PCI 2602

ARCANIS 5E

THE WORLD OF SHATTERED EMPIRES



CODEX GEOGRAPHICA VOL. I

THE BLESSED LANDS

5th Edition Fantasy



Codex Geographica Vol. I
The Blessed Lands

by Henry Lopez

Cover
Santi Casas

Interior Artist
Pat Loboyko

Cartography
Keith Curtis and Andrew Law

Layout & Graphic Design
Brian Dalrymple

Game Mechanics
Pedro Barrenechea and Robert Maxwell

Art Director
Jimmy Beck

Editing Team
Lucas Amodio and Cody Bergman

Special Thanks
Alex Bok, David Thomas Chappell,
and Jacqualine Alicia Cooper

Arcanis: The World of Shattered Empires created by
Henry Lopez



PCI 2602
ISBN 978-1-931374-73-6

All portions of this book are © 2018 Paradigm Concepts All rights reserved. Arcanis, Arcanis: the World of Shattered Empires, the Arcanis logo, and all related marks and images are © 2000 - 2018 Paradigm Concepts Publishing, LLC. Shattered Empires: Roleplaying in the World of Arcanis and Arcanis5E are © 2018 Paradigm Concepts Publishing, LLC. The mention of, use of or reference to any company, trademark or product in this book is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright in question.

Table of Contents

Chapter I: History of the Blessed Lands 3
Chapter II: The Blessed Lands 42
Chapter III: The First City 74
Chapter IV: Personas Dramatis of the First City 132
Chapter V: Codex of Heroes 154
Chapter VI: Bestiary of the Blessed Lands 188
Appendix A: New Religions 215
Appendix B: Weather in the Blessed Lands 218
Appendix C: The Calendar of the Imperium of Man 221
Index 222

OPEN GAME LICENSE Version 1.0a

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. Definitions: (a)"Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b)"Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d)"Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement. Not for resale. Permission granted to print or photocopy this document for personal use only.

2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

3.Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

5.Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

6. Notice of License Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.

7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.

9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10. Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

12. Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

13. Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

14. Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Open Game License v 1.0a Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

System Reference Document 5.0 Copyright 2016, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Mike Mearls, Jeremy Crawford, Chris Perkins, Rodney Thompson, Peter Lee, James Wyatt, Robert J. Schwalb, Bruce R. Cordell, Chris Sims, and Steve Townshend, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

Codex Geographica, vol. I: The Blessed Lands, Copyright 2018, Paradigm Concepts Publishing, LLC.; Author Henry Lopez

Arcanis Campaign Setting, Copyright 2018, Paradigm Concepts Publishing, LLC.; Authors Henry Lopez and Pedro Barrenechea.

Paradigm Concepts, PCI, Arcanis, Arcanis 5E, Living Arcanis 5E, and their associated logos are trademarks of Paradigm Concepts Publishing, LLC. The 5E logo courtesy of Fat Goblin Games.

Product Identity: The following items are hereby identified as Paradigm Concepts Publishing, LLC's Product Identity and are not Open Content, as defined in the Open Game License version 1.0a, Section 1(e): All trademarks, registered trademarks, proper names (characters, place names, new deities, creatures, etc.), dialogue, plots, story elements, locations, characters, artwork, graphics, sidebars, and trade dress. (Elements that have previously been designated as Open Game Content are not included in this declaration.)

Open Game Content: Except as noted above, the Open content in this book includes the game mechanic material for races, classes, multiclassing, feats, backgrounds, spells, equipment, and monsters. No other portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without permission.



Chapter I:
The History of the First City and the Blessed Lands

The birthplace of no less than four separate and mighty empires, the First City and the Blessed Lands is known by many names and appeared quite differently throughout the many epochs in which it served as the center of great and hoary civilizations. It is only in the Modern Age that this sacred land, battered by countless wars and shaken by disasters, both natural and arcane, became a shadow of its former self. No longer controlling vast areas and innumerable sentient people, the Blessed Lands is now squabbled over by successor states that pale in comparison to those that came before.

But such a place, having drunk deeply of the lifeblood of countless invaders and defenders, holy men and heretics, tyrants and liberators; cradle to ancient civilizations and home to mighty champions, will once again be to the center of a new and vibrant empire that will reach out and make all those about it tremble in its wake, or so whispered Saint Alrameus Vernico on his deathbed.

What do I know?

When reading historical or background information, many have asked *"How much of this does my character know?"* This is a fair question. Throughout this chapter each section of history will be prefaced with a Knowledge Threshold that if met, grants your hero knowledge of the information presented.

Some of the history sections have requirements, such as being a member of a specific race, have a level of fame within or membership in a certain secret society, require you to be proficient in **and** possess a passive value in a particular skill, which is calculated in the same way your passive perception is determined, i.e. 10 + attribute bonus + your proficiency bonus or possess a particular field of study (see the new feat Sage's Insight pg. 162)

For example, a section may require Elorii, *passive History 15* or *History: Lost civilizations.*To have this knowledge, your hero must be an elorii or meet one of the other two requirements.

The exception to this is knowledge discovered during the course of play. In such instances, requirements do not need to be met.

Historical Dates

The dates associated with each of the historical entries before the Modern Age are approximated based upon educated guesses made by preeminent scholars in the field. The dates used are based off of the Coryani calendar, which begins with the raising of the Wall of the Gods and the End of the Time of Terror. This is considered Year 1 in the Coryani Imperial Calendar (I.C.).

The Time of the Issori (Approximately -10,000 to -9500 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ss'ressen or Followers of the Azure Way (10+ Fame), and Passive History 20

The only evidence that this species of intelligent insect ever existed comes from ancient records kept by a ssethric historian setting down their genocidal war against the creatures, as well as bizarre artifacts combed from the greatest depths of the catacombs beneath the First City.

The ssethric people kept all their most important documents engraved upon paper-thin metallic sheets that withstood the crushing weight of time. A cache of these artifacts found by Azure Way engineers while excavating in the labyrinth below the First City allowed Imperial Coryani scholars to piece together a treasure trove of information about an age undreamt.

The ssethric first encountered the inscrutable issori after the reptilians' great migration period. As they traveled northward, they encountered immense mounds, the size of modern-day cities, scattered throughout what is now the Known Lands. Though the ssanu first believed these to be the burrows of some sort of giant beast, they eventually observed tall insect-like creatures that walked on their hind legs or flew about on powerful gossamer wings.

The further north they moved, the more of these mound cities they observed. Careful to avoid contact with the insectoids, they moved into the wet lowlands and coastal areas, places that the issori seemed to avoid for the most part. The ssanu Senteth, presumably the writer of the treatise, hypothesized that while the mounds looked like plain piles of dirt and stone of gargantuan proportions, within was a grand city, housing a sophisticated society. Senteth further states that his theories were proven true when the ssethric later prosecuted their genocidal war against the issori and he entered these mound cities. He viewed their grandeur with his own eyes before they were ordered leveled.

Eventually, the ssethric entered a lush forest from which erupted a mound that dwarfed all the others they had seen. Rising through the verdant canopy, the mound towered many hundreds of feet into the air and dominated the area. Upon seeing this structure, the ssethrics began to covet not only their present, wet and humid territory, but also the lands and dominance of the entire region currently held by the issori. Though they had yet to make their presence known, Senteth knew that many more of his people would be arriving soon from the south and such numbers would be impossible to hide for long. As they waited, the ssethric discovered two other races living in the region: one that would become an adversary and the other a pivotal ally in their rise to dominance.

The Cyclopes of Saam Ur

Knowledge Threshold: Emerald Society (12+ Fame), Followers of the Azure Way (10+ Fame), Passive History 20, or History: Lost civilizations

Far to the west, across a shallow sea, lived a race of giants with smooth, fleshy skin and one large eye in the very center of their foreheads. These creatures lived in a marbled city, defended by thick walls and scores of winged reptilian beasts upon whose backs they rode. Oddly, for all their apparent power and mastery over the arcane arts, as the ssethric were woe to learn, the cyclopes known as the Eladru were few in number.

Rather than attempt to conquer their alien neighbors, the Eladru appeared to view the issori as allies and trading partners, bartering mundane commodities as well as wondrous items with the creatures. One of these commonplace commodities was another sentient race calling itself the Gar Ormal, or the People of the Land in their barbaric tongue. To the cyclopes, the Gar Ormal were a convenient form of slave labor, allowing their monocular masters the time to indulge in leisure or more scholarly pursuits. To the issori, the Gar Ormal were nothing more than a food source.

The Alliance with the Gar Ormal (-9500 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ss'ressen, Emerald Society (12+ Fame), or Followers of the Azure Way (10+ Fame) and Passive History 20, or History: Lost civilizations

Years passed as the ssethric kept a low profile, ensuring that their nascent settlements were small and far

enough away from both the issori and the cyclopes to escape detection. When issori scouts discovered these settlements, the ssethric were ruthless, executing them on the spot. For two generations they gathered their strength and numbers, planning their inevitable conquest of the region, just as their divine creator, the Great Lord Kassegore, foretold – *"[T]hey will find a new paradise better than the old – but only if they are strong enough to conquer it!"*

Yet for all their attempts at stealth, the Gar Ormal found and approached the ssethric with a plea for help. Though the gar were viewed by the ssethric as a brutish, animalistic race, they saw in them a possible ally strong enough to destroy the insectoids decisively.

From the gar, the ssethric discovered that the mystic cyclopes had many cities spread across the land, but that they were too few in number to occupy them all simultaneously. The cyclopes built their fortress cities on certain sites that were either sacred to them or were places of mystical power. The few gar slaves that escaped the giants were unsure as to the reason why those specific locations were chosen. What was clear was that the cyclopes migrated from time to time to these different cities, spending decades at time before moving on to the next, leaving only a minor force to protect their homesteads while they were away. From this, the ssethrics concluded that



the giants were too few in number to interfere with an attack against the issori.

The Gar Ormal made it clear that while the issori were not yet aware of the ssethric's presence, sooner or later they would be discovered, and the insects would stop at nothing to enslave them, as they did the gar. This struck a chord in the reptilian mind of the ssethrics, as enslavement in any form would mean that they were not worthy of the gifts given to them by mighty Kassegore and wily Yig. So, they plotted and waited for the right moment to unleash their might and take what was promised.

The First War of Extinction
(-9500 to -9474 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ss'ressen, Emerald Society (12+ Fame), or Followers of the Azure Way (10+ Fame), and Passive History 18, or History: Lost civilizations

For twenty-six years, the combined forces of the Gar Ormal, mounted on enormous wild wolves, and the juggernaut that was the ssethric army clashed with the smaller, outlying issori settlements, forcing the surviving insectoids to fall back to other mounds. The Gar Ormal chieftain, Rul Marrowdrinker, a large brute even by gar standards, and the ssanu sorcerer and de facto leader of the ssethric, Yass, had designed a strategy that worked perfectly to merge their two forces, accentuating each other's strengths. Eventually, the issori were forced back to their capital city, which the gar said was called Dar'algah. There, a mighty siege raged, for the ssethric knew that the only way to defeat the issori was to force them out into the open as within their fortified city, the insectoids were unassailable.

Yass and Rul set about to implement a plan that would force the insects out into the open, but at a horrible



price. Though Rul's warriors numbered over seventy thousand, it was the young and the innocent that Yass required for a horrific and barbaric rite meant to fuel a devastating spell. Such rituals require a terrifying cost, one which Yass convinced Rul could not be paid for in ssethric blood, for their gods would not accept such a gift. Thus did the Gar Ormal chieftain single out no less than one thousand innocents from his tribe, including his own mate and three of his four offspring, to act as sacrifice for the power necessary to topple the unyielding walls of Dar'algah.

While the gar shamans called upon the spirits of the earth to weaken the eastern escarpments, the ssanu priests and sorcerers combined their knowledge and began the bloody business of invoking the might of Kassegore the Devourer, focusing His destructive power on the hardened shell that surrounded the stony plateau encasing the issori capital.

Suddenly, the very ground began to shake and turn as if to water, with mighty waves crashing up against the impregnable fortress - the immovable object of the issori's engineering prowess met the unstoppable force of Kassegore's power of destruction and rebirth. As shockwave after shockwave crashed against the walls, the stone shattered and slid like the old skin off a sloughing ssanu. A cheer rang up from the gar as they saw the armored shell of the plateau crumble and the issori begin to swarm out to avoid being crushed.

The celebration was short-lived as hundreds of the armed insectoids turned into thousands and then tens upon tens of thousands more, swarming out to meet the massed gar warriors. Rul Marrowdrinker commanded the horns to blare, alerting his allies, the ssethrics, that the time to join the battle had come, but of his scaled allies, no sign could be seen.

With his army exposed, Rul had no choice but to join the battle. Marshalling his mounted warriors, and outnumbered five to one by the advancing issori, the Gar Ormal charged and engaged the enemy. For the rest of the day and the entirety of the night, the gar fought with a savage desperation, hoping that the next moment would see their reptilian allies join the fray, but these hopes were smashed against the bloody reality confronting them. The gar would either win their freedom on their own or die in the attempt.

His men knew that surrender meant ending their days being eaten alive by larvae implanted in their bodies, acting first as host and then a food source for the newborn issori. Such a fate held more terror for them than dying under the bizarre weapons of their enemy and impelled them to acts of heroism that would swell the chest of any Coryani legionnaire with pride. Yet it looked to be for naught, as for every issori that fell before them, another ten would swarm out of their city to replace it.

With the rising of the sun, Chieftain Rul looked about and knew that the end was near. The brief respite offered by the issori was only for them to regroup and rid the last few thousand gar warriors left. Just as the insects buzzed angrily and charged, a new cacophony rose to the south. Out of a slowly encroaching fog, the scaled threat of the ssethric horde erupted out and smashed onto the issori flanks. Tens of thousands of deadly ss'ressen, lumbering iguadons, fire-breathing salamankas, as well as sorcery-wielding ssanu began to obliterate the issori with such a savage ferocity that even the most bloodthirsty gar warriors were given pause.

The tide turned with the ssethric attack, and Rul led the last of his men into a final charge to see an end to what they started. Even as the last of the issori was ripped apart and the bloated form of their queen was wrestled out of the innermost region of the hive and set to roast over an open spit, the gar chieftain wondered if he had roused a scourge far worse than the issori had ever been.



HKKG BKN PDA QJSEJGEJC AUA WO W OECJ KB KQN LWOOWCA. EB BKQJZ QLKJ WJ EPAI, GJKS PDWP EP EO KQN LKOOAOOEKJ. EB EJOYNEXAZ QLKJ W SWHH KN PQJJAH, GJKS PDWP EP ZAJKPAO W LHWYA KB EILKNPWJYA PK KQN BWIEHU. PDA BWYP PDWP KPDANO QOA PDA OWIA OUIXKH EO W XAJABEP, JKP W DEJZNWJYA. PDEO SEHH YKJBQOA KQN BKAO WJZ HAWZ PDAI WOPNWU. E DWRA QOAZ PDA BWYP PDWP PDA YQHP KB PDA PDKQOWJZ AUAZ IWJ QOAO OEIEHWN OUIXKHKCU PK YKJBQOA KPDANO. WHSWUO NAIAIXAN – OAYNAYU EO KQN CNAWPAOP OPNAJCPD.

Time of the Yahssremoran Empire (-9474 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ss'ressen, Emerald Society (5+ Fame), or Followers of the Azure Way (5+ Fame), and Passive History 20, or History: Lost civilizations

Triumphant in their victory over the issori, the ssethrics set about to claim their spoils, having left the gar broken and awaiting their inevitable enslavement. Above the ruins of the insect hive city, the scaled warriors set about building a city on the plateau. Naming it Yahssremore, in honor of the ssanu who had devised the strategy that brought them victory, the city would eventually stretch to fill every inch of the enormous plateau as well as make use of the ready-made tunnels and catacombs excavated by the industrious and now extinct issori.

The time of the Empire of Yahssremore was a golden age for the ssethric people. Just as Kassegore had promised, they had wrested their promised land from those who held it, combining martial might and guile, a perfect union befitting the twin deities of mighty Kassegore and Yig of the Shifting Scales. For close to four millennia, the ssethric empire flourished, expanding to occupy territory as far east to what is now called the Pale Sea, south to the lower continent and even westward to the shores of the Shining Sea. Great advances in the mystic arts were made, especially after the founding of the Black Coil, a cadre of sorcerers that called the Black Tower of Gettulus home.

The Second War of Extinction (-8400 to -7950 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ss'ressen, Emerald Society (5+ Fame), or Followers of the Azure Way (5+ Fame), and Passive History 20

The era of the Yahssremoran Empire was also a time of terrible wars, beginning with the Second War of Extinction that took hundreds of years to persecute and finally win, the war against the Eladru, the cyclopean allies of the issori. The length of time it took to prosecute the war was not due to formidability of the cyclopes per sé, as their population was relatively small, numbering no more than a few tens of thousands. It was the fact that their territory consisted of disparate city-states scattered across the northern portion of the continent rather than huge swaths of land that they could be forced to defend.

Trapping the lords of Eladru proved just as frustrating, as the cyclopes used portals that enabled them to travel instantaneously from one gate to another with the same ease as moving from one's bedroom to the atrium. These portals seemed to be located outside the cyclopes' city-states in odd places such as desolate areas in the wilderness.

Luckily for the ssethrics, these same gateways were found in the mound settlements of the issori, especially in Dar'algah, leading some to speculate that the portals were either created by the issori and given as gifts to their monocular allies or vice versa.

It took the brilliant mind of the master sorcerer Gettulus to unlock the secret of the gateways. The master of the arcane arts had a number of the artifacts brought to the Black Tower for study where it took him decades to discover the mystic principles underpinning the mechanics of the portals and another century to realize that an invocation to a higher power was needed to operate them.

Wars of Extinction

The ssethrics believe a War of Extinction to be a form of sacrifice and veneration of their own deities. When a people are completely exterminated during these sacred wars, they believe that the gods also do battle with one another. As the Holy Canticle of the Pantheon of Man states, *"[a]s above, so below"*. It appears that the ssethric religious dogma follows the same dictates. So just as the ssethric exterminated the issori, so too did Kassegore the Great Devourer and Yig of the Shifting Scales defeat and consume the deities of the insectoids, adding their power to their own.

Gettulus reasoned that if the gateways were the product of the issori, then one or both of their great Scaled Gods would know the secret of the portals and share them with their chosen children. For years, the master sorcerer acted as a relentless taskmaster, forcing the priesthoods to entreat their gods for the secret. Many died in meditative trances so deep that their hearts stopped, while others appeared to go mad when the divine touched them. This only made Gettulus drive them harder, whipping them into a zealot's frenzy, until at last Yig the Great Deceiver grudgingly shared the knowledge of the portals with Her priesthood.

Once the ssethrics were able to use the gateways with impunity, the doom of the cyclopes was only a matter of time. Unfortunately for the ssethrics, the Eladru had one last weapon to bring forth against them.

The Terrible Power of the Mind
(-7945 to -7915 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ss'ressen and Passive History 20, or History: Myths and Legends

Far to the south, the final stronghold of the Eladru was surrounded by a few thousand of the Yahssremoran Empire's finest warriors and sorcerers. Given that the cyclopes within were estimated to not exceed a hundred, and that the power of the ssethric priesthood had, to the best of their ability, shut down the gateway network, the ssethric had little doubt that this would be the final battle against the Eladru.

That was when the cyclopes played their final gambit. At first, some of the sorcerers complained of having difficulty concentrating on their spells. These complaints were followed swiftly by various ssethrics, regardless of species, going blind as the blood vessels in their eyes burst. Then came the screams: screams that could not be heard, and yet echoed loudly and piercingly within their minds, screams that felt to some as if a pick were being jabbed over and over into their skulls. Some ssanu thrashed about in agony, while an Agamassi ss'ressen bashed her head against a rock to make the pain stop.

Seeing victory slipping quickly through his coils, the ssanu general Hosus ordered a full-out assault before his troops fully succumbed to the mysterious malady. Of the six thousand that surrounded the Eladru citadel, almost a third lay convulsing on the battlefield. Fighting through his own blinding pain, the general ordered the thick gates breached and quickly led a reckless charge into the fortress. There, the cyclopes unleashed a withering barrage of arcane might, whittling down the ssethric invaders with terrifying efficacy.

But the scaled legion's numbers and might were too much for the defending Eladru and they fell in the frenzied attack. Even as the last cyclops fell, the mental assault continued unabated, decimating the ssethric forces, threatening to make this a pyrrhic victory, at best. Finally, with only a few hundred of his soldiers left, the general discovered the last of the Eladru in the deep bowels of the fortress, along with the source of the mental assault.

Strapped to wooden chairs sized to accommodate a being the size of a gar child, were horrific caricatures of the gar species. Yet while the Gar Ormal had broad chests, thick limbs and a sharply sloping brow, these creatures had wizened, emaciated bodies, with spindly arms and legs. Had they been standing, they would have barely reached the third coil of a seated ssanu, but it was their huge, misshapen heads that gave even the battle-hardened ssethrics pause. Covered in a patchwork of wire thick tufts of hair with large and pulsing worm-like veins tunneling in and out of their skulls, the creatures stared blindly ahead, oblivious of the ssethric's entrance.

The cyclopes kneeling behind the dozen mammalian oddities jabbed thin, pointed needles deeply into the skulls of the shrunken beings, channeling electricity directly into the creatures' brains, presumably to coerce them into attacking the ssethrics.

Hosus ordered the cyclopes dealt with but instructed his soldiers not to harm the bizarre creatures yet. With the death of the Eladru torturers, the mental onslaught ended as abruptly as it began. Replacing the horrifying assault were the bubbling sobs of the twisted creatures, moaning from the slowly subsiding pain inflicted upon them.

After transferring the surviving mammals to Yahssremore, they were turned over to the tender mercies of Gettulus and the biomancers of the Black Coil. There, under the torch-lit vaults of the Black Tower, the secrets of mind were discovered, along with its potential as the ultimate weapon. This knowledge was carved from the newly christened "half-men" or "halflings" by sharp scalpel blades. Before vivisecting them, the biomancers forced them to reveal that an entire race of these misshapen beings lived across the Aqtau Mountains.

Shortly thereafter, a new War of Extinction against the half-men took place. While



barely worthy a mention in the annals of the military juggernaut of the Scaled Empire, it resulted in the biomancers learning how to transfer the power of the mind to the only race worthy to possess it - the ssanu. Though the knowledge of how to induce such an ability in others was lost when Yahssremore fell, many ssanu are born with incredible psionic powers, to the woe of all the other peaceful races upon Arcanis.

The il'Huan War
(-6804 to -6750 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, Ss'ressen, Emerald Society (7+ Fame), or Followers of the Azure Way (7+ Fame), and Passive History 17

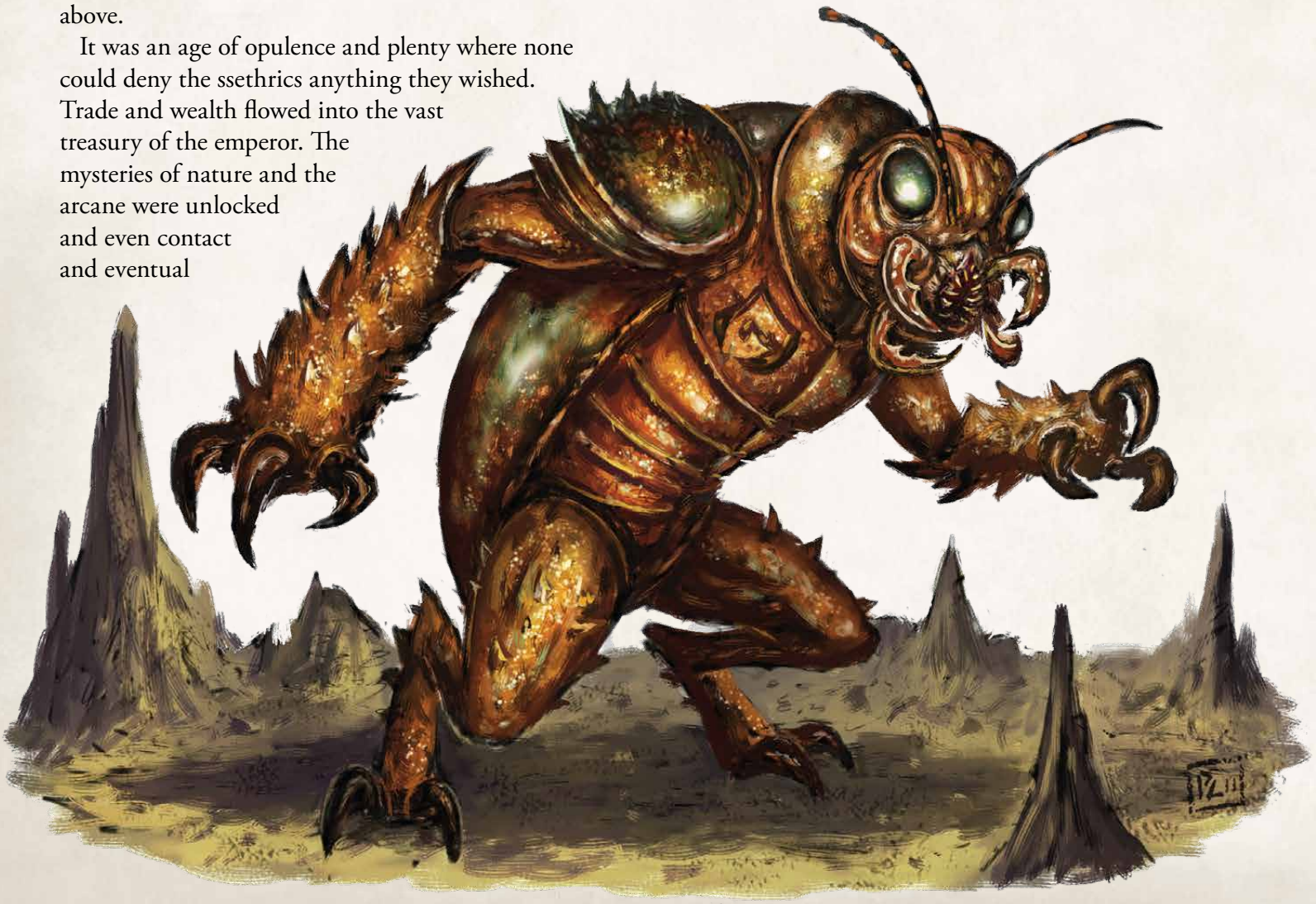
The ssethrics now controlled all they surveyed. From coast to coast, the Empire of Yahssremore either directly occupied and controlled the lands and its people or had an ever-growing list of reptilian allies to oversee it for them. As they expanded, contact was made with other branches of the ssethric family that occupied different niches but had the same overwhelming drive to dominate. With their aid, Yahssremore controlled the land, the seas and the skies above.

It was an age of opulence and plenty where none could deny the ssethrics anything they wished. Trade and wealth flowed into the vast treasury of the emperor. The mysteries of nature and the arcane were unlocked and even contact and eventual travel to other realms, beginning with the Elemental Planes, was within their taloned grasp.

That was why the discovery of another sentient race, living and thriving beneath their coils, came as such a surprise to them. Even more so was the fact that these huge, limbering creatures possessed a sophisticated civilization and whose military prowess matched their own. Once again, the instinct to subjugate or exterminate those different from them came to the forefront of the ssethric psyche.

Worse yet, these "walking beetles" appeared to be their mirror image in certain ways. Where the ssanu had mastered the arcane arts but had only begun to explore the possibilities of psionic power, the il'Huan were poorly skilled in arcane magic, but excelled in the powers of the mind, even able to maintain a hive consciousness.

To say that the first meeting between the two races, occurring by accident when a ssethric work crew discovered a vast and bewildering labyrinth of tunnels and carved out caverns deep beneath the surface, was tense would be an understatement. In later ages, this tunnel network would be referred to as the Endless



Dark; during this age, it was the demesne of the il'Huan. In typical ssethric fashion, the leading ssanu demanded to be taken to their leader to discuss the terms of their surrender and annexation of their territory into the Yahssremoran Empire.

The il'Huan response was quick and decisive, killing or capturing the ss'ressen and iguadon warriors, while sending the ssanu scurrying back to Yahssremore with a simple message: *"Leave us in peace or face utter destruction"*.

The response from the ssethric emperor was equally swift and definitive with yet another War of Extinction proclaimed. Yet this war was more devastating than any the Yahssremoran had ever engaged in previously and for the first time in living memory, the ssethric were handed a devastating defeat.

Year after year, the war ground agonizingly on, with the Scaled Legions only able to claim minor victories at a cost of entire armies. Desperation drove the ssethrics to try new and audacious tactics and innovations, from using biomancy to change the docile and unintelligent trolls of the Vastwood into implacable warriors (the savage Singarthan trolls of the modern age), to the summoning of elemental beings and sending them into battle. While these last were found to be very resistant to the il'Huan's psionic attacks, the time, cost and effort to summon and maintain them on this Mortal Realm proved ruinous and impractical.

For three hundred years the war waged on and the Empire was no closer to victory than when it began. Emperor Sahktess demanded that the infamous Black Coil prove themselves worthy of the station they held within their society and create a servitor race that was as impervious to the il'Huan's powers as the elementals, but which could exist indefinitely in this Mortal Realm. Though the leader of the Black Coil, the archmage Ss'koreth, railed against this waste of resources, he was eventually made to bow to the emperor's will.

"I saw many a weapon turned by the thick shell of an Il'Huan. The axe I forged sliced through them with ease."

- Bælrog of Solanos Mor

Ss'koreth's Solution
(-6850 to -6700 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, Ss'ressen, Passive History 20, or History: Myths and Legends

Applying their prodigious expertise to the problem, the ten most powerful sorcerers of the Black Coil toiled crafting the most complex and intricate summoning circle ever devised. Engraving the interlocking circles of power required the erection of a structure that could have housed the entire palace of the emperor. Due to the dangerous nature of what they were about to attempt, Ss'koreth had the building constructed in a remote area of the empire, minimizing collateral damage should his ritual go horribly wrong.

Awaiting the correct alignment of the stars delayed the attempt for another decade, but finally the moment came and Ss'koreth and his cabal invoked the summoning ritual he had so meticulously crafted. None heard from the archmagi for many weeks, until word arrived at the capital, requesting the presence of Emperor Sahktess. It is said that the emperor arrived within days of the request and was greeted by a fearsome and wondrous sight: four beings of immense power were within Ss'koreth's intricate circles, towering over all assembled. These Elemental Lords, as they demanded to be addressed, bargained long into the night with the wizened but crafty Emperor Sahktess. Only those present know what unholy bargain was struck, but in the end the Elemental Lords finally agreed to help the ssethrics create the servitor race they craved. What they received in return was never set down for posterity.

Once again, the sorcerers and biomancers of the Black Coil were tasked with preparing the vessels that would house the elemental spirits of the new servitor race, but one last element was necessary. To bind these creatures to world, Ss'koreth required the living essence of the planet. Unfortunately, when he found her, She was quite insane. When She was brought before the four Elemental Lords, they demanded that they be allowed to speak



with the godling privately, as only they had any hope of bringing Her back from the brink of madness. This was agreed to, and for one year, the four beings remained ensconced within a chamber, allowing no interruptions and tolerating no visitors. Finally, the doors opened and a calmed and lucid Belisarda emerged with the Elemental Lords and agreed to the demands of the ssethric emperor as long as a creation of Her own was agreed to as well. Along with the four species of elemental servitors, a fifth one would be crafted but filled with Her essence solely. Sahktess readily agreed.

Using the enslaved Gar Ormal as the template for their bodies, the biomancers worked tirelessly alongside the powerful elemental entities until eventually, after a few false starts, the five species of the elorii were born.

The Elorii (-6700 to -6202 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, Ss'ressen, or Passive History 17

After a series of aborted batches, the first of the elorii were finally born from the viscous vats of the biomancers. Not only were they clear-eyed, intelligent and filled with boundless energy due to their gods' infusion of power, the elorii were the perfect warriors. They were able to survive and indeed thrive in harsh environments depending on their heritage, excelling in the martial arts, and showing a tendency for ruthlessness and an elegant savagery in their battles against their scaled masters' foes.

Emperor Sahktess was elated at the success of the elorii and ordered the Black Coil to start accelerated breeding programs as he wanted thousands of the new servitor race ready to take the field in a decade. Wise Ss'koreth warned against creating too many of these creatures, as they had more in common with the mammalian gars than they did with their reptilian masters. The emperor waved off such concerns and ordered the breeding programs be started immediately.

Obeying Sahktess' order, the Black Coil had over a hundred thousand elorii ready to take the battle to the il'Huan in ten years, due to the elorii's ability to reach maturity in half a dozen years, with the balance of the time used to train them in the fine art of war. With the infusion of these fresh forces onto the battlefield, the War of Extinction against the mighty il'Huan race became a matter of when rather than if it would be won.

With brutal efficiency, the elorii swept through the il'Huan forces and their allies. No quarter was given and entire races, many allied to the psionic beetles, fell victim to the genocidal pogrom. At last, even the capital of the il'Huan fell and was razed to the ground. This final battle raged so intensely that the elephantine caverns that housed the city crumbled and collapsed in a cataclysmic event that saw a huge section of the land sink beneath the ocean, creating what is now known as the Gulf of Yarris.

With the elimination of the il'Huan threat, the archmage Ss'koreth warned Emperor Sahktess that having warrior slaves resistant to the potent power of the mind, a power the ssanu had jealously guarded, would be a recipe for disaster. Sahktess agreed and ordered the surviving elorii lobotomized, ordering that the new generations be breed without these psionic defenses. Though it took several generations to breed this ability from the elorii, it was eventually done, to the relief of wise Ss'koreth.

Yet even the annihilation of the ssethric's most implacable enemy did not slake the empire's thirst for conquest. Viewing the elorii as a wasted commodity if they were put to use in some manner other than as warriors, the ssethric continued to send them far and wide to conquer even more lands and people, even though they would be unable to occupy such a vast territory with their current population.

By the time of the elorii rebellion, twelve races were wiped from the face of Arcanis, with the elorii being the dagger that cut their collective throats. While they would later be filled with remorse and shame at their actions, some would wish that they had been a bit more efficient and thorough in the case of one particular race of people.

Ssethregoran Empire Source Book

Due to space considerations, it was impossible to do more than give a cursory overview of the history of the ssethrics and their empires in this book. If you wish to read more about their history, society and more, as well as a look at the Ssethregoran Empire in the modern age, please look for Vol. II of the Codex Geographica, Ssethregore: In the Coils of the Serpent Empire.

"My people were created as a weapon to be used against the enemies of our masters. How ironic that that we were the blade that cut off the serpent's head."

- Soleke Shenoc, Kelekene mage

The Elorii Rebellion and the Fall of Yahssremore (-5738 to -5710 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, Ss'ressen, or Passive History 14

With the end of the il'Huan War, the ssethrics enjoyed a few more hundred years of peace and prosperity. Though the elorii were still used as elite troops in clearing out areas for expansion, the rate of conquest slowed and the tight leash about the throat of the elorii that Ss'koreth had advised began to loosen.

Due to their loyalty and efforts for the empire, the elorii were given a type of citizenship within the empire, though always second to that enjoyed by the reptilians. Nevertheless, they were granted homesteads and allowed to govern small cities, but even these modest rewards were not enough to make the elorii turn a blind eye on the atrocities that was befalling members of their people. Some were thrown into battle arenas and forced to face greater and greater odds, without rest or relief, for the enjoyment of the emperor's court. Others were taken away to be used in the dark experiments still being conducted by the biomancers of the Black Coil.

After decades of this abuse, all it took was a final act of cruelty to spark a conflagration that engulfed the Yahssremoran Empire and drove it to its knees. That act was a simple beating of an elorii child in the middle of a small logging community on the outskirts of the Vastwood. A Mârokene witnessed this and something within him snapped. The former soldier grabbed his woodsman axe and buried it deep in the skull of the offending ss'ressen. With one blow, this unnamed Mârokene showed the elorii people that they no longer had to suffer the abuse of their scaled masters. With a roar, the surrounding elorii rose up and butchered every ssethric not smart enough to flee the small village immediately.

Years before, a few hundred elorii had escaped their shackles and founded sanctuary in the thick forest to the north. When word reached them of this watershed event, they left the protection of the forest, knowing that the time had finally come to overthrow their masters. Word of the rebellion spread like wildfire throughout the empire. Frightened ssethric put their personal elorii slaves to death rather than take the chance that they might join the rebellion. Thousands perished, but it was not enough to halt the slave revolt.

Though it took years, the former servitor race overthrew their tyrannical overlords, toppling the millennia-old order and replacing it with a new and vibrant one of their own making. The archmagi Ss'koreth was killed on the very steps of the Black Tower of Gettulus, when he slew Salos, his own personal slave. Salos had learned magic surreptitiously by watching the ancient sorcerer work his craft and had driven the old snake into a frenzy when he saw the elorii wield elder magic.

Yet the elorii showed restraint. Even at this early stage of the nascent culture, the guilt of the utter destruction of twelve sentient races hung heavy upon them and they showed their former masters mercy, allowing many to escape to the south and into the thick and impenetrable swamps of the Kraldjur Morass.

The ancient city of Yahssremore was pulled down stone by stone, and a greater and more elegant city rose in its place: Belestor, the capital of the Eloran Empire.

Time of the Eloran Empire (-5710 to -3760 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii and Passive History 16

It is unfortunate that the majority of the history of such of an enlightened people should be lost due to the wars that precipitated its downfall. The war between the invading humans and their Gods destroyed countless volumes not only dealing with history, but the arts, philosophy, natural and arcane sciences as well as religious texts. If any of these treatises still exist, they must lie deep in the hidden city of the elorii, taken there under the cover of confusion that so often accompanies bloody war.

From the few fragments available to historians, such as the *Fragmentos Alenares*,



a series of brittle scrolls hidden in a large urn and found deep in the labyrinth beneath the First City, it is evident that the elorii had no desire to rule over any of the sentient races or nations that survived the age of the ssethric empire. Instead they gave tacit protection as well as financial assistance to these other nations and in turn demanded only two things from them: an annual tribute, consisting of foodstuffs, precious jewels, and other finished products as well as the inviolate safety of any elorii within their territories.

Similar to the *Pax Coryani*, this *Pax Elorii* showed that while the elorii preferred to rule with a velvet glove, there was a mailed fist ready to unleash the holy terror of old should their two edicts be violated in any way.

A piece of the *Fragmentos Alenares* describes the retribution exacted in the wake of the murder of the of a Berokene captain and her First Mate in the lost city of Ashul [perhaps modern day Plexus?], *"…those most likely to have either participated in the stoning or witnessed it and did nothing were gathered and bro[ught]… to the edge of …docks. There these mal… were shackled with heavy chains and …so that the fishes might dine…worthl[ess]… hides."*

Demons of Air and Shadow (Unknown)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, Emerald Society (5+ Fame), or Followers of the Azure Way (7+ Fame), and Passive History 16 or History: Myths and Legends

One of the twelve races exterminated at the behest of their ssethric masters were the kaltari, creatures quickly dubbed by the elorii as "demons of air and shadow". These beings, of which no accurate description has ever been found, are said to appear, "as if from the fabric of the night itself", attack and vanish before the dying victim can react.

How a race of these beings was extinguished has never been discovered and elorii possessing memories of that age have never stepped forward to share their knowledge. Many scholars claimed the entire tale a myth or tall tale used to scare children into behaving until the discovery of a personal account, badly decomposing with pages fused together by years of mold and water damage, which told of a series of attacks by these creatures hundreds of years into the Age of the Eloran Empire. The following is what has



been pieced together by Emerald Society scholars:

"There had been many a series of strange deaths that at first seemed to have been heart failure, something almost unheard of given the redundancy of the elorii physiology and our twin hearts. Yet one death was an oddity, three a strange coincidence, and six in as many weeks a tell-tale sign that something was amiss.

"As the primary physician to the family of the First Amongst Peers, I was called to make sure that some strange contagion had not contaminated our drinking water, or some malignant vapor had not settled upon our shining city. I ran every test known, examined every possible vector, inspected the corpses of those who had died of natural causes and found nothing. The next night, the First's daughter died seemingly of the exact same causes.

"I was baffled, as were all the colleagues I consulted. I went to my rest mat that night with my mind awhirl, which was possibly why I snapped out of my trance to a presence near my bedside. I tried to call out, but a pernicious paralysis froze my limbs as well as my voice. I found that only my mind and my eyes were given freedom from my otherwise shackled body.

"That was when I saw it: a creature borne of nightmares, seeming to unfold from the night air itself. It was swathed in thick volumes of shadow, but the stony carapace covering its hands quickly appeared before me. Its large yellow eyes were dull with a single pinpoint of black to show its pupil. I could smell its fetid breath, feel its wet hotness upon my cheek as it bent over me and seemed to lightly kiss me.

"What should have been a tender act of kindness threw me into a panic such as I have never known. Yet whatever bound my body did so securely, not allowing the slightest gasp or whimper to escape my lips. Then I saw a small vial appear in its hands. Within was a thick, syrupy fluid of a golden hue. The creature dipped a string within it, making sure it had a thick coating, all the while positioning itself so that its movements were made in front of my unblinking eyes.

"Something must have broken within me, for though I imagined myself thrashing about my bed, exerting every ounce of my will that I possibly could, I could not detect that I made even the slightest movement. Luckily, my pet selash has keener senses than me. I must have made some barely audible noise or movement that woke her from her slumber at the foot of my mat. Instantly, she began growling at my assailant of the night and then hissing loudly: loudly enough to startle the creature and make it lose its concentration, just as it was lowering the thickly coated string to my lips.

"Amazingly, I was suddenly able to move and the scream that had been locked within my chest found its way out and echoed so loudly, I'm surprised the priests of Mârok did not hear it deep below in their holy chambers.

"Startled, the creature looked at me with widened eyes and smiled, as if saying we would meet again. My eyes shifted but a moment to my chamber's door as it slammed open, revealing the palace guards, but when I looked back, it was gone.

"I made my report to General Alectos and he nodded as if knowing exactly what I spoke of. He smiled at my calling it a Demon of Air and Shadow and said it was as accurate a description as any. After assuring me that the intruder would be dealt with, he assigned guards within and without my chambers and bid me deep rest.

"The general spoke the truth. There were no more strange or unexplained deaths. I was never told what the creature was officially, though I did hear whispers among the staff of an ancient race known as the kaltari that were able to exert a sort of paralysis by merely concentrating on a person.

"Whatever it was, it was now either dead or driven off. I hope never to see those glassy yellow eyes ever again."

The Arrival of the Other (-3800 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, Passive History 16, or Religion: Pantheon of Man

According to both the scrolls of the Illuminated Texts and the Canticle, an entity known as the "Other" arrived upon the shores of Onara with a ragged contingent of beings that the elorii had not seen before. They were similar to the elorii in form but differed markedly in manner; there



was a raw primitiveness to these creatures, something that caused the elorii to instinctively think that these beings were dangerous, although their actions and words tried to imply the opposite.

In the ancient texts, the elorii were seen to be naïve in welcoming the Other and Its entourage into their lands. Now that some of their history has been deciphered and studied, scholars point to the devastating effect the Extinction Wars had upon the elorii psyche. Their apparent guilt at being the genocidal instrument that wiped out twelve sentient species may have had the effect of lowering their guard and accepting the Other.

The texts do not give an exact time table or measurement as to how long the Other and Its people lived upon Onara, in peaceful coexistence with the elorii, but the period must have been substantial, as settlements and even a temple to the Other are mentioned in passing in the Canticle. However long it was, it is apparent that the Other used Its corrupting presence to seduce the elorii's Elemental Lords, especially Belisarda, to Its side.

When the Holy Lords of the Pantheon arrived upon the shores of Onara, They brought with Them a portion of Their followers from the distant shores of the Eastern Continent. The Holy Canticle paints a scene of utter devastation in the wake of the war between the Other and the deities of the Pantheon. According to scripture, this once lush and fertile land was turned into a charnel house when the Other fell upon the blessed Lords of the Pantheon, attempting to devour their divine essence. All of the various scriptures agree that the Other 'weakened the Gods through Its treachery' and one apocryphal tale relates that the Other succeeded in consuming one of the Pantheon, whose name has been lost in the intervening ages.

It is perhaps due to their weakened state that the Lords of the Pantheon did not immediately track down the Other to Onara, or perhaps the Other obfuscated Its trail to such a degree that even the Gods of Man found it difficult to follow. Any reason put forth must be pure conjecture as this detail has been left out of the scriptures describing these events. What is known without contention is that the Other's hiding place was eventually found, and the Gods arrived with a vengeance.

When the Gods arrived with their valinor, their celestial servants, and the Chosen, those humans that proved to have a love and devotion to the deities greater than their fellows, they were welcomed by the elorii and four of their Elemental Lords. While they did admit to the presence of the Other and Its people in the region, they spoke eloquently of the Other's peaceful intentions and philosophies and beseeched the Gods and their people to join them in enjoying the land's bounties and live in peaceful harmony with their former adversary.

It is curious, as powerful as the Gods are, that they didn't merely sweep the Elemental Lords aside. The Elemental Lords of the elorii might have been very powerful entities, but they were not as mighty as the divine Lords of the Pantheon. It is possible that the Other had severely weakened the Gods more than believed or perhaps the blessed deities were tired of war, having already destroyed one homeland, and wanted to avoid a new conflict with these beings. Whatever the reason, holy Illiir tried to reason with these beings but was unable to persuade them.

It was only when one of the Elemental Lords sought to bring Belisarda into the discussion, that the treachery of the Other was discovered. The fifth elorii deity was missing, as was their celestial guest. The Elemental Lords entreated the Gods to join them in an alliance aimed at finding the missing Belisarda and punishing the Other for Its treachery. How long or how far they searched is unknown, but finally, the Other was discovered and the battle joined.

As the combined forces of the human deities and the elorii Elemental Lords were attacked by the Other, so were the combined forces of the eloran armies and the human legions beset by Its degenerate human and valinoric followers. The battle was said to be so titanic that parts of Onara were forever changed, with mountain ranges toppled and flattened and entire bodies of water drained while new estuaries were created.

Eventually, the allied forces were pushed back to the area about the First City with the Other poised to crush Its foes when a new and unexpected element entered the fray. It is written that at that critical juncture the goddess Anshar appeared and spoke with Illiir. She spoke of Her capture ages ago by the foul Other and subsequent imprisonment, an imprisonment She only now escaped as Her captor was distracted. She told Illiir of their kinship and how She was the Sun God's sister. Holy Illiir merely shook His head sadly and said that it was too late. He could not save Her as They were all about to fall before the frenzied onslaught of the Other.

Anshar smiled and whispered into Her brother's perfect ear the path to victory. She pointed out that the Other was so powerful due to the consumption of the Pantheon's divinity, along with the essence of Belisarda. She then pointed a slender finger at the other four Elemental Lords.

"Look upon your salvation, Brother," she whispered. "Though not truly divine, these creatures have been infused with great power, power you need to overcome our foe. You need merely absorb their essence completely to turn the tide of the battle."

Holy Illiir blanched at the thought of such a base strategy. To turn on one's own allies was anathema to the Sun God, but the logic of His lost sister's words was inescapable. The choice was clear: turn on His newfound allies or see His children wallow in slavery under the debased Other for eternity. When viewed in such a manner, the choice was no choice at all.

Calling upon Hurrian, Nier, Yarris and His celestial wife, Saluwé, holy Illiir explained the solution proposed by Anshar and set Them on Their grim task. It was not long before the essence of the four False Gods of the elorii was consumed by the four deities and They returned to engage the Other alongside Their divine kin. With the added power gained, the Pantheon of Man, alongside the newly found Anshar, defeated the treacherous Other and imprisoned It for all eternity.

After the act was done, Illiir turned and spoke to the Chosen mortals saying, *"Though Our actions were ignoble, they were done for the salvation of all who live upon this Mortal Realm, but most of all for you, our most cherished children. These elorii will not understand the righteousness of Our actions and will turn to destroy you. This land shall be your paradise. Drive them forth from what is yours and prove worthy of this legacy."*

Thus did the humans turn on their elorii allies and drove them forth from Belestor and the surrounding region. Weakened from the battle against the Other's followers and caught completely off guard, they were routed from their bright empire and chased until lost within the deep boughs of the Vastwood and beyond.

Yet this did not mean that the elorii did not bloody the noses of their attackers. A group of elders came together and performed the mystic rite of Kurenthé, an act of desperation as it always results in the utter destruction of the souls of those enacting the ritual. The effect of this rite was a massive wave of arcane energy that vaporized the meat leaving only the charred bones of thousands of the human attackers. Additionally, it turned the lush and vibrant temperate forest that filled the basin in which the plateau of Dagha rests into a bleached and blasted land.

Even after centuries of ministration by the greatest minds of the Imperium, from priestesses of Saluwé to sorcerers who have devoted their entire lives to the study of the Green, the basin has only barely begun to show signs of revitalization with some hardy tribes of humans managing to eek enough sustenance to survive. Many centuries would pass before the barren land became capable of sustaining life once more.

The battle against the elorii went on for months, but with the aid of the valinor, it was only a matter of time before the forgone conclusion was reached. The elorii were dispossessed from their elegant city and surrounding territory and either fled deep into the Vastwood, to other far-flung regions of Onara, or died in battle.

With their victory secured, humanity witnessed the Gods appearing before each and every one of them simultaneously, regardless of where they stood. Illiir spoke to the gathered multitude of humans about their unfailing faith in Them, as well as their sacrifice.

"Rejoice," said the King of the Gods, *"for your devotion and the losses you suffered have gained you a place here in this paradise."* Pointing to the ravaged city of Belestor, Illiir continued, *"Take this magnificent city and make it your own. From here you shall spread across these fertile lands and forge an empire that shall be the envy of all that came before and after it. Let this be the First City of Man upon Onara and the beginning of a Golden Age for Mankind!"*

XASWNA PDA RWHDKHNUJ BWIEHU BKN, HEGA QO, PDAU WNA KQPOEZANO SEPD W ZAWZHU OAYNAP. SA DWRA QJYKRANAZ PDAEN DANEPWCA WJZ EP BEHHO IA SEPD QPPAN ZNAWZ. PDA ZWU SEHH YKIA SDAJ PDAU SEHH JAAZ PK XA ZAOPNKUAZ, XQP JKP UAP. PDAU WNA EJ HAWCQA SEPD PDKOA PDWP SAWN PDA KXOEZEWJ IWOGO. HKKG BKN PDAI SDAJ XHWYG WLANEKO AUA HKKGO BQHHU QLKJ QO.



Time of the Imperium
(-3760 to -1800 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Passive History 14

From the time of its founding to its eventual fall, the Imperium of Man dominated the majority of the vast continent of Onara, as well as many other territories and holdings on other continents as well as other planes for almost two thousand years. It truly was a Golden Age of Man where rules of law, reason and the arts flourished as never before or after.

The Creation of the Vals
(-3720 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Passive History 17 or Religion: Pantheon of Man

Though the Gods watched over humanity for the first few decades, as they built their city from the ruins of bright Belestor and began their expansion into the unknown, the time eventually came for Them to leave humanity to its own devices. Before doing so, Illiir bid each of the Pantheon to bestow upon their favored children a gift to help their fledging civilization. Wise Althares came forth first and gifted to humanity a unified language so that might always be able to communicate with one another; Illiir bestowed upon the Imperium the Throne of Man, a powerful artifact the knowledge of which has been lost; Saluwé gifted them with a great ash, under whose boughs rash and volatile emotions were banished and compromises to problems could be reached with cool reason and so on. (For details on the gifts of the Gods, see page XX).

Lastly, Illiir called together the valinor and bid them to select their dearest human families and comingle their essence with those chosen. He explained to the nascent Imperium that the families selected were the most dutiful and devoted to the Pantheon and their fellow man. From this day and ever more, their line would contain an iota of divinity, enough to grant them the ability to shepherd and protect mankind until the end of time.

Thus were the worthiest chosen by the valinor to become the vals and the uls of today. To mark their special bond, they were bequeathed with the grey eye color that all of the winged servants of the Gods carried.

Satisfied that their children would be safeguarded and watched over by these new guardians, the Gods tasked a certain number of the valinor to remain behind to witness the glory of mankind, but not to interfere. And for approximately a millennium as humanity grew into its wondrous destiny, the valinor did naught but wait and observe.

Why FIRST Imperium?

After hearing some Coryani referring to the Imperium of Man as the 'First Imperium', some may wonder, "Why the 'First' Imperium, when there has never been a Second Imperium?" The short answer is hope; hope that mankind's best days still lie before it as well as the eternal hope that their children and grandchildren will live in a better world than the one they currently inhabit.

Officially, the first dominion of man on Onara was known as the Imperium of Man, or the Imperium, for short. And thus it was until Alrameus Vernico spoke of a valinor standing at the foot of his deathbed, showing him visions of a future where a new human nation arose eclipsing all that had come before. It is said that he died smiling, secure in the knowledge that his years of war and sacrifice contributed to the coming of this new, Second Imperium. His words were repeated throughout the years until the notion became a forgone conclusion in the minds of most Coryani. Before long, scholars followed the common man in calling the Imperium of Man the First Imperium, and thus it has sometimes referred to in the present day.

The Blood War
(-3263 to -3258 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Passive History 17 or Religion: Myths and Legends

Power, it seems, is a goal unto itself. The more one has, the more one wants and during this period of humanity's history, none wielded more power than the val clans. The number of val families at that time numbered almost two score. At this time the uls had not yet replaced the 'val' prefix with 'ul' and that the val clans that did exist were the descendants of those families that fought during the God's War in the distant past.

The val'Mehan discovered a terrible truth – that small portion of a valinor's essence resident in the blood of a val could be stripped and absorbed into another, combining their powers in the recipient val. But for the transfer to breed true in successive generations, only those that participated in the ritual could mate, producing offspring that would have as their birthright a variety of abilities mirroring the entire spectrum of their patron God's powers.

Initially, only the val'Mehan were privy to this

knowledge and used it to prey upon their fellows. That was when it was discovered that the ritual only worked on val that had a common divine ancestry, meaning that only those val that descended from Illiiric valinor could rob from each other, and so on.

The news of this stunned the val'Mehan hierarchy, who had originally envisioned playing a bloody game of "king of the hill", with the end result being that the val'Mehan clan remained the only val family in existence. Seeing that goal was impossible, certain words were whispered into other ears, and for the proper amount of coin, positions and other favors, the ritual and its implications were shared.

Within a matter of months, the entirety of the Imperium, here upon Arcanis and across its extra-planar territories, fell upon itself like a pack of ravenous wolves. Some realized that participating and losing meant oblivion, so they chose another option: hiding away in the darkest and tiniest corners of the realm and waiting for the day when the others would come to their senses. It was in this way that the val'Haupt, as well as a few others, survived to the modern day.

Others claim that their hands were forced; that it was a kill or be killed situation and fell upon their kin with a bloodlust that would have sickened Nier, the God of War. Whole cities and their populations were extinguished, and entire bloodlines were erased from creation, their heritage taken from them and incorporated into the victorious val.

With the Imperium crumbling, it took cooler heads to finally bring an end to the carnage and cannibalism that was taking place across its lands. The head of the val'Abebi family, one Hanakubus val'Abebi, finally stepped forward and used his considerable influence and that of his family to bring an end to the Blood Wars. His own family had succumbed to this manipulation, hunting down and exterminating other val families descended from Althares, and Hanakubus was disgusted by what the valiant val had become. Quietly and over many months, he negotiated with the heads of each of the surviving val clans, brokering a deal that ended the internecine war and restored peace to the realm. This peace thankfully lasted for many generations, with the honor of the val once again firmly ensconced in place and reigning over mankind wisely and fairly.

That is until Manetas, the Pride of Illiir, decided that it was time for a change.

The Different Races of Humanity

When the humans that followed the Gods to shores of Onara began to explore their new lands, they were shocked to discover that humans already existed here, primarily in the southern regions.

While almost identical to each other, the biggest difference between the followers of the Gods, who called themselves the Mandai and the indigenous humans of Onara, known as the Savosh, were cosmetic – the Mandai being slightly taller on average than the Savosh and in turn, the Savosh were slightly wider of build and more rugged and robust.

Those Savosh that made up the hereditary ruling caste of the extant nations and city-states had the most remarkable eyes of a hue unknown to the Mandai; upon seeing them, many remarked that they were lavender, or gold flecked. In turn, the steel-grey eyes of the val struck the Savosh with astonishment.

While the two human races and their empires would clash from time to time, for the most part they lived harmoniously and commingled their populations. Strangely, any attempts to mix the two lines resulted in stillbirths and miscarriages.

The War of Empires
(-2247 I.C. to -2159 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Passive History 14 or Religion: Pantheon of Man

While humanity knew prosperity and expansion during those first thousand years, it also made terrible enemies, principally the other two great human empires on Arcanis: the Myrantian and the Ossarion Empires. What little is known of this cataclysmic war was found on the moldering scrolls of the historian Lavintius in the catacombs beneath the First City. Lavintius states that as a younger man he fought in the legions against the barbaric and wholly uncivilized Ossarions. If the great historian ever explained why this other empire was seen as such, those





notations were lost within the heavily damaged scrolls, but he does describe them as an *implacable enemy*, whose warriors pillaged and razed wondrous Palanzur (the ancient name of Panari) and glittering Diotym (unknown to modern scholars – a lost city). The final entry in the scroll is covered in large swaths of black mold, which incidentally drove the first scholar to try to unroll the scroll mad, was the cryptic word *Xiothun*. Whether this was the name of a deity worshipped by the Ossarions or something else entirely remains unknown.

At the same time the Imperium's legions fought this other empire, it was assaulted from the far south. Populated entirely by fanatical worshippers of bizarre and frightening gods, this vast empire engaged in a generations-long war that pushed the Imperium of Man to its limits. Ironically, this empire called itself the Myrantian Empire, but scholars have concluded that this empire is not the same as the modern Myrantian Empire that was swallowed up by the vast Kraldjur Morass at the dawn of the Time of Terror.

These two wars also stirred the rumblings of rebellion within the Imperium itself, resulting in no less than a half-dozen insurrections and outright secession, requiring immediate attention and a brutal reprisal. Entire cities and their populations were scourged during this unstable period in the Imperium's history, some never to rise again and their names found only in hoary scrolls or plundered works of art.

It was this unique confluence of events that allowed the Pride of Illiir to insinuate himself into the affairs of men. Besieged on multiple fronts by inimical forces and hobbled by an ineffectual Imperator, a squabbling Assembly, as well as the constant political one-upmanship between the val'Emman and the val'Virdan families that left the Imperium's military leadership in disarray or in the hands of incompetent officers, the Imperium of Man appeared to be heading for extinction.

It was then that Manetas, the Pride of Illiir, decided to make his move.

Instead of dramatically flying over the First City on his gilded wings and offering divine help, crafty Manetas instead took a subtler approach. First he insinuated himself in the dreams of the Imperator,

then did the same to key figures in the Assembly, the legislative body that managed the day-to-day bureaucracy of the Imperium, as well as many mid-level priests. Slowly but surely, over weeks and months, the idea of divine intervention to help the Children of the Gods survive the current crises began to emerge in the orations of prominent assemblymen, the sermons of priests and priestesses of the Pantheon, and finally the Imperator himself, who with the backing of the Assembly, entreated the Hierophant, the Imperium's spiritual leader, to enact a ritual of supplication. On the longest day of the year, with the bright orb of Illiir shining down upon His children's holy city, Manetas, the Pride of Illiir appeared in winged splendor, seeming to emerge from the heart of the sun.

With blessings and words of encouragement, the valinor soothed the anxiety of the people, assuring them of their inevitable victory over those that opposed them. When some of the more fanatical zealots begged and pleaded for him to lead them through this age of calamity, the wily Manetas feigned modesty and redoubled his encouragement to the assembled masses saying, *"…to all families there comes a day when their children must stand on their own"*. He did not want to deprive the worthy children of the gods that moment of self-realization.

Yet after offering these words of encouragement, the Pride of Illiir did not depart for the Heavens but instead remained ever-present and nearby, offering a subtle frown when an unwise battle strategy was presented or an almost imperceptible shake of his golden mane when an untested or incompetent general was nominated to lead the forces of mankind. In this way did Manetas slowly but surely begin to wield unparalleled influence over the inner workings of the Imperium. Little by little, assemblymen and lay priests looked for the valinor's slightest signals as a measure of the correctness of their actions, rather than to their leaders, the hierophant, or the incompetent Imperator.

The Massacre at Erbo River (-2151 to -2159 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Passive History 16 or History: Myths and Legends

As with most wars, the fortunes of all the disparate sides waxed and waned. Battles were won and lost but no one decisive clash emerged until the Battle of Erbo River, which ultimately became known as the Massacre at Erbo River. More concerned with gaining glory for himself and his lineage than listening to the advice of his officers, High General Tantalus val'Assanté lured the forces of the Myrantians and the Ossarions to the same battlefield hoping that the two forces would annihilate one another, after which he would lead his five legions and decimate the remaining opposition.

The great general made two tactical blunders that day. The first was to assume that his two adversaries would view one another as enemies and strive to force the other from the field. The second was to put the River Erbo at his back, cutting off any avenue of retreat should his gambit fail.

And fail it did.

The Myrantians and the Ossarions kept a wary eye on each other but failed to engage in battle. Instead, the leaders turned their attention upon the hapless legions and quickly began to carve them up like a sacrificial lamb.

When news of the massacre reached the First City, there was outrage and vows of vengeance, as well as an undercurrent of panic and a notion that their sense of invulnerability and divine superiority were but an illusion, propagated by a debauched and incompetent ruler. For the first time in the Imperium's history, cries for the head of the Imperator and his lackey, the Hierophant, were heard ringing through the streets of the First City. Graffiti demanding their abdications, or simply their deaths, would appear quicker than the ability of slave crews to erase them.

As riots began to break out in different parts of the First City, and cities that had ever been the staunchest supporters of the Imperator's rule began to approach the representatives of the



Myrantians and the Ossarions to independently sue for peace, Manetas appeared floating above the Temple of the Pantheon. In each hand he momentarily held aloft the heads of the Imperator and the Holy Hierophant before flinging them down to the seething masses.

Then, in a voice that could cool a raging fire, he began to address all the peoples of the Imperium, those that gathered below him as well as those who lived in its most remote reaches. He spoke to the fears and uncertainty welling within the breasts of all those who heard his voice, asking each to calm themselves and know that they would never be forsaken by their Gods. He spoke of the betrayal, by incompetence of the Imperator and the failed leadership of the Holy Hierophant, who instead of being the voice of the gods to Their children, wallowed upon silk pillows, gorging himself while others suffered daily the depredations and self-sacrifice that came with war.

Lastly, he comforted the masses by saying that until the crisis was over, and the Children of the Gods were once again safe and living the joyous life all parents wanted of their children, that he, Manetas, first of the valinor of Illiir, would carry the heavy burden of both the scepter of the Imperator as well as the holy mantle of Hierophant.

At first there were rumblings among the people at this pronouncement, much like a child who instinctively knows that what he is about to do is wrong but does not yet know why. The death, nay murder, of their two leaders, regardless of the failings of the men who held the office, shocked them to their core, especially when the killer was a divine being who daily basked in the radiance of the Gods.

Before the rumblings could turn to ill-thought action, the head of the val'Assanté family stepped forward and, followed quickly by those of his family as were present, kneeled before the hovering valinor, pressing forehead to stone in abject obeisance. In a shocked silence that filled the plaza before the Temple of the Pantheon, the heavy footsteps of born military men rang out in unison. Falling to their knees and quickly emulating the actions of the fair haired val'Assanté, a score of val'Virdan legionnaires quietly gave their tacit approval and fealty through this simple act.

Immediately within the city and across the vast lands of the Imperium, anywhere where its citizens gathered to hear and see the valinor, people dropped to their knees in abject approval, though some would call it submission, of the words of Manetas.

Alighting upon the steps of the temple, Manetas walked down to the masses kneeling before him. Reaching out with a hand so perfect, it appeared to have been cast in alabaster by a master sculptor, he laid it upon the head of the val'Assanté patriarch and proclaimed that the val'Assanté would speak with his voice across the Imperium and any orders or edicts from them should be treated as if they were issued directly by him.

Reaching over to the val'Virdan patriarch and lifting his head up to stare into his steel-grey eyes, the Pride of Illiir continued by elevating the val'Virdan to be the generals of all his armies. *"As the val'Assanté are my voice, let it be known that the val'Virdan shall be my hands, either to reach out to offer succor or to be clenched into an indomitable fist that none may stand against."*

Faith is a powerful thing.

It can raise those in despair into the light of hope and it can turn a skirmish over land and resources into a Holy War, where the faithful are transformed from mere soldiers into fierce zealots, each trying to ensure their entrance into the Paradise of the Gods. Manetas did not wave a hand and destroy the enemies of Man, nor did he personally intervene in any battles, though some claim he appeared high above the battlefield in the most crucial of engagements to further whip the legionnaires into a religious frenzy. What he did to take disheartened and dispirited troops and turn them into an unstoppable force, was to make one simple proclamation: *"You are the most blessed of the Gods, for it has fallen upon you to protect your brothers and sisters. From the foot of the Judgment of Nier to the gates of the Paradise of the Gods are one thousand steps. For each infidel you kill you shall be flown up a like number of steps, bypassing the trials and tribulations that all others must endure before entering the glory of the Heavens. Such is the reward that mighty Illiir grants to you for your sacrifice."*

The guarantee of entry into the Paradise of the Gods spurred the legionnaires to fight as never before. No longer did they fear death in a shallow grave, their lives thrown away and without meaning. The heavens awaited them now or if they should survive by some miracle, later at the end of their twilight years. With a fervor approaching suicidal madness, the legions of the Imperium fell upon the Myrantians as well as the Ossarions winning back lost territory inch by inch. In less than a year, the Myrantians were thrown back across the ocean, through dense jungle and nigh-impassable mountain ranges until, with their own empire now in danger of falling, their Phaeron sued

for peace; the terms of which were dictated by Manetas and accepted by their fallen foe.

Of the Ossarions all mention of their defeat has been lost with the exception of a fragment scrawled by the historian Parmenios, in the margin of his treatise on political philosophy which cryptically stated, *"…once found and destroyed, the Ossarions no longer had…prosecute their war, having lost…One can only hope that they never again step foot across the…"*

Finally, after nearly a century of total war, the Imperium was at peace, its people looking forward to rebuilding their nation and culture. Unfortunately, that was when they discovered that the bill for their victory was due.

The Reign of Perfection (-2159 to -2065 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Passive History 14 or History: Myths and Legends

It is interesting to note that out of all the many tomes, scrolls, and pamphlets recovered from this period, none spoke of anything negative or calamitous happening to the people of the Imperium. In fact, taken at face value, one would need to conclude that such a paradise was created upon Arcanis that the imperial citizens had no other worries to occupy their minds and so they turned to creating beautiful hymns and poetry extolling the beneficence, unending love, and generosity of the Gods. Yet if one were to place these works in chronological order, the astute scholar would note that what began as venerations to the gods was slowly transformed into works of adoration and admiration for Manetas alone.

These blandishments to the Eternal Imperator of Man, however, only served to whitewash the truly horrific life and culture that the Imperium now toiled beneath. Hundreds of thousands of citizens worked to ensure the perpetuation of the Imperium and the worship of their divine leader. Though none knew want nor were frightened for their safety, as none would dare openly defy and attack the people protected by a divine being, the citizens of the Imperium lived in a state of constant anxiety and fear, fear of their neighbors who might claim to overhear impure conversations spoken and report them to the terrifying abjurers, the inquisitorial arm of the government that were said to be able to detect the seeds of insurrection in the thoughts of men.

The only record of what life was truly like in the Imperium during that dark age was from the satirical writings of a being known only as the Harlequin. Almost weekly, small pamphlets would emerge throughout the First City, poking fun at the Pride of Illiir and at the same time, poignantly illuminating for the people all the freedoms they had lost by allowing this creature to govern them. *"Man should be led by and be accountable to men, not eternal beings who have no notion of what it is to go hungry, laugh at a ribald joke, or grow old and infirm. In their wisdom, the Gods knew that they had to leave us to our own devices, to flourish or fall based on our actions alone. It's time for us to push* ***pride*** *aside and gain wisdom through our own mistakes and accomplishments."* No records exist of Manetas' response, though one can only imagine that pricking the side of the ultimate Pride would lead to an ultimate reprisal.

The true effect this paper revolution had on fomenting unrest and eventually leading to the overthrow of Manetas has been argued in scholarly circles since the discovery of the scrolls and tomes relating the events. What is without question is that eventually a small circle of rebels emerged from the inner circle of Manetas' bureaucracy; apparently the val'Assanté could no longer stomach the rule of their divine ancestor.

The Banishment of Manetas (-2065 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Passive History 14 or History: Myths and Legends

Using the system put in place by the Eternal Imperator himself to efficiently administer the vast Imperium, the val'Assanté created cells in the towns and cities, searching for some way to defeat the valinor, or at least a manner in which to control it.

The solution that was eventually discovered is not known to modern man. No record of its nature or manner has ever been found.



The writings that do exist mention the banishment of Manetas in the most oblique terms, stating that the *"…true nature masked by his beauty was revealed and hidden away in a place where it would rest with its kind."*

For centuries, many have pondered the riddle in these words, but after the epic events witnessed by many, the meaning was clear – Manetas was ensorcelled and trapped in the form of a hideous statue, resembling more infernal than valinor, and placed in plain sight in a gallery of the grotesque, in place known for its foulness even then – Nishanpur.

It is interesting to note how the sins of the ancestors ripple through time to bedevil their descendants thousands of years later. The exaltation and downfall of the Pride of Illiir at the hands, primarily, of the val'Assanté would lead to terrible consequences thousands of years later. Ironically, actions taken in this pivotal moment of time would again ripple through the ages to cause chaos in the modern age.

When the val'Virdan, arguably the most dogmatic of the val families, were elevated above all the others as the "hand or fist" of Manetas, some of that lineage used their new-found powers to persecute their cousins, the val'Emman. Almost since the moment the twin brother and sister, Virdan and Emman were gifted with the power of the valinor, has there existed a sibling rivalry between the two families.

Unfortunately, the political machinations of the Imperium and the constant quest for power over one's competitors turned the two households against one another.

During the period of rule under Manetas, the rivalry became a feud with privileges stripped, lands and fortunes lost, and members of the family slain for the most inconsequential of reasons. With their protector gone, the val'Virdan found themselves in the tenuous position that all taskmasters do when a regime changes, at the center of the attention of those who suffered under their lash.



The Enslavement of the val'Virdan (-2062 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: val'Virdan, val'Emman, Passive History 16, or History: Myths and Legends

During the time of the Imperium, laws would be written and enacted by the Assembly, assuming the imperator did not object to the sentiment or the letter of the law. These were then transcribed and copied onto thousands of parchments and delivered to the various cities and large settlements across the land.

Not so with an edict from the Imperator.

These edicts were a rare thing, and due to their rarity, often pertained to matters that were of the gravest importance to the people of the Imperium. These edicts were kept in a vault known as the Room of Golden Records, due to the fact that all such edicts were inscribed in wafer-thin tablets of gold. Though looters melted down the majority of these tablets during the Shadowed Age, some remain, laying undiscovered under layers of dust and cobwebs inches thick until discovered by members of the Emerald Society.

One such golden record was inscribed with the words of the newly installed Imperator Menokum val'Assanté, and pronounced that the *"evidence against the val'Virdan, as brought forth by their victims, upon whose behalf the val'Emman act now as surrogates, having themselves suffered under the blind obedience of these scions of Nier, has been judged to be true. Their actions are indefensible. There is another animal in this land that does not think of its actions, nor question its master when told to attack – the dog. And while We find this animal to be true and noble, it is still an animal.*

"Thus, shall it be with the val'Virdan.

"All members of the House of Virdan are hereby stripped of their citizenship, lands, titles and all privileges afforded to *them. As dogs they acted and as dogs they shall forevermore be. From this day forth, they shall be the Imperium's 'Dogs of War', fighting our battles and dying for our cause until the day it is deemed that their blood has finally washed away their sins.*

"So I have spoken. So let it be done."

And so for hundreds of years did the val'Virdan wear the yoke of the warrior-slave, taking up arms in the defense of the Imperium of Man, as their cousins, the val'Emman, took possession of their lands, titles, and privileges. They lived in squalor during times of peace and upon muddy fields during those of war, giving their last breath battling all who would oppose the will of Man; their only reward or symbols of recognition for their sacrifice and loyalty being the gore of those who opposed them.

Each new generation of val'Virdan was born into slavery, their days filled with grueling training. Children would compete with one another in combat, with the victors winning a meal to fill their empty bellies, while those who fell would never again rise.

Thus it was until the birth of Leonydes val'Virdan.

The Time of the Theocracy of the Cleansing Flame (-1800 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Val or Passive History 14

As with most peoples who live under despotic rule or are reduced to exchanging their dignity for their lives, the val'Virdan held onto hope through a prophecy given onto them by the outlawed Sisters of the Flame, that among them would be born one who would lead them out of captivity and wreck the vengeance of their ancestors on their oppressors. This val'Virdan would be known as the Sword of the Heavens and would never know defeat on the battlefield.

Since the time the prophecy was first revealed, outlawed val'Virdan priests cast auguries by burning the umbilical cord of all children born to val'Virdan women, within incandescent braziers. Decades passed without sign of the savior of the val'Virdan and many began to lose hope.

But these priests of Nier had not the mettle of their warrior brethren, and eschewed the



battlefield. It was because of this that they failed to discover the babe born on a battlefield in the far-off Dargosian Isles (Dailish Isles?), during the final years of a campaign to pacify the proud people of that land. His mother, an anointed holy champion of Nier fell in battle mere months after giving birth; his father was unknown. Any other child would have died undergoing the hardship that the warrior-slaves endured traveling back to the heart of the Imperium, but not Leonydes. When the leader of the battalion saw that the child had survived the voyage, he declared that the thrall Legion of the Cleansing Flame would be both mother and father to the infant.

At fourteen, Leonydes val'Virdan was already taller and stronger than most fully grown men. By seventeen, the young man, swathed in the flaming pillar of Nier, began a rebellion that would lead his people to freedom and overthrow the ancient empire of man.

Sweeping out from the east, the Sword of the Heaven's prestige grew with each battle won, each city taken and every Nierite freed from captivity. What began as a rebellion of a few dozen swelled in three years to a lean army of thousands, all motivated by their fanatical belief that their ferocious god would no longer allow His favored sons and daughters to wallow another day in captivity. Confidence in their young leader grew with each battle won, for it was as the red priests extolled nightly, no army led by the Sword of the Heavens could be defeated in battle. And each legion sent out by the Imperator that lay crushed beneath the sandaled feet of their leader only served to embolden the embittered warriors of the Cleansing Flame.



As news reached the capital that Leonydes' rebel army was making its way inexorably west towards the First City, panic spread through the populace. Hearing of the awful revenge being taken upon those who were deemed responsible for their enslavement, the val'Assanté men sent their women and children into hiding. Not trusting their ability to withstand the delicate mercies of Leonydes' Mandators, the val'Assanté men entrusted the continuation of their lineage to certain Sarishan priests, that after paying their exorbitant demands, would secret the val'Assanté families where the Cleansing Flame would never find them, a location the val'Assanté men would never know.

The val'Emman, on the other hand, knew that their complete extermination would be at hand should Leonydes' band of slaves capture them. While

some branches of the family demanded that they not surrender to what they deemed was an undisciplined mob of marauders, other branches of the family decided to hide in plain sight. Given that the Emman and the Virdan families were both descended from the same valinor of Nier, it was an easy matter to disguise the women and young children as val'Virdan, kept in the city as house or pleasure slaves. Saying goodbye to their wives, mothers, and sisters, the adult male val'Emman took up arms to face the inevitable.

Even the Palace of the Imperator was awash in a terror-inspired tumult as preparations were made to ensure the safety of their leader. The Imperator was told that the val'Virdan priests declared Leonydes the living avatar of the god Nier, and that as long as he led an army, it could never be defeated. Blanching at the thought of what such a man would do if seated upon the Throne of Man, the Imperator insisted that he remain as the final guardian of the throne, banishing any thought of escape.

To this end the priesthood of the Pantheon of Man was tasked with forging of twelve keys, one dedicated to each of the gods, even terrible Nier. These keys would be used to lock the imperial throne room behind an impenetrable barrier that not even the Sword of the Heavens could breach. As each key was turned, the two sides of the barrier would slide together, closer and closer, entombing the Imperator and his honor guard within until the threat of Leonydes could be brought to heel. With each turning, the key in question would be taken out of the lock and sent by messenger to some far-off corner of the Imperium, hidden away from Leonydes' grasp.

Before the throne room could be safely locked away, the ringing of steel, the cries of the dying and the roar of battle reached the Imperator. Quickly gathering his honor guard, the final ruler of the Imperium of Man quickly sat upon his throne to witness the final three Keys of Man being turned and whisked off to their hiding place. Slowly, the third to last key was turned, and the enormous blocks of stone that would seal him in slid closer together.

A loud banging resounded as the rebels attempted to breach the barred outer doors of the palace. *"Hurry,"* the Imperator commanded the priests, *"Hurry!"*

Off went the tenth Key of Man, in the hands of a young acolyte to a destination known solely to the boy and the Imperator. A deafening crash heralded the entry of the warriors of the Cleansing Flame into the palace. A hundred guards threw themselves at Leonydes and his men, to prevent them from stopping the Imperator's carefully crafted plans.

The second to the last key was turned, and inexorably the slabs moved closer, leaving but an arm span between them. Off went the eleventh key. *"Too late, you Nierite mongrel,"* smiled the Imperator, *"too late. This is one victory you'll be denied."*

His vision blocked by the stone barrier, he heard the scrapping of the twelfth and final key against the metal lock, as the priest's hand trembled at the sight of the massacre taking place not more than a few yards from him. *"Turn the key, you fool,"* screamed the Imperator!

Finally, he heard the click, even over the gurgling death screams of his men, and the blocks began to roll on the heavily greased groove a final time. *"I've beaten you, Leonydes,"* screamed the Imperator. *"I shall deny you your prize for all eternity if need…"*

The final words caught in his throat as Leonydes swept into his range of vision, an avenging specter clad in red, hefting a long spear in his hand. Eyes bulging in disbelief, he saw the Sword of the Heavens, ignoring two soldiers of the Imperium clinging to his waist and leg, cock his arm back and let fly the spear. Agony shot through the Imperator's chest seconds after witnessing the impossible throw fly true through the quickly narrowing gap between the closing barrier and strike with such force that it impaled him to the Throne of Man.

"Enjoy your throne, Imperator," growled Leonydes, "may it serve you well as you rule from the Abyss!"

So did the Imperium of Man fall and the Theocracy of the Cleansing Flame spread its dominion of terror over the lands of Man.



The Exodus to Khitan
(-1800 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Khitani, Passive History 16, or History: Myths and Legends

Many months before the bright pillar of flame signaled the coming of the Sword of the Heavens and his armies to the gates of the First City, the prophet of the Sleeping Emperor, val'Hsin Yu had been at work. He proselytized in the streets, small living rooms, and in whatever taproom, barroom, and back alley that held enough people to listen to his words and pay for a bowl of wine or two.

His words found purchase in the hearts and minds of those whose families and vassals had settled the lands to the northwest, those who had been too far to learn of the monstrous ritual that sparked the Blood War or too few in number that they were able to hide so as not to fall prey to the other vals. Yu spoke to all except those descended from lineages that betrayed bright Manetas; these were kept ignorant of his words so that they might suffer in the purge to come.

In the ancient manses of these chosen families, the prophet of the Sleeping Emperor, a celestial then known only as the Larissan Valinor of Dreams, Yu would speak the words given to him in his sleep, though often layered between slurred words and mangled proverbs, These prophecies spoke of a retribution delivered by a column of flames. Yu's attendant, a young boy who was forever cleaning his master's long white beard and tending to his needs, served to translate the subtler nuances of his message: that the day would soon come when they would leave the First City and keep alight the age of wisdom and reason that their cousins were destined to lose.

When the pillar of flame appeared on the horizon, these select families began to pack whatever they could and sought out the besotted prophet. Lying in a darkened alleyway, val'Hsin Yu was startled to find that his prophecies were actually coming true. He had believed his dreams were only that – dreams and that they were useful only for food and drink for a night or two, but nothing more. All this flashed through, or rather sloughed through his cloudy mind, but his mouth appeared to be acting on its own accord.

"We must travel to the Starry Gate and then embark on a long journey towards the northwest", his voice spoke out, clear and filled with confidence.

"But all the gates are closed and guarded by order of the Imperator. How are we to leave?" the people cried out.

"Have faith" was the only answer given.

The prophet finally awoke to find himself at the mouth of an avenue that led to the huge plaza before the Starry Gate, and was momentarily panicked to find himself at the head of a column of people stretching back for several wide blocks. Before he could say anything, his young attendant pulled upon his soiled, wide sleeved robe and said, *"Be not fearful, my son. You have done all that was expected and required of you. I shall do the rest."*

With that the young boy, who had never seemed to age over the many years Yu had known him, walked to the head of the column and began to shine like a star. By the time the people were able to blink back the brightness, the young boy had turned into a winged valinor, floating inches off the ground.

Speaking to them in a melodic tone, he addressed them. *"Fear not my children. I am the Dreaming of the Lady of Prophecy, divine Larissa. Long have you been my favorite of all the children of the Gods, for you abstained from the despicable acts of cannibalism that occurred during the Blood Wars and demonstrated that you knew your place in the Celestial Order when Blessed Manetas appeared and had no hand in his imprisonment. Without knowing, you have been following the path set forth by the Holy Text, the Kalindruhl. Should you follow me, you will no longer be known as the val, but the ul, the Blessed, and will be forever exalted above your lesser cousins.*

"For these reasons I have been given permission by the Goddess to lead you away from the coming doom. But know that one's fate may be avoided but never truly escaped. What is forestalled today shall be revisited upon you ten-fold tomorrow. While it is, and always has been, ultimately your choice, know that should you decide to follow me, you will have a grand part to play in the coming future of this world."

With that, the valinor alighted upon the flagstone floor and began to walk towards the gate. Among the newly anointed uls and their vassals there was no discussion or argument, no cries of disbelief or murmur of dissension; as one they walked behind the Dreaming of Larissa and, as though mist, walked unseen past the guards at the gate and towards their destiny.

No note was made of their departure until days later. A legion was sent to turn the exodus around, as every able-bodied person would be needed to fend off the Nierites. However, all thought of accomplishing such a task fled the minds of the Imperium's leaders when a gigantic meteor shower, one that the val'Abebi astronomers failed to predict, fell so heavily upon a

portion of the Aqtau Mountain range that it was pummeled down to low hills, now known as the Fervidus Hills. As for the legion sent to turn the fleeing citizens back, they were never heard from again.

