charge's age does not determine when an antar fulfills their obligation, but rather the ascension of their charge to an expected level of authority or competence, which varies depending on social status and expected responsibilities. This was seen when then-Duke Geonay val'Sungha, despite being next in line for the throne of Capharra, gave up that position to a regent-prince for many years while serving as antar to Tryhkon val'Sungha. Geonay was not released from these responsibilities until Tryhkon ascended the throne of Pajharo after years of military and political service.

Archon

Archons, or justiciars, are high-ranking officers in the armed forces of the kio nations that act as the voice, and sometimes fist, of the kio ruling lords. The archons act as mediators and magistrates, being judge, jury, and executioner within their assigned region. Due to the complexity of the treaties, agreements, and fealties owed to the various royal houses and kingdoms of the League of Princes, archons may be able to overrule local lords and other titular rulers depending on whom they serve. Archons are also authorized to cross borders and pursue their objectives outside of the Western Lands, should their duty require.

In certain places, like the Shadow Towns, the presence of the kyhy'it, the paramilitary police force used by the kio nations, may be lacking or absent. It is in these places that the archons and their aides are most needed to dispense justice and uphold the peace of Capharra.

The title Lord Archon is one reserved for the ruler of most of the nations in the League of Princes, though not all choose to accept the title or exercise its duties, responsibilities, and privileges. King Geonay of Capharra is the Lord Archon of Pajharo. Duke Tryhkon of Pajharo is the Lord Archon of Bhiharn. Prince Irgar of Bhiharn has refused the title and has made one of his cousins, the Lady Ostiliosh val'Sungha, the Lord Archon of Lhyllifel. Lastly, the Lord Archon of Mhyrcia is Aihis Kurn, the King of Lhyllifel. Mhyrcia occupies the lowest rung of the social ladder and their Speculator Prince does not hold the title, though the Shadow Towns do have their own archons to protect their interests.

Eppion, as a Coryani protectorate, does not recognize the authority of the archons over them, but they will not impede any investigations in their territory, as long as the Archons share their findings with the Satrap.

Clothing

When traveling about the city or on business, most kio wear simple clothing, such as tunics and skirts or breeches. While in a more relaxed setting, such as home among family or a gathering with good friends, the clothing is more relaxed, with women wearing long drape of cloth several yards in length, wrapped either tightly if a more formal affair or loosely. Men wear long tunics of varying opulence depending on their social status tied at the waist with a belt. Regardless of what style of clothing they are attired in, all kio clothing share one trait in common, they tend to be bright and colorful. A gathering of kio is an explosion of colors. The exception to this is the val'Sungha House of the Raven who enjoy running contrary to social norms, wearing various shades of black and grey.

Death Rites

Though gifted with remarkable strength and vigor through their twilight years, the kio are mortal and eventually perish. It is believed that a kio who dies doing what they have dedicated their lives to, whether it be the arts, farming, trade, or soldiery, is said to have died a good death. Deaths that come from a debilitating illness, assassination, or mishap are seen as inauspicious ones. The kio believe that the life granted to them by the Creator is a precious gift, one that is not to be squandered by leading a life without purpose. Likewise, suicide is a grave insult, as taking one's life is seen as throwing that precious gift back into the face of one's parents, house, and the Creator. The exception to this belief is giving one's life in the defense or service of a greater ideal. In the Kion culture there is no greater honor.

Kio funerals are solemn and complex affairs, filled with ritual and duties for the deceased's family, or should they not have any living relatives, close friends and compatriots. The noble class, as well as for those who can afford it, have the body taken to the embalmers who cleanse and prepare the corpse for wrapping. Kio bodies are mummified through a long process that can take up to 30 days, where it is desiccated by using certain herbs and minerals. The body is then wrapped in linens, similar to those discovered on Ssethregoran mummies and numerous ancient tombs and crypts. The mummy is then placed within a cradle and must be carried up the mountainside to their final resting place. Numerous niches have been carved into the side of Antisc, a mountain located in the southeastern spur of the Lhauzyr Mountains. Though there is a winding trail up the 14,000-foot mountain, the way can be treacherous. Once placed in

the niche, the family members stand vigil until sunrise the next morning, usually telling stories in remembrance of the deceased. It is thought that the kio lay their dead to rest in the mountainside as symbolic of the soul returning to the endless sky.

Those who were not afforded a place due to their social standing and cannot afford the expense, instead prepare a funeral pyre for the deceased. The cremation of the body takes place at sundown and once again, family members stand vigil over the deceased until sunrise. The symbology in this funeral rite speaks to the Kio's wish for the soul to travel upwards. In this case the soul is free of the body and allowed to rise unimpeded to meet their ancestors.

The inability to give a kio a proper burial is considered a black mark upon the honor of the deceased's family. For that reason, kio go through extreme lengths to retrieve and return the body to their homeland, if they are of the noble class. Those belonging to the other social classes may opt to cremate a body where it is if it is impractical to return it to the Western Lands. In these cases, a small piece of the body, usually the index finger, is brought home as proof of the kio's death.

Afterlife

The kio do not believe in the afterlife espoused by the Mother Church of Coryan and believe that the concept of Beltine's Cauldron torturous and hellish. Instead, they believe that upon death the spark of life that is the soul returns to become one with the Creator, in effect becoming one with existence. The kio do not believe in reincarnation but are instead taught that they are only given one life to live. Perhaps this is why the kio live their lives to the extreme, pushing themselves both physically and mentally.

Dueling

As in many other cultures, the act of dueling is meant to allow the participants to satisfy their sense of honor, either for a perceived slight or some other transgression where they feel themselves the aggrieved party, without becoming mired in legalities. To the kio, the practice of dueling is a formalized affair; a ritual that is strictly followed to avoid further escalation and violence. A duel is

always fought between two, and only two, participants. The duel consists of the challenger and the challenged, their *yr'ki*, and often, a *kienmur*, who officiates the combat.

It should be noted that kio duels are affairs to the death, or at least until incapacitation. Unlike the duelists of Savona, duels are not initiated lightly or for sport. When a kio duelist draws his blade outside of training, it is to defend something they hold very dear and willing to die for. Anytime a kio enters into a duel, they know that they may be seeing their final day of life and thus give it serious consideration before doing so.

Causes: Many duels are fought over insults to honor, either personal or to something held dear by the offended, such as country, their military organization, or even their sovereign. In the lower rungs of society, men have fought duels over women, regardless of the true affections of the lady in question. This has sometimes led to a subsequent duel between the victor and the object of their affections.



The challenge: Once an offense given, the challenger draws a few drops of blood, usually by pricking his finger, and marks the person he wishes to duel by stamping their chest with his blooded print, though any body part will do. When this is impractical, a verbal challenge may be made. The person challenged may then accept or dismiss the challenger. A dismissal usually leads to escalating insults until the challenged person accepts, or the challenger walks away, satisfied that he has dressed down the offender sufficiently to satisfy his honor. Once the challenge is accepted, the yr'ki of the duelists quickly set the time and parameters of the duel, such as when and where it will take place, as well as to seek out a kienmur to officiate the duel.

In kio society, dueling is a right afforded to anyone, regardless of rank or social standing. Though it is frowned upon for members of a higher station to challenge those below them, due to the fact that their better training and weapons gives them an unfair advantage, the reverse does not have a stigma attached to it.

The role of the yr'ki: Named after a keen eyed avian predator, the yr'ki serves the same role as the second does in other dueling cultures. The yr'ki is usually a relative or close friend of the duelist, who ensures that on the appointed time of the duel, his charge is prepared for combat, both physically and mentally, and is not ambushed by several foes. It is also their duty to hire someone to act as kienmur. During the duel, they act as observers and are forbidden to interfere, standing silent and alert to any signs of treachery. At the end of the duel, they hand the victor the prize and stand ready to receive its return.

The final duty of the yr'ki is to stand in for their charge should they be unable to meet their opponent. This is often because one of the parties is too old, infirm, or suffers from a wound that prevents them from dueling. Other times, the duelist dies before the appointed time and their yr'ki stands in to defend the honor of their fallen comrade. When this occurs, the yr'ki is required by the dueling code to use the blade of their charge.

Duels in other cultures, such as those in Cafela, see the duelists' second try to defuse the situation by offering apologies, small gifts, and other gestures. Not so in a kio duel. If there is a true insult or grievance, and not just the slurred boasting of a drunk, the yr'ki will egg on the aggrieved party, urging them to make the challenge.

The kienmur: The title of kienmur is conferred to one who has studied the dueling code and mastered its vagaries. These learned officiates are rare and are found in the royal courts of the three kio kingdoms. Most who act as kienmur are just those who have a good grasp of the basics of the rules and are primarily there to ensure that the duel is conducted fairly and without prejudice.

The Dueling Code: Over the years the rules for dueling became so complex that the ruler of Pajharo demanded that they be simplified and codified. The rules call for all the customs detailed in this entry, along with other minutia such as the exact distance the duelists must start apart, how to continue a duel in inclement weather, and even accounts for a battle breaking out during the duel. This last instance occurred in the city of Blackwand when a large raiding party of gar attacked the city a few minutes into a duel. To their credit, the two duelists continued their duel to satisfy their honor. Only when one was vanquished did the victor turn to defend the city from the marauders.

The code clearly states that no use of enchantments or other sorcerous enhancements can be used or placed upon either the combatant or their weapons. The only exception to this rule pertains to the use of family or heirloom kio swords, which must be used and are frequently permanently enchanted. Even if one of the duelists does not have a comparable kio sword, they are forbidden from using a magical blade to compensate. Violation of this rule will result in the execution of the offender.

The code stipulates that should a duelist not have someone to act as their second, as in the case of a foreigner, a kio will stand in that position, even if they are from the opponent's camp. The kio who does so must faithfully execute their duties as a matter of honor, regardless of their feelings for their charge. Should they not do so, the kienmur will make note of it and ensure that their disgrace is known far and wide.

In the last century, the dueling code was modified to forbid duels within the military, as the loss of valuable officers to the practice became untenable and a threat to the security of the region. Offended soldiers must wait until both are discharged to finally attend to the matter of honor.

Lastly, the code forbids offering a challenge to their exalted ancestors, the true-blood kio, under any circumstances. Though it is rare for one of the pure bloods to offer offense during their periodic forays down from their aeries,

The rights of the challenged: The person challenged has the right to set the date of the duel up to two days from the time of that the challenge is made. They may also choose the terrain, as long as it's within a reasonable distance, can be reached in the time allotted for the duel, and possible to conduct the duel in the environs. For example, underwater or on a mountain peak are not acceptable locations.

Weapons: Blades are the sanctioned weapon in a kio duel, and while this is generally taken to mean one-handed swords, some foreigners have successfully argued that the code doesn't specify what type of blade they may use. This has been allowed, but the limit of one bladed weapon is strictly enforced.

Duels are always to the death: Kio duels are not to be offered or accepted lightly. There is no such thing as a duel to the first blood, they are always to the death. Given that it is difficult to knock someone out with a sword, it is unusual for one of the duelists to become unconscious during the event. Should this occur, a second duel will be set three days hence, as killing a downed foe, besides being dishonorable, is considered cold-blooded murder.

There are two exceptions to duels to the death. Should one of the duelists toss away his blade, fall on his knees, groveling and begging for forgiveness, the opponent may spare their life, as such an unseemly spectacle completely destroys the sniveling duelist's honor and brands them a coward. In such a case, the yr'ki will strip them of their kio sword and ensure that word of their craven act is spread. Some yr'ki are so offended by this display, that after taking the kio blade, will execute them by beheading, after which they will fall upon their own sword for their part in their charges' conduct.

The second exception is in the maiming of one of the duelists. If this occurs by accident, the duel stopped immediately. Very skilled swordsmen (or women) using an heirloom kio sword are able to slice through a person's wrists or arm. This is a show of disrespect towards the opponent, displaying the duelist's contempt. Attacks against an opponent's legs is dishonorable in the kio's eyes and will stain the offender's honor for committing such an act.

The duel: The duel itself is simple in comparison to all the preparation. The duelists shed their shirt, though women are allowed a light shirt for modesty sake and remove any jewelry they may be wearing. They stand upon the agreed upon ground, awaiting the signal from the kienmur to begin. After reciting the offenses that led to the duel and asking if both are committed to defending their honor and that of their family, the kienmur will hold out an egg at chest height and crush it, symbolizing the death of one of those before them. When the yolk touches the ground, the duelists may begin.

Returning the prize: One would imagine that the killing of a family member would leave to a never-ending cycle of vengeance, but the dueling code has an ingenious mechanism to stop this with the offering of the prize. At the end of a duel, the dead combatant's yr'ki takes their sword and offers it to the victor, saying *"The honor of their family is now in your hands."* The victor takes the kio blade and after a pause, hands it back to the yr'ki saying, *"Honor has been satisfied by blood. Let the return of this family's honor end all further enmity between our two great houses."* By returning the sword to the family, the duelist is shown to be honorable and no further action will be taken against them. Of course, new offenses, real or perceived, may arise between the two families, but taking vengeance for the death of a family member is forestalled.

Not returning the blade of the fallen, is a stain upon their family's honor, one that can only be expunged by members of that house. Interference by others compounds the insult, as it implies the members of the house is so weak that others must step in to help them. The exception to this is the yr'ki, who may act to retrieve the blade, but only if they act immediately.

Gender Roles

The kio are one of the most egalitarian people in the Known Lands, with neither gender barred from any trade or position of power. The only true barrier is ability and social status. For example, only a val'Sungha may sit upon the thrones of the three kio kingdoms. Conversely, a person of a high class would be forbidden by their families to pursue a career as an animal trainer or an embalmer.

Greetings

Generally speaking, the kio are a warm and open people, who value their connection to family and friends. Their manner of greeting reflects this as they meet others with open arms. The standard greeting has the arms extended outwards, with their palms upwards. The person greeted in this manner, usually a friend, acquaintance, or a stranger introduced by a friend, lays their forearms on the other person's forearms and grasps them just before the elbow. Kio greet family members and those close to them in the same manner, but then pull them into a hug. A kiss on the forehead is a sign of familial affection.

When greeting a stranger, a potential adversary, or in a formal setting, the kio will introduce themselves in a specific manner, starting with their name, country or city of origin, any titles they may possess in order of importance, affiliations, and lastly as the wielder of their kio sword. For example, Gilifae val'Sungha would introduce herself in the following manner: *"I am Gilifae val'Sungha of the House of the Swan, former Prince-Regent of Capharra and High Kyhm'mé of the kio, Knight-Commander of the Order of the Yhrki, the Swan Knight, and bearer of the Swan's Grace."*

Honor

To the kio, nothing is more important than the concept of honor – that of their family, their people, and their own personal honor. Acting in a noble fashion, being honest and forthright, respectful of duty, being a person of your word, and keeping one's vows regardless of personal consequences. In practice, this may put the kio in a precarious position when their vows and duties conflict with one another. Due to this, it is rare for any kio to be fully free of any blemishes upon their honor, leading many to perform deeds worthy of sufficient glory that their infractions are forgotten and forgiven.

This is similar to the Milandisian code of nobility practiced in that kingdom, but the kio take it a step further. Speaking the truth is so ingrained in their upbringing, that it is believed that a kio who lies is an aberration. The very laws of the kio deal harshly when falsehoods are uncovered, particularly when it leads to damages or injuries. Of course, the kio lie when necessary, but these tend to be small fictions or exaggerations. Bold and blatant lies, especially ones easily disproven are seen as signs of a corrupt moral character, or at the very least stupidity. As a general rule, kio would rather stay silent on a matter than speak an outright falsehood. The diplomats among them, especially those taught by Prince Irgar val'Sungha of Bhiharn, are able to weave oratory constructs that are on their face factual but crafted so that the intended listener hears what the kio wants them to hear. This skill is an art, one so valuable that even the val'Mehan send their scions to study these techniques at the prince's court.

Dishonor and Redemption

While many see the kio as superhuman in many ways, they are quite human, with their own foibles, passions, and faults. Though they may try to adhere to the code of honor espoused by society, they inevitably falter in some way. Missteps that are considered minor peccadillos are either overlooked or dealt with by the head of the family with additional duties or acts as punishments. In response to those personal transgressions that exceed this ineffable limit, many kio take on quests—some self-imposed, others assigned by family elders—to redeem themselves in the eyes of their peers. These quests are, by definition, difficult and have some component within them that underscores the value the questor failed to embody. Where the failure was cowardice, the quest requires a show of bravery; if the failure was one of naiveté or gullibility, then cunning is necessary to complete it; if cruelty, then kindness is an integral component and so on. Kio society can seem rigid and absolute, but the kio understand that perfection is a goal that is aspired to, but rarely achieved. Because of this, redeeming oneself after a failure is seen as more laudable than having never wavered at all.

Those that continue to commit the same failings without any true effort to atone, even after being given numerous chances to do so, are eventually seen as being irredeemable. These kio, while allowed to remain within the kio lands, are stripped of all privileges and ostracized from kio society, considered to be a foreigner by all. Those kio that indulge in criminal endeavors fall into this category, as well as those that bend a knee to false gods.

There are however, those transgressions that are so unpardonable and heinous, such as parricide, treason against the kio people, or other such inexcusable crimes, that a simple act redemption is not enough. In these cases, banishment or, in the most extreme circumstances, execution is meted out.

Such was the case with the traitorous House Tesstra, who precipitated the internecine war between the kio Houses in a bid to gain power. The heads of the family were beheaded with their own familial kio swords, with the rest of the family ritually scarred and banished. So great were their crimes, that their swords were shattered, and with any attempt to reforge them punishable by death.

Hunting & Falconry

It should come as no surprise to learn that hunting as a sport on the verdant preserves is reserved for the those of power and influence in the kio lands. Each royal house, as well as those of the dynatoi, have areas set aside on their lands for hunting various beasts. Those of the royal class and the Guild Houses use these hunts to curry favor, forge treaties, arrange propitious marriages, or plot on whom should be elevated in station or eliminated from their ranks.

The members of the dynatoi use specially bred hounds to harry the prey so that their masters may strike the killing blow. Only the royals are afforded the privilege of hunting with trained predator avian such as the falcon, hawk, or peregrine. Wagers are often made between members of the hunting parties as to who will make the first kill, the hounds or the falcons. Those of the Guild Houses must take the measure of their royal host's temperament and mood and determine whether they will admire an honest contest or be offended should their prize bird lose.

Each of the royal houses have a cadre of breeders and trainers whose sole responsibility is caring for their master's prized hunting animals.

The Khytim Ulan

As time passed and a true blood kio mated with the val, the resultant new val'Sungha branch was added to the complex lineage of the family. This intricate and convoluted genealogy necessitated the creation of a group of scholars whose sole purpose was to keep meticulous records of each kio bloodline.

This order of scholars, open to any kio but always led by a group of val'Sungha masters, were given the title of Khytim Ulan, meaning the Keepers of the Blood. While impossible for a Khytim Ulan to be present at the birth of each and every kio child, their presence is considered to bestow blessings upon the newborn babe. Additionally, all members are trained to act as midwives, if necessary, and a Khytim Ulan has delivered many a kio child.

Many of the more prominent and affluent kio families pay exorbitant sums for one of the Khytim Ulan to create an Ulan Eriwye, which translates roughly to "living blood." In a lengthy, tedious and assuredly excruciating process, a member of the kio lineage is selected and sent to the Khytim

Ulan's monastery complex. Over a period of months or perhaps years, depending on the family's history, the entire lineage of the family is tattooed on the volunteer's body. When complete, this person becomes the living record of that family's illustrious genealogical history.

As a new generation is born, the Ulan Eriwye is "updated" with the information and this continues until his death. At that time, in a solemn ceremony conducted by skilled members of the Khytim Ulan, the Ulan Eriwye's body is skinned and preserved. Then a new volunteer comes forth and the record of family going back one generation is inscribed upon the body as well as any new births since the last Ulan Eriwye's death.

These preserved skins are kept in the lower vaults of the Khytim Ulan's monastery with each lineage accorded its own chamber. Thus, macabre additional copies of the order's records are preserved upon the living skin of a member of that family.

There are whispers that the monks of the order are able to enact black rituals that can call the soul of the skinned Ulan Eriwye back and wring from it whatever knowledge or secrets it desires, though another version of this tale is ascribed to the foul val'Baucisz family of Eppion.