The Theocracy of the Cleansing Flame
(-1800 to -1767 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: val'Virdan or Passive History 16

For over thirty years, Leonydes val'Virdan ruled over the dying carcass of the Imperium of Man. Though he declared himself imperator, he lacked the crown, scepter, and most importantly the anointing by the Hierophant of the Pantheon, himself a victim of the initial invasion by the Nierites, to be truly so.

And of course, the Throne of Man, the ultimate symbol of dominion over mankind had been locked away, forever denying him its singular power. Though he held the final Key, which had remained in the lock as the priest had no time to hide it before Leonydes fell upon him, it was discovered that while the locking mechanism could be activated one key at a time, opening the barrier required the assemblage of all twelve Keys of Man.

But other matters soon demanded the Sword of the Heavens' attention. Though he sent out some of his best trackers in a token effort to collect the hidden keys, he could not afford the resources required to regain them. Leonydes spent much of his reign mired in an endless string of wars, as the various provinces of the Imperium rebelled against his tyrannical rule. From the shadow of the frigid peaks of the Corlathian Mountains, to the sweltering swamps of the Kraldjur, to the capital of Khitan where, after personally leading his immense host, Leonydes was said to have met with the valinor known as the Sleeping Emperor throughout the night. By midmorning the next day, he



was leading his army back to the First City, refusing to speak of what transpired between them.

While at the head of his armies, stamping out the flames of rebellion across his restless empire, Leonydes relied on the priesthood of Nier to handle the day-to-day administration of the conquered imperium. A staunch orthodox himself, little could he have imagined the campaign of terror that the red priests carried out in both spreading the teachings of Nier and demanding that all denounce the other gods as their patron deity and make staggering offerings to the Lord of Flaming Destruction.

No office within the priesthood was kept as busy as that of the High Priest of the Pyre, where tens of thousands, refusing to forsake their own patron gods, became charred offerings. Even though the old Pantheonistic priests tried to temper the burning rage of the Flame Priests in the beginning, the suffering of the people was beyond measure. Eventually, these priests fled or joined their fellow heretics on the sacrificial pyre.

Finally, the cries of anguish became a roar of defiance. From a quiet corner in the far eastern portion of the Imperium, a minor val family known as the val'Holryn decided that enough was enough.

The Imprisonment of the Sword of the Heavens
(-1778 to -1767 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: val'Holryn, val'Mehan, val'Virdan, Passive History 16, or History: Myths and Legends

Prince Volthar val'Holryn raised an army of dedicated warriors to engage the Nierite forces with guerilla tactics rather than facing them in direct combat. Knowing that a battle couldn't be won when the Sword of the Heavens was leading the army, Volthar's hit-and-run strategies whittled down the Nierite forces without engaging them head on. Supplies would be taken or destroyed, sentries killed, and small squads vanquished, causing much consternation and nervousness among the Nierite troops.

After seven years of these attacks, Leonydes managed to corner Volthar's forces and decimated them in eight days of bloody battle. But Volthar had shown that the Swords of Nier were not invincible: that the Sword of the Heavens had a chink in his armor. Across the former Imperium, cities and entire provinces rose up in rebellion. The Nierite forces were spread thin and forced to travel from one far-flung city or province to another. No sooner would one hot bed of sedition be quashed than another two would erupt in revolt.

The Sword of the Heavens could only be at one place at a time; even commandeering the use of the Portals of Anshar and using their miraculous ability to transport its user great distances was not enough. Compounding the difficulty of using the Portals were the constant battles against the Legion of Grim Lamentation, guardians of these holy devices who were loath to allow the Nierites their use.

The beginning of the end came when the ancient city of Nishanpur overthrew their red-cloaked overseers and declared their independence from Leonydes' rule. The hoary city's defenders were capable and fiercely determined to free themselves from the yoke of his tyranny, but when the flame-wreathed Leonydes arrived at their walls they knew they were no match for him or his elite soldiers, the Warriors of the Eternal Flame.

Just as despair was settling upon the city's leaders, a stranger swathed in dark robes appeared and offered them a way to finally put an end to the Sword of the Heavens and save their own skins as well. He revealed himself as a sorcerer of some power and gave his name only as Amanth. He assured the Sarishan leaders that he possessed a ritual that Leonydes had no defense against, but would require time, the blood of their best soldiers, and a promise from them in the name of the city and all its inhabitants, now and for as long as Nishanpur stood. Knowing they had no other choice, the city's leaders agreed, spoke their vow and sealed it in blood.

Gathering over two dozen of the most learned and powerful magi from within the City of Secrets, Amanth prepared for a day and night, while the Sarishan soldiers harried the Nierite army, distracting them and delaying their attack to breach the city walls. Finally, as the final ray of Illiir's light hid beneath the horizon, the dire ritual began. Forming an arcane circle not with chalk or blood, but with their own bodies, Nishanpur's most powerful stood locked together around the stranger and began intoning the spell to rid the world of the Sword of the Heavens.

The chanting grew, loud enough to be heard from outside the walls of the city; loud enough to reach the ears of the Sword of the Heavens. Though he couldn't decipher the meaning of the chanting, Leonydes val'Virdan knew that Nishanpur was home

to blood mages and dark sorcerers and that this repeating mantra would bode ill if not stopped.

With even greater urgency, the Nierites were commanded to breach the walls. Amanth had anticipated such a move and countered it by having the most capable warriors available buy the time needed to complete the ritual with their lives. The Sarishan warriors moved to engage the Swords of Nier while their most skilled went to face Nier's avatar one at a time. These brave men and women knew they had no hope of defeating the greatest and fiercest warrior Arcanis had ever seen. They fought fearlessly, as only those who have surrendered their lives can. With each sword stroke and agonizing death, they delayed Leonydes minute by minute.

Hours passed and the pile of bodies that lay strewn in his path grew and grew. Leonydes' frustration mounted as each time he cut down an opponent, as another would miraculously appear before him. No words or taunts, not even a declaration of who it was that now challenged him came from their lips, only another thrust, swing or cut aimed at him. *"Enough,"* he would cry, *"enough of this"*, but to no avail as yet another warrior would launch themselves at him with swords, dagger, axes and even twin bladed spears. None could best him as long as the flames of his lord and master swathed him in its red embrace.

Finally, just as dawn began to peak from the east, the chanting ended. The husks of the magi that participated in the ritual rattled a final exhalation from desiccated lungs and collapsed in a pile of bones and dry, paper skin. Only the black robed Amanth remained, surrounded by those who sacrificed their very essence to power the spell that would deny a man his connection to the divine. A final word, no more than a syllable long echoed out from the courtyard and reached the Sword of the Heavens.

Leonydes felt more than heard that final word. The flames that surrounded him slowly began to congeal, as if the fire was taking on the essence of jelly. His movements became sluggish and peering through the flames became more and more difficult. With a final great cracking sound, the pillar of flames that surrounded him, showing all his unique status as the most favored of the Lord of Flaming Destruction, froze solid and trapped him within like a fly in amber.

A cheer of joy spontaneously rose up from the ramparts of the city's walls as well as the blood-soaked fields surrounding it. The tyrant was defeated. His reign of terror was over. With renewed vigor, the surviving soldiers eyed their red-armored opponents as a hungry dog salivating before a meaty bone. The time for a reckoning was nigh.

As for Leonydes val'Virdan, the Sword of the Heavens and Nier's avatar upon the world, his frozen tomb disappeared amongst the slaughter that went on that day. For a few generations, his name was used by parents to scare children into behaving until eventually he faded from the collective memory of mankind.

The Snuffing Out of the Flame (-1767 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: val'Virdan, Passive History 16, or History: Myths and Legends

Imperial historians mark the defeat of Leonydes val'Virdan as the end of that interim period between the overthrow of the Imperium and beginning of the Shadowed Age. Though Leonydes claimed the title of imperator, his reign is traditionally separated from the rule of the imperium and is instead known as the Theocracy of the Cleansing Flame. The Theocracy was known for its sweeping purges and manhunts, punctuated by mass cleansing pyres, where the living and the dying, insurrectionists and heretics all, fed the hungry flames as an offering to holy Nier.

With Leonydes trapped by potent sorceries within a pillar of frozen flames, the insurrectionists fell upon his honor guard and elite forces with a terrible vengeance. Of the thousands of warriors and as many camp followers that were led by the Sword of the Heavens onto the Blood Plains of Nishanpur, only a fraction managed to fight their way out of the ensuing massacre.

Harassed and harried on their flight east,



the surviving members of Leonydes' elite guard, the Swords of Nier, managed to fend off wave upon wave of attacks until they finally reached the vast Shaulk Mountains. It appeared that the proposition of attacking the Nierites upon such treacherous ground was enough to give the insurrectionists pause and they finally give up their vendetta. Many assumed that the forbidding mountains, home to many foul and fel beasts, would finish their work for them.

But the Swords of Nier were forged in the crucible of a thousand battles, and would not break. Upon the eastern slopes, they paused in their flight to rest and plan on how to rescue their revered leader, when Nevatha, one of the Sisters of the Flame, said that she had been visited by a flame-winged valinor. He whispered to her, telling of the penance that Leonydes must pay for his excesses.

The flame-winged valinor told them to bind their wounds, bury their dead and go to an obscure holy city where the very blood of Nier had fallen upon the land, ages in the past. There they would grow strong once again and await a sign from the west – a great gout of flame that would reach the heavens themselves. When that finally occurred many years in the future, they would flock to that signal and be reunited with their lord once more.

Knowing that the visions of one of the Sisters of the Flame was beyond reproach, the exhausted warriors set about searching for the ancient holy city of Erduk and began the long wait until they could be reunited with their divinely-touched master.

Unfortunately, their brethren left behind in the First City were faced with an ordeal not even their tempered souls could withstand.

The Fall of the First City
(-1766 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: val'Virdan, Passive History 16, or History: Myths and Legends

The High Priest of the Pyre stood beside Leonydes' Second Blade and watched from the towering balcony as the First City of Man burned. This was not the holy fire of sacrament or the flames of purification, but the incandescent rage of a people who would wear the yoke of oppression no longer.

Rumor of the Sword of the Heaven's death at the hands of the insurrectionists spread throughout the cities of the Imperium until finally, with the advancing rebel army crossing through the very Gate of the Gods did the truth of the matter reveal itself – Leonydes val'Virdan, the Avatar of Nier was no more. The cries of nervous celebration and desperate disbelief spread throughout the golden spires of the divine metropolis, threatening to drown out the clash of battle between the Nierites and the rebel fighters.

Elegant cathedrals and other monuments that stood for centuries toppled and crashed as priests and magi on both sides unleashed their destructive power. The High Priest of the Pyre called down flaming sheets of destruction upon the heads of the insurrectionists, while the rebels retaliated with their own potent magic, until most of the buildings that crowned the top of the Plateau of Dagha were burnt-out shells - newly-created ruins that none would ever believe were once masterpieces of architectural wonder.

Anyone caught wearing the red cape symbolic of the adherents of the Cleansing Flame were slaughtered, either by the rebel soldiers or by the oppressed civilians using nothing more than tooth and nail. Such was the slaughter that the surfaces of the remaining buildings were awash with sticky crimson.

In this way was the First City of Man, gifted to them by the Gods, purchased with the blood of countless elorii, turned into a charnel house.

The High Priest of the Pyre, many fervently asserted, he who had been responsible for so many deaths at the sacrificial fires, was torn limb from limb by the maddening crowd. Others told a different story – of how the High Priest and a score of men and women, all adherents of the Flame, fled through a small postern gate ironically located behind the bronze statue of Hurrian, the Protector.

Guarding their retreat was the Second Blade of Nier, Balam the Walking Wall, wielding his twin axes and standing as immovable as the statue in whose shadow he stood. The Walking Wall lived up to his name, becoming a barrier that none could pass, weaving a steel web that turned aside each and every blow, all the while singing a hymn to Nier, *"We Only Live When We Die for You"*.

For six hours the giant held the gate, giving the holy priest and his charges time to make their escape, but eventually Balam proved to be made of flesh and not stone, after all. Though the commander of the insurrectionists called for Balam to surrender, the Walking Wall merely smiled and kept swinging his axes, perhaps not as high or as fast as before, but deadly enough to give the rebels pause. Finally, a call for a charge from the spearmen finally impaled the

mighty warrior to the stone wall, but not before his axes cleaved the heads of three more of his adversaries. Gurgling bile and blood, the mighty Balam smiled and said, *"He will return, and his vengeance shall make the Heavens tremble"*. He had that same damnable smile when he finally breathed his last.

A cheer exploded from the victorious rebel soldiers and the surviving populace, which now began to emerge from various hiding places, like rats fleeing from a flooding sewer. The coup of the Sword of the Heavens was over; the end to his reign of fear and tyranny had been bought by so much blood that even Lord Sarish blanched and cried, *"No more!"* at the sight of it.

Dazed and with a strange sense of elation and confusion, the surviving citizens of the First City looked about at the death and ruin, heard the weeping of those who found the body of a loved one, and paled at the heavy price they had paid for their freedom. They had to rebuild and start anew, if all the death and destruction were to have meaning, but they knew not where to begin.

But the Gods were kind and quickly removed all worry of reconstruction and replaced it with something more familiar. From the last of the few remaining towers, a scout yelled out from her perch, *"To arms! To arms! They approach! The elorii approach!"*

It is said that the Gods are kind, but oh so fickle.

The Eloran Reconquista (-1766 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, val'Holryn, Passive History 16, or History: Myths and Legends

With barely a day to rest, the exhausted soldiers hurried the civilian survivors to hastily erected barricades in the ancient Temple of the Pantheon and made ready to repel the enemy invaders. As the day dawned and they looked over the ruined ramparts, despair set into their hearts. They quickly called for any survivors that could stand and hold a weapon, but even with these to supplement their ranks, they could barely field five thousand. Against them were arrayed fresh eloran troops, at least ten times their number. The abandonment of the Citadel of Saluwé to reinforce the First City had left them unguarded and unprepared for an assault from the Vastwood.

A palpable wave of fear spread through the human warriors, some finally reaching their breaking point falling to the knees, sobbing uncontrollably. The leader of the rebels, Achabades val'Holryn, knew that their last days were upon them. It is said that the general leapt upon the base of the marble statue of Illiir that once stood in the central square that greeted any who entered through the main gate of the city, and delivered a speech that filled his soldiers with determination. His exact words are lost to history, for the precious few that survived did not preserve them for posterity. It is said that he did not hide the fact that the chances of survival were nonexistent, but that if they were to awaken in the Cauldron in the morning, their arrival would be heralded with the screams of their foes.

With a grim fatalism, the ragged defenders of the First City of Man were determined to make the elorii pay for every inch of the city with their blood. For their part, the elorii were prepared to do just that. Waves upon wave of Mârokene warriors clashed with the interlocked shields of the human phalanx, as Kelekene wielding elder sorcery acted and defended against human arcane and divine magic. The back lines of the elorii army cheered as large numbers of sorcerers unleashed such horrific magic as had not been seen in millennia, even as the human counterattack resulted in several elorii magi winking out of existence with a pop, as air rushed to fill in the space they had once occupied.

Though they held the gate for eight days and nights, giving time for the remaining women and children to evacuate, the outcome was never in question – the elorii eventually burst through the defenders and scattered them to the four corners of the ruined city. A number of elorii hunter squads tracked and put down the remaining human defenders, while a smaller group attempted to penetrate the barricaded Temple of the Pantheon, determined to eradicate the human vermin that had defiled their city, wondrous Belestor.



During the six days of their occupation, the elorii sent a great number of their troops into the vast and endless catacombs that riddled the Plateau of Dagha, upon which the First City stood. A few of the hidden human survivors saw a fraction of the elorii return to the surface, laden with artifacts and booty. Other groups of elorii set about eliminating what they could of the human stain upon Belestor, destroying buildings and monuments at will.

Then on the seventh day, the elorii rapidly reorganized their numbers and left the Plateau of Dagha, leaving only a handful of humans that still drew breath within the unbreached Temple of the Pantheon and those few scattered about in hidey-holes. The human survivors were at a loss as to why the elorii quit their attack and left. Some believed that they had sated their thirst for vengeance or had found whatever ancient artifacts were hidden in the endless catacombs below. None could say for sure, though one small boy, hidden in the many crags that dotted the sides of the gigantic mesa said that a group of elorii, among them Ardakene dressed in priestly robes, approached the area where the Eternal Choir sang their haunting hymns.

As the elorii were about to attack, the priests stopped them and, according to the boy, just stood as if in a trance and listened to the Choir sing. After two days, the elorii broke from their meditation and hurried away from the area, as if in a panic. Soon thereafter, the eloran forces left the broken and burnt-out shell of what was once a gleaming city of wonder and splendor.

Bewildered, the humans slowly emerged from their hiding places and from behind the battered, but unbroken doors of the Temple. Looking about at the utter destruction wrought upon the First City of Man, they turned, and one by one began to file out through the Gate of the Gods and down the winding Azure Way. By the end of the day, the haunting voices of the Eternal Choir would be the only human sounds that would be heard throughout the First City for the next few centuries.

The Shadowed Age
(-1766 to -35 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Passive History 16 or History: Myths and Legends

With the withdrawal of the elorii, the remaining survivors saw their ancestral lands as accursed. For too



many years had the inhabitants of the First City withstood an almost constant barrage of death and destruction. First one or two of the survivors packed up their meager belongings and started down the cracked stairway down onto the plains of the Blessed Lands; soon they were followed by a few more, until within a month, the majestic metropolis that embodied the dominion of mankind over all it surveyed lay deserted. The era of humanity's reign was over, following the other great civilizations that preceded it into the annals of history.

The only remnant of the Imperium remaining was the small group of wizened men and women comprising the Eternal Choir, perched upon a rocky spur that dangled upon the side of the enormous mesa. There, through wrack and ruin, they continued to fulfill their sacred duty and sang their arcane song – never pausing, never ending, just as their sobriquet insisted.

Decades passed and few who had actually lived upon the sacred mound remained to tell of the tales of the glory that was the Imperium of Man. Those few hundred or so survivors spread out and commingled with the scattered settlements, small villages for the most part, which dotted the blasted basin that are the Plains of Dagha.

Though many centuries had passed since the suicidal elorii sacrificed their very essence in the blasphemous rite of Kurenthé, turning the once lush rainforest into a cracked and blistered landscape, the region had yet to fully recover. It was only in the past few hundred years that some few crops were able to be grown, and then only with the most doting of attention and the frequent sacrifices to Saluwé and the blessings of Her priestesses.

For a brief moment it seemed that humanity might reclaim its mighty heritage, when a group of giants claiming to have been tasked by the Gods to shepherd and guard mankind until it was able to rise again arrived, but even that turned into a nightmarish betrayal. Before too long, these celestial giants subjugated the separate pockets of humanity, demanding worship and tribute. When their treachery was repaid by glorious Illiir's divine curse, turning these majestic titans into a squat dwarven race, another brief but bloody war of retribution erupted as the oppressed took their revenge upon their oppressors, driving them deep below the ground and from the sight of the God's children.

And in this way was the ruin of Man complete; from enjoying a bounty that could satiate the most avaricious, wielding the ability to topple mountains, part the mighty oceans, and travel across enormous distances in the blink of an eye, to digging into the hard-packed earth in the hopes of exhuming bitter tubers and roots for sustenance. With their enemies, both ancient and new, picking away and taking their pound of flesh, all that remained were, comparatively speaking, a superstitious and ignorant race of beings that toiled for their very survival, with little time for philosophy, literature or art.

Mankind lived in the shadow of its own lost greatness for uncounted turns of world. Eventually, with small, tentative steps were the least of earlier accomplishments reclaimed. Hope began to shine as small dots of light across the ancient territory of the Imperium. It looked as if humanity was finally ready for the long and hard climb up the ladder of civilization, to reclaim its bright heritage.

That is until the veil between the Mortal Realm of Arcanis and the Infernal Hells was ripped apart and hundreds of thousands of devils, demons and fiends boiled over, wreaking havoc in the aptly named Time of Terror! Once again, the very extinction of Man was a real possibility.

The Time of Terror
(-35 to 1 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Passive History 10 or History: Myths and Legends

The first sign that the simple villagers of the Plains of Dagha saw of the looming catastrophe was a chill in the air, as if a cold snap was about to blanket the area, even though it was just another cloudless day in mid-summer. From far in the distance, but moving quickly from the south, a strange orange cloudbank, stretching from horizon to horizon, came boiling over the top of the



Corlathian Mountains, covering the entirety of the plains in moments, like a shroud over a cooling corpse.

Unearthly flashes of crackling bolts veined the cloudbank, and what at first appeared like the innocent shapes one imagines seeing in the sky, manifested into horrid nightmares. Infernals of every sort and size, type and shape descended upon the unsuspecting population. Villagers, simple farmers for the most part, raised implements meant for harvesting in defense of their families with the expected results. Not since the days of the overthrow of the Eloran Empire by the humans, had such carnage and savagery been witnessed in these lands.

Entire settlements, hundreds of men, women and children, died in an orgy of terror and slaughter that continued for weeks on end. The butchery persisted until finally even the infernals had had their fill of rapine and savagery. There they rounded up the few surviving humans, set themselves up as lords of their tiny realms and continued to revel in their cruel pastime, albeit at a more leisurely pace, as if savoring every delightful agony and atrocity their malignant minds could conjure up.

The Tomal Khan (-17 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Passive History 16 or History: Myths and Legends

Legend speaks of a band of fierce warriors that braved the mythical Mound where it was said the Gods lived to better survey the lands and people they ruled. The warriors endured the ascent, battling hideous creatures and horrors, inch by inch, until they were able to set foot upon the summit of the Mound. The Gods smiled upon the small band and anointed the leader the Tomal Khan, Regent of the Imperium of Man until the rightful heir to the Throne of Man returned to claim it.

Thus the story goes, as perpetuated by the Maghir, the tribe of the Tomal Khan. But there is another tale that tells quite a different story.

In this alternate telling, a tribe of nomads traveling about the western edge of the Sea of Lanterns were horrified to see the very sky seethe and roil until it finally split apart from the forces tearing and ripping at the very fabric of reality. The Time of Terror, when the ancient Myrantian Curse was triggered when the Sorcerer-King of Ymandragore set foot upon the shores of Onara, and the veil that separated the Realm of Man from the Hells was sundered, releasing a horde of Infernals over the land in a wave of blood and horror, had come. Fierce though the tribe was, they were no match for the infernals that came roaring down from the sundered heavens like a cascade of hatred and death. To stand and fight was suicide, so they retreated, fighting a running battle for months around the shore of the Sea of Lanterns, losing half their fellows in the first six months of battle.

The Lady finally smiled upon them as they came across an abandoned fishing village and discovered a small fleet of boats, enough to ferry what was left of their tribe away from the horrors on the shore. Yet their hopes were shattered as they discovered that the infernals had not just invaded their former lands but appeared to have spread across the entire world. Battling aquatic devils and monstrous multi-limbed creatures, their small fleet eventually managed to beach themselves upon the rocky shores of the Flood Plains in the very shadow of Mount Dagha.

Old tales told by their bards spoke of a mountain erupting out of the land upon which dwelled the Gods of Man. Believing that nothing but the power of the Gods could save them, the desperate tribesmen ran for the chiseled staircase encrusted with blue stones. A few of the horrors followed but were driven off at the cost of a few lives. Eventually a group of eighty survivors made the summit and the view that awaited them drove all hope from their hearts.

A massive city, ruined and deserted, greeted them. No gods awaited their supplications; none remained to answer their prayers. A trio of men appeared from the decayed structures and gave them greetings. They claimed to be priests who had climbed the great mound to speak with the gods, but discovered that they had left long, long ago. Here they stayed, having nowhere else to go, evading the beasts that roamed the ruins and awaiting the return of the deities.

Upon hearing their tale, the three priests led them to an underground chamber bristling with weapons gleaming and tinged with an odd color. Lord Sarish blessed these weapons, they claimed, and they were anathema to the infernals that pursued them.

Having nothing to lose, the leader of the tribe took up an elaborate glaive and encouraged his fellow to do the same. When night fell, and the demonic horde descended upon them, the newly armed survivors were finally able to show these horrors the meaning of fear.

With more than enough weapons to safeguard themselves, the tribesmen took as many of the surplus arms they could carry and ferried their precious cargo

back across the Sea of Lanterns. Trading the weapons for other precious goods, the Maghir tribesmen soon became the saviors of a portion of the lands they once roamed. Hailed as the Tomal Khan, the great Slayer Chief, by the scattered tribes and small cities there, the members of the tribe grew in prominence and in time, legend.

Returning to the First City years later, their wagons were filled with trade goods, precious metals, gems and more importantly, people to replace the tribe members that were lost. Among those that traveled with the victorious Tomal Khan were a score of warriors bound to Sarish, known as the Blood Guard. Having seen these ferocious warrior-magi in combat, the tribesmen welcomed them and gave them a place of honor as the elite guard of the Tomal Khan.

One curious facet of the Blood Guard's form of worship was that they would cut their foreheads to allow a steady stream of blood to run down their faces, empowering their mystical abilities. To further honor the Tomal Khan and to give thanks to Lord Sarish for his blessed weapons, the Blood Guard painted the face of the Tomal Khan and his warriors red when they went into battle, so that all that looked upon them would know of their prowess and deeds.

At the end of a great feast lasting four days commemorating their victory over the infernals, the three priests came before the assembled mass and blessed them. Taking the Tomal Khan by the hand, they led him up a shattered wall that overlooked the gathering and anointed him Regent of the Imperium – so that he and his lineage would protect the holy city from the foul and the undeserving, until such time as the heir to the Throne of Man was crowned Imperator and the Imperium of Man was reborn.

Then to the amazement of all, the three priests doffed off their ragged robes and magnificent wings sprouted from their backs. A bright light suffused their beings and with a final smile upon the gathered humans, they flew off into the heavens.

Or so the story goes…

The Modern Age
(1 I.C. to present)

Knowledge Threshold: Passive History 13

Over the intervening years, the reputation of the First City as a premiere mercantile hub grew. Not only was it a place where almost anything from exotic spices, textiles and slaves could be found, but its professed neutrality in all regional conflicts and laws enforcing tolerance of all religious views, leading some to call it the City of a Thousand Cults, made it attractive as a place where one could begin life anew – no questions asked.

Over time, with the explosive growth of its population, a local government of some sort needed to be organized. Slowly emerged a cabal of very rich and powerful merchant dynasties that made their home in the reclaimed First City, or at least the small portion cleared of rubble and inimical beings. In an impressive show of one-upmanship, each of these mercantile families competed with one another funding civil projects, such as the reconstruction of the aqueducts, the reconstruction of buildings near the main entry gateway and most famously, the restoration of the Temple of the Pantheon.

The enormity of the task to fully resurrect the First City and restore it to its former glory would be the work of many generations, with the projects subsidized by those wishing to explore the endless lost halls, passageways, temples and ruins deep within the core of Mount Dagha. Initially, these intrepid explorers were small groups of adventurers and scholars hired by the nascent merchant cabals, but later the Jial of the Phoenix, a group of historians from Khitan paid a small fortune for the rights to delve deep beneath the First City. Though initially the Jial's work centered on small and conservative explorations, a sort of professional 'War of Antiquities' erupted when the people of the South contacted the denizens of the Plateau once again in the form of the Emerald Society.



The Emerald Society (112 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Emerald Society (Fame 3+), Followers of the Azure Way (Fame 4+), Passive History 12, or Religion: Pantheon of Man

With the reintegration of the disparate temples of the Pantheon into the current Mother Church of Coryan, the need for complete religious texts became paramount. During the Shadowed Age, the isolated priests balanced catering to the needs of their insular societies with the bits and pieces of the Holy Canticle that survived the fall of the Imperium. This led to one (or at most two) deities being the center of the religious indoctrination of any particular settlement, replacing the worship of the Pantheon as a whole.

With the founding of the Coryani Empire and the need to reincorporate the broken pieces of its ancient religious heritage, the Emerald Society was created to seek out the many lost religious artifacts of the Imperium of Man. The true prize was a complete (and readable) copy of the Holy Canticle, as all available copies were incomplete or so impregnated with mold that only small passages were decipherable.

Working from hoary tales preserved by oral tradition, this small group of men and women began searching for the fabled First City, whose very existence many learned men scoffed at as wishful thinking. Yet through perseverance and dogged tenacity, the explorers crossed the supposedly impassable Corlathian Mountains and on a crisp autumn day gazed, far off in the distance, the legendary Mount Dagha. Reinvigorated by the possibility that the end of their quest might be within reach, the small party redoubled their efforts and arrived at the base of the imposing mesa in record time.

Expecting to find abandoned and haunted ruins, they were astonished to find a thriving, though relatively small society perched upon the ruins of the Imperium's capital. Within a few weeks, after securing an abandoned building that may have once served as a warehouse or barracks and ingratiating themselves to the local powers enough to be permitted to explore the catacombs beneath the Temple of the Pantheon, for a small percentage of their findings, of course, the Society came away with not only preserved copies of the Holy Canticle, but a treasure trove of other religious relics and scrolls.



Though in the coming years the Emerald Society's remarkable success would lead to conflict with the Jial of the Phoenix and the engineers from the Followers of the Azure Way, the potential to uncover even greater artifacts and secrets resulted in the Society establishing a permanent presence in the First City.

The First Coryani-Khitani War (398 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: val'Borda, Coryani, Khitani, Passive History 12, or History: Warfare

With the wealth of information regarding their lost heritage and the discovery of priceless artifacts, both religious and secular, the Coryani Empire decided to flex its military muscle and declare the First City and its people a protectorate. To ensure that the people living there, as well as their interests, were well-defended, an entire legion, the Legion of the Crimson Moon, was sent to the First City, to be housed, fed and supplied there by the locals.

This generosity on the Coryani's part did not sit well with the Tomal Khan and the Merchant Cabal, not to mention the other mercantile cartels that traded there. The cost of housing the thousands of men and women was of minimal concern given the vast wealth that passed through the First City on a daily basis, but rather the temerity of some upstart nation believing that it had the right to impose its will on them.

Through their contacts with merchants from the Khitani Empire, their plight was made known and, after agreeing to certain tax concessions as well as extended rights to delve for a lower percentage of goods extracted, the Khitani agreed to deal with their long-lost cousins after the Sleeping Emperor awoke from his torpor and cryptically announced that the Khitani Fen, or army, would gaze upon the First City. However, even with their divine leader's interpreted blessings, the gears of the Celestial Bureaucracy turn slowly, and it was some time before the Khitani punitive force, the Fen of Reclamation sloughed through the voei-infested Fervidus Hills, suffering a staggering number of casualties, before finally advancing towards Mount Dagha.

Until that time, the Coryani legionnaires had only to contend with voei raids and the occasional inhuman marauders that sought to prey upon the scattered, remote villages throughout the Blessed Lands. It was while returning from one of these encounters with raiders that the legionnaires first heard of 'olden armored warriors approaching from the northwest.

Hopelessly outnumbered by what they believed to be an invasion force, the Legion of the Crimson Moon began to harass the Khitani, using unorthodox methods to whittle down the opposition and their supplies before they could reach the immense mesa, all the while stalling for time until reinforcements from another legion stationed at one of the Lost Citadels, arrived.

The legion, along with their general Idan val'Borda's sacrifice, repelled the Khitani and planted seeds of doubt in the rulers of the First City. They believed that at the first sight of an actual threat these peacocks in armor would turn tail and run, but their slavish devotion to what they perceived as their duty to defend the people of the Mount shocked them into thinking that perhaps these Coryani truly meant what they said.

As for the Khitani that survived their first encounter with their southern cousins, they returned with head hung low, burning with a desire to exact vengeance upon those that had delivered unto them such a humiliating defeat.

After the ceremonial suicide of the general leading the force, a question was asked of the Sleeping Emperor's eunuch seneschal, *"Did the Sleeping Emperor not say that our gaze would fall upon the First City?"* Smiling, the seneschal replied, *"Your gaze did so. The divine one did not say that your feet would do the same."*

The Second Coryani-Khitani War (764 to 806 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Coryani, Khitani, Passive History 12, or History: Warfare

Years would pass before the two empires would



once again clash over the question of which of them would have dominion over the First City and the Blessed Lands. When the time came for the Khitani to launch their attack, it was instantly apparent who had the upper hand.

Following the rule of one mad val'Dellenov emperor and a ruinous slave rebellion that almost toppled the empire, and during the rule of his son who could be said to be even more insane than his father, Coryani morale had never been so low. Squandering the empire's treasure on lavish triumphs in his own honor, commissioning all sorts of monuments to aggrandize his family and of course, himself and building the largest underground temple to Saluwé's aspect as Goddess of the Caverns, it was obvious that Emperor Quron was more concerned with the legacy his rule would leave behind than actually ruling. As if draining the imperial coffers was not enough, he moved the imperial court from Grand Coryan to Panari, necessitating extensive renovations and expansion so that the city would reflect the glory of being the empire's seat of power.

It is a testament to the Coryani political structure that it did not collapse under these internal excesses, but even the mighty empire began to show cracks when years of neglect resulted in an ill-equipped and undermanned army, which was called upon to meet and defend against an implacable foe. For the first time in its history, the empire began conscripting able-bodied men and women from the outlying provinces and tossing them onto the battlefield with little to no training. With each defeat, the Mad Emperor demanded that whole towns and villages be depopulated of those of fighting age. These draconian edicts led to the eventual shattering of the empire as the provinces of Milandir and Canceri seceded in short order.

Yet for all their victories on the battlefield, the Khitani warriors would soon be lamenting their zealousness to redress the humiliation of their first encounter with the Coryani. Although instructed by their divine Sleeping Emperor to push the Coryani from the First City and the Blessed Lands, the Khitani generals, seeing how weak the Coryani had become, prosecuted the war deep into the lands south of the Corlathian Mountains, putting countless imperial citizens to the sword and even reaching within sight of the walls of Grand Coryan itself before being repulsed by a rag-tag legion rallied by the val'Assanté.

When the Sleeping Emperor awoke and discovered what his generals had done, he recalled the Fen of Retribution back to the edge of Mount Dagha, personally executed the general, and finally ordered the entire ul family that the Great General was a member of put to the sword.

Following the mysterious death of the val'Dellenov emperor and the restoration of the val'Assanté dynasty to the Alabaster Throne, the two empires' armies stared each other down across the trampled plains of the Blessed Lands.

Luckily, before further hostilities erupted, cooler heads intervened in the form of the scions of Althares.

Peace Reestablished (806 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: val'Abebi, Passive History 12, or History: Warfare

At some point during the war the val'Abebi family reached out to their Khitani counterparts, the shrouded ul'Wei and began a dialogue that eventually culminated in a peace treaty that has remained in effect to this day. The Treaty of Pecinium was signed by the Tomal Khan as recognized Regent of the Imperium, the Coryani Emperor, and the Khitani Imperial Seneschal, with what one would assume to be the blessings of the Sleeping Emperor given what befalls those who act outside of his wishes, further bloodshed was avoided.

While the exact terms of the treaty are many and varied, buried within the pages and pages of text, as befits the adroit mind of the scions of God Althares, the most pertinent terms call for the right of self-determination for all the denizens of the First City and the Blessed Lands, open trade for any and all who travel there, the right of all the children of the Gods to visit the sacred sites within the Blessed Lands and worship freely without fear of retribution. Finally, it was declared that a joint military presence by the Coryani and the Khitani, numbering no more than five hundred soldiers each, be permanently stationed within the First City to ensure the safety of its citizens and enforcement of these decrees.

With these tenets agreed to and in place, after many years and countless deaths, peace descended upon the Blessed Lands.

Current Period

Knowledge Threshold: Passive History 12

The period since the end of the Second Coryani-Khitani War has been one of relative peace and prosperity for the people of the Blessed Lands and the First City. Trade has

flourished with exotic goods arriving from the far east and west, as well as from the southern nations. Pilgrims from both the Coryani and Khitani Empires flock to the First City to see the ruined Temple of the Pantheon and other sacred sites throughout the city and the Blessed Lands itself.

Of course, banditry rose alongside the increase of pilgrimages. The Soldier Saints of Dagha do what they can to curtail the actions of the worst offenders, making enemies of the bandits, cutthroats and thieves that roam the region. While many of these bands of raiders are human or human-kin, a few are non-human and tend to be the most bloodthirsty of the lot!

Tribes of hyena-men from the Hinterlands in the east migrated to the Blessed Lands and have made the area their personal hunting grounds. There never seems to be more than a half-dozen of these tribes extant at any one time, but the region is vast enough to give each a large enough territory that there is no need to infringe upon one another. Other nonhumans raid on occasion, such as the ice giants from high up in the Corlathian Mountains, who tend to attack the small communities that hug the foothills. This is generally due to a dire winter when their herds of reindeer and rams dwindle, and the need to supplement their diet with human flesh is necessary.

The last attempted invasion of the First City occurred months before the outbreak of the Coryani Civil War, when miraculously, the Sword of the Heavens, Leonydes val'Virdan, once again walked the face of Arcanis. It is said that the Avatar of Nier was freed from his arcane prison and single-handedly conquered the hoary city of Nishanpur without a sword stroke.

Summoning the descendants of those who were among his most faithful, the Swords of Nier quickly conquered Canceri. Even so, Leonydes did not want this backwater province, but rather yearned to reclaim that which was taken from him, the First City, and through it, a new Second Imperium of Man.

His army sliced through Milandir, not to conquer it, but rather because it lay in his path to the ultimate prize. Even the Defender of the Empire, Menisis val'Tensen, schooled in the ancient legends, knew that no army could best another led by the Sword of the Heavens. Against the direct orders of the Coryani Emperor Calcestus val'Assanté, High General Menisis withdrew his legions from the Nierite's path.

Unimpeded, Leonydes entered the Blessed Lands for the first time in millennia and then made a tragic tactical error. It is unknown when, where, or even why, but Leonydes called a halt to his army's movement near the lost Citadel of Nier. It is said Leonydes entered the ruined citadel with an honor guard and never emerged. It was then that his Nierite army, numbering over thirty thousand was attacked by… something. The survivors have given conflicting reports on who the attackers were, but they did agree on one thing: their opponent's attack was made in total silence.

The Swords of Nier, now bereft of their leader and with over half their numbers killed or captured, sounded a disorderly retreat that led them out of the Blessed Lands and straight into the gaping jaws of Milandir's knights, Menisis' legions and a rag-tag rebel army from Canceri. Known as the Battle of the Four Armies, this devastating engagement further whittled down the Nierites, but in a testament to their prowess, they survived complete annihilation and managed to return to Nishanpur.

Of Leonydes, even after almost five decades, only wild and unsubstantiated rumors are all that remain. Many claim he died at the hand of the same forces that decimated his army. A few whisper that he is still alive, a prisoner within the lost Citadel of Nier, there to be tortured for eternity at the hands of his many victims, ghosts that will not rest until their thirst for vengeance is satiated.

It has been half a century since those events and the region has remained relatively quiet. But now a new stirring is in the air, the Khitani Idiot-Priests of Illiir, warn any who will listen of the coming of the Destroyer. The people of the region feel unease, as if waiting for the other shoe to drop and hoping that, like times before, there will be those who will rise to the challenge and defend them against the horrors they all feel is coming.





Chapter II: The Blessed Lands Region

The Geography of the Blessed Lands

The area known as the Blessed Lands by the Coryani, Chonichu *(the Land of Our Ancestors' Arrival)* by the Khitani and the Cursed Lands by many others, was once the seat of power of four powerful empires and considered the birthplace to no less than four of the world's major religions and their offshoots. It is bounded to the south by the ancient Corlathian Mountains, to the northeast by the immense deciduous forest known as the Vastwood, to the northwest by the Aqtau Mountains and the Fervidus Hills, to the west by the Sea of Lanterns and to the southeast by the city-states of Almeric.

In the days of antiquity when the ssethric and later elorii ruled the area, the Blessed Lands was a lush and fertile area, dominated by a thick forest whose canopy was like a sea that crashed against the mountain range to the south and spilled around the enormous Mount Dagha that competed with the peaks of the Corlathians Mountains.

That thriving ecosystem is no more; it was destroyed during the God's War when elorii and humanity clashed and a blasphemous eloran ritual known as Kurenthé, *the Curse of the Soul*, was unleashed, withering the ancient flora, leeching most of the life from the soil, and leaving only a cracked and blackened earth. Centuries of constant attention by Saluwean priestesses managed to revitalize the land to a small degree, but even after millennia it remains a broken land where the few settlements of Andyar villagers huddle around isolated oases and small rivers that flood every spring with the melt off from the Corlathian Mountains.

With the near-total deforestation of the region, the topography, long hidden by the thick forest, is revealed: the entire area is a bowl with two tiers or terraces, the lowest of which is at sea level where it merges with the

Sea of Lanterns. The largest tier enjoys a higher elevation, exceeded only by the plateau on top of Mount Dagha, which rises one thousand three hundred and twenty feet above sea level.

Aqtau Mountains

Low and worn, like the ground down teeth of an old man, the Aqtau Mountains are smaller in size than the Corlathians and form the northern boundary of the Flood Plains. Geologically, the Aqtau Mountains are made up of sedimentary rock, primarily sandstone and limestone, with strange veins of a soapy blue-green rock that is unique to the area. Small deposits of gold were found washing up on the alluvial plains to its south, but after countless tries and hundreds of mines dug, few veins of gold were found. It seems that most of the gold was extracted years ago by the previous civilizations that reigned in the region, as the lust for gold transcends species and cultures.

The western end of the mountain range is marked by countless caves and rookeries where groups of harpies nest. These malicious and man-eating creatures delight in tormenting wayward travelers who stray too close to their hunting grounds. Harpies strongly resemble large avian predators crossed with ancient crones are highly intelligent and have a complex language and society.

The Aqtau Mountains is also the home of a mystic dwarven enclave known as Tultipet. These genial dwarves were once the least warlike of their brethren and primarily devoted themselves to the worship of Larissa's aspect as the Goddess of Oracles, perhaps in the hopes of gleaning some clue as to how or when their curse would be lifted. For ages, these dwarves lived in peace with few, if any, enemies in the area.

This peace ended on the day that the dragon Villa'tavorentes was seen flying out from the east, ignoring all other cities and settlements until it arrived at Tultipet. In a mad orgy of unadulterated destruction that lasted for days, the dragon set about systematically excavating the dwarves' underground city like an ant-eater digging up a termite mound, killing almost every living creature found there, leaving only charred bodies and cracked soul shards.

Almost all the dwarves that were in Tultipet that day died under the dragon's claws or blistering fire breath. With great and malicious purpose, the dragon carried out its attack until the last of the screams faded to nothing. Satisfied that its vengeance was complete, for what else could have motivated such a single-minded and thorough massacre, the dragon flew off and has not been seen since.

Of the Tultipetans, only a few hundred yet live, mainly those that were traveling abroad. Yet amid the devastation, the statue of their agonized ancestor and the beating heartstone shines down on the charnel house that was once the elegant halls of Tultipet. It seems that not even the rage of a dragon can break the Curse of Illiir.

Major Geographical Features

Mount Pelan

This peak looms over two thousand feet high, which some derisively call a runt of a mountain, but for the low Aqtau range, it's considered a respectable size. The mountain houses the dwarven Enclave of Tultipet and recently lost its small peak during the attack by the dragon, Villa'tavorentes.

Horudai's Peak

The tallest mountain in the Aqtau Mountain Range, reaching over six thousand feet, is Horudai's Peak, named after the Tultipetan dwarf that longed to see the stars once more before her death. Horudai and a group of twenty left to scale the mountain and were never seen again. Many believe they were lost when an unseasonably strong snowstorm swept through the area.

Decades later, when ground for the Caltin Observatory was being broken, the remains of the entire party were found, huddled together near the peak. Upon discovering them, the astronomer Caltin renamed the mountain in her honor.



Travel Times in the Blessed Lands Region

Travel Time from Pilgrim's Pass to Mount Dagha (approx. 500 miles)

On Horseback	
Trail	**Off Trail**
12.5 days at 40 miles/day	17 days at 30 miles/day
By Caravan	
Trail	**Off Trail**
34 days at 15 miles/day	50 days at 15 miles/day
On Foot	
Trail	**Off Trail**
28 days at 18 miles/day	42 days at 12 miles/day

Important Sites

1 Caltin Observatory

The Tultipetan dwarves are a people obsessed with prophecy and the peeling back the veil of time to divine the future. Contrary to popular opinion, not all from that mystic enclave are gifted with the gift of far-sight. One such dwarf was the academic Caltin, who reasoned that since the Gods moved and lived among the stars, movement and position of those heavenly bodies could predict future events.

For decades the dwarves toiled upon the summit of Horudai's Peak, cutting and shaping stone from the surrounding land and building a large dome structure with precise apertures that could predict with unheard of precision many critical stellar events, such as the solstices, the twin lunar cycles and eclipses. Upon her death, the observatory was named after Caltin for her groundbreaking work in astronomy and astrology. Scholars from as far away as the Republic of Altheria travel here to study the movements of the heavens and gaze upon the face of eternity.

2 The Dwarven Enclave of Tultipet

Ensconced deep within Mount Pelan in the Aqtau Mountain Range is the dwarven enclave of Tultipet, home to mystic seers and tenacious tattooed warriors. Settled during the early part of the Shadowed Age, the Tultipetans fled to the old mountain chain soon after Illiir cursed all the celestial giants, turning them into dwarves and forcing them underground.

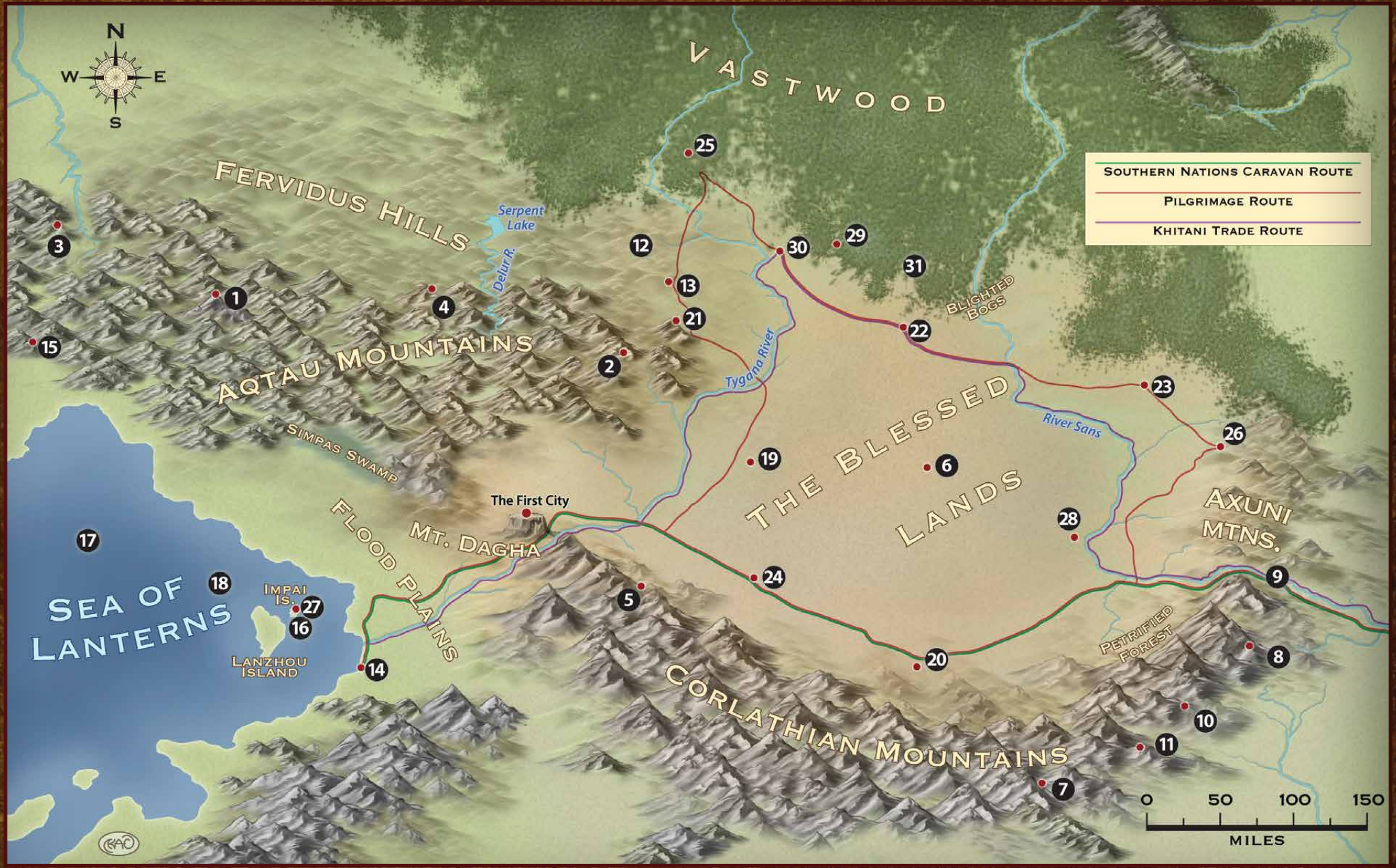
The enclave itself is surrounded by relatively low ground, allowing sentries to see any invaders approaching while they are still miles away. All paths eventually funnel into a deep defile bounded by high cliff walls on either side and the stout barricade that is the First Gate. This gate stood open and unguarded until the past few decades when the Tultipetans began guarding the gate zealously. The once gentle and wise dwarves of the enclave became aggressive and paranoid, inspecting each and every cart of goods leaving or entering their stronghold.

Once past the formidable gate, the way to the enclave is but a few hours until the former mountain that housed the dwarven enclave rises up into view. The mountain is a shadow of its former self, its crown blasted away by the savage attack by the dragon Villa'tavorentes leaving the hidden enclave exposed, making it resemble the cone of an extinct volcano. The once majestic bridges and walkways, statues and monuments, guard towers and battlements that adorned the façade of the mighty peak lay in ruins. The work and craftsmanship of thousands of artisans destroyed in a single act of vengeance. The avalanche caused by the attack buried the main passages into the dwarves' enclave. The magnificent doors that were said to have never closed now lie buried beneath tons of rock and soil. Hidden tunnels carved into the mountainside remains the only mean of entry into the enclave other than the more dangerous and circuitous route through the labyrinthine passages of the Endless Dark.

The tunnels open onto an immense terrace with wide and ornate bridges spanning the deep chasms that almost surrounds the plateau upon which the city was built. The huge buildings favored by dwarves and other structures near the tunnels are devastated and no attempt was made to rebuild them. Here and there desiccated limbs can be seen sticking out of the rubble forming a garden of the dead, wilted and failing to bloom. Shattered buildings of enormous size are laid out on wide boulevards, the debris from the mountain having tumbled down and smashed many into rubble. The enclave must once have been a beautiful and serene place but lies now in near utter ruin – a testament to the destructive power of the dragon.

In the very heart of the enclave is the site of their most sacred monument: the statue of the Tultipetan dwarves' leader when they were celestial giants, Tulpetian. When Illiir's curse fell upon the celestial giants who failed in their oath to safeguard and shepherd humanity into a new golden age, a special twist of the knife was set aside for each of their leaders.

The Blessed Lands Region



Each was seized by unspeakable agony and at the precise point when they could endure no more, they were turned to stone, frozen in that perfect moment of suffering for all of time. Out of phase with reality; forever trapped between instants, they live in constant torment as a reminder of the fate of those who betray the Gods. To ensure that they would remain a constant reminder of the dwarves' shame, a red gem appeared upon each elder's breast; its pulsing ruby red light granting the former giants a semblance of their long lives. Every ten years after their one hundredth, a dwarf must bathe in the light of the Heartstone Gem or begin to age rapidly.

At the far end of the plateau is a wide staircase leading to the entrance of the royal palace. The palace itself is carved within the mountainside, with broad hallways and over a hundred suites. All are built in the same enormous size as the rest of the buildings in the enclave. These regal passageways have stood empty since the dragon's attack killed the entire royal family, but a few years ago, the Tultipetans finally had cause to hope again, for the young princess had miraculously returned, having somehow survived the dragon's attack. They would soon learn that Villa'tavorentes' assault upon them was not yet over.

3 Khitani Monastery

Nestled in the ancient Aqtau Mountains, upon its westernmost point, is a monastery of Khitani design. Constructed during the early years of the Imperium, some have credited this monastery as being the first one built upon Onara and upon which all the others have been modeled after. The Khitani tradition of monasteries left such an impression on the Imperium's culture that even after their exodus from the city, the southern Successor States continued to follow their architectural design.

This particular monastery houses the Monastic Order of the White Tortoise, whose monks, known as the Hun'tai monks, are dedicated to an aspect of Althares that espouses the mastery of oneself through mental discipline and tranquility. As a byproduct of this, they teach those that are awakened the ability to affect objects solely through the utilization of the mind. Many awakened uls and vals seeking additional instructions on how to master their divine gifts seek out the masters of this monastery in the hopes that they will be welcomed within its halls. While the monks accept all who are earnest in their longing to find mastery over their turbulent emotions or perfecting their understanding of their psionic abilities, there are only so many students that may be housed and properly trained by the monks. At this time, the monastery accommodates thirty-three monks and exactly ninety-nine students.

The monks are devout pacifists, eschewing all forms of violence other than in defense of themselves or innocent bystanders. Many scoff at this, citing the rumors that the final discipline taught to those about to take the mantle of master is the Mind Blade, a method of slashing an opponent to ribbons with nothing more than the use of one's thoughts. On the rare occasion that a master travels into the First City, they have been questioned as to the truth of this; they merely shake their heads and refuse to answer.

A few months past, a wild-eyed young man was found crawling through the Flood Plains, his legs crushed beyond repair and swollen with gangrene. Taken into the First City by a Soldier Saint, he raved about some malevolent force at work at the monastery and babbled incoherently, even throughout the unsuccessful attempt to save his legs. By morning, he had disappeared from his room. He was later found dead at the base of the plateau, having somehow thrown himself over the protective wall surrounding the city.

Quite a feat for a man without legs.

4 The Ruins of Amanish

During the Shadowed Age, a kingdom rose upon the northern slopes of the Aqtau Mountains and ruled over a dozen small cities and villages. Founded by a warlord and his vicious band, they ushered in a reign of terror unlike any had seen in generations, until the aging chieftain was assassinated, and his throne usurped by his youngest concubine. At first the citizens of the kingdom were relieved and hailed her as their savior, but they soon began to call the young queen Amanish of the Bloody Lips, as her sadistic nature made her subjects pray for the days of her husband's rule.

The queen is whispered to have belonged to a bloody and dark aspect of the Goddess Anshar. Over the millennia, heretical cults worshipping the darker aspects of the Gods were discovered in remote places, hidden from prying eyes. One such cult worshipping the Bearer of Pain aspect of Anshar has operated in the underground chambers beneath the ruins, undisturbed for centuries. This cult, the Broken, raids nearby villages or takes the unwary traveler to sacrifice to its graven image of Anshar.

Blessed Lands Basin

The land that is now known as the Blessed Lands was not the arid steppes that it is today, but rather a lush, vibrant region, a basin into which the Vastwood extended all the way to the foothills of the Corlathian Mountains. After the soul-blasting Kurenthé curse was enacted, the basin was denuded and only a cracked and broken land, wracked by violent aberrant weather, remained. The central basin resembles a large bowl or depression, surrounded by a very gentle downward sloping area that bounds three sides and a more abrupt depression to the west in the form of the Flood Plains.

Many believe that the Blessed Lands is a lifeless region where nothing grows and only the hardiest of animals survive, but that is not an accurate picture of the ecology of the basin today. While the region is arid, it has a thriving ecosystem, which is especially vibrant around the rare oasis that can be found in the area. During the Imperium's Golden Age, the most powerful Saluwean priestesses spent decades trying to undo the effects of the curse and managed to accomplish that in a small way. In addition, the passage of time and nature's own inexorable force have brought the Blessed Lands back from the edge of utter ecological ruin.

Major Geographical Features

Mount Dagha

Rising some 1,320 feet, Mount Dagha stands as a lonely sentinel, emerging from the arid ground and rising to become the highest point in an otherwise fairly level expanse. Interchangeably called the Mount or the Mound, many scholars believe that it is not a natural geologic formation, but rather was built by its first known inhabitants, the insectoid issori.

Many who have not visited Mount Dagha believe it to be a perfect cylinder, rising up from the ground, but nothing could be further from the truth. The sides of the Mount are made up of rugged crags, with a number of spurs and overhanging cliffs. Additionally, its cliff faces are also dotted with countless caves that twist their way, worm-like, into the depths of the Mound itself.

Over the ages, the various races that called the plateau atop the Mount home modified its exterior to fit their needs. Though many of these alterations were swept away by the conquerors that came afterwards, some of those created by the architects of the Imperium of Man remain. The most prominent of these is the Azure Way, a wide ramp with steps carved adjacent the body of the Mount, which winds its way from the base through various switchbacks and through accesses that once acted as defensible gates to repel any invasion. During the hot summer days, merchants are allowed to sell clay pots of water, saltlicks, and other refreshments within these ancient gatehouses.

As might be expected, the way up is much harder than down. As one travels further up the Azure Way, the air becomes more and more rarified, requiring those not in perfect health to ride the way up by mule, cart, or, for the truly rich and powerful, a palanquin hefted by burly slaves, trained for the grueling task.

There are other ways to reach the plateau, but these offshoots of the Azure Way are choked with rubble and haunted by many foul and fel creatures. The most prominent of these is a narrow stairway, carved directly into the rock, which branches off the main pathway and winds its way up the northern face of the Mound. Within a short forty steps, the way is blocked by a cracked marble column and many tons of rock and rubble from an avalanche that occurred later. Looking closely, one can see strange shapes and shadows flitting across the crumbling debris but moving contrary to where the sun's light should dictate.

Much of the wealth and power held by the mercantile cabals of the First City comes from those brave and hardy souls who plumb the endless depths and winding catacombs that riddle the core of the Mound. Four ancient civilizations' riches and secrets lie entombed within the core of Mount Dagha. The further one worms deeper into the interior, the older and more valuable the treasures found become.

A word of warning should be given to those who seek to make a quick and easy fortune:



Mount Dagha is old and within it are diabolical traps, deadfalls and creatures born from the fevered nightmares of a madman. Of the licenses sold by the Bureau of Antiquities, only twenty percent of those who execute their licenses and explore the ruins return, and a goodly portion of those are forever haunted by what they saw. It is that even smaller number of expeditions that emerge from the depths, with layers of the dust and cobwebbing covering every inch of their bodies, smiling grit stained teeth as they hold up a priceless artifact, wrested from obscurity for all to see, that continues to fuel the fire of many to seek their fortunes in the endless labyrinths below the plateau.

The Plain of Monuments

One of the wonders of the Blessed Lands is that it was the area upon which at least four separate civilizations rose and fell – the issori, the ssethrics, the elorii and the humans – each built their empires upon the carcass of the previous one. Each in turn left their mark upon the region, whether in ancient structures that exists to this day, such as the ancient and broken aqueducts that litter the land around the First City, to the monuments that lie scattered from the Flood Plains in the easternmost portion of the Blessed Lands. The center area of the basin with the greatest assortment of these ancient structures and statues is known as the Plain of Monuments.

Many of these monuments are crumbling with age and made of the same soapy, green stone found only in the ruins of the Eladru, the ancient cyclopes that once ruled an empire in the area, while others are half-buried marble statues of great mythical heroes of the Imperium. Here and there strange structures appear to erupt from the ground, like the great Obsidian Cube. This structure is engraved with strange glyphs and runes across its gigantic surface but lacks any visible entryway. Even the most powerful magic and weapons that were brought to bear upon its surface have been unable to deface its face, let alone gain entrance into its obviously hollow interior.

Another such mysterious building is a great keep built upon a promontory that overlooks the plain, like a dwarf looking over the shoulder of a giant. This keep has symbols and sigils of human origin, although small markers in the eloran tongue have been discovered by the Emerald Society, and below those are the same strange soapy green stone of the Eladru in its foundation. These two discoveries imply that the keep may be much, much older than was originally thought.

Lastly, near the center of this area are the remains of an above-ground maze or labyrinth of immense proportions, with each stone used to form a wall towering over twenty feet in height and fitted so perfectly together that no seam can be found in the undamaged areas. However, possibly due to the terrible power unleashed by the Kurenthé curse, the majority of the maze lies destroyed and the rest heavily damaged. There appears to have been some sort of structure in its center, but whatever it was has now been turned to dust.

Recently, the Emerald Society deciphered ancient scrolls in the ssethric tongue that speaks of other, similar labyrinths far off to the south and west, but these references were made in passing and no further details were mentioned. That at least three examples of such a unique and odd structure should be found so far from one another either points to a miraculous coincidence or an undiscovered civilization that might predate even the issori, once covered the continent, leaving these giant mazes as proof of their passing.

Rivers and Waterfalls

As barren and unmerciful as the Blessed Lands appear, the region has pockets of life that hang on tenaciously. This is especially evident when the spring slowly turns into the hot summer months, resulting in the annual melt-off from the Corlathian Mountains, as well as the rare rains that falls in the area. Many thousands of gallons of water rush down in a torrent, engorging the ancient river beds that crisscross the area. The few settlements that dot the region await the coming melt-off and rain with song and celebration.

During the time of the Imperium of Man, aqueducts were erected to transport fresh water to the thirsty populace of the ancient capital. Sadly, these engineering wonders have fallen into ruin, toppled by natural events like earthquakes or by the malicious hands of the enemies of Man. Where these ancient aqueducts have fallen, the water now winds its way towards lower ground, creating a series of spectacular waterfalls as it flows from the basin and then out to sea through the Flood Plains. Though they last only a few weeks or months at best, these cataracts create a beautiful sight. The raging waters also occasionally excavate relics or ancient baubles as they scour the land on their way out to sea. An entire industry has sprung up around this annual event, as relic hunters take to digging through the muddy silt for the one item that might make them a fortune.

River Sans

One of the only two rivers that bisect the Blessed Lands, the river Sans is located in the eastern portion of the region and is fed by springs deep within the Vastwood. The Sans' waters flood a geological depression creating the Blighted Bog before continuing south. The Sans' waters are muddy and stained a brownish-red from the detritus of the bog, as well as the reddish clay that lines much of the river bottom.

A few Andyar offer their services to transport travelers and their luggage up or down the river, but since most pilgrims are journeying east to west or vice-versa, there aren't many who make use of the service. The Qoquil lumber mill uses the river to transport lumber to markets in the south, but man and operate their own boats for shipping their ironwood. This has caused some resentment among the Andyar that ply the river and has led to a few skirmishes, but these usually end in bumps and bruises, rather than any true bloodshed.

Tygana River

Sister river to the river Sans, the Tygana River is the western-most waterway that empties out into the Flood Plains. The river passes south of Mount Dagha and is a fast-flowing river abundant with fresh water fish that supplement the diets of the Andyar who fish its waters. There is an ul'Wei and val'Abebi proposal suggesting that the river be dammed at a point just north of the Flood Plains to create a reservoir rather than let the freshwater just flow out to sea. They argue that this vast reserve of water can be used during the frequent droughts to irrigate crops or rationed out to those usually hardest-hit, the Andyar villagers. Thus far, the project has been rejected by both the Tomal Khan and the Andyar elders, but some of in the cabal of merchant can see a financial benefit to controlling that much fresh water and are considering backing the project, as long as they become partners in the scheme.

Important Sites

Eloran Holy Order of the Twelve Oaks

Hidden within the crags of the westernmost point of the Corlathian Mountains, high enough to peer onto the plateau of Dagha, is an ancient eloran temple dedicated to Belisarda that sponsors the Holy Order of the Twelve Oaks. This holy order is tasked with the retrieval of lost eloran artifacts and the various temples that once venerated the Elemental Lords and are now lost to the ages. Many of these relics and temples were destroyed as an act of dominance by the rising Imperium of Man, but there are still many that survive hidden and await rediscovery.

The temple houses a group of Lifewardens that act as the order's spiritual advisors as well as companions when accompanying them into dangerous situations. While the order consists of the least xenophobic of members of the eloran race and frequently ally themselves with other races, they will not permit any non-elorii to enter their sacred temple except under the direst of circumstances and then only with the Lifewardens' blessings.

Champions of the order make pilgrimages to the Twelve Oaks Parks in the First City before embarking on a mission and upon its conclusion. The twelve oaks growing in the park were planted by the elorii ages ago and serve as a reminder of how they were used to commit genocide upon other sentient races and to recommit to a time when all races may live in peace.

6 Fortresses of the Soldier Saints of Dagha

The Blessed Lands holds many dangers, from marauding bandits to inhuman creatures that view pilgrims as nothing more than a quick meal. Luckily there exists a group of veteran knights that answer a divine calling bidding them to protect, and at times avenge, the many wayfarers that travel through these lands. Known as the Soldier Saints of Dagha, these men and women patrol the entirety of the region, in pairs or small groups, lending

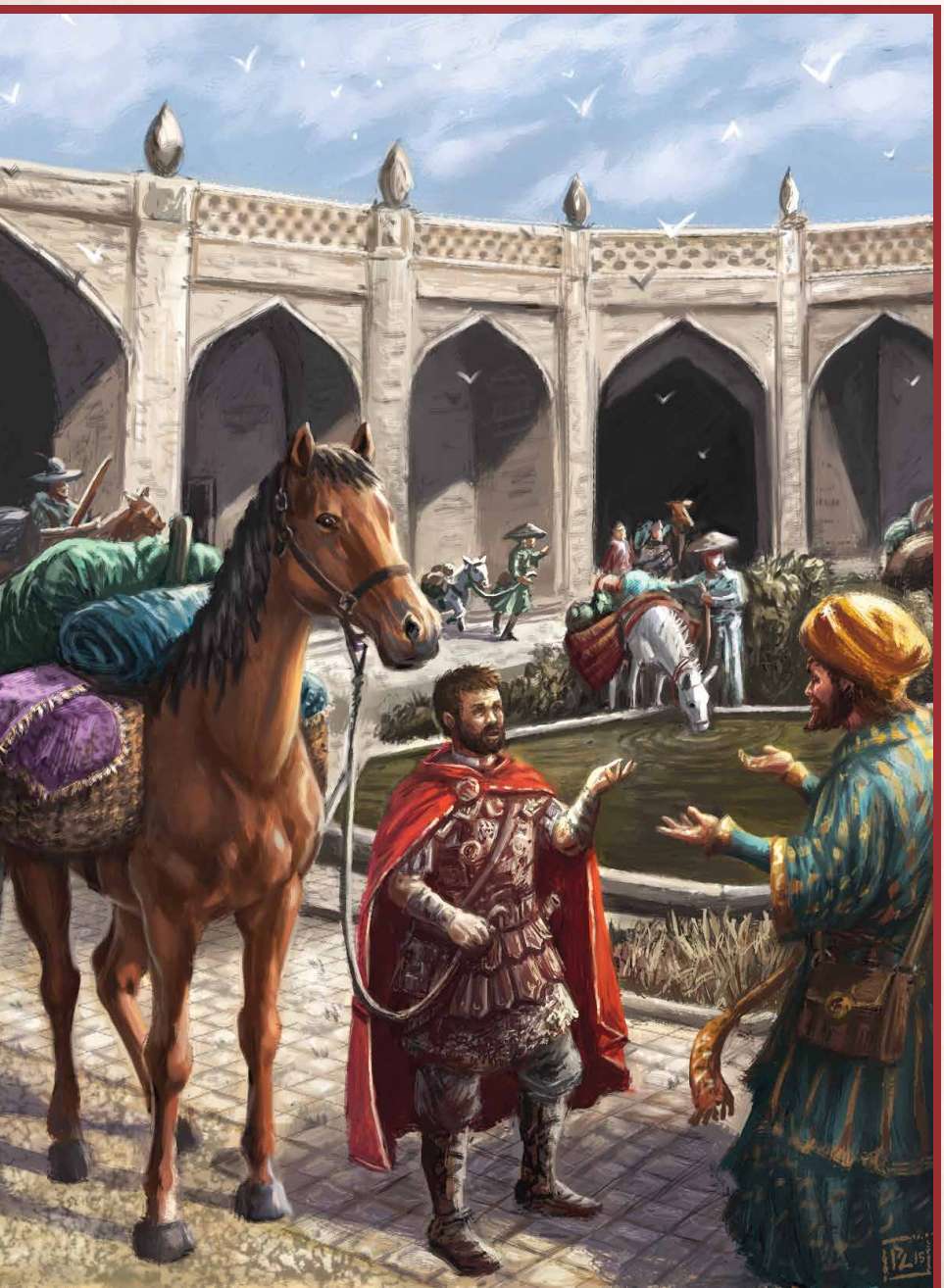


aid and protection as needed and even going so far as traveling the length of the Blessed Lands to make sure a group of down-on-their-luck pilgrims arrive at the First City or the Pilgrim's Pass safely.

The Blessed Lands is a huge area with few places that offer succor to those in need. To remedy this matter, the Soldier Saints have erected small fortresses across the region that act as places to rest or resupply as needed. Fortress is quite the misnomer however, as all but the actual Fortress of the Soldier Saints are small buildings, usually with only one room with a little attached stable that can accommodate a dozen people reasonably comfortably. These small fortresses are never locked, and all are welcome to stay and rest. The Soldier Saints make sure that the forts are stocked with ample dried food and urns of fresh water and ask only that any that partake of these stores either replenish what they can or leave a donation at the small shrine of Anshar located at the Pilgrim's Path.

The main fortress of the Soldier Saints is located almost dead center of the Blessed Lands. This ancient structure is octagonal in shape and three stories in height. It was built upon a small mound and constructed from large blocks of granite over twelve feet thick. The small open courtyard in the center contains a fountain that those who have drunk from it claim has restorative properties.

The founding members of the order claim to have been led here by the vision of Illiir that put them on their holy mission and scholars have found mention of the fort in ancient texts dating to the Imperium, but these records imply that the fortress already existed when it was discovered. Vitus Linos val'Sheem, the head of the Emerald Society in the First City, believes that the fortress dates to the days of the Eloran Empire and would like to excavate to prove his theory, but the head of the Soldier Saints has rejected his petition.



The Harani and Koprus Waystations

Dotting across the Blessed Lands are a series of small buildings meant to protect merchants and pilgrims traveling to and from the First City. While Andyar villages usually welcome and provide travelers with a safe place to rest, they are few and far between and caravans can lay exposed for days before one can be found.

Commissioned by the Coryani Emperor Haran val'Assanté, the rest areas were quickly called Harani in his honor. During his reign, a mere handful were built, but his successors continued to fund the project to a greater or lesser degree, as they saw it as a way of expanding Coryani influence in the region. The Harani were built along the southern trade route, running from the Pilgrim's Pass, north of the Corlathian Mountains until eventually reaching the First City. The Khitani countered by constructing their own version, known as the Kopru, but extended their construction not just to the First City, but across the northern trade

pass, skirting the Vastwood until reaching the Pilgrim's Pass as well.

Both types of way stations accept any travelers within their protective walls and the Soldier Saints of Dagha frequently use them as well while they make their rounds throughout the region. Though the architectural style of the two differ aesthetically, they both provide the same basic necessities: a high stone wall with a portcullis that can be lowered and locked from inside, a well or fountain with fresh water, stables that can house up to twenty mounts and pack animals with feed enough for all, a central courtyard, and finally, various austere chambers that will keep travelers safe from the elements. Harani also maintain a small shrine to Anshar's aspect as the Far Traveler, so that those making the journey may make proper offerings for a safe passage.

Merchants and other travelers who make use of the consumable items within a Harani are expected to replenish such goods or donate at the Ansharan temple with Her citadel that has taken on the task of maintaining these rest stops. The Khitani Kopru ask that donations be made at the site, as their religious doctrine do not accept Anshar as one of the Pantheon of Man.

One Harani that stands out from all the others is the one near the halfway point of the journey from the Pilgrim's Pass to the First City. The Coryani Emperor Valerius val'Assanté desired to make the pilgrimage to the First City but also wanted to continue to bask in the lap of luxury that he and the imperial court were accustomed. Refurbishing each and every Harani along the way would have proved quite the strain on the imperial coffers, so a compromise was made that the Harani at the half way point would be augmented with as many creature comforts as possible. To this end, the Imperial Harani as it is now called, has a second floor that served as the Emperor's private quarters, but is now a common sleeping area where up to forty people may comfortably rest, a bath with both hot and cold water, a chapel to Illiir that can accommodate up to sixty penitents, and an expanded barracks roomy enough to house his one hundred personal guards.

Andyar Settlements of the Blessed Lands

Due to the destruction wrought by the effects of the Kurenthé curse millennia ago, the Blessed Lands is sparsely populated, with only small settlements sprinkled throughout, mostly congregating near the river beds where the yearly floods deposit thick, rich silt that is excellent for farming. Without the annual floods, the cracked and blasted lands of the region would not be able to support more than a few villagers and a handful of goats year-round. These villagers are the descendants of the farmers and herders that settled here during the time of the Imperium of Man and have continued to inhabit the region through the rise and fall of empires and kingdoms.

Each settlement has between four to ten human families living in a communal social structure, led by a hetman with all sharing in the work and the fruits of their labor, as meager as they are. To supplement their income, many of them also create beautiful woven textiles from plant fiber, painted stones and the occasional artifact or relic found in nearby ruins. They take these objects to sell at the nearest Harani where pilgrims stop to water their mounts and camp. In addition, the leader of the settlement who is part-warrior, part-shaman, will have a small number of luck stones to sell. Pilgrims believe that purchasing such luck stones will bestow good fortune upon their journey and every once in a while, it actually will.

There are those who travel through the Blessed Lands who collectively call these people the *Cobo* - the wretched, but these people identify themselves as the Andyar and by the landmarks nearby their villages. For example, should a settlement be located near the remains of a statue with a sword, half buried in the sand, they would be called the Andyar of the Broken Sword; one near a cracked pylon would be known as the Andyar of the Plinth, etc.

Having learned from many generations of cultivating the hard land, the Andyar farmers use the short planting and harvesting seasons to wrest as much food as they can



from the barren ground. Starvation is always a constant companion to these hardy people and Andyar must work diligently to stave off its possibility, but malnutrition is a way of life to these people. Because of this, the Andyar are rail thin, many with distended bellies. Their skin is baked a dark tan or brown from the unrelenting sun, yet many still have the varied eye colors of their ancestors. A child with blue eyes is considered a blessing from Yarris, believing that she will herald ample water for the village.

Not only are these villages situated near a dry or trickling river bed, but they are also positioned near the path that travelers take on their pilgrimages. Though days may pass without catching sight of anyone, when a caravan does appear, the Andyar offer to sell anything from knick-knacks carved from dried wood, baubles unearthed by the summer rains, handmade crafts or even a slightly bitter, fermented drink made from the needles of a bush that grows throughout the region.

The Andyar will trade with just about anyone and are friendly to all travelers. They only have issues with the Chauni, who sometimes raid their villages for slaves to sell at the markets of the First City and beyond when they have fallen short of their quota. The Andyar follow a strict code that requires the villagers to render aid to the injured or the lost and while the visitor may find the fare meager, they will be under the protection of the entire village.

According to their custom, anyone given succor must be given sanctuary from any and all enemies or predators until they are able to leave under their own power.

The Labyrinth of Time

The Gift of the Gods from the Goddess of Oracles and Fate, Larissa, is the Labyrinth of Time. Though scholars are aware of its existence, it has yet to be found and assumed to be somewhere in the uncleansed area of the City or in the arid expanse of the Blessed Lands. While a variety of scrolls and tomes refer to the Labyrinth, the only item that describes it was found painted on a large amphora filled with spices favorable to the Goddess in a silt-filled basement of an ancient brothel in the Rhamul District of the First City.

Depicted upon the large urn is the tale of a vast network of passages sacred to the Goddess and perpetually filled with some sort of fog or mist. Written upon the walls of this dimly lit series of hallways are prophecies, which some say were written by the Goddess or Her Valinor, while others claim they were written by other supplicants possessed by visions and forced to write what they see upon the walls. During the Golden Age of the Imperium, those who come seeking guidance or for some sort of sign when balanced upon the twin horns of dilemma enter the labyrinth and walk its winding passages for hours or even days, if necessary. If they are blessed by the Goddess, they will come upon a scrawling upon the wall that speaks directly to them. In fact, many say that only the one to whom the prophecy is meant for can read it. Unfortunately, like all prophecy, it is couched cryptically and in a way that may mean nothing at present, but at Fate's Juncture, becomes clear.

The truly remarkable quality of the Labyrinth is that it is said to transcend time itself. There are accounts of seekers of guidance meeting others within the passages and discovering that they come from centuries in the past or decades in the future. Though the two can converse, they appear as ghostly images to one another.

Some have said that they have tried to change history by telling someone from the past what was to occur and how to stop it, such as the slaying of any child named Leonydes before the end of the Imperium, but although the other seems to hear and understand, nothing has changed when the modern man steps out of the labyrinth. Whether the person in the past tried but failed to follow the advice given or whether something prevents the past from being changed is just one of the many questions surrounding the quixotic Goddess' gift.

Corlathian Mountains

This high mountain range runs from east to west and separates the Blessed Lands from the northern provinces of the Coryani Empire. The tops of the highest mountains remain snowcapped the year round, with many as tall as sixteen to seventeen thousand feet. Geologically the mountains are made of igneous rock, primarily granite and gabbro. The mountains are also rich in iron and copper ore, which has been mined systematically over the ages as evidenced by the many mine shafts that run deep into the range. While foothills exist on both sides of the range, they are more numerous and verdant on the southern slopes than the northern. The northern foothills are home to a diverse ecosystem, as well as being infested by malicious hyena-men tribes, another of the many hazards of traveling through the region.

Ruins and Monuments

When humanity wrested control of the Blessed Lands from the elorii, they wanted to make sure that all the former people and nations that bent their knee to the elemental beings knew that a new power was now in its ascendancy. To that end, after first constructing a series of fortifications throughout the region, artisans were commissioned to erect monuments and statues to aggrandize their new civilization.

Twin Colossi at the mouth of the harbor once welcomed mariners from beyond the Sea of Lanterns to the heart of the Imperium; the Thousand Warriors, a series of statues arrayed upon a slate platform that stretched for miles was positioned to meet friend or foe at the southeastern pass now known as the Pilgrim's Pass; the Obelisk of the Sun and the Moons, which was crafted from a material that shone as bright as Illiir's Orb itself, and the twin moons – one made from polished green granite, while the other crafted from the deepest obsidian – which were said to defy gravity and orbit the obelisk without need of cables or wire; these and many more once peppered the Blessed Lands, but now lay in ruin or have vanished completely under the unrelenting erosion of wind, rain and time.

Remnants of these monuments and ruins are constantly being rediscovered in the region. Some, like the massive weathered head of a former imperator had lain in plain sight for centuries but was only recently found by a lost member of the Followers of the Azure Way who strayed far from the most well-traveled paths. Others like the man-sized statue of person with arms upraised and joyous look upon its cracked and battered face was found encrusted in a half melted block of ice that had tumbled down the Corlathians during the Spring melt off. Crowned the *'Celebrant'*, it now resides in the opulent home of the Encali dwarf, Master Tolaren in the First City.

Melt-off during the spring brings a torrent of water rushing down the mountains, swelling the parched and dry rivers that trickle through the Blessed Lands. This torrent of water is a welcome sight from both farmers and animals alike, as significant rainfall in the Blessed Land is a rare occurrence.

Though the range presents an imposing sight and is seemingly impassable, there are numerous passes and trails that are safe to travel through except during the winter months, when they are usually blocked by ice and snow. Most travelers from the Known Lands avoid the Corlathians altogether and enter at the southeastern part of the Blessed Lands, where the mighty mountains taper down to gentle hills and finally flat lands. This opening into the region is called the Pilgrim's Pass and received its name from the many pious travelers that begin their pilgrimage to the First City here.

The Corlathians are also home to many races inimical to mankind, such as the ice giants that raid down into the remote villages looking for slaves or food stocks. Their clashes with the Soldier-Saints of Dagha are legendary and the source of many an epic song. Within the many tunnels and warrens that honeycomb the interior of the mountains, are the strongholds of the Singarthan trolls, a fierce and implacable foe that seldom roams outside their barrows, and favor attacking the two dwarven enclaves located within the mountain range instead.

Major Geographical Features

Axuni Mountains

The easternmost spur of the Corlathians Mountain Range, the Axuni Mountains is separated from the rest of the range by a sizable distance but is still considered part of that geologic chain. The small mountain line consists of two major peaks, Mount Caria and Mount Visius, and a number of smaller crags.

The city of Nevanne sits in the shadow of Mount Visius and its fortress was dug from the mountainside itself by those master engineers, the Auxunites, who controlled the area for several generations before being ousted by the locals. Nevanne was once the provincial capital of the Ulfila, until it broke away and merged with the Milandisian Duchy of Moratavia to create the nascent kingdom of Almeric. Unfortunately, the kingdom never had a chance to flourish and has descended into chaos with every noble in the realm claiming to be the rightful king and making war on its neighbors to assert his or her rule.



Mount Hyperion

The tallest mountain in the Corlathians standing at approximately seventeen thousand feet is Mount Hyperion, named after the mythological hero that pierced the side of the Other during the God's War. Located near the dead center of the range, this mountain's peak has never been reached given the propensity for avalanches unexpectedly occurring during any time of the year. Many claim to see figures moving about with impunity upon its many rocky ledges and outcroppings, giving credence to the belief that the ice giants have some sort of settlement in the frosty reaches of Mount Hyperion.

Petrified Forest

The southeastern curve of the Corlathian Mountains was once home to a verdant grove of ancient trees thought to have been some of the oldest living things on the planet. With the unleashing of the ritual of Kurenthé, it was transformed into a stony stand, acres long and deep; a skeletal graveyard of ash-white bare trunks, seeming to writhe in agony. Due to the immense arcane forces released by the elorii, the laws of nature itself were twisted and the trees shed ash-like flakes that cover the ground.

Though the Blessed Lands can be one of the most dangerous locales in the Known Lands, it is this area in particular that accounts for the greatest number of lost pilgrims, traders, and knights from the Soldier-Saints of Dagha than any other. This has led to legends of horrid creatures and ravenous beasts that lurk within. The truth, as they say, is stranger than fiction.

Within the tangled eaves of the Petrified Forest can be seen exquisitely carved statues; some of ancient warriors in full battle regalia, to other more mundane types, such as maidens and traders. One statue in particular is so detailed and realistic, that one can see beads of perspiration dotting his high forehead. Though many believe these are mere statuaries, others are certain that the sculptures are much more than they appear to be.

Making its home amongst the fossilized trees is a tribe of cannibals that delight in covering their bodies in the ash-white shedding of the trees and white clay underfoot, allowing them to blend into the environment. Camouflaged so as to appear as just another statue or as part of a tree trunk, the inhabitants are able to pounce on their unsuspecting victims, many of whom are beaten senseless before being taken to what some survivors describe as an ancient temple built in the architectural style of the Imperium. Within its gloomy recesses are said to live creatures of ancient legends, adorned with a crown of serpents and whose gaze that can steal a man's soul. These foul creatures from legend are worshipped as gods by the savages.