Kio Swords

To the kio, their blades are synonymous with their family honor and a link to their ancestry to those that once lived in the fabled sky kingdoms. There are three types of kio swords, the ancestral blade, the family heirloom sword, and those used by the soldiers of the ky'vec.

The ancestral blade: When the sky kingdom of Ylliph'kim crashed, some of the survivors had the presence of mind to take their blades with them as they blindly moved through Uggur. These blades were forged by master smiths using a unique alloy used in the construction of the sky kingdoms that were light, yet durable as the strongest steel. Throughout the ages, these smiths crafted a variety of swords for their clients, some were smaller blades while others were fashioned as a two-handed sword. Nine of these wondrous weapons survived the harrowing trek through the gar-infested lands, with many lost along the way.

Those blades were given to the heads of the three branches of the val'Sungha family to safeguard the kio from all enemies. Over the ages, two were lost, leaving the val'Sungha of the Swan with their original three in their care, while the other branches have only two each. These blades are so famous, that the owner is often

known the wielder of the sword, rather than by name.

The family heirloom sword: Over the centuries, desperate scavenging expeditions to the crash site have yielded small scraps and bits of twisted metal. These precious few samples of the sky kingdom's unique metal alloy are then melted and reformed with the highest quality steel to produce the family heirloom sword. These one-handed long swords are given to some members of the val'Sungha and the higher ranking dynatoi families and then handed down, generation to generation. They are highly prized by their owners, who would go to any lengths to gain its return should it be lost or stolen.

The common kio sword: Obviously, it is impossible to field an army with true kio blades, given the rarity of the alloy. Instead, the kio weapon-smiths create blades in the same form and fashion as the heirloom swords. These swords are made of high quality steel from iron mined from deep within the Lhauzyr Mountains, and while slightly lighter than a normal sword, their tensile strength and flexibility makes them capable of finesse attacks and defense.

Marriage

Marriage for the kio of the royal and dynatoi classes are arranged when the child turns five. These marriages are used to strengthen familial ties, shore up political alliances, and move a family up the pecking order. Love between the betrothed couple, should it occur, is a welcome happenstance and does not have any bearing on the final agreement between the families. The nuptials may take place any time after both the bride and groom reach maturity at sixteen. Depending on the standing and wealth of those involved, as both sides are expected to share in the expense as best as they are able, the wedding can be a lavish affair or a modest gathering, with some families teetering on bankruptcy after throwing a grand gala.

The marriage ceremony itself is quite simple, with the ritual officiated by the lord to whom the highest ranking family owes fealty. After vowing to honor their sovereign lord, their families, and finally each other, the couple are finally wed. Depending on the social status of the couple, the celebration afterwards can last as short as a day, or as long as a week, such as when the former king of Capharra was wed.

Ironically, those of the lower class level enjoy the privilege of marrying for love, though some families on the upper strata of this class will happily arrange a marriage if circumstances allow. These wedding celebrations are simple affairs lasting through the evening.



The only way a woman may avoid an arranged marriage is if she joins the *Yhrki*, an all-female knightly order that forsakes all titles and familial duties. Unfortunately, males don't have this option and need to flee their homeland and avoid the bride's relatives, who see his failure to fulfil his duty as a grave insult towards their house, and never return to the Western Lands.

Religion

Many incorrectly believe that the only gods that the kio worship are their True Blood ancestors who live in the aeries above them, due to the fact that they do not build temples nor venerate any gods. The truth of the matter is that the kio do indeed possess religious beliefs, but in their Creation myth there is only one supreme deity, who expended Their essence in the act of creating all life and matter within the empty void that was the universe before time began. It was this supreme deity, whose gender is neither male nor female, that created the souls every kio ever born or will be born. Further, the essence of the Creator is believed to exist, in some small way, in everything.

There is an apocalyptic component at the end of the myth that says that in the end of days, when all things finally decay and die, the Creator will be reborn, and begin the cycle anew. Most kio believe that this is occurred numerous times, and a small number think that this may be the final cycle. This group is scoffed at and are seen as mentally deranged cultists that so fear the end of their own lives, they cannot abide the thought of the world continuing without them.

When a kio dies, their soul merges back with the Creator, slowly reforming the deity, just as everything does. This is the reason that while the kio readily accept the fact of the power of the human Pantheon, they do not see them worthy of worship any more than one would worship a hand when they already venerate the body. The human gods are merely a manifestation of the Creator, and while certainly powerful, are but a fraction of the true supreme deity. This does not stop some kio from venerating the Gods of the human Pantheon, going so far as to enter the clergy becoming priests and holy champions of the various deities. The kio that does so is believed deranged and their actions tarnish the honor of their House. Should these kio possess a hereditary kio sword, the sword is taken from them and given back to their family. Their names are stricken from the familial history and they are viewed as less than human in the eyes of other kio.

Slavery

The kio find the very concept of slavery, the reduction of a sentient being to an object, abhorrent. The undir of the Sword Fens would disagree, claiming that their brethren living in the kio lands are slaves in everything but name, with the chains that bind them forged from coin and social incentives

rather than iron. Regardless of their distaste for the practice, the kio do not intervene should a foreigner travel to their lands with slaves in tow.

Vyhlkiarn

When one sets themselves upon the path of the Vyhlkiarn (Vel-Kee-Arn), they are vowing to accomplish a seemingly impossible task at the cost of not only their lives, but of something of even greater value to the warrior. This can be the loss of their house's ancestral sword or the sacrifice of something dearer, as in the case of Jhyn'kyar N'sai, the life of his newborn daughter.

The Vyhlkiarn ritual was taught to the younger generation of kio by pure bloods as a tradition already ancient when the Sky Kingdoms soared above the land of Arcanis. As with all things passed down from the revered pure bloods, the Vyhlkiarn is treated as a sacred rite, never taken lightly and certainly not for trivial matters. Those setting themselves upon the path must first seek approval from the local archon. Once their goal is deemed worthy, the kio undergoes a series of purification rites meant to focus their resolve upon their stated goal. At the end of these rites, the kio vows to accomplish their task and states the cost of their failure beyond their own life. With that, the warrior is said to be upon the path of the Vyhlkiarn. Success brings respect for the warrior and honor for their house. Failure brings about the dire results stipulated by the warrior, without exception or equivocation. Due to the seriousness of embarking upon this path, only a handful of warriors each generation do so.

GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONS

The three kingdoms have a symbiotic relationship with one another. Created after the War of the Passions to appease the desires of the three branches of the val'Sungha family, a convoluted, byzantine form of government replaced the more traditional feudal system, which failed spectacularly in the eyes of the pure blood kio. Unlike other monarchies, the thrones to the three kingdoms is not hereditary, but are instead appointed positions with a line of inheritance that is followed precisely.

Political System

The kio nations use a modified feudal system where the ruler of each of the three kingdom is advised and aided by their royal court. Among these kingdoms, prince of Bhiharn owes direct fealty to the duke of Pajharo, who in turn, answers to the ruler of Capharra. The monarch of Capharra tacitly is the

ruler of the three kingdoms, though in practice they tend to not meddle in internal affairs of the other kingdoms unless it impacts others. Laws are executed by archons, who act as magistrate, mediator, and arbiter, and enforced by the ky'vec.

Social Class Structure

While not as rigid as the caste system in place in the Theocracy of Canceri, the kio class system is more of a pecking order or hierarchy than a social stratification that determines the type of work one may do, who they may marry, or even what they may wear. Within kio society, one is born to a House that is pegged at a certain level, either as one of the dynatoi houses, a Guild House, or one of the many commoner houses. Only the val'Sungha may claim to be part of the royal class, which contain numerous individual interrelated houses as they are all part of the val'Sungha family.

Every house owes fealty to another higher ranked house, even if it is only implied, as in the case of members of a commoner family who owes fealty to the lord of the land they reside upon. No kio is born in a vacuum, as even orphans have some relative, no matter how distant, to look after them. In the unlikely chance that an entire house is wiped out, something that has not occurred since the internecine War of the Passions, the house that the orphan's family owed fealty to adopts them, making them part of their household.

The Royal Court

Only those houses elevated to the dynatoi can be part of the royal court, with each one allowed one representative to each of the three courts. Houses whose members hold one of the coveted positions of the court, such as seneschal, have the advantage of having more than one member in the court.

Currently, there are twenty-four Houses represented in each of the royal courts, three of which are the branches of the val'Sungha family. Each ruler chooses who to grant titles to and which Households their favor. These House representatives have additional prestige and influence and are courted by the rest of the court for favors or their support in advocating for their agenda.

Within the court is an unofficial group known as the King's (or Queen's) Body in Capharra and a similarly named organization in each of the other two kingdoms. This council consists of the *Ostigarios*, a seneschal or vizier who acts as the titular head of the group, the *Epi'rynasteos*, the master of the King's coffers, the *Kyhm'vhr*, a general of the ky'vec that acts as a liaison between the monarch and the kyhm'mé, as well as the court's master strategist, the *Nipsys Vas'vhn* or Warden of the Larder, the official in charge of overseeing food production and logistics, and lastly, the *Archon'mé* or the Chieftain of the Justiciars, is the most senior archon of the kingdom and acts as a funnel of information to their

subordinates, informing them of any changes or new laws. These five wield enormous influence and power of the kingdom and vie with one another for the monarch's favor. These positions also carry a generous stipend, as well as grants of large tracts of land as the kingdoms expand, further encroaching upon the lands of Uggur.

There is one additional entitled position that is not a part of the inner councils, the *Amyn'rnu* or the heraldic authority, a person of great influence, as any changes to existing symbols of a house or the establishment of a new house must first be approved by them. Marriages between houses often requires a new or modified heraldry for the new branch of the family, as do those houses elevated from the common stock to become Guild Houses. Any major change in status, such as joining the dynatoi, must be reflected in the house's banner. Being the final arbitrator for such things means that a position that was considered minor when it was created, has become rich and influential within the kingdoms. It should be noted that there is only one office of amyn'rnu for all three kingdoms, making it the only position without a counterpart in the other kingdoms.

A final power reserved solely for the Royal Court of Capharra is the appointments to the thrones of the three kingdoms. See below for further details.

The Guild Houses and the Dynatoi

While the val'Sungha control the thrones of the three kio kingdoms, certain kio families have dominion over key industries and trade, known as Guild Houses. The richest of these join the ranks of the dynatoi, denoting their eligibility to become senior office holders and hold titles. Most importantly, their families join the royal court of each of the three kingdoms.

Guild Houses control everything from mining and farming to finished goods and trading contracts. The Guild Houses employ the vast majority of the population in the Western Lands, be it kio, undir, or ex-patriots that find themselves living in the League. Most Guild Houses do very well financially and use that money to purchase influence within the royal court, or covertly with foreign powers, though its use is frowned upon if discovered. Guild Houses are the lowest rung of the social class system the kio follow, that grant the privilege of a house banner, following the customary rules of heraldry. Over the centuries, alliances have been forged and enmities made between the various houses, sometimes leading to espionage, the destruction of property, usually through arson, and even murder. As long as these outbursts of violence remain localized and cause minimal damage, the ky'vec turn a blind eye by order of the royal court.

When a Guild House amasses enough wealth, power, and influence as to be indispensable to the crown, they are elevated to the ranks of the dynatoi. They are given responsibilities within the bureaucracy that runs the three kingdoms, along with the privileges and benefits that comes with these new responsibilities. Newly elevated Houses find themselves playing the game on a completely different level, where a wrong word or a hastily crafted alliance can quickly ruin them, sending them spiraling down into political destruction.

Those that survive their first few years within the three royal courts, master the game by necessity and see an entire new world open to them. Titles can now be earned for deeds that benefit the kingdom or the crown, though many are able to be purchased outright. When the crowns see their coffers dwindle, rather than raising taxes, a move that would surely make them unpopular, they sell lands and the respective titles for exorbitant amounts. Recently House Syng'iway of the Great White Owl purchased a tract of land that touches the southern bank of the Lhauveris River for over a million golden king's heads. This huge expense for a piece of land not worth a quarter that amount was justified in the mind of the Tinet'ki Syng'iway as it cut a rival house's access to the river, requiring them to travel a considerable distance to ford the river or pay her to cross the bridge her house now controls.

Edicts, Laws and Proclamations

The laws of the three kingdoms are drafted as bills by the dynatoi and ratified by the monarch of that land. In practice, the final passage is in the hands of the ostigarios who stamps the bill with the monarch's stamp, making it the law of the land. Laws enacted in Capharra are meant to carry across all three kingdoms unless it specifically deals with a local issue. Should a Capharran law conflict with those in Pajharo and Bhiharn, the Capharran one takes precedence, though if the duke or prince does not wish it enforced, they can make the archons aware of their desire to turn a blind eye to any infractions of this new law. This will work for a time, until the reason that triggered this new law passes or the royal court in Capharra takes note and insists on its enforcement.

An edict, on the other hand, bypasses the royal court, coming directly from the monarch, and is considered the law of the land the moment it is stamped by the seal of the monarch. Edicts are rare as most monarchs are not experts in the law and their misguided attempt to rule by fiat usually ends up causing confusion as they contradict previous laws passed under their hand or are so poorly structured that they are either impossible to enforce, or even have unintended consequences.

A proclamation is a notice made under the seal of the monarch of one of the three kingdoms to alert their subjects, such as a state of emergency, declaration of war, or rationing



of grain due to food shortages. Heralds are sent to every city and large town in the three kingdoms proclaiming the will of the monarch. The last great proclamation was made by King Geonay of Capharra, where he declared the knight-commander of the Order of the Yhrki and all of her knights as traitors to the three realms and demanding their capture or proof of execution.

The Line of Succession

As stated above, there are no hereditary heirs to thrones of the three kingdoms. After the chaos wrought by the War of the Passions, the pure blood kio scolded their destructive children and established the byzantine form of government that exists to this day. The three kingdoms would each owe fealty to one another, with an established hierarchy of Capharra at the top, followed by Pajharo and Bhiharn, each owing fealty to the one above. The ruler of Bhiharn would

have the title of prince and would be the next in line to the throne of Pajharo. The ruler of Pajharo is given the title of duke and will ascend to the throne when the king or queen of Capharra dies. It is the Royal Court of Capharra alone to name the heir to the throne of Bhiharn and thus third in line to the Capharran throne. The only caveat to this arrangement is that those chosen must be of the val'Sungha family.

Currently, the elder Prince Irgar val'Sungha sits upon the throne of Bhiharn as he has done for over sixty years. Years ago, he chose to forgo ascension to the throne of Pajharo, when his heir suddenly died. He claimed it was due to the unrest in the Sword Fens, something he could not leave unfinished to his successor. Though true, the wily prince knew that the king of Capharra, the elderly and frail Mornir, feared the volatile Duke Geonay ascending the throne. Ever the consummate diplomat and manipulator, at a royal ball in Capharra, he led the Duke into several oratorical traps with other high-ranking nobles, embarrassing him before the Royal Court by his own words. Knowing that rule of Capharra would be difficult if he could not rehabilitate his reputation, he snatched at the solution proffered by Prince Irgar. He could become antar to the young prince Tryhkon, given his inexperience. Since Irgar had abdicated his right to ascend to the throne of Pajharo, it would be the naïve Tryhkon that would sit upon the throne Geonay now occupied, perhaps ruining the great work he had done while ruling that kingdom.

Months after a regent was appointed to Pajharo while Geonay instructed Tryhkon, King Mornir died of a fever, and Geonay was trapped. He could not be crowned King of Capharra, a role he has coveted all his life, but to make matters worse, the Royal Court appointed the king's hand-picked successor as prince-Regent, his self-righteous cousin Gilifae val'Sungha. The bewildered Geonay realized he was out maneuvered but was not sure whose hand was the one pulling the strings, Irgar, King Mornir, or someone else.

For his part in the expert manipulation of the kio political code, Irgar was given an unprecedented gift by the King's Body, the ability to select his successor. Thus far, he has refused to name the next prince of Bhiharn, instead all must wait until his will is unsealed.

Monetary System

The League of Princes uses a monetary system similar to those used in the rest of the Known Lands, with gold coins at the top, followed by silver and copper coins respectively. These coins are minted in Whon with new ones stamped as needed or when a new ruler is crowned. The new gold coins colloquially known as golden *king's heads*, bear King Geony's profile on one side and the swan crest on the other. The Capharran silver coin is known as a silver *beak*, with the profile of the avian symbol used by the branch of the

val'Sungha family that rules Pajharo on both sides. The Capharran copper is called a copper *claw* for its depiction of a striking raven, the symbol used by Prince Irgar of Bhiharn.

Transfers of large sums of money are done with precious gems. The emerald and ruby mines located within the borders of Capharra and Pajharo provide enough gems needed to make this possible.

Schools of Sorcery

Due to the unique circumstance of the kio being able to practice eldritch sorcery, while the royal val'Sungha line is able wield elder magic, an institution to train both in how to safely use their abilities was created. The first Academy of Sorcery was built in Whon, but soon others were erected in the capitals of Pajharo and Bhiharn. Within these halls, masters of their respective traditions teach neophytes in the techniques and disciples required to safely employ their mystical talents. The number of novices never rises above a score or so, with an even smaller group of val'Sungha learning elder sorcery. There exists a rivalry between the two groups, though the masters ensure that it remains a friendly one.

The openness in which the kio treat their magi is a wonder for those sorcerers visiting from afar, who are careful to hide their abilities from fearful commoners and the eyes of the Sorcerer-King of Ymandragore. The kio explain that their citizenry, even at the lowest societal rung are not superstitious bumpkins off a plantation in Balantica, and that the Harvesters of the Isle of Tears seem to avoid the League of Princes, with the only reported takings coming from ships accosted at sea or the rare occurrence in the Shadow Towns.

HOLIDAYS

Like all civilizations, the kio celebrate certain cultural traditions and commemorate anniversaries of events of significance to them. These holidays are recognized by the three kingdoms, declaring them days free of toil, unless required for the celebrations, like cooks and servants, or for security.

The Day of Gratitude

A holiday looked forward to with few exceptions is that of the Day of Gratitude, which is celebrated whenever the pure blood kio descend from the Aerie. It is on this day that the anniversary of the salvation of the kio by the undir is commemorated, with large fetes and gifts given to the undir populace. In the capitals of the three kingdoms, the royal family are famous for feasts with more food on the table than most undir see in a year. The array of foods is unending and the wine flows like the Lhauveris River, which is to say fast and to overflowing.

Around the cities of the three kingdoms, the various Houses of the dynatoi compete with one another with who can host the grandest party and give the most lavish gifts. For their part, the undir enjoy the bounty the holiday brings, with the children sneaking off with extra bits of food to stock their larder for a few days. The exception to this are the undir of the Sword Fens of Bhiharn. Some of these undir see the kio, as well as other foreigners, such as the Coryani, as invaders spreading the corruption of their civilization throughout undir lands. While the rest of the kio lands are festooned with colorful garlands and ribbons, stuffing or drinking themselves to a stupor, the festivities in the cities and towns of Bhiharn are more subdued, as over the years, radical undir, those wishing to see all foreigners driven from their lands, stage attacks during the festivals targeting kio and other outsiders, murdering dozens and wounding even more. Prince Irgar tries to defuse these attacks months before the holiday, but his peace offerings are normally rebuffed, leaving him with only option being reprisal attacks, which only further inflames the situation. Were it up to him, he would forgo attacking the Sword Fens, but the kio of Bhiharn would rise up against him were he to do so. He's left in an impossible situation with few good options.

Renewal of the Blood

Once every one or two generations, the pure blood kio descend from their aeries and stay for a time with their numerous descendants. These ancient kio look as young and vibrant as when they last appeared, with many of the elder val'Sungha and kio saying that they seem not to have aged a day. A month-long holiday is declared throughout the three kingdoms, with grand feasts and contests of athletic prowess in honor of their progenitors.

During the holiday, the male pure bloods may choose to mate with any female kio, or rarely an undir, even if they are married, during the hedonistic fetes that rage long into the evening. The female must consent, but the progenitor kio are rarely refused as being selected is considered a seminal honor that happens once in a lifetime. Should a female become pregnant, Houses will vie with one another with marriage proposals and other gifts and promises to tempt the woman to accept their offer. Entire common families have been absorbed by those of the dynatoi just to claim having a blessed offspring as part of their household. It is in this manner that the kio bloodline is not diluted by generations of comingling their blood with humans and undir.