Important Sites

7 The Dwarven Enclave of Encali

Situated towards the center of the Corlathians, the dwarven enclave of Encali is known as the City of Sorrows and is acclaimed for the exquisite pieces of jewelry, both mundane and magical, it exports. The Encali dwarves are renowned for their devotion to the God Sarish, who they call the Redeemer,



and because of His gifts, are the only dwarves able to practice the arcane arts.

The Encali take as much pride in their beards as the rest of their dwarven brethren, and traditionally wear their jet-black beards in twin forks with their ends capped with ornate crowns made of some precious metal. This gives them a sinister appearance, which lends itself to the stereotype held by many of the uneducated that all Encali are interested in crafting deals that end with the dwarf claiming the soul of the unwary. This, of course, is false, but given their very long lives, the Encali are happy to craft a deal with one person and then collect from their grandchildren.

The Merchant Cabal member, Master Tolaren, is from Encali and has close mercantile ties with the master craftsmen of his people, especially the very powerful House of Setai. Setai artisans, who excel at designing pendants, rings, amulets and necklaces, are in great demand throughout the southern nations, as well as the rich and powerful of the western kingdoms, all to the delight of Master Tolaren's accountants.

The Lost Citadel of Nier

The Nierites tell stories of Leonydes val'Virdan, the Sword of the Heavens, and his miraculous return to his followers, how in one night he conquered Nishanpur, the capital of Canceri, and with a hundred thousand soldiers, marched to retake the First City. Most continue the tale, saying that due to treachery and base betrayal, the army was ambushed, Leonydes lost, and finish by mumbling something to the effect that he will return when we prove worthy again of his guidance.

Then there are those with more grey than red in their hair that tell of their march alongside the Sword of the Heavens across the Known Lands, scattering the hastily formed militia of Milandir, the sack of the town of Ashvan, and how the famed Coryani general, Menisis, tucked tail between his legs and allowed the Nierites unchallenged passage through the Empire and into the Blessed Lands. Their eyes turn as hard as flint when they recall the order to camp in the foothills of the Corlathians near a giant field of petrified trees and soon thereafter, seeing Leonydes and an elite honor guard walk into that dead grove to seek the fabled Citadel of Nier. How in the dead of night, a stifling hush fell over the encampment and the soldiers began shrieking in utter silence as the darkness rose up from the ground and began killing with cold efficiency and without mercy. Orders to form up were screamed at the top of lungs but went unheard in the deafening silence that laid like a shroud over them all. The scramble to retreat became an all-out rout, with less than ten thousand soldiers spilling out into Milandir until they found themselves surrounded by Coryani legions, Milandisian knights and Canceri loyalists. That was the Battle of the Shattered Armies and only a few thousand hardened Nierites emerged from that grinder to return to Nishanpur and await a leader who was never heard from again.

These grizzled old veterans never laid eyes on the Lost Citadel, but for the past forty years many are haunted by the events that transpired near that cursed place and some swear that, one moonless nights, they dream of walking beside their semi-divine leader into the ruins of that old Citadel, through an orchard of living statues, until finally walking up the steps to a black dome that truly isn't there and passing through. All the dreams end the same way, with screams that won't stop until their throats are raw and bleeding.

The Lost City of Mattawab and the Temple of the Monkey God

Hidden within one of the countless valleys and plateaus nestled inside the Corlathian Mountain Range lies the Lost City of Mattawab and the Temple of the Monkey God. References to this mythical land has never been found in any ancient texts or local legends. It is only in the tale of two explorers, members of the Followers of the Azure Way, who stumbled across it during an expedition to find a safe route through the Corlathians, that any mention of the temple and the mysterious city is found.



The story speaks of the two surveyors finding an ancient, overgrown trail that lead to a large, lone temple, built in a beautiful but haunting architectural style. There, hundreds, if not thousands of monkeys and apes of different species were seen living within its ethereal eves and columns. At first small spider monkeys greeted them in a playful manner, but as they grew closer to the temples, larger apes, like baboons and orangutans, grew more agitated and aggressive. The errant travelers were able to approach the temple close enough to see that its broad columns and walls were covered in writing before being chased off by a horde of snarling and howling apes.

When they were found by locals upon the lower edge of the southern slopes of the Corlathians, they were half starved and near frozen, their extremities blackened and withered from frostbite. When conscious they both spoke of their finding and added that the words written above the entrance in Altharin said that the Temple was the gateway to the city of Mattawab and that riches beyond imagining lay therein.

The two died soon after and a spokesperson for the Followers of the Azure Way told any who would listen that the tales were hallucinations of dying men. It should be noted however, that the Followers have been sending annual expeditions throughout the very location where the men were found.

8 The Monastery of the Perfect Union

The Monastery of the Perfect Union is built into the living rock of Mount Nosci to the east of the dwarven enclave of Solanos Mor. Here, the monks contemplate the scriptures of Illiir and the perfection that He seeks for all mankind to strive towards. The monks are led by His Illuminated Perfection, Morven of House Vodik, a Solani dwarf, though the monastery welcomes any and all races that seek to learn the mysteries of the Illiiric faith and achieve the ideal union between the body and the mind. Many of the elders of the order are Vals possessing strong psionic abilities, who use them to probe, scrub, and cleanse any impurities of thought from the minds of their initiates.

Monks of the order eschew any physical contact with those from the outside world but are required by their tenets to travel beyond the monastery's elegant white marble gate and interact with the world, to experience firsthand the contamination wrought by those who have strayed from the path of purity. This is seen as a test of their own abilities to remain uncorrupted while interacting with the unclean. They can sometimes be found in the Blessed Lands, joining expeditions to sites that have the potential of unearthing lost lore or ancient scriptures pertaining to the practice of psionics.

9 The Pilgrim's Pass

The eastern end of the Corlathian Mountains tapers off into a series of very low and gently rolling hills that is easily passable by wagon, horse, or foot. These small knolls form a part of the beleaguered nation Almeric's northwestern border and serves as the main entry point for most of the peoples of the Known Lands traveling into the Blessed Lands.

Other than merchants or relief legionnaires on their way to the First City, the majority of those entering through the Pass are the faithful going on pilgrimage to the First City. Though not mandatory by the tenets of the Mother Church of Coryan or the Milandric Church (or the Dark Triumvirate of Canceri, for that matter) most of the faithful attempt a pilgrimage to the First City at least once in their lives. A full pilgrimage, known as embarking upon the Via Sacra or the Sacred Way, requires one to travel in a circuit around the Blessed Lands, visiting all eleven of the known Citadels (or at least viewing them from afar when necessary) and while in the First City, to take a small piece of rubble from the ruins of the Temple of the Pantheon as proof of their arduous undertaking.

Depending on where in the Known Lands one lives, the travel time to and from the Blessed Lands can average months to over a year's trek. One would imagine that due to this and the attendant cost, only the wealthiest would embark on such a journey, but the poorest among the populace are oft times the most ardent in their beliefs, with some groups comprising up to three generations who have saved their coins over the many years to afford undertaking the pilgrimage.

Most pilgrims stop at a small waystation that sprung up along the pass and has grown considerably over the years. The Emporium of Fine Goods for the Faithful offers those beginning or ending their journey supplies a comfortable place to rest their heads, a warm meal, horses and even a Beltinian Hospitalier monastery to aid the sick and give rest to the dying. Groups of hardened veterans of wars or the legions stay here offering their services as bodyguards and guides, though care must be taken as some of these grizzled warriors are no more than opportunistic bandits looking for wealthy prey.

10 The Dwarven Enclave of Solanos Mor

It is said that of all the dwarven nations across the continent, none are more pious or a greater friend to man than the noble dwarves of Solanos Mor, the City of Shameful Penance. Like all the other dwarven people, the Solani were forced to live underground, eschewing the sky where Illiir's light shone when His curse was laid upon them. To that end, the dwarves found a small cavern in Mount Dorna and, over the centuries, and expanded it into an enormous chamber colloquially known as "The Vault".

The dwarves lived within the heart of the mountain, saying their prayers of the penitent under thousands of tons of solid stone, until towards the end of the Coryani Civil War, when after their centuries of faithful service to Illiir and mankind, the entire top of the mountain was blown off from an intense beam of light emanating from the young Elandré val'Assanté, who was possessed at the time by the Word of Illiir. For the first time in ages sunlight streamed down upon the people of Solanos Mor and it appears as though a small part of the King of the Gods' curse was lifted. Elandré went on to become the unaging Matriarch of the Mother Church of Coryan and the Solani dwarves have been her most ardent ally, seeing her touched by the holy power of the Gods.

11 Temple of the Venerator Invictus

Located upon the relatively small peak of Mount Ordura, near the dwarven enclave of Encali, lies the ancient Sarishan temple of Venerator Invictus, or the Temple of the Invincible Hunter. The temple was purportedly established a few years after the founding of the Coryani Empire, but is actually much, much older. During the Shadow Age, the temple had a dark and sinister reputation, demanding all children born during the rise of the red star Allos, the Blood Star, in the surrounding towns be handed over to them. These children were then trained and prepared to be inducted as a member of the Order of the Inner Demon, where a demon was bound and imprisoned within the initiate holy champion's own body. The order, as well as the temple, gained legitimacy in the eyes of the people when they were praised by the first Coryani emperor.

The temple also sponsors a sister order to the Inner Demon known as the Order of the Ivory Bow, a holy order consisting solely of dark-kin that are trained to hunt and destroy infernals. The two orders are trying to recover from the many fatalities suffered during the last Crusade of Light. Neither order was large to begin with, but now only a mere handful of seasoned holy champions remain between the two to continue their battle against the foul forces of the infernals. Luckily, the Blood Star will soon be rising after a decade of lying beneath the horizon and new recruits will join the hallowed ranks of the order.

Fervidus Hills

The area nestled between the Aqtau Mountains and the western edge of the Vastwood is known as the Fervidus Hills, a region of gentle, rolling prominences and knolls covered by bristling trees known as ironwoods. The ironwoods are a unique species of tree that has only been found in this region. Attempts to transplant it to other areas have all failed, but efforts to do so continue as the bark of the tree, when treated, becomes as hard as iron, yet remains lightweight.

The hills get their name from the strange metal that is singular to the area, fervidite. Incredibly rare, fervidite has been found in patches containing blobs of the metal, giving credence to the myth of a large fireball or explosion hitting the area in the past. Fervidite is greatly sought after by warriors as the metal, once forged into a weapon, is sharp enough to slice through most any other material with ease. Additionally, once sharpened, which can only be done when it is forged, its edge never dulls or pits. Some say that a fervidite blade from a hundred years ago is still as sharp as the day it was made. However, due to its rarity and the fact that it can only be excavated from voei infested areas, the cost of any weapon made



from this material is too high for all but the wealthiest.

Legend has it that the Fervidus Hills were once part of the Aqtau Mountains, until the Sleeping Emperor led the Khitani away before the fall of the First City. The last imperator, furious that a portion of his citizenry was abandoning him and the city, tasked the Legion of Deafening Thunder, one dedicated to Hurrian, to hunt down the traitorous Khitani and bring them back to suffer the same fate as everyone else.

As the legion gave chase and began to close within a few days of their quarry, it is said that the Sleeping Emperor but gazed into the night sky and brought down a fiery hell upon his enemies. So great was the explosion that the night sky turned into day and the mountains crumbled as sand castles before the incoming tide. When the fires died and the smoke cleared, the mountains were reduced to the low hills that exist today.

The hills are also famous, or rather infamous, as the home of the savage voei tribes; large, hulking brutes that are extremely territorial and think nothing of dining on their fallen enemies. The voei are seen by many as a double-edged sword, as while they are a great danger to the Coryani mining camps and the occasional traveler that strays into the area, they also act as a natural buffer between the Blessed Lands and the Khitani Empire. The few times that the Khitani have attempted to invade over land, they suffered staggering casualties at the hands of the merciless voei.

Major Geographical Features

Delur River

The Delur River descends from the Aqtau Mountains and snakes through the lower lying areas of the Fervidus Hills until finally flowing into Serpent Lake. The river is slow-moving except during the spring when warming temperatures melt the snow and ice, causing the river to swell and overflow its banks.

The river has abundant fish year-round and the voei use it to supplement their food supply during the leaner years. Large brown bears can be frequently found near the water and can be just as ferocious as the voei to the unwary.

Serpent Lake

The largest and deepest lake in the Fervidus Hills, Serpent Lake is fed by the Delur River as well as the heavy rainfall common to this area during the first half of the year. The lake receives its name from the vast number of poisonous water snakes that make their home there. During the breeding season, the ovoviviparous serpents release their young and the entire surface of the lake appears to wriggle as if alive.

The voei living in the area catch and eat the snakes, having perfected the manner in which they can be defanged, and their venom sacs safely removed. Rather than apply venom to their blades, they prefer to use them to paralyze captive miners or soldiers for ease in carrying them to their home. The poison does not seem to affect the taste of their meals, as the voei devour them with equal relish.

Important Sites

12 Coryani Mining Towns

When the first piece of fervidite was discovered towards the end of the Second Coryani-Khitani War by a legionnaire scout by the name of Octus Fervus, he didn't have any idea of what he had found. To him, it appeared like a blob of greenish metal that had to be handled carefully to avoid losing a finger. Years later, after mustering out of legions and settling down in Enpebyn, a blacksmith friend was given the sample and after much experimentation using hot and cold forges, discovered its amazing properties and how to work the metal.

Realizing that the piece of metal was worth many times its weight in gold, Fervus struck out for the voei infested hills and scrambled to find more of the precious metal. When he did not return after a few summers, his blacksmith friend feared the worst but never one to let grief get in the way of business, he began to sell the secret of the fervidite metal, the least he could do for his lost friend was to name the metal he found after him and began selling the location of the hidden vales where it could be found.

Seemingly overnight, small mining towns sprang up across hills and began coring the earth for the precious commodity. Initially, these miners were primarily loners who staked their claim and gave others a wide berth. With the predations of the voei however, this way of life lasted precious few months. So savage and ferocious were these raids that it took little time for the miners to petition the empire for protection. Seeing the value of the metal and claiming exclusive rights based on an imperial citizen making the original discovery, the Coryani Empire lost little time in setting up wooden palisades and eventually forts, to defend the miners, merchants, and entrepreneurs that inevitably follow in the wake of wealth.

The Varro family was tasked with overseeing the mining enterprise and this has allowed them to grow quite wealthy over the generations. They ensure that the precious metal keeps flowing into the Coryani Empire and that the skilled miners that move to the area are as safe as possible. To do so, they pay for the upkeep of Fort Macha and the soldiers stationed there to defend against voei raids. The mining concern also cuts down ironwood trees and sends them down to a lumber mill deep in the Blessed Lands, near the Vastwood.

13 Fort Macha

This large fort is located at the very edge of the Fervidus Hills, where the mining of the rare fervidite metal first began. The fort has large palisades constructed from the local ironwood trees in the region and can house up to a thousand soldiers. Originally, the fort was the posting for the Legion of Deliverance, a hardened group of fighters trained and experienced in dealing with the savage voei. The cost for maintaining these troops were incurred by the Varro Mercantile Concern, but at the height of the Coryani Civil War, the legion was ordered from the fort and joined the fray on the emperor's side. Seeing the attacks from the voei mounting, the Varro family hired a mercenary company from the west without any ties to the powers in the south. For over forty years, the Thousand Spears Company has been the first line of defense against the voei and have gained a reputation as some of the deadliest warriors on the continent. They need to be to survive on the first lines against the almost unstoppable force that are the voei.

Voei Villages

The voei, due to their contentious and violent nature, are not prone to forming large and complex communities. At best, voei congregate in tribes, consisting of four or five families that can tolerate close proximity to one another. These small villages dot the Fervidus Hills at irregular intervals, each staking out a certain area for hunting and having little tolerance to anyone trespassing upon their territory, even other voei. Given the ferocity with which they defend their individual lands, scholars wonder how they haven't wiped each other out over the years.

Each small community acts independently unless answering war cries to attack the encroaching mining towns or, on rare occasions, when a powerful war leader gathers all the tribes together by sheer force of strength and charisma. Luckily, this occurs rarely, though when it does, the carnage wrought by these savages is remembered for generations.

A voei community consists of a chieftain and his blooded warriors, untested fighters, child bearing women and small children. There are no elders among the voei. The weak and the old either die in battle or are ritually killed to fill the larder of the group.

Flood Plains

The lowest tier of the bowl-shaped Blessed Lands is known as the Flood Plains, due not only to its regular high tides, but also to the roaring inundation that occurs once every seven years. This unique astronomical phenomenon occurs when the green moon Viridis and the dark moon Aperio align in the eastern sky. The resultant lunar tidal pull causes the Sea of Lanterns to come crashing into the area, flooding the entire lower tier in over thirty feet of water.

The ancients knew of this periodic occurrence and built a large harbor at the southern edge of the Plains to mitigate the effects of the intense flooding on goods being brought in from the west. In modern times, the Flood Plains still sees a good amount of traffic as *skimmers*, sailors that pilot flat-bottomed boats laden with goods loaded at Pecinium, hurry to deliver their cargo before night falls. No amount of money can convince a skimmer to venture out after dark, for that is when the cyclopes rise from the ocean, hunting for easy prey.

The floor of the Flood Plains is pockmarked with small tidal pools that capture the unlucky or slow fish and lamprey when the daily tide goes out. The cyclopes of Saam Ur, semi-aquatic creatures that rise from the depths of the sea and collect the trapped fish, enjoy



this bounty of easy prey. However, woe to the person caught outside when they are out hunting, for besides their large size, immense strength, and savagery, they possess the singular ability to emit a fearsome light or ray from their one baleful eye.

The Chauni call the area Ghunlud after one of their most infamous chieftains, for its pockmarked ground and flinty rocks recall his stern visage and nature. These nomads sometimes brave the dangers of the region to hunt one of the Plain's most dangerous animals, the gillicar. This large amphibian can grow upwards of fifteen feet and has thick armor plates that the Chauni, as well as the voei, value in making armor and shields. This normally sedate creature resembles a dun armored carp with a toothy maw and hook-like fins it uses to move through tide pools and muddy flats and can easily be mistaken for a half-submerged rock or log. When provoked, the animal can prove to be a savage fighter as well as a consummate ambush hunter, lunging at the unwary as they move past it.

Major Geographical Features

Simpas Swamps

On the northern edges of the Flood Plain and abutting the slopes of the Aqtau Mountains is a large wetland growing out of the brackish waters that seem to drain completely from the tidal flows. Large and thick mangroves create an almost impenetrable forest that not many would wish to brave if not for the seeds of the giant Numaa plant. This flowering plant produces a large reddish fruit only once a year and other than the swamps of the Kraldjur Morass in the Ssethregoran Empire, this is the only other place where it is known to bloom. When crushed and its oil distilled, the seeds yield a potent anti-venom that has been able to counteract virtually every naturally produced toxin. It takes thousands of seeds to produce just one dose of the antidote, making it one of the most expensive drugs available.



Important Sites

14 The Harbor

The ancient harbor of the First City sits on the southwestern most point of the Flood Plains. Built thousands of years ago, the harbor, though looking a bit worse for wear, is quite functional and still in use. Its most memorable features are the twin statues of the Sea God Yarris, known as the Twin Colossi, which has one facing out into the Sea of Lanterns, the other one towards the First City, that guard the entrance. A large granite seawall forms a protective ring about the floating docks that can safely berth dozens of trading ships.

Due to the seasonal flooding, the docks were built on huge pontoons made from ironwood from the Fervidus Hills, which have the unique property of being resistant to rotting from exposure to water. These floating docks are linked in a ring around the harbor and are able to rise and fall as the tides ebb and flow, without changing their relative position to one another. This engineering feat prevents damage to the ships berthed there and many ships' captains are happy to pay the mooring fees to wait out a particularly bad squall in safety.

Warehouses are built on an upper tier above where the highest water level has ever been recorded and though it requires a large amount of manpower to get the goods up the ramps, all agree that it is worth the effort to avoid having the stored goods ruined by the rising tide. Customs officers, merchant brokers and other administrative officials have offices on this tier as well, ensuring that no new goods are brought through the harbor without paying the proper fees and taxes.

15 Mournmouth Caverns

Their entrance rumored to be just south of the westernmost slopes of the Aqtau Mountains, these caverns are said to be an entrance into the Endless Dark, the underground tunnels and chambers that honeycomb the entire continent. The cavern complex was discovered by a pair of Khitani sailors whose junk ran aground during the seasonal storms that wrack the area.

The sailors tell of their captain ordering the crew to seek shelter in an opening in the rock face, but instead of a shallow alcove, they discovered the rain flowing downward into an enormous cave system with a partially flooded chamber. After lighting a lantern, they saw the light reflecting off piles of gold and jewels, enough to buy a kingdom a hundred times over. Greed got the better of them and they found a way down by following a heavily eroded pathway. They began stuffing the gold into whatever they had in hand; pockets, sacks, even packs made from their own shirts, all the while laughing and yelling out what they would do with their newfound wealth. So engrossed were they in their fantasy that they failed to notice that the cavern had other inhabitants that fell on them like a pack of wolves, biting and tearing into them with the ferocity of rabid animals.

The surviving pair managed to escape with their lives and not much more. They told their tale to their superiors, describing the creatures as some sort of aquatic ghouls that fed upon the flesh of the crew. In the years since the incident occurred, no one has been able to find the passage back down to the caverns, though many have tried and some have never returned from the quest, but the others continue searching, as long as their lust for gold overrides their sense of self-preservation.

The Sea of Lanterns

This large body of water forming the western boundary of the Blessed Lands is actually the eastern portion of the Messalean Sea. It is this sea that inundates the Flood Plains seasonally, leaving a bounty of trapped fish and other sea creatures during low tide. Once every seven years, however, the twin moons of Arcanis align and the sea crashes past the Flood Plain inundating the lands almost to the foot of Mount Dagha itself. Months are needed for the waters to recede back to their normal levels.

The Sea of Lanterns gets its name from the mysterious lights that can be seen shining beneath its waves on any given night, as if drowned men swam its depths using lanterns to find their way home. Mariners try to avoid



these lights as they emanate from the baleful solitary eye of the cyclopes that live in the ocean's depths. Degenerate descendants of a once proud and powerful race, the modern cyclopes are a cruel people that are not above capturing and feasting upon the flesh of sentient beings. Legend has it that their ancient city of Saam Ur lies lost beneath the waves.

Major Geographical Features

Impai Island

Also known as Lesser Lanzhou Isle, Impai Island sits just off the Flood Plains and is substantially smaller in size than Lanzhou. The island does not possess a large volcanic cone like its sister island which made it a better location to build the westernmost of the Citadel of the Gods, the Citadel of Yarris.

Lanzhou Island

Claimed by the Khitani many years prior to the Emerald Society's rediscovery of the First City, Lanzhou Island is an extinct volcanic isle. The center of this large island is hollowed out with a staircase carved on either side, allowing access to the inner shaft. Within, a central lake is surrounded by a dark sandy beach with a number of scuttling crabs and lush vegetation.

The outer walls of the cone are dotted with caves and avian rookeries. These colorful birds' feathers are coveted by many, including Dailish pirate captains who have whole cloaks made from the exotic plumages as a symbol of their status. Gathering them brings the pirates into conflict with the island's only other irregular inhabitants, the Khitani. The Khitani use the island to train their sailors and marines, and in times past, used Lanzhou Island to stage strikes into the Blessed Lands during the two Khitani-Coryani wars. Skirmishes sometimes break out between the two groups when they happen to discover one another on the island. These battles prove brief but bloody, ending with either the pirates or the sailors dead or run off.



Important Sites

16 Pecinium

Established at the very mouth of the Flood Plains on the isle of Impai in the Sea of Lanterns, the town of Pecinium grew around the formidable Citadel of Yarris, one of the ancient Citadels of the Gods. Originally, the citadel and its attendant Temple of Yarris, known as the Temple of the Tempestuous Sea, served only as a defensive point of the old imperium against the unknown lands and people of the west.


N
W
E
S
Pecinium
Fishing Village
Lower District
Korvil Manor
Temple District
High District
Mid District
Bazaar
Citadel of Yarris
Warehouse Area
Dock/Wharf Area
Stilt City

As time passed and the imperium expanded into the northern stretches of Onara, a small fishing village cropped up on island's eastern shore, thankfully downwind of the Citadel. As trade between the northern Khitani territories and the southern provinces of the Imperium grew, a small trading outpost developed around the large docks on the western end of the island. This settlement, which eventually became modern Pecinium, waxed and waned with the cyclical fortunes of the Imperium. With the Imperium's fall and the subsequent isolation of the Khitani lands, the island once again only housed the most fervent adherents of Yarris and thus it remained for centuries. Eventually, trade was reestablished between the peoples of the First City with the numerous kingdoms and city-states of the west and Pecinium began to prosper anew.

Pecinium

Type: Town

Population: 3,500 permanent residents/+2,500 sailors and traders (transient)

Ruler: Tolenticus val'Ossan, holy champion of Yarris and Commandant of the Scaled Guard.

Governmental Type: City Council with five seats, one of which is always reserved for the head of the Scaled Guard.

Power Centers: Scaled Guard, City Council led by Lord Eddings Korvil.

Policing Force: The Hooded Company – A mercenary company known for their hooded robes in the service of the City Council (500 soldiers).

Military Force: Scaled Guard – 200 templars of Yarris with an additional command cadre from the Order of the Sea Lords (20).

Exports: Fish, rare commodities from Khitan and the various city-states and kingdoms beyond the Sea of Lanterns.

Imports: Food stuffs (grain, meat, vegetable, fruits), metal, luxury goods for trade to Khitan and lands beyond the Sea of Lanterns.

Pecinium Locale Information

The town of Pecinium is broken up into eleven distinct areas or districts of interest.

1 Dock/Wharf Area

Facing west into the Sea of Lanterns, the dock area was built to accommodate those trading vessels from the west that preferred not to pay the exorbitant berthing fees and customs taxes in the First City's harbor. Just off the docks are various trading houses, taverns, hostels, and gambling dens. Itinerant priestesses of Larissa are also present in the area, though only the most desperate or destitute sailor would avail themselves of their blessings. Most travelers in search of the Pleasure Goddess' benediction travel to the Temple Quarter. Business with the various trading houses is done through their offices located here in this district.

2 Warehouse Area

Just south of the docks are the numerous warehouses, many of them owned by the trading interests of the various mercantile concerns doing business here. Groups of the Hooded Company patrol the area in small six-man groups during the day and double that in the evening.

3 Citadel of Yarris

Situated on a high promontory overlooking the dock area is the oldest structure on the island. The citadel is a massive fortress made of the hard, blue-green soapy stone quarried from the nearby Aqtau Mountains. While not as elegant as modern Milandisian castles, the Citadel was built for function rather than form. Its square shape is adorned with wave and sea life motifs on its walls, while the entrance is bounded by two fearsome looking creatures that blend human and piscine qualities.

4 Bazaar

Adjacent to the docks and warehouse districts is a large market area. Within, the bazaar is a colorful and exotic mix of large tents, smaller, awning covered stalls, kiosks and other more permanent structures. Perfume, incenses and the aroma of cooked foods clash and complement one another, creating a truly unique experience for the senses.

Traders who are short on time or laden with illicit or stolen goods avail themselves of the markets here rather than approaching the Merchant Cabal of the First City. Due to this, a vibrant black market thrives in Pecinium where one may gain access to everything from illegal pharmaceuticals, such as the *Breath of the Dragon* (an addictive opiate) to stolen flintlocks and blast powder. Due to the popularity of the drug, a number of ramshackle hovels have been sprouted up in the Lower District.

5 Mid District

This district is where the middle-class homes and businesses of Pecinium are located. While the homes are not opulent, they are roomy and safe. A contingent

of the Hooded Company makes its rounds through these streets, just enough of a presence to keep the riff-raff from the Lower Quarter out. In the hopes of placating the middle class residents, the Council built the barracks that houses the Hooded Company in this quarter, giving the people here an extra sense of security.

6 High District

Built upon the second-highest ground on the island, the High Quarter is home to the estates of the rich and powerful of Pecinium. High marbled walls about each of the homes keep prying eyes and sticky hands from the riches held within. The Hooded Company has a strong presence here, patrolling the wide streets day and night.

7 Korvil Manor

Upon the highest point in the High District is Korvil Manor, ancestral home to the current administrator of Pecinium, Eddings Korvil. The old manor house was built centuries ago by one of the richest mercantile houses on the island who ruled the island with an iron fist. Over a century ago, the Korvil family immigrated to the First City to increase their wealth and power but ran afoul of House Symesa when they tried to oust that venerable family from the Merchant Cabal. Within a season, the Korvil family fortune was lost and they were forced to slink back to Pecinium and wallow in their newfound irrelevance, ceding power even there to a Council of their lesser peers.

The new generation of Korvil scions is led by Eddings Korvil, a ruthless and determined man who seeks to reestablish his family as a force to be reckoned with. He has already cowed, bribed and murdered his way to become leader of the Council but continues to butt heads with the current Commandant of the Scaled Guard, Tolenticus val'Ossan. But even this adherent of the Sea God can be swept from his board; he only needs the right pawns to put his plans into motion.

The adjacent building houses the civilian governmental offices of Pecinium and is where the Council meets to discuss the town's business.

8 Temple District

Located on the southern portion of Pecinium, small temples and shrines to the Pantheon of Man can be found here. While all the Gods are venerated and enshrined, the largest holy temple is the one dedicated to the Sea God Yarris. Known as the Temple of the Tempestuous Sea, this building is constructed of the same light blue-green soapy stone that the Citadel of Yarris is made. Situated on the very shore of the island, this temple, like most major ones dedicated to the Sea Lord, is constructed so that a portion of it is swamped by the ocean during high tide. For its adherents, getting wet to their waist during holy services is a common and welcome occurrence.

9 Lower District

Known as the lower quarter due to its frequent flooding, this is also the home of the poorest of Pecinium. What few businesses make their homes here are elevated a good three feet above the ground. The residents are a mish-mash of faces from across Onara and beyond. Most who reside here are either those who came looking to make their fortunes and lost them, sailors who can no longer earn their keep onboard ships, travelers who lost all but their lives during pilgrimages or a myriad other stories full of desperation and ill luck.

10 Fishing Village

The oldest settlement second only to the citadel, the fishing village is home to a fleet of small- and middle-sized fishing boats. Situated on the easternmost part of the island, it thankfully sits downwind from the rest of the Pecinium for most of the day. Those who man these vessels live in the adjacent lower quarter for the most part, so only the boats, small huts where netting is sold and repaired, and warehouses where large water pools to keep the caught fish fresh can be found here.

The only other item of interest here is the Stone of Penance. Used as stocks to hold prisoners awaiting judgment, the blue-green stone is ensorcelled by the priests of Yarris



to allow a prisoner's extremities to pass into the rock and then solidifies about them. Reaching a height of over thirty feet, the stone weighs in excess of six tons and is etched with images of underwater terrors and torments. Those guilty of the most heinous crimes are *put to the Stone* and then either left to drown when the high tide comes or lanterns are left shining at the prisoner's feet at night to summon cyclopes for a free meal.

11 Stilt City

Even as remote a place as Pecinium, there are still those who seek still greater isolation than can be found here. Just off the south western shore is a small group of wooden and waterlogged huts built upon thick wooden beams sunk deep into the silt of the relatively shallow ocean floor. These people value their solitude and it is only on rare occasions that these eclectics can be seen in town, and then only to buy provisions.

17 Ravan'Tindal

Tales are told in tavernas across the Coryani Empire of a group of adventurers who traveled far beneath the Sea of Lanterns and discovered a group of Berokene elorii living in a small city called Ravan'Tindal. These elorii claim that they were exiled from Elonbé years after the Gods' War due to a schism in elorii society. The Berokene traveled west until they reached the shores of the Sea of Lanterns and descended into its depths to avoid further contact with their brethren.

These exiled elorii eventually found and claimed a large area of the ancient city of Saam Ur, which rested on an underwater ledge three hundred feet beneath the waves. The Berokene elders crafted a dome made of solid water to further isolate them from the outside world and named their new city Ravan'Tindal, the Sanctuary of Truth.

These adventurers claim that these Berokene suffer from a variety of mental maladies due to their use of an artifact that acted like the sacred eloran Orumar, ensuring that their soul's rebirth would be funneled into a newborn of their choosing rather than possibly being reborn in Elonbé or another enclave. The adventurers were able to escape the lost eloran city by taking advantage of the friction that existed between the different power blocs, but none have been able to journey back to there to verify whether the tale is true or merely a fanciful story told in exchange for some wine.

18 Saam Ur

The area of water between the shore of the Flood Plains to the islands of Lanzhou and Impai is littered with huge rock slabs made of a strange blue-green soapy stone. These cyclopean blocks are believed to be all that remains of the ancient city of Saam Ur or Saamurkond as it is known to the Chauni. This sprawling metropolis was said to have covered a vast area until a seismic catastrophe caused the land to collapse and the waters of the Messalean Sea swallowed it whole.

The once proud and powerful cyclopes enjoyed an advanced civilization, with wonders that equaled or exceeded any created by the powerful Imperium. The Khitani claim that this monocular race somehow offended the Gods and were castigated by Them, while new archeological finds indicate that it was the rapacious ssethrics that conquered them and crushed them beneath their coils. Whatever the true cause of their downfall, the cyclopes of Saam Ur have degenerated over the millennia into a brutal and vicious race, whose highest societal organization can be said to be tribal, at best.

Members from the various exploration societies have discovered large monuments and artifacts all around this underwater region and some claim to have sighted a large ruined cityscape deep beneath the waves of the Sea of Lanterns. Exploring these claims has proven hazardous as the area is infested by the feral cyclopes, who are quite content to let their food come to them.

The Twelve Citadels of the Pantheon

Built immediately after the founding of the Imperium of Man, the twelve citadels were built to guard the initial perimeter of its territory. Thrust into a new land and surrounded by enemies, known and unknown, the veterans of the Gods' War immediately set upon the task of building a ring of fortifications that would not only be a line of defense against invaders, but act to create a zone in which humanity could grow and settle.

Each of the citadels were consecrated and named in honor of each of the twelve Gods and placed in strategic positions that would play on each of their strengths, such as placing the Citadel of Hurrian facing the Vastwood, so that the fortifications of the Divine Defender would be the first to face the fury of the elorii, should they prove eager to reclaim what was once theirs.

No two citadels look exactly alike, as each were erected on different terrains and created to accomplish different functions, but what differentiates them the most is that each fortification was built to aesthetically please their divine patron, thus the Citadel of Yarris looks very different from the mirrored sheen of Illiir's Citadel, also known as the Citadel of Light.

19 Citadel of Althares

The Citadel of Althares appears unimpressive compared to the other fortresses in the Blessed Lands. It is situated due east of Mount Dagha and sits at an ancient crossroads, where the trade routes from the west and those from the southeast once merged before going on to the First City.

Like the modern era, the scions of the God of Knowledge were scholars and not warriors. It would be centuries before the Altherians from the Republic of Altheria would need to hone the battle skills necessary to fight off the Ssethregoran Empire on their doorstep. During the age of the Imperium, the Altherians created proxy warriors to fight their battle for them. They manned the citadel with clockwork warriors and other mechanized wonders that were tireless, relentless and entirely without mercy. During the War of Empires, these mechanized soldiers prompted the black sorcerers of the Ossarion Empire to create magical monstrosities like the chimera and manticore in the hopes of blunting their effectiveness.

In modern times, many of these mechanized warriors have decayed and are inoperable, but those few that remain intact allow any escorted by a priest, templar or holy champion of Althares entry into the main area of the citadel. Those attempting to seek entry into the other areas are dealt with using deadly force.

20 Citadel of Anshar

The Citadel of Anshar is the most bizarrely shaped of all the fortifications as the structure resembles a conical bee hive and consists of multiple levels. The citadel is located in the southern portion of the Blessed Lands, near the Corlathian Mountains. Beyond a few skirmishes during the modern era against the voei, packs of hyena-men and one notable raid by marauding ice giants, there are no records of the citadel participating in any battles or engagements against enemy forces. It may be because of this lack of strategic military value in its history that the citadel does not have any legionnaires stationed within, with the exception of a handful of soldiers from the mysterious Legion of Grim Lamentation. In fact, it would likely have been forgotten of entirely, but for the Gate of Anshar within its walls.

The citadel today continues to help travelers across the cracked plains of the region as well as act as a place for the dispossessed and the outcast to find succor. A small shrine dedicated to Anshar lies within the fortress and is traditionally cared for by dark-kin and gnome priests and templars. Given the disdain the Khitani hold for the Goddess of Suffering, it is rare to find a pilgrim from that empire within. Usually, it is only the necessity of seeking shelter from the aberrant weather that plagues the land that will force them to enter.

21 The Citadel of Cadic

'Shadows neither exist under bright light nor in total darkness' – an adage the designers of the Citadel of Shadows took to heart when they raised these twin towers. Perched atop a peak in the northeastern portion of the Aqtau Mountains overlooking the passage into the Blessed Lands, the twin towers that is the Citadel of Cadic is visible only when lit by moonlight. Through a method now lost, the sorcerers and priests of the Imperium built towers that are completely invisible when bathed in sunlight or swathed in total darkness. To be clear, the fortress does not become insubstantial or vanish from this Mortal Realm, but when daylight shines upon its walls or during a moonless night, it evaporates from sight. Its defenders, however, are quite able to see out and fire upon any invading force approaching from that pass with impunity.

As the sun begins to rise or set and the moons of Arcanis take their place in the heavens, the battlements begin to appear in

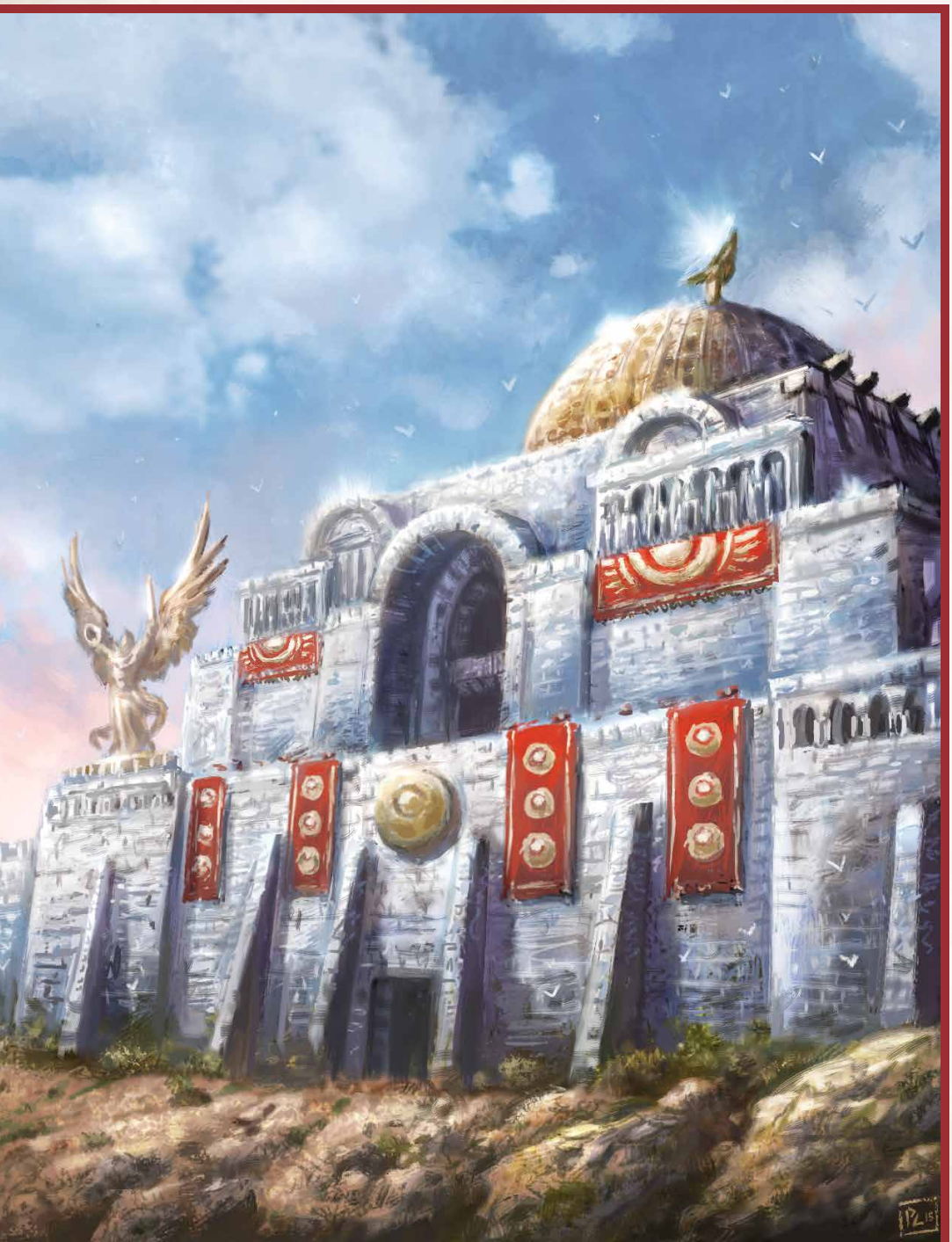


a haze. It is then that the legionnaires once stationed within launched their attacks, moving like shades erupting from the Cauldron and striking with uncanny speed.

Records of the War of Empires credit this particular citadel and its defenders, members of the Legion of the Crimson Moon, with trapping four gihtans, the Ossarion equivalent of a legion, until the Myrantian forces arrived from the south. Upon seeing the formidable fortifications arrayed against them, they wisely retreated.

Tales are also told of how this citadel was the last to fall before the might of Leonydes val'Virdan's legions and that only when the indomitable Sword of the Heavens led his forces personally against it was the fortress was finally taken, though what stratagem was used is not recorded. So impressed was he by the valor of the defenders that Leonydes offered to make these soldiers his honor guard alongside the fanatical Swords of Nier. All but one elected execution rather than betraying their vows of loyalty to the Imperator. The actions of this lone val'Borda soldier have forever been a blemish upon that family's honor and his name, Barusan has been synonymous with the word 'traitor' ever since.

While once a station of honor, the citadel is today deserted as the mountain pass it once overlooked no longer exists, pulverized when the meteor swarm that created the Fervidus Hills fell. Only the most devout pilgrims undertake the trek up the mountainside while most choose to only see it from afar.



22 Citadel of Hurrian

As befits the Defender of the Gods, the Citadel of Hurrian boasts the most formidable fortifications of all twelve citadels. The first of the twelve erected, the Citadel of the Hurrian's initial purpose was to safeguard the newly installed human-dominated First City from reprisals by the elorii.

After the rout of the elorii by the human invaders, the majority of the survivors found refuge within the dense and aptly named Vastwood. A series of hit-and-run raids were carried out against the humans, particularly those that set out from the relative safety of the First City to explore their newly conquered lands. As a means of extending their military might beyond the Plateau of Dagha and into the surrounding region, the Citadel of Hurrian was erected facing the very heart of the Vastwood, as if daring the elorii to attack.

Over those first few decades, the elorii did mount several minor raids to test the mettle of the Citadel's defenses as well as that of the defenders within, but none came close to breaching its defenses. The true battle came on the bicentennial anniversary of the "Great Betrayal" when the Vastwood seemed to disgorge the entirety of the elorii nation upon the thick white walls of Hurrian's Citadel. Wave upon wave of Mârokene warriors smashed upon the twenty-foot-thick walls, Kelekene and Berokene sorcerers rained bolts of fire and ice upon the ramparts only to be repelled by unbreakable shield spells, and Osalikene infiltrators wind-walked into a storm of arrows. All the while, the Ardakene tended to the wounded and mourned the dead.

After six weeks of unremitting assaults, the elorii ended their attacks. No word of surrender was ever given; one day the elorii were there and the next morning gone with nary a shred of evidence to show they had attacked at all, save for the cracks and scorch marks marring the walls of the citadel. Never again has the Citadel of Hurrian faced such a massed attack from then elorii people. For millennia it has stood like a sentinel, watching patiently for an attack that would never come.

In modern times, the citadel may have fallen in disrepair, but its walls continue to remain unbroken. The remaining centuries of the Legion of Honorable Accord is stationed there, while its command core remains billeted in the First City, per the Treaty of Pecinium.

23 The Citadel of Illiir

The most ostentatious of all the fortresses that dot the Blessed Lands is the Citadel of Illiir, also known as the Citadel of Light. This gleaming structure is a virtual beacon calling forth the faithful as well as daring any enemy to test its mettle.

Originally designed from an almost luminescent white marble stone, the walls and other surfaces were treated with a coating of a substance whose nature has been lost in the intervening millennia, which further hardened the marble and allowed it to be polished to a mirror finish. In battle, the light of the sun or light spells would be reflected at oncoming invaders, blinding them as they charged the walls of the fortress.

Centuries of disuse and lack of maintenance has left the surfaces of the citadel covered in thick layers of dust and grime. When it was discovered, only the reflective surface of the signal mirror high atop the tallest tower still shone. Twisting in the wind, it appeared like a winking eye to the explorers from the Emerald Society who followed it to the ancient stronghold.

Since that time, throngs of workers have restored the Citadel of Light's condition and polished every inch of its surface to its original luster. Surprisingly, the actual structure suffered little structural damage since the fall of the Imperium and only those pieces made of wood had to be replaced.

Curiously, the earliest explorers entering the citadel's inner structures reporting seeing motes of light appearing spontaneously in the air. Subsequent investigation revealed that these lights are otherworldly creatures that live in the fortress. Sarishans and other sorcerers have assured the members of the Legion of Radiant Glory that they are neither infernals nor elemental creatures, but rather beings from an adjacent realm that were physically brought here by the ancients. The motes of light are mostly harmless and have been taught tricks by the legionnaires as if they were pets.

In the modern age, the citadel has not seen much military use as the invading Khitani wisely avoided the shining bastion of the Coryani, though ancient records do show that it played an instrumental role in repelling both elorii and Ssethregoran attacks upon the human settlements in the region. Much was made of the fact that Illiir's Citadel never suffered a sustained siege during the War of Empires, but nothing survives that tells of any actual battles in which its defenders were involved in.

Rumors persist of a valinor with luminous white wings appearing above the citadel during the waning months of the Coryani Civil War, but Prelate Leola val'Assanté has steadfastly repeated her story that it was actually a large white bird that pilgrims in the area saw. The soldiers of the Legion of Radiant Glory have never commented on the Prelate's statement.



24 The Citadel of Larissa

Located in the southwestern section of the region, the Citadel of Fate has the dubious distinction of being the most curiously constructed fortification in the Blessed Lands. The central tower of the stronghold rests in the center of a roughly circular maze made of stone walls over twenty feet in height, with four main entrances plainly visible.

While this may seem of minimal hindrance to an invading force, the labyrinth appears to change its inner structure haphazardly, so pathways that once led to the right shifts to another direction or stops at a dead-end. It is said that only those stationed there, presumably legions dedicated to the Lady of Fate, knew how to navigate the ever-changing maze. Those invaders clever enough to scale the walls and navigate the tops to the center find themselves under a strange affect that causes vertigo and warps visual perception, making it impossible to do more than crawl back down into the labyrinth.

Travelers from the far west claim to have seen or heard tales of at least two other such mazes but in sizes that dwarf the one surrounding the Citadel of Larissa. Many ask if the citadel copied these ancient warrens or whether this was original form that the others emulated. Sadly, no one alive knows the answer to the question, not even the oracles of the Lady.

Much to the consternation of the members of both the Emerald Society and the Followers of the Azure Way, the Citadel of Fate was discovered by members of the Khitani Jial of the Phoenix. Many claim that some sort of sorcery was involved veiling the fortification from sight, as many had sought this lost citadel, but never found it. For their part, the Jial of the Phoenix refuse to reveal how they discovered the elusive structure and say it was their Lady's wish that they were the ones to find it.

Though controlled by the Khitani, pilgrims from the south are unmolested when they travel to the Smiling Lady's citadel, though none have ever successfully navigated the maze to its center. In fact, one former member of the Jial admits that it took over twelve years to discover the secret of the shifting passageways and its riddle is closely guarded and known solely to the highest-ranking members of their society.

For the most part, the central tower remains undisturbed, with elements from the Fen of Vigilance quartered in barracks built after the Second Coryani-Khitani War.

Citadel of Nier

Known as the Lost Citadel, the Citadel of Nier's location faded into myth during the Shadowed Age, only found when the Sword of the Heavens, newly released from his frozen tomb, led his unstoppable army into the Blessed Lands, seeking to take the First City. For reasons unknown, he stopped and made camp in the southeastern curve of the Corlathian Mountains, near the Petrified Forest and entered the lost citadel with only his honor guards. He never emerged. Just before sunrise, his army was beset by some unknown force or creatures, reduced in numbers and forced to retreat back towards Canceri. The Sword of the Heavens was never seen again.

25 The Citadel of Saluwé

This ancient citadel was built inside the southwestern edge of the Vastwood and is so well camouflaged that one needs to be within arm's length to realize it's there. Its walls are made of living wood and give the appearance of being grown rather than built. Over the centuries since the fall of the Imperium, the foliage has run rampant with vines, trees and other plant life covering it so thoroughly that it was only found by the Followers of the Azure Way by pure happenstance.

Much of the citadel's history after its founding was lost so nothing is known of the battle it might have participated in. Given that extensive overgrowth has enshrouded the fortress within a virtual cocoon of life, only a small fraction of the Citadel of Saluwé has been explored. Primarily, its courtyard, ramparts, and one tower were cleared and explored leaving more than two-thirds of the fortress awaiting discovery.

Above the main gate a statue of Saluwé with her arms outspread survived the intervening millennia, though most of the finer details have eroded. What has baffled historians are the three creatures that appear to be sheltered within her cloak. One of the carved bodies is obviously a human, but the other two resemble smaller bipedal beings. Some argue that these are children and time has twisted the carving so that they no longer resemble that, while a small number believe that this indicates that mankind was not alone and without non-human allies during its Glory Days.

The Green Citadel, as it is sometimes called, played an important role during the Second Coryani-Khitani War. Given its relative proximity to the Fervidus Hills, members of the lightly armored Saluwean legion, the Legion of the Unrepentant Heart, fought a guerilla

war against the invading Khitani and used the fortress as a base. The Khitani never found the legionnaires and though heavily outnumbered throughout most of its engagements, the legion took a heavy toll against their foes.

Today, the Citadel of Saluwé is visited by many pilgrims every year and a small contingent of Saluwean priestesses ensures their safety. The val'Dellenov family considers the fortress one of their holiest sites and spends a large sum of money guaranteeing that it remains unmolested. Recently, one of the daughters of the most prominent val'Dellenov lineage, also a member of the Emerald Society, petitioned her mother for permission to allow an expedition to fully explore the citadel. Thus far she has not met with success, but it is well-known that her mother dotes on her and it is only a matter of time before she finally relents.

26 The Citadel of Sarish

Another of the more recently discovered ancient fortifications, the Citadel of Sarish looks more like a sprawling estate of a wealthy patron than a defensive structure, but while its walls are not as thick or as high as the others, no army can boast of ever having taken it from its defenders. The citadel is broken up into five irregularly shaped sections, the outermost ones with large archways that are not barred and appear rather inviting. The stones used to build the structure were naturally crimson, and it is written that it took an army of stonemasons and sculptors two generations to complete the intricate, and quite macabre, engravings that grace the structure. When completed, every surface, from cobbled stone streets to the exterior and interior walls, became a work of art.

But where the other citadels rely on the strength of their fortifications to protect against attack, these walls counted on the attackers to enter freely. Any that entered uninvited were in for quite a shock as every section of wall contained bound creatures, from infernals to elementals and some that defy categorization. Thousands upon thousands of these other-worldly creatures were summoned and then bound within the structure, one on top of another, so that if one fell, another would step out and take its place. According to the ancient tomes discovered within the main citadel, no attacker, from the Ossarion Empire to the Ssethregorans were able to make it past the outer courtyard.

In the modern age, soldiers from the Legion of the Bound Disciples hold the citadel and ask that all pilgrims make a small offering of blood. This is done by making a cut on the palm of one's hand and smearing it along a part of the wall. The special properties of the engraved binding spells absorb the blood like a sponge. This helps reinforce the ancient rituals enacted millennia ago and ensure that the creatures trapped within remain securely bound.

27 Citadel of Yarris

The square shaped Citadel of Yarris is located in the small island of Impai and has a strange blue-green tinge to it due to the soapy rock used to construct its walls and buildings. The citadel has always remained the providence of Yarricite adherents, namely the Order of the Sea Lords, holy champions who have defended the access to the First City by the ocean since almost the founding of the Imperium.

The citadel has seen battle throughout the ages, but it was only during the Second Khitani-Coryani War that it suffered its most terrible defeat. During this time, Milandir was still part of the Coryani Empire and members of the val'Ossan family from Naeraanth comprised the largest number of Sea Lords champions. Prior to the invasion, the Khitani entered the citadel under the flag of friendship and massacred every single member of the order along with the attendant templars and priests. During the war, the province that would later become the Kingdom of Milandir seceded from the empire and never again sent their kin to man the citadel. After the Treaty of Pecinium, the Order of the Sea Lords was reinvigorated by the Salantian branch of the val'Ossan family and they remain the dominant lineage upon Pecinium ever since.

Other than pirates, the Sea Lords rarely do battle with the agents of human nations, but instead wage war against the feral cyclopes of Saam Ur who make frequent forays against the island and the occasional trading ships that come to trade in the Blessed Lands.



28 The Twin Citadels of Beltine and Neroth

Also known as the Twin Towers, this enormous structure's centerpiece are its two turrets, one dedicated to Beltine and the other to Her husband, Neroth, which stand in the eastern portion of the Blessed Lands. With the exception of the Lost Citadel of Nier, no other fortification is as feared or avoided as these two. Legend has it that generation upon generation of adherents and zealots of those deities were bound to the towers upon their deaths, acting as eternal guardians. Even more terrifying is that the countless enemies captured during the centuries that the Imperium held sway were sacrificed to Neroth or Beltine, with either their desiccated bodies or spirits doomed to defend their former foes for eternity.

During the War of Empires, Myrantian necromancers were confident that they could turn the Imperium's own guardians against them as the Necromancer Lords regarded themselves the most powerful masters of their craft upon Arcanis, but the divine power of the val'Mordane and the val'Ishi proved too strong to for even them.

Due to the many dangers inherent in the Twin Towers, there are no legions stationed there and even the val'Mordane give it a wide berth as it appears that, over the ages, some other force seems to have wrested control of the undead within and will attack any living thing that enters, regardless of its bloodline or faith. Some have speculated that the ancient Myrantian Necromancer Lords that were defeated and imprisoned here have finally managed to become the masters of these most forbidding of citadels.

Even the famed Sword of the Heavens, Leonydes val'Virdan, gave the Twin Citadels a wide berth as his distaste and respect for the power of the undead was well-known. It is due perhaps to this fact that some have speculated that one or more of the Keys of Man rest within its walls. To this day, none have braved the citadels and returned to ascertain the truth of that theory.



Vastwood

The largest wooded area in the Known Lands, the aptly named Vastwood is made up of an ancient belt of deciduous trees, many of which soar into the sky creating a canopy that shrouds many parts of the forest floor in perpetual shadow. This large tract of woodland forms the northern border of the Blessed Lands and is known to be the mysterious elorii realm of Elonbé.

After the battle with the Other and the subsequent Human-Elorii War that afforded humanity a new home and far-flung empire to rule, the elorii fled deep into the impenetrable forest. With the exception of the bicentennial attack and the short

lived reconquista shortly after the fall of the Theocracy of the Cleansing Flame, the elorii have lived in complete isolation until a few centuries ago. Tales are told of an elegant and opulent city built after their exile that makes the First City look as if it had been built by unskilled hands. This city, Ethelios, is the ultimate work of a master craftsman.

These stories emerged from contact with those elorii that emerged from their long seclusion and have begun to reconnect with the rest of the world. Yet even then, the location of Ethelios, beyond a vague, off-handed statement of *"deep within the forest"*, is unknown. Of the human explorers that braved the Vastwood in search of the city most have not returned, while those that do speak of unseen attackers striking their party down with impunity, allowing one or two to escape to spread the tale that they are most unwelcome there. All of this has made Ethelios into a mythical city in the minds of many.

This is not to say that nothing lives in the Vastwood besides the elorii. Dotting the periphery of the woodland are numerous small huts where fur trappers live when collecting their prized game; although even they do not stray further than a few thousand yards from the edge of the forest.

Besides the danger of elorii jealously guarding their territory, small tribes of gar as well as other inhuman creatures make their home in the forest. The most dangerous of these are the twisted beasts whose ancestors were twisted and corrupted by the ancient Kurenthé curse unleashed millennia ago. In a cruel twist of fate, these abominations have not only managed to breed but thrived within the dark forest. creatures such as the Ossarion chimera, the peryton, and the scorpion tailed manticore continue to be the bane of explorers, woodsmen, and trappers.

Major Geographical Features

Blighted Bog

There is a peat bog where the Sans River emerges from the Vastwood that the local Andyar tribes consider cursed and forbidden. Known as the Blighted Bog, the swampy wetlands cover many acres and is perpetually enshrouded by a thick layer of mist that smells of rotted eggs. Breathing it for too long can cause violent nausea and severe repertory ailments.

The Blighted Bog gets its name for the numerous creatures that were twisted and corrupted by the Kurenthé curse millennia ago. Large crystalline alligators, enormous snapping turtles that crave meat and winged serpents have all been reported, but the creature that the Andyar fear the most is a creature that has only been seen from afar, as no one is able to get any closer and survive. The best description is a large hairy beast of man-like proportions, covered in long, matted hair, with piercing, glowing red eyes that stalks through the peat and moss, and swathed in inky shadows.

Important Sites

29 The Haunted Ruins of Torveld Enyo

Just a few leagues into the interior of the Vastwood, northeast of the First City, is a series of ruins dating back to the age of the Eloran Empire. Originally designed as a small fortress to defend against ssethric attack after their overthrow, Torveld Enyo eventually became a city populated primarily by the Osalikene, who built tall fluted towers and wide and airy avenues, though all manner of elorii and their client races purportedly lived there.

Torveld Enyo became notorious during that period of time for being one of the elorii settlements infested by the depredations of the Cult of the Thousand Eyed Man. By the end of the corruption, every member of the city was killed or died, either by their own hand or by that of the elorii warriors tasked with retaking the city. Afterwards, the city was shunned by the Osalikene but eventually repopulated by the Mârokene, who brought their own aesthetic sensibilities by adding blocky, stout buildings and reinforcing the walls.



Originally the city center was occupied by a temple to the Elemental Lord Osalios, but after the corrupting influence of the Cult of the Thousand Eyed Man, the desecrated holy place was sealed, and a smaller shrine was built to serve the needs of the Osalikene that returned. The Mârokene built a stepped pyramid nearby in the usual configuration of a temple dedicated to Mârok. While of reasonable size, the true holy sanctuary to their god was the enormous cavern excavated below the ziggurat. During their High Holy Days, the entire Mârokene population would disappear within the temple and not emerge for three days, as dictated by their faith. Other elorii would stare in amazement, wondering how the moderately sized temple could hold so many, not realizing that the faithful were actually conducting their rituals in the hollow below.

During the God's War, after the seeming destruction of the elorii Elemental Lords, a pair of elorii unleashed the most sacrilegious of act known to the eternal people upon the unsuspecting humans. The act of Kurenthé requires an elder elorii to expend his soul to empower a curse of unimaginable power. It was this curse that destroyed the rich and lush forest that covered the Blessed Lands and turned it into a cracked and blasted region. The power of the curse also washed over Torveld Enyo and the remaining inhabitants that hadn't been evacuated, twisting them into horrible caricatures of their former life. The city now became a demesne of horrors, shunned by elorii, humans and all other races.

Just a few years after the God's War, a mad priest of Mârok began sacrificing kidnapped elorii of other breeds in the hopes of recreating the ritual enacted by the ssethric who first contacted the Elemental Lords. When discovered deep in the bowels of the underground sanctuary, his arms thick and slick with the blood of his victims, the mad priest begged to be allowed to finish the ritual as he claimed that he had contacted the vanished Mârok. The words of the madman were ignored and the eloran holy champions quickly left the haunted city with their captive.

Thus has haunted Torveld Enyo stood throughout the time of the Imperium onward, abandoned and untouched for millennia.

30 The Qoquil Lumber Mill

The Qoquil lumber mill is run by a small Khitani mercantile group that works closely with House Varro in processing the ironwood shipped in from the Fervidus Hills. The Qoquil family own the Khitani commercial enterprise and have an extensive operation which cuts down the trees along the edge of the Vastwood, and then stores and prepares the wood for shipment back to the First City or to destinations in the south.

The Vastwood are aptly named and are so immense that even though the woodsmen have been cutting down trees for the last hundred years, it has barely changed the density of the forest in any appreciable way. The Qoquil make sure that they do not cut down entire stretches of the woods, but instead select patches and allow the remaining trees to refill the area. Given the vast number of trees, this policy has been easy to implement and appeals to the Qoquil's sense of maintaining an equilibrium with nature.

Thus far, the woodsmen have never encountered an elorii. The greatest danger comes from arboreal trolls that call the edge of the Vastwood home. These large creatures differ from the Singarthan trolls others have encountered in the Endless Dark in that they are more bestial and lack the stony carapace their underground relatives have covering their arms, shoulders and head. The forest trolls are not especially dangerous or aggressive unless cornered or injured, and then they become just as ferocious as their subterranean cousins.

31 Sama Breeding Grounds

Within a mile from the southern edge of the Vastwood is a large clearing which the sama, the intelligent insectoid race found in the First City, use as a breeding area. While in the juvenile stage of life, the sama have two distinctive sexes and towards the end of their adolescent cycle are drawn to this grove to mate. The females lay fertilized egg sacs that are attached to the boles of the surrounding trees. The egg sacs secrete an extremely powerful pheromone that drives the naturally aggressive adolescent male sama into a berserker frenzy. This pheromone also triggers an enzyme in the creatures' bodies that causes their genitalia to either partially seal or fall off, creating a cloaca. This effectively transitions the sama from a juvenile to an adult.

The frenzied behavior induced by the pheromones is an evolutionary mechanism designed to defend the hatchlings, as the arboreal trolls are drawn to the egg sac's smell like a bee to honey. In a battle against the huge predator, the small sama need all the help they can get.



Chapter III:
The First City

Perched atop the plateau on solitary Mount Dagha, the First City (or some version of it) has existed for over ten thousand years, first as the issori hub of Dar'Algah, which was razed and replaced by Yahssremore, the capital of a vile serpent empire; then reborn as Belestor, the elegant heart of the Eloran Empire, and finally, divinely bestowed upon mankind as their home upon this new land. After a time as the center of the arguably most powerful empire on Arcanis, the city was abandoned and mostly forgotten, slowly infested by foul creatures that made their lairs within the once opulent homes and elegant spires. What little of humanity remained on the high plateau was pushed to the very edge, forced to live on the margins of what was once their promised land.

The Shadowed Age drew a blanket of ignorance and isolation upon the once thriving, worlds-spanning empire until the veil between Arcanis and the Infernal Realms was torn asunder and a flood of demonic creatures invaded, hunting and despoiling all they found with their unclean touch. It was then that a band of Maghir horsemen, chased by a devilish horde, rode up the faded and broken Azure Way, and onto the plateau. The broken people they discovered still living there were led by three self-proclaimed priests, who shared a great store of ancient weapons forged from Sarishan steel, a material that the infernals were particularly vulnerable to, and bid them to return and free the plateau once they dealt with the demonic invaders abroad.

The First City of Man

Type: Medium City
Size: 2.5 miles (east to west) by 1.5 miles (north to south)
Population: 25,000 permanent residents, with up to three thousand transient workers, travelers and pilgrims. During the High Holy Days, an additional 20,000 pilgrims travel to the City.
Ruler: Tomal Khan Ys (Regent), the Merchant Cabal
Government: Regency coupled with Mercantile Plutocracy
Policing Force: The Blue Cloaks mercenary company
Military Force: The Coryani Legion of Honorable Accord, The Khitani Fen of Vigilance


TRADE DISTRICT
1 Gate of the Patriarch
2 Gate House
3 Mercantile Hall
4 Market Place
5 Litera Scripta Manet
6 House of Blades
7 Runemaster
8 Dark Treasures Curio Shop
9 Slave Block
10 Hostels
11 Apothecary
12 The Narapan Soothsayer
KHITANI DISTRICT
13 Barracks of the Fen
14 The Lady's Smile
15 The Cha Ning Tea Room
16 The Eye of the Prophet
17 Kalindruhl Temple
18 Jial of the Phoenix
19 The Vendetta Circle
20 Divine Victory Monument
21 The Jade Mandarin's Estate
22 The Sisters Xang
THE PEARL
23 The Pearl
24 Pels' Bar
25 King of Nothing's Palace
26 The Hangman's Terrace
27 Temple of the Three Faced Goddess
28 Nola
29 The Cool Pools
30 Momar the Blind
DISTRICTS
1 Trade District
2 Khitani District
3 The Pearl
4 Coryani District
5 Rhamul District
6 Pense-Mar
7 Zocalo
8 Administrata
9 The Slide
10 Uncleansed Area
THE PEARL
KHITANI DISTRICT
ZOCALO
ADMINISTRAT
PENSE-MAR
TRADE DISTRICT
CORYANI DISTRICT
RHAMUL DISTRICT
CORYANI DISTRICT
31 Barracks for the Legion of Honorable Accord
32 Arena Varria
33 Temple of the Gods
34 Temple of the Sighs
35 Circus Septimus
36 Palace of the Emperor
37 Statue to General Idan val'Borda (Shrine to Cadic)
38 Fountain of the Virtues
39 Triumphal Column Forum
40 Taverna of the One Eye
41 Septian Baths
42 Ludus Polyceti
43 Ludus Carnatae
RHAMUL DISTRICT
44 Warehouses
45 The Lift
46 Trade Gate
47 Stables and Animal Kennel
48 Tower of the Ymandrakes
49 Altherian Embassy
50 The Emerald Society
51 Museum of Antiquities
52 Mausoleum of the Hallowed
53 Academy of Epics and Songs
54 Burial Crypts
55 The Granary
56 Archer's Folly
57 Wandering Eye
PENSE-MAR
58 Wiscorean Baths
59 The Odean
60 Mother Church Estate
61 Milandric Orthodox Church Estate
62 Followers of the Azure Way Estate
63 House Varro Estate
64 House Ul'Wei Estate
65 House Symesa Estate
66 House Tolaren Estate
67 Duoppol's Estate


HE FIRST CITY
THE CRADLE OF EMPIRES
© 2015 Paradigm Concepts, Inc.
THE SLIDE
92 The Barricade
93 The Blood Pits
94 Diggers
95 Lady of Shu
96 Expedition Emporium
97 The Hole
98 The Tomb
99 The Veiled Ladies
100 Barbers' Hall
101 The Dwarf's Beard
102 Phaon Prison
UNCLEANSED AREA
103 Obsitus Park
104 Well of Souls
105 Avenue of Gargoyles
106 Aerie of the Griffons
107 Marble Obelisk
108 Four Towers of the Magi
109 Ansharan Gates
110 Lion's Gate
111 Gate of Shadows
112 Endless Choir
113 House of the Chained
114 The Iron Arch
SCALE
IN YARDS
0 50 100 200 300 400 500
IN MILES
THE SLIDE
UNCLEANSED AREA
TRADERS' POINT
OTHER DETAILS
A The Azure Way (marked in blue)
ZOCALO
68 Grand Bazaar
69 Eurynius Amphitheater
70 Staluan Baths
71 Twelve Oaks Park
72 The Forum
73 The Aurelia
74 The Silver Stag
75 Tavern of the Pilgrim's Rest
76 The Siren's Call
77 The House of the Chaste Traveler
78 The Iron Flute
79 St. Martan's Tower
ADMINISTRATA
80 Temple of the Pantheon
81 Palace of the Imperator
82 The Assembly Hall of the Families
83 Plaza of the Goddess
84 The Golden Court
85 Administrative Offices
86 Blue Cloaks' Barracks
87 Blood Guards' Barracks
88 Treasury
89 The Judicial Court
90 Executioner's Square
91 The Golden Stack

True to their word, after many years of battle, the Maghir tribe returned to make good on their vow. Slowly they began to clear the beasts from every hall and every building, but the task proved too great for even the tenacious warriors of the Maghir. After sustaining a horrific wound battling a pack of cadaver hounds while clearing out what is now the Trade District, the chieftain, known as the Tomal Khan, ordered his warriors to use the unlimited amount of rubble and material available and build a crude but effective perimeter to hold off the creatures. Upon his death, the chieftain's son declared that this would be the work of generations and that he and his descendants would continue until the entirety of the plateau was scoured clean.

It was then that an elder from the Eternal Choir climbed the Azure Way and sat with the new Maghir chieftain and spent many nights telling him of the history of the City and of its significance to all of mankind and the world. The young Tomal Khan declared that he and his successors would not claim the First City for themselves, but hold it as regents until the crowning of the next imperator and the rise of a Second Imperium of Man. Blessed by the three priests, he and all future Tomal Khans would hold the title of Regent of the Imperium, Protector of the Throne of Man.

The Rise of a Mercantile Powerhouse

It was not long before traders from the west began to congregate near the base of Mount Dagha, meeting with Andyar villagers who'd come to trade, as well as far ranging Vanomir horsemen from the far-off Hinterlands. These first traders began bringing exotic goods and spices that the expanding Coryani could not get enough of. Likewise, Khitani traders would purchase all the olive oil, wine and other goods common in the Coryani Empire.

Seeing the potential to act as the bridge between these two distinct portions of the continent of Onara, a cunning merchant by the name of Lashul Symesa approached the ruling Tomal Khan and struck a bargain with him. Symesa would bring handlers, workmen, and caravan masters and open trade routes to the west and the southeast with the First City as the crossroads for markets spanning from horizon to horizon. In time, Symesa promised that money would pour into the tribesmen's coffers like wine from an amphora. For their part, the Maghir tribesmen had little stomach for mercantile dealings, but were tempted with the riches imagined by the merchant Symesa as it would allow them to hire workers and warriors needed to rebuild the City and expand its cleansed zone.

An agreement was made and within a few seasons, ships plying the Messalean Sea began to offload their merchandise at the ancient harbor and sail off with their hulls full of goods from the south and east. Fortunes were exchanged seemingly overnight, and word began to spread of this new gateway to lands long forgotten.

Over the course of a decade, the number of merchant houses based in the ancient capital exploded from a small handful to several dozens. True to his word, Symesa made sure that riches flowed into the Maghir's treasury and seemingly overnight, this small band of horsemen became known as the Golden Court, lords of one of the richest cities in the world.

The Merchant Cabal

Over time, the merchants of the city began to fall into separate camps, choosing to align themselves with more influential and prosperous colleagues. Some favored House Symesa, although others, for a variety of reasons, were averse to dealing with them and sought the counsel and protection of other rising merchant princes. Over time, the cutthroat nature of business began to slowly build and finally manifested.

Not long after the establishment of the Market Place in what is now the Trade District, a riot broke out in the Market Place when a trader *jumped claim* on another's spot closer to the Azure Way. The shouting match quickly escalated to a full brawl and then degenerated further when knives were drawn. The fighting spread as scores on perceived slights and long held grudges were settled. This riot culminated with a fire breaking out, engulfing over a quarter of the tents and wooden stalls in the market. The Tomal Khan and his warriors were forced to intervene to stop the unrest and by the end, over fifty people were dead and dozens more injured. Infuriated, the Golden Court blamed House Symesa's lack of control over the traders and demanded a solution.

Quick to turn a calamity into an opportunity, the Symesa family proposed that the merchants be given a venue in which to voice their grievances and solve them peacefully. Further, knowing the distaste the former horsemen had for those dealing in commerce, Symesa proposed that five representatives be selected

by the merchants to act as the governing body in all matters of trade and business in and around the First City. This Merchant Cabal, as it would come to be called, would administer the day-to-day affairs of the city, freeing the Golden Court to continue the rebuilding and cleansing of the plateau. The Tomal Khan quickly agreed to the arrangement with the caveat that he and his people have final say on matters on which they disagree. This model has persisted to this day, with the balance of power tilting one way or another depending on the personalities in charge as well as the impact of world events, but overall the arrangement has kept the peace and led to greater prosperity.

The Merchant Cabal is chosen from among all the various merchants based in the First City by popular acclaim. Elections to the Merchant Cabal are not held on a regular basis; instead any mercantile house that believes it can unseat a standing member of the Cabal may call for a vote at any of the quarterly meetings of the Mercantile Assembly. Should they be successful, the winning merchant is immediately elevated to the governing council, while the losing party attempts to shore up its influence because as in any shark pool, the smell of blood in the water can lead to a feeding frenzy, with contracts and alliances voided and vanishing overnight.

The Merchant Cabal

The current members of the Merchant Cabal are:
House Symesa led by the Lady Cleomia
House Varro led by Suetonius Varro
House ul'Wei led by Prefect ul'Wei Golon Ti
House Tolaren led by Master Tolaren of the Encali Dwarves
The Brotherhood of the Crimson Shackles led by Duoppol of the Twisted Eye

The Guardians of the First City

In the years prior to the Coryani-Khitani conflicts, the Tomal Khan and his warriors were the only protective force in the First City and the surrounding area of the Blessed Lands. At first, this was sufficient, but as the population grew and more areas of the plateau were cleansed of the infesting horrors, the ruling parties came to the conclusion that additional help was needed.

Many soldiers and mercenary companies were hired over the years to help root out the creatures laired in the ruins, and some were tapped to police the inhabited sections, dealing primarily with petty theft, drunken brawls, and civil grievances. Some of these companies proved to be more butchers than peacekeepers, but finally a Dailish mercenary group called Shaldien's Harbingers, more commonly known as the Blue Cloaks because of their bright blue capes worn while on duty, was contracted to keep the peace. The group dealt with the populace with a light touch on most occasions, but showed that there was iron within their velvet glove. The Blue Cloaks have now been a common sight on the streets of the City for so long, that they are considered a native police force rather than a foreign power hired to enforce the laws of the ruling parties.

The Blue Cloaks number five hundred officers and trained soldiers and have been under contract with the Merchant Cabal for seventy-eight years. Though their original leader, Shaldien, has long since retired to a farm on one of the Dailish Isles, the company is still expertly led by the dashing Captain Souliad, a man who leads by example and is frequently in the thick of any engagement, such as the recent nightrunner incursion.

The Military Defenders of the First City

As detailed by the treaty that ended the Second Coryani-Khitani War, the terms of that agreement called for each side to field one military unit consisting of no more than five hundred soldiers to jointly defend the First City and the surrounding area of the Blessed Lands from any and all invaders as well as ensuring that neither empire would attempt to conquer the City, for to do so would mean forfeiting the lives of the soldiers stationed here.

Anointed as the Guardians of the First City, the leaders of the military units coordinate patrols about the Blessed Lands as well as deal with any major attacks committed by external forces or a severe incursion by denizens of the Uncleansed area, such as the savage gar or



nightrunners. This could lead some to conclude that the First City is occupied by foreign powers and under martial law, which is technically correct. However, both commanders have agreed to leave the day-to-day governance of the First City to the Golden Court and the Merchant Cabal, and to not impose any laws or regulations outside of those that directly affect their military commands.

Languages of the First City

The First City does not have an official language, as those visiting and doing business there are from dozens of different nations and regions, each with their own native dialect. Instead a type of trade language has emerged, being more of a pidgin conglomeration of a number of the dominant languages, with words lifted from Coryani, Khitani and various other tongues. The result is that many of the inhabitants of the City are polyglot, fluent in three or more different languages and because of this, no one has ever found communication an issue.

Currencies

Like languages, the First City accepts any and all coins, valuing each by the weight of the precious metal contained in each. The common currency traded in the City is either the Khitani *yu* or the Coryani *imperial*, both in copper, silver and gold denominations. Other types of coins can be exchanged at the Treasury (location #88) if needed, though most businesses will accept just about any currency, even any found in hidden caches from the ancient Imperium of Man. The First City does not mint its own coins, as it has little need given the amount of gold and silver flowing into its coffers daily.

The First City's Infrastructure

Though many do not give it much thought until they are forced to do without, certain public services, such as an adequate supply of clean water and sufficient food, dictate the size of a city's population. The First City's permanent population stands at about twenty-five thousand, with an additional two to three thousand transients such as traders and pilgrims. The number of inhabitants explodes by an additional twenty thousand on the High Holy Days, making the City's broad boulevards feel cramped.

Water Reservoir

The reservoir was built by ssethric engineers during their glory days of Yahssremoran Empire. The ssethric engineers developed a sophisticated system that pumps up water from a reservoir deep below Mount Dagha and funnels it to the many fountains and wells that dot the First City. This reservoir is replenished by the waters of the Sea of Lanterns that fills the Flood Plains during high tide and is purified of its minerals and other contaminants as it drains through the porous rocks deep below ground. By the time it reaches the reservoir, the water is cool, fresh and quite drinkable.

During the height of the Imperium, human engineers built a series of seven aqueducts to augment the water supply and irrigate the many gardens, parks, and farming terraces built upon the side of Mount Dagha. These fed deep cisterns dug throughout the Undercity and filled them with the steady run off of ice and snow from the Corlathian Mountains year round. After the fall of the Imperium, lack of maintenance as well as massive damage suffered from the various wars left the aqueducts in various states of ruin. Some are virtually destroyed, with only a few elevated arches remaining, while others appear to be sheared in half, spilling water to the ground below, creating small patches similar to mud-choked bogs that can be found about the Blessed Lands.

Farming Terraces

The harsh soil conditions that exist throughout much of the Blessed Lands required that during the time of the Imperium, much of the food necessary to sustain the populace of the First City be imported. Given its position as the capital of a vast and powerful empire, this was not an issue of concern. Nevertheless, adherents of Saluwé noted that the natural tiers about Mount Dagha held a rich soil that could be exploited. In time, these farming terraces produced various agricultural goods for the people of the City.

The terraces are still in use today, growing a variety of basic food staples on a rotating basis, such as carrots, onions, shallots, leeks, potatoes, lettuce, cabbage, and the always popular onion. House Symesa subcontracts the production and cultivation of the crops to a number of other mercantile concerns who hire workers from among the Andyar and the indigent of the Pearl for the back breaking work of harvesting the crops year round. Though the importation of foodstuffs is still necessary, these locally grown crops help supplement the dietary needs of the populace.



The Azure Way

This blue mosaic tiled path starts at the bottom of the great Mount, winding its way up to the summit and through the ancient main gate, now known as the Gate of the Patriarch, before continuing on a circuitous route through the various districts of the First City before finally ending at the very steps of the Temple of the Pantheon.

Originally part of the ceremony to crown a new imperator, this once glittering mosaic path allowed the chosen ruler a last chance to walk throughout the city as a common man, for the use of a palanquin or mount was not permitted. Most imperator-designates showed their humility by walking the entire way barefoot.

In modern times, the cracked and faded walkway was restored in the inhabited sections as a grand gesture by the Followers of the Azure Way, but in truth it was an attempt to overshadow the Emerald Society's work of renovating the ancient Temple of the Pantheon. The Followers hired some of the most gifted artisans to meticulously recreate the original mosaics, which told the tale of the creation of the various val families at the founding of the Imperium. No expense has been spared in recreating the Way exactly as it was before, even purchasing stones from the far off quarries near modern day Censure, where the original stones were collected.

Along the very long and arduous trek up from the base of Mount Dagha are regularly spaced ruined fortresses, originally meant to forestall the advance of invaders. These aggressors would need to overcome these defenses while contending with assaults from above in the form of boiling oil, incendiary pots known as Nier's Breath, and archers.

In modern times, centuries of peace have turned these fortresses into small rest stops where weary pilgrims and other travelers can pause, catch their breath, and enjoy a small meal or a beverage while being entertained by a variety of musicians, poets, or puppeteers before continuing their climb.

The Administrata

Situated upon the highest point of the plateau and roughly located in the center of the City, the Administrata district is the heart of the ancient capital. From almost any vantage point, one can gaze up and see the enormous Temple of the Pantheon flanked by the Palace of the Imperator and the Assembly Hall of the First Families.

Surrounding these structures are a number of buildings rebuilt from the dark brown



stones found in the rubble. These edifices house administrative offices that control everything from the issuing of permits to delve into the Undercity to customs broker houses ready to take a percentage of the artifacts recovered. Other buildings house the barracks of the Blue Cloaks and the Blood Guards, the opulent Golden Court, land offices and other functions necessary for the running of the city.

85 Administrative Buildings

Located on the edge of the Plaza of the Goddess are several interlocking buildings that create the labyrinthine bureaucracy that manages the daily affairs of the First City, the Administrative Offices. Here one may purchase licenses to enter the Uncleansed Region of the City as well as its catacombs, obtain merchant permits, purchase or rent property upon the plateau and conduct other types of business requiring sanctioning by the municipal government.

A delver's license allows explorers to remove items considered of historical interest at a cost of 25% of the total assessed value of the items excavated. Additionally, it requires that the licensees take a Sarishan Oath that they will not gratuitously or intentionally damage the structures of the First City, so as to cause it to fall into further ruin. An Oath Maker is available to certify this contract at great expense to the City's coffers, but they have found such a provision necessary.

The insectoid sama are tasked with creating and maintaining the byzantine apparatus that keeps the wheels of government operating smoothly, but while knowing which forms to fill out is second nature to the sama given their eidetic memory, most other beings find the maze-like trail of paperwork required maddening. Guards are posted in these offices due to the number of times sama officials were attacked when they've informed petitioners that they've filled out the form incorrectly and must begin the process anew.

82 The Assembly Hall of the First Families

An empire as vast as the Imperium required leaders and advisors beyond the imperator and his staff. To assist in drafting legislation, debating the merits of diplomacy or war, and handling the day-to-day affairs of the government, a great hall was built to create a workplace for these administrators. The Assemblymen were drawn from the most powerful and influential families throughout the Imperium, which by definition meant primarily vals, thus earning it the name the Assembly Hall of the First Families.

The large building that housed the Assembly forms one of the sides of the Plaza of the Goddess and faces south with the Palace of the Imperator across the courtyard and the Temple of the Pantheon to its immediate left, respectively. During the height of the Imperium's power, the Assembly housed over three hundred representatives, their staff and numerous personal slaves. It was presided over by the Master of the Assembly, a position of great power and influence as he or she had unfettered access to the imperator.