At the end of the holiday, determined when the pure bloods decide to return to their aeries, they may select a handful of kio who have shown superior athleticism and prowess to return with them to the aeries, to live among the progenitors for the rest their natural lives. This is such a monumental event that the family of the one chosen is viewed with such esteem that it borders on reverence. By royal decree,

that house is elevated, if it does not already belong to the dynatoi, and absorbed by one of the prominent families. Should a val'Sungha be selected, that branch of the family receives accolades from their cousins, as well as a boost in their political capital in the royal courts.

Unbeknownst to all, the name of the holiday has a more sinister hidden meaning. The chosen kio were taken, not as some reward or due to the love their living ancestors feel for them. After a few weeks living in the lap of luxury and seeing sights and wonders undreamed, they are drugged and taken to a facility in the aerie where their youth and vitality are leeches from their bodies to prolong a pure blood's life. Over the ages, the seemingly eternal progenitors began to suffer from a degenerative disease that killed some before its effects were retarded, but not reversed. Over time, they developed a cure, which required the transfer of their essence into the body of a healthy kio. This had the effect of destroying the consciousness of the donor and leaving the diseased ravaged body an empty husk. Over time, the pure blood kio's essence would transform their new bodies into one's that appear exactly like that of their old bodies. Over long decades, their new forms would once again become infected with the plague and the process would have to start anew. This disease has had the side effect of sterilizing the females, preventing them from producing ovum. This has resulted in no births among the pure blood populace for over six hundred years. Since each pure blood's response to the disease varies in intensity, they are able to limit their culling of the kio populace to a handful every few generations, by treating those in the final stages before death first, while the others wait their turn for renewal.

MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS

Bordered by the hostile races of Uggur to the southwest, a tenuous peace with the Entaran elorii to the east, Coryani occupation in the Shadow Towns, the uncertainty of relations with the Chauni, and the undir unrest in Sword Fens, the three kingdoms maintain a robust, if somewhat disorganized military to deal with these potential threats.

The Ky'vec

Named after a species of bird that has the peculiar habit of stationing a pair to circle a hunting ground, while the rest of the flock feeds, the *ky'vec* is the main body of the three kingdom's military force. This army defends the kingdoms from invaders, guards the border with Uggur, and acts in conjunction with local police forces, such as the city watch, within the League of Princes. Each of the kio nation raises its own *ky'vec* from its populace, and while in theory they

are meant to answer to the ruler of Capharra, each of the various generals, known as *Kyhm'mé* or Sky Chiefs, owe their true allegiance to the lord that their House owes fealty. The Shadow Towns rely on the protection of the ky'vec, while Eppion and Lhyllifel prefer to rely on their own armies. The Lhyllifelen militia, made up entirely of undir warriors, has closer ties to the elorii of Entares than it does with Capharra.

Answering directly to the Capharran king, each of the three ky'vecs are led by a *kyhm'mé*. The generals are responsible for overall strategy in defending the League, ensure that the peace is kept within their respective borders, logistical acquisition, and projection of the kio kingdom's will throughout the Western Lands. This projection is done through the use of archons and the judicious application of force, rather than invasion or occupation.

Below the *kyhm'mé* are the *kyh'yit* or wing lords, who act as commanders of the ky'vec in the field. They are attended by the *vyhre'ki*, line officers of the ky'vec, out of whose ranks archons are chosen. *Vyhre'ki* are equivalent to the Coryani centurion, in charge of a group of soldiers totaling seventy-seven, a particularly auspicious number to the kio, called a *vyhrn* or talon. The *vyhrn* is made up of smaller units known as flights or *ve'ki* consisting of five to ten soldiers. Each *vyhrn* flies a banner emblazoned with a variation of the general's House emblem, such as an eagle, talons extended, striking its prey.

There are two additional officers within a *vyhrn*, the *yh'gi* and the *ujch'ki*. The *yh'gi* is a strange combination of intelligence officer and unit historian. They, along with their hand-picked squad, are expected to scout an area, gather any pertinent intelligence concerning the populace and its current mood, and relay that information back to their superior officer. To do this, most *yh'gi* have a messenger bird, such as a kite or hawk, trained to deliver messages. In addition to those duties, they also record the history of the *vyhrn*, their acts of heroism, as well as their defeats. When in battle alongside their comrades-in-arms, they sing epic ballads to stir their hearts, propelling them to new heights of bravery and, if needed, sacrifice.

The *ujch'ki* are the drill officers, charged with training new recruits as well as keeping the soldiers physically fit and their skills honed. The *ujch'ki* are both loved and loathed by those they train, but they are universally respected for their other duty, safeguarding the life of the commanding officer while in battle. Should the command group ever find itself overrun and engaged in battle, it is the responsibility of the *ujch'ki* to protect the officers from harm, even at the cost of their own lives.

There is also a small unit of battle mages that accompany the ky'vec when they are facing opponent's that have their own sorcerous capabilities or a very large force that they can whittle down through the use of spells that can strike large numbers of targets.

The Order of the Sky Knights

Another elite military organization, the Order of the Sky Knights are used judiciously due to their rare mounts, the giant eagles of the Lhauzyr Mountains. Trained and cared for by members of House Cetergis, the eagles carry very skilled riders into battle upon their backs. Due to the weight of the armored rider that these eagles must carry, the sky knights are required to be lithe of body. For this reason, most sky knights tend to be young woman, though the occasional small statured male has been accepted into the order.

The knight-commanders of the order are chosen from the val'Sungha House of the Eagle. This val'Sungha branch of the family are more militaristic than their cousins, and are usually at the forefront of any battle, leading the ky'vec against the enemy. The fact that these enormous avian creatures match their families chosen symbol is seen as auspicious, making induction into the order a coveted position within the family. The number of knights within the order is limited by how many giant eagles exist, a creature whose population was never very high. To further exacerbate the situation, the eagle's natural enemy are the devil-bats of Uggur, winged humanoid creatures that see the giant eagles and their eggs a delicacy.

The order last saw battle during the last Coryani incursion and suffered heavy losses, with a full quarter of their mounts and riders falling in battle. Blame was placed squarely on the shoulders of King Geonay val'Sungha, who demanded that the sky knights harry the Coryani legions while the ky'vec was being mobilized and moved to deal with the invaders. Alone and with minimal support, the knights rained bloody terror upon the legions, but the light armor worn was no match for the Coryani artillery or their vaunted battle-mages. The losses infuriated the val'Sungha House of the Eagle, whose support for the newly crowned king has cooled to dangerous levels.

The Order of the Yhrki

The Order of the Yhrki is an all-female knightly order pledged to defend the kio people regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or the social strata they occupy. Likewise, the order accepts any kio woman within its ranks, with the exception of convicted criminals and fugitives of the law, an ironic turn of events, given the current state of the order.

The order was founded centuries ago in the aftermath of the War of the Passions, when the elder Pure Blood kio required a group not beholden to any sovereign or organization. For this reason, all those joining the order must forsake all familial ties, titles, and citizenry to any kingdom. Instead, the laws of the three kingdoms recognize their order's independence, while granting it all the rights and privileges of their citizenry, going so far as to build a keep for them in each of their territories.

The current leader of the order is the former Regent-Prince of Capharra, Knight-Commander Gilifae val'Sungha, cousin of King Geonay and now, branded traitor, along with the rest of the order. Due to the loss of face the newly crowned king of Capharra suffered at the hands of the invading Coryani, Geonay blamed their losses to the refusal of the Order of Yhrki to side with them against the invaders, as they vowed to do. Gilifae felt that the League's only hope lay in using guerrilla warfare against the superior Coryani legions until the ky'vec of the three kingdoms were fully mustered and fielded. When atrocities began to be committed by both sides against lower class kio and the hapless undir caught in the cross-fire, Gilifae ordered her knights to dispatch these offenders regardless on which side of the war they fought on. For this, and for the enduring hatred King Geonay feels for his cousin's actions in delaying him the right to the throne, the Knight-Commander and her yhrki knights have taken to ground until the kill-on-sight order is rescinded.

Red Dragoons

The Red Dragoons are an elite cavalry unit sponsored by the kingdom of Pajharo. Resplendent in their red-lacquered breastplates, open-faced dragon helms, and razor-edged cavalry saber, the Dragoons remain stationed in Fort Tyroch, acting as the first line of defense against any incursions by the gar and their humanoid allies of Uggur.

Famously led by Prince Tryhkon val'Sungha for many years before his ascension to the throne of Pajharo, the cavalry unit is now led by the duke's younger cousin, the Prince Jyngeshy val'Sungha, who has continued Tryhkon's reckless and brutal tactics, raiding deep into gar territory, without sufficient cause or need, other than to kill as many of the humanoids as possible.

Fort Tyroch is a large stone fortification located in the Lupyx forest in western Pajharo. It once served as an outpost for the most daring undir who dared the mountain passes in search of exotic hides and furs. Now, besides being the center of operations for the Dragoons, it is a sanctuary for those hunting or seeking treasure in Uggur. Many hunters and adventurers from Blackwand now come to the region to cull the tribes of gar and other humanoids and giant-kin. The fact that Prince Jyngeshy has placed a bounty on every scalp delivered has made venturing into the area quite lucrative.

The Royal Honor Guard

The Royal Honor Guard is made up of the very best warriors the League of Princes can offer. These guardsmen are selected from the elite Red Dragoons and unmatched in skill and prowess. Tasked with keeping the royal family safe at all times, the concept of a royal honor guard has spread throughout the rest of the val'Sungha family. Any that can afford to outfit such a group now have a private corps



willing to lay down their lives in their defense. Seeing the proliferation of the guardsmen, the Capharran king quickly crafted an edict forbidding any other than the Royal Honor Guard from wearing the purple surcoat and cloak. Fearing the penalty for violating the royal command, the various Houses complied, though they still require their guardsmen shave their heads, just like the Royal Honor Guard.

Honor Guards are recognizable by their bald pate, for both male and female guardsmen, and their cloak and surcoat matching the House colors that they serve. All of these elite warriors, including those of the Royal Honor Guard carry a Capharran war glaive as a symbol of their station. The war glaive is such an expensive weapon to craft that only the wealthiest can afford to furnish an entire unit with them. The long haft is made of solid oak, which is polished to a golden sheen. The blade appears to be forged from pure silver enchanted to the strength and durability of steel. Fine tracery graces the blade, which are actually runes inscribed to provide additional fortitude or power to the weapon. For the wealthy few, the Capharran war glaive provides a distractingly beautiful yet formidable weapon.

CODEx OF HEROES

RACES

Kio

The kio are an ancient and mysterious race whose origins are clouded in mystery. Like humans in many ways (in fact some scholars claim that they are merely one of the race's myriad variations), the kio share amazingly similar characteristics. Every kio is tall, every kio is graceful, and every kio has a fair complexion.

Personality

The kio are introspective and philosophical. Every task and challenge are merely another step in the race's never-ending quest for personal perfection. Kio tend to be mercurial of temperament, being calm one moment and then flaring up into a rage the next. To say they are a passionate people would be an understatement. This is not to say that the kio are rash or impulsive by nature. An ancient kio proverb says, "one's ears may be cowards, one's eyes never so" – meaning one must consider any action carefully before the fact and may decide to avoid difficulty, but once an action is begun it should be seen through to the end.

Physical Appearance

Kio appear as tall, fair humans. The women are at least 5 foot 10 inches tall, while the men can reach a height in excess of 6 feet. They are uniformly slim and active; there is no such thing as a fat kio. They mature by age 16 and typically live for approximately 150 years, remaining vital and vigorous well into their 13th decade of life. Most kio have light hair in various shades, from a very light brown to dark blonde.

Relations

Though there is little open hostility, the kio's haughty attitude tends to annoy the humans of the region. They have an odd relationship with the Tir Betoqi dwarves; not an open hostility, just a mutual avoidance when possible. The elorii do not appear to consider the kio to be humans and do not show any uniform animosity or regard for them.

Lands

The kio universally hail from the Western Lands and many of the princes of that region are kio, or of the mixed blood kio/val family known as the val'Sungha.

Religion

The kio do not venerate any of the human Pantheon deities, and instead believe in a creator god that died in the act of birthing the universe. Of course, there are some that are seduced by Coryani culture and religion and follow the human gods or have become seduced by the veneration of lesser spirits. These kio become pariahs in the eyes of kio society.



Kio Following the Coryani Way

Those openly worshipping deities of any pantheon or taking levels in any divine or primal spell casting class or archetype (such as cleric or holy champion) at any time will find that their fellow kio will treat them with contempt, seeing their actions disrespectful to their pure blood progenitors and an indelible stain upon their and their family's honor. These kio will not begin play with a unique kio sword (as stated below) and have disadvantage on all Charisma based skill checks.

Kio Traits

Your kio Hero has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase: Your Dexterity score increases by 2, and two other ability scores of your choice increase by 1.

Age: Kio mature by 16 years old and typically live for 150 years, remaining vital and vigorous well into their 13th decade of life. Most kio become Heroes around age 20 and retire from adventuring when they reach their 60's.

Size: Kio appear as tall fair humans. The women are at least 5 feet 10 inches tall and the men more than 6 feet, but both are slim and active – there is no such thing as a fat kio. Your size is Medium.

Speed: Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Versatility: You gain proficiency in two skills of your choice.

Kio Sword: You are proficient with kio swords and you begin play with a unique kio sword. This sword is a treasured family heirloom with its own history and bearing it brings you honor and respect.

People who recognize your sword's significance treat you in accordance to their cultural and political leanings. A Coryani senator who has had good relations with the kio will treat you quite differently than one whose wife was once seduced by a charming kio duelist.

Among the kio you are considered a “person of note” and kio that you meet have a chance to recognize the blade and its history with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (History) check.

Languages and Literacy: You speak Kion and Low Coryani and are literate. You also learn a number of additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier.

Variant Kio: Swordless

Somehow, you have lost your kio sword. Perhaps it was taken from you in a duel, or it was destroyed in battle. Either way, you have lost the very item that gives you an identity in your culture. To your fellow kio, you are nobody.

Bonus Feat: Instead of the kio sword you normally gain as a kio or val'Sungha, you gain one feat of your choice. You must meet any of the requirements of your chosen feat.

Fearless: Because you have lost your status in your own society, you act with a level of suicidal ferocity that an accepted kio or val'Sungha would not. You have advantage on all saving throws against fear and disadvantage on all saving throws that would cause you to retreat from a threat.

Swordless: You have disadvantage on all Charisma (Persuasion) and Charisma (Perform) checks made with any kio or val'Sungha. You retain these penalties even if you gain a new kio sword unless it is granted to you by one of the val'Sungha Royal Houses.

val'Sungha

Born from a union between a pure blood kio and her three consorts, a val'Assanté, a val'Borda, and a val'Sheem, the val'Sungha are one family with three distinct branches. These kio took great pains to separate their lineages, making each branch's bloodline powers both unique and common between them.

Personality

The val'Sungha are much like their kio brothers, though like vals in the rest of Arcanis their bloodlines and special heritage give them a privileged position in Kio society. They tend to be more haughty and aloof than the average kio, displaying an aristocratic bearing and expectation of deference granted to them by their status as the chosen of the True Kio.

Physical Appearance

Like their kio cousins, the val'Sungha are tall, athletic, and graceful, and of similar height. The three branches of the family have similar finely chiseled features and grey eyes like all val. It is only in their hair color that one can distinguish their lineage, with the val'Sungha of the Raven having dark brown hair, those of the Eagle with dirty-blond hair, and those of the Swan possessing platinum blond hair.

Relations

Though there is little open hostility, the kio's haughty attitude tends to annoy the humans of the region. They have an odd relationship with the Tir Betoqi dwarves; not an open hostility, just a mutual avoidance when possible. The elorii do not appear to consider the kio to be humans and do not show any special animosity or regard for them.

Lands

The val'Sungha universally hail from the Western Lands, specifically the Kio nations of Capharra, Pajharo, and Bhiharn, and all descend from the ruling houses of those principalities.

Religion

The val'Sungha, like the kio, do not venerate any of the human Pantheon deities, and instead believe in a creator god that died in the act of birthing the universe. Of course, there are some that are seduced by Coryani culture and religion and follow the human gods or have become seduced by the veneration of lesser spirits. These kio become pariahs in the eyes of kio society.

val'Sungha Traits

Your val'Sungha Hero has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase: Your Dexterity score and Charisma score increase by 1.

Age: val'Sungha age much at the same rate as normal kio, becoming mature by 16 years of age and typically living for 100 years, remaining vital and vigorous almost to the end of their lives. Because of the noble status of the val'Sungha, they often begin adventuring earlier than most, and continue to adventure until called back home to fulfill their duties or until they die.

Size: val'Sungha are as tall as normal kio. The women are at least 5 feet 10 inches tall and the men more than 6 feet, but both are slim and active – there is no such thing as a fat val'Sungha. Your size is Medium.

Speed: Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Languages and Literacy: You speak Kion and Low Coryani and are literate. You also learn a number of additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier.

Kio Sword: You are proficient with kio swords and begin play with a unique kio sword. This sword is a treasured family heirloom with its own history and bearing it brings you honor and respect.

People who recognize your sword's significance treat you in accordance to their cultural and political leanings. A Coryani senator who has had good relations with the kio will treat you quite differently than one whose wife was once seduced by a charming kio duelist.

Among the kio you are considered a “person of note” and kio that you meet have a chance to recognize the blade and its history with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (History) check.

Psionic Potential: Val are one of the few races known to have the capability to learn psionics.

Val Bloodrank: You gain an additional ability score, your Blood Rank, which represents the Valinoric blessings inherited by your family. Your Blood Rank modifier is always equal to your Blood Rank. At 1st level your Blood Rank is 1 and increases to 2 at 3rd level. Whenever you increase your Blood Rank, you can select a bloodline power which must be of a rank equal to or lesser than your new Blood Rank.

When you receive an Ability Score Improvement feature from your class at 4th level, and again at 8th, 12th, 16th, and 19th level, you may increase your Blood Rank by 1 instead of increasing your ability scores. Your Blood Rank maximum is 5.

For example, when you reach 4th level in the fighter class you can either choose the Ability Score Improvement feature or a feat. Instead of either option, you could choose to increase your Blood Rank.

If a bloodline power grants the use of a spell, your Blood Rank acts as your spellcasting ability modifier.

Spell save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Blood Rank

Spell attack modifier = your proficiency bonus + your Blood Rank

Val bloodline powers are activated with pure thought and willpower and may be used as long as you are not incapacitated.

Spells you cast with your bloodline powers are cast at their minimum spell level or at a spell level equal to your Blood Rank, whichever is higher. You do not need to provide components for spells you cast with your bloodline powers, nor can you use your spell slots to cast spells from your bloodline powers.

Val Presence: You have a bonus to all Charisma checks equal to half your Blood Rank (minimum of 1) when dealing with humans, val, dark-kin, gnomes, and other beings with human heritage.

val'Sungha Houses: The val'Sungha family is split into three “Houses”, each descending from one of three suitors that created their race. Because of this, val'Sungha from different houses manifest some of the same bloodline powers, as well as some of the bloodline abilities inherited from their ancestor.

Choose one of the following three Houses: House of the Eagle, House of the Raven, or House of the Swan. This choice defines your bloodline and additional features. You may only select benefits from your chosen House (such as Bloodline powers).

val'Sungha Bloodline Powers: At 1st level and every time you increase your Blood Rank, you can select a bloodline power. The bloodline power you select must be of a rank equal to or lesser than your new Blood Rank.

Metabolism of the Ancestors (all val'Sungha) (Rank 1): Your pure blood ancestors were graced with a metabolism far superior to those of normal humans, and so they passed this trait on to you. You gain 1 additional hit point per level gained after getting this bloodline power. You have advantage on all Constitution saving throws against diseases, poison, or other pathogens.

Temptations of the Flesh (House of the Eagle val'Sungha only) (Rank 1): See the Arcanis 5e Campaign Guide, page 48 for details. Change all references from val'Sheem to val'Sungha (House of the Eagle).

To Know the Gloom of Night (House of the Raven val'Sungha only) (Rank 1): See the Arcanis 5e Campaign Guide, page 38 for details. Change all references from val'Borda to val'Sungha (House of the Raven).

The Blinding Light of Truth (House of the Swan val'Sungha only) (Rank 1): See the Arcanis 5e Campaign Guide, page 37 for details. Change all references from val'Assanté to val'Sungha (House of the Swan).