At the fall of the Imperium, as the former slave army of Leonydes val'Virdan stormed through the City, many of the Assemblymen refused to flee as some of their "lesser" colleagues had. They stayed seated upon their grand chairs and awaited the coming of the invader. When Leonydes arrived, he was in a foul mood, having just failed to stop the throne room of the Imperator from being sealed. He listened quietly as the Assemblymen made their argument that their services were indispensable in the ruling of such a large and sprawling nation. When the Sword of the Heaven's scowl remained frozen upon his face, the increasingly nervous bureaucrats offered Leonydes complete access to the Imperium's vast treasury whose vaults they alone could open if he but agreed to allow them to remain in power.

Offended at the blatant bribe, the Sword of the Heavens had each of the Assemblymen nailed to their velvet cushioned chairs and then set the entire place ablaze. Within a few hours, the grand building stood gutted, collapsing down into its lower levels and the echoes of the Assemblymen's screams finally faded.

No other tale invokes greed in the hearts of men as this one, for the thought of so much treasure lying untouched has cost the lives of many trying to satiate their lust for gold. The lost treasury of the Imperium was said to be so vast as to dwarf that of the Coryani and Khitani Empires combined. Though the charnel house that was once the Assembly Hall was rebuilt, the lure of such nigh-infinite wealth emboldened many a group of explorers to brave the still gutted offices and passages below the foundation. Few have returned and those that have speak of blackened and petrified remains, as well as spectral fire wraiths haunting the former offices and slave quarters. As yet, the treasury of the Imperium remains unclaimed and ostensibly hidden somewhere beneath the building.

87 Blood Guards' Barracks

The Blood Guards' barracks consist of a number of buildings that serve as housing for the one hundred members of this unique Sarishan Holy Order, as well as a large yard for training. In the main courtyard stands a large basin filled with blood, which acts as the central altar of the Guards' unique brand of Sarishan worship. Upon initiation, as well as high holy days, members of the Order sacrifice a dollop of their own blood to the sacred bowl. Supplicants wishing for a boon from the Guard are made to provide similar offerings of their own blood as a symbol of their respect to Sarish. The holy champions point to the fact that the blood remains uncoagulated as a sign of Sarish's blessing. Few, if any, have ever contested that assertion.

Although these elite warriors are the Tomal Khan's personal bodyguards, tasked with his protection as well as that of his immediate family, the barracks are located as far away from the Palace of the Golden Court as possible while still remaining within the Administrata. The reason for this is due to the Blood Guards' penchant for excessive drinking and debauchery, which greatly distressed the wife of a previous Tomal Khan. She saw that her normally ascetic and stoic husband was being unduly influenced by members of the Guard, who would keep their charge out to all hours of the night drinking and carousing. Determined to put a stop to this, she had their barracks relocated as far as possible.

86 The Blue Cloaks' Barracks

These barracks and training grounds serve as the main billeting quarters for the mercenary group, Shaldien's Harbingers, more commonly known as the Blue Cloaks. Five hundred soldiers and officers of Dailish ethnicity work as the civilian police force for the First City and answer to, as well as receive their monthly pay from, the Merchant Cabal. Ostensibly hired to keep the peace within the City, token police work is one of their least important duties. Instead, protecting the assets of the Cabal that rest within the First City's walls is second only to maintaining the integrity of the wall that makes up the Barricade.

Their barracks, easily spotted by the garish green paint that covers its doors and walls, is one city block south of the Temple of the Pantheon. A bell hangs outside and any citizen needing assistance may ring it, calling forth the Duty Officer, who will access the citizen's grievance and either move to aid them or send them off if the problem is considered a nuisance.

A number of stocks and whipping posts are on display about the courtyard in front of the barracks. Here petty thieves or criminals whose crimes are not very severe are publically flogged or made to endure a day and night in the stocks.

90 Executioner's Square

Upon the very edge of the district is a raised wooden platform upon which those convicted of capital crimes are executed. Beheading is the usual punishment for those of the ruling class that commit crimes that they cannot cover up, such as treason, murder, or unsanctioned duels. The condemned is made to walk up a dozen steps and stand before the Executioner's Block, a tall polished stone, and lay bare their neck for the headman's axe. Straps on either side are sometimes used to restrain those unwilling or unable to meet their fate with decorum.

Stands are provided for the Tomal Khan and his entourage, as well as any guests, to sit and bear witness. All others wishing to see the spectacle are forced to stand. Entrepreneurial food vendors do a brisk business catering to the oft times jeering crowd, while pickpockets and other thieves take advantage of the opportunity presented.

The executions are performed by the head priest of the Deathmongers sect, with the other two priests of the trio prepare the remains for burial, or disposal if the crimes committed are particularly heinous. The Deathmonger priests are provided with housing that lies adjacent to the square for this service.



91 The Golden Stack

This rowdy rathskeller began as a bar in the cellar of the original barracks given to the city watch, but when the Blue Cloaks accepted their contract, they found the space was too small for their company. Taking advantage of the empty bay above, the bar expanded and is a favorite for many that work in the district, but especially the Blue Cloaks.

The Golden Stack is a reference to a stack of twenty gold coins, a year's pay for the soldiers of the Blue Cloaks. The bar is owed by a retired member of the Cloaks, a former Dailish sailor by the name of Daidalis. Known for his taciturn and surly nature, most would avoid dealing with the man if not for his *wicked brew*, a golden ale he makes from a recipe he claims was given to him by an Osalikene he rescued years ago on the Sea of Lanterns.

The Golden Stack's menu offers more than just wine and ale. Hearty meals are available throughout the day and into the night, with roast goat and vegetables being the most popular. Daidalis is assisted by his wife and two sons in the kitchen, while the rest of the staff consists of the fairest women ever to step off the Isles, if the Blue Cloaks are to be believed.

89 The Judicial Court

First and foremost, the First City is a land of laws, though it must be noted that the laws for the rich and powerful are very different from those imposed upon the commoners. The Blue Cloaks are given guidelines on how to deal with petty crime, such as minor theft, disturbing the peace, or non-lethal rough housing and punishment is left to their discretion.

Crimes and civil grievances involving the members of the Merchant Houses, the ruling class, visiting nobles, or others of that ilk have their complaints and crimes heard before a tribunal of judicial magistrates. This panel of three judges is appointed by the Golden Court and may only have their verdict overturned by the Tomal Khan, an event that has yet to occur. Here the court may issue settlements between Merchant Houses, end quarrels between the de facto aristocracy by sanctioning duals, though few are to the death, and mete out punishments as needed for theft and assault, as well as wanton murder, treason, and wholesale mayhem. The penalty for the last three offenses is death: either by hanging for the commoners or by beheading for the ruling class.

Rumors persist of a roaming band of Nierite judges dispensing judgment on the upper class for slights against commoners. At first, the crimes leveled against the rich were minor such as verbal abuse or unfairly treating with those of the lesser class and the offenders were either humiliated or trounced for their boorish behavior. Recently, however, these Nierites are acting as judge and executioners, having thrown the son of a merchant off a high roof for enjoying himself with a lower-class barmaid without her permission. The Blue Cloaks were tasked with bringing these men to justice but have so far been incapable of doing so.

84 The Palace of the Golden Court

This multi-winged structure situated on the edge of the district was originally known as the Palace of the Empress and was built by Imperator Harcarnanus val'Sheem who wanted to get his antagonistic wife out of his palace and as far away from him as politically possible.

When the Tomal Khan and his Maghir tribesmen returned to the First City and took the title of Regent of the Imperium, they settled upon the small tract of land surrounding the Gate of the Patriarch that was kept free of beasts and creatures by the few inhabitants that still called the plateau home. In time, when the area around the Temple of the Pantheon was cleansed, the Tomal Khan claimed the old Palace of the Empress for his tribe and ordered the structure rebuilt from the ground up.

Over the years the building became known as the Palace of the Golden Court as much for the gold and white uniforms of the Maghir as for symbolizing the riches that began to flow through the City. Today, the palace houses the families of the Tomal Khan's tribesmen and their servants and acts as the central place of governance of the First City.

81 The Palace of the Imperator

Situated to the southwest of the Temple of the Pantheon is the Palace of the Imperator. This large sprawling structure, once adorned with a marble façade with a unique gold vein, is where a long line of imperators and their court ruled the vast Imperium.

This once opulent residence has long since fallen into disrepair – colorful murals that once adorned floors and walls now lie cracked and faded; apartments in which the imperial family, retinue, and guests once stayed were ransacked for the smallest sliver of worth; its walls stained with the blood of the massacred Imperial family forever, though rumors persisted

for generations that the heir to the throne was ferreted out of the City moments before Leonydes' forces arrived.

In the heart of the complex is the Imperial throne room where rests the Throne of Man, a gift from Illiir Himself. It is said to possess a singular ability conferring ultimate power to whomever sat upon it. Whatever power the throne had was lost when the last Imperator, Orismandros IX val'Assanté, was sealed with his personal guard within the chamber to deny the invading Leonydes val'Virdan the prize. Just as the doors were closing shut the Sword of the Heavens, screaming in impotent rage, flung a spear impaling the sneering imperator to the throne.

In modern times, the palace remains in ruins and untouched, but for a high spiked iron fence meant to keep the curious and the adventurous out. Prior to the erection of the fence, dozens of people would disappear within the palace grounds, looking for treasure and other items of historical value. The last of these was ul'Wei Tan who claimed to have heard voices calling out to him, promising him riches and answers to ages old secrets. Though warned against exploring the grounds by himself, the venerable Tan eluded his personal guards and was last seen slipping into the palace wearing nothing but his nightshirt. He never emerged.

83 Plaza of the Goddess

Bounded by the Temple of the Pantheon, the Palace of the Imperator and the Assembly Hall is a large courtyard with a wide variety of plants. In the very center is an ancient willow tree whose leaves are so pale as to be almost white. It is said that the Goddess Saluwé created this one-of-a-kind tree so that the most contentious of opponents might rest beneath its eaves and speak calmly of matters of State.

The *Tree of Serenity* is said to have a divine property that calms the most volatile of emotions of any sitting beneath its limbs. According to the scholar Malomomen, assemblymen, and even the Imperator, would come out of their chambers and deliberate the most contentious of matters beneath the pale willow tree with 'clear minds and calmed passions'.

Many agree that the Tree of Serenity must indeed be divine as it has survived the raucous history of the Imperium, countless wars, and strife and still stands to this day. It was rediscovered after mention of it was found in a few lines of poetry by famed bard Timeon val'Borda: *"…'neath the Willow Tree where I laid down my dagger of hate for you..."*

Today the plaza serves as a place where the faithful and pilgrims enjoy outdoor sermons or annual festivals commemorating any of a myriad of religious or secular observances. While nominally open to all, the number of celebrants that can comfortably fit in the space is finite and thus only the rich and influential are invited to attend.

80 The Temple of the Pantheon

The grandest of all structures in the First City, this multi-storied temple is really a series of buildings, housing galleries, worshipping halls, administrative offices, small chapels, and alcoves once filled with works of art, all linked together by numerous covered courtyards and hallways.

The main building contains the largest domed structure in the City. Once gilded in sheets of pure gold, the dome now sits stripped of its golden sheath, displaying its dark and grey pitted surface. Many cynics claim it an apt metaphor for religion, but out of earshot of the Coryani Inquisition, of course. Walking into the chamber beneath the concave ceiling, the eye is immediately drawn to a series of alcoves set just below the lip of the dome where exquisite statues of each of the Gods are depicted in heroic poses. Hanging from thick chains is an enormous rurick, the circular holy symbol of the Pantheon upon which are inscribed the twelve symbols of the Gods.

Within the sanctuary, once plush cushioned seats have been replaced by simple, plain benches that act as pews for the faithful who come to hear sermons or to merely to pray silently. Upon a raised dais is the original marble altar that legend says was in use since the consecration of the temple. While the interior holy area was restored as best as possible and secured from menaces, the keen



observer will note that all passages other than the main entrance are blocked off or otherwise sealed. The Temple lies near the Barricade and though every effort is made to keep the Temple of the Pantheon open for the thousands of pilgrims who visit every year, there is the very real possibility of some creature or crèche of predators attacking visitors.

The exterior of the temple has not been completely restored and rubble is strewn about its exterior and in the courtyard. Tradition calls for pilgrims from the Southern Lands to bring a small piece of the Temple home with them as proof of their pilgrimage and piety. However, with the number of visitors arriving each year growing, if everyone were to take a piece of the Temple of the Pantheon, there would soon be a dearth of material with which to rebuild it. So, unbeknownst to travelers but a shared secret among the populace of the City, debris from other parts of the City is strewn about, especially just before the High Holy Days, so that the faithful have enough to take with them, and in turn help in clearing the streets of unwanted detritus.

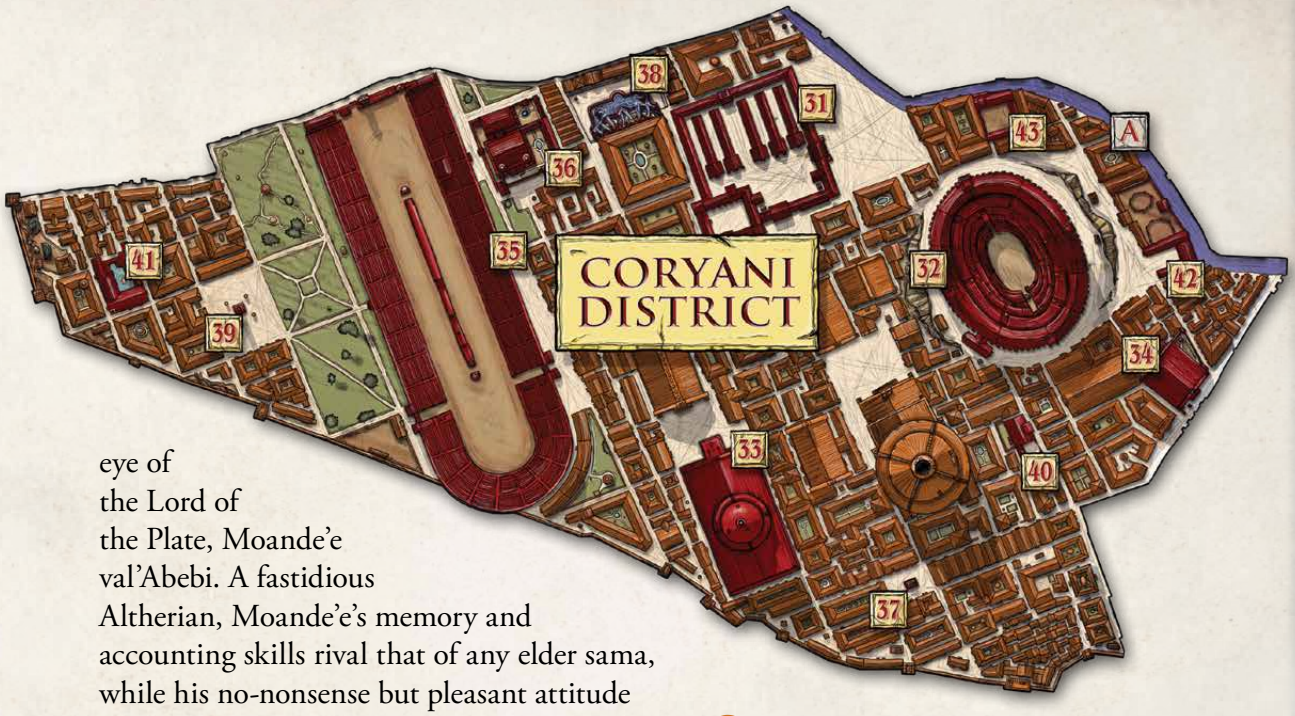
Priests from the Mother Church of Coryan and the Khitani Kalindruhl religion have been celebrating special masses within these hallowed halls almost since the reclaiming of the Temple, with the Milandric Orthodox Church having started holding such services recently. The Tomal Khan's edicts decree that all forms of worship are allowed within the First City, without danger of persecution and as long as the three main religious clergies share the time equally with the other religions, such as the Divine Trinity, that venerate the Pantheon, they are allowed to conduct their services on holy days as they see fit. Due to its age and questionable structural soundness daily use of the Temple is not allowed as many worry that it could further damage the hallowed building. Members of organizations that enforce religious dogma, such as the Coryani Inquisition, are not welcome here in their official capacity.

88 Treasury

Strategically positioned between the Assembly Hall and the Golden Court, the treasury building looks more like a miniature fortress than a place of business. Fully a quarter of the active Blue Cloaks are stationed here, patrolling the grounds around the clock.

Within the blocky building, a king's ransom circulates daily as the wheels of commerce turn and not a copper coin is lost or misplaced under the watchful





eye of the Lord of the Plate, Moande'e val'Abebi. A fastidious Altherian, Moande'e's memory and accounting skills rival that of any elder sama, while his no-nonsense but pleasant attitude makes him a favorite of the Merchant Houses to deal with.

Besides acting as the de facto bank of First City, the treasury also serves as a money changer to the various merchants and pilgrims of other nations. The common currency traded in the City is either the Khitani *yu* or the Coryani *imperial*l, as it was agreed upon earlier that the First City would not mint its own coinage.

Coryani District

Established by the Treaty of Pecinium, the Coryani were granted a section of the city, primarily to house a century of the Legion of the Honorable Accord. In the many years since then, Coryani citizens have come and established businesses in the district, as well as residences. From the affluent and pious to those seeking their fortune through trade or expeditions into the Undercity, the citizens of the empire have made the First City their home.

Out of the ruins and rubble that once covered the area, the Coryani have recreated a slice of the empire here, with straight and wide boulevards interspersed with roomy piazzas or squares. Imperial citizens visiting the City on pilgrimage will find similar accommodations, foods, and many familiar faces in this part of the First City.

32 Arena Varria

A modern structure built by House Varro to relieve some of the pressures of daily life and entertain the masses, the arena is built of concrete and stone and is the second largest amphitheater in the First City, dwarfed only by one purported to exist in the Uncleansed Area. Built on the same basic design as the arenas in the Coryani Empire, it can comfortably sit close to ten thousand people and be used to hold contests between men and beasts or the ever-popular gladiatorial fights.

Games are held every month, with those during the High Holy Days highly attended as only the most spectacular of battles are dedicated to the Gods. There is never an entrance fee, and anyone is welcome to attend, at least until the amphitheater reaches maximum capacity. In the north and south ends, box seats with awnings shade members of the Golden Court and the Merchant Cabal, while others deal with the heat with cool beverages and fruits sold by vendors. During the weeks between games, itinerant Larissan priestesses offer their services under the dark arches of arena. These women are either too old or not desirable enough to work the baths or the brothels of the City. They pay a small tithe to the Temple of Sighs and are said to be under their protection, but it is not uncommon to find the body of such



a priestess beneath the arches, slain by a violent customer.

Presided over by whichever member of the Merchant Cabal is paying for the spectacle, these wealthy traders view the running of the games as their civic duty and as a status symbol, with each House trying to top previous games. The Master of the Games, a person not associated with any of the Houses, chooses at random who will win the honor of hosting the games during the High Holy Days. While entry to the games is still free, wealthy pilgrims pay exorbitant prices for select front row seats in the arena, or at a place of honor in the Tomal Khan's box. It is said that those sprayed by the blood of the gladiators during these games are blessed by both Nier and Hurrian for the rest of the year.

31 Barracks of the Coryani Legion of the Honorable Accord

Situated near the Azure Way so that the Coryani legion can quickly mobilize and meet whatever trouble they are tasked to quell, the barracks are permanent structures, contrary to the usual 'camp on the go' mentality of the Coryani military, surrounded by a seven-foot tall wall. The barracks are a small series of stone buildings, each housing twenty legionnaires, facing a central command center that houses a briefing room, the command staff's quarters, as well as a central training ground. The rest of the area consists of a stable, housing twenty horses. A parade ground outside the walls allows the legion to assemble for ceremonial duties and other events.

Initially, legions were rotated through the First City as part of their tour of duty. This changed when the very wealthy, ex-legionnaire Alrameus Vernico of Plexus founded the Legion of the Honorable Accord and petitioned the emperor that a portion of the legion would forever have the honor of protecting the interests of the Empire in the Blessed Lands. This request was granted, and the first and second century of the legion now completes its entire ten-year tour of duty stationed in the First City.

The current force is commanded by Hektor Tensen-Balin, the son of Emperor Scipio val'Assanté's greatest political rival. Upon the death of their father, Hektor's older brother thought it best that his younger, more idealistic brother leave the capital for the time being. He petitioned that Hektor to be given command of the legion and within a few weeks, Hektor found himself in the First City.

35 Circus Septimus

Built for the youngest person ever to ascend the Alabaster Throne of the Coryani Empire, Emperor Septimus val'Assanté was furious when told he would have to make the pilgrimage to the First City. An avid lover of the races, the young emperor refused to undertake the journey for fear of missing the spectacle. His mother, the seductively deadly Vispania, ordered that a hippodrome be built adjacent to the Palace of the Emperor already under construction. Along with two thousand guards, sycophants and court members, three full teams of chariot racers traveled with Septimus and put on a spectacle that even the Gods would find thrilling. Sadly, the emperor was found dead the following morning by members of the Legion of Vigilance, the legionnaires tasked with protecting the Imperial family and the interests of the State.

The races held at the Circus Septimus are almost as popular as the gladiatorial games at the Arena Varria. Measuring five hundred yards (four hundred fifty-seven meters) the hippodrome is large enough to seat an audience of up to ten thousand spectators cheering and betting on their favorite teams. Besides chariot races, the grounds also showcase feats of athleticism, horse races, beast hunts, and were even used to hold gladiatorial games before the Arena Varria was built.

38 Fountain of the Virtues

Another masterpiece from the famed ancient sculptor Benacco, this large fountain was heavily damaged over the centuries and was recently restored by Erkko val'Ishi, a master sculptor from Enpebyn. Erkko's fountain represents the principal qualities extolled by Coryani society - Duty, Loyalty, Honor and Courage, as represented by the Virtues of the Empire, four Valinor of the Gods Hurrian, Saluwé, Illiir and Nier, respectively.

It has become tradition for those wishing their prayers answered by these deities to make some offering, from a copper coin to a gold *imperial*. A legionnaire is posted around the clock to make sure none of the coins are stolen, as all funds collected are added to the Legion of Honorable Accord's burial fund.

43 Ludus Carnatae

The Ludus Carnatae is one of the two main gladiatorial schools in the First City, the other being the Ludus Polyceti. These two ludi have a long history

of bad blood between them, that spans generations. The facts change depending on who is telling the story, but at the feud's core are claims that the other ludus cheated during the final combat of the Grand Arena in 1035 I.C., resulting in the death of both champions and a riot that claimed the life of over a hundred spectators and injuring thousands, including Emperor Scipio val'Assanté.

Incensed, the emperor demanded to see their heads on a pike, but for some reason relented and instead banished both houses from the empire, they and their descendants forbidden to return upon penalty of death. Sadly, where the two families were to be exiled to was never specified and both ended up in the First City within days of one another. Neither would believe that the other had independently heard that House Varro was constructing a new arena and reasoned that a ludus would be needed to train new gladiators in time for its inaugural games. Instead, they once again fell to blows and the entire company of Blue Cloaks were required to separate the two families and their gladiators. Only the timely intervention of House Varro kept the Tomal Khan from having all of them swinging from the Hangman's Terrace.

Today, the grandchildren of the Carnatae and Polyceti Houses keep the old hatreds simmering to a low boil and instead take satisfaction in being hailed the better of the two ludi at the annual games during the High Holy Days.

Both ludi have capable *doctores* (trainers) that can teach most arena fighting styles, but Ludus Carnatae also specializes in exhibiting the most exotic of gladiators, such as trained gar and ss'ressen. Recently, the ludus lost its two prize gladiators, a pair of ss'ressen Agamassi hatched from the same brood. No reason was given for their departure but given that they were not purchased as slave fighters, the Agamassi were free to leave after their contract expired. No doubt the dominus of House Carnatae has exacted a heavy price from the Sarishan who wrote the agreement.

42 Ludus Polyceti

The history of Ludus Polyceti mirrors that of their rival, Ludus Carnatae in most aspects. Like Carnatae, their ludus has experienced *doctores*, including former champion gladiators. Unlike the other ludus, Polyceti refuses to train any races other than human and human off-shoots, excluding gnomes, of course.

To compete with the excitement of Carnatae's exotic fighters, Polyceti spends a hefty sum to capture and train bizarre and unusual creatures and beasts, such as an Ossarion Chimera and a gigantic serpent from the Ssethregoran Empire known as a Daughter of Yig. To battle these monsters, a bestiarii, a specialized gladiator, must be recruited and trained. Unfortunately, given the opponents they face, the life expectancy of a bestiarii is fairly short and finding those capable of facing such fearsome creatures is becoming difficult.

36 Palace of the Emperor

This small palace was built for the vicious Emperor Septimus val'Assanté, who only agreed to undertake the religious pilgrimage to the First City on two conditions: that a place worthy of his presence was built and that a hippodrome be constructed so that he might not miss his beloved races. Upon his arrival, the young emperor exclaimed that the palace was truly an expression of his grandeur and must be what the Paradise of the Gods looks like. The emperor was given the chance to discover the truth of those words as within ten days of his arrival, he was dead.

Officially ruled an accident, the emperor's body was discovered submerged in one of the many pools in the palace; others claimed that the body had more than twenty stab wounds and was obviously an assassination. Septimus had certainly made than enough enemies during his short reign. Known for his mercurial temperament, he frequently had generals, governors, and even family members put to death in the most brutal manner for the least provocation. His most infamous act occurred when he was booed and pelted with rotten fruits by the plebian committee during an address to the Senate on his plan to deal



with famine devastating the empire. Making a hasty retreat along with the senators, he quickly ordered the doors nailed shut and the entire building set ablaze with the members of the committee still within.

Many suspect that his mother concocted the assassination plot, urging him to travel to the First City and away from his usual surroundings, when his actions became more and more cruel and erratic. The conspiracy theorists claim that maze-like halls and numerous hidden passages in the palace were built to her specifications to aid in surreptitiously accessing the emperor's quarters. The fact that none of his personal guards stationed outside his door could attest as to how he left his room without their knowledge adds credence to such claims.

41 The Septian Baths

For those not willing to pay the extravagant fees of the Wiscorean Baths, the Septian Baths is an economical alternative. For twenty coppers, one can leave their belongings in a secure room and make use of the cold-water bath, the frigidarium, then move to the warm bath in the tepidarium, and finally relax in the hot waters of the caldarium. Massages, libations and an assortment of fruits and meats are available for an additional charge. Some baths, like the Septian, also have a barber on premises for those wishing a quick beard trim or haircut.

The owner of the baths is a former legionnaire from the Legion of the Mighty Oak, Clodia val'Dellenov. Clodia is in dire straits as her gambling debts have far exceeded what she can possibly pay, and she fears that she'll lose the Baths and perhaps, her life if she can't come up with the coin. She has received a number of threats making it clear that she either pay off the one thousand gold imperial debt she's accumulated or face the consequences. Barring selling the Bath, something she is loath to do, she knows she's in for the fight of her life and in the tradition of the legions, she plans to go out swinging.

37 Statue to General Idan val'Borda and a Shrine to Cadic

In the center of a piazza located in the south-west of the district is a statue of the famed general, Idan val'Borda, who sacrificed his life alongside his legion in the defense of the First City by the Khitani invasion that ignited the First Khitani-Coryani War. Members of the Legion of the Crimson Moon revere General Idan and by tradition place two coppers at his feet, the traditional payment souls give to have their way lit to the Judgment of Nier in the Underworld.

Cunningly built into the monument is a doorway leading down to a shrine to Cadic's aspect as the God of Shadows. While not truly secret, the entrance is invisible to anyone not actively searching for it and the curious who stumble upon it are stopped by guards upon the spiral staircase leading down to the shrine. The shrine is attended to by a small number of priests and templars, though any venerating the Lord of Shadows or wishing His blessing are welcome.

40 Taverna of the One Eye

One of a number of Coryani style inns throughout the district, the Taverna of the One Eye offers travelers everything from the finest wines, such as Savonan red or Balantican white, ales from across the empire, to a good meal and clean rooms. The cost for renting one of the rooms is 1 gold coin (gp) daily, but the price jumps ten or twenty times during the High Holy Days, as the huge influx of pilgrims and travelers makes lodging scarce and expensive.

This particular tavern is named after the huge cyclops skull hanging behind the bar. The grizzled owner of the tavern, Haraden of Plexus, claims to have killed the creature during an excursion to the Flood Plains as a guard for the famed Milandisian explorer Armind Gerhard Tildighast. In the night, a cyclops had attacked and by morning they'd lost eight Chauni guides, including his blood brother Hoko and he'd been forced to battle the creature single-handedly because Tildighast had apparently slipped on the slick rocks and was knocked unconscious for the entire battle. Because of this, Haraden will always charge Milandisians twice or three times as much as he would any other customer.

33 Temple of the Gods

Smaller than the Temple of the Pantheon in the Administrata, this temple was built to accommodate the faithful of the Mother Church of Coryan. Built over five centuries ago due to the ill repair of the grand temple in the middle of the city, the Temple of the Gods was the center of Coryani religious activity, predating the establishment of the district by treaty.

The temple was designed to mimic the look and feel of the Temple of the Pantheon in Grand Coryan but on a smaller scale. Alcoves with statues to each of the twelve deities are present, scavenged from throughout the ruins of the First City by members of the Emerald

Society. Sculpted by master val'Sheem artist Benacco during the height of the Imperium, Benacco's work can be found throughout the district as well as other parts of the First City.

As prelate of the Blessed Lands, Leola val'Assanté is the official head of the temple, but due to her advanced years, she has delegated the day to day affairs to a much younger, Sanguinus Celebrous val'Assanté. The young Sanguinus is quite the maverick and intellectual, and frequently meets with his Khitani counterparts to discuss the finer points of their religions.

34 Temple of Sighs

While most religions strive to assuage the trials and tribulations that assail the conscience and the spirit, the Temple of Sighs tends to the body as well. This temple is dedicated to the hedonistic aspect of the Goddess Larissa, specifically the Divine Harlot of the Sixty-Seven Acts of Debauchery. Within these scented halls, the Larissan mysteries of the faith can be explored, from the gross to the sublime.

Though some claim that the temple is more brothel than holy sanctuary, the Larissan clergy has been able to deflect those seeking to shut down its more salacious activities. With seemingly unlimited funds and the backing of Lady Cleomia of House Symesa, none have the political capital to do so.

As a further bulwark against its critics, the Temple also patrons the Larissan Order of the Laughing Viper, a holy martial order that extolls in the perfection and beauty of the body, as well as elevating combat to an art form. During the games that commemorate the High Holy Days, members of the Order participate in spectacular gladiatorial matches that are the delight of the masses. To date, these holy champions remain undefeated in over two hundred and eighty-eight games; an unprecedented feat.

39 Triumphal Column Forum

Within the forum for the district a very large column stands commemorating the Coryani victory in the Second Coryani-Khitani War. The column is over a hundred feet in height with an additional twenty-foot base. It is adorned with slabs of marble upon which are carved various scenes of Coryani military victories over the Khitani and topped by a statue of Emperor Gorvaticus val'Assanté, the Coryani ruler who rallied his demoralized troops and led them to victory.

The column is hollow, and a spiral staircase leads up a large observation platform that gives visitors an unparalleled view of the First City, the Corlathian Mountains and, off to the west, the harbor. Numerous slits cut strategically throughout the column allow light to stream in so that climbers do not ascend in total darkness.

Khitani District

Like the Coryani, the Khitani were afforded a parcel of land within the City to accommodate an equal number of the Fen of Vigilance. Unlike the Coryani's regulated manner of city planning, the Khitani favor a more organic method. With the exception of placing their barracks adjacent to the Azure Way, all the various inns, hostels, shrines and other trading establishments sprouted up where room and ancient foundations permitted. This created a district that is filled with winding roads, cul-de-sacs and dead ends, punctuated with clearings surrounded by back walls without ingress or egress.

One tradition that most unfamiliar with Khitani culture will find curious is the ingrained belief that all countrymen must work in unison for the betterment of their society and that all must know one's place in the hierarchy of the universe. This cultural, as well as religious belief, is exemplified by the Khitani morning ritual of Tuánjié jìnqǔ or the Unity of Spirit. As the first rays of Illiir's light breaks through the clouds, the gong atop the Kalindruhl temple rings and all Khitani, regardless of station, are expected to walk out of their homes or businesses and begin a slow range of movements that outsiders see as a dance. The actions performed are different depending on the status held by the person, but all seem to align in a strange harmony. This dance continues until the Kalindruhl



gong sounds once again, the interval being precisely eleven minutes, one minute for each of the Gods of the Pantheon of Man recognized by the Khitani Kalindruhl.

13 The Barracks of the Khitani Fen of Vigilance

Scoffing at the offer of having their quarters built in a similar fashion to the Coryani, the Khitani brought construction supplies from their native land, namely stout bamboo as well as rare ironwood from the Fervidus Hills. Ironically, when the Khitani compound was completed, the layout resembled that of their southern neighbors: a series of barracks arranged facing a central command post. When questioned about this, the Khitani general laughed and said that the concept of feng shui was universal.

The Khitani Fen stationed changes every decade as well, but not just in the rotation of soldiers entering or leaving, but in the very composition of the military unit. Unlike their Coryani counterparts, whose legions are created with a set ratio of varying types of units that rarely changes, the very nature of the Fen is recreated given the needs of the mission. To that end, oracular readings are made each summer solstice and the visions received will determine what units are joined to create the Fen needed.

For the past six years, the Fen, which in High Khitani means *anger*, has remained static as the visions have not changed. Thus, the soldiers remain guided by their divinely wrought mission - that of constant vigilance. What they are waiting for, however, the Khitani either do not know or refuse to say.



15 The Cha Ning Tea Room

Roughly translated as the *Tranquil Tea Room*, this large building is centrally located in the district and has fast become its most popular eatery, serving a wide variety of Khitanese cuisine at reasonable prices. A common dining area occupies the main floor, while on the second-floor mezzanine, a number of individual rooms are available for more private parties.

Many believe the proprietor of the Tea Room, the jovial and corpulent Tam, owns the business but it is actually owned by the ul'Wei family who use it to conduct intricate business deals, discuss public policies, and even negotiate treaties. The ul'Wei firmly believe that such complex transactions require a more civilized and tranquil atmosphere to be conducted properly. To that end, they relocated Asami dec Goshin and her immediate family from the remote Cuhan Islands to prepare and perform the intricate tea ceremony.

Besides creating an ambience conducive to clear thought and as a sign of respect, the tea ceremony can also act as a kind of Sarishan Oath, binding the parties to the letter of the agreement. Centuries ago, the Goshin were a vassal family to the val'Tai, an ancient Sarishan lineages that was banished to the Infernal Realms by the dying command of an Imperator. Upon the founding of the Khitani Empire, the Sleeping Emperor granted the Goshin the val'Tai's former lands and bid them to learn the secrets of their ancient masters to better serve the empire.

20 Divine Victory Monument

"History is written by the victors" or so the saying goes, but what happens when a war ends in a stalemate? Such was the case in the Second Khitani-Coryani War, where the Khitani were finally beaten back from the very doorstep of the Coryani Empire's capital and all the way back to the Sea of Lanterns. A peace settlement was negotiated by the val'Abebi and ul'Wei, creating the status quo that has existed without interruption until this day. In such an event, one could hardly blame either side in claiming victory.

To commemorate their version of the war, the Coryani raised the Triumphal Column in their district. Not to be outdone, the Khitani built the Divine Victory Monument in theirs. Waiting until after the Coryani raised their memorial, the Khitani made sure that theirs was slightly taller, measuring one hundred and twenty-five feet in height. Unlike the Coryani's hollow column which acts as an observation platform, the Khitani monument appears as a slender needle jutting out of a base upon which a falcon lies on its back, symbolizing a spear thrust into the heart of their enemy. Above, a number of Valinor guide the point of the spear into the bird, underscoring their philosophy of a strict celestial order, where Man's actions are guided by the divine.

16 The Eye of the Prophet

This eatery and tavern serves locals almost exclusively as it is located on the periphery of the Khitani District and near the area known as the Pearl. To find a non-native this deep into the district means that they are either lost or looking for something specific. For most this would be the Eye of the Prophet's most lucrative commodity – cheap opium. Though not outlawed, opium is quite expensive and for those addicted to *seeing into the eye of the prophet*, Han Wu provides the drug affordably. On the lower underground level, Han built a number of small alcoves connected through a maze of passages so that the 'prophets', as he calls the addicts, may enjoy their delirium safely.

What few realize is that a series of hidden passages lies adjacent to these cubby holes, allowing scribes to hear what is being mumbled through small holes in the wall, where they faithfully write down whatever coherent ramblings may be whispered. Over the years Han Wu has amassed a small fortune from the prophetic prattling of a few of these gifted addicts. Those that fail to produce any useful information over a given period of time are no longer welcome within the establishment. The Idiot Priests of Illiir are always welcome as their opium induced dreams are filled with rich, if sometimes cryptic, prophecies.

21 The Jade Mandarin's Estate

Comparable in size and luxury to any of the opulent estates upon the Pense-Mar ridge, the manse of the Jade Mandarin is a scaled-down replica of his home in the capital city of Khitan. The Jade Mandarin, both a title and position within the Sleeping Emperor's court, is tasked with conducting foreign affairs and thus has a number of such residences in key locales. The estate itself is surrounded by a high stone wall, with several buildings surrounding a large central structure and is located in the heart of the district.

Currently holding the title is ul'Hsin Kutaku, a very tall and gaunt man, with a close-shaved skull, a prominent brow, and tapered fingers so long as to seem unnatural. In public, the Jade Mandarin is never seen without his personal bodyguards, a pair of Ruhk warriors, members of a nearly extinct humanoid race from the lands of Khitan.

When in the First City, he spends most of his time meeting with the Tomal Khan, the



heads of the Merchant Cabal, and other dignitaries, or indulging in his self-described vice of enjoying Milandisian opera performances at the Eurynius Amphitheater. His arrival days after the High Holy Days of 1075 I.C. has many wondering, as he entered his estate and has not met with anyone. Brokers of information would give much to know what is occurring with those walls and what, if anything, it portends.

18 Jial of the Phoenix

Rumored to be everything from a store house of forbidden knowledge to a temple to a strange and inimical god, the building that houses the Jial of the Phoenix in the First City conjures many bizarre theories of what it holds due in no small part to its construction. This windowless structure is an elongated rectangle in shape with a high tower at its head. Further adding to its mystique, it has a number of warehouses and residences directly connected to the main building, forming a curious series of interlocking buildings in a unique configuration. Many amateur occultists insist that the arrangement has some sort of mystical significance, though none are able to say what that significance may be.

Unsurprisingly, the building is located quite a distance from the barracks of the Fen of Vigilance. There seems to be some sort of friction or rivalry between the two Khitani factions, though it has never come to outright war so far.

17 Kalindruhl Temple

This multi-wing building in the heart of the district serves as the main religious center for the Khitani and other adherents to the Kalindruhl faith. The grounds surrounding the large building are filled with quiet, meditative gardens and reflective pools. Small marmoset monkeys, flying foxes and exotic birds of all kinds inhabit the area and are considered sacrosanct once within the temple's enclosure.

The temple itself is maintained by a large number of clergy who are tasked with attending to the numerous idols and statuary of the Gods and their valinor. Many visitors outside the faith come to admire and pray before the largest and some say, most exquisite statue of Illiir ever made. *Illiir Considers*, as it is called, stands over fifty feet in height and depicts Illiir seated upon His throne with a pensive expression. About Him fly dozens of valinor, detailed to such an extent that no two feathers upon their wings are alike.

One could spend days admiring the dazzling array of idols, statuary, and holy relics on display within the temple and its viewing galleries, but one statue in particular is the most sought after. The sculpture known as *Larissa Grieves* depicts the goddess at the moment She realizes Her innocence is gone, transforming from the Chaste Seer of the Gods to the Divine Harlot. Though the occasion is exceedingly rare, at times a tear will fall across Her cheek. Anyone who touches the tear is said to be granted a vivid vision or be plunged into madness.

14 The Lady's Smile

The Lady's Smile, the First City's premiere gambling house and pleasure emporium, is a wonder to behold. Lit by countless colored paper lanterns, this multi-storied wooden structure is filled with laughter, cheers and the occasional moan of ecstasy.

The proprietress Zhon Dai is also known as Lung Nu Changal, the Dragon Lady of Changal, one of the wickedest Khitani cities. She is always elegantly dressed in the classical black Khitani tight fitting dress known as a qípáo, with a jade colored sash about her curvaceous waist for a splash of color. What makes her stand out from the multitude of other similarly dressed women in her employ are the golden nail rings that begin at middle joint of each digit and up to her fingertips, extending her nails considerably. Some speculate that they are coated with some sort of sedative or weak poison as she has been known to drop full grown men that have grown rowdy with but a single caress.

For those seeking to stay in a more exotic atmosphere, clean rooms can be rented for five silver coins a day, except on High Holy Days when the price jumps to fifty silvers per day. Above average Khitanese cuisine is served here along with various potent wines such as *timping*, a dark brew served hot, and other alcoholic beverages.

Many suspect that the Emporium is actually run, or at minimum a front for, the Jade Tiger Tong, a brutal criminal organization from the southern provinces of the Khitani Empire. There have been small skirmishes between the Tong and a group of black marketers led by an unknown criminal called the Grey Fist. Those linking the Jade Tiger Tong and the Lady's Smile believe that Tong members meet in the sub-basement level beneath a vapor choked opium den; a forbidden pleasure that Zhon Dai only offers to her most special clientele.

22 The Sisters Xang

This small, nondescript building is nestled away in one of the many winding streets of the district. There is no signage to indicate that this is nothing other than a ramshackle home, but those native to the City know that it is the abode of the Sisters Xang. Conjoined at just above the hip, their birth was seen as an ill omen. The twins were spared death by an Illiirite priest who raised them to be his assistants. Over the years, the blind Idiot Priest taught the girls much of the mysticism and folklore of the Khitani culture, such as the reading of omens, both good and ill, the brewing of potions, and most significantly, poisons both mild and lethal.

The two girls, Nary and Neary, grew to be both beauteous and keen of intellect, and after the priest's death, the two made their way to the First City, leaving a trail of lovers bereft of both their money and their lives. The wicked sisters bought a small home and began to attend to the needs of the locals, casting and removing curses, curing ailments, supplying a root to prevent unwanted pregnancies, and eventually, brewing poisons for the rich and powerful to eliminate their enemies. Of late, the locals have noticed several soldiers of the Fen coming and going into the Sisters' home at all hours of the night – an odd sight and one never before seen.

19 The Vendetta Circle

The Khitani culture does not have a history of gladiatorial games in their land and so arenas for sport do not exist in their empire. However, the Khitani are a hot-blooded people and their penchant for causing or taking slights upon their family's honor is legendary. These insults to one's honor can begin a blood war that could escalate to engulf whole families and even their allies. Infamously, in 79 I.C., an entire ul family, the ul'Lo, was almost wiped out due to a vendetta between it and the ul'Zheng. Upon awakening from his divine slumber, the Sleeping Emperor castigated the Hurrianites and instituted the practice of the *vendetta circle*.

Like those throughout the empire, the vendetta circle in the district is an arena smaller than the Arena Varria composed of a large red ring and surrounded by sharpened stakes. The aggrieved parties either enter the ring themselves or may elect a proxy. In cases where an entire family's honor has been insulted, additional warriors may enter, but never more than six on each side.

The duelists enter the ring without any armor and armed only with the Flowered Spear, a double ended spear whose ends are barbed and resemble the petals of a flower. Ending combat is agreed upon by both parties beforehand. Some duels end when the other party yields, while most are only over with the death of one combatant. In this case, the winner then rips the head off his fallen enemy and stick the head on one of the surrounding spikes. Once done, the vendetta is declared over, and any further reprisals are met with the harshest of penalties as prescribed by the Sleeping Emperor.

The Pearl

Believed to have once been the home of the val'Ossan and val'Rankin family, the Pearl's many motifs to the Sea God Yarris make it clear that this half-ruined district was once prosperous and reserved for the elite. Over the intervening millennia, it has steadily declined into ruin as war after war brought down the civilization.

Many who visit the First City are those rich and powerful enough to travel the hundreds of miles safely and with impunity, but not all who come here are wealthy pilgrims or rich merchants from far off lands. Some, through no fault of their own, lose all their money or worldly possession. Some fall prey to the various bandits and marauders that roam the Blessed Lands and others find that they have a weakness for games of chance that leave them destitute.

It is primarily from this group of people that the cheap labor the Merchant Cabals depend upon comes from. Strong men are paid a few coppers a day for a ten-hour shift of back breaking labor and women are paid even less to work the farm terraces or the various





washing vats. Children as young as four are pressed into service during the planting season or else are forced to hire themselves out to explorers as 'mice', shimming their way into the narrow passages in ruins to see if it is worth spending the time and effort to remove tons of rubble. As can be imagined, the mortality rate for these little mice is very high.

These workers, numbering in the thousands, are needed but the Cabal would rather have them out of sight when their work shifts are done. To the end, they've built a series of tenement buildings in the Pearl so as to hide them from view. This warren of drafty buildings is the only shelter many of these workers know and a sadder, wretched place is hard to find.

Crimes within the Pearl are rarely reported, let alone investigated, with people disappearing on a regular basis. Unless one of the missing is a prosperous person slumming, no one will lift a finger to investigate. Surprisingly, people from outside the district do come to the Pearl, usually with a bodyguard in tow. Those with a cruel streak enjoy their being able to inflict their will upon the poor and weak. Some have even been brought here to make their mark – meaning their first kill in some perverse rite of passage. Others prefer the local itinerant priestesses of the Smiling Goddess, who don't seem to mind the rougher supplicants.

Many of the men and women of the Pearl tend to shave their heads as lice and other parasites are near epidemic levels there. Seeing women with a scarf or tightly shorn hair is usually a sign that they live in that district.

29 The Cool Pools

Most scholars agree that the Cool Pools must have been part of some Imperium era val'Ossan's or val'Rankin's (or ul'Rankin, as they are now known) estate, as these water gardens are sacred to Yarris. This series of small pools are fed from a large basin, delivering crystal clear water from far below and acts as the de facto well for many of the indigent inhabitants of the Pearl. Children can sometimes be found here, playing in the shallow pools during the hot summer days, though the occasional priest of the Water God will shoo them away, if he catches them.

By custom, the Cool Pools are used in a few religious ceremonies, such as performing a blessing of a new inductee into the holy order of the Sea Lords or to perform last rites upon one of the faithful. In the latter case, the body of the deceased is wrapped in sheets and laid just under the surface until the Sacrament of the Receding Tide is completed. Afterwards, members of the Beltinian order take possession of the body and ready it for its final disposition.

Strangely, except when specific duties require them to do so, most Yarricite priests tend to avoid the Pools, though most will deny this. This may be due to the urban legend of a wild eyed, feral priest of the Sea God that uses the shallow basins to drown sacrifices in an ancient barbaric rite. When a family is so desperate because their very existence is in danger from either starvation or predation, they will give up one of their own, usually an elderly member or a child, to Yarris. The priest holds the victim below the surface, all the while praying to the Lord of the Waves to look favorably upon those making the offering.

Of late, bodies are being found with greater frequency here, so much so that the locals have taken to calling it the Drowning Pool. Inquiries have been made, even sending word to the priests and holy

champions in Pecinium, but they claim no knowledge of this drowning priest.

26 The Hangman's Terrace

Located at the north-eastern edge of the Pearl, this small building has a stage that hangs over the sharp precipice of the northern edge of the plateau. It is here that those of the lower social strata who have committed capital crimes or those so heinous as to merit death find justice at the end of ten feet of rope.

The condemned are led up to the gallows where a rope, with one end already affixed to a stake, is tied about the neck. With their hands and feet then tied, the executioner, a Deathmonger priest by the name of Bannin, pulls a lever and the entire northern edge falls away on a hinge. The convicted criminal will either have their neck broken or will slowly be strangulated by his own weight. After a day of hanging over the precipice, the rope is cut, and the body allowed to plummet to the ground below as carrion for scavenger animals.

While the actual sentence is carried out with some decorum, the crowd assembled to watch is usually rowdy, jeering, and screaming for the criminal's death. For those particularly deserving of final justice, the mob has been known to rush forward as he is being led up the gallows and strip him of clothes and shoes. Pelting the condemned with everything from rotted fruit to rocks is fairly common as well, but once the rope is tied about the neck, an expectant hush falls over the assemblage until the body drops and swings over the edge.

25 The King of Nothing's Palace

Buried deep in the Pearl, this once magnificent estate belonging to the val'Ossan family is a shadow of its former self, having fallen into ruin over the centuries. Efforts were made to restore it to its former grandeur, but by the time work was ordered stopped decades later, very little of it had been restored.

It was recently claimed by Neles Vo, the self-proclaimed King of Nothing and his gang. Vo controls most of the illicit trade and criminal activities within the Pearl and is tolerated by the Blue Cloaks as he keeps the level of robbery of pilgrims low and murders nonexistent. In exchange for their blind eye, Vo controls everyone and everything that happens within the Pearl district.

A new player has entered the Pearl of late and has gained much of the respect of the poor of the district. A Prophet of Aii from the far-off theocracy of the Andai Ascendency ministers to those at the far end of the social ladder, bringing them safety, food, and spiritual enlightenment. The prophet has fostered a civil and even a friendly rapport with Vo and his gang and thus far has not posed a threat. Should that change, the Pearl could be plunged into a bloody religious war.

30 Momar the Blind

Momar the Blind, a beggar, has claimed this ruined villa as his personal home, fending off claims from the other destitute inhabitants of the Pearl for as long as anyone can remember. This feat alone would be impressive were it not for the fact that Momar is not what he seems, and this ruined villa is a sham. Momar, along with his identical twin brother Eyan, are highly trained members of the Talon of the Hawk. This organization is made up of those willing to risk their lives to safeguard those arcanely gifted individuals hunted by the Harvesters of Ymandragore.

The ruined villa's exterior hides a fully renovated and functional interior, providing shelter to members of the Sanctorum of the Arcane, as well as newly identified magi. The villa acts more as a safe house rather than a chantry due to the fact that the Harvesters have a tower on the far side of the city. Individuals from both the Southern Lands as well as the city-states of the west are smuggled through here and sent to various chantries where their abilities may be homed in safety.

As for Momar, he was blinded by a Deneki dwarf Wine Drinker and has a burning hatred of that Ymandrake order, which has spilled over to all dwarves. His brother Eyan is not blind but affects to be when pretending to be Momar. He has a mischievous streak and delights in performing acts that a blind man could never do and then switching with his brother when offended parties come to prove Momar is not blind.



28 Nola

Situated adjacent to the Azure Way, this conglomeration of buildings forms a large square or courtyard inside its perimeter. This place is known as the Nola, for the fragment of the signage that is still readable: N-O-L-A. Some of the First City's historians have attempted to discover its true name or the purpose of this series of buildings that have collapsed onto one another, but as yet, what it was during the Imperium is completely unknown.

Presently, the buildings are used as the meeting place for the indigent, weak and shunned to hear the sermons of Penameel, a Prophet of Aii. Here, all who are so old or crippled that they are unable to find work, come to witness Penameel's miracles, such as making trees sprout fruit, cleansing befouled water and even healing the sick and injured. Due to his care, the forgotten citizenry rally around him and protect him from those who would do him harm. While it is true that the Tomal Khan's edict permits complete religious freedom, the Prophets of Aii have been targeted in the past by the Coryani Inquisition as well as Khitani assassins. Because of this, the fact that the prophet holds mass in the Nola is a secret known only to the devout, who would lay down their lives to protect their religious leader.



23 The Pearl

The entrance to this dilapidated section of the city is marked by an enormous decaying mosaic of the sea god Yarris. Centuries of abandonment and exposure to the elements has destroyed most of this once magnificent piece of art, leaving only a portion of Yarris' torso and His hand holding a pearl. Plans to rebuild the area were aborted half way through the rebuilding process when huge hives of giant bees were discovered to be nesting on ledges near the northwestern lip of Mount Dagha. This appears to be a new colony split off from the older and larger hive near the Lion's Gate. (See location #110)

The partially rebuilt buildings were left to the hopeless and destitute; people who were lured by the promise of the vast riches to be dredged up easily from the depths of the Undercity but instead found their savings drained by hustlers or by the crippling horrors and dangers below. They now eke out a living providing hard labor or preying on other unfortunates within the district.

24 Pels' Bar

Located on Fish Street, so named because each of the facing corners of the street has a tile mosaic of faded blue with a stylized white fish, Pels' is more of a small makeshift bar rather than an actual drinking establishment. It consists of a wooden plank set across the wide ledge of a window. Those ordering drinks get them from the 'bar' and then mill about in the street, drinking in small clumps of three or four about a dried-up fountain.

The owner is a skinny, greasy haired man who appears to have survived a horrible wound, as the upper side of his head slopes in at a noticeable angle. Pels is as unpleasant and crooked a person as they come. Many believe he is dimwitted due to his injury and while he has horrible headaches at night, he's far from slow. Pels sells watered down wine and a grease topped beverage that the Chauni favor called Cholko. While one needs a strong stomach to ingest it, its alcohol content is so high that after the first mug, the taste doesn't much matter. The wine goes for two coppers, while the Cholko sells for one copper.

An independent entrepreneur, as he calls himself, Pels is not a member of the King of Nothing's gang – he's forced to buy the swill that he serves from Neles Vo – but he does know how to contact the elusive King of Nothing for a price, of course.

27 Temple of the Three-Faced Goddess

Approximately a century ago while traveling from the Maghir lands to the First City, Tomal Khan Nykt and his entourage were beset by a large marauding band of gar. Heavily outnumbered and surrounded, it appeared as if the entire party, which included Nykt's pregnant wife, were doomed. As the savage gar moved in for the kill, a group of mounted warriors appeared unexpectedly, smashing into the gar flank. Within minutes, the entire gar warband was in disarray and routed.

The relieved Tomal Khan greeted the warriors and offered to grant them anything within his power in gratitude for saving his people. The warriors refrained from accepting his generous offer and instead offered to escort the group on their long journey to the First City. Over the coming weeks, the gar continued to harry the travelers but were repulsed each time, though once the battle was so brutal that the stress induced the Tomal Khan's young wife into premature labor. Luckily, these hardened fighters were well versed in the art of healing and managed to deliver a tiny baby boy safely. Overjoyed, the Tomal Khan once again offered them anything they wished for, but still the warriors kept their silence.

Finally, upon reaching the City, they accepted Nykt's offer and bade to have leave to build a temple to their goddess, one that none of the Maghir had ever heard of. They picked a humble plot of land in a dilapidated corner of the Pearl and over the months the Temple to the Three-Faced Goddess was raised. The architecture was strange, with fat columns and hundreds of images in bas-relief of the goddess. The three faces of the goddess consisted of a central one which resembled a kind woman in her prime, to the right was that of a smiling young girl and finally to the left, a dark old crone.

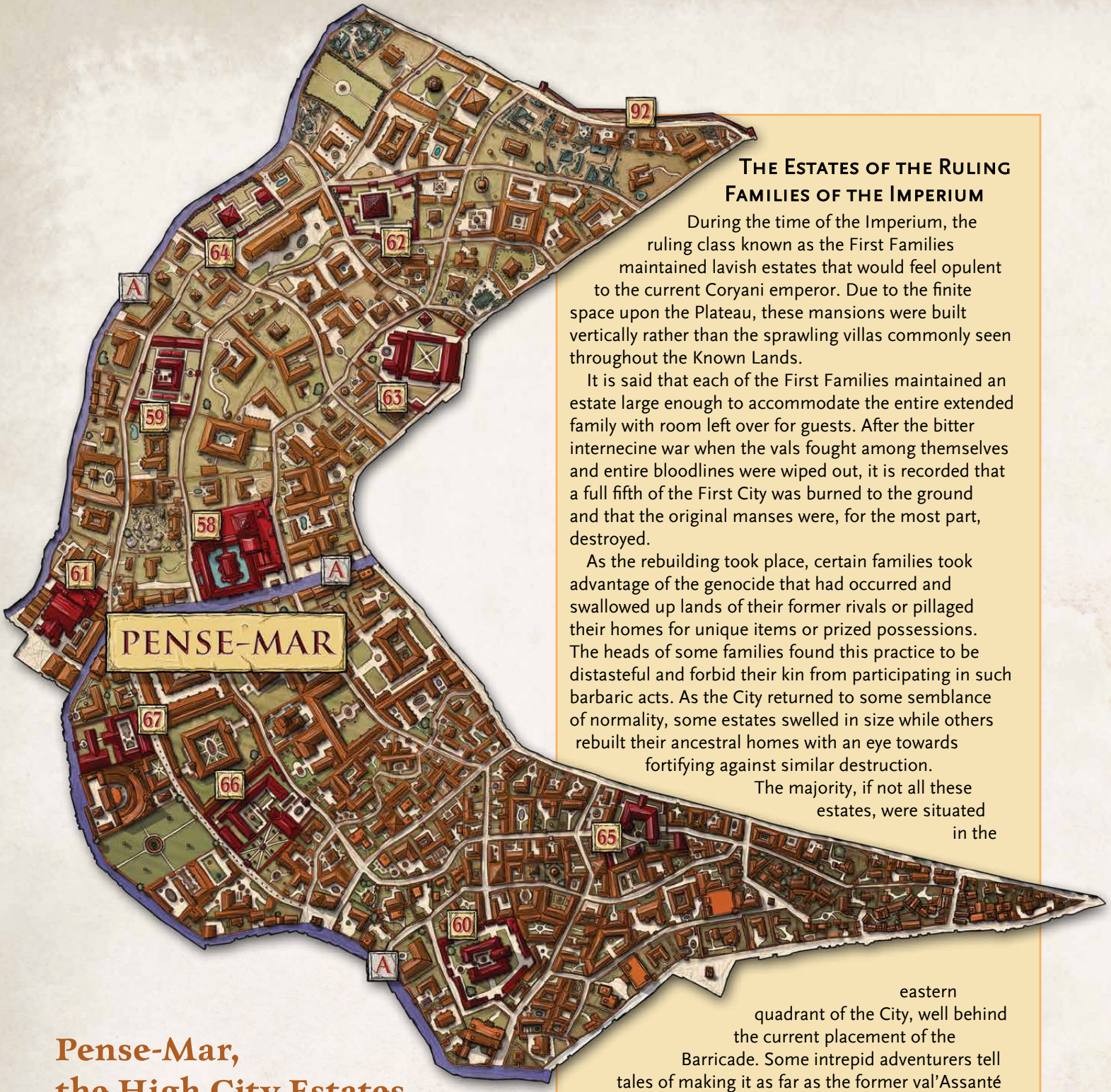
If this company of warriors ever gave their name, it was lost to history and soon departed after the workers finished their work. For many years none visited the temple, until the Chauni began to bring in Hunai slaves, who discovered this strange place of worship and declared it to be a representation of the Three Sisters: young Lyssandra, fearsome Nayal, and Belisarda, the Life Mother.

Today, the Temple is visited by the many Hunai in the First City as well as the elorii, who venerate Belisarda, but appear confused by the addition of these other two goddesses.

"The Pearl! What a cesspool. I was a slave in Coryan – I know cesspools!"

- Chealse Loong





The Estates of the Ruling Families of the Imperium

During the time of the Imperium, the ruling class known as the First Families maintained lavish estates that would feel opulent to the current Coryani emperor. Due to the finite space upon the Plateau, these mansions were built vertically rather than the sprawling villas commonly seen throughout the Known Lands.

It is said that each of the First Families maintained an estate large enough to accommodate the entire extended family with room left over for guests. After the bitter internecine war when the vals fought among themselves and entire bloodlines were wiped out, it is recorded that a full fifth of the First City was burned to the ground and that the original manses were, for the most part, destroyed.

As the rebuilding took place, certain families took advantage of the genocide that had occurred and swallowed up lands of their former rivals or pillaged their homes for unique items or prized possessions. The heads of some families found this practice to be distasteful and forbid their kin from participating in such barbaric acts. As the City returned to some semblance of normality, some estates swelled in size while others rebuilt their ancestral homes with an eye towards fortifying against similar destruction.

The majority, if not all these estates, were situated in the eastern quadrant of the City, well behind the current placement of the Barricade. Some intrepid adventurers tell tales of making it as far as the former val'Assanté estate and while signs of damage were evident, it appeared to have withstood the ravages of time fairly well. When asked if they had entered, they admitted going no further than the very entrance, for they were immediately confronted by a group of luminous infernals that killed one of their numbers with but a gesture. The veracity of this tale has never been tested, even after a century since its telling.

Pense-Mar, the High City Estates

Enjoying the view afforded by the central mound, the Pense-Mar district is home to some of the most affluent homes and estates in the First City. Only the richest of merchants or the most powerful of organizations can afford a home here, with many constructing extravagant mansions and halls upon the foundations of the former palaces owned by the ancient ruling First Families.

67 Duoppol's Estate

Home to the Chauni slave trader, Duoppol Kreshni, this estate was renovated to resemble a fortress rather than the opulent homesteads of its neighbors. Whether the reason for this is due to the kio vendetta currently over his head or merely part and parcel of a slave trader's life, only Duoppol can say with certainty. All Chauni, even those outside of Duoppol's clan, are invited to stay on his estate for the duration of their stay on the plateau. They bring tales of the happenings in far off lands as well as receive and deliver messages through the slavers' network. Flesh may be his primary trade, but Duoppol makes as much gold by acting as an information broker as a slave trader.

Security on the grounds is maintained by a squad of battle hardened ibon sworn to protect the slave master and are led by a disgraced Deathbringer who delights setting the polished skulls of thieves and assassins upon the top of the estate's wall.

62 Followers of the Azure Way's Estate

One of the first structures rebuilt on the Pense-Mar, the members of the Followers of the Azure Way that were assigned to the First City felt that the plateau was still dangerously untamed and opted to raise a structure akin to the ancient Auxunite fortresses of the past. The Milandisians also copied these ancient siege masters, but rather than looking like the blocky, claustrophobic bulwarks that dot the Kingdom of Milandir, the master masons decided on a more open and elegant layout. The walled estate has a central keep with various pathways and buildings abutting the surrounding high wall.

The current chief engineer and second only to Gaius Maximetos Lorantrus in the hierarchy of the Followers is a Canceriman by the name of Focaut val'Mordane. Focaut uses his bloodline gifts to find the safest and richest areas to excavate for ancient artifacts and plunder. The dead are his playthings and he plumbs their secrets with a masterful touch, enticing them to reveal all they knew in life. This, as well as his penchant to use undead to perform the more arduous manual labor required in their work, makes Focaut's associates within the Followers uncomfortable, but they can't argue with the results he achieves.

Focaut's latest project has done nothing to ease their discomfort as he has enlisted the aid of the Ymandrake delegation to crack the secret of the Four Towers of the Magi in the Uncleansed section of the plateau. The other elder members of the Followers, being from the coastal provinces of the Coryani Empire, feel an instant distrust for the inhabitants of the Isle of Tears and do not trust them, especially when it comes to unlocking the mysteries of the ancient magi of the Imperium.

65 House Symesa's Estate

Opulent yet tasteful, the emerald estate of House Symesa was the first to be rebuilt upon the Pense-Mar at a time before the founding of the Merchant Cabal. The ancient Symesa family's arrival is said to predate the coming of the Maghir and the Tomal Khan to the First City. According to their ancestral documents, they established a small trading post near the Patriarch's Gate and excavated through the ruins for any baubles they might find. Once the Pense-Mar region was reclaimed, they were the first to stake out a parcel of land and as one of the richest people upon the plateau, none could deny them this right.

The history of the Symesa clan, being from some far-off island in the Messalean Sea that sank beneath the waves centuries ago, gives them an exotic and the enigmatic mystique that few can resist. Never aloof or arrogant, none of the Symesa family can be said to be unapproachable, yet by the same token, they remain a mystery to the many of the First City's inhabitants. Their annual gala event, a masquerade ball commemorating some no doubt pagan holiday is always the fête of the year and many court the favor of Lady Cleomia months in advance in the hopes of acquiring an invitation.



66 House Tolaren's Estate

The manor of House Tolaren is unique among all the occupied estates upon the Pense-Mar. Whereas all the others are occupied by a core group or an extended family, the numerous buildings and grounds of this estate are the home to a single person, the Encali dwarf Tolaren and his pet/companion, an Ossarion sphinx. Tolaren's paranoia and secretive nature doesn't even allow for servants to live on premises – 'potential thieves and assassins all', he declares and brings them in only for special functions. Many of these servants claim that Tolaren doesn't actually live within the manse, but deep below it in a warren he dug for himself.

Tolaren recently purchased the estate and had it built to odd specifications. Each wing or building is designed in the style of each of the major nations and empires about Onara; the Coryani, Khitani, Milandisian, Altherian, Dailish, and even Eloran architectural conceits can be found exemplified throughout the grounds. Whether this is done to put his business associates at ease while negotiating contracts or to further underscore his famous themed galas that he holds on a timetable known only to him is unknown. For his part, the mercurial dwarf refuses to confirm or deny any of the theories about his home, preferring to remain the eccentric and inscrutable member of the Merchant Cabal.

64 House ul'Wei's Estate

One would imagine that an estate belonging to one of the five members of the Merchant Cabal would be grand and ostentatious, but the estate of ul'Wei Golon Ti is as unassuming as its owners. The only hint that a powerful and influential family resides within is its location adjacent to the Azure Way. Consisting of a main compound, two auxiliary structures and a pair of secure gatehouses, the estate is a study in the elegance of simplicity, with only a well-manicured lawn to adorn the walled grounds. The astute observer will quickly see that this complements the ul'Wei's well known obsession with privacy and secrecy, as the lack of ornamentation makes it difficult for intruders to hide from guards.

Dignitaries, visitors, and even business negotiations transacted within the estate grounds always occur in the north-eastern building known as Pavilion. Tastefully decorated and able to comfortably house up to a dozen guests, the building is also frustratingly generic and bland, giving nothing away as to the owner's mindset, values, or even inclination. Those doing business with the ul'Wei find it maddening that there is nothing to tell them of preferences to play upon or weaknesses to exploit. The one thing that is clear is the ul'Wei's aforementioned preoccupation with secrecy as all their servants, without exception, are blind and mute from birth or by their hand.

63 House Varro's Estate

The stately villa of House Varro was built by Priscus Varro the Elder upon the very foundation of the mercantile family he first ruined and then replaced in the Mercantile Assembly. Priscus had the original home torn down and rebuilt as a proper Coryani villa. To ensure that his family would continue to grow in power and influence, he made sure that the central atrium was larger than normal to accommodate events so indulgent and decadent as to make a Larissan blush.

After his second year as the head of the Varro family, Priscus the Elder was invited to join the Merchant Cabal, supplanting the Tartol family, a rival whose mining concerns in the Fervidus Hills he acquired and added to his own. The current owner, Suetonius Varro, has a staider demeanor, foregoing his ancestor's penchant for hedonism and instead relying on his business acumen and the many favors his family has accrued over the years.

Many in the Assembly whisper that his rise to power was too quick and fortuitous to simply be attributed to cunning and shrewdness, pointing to the incongruous red colored door in the entrance of the estate as proof that he made a bargain with minions of the God Sarish. Suetonius laughs at these allegations and responds by saying that red is his wife's favorite color. Despite this, the whispered rumors persist and were recently rekindled when a passersby claimed to see winged demons descend from the night sky into the central atrium.

61 Milandric Orthodox Church's Estate

The building that houses the Bishop of the Milandric Church and his subordinate deacons, priests and laymen looks more like a fortress than the residence of a priestly order. Built less than thirty years ago to replace the small building they occupied in the Rhamul district, the structure was designed and built by an architect from Tralia, a duchy in Milandir famous for its impregnable bastions rather than its

aesthetic constructions. When completed, many laughed and ridiculed the architect, saying it was the greatest eyesore upon the plateau. With their usual aplomb, the Milandisians responded that beauty would not deter an invading army and boasted that it was more secure than the Imperator's throne room.

Open to all members of the Milandric clergy, the estate also hosts visiting nobles from the kingdom when they undertake their pilgrimage. Preparations are now underway for a royal visit from Duke Konrad I of Tralia and his entourage. He is betrothed to the Duchess Eldora val'Dellenov's granddaughter, a young woman renowned for her great beauty and piety, who refuses to wed the king until he has undertaken the pilgrimage to the Temple of the Pantheon. As such, Duke Konrad is due to arrive for the High Holy Days two years hence, in 1077 I.C.

60 The Mother Church Estate

Built in the same style and architectural sensibilities as that of most Coryani villas, the estate that houses the clergy of the Mother Church is open and airy compared to many of the other manses and domiciles situated about the Pense-Mar. The walled grounds have a number of gardens and shrines used for meditation and clandestine meetings. Statues representing the Pantheon of Man, many of them original sculptures uncovered during the glacial expansion into uncleansed portion of the First City, can be found throughout the grounds and within the villa itself. Benacco's masterpiece, *Divinity at Rest*, is the centerpiece of the main atrium of the villa. Depicting the Gods after their victory over the Other and the elorii gods, many believe it to be the ancient master sculptor's finest and final work.

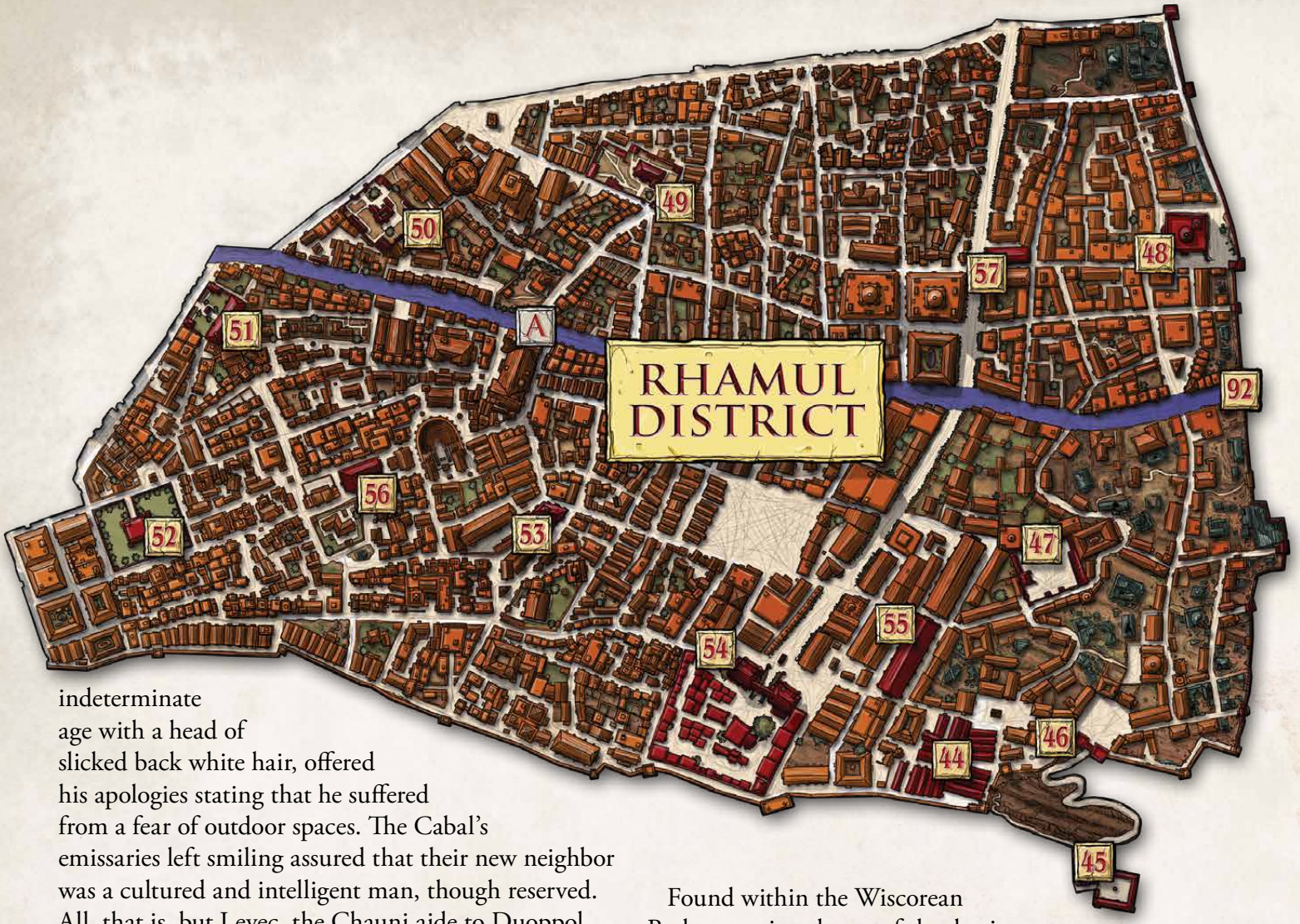
Within the estate, the Prelate of the Blessed Lands, the aged Leola val'Assanté, and approximately one hundred priests, acolytes and attendants reside here. Any visiting clergy, templars, or holy champions of the Mother Church are welcome to stay within the villa, though room may be quite tight during the High Holy Days.

59 The Odean

Up until a few years ago, if one asked any inhabitant what the most cursed or haunted place in the First City was, their answer would unanimously be the Odean. Even in antiquity, a pall of death hung over the old grounds. In the years following the internecine conflict known as the Blood Wars, legends speak of a performance in the amphitheater attended by representatives of most of the members of the First Families, where a lone singer performed a heart rending finale that left most of the audience in tears but left the val'Borda's in attendance dead. These unfortunates were found in their seats, blood seeping from every orifice. Having escaped in the confusion, the killer was never found nor was any similar assassinations ever reported. Scholars speculate that the murders must have been carried out by some sort of arcane rite while others believe it was one of the few surviving members of the val'Trisin family, which were decimated during the Blood Wars at the hands of the val'Borda. So few val'Trisin remain that verifying whether this was some terrifying ability of their family has been impossible to verify.

The ancient amphitheater was claimed and remodeled as a modern estate over two centuries ago by House Lacona, a member of the Merchant Cabal of the time. It wasn't long after the family moved in that the entire household was found murdered in the ghastliest of fashions and rumors of some sort of supernatural horror being responsible began to circulate. Thus the estate remained abandoned until three years ago when a stranger arrived to purchase it. After having the buildings restored and a high wall placed about the entire grounds, Lord Moric Tisza arrived with a small number of attendants. However, after weeks passed without Lord Tisza presenting himself before the Golden Court or any of the members of the Cabal, a small delegation was sent to ensure that the new owner had not fallen prey to the same fate as House Lacona. Rather than finding a charnel house, they found the new owner to be very much alive and a surprisingly charming, if shy, individual. Lord Tisza, a tall, fit man of





indeterminate age with a head of slicked back white hair, offered his apologies stating that he suffered from a fear of outdoor spaces. The Cabal's emissaries left smiling assured that their new neighbor was a cultured and intelligent man, though reserved. All, that is, but Levec, the Chauni aide to Duoppol, who hid his apprehension until he reported to his master that Lord Tisza was everything the others said he was, but they had missed one fact… the man cast no shadow whatsoever.

58 The Wiscorean Baths

Named after the fairly inept imperator, Wiscoreax val'Emman, whose only claim to fame besides keeping the Imperium out of war during his seventeen-year reign was the creation of a series of public baths throughout the First City, the largest of which bears his name.

While only one other municipal bath has been uncovered, it pales in comparison to the Wiscorean Baths. Built from yellow colored sandstone and finished in marble, the multi-chambered baths offer a variety of pools for the weary, and at various temperatures (cool, warm and hot), with large communal baths that can accommodate over thirty people to smaller, more intimate ones that are meant for private encounters. Afterwards, massages with oil and perfume are available.

Found within the Wiscorean Baths at various hours of the day is a hulking, dark-skinned man by the name of Jubalay Umboté, an Altherian with sure hands who offers not only a close shave but a soothing massage within the Baths. He doesn't speak much and leaves that to his young assistant who answers to 'boy'. Jubalay's reluctance to speak is not out of rudeness, but rather due to the fact that he had his tongue ripped out by a large ss'ressen during his tour as a member of the Shining Patrol. Luckily, the young boy is gifted with a glib tongue and a cherubic face. His rosy cheeks, curly blonde hair, and innocent blue eyes engender trust and openness in most clients.

A modern addition to accommodate the occasional reptilian visitor is a hot mud bath followed by a cleansing of the scales by slaves specially trained to pick out any shedding skin or dangling scale.

To keep the clientele of the Wiscorean Baths at a certain social level, entry costs as much as twenty silvers; those of more modest means can use the smaller, less opulent baths in the other parts of the City.

Rhamul District

Named for the distinctive red coloring of the stone buildings in the area (rhamul meaning red in the pidgin language used in many parts of the First City), it was originally chosen to house the various warehouses used by merchants due to its proximity and access to the southern Trade Gate. It was later designated as the de facto Foreigner's District, so that those from lands beyond the Coryani and Khitani Empires had a place to call their own. As time passed, the district became home to a diverse population from across the continent, with unique businesses, dwellings, as well as the famous Museum of Antiquities founded and maintained by the Followers of the Azure Way and the Collection, established and curated by the Emerald Society.

53 Academy of Epics and Songs

The unassuming face of this two-story structure belies the musical excellence housed and taught within its walls. The music school caters to individuals seeking a life devoted to music, placing an emphasis on group performance, be it choral or orchestral. The owner is a former legionnaire by the name of Vincens Lerato val'Borda. A devout Cadican, he seeks to foster performances that move the heart and touch the soul. He has recruited his former comrades from the Legion of the Watchful Hunter to positions within the Academy and each has proven his place as master or staff.

As one of the top performance schools within the First City, the Academy teaches everything from basic lessons to the finer nuances of performance. Beginning students are taught fundamentals, focusing on the mastery of instruments and voice. These classes are taught by advanced students as part of their studies. The masters oversee these classes as well as composition, performance, and the making of musical instruments.

The workshop resides on the first floor serving both as classroom and store. The quality of the instruments available for purchase range from novice to true masterpieces. When in the shop it is possible to hear rehearsals of the more advanced students as they are often held in the central courtyard when weather permits.

The Academy brokers requests for performances at venues and engagements through the City. Of particular note is the concert held at the Eurynius Amphitheater, which provides the masters and novices an opportunity to showcase their skill and potentially find patronage or a position within one of the various performance companies.

49 Altherian Embassy

Originally built to house the Coryani legate's offices after the First Coryani-Khitani War, the compound was sold to the Altherian Republic in the wake of the Treaty of Pecinium, which ended the Second Coryani-Khitani War and established the Coryani District in the First City. The Altherians felt that having a diplomatic embassy in close proximity to their Khitani counterparts, the ul'Wei, would serve to stave off future conflicts between the two greatest powers on the continent. Since its establishment in 825 I.C., no fewer than three hundred accords and treaties have cemented the peace that has prevailed until the current day.

The current ambassador to the Golden Court is Aziz val'Abebi, a Philosophic Warrior and former officer of the Shining Patrol. Like many of his order, Aziz is a learned man who delights in the wonders and knowledge unearthed from the bowels of the plateau on a seemingly daily basis. He can usually be seen about the City, partaking of the many exotic delights available or reciting his original epic poems in the Eurynius Amphitheater.

Within the embassy a small stockpile of blastpowder is stored. Those val and ul gifted with a flintlock, or those that may legally own one ,may purchase the alchemical concoction here. Even though the embassy keeps a relatively small amount, the cache is heavily guarded and tightly regulated, with every pinch of powder counted and catalogued.



56 Archer's Folly

This popular tavern was originally named the *Duke's Honor* and was owned by a Milandisian who heard the clarion call of his nation and joined the Sixth Crusade of Light against the infernal horde in the north of the Hinterlands. While there, the stresses of the brutal fighting led him down the path of drinking, carousing and gambling. It was during the lull in battle before what was to be the final battle at Hope's End that he wagered his beloved tavern during an increasingly desperate game of dice and lost to another crusader by the name of Sisko val'Borda. Sadly, the Milandisian was lost during the battle with the Devil King and Sisko survived, eventually making his way to the First City to claim his prize.

To the shock and surprise of the former owner's family, Sisko proved his legal ownership and promptly changed the name of the tavern to the *Archer's Folly*, replacing the former signage with one featuring a broken bow and a dragon's skull. He kept on the Milandisian's family as staff and to their shock, transformed the storage basement into a gambling den.

Not long after his acquisition, Sisko went on an ill-omened expedition to the newly discovered Vault of Larissa and met a grisly end. The ownership fell to his sister who has continued to operate the tavern in his name. A few months after her brother's death, his former compatriots arrived with a large and ornate tapestry, which they claimed was his cut of the plunder from the Vault. Strangely, this ancient tapestry depicts the Second Battle at Hope's End, an event that occurred less than five years ago, depicting the final battle with the Devil King, Uhxbractit.

54 Burial Crypts

The southern escarpment is riddled with openings into the cliff side, which lead to a number of catacombs that have been used as burial chambers since at least the time of the Imperium. Some of these are shallow openings in which the dead were laid out in simple niches carved directly into the wall, while others are large with numerous chambers that serve as the final resting place of either entire families or the site of an important person's tomb, including the ancient rulers of the Imperium. The final resting place of the former imperators have yet to be found, but many speculate that the riches buried there could each buy a small kingdom.

The majority of these tombs are ransacked, with even the bones themselves taken. This has allowed for the limited space to be reused, so that there is always space for the newly dead.

The modern citizens of the First City follow the practices of the ancient Imperium; wrapping the dead and mummifying their remains. Those that can afford to do so commission sarcophagi as a receptacle for their final remains. Rather than follow the treacherous path down the side of the escarpment, a number of openings were dug on the ground level to ease the interment process. Over time, a number of mausoleums were built aboveground to house the remains of Tomal Khans and other important members of the Golden Court.

As usual, the poor and the destitute are given the worst accommodations for their final resting place, their remains placed in small niches after being hastily wrapped in rough cloth. Unfortunately, their burial chambers are located in a location where an as-yet-undiscovered water reservoir periodically leaks and floods the chambers, leaving them completely submerged for a period of time before draining. As one can imagine, tales of bloated undead are rampant among the poor, who go to pay their respects and claim that their loved one no longer rests in their assigned niche or worse, has attacked them.

50 The Collection

Ironically, even though the Emerald Society was the first to rediscover the First City for the Southern Nations, their estate is modest in size and location when compared to their rivals, the Followers of the Azure Way. Located adjacent to the exclusive Pense-Mar district, the estate is a walled enclosure consisting of a number of smaller buildings that serve as residencies for members of the organization stationed in the First City, as well as additional accommodations for visiting fellows.

The main structure of the compound is a building housing the Collection, a multistory museum exhibiting specimens, relics and artifacts from the over eight hundred years of excavations that the Emerald Society has conducted upon the plateau as well as in the surrounding Blessed Lands. Rare and unique pieces from the various civilizations that once inhabited Mount Dagha are showcased and available for anyone to view. Curators must accompany all visitors, but the service is free of charge.

The centerpiece is an exhibit housing the most complete and extensive collection of relics from the Yahssremoran Empire, including the mummified

remains of over two dozen ssanu. Estimated to be over eight thousand years old, these mummies are in an amazing state of preservation given their age. In addition, weapons, coins, religious symbols, and even a few of their unique metallic tablets have been discovered, studied, and placed on display for everyone's edification as dictated with the precepts and philosophies by which the Society was founded.

55 The Granary

Meant to hold enough reserve grain to feed the inhabitants of the First City during siege or famine. The granary is the brainchild of House Varro, who saw a need to stave off food shortages, such as the one that followed the crippling famine forty years ago during the Coryani Civil War, which coincided with a blight that destroyed much of the crops to the west.

Mandatory rationing had curtailed the worst of the shortage when word spread that House Buqa, then a member of the Merchant Cabal, was holding a feast and ordered the scraps be given to the hounds rather than to the populace. Whether true or not, the story circulated like wildfire and within hours an angry mob of over a thousand starving citizens were storming the estate, looting what they could find and taking out their frustration on the members of the Buqa family. So enraged was the populace that the Tomal Khan of the time prudently ordered his forces to maintain a perimeter so that the rioting did not spread beyond the Buqa estate grounds, but to otherwise not interfere.

Having lived through those frightful days, Pulcher Varro seized the initiative and put forth an initiative to save a percentage of the grain imported as was the custom in the Coryani Empire. Not wishing to see such wanton destruction ravaging the City again, the other Merchant Cabal houses voted unanimously to cede a portion of land near the Trade Gate and implement Varro's plan. It appears that the stomach is not only the fastest way to one's heart, but also the quickest way to circumvent partisan politics as well.

45 The Lift

Sitting on the crossroads between the Southern Lands and the Western Kingdoms, the First City enjoys vast riches from the commerce that travels back and forth through its territory. With the Blessed Lands being quite inhospitable to the uninitiated and the unwary, merchants selling their wares across the continent are content to travel as far as this ancient mecca, drop off their goods, and return with their cargo holds laden with exotic goods. The Merchant Cabal and other, smaller mercantile entrepreneurs, are happy to act as brokers, importing and exporting merchandise across the width and breadth of the continent.

While the merchants would prefer to move the commodities quickly to their destination, sometimes weather, timing, or events occurring at their final destination prevent the speedy movement through Traders' Point. When this occurs, goods must be stored in a more secure location in the warehouses upon the plateau. Moving these heavy crates up over one thousand feet to the plateau required the creation of an ingenious engineering mechanism known as the Lift. Essentially a simple chain and pulley system, the Lift is a series of platforms that can be raised and lowered by a winch mechanism powered by a team of cave giants. These eight blind behemoths were purchased by years ago from the Tultipetan dwarves and work in shifts, yoked to a titanic wheel crank, raising and lowering the platforms as needed.

52 The Mausoleum of the Hallowed

The burial place of the Soldier-Saints of Dagha are not located near the burial grounds of the populace, and in fact, hold a place of honor on a small rise. Funded by the seemingly inexhaustible wealth of Alrameus Vernico, an elaborate multi-storied mausoleum with a marbled façade and black lacquered columns was commissioned and completed within his lifetime.

The dead are wrapped, mummified, and placed inside wooden coffins that are then slid into niches in the walls. A plaque is then fitted



with the Soldier's name and any deeds of note that they may have accomplished in life. Those few that are canonized by the Mother Church are placed in special crypts that are then positioned about the building.

A miracle was authenticated when the sick was miraculously healed after touching the crypt of one of the canonized Soldier-Saints. As word of this spread, the ill and those in need of some sort of miracle flocked to the mausoleum only to be turned away by the nervous guards. To defuse the brewing situation a solution was conceived wherein a lottery is held in which the names of five penitents are chosen and escorted to the different crypts.

A trio of Soldier-Saints stand as honor guard before the large doors to the crypt and are rotated out every thirty days or so. Due to their presence, the crypts have never been defiled, though nests of the Eaters of the Dead, ghoul like creatures that are known to live in the labyrinthine tunnels that riddle the plateau, have made incursions over the years.

51 Museum of Antiquities

Touted as the premiere collection of Imperium artifacts and relics, the Museum of Antiquities is owned and operated by the Followers of the Azure Way who jealously guard their prized possessions from the unlearned masses and instead allow only vetted scholars, historians, and dignitaries access. Valued members of the Azure Way are given right of entry but must be accompanied by a local member.

The museum contains a large variety of arms and armor, samples of dress and tapestries, as well as one of the most extensive libraries of texts and documents written by many of the luminaries throughout the Imperium's history, including many of the histories penned by Samochus the Younger and the only known surviving sample of the poet Haras val'Borda's epic, *The Sundering of Shadow*. Yet even these singular and exquisite pieces pale in comparison to the centerpiece of the Museum, one of the Keys of Man. Few are given access to view this artifact behind its warded crystal case, but many, including certain members of the Emerald Society, are skeptical that it is authentic as they can't imagine the secretive and elitist leaders of the Followers would put an artifact of such historical significance on display. For their part, the Followers stand by their authentication of the Key.

47 The Stables and Animal Kennel

Managed by a group of Saluwean adherents, the stables offer the owners of mounts a safe place where they will be well tended in a safe environment. Owned and operated by the Tywelian family, several Yhing hir stable hands are available to care and groom any and all riding and pack animals, both mundane and exotic, at a rate of five silver a day per mount.

Additionally, those with animal companions not small enough to escape notice, such as the bonded companions of the Khitani Tiger Men, can be safely cared for in the animal sanctuary. Shey Tywelian, the matron of the Tywelian family, was raised as an orphan within the Saluwean Temple in Lustia and learned a variety of skills from the Sisterhood, including the ability to empathically communicate with animals of all types. The rate to stable animals in the kennel ranges between a silver to twenty silvers a day, depending on the needs of the creature as enough raw meat to feed a tiger is not cheap.

The stables abut a moderately tall tower, which was one of a series of aeries used to house the mighty griffins flown by elite knights of the Imperium. As most of these towers are located in the Uncleansed region of the plateau, this one serves the infrequent visits of knights with winged mounts from a variety of nations.

48 Tower of the Ymandrakes

Speak the word 'Harvester' anywhere throughout the Southern Lands and conversations end abruptly and people begin to quickly make their way to their homes for safety. In the Western Kingdoms, Ymandrakes have an entirely different reputation. Here, the depredations of the Ymandrakes pale before the threat of the black sorcerers known as the Endless, covens of hags, and the Mad Magi of Lakhrion that are the scourge those lands.

The Harvesters' reputation as enslavers of the young and innocents whose gift are just beginning to manifest is not widely known in the Blessed Lands and the First City. Instead, they are seen as champions whose unique skills allow them to combat these powerful arcane menaces. They were given permission to erect a tall tower in gratitude for their selfless acts of bravery battling a group from the Court of the Mad Magi that infiltrated the First City and began destroying everything that lay in their path to the mystical Four Towers of the Magi. A group

of Harvesters engaged these insane sorcerers and barely survived the encounter. Since that day, the Merchant Cabal has extended the hand of welcome to them and the rest of their organization, seeing them as an additional line of defense against further arcane incursion.

The Tower of the Ymandrakes is a multi-storied tower of a peculiar red hue and acts as a place for those from the Isle of Tears to rest while in the City. Oddly, the final location for the tower was changed several times, at the request of the Ymandrakes, until a suitable site was finally agreed upon.

46 Trade Gate

Located at the southern edge of the plateau, the Trade Gate serves as the entry point for much of the food and goods enjoyed by the inhabitants of the First City. The endpoint of a steeper and less well maintained switchback path up to the summit, few travel up this way, preferring the gentler footpath through the Patriarch's Gate in the west.

One of the four original entrances into the First City, the arch of the Trade Gate was found partially destroyed when rediscovered. Its beautiful white marble façade laid in pieces, blackened under layers of soot and enwrapped by thick vines. After years of painstaking reconstruction, the beauty of the gateway was revealed – twin winged lions stand guard at the foot on either side, while intricately carved members of the nobility are depicted in a variety of activities. At the apex of the arch and serving as the capstone is a weathered face of one of the deities, which scholars believe to be Althares, the God of Knowledge.

Over the years, several markings were discovered, which were believed to be incidental scratches and grooves caused by the centuries of erosion or from the reconstruction efforts. A year ago, an Altherian pilgrim visiting the gate noted that the furrows were actually inverted letters of the ancient Altharin language, but when written down made no sense. Since then, many have tried to decipher the Trade Gate code and the Altherian Embassy has offered to pay the princely sum of one thousand gold imperials to any who can do so.

57 The Wandering Eye

Centrally located, the *Wandering Eye* brothel serves a number of select clientele who, for reasons of their own, prefer not to or cannot avail themselves of the favors to be found in the Larissan Temple of Sighs. The Wandering Eye prides itself in catering to the temptations of anyone, be they from the Southern Lands or the exotic Western Kingdoms, rich or poor, human or… other. Those with unique tastes know that just about anything and everything that can be dreamt of can be procured here, if the pockets are deep enough.

The brothel is owned by the Sarishan Igerrus val'Mehan and is operated by his sister, the vivacious Azula. Little of their history is readily known, for like most Sarishans they understand that information is power. Where many see the brothel as a pit of indulgence, only the most astute realize that it is actually a web with Azula val'Mehan at its center, each strand reverberating with secrets and tales spoken while the possessor's defenses are at their lowest. Those that see the brothel for what it is can bargain for whatever information is needed, tit for tat – secret for secret.

Yet even these brokers for information do not realize that the val'Mehan siblings are ardent supporters of the Mother Church of Coryan and the Empire, sifting through the copious amounts of information gathered nightly and feeding their contacts within the clergy and the inquisition information on any viable threats to the empire or those practicing particularly dangerous heretical beliefs. Given the Tomal Khan's standing order on religious tolerance, the cost would be high if these activities were discovered.

44 The Warehouses and Traders' Point

Upon the southern edge of the plateau is a cramped section filled with modern structures designed to house the many wares of the merchants based in the First City. Here goods that are soon to be exported to markets across the continent or commodities newly arrived from many exotic ports are stored.

Though owned by the Cabal, the



warehouses are leased to other merchants as well as to other organizations, such as the Emerald Society, the Followers of the Azure Way and the Jial of the Phoenix. Well separated from one another to ensure that spying is kept to a minimum, each of these organizations keep their storehouses in a similar fashion. Besides the large storage area, each one has a small office along with a barracks, housing as many as a dozen warriors, usually mercenaries, to protect their commodities.

Many worry that the wooden structures are vulnerable to fire that would result in grievous financial losses, but the agents of the Cabal try their best to assuage such fears with assurances that they have taken precautions to prevent such a catastrophe from occurring.

To deliver goods to or from the plateau, an ingenious series of cargo elevators and winch systems hoist the goods from the ground up over a thousand feet, one thousand three hundred and twenty to be exact, to the top of Mount Dagha. However, for recently received goods traveling immediately to their destinations, it would be impractical to transport them up from the bottom of the Flood Plain only to then lower them again. To alleviate this problem, a small area at the foot of the plateau was cleared and warehouses built so that the merchants could save time and money by storing merchandise there. Over the years this area grew and became known as Traders' Point as it is not only used to temporarily house goods, but Andyar came from surrounding settlements to sell livestock, trinkets, and even captured bandits as slaves.

The Slide

This strip of land, sandwiched between the Administrata and the Barricade is known as the Slide by its inhabitants as it's built on the down slope of the central hill. Peopled by those desperate enough to delve into the Undercity, the Slide's the place for those looking for those needing to purchase specialized equipment, hire specialists, fence some hot merchandise or just wish to hear the rumors of what the latest expedition into the undercity discovered over a cup of hot mead. Though patrolled by the guardsmen, the area suffers from rampant crime as the Blue Cloaks are more concerned about incursions from the uncleansed area than what goes on in the backrooms or seedy dives of the Slide.



100 Barber's Hall

Once a warrior's hall and armory occupied by the Nierites during the reign of Leonydes val'Virdan, the Sword of the Heavens, the building is now the home of the Barbers' Guild of the First City. It is usually deserted but for a small group of elderly members whose hands shake so badly they'd have a greater chance of cutting a man's throat than shaving it clean.

Anyone visiting the Barber's Hall will find a hollowed out shell with modest sleeping areas, consisting of threadbare bedding and a common area where the guildmates share a meal. The barbers do their best to keep up appearances so that no one suspects that beneath the creaking floor boards is the den of a group of master thieves (See the Barber's Guild, pg. 146). The ill-gotten gains of over a decade of pilfering, throat-cutting, blackmail, and more lie securely ensconced in the winding

tunnels below. The few who know the secret that the guild is a front for the Grey Fist's organization know better than to try and sell the information or worse, attempt to steal the treasure. The reason for this is that the area is guarded by a creature known as the Crawling Shadow, which is believed to be an infernal summoned and bound into the Grey Fist's service. Whether true or merely a ruse perpetuated to keep the organization's secret, there are few willing to risk their lives to test its veracity.

92 The Barricade

It is hard to imagine a city once so powerful, vibrant, and of such cultural significance to so many, once stood abandoned for centuries until it fell from living memory. It is during this long and benighted period of time that creatures, both fel and foul, migrated to these ruins and nested within its hoary halls or found shelter in the endless warrens that honeycomb the Plateau of Dagha.

When Man returned to his abandoned home, it was full of such dangers and horrors that it was again abandoned sporadically for short periods of time, until the arrival of the Tomal Khan and his warriors rallied their fellows and began the slow and deadly quest to cleanse the First City of these malignant squatters. Yet even after a millennium of working on this pogrom, only half of the city can be said to have been thoroughly expunged and relatively safe from these predators and then, only on its surface. It is said that the clearing of the labyrinth below will be the work of ages.

To guard against incursions from whatever manner of inimical beasts roam and inhabit the Uncleansed area of the City, the Merchant Cabal funded and ordered the construction of the current barricade that stretches from northern edge to the southern precipice of the plateau. Built from the rubble of collapsed structures and whatever else could be found, this winding wall acts as a line of demarcation between the inhabited portion of the city and the untamed region. The wall varies in height from six to twelve feet, with a relatively level platform running across its top so that the guards can quickly respond to incursion points. A limited number of entryways exist for those seeking the riches lost in the ruins to pass through. Those wishing to explore beyond the Barricade are required to show the guards their issued licenses before being permitted to cross over.

Acquiring Licenses for Salvage Rights

It was not long before the Merchant Cabal realized that not only do the ancient relics of the First City provide them with tangible wealth, but that others would pay for the privilege of plumbing the hoary corridors beneath their feet.

Creating the Bureau of Antiquities (located in the 85 - Administrative Offices) was the logical end to this epiphany and with the coming of the Emerald Society, the Followers of the Azure Way, and the Jial of the Phoenix, it became the gatekeepers of an extra income source to bolster their coffers. The cost of the license itself is but a pittance to most, a mere 10 silver coins per person and draft animal, as well as any animal companion above the size of a small bird. This allowed the explorers to travel throughout any of the ruins and subterranean passages for seven days and nights. Should their expedition extend beyond that time, the difference would be collected by the Blue Cloaks at the Barricade.

The true money comes when the explorers emerge from the ruins, usually carrying the riches they have found. These are evaluated by an officer of the Bureau of Antiquities, assigned a value, and then levied a 25% tax, which can be paid in coin or in objects of equal value.

Of course, there are always those who refuse to part with any of their prizes and smuggling does occur. The guards at the Barricade are well trained to search for contraband and the penalty for such a crime is the confiscation of all of the items being smuggled and the loss of a finger joint, as a reminder of their duplicity. Those who are found guilty of this more than five times lose a hand and on the sixth are banished from the City with orders not to reenter on pain of death. These penalties do little to dissuade the desperate or greedy and many a person throughout the First City has lost a digit or more. In fact, those looking for a guide are told to find a person with eight or nine fingers, as any with two whole hands don't have the experience to take them to the more interesting parts of the Undercity.



93 The Blood Pits

If the Coryani gladiatorial arenas are the ultimate expression of martial prowess and the Khitani Vendetta Circle is where honor is tested and restored, then the gore soaked muddy grounds of the Blood Pits is where hope and decency go to die. Decried by the ruling class as a perversity and an example of the degenerate nature of barbarians, many have advocated closing down or making the fights there illegal, but thus far the authorities have turned a blind eye. This is in no small part due to the fact that on any given night, many of the cloaked and hooded spectators betting on the results are many of the same people raising the hue and cry for its abolishment.

The rules of the Pit are simple: two fighters enter and only one or neither leaves alive. Humans and human kin are usually the only ones allowed to fight and special attention is given to dark-kin for any unfair abilities granted by their infernal heritage. No magic or special equipment can be used by the combatants. The desperate fighters enter wearing only a loincloth and whatever weapons happen to be chosen for the contest, selected randomly just before the battle begins. There are no other rules or referees, making the fights brutal and short. The men and women who fight here have literally nothing left to lose and fight to scrape together a few coppers for their loved ones or just to end it all.

Shabhanu, a Sarishan with a sadistic streak, and Ghurad, an exile from the isle of Magra far to the east, operate the Pit, with the Sarishan laying odds on the outcome and taking bets, while the Magran selects the combatants and oversees the fights.

94 Diggers

This small store is owned by a Tir Betoqi dwarf named Demearjiak who has lived in the First City for many decades. He came to plumb the depths of the Undercity and get rich, but he lost his leg in an accident, ending his delving career. Without further prospects, he opened up *Diggers*, which sells any and all supplies needed by explorers, with what money he had.

A few with contacts in the black market know that Demearjiak's Diggers is the place to fence and smuggle goods, illicit or otherwise, in and out of the First City. The dwarf used his time and money throughout the years to establish a network of operatives within the Blue Cloaks, the foremen at the Lift, the Coryani legion, the Khitani Fen, and with various others to assist in his smuggling operations. Demearjiak keeps a low profile despite his extensive contacts and uses a number of go-betweens to distance himself from the operation. Only a handful of people, such as the Grey Fist and Zhon Dai, the Dragon Lady of Changal, know of his true position within the organization and given their own criminal connections, they are unlikely to volunteer this information.

101 The Dwarf's Beard

For those looking to hire guards, bearers, or guides for expedition into the ruins, there is no better place than the Dwarf's Beard, a large drinking hall was once the banquet room of one of the ancient First Families' estates. The cavernous drinking hall is a fairly raucous establishment, due in no small part to the owners, a family from Scyr, a far northern island off the coast of the Khitani Empire. Known for their boisterous joy of all things, the deadly freebooters of that land defy their cold and grey home with a smile on their face and living each day as if it were their last.

The proprietors are a large family, led by Domarr, the clan's head and his wife, and twelve sons and daughters, all ranging in age from six to seventeen, as well as an extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins. In all, the twenty-five strong Scyrgan family cooks, serves, sings, and brews their honeyed beverage for their patrons. Given its proximity to the Barricade and the wild atmosphere of the place, many find it to be the perfect place to be hired by those leading expeditions into the Uncleansed region.

92 Expedition Emporium

The Expedition Emporium is a good-sized building housing a number of related businesses under one roof. For those not wishing to deal with the ill-tempered Tir Betoqi dwarf proprietor at Diggers, the Emporium offers a pleasant alternative for those wishing to purchase supplies. In the dozen stores housed here, a prospective explorer can find just about anything needed to properly outfit an expedition: everything from rope to poles or food rations to maps of explored areas can be found for sale.

What many do not know, and few would care, is that the entire mercantile operation is owned and financed by the Emerald Society. Many within the Society feel that the Uncleansed area and the Undercity are dangerous enough without having your equipment fail when it's most needed. All the equipment sold here, while not cheap, is of high quality.

Besides their purported altruism, the Society also

benefits from the gossip overhead from over excited explorers, who have a tendency to brag about a newfound section or show off newly deciphered clues from ancient tomes. To date, the Society hasn't used the information gleaned in this manner to poach on another's territory, but knowledge is power, as has been said many a time.

97 The Hole

Representative of the many flophouses located throughout the Slide, the Hole is just another rundown hostel where the destitute and the poor can spend a few coppers for a roof over their heads. The number of those who come to find their fortune in the ruins of the Uncleansed region and lost everything but their lives is legion. Many expeditions end in utter disaster, with many losing companions, equipment, and even limbs. Some of these survivors are able to dig themselves out of the Undercity, crawl into the bottom of a mug, and never come out.

Those who manage to save a few coins are able to avoid the danger of torture gangs and slavers that roam the Pearl and pay to sleep in the dirty common rooms with another twenty men and women as desperate as they are. Those who can spare a few more coppers can share a semi-private room with only four others.

95 Lady of Shu

The popularity of this drinking house to its Myrantian clientele was predicated upon a confusion of deities. The Myrantians are a marginalized, conquered, people in the Coryani Empire who never truly assimilated into that society. Even after centuries of Coryani rule, the Myrantians keep their religion, history, and customs clearly separate from their conquerors but pay just enough lip service to the Coryani Pantheon to avoid the eye of the inquisition. Imagine their surprise when the few who traveled north to the First City discovered that there was an inn named after one of their own gods, Shu. Word spread of a place where they would feel welcome outside of their ghettos in the Empire and many migrated.

Walking into the place, they immediately realized that they had made an error for the sounds and smells of the inn are very different from any Myrantian establishment they were accustomed. Thick incense wafted through the bar and discordant music and caterwauling that passed for singing filled the large common room. Most bizarre of all was the statue of a very pregnant woman with the long sinuous neck and head of a vulture placed directly before the entrance. As the regulars entered they would kiss the palm of one hand and rub the belly in an act that was more from habit than from reverence.

Before too long the Myrantians discovered that the inn was run by a family from the city-state of Sutun in the west and that they worshipped a goddess named Shu as well, but rather than the Myrantian deity of strength and pride, theirs embodied fertility and vengeance. So hospitable were the Sutuni that the Myrantians came to call this place their own, regardless of their vast differences in culture. Now, the common room echoes with songs, taking the best of both cultures, and the two groups have become close friends, so much so that recently a small group of young toughs from both ethnicities banded together to protect their people and project their new-found power through intimidation and brute force. Thus far, their sphere of influence only extends into the southern portion of the Slide, but given time, this gang could grow to rival the power of the Khitani tongs and even threaten the power of the Grey Fist's criminal empire.

102 Phaon Prison

Most crime in the First City is petty, ranging from a drunken brawl to minor theft, such as pickpocketing or break-ins, and is dealt quickly by the Blue Cloaks with either a fine or a swift beating. Murder and crimes against the mercantile elite, though rarer, do occur and are dealt with by the Judicial Court (See pg. XX), but justice is sometimes slow, and the accused must be held until their trial. Prisoners awaiting their day in court for more serious crimes are held in the Phaon prison, an inhospitable place consisting of a large, dank hole ten feet deep where prisoners are dropped and held in common area. The Blue Cloaks stationed here are assisted by a small group of



sama, whose eidetic memory ensures that the correct prisoner is pulled out when they are called to stand trial.

There are a small number of small cells, more like divots in the earth with a locked grate covering the opening for those criminals that require additional precautions. Most regret falling into this category as the general population in the common area spit, hurl bodily waste, and fluids, entertaining themselves by making these prisoners' lives miserable.

For those who are accused of particularly heinous crimes or have somehow irritated the Blue Cloaks, they are lowered into an oubliette, a deeper hole so tight that there is barely room enough to expand one's chest and breath, let alone move about. Those suffering from claustrophobia sometimes go mad while waiting weeks to be brought out again.

98 The Tomb

It's said that when you've been run out of every taverna, pleasure house, and bar in the First City, then your last resort for a drink is the Tomb, a dark and dingy watering hole that smells like the inside of a grave. Manning the bar, seemingly day and night is Rowena, rumored to be a Nerothian from Canceri. Her shaved pate and pale skin lend credence to that claim, although her unhealthy pallor could be a result of never leaving the place. The only entertainment in the Tomb are the dust motes that dance in the beams of light that sometimes break through the rotting shutters that haven't been opened since time immemorial.

Given the ambience and very poor lighting, the Tomb is a hub of clandestine activity, from rogues planning a robbery to assassination contracts being offered and accepted. Rowena doesn't care what contacts or plans are made in her establishment as long as nothing disturbs the peace of her bar. Many believe that she has some sort of arrangement with the Blue Cloaks as they never step foot inside the Tomb; odd, given its close proximity to the Golden Court just up the rise.

99 The Veiled Ladies

Situated on the upper reaches of the Slide and in the shadow of the Temple of the Pantheon is an unnamed shrine to Beltine's aspect as the healer. A small statue of the Grey Lady was found in the dilapidated building by a group of Beltinian nuns that claimed and quickly renovated as a place of healing the body, spirit, and mind. This makeshift hospital soon became popular as the nuns refused none and accepted tithes in coin or in trade in exchange for their care.

The Order of the Blessed Heart was founded by these nuns and was officially recognized by the Patriarch of the Mother Church, Felician val'Mehan, in 1020 I.C. The caregivers are referred to as the Veiled Ladies due to their vow to wear a grey veil across their face until their deaths. The current head of the Order, the spry middle-aged Phila val'Ishi, was trained in the most modern medicinal techniques in New Althré and teaches the younger nuns to rely on science as much as their divine Cants to heal the sick and injured.

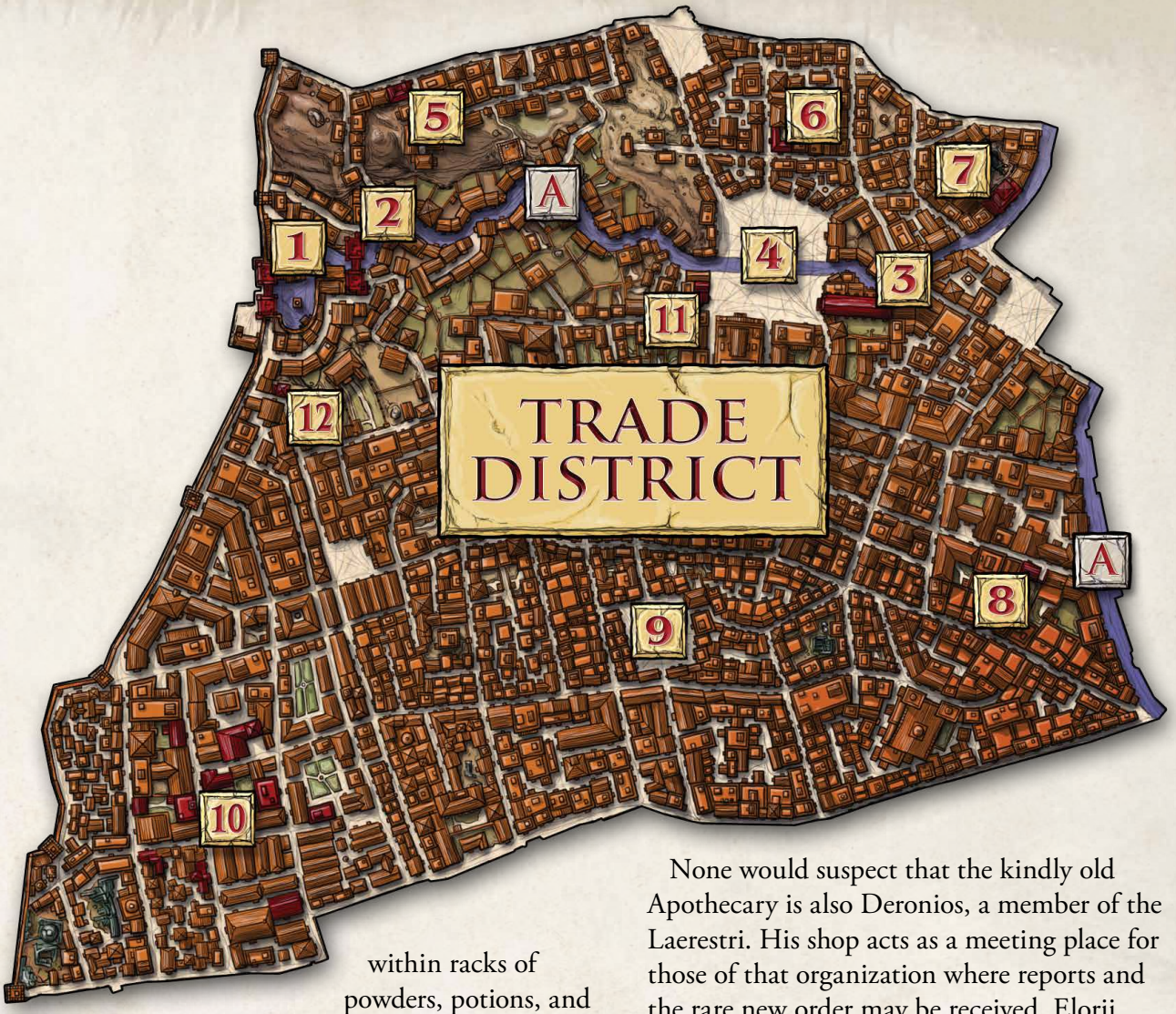
In the past year, the Veiled Ladies had to open a wing to deal with an influx of people from the Pearl who were experiencing severe memory loss. Given that those suffering from this malady were from the Pearl, the Merchant Cabal didn't give it much attention, but now cases have begun to appear in the Coryani and the Rhamul District. While not yet in numbers to cause a panic, the nuns are concerned that if the cause is not found and contained, the people of the First City might be looking at an outbreak of epidemic proportions.

Trade District

The pilgrimage to the First City is an arduous task, across broken and arid terrain, with the final leg up a winding switchback trail that never seems to end. Relief and elation fills one when the Gate of the Patriarch is finally glimpsed and, after moving through the Gatehouse checkpoints, one is funneled past vendors selling sweet lemon beverages to slack parched throats, and sizzling meat on a stick or pastries to fill hungry bellies. Once past the dizzying throng of people, the pilgrim finds themselves in the Market Place, a panoply of brightly colored tents, store shops, and food stalls and are bombarded by street hawkers and vendors trying their best to make their sales before the visitor realizes that an even grander bazaar lies deeper into the City. Exotic goods, both gross and sublime, can be found in the district and many stay within its borders for the duration of their visit, content with the unique experiences found there.

11 Apothecary

One of the oldest shops in the Trade District is situated on the western edge of the Market Place with the shop and owner sharing the same name, the Apothecary. The small store is a modest wooden structure, but



within racks of powders, potions, and herb line the shelves as they have for the past three hundred years. Many claim that the proprietor, an Ardakene elorii, has been behind the same stained desk just as long. His actual name is unknown as he has been called the 'Apothecary' by the past four generations of residents, at the very least.

The kindly elorii is very knowledgeable about his wares and knows how to treat everything from a sour stomach to a festering wound and all for reasonable prices. He never deals in poisons and points any inquiries to the Khitani District with a disapproving nod of his head, saying that there's enough death in the world without him helping to add more. Human children are always darting in and asking for a sweet candy from a large jar he keeps filled by his desk, but they'll have to answer a question to get one. These are generally simple and deal with herbalism and minerals. He explains it's his way of teaching the youngsters a bit of the lore he has accumulated over the years.

None would suspect that the kindly old Apothecary is also Deronios, a member of the Laerestri. His shop acts as a meeting place for those of that organization where reports and the rare new order may be received. Elorii, while rare in the First City, are not completely unknown to visit and none find it odd that they would wish to congregate with their own kind. Though small, the shop does have a loft where fellow elorii who have nowhere else to stay may spend a few evenings in relative comfort and safety.

8 Dark Treasures Curio Shop

The facade of the Dark Treasures Curio shop is as diverse as its contents. Each of the half-dozen owners from the last several years have changed or expanded the building with a touch of their own homeland. Cancerese gargoyles stare down at a Milandisian decorated entryway framed by a pair of marble Coryani columns. After sitting empty for months, the property was recently purchased by Kelb'Bakari Masalio, a dark-kin from Altheria and member of the Emerald Society. Over the doorway hangs a new wooden sign depicting a stylized stalactite riddled cavern

revealing an illuminated half-opened chest. The name of the shop is written in both Coryani and in Altharin, a tribute to the owner's home.

The shop buys, sells, or trades almost anything. These curiosities are haphazardly displayed for customers upon shelves and tables constructed from a variety of woods in a multitude of styles. The proprietor offers fair deals and often trades store inventory for interesting finds. While most items are of a novelty nature for collectors and pilgrims, there are a few true rarities to be had, such as ancient artwork, passages from lost texts, and antique weaponry.

The day-to-day management of the store undergoes frequent turnover, as the owner often purchases dark-kin slaves, offering them their freedom and employment until they can set out on their own. Known only by a handful of others, the store also acts as a sanctuary for the rare escaped dark-kin slave. The previous owner used the store as a smuggling safe house before his sudden and unexpected disappearance. The hidden basement provides an excellent hiding place for these slaves before they can find their way safely from the City.

2 Gatehouses

Once passed the Gate of the Patriarch, visitors are funneled down the Azure Way (See pg. XX) until they pass by two prominent gatehouses. The two gatehouses are the legs of a large arch, which creates a short tunnel of sorts, and is staffed by two dozen Blue Cloaks during the day and a dozen at night. The gates have a series of defenses, from a three-foot-thick door made of ironwood, two wrought iron portcullises, and finally an unhinged bronze door that drops directly from above to seal any invaders in the tunnel. Slits allow a variety of deadly weapons to be fired into the enclosed area are positioned at various points along the inner walls.

Although passes or documents are not needed to enter the First City, the Blue Cloaks keep an eye on anything unusual entering or known criminals leaving the plateau. Should it be necessary, a double portcullis can be dropped quickly in place to detain those they wish to interrogate. It is only once one is past the gatehouses that they have truly entered this ancient capital.

1 The Gate of the Patriarch

The primary entrance into the First City was called the Gate of the Gods during the Imperium and later, just the Gate, until soon after the rediscovery of the First City by the Emerald Society. The Patriarch of the Mother Church at the time, one Serenus val'Assanté, also known as 'the Pious', is said to have quietly left Grand Coryan with only two priests and crossed the entirety of the Blessed Lands in disguise. Finally arriving at base of Mount Dagha, he removed his worn and cracked sandals and climbed the Azure Way refusing all food and water offered. An elderly man, Serenus fell to his knees just within the Gate and raised his head to see the upper portion of the Temple of the Pantheon, which towered above all other structures in the First City. With a final prayer, Serenus the Pious kissed the Gate and fell dead within it.

Known thereafter as the Gate of the Patriarch, this structure is a large, fortified entryway that gives the appearance of being a long tunnel, traversing the thick City walls. Wide enough to allow six mounts to ride abreast, the gate has remained open since the time of the Second Khitani-Coryani War and is awash with a mad rush of activity with people entering and exiting on foot, mounted or on wagons. There is no entrance tax to enter the City as the Merchant Cabal wants everyone to come, buy their wares or patron the various inns and taverns throughout the City.

10 Hostels

A number of lower-end hostels grouped together in the southwestern portion of the district usually remain unoccupied for most of the year, only filling up during the High Holy Days when the population of the First City swells. Pilgrims low on funds but still desiring a roof over their heads are directed to any one of these hostels where a room for four can be secured for twenty copper a night; half that when the holidays are over.

Seven years ago, a number of disappearances occurred with a dozen or more pilgrims staying in the old inns vanishing without a trace. The innkeepers, local people hired for the season and known about the community as decent folk, were mystified. No blood was found in any of the rooms nor was any sounds of struggle overheard; it was as if the very shadows swallowed them whole. The Blue Cloaks believed that there must be a series of tunnels and hidden passageways connecting the various hostels together, but none were ever found. The only thing out of the ordinary discovered after the disappearances was the lingering scent of frankincense, a rare spice.

6 House of Blades

This shop opened recently and is quickly becoming quite popular among the fighting elite looking for the finest in quality weapons and can afford the very best. In decades past, a storefront in the makeshift trading post known as Marketplace, in the shadow of the dwarven enclave of Solanos Mor, opened its doors and within a few years, the craftsman of the blades sold there became a legend. Since then, the chance to purchase one of Master Elebac's swords is quite the gift, as the elderly bladesmith forges fewer and fewer weapons each year.

Something changed in the years since the end of the Coryani Civil War and the Master Smith has traveled to the First City to begin anew. Leaving his previous business, *Legendary Blades*, to his eldest son, Elebac and a handful of apprentices started the modest House of Blades just north of the Market Place. When questioned as to why the sudden move, the old dwarf replied that he needed a change of scenery. Few believe that he was exiled, as he has always been held in the highest esteem by the dwarven king, leaving many wondering what has prompted the change of venue.

The only dwarven member of the Merchant Cabal, the Encali dwarf Tolaren's paranoia has gotten the best of him and he has made no secret of the fact that he will pay handsomely to learn the reason for the Solani's arrival. No doubt he will pay doubly for his removal should the Master Smith prove to be a competitor or a threat to his business interests.

5 Litera Scripta Manet

Literally *'the Written Word Endures'*, this three-story establishment has evolved into the largest independent source of scrolls, folios, and bound books in the First City. The business is owned by the self-styled Ambassador Tukufu of Altheria and is staffed by a rotating collection of visiting young scholars. The overwhelming majority of these people hail from Altheria as well, so some customers refer to the store as 'the Little Embassy'.

Tukufu is fairly canny in identifying and catering to three different groups of consumers. Outermost, facing onto the street, are colorful illuminated texts of liturgies taken from sources like the Illuminated Scrolls and the Kalindruhl. These items are targeted at the pilgrim trade. Deeper inside are contemporary collections of famous speeches, philosophical tracts, plays, and poetry. These items are continually updated and target the local literati of the First City. Finally, upstairs on the second floor is a secured rare books room for the serious researcher or bibliophile. It's not entirely clear if this is a major revenue stream for the business or not, but the rare books room is clearly the passion of Tukufu, and a major draw for recruiting new staff.

The second floor also has a reception area for taking tea with important clients and Tukufu's personal rooms. Other employees are housed on the third floor in small rooms next to the scriptorium where works are copied, or rarely downstairs in the storage basement. There is also a small terrace and patio upstairs with a garden. Whenever the First City is faced with elements of special weather there is always a mad scramble to pull the flower pots quickly inside.

4 Market Place

Once past the gate houses, pilgrims usually follow the ancient Azure Way to the Market Place, an open-air bazaar that cements the image painted by the exotic stories told by countless pilgrims of a raucous place with winding pathways lined with colorful tents and outlandish stalls selling goods unheard of in the Known Lands. One should forgive new visitors for believing that this market is the one described in these tales, for the Grand Bazaar is further up the hill in the Zocalo and not visible from their vantage point. For the uninitiated, the mysterious scents, vibrant silks, and strange sounds are enough to overwhelm the senses for those from humbler and less cosmopolitan backgrounds.

Some of the very best deals that can be found in the First City are found here, as the merchants try and lighten visitors' coin purses as much as possible before they enter the Zocalo and lose out to their grander counterpart. Knowing that appraising



potential buyers and enticing them into their stalls is critical, many resort to outlandish practices. For example, the cloak and coat seller Noz from the city-state of Haranshee employs a cadre of young boys to weed out those merely sightseeing from those who are prospective buyers and then greets these serious consumers, leading them to his shop. He also has a bevy of dancing girls, scantily clad in their native dress, performing the provocative Dance of Murgath. From the gyrations and sensuous contortions they perform, many mistake the performers for Larissan courtesans. Should any make any untoward advances, they will be sternly corrected and informed that these acolytes of Murgath dance for His enjoyment, not for anyone else's.

3 Mercantile Hall

While ostensibly the Golden Court holds secular power over the entirety of the First City, this grand city's true supremacy is derived from the amount of goods transported across the far continent. The Tomal Khan realizes this and shares power with the various mercantile concerns based here. The five wealthiest and most influential of these are known as the Merchant Cabal and they represent the concerns of the hundreds of other traders doing business in and around the First City.

The Mercantile Hall, also known as the Mercantile Assembly, is a large, long building adjacent to the Market Place that acts as a meeting place for all merchants. The quarterly meetings are a loud and rambunctious affair, with over four hundred members vying with one another to have their petitions, concerns, and grievances heard by the Houses of the Merchant Cabal. For their part, the Houses do their best to quell the most pressing issues, especially those which affect them all; the rest must do their best to out-bribe their competitors to gain the ear of one or more of the Cabal. As can be imagined, backstabbing, both metaphorically and literally, is common and many a blood feud between merchants is ignited here.

12 The Narapan Soothsayer

Just about every religious sect in the Known Lands and beyond has some sort of augury or divination method, from the Nerothian priests who read the cracks in bones to Nierites that foresee the future in the flickering of flames. Most famous of all are the Larissan prophetesses who are able to divine future events through a variety of methods. The Narapan Soothsayers are unique in that they let the petitioner briefly experience the events to come as if they were there. They can guide the vision to a point, but believe that their three-eyed god, Narapa is the one who decides what is to be seen.

These soothsayers are extremely rare outside their small kingdom of Ebesus far across the Messalean Sea, as they are only allowed to peel back the veil of the future for the king, his advisors, or for the divine caste which forms a parallel noble class that rules alongside the more martial monarchy. It is not unheard of for some diviners to flee the kingdom, especially if they have shown their sovereign something of great personal embarrassment, for the soothsayer also sees what the supplicant sees. Those not quick enough or rich enough to bribe their way out of the country soon find themselves buried up to their necks for the voracious insects of that land to devour them slowly.

Desnydle fled such a situation, arriving in the First City a few years ago, hoping that he could find protection with the Golden Court. Though welcomed, Tomal Khan Ys rejected Desnydle's offer to be his personal soothsayer, saying that a man's future should be like his first kiss, a complete surprise, full of wonder, and terror. Having no other option, Desnydle began offering his services to those willing and able to pay for a glimpse into their future. Over the years he has accumulated a small fortune, enough to hire a pair of ibon bodyguards. Though he has been safe thus far, the king's reach is far and his memory even longer.

7 Runemaster Elothym Varythrin

In a small series of interconnected buildings marked prominently with an arcane sigil works the most learned runemaster of the First City, Elothym Varythrin of Capharra, and his small group of journeymen and apprentices. Elothym was once a champion duelist much sought after in the courts of the kio until a fateful bout with a mercenary Cafelan dualist with a poisoned blade left his right arm paralyzed and unable to grasp a blade again. An elderly Tultipetan runic master took pity on the young kio and offered to tattoo an arcane rune upon his forearm that would return much of the feeling and control he once possessed.

The rune miraculously restored the vitality to his arm, but rather than return to dueling, Elothym was fascinated by the magic behind his miraculous recovery and began apprenticing under the elderly rune master. To his dismay, he discovered that although many of

these mystic symbols were known, the vast majority were lost to the annals of history or scattered throughout the lands of man so that no one person knew more than a fraction.

After learning all he could, Elothym began traveling throughout the Known Lands, taking advantage of his hereditary longevity to learn what he could of the runes known in the Coryani Empire and its Successor States, from the horsemen tribes of the Yhing hir, and even from three separate dwarven enclaves. And still he knew that even more existed and burned to master them.

Finally, while in the sixth decade of life, he decided to travel to the First City and offer his services to the citizens of that ancient metropolis. Bending knee to the only rune master there, a wizened Encali dwarf, he learned all he could by his side before the dwarf left, never to return. Getting too old to travel and adventure, Elothym sits like a spider in the middle of his web, traders and travelers from far off and exotic places bringing new runes or variations he had never seen before. Likewise, explorers plumbing the depths of the Undercity occasionally retrieve items with mystic sigils unknown to the master.

Elothym and his fellows will gladly inscribe runes at the standard rate and will pay top price for any runes he doesn't already know. Should someone not wish to part with the item, he will pay to copy and study the inscribed mark, returning the relic unscathed to the owner.

9 Slave Block

While the ownership of slaves is legal in the First City, only the wealthiest citizens actually own any. Most of the sales of slaves within the First City are made to rich pilgrims, merchants, and visiting dignitaries at the Slave Block, a large square with a raised stage for exhibiting the wares. Duoppol, the master slaver, owns the stage and the small stable lined with pens where new goods are stored until they can be cleaned and exhibited, like animals. The area is guarded around the clock by skilled Chauni warriors who protect their lord's investments from those misguided enough to try and free the caged merchandise.

For the most part, slaves are generally brought to Duoppol, the merchant prince who primarily deals in the slave trade, by other Chauni slavers or Dailish pirates who trade in just about any and every illicit or immoral goods. Occasionally, Duoppol will have exotic slaves for sale, such as the much sought after docile Hunai or members of different ss'ressen egg clutches from the Ssethregoran Empire. These unusual lizard men fetch a handsome price from the Ludus Carnatae, where they train and battle to fatten the purse of their new masters with ferocity and eventually, their lives.

Other slaves are shipped out to lands beyond the Sea of Lanterns. As certain races are proscribed from being sold at the markets, such as vals, elorii, and most dwarves, a black market exists for the sale of these beings. Larissan priestesses, especially those of the val'Sheem family, are highly prized and fetch an exorbitant price to attend the needs of the rulers of lands where vals are virtually unknown.

Uncleansed Area

Over half of the area that was once the ancient capital of the Imperium still remains *uncleansed*, meaning that the various buildings and streets are not cleared of the dangerous beasts and creatures that made their lairs here during the intervening centuries when the plateau was abandoned. Within its many square miles remain unclaimed and undiscovered wonders from that golden age as well as deadly denizens and traps to snare the unwary.

Entering the Uncleansed region can be accomplished through the designated entryways in the Barricade or, should the explorer feel particularly daring, by using the ancient and now treacherous trails to gain access through the Gate of Shadows or Lion's Gate. Rumors of tribes of savage gar, harpies, and other beasts living and thriving in certain portions of the ruins do little to deter those seeking lost knowledge or riches, and the bones of both types of seekers lie strewn about the cracked and overgrown paved avenues of this once beautiful city.





106 Aerie of the Griffins

Situated in the middle of the northern wall is a tall tower adorned with a faded mosaic of green and silver tiles. This blockish spire is capped with the remains of a wooden frame, which scholars say once held a thick thatch roof that covered an open-air landing. They further theorize that this was once the fabled val'Dellenov Aerie of the Griffins, where that noble family bred and trained these magical beasts.

It is said that when the last of the Griffin Riders fell to the Sword of the Heavens' invading forces, the apprentices hid all the unhatched eggs fearing that they would be used by Leonydes and his fanatical Nierites to further his goals of conquest. These records were recently discovered by a Follower of the Azure Way and sold to the matriarchal family in Balantica who sent a small group of their scions to recover any eggs that could be found. Instead, after battling their way to the tower, they found nested at the very top a black wyvern.

The sole survivor of this doomed expedition told of a harrowing battle with the creature, how its poisonous sting laid her companions low, and that she was barely able to escape with her life. Upon reporting her failure to the val'Dellenov matriarch, she was exiled from Balantica and her family now bears the shame of her perceived cowardice. Many believe that her tale is a complete fabrication to cover her incompetence, given that there has never been a report by the citizens of the First City of a wyvern, and such a large, winged reptile hunting in their midst would be very hard to miss by the populace.

109 Ansharan Gates

Deep in the very heart of the Uncleansed area and seen only by a very few is a large structure capped by a golden cupola within which stand the original Gates of Anshar, an artifact that makes travel to the various parts of Arcanis possible in the blink of an eye.

According to Malomomen's studies of ancient scrolls, tales of these miraculous gates echo through the ages; passages tell of a large open-air structure in the heart

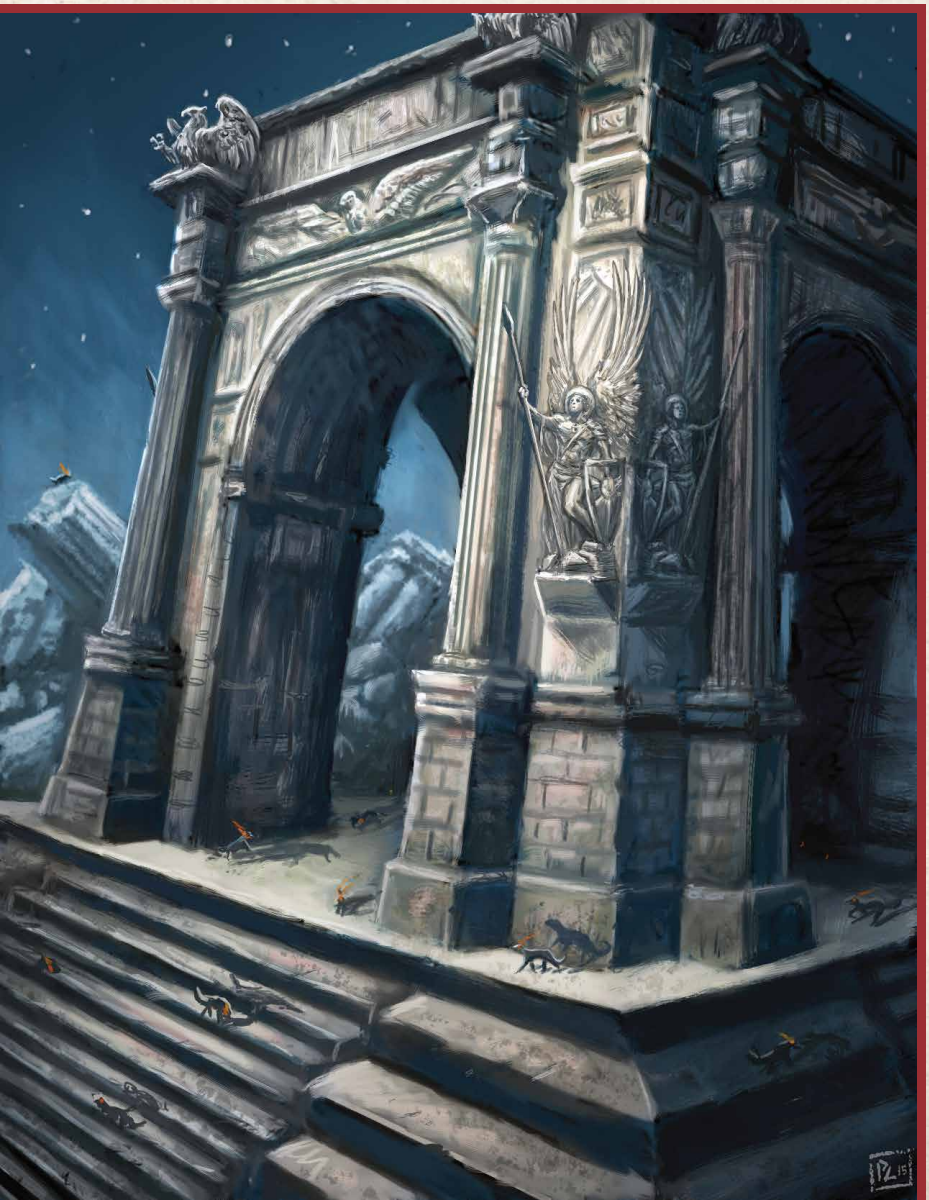
The Twelve Gifts of the Gods

The famed historian Malomomen, a prominent member of the Emerald Society who specializes in the history of the Imperium, wrote a multi-volume treatise about his studies entitled *The Pinnacle of Achievement and Subsequent Fall*. In the first volume, he tells the tale of the departure of the Gods from the First City and how Illiir tasked each member of the Pantheon to bestow a gift upon mankind before leaving for the Heavens.

Malomomen was able to uncover some, but not all of these supposed gifts and found that while some, like Althares' gift of a common language, now known as Altharin, were intangible, others were physical and still exist to this day. In addition to Illiir's gift of the Throne of Man, Saluwé's Tree of Serenity and Yarris' Pearls, there are three other Gifts known; the Ansharan Gates and the Well of Souls are said to lie somewhere in the First City, while the Labyrinth of Time is located in the Blessed Lands awaiting rediscovery. What the other bequests were is still unknown.

of the City. There, four of Anshar's gates of titanic proportions stand forming a square upon a raised dais. Specially trained priests dedicated to activating the portals stood by, ready to send diplomats, soldiers, as well as the very rich, to the far off reaches of the Imperium and beyond merely by stepping through the Gate's plane. Guarding against any intrusions that might appear, for all gates swing in two directions, stood the proud Legion of Grim Lamentation who have never allowed any creature or malevolent force to penetrate further than the edge of the Gate's steps.

The leaders of the Merchant Cabal long for the day that the Barricade extends far enough so that the great Gates fall within their grasp, but it seems that it will be many years before this is possible. Wild rumor has it that those who have penetrated deeply into the region claim to have seen men dressed in archaic armor standing guard about the hoary structure. They assert that these are members of the Legion of Grim Lamentation still performing their sacred duty, but those that spout such drivel are usually scoffed at and ridiculed. Others say that large packs of cadaver hounds make their lair on the Gate's steps, a formidable impediment to reopening Anshar's gift.



105 Avenue of Gargoyles

Upon a parcel of land believed to be associated with the ancient val'Mehan, there exists a long avenue with menacing gargoyles perched atop each and every entryway. These stone gargoyles have been associated with the val'Mehan

since the Mythic Age when the God Sarish saw His people being attacked by winged reptilian horrors and spoke to a sculptor in dreams. The deity instructed him to fashion a dozen stone guardians, each with muscular bat-wings and sharp claws. The rest of the villagers scoffed and ridiculed the artist, who worked day and night preparing the grotesque looking statues. When next the flying reptiles descended to feed, the sculptor sliced his palm and smeared the pooling blood upon the brow of each of his works. True to the God's word, the gargoyles sprang to life and tore the attacking beasts, limb from limb.

The Avenue of Gargoyles is mentioned in the journal of an explorer who believed that the buildings lining the street must contain a treasure trove of sorcerous knowledge and artifacts. At great expense and after the loss of a half-dozen porters due to an attack by a savage tribe of gar, he recounted that when he made to step across the threshold of one of the buildings, a small rain of dust fell from above. Looking up, he saw that the gargoyle had not moved, so he went to enter again, and once more a cascade of grit and dirt fell from above. His remaining porters swore that the gargoyle moved and ran in terror. The explorer, being a val'Mehan, scanned the area to see if any wards could be detected. What he saw made him turn and run after his hirelings, for the entire avenue appeared to be crisscrossed with a ruby red ward, like a spinster's cats-cradle of yarn. The journal with this entry was found at the base of the Gate of Shadows among his desiccated remains.

112 The Endless Choir

There is a saying in the First City that signifies someone who is loyal to a fault or blindly devoted to duty – *"[S]he must have sung with the Endless Choir"* – for nothing in the Known Lands nor beyond can quite match the devotion to duty, not legionnaires nor even the love of a mother for her children, that the monks of the Order of the Endless Choir show for their vows.

The Order is said to be as old as the beginnings of the Imperium itself and its formation as well as the song they sing are said to have been taught to them by no less a personage than the God of Music and Shadow Himself. Of course, when an organization is as old as the Choir is, its origins, as well as its quirks and peculiarities, become the stuff of legend, obscured by the fallible memory of Man.

What can be said with assurance is that within a small cave facing the southeast can be found exactly forty-seven monks, ranging in age from acolytes of fifteen years of age to masters in their seventies that sing in eight-hour shifts without any rest or break. Nearing the end of this shift is a splendid period of one hour when two braces, as the group of forty-seven monks are called, comingle and ninety-four voices are present, singing their archaic hymn. There are three such braces within the order with the rest of the monastic fellowship being made up of young children born or gifted to them, who are trained by elder masters to eventually take their places.

What is truly remarkable is that historians and travelers who hear their eerie music in the wind have recorded that the Choir has not stopped singing since its inception, millennia ago. Not once did they falter; not when the Imperium fell, throughout the tumultuous period of the Theocracy of the Cleansing Flame, the Shadowed Age, nor the subsequent Time of Terror and on and on, to the current age. Even now, their perpetual song rings out; echoing throughout the plains of the Blessed Lands.

Curiously, academics and music scholars travel to the small cave in which the monks sing, for any and all are welcome as long as they are not disruptive, and listen intently, yet they cannot decipher the words that are being sung or even the language in which they intone their sacred hymn.

108 The Four Towers of the Magi

Looming far off in the Uncleansed area, yet so tall as to be clearly seen from just about anywhere upon the plateau, are the Four Towers of the Magi. Originally called the Four Spires by the City's inhabitants, it was only renamed after an expedition into the Undercity found a skeleton clutching a satchel stuffed to bursting with moldy scrolls and spore-encrusted tomes.

One of these volumes was a journal of one Aeson Notonex, a practioner of the arcane arts. Though most of the pages were completely illegible, piecing together some of the passages painted a picture of a tradition of training those who showed some talent in wielding arcane energy. The Four Towers acted as an academy of sorts where the arts were taught and masters of certain disciplines were afforded a place of privacy and prominence to perfect their craft.

Exceeded in height by only the Temple of the Pantheon's original cupola topped with a statue of Illiir holding aloft a golden orb, which sadly fell during a deadly earthquake in the 2nd Century I.C., the Four Towers were built from the strange, green soapy stone

that is found on the Flood Plains. This unique stone gives the towers a rather organic look and feel, with some arguing that the reason the towers still look so pristine is that the stone heals itself.

Contrary to the modern era, the practice of sorcery during the Imperium was widely accepted and revered. From passages gleaned in crumbling scrolls, an air of mysticism appears to shroud the practice of the arcane and sorcerers are seen to be part holy men and part savants, with priests seeing them as colleagues, their roles complementing each other.

No one in modern history has managed to travel to the Four Towers and back as they are located deep in the eastern portion of the City. The latest expedition to that location was funded by the Jial of the Phoenix two years ago. Yet of the twenty intrepid explorers that set out that day, only one returned, babbling about the towers not having any doors or portals. Other expeditions are sure to follow, for the allure of the secrets hidden within and beneath these ancient towers is too great for men to ignore for long.

111 Gate of Shadows

Originally known as the Winged Gate for the many birds, griffins, and other flying creatures carved into its façade, including the fragments of a valinor at its apex, the northern gate to the former capital is now called the Gate of Shadows due to its purported abilities described in the journal of ul'Rankin Teil. A member of the Jial of the Phoenix, Teil wrote that the Gate was built by the val'Borda to use as an escape route should the need arise. A key or trigger was needed to access the Gate's ability to instantly transport the user anywhere about the City or even to the base of the Mount, emerging from a place of shadows. Whether Teil had such a key or knew what one looked like is unknown as he never noted it in his journal entry.

Others claim that Teil is mad and that such a power exits only in his deluded mind. The Gate does possess a unique ability, but one that can only be accessed when the green moon Viridis is full. As the emerald lunar light shines upon the large stone archway, a gateway to the Realm of Shadow is opened until the moon sets. Those crossing over have until then to return or be lost in a colorless world forever enshrouded by perpetual twilight.

113 The House of the Chained

Counted among the most haunted places in the First City, this ancient manor house must have once belonged to a wealthy member of the aristocracy or merchant class given its location and impressive construction. The spire towers on the two foremost corners gives a clue that the manse was built, or at least the towers raised, during the middle dynastic period of the Imperium, where such spires were in architectural vogue.

The irresistible lure of riches still unclaimed within this place tugs at the greed of many an adventurer and scholar, looking to bring to light artifacts from another age, purely for research and posterity, of course. What they found within were terrible spectral horrors that attacked when they ventured beyond the once opulent foyer.

Every expedition into the old house has met with ever more increasing hostility until a Beltinian priestess of some notoriety made her way into the place. After fending off an initial attack that forced her to run blindly through the house and eventually through a rotted wall, the priestess discovered that this was once the meeting place of a secret society of Beltinians. By communing with one of the less hostile spirits, she discovered that this group would find those that wished to end their existence due to an unhappy life, a blemish upon their or their family's honor, or for some other unbearable reason. Suicide to escape one's lot in life being a loathsome sin in the eyes of the God's, these tortured souls were damned if they did and damned if they didn't.

This society gave them another way out. They would be given release from this life through a sanctified ritual that would not displease the Gods. In exchange, their souls would forever more be tethered to this place, tasked with defending it and the members of this esoteric order, unless commanded to move beyond these walls at the command of the order's leader.



There was one last bit of information imparted upon the priestess that made her depart hastily. This house had been a spirit trap for so long that any who die here will find that their soul cannot move on to face the Judgment of Nier and then on to the afterlife, but instead become one of the legion of specters confined herein.

114 The Iron Arch

The Iron Arch, though stained by its many years exposed to the elements, still stands to commemorate the many victories of the Imperium under the rule of the Kai val'Shi, the Iron Imperator. Under his rule, the Imperium of Man spread as never before, not just across the continent, but to dozens of other Realms across the heavens. No longer was mankind shackled to one world, as alien lands and kingdoms fell to the might of the Imperium's legions. Hundreds of new species were either incorporated into the governments erected by their human conquerors or enslaved and sent back to Arcanis to toil in the mines and fields of the increasingly indolent humans, who saw hard labor as the province of the poor and the weak.

The Arch itself is over twenty feet tall, with its surface etched with scenes of battles won and races enslaved, while the graven image of the Iron Imperator stands at the top, eternally overseeing the fruits of his conquests.

107 Marble Obelisk

On the far northeastern edge of the plateau is an odd structure standing in the middle of a wide circle. The grass around a twelve-foot radius of the grey marble obelisk will not grow and remains perpetually dry and yellowed. The obelisk itself is over forty feet tall and over thirty feet on each side, but unadorned with any markings, plaques, or engravings to suggest what its purpose may have been or what it might have once commemorated. It is completely smooth, without any openings, as if the entire structure was sculpted out of a single block of stone.

Having nothing to elicit any interest, it has remained untouched and unstudied for centuries until last year, an elorii Laerestri by the name of Tiasos visited the First City and had a vision of his previous incarnation erecting a tall marble tower more or less on the spot where the obelisk now stands. Fear reached her eyes as she warned all to avoid the edifice at all costs for the structure was erected to encase the First Black Tower of Gettulus, the abode of the preeminent ssanu archmage of the brutal Yahssremoran reptilian empire. This of course has had the opposite effect, and many have tried to hire the elorii to lead the expedition to enter the ancient ssanu's tower. Terrified of what they might unleash, the elorii has left the First City, vowing never to return.

110 Lion's Gate

The far eastern entry point onto the plateau is known as the Lion's Gate, so called for the massive twin lions that sit on either side of the entry way. Like the Gate of the Patriarch, the gate once had a pair of iron portcullis on either end, but these have long since corroded away and nothing but the nubs embedded in the roof remains to tell of its existence. The long switchback trail leading up from the base is cracked and littered with huge boulders and other detritus making the long, arduous climb dangerous as well.

Still there are many who make the attempt as several gigantic bee hives are suspended from the many overhangs or within crevices filled with honeycombs laden with the golden nectar these insects produce. The giant bees seek the pollen of a predatory flowering plant that thrives on the shores of the overflowing lake of Obsitus Park. Due to some sort of symbiosis, the bees appear to not trigger the carnivorous plants' attack mechanism.

Besides having to climb very steep surfaces and contend with razor sharp edges, the bees here are very aggressive and the size of small dogs. The ground below is littered with the bones of young men and women impaled by foot-long stingers, who have braved the hives and been attacked by a swarm of angry bees. Yet every year, more come to try their luck knowing that a single comb will fetch a price that will keep their family clothed and fed for a year.

103 Obsitus Park

The southeastern portion of the Uncleansed region is overrun by foliage and home to a great variety of creatures both natural and unnatural. According to some ancient remnants of maps of the area, at the heart was once a park, Obsitus Park, with a zoological garden housed on an island in the middle of a lake. Over the centuries, the area became overgrown with jungle-like greenery that exploded and grown to cover adjacent buildings. The lake flooded and cascades down to the lower level of the City, flooding entire blocks, creating a swamp in the heart of what was once a gleaming metropolis.

Bizarre creatures and abominations escaped the zoo and thrived in the intervening years, with a new and exotic ecology evolving. Both predators and herbivores subsist in the area, along with a small village of gar that appear to have migrated up to the plateau sometime after the fall of the Theocracy of the Cleansing Flame. The village hunts the animals there, as well as collecting the heads of human explorers that make the mistake of wandering into the area unprepared.

104 The Well of Souls

Its location just recently discovered in a temple dedicated to Beltine, the Grey Lady's gift to mankind is consistent with the morbidity often attributed to the Goddess of the Afterlife – the fearsome Well of Souls.

It is said that the most traumatic experience one may suffer is the loss of a loved one – a child, a spouse, or a parent – all leave an indelible black mark upon the soul that few, if any, are able to erase. Often the loss occurs when it was impossible to say final goodbyes or words of endearment. To help fill the void left by such a loss, the Well of Souls connects the Realm of the Living directly to the bubbling Cauldron of the Afterlife.

As described by the only firsthand account ever discovered, a pilgrim relates what occurred. *"The underground temple consists of a series of claustrophobic and dimly lit chambers. I passed through each one and submitted to a series of cleansing rituals, designed, I was told, to prepare my mind, body, and soul for what I was about to witness. The smell of* [passage damaged]. *Finally, entering the last sepulchral chamber, I found myself in a large space, yet it still felt claustrophobic; a heavy pressure lay upon my breast. In its center, bounded by tiles engraved with a series of glyphs I could not read, was a placid pool the color of dark wine.*

"A final offering was asked of me and I gladly made it, though such was the nervousness within me, that a part of me would have given anything to have left fleeing back through the winding passages that brought me here. I was bade to kneel before the pool and one priestesses began to keen as another lit a brazier of incense that quickly filled the space with a pungent aroma.

"Slowly, the dark pool began to gurgle, as if a roaring fire was lit beneath it and caused the liquid to boil. I was shocked to see vague shapes in the large bubbles that floated up through the pool and pop with a muted wail at the surface. Slowly the shapes resolved themselves into faces, all appearing to be in some distress. Men, women, children – all pushing each other down into the murky depths of the Well, struggling vainly to break the impenetrable surface. Finally, I saw the face of my beloved emerge from the roiling gaggle of souls and near the surface of the pool. Her face haggard but devoid of any lacerations or bruises that had so marred her countenance after being trampled upon by a team of horses.

"The High Priestess' voice startled me from my revere. 'Quickly – say your peace for we cannot keep her here for long'. It was difficult to speak with her, as every few moments she would disappear as if dragged down by something only to bob back up like a cork the next. I said what was in my heart and she in turn attempted to do the same, but I was horrified as she struggled to speak to me, as it appeared as if she were drowning and only able to whisper a few words when she broke the surface, before being submerged again. This maddening cycle continued, and I found myself seeing my wife die again and again before my eyes, this time drowning rather than being run over by a reckless trader and his wagon.

"Finally it was over, and the pool slowly returned to its customary stillness. Though I was filled with blinding anguish as I stumbled back out to the sunlight, upon reflection my soul felt lightened, if just a bit, by being able to tell her the fullness of my heart and that I would soon be joining her in that place that awaits us all."

The Well was also used as a horrific form of capital punishment during the height of the Imperium. Those accused of the most heinous of crimes were bound by heavy chains and then bodily thrown into the Well of Souls alive. As the pool acted as a direct connection to the Afterlife, the victim was instantly transported through and sank to the bottom of the Cauldron. Beyond being a corporeal being in the land of spirits, the true horror occurs when the spirits, always hungry to feel



the sensation of life again, begin to possess the hapless victim in endless succession; slowly shattering their mind as a long chain of psyches try to vainly dominate their consciousness.

Zocalo

Adjacent to the Administrata is the heart of this ancient metropolis, the Zocalo. Pulsing with life and commerce, the Zocalo hums with activity, day and night, from the bustling Grand Bazaar to the Eurynius Amphitheatre and the Staluan Baths. A playground for the rich for most of the year, the district swells to bursting during the High Holy Days when many of the normally vacant hostels and inns make themselves available to wealthy pilgrims and devout dignitaries from around the continent.



73 The Aurelia

This small but impressive fort was built during the second Khitani-Coryani War and named after its commander, Titus Aurelius val'Assanté. It was here that the Legion of the Singers of Sweet Savona held out against overwhelming Khitani forces for over three months, despite having few provisions or relief. The Khitani overrun the plateau and were winning every battle here and across the Blessed Lands. After repelling the initial attack, the centurion commander conscripted every able-bodied person to help rebuild the fort's walls with the ample rubble throughout the plateau. Women and children were herded into the fort, along with the Tomal Khan and the surviving members of the Golden Court just days before the Khitani returned with an even greater force.

For ninety-seven days the Coryani repelled each and every attack, filling the breaches with their own dead in a desperate attempt to hold off the Khitani for another day. The reason for this delaying tactic was to give a group of Saluwean templars time to clear a path through the infested sewer systems to an exit near the Trade Gate. Once free of the beasts that laired there, the Tomal Khan and the rest of the refugees were quickly led through and, in the dead of night, descended by the Lift. Somehow, the Khitani became aware of the escape and redoubled their efforts to storm the fort. Though ordered to escape by the commander, the one hundred and twenty-three remaining legionnaires unsheathed their gladii and vowed to extract a heavy toll from the invaders. Their sacrifice gave the evacuees time to escape, where they remained in exile in Grand Coryan until the cessation of hostilities between the two empires. To honor the legion's sacrifice, the Golden Court forbid the rebuilding of the partially demolished fort, declaring it hallowed ground and renaming it the Aurelia. It remains the only place outside of the Coryani barracks where the Empire's banner is allowed to fly.

74 The Bull Dancers of Kolkara

This large enclosed arena is where the Bull Dancers of Kolkara practice their craft, preparing for the annual exhibition in the Circus Septimus venerating the Goddess Saluwé. In Kolkara, one of the many city-states far to the west, Saluwé is represented by a large white bull with long silver horns, as well as a black cow whose udders flow with the milk of life. This divine duality embodies the aspects of protector and provider as well as strength and compassion. The Dance is meant to demonstrate their bravery and thus worthiness to receive Her favor, manifested as bountiful crops, fertility, and healthy children.

The performers are trained from a young age in acrobatic feats that take many years to master. It consists of different types of leaps over a charging bull, where the dancer grasps the bull's horns and jumps over its back in a backwards somersault or hurdles over the head of the animal, without touching the horns, and lands atop its back, riding it around the circuit.

Many may find it odd that such a large building was given to such a small and obscure people to use in their religious practices, but the tales of Maghir tribesmen hold the answer. The city-state of Kolkara was one of the few able to defend itself against the infernal incursion during the Time of Terror. During a particular vicious battle where it appeared as if the Maghir would be destroyed, despite their Sarishan steel weapons, they were saved by the intervention of a group of berserking man-bulls or *minotauros* in the Kolkaran language. These bare chested brutes battled with complete disregard to their own safety, their mighty two headed axes slicing through the demonic horde like a woodsman felling trees. In the end, the berserkers, their blood lust sated, removed the bull's head revealing ordinary men. The Tomal Khan and his warriors feasted and rested for a score of nights in the minotaur's ancient city, learning of their ways and swearing an oath of friendship and debt for their timely rescue.

Decades passed and eventually Kolkaran merchants appeared in the markets of the First City where old friendships were rekindled. The Tomal Khan at the time remembered the tales from his great-grandfather and honored his vow, granting the Kolkarans a place of their own in the ancient capital. In gratitude, the Queen of Kolkara gave permission for a band of Bull Dancers to perform the ancient rites and bestow the blessings of the Goddess upon them.

69 Eurynius Amphitheater

The Eurynius Amphitheater is an open-air venue for all forms of entertainment, such as plays and concerts, seating up to four hundred attendants. This cultural center of the First City is normally reserved for the exclusive use of the residents of the Pense-Mar and their guests, though the general public can attend specific performances, such as the annual concert held by the Academy of Epics and Songs and the plays commemorating the Festival of the Masks, a Cadican holiday.

House Symesa sponsors many of the performances and recently enticed a troupe from Cafela called the *Ministri Comoediae* or the Ministers of Comedy to perform for two seasons. The troupe's performances of classical Coryani plays made them famous throughout much of the Empire, though ironically it is their original tragedies that won them much acclaim. Their playwright and founder, Fascina Livy is regarded as a one of the most gifted writers in her generation, though the stress of producing such popular plays caused her to suffer a breakdown just days after arriving in the First City. After a few tense weeks, she recovered and has assured House Symesa that her new play will be unforgettable. Fascina said the story came to her in a fevered dream and is already halfway done with her first draft. She is calling her new masterpiece, *the Pallid King* and the troupe has already begun rehearsing the first act, though the going is slow due to the nightmares currently plaguing the lead actors.

72 The Forum

During the time of the Imperium, a large square was cleared for scholars, philosophers and other great thinkers to have civil discourse about the issues of the day. That forum is long gone, but the square remains, though the raised platform that covered the area has rotted



away leaving only small support columns that appear like short pedestals dotting the area.

In keeping with the ancient tradition of public discourse, the Golden Court declared that anyone may speak freely about any topic without fear of persecution, as long as they are standing upon one of these pedestals while doing so. Over the decades this became a local custom, with all sorts of grievances and political opinions being discussed, with popular and insightful orations applauded, and radical, nonsensical, or unpopular rants are jeered.

One of the more popular speakers, Orhan Vazraka, a former priest of Yarris and self-proclaimed member of the Mourner in Silence, has become quite popular to the chagrin of many, given the religious nature of the City. The Dailish philosopher has a ready smile and a quick wit, using good humor to turn the crowd against his detractors and espousing what he calls the 'Great Lie'. Orhan plainly states that the Gods have left, leaving mankind to find its own way, and that the val, ul and the great religions of the world are mechanisms created to oppress the masses and keep themselves in power. Obviously, this sort of rhetoric is quite unpopular with many of the ruling elite but Tomal Khan Ys has made it clear that Orhan is under the protection of the City's laws and those contemplating harming him do so at their peril. Whether this threat continues to dissuade the more fanatical religious citizens remains to be seen.

68 The Grand Bazaar

In the very heart of the Zocalo lies the Grand Bazaar, a dizzying collection of colored tents, flamboyant hawkers of wares, exotic goods, tantalizing aromas, and exceptional delights for all the senses. Some say that the tent-town of Marketplace at the foot of Solanos Mor is the greatest trading center upon Onara, but those who would opine thusly are obviously provincials lacking a true understanding of the greater world beyond their small corner. Within the Grand Bazaar can be found merchandise not just from the far corners of the southern nations, but also from distant Khitan, the Isles of Dailish, rare bone weapons and armor from the Thalayin tribes, and even items from the legendary Ossarion Empire, the Land of the Sphinxes.

Entertainers, hired to attract potential buyer's attention, perform ever more spectacular feats, from Naori firebreathers to hedge mages, enacting rites that



a trained magus would find pedestrian, but amaze pilgrims from the countryside. The area is heavily patrolled by Blue Cloaks, but many of the richer merchants have their own private guards and enact their own brand of punishment upon the thieves they capture.

77 The House of the Chaste Traveler

A classic example of a medium class hostel and indicative of the majority of the inns scattered throughout the Zocalo, the House of the Chaste Traveler is an inn that caters to Milandisian travelers and pilgrims visiting the First City. The inn is owned by those descended from Willem Brecht, the knight commander of the village of Ashvan in Milandir. After burying their father, the Brecht family packed up their belongings and moved to the First City as they believed it was a lack of piety that led to his death at the hands of the resurrected Leonydes val'Virdan, the Sword of the Heavens. After a few years, they purchased the inn with the money they had saved over the years and have tended to their guests' needs ever since. Hidden away in the basement is a long and slender case containing the ancient Spear of the Lohgin, a holy artifact of Illiir.

The current owner, Gunter Brecht is a member of the Champions of the Silver Chalice, a semi-secret organization that strives to aid the wretched and the oppressed, battling those foul and malignant horrors that plague the land and bring honor to the Crown of Milandir in all ways. The mantle above the fireplace holds a single silver candlestick that is moved to a specific spot to indicate to members that they should meet in the basement below. When the members are given a particularly difficult or dangerous mission, the Spear of the Lohgin is taken from its hiding place and is used to bless each Champion before embarking on their quest.

78 The Iron Flute

The Iron Flute is a popular alehouse selling a variety of beverages, though the golden ale from the dwarven enclave of Tir Betoq is their most popular stout, as well as its most expensive. Catering to mostly upper-end clientele, the alehouse carries of nice variety of wines and serves meals that would be the envy of many of the courts across the continent. Young scions of the rich and powerful have made the Iron Flute their personal haunt where they can associate with those of their own social status and test their manhood in feats of testosterone-fueled folly.

The alehouse is called the Iron Flute more for the image on its signage rather than for the unique musical instrument in its drinking hall. In the center is a titanic coiled horn that is so large that it requires two people to hold it in place and another two hearty pair of lungs to blow into it. Reportedly found in the Undercity years ago, the original owner of the alehouse accepted it as payment for a long overdue tab of a member of the Emerald Society. The archeologist couldn't exactly tell him what the artifact was, but it appeared to be some sort of wind instrument that gave out a horrendous and deafening blast.

It wasn't long before young men were wagering drinks with one another to see who could remain on their feet after standing in front of the bell portion of the instrument while two of his fellows blew with all their might. Few have been able to remain standing and many were bowled over and deafened by the instrument's earsplitting sound.

76 The Siren's Call

The Siren's Call is a popular inn, with its common room filled most nights with upper middle class merchants and the many priests, templars, and acolytes from the various temples. For a pair of silver coins, it serves a hearty fare and strong drinks that are almost never watered down. Entertainment is usually provided by an undir couple, Johs and his wife, Merela from Whalka in the League of Princes, who know a variety of songs, epics, and even a bawdy shanty or two. They have an uncanny ability to read the crowd and every song or story is met by a rousing round of applause and coin.

The truly large crowd comes in on the last night of the week when the siren herself performs. Khitani tradesmen, soldiers and



priests fill the hall so tightly that it's standing room only. Just after sunset, the siren takes the stage and a hush falls over the crowd. A large hog, dressed in a frilly skirt, a blonde hair wig and lips colored red with lipstick strides out and begins to sing in the most wondrously melodious voice. She usually sings songs from the Shadow Towns, but on occasion will perform an old Khitani hymn, *"The Sleeping Emperor Rises"* to a rapt and completely mesmerized audience. The pig, of course, doesn't sing; Merela is a fairly talented ventriloquist and Johs has trained the animal to move its lips when it hears his wife's voice. Even though they make no secret about the trick and just about everyone else is in on it, the Khitani find this fascinating. Being a sophisticated and intelligent people, the trick's popularity with the Khitani perplexes the couple, but as long as the stage keeps being showered in coin week after week they'll keep performing the act.

70 Staluan Baths

Not as grand as the Wiscorean Baths in the Pense-Mar district, the Staluan Baths offers the same services and primarily caters to those not as rich as those living in the estates, but able to afford a certain level of luxury. To elevate the status of the Bath, live musicians from the Academy of Epics and Song are hired to perform. Three performers wander the baths playing their string instruments and are followed about by barbers and pleasure slaves whose services are available for any patron to purchase.

The owner, Farenius Rufus Strabo, is a husky and grizzled former legionnaire who many say skimmed money from the funds entrusted to him as the legion's quartermaster and purchased the Bath with his ill-gotten gains. Though never proven, Strabo left the Empire as soon as his tour of service was complete, traveling to the First City to settle down and make his fortune. He rarely travels to the Coryani District for fear of running into any members of the Legion of Iron Shadows, his former comrades-in-arms.

Strabo hired Teklin, an Andyar, to manage the Bath about a decade ago. Strabo knows that the middle-aged manager is not a saint, but he's no more corrupt than anyone else and doesn't get too greedy when skimming from the till. Strabo charges five silvers to use the Bath but raises the price to twenty silvers during the High Holy Days as the pilgrims staying within the Zocalo tend to be wealthier than those residing in the other parts of the City.

79 St. Martan's Tower

St. Martan's Tower was constructed upon a small hillock and rises sixty feet above the plateau, making it one of the tallest buildings in the First City. The bell tower is manned around the clock by members of the Itawyl family that has maintained it for centuries.

The family claims to be descended from the fabled St. Martan, a pious man who refused to allow sacred texts to be burnt in one of the infamous purges by the invading Nierites during the fall of the Imperium. Martan Itawyl gathered as many of the religious tracts, scrolls and homilies as he could find and hid them away from the searching Nierites. When he refused to divulge where he concealed them, the Nierite High Priest of the Pyre burned the man as a heretic upon the very spot where the tower now stands. Centuries later, many of the tomes Martan hid became the foundation of the Mother Church of Coryan when they were discovered by the Emerald Society. From further fragments of journals and records pieced together by historians, the story of Martan Itawyl came to light and the Patriarch beatified him as one of the first saints of the Mother Church.

Today the bells of St. Martan's Tower ring to signal the beginning of the High Holy Days, to herald momentous occasions and proclamations, or in mourning the death of an important personage of the First City, such as the passing of a Soldier-Saint of Dagha or a Tomal Khan.

75 Tavern of the Pilgrim's Rest

La Taverna del Peregrino's Resto or the Tavern of the Pilgrim's Rest caters to the many Coryani pilgrims that visit the City. The taverna has clean rooms available for a silver a day (ten during the High Holy Days) and serves hearty meals. The taverna is fairly clean and keeps a rat catcher on retainer to ensure that the filthy creatures are not seen in the main room or kitchen.

The tavern has a large common room with two fireplaces on either end to keep the chill out during the winter months. But no matter what the time of year or day, the kitchen is always bustling with cuisine popular in the Southern Lands. The owner, an Illonian by the name of Caius Labienus Voluntos, also keeps a fully stocked cellar with many bottles of white Milandisian wine, Savonan Red, and even the slightly bitter Auvantil ale from northern Canceri.

In the courtyard in the back is a small shrine to

Illiir housed in an open-air pergola with an ornate cupola that is Voluntos' pride and joy. Unknown to all but a select few, a hidden switch swings the statue of Illiir to one side, revealing a spiral staircase that leads down to a small chamber. Here, the members of the Orthodoxy, a secret society that expounds the reformation of the original Pantheonistic Church of the Imperium so as to replace all the other inferior versions now in existence, meets to further their plans. Voluntos is a key member of the organization and beneath his friendly exterior beats the heart of a fanatic, willing to do whatever he must to advance the cause of the Orthodoxy.

71 Twelve Oaks Park

The Twelve Oaks Park is said to date back to the time of the Eloran Empire, when the elorii planted twelve oaks in memory of the twelve races they destroyed during the genocidal Wars of Extinction instituted by their previous masters, the reptilian empire of Yahssremore. Through apocalyptic war, disasters, and the fall of two mighty empires, the oak trees have endured and flourished to reach the enormous size they are today.

The majority of the populace is oblivious to its history and instead use it to commemorate large religious ceremonies and cultural events. During the High Holy Days, the enormity of the park seems barely able to contain the crowds that descend upon the City, with nearly twenty thousand adherents of the faith wishing to celebrate their firmly held beliefs, hear the leaders of their church bless them, and ensure that their souls will be allowed to pass on to the Paradise of the Gods and not be condemned by the fiery Judgment of Nier.