Perfect Balance (all val'Sungha) (Rank 2): Your pure blood ancestors were the model of grace. From them you have inherited an almost preternatural sense of balance.

- Your Dexterity score increases by 1 to a maximum of 20.
- You have advantage on all Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks.
- You can cast *featherfall* upon yourself only once and regain the ability to do so after completing a long rest.

Rewards of the Flesh (House of the Eagle val'Sungha only) (Rank 2): See the Arcanis 5e Campaign Guide, page 49 for details. Change all references from val'Sheem to val'Sungha (House of the Eagle).

Cadic Guides My Hand (House of the Raven val'Sungha only) (Rank 2): See the Arcanis 5e Campaign Guide, page 38 for details. Change all references from val'Borda to val'Sungha (House of the Raven).

He is With Me; I Shall Not Fail (House of the Swan val'Sungha only) (Rank 2): See the Arcanis 5e Campaign Guide, page 37 for details. Change all references from val'Assanté to val'Sungha (House of the Swan).

Enhanced Strength (all val'Sungha) (Rank 3): Despite appearing frail, your pure blood ancestors possessed significant strength. From them you have inherited some of their almost supernatural strength.

- Your Strength score increases by 1 to a maximum of 20.
- You have advantage on all Strength checks involving brute strength, such as climbing or throwing something.
- You can cast *enhance ability* upon yourself only, using either the Bear's Endurance or Bull's Strength feature, once and regain the ability to do so after completing a long rest.

Touch of Pleasure (House of the Eagle val'Sungha only) (Rank 4): See the Arcanis 5e Campaign Guide, page 49 for details. Change all references from val'Sheem to val'Sungha (House of the Eagle).

In Darkness There is Death (House of the Raven val'Sungha only) (Rank 4): See the Arcanis 5e Campaign Guide, page 38 for details. Change all references from val'Borda to val'Sungha (House of the Raven).

Morning Banishes the Shadow (House of the Swan val'Sungha only) (Rank 4): See the Arcanis 5e Campaign Guide, page 37 for details. Change all references from val'Assanté to val'Sungha (House of the Swan).

Our Ancestors Cannot Fail and Neither Shall We (all val'Sungha) (Rank 5): The pure blood kio are superior to all lesser forms of life and can recover from even the most egregious of wounds. While not as potent as them, you have inherited this ability to rapidly heal damage.

- Your Constitution score increases by 1 to a maximum of 20.
- As an action, as long as you are conscious, you may heal 1d4 + Constitution modifier hit points.
- You can cast *greater restoration* upon yourself and regain the ability to do so after completing a long rest.

Variant val'Sungha: Swordless

Somehow, you have lost your kio sword. Perhaps it was taken from you in a duel, or it was destroyed in battle. Either way, you have lost the very item that gives you an identity in your culture. To your fellow kio, you are nobody.

Bonus Feat: Instead of the kio sword you gain normally as a kio or val'Sungha, you gain one feat of your choice. You must meet any of the requirements of your chosen feat.

Fearless: Because you have lost your status in your society, you act with a level of suicidal ferocity that an accepted kio or val'Sungha would not. You have advantage on all saving throws against fear and disadvantage on all saving throws that would cause you to retreat from a threat.

Swordless: You have disadvantage on all Charisma (Persuasion) and Charisma (Perform) checks made with any kio or val'Sungha. You retain these penalties even if you gain a new kio sword unless it is granted to you by one of the val'Sungha Royal Houses.

NEW CLASSES

Cleric

Due to the Kion culture's disregard for the religions of the rest of Arcanis, considering them to be little more than superstition or the appeasement of beings not worthy of being called Gods, there are no kio clerics in polite kio society. However, a number of kio over the centuries have been wooed by the power of foreign Gods, especially those of the Pantheon of Man, and have embraced religion.

A kio or val'Sungha may become a Cleric of any God of the Pantheon of Man. However, if they take a level of cleric at 1st level, that kio or val'Sungha must select the Initiate of the Gods background variant Shunned By Your People. If a kio or val'Sungha takes a level of Cleric any time after 1st level, the feature gained from their background is replaced with the feature Shunned from the Initiate of the Gods background variant Shunned By Your People.

Elder Sorcerer

Unlike other of the younger races of Arcanis, the val'Sungha have inherited their pure blood kio ancestor's ability to wield Elder magic. While many traditions have not been passed down from these ancestors, val'Sungha mages are able to use the Elder Sorcerer Magi and Rhu'haman (Elder) Sorcerous Traditions.

New Elder Sorcerer

Tradition: Rhu'haman

In the ancient past when the sky kingdoms of Yhriwhon crisscrossed Arcanis far above the surface, it was occasionally necessary for the inhabitants to travel between the kingdoms and the ground. To facilitate this travel, as well as other tasks required for the daily function of these floating cities, kio sorcerers became masters of manipulating air magic. They used these magics to perform impressive feats of acrobatics, call upon the winds to carry them, or even travel long distances on the very currents of air.

Unlike other traditions known in the Sky Kingdoms, enough of these mages survived Ylliph'kim's fall to keep the tradition alive to the modern day. As one of the few links to their ancestors, this sorcerous tradition is one of the most commonly practiced by the kio. As a likely extension of their mastery of air magic, these sorcerers are skilled in the arts of summoning air elementals from other planes, a skill rarely seen outside of the elorii and the ssethrics. Some

believe that they learned this skill from their interactions with the elorii sometime in the distant past, but the elorii find such insinuations offensive. While the elorii value their elementals, the kio of the rhu'haman view them as little more than expendable tools.

What makes the rhu'haman so unique is that it truly consists of two traditions, the elder, classical tradition and a more modern, brutish eldritch tradition.

Race Restrictions

Only val'Sungha may take the Rhu'haman (Elder) Sorcerous Tradition.



Upon the Wind

Beginning at 2nd level, you may cast *jump* at will without expending a spell slot. Additionally, when you learn *find familiar* you may use it to summon an elemental servant instead of a familiar. See the **Arcanis Campaign Appendix 1: Bestiary** for your elemental servant's stats.

Unlike a normal familiar, when you dismiss your elemental servant, it returns to the Elemental Plane it came from but does not regain any lost hit points or spent hit dice until it spends at least 8 hours on its home plane, after which it will regain all of its hit points and spent hit dice.

If your elemental servant is ever slain, you may not summon a new one until you complete a long rest. The elemental servant you then summon is not the same one you summoned previously; it is a new creature.

Manipulation of Wind

Beginning at 6th level, when you are the target of a ranged weapon attack you may use your reaction to impose disadvantage on that attack roll. If the attack misses you, you may spend 1 arcane point to redirect the attack upon any creature within 60 feet. Make a spell attack roll, if successful the attack deals double the weapon damage, plus your spell casting attribute bonus as additional damage.

The Winds will Carry Me

Beginning at 10th level, you may cast either *fly* or *levitate* without expending a spell slot a number of times equal to your Intelligence modifier. You regain all expended uses after completing a long rest. Additionally, you have advantage on concentration saving throws to maintain concentration on any spell cast though the use of this class feature.

Master of the Winds & Storms

Beginning at 14th level any time you cast a spell that deals lightning or thunder damage, manipulates or uses air (such as *alter winds*, *control weather*, or *wind wall*) the spell is considered to be cast from a spell level one higher than the one you used to cast the spell. Additionally, when casting any spell that deals lightning or thunder damage you may apply either the *twin spell* or the *careful spell* metamagic ability without expending a spell slot a number of times equal to your Intelligence modifier, regaining all expended uses after a long rest. You do not need to know either of these metamagic ability to use this feature (**Arcanis Campaign Guide**, pg. 252)

Eldritch Sorcerer

While the val'Sungha are able to manipulate the Elder Arcanum, arcanelly gifted kio are only capable of utilizing Eldritch magic. Kio are considered to be human for all benefits and restrictions of the Eldritch Sorcerer class that do not specifically forbid kio.

Due to their disregard for the religions of Arcanis, any kio or val'Sungha who takes the Sorcerer-Priest of Sarish Archetype of the Eldritch Sorcerer class will face great scorn and shame from their people. That kio or val'Sungha loses the feature gained from their background, which is replaced with the feature Shunned from the Initiate of the Gods background variant Shunned By Your People.

New Eldritch Sorcerer Tradition: Rhu'haman

Unique among the people of the Known Lands, the kio may boast that among their people are those that can wield elder sorcery, as well as those that can command eldritch magic. The Academy of Sorcery adapted to this singular situation by instituting programs that allow their students to master a different version of the same tradition, as exemplified by the Rhu'haman Tradition.

Kio eldritch sorcerers train to tame the air and winds about them, as well as call down devastating bolts of crackling energy. While not as precise in its application as that taught in the Elder Tradition, it is still a potent school of magic.

Race Restrictions

Only kio, but not val'Sungha, may take the Rhu'haman (Eldritch) Sorcerous Tradition.

Wind at my Back

Starting at 1st level, you have advantage on all Strength (Athletics) and Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks while jumping. Additionally, you gain two bonus spells, *jump* and *thunderwave*, which cannot be swapped as you advance in level.

Storm Caller

At 6th level, any time you cast a spell that deals lightning or thunder damage you deal additional damage equal to your Intelligence ability bonus. Additionally, any time you cast *thunderwave* creatures suffer disadvantage on their Constitution saving throw to resist the spell.

The Winds Will Carry Me

Starting at 10th level, you may cast either *fly* or *levitate* without expending a spell slot a number of times equal to your intelligence modifier. You regain all expended uses after completing a long rest. Additionally, you have advantage on concentration saving throws to maintain concentration on any spell cast through the use of this class feature.

Storm Bringer

Starting at 14th level, any time you cast a spell that deals lightning or thunder damage, manipulates or utilizes air (such as *alter winds*, *control weather*, or *wind wall*) the spell is considered cast as if it was cast at one level higher. Additionally, when casting any spell that deals lightning or thunder damage, creatures who possess resistance against that type of damage suffer full damage, while creatures that are immune to that type of damage suffer half damage.

Storm Step

Starting at 18th level, when you suffer lightning or thunder damage you may use 1 arcane point to gain resistance against that type of damage. If you cast a spell on your next turn that deals thunder or lightning damage it is empowered as if you had used the *empower spell metamagic ability* (**Arcanis Campaign Guide**, pg. 252).

Fighter

Kio and val'Sungha may take any Fighter archetype accessible by kio, val'Sungha, or humans unless that archetype specifically forbids kio.

New Fighter Martial

Archetype: Duelist

"Oh, this time you brought six of your friends? Wonderful!"

– Alcanté val'Sheem

Duelists in Arcanis are diverse lot ranging from the gentry of Sweet Savona who see the dance of blades as something of a sport to the kio who view duels as a matter of deadly seriousness. Where the common warrior may rely upon strength and brutish tactics, the duelist takes advantage of the smallest of openings, parrying attacks, and reposting with terrifying speed. Although trained in the use of armor and most weapons, duelists tend to gravitate towards light and quick weapons, commonly forgoing armor and instead relying upon their speed and wit.

Duelist's Grace

Beginning at 3rd level you gain the canny defense fighting style. If you already possess the canny defense fighting style you may choose either the Duelist or Two-Weapon Fighting style. Additionally, when wielding two finesse weapons you add half your proficiency bonus to your Armor Class if you are not using a shield. While wielding one finesse weapon and no other weapons you may add your proficiency bonus to your Armor Class.

Duelist's Dare

Upon reaching the 3rd level you may choose a creature within 30 feet of you that can clearly see and hear you. As a bonus action, you can issue a dare to that creature. Your target must make a Wisdom saving throw (DC 8 + your Intelligence modifier + your proficiency bonus). If your target fails their saving throw, they consider you a significant threat that it finds very difficult to ignore. For 1 minute and as long as it can see you, that creature has disadvantage on all attacks against creatures other than you. At the end of each of its turns, the target can make another Wisdom saving throw. On a success, the effect ends. If your target succeeds on their saving throw, you cannot dare them again until you complete a long rest.

Exploit Opening

At 7th level when a creature fails a saving throw, becomes prone, or misses a melee attack within 5 feet of you it provokes an opportunity attack from you. You may use this ability a number of times equal to your Intelligence bonus, regaining all expended uses after a short or long rest.

Flashing Steel, Iron Will

Starting at 10th level when wielding a finesse weapon and attacked in melee, as a reaction you can impose disadvantage on an incoming melee attack. If that attack misses, you may make a single attack against that target as part of the same action. You gain advantage on all saving throws against spells cast by a creature currently under the effect of your duelist dare ability.

A Thousand Cuts

Beginning at 15th level when you use your action surge class feature all your melee attacks deal an additional 1d6 damage as long as the weapon or weapons used possess the finesse property.

Steel Focus

Upon reaching 18th level you can choose one creature under the effect of your duelist dare and give them your full, undivided attention. Once per turn when you successfully hit a creature you are focused on, you deal an extra 10 points of damage.

New Fighter Martial

Archetype: Iron Guard

It is a little-known fact outside of the Western Lands, but the val'Sungha are the only one of the younger races to have mastered elder sorcery. While many of the elder races, such as the elorii and the ssanu, tend to focus on the elemental tradition, the true kio and the val'Sungha see such extravagant displays of force distasteful and the sign of an unimaginative mind. As with their culture of dueling, these val'Sungha sorcerers strive to use the Arcanum to perfect themselves and to subtly twist their environment to meet their purposes. To this end, the val'Sungha have focused their minds to the practice of transmuting their surroundings to suit their needs.

The most well-known of these elder casters among the kio are the iron guard, a group of val'Sungha mage-warriors who use the Arcanum to shape their bodies into the ultimate weapons. They train for years to elevate their form to physical perfection.

Additional Proficiencies: When you take this Martial Archetype you gain proficiency in Arcana.

Race Restrictions

Only val'Sungha may become Iron Guards.

Hunted by Ymandragore

The Sorcerer King of Ymandragore hunts all arcane casters. Displaying your sorcerous skills openly or in a public setting is a sure way to come to the attention of the Ymandrake Harvesters.

Spellcasting

Beginning at 3rd level you learn to cast a small number of arcane spells.

Arcane Flexibility

You gain 1 arcane point and gain more arcane points as you reach higher levels in this class, as shown in the Arcane Points column of the Iron Guard table. You may never have more arcane points than shown on the table for your level. You regain all spent arcane points when you finish a long rest.

See the **Arcanis Campaign Guide Chapter VI: Magic of Arcanis** for more information on arcane points and how to use them.

Cantrips

You learn 2 cantrips of your choice from the Iron Guard spell list. You learn an additional cantrip once you reach 11th level.

Iron Guard

Fighter Level	Arcane Points	Cantrips Known	Spells Known	Spell Slots per Spell Level			
				1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th
3	1	2	2	1	—	—	—
4	1	2	2	2	—	—	—
5	2	2	2	3	—	—	—
6	2	2	3	3	—	—	—
7	2	2	3	4	1	—	—
8	3	2	3	4	1	—	—
9	3	2	3	4	2	—	—
10	3	2	3	4	2	—	—
11	4	3	4	4	3	1	—
12	4	3	4	4	3	1	—
13	4	3	4	4	3	2	—
14	5	3	4	4	3	2	—
15	5	3	5	4	3	3	1
16	5	3	5	4	3	3	1
17	6	3	5	4	3	3	2
18	6	3	6	4	3	3	2
19	6	3	6	4	3	3	3
20	7	3	6	4	3	3	3

Metamagic

Starting at 3rd level you gain the ability to twist your spells to suit your need. You learn the Metamagic ability *subtle spell* (**Arcanis Campaign Guide**, pg. 252).

Metamagic

The Iron Guard Spellcasting table shows how many spell slots you have available to cast your spells of 1st level and higher. To cast one of these spells, you must expend a slot of the spell's level or higher. You regain all expended spell slots when you finish a long rest.

For example, if you know the 1st-level spell and have a 1st-level and a 2nd-level spell slot available, you can cast that spell in either slot.

Spells Known of 1st-level and Higher

You know two 1st-level spells of your choice from the Iron Guard spell list. The Spells Known column of Iron Guard table shows when you can learn more Iron Guard spells of your choice. Each of these spells must be of a level for which you have spell slots. For instance, when you reach 7th level in this class, you can learn one new spell of 1st or 2nd level.

Additionally, when you gain a level in this class, you can choose one of Iron Guard spells you know and replace it with another spell from the Iron Guard spell list, which also must be of a level for which you have spell slots.

Hone the Body

Beginning at 3rd level, while you are not wearing armor and not wielding a shield, you gain the following benefits:

- Your AC equals 10 + your Dexterity modifier + your Intelligence modifier.
- You can roll a d4 in place of the normal damage of your unarmed strike. This die changes to a d6 at 5th level, a d8 at 11th level and a d10 at 17th level.
- Additionally, when not wearing armor you reduce bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage you suffer from non-magical weapons by 3. This feature does not stack with similar features granted by feats, spells, or other class features.
- Starting at 5th level your unarmed attacks are considered magical for the purposes of overcoming resistance and immunity to nonmagical attacks and damage.

Adaptive Training

You have learned to modify your fighting style to better suit your chosen form of combat. If you possess the Pugilist or Duelist Fighting styles gain a +2 bonus to your unarmed attacks. If you possess Defense or Canny Defense fighting style you gain a +1 bonus to your armor class when unarmored. If you possess the Defensive Duelist fighting style you may benefit from it when attacking unarmed. If you possess the Protection fighting style you may utilize it without the use of a shield. If you possess any other fighting style you may replace it with either Pugilist or Canny Defense.

Arcane Strikes

Beginning at 3rd level, you begin to gain access to unique metamagic developed over the centuries. You may spend 1 arcane point to sheath your hands in elemental power. For the 1 minute your unarmed attacks are considered magic for the purposes of overcoming resistance and immunity to nonmagical attacks and damage and deal additional force damage equal to your Intelligence ability modifier.

Battle Evocations

At 7th level, when you use your action to cast a cantrip you may make an unarmed attack as a bonus action. You may use Arcane Strikes when using this ability.

Arcane Celerity

Starting at 10th level when taking an attack action you may spend 2 arcane points to cast a spell with the casting time of 1 action as a bonus action.

Arcane Conduit

Upon reaching 18th level after you successfully strike with an unarmed attack, as a reaction, you may spend 2 arcane points to cast and channel a single spell into that strike as long as that spell requires a melee spell attack. You are not required to make an attack roll for this spell. If you score a critical strike with the initial attack the spell's damage, if any, is also doubled.

New Fighter

Martial Archetype:

The Order of the Sky Knight

"The damn Uggur forces were crushing us. We were in a rout; there was no way we could win. Suddenly, first one, then a legion of shadows flew over our heads. The next thing we knew, giant eagles ridden by the Kio Sky Knights swooped towards the barbarian horde, pulling them up short in their tracks. High Kyhm'mé Giliphé had delivered the promised troops just in time." – Personal account of Antarn Mhyré val'Sungha.

Whether the graceful kio upon their giant eagles or the Milandisians of Sylvania mounted upon their griffons, sky knights provide a unique force to the general upon the field to wield.

Nationality: Western Lands or Milandir

Additional Proficiencies: When you take this archetype you gain proficiency with Animal Handling.

Race Restrictions

The Order of the Sky Knight exists in two different places, the kio nations of the Western Lands and the Milandisian Duchy of Sylvania. The orders differentiate themselves by their unique mounts and their proper names: The Kio Order of the Sky Knight and the Milandisian Order of the Sky Knight.

For Heroes from the League of Princes, the Order of the Sky Knight may only be taken by kio or val'Sungha with the Initiate Kio Knight background feature.

For Milandisian Heroes, the Order of the Sky Knight may only be taken by female humans or vals from Milandir with the Milandisian Knight Errant or the Knight Aspirant background feature.

Flying Mount

At 3rd level, you gain a flying mount as a special companion. If you are one of the Kio Sky Knights you gain a giant eagle as your mount. If you are a Milandisian Sky Knight you gain the Milandisian mountain griffin as your mount.



Your flying mount gains all the benefits of your animal companion ability (see below).

If your flying mount is ever slain, you can acquire another flying mount from your parent order. This requires a month of downtime as you and your new companion become acquainted with one another.

You may choose to form a bond with a new flying mount of the appropriate type, even if your current mount is still alive, by willingly severing the bond between you.

Animal Companion

At 3rd level your flying mount becomes more than just a mount, but an animal companion. It gains a variety of benefits while it is linked with you. You can have only one Animal Companion at a time, even if you gain this ability through different class features.