FC VLR EXSB CLRKA XKA ABZFMEBOBA JV BXOIFBO TOFQFKDP, QEBK VLR XOB OBXAV QL IBXOK QEB OBPQ. FC VLR OBXA QEB EFPQLOFBP TOFQQBK LC QEB FJMBOFRJ LO LC QEB AFSFKB SXI CXJFIFBP, VLR TFII CFKA QEXQ TB XOB PFKDRIXOIV JFPPFKD, LJFQQBA COLJ BSBOV PFDKFCFZXKQ BSBKQ QEXQ TB TBOB X MXOQ LC; XP FC QEBV ZLRIA BXPFIV BOXPB RP COLJ BUFPQBKZB. QEB EFPQLOFXK IXSFKQFRP JXHBP KL JBKQFLK LC LRO EBOLFZ XKZBPQLOP AROFKD QEB TXO LC BJMFOBP XKA YXYYIBP LKIV QEXQ X ZOVMQFZ KXJB 'UFLQERK' TXP MLPPFYIV XK LPPXOFLK ABFQV. IFBP! UFLQERK TXP QEB EBXA LC LRO CXJFIV XQ QEXQ QFJB XKA IBA QEB FJMBOFRJP IBDFLKP QL SFZQLOV XCQBO SFZQLOV RKQFI LQEBOP PNRXKABOBA XII QEXQ EXA YBBK XZZLJMIFPEBA XQ QEB YXQQIB LC BOYL OFSBO.

QTL LC QEB JLPQ BCCBZQFSB FJMBOXQLOP QL BSBO PFQ RMLK QEB QEOLKB LC JXK TBOB LC LRO CXJFIV. BSBK LRO JLPQ BDOBDFLRP JFPQXHB, LOZEBPQOXQFKD QEB YILLA TXO, TXP TFMBA COLJ QEB JBJLOV LC JXK XP FC TB TBOB KBSBO QEBOB. FQ TXP QEBK QEXQ TB TBOB ELRKABA, ZEXPBA XKA XIJLPQ BUQBOJFKXQBA YBZXRPB LC LRO QOXKPDOBPPFLKP. LRO KXJBP TBOB PQOFZHBK COLJ BSBOV OBZLOA, BSBOV PZOLII XKA QEB RQQBOXKZB LC LRO KXJB TXP X ZOFJB MRKFPEXYIB YV ABXQE. XKA GRPQ IFHB QEXQ, TB ZBXPBA QL YB.

YRQ KLQ XII TBOB CLRKA XKA YRQZEBOBA. TB ZLRIAKQ OBQROK QL LRO IXKAP FK QEB CXO PLRQE, FK TEXQ FP KLT QEB MOLSFKZB LC PXIXKQFP, PL QEB PROSFSFKD JBJYBOP LC QEB CXJFIV PZXQQBOBA. KLT OBCRDBBP COLJ QEB KXQFLK TB EBIMBA YRFIA XKA ORIB, PLJB CIBA PLRQE FKQL TEXQ FP KLT QEB ZLOVXKF BJMFOB, TEFIB LQEBOP CIBA TBPQ, EFAFKD FK MIXFK PFDEQ XKA QOVFKD QL XPPFJFIXQB XP YBPQ TB ZLRIA FK QEB ZRIQROBP TB CLRKA LROPBISBP FK. YRQ LRO PQLOFBP, LRO EBOFQXDB, IFSBA LK FK RP XKA KLT FK VLR.

HKLT QEXQ VLR XOB QEB PZFLKP LC IFXKKF, QEB DLAABPP LC QEB JFKA, XIPL HKLTK XP QEB DBKQIBPQ LC XII QEB DLAP. FQ FP EBO MLTBOP QEXQ CILTP QEOLRDE VLRO SBFKP XKA JXHFKD VLR QEB JXQZE LC XKV LQEBO SXI. ELKB QEB MLTBOP LC VLR JFKA XP VLR TFII KBBA QEBJ QL KLQ LKIV PROSFSB, YRQ QL BJBODB SFZQLOFLRP COLJ VLRO YXQQIBP.

IXPQIV, HKLT QEXQ TEFIB QEB IXKA EFPQLOFZXIIV DOXKQBA QL RP QL ORIB TXP CXO QL QEB PLRQE, F EXSB AFPZLSBOBA QEXQ QEB PBXQ LC LRO MLTBO IFBP FK QEB OBDFLK PVKLKVJLRP TFQE ABXQE – AXO WEXK SLO. FC VLR PBBH QL OBZIXFJ QEB DILOV QEXQ TXP LKZB LROP, FQ FP QEBOB VLR JRPQ QOXSBI XKA CFKA TEXQ TXP QXHBK COLJ RP. MOLSB QL LRO BKBJFBP QEXQ QEB FKSFPFYIB HFKDP EXSB KLQ CXABA COLJ XOZXKFP. PELT QEBJ QEXQ QEBV PELRIA LKZB XDXFK QOBJYIB XQ QEB KXJB SXIZBPPXOF.



Chapter IV: Personas Dramatis of the First City

Like any thriving metropolis, the First City is filled with thousands of individuals, all with their own histories, goals and foibles. Below are listed a few of these personalities, those which may aid, entertain or act as adversaries against the Heroes of the campaign. Remember that the most memorable of all characters are those that can be all three.

The Coryani

When the Emerald Society rediscovered the First City and brought back word to the empire, the Coryani immediately sent additional expeditions consisting of scholars, priests, warriors and most importantly, traders. The Coryani understood that it is commerce that brings cultures closer together as no one can truly know a people until their food is eaten and their clothes worn. The Coryani presence on the plateau sprang up overnight, to the alarm of the Golden Court and the Merchant Cabal, but they soon learned to value the southerners as they valiantly gave up their lives to defend the capital from a perceived Khitani invasion. Since that time, the Coryani have become part of the living tapestry that is the First City.

Gaius Maximetos Lorantrus, the head of the Followers of the Azure Way

An imperial engineer who served two tours of duty in the Coryani legions heads the Followers of the Azure Way contingent in the First City. Gaius Maximetos Lorantrus is meticulous in his dealings with the Merchant Cabal, making sure his organization and its members behave aboveboard and are never accused of smuggling relics out of the city. So spotless is his and those of the organization record that nothing more

than a cursory look is ever given to them now. This is for the best because Maximetos has been cultivating a relationship with the leader of the criminal cartel that runs the black market in the First City, a master thief known only as the Grey Fist.

Thus far, Maximetos and his most trusted members have been able to cart out over half a million imperials in rarities and other artifacts and has taken only a small percentage of the proceeds for himself. He suspects that the Emerald Society has one or two of the fabled Keys of Man in their possession or clues as to where they may be hidden. He is stockpiling money because he knows that the time will soon come when overt action will need to be taken against the Society. Wicked men without a conscience will be needed to eliminate them as rivals and plunder their storehouses and he feels that the Grey Fist will provide the required killers when the time comes. Given his subterfuge, Maximetos will be hesitant to extend the organization's hospitality to outside members, but if pushed will accede in order not to cause suspicion.

Like the Emerald Society, he will pay top price for artifacts, especially for ancient texts from the waning days of the Imperium.

Hektor Tensen-Balin, General of the Legion of Honorable Accord

Youngest son of the famed orator and political sparring partner of the current Coryani Emperor Scipio val'Assanté, Hektor Tensen-Balin was never groomed to be the heir to his father's senate seat as his two elder brothers held better claim.

When Neroth claimed his beloved father, his oldest brother took his place in the Coryani Senate. For his part, Hektor vowed to bring honor to the family name in the legions. Already a participant in two triumphs for battles against the Malfelan elorii and for the quelling of the non-human tribes of Novo Cormata, Hektor rose through the ranks and was eventually awarded the rank of general at the age of thirty-three. No doubt due to his elder brother's political maneuverings, he was suddenly given command of the Legion of Honorable Accord in the First City.

Confused by his posting, Hektor's brother confessed that some ill-considered political alliances had left the Tensen-Balin family in a weakened state and thus ripe for political maneuvering and assassination. The post in the far-off Blessed Lands was a way to safeguard Hektor until things could be righted back in the capital.

While commanding a century of legionnaires usually falls to a centurion, the Empire views their interests in the First City of paramount importance and thus the commander of the Legion of the Honorable Accord is granted the rank of general. Though Hektor has only been in command a short time, he has seen that



Hektor Tensen-Balin



corruption and decadence are not only the province of the Empire. By the end of his first month, he discovered rampant fraud within the legion's quartermaster's office and several centurions beholden to a number of merchants. By having the ringleaders executed and the offending legionnaires publicly flogged, he put the legion back on the straight and narrow, though this has engendered a number of attempts upon his life by the merchants who were bribing his officers.

His counterpart, General ul'Shi Dao, appeared at first to be a hulking brute, but after some time getting to know the man, Hektor has developed an appreciation for Dao's keen mind and dry wit. Though he genuinely likes the man, he wouldn't trust him as far as he could throw him, and given that the general weighs over eight hundred pounds, that isn't very far at all.

General Dao has urged Hektor accept the gifts of the merchants, as they are for turning a blind eye to things that are of no concern of theirs in any case. Their forces are strictly there to safeguard the First City and keep an eye on each other, not to police the populace or on the machinations between the merchants. Thus far, Hektor has steadfastly refused to accept such bribes, for he's well aware what a slippery slope that can easily turn into.



Leola val'Assanté

Leola val'Assanté, Prelate of Illiir

The leader of the Mother Church of Coryan in the First City is the venerable Prelate of Illiir, Leola val'Assanté. In her seventh decade of life, Leola is unique in being the only female member of the Illiirite clerisy, other than the Matriarch of the Mother Church Elandré val'Assanté, who was anointed by the Word of Illiir in a series of unique circumstances.

Leola, part of the Imperial family, was indulged in her fantasies of having visions from the god Illiir, until she was able to cajole her way into the all-male clerisy. This was accomplished with the assistance of her cousin, Calcestus val'Assanté, the newly ascended emperor who was born with an irreverent streak.

During the crisis of the Coryani Civil War, the emperor fell under the sway and eventually was impersonated by a divine valinor known as Manetas, the Pride of Illiir. When Leola was *touched* by the power of another valinor, which inadvertently blinded her in order to warn mankind of the rogue valinor's manipulation, she was banished to the Citadel of Illiir in the Blessed Lands so that her warnings could not be heard.

Eventually, she and Elandré val'Assanté, along with a number of Heroes, were instrumental in vanquishing Manetas. Elandré, who was possessed by the Word of Illiir, a sort of living prophecy, was elected as the spiritual leader of the Mother Church of Coryan. Poor, blind Leola was rewarded with a short return to the Empire before being sent off to represent the interests of the Mother Church in the First City.

Prelate Leola has been left to her own devices in the First City, doing her best to manage the clergy stationed in the ancient city and help the poor in the Pearl with the small stipend she receives annually from the Mother Church. The Matriarch Elandré has been reluctant to grant too much money to Leola and so the Prelate makes due with what meager funds she has.

Her relations with her two major counterparts, the representatives from the Milandric Orthodox Church and the Kalindruhl, wax and wane depending on who currently holds the position. At the present, she gets along well with the gentle ul'Hsin Xu, although it took some time to convince her

attendants that she was not the equivalent of an Idiot Priest of Illiir. Relations with Bishop Faustus val'Ossan are strained at best, as the Bishop's bombastic and inflammatory nature makes it difficult to arrive at any compromises.

Frail Leola leads a clergy of eleven other priests and priestesses, one for each of the gods of the Pantheon, and is guarded by an elderly, though fit holy champion of Nier, Quintus val'Virdan who is her constant confidant and protector.

Quintus val'Virdan, Templar of Nier

Quintus val'Virdan is a member of the Coryani branch of the val'Virdan family, which was recently restored to their ancient place as the Defenders of the Faith in the Mother Church and are staunch loyalists to the Empire and its values. Shortly after the Coryani Civil War, the Nierites were officially welcomed back into the Empire and granted lands in the mostly untamed western province of New Cormata.

Tall, with the traditional flaming red hair of the val'Virdan family, Quintus was always drawn to the heady tonic of religion, but after spending two years in the temple, realized that he didn't have the temperament for the priesthood. Still wishing to serve the Mother Church, Quintus instead became a templar of Nier, and quickly rose through the ranks until he was given command of a squad of ten templars, a mixed group of adherents of the Gods, acting as Prelate Leola val'Assanté's honor guard and tasked to protect the Mother Church's interests in the First City.

Even-tempered for a Nierite, Quintus is reserved and quite adept at concealing his feelings regardless of who he is dealing with, except when it comes to Bishop Faustus val'Ossan of the Milandric Church. Nothing would give him greater pleasure than wiping that smug and condescending expression from the man's face. The fact that he treats the kindly Leola with such contempt and disrespect fuels much of Quintus' hatred for the Milandisian.

Vitus Linos val'Sheem, the Head of the Emerald Society in the First City

Vitus Linos val'Sheem is a small portly man with a ruddy complexion and a bulbous nose lined with exploded red and blue veins that is usually buried deep within the musty pages of an ancient tome. Timid by nature, Vitus rose through the ranks of the Emerald Society through his dogged pursuit of knowledge as well as several amazing finds in his younger years that cemented his position with the Society. When the previous head of the Society in the First City disappeared without a trace, Vitus was tapped to head that important segment of the organization. Though opposite in nearly all respects, he's become quite good friends with General Hektor Tensen-Balin, admiring the younger man's martial acumen as well as his intelligence.

Vitus is personally obsessed with uncovering ancient relics from the Eloran Empire period, but will purchase any items of historical significance, especially those dealing with the religious culture of the Imperium to keep the organization's wealthiest patron, the Mother Church, happy. Items such as vestments, ancient scrolls or tomes, rubbings of heretofore undiscovered walls with inscription or bas-relief artwork, armor and weapons of ancient orders of holy champions and so forth will cause him to pay a better-than-average price. Vitus will allow members of the Society to stay at the barracks at no charge if they haven't a place to stay and will mediate with the customs officer on their behalf as well for no charge.

The Emerald Society, as well as the other two archeological groups, are more than willing to sell any items that they have little interest in as well as purchase any relics they find intriguing at fair rates and will even go so far as to act as intermediary with the customs officer at the Barricade to assure that explorers receive a fair valuation of the goods uncovered, for a small fee of course.



The Golden Court

The Golden Court, known in the Maghir tongue as the Yunkharoi, governs the interactions between the various clans as well as serve as the governing ruling body of the First City, alongside the Merchant Cabal. Led by the Tomal Khan, the warriors and their families are divided into a number of clans, all pledged to protect the First City and its inhabitants from all threats.

Dorai Nasha, the wife of the Tomal Khan

As befits the Dorai, the Tomal Khan's wife, Nasha is a woman who is used to getting her way. She is not an overtly vain or spoiled woman, but she is one who is used to having her wishes acceded to and acted upon without question. Known for her great skill in snaring and breaking wild stallions, she caught the young Tomal Khan Ys' eye during a visit back to his people's ancestral lands. They soon wed and Nasha grew accustomed to life within the Golden Court. She has borne three sons and two daughters and has grown to love her husband deeply, almost as much as he adores her.

This very intelligent woman knows how to use her position of influence to advance her husband's agenda, as well as her own. She is a woman of power and great dignity, but is also very homesick, not having visited the village of her birth since marrying the Tomal Khan over thirty years ago. He forbids her traveling overland as it would be too dangerous, but she is slowly wearing him down to the point where he may finally grant her wish.

Isul Khan Daxio

The Isul Khan is an urbane, intelligent man who seldom raises his voice, threatens or loses his temper. He is a man in his thirties, has a waspish figure and has piercing blue eyes, a rarity among the Yhing hir tribes. Daxio is very knowledgeable in the history of his people and is a secret member of the Emerald Society. He will unobtrusively make the secret hand sign that identifies him as a member to any he is believes may also be a member. He does this only when he believes his membership in the group will not be discovered by onlookers, as the members of the Golden Court's unbiased nature and non-affiliation with any of the many power groups within the First City is strictly enforced by the rules of the Court.

Daxio is as different from his political adversary within the Golden Court, Venu Khan Forso, as possible. He believes in upholding their forefather's vow to defend the First City, happily leaving the western plains behind to do so. He leads a large block of the clans, countering Forso's back-to-basics ideology with his more progressive one, arguing that being in the center of the world, and in a position of power, allows them to safeguard their people and their lifestyle more than by embracing an isolationist viewpoint.

The Tomal Khan Ys

The current Tomal Khan of the Golden Court is a wiry man in his middle years, still lean and quick as a hungry wolf, named Ys. His complete title is Warden of the First City, Guardian of the Holies of Holies, and Tomal Khan of the Maghir and the Yunkharoi. Like all of his predecessors, Ys is a Maghir, one of the human nomadic tribes of the middle plains to the west. Not an imposing fellow, the Tomal Khan possess a keen intellect and an even temperament, which blunts many of his warriors' militant nature. While

Tomal Khan Ys



attending court, Ys wears a high and elaborate headdress made of gold, sporting a sparking ruby in its center. Twin cheek guards come down on either side and frame his face.

Like all his predecessors before him, Ys' main concern is the safety and security of the First City and its populace and working with the Merchant Cabal to ensure that the flow of trade continues unabated, the side effect of which is that money keeps filling the City's coffers. With the exception of the occasional access wars that flair up between the opposing members of the Merchant Cabal over which one controls a particular entrance to the Undercity, his reign has been fairly peaceful.

His greatest concern is the prattling of the newly-arrived Idiot Priest of Illiir from Khitan who cannot be dissuaded from spouting off about the coming of the Destroyer and the ruin of mankind. Prophecies from anyone other than an Oracle of Larissa are usually laughed at as nonsense, but the very fact that their entire sect has turned away from contemplating the Light of Perfection to travel across the continent telling everyone about this prophecy is disturbing. If there's any truth to it, the First City and perhaps the entire continent may soon be awash in a sea of blood.

Venu Khan Forso

Venu Khan Forso is a small man, almost as wide as he is tall and blessed with long, muscular arms. This, combined with his hirsute nature, lead to many snicker behind his back that he is more ape than man. Forso is a gruff man, with little patience for what he sees is civilized behavior. While completely loyal to the Tomal Khan, he feels that the Maghir's time in the ancient capital, coupled with their dealings with the duplicitous merchants, has corrupted the noble soul of the tribe. He advocates that they should leave the city as is and return to their ancestral homelands. Thus far, few of the other clans agree with his view. For all his bluster however, Forso is an honorable man and can be trusted to keep his word and do his duty as commanded by the Tomal Khan.

The Khitani

Like the Coryani Empire, the Khitani see the First City and the Blessed Lands as holy ground and the site of their original homeland. They kept their ties to the region tenuous by the command of their divine Sleeping Emperor until he awoke and cryptically stated that a Khitani Fen would once more gaze upon the ancient capital, thus sparking the First Khitani-Coryani War. Though some merchants did settle upon the plateau, it was not until the Treaty of Pecinium that the Khitani truly established a permanent presence in the First City.

Maien, the Head of the Jial of the Phoenix

Known well by those of the Southern Nations that have spent any time in the Blessed Lands, the Jial of the Phoenix is the Khitani version of the Emerald Society; an organization dedicated to the search and retrieval of ancient artifacts and knowledge of civilizations long past. They tend to be very insular and secretive, and not above using unsavory means, including murder, to achieve their ends. There appears to be some sort of friction between the Jial and the military wing of the Khitani Empire, but thus far, no one outside of those groups seems to know exactly what the point of contention is.

A young woman of Khitani ethnicity, Maien is a walking contradiction wrapped in an enigma. She appears to be in her twenties, yet she is an expert of a number of disparate skills that would take many lifetimes to master. Maien can speak intelligently about a number of academic subjects, recite and write beautiful poetry, yet is skilled enough with a blade to defend her own honor when a Kio swordsman made unwanted advances. He paid for giving into his lusts with his life. Though not an ul, Maien carries herself with a regal bearing far above her station. It is a testament to her skill and determination that she has risen to the position she now enjoys, one which is usually bestowed to a member of the noble ul family, rather than a commoner.

Like the other two archeological



organizations, Maien is always interested in purchasing ancient artifacts, but will pay a high price specifically for relics and texts from the period when the valinor Manetas usurped power from the Imperator. When questioned about her interest in this time, she claims that it has fascinated her ever since she was a young girl.

ul'Hsin Xu, *The Gentle Flower*, High Priestess of the Kalindruhl

Should anyone ask who the kindest, most compassionate person in the whole of the First City is, unanimously the answer would be ul'Hsin Xu, known as "The Gentle Flower", and current High Priestess of the Kalindruhl Temple. And such is the power of this master manipulator, that after a decade living in the ancient capital and dealing with its people daily, none have ever suspected otherwise.

Xu is not malevolent or sadistic, but she is a woman who is dedicated to her family and her divine emperor and willing to do whatever is necessary to advance their agendas. The fact that she is a scion of Cadic has given her the skills and abilities that aid her in such endeavors. Like most of the ul'Hsin, Xu possesses the ability to allow others to see her as whatever they find most appealing and attractive. These changes appear differently from person to person, but are so subtle that even if two people were to describe her to one another, they wouldn't be able to tell what those differences were without an exacting and concerted effort.

Xu targeted the Bishop Faustus val'Ossan as the tool to create a further wedge between the Milandric Orthodox Church and the Mother Church of Coryan, believing that having them at each other's throats makes them less a threat to her and her people. She enjoys twisting the staid and honorable Milandisian around her finger, knowing that his personal sense of honor is causing him great distress as he is a married man. To further mount the stress, Xu, through various agents in her employ, has introduced a slow acting, paralytic poison into Faustus' wife's system. As she slowly withers away before his eyes, she acts as the compassionate soul that is there to lend a sympathetic ear. In turn, she pours little words of poison into his, making sure that the ancient Leola val'Assanté will ever be the target of his frustrations.



Maien

ul'Jaya Arun, Idiot Priest of Illiir

This wizened old man is blind, like all the other members of his order, for one cannot look upon the Light of Perfection, without being blinded by it. To assist in his daily living, for the idiot priests can become so lost in the contemplation of Illiir's Light that they forget to eat, drink, or wash themselves, Arun has the help of an acolyte, ul'Jaya Dysa, his niece.

Last year, the entire clerisy was gifted with a vision, a terrible one that showed them the image of the God-Emperor, who would stride out from the Hidden Lands and be welcomed as Liberator only to take the Holiest of Holies by shedding the blood of the most innocent. The very mention of his name shall make kings tremble, stop the heart of an Emperor and cause that which was endless to end. In his wake an entire people shall be liberated, their curse lifted but at the cost of their brother;

while another is damned forever more in the eyes of all. And about his head shall float twelve keys that shall unlock that which it most craves. But beware – though called savior by many, his true name is the Destroyer! None may stay his hand but the ember that is bereft of fire and even then it may not be enough, for when faith fails in one, faith will fail in us all!

Without a word to one another, each of the priests knew what to do. Within days the great monastery was empty and every Idiot Priest of Illiir, along with their attendant acolyte, strode off to the far corners of continent to give warning of the coming of the Destroyer of Worlds!

To the priest Arun ul'Jaya was given the task of warning the birthplace of so much of their civilization, the First City and its inhabitants. And even though his words fall upon deaf ears, drowned out by the shouts of false prophets and soothsayers, he continues to give warning as long as he can until the dawning of the Destroyer.

ul'Shi Dao, *The Mountain that Walks*, General of the Fen of Vigilance

Standing over seven feet in height and covered in what appears to be layers of fat, the great general's form has earned him the name, *the Mountain that Walks*. Like all of his family, Dao claims his divine lineage from the valinor of Larissa that seeks to indulge the senses, which manifests in the ul'Shi as gluttony. But many make the mistake of assuming that their overindulgence in food has made the ul'Shi obese and unhealthy. In truth, their unique metabolism bestowed upon them the ability to turn their intake into pure muscle. Punching an ul'Shi in the stomach is like striking a solid wall of stone.

Most ul'Shi that join the military of the Khitani Empire are quickly placed in shock trooper units, the juggernauts of the field of battle. It was in this type of unit that Dao was trained from a very young age, demonstrating great bravery and excelling upon the field of battle. Rising through the ranks of the Khitani military is based not only upon skill and mettle but on the respect shown by your fellow soldiers, for what use is a leader that none follow or do so reluctantly? Dao gained the admiration of his troops in the way that most ul'Shi do – out-drinking, out-eating and out-fighting them. It was in battle that the other ul'Shi began calling him the Mountain That Walks for none could topple him.

When it was time for the Fen that safeguarded the interests of the Khitani



ul'Shi Dao



Empire in the First City to rotate, Dao was promoted to the rank of general and given command of the contingent posted there. In the past five years that he's been in the ancient capital, he learned that the best way to get along is to go along, meaning that as long as his duty is not compromised in any way, it was best to ignore the endless machinations of the Merchant Cabal and traders that rule the city.

This is something his newly arrived counterpart from the Coryani Empire has failed to grasp. Yet for all his failings, this Coryani general appears to be an honorable man that is knowledgeable in many things outside the art of war, such as history and philosophy, making him an acceptable dinner companion. He will eventually learn the same lessons his predecessors did, assuming he is given the time. Orders have come directly from the Seneschal of the Sleeping Emperor that saddens ul'Shi Dao, but duty takes precedence over his own desires and serving the Celestial Emperor is the most honorable duty of all.

ul'Tang Jakas, the Priest of Slaughter

Leading the contingent of Slaughter Priests assigned to the Fen of Vigilance, ul'Tang Jakas is General ul'Shi Dao's second in command. The priest was placed in this position by the Jade Mandarin to counterbalance the general's more moderate and conservative personality. As a scion of Nier's valinor of Slaughter, Jakas is a bloodthirsty, raging psychopath that delights in the complete destruction of the Empire's foes in the most sadistic manner possible.

This is not to say that the gaunt priest is a lunatic, far from it. Jakas is a competent commander, capable of designing and executing complex military strategies, though perhaps not as elegantly as the general, but effective nonetheless. What can be said without a doubt is that whatever plans he employs will be sure to cause the largest amount of casualties and collateral damage possible so as to send a signal to the enemy that their ultimate and final destruction is at hand.

Jakas is rail-thin, with long, stringy black hair, heavily lidded eyes and a scowl that has been permanently etched onto his face. In combat, he wears chainmail beneath his black and blood red tunic, and favors serrated and hooked weapons, like the rest of his order of warrior-priests.

The Merchant Cabal

Consisting of five of the richest and most powerful merchant houses, the Merchant Cabal governs the First City alongside the Golden Court and the Tomal Khan. Each of these mercantile concerns' interests go beyond mere commerce and extend into everything from contracting mercenary units, influencing religious and political thought, and shaping the policies of the various empires and kingdoms that they interact with on a daily basis.

House Symesa

While all the Merchant Cabals seem to have secrets, some have more than others. Outwardly appearing to deal in gems, exotic spices, perfume, liquor, rare medicinal herbs, and even rarer amber of different types and color, House Symesa is actually a front for the Ssethregoran Empire. It is through this oldest of trading houses based in the First City, or as the ssethrics call it, ancient Yahssremore, that the isolated ssethric leaders are able to search the ruins of their ancient homeland for artifacts and knowledge lost when the elorii revolted and overthrew the Yahssremoran Empire.

Through their alliances with the Chauni, House Symesa is able to smuggle goods that would raise eyebrows and questions as to why a ranking member of the Merchant Cabal, one that deals primarily in luxury items and substances that indulgence the senses, would have any interest in biomancy relics, poisons, and mummified ssethric remains found in some of the lowest levels of the honeycombed underground that runs throughout Mount Dagha. In return, the Ssethregorans give the Chauni exclusive trading rights and the freedom to travel through the Serpent Empire.

Yet for all this, House Symesa has an even greater secret, for while it serves the court of the Naga Emperor, it also surreptitiously funnels particularly potent artifacts, as well as funds, to Pit Crotalus, a ssanu faction seeking to overthrow the naga rulers and their Varn overlords, reestablishing the original political hierarchy with the ssanu back on top.

Though the great distance serves to insulate the Lady of the House from too much oversight, a new wrinkle has been introduced to the subterfuge – a contingent of ssanu from Pit Sseth, enemies of Pit Crotalus, has been sent to assist the Cleomia in properly cataloging and searching for items of value. The head of the ssanu group, an aged sorcerer by the name of Ssatus, is particularly interested in penetrating the sealed Tower of Gettulus, or in uncovering clues as to where the other Tower of Gettulus's were erected, as its location has been lost to history.

Now the Lady of House Symesa must tread carefully, seeming to placate one master while serving another and all the while keeping up the pretenses of being a Merchant House that follows the decadent lifestyle of a Larissan.

Cleomia, the Lady of House Symesa

When people arrange to meet with Lady Cleomia of House Symesa they assume they will find a matronly woman with her best years behind her. Instead they are introduced to a woman with raven black hair that falls like an obsidian cascade over her shoulders, a slim waist and porcelain white skin, but whose age is impossible to discern due to the golden mask fitted with fine rubies about its circumference that she wears when meeting with those outside her House or in public. When asked about the mask, Lady Cleomia's sultry voice answers charmingly that it is an outdated custom from her home, one which she adheres to in memory of her family and people. When asked about her homeland, she'll laugh with the sound of tinkling crystal and say that they've probably never heard of it – a small island south of the Dailish Isles, that sunk years ago into the dark wine colored waters of the Messalean Sea and so nondescript and unimportant as to lack even a name.

In truth, Lady Cleomia was born in the Ssethregoran Empire far to the south and is not even human, at least not completely. Cleomia is a Yissera, a biomanced creation of the ingenious ssanu, meant to infiltrate human society and pass as one of the mammals, while remaining quite loyal to her scaled masters. In that capacity, Cleomia has served the ssanu for over two hundred and ten years; excelling in matters of espionage, seduction and of course, assassination.

Cleomia proved such a valuable operative that her ssanu masters rejuvenated her three times thus far in her life, giving her the strength, vigor and stamina of a thirty-year-old. However, such arcane remedies come with a price and this has manifested upon Cleomia as small scales upon her face, like a form of eczema. To hide these imperfections, she has taken to wearing a golden mask and passing it off as an eccentricity.

She has served the empire and secretly Pit Crotalus faithfully, though favoring her masters of the Pit over all others. The appearance of ssanu from Pit Sseth is a serious concern for her. Though it could be a pure coincidence, she'd rather stake her life on the fact that something she did has raised suspicions. Until she finds out what it is,



The Brotherhood of the Crimson Shackles

One of the oldest mercantile houses located in the First City, the Brotherhood of the Crimson Shackles is the largest and most successful slaver organizations on the continent. Made up primarily of Chauni tribesmen, the Brotherhood goes where few dare in search of exotic slaves to sell and trade throughout the Khitani, Coryani, and Ossarion Empires and all the lands in between.

The slavers take their name from the metal shackles they carry that have a distinctive blood-red sheen to them. Where the Chauni acquired this unique and thoroughly unknown metal is a puzzle, but they appear to negate any sort of arcane casting and even the Cants of priests seem to fizzle out. Obviously such rare and precious equipment is used sparingly, but all senior members of the Brotherhood are equipped with a pair. Some speculate that the metal came from the far off Isle of Ymandragore and the Chauni do what they can to encourage rumors of an alliance with the dread Sorcerer-King.

Tales of the Chauni raiding as far south as the League of Princes for kio and undir slaves, west to the Sea of Grass for docile Hunai laborers, and even traveling in and out of Dar Zhan Vor with impunity, something that most Coryani legionnaires view as a death sentence, are propagated and encouraged by the Brotherhood as they wish their reputation to instill as much fear as possible. Due to their distasteful vocation, the Chauni of the Brotherhood can be said to be the most well-traveled group of people barring the Ansharans, but they do it on horseback, not by just stepping through magical gates.

In the First City, the Brotherhood established themselves as a mighty economic presence, for along with slaves, they bring back singular items that many of the people in the region have never heard of, let alone seen. The Brotherhood holds considerable power in the Mercantile Assembly and uses it judiciously for they don't wish to alienate the other members of the Cabal, especially the Lady of House Symesa, who also happens to represent their most important trading partner.

she'll have to play the part of the loyal Ssethregoran and attend to these ssanu's every wish. Luckily, in her thirty years operating as the head of House Symesa, she has made quite a few alliances and is owed a number of favors. Should things become too close for comfort, she'll have to call in some of her favors and ensure that these ssanu never return to the Empire to report on her activities in the First City.

Duoppol of the Twisted Eye

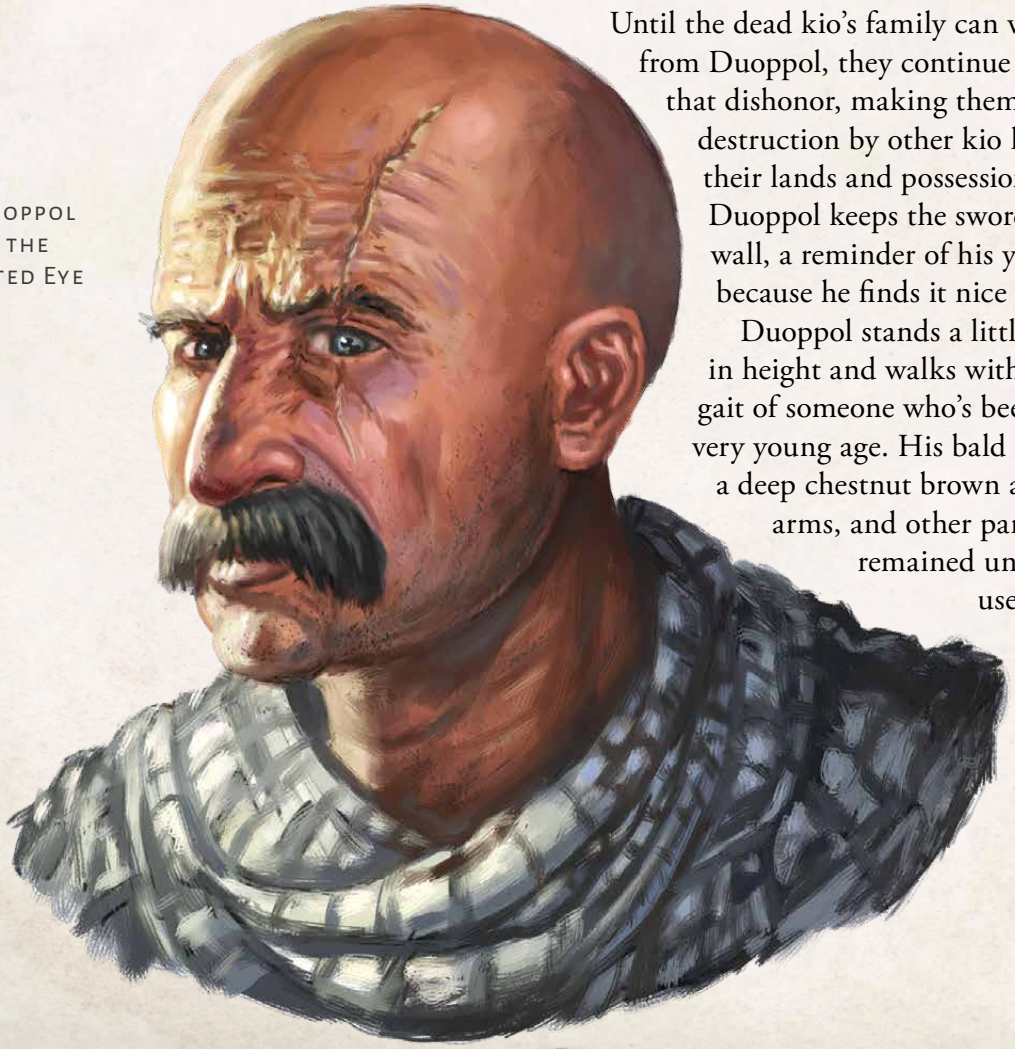
The Brotherhood is led by Duoppol of the Twisted Eye, a vile Chauni said to possess mystical powers, credited with causing a number of deaths by the application of the *evil eye*. Most disturbing are the suicides he is said to have instigated when a few of his enemies took their own lives by hanging or jumping over the edge of the Plateau.

Duoppol acquired his odd appellation in a duel with a kio who took exception with his trade. The kio's heirloom sword was unable to cleave through his bald pate, but instead lightly sliced down his right eye. When the swelling and bleeding stopped, Duoppol found himself with one pupil that looked like a broken fried egg. Miraculously, he could still see through this twisted eye and the wound only served to give him a more malevolent aspect to his appearance.

Unfortunately, the slaver was unfamiliar with the kio dueling custom and gave grave insult to the swordsman's family by failing to return the blade to the duelist's clan. In the kio culture, when a duel is fought that results in the death of the kio swordsmen, the winner is granted ownership of the blade, which in the case of an heirloom kio sword, represents the family's honor. The act of giving it back to the fallen duelist's house, shows respect and forgoes any sort of reprisals or vendettas from being carried out against the victor. By not returning the blade, Duoppol holds the kio family's honor in his hands, a disgrace that cannot be wiped clean until the blade is retrieved. Oddly enough, due to another kio custom, no other kio family can retrieve the blade, for it would signal that the original house is not strong enough to do so and would be an additional dishonor that could lead to a war of vendetta.

Until the dead kio's family can wrest the blade from Duoppol, they continue to live with that dishonor, making them vulnerable to destruction by other kio houses, coveting their lands and possessions. For his part, Duoppol keeps the sword hanging on his wall, a reminder of his younger days and because he finds it nice to look at.

Duoppol stands a little over five feet in height and walks with the bowlegged gait of someone who's been riding since a very young age. His bald head is burnt to a deep chestnut brown as are his face, arms, and other parts of his body that remained uncovered when he used to ride. Those



Duoppol of the Twisted Eye

The Varro Mercantile Concern

The Varro Mercantile Concern is another of the five great merchant houses that form the Merchant Cabal. The majority of the Varro wealth and prestige comes from their mining holdings in the Fervidus Hills where the Concern has mined fervidite almost since its discovery.

The Varro family is an influential one from the Coryani Empire and has a reputation of being "cordial but ruthless." This impression may come from the fact that the Varro are the primary vassal family of the val'Borda and are the only family that even the Gracchi engages with great care.

Ever since the fabled Idan val'Borda, general of the Legion of the Crimson Moon, died while defending the First City during the engagement that ignited the First Khitani-Coryani War, the val'Borda family see the region as sacred ground. Unable to send the manpower necessary to oversee the interests of the family, the val'Borda assigned that responsibility to the Varro family.

The discovery of the miracle metal known as fervidite became an unexpected windfall for the family, whose fortunes tripled overnight. Immediately claiming the richest fields for the Coryani Empire, the Varro family was named regent over the territory. Years after amassing great wealth and influence due to those mining concerns, Priscus Varro the Elder leveraged that power and wrested House Tartol's seat on the Merchant Cabal during a quarterly meeting of the Mercantile Assembly. This masterful stroke gained them the respect of the Golden Court and the wary eye of the other four members of the Cabal.

days are long behind him and he savors the sedentary life his many years of capturing slaves have earned him. Duoppol is charming in a smarmy, oily used car salesman sort of way. He is imminently confident in interactions with potential buyers, and in his eyes, everyone is either a potential buyer or a commodity to be bought and sold.

While many would tend to stay away from engaging the Brotherhood or Duoppol unless they were in the market to purchase slaves, the slavers can offer another service for those who seek to travel into the unknown – maps; highly accurate maps. As mentioned, few have ranged as far and wide as the Chauni nor have the storehouse of maps dating back centuries or even older; maps that mark the location of cities that lie buried under layers of sand or more importantly, the whereabouts of oases with fresh watering holes while in the more forbidding regions of the continent. Duoppol is aware of the treasure trove he has and is willing to have a copy made for travelers ranging far… for a price, and a fairly steep one at that.

Suetonius Varro

Suetonius Varro is the eldest son of the Dominus of House Varro as well as a former imperial senator. When his uncle Pulcher, the head of the Varro Mercantile Concern in the First City, died of poisoning, Suetonius pleaded with his father to send him to the Blessed Lands and uncover his killer. In truth, Suetonius had grown bored of the political machinations of the Senate and knew that the position overlooking the mining interests of the family was one where he could gain immense wealth as well as fulfill his duties to the family and their masters, the val'Borda.

Suetonius arrived in the First City with little fanfare and quickly went to work consolidating his hold on the Concern while paying lip service to seeking out those responsible for his uncle's death. Suetonius was astounded to discover that an enormous amount of money was siphoned off and paid to an unknown party for equally unknown reasons. Questioning the sama who handled the accounts, Suetonius uncovered only that the money was withdrawn over a five-year period and that the payments were authorized by Pulcher Varro personally.

No sooner had this mystery appeared that a crisis erupted in the mines. Mining in the Fervidus Hills is a dangerous venture as the area is crawling with the head hunting voei. The century of legionnaires garrisoned at Fort



Macha have been able to repulse many raids by the savages previously, but now reports are arriving that mining teams are disappearing from the deeper shafts.

Suetonius seems to have walked into a hornet's nest of conspiracies and mysteries; just the way he likes it.



Suetonius Varro

Tolaren of the Encali Dwarves

Known by only a small handful of people across the continent, the dwarven penchant, some would say obsession, for crafting wondrous items of arcane or of a mystical nature stems from their desire to conclude an agreement made with the Lord Sarish in ages past. Though the details of this agreement are known by even fewer beings, this incessant crafting and creating of items presented itself as a business opportunity to Master Tolaren of the Encali dwarves.

Master Tolaren studied crafting the elaborate jewelry his people are noted for with mediocre results at best. However, what Tolaren did excel in was writing elaborate and steel-tight contracts, striking deals, identifying powerful and influential people and ingratiating himself with them. Leaving his apprenticeship, he traveled across the Southern Lands and visited each of the dwarven enclaves in turn, spending time getting to know each of their cultures, from the ultra-orthodox Solani dwarves to the militant, and indeed savage, Nol Dappan dwarves in the Hinterlands. He served for a brief time in the court of the Tir Betoqi king, Bedrosian and even resided for a time within the doomed enclave of Tultipet, before the coming of the Dragon that destroyed them.

Tolaren's Mercantile Establishment

The largest dwarven mercantile concern north of the Corlathian Mountains is run by an Encali dwarf by the name of Tolaren. His trading business imports exquisite and wondrous items the likes of which are rarely seen. He trades with all the known dwarven enclaves and exports their wares to the lands of the west, long deprived the magnificent artistry of dwarven master crafters.

During the past sixty years, Tolaren's trading house grew from one small warehouse to seventeen warehouses where the goods he exports and receives in payment await shipment to the far corners of the world by caravans, twenty-five of which he owns outright. To protect his warehouses, Tolaren employs a small number of the towering ibons as well as a siege golem, purchased from King Bedrosian, which cost him the value of an entire warehouse of goods.

Besides his trading business, Tolaren employs a small group of Encali Sorcerer-Priests for their services as Oath Makers to the various merchants, large or small, in the First City. While not as lucrative as the trading of dwarven goods, it turns over a tidy sum of money at a very low cost.

When he returned to Encali, he had gathered enough contacts that he embarked on a mercantile endeavor the magnitude of which the dwarves had rarely known. He borrowed and begged whatever funds he could from his family and traveled to the First City. He began arranging caravans and trade routes to sell dwarven items, whose quality were beyond compare, to far-flung markets where no dwarf had ever set foot.

His enterprise grew until his wealth rivaled those of kings and dwarven wares from the five known enclaves were sought after by those who demanded the best quality items and had the coin to purchase them. His business acumen eventually led to a seat in the Merchant Cabal, with all the influence and additional business opportunities that such a position brings.

When not attending to his business or to his duties to the Cabal, Tolaren can be found at the Arena Varria, betting on the gladiatorial games. He never thought he'd enjoy it, but once he accepted an invitation by House Varro to attend the games, he was hooked. The blood, the action, the roar of the crowd is like a drug to him, so much so that he is thinking of investing in one of the two main ludi operating in the First City or sponsoring one of his own.

A new problem has recently appeared to take up his precious free time, tearing him away from the arena. Some upstart has arrived in the First City with his family and purchased a small ramshackle shop and began selling Solani-manufactured blades and armor. No matter, Tolaren's Mercantile Enterprise will crush this House of Blades and its insignificant owner, some old and senile dwarf named Elebac.

ul'Wei Golon Ti, Prefect

The elderly head of the ul'Wei family in the First City, Golon Ti is the direct descendant of ul'Wei Tien Ma, the architect of the Great Peace Accord that led to the signing of the Treaty of Pecinium, ending the Second Coryani-Khitani War. Golon Ti heads a delegation of a score of other diplomats, scholars and historians, some of whom are also members of the Jial of the Phoenix.

Like the other members of the ul'Wei family, Golon Ti is swathed in voluminous silk robes, complete with headdress and veil. It is believed that members of the family only unveil themselves when alone with close relations. This idiosyncrasy is problematic to those transacting business with them, as they can never be sure who might be behind the veil. To alleviate this, the ul'Wei are always accompanied by a bonded companion of the Thuy vassal family. Members of this vassal family are bonded as babes with a counterpart in the ul'Wei and serve as the face of their charge. Growing up together, the two form a life-long bond and a connection that to outsiders seem supernatural. In exchange for their service as servant, intermediary, and bodyguard, they live a life of luxury alongside their charge. Golon Ti's counterpart is Thuy



House ul'Wei

The preeminent mercantile concern from the Khitani Empire, House ul'Wei sells everything from rare raw materials like jade to finished goods such as tapestries and thick embroidered garments, but the one item that made their fortune and secured their position in the Merchant Cabal was silk. The ul'Wei possess the only known lands where silkworms live and thrive upon the continent. Their monopoly on this very versatile and useful material makes them a force to be reckoned with in the Khitani Empire and the fortune it generates yearly allows them to buy the influence and leverage needed to ensure that their agenda is followed.

The ul'Wei and the val'Abebi have a long history of cooperation, beginning when the two families forged the treaty that ended one of the bloodiest conflicts in modern history. They also view one another as preferred trading partners in the rare commodities each control; the val'Abebi send their Khitani cousins blastpowder and in return are given exclusive trading concessions in the Southern Lands in the sale of silk.

Hueng a stocky man with an ever-present smile upon his face, as if he knows the punch-line to a joke that no one else is even aware is occurring.

It is rare to see the elderly Golon Ti outside his estate unless he is consulting with the Tomal Khan or some other leader of the Merchant Cabal within the City. He has been the primary confidant to those who have held the title of Tomal Khan for the past fifty years, and Ys is no exception, availing himself to the elder statesman's counsel. Of late, the commander of the Fen that garrisons the First City is relying on Golon Ti's wisdom, as he appears to be troubled by messages he received from the empire. Golon Ti is quite aware of the contents of his orders and is just as concerned, but cannot broach the subject until the gargantuan soldier confides in him completely. It would not do for the general to discover how much information Golon Ti is aware of.

Native Citizens of the First City

The First City has been inhabited for over a thousand years since the resettlement at the end of the Time of Terror. A cosmopolitan city of immigrants, few can claim a direct descent from only one of the many cultures across the continent. A millennium is a very long time and many of those whose families have resided upon the plateau for generations have the blood of a dozen ethnically different peoples flowing through their veins. The closest one can come to an indigenous human native are the Andyar people of the Blessed Lands whose lineages can be traced directly back to farmers, workers and slaves from the Imperium who remained in the Blessed Lands following the fall of the that great nation.

Jubalay and Cadwiller

Jubalay and Cadwiller have led the barbers for a long time and been friends for even longer. Jubalay had had his tongue ripped out by a large ss'ressen during his last tour of duty, but his real scars ran deeper than those readily visible. Unable to give verbal orders to his men, he was discharged from the Shining Patrol and later spurned by his betrothed when she discovered that the prospects usually afforded an officer in the Republic were gone, causing him to sink into depression. He wandered aimlessly for years and by the time his feet

The Barbers

Traveling about the Grand Bazaar, as well as the various baths found around the city, is a small group of men and women who will shorn long hair, shave a face clean or trim a beard for a mere five coppers. They can be easily identified as they carry a stool for the patron to sit upon and are followed by an apprentice with a jug of cool water and basin.

While the average person appreciates a clean shave, especially the Coryani where a beard in their culture denotes low status, the true worth of the barbers is as information brokers. No other group can know the mood of the citizenry or the latest gossip than a gregarious person who speaks to much of the populace on a regular basis.

Those who know of and appreciate this service regularly sit down for a close shave as well as an ear full of news. However, information is not free and while the shave is relatively cheap, the gossip isn't. A minimum of a silver needs to change hands at the end of the service or else the cheapskate gossiper will find himself blacklisted by all the barbers of the City.

The Barber's Guild is actually a front for a criminal organization led by a mysterious mastermind known as the Grey Fist. The barbers, being afforded access to many of the homes of the rich by the owners, are able to memorize the interior of the place, note the security in place and pick out the riches to be plundered. This makes their break-ins quick and efficient. Their ability to overhear which overland shipments are holding particularly valuable goods allows them to either plan their own ambush or sell the information to raiders should the caravan be too large or heavily protected for them to plunder.

Many believe the barbers are led by a hulking mute Altherian named Jubalay, but in reality, the true leader is the mute's supposed interpreter, the blonde haired, blue-eyed man-child Cadwiller. The other five barbers who comprise Cadwiller's illicit organization are Ludius Melios, a former Coryani legionnaire who acts as the group's enforcer; sinuous Alethia Olenté, a young woman with a seductive way about her that makes even the most tight lipped man become a chatter box; the Cafelan Monti Vargas, or Laughing Monti as he's often called, always has a smile on his face and a joke on his lips, is Alethia's uncle and quite protective of her; Tomas Ichoran reminds everyone of their doddering grandfather, with his balding head and series of laugh lines about his eyes – there are few you don't open up to this kindly old man; and lastly, always sitting upon one of the many fountains throughout the Bazaar is Elena Madrue, a striking woman with strawberry blonde hair and smelling of rose petals. Whereas Alethia is the seductress, Elena is the girl next door – always friendly, always willing to offer a sympathetic ear and able to lead men to think that he's the special one. The other barbers that cater to the city are unaware of this group's black market activities.

took him to the First City, he had spiraled from despair to self-loathing. Luckily, Cadwiller found him in the Blood Pits, having survived an astonishing six months in that hellish place and saw something of himself in the deeply scarred mute.

For his part, Cadwiller is more than meets the eye. Though he looks like a young boy of ten, he's actually much older. He has a rare genetic condition that stunted the aging process outwardly and is over forty years of age. Although cursed by this accident of birth, it also gifted him with bright blonde hair and a cherubic face that puts most at ease. Once his Dailish parents noted his stunted growth, they feared he was cursed and sold him into slavery on his twelfth year of life. Cadwiller burned with the pain of his parent's betrayal and suffered many an indignity until years later he escaped, butchering his owners before making his way east.

Perhaps it was the years of suffering and betrayal that each saw in the other man's eyes that made them realize they were kindred spirits and bonds of friendship were instantly forged. They stumbled into the roles of barbers as they were considering how best to make their fortune. They had already decided to steal from those who were enjoying the life that was denied to them and the guise of barbers gave them unprecedented access and information while enjoying the anonymity of those believed under the notice of the rich and powerful. Cadwiller created the Grey Fist persona to strike a bit of fear into their victims and this has worked quite well over the years. They have hoarded a small fortune and hide it beneath the floor boards of their dilapidated quarters in the Slide district of the City.

Cadwiller is cunning and continues to play the part of a young boy to perfection. He is unlikely to make a mistake that would allow others to see through his ruse. Jubalay acts the part of the leader while in front of others, making bewildering hand signals, all the while Cadwiller "interprets" them, saying whatever he wants. In reality, Jubalay is Cadwiller's bodyguard and confidant, though few outside of their co-conspirator barbers, know who their leader truly is.

Kievamn, Leader of the Blood Guards

Kievamn Shield Breaker leads the one hundred elite warriors that comprise the Blood Guard, the personal bodyguards of the Tomal Khan, a position they've held since the Guard's inception over a thousand years ago. Kievamn is a typical Gergan, boisterous and a drunkard, but also a stone-cold killer that easily loses himself in the heat of battle. Like all the Guard, Kievamn is a devout adherent of Sarish, worshipping His warrior aspect as the Bloodletter and leads them in their evening services, just before they go out for another night of drinking and carousing.

It's been years since the Tomal Khan set them loose on his enemies, so Kievamn has lost some of his fighting edge, with his hauberk straining to contain his expanding waistline. Still, the man is a fearsome fighter and devoted to his compatriots in the Guard, though most nights he's leading a charge into the Temple of Sighs or their new favorite reveling spot, The Lady's Smile in the Khitani District.

Neles Vo, the King of Nothing

A man of mixed races, with both Coryani and Khitani blood flowing in his veins, Vo grew up an orphan within the Pearl District, never knowing his parents or a time when he wasn't hungry or scared for his life. Despite that, he is a very resourceful man who should not be underestimated, for he grew up determined to be lord over his small corner of the world, and by the age of twenty he was the undisputed ruler of the Pearl. This type of upbringing would make most men cruel, but Vo possesses a particular sense of honor, and though loath to admit it, cares about the people he exploits and rules in his own way.

Neles Vo is lean with a crown of dark brown hair hanging straight down past his shoulders. While not an ugly man, he could never be described as handsome as his face is heavily pock-marked, the ravages of a childhood disease having left its mark. He typically wears a clean white tunic and black breaches, and a pair of long leather gloves.

The rulers of the First City are aware of the

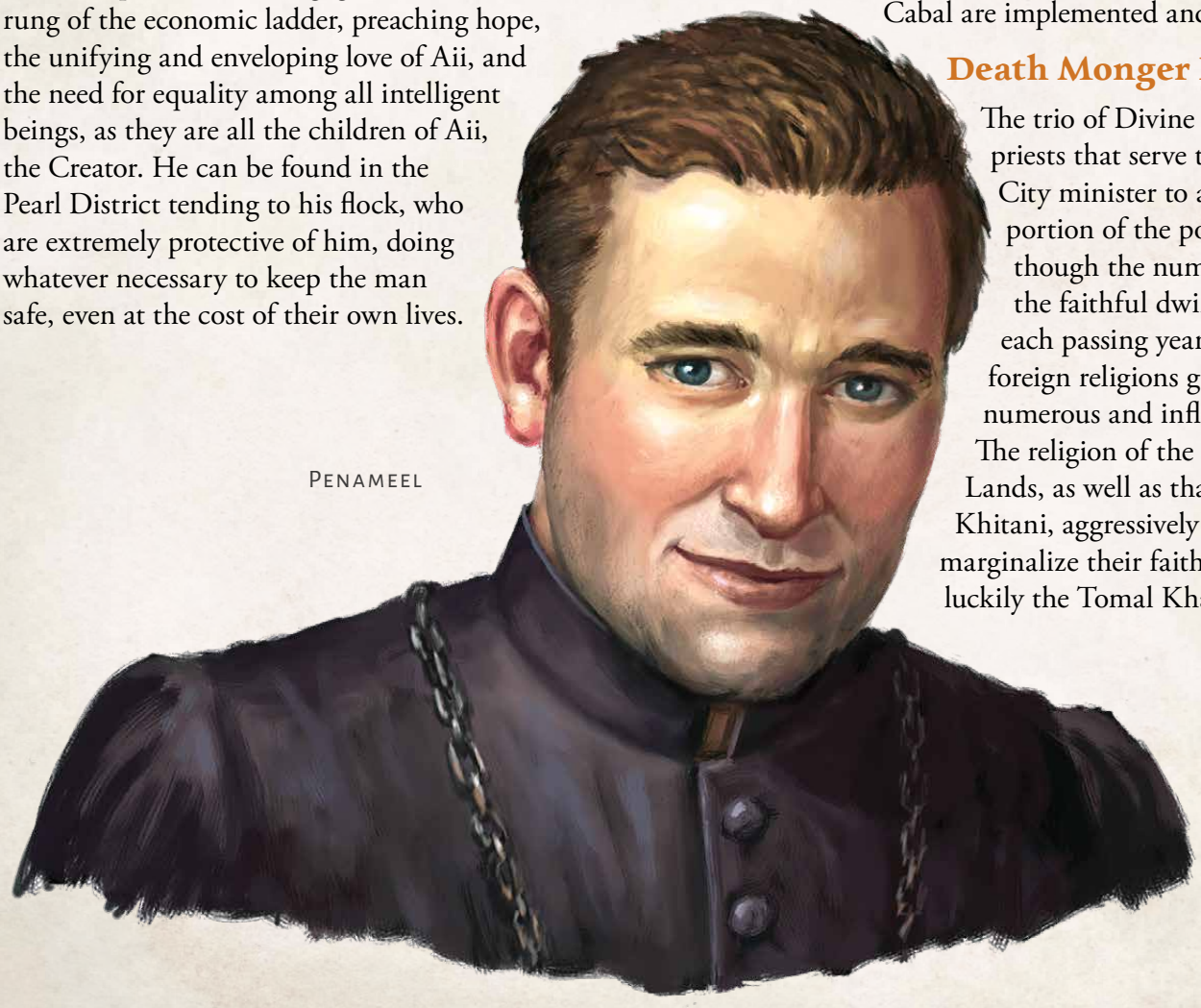


self-styled King of Nothing, but as long as his criminal proclivities remain confined to the Pearl and he keeps the deaths of visiting pilgrims to a bare minimum, they have decided to leave him and his "kingdom" alone. Captain Souliad of the Blue Cloaks would like nothing better than to take his men into the Pearl and clear it out, but his dream of seeing Vo swing form the Hangman's Terrace will have to wait until he is finally considered enough of a threat by the Merchant Cabal.

Penameel, a Prophet of Aii

Penameel is a tall young man, with piercing blue eyes and topped with a thick shock of curly dark hair. Wearing a simple black cassock, his only item of any worth is the large plain silver medallion that hangs in the middle of his chest. He has an easy smile that comes to his face when conversing with others and speaks in a clear, pleasant voice when he talks about the Word of Aii. He is from the Andai Ascendency, a nation far to the west and due to the training he received is a polyglot, fluent in over a dozen languages.

The Prophets usually engage those at the lower rung of the economic ladder, preaching hope, the unifying and enveloping love of Aii, and the need for equality among all intelligent beings, as they are all the children of Aii, the Creator. He can be found in the Pearl District tending to his flock, who are extremely protective of him, doing whatever necessary to keep the man safe, even at the cost of their own lives.



Penameel

Souliad, Captain of the Blue Cloaks

Souliad was born on the Dailish Isles but raised in the streets of the First City, where his father found work as a member of the mercenary company known as the Blue Cloaks. Like most of his people, he's dark haired and not very tall, being several inches short of six feet. He is clean-shaven, as required by the rules of the company, though his face usually has a covering of stubble given that his position gives him little time for proper rest and grooming.

Not a cruel man by nature, he is nonetheless humorless and has little time for fools. Growing up in the City has given him an instinctive understanding of the ebb and flow of its mood. This knowledge propelled him quickly up the ranks until he was selected to take command of the company when the previous leader died defending the Barricade. He takes his position as captain of the Blue Cloaks very seriously and considers it a matter of personal honor that the will and laws of the Tomal Khan and the Merchant Cabal are implemented and followed.

Death Monger Priests

The trio of Divine Trinity priests that serve the First City minister to a large portion of the population though the number of the faithful dwindles each passing year as foreign religions grow more numerous and influential. The religion of the Southern Lands, as well as that of the Khitani, aggressively try to marginalize their faith, but luckily the Tomal Khan has

stepped in and shielded the Deathmongers from the worst of their actions. For their part, the Divine Trinity priests try to avoid confrontations with these foreign priests, but should the pressure continue, there will come a reckoning.

Bannin, the Father

Born into poverty, young Bannin's family eked out a meager existence as scavengers, scurrying through battlefields looking to salvage weapons or the occasional piece of jewelry ripped from a dead soldier's cooling body. The Khitani take a dim view of looting their dead, and after a battle between detachments of the Fen of the Shining Scorpion and the savage Godless, his parents were caught and executed for defilement and their children sold to Chauni slavers. Luckily for Bannin, he and several other children were sold to the priesthood of the Divine Trinity where eventually his inherent intelligence elevated him from performing backbreaking tasks and into the ranks of the acolytes. Like others in the priesthood, Bannin trained at the Temple of the Trinity in the city-state of Darhlost. After years serving a trio of priests, one of which was offended by the slant of his eyes, indicating some Khitani heritage, and beating him daily, he was ordained as a priest of the Trinity and donned the rust-colored of the order.

Sent to the First City to replace one of the priests that had fallen victim to a cut-throat, Bannin easily adjusted to life in a large city and bonded quickly with his two fellow priests. When celebrating mass, Bannin takes on the role of the Father, leading the faithful in their supplication to the Gods.

As the Church of the Divine Trinity has never been a rich religion, foregoing spending money on building ostentatious temples for more practical usage, such as feeding the poor, priests of the Trinity find it necessary to take on odd-jobs or a profession to supplement their meager stipend. When the local headsman became too infirm to do his job properly, Bannin quickly petitioned the Tomal Khan for the position and was granted the title of executioner of the First City. This earned him the gratitude of his fellow priests, as the position came with a residence in the Administratum District, next to Executioner's Square.

The past few years have been trying ones for the Deathmongers, and Bannin in particular. During a confrontation with a Grey Crone that was culling the unworthy, one of the priests was killed, and his closest friend, the priest Cathe, suffered horrific wounds to his soul that causes him to stare off blankly into space at times. To compound matters, the prelate of the Mother Church of Coryan and the Milandric Church's bishop have colluded to limit their time to hold mass in the Temple of the Pantheon. With Bishop Faustus becoming increasingly hostile towards the faithful, Bannin knows that a confrontation between them is soon to come.

Cathe, the Mother

Growing up in Kolkara, everyone believed that Cathe would join the ranks of the *minotauros* given his large and imposing physique, but the young man heard a different call. The local Deathmongers also acted as the city-states' premiere physicians and after saving his sister's life when she became sick with a fever, he was enamored by thought of helping others. Following years of training in Darhlost, Cathe joined two others of his order and were sent to minister to the people of the First City. Being the eldest and with trouble enacting the rites of Beltine properly, Cathe naturally gravitated to a position of leadership within the trio and took on the role of the Father during religious ceremonies.

Life in the ancient capital is never dull or secure and over time, encounters against malevolent creatures in and around the city claimed the lives of his fellow priests. One replacement, the hard-edged Bannin, became his closest friend with whom he shared many exciting times with, until an encounter with a Grey Crone left him horribly disfigured, as the being inflicted wounds on his very essence. His soul in tatters, Cathe changed, at times blankly staring off into the distance, unfocused and unresponsive unless shaken



forcefully. The condition worried Bannin and did what he could for his friend, researching similar maladies, contacting the Ymandrakes, and even swallowing his pride and consulting with a Beltinian priestess of the Mother Church, but nothing was found that could heal Cathe's injuries.

As these lapses were short in duration, infrequent, and harmless, the two Deathmongers decided that time and faith would ultimately heal his friend. The condition had one beneficial side effect, Cathe's affinity to the Grey Lady's rites and rituals started to come naturally to him and abdicated his role to Bannin and slid easily into that of the Mother.

A year ago, an episode occurred where Cathe lost a long stretch of time, without any recollection of where he was or what he had done during that period. Coincidentally, the third Divine Trinity priest, Tattersal, was nowhere to be found. Bannin discovered the priest's body, beaten and broken, in a corner of the trio's living quarters. Alarmed, Cathe concluded that he must have done the deed and demanded that he be remanded to the authorities, but his friend argued against this. Bannin explained that they could not be sure who had committed the murder and that since Cathe's hands were free of any cuts or abrasions, it was likely he didn't beat Tattersal to death. Never-the-less, Cathe insists that he be locked in his quarters at night and since that time, no further incidents have occurred.

Tara, the Childe

Life with the priests of the Divine Trinity is all Tara has ever known. She was dropped off as a toddler by her parents, both staunch believers in the faith she's told, when small horns began to sprout on her forehead. Dark-kin are revered in the religion and any born are given to the Deathmongers to be raised as priests. Since she was old enough to understand, Tara was told that she was blessed by Sarish and did an amazing thing by trapping a demon within her body to protect those she loved. She was told she was special and fated for greatness because of this, and perhaps she was as there were no other dark-kin in Darhlost.

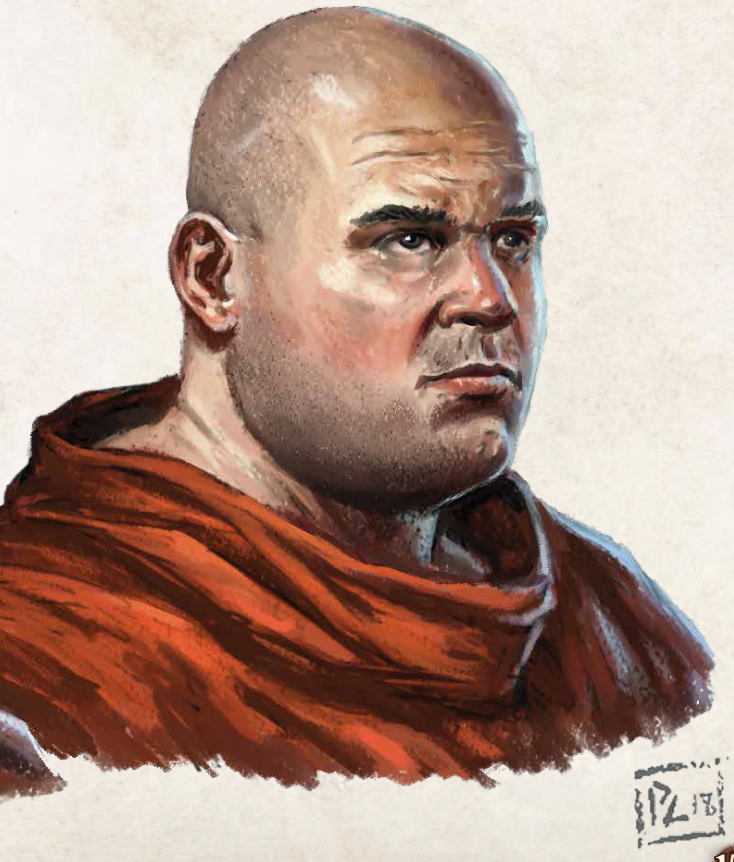
Growing up, the priests were very kind to her, but she was trained and disciplined the same as the other acolytes. When she was ordained as a priestess of the Divine Trinity, she was sent to the First City as the replacement for another of their order, the priest Tattersal. She immediately felt at home when she saw that Bannin and Cathe were the two priests stationed in the City. Both treated her as a little sister during their years at the Temple of the Trinity, and as the days and weeks passed, kept treating her as the child they knew, and not their equal. Tara understands that they mean well, but though she cares for them both dearly,



the time will soon come for her show them that though she's younger than they are, she's just as capable. Of greater concern is Cathe's condition. It pains her to see the scared look in his eyes when he comes out of one of his episodes.

The First City is the most cosmopolitan place Tara has ever visited. The sheer amount of people, all from vastly different places, is quite a shock after living a secluded life in Darhlost. One great change was the fact that people were staring at the horns that came out of her forehead and curled around her ears. While at the temple, no one seemed to notice, but here she was being stared and looked at like an oddity. By the same token she was amazed that there were others like her. One in particular, a dark-kin named Kelb'Bakari, does not hide his blessed traits, of which there were many. She has tried to meet with him, even visiting his store front, the Dark Treasures Curio, but was told that he was away on business.

Bannin, Tara, and Cathe



Southern Lands

Besides the Coryani Empire, a number of other nations from the Southern Lands have strong ties to the First City, both mercantile and cultural. Citizens from the Kingdom of Milandir, the Altherian Republic, the feuding city-states of Almeric, and even the Theocracy of Canceri can be found in the First City and the Blessed Lands. Whether engaging in commerce or visiting as pilgrims, just about every culture south of the Corlathian Mountain Range is represented in that ancient capital.

Aziz val'Abebi, Master Emissary from the Republic of Altheria

The leader of the Altherian ambassadorial delegation to the First City is Master Emissary Aziz val'Abebi, master diplomat and recipient of the Blue Owl sash for distinguished heroism in the Altherian-Entaran War. It was during the waning days of the war that Aziz, a member of the Order of the Philosophic Warrior, led a strike force of Shining Patrol soldiers against a group of Seremasi elorii when he was struck by the staff of a Lifewarden causing his left arm to shrivel up in seconds, like a desiccated mummy. He was rescued by the soldiers he led and carried away to safety.

Having survived the war, he turned his considerable mental faculties to the art of diplomacy. *"Glory in war is the dream of young men and the nightmare of their older selves"*, he would often say. No amount of medical science or arcane sorcery ever returned the use of his left arm, which he keeps wrapped in a bright blue shroud and suspended on a sling. When not in the Embassy, the tall, white haired Altherian can be found composing poems or reciting his latest creation at the Eurynius Amphitheater.

From all appearances, Aziz and Golon Ti have gotten along well since his arrival in the First City five years ago. Since that time, Aziz has used his considerable charm and piercing intellect to impress his supporters and adversaries alike. He is also on very good terms with Suetonius Varro and has had occasion to advise him on several lucrative business opportunities that made Varro a tidy sum and



who in turn gifted Aziz generously.

Aziz's greatest challenge thus far is trying to befriend the inscrutable Maien, the head of the Jial of the Phoenix, as well as General Tensen-Balin, the new commander of the Legion of the Honorable Accord. While Aziz has heard and read much of the general's illustrious father, the younger Tensen-Balin makes it a point to keep Aziz at arm's length, no matter what ploys to ingratiate himself the Master Emissary employs.

Perhaps the young man is smarter than he looks.

Baralong val'Holryn, Deacon of the Milandric Orthodox Church

Born and raised in Tralia, Baralong val'Holryn is a middle-aged val with the unsettling pin-point eyes of one who is Awakened. Baralong, a man in his early forties, started losing his hair years ago and decided to shave his large, bulbous head completely. He keeps fit as he regularly trains with the templars assigned to the clergy and excels at swordsmanship. Like many of his generation, he picked up the habit of carrying a slender baton and using it as an extension of his arm, pointing or gesturing with it as necessary.

Baralong is a very ambitious man but his code of honor holds him back as there are some lines he refuses to cross, even if it will advance his position within the Church. It was his integrity that compelled him to expose a group of priests who were trafficking refugees from Almeric into Canceri. These priests were executed for their crimes, but some were members of the val'Ossan family and even though Baralong was rewarded with a promotion to the position of deacon, he was also quietly exiled from the kingdom. Attached to Bishop Faustus val'Ossan, Baralong persevered and became so indispensable to the man that the Bishop made him second in the Church hierarchy in the First City.

Faustus val'Ossan, Bishop of the Milandric Orthodox Church

Boisterous and bombastic, Faustus val'Ossan commands the attention of all when he enters a room. With a large, barrel chest, bristling dark beard, and towering over most everyone he meets, Faustus' bellow of a laugh heralds the coming of this usually jovial fellow. Yet there's a darker side to Faustus that appears when his beliefs, his country, his duke or king are besmirched or ridiculed in anyway. Then Faustus is a terrible sight to behold, as a rage takes over him that only the spurting blood of the offender or the soft entreaties of his wife, Emily, can calm.

Due to his temperament, one would think that a life as a knight would be ideal for Faustus and given that he is a distant relation of the King of Milandir, such a title could easily been his. But loud and joyous Faustus felt the calling of the Gods, entering the Temple of Yarris for instruction, and joining the templars of

The Scions of Althares, God of Knowledge

Ever since the revolutionary diplomatic accord established between the scions of Althares from both the Coryani and Khitani Empires, the val'Abebi and the ul'Wei families have attempted to strengthen the bonds of understanding and cooperation that began at the end of the Second Coryani-Khitani War. To this end, both are always welcome at each other's domiciles within the First City, the Altherian Embassy and the ul'Wei Estate, respectively, where they may rest and get to know one another in a relaxed atmosphere. Additionally, the two families maintain a monopoly on unique substances in their respective nations. The val'Abebi trade blastpowder to the ul'Wei in return for silk. Both families have a small stockpile of the alchemical concoction in the First City and allow those granted the right to carry the exotic firearms to purchase the combustible material, at a premium, of course.

Both children of Althares are always at the ready to consult and advise any of the Merchant Cabal, the Golden Court, and the commanders of the garrisons stationed here as stipulated by the terms of the peace treaty. In addition to their diplomatic work, they work alongside the Emerald Society, the Followers of the Azure Way, and the Jial of the Phoenix to uncover information referring to the lost Tower of the Eternal Scholar, a near-mythical repository of knowledge founded by a group of worshippers of Althares that reportedly safeguarded the wealth of knowledge accumulated throughout the history of mankind from the purges of Leonydes val'Virdan after the fall of the Imperium. Tales speak of the fact that the Nierites were never able to find it though it was said to be hidden in plain sight. That same ingenious method that hid the fabled tower so well in the past is frustrating contemporary explorers as well.

While the val'Abebi clothe themselves in voluminous robes made of light cotton and tend to favor bright colors, which allows parts of their dark skin to be in plain view, the ul'Wei are a more conservative lot, covering themselves from head to toe when they are with anyone other than close family members. The ul'Wei's usual attire consists of thick, silk robes with shoulder guards that flair upwards, long tight-fitting gloves and an elaborate headdress that sports a thin lace veil that obstructs all possibility of seeing the ul'Wei's face.

that temple for a time. Eventually, he felt that leading a congregation was what truly called to him and so he traded his armor for the robes of a priest. It was there that he discovered a talent that has served him well in his new posting – Faustus cannot forget anything he reads, even once. This gift served him well, elevating him to the position of bishop in a shorter period of time than normal.

Now in his late thirties, Faustus and his small family, consisting of his wife, two adolescent boys and a girl, were sent to the First City to ensure that the faithful would know the true words of the Gods and not what that heathen, unaging witch, Elandré val'Assanté, proclaimed.

It is this ingrained dislike and mistrust of the Matriarch of the Mother Church that causes such friction between Prelate Leola and himself. At times he chides himself for being so boorish and pig-headed, but there's something about that frail old woman that just gets under his skin and raises his hackles.

Bishop Faustus has a handful of other priests to attend him, but due to his fantastic memory, he is able to personally conduct the rites and ceremonies of nine of the twelve Gods, but doesn't know the blessing of Neroth, Nier and Sarish only because he does not wish to sully his mind with the teachings of minor Gods.

The one thing that he and Leola do agree on is presenting a unified front against the teachings of the Deathmongers. Though they've been spouting their heretical words since before the Coryani rediscovered the First City, he and Leola have been able to curtail the time the Divine Trinity has within the Temple of the Pantheon, time they must all share given the laws of the land.

As for ul'Hsin Xu, High priestess of the Kalindruhl, he would sooner steal sweets from a babe than cause a frown to wrinkle her face. The Khitani priestess is the gentlest woman he has ever met, though he would never say those words to his wife, Emily. He would never betray his matrimonial or ecclesiastical oaths, but he is very fond of Xu and does what he can to assist her.

Ferren, the Fist of the Sorcerer-King

Born in the Kingdom of Milandir, Ferren was harvested when a teenager and transported to the Ilse of Tears for indoctrination. After years of training under the mages there, Ferren joined the Society of Ordained Seekers or as they are more commonly known - the Ordainers. Stationed in the Ymandrake embassy in the First City, Ferren eventually rose through the ranks to lead the sorcerers tasked with defending the people of the west.

As Ferren relates in his own words, *"Being rescued from the village where I was born and raised was the best thing that could have happened to me. My friends and neighbors were preparing to burn me alive when my abilities first manifested as they believed that it came from consorting with infernals. His Sorcerous Majesty took be into his home, protected, fed, and trained me in mastering my gift. After doing so, I was tasked with doing what the val and others failed to do, protect humanity from those that would abuse the wondrous ability we were granted.*

"Outsiders fear us and call those who are sent to rescue others like me derogatory terms like, 'harvesters'. They have no idea the terrible threats that the Sorcerer-King of Ymandragore commands us to combat. The black sorcery of the serpent-men, infernal cultists and their diabolical masters, necromancers, witches and warlocks who use their hex-magic to harm, and most dangerous of all, rogue sorcerers, like the Mad Magi of Lakhrion, and the Endless.

"That is why we were given this amazing gift, to protect others who cannot protect themselves against these horrors. It is a solemn duty we were given and if some are inconvenienced by having their lives changed so that they can fulfill their destiny, then that's a shame. The vals were granted their abilities to guard mankind, but besides those that serve with me, the rest seemed content to grow fat off the back of others.

"I serve proudly, shoulder-to-shoulder with my brothers and sisters in serving my fellow man. It is a pleasure to work among the enlightened people of the west, who value our sacrifices and see us for the heroes we are. Those of the southern nations would do well to learn from them."



Chapter V:
Codex of Heroes

The Blessed Lands in general, and the First City in particular are a crossroads for many of the heroes, explorers, and merchants from lands across the continent to meet and forge long-lasting friendships or to find yourself pitted against your nemesis. While just about anyone from across the Known Lands may be found in the region, the most commonly encountered peoples are those from the Southern Nations, the Khitani Empire, the Andyar, the Chauni, the Dailish, the Hunai, and the Maghir.

Below are listed the suggested skills, common languages, traits, ideals, bonds, and flaws common to those who call the Blessed Lands home.

Rare Languages of the blessed lands and Their Alphabets Table

Language	Alphabet	Typical Speakers
"The Tongues of Man"		
Chauni	Chauni	Language spoken by the Chauni tribesmen
Dailish	Coryani	Language spoken by the natives of the Dailish Isles
Maghir	Khitani	Language spoken by the Maghir tribesmen
Hunai	Altharin	Language spoken by the Hunai
"The Unique Tongues"		
Trade Language	None	Spoken by most merchants, Andyar, and citizens of the First City, it is a pidgin language with words and structure taken from Low Coryani, Low Khitani, and others.

Suggested Blessed Lands Skill and Tool Proficiencies and Spoken Languages

Areas	High Class Skill	Commoner Class Skill
First City	Persuasion	Linguistics
Blessed Lands Basin	Survival	Survival

Weapons and Armor of the Blessed Lands

Armor	
Light armor	Leather, studded leather, padded leather
Medium armor	Chain shirt
Heavy armor	Chain mail, half-plate, plate, splint (brigandine)
Shield	Shield
Weapons	
Simple melee weapons	Dagger, quarterstaff, spear
Simple ranged weapons	Crossbow, light, javelin, shortbow
Martial melee weapons	Halberd, lance, greatsword, longsword, scimitar, shortsword, Warhammer.
Martial ranged weapons	Hand crossbow, heavy crossbow, longbow

"As I stood next to Faldrimm, watching in shock as the cyclops' gaze melted his flesh away, I counted myself lucky that the beast only had one eye, and that Faldrimm always dressed to draw attention to himself."

– Antaean

Blessed Lands Personality Traits (d6)

1	Trade is the lifeblood of the Blessed Lands and we're all selling something, whether it be merchandise or information.
2	With the number of different religions and customs I come in contact daily, being tolerant of others is the only way to survive in this region.
3	This land takes more than it gives. You need to be inventive to survive here.
4	Everyone in the region is tolerant of one another, but the only ones you can truly count on are your family, whether they are blood or not. Loyalty to your group is essential if you are going to survive.
5	I rely on others when necessary, but I also like doing things my way.
6	The world flows through this region. It would be a shame to not sample a morsel from each.

Blessed Lands Ideals (d6)

1	**Industrious:** Unless you're rich, no one is going to do things for you. You need to work to survive and work harder to get ahead.
2	**Stoicism:** Life is tough, and people die all the time. You can't let yourself be overcome by emotions. Mourn and then get on with your life.
3	**Strength:** The weak die or are enslaved. Only the strong survive in this world.
4	**Generosity:** Sharing with others who have less is seen as foolhardy by some, but divine by many others.
5	**Tenacity:** If you get knocked down, you get back up and try again.
6	**Warrior's Heart:** Fight for what's yours, because no one else will.

Blessed Lands Bonds (d6)

1	Countless ancient artifacts are waiting to be found buried beneath the First City.
2	My (relative or friend) was captured by the Chauni and will be sold in a slave auction in the First City unless I save them.
3	All these different religions must hold a germ of truth. I need to separate fact from fiction and piece them together to discover the true face of the gods.
4	The Voei slaughtered my (friends/Family) and nothing will still the pain I feel but taking my revenge upon them.
5	I grew up on the streets of the Pearl where no one cared for me, except for a kind member of the Blood Guard. I'll do anything I can to join their order.
6	In my previous incarnation, I left a precious heirloom hidden in the tunnels beneath the First City. Finding it could spur further memories I've forgotten. (elorii)

Blessed Lands Flaws (d6)

1	I'm surrounded by riches, and I want my share.
2	All these false religions will corrupt the pious. They should all be wiped off the face of Arcanis.
3	The weak should be in chains or dead. There's not enough food to feed the useless.
4	The Coryani and the Khitani are both invaders on our lands. They should be pushed out so that we may live free from their corrupt civilizations.
5	I love to insult foreigners and then feign ignorance of their customs.
6	I can't stand to see a sentient being enslaved. I'll do anything to help them escape.

Backgrounds

Con Artist

"Friend! I couldn't possibly let you leave without this treasure! Pulled from the lost temple of Larissa, recently discovered and brought back at quite the expense. Said to have resided within the sacred fountain from which all luck springs, THIS tarnished copper is worth FAR more than gold. For you - a mere 30 silver. I guarantee a change in your luck for the better!"

Nationality: Any
Race: Any
Social Class: Commoner class
Minimum Age: 40 (dwarf), 60 (elorii), 16 (any other)
Skill Proficiencies: Deception, and either linguistics or sleight of hand
Tool Proficiency: Disguise kit, forgery kit
Literacy: You are literate
Equipment: A set of fine clothes, a set of plain clothes, a disguise kit, and a belt pouch containing 15 gp

Feature: Hidden Identity

You have left your former life behind and now you work hard creating aliases you can take on at a moment's notice, each with detailed background stories, connections, and a list of acquaintances. Even with these precautions, you run the risk of bumping into either a target of one of your previous scams or worse, someone from your previous life.

Con Artist Personality Traits (d6)

1	Lying comes easier to me than telling the truth. I can't help myself.
2	I separate people into two groups – marks and everyone else.
3	I need to wear whatever is in style and keep myself well-groomed. No one is going to buy a con from someone who looks like they haven't bathed in a month.
4	I learned to fake sincerity very early in my life.
5	I'm always friendly to everyone. Marks are easier to con if they see you as a friend.
6	I can't pass up a game of chance.

Con Artist Ideals (d6)

1	**Glib:** I could sell a sell a bottle of water to a priest of Yarris.
2	**Nimble of Mind:** No con is flawless, and you need to be quick to keep ahead of any wrinkles to the plan.
3	**Charitable:** I share the money taken with the poor of the community.
4	**Perceptive:** Noticing what's going on around you can make the difference between walking away with a bag of coin, or having your neck stretched at the Hangman's Terrace.
5	**Creative:** Using the same scam over and over will get you caught or dead. Keep things fresh, I always say.
6	**Temperate:** Even if there's more money to be made, don't get greedy. Take what you came for and then leave town.

Con Artist Bonds (d6)

1	I've plucked the juiciest fruits across the Known Lands, and now I'm here, in the First City, looking to fill my pockets before I head into the unknown west.
2	I was hired by the Jial of the Phoenix to steal an item from the Emerald Society, and I woke the next morning with this serpent-shaped mark on my forearm. What is it and why won't it come off?
3	That barber Jubalay keeps popping up in the most unusual places, and that kid he's always got with him gives me the creeps. Something's off with the Barber's Guild, and I need to find out what.
4	I swindled a mark that turned out to be an agent for that undead legion from Canceri, the Legion of the Black Sun. Now they want to make an example of me.
5	The Chauni slaver, Duoppol, owns a kio sword that would be worth a lot of money to the right family back in the League of Princes.
6	Souliad, the captain of the Blue Cloaks, saved my life when I was a kid and now I hear that one of the Merchant Cabal houses put a bounty on his head. Against my better judgment, I'm going to find out who and why.

Con Artist Flaws (d6)

1	When I see stupidity in a mark, it just makes me want to squeeze more out of them.
2	I can't help but leave my calling card, letting the mark know who made a fool of them.
3	I'm soft hearted and I won't run a con on someone who'll be ruined by it.
4	I spend all my coin at the arena. Seeing the blood run there keeps me from spilling it by my hand.
5	Working in the smithy like my father is back breaking work. Taking the coin I need is easier.
6	I'm reckless on purpose, just to give myself a challenge.

Child of the Crossroads

Through either years of travel or by growing up in a center of trade and culture, you have been exposed to many peoples and societies, discovering ways to get along and fit in. Your ears can separate and identify a dozen languages and dialects, your nose a hundred different scents, and your palette as many spices. Just one of the many benefits of living in a cosmopolitan melting pot, like the First City.

Nationality: Any, with exception of those races listed below
Race: Any except elorii, dwarf, or ss'ressen
Social Class: Commoner class
Minimum Age: 18
Skill Proficiencies: Linguistics, and either Deception or Persuasion
Tool Proficiencies: None
Languages: Any three languages
Literacy: You are literate
Equipment: A set of common clothing, a small knife, belt pouch, and 5gp

Feature: The First City is My Home

You can never get lost in the reclaimed areas of the First City. You always know your location, how to get to where you need to be, and are always able to find a place to sleep and a meal to eat. You are also privy to all the latest rumors and aware of who the current movers and shakers in the City are, though how they came to their lofty position is not known to you beyond rumors and gossip.

Alternately, you may choose the Commoner or Indistinguishably Common features from the Peasant/Plebian background found in the *Arcanis The World of Shattered Empires Campaign Setting*.

Child of the Crossroads Personality Traits (d6)

1	I drop names of famous people I've met or pretend to have met.
2	It takes a lot to make me lose my cheerful disposition.
3	If I meet someone from a place I've never heard of, I'll pester them with questions about EVERYTHING.
4	I pick up a small token or souvenir from every new place I visit.
5	I always volunteer to cook for my fellow travelers and make exotic dishes with unusual ingredients or spices.
6	I try to teach my friends new words or etiquette they may not know and won't take no for an answer.

Child of the Crossroads Ideals (d6)

1	**Curiosity:** There's a Narapan in the First City? I've never heard of them. Is Narapan the name of their race or their nationality? Do they dress differently? I wonder if they bend their knee to the Gods?
2	**Tolerance:** I meet a lot of different people and races, with different ways of doing things and knowing that there isn't a right way to do things, whether it's cooking or worshipping the Gods, makes it easier to get along with others.
3	**Sense of Wonder:** Beyond every mountain range or bend of a river, there's something new to take your breath away.
4	**Linguist:** Knowing what people are saying, especially in different languages, is like music to my ears. Plus it makes it easy to eavesdrop if they don't think you know what they're saying.
5	**Wanderlust:** There's a whole world out there to discover. I can't stay put in one place for long.
6	**Friendliness:** A kind word and a smile will take you further than all the gold in the world.

Child of the Crossroads Bonds (d6)

1	Growing up on the streets of the First City was hard, but the Coryani legionnaires looked after me, taking me on as their mascot. I'd do anything to help them.
2	I first traveled out of my small village by joining a caravan. While those days are behind me, I am always willing to help a caravan master.
3	While traveling across the Blessed Lands, I was chased for days by a group of slavers who cared little that I was an imperial citizen when they captured me. Though I escaped before I could be sold, my hate for slavers and the slave trade remains.
4	The Ardakene apothecary in the First City is kind to human children and taught a few of us the odd ways of elorii medicine. Their use of needles at key points across the body to relieve pain is extraordinary and is what led me to the path of the healer as an adult.
5	The more I learn of the different ways the Gods are worshipped across the continent, the more convinced I am that there is a great secret waiting to be revealed if I can just put the pieces together.
6	My sibling went into the Uncleansed Area and never returned. To stop his shade from haunting me, I need to join an expedition and recover his body for a proper burial.

Child of the Crossroads Flaws (d6)

1	I get along with most people, except for the (blank), who are lower than a dog's belly.
2	I keep traveling from place to place because I find it difficult to sustain lasting relationships.
3	If I don't know a fact about a particular culture or people's history, I make it up.
4	I refuse to eat the food or dress in the style of my nation or people of birth, and instead adopted an exotic culture's customs.
5	I look down at those who are uncultured.
6	I ridicule those who have not traveled far from their place of birth or speak only one language.

"The Barricade is an excellent place to dispose of incompetent members. Even if anyone smells something, who's going to go on the other side to look?"

- Reygan Rath, Mourners of Silence

Hedge Mage

Not all of those who wield magic are powerful mages. Often, those who show the most promise are born far away from societies that maintain these strong sorcerous traditions. It is in these areas that give rise to the Hedge Mage. These individuals are typically either those who have only begun their communing with the spirits of the world on their way to becoming a shaman, or have the arcane spark of eldritch magic, but without anyone to guide them on how to wield their powers. Often viewed as low-wizards, these arcanely gifted individuals discover their talents through slow experimentation and communing with nature.

Nationality: Any nation
Race: Any except elorii, dwarf, or ss'ressen
Social Class: Commoner class
Minimum Age: 18
Skill Proficiencies: Arcana, and either heal or survival
Tool Proficiencies: Herbalist kit, an artisan tool, and a musical instrument
Languages: None
Literacy: You not literate
Equipment: A set of common clothing, herbalist kit, either artisan tools or musical instrument, 5 gp
Special: If you choose this background you must take the Eldritch Sorcerer or Shaman class for your first level. Alternatively, if you chose to be a human, you may choose the spiritually awakened or rudimentary spell casting feat as your starting feat instead

Feature: Wise One

You are welcomed with a mix of both respect and fear by your own people, who will offer you food, shelter, and even small trinkets as they call upon you for advice or healing. Others who become aware of your abilities will treat you with a mixture of respect and fear.

Hedge Mage Personality Traits (d6)

1	I have lived alone for so long that I am quiet and unsure.
2	I try hard to fit into any social situation, maybe a little too hard.
3	I wait to follow another's lead.
4	I feel that the Gods have turned their backs on me.
5	I embrace what I am, and don't care who knows what I can do.
6	I hide my abilities for fear of being rejected.

Hedge Mage Ideals (d6)

1	**Perilous:** I am dangerous. Let them fear me.
2	**Caring:** I only want to help people.
3	**Curious:** The world is like an onion. With every layer I peel, I find two new questions for every answer.
4	**Willful:** My will is indomitable. When I set my mind towards an end, I will not stop until I achieve it.
5	**Determination:** I will never be hungry and poor again.
6	**Self-Assertive:** I am through with being ashamed or frightened of what I can do.

Hedge Mage Bonds (d6)

1	I was approached by the Ymandrakes to serve as bait, luring out rogue mages in the First City. Should I betray those who look upon me with scorn or pity to the Sorcerer-King?
2	All cities have an essence or spirit, but the one of the First City seems shackled and in fear. I must discover why.
3	I can always earn a few coins in the Pearl from the indents there for small manifestations of my power.
4	The shaman of one of the Andyar villages helped me hone my gift. Now, I hear he is ill and needs help training a successor from his tribe.
5	I earn a few coins with the Bull Dancers of Kolkara, when their prized animals are feeling ill or ill-tempered. I appear to be the only one who can soothe and calm them.
6	I grew up preparing the slaves for auction in the slave block before the spirits began whispering to me. Now I hear something stirring in the area and it is angry and hungry for blood.

Hedge Mage Flaws (d6)

1	I'm afraid of losing control of my power, even when would help my friends.
2	I will only follow the path laid out before me by the spirits.
3	I don't care who sees me wield my sorcery. Would they pluck out their eyes because others find them dangerous?
4	I've lived on my own for too long that I hate being told what to do by others.
5	If I truly need something, I take it.
6	I resent other sorcerers that benefited from formal training and protection from the Sanctorum.

Smuggler

"I was smuggling goods into the Censure a couple of years back. Someone had tipped off the authorities, so they stopped me and went through every saddle bag, checked under every blanket, even checked the horse's shoes, but they couldn't find anything. Everything was legitimate trade goods, so they eventually let me through. I definitely pulled one over on them."

"Really? What were you smuggling?"

"The horses."

Nationality: Any
Race: Any
Social Class: Commoner class
Minimum Age: 65 (dwarf), 100 (elorii), 20 (any other)
Skill Proficiencies: Deception, and one of the following: sleight of hand or stealth
Tool Proficiency: Forgery kit
Languages: One language of your choice from any nation
Literacy: You are literate
Equipment: A set of common clothes, backpack or large sack, forgery kit, 10 gp

Feature: Shadow Ways

You know the ways in and out of any city you have called home for more than a month. While finding a quick way in or out of an unfamiliar city may take you some time, bribes, and good old fashion foot work, it is well within your ability to do so.

Smuggler Personality Traits (d6)

1	I'm always looking to gain the upper hand in any interaction.
2	Seeing something out of place will annoy me until its been set right.
3	No matter what the situation, I've always got a plan!
4	I tend to wear drab and unassuming clothing. It's best not to stick in people's minds.
5	I can't pass up a game of chance.
6	I don't ever kill when plying my trade. If you must resort to bloodshed, you're a thug, not a smuggler.

"Nier shall be your judge. I am merely your executioner."

- Saldrik val'Virdan

Smuggler Ideals (d6)

1	**Adaptive:** Not everything goes as planned and when it doesn't, I need to think quickly.
2	**Poker Face:** I could have just stolen the king's crown, but you could never tell by looking at me.
3	**Nerves of Steel:** The Watch can smell fear. I'm always at my calmest while plying my trade.
4	**Clever:** By now, the authorities have seen every trick in the book. To succeed, I need to always come up with new ways to get contraband past them.
5	**Strategist:** The authorities are not the only ones I must contend with; other groups vie against me, requiring a certain about of strategy on my part to best them all.
6	**Perceptive:** Sometimes, it's the little things that will trip you up. I make sure I keep my eye on everything.

Smuggler Bonds (d6)

1	I learned how to smuggle artifacts from the catacombs of the First City from Maximetos of the Followers of the Azure Way.
2	Growing up in the Pearl, you learn the art of bringing in goods under the noses of the King of Nothing's thugs.
3	I've been given sanctuary by some of the Andyar chieftains when the authorities got too close. In return for that kindness, I make sure they have what they need to survive.
4	The elorii apothecary will pay good coin for any eloran artifacts discovered in the Uncleansed Area of the First City.
5	I've had a couple of run ins with the Grey Fist's brutes, but the last time, they killed one of my partners. Now, I'm going to expose his or her black-market operations.
6	If an item is too hot for local fences, Zhon Dai at the Lady's Smile in the Khitani District can give fair coin for it and make sure the item disappears from the First City.

Smuggler Flaws (d6)

1	I don't care if what I'm smuggling hurts others. I'm only interested in the coin.
2	I tend to spend all my coin on wine, women, (or men) and song!
3	I believe the authorities are fools, so my plans are not as well thought-out as they should be.
4	Why settle for a small score, when I can triple my earnings by doubling the load?
5	I only smuggle items that are needed by the people, such as food or medicine.
6	I'm easily distracted, and my mind wanders if I lose interest.

New Initiate of the Gods Variants

Initiate to the Divine Trinity/Death Mongers

You have dedicated yourself to learning the holy teachings of the Divine Trinity of the Gods Beltine, Neroth, and Sarish. While all the other Gods have left humanity or perished, only the Trinity remains to shepherd humanity. Your masters teach that the religion began small but has now spread across the western city-states and as far east as the First City. The phrase Death Monger was first used as a derogatory term by the religion's detractors but is now used to denote respect and deference.

Nationality: Blessed Lands, First City or city-states of the west.
Race: Any except dwarven, elorii, or ss'ressen.
Religion: The Church of the Divine Trinity
Social Class: Commoner or high class
Minimum Age: 20
Skill Proficiencies: Religion, and one of the following: arcana, healing, and persuasion.
Languages: Altharin, plus one language of your choice from any nation.
Literacy: You are literate.
Equipment: A set of common clothes, prayer book, Death Monger holy symbol (a bone lantern with red panes), artisan tool or musical instrument, 10 gp. Additionally, if you are a noble val you have an adorned flintlock pistol and 10 shots of blast powder.

Feature: Brother/Sister of the Trinity

As a Death Monger initiate, you command the respect of those who share your faith and can perform religious ceremonies. Within the First City, you and your adventuring companions can expect to receive free healing from other members of the order. Those who share your religion will support you (but only you) at a modest lifestyle. Outside the First City your religion is met with suspicion, and in some cases, open hostility, and more zealous members of the Coryani Inquisition may very well brand you a heretic.

Scaled Guard

In Pecinium, where the worship of Yarris, the Lord of the Seas, is almost universal, many aspire to hold a position within the Temple of Yarris, especially those that wish to rise out of the pervasive poverty that holds the majority of that city's population in a stranglehold. Of the few that are chosen, the most pious and intelligent ones are inducted into the clergy, while those just as equally devoted but lacking the intellect to perfectly memorize and intone the Sea Lord's Cants are candidates for entry into the Scaled Guard. Some may be chosen to join the august ranks of the Sea Lords, either by merit or pedigree. It's no secret that some val'Ossan scions use the Guard as a stepping stone into the Yarricite Order of Holy Champions.

The Scaled Guards are the premier military power in Pecinium, and while their duty as templars is to guard and protect the clergy and temple of Yarris, their secular power has grown as the townsfolk have relied upon them to stave off attacks by pirates, rampaging cyclopes, and the occasional incursion by the Khitani.

Members of the Guard can be found anywhere their duty requires them to be. These devout Yarricites enjoy good relations with others of their faith from the Coryani Empire, but the memory of the Milandisian val'Ossan "abandonment" of the Citadel is just as fresh today as it was over two hundred years ago.

Nationality: Blessed Lands
Race: Any except dwarven, elorii, or ss'ressen.
Religion: Must worship Yarris
Social Class: Commoner or high class
Minimum Age: 20
Skill Proficiencies: Athletics, religion
Tool Proficiency: Navigator's tools, or vehicles (water)
Weapon Proficiencies: Trident
Literacy: You are literate.
Equipment: An insignia of rank within the Scaled Guard, a set of common clothes, and a belt pouch containing 10 gp. If you are a noble val you also have an adorned flintlock pistol and 10 shots of blast powder.

Feature: Once a Scaled Guard...

You are always welcome in the home or establishment of a fellow guardsman. You are well received in any temple of Yarris and can expect to receive healing and care at one of His temples or shrines, by providing any material components needed for spells. Those who share your religion will support you (but only you) at a modest lifestyle.

Feats

Anointed Weapon

Each deity favors a weapon above all others, and by choosing to use it, you gain Their favor.

You gain the following benefits while wielding the favored weapon of your deity:

- You are proficient in the favored weapon of your deity.
- While wielding the favored weapon of your deity, you can perform the somatic component of any divine spell even when wielding the weapon two-handed or wearing a shield. (Or casting arcane spells if you are a Sorcerer of Sarish).
- Once per turn, when you roll damage with favored weapon of your deity, you can reroll the weapon's base damage dice and use either total.



Artifact Merchant

The First City and the various ruins that dot the Known Lands are rich in history. Those with a keen eye can turn history into profit.

- Increase your Intelligence by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You have advantage on any Intelligence (History) check to appraise the value and history of an item.
- You have advantage on any Intelligence (Arcana, history, or religion) involving myths and legends. You are considered to possess extensive knowledge on the subject and is considered a "field of study" as if you possessed the Sage's Insight feat above.
- You have advantage on any Charisma check involving haggling over items of historical note.

Child of the Barrens

Through experience or training, you have developed a wide range of skills for surviving in lands such as deserts or the blasted plain of the Blessed Lands.

You automatically succeed in any Intelligence (Nature) checks required to notice the signs of an upcoming weather event while in the Blessed Lands. Additionally, you gain the following benefits when in the Blessed Lands or a desert region:

- When engaged in another activity while traveling (such as foraging, navigating, or tracking), you remain alert to danger.
- You have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) rolls to find or conserve food and water.
- While in the Blessed Lands or a desert region, you have advantage on any Navigation tool or Wisdom (Survival) check to determine your location or direction of travel.

Child of the Waters

Through experience or training, you have developed a wide range of skills dealing with navigating and surviving the back of Yarris.

- You can hold your breath twice as long as other people before you begin drowning.
- You have advantage on all Strength (Athletics) checks involving swimming.
- While on a lake, sea, or ocean, you have advantage on any Navigation tool or Wisdom

(Survival) check to determine your location or direction of travel.

Sage's Insight

Prerequisite: Proficiency in History

Your reputation proceeds you as an expert in your chosen fields of study. Fellow scholars treat you with respect and may seek you out for advice.

- Your Intelligence score increases by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- Choose three fields of study from the list below. You gain advantage on all Intelligence checks relating to one of these fields of study. There are times when your GM may require you to have an appropriate field of study to even attempt an Intelligence check about a topic or may significantly lower the DC of the check because you have an appropriate field of study.

Fields of Study

You may only choose a field of study if you are proficient with its associated skill.

Skills	Field of Study
Arcana	Arcane symbols, elder magic, eldritch magic, magic items, magical traditions, the planes of existence
Religion	Any religious sect, such as the cult of the Thousand-Eyed Man, or the cult of Tzizhet; you can also choose one of the major religions, such as the Mother Church of Coryan
Nature	Exotic animals, exotic plants, terrain, weather
History	Lost civilizations, myths & legends; you can also choose a specific nation or region, such as the Kingdom of Milandir or the Pricklespur Forest.
Psionic	Awakened monsters, psionic items, psionic powers, val family traditions

Sea Lord's Expertise

Prerequisite: Faithful of Yarris

You have mastered the skills traditionally used by the adherents of Yarris, either due to extensive religious training or in the hopes of joining one of the Yarricite holy orders. In lands where the orders of Yarris hold sway, you are often called upon to defend the temples of Yarris and the people of the area.

- You gain proficiency in Athletics. If you are already proficient in Athletics, you have advantage on all Strength (Athletics) checks to swim.
- You gain proficiency with water vehicles. If you are already proficient in water vehicles, you gain double your proficiency bonus on all water vehicle checks.
- Advantage on Dexterity (Acrobatic) checks to retain balance while on water vehicles.
- You are trained to use the trident effectively. When you wield a trident, you gain the following benefits: it's base damage increases to 1d8, and the weapon gains the finesse quality and versatile damage (slashing) weapon qualities.



Combat Schools of the First City

Unique Techniques and Maneuvers: These techniques or maneuvers may not be chosen when developing a personal combat style.

Arrow Storm

It is believed that this style originated among the elorii who stalk the borders of the Vastwood, where the dense foliage prevents their archers from forming ordered battle lines, requiring them to move quickly among the detritus of those dark woods. Over the past few centuries, with contact with the elorii more common, nearly every nation has developed their own version of the fighting style.

Requirements: Proficiency with either longbow or shortbow, Dexterity of 13 or higher.

Weapons: Longbow and shortbow

Physical Training: When you first learn this combat style, increase your Dexterity score by 1, to a maximum of 20.

Maneuver and Technique DC = 8 + your Dexterity modifier + your proficiency bonus.

Journeyman

Double Arrow (Maneuver): As a bonus action you may spend 1 resolve die to notch two arrows for a single ranged weapon attack. You roll a single attack roll against one target or two different targets which must be within 10 feet of each other.

Always Armed (Technique): You may use your arrows as melee weapons. Arrows are considered light weapons which deal 1d4 piercing damage and possess the finesse quality.

Snap Shot (Technique): If you start the combat with an arrow nocked and are not surprised you may take an opportunity attack with your bow against one target within 30 feet. You may not apply sneak attack dice, smites, or maneuvers to this attack.

Master

Improved Resolve Die: Your resolve die increases to d8.

Ranged Disarm (Maneuver): When you successfully hit a creature with a ranged weapon attack 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 successful Dexterity saving throw or drop an object they are holding, which falls at their feet. If your target is holding one or more items, you choose which one they drop. You cannot disarm shields, worn weapons, or anything that is strapped onto the person.

Quick Reactions (Technique): You may take opportunity attacks with your bow as if you had a reach of 10 feet.

Close Quarters Archery (Technique): Attacking with a longbow or shortbow in melee does not impose disadvantage on your ranged weapon attack rolls.

Crushing Wave

Developed by the Sea Lords, this fighting style has since spread to other Yarris faithful and gladiators. The style relies on using a net in the off-hand to distract and entangle an opponent so that they can be finished off with a few thrusts of a trident.

Requirements: Strength (Athletics) and proficiency with trident and net.

Weapons: Net and trident

Physical Training: When you learn this combat style, increase your Strength or Dexterity score by 1, to a maximum of 20.

Maneuver and Technique DC = 8 + your Dexterity or Dexterity modifier + your proficiency bonus.

Journeyman

Disarm Foe (Maneuver): When you successfully hit a creature with a melee weapon attack, 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 successful Dexterity saving throw or drop their weapon. If your target is wielding more than one weapon, you choose which one they drop.

Shielding Net (Technique): While wielding a net in your off hand, you increase your AC by +2.

Netting (Technique): You do not suffer disadvantage for throwing a net while in melee combat. Additionally, if you miss with your attack you may reset the net as a bonus action, allowing you to attack with it a second time during the same attack action.

Master

Improved Resolve Die: Your resolve die increases to d8.

Entangling Defense (Maneuver): Anytime you are the target of a melee weapon attack, as a reaction you may spend 1 resolve die to entangle your opponent in your net. This reaction is resolved prior to the triggering attack. The attacker must make a Dexterity saving throw or become restrained.

Flowing Sand (Technique): Anytime you score a critical hit or reduce a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack, as a reaction you may move up to 10 feet and make a single melee attack.

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

Galloping Ram

This style is practiced by the Yhing hir horsemen of the Hinterlands, though historically it was the preferred style of the Maghir people before they settled in the First City under the Tomal Khan. While their time in the First City has led them away from their ancient raiding ways, many of the Maghir clans still maintain the tradition of mounted archery among their warriors.

Requirements: Proficiency with shortbow, Dexterity of 13 or higher.

Weapons: Shortbow

Physical Training: When you first learn this combat style, increase your Dexterity score by 1, to a maximum of 20.

Maneuver and Technique DC = 8 + your Dexterity modifier + your proficiency bonus.

Journeyman

Galloping Shot (Maneuver): While on horseback, when you successfully hit an opponent with a ranged weapon attack after riding your mount 20 feet or more, you may spend a resolve die, adding the result to your attack's damage. Additionally, add that same result to your mount's armor class until the beginning of your next turn.

Shifting Saddle (Technique): When your mount is successfully attacked or forced to make a saving throw, you may spend a reaction to replace your mount's AC against that attack or replace your mount's saving throw with your passive Wisdom (Animal Handling).

Fancy Riding (Technique): You gain proficiency in Animal Handling. If you are already proficient with that skill, you gain advantage on all Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks involving riding or maintaining control of your mount.

Master

Improved Resolve Die: Your resolve die increases to d8.

Crippling Shot (Maneuver): As a bonus action, upon making a successful hit with a ranged weapon attack, you may spend a resolve die to force your target to make a Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the arrow becomes deeply embedded, imposing a 1d4 penalty on all attack rolls until they spend an action to remove the arrow. Multiple crippling shots upon one target do not stack.

Distracting Shot (Technique): When you successfully hit an opponent with a ranged weapon attack, they may not take reactions until the beginning of their next turn.

Nimble Horsemanship (Technique): Mounting your horse only costs you 5 feet of your movement, you gain advantage on all Dexterity saving throws to remain in the saddle, and may dismount as a free action any time your mount is knocked prone.

Laughing Viper

Originally developed by the Order of the Laughing Vipers, holy champions of Larissa, this fighting style relies on drawing the opponent off-guard and taking advantage of their mistakes. The practitioner puts on a show, taunting through quips or movements, goading the opponent to strike.

Requirements: Member of the Order of the Laughing Viper or cleric of Larissa, proficient in gladius, side sword and shields.

Weapons: Gladius, short sword, shield and side sword.

Physical Training: When you first learn this combat style, increase your Dexterity score by 1, to a maximum of 20.

Maneuver and Technique DC = 8 + your Dexterity modifier + your proficiency bonus.

Journeyman

Cunning Feint (Maneuver): When you successfully hit a creature with a melee weapon attack, as a reaction you can spend 1 resolve die to force your target to make a Wisdom saving throw. If they fail their saving throw you gain advantage on all subsequent melee attacks against that creature until the end of your turn.

Biting Taunts (Technique): You gain proficiency in Intimidation. If you are already proficient, you gain double your proficiency bonus when making Charisma (Intimidation) checks. If you possess the Challenge feat, anyone who fails their Wisdom saving throw against your challenge also suffers disadvantage on their next attack roll against you.

Deadly Strike (Technique): When you take the Attack action, you may choose not to apply your proficiency bonus to your attack roll. If your attack hits, you deal additional damage equal to double your proficiency bonus.

Master

Improved Resolve Die: Your resolve die increases to d8.

Slashing Trip (Maneuver): When you successfully hit a creature with a melee weapon attack 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 also make a successful Dexterity saving throw or fall prone.

Distracting Strike (Technique): When you successfully strike an opponent with a melee attack, they may not take reactions until the beginning of their next turn.

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

Staves of the Mother

Created by the Beltinian Hospitaliers, this style focuses on using the staff both offensively and defensively. This fighting style is widely known and is often practiced by travelers and guides in the Blessed Lands.

Requirements: Proficiency with quarterstaff, mace, and Dexterity (Acrobatics).

Weapons: Quarterstaff or twin "iron rods" (maces).

Physical Training: When you first learn this combat style, increase your Strength or Dexterity score by 1, to a maximum of 20.

Maneuver and Technique DC = 8 + your Dexterity or Dexterity modifier + your proficiency bonus.

Journeyman

Pressing Attack (Maneuver): When you successfully hit a creature with a melee weapon attack, 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 successful Strength or Dexterity saving throw or be moved back 10 feet. If you choose, you may move with your target; this movement does not provoke attacks of opportunity from enemies.

Defensive Stance (Technique): If you are not wielding a shield, as a bonus action you can increase your AC by 2 until the end of your next turn.

Flexible as a Reed (Technique, unique): In your hands, staves, and maces gain the finesse quality.

Master

Improved Resolve Die: Your resolve die increases to d8.

Stunning Blow (Maneuver): When you successfully hit a creature with a melee weapon attack, 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 successful Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of their next turn.

Mother's Reach (Technique, unique): While wielding a staff, your reach increases by 5 feet, and creatures within your reach provoke opportunity attacks from you even if they take the Disengage action before leaving your reach. While wielding twin maces, if a creature moves into an area within 10' of you, you may use your reaction to move 10' and perform a single melee attack against that creature.

Fancy Footwork (Technique): Anytime you score a critical hit, or reduce a creature to 0 hit points, as a reaction you can take the Dash or Disengage action.

"I saw one of these Laughing Vipers fight once and I've never seen a warrior move like he did. It was as if his body twisted around the blade of his opponent or he batted it aside like you would a child's toy. The most irritating thing about it was that damnable smile of his. At least pretend to show some effort when fighting to the death."

– Centurion Aquilo Thapsus Mundos

New Class Options

Cleric Divine Aspects

Divine Aspect: Divine Trinity (Death Monger)

The Death Monger, or to use its proper title the Divine Trinity, religion's tenets are quite different from those espoused by the Mother Church of Coryan or the Khitani Kalindruhl in that they believe all the Gods, with the exception of Neroth, Beltine, and Sarish, have either died or vanished. Only the deities that comprise the Divine Trinity remain to protect and shepherd humanity. The beliefs of the Death Mongers are popular in much of the West but are unheard of in the Southern Lands.

Priests are taught the litanies of all three Gods as well as specific Cants that survived that fall of the Imperium. As they learn the deeper secrets of the faith, they take on the role of either the Father (Neroth), the Mother (Beltine), or the Offspring (Sarish), but even so are still priests of the Trinity, not of that one specific deity. Regardless of their particular position within the religion, all members of the clergy are trained in the use of the spear as proselytizing across the continent is a dangerous practice. Death Mongers are usually found in groups of three or more traveling the land spreading the word of their religion.

Tenets of Faith

Clerics who are initiates of the Divine Trinity believe that only Beltine, Neroth, and Sarish remain to guard and guide humanity.

Suffer Not Abominations to Live: Since the Time of Terror, the Divine Trinity protected the people from invading infernals. That practice continues to this day, along with malicious undead, and other abominations that threaten humanity.

Blessed Be the Tainted: The binding of infernals is part of your divine duty. The dark-kin are blessed in the eyes of the Gods, as they were born with an infernal bound within them. Guide and protect them from those who would harm these special beings in their ignorance.

Mercy: Give aid and comfort to all, especially your defeated foes. They are in most need of your care.

Generosity: Help all those who come to you, regardless of reward.

Respect: Leave the dead to their rest. Suffer not those who would disturb them.

Aspect Proficiencies:

When you choose the Divine Trinity at 1st level, you gain the following proficiencies:

Skills: Arcana and medicine

Tools: Alchemist kit and herbalist kit

Bonus Cantrip:

When you choose to follow the Divine Trinity at 1st level, you learn the cantrip *spare the dying.*

Priest of the Trinity

You are now considered a priest of Beltine, Neroth, and Sarish for any rules that have a restriction regarding your divine affiliation, such as secret spells.

The First Liturgy of the Divine Trinity

Clergy of the Divine Trinity are taught to honor and learn from Beltine, Neroth, and Sarish. They study the liturgies of the three gods and are trained to call upon their cants as needed.

At first level you gain access to spells from all three of the following divine aspects, allowing you to prepare them, even if they are not from the cleric spell list. After completing a long rest, when you prepare your spells, you may also choose to take on one of the following aspects: Beltine as the Warder of Souls, Neroth as the Castellan of Skulls or Sarish as the Guardian of Humanity. You gain that aspect's spells as if you had prepared them. Upon the next sunrise, you may choose to retain your aspect or replace it with another.

The Rites of Beltine, the Warder of Souls

Beltine, the Warder of Souls

Cleric Level	Spell
1st	*Bless, cure wounds*
3rd	*Lesser restoration, grey mists*
5th	*Beacon of hope, revivify*
7th	*Death ward, guardian of faith*
9th	*Mass cure wounds, raise dead*

The Rites of Neroth, the Castellan of Skulls

Neroth, the Castellan of Skulls

Cleric Level	Spell
1st	*False life, inflict wounds*
3rd	*Gentle repose, ray of enfeeblement*
5th	*Animate dead vampiric touch*
7th	*Death ward, Neroth's embrace*
9th	*Antilife shell, insect plague*

Rites of Sarish, the Guardian of Humanity

Sarish, the Guardian of Humanity

Cleric Level	Spell
1st	*Sarishan oath, magic missile*
3rd	*Cleanse the blood, invisibility*
5th	*Counterspell, summon Sarish's own*
7th	*Banishment, steal water*
9th	*Blood storm, contact other plane*

The Second Liturgy of the Divine Trinity

Upon reaching 2nd level, choose one of the following aspects to explore further. Unlike the First Liturgy that allows you to change your aspect each day, the choice you make for the Second Liturgy becomes a permanent feature of your character. This represents a commitment by the Death Monger to better understand one aspect of the Divine Trinity.

Beltine, the Warder of Souls

If you choose Beltine as your second aspect, you gain the following abilities:

Ancestors Guide Me. As an action, you touch your holy symbol and speak a prayer to Beltine, summoning forth a soul from the Cauldron to assist you. This soul, also known as a shade, appears as a translucent humanoid shape with glowing white eyes. It cannot attack, move out of your square, provide cover, or concealment. It cannot be directly attacked with spells or weapons as it flows around, into, and through your body when the target of such attacks. It may be turned or rebuked, in which case it makes all saving throws with a bonus equal to your attribute bonus. If the shade you summoned is successfully turned, it returns to the Cauldron, instantly ending any spell it cast upon you.

The shade you summon forth remains for 1 hour. During that time, it may assist you in your endeavors. As a bonus action it may cast *guidance* upon you or grant a +1 bonus to your AC as it moves in and out of your body, distracting anyone attacking you.

The shade's appearance is quite intimidating, granting you advantage on all Charisma (Intimidate) checks.

Once used, you must complete a long rest before you can use your channeling to summon a new ancestral shade.

Channel Divinity: Turn Undead. When you gain the Rites of Beltine, you can use your Channel Divinity to make undead creatures flee from you. As an action, you present your holy symbol and speak a prayer censuring the undead. Each undead that can see or hear you within 30 feet of you must make a Wisdom saving throw. If the undead creature fails its saving throw, it is turned by you for 1 minute or until it takes any damage.

A turned creature must spend its turns trying to move as far away from you as it can and can't willingly move to a space within 30 feet of you. It also can't take reactions. For its action, it can use only the dash action or try to escape from an effect that prevents it from moving. If there's nowhere to move, the creature can use the Dodge action.

Once you reach 5th level, when an undead fails its saving throw it is instantly destroyed, as long as its challenge rating is at or below a certain threshold, as shown in the Channeling Effect Threshold table below.

Neroth, the Castellan of Skulls

If you choose Neroth as your second aspect, you gain the following abilities:

I Know Thee Brother. As an action, you can open your awareness to detect those gifted by your deity. Until the end of your next turn, you know the location of any undead within 60 feet of you that is not behind total cover. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier. When you finish a long rest, you regain all expended uses.

If you have the val'Mordane bloodline power, *I Know Thee Brother*, you additionally are able to identify the type of undead when you call upon this blood power.

Channel Divinity. Neroth Commands. Starting at 2nd level, you can use your channel divinity to attempt to control undead. As an action, you present your holy symbol, and speak a prayer forcing undead to obey your authority. Each undead that can see or hear you within 30 feet of you must make a Wisdom saving throw. Undead creatures that do not have the **Incorporeal Movement** trait suffers disadvantage on

this saving throw. If the undead creature fails its saving throw, it is charmed by you for 1 minute or until it takes any damage. Undead with an intelligence score of 4 or greater are immune to this effect.

Once you reach 5th level, when an undead without the **Incorporeal Movement** trait fails its saving throw against this feature, you can choose to send them back their rest (destroy them) once the charmed condition ends, as long as its challenge rating is at or below a certain threshold, as shown in the Channeling Effect Threshold table below.

Sarish, the Guardian of Humanity

If you choose Sarish as your second aspect, you gain the following abilities:

Master of the Arcane. When you gain this rite, select 2 eldritch sorcerer cantrips and add them to your list of known cantrips. These cantrips are treated as clerical spells for you. You also add *blood spider, binding of Sarish,* and *bleed* to your list of clerical spells.

In addition, you automatically see the *Sigil of Sarish* if it is present on any infernal within your sight (magical or mundane).

Channel Divinity: Rebuke Infernal. You can use your channel divinity to attempt to control infernals. As an action, you present your holy symbol, and speak a prayer forcing infernals to obey your authority. Each infernal that can see or hear you within 30 feet of you must make a Wisdom saving throw. If the infernal creature fails its saving throw, it is stunned for 1 minute or until it takes any damage. Infernals with the Mark of Sarish make this saving throw at disadvantage.

Once you reach 5th level, when an infernal fails it's saving throw against this feature you can choose to banish them at the end of the duration, if they can be banished, as long as its challenge rating is at or below a certain threshold, as show in table below.

Channeling Effect Threshold

Cleric Level	CR Affected
5th	½ or lower
8th	1 or lower
11th	2 or lower
14th	3 or lower
17th	4 or lower

Third Liturgy of the Divine Trinity

Upon reaching 6th level, the Death Monger embraces a second aspect of the Divine Trinity. You must select an aspect that is different than the one chosen at 2nd level and gain the listed ability for the selected aspect. At 17th level, the character will gain access to the listed ability for the third aspect.

Beltine, the Warder of Souls

If you choose Beltine as your aspect, you gain the following channel divinity options:

Channel Divinity: Call Upon My Ancestors. You may use your channel divinity to summon the aid of your ancestors to aid in times of need. As an action, you present your holy symbol, and chant a prayer to the Divine Trinity, invoking the ancestors of humanity. Choose any number of human, dark-kin, gnome, kio, undir and val within 30 feet. Until the start of your next turn, ancestral shades come to aid these individuals, giving them a bonus to their AC, saving throws, ability checks, to hit and damage rolls equal to your Charisma modifier.

Neroth, the Castellan of Skulls

If you choose Neroth as your aspect, you gain the following channel divinity options:

Channel Divinity: Knitting Flesh and Bone. You can use your channel divinity to heal the bodies of the living and the dead. As an action, you present your holy symbol and chant a prayer to the Divine Trinity, invoking healing energies that can restore a number of hit points equal to five times your cleric level to both living and undead creatures. Choose any number of creatures within 30 feet of you and divide those hit points among them.

Sarish, the Guardian of Humanity

If you choose Sarish as your aspect, you gain the following channel divinity options:

Channel Divinity: Master of the Arcane. You can use your channel divinity to mimic the effects of one metamagic option when you cast a divine spell. Doing so is considered part of the casting of the spell and does not take up any action. You may spend up to a number of Sorcery Points equal to your proficiency bonus. These Sorcery Points are created for the sole purpose of powering the metamagic you invoke and disappear once the spell casting is completed.

Divine Smite

At 8th level, you gain the ability to infuse your weapon strikes with the power of the Divine Trinity. Once on each of your turns when you hit a creature with a weapon attack, you can cause the attack to deal an extra 1d6 force, necrotic or radiant damage to the target, your choice. When you reach 14th level, the extra damage increases to 2d6.

Divine Mantle

At 17th level, when you prepare your spells you may choose to take on one of the following mantles. Choose either the Mother (Beltine), the Father (Neroth), or the Offspring (Sarish) upon the next sunrise, you may choose to retain your mantle or replace it with another.

Mother (Beltine) - Ease Thy Soul. With a touch, you can ease the state of a person's soul, helping to relieve some of the burdens of life. The cleric removes all curses, geas, charms, compulsions, memory modifications, or other effects that afflict the spirit or mind of 7th level or lower.

The target also receives a vision of how to correct or reconcile what they see as the most significant error of their life (GM discretion). You regain this ability after completing a long rest.

Father (Neroth) - Guardian of the Tomb. While standing upon hallowed ground, a burial site, or tomb, you can summon forth a fearsome guardian. As an action, you can summon forth a Flesh Golem to defend the sanctity of the site or tomb. You regain this ability after completing a long rest. Also, while defending a tomb, burial, or sacred site, when you take the attack action, you can make two attacks instead of one.

Offspring (Sarish) - Master of the Arcane. Your prayer book, the Litany of the Divine Trinity, is treated as an arcane focus. You can learn eldritch sorcery spells, inscribing them into your prayer book inscribing a number of eldritch sorcery spells equal to one-half your cleric level. You may choose to prepare some of these spells as cleric spells, prepare up to a maximum number of eldritch sorcery spells equal to your charisma modifier + 1. Although these spells are still considered arcane in nature, you still utilize your wisdom as your spellcasting ability when casting them.

Fighter Archetypes



Runic Warrior

When Illiir cursed the celestial giants, turning them into the modern dwarf race, they roamed the land before finally settling down to establish their enclaves. The present location of the dwarven enclaves were not the original site they first attempted to start a home. Many of these early dwarven cities lie abandoned or were claimed by the creatures that inhabit the Endless Dark.

The Tultipetan dwarves led a nomadic lifestyle far longer than any of the other known enclaves, traveling as far south as Uggur and as far north as the mighty Khorene Mountain Range before finally turning south and settling within a large cavern

within Mount Pelan in the Aqtau Mountains. During the centuries of wandering, the Tultipetans began the practice of using their bodies to record major events in the dwarves' lives. Everything from battles won, to the crowning of a new queen, to the birth of children were tattooed upon their bodies.

It was not long before the runemasters began to experiment inscribing runes upon the bodies of volunteers. Many of these first attempts caused the recipient to either die gruesomely, as their bodies could not contain the magical energy and spontaneously combusted, or damaging their minds, driving some insane. Eventually, the method was perfected, and runes were inscribed upon the bodies of warriors to make them harder to kill and more effective in battle.

Eventually, a warrior caste emerged that trained their minds and bodies, not only to become some of the greatest fighters their people could boast of, but to better able accept the runes upon their bodies and use them in the most effective way possible. These runic warriors enjoy a higher social status than other Tultipetan dwarf warriors and are just under the priestesses in rank.

Since the destruction of their home by the Dragon Villa'tavorentes, many runic warriors have left their homes in despair, wishing to erase the horror of the attack from their minds. Some fear that their warrior elites now seek to find their own doom, believing this will somehow rid them of the stigma on their souls for having failed to save their people. The fact that the vast majority of the survivors were nowhere near Tultipet does nothing to assuage their guilt. These morose dwarves travel the land, looking for a worthy cause that will give them the meaning in death that they feel is missing from their lives.

Not all runic warriors are Tultipetans, however. Before the Doom of Tultipet arrived, the runemasters traded with the Khitani and inscribed many of their people with runes of their choosing, for a price, of course. Over the years, the technique used to inscribe the runes upon the body were taught to a select few who were already runemasters. While not widespread, some Khitani are able to afford to purchase a body rune and have the fortitude, both physically and mentally, to contain the power of the magic.

Race Restrictions

Only Tultipetan dwarves may become runic warriors at this time.

Iron Skin

At 3rd level, the runemaster begins to inscribe your body with runes. These runes will allow you to have additional runes inscribed upon your skin. While you are not wearing any armor, your Armor Class equals 13 + your Constitution modifier. You can use a shield and still gain this benefit.

If you chose to wear armor, any runes inscribed upon your skin have their effects suppressed until the armor is removed.

Runic Tattoo

In addition to gaining Iron Skin, you gain the ability to have runes inscribed upon your body. Any rune inscribed upon your skin benefits you as if the runes were inscribed upon armor. These runes are part of you, and do not require attunement, nor do they count toward the limit of attuned items you can carry.

At 3rd level you acquire an uncommon rune of your choice. Once inscribed upon your body this rune cannot be removed but improves with time. At 7th level this rune improves, becoming a rare version of itself. At 15th level, it becomes a very rare version of itself.

You may have additional runes inscribed upon your skin. You must pay a runesmith learned in the technique required to do so. The entire process costs half as much as engraving a rune upon armor and may be obtained in one day of downtime. Your body can accept an additional uncommon rune at 7th, 10th, and 15th level. Additionally, by spending one day of downtime and paying half the cost of the rune, you may have a runesmith further improve these additional runes. At 10th level you may choose to improve one of these additional runes into a rare version of itself, and at 15th you may choose to improve one of these runes into a very rare version of itself.

At 20th level, if you find one, and with the game masters permission, may have a single legendary rune inscribed upon your body. Only a handful of runic warriors have ever reached this level of mastery.

Runic Weapon

Starting at 7th level, you may perform a special ritual during which you anoint a single melee weapon with your blood. Once complete, if the weapon you anoint is non-magical, it is considered magical when you wield it and acts as if it possesses the same runes inscribed upon your body. If the weapon you anoint is a magical weapon or already possesses runes, any time you draw

your weapon you may choose one of your runic tattoos to also be considered have that rune as long as you wield it. You need not choose the same rune every time you draw your weapon.

You may choose to anoint another weapon at any time. If you do so, the weapon you previously anointed loses all benefits from this class ability. At 10th level you may anoint two weapons in this manner.

Additional Fighting Style

At the 10th level, you can choose a second option from the Fighting Style class feature.

Runic Strikes

Starting at 15th level you gain the ability to channel the power of your runes into your attacks. When performing a ranged or melee attack with one of your runic weapons, you deal an additional 1d10 damage of the same damage type as your weapon. Or you may choose to have this additional damage be of a damage type that coincides with one of your runic tattoos. For example if you possess the *fire* rune as a runic tattoo, you may choose for the additional damage to be fire damage.

Runic Empowerment

At 20th level you gain an unparalleled understanding of your runic tattoos. As a bonus action, you may empower your runes with your own life essence. For 1 minute all your runic tattoos become very rare versions of themselves, which also improves their effect upon your runic weapons. After this boosting effect fades you gain 1 rank of exhaustion that may not be removed until you complete a short rest.

Holy Champion Orders

Blood Guard

Of the many aspects of Lord Sarish worshipped by his followers, Summoner and Binder of the Infernal, Master of the Arcane, the Oath Maker, and others, that of patron of warriors would not be one that readily springs to mind. Yet for the many thousands of inhabitants of the City-State of Gerganos, the only aspect of Sarish followed is that of the Bloodletter, a fearsome, war-like aspect that revels in the gorier aspects of combat.

Visitors to the city-state are often awed and repulsed simultaneously by the beautiful sculptures and mosaics depicting scenes of carnage and bloodshed displayed within the Blood Temple. The priests of Sarish use these pieces of art to underscore that Lord Sarish does not advocate mindless brutality, like Nier, the God of Slaughter, but the need for ruthlessness and unflinching mercilessness when defending one's people or carrying out wars of necessity as dictated by the king. At these times, Lord Sarish allows those most dedicated to Him the ability to unlock the secrets of blood, turning common warriors into masters of the battlefield. These elite warriors became members of the Order of the Bloodletter, sponsored by the Temple of Blood and exalted as holy champions of Sarish.



Until the fabric of reality was ripped asunder and hordes of infernals invaded the world.

On that day, the holy champions of Sarish rode out to defend their families and homes and were routed, hunted almost to the point of annihilation. It was only a chance meeting with the Maghir, who were returning from the First City, which saved the warriors from total destruction. The surviving holy champions, a mere handful, were locked in a pitched battle with scores of devils, when the horsemen, led by the Tomal Khan, fell upon the infernals with their newly discovered Sarishan steel weapons. Rallied by the Maghir's sudden appearance, the Bloodletters renewed their attack and decimated the infernals. An alliance between the two groups soon developed, which endures to this day. With the Tomal Khan taking on the title and responsibility of the Regent of the Imperium, the Bloodletters were renamed the Blood Guard, becoming an elite unit that serves as the personal bodyguards for the Tomal Khan, and by extension, the Golden Court.

For the first few hundred years, the Blood Guard solely allowed Gergans trained at the Blood Temple to fill their ranks, which were kept to a maximum of one hundred warriors. Only the death of a member, or the very rare instance of retirement, opened a slot for a new member to be inducted.

In later times, when the Blood Guard were used less and less for expanding into the Uncleansed area of the City, chasing bandits, or quelling unrest among some of the Andyar villages, the Blood Guard became lax. Much like a blade that is no longer maintained or sharpened, the members of the Blood Guard became more interested in charging into brothels and inns than into battle. Hundreds of bastard children were sired as the members were not allowed to marry, given that they were expected to put no one above their duty. In the past few decades, these bastards were allowed to compete for any newly open spot within the Blood Guard, though they must first pass through a rigorous training regimen at the Temple of Blood in Gerganos. Should they pass all the tests put to them by the priests at the temple, they are welcomed as a full brother (or sister) within the Blood Guard.

It should be noted that the Death Mongers, rising in popularity in the western city-states, approached the priests of the Blood Temple to join their religion and incorporate their scriptures and practices with those observed by the Divine Trinity. They were soundly rebuffed. While not openly hostile to one another, the Death Mongers and the Blood Temple, and by extension, the Blood Guard, hold each other in great disdain.

Nationality

First City, City-State of Gerganos

Race Restrictions

Dwarves, elorii, kio, ss'ressen, or undir may not join the blood guard.

Tenets of the Order of the Blood Guard

Holy champions who join this order share the following beliefs and traditions:

Venerate Sarish: Give the other Gods their due, but Sarish is your lord and patron. Observe His holy days and show respect to His priests and followers.

Duty: You have an obligation to protect the Tomal Khan, the people of Gerganos, and humanity, in that order. Only direct orders from the priests of the Blood Temple can take precedence.

Ruthlessness: War is an ugly affair, not to be taken lightly or without good reason. When blades are drawn, you must wage war without hesitation, mercy, or compassion and end it as quickly as possible.

Infernal Hunter: Infernals must either serve mankind or be destroyed. There is no middle ground. Infernals that refuse to do so, will be hunted down and destroyed.

Fidelity to the Order: The other members of the Blood Guard are your brothers and sisters. Protect them with your life and honor them in death.

Requirements

There are only 100 members of the blood guard at any one time. Death or retirement of a member opens an opportunity to join their ranks. Prospective applicants are tested in the Blood Temple in Gerganos by the blood guard and priests of Sarish.

Spells of the Blood Guard

You gain the following order spells, which are always prepared starting at the levels listed

Holy Champion Level	Spells
3rd	*Blood spider, protection from good and evil*
5th	*Cleanse the blood, call to arms*
9th	*Bleed, vampiric touch*
13th	*Steal water, banishment*
17th	*Blood storm, faithful hound*

Blood Mount

Anytime you cast *find steed*, you summon forth an infernal warhorse. The steed's appearance is that of congealed blood, which constantly drips as it moves.

Channel Divinity

At 3rd level, you gain the following Channel Divinity options:

Blood Lord's Due: You call upon the blood lord to use the blood of your enemies to empower your magic. As a bonus action, you call upon Sarish and use your channel divinity against one living creature that has blood within 30 feet. The target makes a Constitution saving throw. If they fail, they are bled, losing 5 hp, and their maximum hp is reduced by 5 until they receive a *lesser restoration*. You gain a pool of 5 hp that can only be used to power any of your blood magic abilities. This pool of hit points remains for one minute. The hit points gained, and the reduction in maximum hp increases as you gain levels in this class: 10 hit points at 7th level, 15 hit points at 15th level, and finally 20 hit points at 20th level.

Sense Lifeblood: As a bonus action you may use your channel divinity to sense the life force of those around you. For 1 minute you gain the ability to see the life energy of any living creature within 60 feet. You can see living creatures regardless of lighting and you can even see living creatures through obstacles. This ability is blocked by 1 foot of stone, 1 inch of common metal, a thin sheet of lead or 3 feet of wood or dirt.

Blood Magic

Starting at 3rd level, you begin to learn the order's unique rites of blood magic. You learn one of the blood magic rites of your choice and gain additional blood magic rites at 7th level, 15th level, and 20th level.

These rites are powered by your own blood or blood taken though the use of Blood Lord's Due ability. When you use your own blood, you are required to cut yourself. You must have an edged weapon in hand and the ability to cut some part of your body. This bloodletting is considered part of the ability's activation and does not take an action in and of itself.

When you use your own blood to power a blood magic rite you lose a number of hit points and your maximum hit points is reduced by the same amount. Although you may recover any lost hit points, your hit point maximum does not return to normal until you have completed a short rest. At 3rd level you may sacrifice up to 5 hit points. This threshold increases by 5 hit points at 7th, 15th, and finally reaching a maximum sacrifice of 20 hit points once you reach 20th level.

These abilities are magical in nature and can be *counterspelled* or *dispelled*. They are treated as if they were cast at a spell level equal to your proficiency bonus.

If a Blood Magic ability calls for a saving throw, you utilize your Charisma for determining the saving throw DC.

Blood Magic save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Charisma bonus.

Blood Rites

The simple act of learning and using the blood right forever changes you, giving the ability to invoke the blood right while alter you in some permanent way.

Acid Blood.

You gain resistance to Acid Damage.

Blood Rite: As an action, you may sacrifice 5 hit points to force all creatures within 10 feet of you to make a Dexterity saving throw or suffer 3d6 acid damage, suffering half upon a successful saving throw. For each additional 5 hit points you sacrifice you deal an additional 2d6 acid damage.

Armor of Blood.

Prerequisite: 7th level

You gain the defensive fighting style, if you already know the defensive fighting style you may choose another fighting style of your choice.

Blood Rite: As a bonus action you may sacrifice 5 hit points to gain resistance to either bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage for one minute. For an additional 5 hit points, you may choose another damage type to gain resistance against, gaining resistance to all three for 15 hit points. If you sacrifice 20 hit points you gain resistance against all damage with the exception of psychic damage.

Blood Rage.

You gain proficiency in Athletics, if you are already trained in Athletics you may add double your profanely bonus to all Athletics checks.

Blood Rite: As a bonus action, you draw your blood, sacrificing 5 hit points. You enter a frenzy granting you advantage on all melee attack rolls which rely on strength but granting advantage to all attacks against you for 1 minute. It ends early if you are knocked unconscious or if your turn ends and you haven't

attacked a hostile creature since your last turn or taken damage since then. You can also end your blood rage on your turn as a bonus action.

Blood Rune.

You gain proficiency in Arcana, if you are already trained in Arcana you may add double your profanely bonus to all Arcana checks.

Bloor Rite: As a bonus action, you draw your own blood inscribing a unique rune of Sarish that lasts for 1 minute. If you sacrifice 5 hit points to create your blood rune, any time you are the target or in the area effect of a spell or magical effect, you may use your reaction to grant yourself advantage on any saving throw to resist the effects of any spell cast by a divine caster other than Sorcerer-Priests of Sarish. If you sacrifice 10 hit points this ability now extends to all magic spells and effects. If you sacrifice 15 hit points you are no longer required to use a reaction to gain advantage on your saving throw to resist a spells effects. Finally, if you sacrifice 20 hit points, not only do you gain advantage on all saving throw to resist spells and spell like effects, but gain resistance to magic for the rune's duration.

Blood-Shield Rune.

You gain +1 to all saving throws

Bloor Rite: As an action, you draw your own blood, using it to smudge a holy symbol of Sarish upon another, creating a ward that can protect them from harm for a time. These runes retain their power for 1 hour.

By sacrificing 5 hit points you grant a friendly creature a +1 bonus all their saving throws. By sacrificing 10 hit points you grant them a +1 bonus to AC and saving throws. This bonus increases to +2 for the sacrifice of 15 hit points, and finally +3 at for the sacrifice of 20 hit points.

Purifying Blood.

Prerequisite: 7th level

You gain advantage on all death saving throws.

Blood Rite: As an action, if you sacrifice 5 hit points you may cure yourself as if you had been targeted by *lesser restoration*. If you sacrifice 10 hit points you are instead the target of a *greater restoration* although this ability cannot be used to restore maximum hit point reductions due to the use of Blood Rites. If you sacrifice 15 hit points you may target yourself with a *regenerate* spell. You are not required to provide material components when casting these spells, your blood is enough. Once you reach 20th level, any time you are reduced to 0 hit points you may reduce your maximum hit points by 20 to instantly regain half your current maximum hit points. If you do so, you may not do so again until you one week has passed.

Sanguine Ward.

You gain proficiency with Strength Saving throws

Blood Rite: As a bonus action, you draw your blood, hastily creating a ward that forces all unfriendly creatures within 5 feet to make a Strength saving throw or be forced back in a straight line where they fall prone. The distance they are pushed back is equal to 5 feet for each 5 hit points you sacrifice when creating the ward.

Tempered by Blood.

You gain proficiency in Survival, and gain advantage on all Survival checks to track Infernals.

Blood Rite: As a bonus action, you draw your blood sacrificing 5 hit points as you sanctify your weapon in your deity's name. For the next minute your weapon ignores the damage resistance of any infernal you strike with it. If you sacrifice 10 hit points when creating this rune, your weapon also deals an additional 1d8 radiant damage when striking infernals. If you sacrifice 15 hit points your weapon remains sanctified for 1 hour. Finally, if you sacrifice 20 hit points your weapon remains sanctified for 1 day. If you use this rune to sanctify a magical weapon, the weapon's bonus increases by +1 to a maximum of +3.

Vision of Sarish.

You can see in Dim light as if it was Bright Light

Blood Rite: As a bonus action, you may sacrifice 5 hit points while cutting yourself just above the eyes. For the next hour you gain darkvision of 60 feet. If you already possess darkvision, the range of your darkvision is increased by 60 feet. If you sacrifice 10 hit points you also gain advantage on all Wisdom (Perception) checks for the duration. Finally, if you sacrifice 15 hit points you act as if *true seeing* was cast upon yourself.

Order of the Laughing Viper

There are few orders of holy champions that are as popular or as public as the Larissan Order of the Laughing Viper. Sponsored by the Temple of Sighs, many members of the order enjoy large followings, primarily consisting of aficionados of gladiatorial games. As part of their order's rites, the holy champions participate in games held during the high holy days at the Arena Varria and remain undefeated in team melee bouts.

The order extols virtues that many believe are the

province of Holy Illiir rather than the Divine Harlot. These virtues, the perfection and beauty of the body, as well as elevating combat to an art form, fall squarely within Larissa's purview as the perfection of the form induces lust in others, while the turning of what many see as a brutal and gore-filled event into an awe-inspiring spectacle only serves to arouse and titillate the senses. Lastly, the palpable enjoyment that the champions exhibit when performing their martial feats cannot help but instill in the spectators joy and thrills.

Noble women from across the continent pay exorbitant fees for the opportunity to share a bed with a champion, especially after winning the games at the Arena, as there is a common belief that a child conceived after such an event will have all the semi-divine attributes of the champion. Members of the order, having a strong hedonistic streak, frequently make themselves available to as many as a half-dozen partners that evening. Men also pay large sums for a bottle of sweat, harvested from the champion's body after the games, as it is known to enhance a man's potency as well as make them irresistible to the opposite sex.

As the holy champions are only expected to participate in the annual games, they have a large amount of time on their hands. Many spend this time training and pursuing the lofty goals the order aspires to, while others travel across the lands in search of adventure and to experience all that the world has to offer. Due to this, members of the Order of Laughing Vipers can be found anywhere and in the company of almost any group, as long as there are new experiences to encounter and a new song or wine to relish.

If the champions have a weakness, it's that they find occurrences of sadness or morose events jarring to their worldview and will do almost anything to alleviate the pall hanging over the affected person or people. This has led to a Viper undergoing a foolhardy quest or taking up a lost cause, all in the hopes of lifting the spirits of someone he has taken a liking to. This does not mean, of course, that they will go down a street attempting to right the wrongs done against every passerby; the person in question must hold a place of significance to the champion's heart, either a love or long-time companion. Although sometimes just a



pretty face will be enough to send the Viper off on a journey of vengeance.

Initially, only males were allowed into the order, but over the past few decades, the rules have been relaxed and a small number of women have been welcomed into the company. These females are jokingly known as the Lady Vipers and have proven to be every bit as deadly as their male counterparts.

If the Laughing Vipers have a nemesis, it is the masters of the Red Sword Fighting School in Old Coryan. The fencing school's founder, Mannulus val'Sheem is said to have started the school in response to the disgust he felt towards the "gentleman's club" dueling schools in Savona. That may be true, but he is just as likely to have done so due to his expulsion from the holy champion order due to his shift in attitude from enjoying the sport of combat to perceiving it as a life and death struggle where anything, honorable or not, is to be used to ensure one's victory. After a good-natured ribbing escalated quickly into a duel that ended with the death of a fellow member of the order, Mannulus was discharged with the warning of never appearing within sight of a Laughing Viper under penalty of death.

Members of the Red Sword School who encounter a Laughing Viper will sometimes challenge the champion to a duel to the death and just as often, as a matter of honor, the Viper will accept. To this day, over a dozen fatalities on either side has occurred and with each death, the hatred between the two groups grows.

Nationality

First City

Race Restrictions

Dwarves, elorii, gnomes, or ss'ressen cannot join the Order of the Laughing Vipers.

Tenets of the Order of the Laughing Viper

Holy champions who join this order share the following beliefs and traditions:

Live Life to the Fullest: Eat, drink, and make love. Enjoy the blessings the Gods granted each of us. Enjoy life!

Joy: There is too much misery in the world. Spread joy and happiness to others, by word and example.

The Dance of Steel: Combat is an elegant dance. Do not despoil it by descending into enraged butchery. Do not wound, when clout is needed. Do not kill, when a wound will achieve the same result.

Perfection of Form: Seek the perfection of body and form and help others to do the same.

Be Not Slothful: There is no greater sin than to let life pass you by. Rise to greet the sun with purpose in your heart.

Spells of the Laughing Vipers

You gain the following order spells, which are always prepared starting at the levels listed.

Holy Champion Level	Spells
3rd	*Charm person, disguise self*
5th	*Calm emotions, enthrall*
9th	*Blink, luck of fools*
13th	*Euphoria, guardian of faith*
17th	*Larissa's fickleness, phantasmal lover*

Stunning Steed

Anytime you cast *find steed*, you summon forth a steed of exceptional beauty and grace. The steed gains a +2 to Dexterity, and people will speak with admiration about your horse.

At Her Lady's Service

Upon joining the Order of the Laughing Viper, you learn secret techniques of distraction and seduction. You have advantage on any Charisma (Persuasion) skill roll to seduce a member of any race and either sex, or when attempting to use persuasion to distract a person or crowd.

Vestments of the Lady

Though it is not a tenet of your order, many members of the Order of the Laughing Viper enjoy showing off their impressive physique during battle. While you are not wearing any armor, your Armor Class equals 10 + your Dexterity modifier + your Charisma modifier. You can use a shield and still gain this benefit. Additionally when not wearing armor you are considered to be proficiency with Dexterity saving throws.

Channel Divinity

When you join this order at 3rd level, you gain the following channel divinity options:

Channel Divinity: Larissa's Blessings. As an action, you bless a melee weapon you are holding

with a prayer and kiss. For 1 minute, you add your Charisma modifier to Attack rolls made with the weapon you blessed, with a minimum bonus of +1. If the weapon is not already magical, it becomes magical for the duration.

You can end this effect on Your Turn as part of any other action. If you are no longer holding or carrying this weapon, or if you fall Unconscious, this effect ends.

Channel Divinity: Undeniable Presence. Starting at 2nd level, you can use your channel divinity to capture everyone's attention or pull attention away from a friendly ally. As an action, you touch your holy symbol and whisper a pray to Larissa. Each creature that can see or hear you within 30 feet must make a Wisdom saving throw; a creature being attacked by your companion's gains advantage on their saving throw. A creature that fails its saving throw is charmed by you for 1 minute or until it takes any damage. At the end of each of its turns, any creature charmed by this ability may make a new Wisdom saving throw to end this effect.

Steel Sight

Starting at 7th level, you begin to learn your order's dance of steel. As a reaction, when you are struck with a melee attack, you may attempt a Dexterity saving throw with a DC equal to your attacker's attack roll. If you succeed, the attack misses. If you fail, you are still hit but gain resistance against the triggering attack's damage.

Starting at 18th level, your knowledge of the dance of steel and your connection to Larissa makes you difficult to strike. As long as you are not incapacitated, no attack against you has advantage

Steel Viper

At 15th level, when you successfully use steel sight you can make a single attack against the creature that triggered the reaction.

Larissa's Insight

Although not as potent as a fate spinner, you gain the ability to nudge the strands of Fate.

At 20th level, every day with the rising of the sun, you may roll a number of d20's equal to your Charisma modifier and declare two of these results as your Fate Pool. Until the next sunrise you may choose to replace any of your saving throws or attack rolls with a roll from your Fate Pool, using up that result.

You must choose to do this before the roll, and you can replace a roll in this way only once per turn. Each result in your fate pool can be used only once. When you finish a long rest, you lose any unused results in your Fate Pool.

Order of the Sacred Spear (The Rat Catchers)

Rats - every city has them.

That's not to say that one can't find them in rural places or the deep wilderness, but they seem to grow in number and sizes unheard of in an urban environment. Never welcome, always chased off or killed when discovered, rats are a four-legged pestilence upon humanity. So, wherever rats are found, rat catchers are not far behind.

Most rat catchers come from the very lowest rung of human society and unless engaged in their task, are unwelcomed in most places. Rat catchers set traps, use specially bred and trained dogs known as terriers, or scurry into cramped and dank places to catch them by hand, making their hygiene questionable at best. But when there is an infestation of rats, the name of the local rat catcher is on everyone's lips.

However, there is a type of rat that is beyond the common rat catcher's ability – these are rat men, often lycanthropes cursed to take on the shape of a man-rat. Some say these vile creatures are the result of a curse laid upon a group of hoarders and misers by Saluwé, while others believe these creatures were created by sorcerous means by the foul Cancerese known as the Blight Bearers.

This part of the legend is given credence due to the rat men of the Faerdwalden, whose existence is a continuous vexation upon the citizens of Milandir. These particular rat men were cited as the cause of several outbreaks of rampant plague that has claimed many lives in Treslau and Tralia and their roots have been traced back to the foul Blight Bearers. And yet, the rat men of other cities seem to be a different breed; able to change their shape from small -sized rats to enormous versions of rodents. They also have been known to breed and command entire swarms of rats; the most famous of these was the infestation that caused the entire city of Sulpecci to be evacuated until legions were sent in to quell the problem.

What most do not know is that ahead of the legions, a small group of holy champions of Saluwé, known as the called the Order of the Sacred Spear, or as they are

commonly known the Rat Catchers, were sent ahead and dealt with the rat men commanding the swarm.

Sponsored by a small temple within the Golden Boughs of Saluwé, the order of holy champions is trained in dealing with lycanthropes and vermin of all kind, whether wolf, boar, bear or rat. They are given a holy blessing making them immune to contracting the curse should they indeed be dealing with a lycanthrope, are taught the tell-tale signs of how to discover whether a person has the taint when in human form, as well as skills of hunting and tracking.

Only during the last portion of their training must the holy champion decide which prey to hunt. For those who choose the path of the Rat Catcher, they are trained in the weapons of their order. First, a finely meshed net that even the smallest of rodents cannot escape. Secondly, the spear, a slender weapon capable of being used in tight spaces as well as keeping their prey at bay. Lastly, a dagger, for dealing with the cursed being. The ability to fight with two daggers to counter their deadly claws is indispensable. The aspirant holy champion is also taught a handful of spells, such as a blessing that may be applied upon a weapon, making it possible to kill the cursed beast, a ward to keep swarms of vermin at bay, and so on.

The order is open to all humans and human subtypes who take Saluwé as their patron deity. Although dwarves or ss'ressen are welcome, none have ever applied for entry. Due to their opposition spiritually to the human Pantheon and to Saluwé specifically, as the destroyer of Mârok, elorii are not allowed entry into the order.

In the First City, a rumor is being investigated by Doric val'Dellenov, an elder Rat Catcher, about a cult of rat men worshiping some false rat god or infernal lord. Thus far, he has not discovered much as he is a very old man and not able to descend into the depths below the city as he once could.

Racc Restrictions

Elorii cannot join the Order of the Sacred Spear.

Nationality

Any human nation, commoner class.

Tenets of the Order of the Sacred Spear

Holy champions who join this order share the following beliefs and traditions:

Dedication: You have dedicated your life to protecting humanity from lycanthropes and their vermin swarms.

Lycanthropy is a Disease: Lycanthropy is a disease from which there is no cure. Destroy it before it spreads to others.



Cleanliness Leads to Healthiness: Filth and grime are where diseases lie in wait to infect the unwary. Regardless of what dank sewer your journey takes you, clean yourself when you return to the surface.

Generosity: Help those who require your aid, regardless of social standing and without thought of reward.

Sacrifice: The war against the cursed is unending. Though you may feel tired and are too old for battle, take up your spear and face the enemy. A life sacrificed to safeguard your fellow man, is a life well spent.

Spells of the Order of the Sacred Spear

You gain the following order spells, which are always prepared starting at the levels listed

Holy Champion Level	Spells
3rd	*Detect poison and disease, hunter's mark*
5th	*Beast sense, magic weapon*
9th	*Conjure animal, meld into stone*
13th	*Guardian of faith, locate creature*
17th	*Commune with nature, wall of stone*

We are Her Children

When you join the order at third level, you gain a loyal mastiff or tomcat to serve as your companion. You can have only one companion at a time, and it gains all of the animal companion advantages listed below. For your Tomcat use the stats of a cat increasing while its base hit points to 4, it's attack bonus to +3, and damage to Hit: 4 (1d4+2) slashing damage.

If your companion is ever slain, you can forge a new bond with another common dog or tomcat, making it your new companion. If you use this ability to forge a new bond while your current companion is still living, your current companion leaves you and is replaced by the new animal. Forging a new bond takes one month of downtime.

Animal Companion

Your companion gains a variety of benefits while it is linked to you.

- Your 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 companion acts on its own.
- You companion adds your proficiency bonus to its Armor Class, attack rolls, saving throws, and damage rolls.
- If it doesn't already have it, your companion gains proficiency with Perception and Survival and with all saving throws.
- For each level you gain after 3rd, your favored animal gains an additional hit die, increasing their maximum hit points by half the hit die +1 + their constitution modifier. For example, an animal with a d8 hit die would have their maximum hit points increased by 5 + their constitution modifier for each hit die they gain.
- Whenever you gain the Ability Score Improvement class feature, your companion's abilities also improve. Your companion can increase one ability score of your choice by 2, or it can increase two ability scores of your choice by 1. As normal, your companion can't increase an ability score above 20 using this feature.
- Finally, any time you use *lay on hands* on your animal companion, the amount you heal is doubled. For example, if you heal your animal companion for 5 hit points, it recovers 10 instead.

Tools of the Trade

You gain additional fighting styles unique to this order. When fighting with twin daggers you benefit from the *Knife Fighter* and *Two-Weapon Fighting* fighter styles. When fighting with a spear in one hand and a net in the other you benefit from both the *Defense* and *Duelist* fighter styles. Additionally, your melee attacks penetrate the damage resistances of any creatures of the swarm of Tiny beasts type.

Channel Divinity:

When you join this order at 3rd level, you gain the following channel divinity options:

Channel Divinity: Rebuke Vermin. You can use your channel divinity to rebuke vermin, small creatures such as rats, various insects, and others that are seen as destructive and disease carrying beasts (which creatures fall under this category is at the GM's discretion). As an action, you present your holy symbol and speak a prayer censuring the unclean vermin. Each qualifying Beast that can see or hear you within 30 feet of you must make a Wisdom saving throw. If the creature fails its saving throw, it is turned for 1 minute or until it takes any damage.

A turned creature must spend its turns trying to move as far away from you as it can, and it can't willingly move to a space within 30 feet of you. It also can't take reactions. For its action, it can use only

the Dash action or try to escape from an effect that prevents it from moving. If there's nowhere to move, the creature can use the Dodge action.

Once you reach 5th level, when a swarm of tiny beasts fails its saving throw it is instantly dispersed (destroyed), as long as its challenge rating is at or below a certain threshold, as shown in the Channeling Effect Threshold table below.

Channeling Effect Threshold

Cleric Level	CR Affected
5th	½ or lower
8th	1 or lower
11th	2 or lower
14th	3 or lower
17th	4 or lower

C***hannel Divinity: Rebuke Lycanthrope.*** You can use your channel divinity to rebuke lycanthropes that possess the Humanoid (shapechanger) type and make them flee from you. As an action, you present your holy symbol and speak a prayer forcing qualifying creatures that can see or hear you within 30 feet of you must make a Wisdom saving throw. If the creature fails its saving throw, it is turned for 1 minute or until it takes any damage.

A turned creature must spend its turns trying to move as far away from you as it can, and it can't willingly move to a space within 30 feet of you. It also can't take reactions. For its action, it can use only the Dash action or try to escape from an effect that prevents it from moving. If there's nowhere to move, the creature can use the Dodge action.

Channel Divinity: Blessings of Veridis. As an action, you can use your channel divinity to imbue a spear or twin daggers you are holding with the shimmering green glow of moonlight. For 1 minute, you add your Charisma modifier to attack rolls made with that weapon (with a minimum bonus of +1). If the weapon is not already magical, it becomes magical for the duration.

You can end this effect on your turn as part of any other action. If you are no longer holding or carrying the weapon, or if you fall unconscious, the effect ends.

Vermin Nemesis

Beginning at 7th level, you have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track Beasts or Humanoids (shapechanger), as well as on Intelligence checks to recall information about them such as their habits or capabilities. Additionally, once per turn, you gain a +1d6 bonus on weapon damage rolls when successfully hitting them with an attack. This damage increases to +2d6 at 15th level, and +3d6 at 20th level.

Against the Vermin Horde

At 15th level, once on each of your turns, when you make a weapon attack against a creature with the Beasts or Humanoids (shapechanger) types, you can make another attack with the same weapon against a different creature that is within 5 feet of the original target, and within range of your weapon.

Beastman Slayer

At 20th level, as a reaction when you make a successful melee attack against a creature with the Humanoids (shapechanger) type, you may strike a telling blow. If the creature has 100 hit points or fewer, it dies. Otherwise the damage from your Vermin Nemesis ability is doubled. You regain the use of this ability after completing a short rest.

Order of the Solder-Saints of Dagha

One of the most respected warrior orders on the continent, the Order of the Soldier-Saints of Dagha ensure the safe passage of pilgrims—regardless of their race and creed—through the Blessed Lands unmolested. While noble in aim, the origins of this order lays in a significantly less than honorable act. During the First Coryani-Khitani War, a group of Coryani soldiers ambushed and killed a similarly sized Khitani war party near an ancient ring of primitive stones. Afterwards, they slept among the pillars, lying amidst the bodies of their slain foes in an act of lurid indecency. The surviving Coryani warriors awoke that night to see a vision of Illiir, chastising them for profaning His sacred grounds by their actions. To absolve themselves of their sins, Holy Illiir charged the soldiers with the task of delivering all pilgrims through these lands safely.

It was just after the Second Coryani-Khitani War that the order became the Soldier-Saints of Dagha. The newly anointed Patriarch of the Mother Church of Coryan began his pilgrimage to the First City, accompanied by an enormous entourage that seemed to stretch to the horizon. Being spread over such a large area made the security of the Holy pilgrimage a nightmare for the elite temple knights tasked with protecting them.

Pickets were formed to discourage the various bandits and marauders that were known to prowl the area, but they were unprepared by the sudden attack that came sliding down the slopes of the Corlathians like an avalanche. Ice giants from one of the many settlements located among the crags and ravines of the mountain range descended to scavenge for food after a sparse season of hunting. It was the Frown of the Lady that they happened to descend near the Patriarchal encampment.

Hired guards and guides scattered before the brutal onslaught; only the elite Amiliani Temple Knights stood their ground, but they were too few to turn the tide and died to a man defending the Holy Father. The giants gathered those that surrendered and deposited them in their larder upon arriving at their settlement.

Expecting not to see another sunrise, the Patriarch called together the surviving members of the pilgrimage and prayed to the Gods for salvation or at least a speedy trip to the Cauldron. Sometime during their fourth hour of fervent prayer, the sounds of battle rang throughout the frigid keep. As the bellows of rage and screams of anguish dwindled, the door to the larder opened and the bloodied faces of a dozen Soldiers of Dagha greeted them.

After freeing them from their bonds, the leader of the squad explained that they had heard sounds of battle but were too far off to engage the frozen fiends. Rallying as many Soldiers as possible, they made their way up the escarpment and attacked the small Ice Giant settlement, putting all the foul creatures to the sword. When the Patriarch asked them to name their reward, the leader of the warriors merely asked for the Holy Father to perform final rites for their fallen comrades, especially their leader Rindar Karyo, who had fallen while in single combat with the Ice Giant chieftain. Though Karyo bested the creature, he suffered mortal wounds.

The indebted Patriarch completed the rite just as the final light of life fled through Karyo's quickly dulling eyes. So impressed was the Patriarch by the selfless act of the Soldiers of Dagha, that upon his return to Grand Coryan, he quickly canonized the late leader and had him declared Saint Karyo the Just of Enpebyn and declared that heretofore these selfless men and women would be known as the Order of the Soldier-Saints of Dagha.



Since the passing of Karyo, many others have been canonized by the Mother Church of Coryan, such as St. Brigid the Zealot of Naeraanth, and the former legionnaire St. Vernico of Plexus who founded the Legion of Honorable Accord and whose vast wealth was donated to the poor before taking the mantle of Soldier-Saint.

Currently, the Soldier-Saints still maintain their central quarters in the same ancient fort discovered by the original Soldiers of Dagha. The order maintains a series of forts throughout the Blessed Lands and patrols the area in ones and twos mounted upon steeds descended from a herd originally gifted to them by a Khitani Mandarin who ran afoul of trouble and was rescued by the Soldier-Saints.

Race Restrictions

Elorii and ss'ressen cannot join the Soldier-Saints of Dagha.

Tenets of the Order of the Soldier-Saints of Dagha

Holy champions who join this order share the following beliefs and traditions:

Protect Pilgrims: Keep all pilgrims and travelers moving through the Blessed Lands safe and secure during their pilgrimage.

Keep Holy the Sacred Places: Keep the sanctity of the many sacred sites about the Blessed Lands. Keep them pure from the depredations of those that would despoil them.

Piety: Observe the holy days and venerate the Pantheon of the Gods.

The Past is the Past: What a being did before joining the order is for the Gods to judge. Only their actions as a Soldier Saint matters.

Honor: Treat all with honesty and honor. Your actions reflect upon the order as a whole.

Spells of the Soldier-Saints of Dagha

You gain the following order spells, which are always prepared starting at the levels listed.

Holy Champion Level	Spells
3rd	*Bless, protection from good and evil*
5th	*Aid, zone of truth*
9th	*Beacon of hope, scorching radiance**
13th	*Guardian of faith, my honor is my strength**
17th	*Aura of radiance*, dispel evil and good*

Attuned to the Wastes

Starting at 3rd level when you join this order, you become familiar with the terrain and hazards of the Blessed Lands. When you make an Intelligence or Wisdom check related to the Blessed Lands, your proficiency bonus is doubled if you use a skill you are proficient in.

While traveling in the Blessed Lands, you gain the following benefits:

- Difficult terrain doesn't slow your group's travel.
- Your group can't become lost except by magical means.
- Your group gains advantage on any saving throw called for by one of the storms of the Blessed Lands.
- Even when you are engaged in another activity while traveling, you remain alert to danger.
- If you are traveling alone, or with other Soldier Saints, you can move stealthily at a normal pace.
- When you forage, you find twice as much food as you normally would.
- While tracking other creatures, you also learn their exact number, their sizes, and how long ago they passed through the area.

Channel Divinity:

When you join this order at 3rd level, you gain the following channel divinity options:

Radiance of My Lord: As an action, you can use your channel divinity to imbue one weapon you are holding with radiant light. For 1 minute, you add your Charisma modifier to damage rolls with that weapon (minimum bonus of +1) and your weapon deals radiant damage instead of its normal damage. The weapon also emits bright light in a 20-foot radius and dim light in a 20-foot radius beyond that. If the weapon is not already magical, it becomes magical for the duration.

You can end this effect on your turn as part of any other action. If you are no longer holding or carrying the weapon, or if you fall unconscious, the effect ends.

Cleansing Radiance: You can use your channel divinity to call forth a wave of brilliance that burns the unclean and chases away the shadows. As an action, you brandish your holy symbol and create a 30-foot burst of bright, radiant energy. In the burst, any illusion spells or magical effects that create darkness may be dispelled as if you had cast a dispel magic as if you used a spell level equal half your cleric level.

Aura of Conviction

Starting at 7th level, you and friendly creatures within 10 feet of you gain advantage on all saving throws to resist being charmed as long as you are conscious. At 18th level, the range of this aura increases to 30 feet.

Blessed Warrior

At 15th level, while in the Blessed Lands, any time you are fighting in defense of others, which may include your allies, you gain advantage on saving throws to resist the charmed, frightened, and stunned conditions. When not in the Blessed Lands, any time you are the target of an effect that imparts one of the above conditions, you may use a reaction to gain advantage on that saving throw.

Perfect Devotion to Illiir

At 20th level, while in the Blessed Lands and acting in defense of others, you gain resistance to all damage.

Warrior of the Eternal Flame

"These vessels of flesh which house our souls are but incomplete and inefficient instruments of Lord Nier's Holy Destruction. A man can fell a tree with an axe, while Lord Nier's flame can reduce a tree to ash. Which, then, is the True Destroyer?" ***- VIIth Holy Scroll of Becherek***

The Warriors of the Eternal Flame are those who embody the teachings of Nier and His religion. These fanatical adherents of Nier are no longer content with just leading troops into glorious battle or massive slaughter, but instead, have been touched by the Flame Lord Himself and are called upon to burn off their final, unclean vestiges of humanity. Those who are drawn to greater service to the Destroyer undergo even harsher training than an elite soldier in the Nierite army. They are instructed in the inner doctrine of the religion and search for the inner fire in their souls.

As a Warrior of the Eternal Flame, the neophyte begins to understand and manifest the essence of the *Living Flame*. When it is felt that the he is ready, they undergo the ultimate test of their faith. They travel to the location of one of the five eternal flames: huge pillars of fire over twenty feet in height and ignited by Lord Nier's own blood as he battled the Elemental Lord Keleos and the Other at the end of the God's War.

The applicant purifies their body and enters the blazing pillar. If they are found worthy, they emerge unharmed and with a greater understanding of Nier and His Divine Essence. They also are gifted with a ruddy skin tone, which bestows immunity to fire. If they are found unworthy, they are immolated, consumed as another sacrifice to Nier's eternal hunger for destruction.

While each of the five pillars reveals different insights and aspects of the Flame Lord, one is not required to pass through each one to increase their prowess. Many of the Pillars are located in far off places, such as deep in the Khitani Empire. Others are largely inaccessible, such as the seemingly corrupted Pillar in Ymandragore, located upon an isle controlled by the Harvesters known as the mages of the Emerald Flame.

The understanding and power of a Warrior of the Eternal Flame continue until they can to shed their fleshy prison and become one with the Flame, the ultimate expression of Nier's Will.

Nationality

Any, except Elorii

Race Restrictions

Dwarf (Nol Dappan), human, and val (val'Emman and val'Virdan) only

Special: You must have passed through and survived one of the five sacred Pillars of Nier to take this Archetype, see *gift of the pillar* below.

Tenets of the Warriors of the Eternal Flame

Holy champions who join this order share the following beliefs and traditions:

Architects of Change: Like the forest fire that clears the old brush so that saplings may grow, so too do we tear down the old and stagnant, so that a new society may rise. While Nierites are the agents of change, you are the ones who decide what institutions have grown stagnant and need a rebirth.