Your animal companion obeys your commands as best it can. It rolls for initiative like any other creature, but you determine its action, decisions, attitudes, and so on. If you are incapacitated or absent, your animal companion acts on its own. Your animal companion adds your proficiency bonus to its Armor Class, attack rolls, saving throws, and damage rolls.

Unless already proficient, your animal companion gains proficiency with Perception and Survival and with all saving throws.

Upon reaching 5th level fighter, and every other fighter level after, your flying mount gains an additional hit die (increasing their maximum hit point by half the hit die +1, plus half their constitution modifier). For example, a giant eagle starts with Hit Points (Hit die) of 26 (4d10+4). Upon reaching 5th level in the fighter class, these values increase to 34 (5d10+5) and increases again when you reach 7th level fighter to 41 (6d10+6) and so on.

Whenever you gain the Ability Score Improvement class feature, your animal companion's abilities also improve. Your animal companion can increase one ability score of your choice by 2, or it can increase 2 ability scores of your choice by 1. As normal, your animal companion can't increase an ability score above 20 using this feature.

Flyby Attack

Beginning at 7th level, when mounted on your flying steed, you don't provoke opportunity attacks when flying out of an enemy's reach. Additionally, when actively controlling your mount, when you take the attack action you may use your bonus action to have your mount attack a creature you

designate within its reach. Furthermore, when mounted on your flying mount your weapon attacks and your mounts attacks score a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20.

Strengthening Bond

Beginning at 10th level, you have advantage on all Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks to control your flying mount.

Additionally, your bond with your mount has grown, with the two of you developing a unique set of whistles, calls, and commands which the casual observer may believe to be some kind of mystical communication. As long as you are within 1 mile of your mount and in a place that does not block sound, you may call it to your location in 3 rounds. This does not mean that it appears magically out of thin air, but that it will unerringly find its way to you. If you are within a building or underground, your mount will move to the closest location it can to you (such as on the roof of a building). If your mount can gain entry to the location you are in, it will attempt to do so if it won't put it at immediate risk.

Falcon's Grace

Beginning at 15th level, if your mount is ever knocked prone or has its speed reduced to 0, instead of crashing you can maneuver to soften the blow to both of you. As a reaction when your mount is knocked prone or has its speed reduced to 0, both you and your mount's descent is slowed to 60 feet per round for 3 rounds. If you land during this time, your mount gains the unconscious condition and you gain the prone condition.

Strike As One

Beginning at 17th level, when mounted upon your animal companion, when using your action surge class feature your steed gains the feature's benefits as well.

Fury

If the kio take a dim view of the Coryani deities, they're opinion of those that truck with lesser spirits is disdainful, or in the case of the undir dacoï, pitiful. Any kio that would allow such a spirit to enter their body and possess them, as furies do, are mad or depraved.

A kio or val'Sungha may become a Fury. However, if they take a level of Fury at 1st level, that kio or val'Sungha must select the Initiate of the Gods background variant Shunned By Your People. If a kio or val'Sungha takes a level of Fury any time after 1st level, the feature gained from their background is replaced with the feature Shunned from the Initiate of the Gods background variant Shunned By Your People.

Holy Champion

Due to the Kion culture's disregard for the religions of the rest of Arcanis, considering them to be little more than superstition or the appeasement of beings not worthy of being called Gods, there are no kio holy champions in kio society. However, a number of kio over the centuries have been wooed by the power of foreign Gods, especially those of the Pantheon of Man, and have embraced religion.

A kio or val'Sungha may become a Holy Champion of any God of the Pantheon of Man. However, if they take a level of Holy Champion at 1st level, that kio or val'Sungha must select the Initiate of the Gods background variant Shunned By Your People. If a kio or val'Sungha takes a level of Holy Champion any time after 1st level, the feature gained from their background is replaced with the feature Shunned from the Initiate of the Gods background variant Shunned By Your People.

Psion

As vals are the only known race able to become Awakened, val'Sungha (but not kio) may become psions.

Ranger

Kio and val'Sungha may take any Ranger archetype accessible by kio, val'Sungha, or humans unless that archetype specifically forbids kio.

New Ranger Archetype: The Eagle Hunter

Can'yhat crept over the broken ridge, eyes squinting against the bitter wind. He and his eagle, Manai, had followed the gar raiders for days, picking them off one by one. Only a few were left, but their leader rode an enormous dire wolf, and all four carried stout bows. On her last pass, Manai took two arrows

in her wing and peeled off from the attack. Can'yhat bound her wounds, but both agreed that the hunt was not yet over.

Not a hunter of eagles, but rather a hunter who trains and hunts with eagles, the eagle hunter is a follower of an ancient tradition among the kio. Unlike the simple falconers of other lands, eagle hunters rarely raise their birds from the egg and instead harvest eaglets from nests or capturing and training adult birds. Due to their larger size and calmer disposition, female birds are favored by most hunters. Eagle hunters forge close bonds with their companions, living side-by-side for years at a time. Eventually, though, the eagles are always released back into the wild, to produce the next generation.

Nationality: Western Lands

Additional Proficiencies: When you take this archetype you gain proficiency with Animal Handling.

Eagle Companion

At 3rd level, you gain an eagle that you trained as a special companion.

It takes 1 month to forge a unique bond with the eagle. Your eagle companion gains all the benefits of your animal companion ability. You can have only one eagle companion at a time.

If your eagle companion is ever slain you may forge a new bond with another eagle, making it your new animal companion. If you use this ability to forge a new bond while your current eagle companion is still living, your current eagle companion leaves you and is replaced by the new one.

Animal Companion

At 3rd level your animal companion gains a variety of benefits while it is linked with you.

Your animal companion obeys your commands as best it can. It rolls for initiative like any other creature, but you determine its action, decisions, attitudes, and so on. If you are incapacitated or absent, your eagle companion acts on its own.

When using your Natural Explorer feature, you and your animal companion can both move stealthily at your normal speed.

Your animal companion adds your proficiency bonus to its Armor Class, attack rolls, saving throws, and damage rolls.

Unless already proficient, your animal companion gains proficiency with Perception and Survival and with all saving throws.

For each ranger level you gain after 3rd, your animal companion gains an additional hit die, increasing their maximum hit point by half the hit die +1, plus half their constitution modifier. For example, an eagle possesses hit points (hit dice) of 3 (1d6) hit points. Upon reaching 4th level your eagle would possess 7 (2d6) hit points (hit dice) and 11 (3d6) hit points (hit dice) upon reaching 6th level ranger.

Whenever you gain the Ability Score Improvement class feature, your animal companion's abilities also improve. Your animal companion can increase one ability score of your choice by 2, or it can increase 2 ability scores of your choice by 1. As normal, your animal companion can't increase an ability score above 20 using this feature.

Finally, any time you use an ointment of healing on your animal companion, they regain 3 times the amount of hit points they normally would

Soul Link

At 5th level, the bond between you and your eagle companion strengthens even more. As long as you are both within 5 miles of one another, you and your eagle can instinctively find one another. You both gain advantage on all Survival checks to find and reach one another. Additionally, when you take the attack action you may, as a bonus action have your eagle attack a creature within its reach.

We Are As One

At 7th level, as an action either you or your eagle companion can look through each other's eyes as if they were your own for up to 1 minute. While in this state, you lose all ability to see through your own eyes and suffer disadvantage on all attack and skill rolls that require sight.

Slashing Attack

At 11th level, you and your eagle companion learn how to fight together and coordinate your attacks to strike foes where it hurts. When you use your bonus action to command your eagle companion to attack, it attacks twice. Additionally, once per turn when your eagle companion attacks a creature you have designated as your quarry, it deals an additional 1d10 slashing damage.

My Soul Takes Flight

At 15th level, when moving overland and your eagle companion is flying above you, you travel at twice your normal speed and gain advantage on any saving throw related to difficult terrain. This bonus to your speed does not apply when in combat or when in enclosed areas. Additionally, your eagle companion has advantage on attack actions against creatures that you have designated.

Rogue

Kio and val'Sungha may take any Rogue archetype accessible by kio, val'Sungha, or humans unless that archetype specifically forbids kio.

New Rogue Archetype: The Rhin'anake

The Rhin'anake are kio devoted to the mastering the lessons of the wind and the predators who make it their home. The wind can be felt, but not seen, and strike with focused power; it can flow around obstacles and penetrate even the most secure of structures. The great owl flies silently before swooping in on its prey, while others, such as the hawk, fly above and strike with great speed.

Race Restrictions

Only kio or val'Sungha may become Rhin'anake at this time.

The Wind Supports Me

Starting at 3rd level you have advantage on all Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks.

Light as a Feather

Starting at 3rd level you may move up to one-quarter of your speed across the surface of water and perform a single action without sinking into it. If you are not on a solid surface when you end your turn, or move a distance further than the listed speed, you sink as normal into the water.

Starting at 11th level you may move up to one-half of your speed as part of this action. Starting at 18th level you may move up to your speed.

Extra Attack

Starting at 9th level, you can attack twice, instead of once, whenever you take the attack action on your turn.

May the Wind Carry Me

Starting at 13th level when you use your bonus action to dash your jump distance is tripled during your dash.

Move Without Being Seen

Starting at 17th level you can make a Dexterity (Stealth) check while moving up to your full speed, even when using the May the Winds Carry Me class feature. You can't use this feature again until you finish a short or long rest.

Shaman

If the kio take a dim view of the Coryani deities, they're opinion of those that truck with lesser spirits is disdainful, or in the case of the undir daco, is pitiful. Any kio that would make base bargains with these spirits are either mad or depraved.

A kio may become a Shaman. However, if they take a level of Shaman at 1st level, that kio must select the Initiate of the Gods background variant Shunned By Your People. If a kio takes a level of Shaman any time after 1st level, the feature gained from their background is replaced with the feature Shunned from the Initiate of the Gods background variant Shunned By Your People.

A val'Sungha may not become a Shaman as the spirits are wary of their celestial birthright, fearing the more powerful Valinor. The spirits will not become a val's spiritual patron for fear of offending their divine progenitors.

NEW BACKGROUNDS

Initiate of the Gods

Variant: Shunned by your People

You have fallen under the influence of worshipers of the Pantheon of Man, turning your back on the ways of your people. You have embraced these foreign gods or engage in practices that are considered unsavory by your people. Either way, you have been specifically excluded from many aspects of your native culture.

Nationality: Western Lands

Race: Human, Kio, or Undir

Religion: Any

Skill Proficiency: Performance, Religion

Tool Proficiency: Any 1 Tool Proficiency

Social Class: High class in culture of adopted religion, below commoner class in home culture

Minimum Age: 24

Languages: You learn either Altharin or High Coryani.

Equipment: A holy symbol (a gift to you when you entered the priesthood), vestments, a set of common clothes, and a pouch containing 15 gp.

Feature: Shunned

Your home culture treats you as a pariah, but your adopted religion sees you almost as a hero for rejecting your heathen ways. Those who hold fast to the "traditional ways" will treat you with disrespect at best and outright hatred at worst. But among members of the church you are treated far better than the common Initiate. You can receive free healing and care at a temple, shrine, or other established presence of your church. You must provide any material components needed for spells. Those who share your religion will support you at a modest lifestyle. As an initiate of the Gods, you command the respect of those who share your faith, and can perform the religious ceremonies of your deity.

Kio Knight

You have earned a place among the elite military orders of Kion society. Unlike the knights found in nations like Milandir, who are minor nobles in that nation, you are a professional soldier, related to but distinct from the levied armies of the ky'vec. The order you join can be as small as a personal bodyguard to one of the great Kio Houses, or one of the famed orders such as the Order of the Sky Knights or the Order of Yhkri. You forsake personal glory and instead seek to grow the honor and prestige of your order.

Nationality: League of Princes

Race: Kio, val'Sungha

Social Class: High class

Minimum Age: 18 is the common age of maturity for a young knight.

Skill Proficiency: Animal Handling, Insight

Weapon Proficiency: Kio sword (kio or val'Sungha).

Languages: Kion

Literacy: You are literate

Equipment: A signet ring with the crest of your order or the symbol of your bloodline, a trinket, 2 sets of clothes (one common, one fine for military presentation), and a purse containing 25 gp. If you are a val'Sungha, you also gain an adorned flintlock pistol and 10 shots of blast powder.

Kio Knight Personality Traits (d6)

- 1 I look up to my superior in the order and will do almost anything to gain their approval.
- 2 I make sure that those in the ky'vec, especially non-kio, show appropriate deference to me.
- 3 While those of my House will always be dear to me, my new family within the order must take precedence.
- 4 My family spent most of their wealth and what meager influence they had to find a post for me within the order, in the hopes of raising our status. I must be worthy of their sacrifice and bring honor to our House.
- 5 I am the vanguard of kio military might. None may stand before my shining blade.
- 6 I see the other knights in the order laughing in the face of death, while I fight down nausea. Am I truly worthy of being a knight?

Kio Knight Ideals (d6)

- 1 **Protector:** I am the bulwark that defends kio and the society we've built. All our enemies will perish beneath our blades.
- 2 **Honor:** The honor of my order must take precedence, even over that of my House.

Kio Knight Ideals (d6)

- 3 **Combat:** There is no more honorable death than falling while defending my people and nation.
- 4 **Status:** My admittance and actions will propel my House's standing in kio society, leading to more wealth, power, and influence.
- 5 **Fearless:** I am the pinnacle of martial prowess. There are no warriors capable of standing before me. I will smile as I take them apart, singly or in groups.
- 6 **Glory:** My actions will be immortalized in song and heard for generations to come.

Kio Knight Bonds (d6)

- 1 My superior officer's House is a political enemy of my family. It's no wonder she keeps sending me out on more and more dangerous missions.
- 2 I and a group of knights were ordered to eliminate a tribe of gar, but I couldn't bring myself to execute their children. My participation in that massacre has haunted my dreams ever since.
- 3 An elorii from Seremas has challenged a member of my House to a duel to the death over the last ten generations. Regardless of whether she wins or loses, she comes back with each incarnation, but never explains why she has this vendetta against us. She is due to return soon, and I was chosen to face her.
- 4 My elder brother was born with the 'Gift' and is a famed sorcerer. His lording this over me prompted me to join the order in the hopes of accomplishing something that will eclipse his fame.
- 5 Being in the order means traveling throughout all the kio lands. I took that opportunity to avail myself to various young ladies in the three kingdoms and now have three betrothals pending. I believe the Known Lands are due for an extended visit.
- 6 An undir dacoï foretold my death under the standard of my order. I plan to prove the old witch wrong.

Kio Knight Flaws (d6)

- 1 My House's status required that I be given a position within the order, but I fear I am not as brave as those around me and I (and my House) will be disgraced.
- 2 You find it difficult not to regale everyone you meet with tales of your battles, each time making your actions seem more and more glorious!
- 3 The gar are either at your feet or at your throat. Show them no mercy.
- 4 You care more about the invitations to social functions than knighthood.
- 5 You use your status as a knight to unfairly negotiate with those of lesser social standing, especially non-kio.
- 6 The undir are utter savages, little better than gar. The idea that noble kio blood is shed to protect them sickens me.

Feature: Kio Knighthood

Unlike other cultures, acquiring knighthood is not a noble title. Among the kio it is position granted to elite warriors who have gained acceptance into prestigious military orders. Being a knight is a privilege, one that comes with responsibilities and demands. As a kio knight you will find that the common folk of the Western Lands will treat you with admiration. Nobles and the other knights will accord you respect.

When in the Western Lands you can always find lodging and food, granting you a modest lifestyle. This can come from chapter houses, local establishments, or even local nobility friendly to your order.

Sanctorum Trainee

Variant: Graduate of the Academy of Sorcery

Unlike most other cultures, the kio do not shun or fear the arcanum like the superstitious peoples of other lands. Due of the fact that gifted kio cast magic from the Eldritch Arcanum and val'Sungha from the Elder Arcanum, an academy proficient in both traditions was necessary, one which was very different from the way sorcery is taught throughout the rest of the Known Lands. These academies teach kio how to use their skills safely and effectively.

Nationality: League of Princes

Race: Kio or val'Sungha

Social Class: Commoner or high class

Minimum Age: 25

Skill Proficiency: Arcana, Insight

Tool Proficiency: Alchemist's tools or Herbalism kit

Languages: Kion

Literacy: You are literate

Equipment: A book of arcane lore, notebook with quill and ink, a set of common clothes, and a purse containing 10 gp. If you are a noble val'Sungha you also have an adorned flintlock pistol and 10 shots of blast powder.

Feature: Haughty

Unlike most of the other nations of the Known Lands, the kio do not fear the practitioners of the Arcanum. They understand that its power and its utility. When travelling in the League of Princes, you can find sanctuary from Harvesters in almost any location of power as the kio have little love for the Ymandrakes. However, because you were raised in a culture that valued and protected you, you find it difficult to adjust to other nations where sorcerers must hide their powers from the Harvesters and the superstitions of the common folk.

Veteran

Variant: Former Soldier of the Ky'vec

The kio are an ancient people with a military tradition distinct from any other armed force in the Known Lands. The nations of the League of Princes contribute to the common kio army, known as the ky'vec. These are common foot soldiers that must be galvanized into a cohesive fighting force.

Nationality: League of Princes

Race: Human, kio, undir, or val'Sungha

Minimum Age: 18

Skill Proficiency: Athletics and Insight

Tool Proficiency: You are proficient in Vehicles (Land)

Weapon Proficiency: You must choose glaive (if human or undir) or kio sword (if kio or val'Sungha) as your weapon proficiency, as well as crossbows.

Languages: Kion

Literacy: If you are kio or val'Sungha, you are literate. If you are human or undir, you are not literate.

Feature: Soldier of the Sky Kingdoms

You served your term in the ky'vec honorably and gained status among your own local unit. Whenever you are in Capharra, Pajharo, or Bhiharn, the common people will treat you with respect, and even offer food or a place to rest. Other serving members of the ky'vec will also treat you with respect, seeing you as a kindred spirit. If you are not a val'Sungha, you are considered to be Commoner class.

NEW EQUIPMENT

Mundane Armor and Weapons

Armor

Kio Hauberk: The kio hauberk uses many of the same techniques used to forge the famed kio swords. Metal rings are woven into quilted silk shirts with sleeves ending just above the elbow and flaps down the front and the back ending just below the knee. These flaps are commonly split, allowing the wearer to ride a horse. A coif and thick, metal ring-covered leather gloves typically accompany this armor. Like all kio-crafted goods, this armor is rare outside the Western Lands.

Weapons

Kio Sword: Kio swords are fashioned with double edged cutting blades like broadswords but are as fine and maneuverable as a rapier. The blade has a ricasso near the hilt and a fuller down the middle. The metal of the blade is ash gray and has a bluish sheen. Hilts have an ornately decorated grip of some significance to the family who commissioned it. Overall, these blades are light, durable, and flexible.

A few kio master smiths have harbored an ancient blacksmithing technique that uses an alloy of purified steel with infusions of meteoric iron to forge the finest swords in the Known Lands, if not the whole continent of Onara. Some kio swords are hundreds of years old and are passed down as heirlooms, still completely functional despite their age. It is exceedingly rare to see one up for purchase. Usually these blades are only

given away for some great service performed for a noble kio house.

So great is the reputé of certain swords that some kio warriors are recognized simply by the sword they carry. All kio swords are named, and as a matter of tradition, most bearers of kio swords introduce themselves as “name,” bearer of “sword name.”

Non-kio cannot buy kio swords, though they may be found or gifted upon honored individuals. Unless they can prove their right to own the blade, non-kio in possession of such a blade will be thought of as a thief by any kio they encounter.

Magical Equipment

Ancestral Kio Blade

Weapon (any sword), legendary (requires attunement by a kio or val'Sungha)

Description: On the most superficial level, these blades resemble more-elaborate versions of the lesser kio blades common throughout the League of Princes.

However, to say that one of these blades is like one of those swords would be like comparing a work of art to a finger painting. Imbued with ancient magic in their construction, these blades are unnaturally durable and sharp, seemingly immune to damage except by the most powerful of magical forces.

History: When the ancient Sky Kingdom crashed, the surviving pure blood kio carried with them ancient blades of exquisite craftsmanship and durability. Before retiring to their aeries, they gifted the nine surviving blades to the three branches of the val'Sungha family. Over the centuries, two were lost, leaving the val'Sungha of the Swan with their original three, while the other branches retain only two each.



Armor

Name	Armor Class	Strength	Stealth	Weight	Cost	Equivalents
<i>Medium Armor</i>						
Kio Hauberk	15 + Dex Modifier (max 3)	-	-	15 lbs.	1,500 gp	

Weapons

Name	Cost	Damage	Range	Weight	Properties
<i>Martial Melee Weapons</i>					
Kio sword	50 gp	1d8 slashing	Melee	4 lbs.	Finesse, versatile

These ancestral swords are of a different style than the other heirloom kio blades. Some are two-handed swords, while others are similar to long swords and short swords. These ancestral swords are unique as they are made completely from a metal known only to the pure blood kio. The ability to craft more of these weapons is impossible, as there is not enough of the unique metal required to forge them available. The loss of one of these blades would impel the val'Sungha family to do anything in their power to retrieve it. The fact that two of the blades are missing has led to generations of val'Sungha combing the land in search of these fabled blades.

Abilities/Effects: You gain a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic sword. Additionally, this weapon is considered to be made of adamantine for the purposes of bypassing resistances and immunities. When you score a critical strike against a target you deal an addition +4d8 damage of the same type as the sword. If the target is wielding a weapon, you force them to make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. If they fail this roll, you may choose to apply all damage from the attack onto the weapon there are wielding. If that weapon's hit point total is reduced to 0, that item is destroyed. Magical items have resistance against this attack.

Optional Rule: Magical Family Heirloom Kio Swords

Heroes who possess a family heirloom may find that as they advance in level, their blades lack of any magical enchantment. Due to this, Heroes may be tempted to utilize magical weapons they come across more often than their family blade. Below is a possible solution to this dilemma.

Entwined Fates: Your fate is intertwined with that of your blade. You must be and remain attuned to your blade as long as it is in your possession. If you are ever away from your sword for more than one month, the attunement is broken and must be re-established once possession of your blade is regained. Due to this bond, one of the following options may be applied to your family heirloom blade.

Simple Scaling: Upon reaching 3rd level the magic within your blade awakens, granting it a +1 bonus to hit and damage. This bonus increases to +2 upon reaching 7th level and finally increasing to +3 upon reaching 12th level.

Dormant Runes: If you own a copy of *Forged in Magic: Reforged* you may instead choose to utilize runes. Your sword possesses the precision rune and 2 runes of your choice, one of which may be an amalgamated or intertwined rune. These runes remain dormant until you reach 3rd level, at which point your sword's a rare version of the precision rune awakens. Upon reaching 7th level another rune of your choice awakens, this one of the uncommon rarity. Additionally, the rarity of your precision rune increases from rare to very rare. Lastly, at 12th level the final rune awakens, it's rarity is uncommon, and the second rune changes from the uncommon rarity to rare.

Glaive of the Second Son

Weapon (glaive), uncommon (requires attunement)

Description: The blades of these glaives are crafted using the same technique used to kio swords. The weapon is crafted from the finest materials possible and styled to be a worthy alternative to one of the famed blades.

History: Among the kio people, the passing of their hereditary swords from grandparent to child is an ancient tradition. However, like with all families, there are often more than one progeny to whom a parent may gift a weapon. In an effort to stem the fratricide that bedeviled their society in an earlier age, one kio family began commissioning these beautiful glaives to help satisfy the desires of their younger progeny. Unfortunately, however beautiful and powerful this weapon may be, it was not enough to stop the desire to claim the coveted ancestral blade.

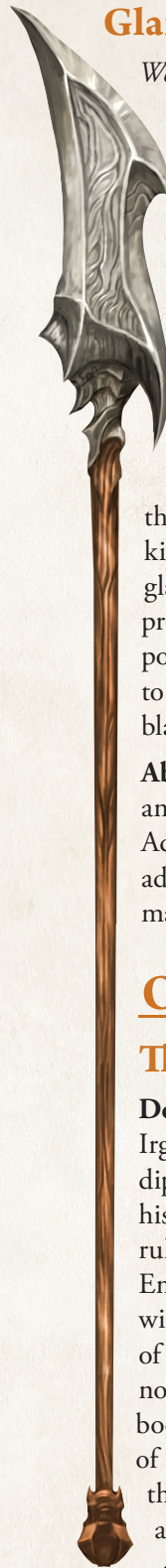
Abilities/Effects: You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. Additionally, the wielder of this weapon has advantage on all Charisma (Persuasion) checks made with citizens of the Western Lands.

Other Equipment

The Art of the Tongue

Description: Penned by the legendary Prince Irgar val'Sungha of Bhiharn, one of the greatest diplomats of the modern age, this book consists of his analysis of many of his dealings with the various rulers of the League of Princes and the Coryani Empire. The book includes many examples of sage wisdom to fellow rulers on how to practice the art of politics, as well as how to keep more powerful nobles at each other's throats for your benefit. This book has seen great circulation across the League of Princes and even the courts of the governors of the Coryani provinces of Annonica, Balantica, and Illonia.

Abilities/Effects: If you own a copy of this book and can read Kion, you gain a +1 bonus to all Charisma (Persuasion) checks made while negotiating with royalty, high officials, and other figures of high political power.



The Book of Harns

Description: This book claims to be the secret history of the Harnen clans, the predominant undir and human groups found in Bhiharn and Eppion. It tells the tale of how they were exiled from their traditional lands along with their 'Blood Lords' by the 'Shadow Men', and how they took to calling the untamed wilderness of what is now the League of Princes home. The book details the clans and rulers of the various Harnic groups, as well as a history of the various blood feuds between them.

Abilities/Effects: If you own a copy of this book and can read Harnen, you gain a +1 bonus to all Intelligence (History) checks relating to the history and culture of the Harns.

The Love of the Three Kingdoms

Description: This book, written in the form of a ballad and tells the story of a torrid love triangle between three prominent val'Sungha nobles from the nations of Bhiharn, Pajharo, and Capharra, all revolving around winning the hand of a highborn lady of Capharra. The work consists of many affairs, betrayals, and back-room politicking and is set in the time before the coming of the Coryani to the League of Princes.

Abilities/Effects: If you own a copy of this book, can read Kion, and are trained in the Linguistics skill, you gain a +2 bonus to all Intelligence (History) checks relating to the history and culture of the kio.

The Wisdom of Yh'gri't

Description: Considered one of the finest and rarest fighting manuals in the kio dueling tradition, copies of this book are eagerly sought out by duelists the world over. The illustrations of the fighting manual form the basis of many styles of kio dueling, but there persist rumors that copies of the original edition grants the owner some mystical understanding of combat. Because of this, the owners of these original copies often find themselves the target of thieves sent by collectors who wish to gain this power for themselves.

Abilities/Effects: If you own a copy of this book and can read Kion, when attacking from surprise you gain advantage on your attack roll.

NEW CUSTOMIZABLE OPTIONS

New Feats

Eagle Warrior

Prerequisite: val'Sungha, proficiency in martial weapons.

Even among the elite militaries there always seems to exist a more prestigious group within that force. In the League of Princes, the main military might is the ky'vec, the standing army of the kio people. Supporting these troops are other elite groups such as the Red Dragoons and various kio knightly orders.

However, within these kio orders are scions of the val'Sungha who demand far more of themselves than other kio warriors.

Not a knightly order per se but rather a family tradition of martial prowess, the scions of the val'Sungha who choose to follow the path of the Eagle Warrior begin training at an early age, around the same time as when others begin their mental training in the psionic arts. Their bodies are hardened in ways that would shock other val families, even those who espouse a martial ethos. Most Eagle Warriors are found in the higher ranks of the kio ky'vec, typically of vyhre'ki rank or higher.

- Your Strength or Constitution score increases by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You have advantage on Constitution saving throws to resist any effect which would grant a level of exhaustion.
- When taking a short rest, you may remove 1 level of exhaustion. You regain the ability to do so after completing a long rest.
- When you are successfully hit with a melee weapon attack you may, as a reaction, attack that creature as long as it is within your reach. You regain the use of this ability after completing a short or long rest.

Kio Knight

Prerequisite: Kio or val'Sungha

You have earned a place among the elite military orders of Kio society. Unlike the knights found in nations like Milandir who are minor nobles in that nation, you are a professional soldier, related to but distinct from the levied armies of the ky'vec. The order you join can be as small as a group of personal bodyguards to one of the great Kio Houses, or even one of the famed orders such as the Order of the Sky Knights or the Order of Yhkri. You are nothing without your order and are an integral part of it, rather than a lone warrior out for their own glory.

- Your Strength, Dexterity, or Charisma scores increase by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You are considered to be High class in the League of Princes.
- You have advantage on all Charisma checks when dealing with kio and val'Sungha citizens of the League of Princes.
- You gain proficiency History and Insight.
- You may take archetypes that require the Kio Knighthood
- If you are not literate, you become literate.

Being Knighted

Beyond taking the Kio Knight feat which represents the Hero seeking out and doing what is required to achieve knighthood during their downtime, Heroes may sometimes find themselves invited to join a knighthood as a reward for some great service or as the unwitting beneficiary of a political move in some complex game which they are not privy. In such cases the Hero has two options: the first is to wait until their class grants them an ability bonus to gain the feat mentioned above, or, with GM permission, switch their current background feature to the Kio Knight Background feature, representing the hero leaving their old life behind.

NEW COMBAT SCHOOLS

Hand, Blade, and Mind

Prerequisites: Must legally own a kio sword

Known dismissively as the 'low' style of kio dueling, unlike most other kio techniques this style is taught outside of the notoriously elitist fighting schools and is available even to lower-status kio. Masters of this style ply the roads of the League of Princes, trading their expertise for the necessities of life. Scandalously to some, some masters of this style are even willing to teach non-kio its secrets, so long as they are the legal owners of a kio blade. After all, no master would sully their House's honor by teaching this style to one unworthy of carrying the blade.

Focusing on calming 'the storm within,' this style is as much of a belief system as it is a fighting one. Practitioners are taught to protect their minds as much as their bodies when in combat. Many duelists of this style use it as sort of a beginner's technique, with many going on to gain entry into the prestigious and exclusive Sova Academy, home of the *Sword that Believes* combat school.

Maneuver and Technique DC: 8 + your Dexterity or Strength modifier + your proficiency bonus. If you choose to increase your Dexterity when joining this combat school, you use your Dexterity modifier for your DC. If you chose to increase your Strength when joining this school, you use your Strength modifier for your DC.

Physical Training: When first joining this school your Strength or Dexterity score increases by 1, to a maximum of 20.

Weapons: Like other kio styles, the Hand, Blade, and Mind style uses the kio sword.

Journeyman

You gain the following maneuvers and techniques when you join this combat school. You can only use these maneuvers and techniques while wielding weapons suited to this combat school.

Pressing Attack (Maneuver): When you successfully hit a creature with a melee attack using your school's preferred weapon, you may spend 1 resolve die as a reaction. Roll the resolve die you spent and add the result to the damage dealt. Your target must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw (their choice) or be moved back 10 feet. You may choose to advance up to 10 feet with your target.

Deadly Strike (Technique): When you take an attack action, you may choose not to add your proficiency bonus to your attack roll. If your attack hits, you deal an amount of bonus damage equal to double your proficiency bonus. This damage is of the same type as your weapon.

Lightning Draw (Technique): As long as you are not surprised, you may draw your weapon as part of making an opportunity attack.

Master

You gain the following maneuvers and techniques when you take the Combat School Training feat a second time and select this school again. You can only use these maneuvers and techniques while wielding weapons suited to this combat school.

Improved Resolve: Your resolve die increases to a d8.

Riposte: When you are missed with a melee attack, as a reaction you can spend 1 resolve die to make an opportunity attack against that creature. Roll the spent resolve die and add its result to both your attack and damage roll.

Force the Opening (Technique): When you score a critical hit with a melee attack, you gain advantage on all subsequent melee attacks against that creature until the end of your turn.

Unfettered Defense: If you are wearing light or no armor you gain a +1 bonus to your Armor Class. You cannot use a shield and still benefit from this technique.

The Sword that Believes

Prerequisites: Kio or val'Sungha, must have at least journeyman rank in either the Way of the High Blade or the Hand, Blade, and Mind Combat School, and must legally own a kio sword

Entrance into the prestigious Sova Academy is the dream of nearly all kio in their youth as only a few are ever accepted to learn the secrets it teaches. To gain admittance, a kio must be accepted as a student by a Keeper of the High Blade, who trains them as part of their own instruction towards status of Master. Students must also present themselves with their own Kio sword to even be considered. The training is long and arduous. Though the price is steep, the rewards are great. This academy is the only school known to teach one of the rarest fighting styles in the Known Lands, the *Sword that Believes*.

Maneuver and Technique DC: 8 + your Dexterity or Strength modifier + your proficiency bonus. If you choose to increase your Dexterity when joining this combat school, you use your Dexterity modifier for your DC. If you chose to increase your Strength when joining this school, you use your Strength modifier for your DC.

Physical Training: When first joining this school your Strength or Dexterity score increases by 1, to a maximum of 20.

Weapons: Kio sword or Ancestral Kio sword

Advanced Combat School

Unlike other combat schools, you cannot choose this combat school unless you have already taken the journeyman level in either the *Way of the High Blade* or the *Hand, Blade, and Mind* combat school. Your maneuver and technique DC remains the same as you chose when you took your prerequisite combat school. As this combat school builds on the listed two combat schools, you may take the Combat School feat 1 additional time for a total of 3 times, taking the *Sword that Believes* 2 times in addition to the 1 prerequisite Combat School. Once the *Sword that Believes* is chosen, you cannot progress further in your original combat school.

Master

You gain the following maneuvers and techniques when you take the Combat School Training feat a second time and select this school. You can only use these maneuvers and techniques while wielding weapons suited to this combat school.

Improved Resolve: Your resolve die increases to a d8.

Moment of Prescience (Maneuver, secret): You may spend 1 resolve die before you make a weapon attack roll to gain advantage on that attack roll.

The Perfect Cut (Technique): When you score a critical strike with a melee attack you deal an additional 1d8 damage of the same damage type as the weapon you are wielding.

Threatening Stance (Technique): Creatures within your reach provoke opportunity attacks from you when they take the Disengage action before leaving your reach.

Grand Master

You gain the following maneuvers and techniques when you take the Combat School Training feat a third time and select this school again. You can only use these maneuvers and techniques while wielding weapons suited to this combat school.

Master's Reputation: For mastering the high school of kio swordsmanship, you are considered to be of High social class in the League of Princes. Your name carries weight and you can get an audience with the local kio noble if need be. Other kio combat schools and chapter houses will offer you a place to stay and treat you to fine meals, granting you a modest lifestyle.

Strike Without Thought (Maneuver, secret): Whenever a creature enters or leaves your reach, even if invisible, as a reaction you may take an opportunity strike. This maneuver can be used even if you are surprised.

Arrow Cutting (Technique): When you are successfully hit by a ranged attack from any ranged weapon except for a flintlock, as a reaction you may reduce the damage you take by 1d10 + your Dexterity modifier + your proficiency bonus. If the damage is reduced to 0 or less, the attack is considered to have missed as you have knocked the projectile out of the air.

The Sword that Believes (Technique, secret): While your melee weapon is drawn, as a bonus action on your turn you gain Blindsight of 20 feet until the beginning of your next turn. You cannot see anything beyond the 20-foot distance, even if you normally could before.

The Way of the High Blade

Prerequisites: Must legally own a kio sword

All kio are taught at least the rudiments in using the kio sword. However, most Houses have only a single heirloom kio blade, which is passed down the generations from one generation to the next. The holders of these rare blades know that they will inevitably be called to defend their honor in duels, and prepare for these combats through rigorous training.

Maneuver and Technique DC: 8 + your Dexterity or Strength modifier + your proficiency bonus. If you choose to increase your Dexterity when joining this combat school, you use your Dexterity modifier for your DC. If you chose to increase your Strength when joining this school, you use your Strength modifier for your DC.

Physical Training: When first joining this school your Strength or Dexterity score increases by 1, to a maximum of 20.

Weapons: Kio sword or Ancestral Kio sword

Journeyman

You gain the following maneuvers and techniques when you join this combat school. You can only use these maneuvers and techniques while wielding weapons suited to this combat school.

Side Step (Maneuver): When you successfully hit with a melee attack you may roll 1 resolve die, adding the result to your weapon damage. After this successful hit, you must move at least 5 feet. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks from the creature you damaged.

Deadly Strike (Technique): When you take the attack action, you may choose not to add your proficiency bonus to your attack roll. If your attack hits, you deal an amount of bonus damage equal to double your proficiency bonus. This damage is of the same type as your weapon.



Duelist's Stare: When fighting against a single creature only as part of a duel, you may force that creature to make a Wisdom saving throw. If they fail this saving throw, you gain a +2 bonus to your Armor Class against that creature for the next 1 minute or until anyone other than you attack them. You regain all expended uses after completing a short or long rest

Master

You gain the following maneuvers and techniques when you take the Combat School Training feat a second time and select this school. You can only use these maneuvers and techniques while wielding weapons suited to this combat school.

Improved Resolve: Your resolve die increases to a d8.

Sundering Strike (Maneuver): When you successfully hit a creature in melee you may spend 1 resolve die to attempt to sunder that creature's weapon instead. That creature must make a Dexterity saving throw. If unsuccessful, all damage that would have been dealt to that creature is applied to their weapon instead. If the amount of damage dealt to the weapon reduces it to 0 hit points, that weapon is destroyed. Magic items gain resistance against all damage dealt by this maneuver.

Fancy Footwork (Technique): Any time you score a critical hit or reduce a creature to 0 hit points with your melee weapon, as a bonus action you can make a Dash or Disengage action.

Force the Opening (Technique): Any time you score a critical hit with your melee weapon you have advantage on all subsequent melee attacks against that creature until the end of your turn.

Sundering Weapons

Normally when attempting to damage or destroy an object, you must specifically target that item's Armor Class in order to do damage. For most wooden items (such as a spear or an axe) the AC would be 14, while iron weapons like swords have an AC of 19. This AC can be modified by the material (see the material's description for more details).

Once hit, an object has a hit points threshold appropriate to it if it is a fragile or resilient item, with most weapons being resilient. Medium-sized weapons are considered to be of Medium size, so an average sword has 18 (4d8) hit points. This hit point threshold can be changed depending on the material it is made of (see the material's description for more details). If the item takes more damage than its hit point threshold, it is destroyed.

MAGIC OF THE KIO

Iron Guard Spells

Cantrips

Chill touch
Empowered strike
Light
Shocking grasp
True strike

1st-Level

Burning hands
Comprehend languages
Detect magic
Expeditious retreat
False life
Feather fall
Jump
Protection from evil and good
Shield
Thunderwave

2nd-Level

Blindness/deafness
Blur
Enhance ability
Enlarge/reduce
Invisibility
Levitate
Magic weapon
Misty step
See invisibility
Slip sideways

3rd-Level

Blink
Counterspell
Dispel magic
Fly
Haste
Vampiric touch

4th-Level

Blight
Dimension door
Fire shield
Greater invisibility
Stoneskin

New Elder Sorcerer Spells

2nd-Level

Deny Breath

3rd-Level

Phase Matter

5th-Level

Augment physique (val'Sungha only)

Mass hallucination (val'Sungha only)

New Eldritch Sorcerer Spells

5th-Level

Augment Physique (Kio only)

Mass hallucination (Kio only)

New Spells

Augment Physique

5th-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

While this spell is active, you gain a +1 bonus to your AC (maximum of 20), Strength Score (maximum of 20), Dexterity score (maximum of 20), and Constitution score (maximum of 20). All of your unarmed attacks are considered to be magical weapons.

At Higher Levels: When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, you can increase the bonuses granted by this spell by an additional +1 (maximum 20).

Deny Breath

2nd-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

You create a small zephyr of air inches away from a creature's mouth that quickly pulls the breath away from the target's lungs. Choose a creature within range. That creature suffers 3d6 bludgeoning damage and must make a Constitution saving throw or become stunned until the end of your next turn.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 2nd.

Mass Hallucination

5th-level enchantment

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self (15-foot radius)

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

All creatures within the radius of this spell have their perceptions of reality twisted, seeing their friends and enemies and enemies as friends. All affected creatures must make a Wisdom saving throw or regard all creatures within this spell's radius other than you as their most hated foe until the end of their next turn. Affected creatures will attack the nearest creature that is not you as its enemy just as it would attack any other creature it truly despised. Affected creatures will never willingly cause damage to you with this attack.

Phase Matter

3rd-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S, M (a shard of meteoric metal worth 25 gp)

Duration: Instantaneous

You attempt to briefly make your target insubstantial. The affected creature must make a Strength saving throw or sink 6 inches into any solid matter that they are standing on but is otherwise unharmed. That creature gains the restrained condition. The affected creature may attempt to extract themselves with a successful Strength saving throw after a number of turns depending upon the material they are trapped in. In dirt and gravel the affected creature may attempt a new saving throw at the end of their next turn. If they are trapped in wood, they must wait 2 turns before attempting a new saving throw, 3 if trapped in stone, and 4 if trapped by metal or similar material.

CODEx OF THREATS

NEW CLASSES

New Fighter Archetype: Talon of Vengeance

The exiled House Tesstra has survived out beyond the frontier, in the harshest environment imaginable thanks to the burning hatred in their hearts and the dream of one day returning to their homeland and tearing it down. Those scions of the House that show great martial aptitude are trained with the steel whip, a weapon considered dishonorable in the hands of a kio of polite society. Yet in the hands of a master, they are said to be able to flay a person with a few flicks of their wrist. Until the time comes for their return, the Talons of Vengeance act as the guardians of House Tesstra, protecting it from all the threats that besiege them.

Race: Kio

Additional Proficiencies: When you gain this archetype you gain proficiency with Survival and the House Tesstra steel whip.

Shards of the Past

When your family was shamed and thrown out of kio society, your family blades were shattered and forbidden to ever reforged them again. In secret, those still loyal to the House collected the shattered portions of your blades and joined you in exile. In the centuries since, the shards were repurposed by adding them to whips, creating the vicious steel whips House Tesstra is feared for.

At 3rd level, you gain access to a House Tesstra steel whip, granted to you by the elders of your family. Wielding this weapon gives you advantage on all Charisma (Intimidate) checks made against kio and val'Sungha. While wielding this weapon, you have advantage when attempting to grapple a creature with the whip.

If your whip is ever lost or destroyed, you cannot receive another and are marked for death among House Tesstra, as an example to others.

Master of the Whip

Beginning at 3rd level you gain 2 resolve die, which are d6's. On your turn you may spend a resolve die on one of the abilities listed below. You continue to gain more resolve die as you advance in level, gaining an additional resolve die at 5th level, 9th level, 13th level, and 17th level. You regain all spent resolve dice after completing a short or long rest.



Crack of Thunder. When you hit with your House Tesstra steel whip you may spend 1 resolve die to force your target to make a Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of your next turn.

Echoing Strike. When you score a critical strike with your House Tesstra steel whip you may spend 1 resolve die to make an additional attack against the same creature.

Whipping Disarm. When you successfully hit a creature with your House Tesstra steel whip you may spend 1 resolve die. Roll the spent die and add its result to the damage dealt. Your target must also make a successful Dexterity saving throw or drop their weapon. If your target is wielding one or more weapons, you choose which one they drop.

All class features which call for a saving throw have a DC of 8 + your Dexterity modifier + your proficiency bonus.

Wicked Snap

Beginning at 7th level, as an action you can snap your whip, creating a crack that causes those around you to become disoriented. All creatures within 30 feet of you must make a Constitution saving throw or be deafened for 1 minute.

Make them Bleed

Beginning at 10th level, you learn to use the blade-shards embedded in your whip like a scalpel. When you successfully hit a creature with your House Tesstra steel whip, that creature must make a Constitution saving throw or reduce their maximum hit points by the weapon damage dealt by this attack. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. If the target is reduced to 0 hit points through the use of this ability and they fail their Constriction saving throw, the target dies.

Coiled Strike

Beginning at 15th level when you take the attack action you may spend your bonus action to impart a quick spin to your whip, gathering up momentum before sending it out in a devastating snap. This attack deals +1d8 force damage and the target is knocked prone. Once you use this feature, you must finish a short or long rest before you can use it again.

From the Past We Bring Death

Beginning at 17th level, when you make an attack on a creature you have grappled using your steel whip, you may end the grapple as a reaction, pulling the blade back with unnatural force, slashing flesh to the bone. Your target must make a Constitution saving throw or suffer 5d10 damage, or half damage upon a successful saving throw. You regain the ability to do so after completing a short or long rest.

New Shaman, Spiritual Patron:

Tchol the Formless

Unlike most patrons, you have not formed a pact with a spirit but with a powerful infernal known as Tchol the Formless. This infernal lord survived banishment with the rest of its kind during the Time of Terror, making its home within the chaotic land of Uggur. The being delights in the torture of other creatures, especially those who believe themselves to be righteous or moral. It particularly enjoys corrupting the kio, for transgressions known only to itself.

Tchol is not a jealous patron and allows the witches to bargain with spirits as long as by doing so further pollutes their essence. As such, Tchol has acquired alliances with many fel beings that shamans within Uggur or the League of Princes hesitate to deal with due to their ill temper or nature.

Corrupt the Innocent (Taboo): You go to extremes to defile creatures with the infernal taint of Tchol. Tchol delights in watching its victims become unclean, and then live with the knowledge that they survive only through its blessings. As such, the Witches of Tchol regularly act as healers among the downtrodden of society. They especially delight in cursing the leaders or nobles of a society, and then offer their aid to

heal the disease or curse by willingly accepting the corruption of Tchol to remove this curse.

Any attempt to avoid corrupting the innocent or defiling society angers Tchol, and it may demand a sacrifice in recompense. In order to appease the Formless One, you must sacrifice at least 2 innocent intelligent creatures in Tchol's name and consume their blood.

Race Restrictions

At this time only kio of House Tesstra may become a Witch of Tchol

Additional Spells

Tchol offers to teach you the following spells. These spells are added to your list of possible spells to learn as you advance in level.

Tchol Spells

Spell Level	Spells
1st	<i>Hellish rebuke</i>
3rd	<i>Spirit guardians</i>
5th	<i>Cloud kill</i>
7th	<i>Simulacrum</i>
9th	<i>True polymorph</i>

Formlessness

You gain the ability to cast *disguise self* at will.

New Shaman Spiritual Path:

Witches of Tchol

Not all of House Tesstra focused on martial prowess to survive in exile. Some with little talent for the whip or blade debased themselves by trucking with lesser powers. Called the Witches of Tchol by the elder sorcerers of the House, these kio made a pact with an infernal fiend known as Tchol the Formless, who survived the Time of Terrors and made a demesne on the outskirts of Uggur. Tchol delighted in further corrupting the kio, which it viewed as a desecration of the highest caliber.

Tchol is not a jealous patron and allows the witches to bargain with other lesser spirits as long as by doing so further pollutes their brilliant essence. These spirits are eager to form pacts with the witches, having been shunned by the kio for so long that they delight in forging bonds with these unfortunate members of that race. The leaders of House Tesstra allow these wretches to do so, as long as their bargains contribute to their survival and eventually, the destruction of the val'Sungha and all of kio society.

Patron Restriction

You must have chosen Tchol the Formless as your spiritual patron

Race Restrictions

Currently, only kio of House Tesstra may become Witches of Tchol.

Expanded Spell List

As a Witch of Tchol, you choose from an expanded list of spells when you learn a shaman spell. The following spells are added to the shaman spell list for you.

Witches of Tchol Expanded Spells

Spell Level	Spells
1 st	<i>Bane</i>
2 nd	<i>Blindness/deafness</i>
3 rd	<i>Stinking cloud</i>
4 th	<i>Black tentacles</i>
5 th	<i>Dominate person</i>

Corrupt the Innocent

Beginning at 3rd level, you have the ability to heal those of a variety of ailments. . . for a price. You gain a pool of healing power that replenishes when you finish a long rest. With that pool, you can restore a total number of hit points equal to your shaman level x3.

As an action, you can touch a creature and draw power from the pool to restore a number of hit points to that creature, up to the maximum amount remaining in your pool. Alternatively, you can expend 5 hit points from your pool to cure the target of 1 disease or neutralize 1 poison affecting it. You can cure multiple diseases and neutralize multiple poisons with a single use of this ability, spending hit points separately for each one.

However, any creature you heal through this method becomes corrupted by the nature of Tchol. That creature has disadvantage on all saving throws against powers of Tchol or a Witch of Tchol, as well as on all Charisma-based skill checks except for Intimidation as you give off an aura of corruption. This curse lasts for a number of months equal to your shaman level.

Arcane Aura

Beginning at 6th level, the magic being channelled by a Witch of Tchol begins to affect those around them. As an action, all creatures within 30 feet of you must make a Wisdom Saving throw against your Spellcasting DC. If unsuccessful, that creature drops whatever they are holding and becomes frightened for a number of rounds equal to your Charisma modifier. Once you use this feature, you must finish a short or long rest before you can use it again.

Spiritual Allies

Beginning at 10th level you may call upon one of the fel spirits that have allied themselves with Tchol. You may call forth one of these unclean spirits to grant you a boon. You may cast any single 5th level or lower spell on the Elder Sorcerer, Eldritch Sorcerer, or Shaman spell list at your spell slot level, without the expenditure of a spell slot. Once you use this feature, you must finish a long rest before you can use it again.

Channel the Formless One

Beginning at 14th level, you can force yourself to possess a single creature like your fiend patron. You may attempt to possess a living creature within 100 feet. That creature must make a Charisma saving throw against your spellcasting DC or be possessed. You enter the body of the possessed creature, who becomes incapacitated and loses control of its body. You now control the body, but the possessed creature retains its awareness. While possessing a creature, you cannot be directly affected by any attack, spell, or other effects that does not specifically attack possessing creatures. This possession lasts for a number of hours equal to your Charisma modifier, when the body you are possessing is reduced to 0 hit points, through an effect such as *dispel evil and good* which specifically target infernals, or by your own choice as a bonus action. When the possession ends, your soul returns to your physical form, wherever it was when you began the possession.

Once you use this feature, you must finish a long rest before you can use it again.

NEW BACKGROUND

Exile/Expatriate

Variant: Scion of House Tesstra

Exiled due to the heinous crimes perpetrated by their ancestors, the scions of House Tesstra were forced to survive in the wilds of Uggur and beyond, with nothing more than their wits. This harsh lifestyle has made them a cold and harsh people, fueled by the hatred and bitterness they are fed growing up about the people who betrayed them. Their hearts are so filled with malice and contempt for their distant kio brethren that they ritually scar their faces with acid, as was done to their forefathers when they were banished from the Western Lands, irreparable marring their beautiful features. As a coming of age ceremony, their faces are left a ruin, which they cover in bandages and wear as a mark of honor.

The scions of House Tesstra can trace their lineage back to the patriarch of the family, Rasselijj Tesstra, and are the only ones permitted to wield the House Tesstra steel whip, a whip embedded with the shards of their ancestral kio sword. All the other members of this House are also trained the steel whip, but the ones they use are of the mundane type.

The kio of House Tesstra live only for the day when their exile ends, and they return to utterly destroy the rest of their people, especially the val'Sungha, to whom they reserve their blackest spite.

Nationality: Formerly Capharra, currently somewhere in Uggur

Race: Kio

Social Class: Commoner class but are considered criminals in the League of Princes and are killed on sight if discovered.

Minimum Age: 20

Skill Proficiency: Deception, Intimidate, and Stealth

Tool Proficiency: You are proficient in poisoners kits.

Weapon Proficiency: You are proficient in steel whips.

Languages: Garish, Kion

Literacy: You are literate.

Scion of House Tesstra Personality Traits (d6)

- 1 You have a very short temper, exploding for the least provocation.
- 2 You see everyone around you as either a tool or a threat. Your House means everything to you. It protected you when you were young and now needs you to protect it.
- 3 Hearing the screams of your victims is the only salve you crave.
- 4 Your heart has no room for love, only hate lies within it.
- 5 You are able to switch allegiances quickly, when doing so increases your chance for survival.
- 6

Scion of House Tesstra Ideals (d6)

- 1 **Relentless:** When your mind is set on a task, you won't stop until you accomplish it.
- 2 **Protector:** House Tesstra has survived in the wilderness by relying on one another. You are capable of doing anything to protect your House.
- 3 **Cunning:** Battles are not won through force of arms alone. Guile and cunning are indispensable to live another day.
- 4 **Savage:** Courtier skills are useless in the wilds of Uggur. One must become a savage to survive among savages.
- 5 **Versatile:** The dangers of Uggur require one to adapt quickly. Versatility in the wild is the key to survival.
- 6 **Quick Thinker:** There is no time to ponder and weigh options when danger can spring forth at any moment. Thought and action must be one to survive the dangers of Uggur.

Scion of House Tesstra Bonds (d6)

- 1 I was befriended by a tribe of gar and gained their trust. They can be a potent weapon when properly aimed at the heart of the kio.
- 2 The ruins of the crashed sky kingdom lie deep in Uggur territory, but the danger in reaching it would be worth it if I could find some weapon that could be used against the val'Sungha.
- 3 I once saw a kio and was filled with wonder at the sight of her. Is this love I feel? I must win him/her over.
- 4 The agony of my facial scarring flares sometimes and can only be soothed by a plant that grows in a grove sacred to the gar and some bestial creature they worship as a god.
- 5 [Tchol Witch] The gar have powerful spirits they call upon. I must wrest the secret of how to call upon them, even if I must kill every last gar in Uggur to do so.
- 6 [Tchol Witch] My master Tchol has tasked us with capturing elorii for him for a dark ritual.

Scion of House Tesstra Flaws (d6)

- 1 The sound of a certain predator fills me with such terror that I freeze when I hear it.
- 2 I don't believe whole heartedly in the hate-filled obsession others in the House feel towards kio society. We would do better to found a new civilization free from that overwhelming hatred.
- 3 I can't be as merciless as others of the House and have allowed certain captives to escape rather than watch them tortured to death.
- 4 I desire more than my fair share and regularly steal food and drink from the House's stores.
- 5 I have made enemies within my family, as my siblings never fail to heap humiliation and pain at every opportunity. I will kill them, even if it means weakening House Tesstra.
- 6 I lie and fabricate stories to manipulate and turn members of the House against one another. I don't do this for material gain, but because it brings me satisfaction to prove that I am smarter than everyone else.

Feature: Forged in Hate

Your entire family are outsiders and you have been raised on hate against the kio and their val'Sungha rulers. You are able to seek out and find those who have been wronged, hate, or otherwise have some sort of axe to grind against the kio. Your ability to fan the flames of hatred burning in their hearts allows you to gain allies in your quest to topple the val'Sungha and remake kio society, with House Tesstra at its pinnacle.

Weapons

Name	Cost	Damage	Range	Weight	Properties
<i>Martial Melee Weapons</i>					
House Tesstra Steel Whip	50 gp	1d8 slashing	Melee	5 lbs.	Finesse, light, reach, special



NEW EQUIPMENT

Weapons

House Tesstra Steel Whip: Like most steel whips, this whip is wrapped with metal rings or bolts to add extra damage. Unlike other whips of its kind, the metal components of this whip are made from the shards of the former kio blades of the family that were shattered when the family was cast out of kio society. The metal of these blades is much lighter than the normal steel of a steel whip, making these weapons faster than a standard one.

When successfully attacking a Medium or Small sized humanoid you may use a bonus action to initiate a grapple with that creature. If you successfully grapple your target, you may move it adjacent to yourself. While grappling a creature with your House Tesstra steel whip, you may not make any other attack with the whip and must hold it in at least 1 hand.

KIO BESTIARY

Giant Eagle

Large beast

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 26 (4d10+4)

Speed 10 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16	17	13	6	14	10
(+3)	(+3)	(+1)	(-2)	(+2)	(+0)

Skills Perception +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages None

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Keen Sight. A giant eagle has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. A giant eagle makes 2 attacks, 1 with its beak and 1 with its talons.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Talons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Milandisian Griffin

Large beast

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 30 (4d10+8)

Speed 30 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18	12	15	4	10	7
(+4)	(+1)	(+2)	(-3)	(+0)	(-2)

Skills Perception +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages None

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Keen Sight. A Milandisian griffin has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. A Milandisian griffin makes 2 attacks, 1 with its beak and 1 with its claws.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage.



Talon of Vengeance

Medium humanoid (kio)

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)

Hit Points 78 (13d8+24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18	14	17	10	10	14
(+4)	(+2)	(+3)	(+0)	(+0)	(+2)

Skills Athletics +6, Intimidation +4, Perception +2, Survival +4

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Garish, Kion, Undir

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Make them bleed. When a Talon of Vengeance successfully hits an enemy with their House Tesstra steel whip, they can spend their bonus action to force that target to make a Constitution saving throw. If they fail this roll, their maximum hit points are reduced by the weapon damage dealt by this attack. This reduction lasts until the affected creature finishes a long rest. A creature dies if their maximum hit points is ever reduced to 0.

Wicked snap. As an action you can snap your whip around, forcing all creatures within a 30-ft. radius to make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be deafened for 1 minute.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. A Talon of Vengeance makes 2 melee weapon attacks.

House Tesstra Steel Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage. When successfully attacking a Medium or Small sized humanoid you may use a bonus action to initiate a grapple with that creature. If you successfully grapple your target, you may move it adjacent to yourself. While grappling a creature with your House Tesstra steel whip you may not attack with it and hold it in at least 1 hand.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Witch of Tchol

Medium humanoid (kio)

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)

Hit Points 78 (13d8+24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10	14	15	12	12	18
(+2)	(+2)	(+2)	(+1)	(+1)	(+4)

Skills Arcana +4, Deception +7, Persuasion +7, Survival +4

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Garish, Kion, Undir

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Arcane aura. As an action all creatures within 30 feet of the Witch of Tchol must make a Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 4 rounds. The Witch of Tchol must finish a short or long rest before they can use this power again.

Corrupt the innocent. As an action, the Witch of Tchol can touch a creature and draw power from the pool to restore up to 36 hit points to that creature. Alternatively, you can expend 5 hit points from your pool to cure the target of 1 disease or neutralize 1 poison affecting it. You can cure multiple diseases and neutralize multiple poisons with a single use of this ability, spending hit points separately for each one.

However, any creature you heal through this method becomes corrupted by the nature of Tchol. That creature has disadvantage on all saving throws against powers of Tchol or a Witch of Tchol, as well as on all Charisma-based skill checks except for Intimidation as you give off an aura of corruption. This curse lasts for a number of days equal to your shaman level

Innate spellcasting. The Witch of Tchol's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. They can innately cast the following spells (spell save DC 15):

At will: *disguise self*

1/day: any spell of 5th level or lower from the Elder Sorcerer Eldritch Sorcerer, or Shaman spell list

Spellcasting. The Witch of Tchol is a 12th level spellcaster. Their spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit). They regain their expended spell slots when they finish a short or long rest. The Witch of Tchol knows the following spells:

Cantrips (at will): *elemental bolt, guidance, resistance, spiritcraft*

1st-5th level (3 5th-level spell slots): *bane, black tentacles, blindness/deafness, cloud kill, dispel magic, dominate person, enemy of my enemy, hellish rebuke, spirit guardian, stinking cloud*

ACTIONS

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

APPENDIX I

GEOGRAPHY, NATIONS AND PLACES OF NOTE IN THE LEAGUE OF PRINCES

Amaryllis River

The Amaryllis River only flows through kio lands near its mouth, where it marks the northern Sword Fens. Only the Lhauveris River is more critical to kio trade. Beyond Bhiharn the Amaryllis travels through Chauni lands, and into the Corlathian Mountains farther north. In this way, Bhiharn gains through the Chauni trade goods from as far away as the Blessed Lands and Khitani. The river is not without its perils. The Chauni call the land to the east of the river Dar Zhan Vor, a forbidden place of mystery and danger.

Bhiharn, the Principality of

Bhiharn is the northern most territory of the kio, consisting of lowlands to the Amaryllis River in the north, which rise to meet the cliffs of Eppion to the south. The state's population consist of kio, a large number undir concentrated in the Sword Fens area, and a human population of mixed ethnicities. The traditional homeland of the val'Sungha branch of the House of the Raven, the principality has been ruled by Irgar val'Sungha for many decades.

The capital, Liveh, which means "fiery aura" in Kion, was named after the val progenitor of this branch of the val'Sungha family, Livel val'Borda. Unique to any of the kio states is the Free City of Blackwand, the only independent city-state in the Western Lands. The people of the state of Bhiharn state are known as Harns.

Blackwand, the Free City of

Located in the Principality of Bhiharn, Blackwand is a fortified port town founded over five-hundred years ago by a group of adventurers and mercenaries that were hired by a prosperous undir merchant to clear the northern portion of the Sword Fens and Sarkhawood Forest of the numerous gar, monstrosities, and abominations that laired there. Over the years, a town sprang up around the fort built by the original adventurers and eventually grew into a city inhabited primarily by undir and people from across the Known Lands, looking for a place to make their fortune or start their lives over.

Capharra, the Kingdom of

The largest most powerful of the kio states, and to which both Pajharo and Bhiharn owe fealty. The Capharran lands are filled with gentle rolling hills and large flat expanses where primordial forests once stood but are now farm lands. Ruled by King Geonay of the Swan, the nation's citizenry is made up of kio and undir, with a small number of other races.

It's capital, Whon, is fairly cosmopolitan considering its location at the far edge of the Known Lands. The city has been called an 'architect's dream' with its fluted towers, graceful arches, broad avenues, frescos adorned walls, and marble statuary adorning every square. The people of this nation are known as Capharrans.

Capharran Lowlands

Once Capharra was covered by the forest of Entaris, but over the centuries it was cleared to create arable farmland by first the undir and then by the kio. This far south the flooding of the Lhauveris, if not gentle, is at least not devastating, and the farms of the broad alluvial plain grow soy, yams, rice, various fruits, and huj, a leafy stalk plant that produces a prodigious amount of yam-like fruit. Attempts to plant huj elsewhere have met with only limited success, as it seems there is something in the Capharran soil or climate vital to its abundance. As the most inland of the kio nations, Capharra is relatively untroubled by raiders from Uggur. However, its proximity to Eppion and the Gulf of Coryan means it is on the forefront of any conflict with the Coryani, as King Geonay learned during the recent struggles.



Chimera Falls

Chimera Falls is the highest waterfall in the Western Lands, tumbling from the highlands of Pajharo to the lowlands of Bhiharn. The falls get their name from the hybrid beasts that once lurked there. Stories of their origin vary. In some tales they are natural monsters, in others the result of a curse or a god's disfavor, and in still others they are the product of a sorcerer's twisted experiments. Whatever the case, most now believe them extinct, though some have claimed to have glimpsed them within the many caves that riddle the cliffs.

Eppion, the Satrapy of

Once known as the location of an ancient undir republic known as Rajhau, the nation of Eppion has a sinister reputation due to its rulers, the val'Baucisz, scions of Sarish and infamous for their black sorceries and blood magic. Eppion is a territory of the Coryani Empire, who use it as a toe hold in the Western Lands, an area they see as a future province, abundant with resources to fuel their empire.

The port city of Metra is the capital, and has a most foreign feel, from the architecture of the buildings, and the clothing worn to the smells and sounds, makes it seem as if one were in the middle of the Coryani Empire. Eppion is ruled by a Coryani appointed Satrap and aided by a council of val'Baucisz nobles. The current satrap is Sulumel Kaipra, a former undir privateer backed by Ladioce V val'Baucisz, the current patriarch of the family.

Eppion is the only area in the Western Lands where, like in the Empire, slavery is legal. The undir who live in the state are not called as such but are bound to the lands they live on and are subject to the whim of their val'Baucisz overlords. Due to this practice, Eppion is not formerly a part of the League of Princes.

Fort Tyroch

Situated on a cliff just with the shady bowers of the Luphyx Forest, stands a fortification built upon the ruins of an ancient fort. Who originally built the fort is a matter of scholarly debate, but it now stands as the first line of defense against encroachments by the gar, giant-kin, and other murderous humanoids and creatures that would prey upon the kio.

Fort Tyroch is the center of operation for the Red Dragoons, the elite cavalry and fighting order, commanded by Duke Tryhkon when his political duties in Grakha permit. The 'Red Duke', as he's called, enjoys hunting down gar, exterminating them like vermin. His penchant for spending time with the Dragoons means that his duties governing Pajharo are suffering from his inattention. A situation certain members of the Royal Court of Pajharo are taking advantage of in pursuit of their own agendas.

Ghanymis River

The Ghanymis marks the border between Lhyllifel and Pajharo, and also serves to separate the northern highlands from the fertile southern plains. The precise source of this river is currently unknown but is believed to originate from a spur of the Lhauzyrs in Uggur. The Jharks constructed Fort Lahgana on the banks of the river to defend against the gar of Uggur's frequent raids by water. The undir plying the river have accused Jhark kio of using the fort to slow trade from Lhyllifel to their advantage, but thus far their complaints have fallen on deaf ears.

Gulf of Coryan

The Gulf of Coryan separates the League of Princes from the mighty Coryani Empire, flowing from the inland Sea of Coryan to the Lauriol Sea. Unfortunately for the kio nations, the bulk of the shoreline is dominated by Eppion and Mhyrcia. Because of this, the few places where the kio nations reach the Gulf are vital. Capharra touches the gulf at two points, and both contain major port cities. Bhiharn has an entire coastline, but this is rendered useless by the treacherous Sword Fens, leaving only a small port city on the far south of the Quebho delta safe for kio ships.

Jhark Highlands

Though rugged and treacherous, the highlands of Pajharo are also beautiful, fed by the many rivers that flow down from the Lhauzyr Mountains. Copses of trees spring up here and there, and the open land blooms with heather and other flowers. The beauty of the highlands belies its treachery. It is not uncommon for creatures from the Lhauzyrs to wander into Pajharo, and the gar tribes of Uggur are a constant threat. The borders of the Jhark Highlands are dotted with fortresses, and ruins of older fortifications, a testament to the ongoing vigilance required to live in this land.

Lake Dynurech

The crescent-shaped Lake Dynurech is small, but significant, for it carved out the cliffs upon which Grakha, capital of Pajharo, now sits. The waters are crystal-clear, and it is one of the most beautiful sights in the Western Lands. More practically, the cliffs surrounding the lake are nearly impossible to scale without ropes dropped from the city above, leaving Grakha well-defended on two sides. Legend has it the lake was much smaller in the Shadowed Age, but a particularly violent spring flood caused some of the cliffs to tumble into the waters below, taking a mighty undir settlement with it. Many believe undir riches remain at the bottom of the lake, but thus far divers have found merely potsherds and other trinkets valuable only to archaeologists.

Lake Ghalka

Lake Ghalka is the sister-lake of Yibho, fed by a small branch of the Lhauveris. It has no natural outlet and sits on the other side of a hill with the Capharran capital of Whon between them. The Capharrans have carved canals linking Yibho and Ghalka, allowing rapid movement through the city and irrigation of the surrounding river valleys. Unlike its counterpart, Lake Ghalka does not have an abundance of serpents, but it also does not have as many fish. Its water is brackish, and a series of locks and devices are used to ensure the canals do not contaminate Lake Yibho's fresh water.

Lake Yibho

Lake Yibho lies within Capharra, but its boundaries mark the borders of Pajharo to the north and Lhyllifel to the west. The Lhauveris and Ghanymis rivers feed it, and the southern Lhauveris is its outlet. The river has rich fishing, which serves the city of Whon on its banks, but it also has an abundance of river serpents, creating a hazard. Legend has it that a batrachian creature of immense power dwells in the depths of the lake, and indeed Yibho means "frog god" in Kion. There is a secret cult to Yibho in Whon, and King Geonay wishes to root it out and destroy what he calls "an infernal presence nested in our bosom".

Lhauveris River

The Lhauveris River is the primary waterway through kio lands, beginning in the Lhauzyr Mountains and traveling through Pajharo, Capharra, and Entaris before emptying into the Gulf of Coryan. Traditionally it was the border between Capharra and Lhyllifel, though that is in dispute. The river is the primary trade route in the League of Princes and at any given time is covered by colorful undir boats. It is also a source of conflict, since both Lhyllifel and Capharra have, on occasion, imposed tolls and tariffs on merchants using the river, causing resentment among other nations and the undir. The spring floods of the Lhauveris can be particularly violent to the north, though Lake Yibho mitigates this violence to the south, creating an alluvial plain that makes Capharra the most fertile land in the League of Princes.

Lhauzyr Mountains

Though no part of the Lhauzyr Mountains falls within the borders of the kio nations, their presence is a constant concern. The absence of the dwarves of Tir Betoq has led to an influx of fel beasts that often cross into the Jhark highlands. Some have suggested sending a permanent garrison into the mountains to protect the northern border, but King Geonay insists the kio need more time to recover from the recent conflict with the Coryani, and Duke Tryhkon is more interested in rooting out gar from Uggur.

Lhyllifel

Geographically similar to Capharra, Lhyllifel enjoys wide open grassy plains, deep forests, and cultivated parcels of lands where the inhabitants, almost exclusively undir, live a good life, free from strife but for the occasional raid from nearby Uggur. Once known as Lhy-lak-fel, the warlike culture of these undir have been tempered, some say neutered, by their elorii guardians since the War of Our Children centuries in the past. These undir, while are still able to defend themselves, no longer need to train soldiers to protect their territory and interests.

Lhyllifel has only one true city, the capital city of Lhosk, with the rest of the undir living in small towns and villages dotting the nation. Compared to the other members of the League of Princes, Lhyllifel is a poor nation, but the people here laugh at that, saying that they live richer lives than anyone else in the Known Lands. They have so much fish in the lakes and rivers, and game to hunt that their bellies are always full, the women are beautiful and wise, and the men are strong and kind. They are not chained to the goal of earning coin, but instead live for themselves.

Foreigners, especially those from the Coryani Empire, believe that the Lhyllifens, as the undir here are called, practice some kind of elemental worship, their spiritual well-being corrupted by their close relations with the elorii. In reality, the undir here venerate the spirits of the Ulumai, just like their brethren across the Western Lands. Their daco once held King Crow higher than the rest of the spirits, but his altars and rituals to contact the spirit of war and vengeance were all destroyed or hidden away, with all knowledge of how to contact him lost.

Luphyx Forest

The Luphyx Forest marks the northern border of Pajharo west of the Quebho River. Not only are the trees here a good source of hardwoods, but the rising foothills of the Lhauzyr Mountains contain rich veins of both precious and common metals, as well as gems. However, the forest stretches beyond Pajharo's boundaries, and those who seek riches do so at significant risk. Dangerous beasts and creatures plague the Luphyx, but this might not be as great a threat were it not for the number of gar in the area. It seems a full tribe has settled in the forest and are resisting all efforts to expel them. Fort Tyroch was built in the shadow of the forest to protect Pajharo, but the Jharks have little power within the woods themselves. Duke Tryhkon val'Sungha does not believe that the tribe inhabits the forest, as none of his expeditions have discovered permanent settlements. Instead, he reasons there must be a secret tunnel to Uggur somewhere in the forested foothills, allowing gar raiding parties to sneak past the border. Finding this tunnel was his obsession when he was studying at Geonay's knee, and even as Duke, he remains convinced it exists.

Mhrycia (The Shadow Towns)

Mhrycia is a unique political entity, being neither a state or territory. Until recently the undir of Lhyllifel laid claim to the area as an extension of their lands. The cool glades and coves, hidden beneath the eaves and thick foliage would lead one to conclude that the region is uninhabited. But concealed beneath the lush flora are some of the richest cities in the Known Lands. Known as the Shadow Towns, these settlements are a merchant's paradise, with every type of goods and merchandise found in the Known Lands and beyond.

Sadly, recent events have found the area occupied by the Coryani, who now control Mhrycia through their client-kings, the val'Baucisz of Eppion. For their part, the Speculator-Kings and the numerous merchants just want to get on with their businesses, but many fear that the avaricious Coryani will attempt to drain even the limitless wealth of the Shadow Towns.

Mhrycia consists of five individual settlements, each distinctive to one another. Eejho prizes its lauded Guild Houses that produce some of the most sought after finished goods in the Known Lands. It also has the oldest schools of law and instruction in the League, turning out some of the finest and sharpest minds, second only to the universities of Altheria.

Mhun sits in the center of large agricultural groves and orchards, producing succulent fruits and tasty vegetables sought the continent over. Besides exporting foodstuffs, Mhun also exports other raw materials, such as rubber and hemp. The people of Mhun also excel in crafting jewelry.

The capital of Mhrycia and the grandest of all the Shadow Towns, Mhry sits in a web of canals and other waterways, elegantly fashioned to seem as if the city were floating on the water. Being the wealthiest of the Shadow Towns, Mhry likes to show off its riches with ostentatious displays, such as gold-plated lanterns lighting the docks, intricate stained glass panes in every window, and statuary to rival those in Capharra and Grand Coryan. Here are located the greatest collection of master craftsmen and artisans of every stripe and discipline, creating exquisite works of art and finished good of incomparable workmanship.

Known as the City of Birds for the many different types of avians, from colorful parrots to bleach-white seagulls, that fly through and about the city, Qhoon is a stately town. The town itself is built around a large harbor, its interlocking walls bounding the enormous docks on both sides, with a cupola made of the lush flora of the region. Second only to Mhry in the amount of exports it transports through their fleet of ships, Qhoon prefers not to exhibit its considerable wealth through vulgar displays.

Sequestered behind a series of canals and channel locks is Whalka, the most gregarious and friendly of the Shadow Towns. Infamous for its grandiose fetes and its luxurious

inns, Whalka is also known for its manufacturing of fine clothing and textiles, even boasting silk bolts from far-off Khitan.

Mount Djuar

While not the highest peak in the Lhauzyr Mountains, Mount Djuar is separated from its neighbors and thus easily recognizable. It rises from the Luphyx Forest just beyond the western border of Pajharo, and according to legend is where the kio first crashed to earth. If the ruins of a kio sky kingdom are there, they remain lost, and in recent years hordes of mountain creatures have made Djuar their nesting grounds. Because of this danger, King Geonay has officially requested that kio no longer send expeditions to the mountain, but many eager kio adventurers continue to search for mysterious Yhriwhon. Most return empty-handed. Many never return at all.

Pajharo, the Duchy of

A stark contrast to Capharra, Pajharo is mostly uncultivated wilderness, with pristine forests untouched by human hands. Unlike the lowlands of its neighbor to the south, parts of Pajharo sits on rocky highlands that gently drop in height the further north one travels.

The capital city, Grakha, sits atop high cliffs at the mouth of a river valley. Overlooking the crystal-clear waters of Lake Dynurech. Grakha's buildings and infrastructure are constructed using the dark granite mined from the Lhauzyr Mountains, with large, crenellated roofs leading many to refer to it as the City of Towers.

The people of the duchy are called Jharks, a hardy and rugged breed of kio and undir who live in less civilized conditions than their southern cousins. The duchy is ruled by Duke Tryhkon val'Sungha of the House of the Eagle and his more militant nature fits well with those he governs. All Jharks are required to serve a minimum of four years in the ky'vec when they come of age.

Quebho River

The Quebho begins in the Lhauzyr Mountains and flows east to the Gulf of Coryan. Along the way it marks the southern border of Bhiharn, separating it both from Pajharo and Eppion, save for a spur of Pajharo that extends north of the river to the west of the magnificent Chimera Falls. After the falls, the river valley briefly marks the fertile and pleasant western portion of Bhiharn, but further east the river splits into the waterways of the notorious Sword Fens. Because of the dangers of the Sword Fens, the southern delta of the Quebho is the only place considered safe for Harnish ships to embark upon the Gulf of Coryan, and even here shipping is always in danger of pirate and rebel raids.

Sarkhawood

The Sarkhawood is the darkest part of the Sword Fens, where water-rooted mangrove trees twist into a thicket that hinders movement and muffles the light. Civilized beings dare not enter, though Blackwand sits just beyond its northern edge. The undir tell stories of swamp witches, undead cabals, and abominations from the dawn of time. Others whisper of a free undir settlement, slaughtering all trespassers and living according to the old ways untainted by the kio or other foreigners. Whatever the case, entire companies of soldiers have vanished in the Sarkhawood, and those few who survive their journey into the forest were either fortunate enough to find little of note or were driven half-mad by the experience.

Suhwé Forest

The Quebho River separates the Suhwé and Luphyx forests, with the Suhwé spreading north. The trees here are a mix of hardwoods and softwoods, and though there are fewer mineral bounties, the wealth of lumber is enough for Pajharo to defend its claim to the forest jealously. Like the Luphyx, the Suhwé is dangerous and infested with foul and unnatural creatures. Besides, the proximity of Chauni lands makes it a tempting place for bandits to stage raids into Pajharo and Bhiharn. The heart of the forest is mostly unexplored. It is commonly believed to house a nest of creatures from the Lhauzyr Mountains, but despite calls to exterminate them, Duke Tryhkon has refused to send his Red Dragoons into the thickest part of the forest, where even a small force might defeat them in ambush. An adventurer from Blackwand claimed to have entered the heart of the forest and survived. He says he saw a monument made of black stone, and a fiendish creature leading a cult of twisted humanoids in worship. Most agree that his story is a fabrication.

Sword Fens

The Sword Fens are a network of waterways and salt marsh that stretch from the Amaryllis River in the north all the way to Mhyrcia in the south, though the title more strictly applies to the brackish land north of the Quebho River along the narrowest part of the Gulf of Coryan. Though technically under the rule of Bhiharn, the uncertain terrain, dense undergrowth, and twisting waterways make the Sword Fens all but ungovernable. The Fens are home to all manner of lawless beings, including undir rebels, heretical cults, pirates, and the Free City of Blackwand, with many vile beasts and creatures besides. The undir settlements within the Fens stretch back to the Shadowed Age. The undir of the Fens did not welcome the kio as did the undir elsewhere, but instead resisted them, and eventually fell to kio swords. Legend has it the curses spoken by dying dacois are the reason the kio have never been able to control the area. Most kio scoff at this, pointing out that swamplands are notoriously difficult to govern whether cursed or not.

Tir Betoq, the Dwarven Enclave of

For over a millennium, the Tir Betoqi dwarves inhabited their underground enclave located deep in the Lhauzyr Mountain range, protecting the people of the Western Lands from the terrors of Uggur and beyond. Though their relations with the kio, especially the pure blood kio, were cool at the best of times, the dwarves never wavered from their self-imposed duty and when the infernal invasion of the Time of Terror occurred, they traveled out of their mountain fastness to help turn the tide of the battle in the kio and undir's favor.

When the Wall of the Gods, the divinely raised, impassable mountain range north of the Hinterlands, fell, the infernal horde trapped on the other side were free to attack with impunity. Seeing it as a sign from the Gods that their time in the Western Lands had come to an end, the entire enclave packed what belongings they could carry and began the long trek to border between the Hinterlands and the now Unsealed Lands. There they began the arduous task of building a new home for themselves, one where they could defend their human charges against the horrors that were to come.

The ancient mountain hold now lies abandoned, and the lands of the League must defend against the rapacious hordes of gar and other predatory humanoids without the aid of their former, unsung protectors. Rumors abound that Duke Tryhkon would give much to take possession of the ancient enclave, seeing it as an impregnable fortress from which to prosecute any attack into the lands of Uggur. Unfortunately, the exact location of Tir Betoq is unknown, and the Lhauzyr Mountain Range is seemingly endless.

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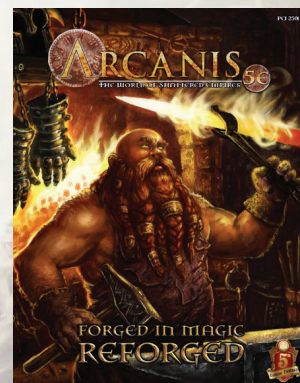


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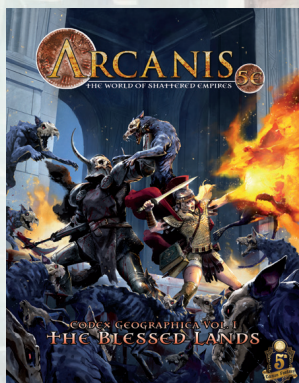
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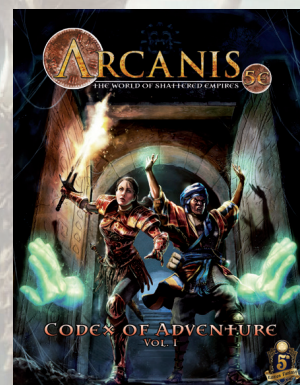
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