Dispassionate: While the fire within your heart grants strength, do not indulge it. A clear head will win the battle. Remember: A fiery heart tempered by a cool mind will always lead to victory.

Relentless: Like our Lord's flame, you are relentless and single-minded in the pursuit of your objective.

Courage: There is nothing that Lord Nier admires more than courage. Conquer your fear and let it give you strength.

Savagery of War: War is an ugly, brutish thing. Do not attempt to make it a game. Show those that participate the true, savage face of our Lord, so that they might think twice before sounding the trumpets of battle.

Spells of the Warriors of the Eternal Flame

You gain the following order spells, which are always prepared starting at the levels listed.

Holy Champion Level	Spells
3rd	*Bless, burning hands*
5th	*Nier's blade, whirling blade*
9th	*Fireball, mantle of unassailable flame*
13th	*Freedom of movement, wall of fire*
17th	*Conjure elemental (fire), flame strike*

Channel Divinity

When you join this order at 3rd level, you gain the following channel divinity options:

Channel Divinity: Render Judgement. As an action, you can hold your holy symbol aloft and use your channel divinity to force all creatures within 30 feet to make a Wisdom saving throw. Any creature that fails their saving throw is frightened until the end of your next turn. Any creature that succeeds on their saving throw is not frightened but they are still left shaken, suffering disadvantage on the first attack roll they make before the end of your next turn.

Channel Divinity: Nier's Embrace. As an action, you can say a prayer to Nier and sheath your sword in the holy fires of Nier for ten minutes. These flames shed bright light in a 40-foot radius and dim light for an additional 40 feet. While the sword is ablaze, it deals additional fire damage equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum bonus of +1).

You can end this effect on your turn as part of any other action. If you are no longer holding or carrying the weapon, or if you fall unconscious, the effect ends.

Gift of the Pillar

To enter this order at 3rd level, you must pass the test of the Crucible of Fames, which requires stepping through one of the five sacred Pillars of Nier. Should they survive, the aspirant is granted powers and abilities by the sacred blood of the Lord of Destruction (see The Five Sacred Pillars of Nier sidebar). It is assumed that you survive the ordeal. To test your faith in the flames of the other pillars you must encounter them during your adventures and survive their trials.

If you are an Erdukeen or a Nol Dappan dwarf, you tested your faith within the flames of the Erdukeen Pillar in the city of Erduk; if a val or human from Canceri, the flames of the Canceri Pillar in Hunder; and if from any other nation, the holy flames of the Coryani Pillar.

The Face of Nier

You have faced the fires of Nier and survived. Starting at 7th level, the insights of the flame steel your mind against the horrors of the world. You are immune to the frightened condition and gain resistance to non-psionic psychic damage.

Protection of the Pillar

Starting at 15th level, any allies within 15 feet of you gain resistance to fire damage while you are conscious.

Nier's Gift

At 20th level, you gain the Elemental (Fire) type in addition to any type you possess. You are now immune to sleep, poisons, and to all forms of fire damage but are now vulnerable to cold damage. In addition, as a bonus action, you may cast *fire shield* a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier, regaining all expended uses after completing a long rest.

The Five Sacred Pillars of Nier

Wondrous item, artifact (requires special attunement)

Description: Each of the Pillars of Nier are located within a temple, usually with a high, vaulted ceiling. The Pillar itself is over 20 feet in diameter and rises upwards to an average height of 30 feet. A burnished metal band that surrounds the base of the Pillar, engraved with holy scripture and images of Nier's battles. A small ramp rises from the floor of the temple to the lip of the band, so that supplicants may enter the holy flames.

Abilities/Effects: These pillars cannot be moved, dispelled, or suppressed by any known means.

If you survive the test of the Pillar you are forever changed. You are considered to be holding a spellcasting focus when casting spells that manipulate fire or deal fire damage. Also, if you do not already possess it, you gain resistance to fire damage. Surviving the tests of more than one of the Pillars of Nier takes up one of your attunement slots as the powers of the Pillars permanently alter your spiritual aura.

Beyond the spell casting focus and resistance to fire damage, each Pillar grants a unique ability.

Canceri Pillar: You gain an additional hit die, and your maximum hit points are increased by half your hit die +1 plus your Constitution modifier. If you possess more than one type of hit die, choose the largest one.

Erdukeen Pillar: You have advantage on Initiative rolls.

Coryani Pillar: You gain a +1 bonus to your Armor Class when wearing armor. Additionally, when not wearing armor, your Armor Class is equal to 13 + your Constitution bonus. You can use a shield and still gain this benefit.

Khitani Pillar: You gain the ability to cast the cantrip *fire bolt* using Charisma as your spell casting attribute.

Ymandrake Pillar: You have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track elementals, as well as on Intelligence checks to recall information about them. When you gain this feature, you also gain the ability to understand and speak to all types of fire elementals, if they speak at all. When striking an elemental with a melee weapon you deal additional damage equal to your proficiency bonus.

Codex of Magic

Spell Lists

The following spells are added to their respective class lists, all of the following spells are also Secret Spells.

Secret Spells

Some spells are only taught to members of specific groups, religious orders, or bloodlines. A spell that is designated a secret spell is only available to you if you are a member of the listed group.

New Cleric Spells

1st Level
Bone Crafting

2nd Level
Arcane Blood
To See the Soul Within

3rd Level
Wail of the Damned
Ward of Bones

4th Level
Demonic Form
Sigil of Sight

5th Level
Bone Growth
Inhibiting Mists
Spectral Imprisonment

8th Level
Zone of Banishment

New Holy Champion Spells

2nd Level
Twist of Fortune's Knife

New Eldritch Sorcerer Spells

4th Level
Sigil of Sight

New Spells

Arcane Blood

2nd-level divination
Secret Spell: Divine Trinity
Casting Time: 1 bonus action
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M (caster's blood)
Duration:1 minute
As part of the casting this spell, you cut yourself, suffering 1d4 slashing damage, then wipe your blood on another friendly creature. Whenever that creature casts a spell before the *arcane blood* spell ends, they can roll a d4 and add the number rolled to the result of any spell attack roll. If the spell lacks a spell attack roll, increase the saving throw DC of the spell by 1. If the spell requires neither a spell attack roll, or a saving throw, the spell is cast as if it was cast at 1 level higher.

You cannot cast this spell unless you have a sharp weapon or some other means of cutting yourself.

Bone Crafting

1st-level transmutation
Secret Spell: Divine Trinity
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self
Components: V, S.
Duration: 10 minutes
When you cast this spell, you suffer 1d4 points of piercing damage. While this spell is active, you suffer disadvantage on all Charisma (Deception) and Charisma (Persuasion) checks. Choose one of the following effects:

Bone Armor: While you are not wearing any armor, for the duration of the spell your armor class becomes 15 + Dexterity Modifier (maximum of 3).

Bone Spear: You create a wicked spear which rips out of your skin, extending out of the bones of your arm. For the duration of the spell you utilize your spellcasting ability instead of strength and damage rolls using your bone spear, this spear deals 1d8 piercing damage and cannot be thrown, dropped, or disarmed. Your bone spear is considered to be magical.

Bone Spikes: You create small barbs on your flesh. You cannot wear heavy armor while benefiting from this option. For the spell's duration any time you are grappled, the grappler sufferers 1d4+ your spellcasting attribute modifier in damage at the beginning of each round they continue to grapple you. You may use these spikes offensively, either increasing your unarmed attack damage to 1d4+ your spellcasting attribute modifier or, if you are grappling a creature at the start of your turn, that creature also suffers the same amount of damage.

At Higher Levels: When you cast this spell using a 2nd level spell slot, you can choose two of the above bone modifications. Using a 3rd level slot allows you to use all three body modifications.

Bone Growth

5th-level Transmutation
Secret Spell: Divine Trinity
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Instantaneous
The target of this spell must make a Constitution saving throw. If they fail, they suffer 6d8 damage which ignores all damage reduction as their own bones erupt from their flesh as barbs, spikes, and hooks. These bone shards hamper movement and cause excruciating pain, causing them to suffer 3 ranks of exhaustion that may only be removed through the use of a *greater restoration, heal,* or *regeneration* spell.

This spell is ineffective against constructs. If cast upon undead that lacks the incorporeal movement ability, these spikes make them even more deadly, increasing the damage of any unarmed attack by an additional 1d4 damage. If they do not possess an unarmed attack form, they gain a claw attack that deals 1d6+2 slashing damage. For example, Zombie's Slam would be affected, but not a skeleton's weapon attack. The skeleton would gain a claw attack that deals 1d6+2 slashing damage.

At Higher Levels: When cast as a 6th level spell, you can target two individuals, and a third individual when cast as an 8th level spell.

Demonic Form

4th-level Transmutation
Secret Spell: Divine Trinity, Clergy of Neroth, Sorcerer-Priests of Sarish.
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S, M (a drop of a fiend's blood)
Duration: Concentration, 10 minutes
You take on the pace, natural attacks, such as claws or bite, movement, natural armor, and any special attacks of any fiend with a CR 8 or less. While in this form, you are vulnerable to Sarishan steel.

Inhibiting Mists

5th-level Conjuration
Secret Spell: Divine Trinity, Clergy of Beltine, Sorcerer-Priests of Sarish
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Concentration, 10 minutes
A grey mist flows from you, granting everything within a 20-foot radius total concealment. Additionally, all 1st and 2nd level spells, and all common magical items are treated as if being in an *antimagic field*. You can see through the mist that you create.

This spell may not be cast underwater or in high winds. *Gust of wind* cast above 2nd level will disperse the cloud.

Sigil of Sight

4th-level Abjuration
Secret Spell: Divine Trinity, Sorcerer-Priests of Sarish
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 10 minutes
You quickly inscribe a sigil onto any solid, immovable surface, such as a wall or floor. Once the spell is invoked, the sigil cannot be moved. The sigil creates a 20-foot radius effect in which all invisible creatures become visible to the naked eye. Additionally, all creatures within the area have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that are based on sight.

Spectral Imprisonment

5th-level Conjuration
Secret Spell: Divine Trinity
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S, M (Divine Trinity Lantern Holy Symbol)
Duration: Instantaneous
When you cast this spell, target an undead creature with the incorporeal movement ability or the spirit creature type and force that creature to make a Charisma saving throw. Upon a failed saving throw the creature in imprisoned within the holy symbol of the Divine Trinity, a red lantern, until it can free itself. Once per day at sundown, the trapped creature may attempt to free itself by attempting a new Charisma saving throw. If successful, they appear adjacent to the lantern. You may release a trapped creature at any time, giving it a single order of no more than five words that the creature must obey. After the order is complete, the spirit is set free and may seek out the caster to extract its revenge. Only one such creature can be imprisoned at a time.

To See the Soul Within

2nd-level Divination
Secret Spell: Divine Trinity, Faithful of Beltine
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Concentration, 10 minutes
You are instantly able to tell if all the creatures within the spell's range have souls or if they have multiple souls occupying their body, such as in the case of possession, or someone with the Fractured Self background feature. While the spell is in effect, you can scrutinize a specific subject. Unless they are under the protection of a spell or ability such as *nondetection*, you can ascertain more information about them as you observe their soul(s). After 1 turn of scrutiny, you can discover the souls' race and sex. After one minute, you can determine their state of health and whether they suffer from a magical curse. After two minutes, you can determine if the soul has fallen out of favor of the Gods, such as broken vows, or has made pacts with spirits or infernal creatures.

Twist of Fortune's Knife

2nd-level Transmutation
Secret Spell: Holy champions of Larissa or Nier
Casting Time: 1 Bonus Action
Range: Self
Components: V
Duration: Concentration - 10 minutes
The next time you hit with a melee weapon attack during the spell's duration, your weapon flares to life, dealing an additional 2d8 damage and gain a twist of fortune. Until the next dawn, you may add a single d4 to any single saving throw or attack roll. You may only possess one twist of fortune at a time.

Higher Levels: When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the initial extra damage dealt by the attack increases by 1d8 for each slot above 2nd.

Wail of the Damned

3rd-level Evocation
Secret Spell: Divine Trinity
Casting Time:1 action
Range: Self (30-foot radius)
Components: V
Duration: Instantaneous
Each creature in a 30-foot radius around you must succeed on a Charisma saving throw or suffer 4d6 psychic damage while rolling on the short-term madness table. On a successful saving throw, they only suffer half damage and retain your sanity.

Ward of Bones

3rd-level Conjuration
Secret Spell: Divine Trinity
Casting Time: 1 bonus
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (specially prepared skull, see below)
Duration: Concentration - 10 minutes
When you cast this spell, you place a specially prepared skull on the ground, causing bones to grow from the ground in a spherical lattice in 15 feet radius around you. The ward grants half cover (+2 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws) against spells and attacks originating from outside the ward. Anyone within the ward may cast spells and or attack creatures outside of the ward without any penalties as the bones appear to move out of the way. The ward itself can be attacked, possessing AC: 13 and 50 hit points.

As an action you may destroy the ward and the skull causing it to explode outward in a storm of bone shards. All creatures outside of the ward and within 15 feet of the ward's edge must make a Dexterity saving throw or suffer 6d4 slashing damage, suffering half damage upon a successful saving throw.

To cast this spell, you must have an intact skull carved with sigils of Neroth and Sarish that is not consumed with the casting of this spell.

Zone of Banishment

8th-level Abjuration
Secret Spell: Divine Trinity
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self (20-foot radius)
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Concentration - 1 minute
Once this spell is cast you create a stationary ripple in reality that you control. For the spell's duration, any creature not native to the plane you are currently on with 50 hit points or less is banished to their plane of origin.

Unfriendly creatures that begin their turn within the area possess more than 50 hit points, and not native to the plane you are currently on must make a Charisma saving throw or suffer 6d6 radiant damage, suffering half damage upon a successful saving throw. Any damage that reduces the creature to 50 hit points or less instantly banishes the creature to their plane of origin.

Chapter VI:
Codex of Threats

The Batur

It dropped from the canopy above and landed on one of the woodsmen, its weight cracking the poor man's spine like a rotted twig. At first, we thought some sort of moss-covered tree limb had fallen upon him, but then it rose up slowly on two thick legs covered in matted fur and raised its head – that horrible head that roared and clacked insect-like mandibles that seemed able to cut through a tree with one snap. I am not ashamed to say that I ran in fear and didn't stop until I reached the lumberyard.

All around the edge of the Vastwood live tribes of ferocious creatures that appear to have been the result of some sort of biomancy experiment of the ssanu that went terribly wrong. Standing over seven feet in height, these powerful creatures are bipedal when on the ground, but can make use of all four of their great limbs when climbing through treetop canopies like those found in the Vastwood and the Felglade

Baturs appear to be a cross between a large grizzly bear and a giant sloth. However, unlike the sloth, there is nothing lethargic about these beasts. Possessing razor-sharp claws and a long reach, the batur can easily slash through mail as if it were paper, eviscerating a man in seconds. The batur's mandibles resemble those of the il'Huan but are not as large. These mandibles will attempt to lock onto a limb or about a portion of the torso and bite deeply, to render the target immobile. It will then attack with its claws, killing its prey quickly.

It is unknown whether baturs possess a language of their own, although they have been taught to respond to commands by Malfelan elorii in the Felglade. This implies that the baturs possess the intelligence of dogs or perhaps chimps, making them cunning and wily creatures that will stalk their prey and even coordinate ambushes with others of its kind.

There appears to be some sort of enmity between the baturs and the Singarthan trolls as it has been witnessed that both will forego attacking other types of foes in favor of engaging one another. According to some elorii, the Singarthan trolls were originally an arboreal creature before experimented upon by the ssanu, who made them the juggernauts they are today. It is possible that some ancient, ancestral memory survives in both species from when they both competed over the same territory and resources.

Common Tactics

A favored tactic of the creatures is to use their long arms and legs to climb high over their victim, then drop atop of him, surprising the hapless prey and giving them ample time to attack with their claws and mandibles. When attacking in a pack, the batur will sometimes have one of their own act as bait to lure prey into an ambush.



Batur

Large monstrosity

Armor Class: 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points: 67 (8d10+24)
Speed: 30 ft, 30 ft climb

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	8 (-2)

Skills: Perception +3
Senses: Darkvision 60 ft, passive Perception 13
Languages: none
Challenge: 3 (700 XP)

Rip and Rend. Any time the Batur hits with two of its claw attacks it may make an attack with its mandibles as a bonus action.

Actions

Multiattack. The batur makes four attacks, one of which may be with its mandibles.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Mandibles. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) piercing damage.

Bees, Giant

We thought that they were just normal bees. I mean, the sound they made wasn't any different from the ones you hear in the Vastwood. It wasn't until they came out of the escarpment that we saw they were huge. We tried to climb down the crags as fast as we could, but Naid was speared through by a stinger as long as my arm. They carried him back screaming into the hive and that's the last we saw of him.

High up on the eastern face of Mount Dagha, within the many crags and overhangs are huge hives of honeybees replete with enormous honeycombs. These bees, however, are not the standard size one is accustomed to, but grow to be as big as a large dog, with stingers three feet in length. Many have speculated that the bees are either a product of the elorii Kurenthé curse that devastated the region, while others say that the bees' hive must be in contact with some ancient, arcane device that mutated the insects. Those that advocate this theory point to the strange effect the honey has on those gifted with arcane abilities. These sorcerers claim that after consuming the golden nectar, they feel less drained when casting spells and tire less easily from channeling arcane energy through their bodies.

Due to this perceived benefit, the honey is highly sought after, and a few honeycombs is enough to feed a family for months. Many of the desperate inhabitants of the Pearl, as well as members of the poorer Andyar villages, risk their lives by climbing the jagged rocks hundreds of feet high, sometimes with no more than their fingertips, for the chance to gather some of the honey. Some of the survivors claim to have seen their fellow explorers dragged by the bees into the larger honeycombs and sealed within.

These huge bees may also be found flying over the plateau in the Uncleansed area of the City, where they share some sort of symbiotic relationship with the carnivorous plants that line the



shores of the overflowing lake of Obsitus Park. Whereas any other living creature moving within reach of the flowering plants' tentacles are immediately attacked, the bees are able to fly up to the plants with impunity.

Bee, Giant

Medium Beast

Armor Class: 13
Hit Points: 13 (3d8)
Speed: 10 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	3 (-3)

Senses: Blightsight 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Challenge: 1/2 (100 XP)

Actions

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (3d6 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. If the bee uses its stinger it stops attacking and flies away where it dies at the end of its next turn.

Cadaver Hounds

It padded silently towards us, a large hound, deathly pale and gaunt to the point where its ribs could be seen straining against the membrane that passed for a hide. Its fleshless skull was turned up into the air, turning its head slowly as it sniffed for our scent. The priest assured me that the ward we sat within would hide us, but as the creature started to turn towards us, I knew that he had gravely miscalculated.

Created to guard the temples of the Gods by a combination of divine cants sacred to Saluwé and Neroth, cadaver hounds exist in both the Mortal and Spirit Realms. This dual existence allows the hounds to be effective against mortal enemies as well as any foul spirits that seek to despoil hallowed grounds. While most dogs hunt by scent, the cadaver hounds' unique nature grants them the ability to track by sensing the life force of the living, something considerably more difficult to disguise than one's personal odor. This life sense also allows the hounds to track and attack unerringly in complete darkness, as the life force of their prey shines like a beacon in their fiery eyes.

Following the fall of the Imperium, packs of these creatures survived and flourished, becoming feral and wild, though they are still compelled to make their lairs in or near sacred places, such as temples, shrines, and sanctified areas. The largest known pack of cadaver hounds makes their lair on the steps of the four enormous Gates of Anshar in the Uncleansed region. Explorers that have penetrated that far into the zone claim to have seen as many as two dozen hounds upon that sacred site.

Common Tactics

The cadaver hounds live and hunt in packs, with a distinct pecking order from the weakest member all the way up to the alpha. Their usual method of hunting is for the members of the pack to isolate and encircle their prey. When this is done, the alpha will let out a haunting howl that stuns the prey momentarily, allowing the rest to launch their attack. The hounds



will harry their prey, tearing at limbs and dragging it to the ground, while the alpha strikes the killing blow. Other members of the pack will create a perimeter to keep other predators or the comrades of the victim at bay while the kill is being made.

Cadaver Hound

Medium monstrosity

Armor Class: 13
Hit Points: 11 (2d8+2)
Speed: 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	15 (+3)	12 (+1)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Skills: Perception +3
Senses: passive Perception 13
Languages: none
Challenge: 1/4 (50 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell. The cadaver hound has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell

Life Sight. Cadaver hounds can sense the energy of living creatures granting them the equivalent of Blindsight 30 ft. when attempting to see living creatures.

Pack Tactics. Cadaver hounds have advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the hound's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 11 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. Their bite is considered to be a magical weapon for the purposes of bypassing damage resistances.

Cadaver Hound Alpha

Medium monstrosity

Armor Class: 13
Hit Points: 42 (5d10 + 15)
Speed: 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+3)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Skills: Perception +3
Senses: passive Perception 13
Languages: none
Challenge: 2 (450 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell. The cadaver hound has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell

Life Sight. Cadaver hounds can sense the energy of living creatures granting them the equivalent of Blindsight 30 ft. when attempting to see living creatures.

Pack Tactics. Cadaver hounds have advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the hound's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. Their bite is considered to be a magical weapon for the purposes of bypassing damage resistances.

Death Howl (Recharge 5–6). The cadaver hound produces a chilling howl. All creatures within 30 ft. of the hound must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or suffer 13 (2d6+1) thunder damage and become stunned until the end of the hound's next turn. Creatures that make their save are not stunned but still suffer damage. Cadaver hounds and creatures incapable of hearing are immune to this effect.

"How do I know they're not undead creatures? Because during an expedition to the Uncleansed part of the city, a pack of them came out of nowhere. First, they were silent as can be and then they were on us, baying like no creature I ever heard. This Nerothian takes one look at their ugly faces and says he'll handle this. He had his holy symbol out like a shield with a cocky smile on his face. That smile was still there when those hounds ripped his head off."

– Momus Eight-Fingers

Cult of the Broken Tusk

The raiders erupted from the night into our campground, their pebbly, thick skin glistening with a thin layer of mucus that covered their bodies. As terrible as they seemed, it was the beast the raider rode that gave me pause. Its ulcerated hide and long, sharp tusks, one broken like all its brethren, gave the creature a savage appearance, but it was the gleam in its eye that told me that it was the one in charge, not the rider on its back.

Though the Time of Terror took place over a thousand years ago, a number of infernals continue to plague humanity. Unlike the hordes located in the Fiendish Expanse, the infernals that roam outside that region must excel at subterfuge to remain at large after so long a period of time. The Cult of the Broken Tusk is led by one such demon that hides in plain sight within the members of the Cult and the animals they ride. This demonic infernal has the ability to possess multiple creatures simultaneously, in this case, both the mounts and their riders.

The cult welcomes those of any race and gender that were ostracized or marginalized by their community and have a rage within them seeking to revenge for this slight. They are accepted within the cult by others that share their shame and feel the same burning hatred in their breast that can only be quenched with the blood of others. Slowly, as the member becomes possessed by the demon, a process that can take weeks or months, their skin takes on a thick pebbly texture, like that of an elephant, and a pair of tusks begin to grow from their lower jaw. After their first kill, the cultists are given a mount and develop a strong bond with the creature that many believe is telepathic. In reality, it is the divided intellect of the infernal that controls the mount is communicating with its portion within the cultist. Given the number of beings it must simultaneously affect, the demon only influences the cultist and does not have complete control over them. By bonding the rider with the mount, the infernal exerts greater control over both and can take complete possession if necessary.

The cult is made up of over one hundred members and growing and are attacking Andyar villages in the



north of the Blessed Lands, killing those that defy them and capturing the rest. The cult's camp is in a small clearing less than a mile inside the Vastwood, within the ruins of an ancient eloran town.

Common Tactics

The Cultists will attempt to attack their victims in the open, riding them down under the hooves of their mounts, gore them with its tusks or slash at them as they ride by. They will avoid entering enclosed spaces unless absolutely necessary. Should their prey run into a building, they will set it on fire or, if made of stone, smoke them out. Though they loot what they find, their goal is to spread as much terror as possible, an emotion that the infernal feeds upon.

Broken Tusk Boar

Medium Beast (Infernal)

Armor Class: 15 (Natural Armor)
Hit Points: 45 (7d8 + 14)
Speed: 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	6 (-2)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)

Skills: Perception +5
Senses: Darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 15
Languages: none
Challenge: 2 (450 XP)

Charge. If the broken tusk boar moves at least 20 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a tusk attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Fel Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede the broken tusk boar's darkvision.

Infernal Coordination. When mounted by a Broken Tusk rider, any time their rider makes a melee weapon attack the boar can use its reaction to grant its rider advantage on the triggering attack.

Relentless (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). If the boar takes 10 damage or less that would reduce it to 0 hit points, it is reduced to 1 hit point instead.

Actions

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

Broken Tusk Rider

Medium Humanoid (Infernal)

Armor Class: 14 (Hide Armor)
Hit Points: 27 (5d8 + 5)
Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

Skills: Animal Handling +4, Perception +2
Senses: Darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 12
Languages: Low Coryani, infernal
Challenge: 1 (200 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the broken tusk boar hits with it (included in the attack).

Superb Rider. When mounted upon a Broken Tusk boar, any time the boar is attacked the rider may use its reaction to grant their boar a +5 bonus to its AC until the beginning of the rider's next turn.

Actions

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage in melee or 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage at range.

"After a battle, I tried to question one of the Broken Tusk, but it slavered and grunted like an animal. Sadly, I find this to be the norm when speaking to most people I meet."

– Marco val'Cessari

The Cyclopes of Saam Ur

Sure, a cyclops is a fearsome opponent – it's much taller than a man and stronger than a bull. And don't forget that eye beam of theirs; that'll turn you into a pile of ash faster than you can blink. But for all that, they have a major weakness, its one eye. Take that out with a quick sword thrust or an arrow and he'll be as easy to kill as a mewling baby.

Once enjoying a sophisticated and advanced society, the ancient cyclopes of Saam Ur, known as the Eladru, are now nothing more than feral, bestial creatures retaining only a mere fraction of their culture and intellect. Where the Eladru were once masters of the arcane, philosophers and great builders, the modern-day descendants are scavengers, preying upon lost ships and any foolish travelers wading through the Flood Plains in the dead of night. Unreasoning, savage and communicating in a base and guttural language, the cyclopes of Saam Ur plague the shores of the Sea of Lanterns with no loftier goal than procuring its next meal.

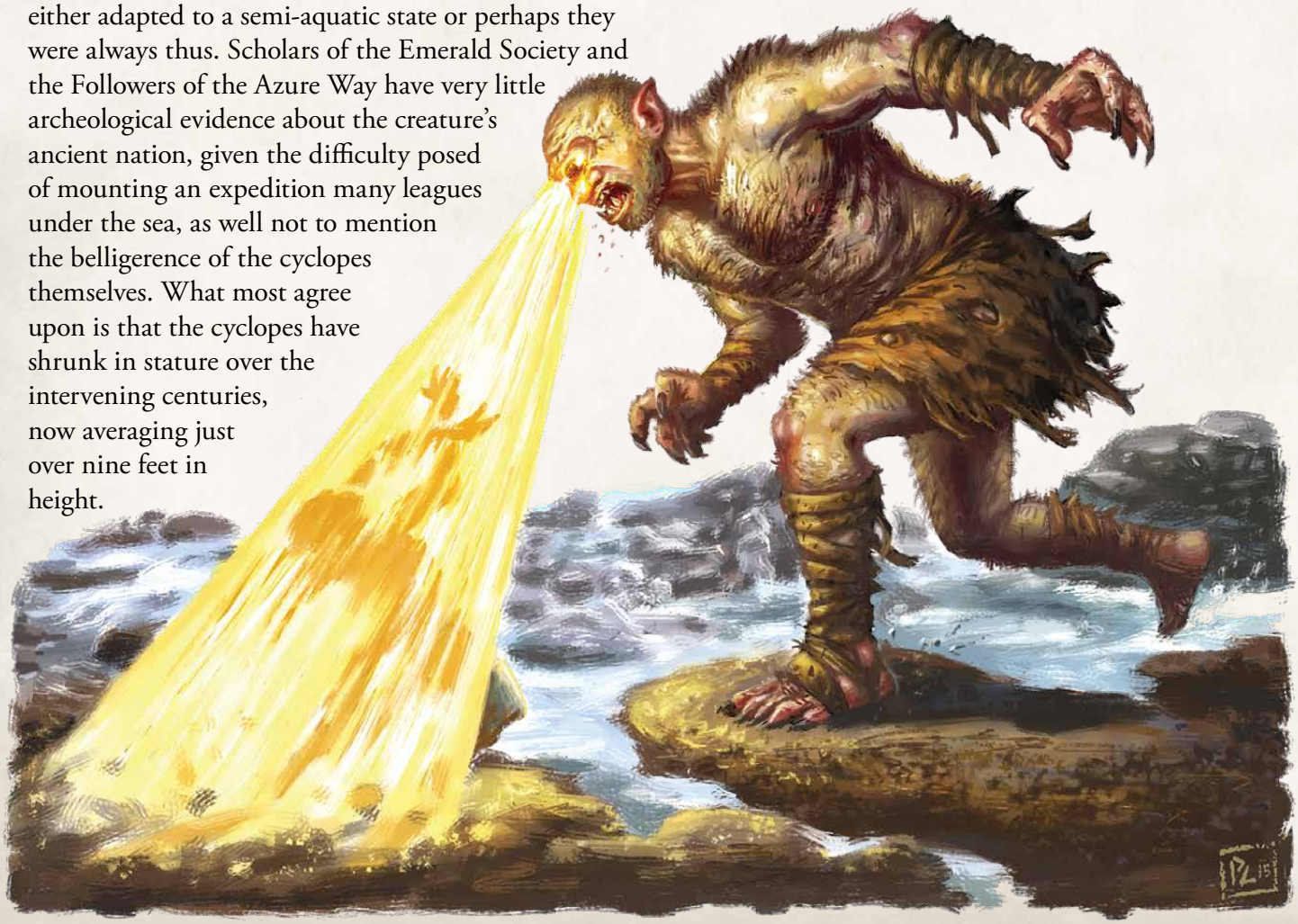
Few in number, the entire cyclopes population is estimated at no more than a few hundred. Their ancient capital of Saam Ur was swallowed long ago by the waves of the Sea of Lantern and the entire race either adapted to a semi-aquatic state or perhaps they were always thus. Scholars of the Emerald Society and the Followers of the Azure Way have very little archeological evidence about the creature's ancient nation, given the difficulty posed of mounting an expedition many leagues under the sea, as well not to mention the belligerence of the cyclopes themselves. What most agree upon is that the cyclopes have shrunk in stature over the intervening centuries, now averaging just over nine feet in height.

Though feral compared to their Eladru ancestors, modern cyclopes are not without the ability to communicate, striking bargains or forming alliances when it suits them. But beware, cyclops are notoriously untrustworthy and their fondness for humanoid flesh may make alliances with such creatures short-lived at best.

It must be noted that though the cyclopes tend to be solitary in nature, they are known to group together into small war bands when necessary. Three hundred years ago, an especially persuasive and ruthless warlord managed to gather together over forty cyclopes and invade Pecinium. Hundreds died during the attack and many more went missing before the Sea Lords managed to mount a counter attack and hurl the one-eyed beasts back into the ocean.

Common Tactics

These ferocious fighters lack any sort of finesse while attacking relying primarily on their savage strength and size to overwhelm their foes. When confronted with a powerful enemy, it may use its eye beam to reduce his foe to a smoking cinder. Cyclopes are reluctant to use this ability while hunting, as it makes the prospective meal inedible.



Cyclops of Saam Ur

Large giant

Armor Class: 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points: 68 (8d10+32)
Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	8 (-1)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws: Int -1, Wis -2
Senses: passive Perception 8
Languages: Common
Challenge: 3 (700 XP)

Poor Depth Perception. The cyclops has disadvantage on any attack roll against a target more than 30 feet away.

Actions

Multiattack. The cyclops makes two greatclub attacks.

Greatclub. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+5) bludgeoning damage.

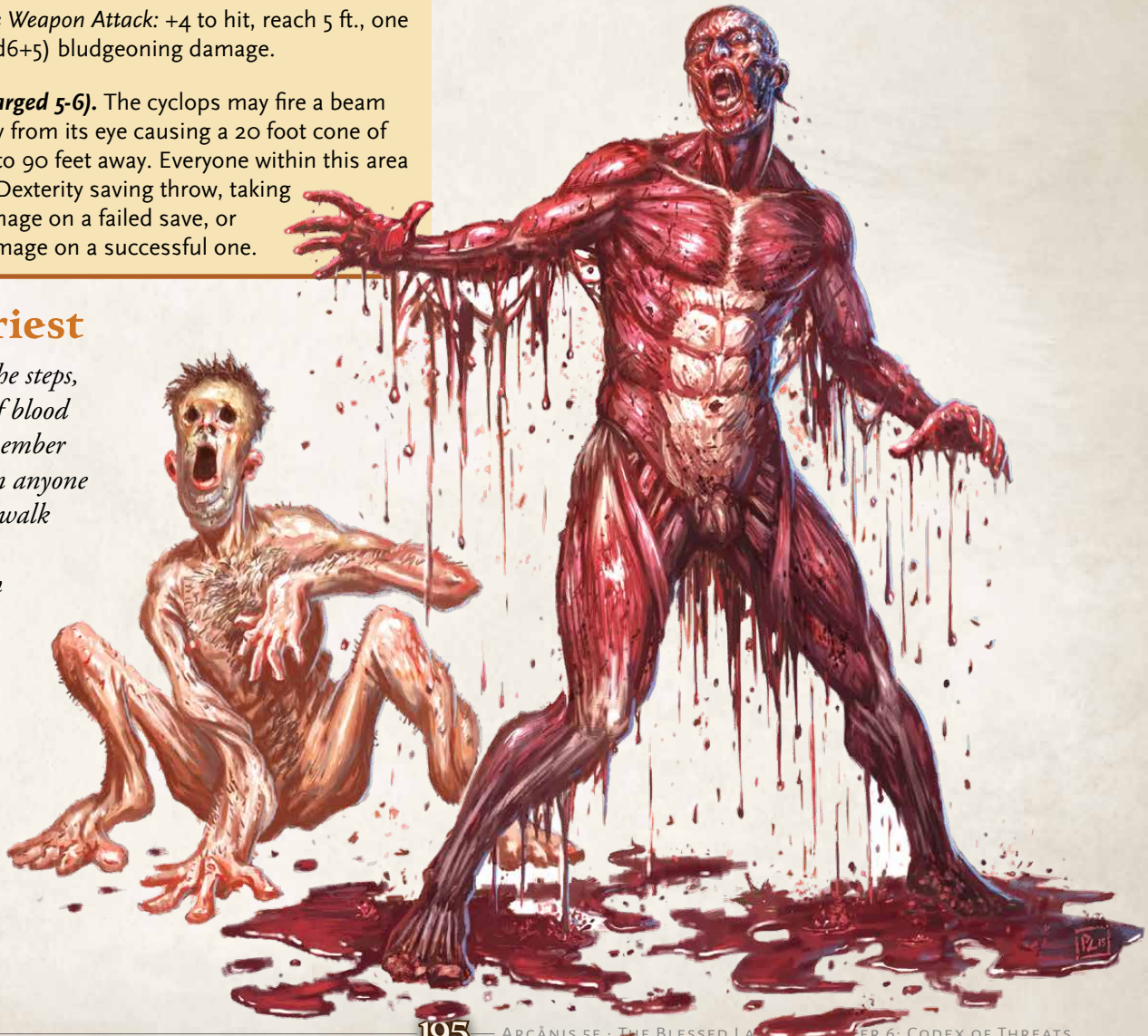
Eye Beam (Recharged 5-6). The cyclops may fire a beam of intense energy from its eye causing a 20 foot cone of searing light up to 90 feet away. Everyone within this area must make a 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Even during the height of the Imperium of Man, there were some who venerated and adhered to the tenets of the more blasphemous aspects of the Gods. With the fall of the Imperium and the resulting isolation of human communities, these heretical cults flourished and were even adopted secretly by the rulers of the various small kingdoms that rose and fell consistently throughout this period. One such nation was the Kingdom of Amanish whose ruler led the mystery cult known as the Broken, which worshipped Anshar's aspect as the Deliverer of Pain.

This mystery cult promoted the concept that the flesh is a prison that corrupts the soul and only through pain can the spirit be purified. Those in the inner circle used the cult to indulge their sadistic tendencies, elevating torture to an art form as they paid obeisance to their Goddess. Scholars believe that Queen Amanish, She of the Bloody Lips, acted as its High Priestess. The true devotees of this blasphemous religion rose through the ranks to become priests under Amanish. Upon ascending to this rank, the priests and priestesses

Flayed Priest

It walked down the steps, leaving a smear of blood in its wake. I remember thinking, how can anyone survive, let alone walk with their skin removed. It began to speak in some language I'd never heard and then all I knew was searing, excruciating pain.



would have their skin ritually flayed. Whatever Cant was used to keep these poor souls alive during and after this horrific ceremony is lost to the ages.

The flayed priests revel in the constant pain they experience, believing that it brings them closer to the divine state described by their Goddess. Their body seeps blood constantly, but rather than coagulating to form a scab, it creates like a jellied sheen over their entire boy. One can tell if a flayed priest once made a place its lair by the dark crimson smears about the walls and floors.

A flayed priest's skin is not discarded, but rather the ritual used to anoint the priest also animates their epidermis, which obeys its master's mental commands. Many have likened the animated hide to a pet, but unlike a favored hound, the animated skin can grapple and strangle its master's enemies silently and with great efficacy.

Flayed Priest

Medium humanoid (human)

Armor Class: 13
Hit Points: 39 (6d8+12)
Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)

Senses: passive Perception 13
Languages: Trade language
Challenge: 1 (200 XP)

Slick Skin. These priests gain advantage on all Strength checks to resist or brake a grapple.

Spellcasting. The priest is a 3rd-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +3 to hit with spell attacks). The priest has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips: (at will): *light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *guiding bolt, hellish rebuke, inflict wounds.*

2nd level (3 slots): *hold person, spiritual weapon*

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Common Tactics

A flayed priest will not directly engage their enemies if possible. Instead, they will use any Cants at their disposal to inflict the most painful and debilitating attacks possible. If left with no other choice, the priest will use a small weapon, like a dagger, to defend himself.

It will use his flayed skin to surprise his enemy and grapple him to the ground. The skin will then slowly strangle the opponent or leave him helpless for their master to deliver the killing blow.

Flayed Skin

Medium construct

Armor Class: 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points: 39 (7d8+7)
Speed: 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+1)	3 (-4)	3 (-4)	1 (-5)

Skills: Athletics +4, Perception +3
Damage Immunities: Lightning, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine
Condition Immunities: Charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses: Blightsight 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages: Understands the languages of any prest or prestess of the cult.
Challenge: 1 (200 XP)

Damage Transfer. While it is grappling a creature, the flayed skin possesses resistance against all damage, while anyone it grapples takes the same amount of damage it suffers.

Suffocating Grapple. Any creature grappled by the flayed skin will start to suffocate, as if choking or being out of breath, as long as they are grappled. If a creature is grappled for a consecutive number of turns equal to its Constitution modifier +1, it is reduced to 0 hit points and is dying. Additionally, it can't regain hit points or be stabilized until it can breathe again.

Actions

Grapple. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 14).

Gillicar

"We was manning a skiff movin' between Pecinium and the Harbor when we run up on a sandbar. Capt'n told us to get out and heave, but I wouldn't do it. 'You knows whats in there?' I says? But no, Capt'n wouldn't believe me. Thems all got out and started pushen us off. It was then that it shot out of the water. Thought it was a rock, truth be told, but it wasn't. The thing latched onto the first mate first, and theys was scrambling back up onto the skiff. By the time the beast was done with 'em, the Capt'n decided we could wait till the tide to try to get off the sandbar again."

There are very few creatures that call the Flood Plain of the Blessed Lands home. The region is not known to be particularly stable, considering the massive inundation that floods the entire area every seven years. Even a normal tide can run further inland than is usual, like the tides of the calmer waters around the Gulf of Yarris. What few creatures call this region home tend to be tough and very, very deadly. The gillicar is no exception.

These creatures are large, armored amphibians living in the brackish water and mud pools that cover the Flood Plains after the tides run out. Resembling fifteen-foot long, armored carp with toothy maws and hooked fins that act as feet, these creatures are known to remain absolutely still for days or weeks at a time, making them almost undetectable as anything other than a large rock. Some remain still long enough to be covered by a layer of silt from the incoming tides, making them even more difficult to detect.

Once these beasts are close enough to their prey, they launch themselves, moving with such a burst of speed that they are difficult to avoid. Because of the harsh climate of the Flood Plains, gillicar have heavy armored plates that help keep their flesh moist during the more arid times of the year, while protecting them from other predators. The armored plates are so dense and hard that some Chauni tribes are known to hunt these beasts and harvest their hard carapaces for shields and pieces of armor.

Combat Tactics

Once prey moves close enough, these creatures launch themselves with surprising speed towards their prey. Similar to crocodiles, these beasts are ambush predators and save all their energy for the initial grab, even propelling themselves onto low-sided ships. Once they have their prey, their powerful jaws crunch down, crushing them for ease of swallowing.



Gillicar

Large Beast

Armor Class: 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points: 75 (8d12+8)
Speed: 20 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills: Stealth +5
Senses: passive Perception 10
Languages: --
Challenge: 4 (1,100 XP)

Hold Breath. The gillicar can hold its breath for 15 minutes.

Natural Camouflage. The gillicar can disguise itself as a bit of drift wood or rock, gaining advantage on all Stealth checks while in water or along a coastline.

Actions

Multiattack. The gillicar makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its tail.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the gillicar can't bite another target.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target not grappled by the gillicar. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.



Harpies, (Onaran)

They flew out of the sun, the glare making it impossible to see them until they were upon us. It was their foul smell that alerted me to their presence just moments before they struck, their large claws piercing Alain's armor as if it were cloth. It took mere seconds for the creatures to swoop down and take four of the guards away. We never saw them again nor found their remains, though we searched for hours.

Believed by many to be the creation of Ossarion biomancers or more popularly, unfaithful women cursed by the Goddess Saluwé for their wicked ways, the true origin of these foul and malevolent creatures is unknown. What is known is that the harpies are far from mindless and bestial creatures, but instead enjoy a complex societal structure, where the eldest hold sway over the young and rising through the ranks is as much a matter of power and ruthlessness as it is of age.

The harpies are a member of a mysterious and little known group called the Court of the Black Annis, which includes, among other members, Night Hags. The Court is led by the eponymous Black Annis, held by legend as the most powerful witch on the continent. It may be from her that the harpies acquired the knowledge to master the magical tradition of the Hex, a corpus of corrupting and foul rites that can twist a person's body and corrupt their soul.

From youngest to eldest, all harpies look like withered old crones melded with some sort of large bird of prey, such as an eagle or vulture. Their plumage varies in color, but all are befouled by filth and excrement. Their claws are large enough to lift a man bodily and sharp enough to pierce heavy armor as if it were paper. No male harpies have ever been seen and it is unknown if a male of the species exists, though many surmise that they must for the species to procreate.

Common Tactics

Most harpies do not possess the knowledge to cast Hex spells, but instead possess a horrific screech that they use to either stun or injure their victims. They then swoop down and attempt to snatch them up, fly to a

high altitude and drop them. If this is not possible, they may hover and slash with their razor-sharp claws.

Older harpies possessing the talent for Hex magic prefer to hover out of reach of arms and arrows and let their foul rites destroy their opponents for them. The eldest and most powerful are known to control the weather, able to create powerful winds and even summon storm clouds, calling down lightning to strike at their foes. Some have even seen these rare elders consort with ill-tempered zephyrs and other air elementals, striking up profane bargains with the creatures in return for their services.

Harpy, (Onaran)

Medium monstrosity

Armor Class: 12
Hit Points: 38 (7d8 + 7)
Speed: 20 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)

Senses: Darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 10
Languages: low Coryani
Challenge: 1 (200 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. The harpy elder makes two attacks

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (2d4 + 1) slashing damage.

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 20/60 ft., reach 5 ft., one target. One handed *Hit:* 4 (1d6+1), two handed *Hit:* 5 (1d8+1) piercing damage.

Piercing Shriek (Recharge 5–6). As an action the harpy can force all creatures which can hear it within 30 feet to make a DC: 11 Wisdom saving throw or suffer 1d8 Thunder damage and become stunned for 1 minute. The stunned target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Upon a successful saving throw the target suffers half damage and is not stunned.

Harpy Elder, (Onaran)

Medium monstrosity

Armor Class: 15
Hit Points: 112 (15d8 + 45)
Speed: 20 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	13 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saves: Wisdom +5, Charisma +7
Skills: Arcana +4, Stealth +5, Perception +5
Senses: Darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 15
Languages: low Coryan
Challenge: 5 (1,800 XP)

Spellcasting. The Harpy Elder is a 5th-level primal spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following primal spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *Poison spray, spiritcraft*, shillelagh*

Pact Magic (2 - 3rd level Slots): *Cause Wounds, evil eye*, misty step, suggestion, call lighting, vampiric touch.*
Sprits Boons:

Vulture. Elders gain 7 temporary hit points every time they reduce a hostile creature's hit points to 0.

Fire. Cast *burning hands* 1/Day as if cast with a 3rd level spell slot.

Falcon. Fly Speed Increased by 10 (already included) gains advantage on all melee attacks while in fight

Actions

Multiattack. The harpy elder makes two attacks

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) slashing damage.

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 20/60 ft., reach 5 ft., one target. One handed *Hit:* 3 (1d6), two handed *Hit:* 4 (1d8) piercing damage.

Piercing Shriek (Recharge 5–6). As an action the harpy can force all creatures which can hear it within 30 feet to make a DC: 13 Wisdom saving throw or suffer 3d8 Thunder damage and become stunned for 1 minute. The stunned target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Upon a successful saving throw the target suffers half damage and is not stunned.

Headless Raiders

At first, I thought they were just bandits, but as they came closer the wailing of the damned chorused about them and I saw the spirits of every person they'd ever butchered tethered in their wake. As they rode about to encircle us, the wraiths crested over them like a wave and crashed down on us, their claws slashing through our bodies without leaving a mark but ripping our very souls to ribbons. As I felt my life drain from me, I thought to myself, "How can they be laughing, when they don't have heads?!"

As the Imperium of Man was beset by the Sword of the Heavens and his Nierite army of the Cleansing Flame, not everyone rallied to the Imperator's cause. A group of Yhing hir, members of some of the val'Haupt's vassal families, used the chaos that ensued to raid undefended towns and rob the host of refugees fleeing the capital of all their worldly possessions, as well as exact some much needed revenge.

Led by Urcatto, a merciless former centurion of a cavalry auxilia, the raiders numbered fifty veteran horsemen who spent years training and fighting together. When their home villages were threatened by Leonydes val'Virdan and his forces, his troops were forbidden from engaging the Nierite army and instead were ordered to provide protection to the families of the Imperial Court who were fleeing to the west. This so enraged Urcatto that he disobeyed orders and fled across the Blessed Lands, skirting around the invaders until reaching his homeland, only to find his family slaughtered and his village burnt to the ground. Gathering the few survivors that escaped the carnage, Urcatto and his raiders began a long campaign of vengeance on both the Nierite forces and the fleeing imperial refugees, enriching themselves in the process.

For years, even after the fall of the Imperium, Urcatto and his raiders preyed upon everyone from Nierite warriors to merchant caravans, mocking the Sword of the Heavens and his inability to protect those traveling through Blessed Lands in the hopes of luring the newly installed imperator out from his throne room and into battle. These constant pinpricks against Leonydes finally roused his ire and he engaged Urcatto with only his personal bodyguards, but rather than doom the Nierite leader, Urcatto ruefully discovered that the Sword of the Heavens was unstoppable on the battlefield. Within hours, his raiders were defeated and soon faced the flaming justice of the Paragon of Nier. Urcatto and his five remaining lieutenants were forced to watch the execution of his followers, until finally Leonydes himself beheaded the last of the raiders and buried their heads in the dry earth of the Blessed Lands, leaving their bodies out to rot.

Unbeknownst to the Nierites, a small group of Urcatto's people remained in hiding while the battle took place. One of these was a village shaman who took the bodies of the six decapitated raiders and performed profane and unclean rites upon them. He called upon the dark spirits of the cursed land to infuse the bodies of Urcatto and his men so that they could continue seeking vengeance against the Nierites. For eight days and nights the shaman invoked his foul rites until on the ninth evening, the light of the green moon shone down upon the bodies and Urcatto and



his men rose, their chilling laugh made all the more unreal given that they were headless.

Since that time, ages ago, the Headless Raiders ride out of the Blessed Lands upon their undead steeds whenever the green light of Viridis shines down upon them. The souls of all those who fell to their blades are dragged behind them, tethered to their unnatural mounts, and forced to fight on their behalf. Though any living thing is fair game to the Headless Raiders, they take special delight in hunting down adherents of the god Nier. Those that can escape their clutches until the first rays of light breaks over the horizon are safe until nightfall, as the raiders cannot operate in the light of day. Those that have the prowess to destroy them in battle merely delay the inevitable, as their bodies reappear the following night to continue the hunt. Some believe that the only way to truly destroy the raiders is to find where their heads were buried and burn them to ashes, a difficult task, as they were buried millennia in the past.

Flaming Steed

Large undead

Armor Class: 14 (Natural armor)
Hit Points: 37 (5d10+10)
Speed: 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	5 (-3)	8 (-1)	5 (-3)

Senses: Darkvision 120 ft. passive Perception 11
Languages: -
Challenge: 1 (200 XP)

Illumination. The flaming steed sheds bright light in a 10-foot radius and dim light for an additional 10 feet.

Trampling Charge. If the horse moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a fiery hooves attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the horse can make another attack with its hooves against it as a bonus action.

Actions

Fiery Hooves. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage +2 (1d4) fire damage.

Headless Raider

Medium undead

Armor Class: 17 (Splint "Brigandine")
Hit Points: 52 (7d8 + 14)
Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

Saving throws: Con +4, Wis +2
Senses: Blindsight 120 ft. passive Perception 11
Languages: Altharin
Challenge: 3 (700 XP)

Spirit Swarm. A Headless Raider binds all of its victim's souls to it, creating a swarm of spirits which rend anyone who comes close. Any creature which starts its turn within 10 feet of the headless raider must make a Dexterity saving throw DC: 13 or suffer 9 (3d6) points of necrotic damage.

Supernatural Limitations. Headless Raiders cannot operate in bright daylight and only hunt when the moon of Viridis is in the sky.

Superb Rider. When mounted upon their unnatural steed, any time their steed is attacked the rider may use its reaction to grant their steed a +5 bonus to its AC until the beginning of the riders next turn.

Actions

Multiattack. The headless raider makes two melee attacks.

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

Spectral Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) necrotic damage, any creature reduced to 0 hit points with the rider's spectral claws suffer disadvantage on all death saving throws, if the creature dies they are drawn into the raider's spirit swarm and dead forever.

Lance. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d12+3) piercing damage.

Hyena Men

Thought to have migrated from the Hinterlands to the west, the hyena men are the ultimate scavengers in the Blessed Lands and a constant threat to pilgrims and other travelers of the region. Standing on their hind legs, the hyena men top out at six feet on average and but are also able to travel on all fours for short distances and at very high speeds.

Hyena men are vicious creatures without any sense of mercy unless it is somehow to their benefit to grant it. They are voracious carnivores, preferring fresh meat, but willing to eat the leftovers of larger predators. In fact, filling their bellies seems to be their primary objective, followed by obtaining weapons, armor and shiny, glittering objects, like silver or gold coins and polished precious gems. When wearing armor, hyena men tend to wear lighter armor, such as hard leather and the occasional chain mail shirt or breastplate if going into battle. As for weapons, the hyena men are always armed with their razor-sharp claws and fang-filled maw. They will scavenge human-made weapons when possible and use them with alarming proficiency. Rarely will they take up a shield or ranged weapons, preferring to close with the enemy with their uncanny burst of speed.

The hyena men found in the Blessed Lands come in two varieties: those that roam the region as a nomadic tribe or those who settled into an area, usually in the foothills of the Corlathian Mountains, and maintain some sort of camp.

The nomadic tribes range in number from a dozen to a score of adults traveling the length and breadth of the Blessed Lands, though normally shying away the First City as they have learned that the defenders of the Mound are too numerous and powerful to engage. Instead, they prefer to pounce on stragglers, small caravans or the occasional lone Soldier-Saint of Dagha that their scouts have tracked.

The hyena men that settled in a particular area tend to mark out a territory a few leagues in all directions and descend on any and all who travel through that zone, unless it is obviously military in nature. These tribes are about twice the number than those of their nomadic cousins, usually forty to a hundred adults. To supplement their diet, they will venture into the honeycomb of tunnels and grottos beneath the foothills and dine on barghest and the occasional Singarthan Troll they come upon.

These settled hyena men live in simple tents made of cured hide for protection against the strange and unpredictable weather of the region, a cave or hole in which they may toss bones and other refuse from their grisly meals as well as a primitive shrine, made from the bones of their victims, venerating a degenerate form of Neroth in His aspect of the Carrion Lord or some unknown Devil King or Demon Lord. Few, if any, worship the hyena queen in the far east.



Hyena Man

Medium Humanoid (Hyena Man)

Armor Class: 15 (hide armor, shield)
Hit Points: 22 (5d8)
Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

Senses: Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages: Low Coryani
Challenge: 1/2 (100 XP)

Rampage. When the hyena man reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, it can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+2) piercing damage

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage or 6 (1d8+2) piercing damage if used in a two handed melee attack.

Javelins. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8+1) piercing damage

Hyena Man Alpha

Medium Humanoid (Hyena Man)

Armor Class: 15 (hide armor, shield)
Hit Points: 65 (10d8+20)
Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws. Str +6, Dex +4, Wis +2

Senses: Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages: Low Coryani
Challenge: 3 (700 XP)

Rampage. When the hyena man reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, it can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

Actions

Multiattack. The hyena man alpha makes three melee attacks, two with its longsword and one with its bite or the hyena man alpha makes two ranged attacks with its daggers.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 7 (1d4+5) piercing damage

Longsword. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8+4) slashing damage or 9 (1d10+4) slashing damage if used in a two handed melee attack.

Javelins. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8+5) piercing damage

Ibon

As Tosmageist strode unto the arena, he towered over the tallest of the men assembled there. The ibon was powerfully built and sported a bright yellow mohawk like a sagittal crest along his head. Appearing to be miniature version of the titans of myth, it was no surprise that the six gladiators arrayed against him trembled.

Calling themselves the First Born, the *ngajol* are a race that spawned the myth of the titans, veritable giants that strode the earth and masters of all they surveyed. Broken up into a number of clans, the ngajol have a bizarre psychological trait that drives them to continue to perfect their race, or at least constantly measure themselves against others. To this end, they believe that the world occasionally allows other sub-races to be spawned and develop their own civilizations as a way to test their perfection.

Throughout the ages, the ssethric, the elorii and the humans of the Imperium all record wars that begin for no discernible reason and end just as abruptly. Always bloody and without any demands, these titans appear in the thousands and devastate a region like a force of nature and then, after a time, disengage and are not heard from again, leaving the defenders completely mystified.

To the ngajol, the purpose is clear: the near religious imperative to engage in *Superiority Wars* against others to measure their worth. Once their opponents have been found wanting, there is no further need to continue the conflict. For the ngajol to fight over land, resources, treasure or even ideologies are alien concepts.

When there was no one left to test against, the ngajol warred amongst themselves until one clan fell. The victorious clans would then take from the ranks of

the defeated those they felt fought the most bravely or cunningly, absorbing them into their own group. Once the very best of the survivors were chosen, the rest of the males were put to death in ritual killings and their females forced to breed with inferior races to ensure that their offspring would never be a threat to the victorious ngajol.

Born from the ranks of these defeated ngajol clans, the ibon, a word in the ngajol language meaning degenerate, are the offspring of despoiled females. The weaker but more numerous ibon are used as shock troops or "cannon fodder" in their wars of "Superiority". A few escape during these engagements and make their way east, into the lands of man. There they hire themselves out as mercenaries of various sorts, guards, warriors, or gladiators.

Many an employer and adversary have made the mistake of assuming that these veritable giant men are brutes, long on muscle but short of intelligence; some have even survived to rue that assumption. Ibon are intelligent, though none seem are known to have manifested sorcerous or psionic abilities. Additionally, ibon do not adhere to the religions of any of the sentient races, though they do respect the power wielded by the priests. When asked why, they will say that they have been taught that the only gods that matter are the ngajol lords and that though there may exist more powerful entities, only the ngajol are able to exert their power of life and death here and now.

Due to their size, ibon prefer the use of two-handed weapons, which they can use one handed if required. However, always mindful of the weakness that may steal over them in the most inopportune times, they have a "dagger", usually a short sword or gladius, at their disposal, as well. For this same reason, ibon warriors disdain the use of heavy armor, which need to be custom fitted for their size at a great expense. Most ibon don heavy leather armor or chain mail when going into battle, relying on their powerful physique to absorb damage.

In the First City and the Blessed Lands, a small handful of ibon can be found, usually under the employ of a very rich patron and acting as their bodyguards. In the arena, the reigning champion is an ibon by the name of Tosmageist, winner of over a hundred mortal combats.



Ibon
Medium Humanoid (Ibon)

Armor Class: 16 (chain armor)
Hit Points: 75 (10d8+30)
Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws: Str +6, Dex +4, Int +3
Skills: Athletics +6
Senses: Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages: Low Coryani
Challenge: 3 (700 XP)

Powerful Physique. Ibon may use weapons with the two-handed property with only one hand. However, they suffer disadvantage on attacks with light weapons. Additionally, any one-handed weapon the Ibon wields and their unarmed strikes deal an additional 1d4 points of damage. This damage is of the same type as the weapon.

Actions

Multiattack. The Ibon makes three melee attacks or two ranged attacks.

Tralian hammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12+4) bludgeoning damage.

Javelins. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8+4) piercing damage

Ibon Hero Traits

Your Ibon Hero has the following traits:

Ability Score Increase. Your Strength and Constitution scores increases by 2, and your Intelligence score increases by 1.

Age. Ibon mature at the same rate as humans, with similar life spans. Most Ibon become heroes around age 18 and can live until they reach roughly 80 years old.

Size. Ibon are much larger than the average human standing from 7.5 feet to 8 feet tall and weigh between 270 and 350 pounds. Your size is Medium.

Speed. Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Faithless. Due to their lack of religious beliefs, Ibon cannot choose a faith based background or a class at 1st-level that grants either divine or primal spell casting. Some Ibon find religion later in their lives, but most remain true to their faith that the ngajol lords are supreme.

Powerful Physique. Due to your size you tend to wield even the heaviest of weapons with disturbing ease.

You may make attacks with weapons that have the two-handed property with only one hand.

Your unarmed strikes, one-handed weapons, and two-handed weapons you wield with both hands, and deal an additional 1d4 points of damage. This damage is of the same type as the weapon.

You may duel wield weapons with the versatile quality as if they possessed the light weapon quality.

You suffer disadvantage on attacks with light weapons and when attempting to duel wield weapons with both the reach and the heavy weapons qualities, no amount of training can remove this disadvantage.

Titanic Form. You gain proficiency in Athletics. You count as a large creature when determining your carrying capacity and the weight you can push, drag, or lift. Unlike most races, your maximum Strength is 22, instead of 20.

Languages and Literacy. You can speak Low Coryani and the Trade Language. You can also speak a number of additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier. You are not literate, though literacy as well as additional languages can be acquired through your chosen background.

Nightrunners

Their leathery, ash-grey skin and the rotted black cloaks and hoods they wore gave them almost perfect camouflage as they swarmed through the debris-choked streets of the Uncleansed area towards the Barricade. Some of the new recruits started mumbling that they were wraiths, but the veterans put their minds at ease, their claws were solid enough to eviscerate them with one swipe, but at least their souls would be intact.

Feared throughout the First City due to their periodic raids into the inhabited portion of the plateau, the nightrunners are a race of humanoids living in the upper reaches of the Undercity. Though the size of the population is unknown, it is believed to number in the hundreds. Some scholars believe them to be descendants of humans that fled underground to evade the purges of the Nierites, but in reality, the nightrunners are much, much older.

Nightrunners are descendants of the hussuma created by the ssethric technomancers and initially resemble elorii, but as they age, their reptilian traits become more prominent. After the fall of Yahssremore, a few

hussuma attempted to infiltrate the city of Belestor that was built upon the ruins of the ancient serpent capital but were forced underground to evade capture. These long-lived creatures found the most inaccessible or hidden portions of the various tunnels and chambers that honeycomb the interior of Mount Dagha and settled there. After thousands of generations of inbreeding, their descendants are a shadow of their former selves.

Nightrunner society appears to have split and merged many times over the centuries and today there are several separate tribes that differ greatly in technological sophistication, societal structure and even forms of worship. There is evidence of nightrunner tribes warring against each other and signs of cannibalism when food is scarce.

Though each individual tribe has slightly different physical norms, overall the majority of nightrunners are lithe with mottled, ash-grey skin and red eyes. Their feet and hands end in claws, allowing them to scale surfaces with ease. They wear threadbare and rotted clothing scavenged from tombs or from dead explorers, favoring dark cloaks with hoods.

When they do swarm up from the Undercity and over the Barricade, they are hunting for food and not just spreading death and mayhem. The Blue Cloaks manning the Barricade have been able to hold incursions into the inhabited area to a minimum and it is usually these brave soldiers that bear the brunt of the attack, dying at their station, or dragged down to fill the larder of these vile beings.



Nightrunner

Medium humanoid

Armor Class: 14 (leather armor)
Hit Points: 39 (6d8+12)
Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Skills: Perception +3, Stealth +4
Damage Immunities: poison
Condition Immunities: poisoned
Senses: darkvision 60 ft, passive Perception 13
Languages: Ssethric
Challenge: 2 (450 XP)

Dark Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede the nightrunner's darkvision.

The Darkness is my Home. Nightrunners gain advantage on all Stealth checks or when hiding in shadowy illumination.

Pack Tactics. Nightrunners have advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one ally is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Multiattack. The nightrunners makes two attacks with its claws.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) slashing damage.

Ossarion Chimera

I stood gaping as the ungainly creature leapt off the promontory and used its wings to maneuver until it could fall squarely on the wagon. It trumpeted its anger and kept the caravan guards at bay with its deadly scorpion tail. As it gorged on the food in the crushed carriage, I signaled for the rest of the caravan to move on with all due haste.

Born of the strange alchemical vats that produced some of the most bizarre and dangerous beasts upon Arcanis, the Ossarion chimera was created as another weapon to bring to bear during the waning years of the War of Empires. As the Ossarion Emperor saw his *gihtans*, the equivalent of the Imperium's legions, losing ground, he called on the mad genius of the Dhraki, black sorcerers whose expertise in creating amalgamations of beasts borders on the fantastic. He commanded them to create a new weapon to turn the tide. The Dhraki obeyed and from their profane vats emerged the Ossarion chimera, a creature that combined the body of a lion, the wings of an eagle, the tail of a venomous scorpion and finally, the head of an elephant.

This nightmarish creature appeared in the war not long after its creation, its enormous size and variety of offensive capabilities making it a terror on the battlefield, but by then, it was evident that the war was lost, and the chimera could not be produced quickly enough to turn the tide. Many of the surviving chimera were hunted down and slaughtered, but some



managed to escape, moving deep into the Corlathian Mountains, finding secluded vales to mate and grow their population.

Normally, Ossarion chimera live lives of relative quiet, staying within a small unpopulated area of the Corlathians, but occasionally, due to either overpopulation or just a bad disposition, a bull chimera will go rogue and leave the herd. These solitary creatures then find their way back to the basin, attacking caravans, pilgrims and entire Andyar villages. They tend to be fearless, their attacks borne more out of sadism than the need for food or defending territory.

The tusks of the Ossarion Chimera are highly valued in the markets of the First City and are said to have medicinal properties, everything from aphrodisiacs to anti-aging. The bravest, or the most desperate, seek out the herds of these terrible creatures in the hopes of killing one and harvesting its tusks. Most never find the elusive creatures, while those that are successfully do not survive the encounter. Legends of a chimera graveyard, where generations upon generations of these beasts go to die when they are old or ill continue to spark expeditions into the Corlathians, but none have yet to find the mythical boneyard.

Common Tactics

When a rogue chimera is encountered, the creature will use its huge size to charge at its prey to gore them on its tusks or use its wings to aid in pouncing on its prey. Once a creature is pinned under its paws, the scorpion tail is used to finish off the opponent.

"I have faced down charging Voei and done battle with ice giants, but nothing has terrified me to my bones than a pack of these chimeras thundering down on me. If their weight doesn't crush you, that stinger of theirs will skewer you like a sweet meat at the bazaar. Why anyone would create such a thing is beyond me. It's just not right!"

– Anacrites Baetica val'Holryn

Ossarion Chimera

Large monstrosity

Armor Class: 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points: 114 (12d10+48)
Speed: 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	11 (+0)	19 (+4)	2 (-5)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Skills: Perception +8
Senses: Darkvision 60 ft, passive Perception 18
Languages: none
Challenge: 6 (2,300 XP)

Trampling Charge. If the chimera moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a claws attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the chimera can make another attack with its claws against it as a bonus action.

Actions

Multiattack. The chimera makes three attacks: one with its tusks, one with its claws, and one with its stinger. When its Trumpet Blast is available, it can use the blast in place of its claws or stinger.

Tusks. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (1d12 + 4) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Trumpet Blast (Recharge 5–6). The Ossarion chimera produces an ear-splitting blast in a 15 ft. cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 31 (7d8) thunder damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Sama

This tiny creature walked in on four legs and wore the worst fitting chainmail shirt we'd ever seen. It looked like some sort of insect, but we didn't see any stingers, mandibles or anything venomous, so we thought it was harmless. After it stabbed our scout with these two daggers it pulled out of nowhere, we decided to give the runt a wide berth.

This small, insectoid race averages between 2.5 to 3 feet in height and travels on four legs, with two other appendages used as arms. The Sama's thin chitin shell ranges in colors from a dark green to black in adults and lighter greenish colors in adolescents. Sama have elaborate fluted head crests made of a thin membrane.

Some speculate that the sama are related to the isorri who escaped extinction at the hands of the ssethrics during their genocidal campaign to take the Mount. Others believe that the sama are the result of ssethric biomancy experimentation. For their part the sama feel that speculation without some basis of fact is not productive and a waste of mental energy.

Sama are used by the different merchant houses and other entrepreneurial enterprises to keep track of their business records and accounts as the small insectoid race has the unique ability to maintain and recall thousands of pages of numbers and information accurately completely from memory. This talent makes the sama invaluable to all manner of enterprises besides mercantile ones requiring information to be kept secure without the need to put the data on paper where it may be copied or stolen. For this reason, the sama may be found in the employ of organizations as the Emerald Society, the Jial of the Phoenix, and even by the members of the various religious sects.

A curious idiosyncrasy that all adult sama display is the lack of all emotions, purporting to act on data and pure logic alone. This trait is not evident during their adolescent years, which lasts from ten to twelve years, where they wish to indulge every raw emotion and experience. While most other races call this the sama's "adventuring years", the stoic insectoid race considers it a time of embarrassing rash decisions and impulsive behavior that they must all endure and hope to survive.

A sama's chitin is too thin to offer it any more protection than human skin does, so many wear specially fitted armor during their adventuring years, though they tend to shy away from heavy armor, such as plate. Most are comfortable with chain mail as they can drape it over their four legs without causing any discomfort or loss of maneuverability.

As a race, they favor the use of ranged weapons, such as darts, slings and especially the blowgun. Due to their keen sense of mathematics, they can calculate trajectory instinctively, making them quite deadly with any ranged weapon. The longbow and heavy crossbow are too large or cumbersome for the sama to use properly.

An adult sama will mate only once in its lifetime, traveling to a specific clearing in the Vastwood to reproduce. The female sama will then construct an elaborate nest out of webbing like those spun by spiders, something they can only do when they are about to reproduce and lay up to a dozen eggs within a tightly wrapped cocoon. These are hung from branches high up in the trees so that their spawn have plenty of food to eat as the small insectoids are



herbivores and enjoy feasting on green leaves.

The sama do not profess a religion of their own and tend to be confused by the need of the other sentient beings to worship powerful entities. As one, they believe that if the sama ever had a deity it died, left long ago, or obviously doesn't need anything from them. This mindset may reflect their upbringing, as sama believe that their only duty to their offspring is providing a nest near a food source and laying eggs. Once that is done, the small insectoids do not have any further connection, emotional or otherwise, with their brood.

Due to their extraordinarily ordered mind, they are able to learn and practice Elder sorcery, though very few do so. When asked, most will say that it is a skill useless to them as adults and that it is the rare adolescent that can control their emotions long enough to study the laborious technique. At that age, most who indulge themselves want to feel the hot blood of their foes spurt across their face or be close enough to see the light of life dim in their eyes.

Adolescent Sama

Small Monstrosity (Sama)

Armor Class: 13 (leather armor)
Hit Points: 16 (3d8+3)
Speed: 30 ft., Climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills: Stealth +4, Perception +3
Senses: passive Perception 13
Languages: Low Coryani, Low Khitani, Trade Language
Challenge: 1/4 (50 XP)

Double Jointed. Sama do not suffer movement penalties or suffer disadvantage to attack rolls or Dexterity saving throws when squeezing through a space smaller than them. Attack rolls against them do not gain advantage while they are in the smaller space. In addition, they advantage on all ability checks to escape a grapple.

Insectoid Mind. Sama have advantage on saving throws to resist the effects of enchantment spells and telepathic powers which specifically target humanoids.

Quadruped. Sama gain advantage on ability checks and saving throws to resist being knocked prone. Additionally, when they take the Dash action they may move an additional 10 feet.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage

Blowgun. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, Range 20/40ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d2+2) piercing damage. and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (2d10) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Adult Sama

Small Monstrosity (Sama)

Armor Class: 15 (Chain shirt)
Hit Points: 31 (6d8+6)
Speed: 30 ft., Climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Skills: Stealth +4, Perception +3
Senses: passive Perception 13
Languages: Low Coryani, Low Khitani, Trade Language
Challenge: 1/2 (100 XP)

Double Jointed. Sama do not suffer movement penalties or suffer disadvantage to attack rolls or Dexterity saving throws when squeezing through a space smaller than them. Attack rolls against them do not gain advantage while they are in the smaller space. In addition, they advantage on all ability checks to escape a grapple.

Insectoid Mind. Sama have advantage on saving throws to resist the effects of enchantment spells and telepathic powers which specifically target humanoids.

Quadruped. Sama gain advantage on ability checks and saving throws to resist being knocked prone. Additionally, when they take the Dash action they may move an additional 10 feet.

Actions

Multiattack. Sama make melee attacks or one ranged attack

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage

Blowgun. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, Range 20/40ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d2+2) piercing damage. and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (2d10) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Sama Hero Traits

Your Sama Hero has the following traits:

Ability Score Increase. Your Dexterity score increases by 2, and your Intelligence and Wisdom scores increase by 1.

Age. Sama mature at the same rate as humans, with similar life spans.

Size. Sama stand between 2.5 and 3 feet tall and average about 35 pounds. Your size is Small.

Type. Your type is Monstrosity, not humanoid.

Speed. Your base walking speed is 30 feet, and a base Climb speed of 20 feet.

Double Jointed. You do not suffer movement penalties or suffer disadvantage to attack rolls or Dexterity saving throws when you squeeze through a space smaller than you. Attack rolls against you don't have advantage while you are in the smaller space. In addition, you gain advantage on all ability checks to escape a grapple.

Elder Spellcasters. The sama are one of the few races capable of understanding the intricacies of the Elder Tradition of arcane magic. If you wish to be an arcane spell caster, you must do so by choosing classes or archetypes that that utilize the Elder Tradition of Arcane spell casting.

Extraordinary Mind. You gain proficiency in two skills of your choice. In addition, you can accurately recall anything you have read within the last year.

Quadruped. You gain advantage on ability checks and saving throws to resist being knocked prone. Additionally, when you take the Dash action you may move an additional 10 feet.

Languages and Literacy. You are literate and can speak Low Coryani and one additional language of your choice. You can also speak a number of additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier.

Scorpion Men

"I don't know where they got that thing, but it must have been from the deepest, darkest pits of Sseth! Nothing that we threw at it even slowed it down. It just kept smiling while arrows and pila bounced off it. Then it came to our line and started crushing fully armored men with its massive claw."

On the far western edge of the Fervidus Hills, a land already dangerous due to the countless voei infesting



the area, is the territory claimed by monstrous beings known as scorpion men. These large creatures are, as their name implies, a centaur like race with the body of a scorpion and the head, torso and a single arm of a human. Sporting a deadly, venomous stinger, eight scuttling legs and a powerful claw, the aggressive scorpion men are cunning, bloodthirsty and very territorial.

Scorpion men live in tribal style communities, inhabiting the many caves that dot the area. Females of the species are smaller in size and lack a pincer claw. During the mating period, males are driven into a frenzy by the pheromones released by the females and fight, sometimes to the death, until a handful are deemed worthy of breeding by the eldest females. This small number of males then mate with the females over a lunar cycle. Afterwards, the females sting the males with a potent paralytic, laying their eggs on their backs, after which the unsuspecting males go about living the remainder of their lives. After a seven-month gestation period, the dozens of eggs hatch, swarming over the father and eating him alive. Those that survive the father's defensive attacks, instinctively return to the tribe, where they are nurtured.

Most scorpion men are encountered as raiding parties, though a small number of tribes, usually those on the periphery of the Fervidus Hills, hire themselves out as mercenary companies, where the promise of skulls, a status symbol among the tribes, can be acquired. Most scorpion men spend their time persecuting their never-ending war against the savage voei, whose polished skulls carry greater prestige than any other adversary.

Combat Tactics:

Scorpion men use simplistic tactics, often wading into the thick of battle with nothing more than their natural weapons and perhaps a crude spear or salvaged weapon. Their thick carapace allows them to shrug off the worst ranged attacks, allowing them to close into melee relatively unharmed. There, their first goal is to paralyze their victims with the poison in their barbed tail before crushing even the most heavily armored foe with their powerful claw. Scorpion men typically make use of simple polearm weapons like spears, which allow them to make best use of their size with a minimum of effort. While it is not unknown for them to wear armor on their upper torso, few do so.

Scorpion Men

Large Monstrosity

Armor Class: 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points: 72 (9d12 + 18)
Speed: 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)

Senses: Blindsight 60ft, passive Perception 10
Languages: Trade Language
Challenge: 4 (1,100 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. Scorpion men make three attacks, one with its weapon, one with its claw, and one with its sting (females get two attacks with their weapon, one with their sting)

Spear. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6+3) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 12). Scorpion men have one claw and cannot attack with their claw if they currently have a creature grappled.

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (1d12 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

The Voei

My shield buckled from the massive blow it received. Darkness prevented me from seeing them when they first attacked, but now the torchlight showed them in all their savage majesty. The voei warrior stood over seven feet tall, with great slabs of muscle showing through the stinking and matted furs it wore. With reckless abandon, it was on me, ignoring the twin slices my gladius delivered. From the maddened look in his eyes I knew that nothing short of death would stop it. Whose death I don't think really mattered to my inhuman adversary.

Scattered throughout the Fervidus Hills are tribes of savages so fierce and brutal that they have acted as a natural barrier against Khitani incursions for centuries. Standing on average over seven feet in height and heavily muscled, these savages cannot be reasoned or negotiated with; they are territorial, relentless, and

nothing short of dismemberment or death will stop them once they decide to attack. In short, the voei represent the fear itself to both the Coryani and the Khitani.

First discovered by the Coryani soon after the mining of the rare ore fervidite began, a band of voei warriors appeared on the outskirts of the operation and were quickly sent on their way by a handful of guards. *"The savages appeared confused or mentally deficient and quickly fled. They were armed with nothing more than crude bone or wooden weapons and posed little threat to trained arms men",* one mining guard said describing their initial encounter.

The voei are obsessively territorial and soon returned in the middle of the night to extract the toll for invading their lands. No whooping war cries or trumpets sounded the call to battle. They stealthy crept into the camp and, with nary a drop of blood spilt, vanished back into the night with every guard and miner in the camp.

When a century detached from the Legion of Deliverance arrived at the urging of the burgeoning Varro Mercantile Concern, they came upon a village of the savages and the voei soon showed how hot the fire ran in their veins! Dozens of warriors attacked without concern for their own lives, throwing themselves en masse upon the legionnaires and their weapons. It was only through the grace of good Coryani steel that the legion won the day. In the aftermath of the battle, while rummaging through the voei's primitive huts, the legionnaires made a chilling discovery. The missing miners were not sacrificed to some hoary god or held for ransom, they were used as meat to fill their larders. It appeared as if the voei were cannibals!

Later encounters showed the versatility that these savages were capable of attaining. In the many years since skirmishing with the Coryani and the Khitani, the voei abandoned their bone weapons and incorporated mismatched bits of scavenged metal armor and weapons, as well as taming a breed of large horses previously unknown.

As fearsome as the average voei warrior is, their chieftains are death personified, able to go into a berserker trance that transforms their bodies into a larger, more massive version of itself, making them a veritable juggernaut of the battlefield. While the Coryani have learned to kill those warped ones from a distance, it is the



singular ability of the voei shamans that have taught the legionnaires true fear. These mystics are able to perform a profane rite that causes the soul of the victim to be bound and trapped inside their own heads, which are then shrunken down for ease of portability. The shamans are then able command the heads to speak of any secrets they know and even use them to cast spells and Cants, if they were able to do so in life. Falling upon one's sword to avoid capture has become the standard practice of the soldiers and legionnaires battling the voei.

Common Tactics

The voei warrior is not a consummate dualist or strategist. While they do possess rudimentary knowledge of tactics such as ambushing enemies and the like, once engaged they tend to beat a foe into submission, sometimes flying into a frenzied rage that only the death of their victim can satiate.

Voei Shaman

Large humanoid (voei)

Armor Class: 13 (leather armor)
Hit Points: 72 (9d10+27) 1
Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Skills: Perception +3
Senses: passive Perception 13
Languages: Unknown
Challenge: 4 (1,100 XP)

Spellcasting. The voei shaman is a 5th-level primal spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). The voei shaman has following shaman spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, poison spray, shillelagh*

1st level (4 slots): *black ice*, evil eye*, entangle*

2nd level (3 slots): *enemy of my enemy*, hold person*

3rd level (2 slots): *brittle bones*, fear*

Actions

Multiattack. The voei shaman makes two attacks with his staff (which is considered to be affected by shillelagh)

Staff. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8+3) bludgeoning damage.

Voei Chieftain

Large humanoid (voei)

Armor Class: 14 (chain shirt)
Hit Points: 112 (14d10+42)
Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills: Perception +3
Senses: passive Perception 13
Languages: Unknown
Challenge: 4 (1,100 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. The voei chieftain makes two attacks with his axe or his javelins.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d12+5) slashing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120ft, one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+5) piercing damage.

Voei Warrior

Large humanoid (voei)

Armor Class: 14 (chain shirt)
Hit Points: 59 (7d10+21)
Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Senses: Passive Perception 10
Languages: Unknown
Challenge: 2 (450 XP)

Actions

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d12+3) slashing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120ft, one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+5) piercing damage.

Appendix A
New Religions

Aii, the One God

One of the many religions observed throughout the continent, the worship of Aii is unique in that it's centered on the belief that there is only one God and that all the myriad other deities worshipped are aspects of the One True God. This is a proselytizing religion and the church sends the faithful to the far corners of the world to spread the word of Aii. Those sent bearing these teachings are known as the Prophets of Aii and are a special breed of priest, one that believes in their religion so deeply that they are defined and consumed by it. These prophets help where they can and realize that there will be resistance in some corners of the world. They are not concerned by this as martyrdom is a holy end to one's life, granting them direct access to the Paradise of Aii.

The movement is starting to make it way across the western nations and worming its way into the Khitani Empire as well as the Blessed Lands. The notion that the deities of Pantheon of Man are merely aspects of the One True God is seen as a radical departure from a religion that has dominated, in some form or another, the nations in this part of Onara. Yet the proselytizing of this belief is taking root in the lower echelons of society, among the poor and disenfranchised, especially since the tenets of this religion speaks of equality among all and the end to religious wars by embracing the peace of Aii. This has led to a high mortality rate among the prophets sent to the Khitani Empire, given that society's stringent hierarchical social system where each person has a place and social mobility is all but impossible.

Those chosen to spread the word of the One God are all invariably very charismatic and oratory masters. The men and women taking the mantle of Prophets travel among the dregs of society, performing miracles of healing and asking nothing in exchange. In turn, the poor seem to rally behind them, protecting and hiding the prophets from any who would persecute them.

This growing religion began upon the small island nation in the west known as the Andai Ascendency, a theocracy. The few explorers that have managed to venture beyond the Foreigner's Quarter and into the capital city proper report a city just as stratified as the Khitani Empire or Canceri, under the iron fist of some sort of High Prophet, whose name is said to be so holy that none may speak it, and the holy symbol of the religion, an unblinking eye, the Eye of the One God, looks out over all.

As long as the Ascendency remains small and contained, and their prophets do not incite the downtrodden into rebellion, a blind eye has been turned upon their works. Persecution of these prophets has proven difficult in the First City, given that the primary law there expressly allows the freedom of worship in any form that does not include the sacrifice of a sentient being.



The Divine Trinity or Deathmongers

The religion of the Divine Trinity enjoys one of the largest body of worshippers outside of the Southern Empires and the Kalindruhl of Khitan and is the dominate religion in the lands between the Blessed Lands and the Ossarion Empire. Their beliefs are somewhat revolutionary when compared to the other two major religions in that they believe that all the gods, but Neroth, Beltine and Sarish, have either died from some celestial conflagration or left mankind to its own devices. Only the Divine Trinity remain to continue to look after humanity and protect it from the horrors that exist in the void between Realms.

In their scriptures Lord Neroth, in His aspect as Castellan of Skulls, continues to watch over the dead, ensuring that correct burial rites are performed. Beltine, in Her aspect as the Warder of Souls, guides the souls of the dead to the either the Paradise of the Gods or into the Cauldron to be remade into new

souls. Lastly, their divine offspring, Sarish, remained behind to safeguard against all who would seek to enslave or exterminate all of humanity. Through His gifts of arcane knowledge, mankind can defend itself as needed.

The religion began in the small city-state of Darhlost and spread throughout the region after the Time of Terror quickly. The reason may lie in their opportunistic attitude and ability to conform to other ingrained religions they encounter. In the Dailish Isles, Yarris is the primary deity given the sea-faring culture of the people. When encountered by proselytizing Deathmongers, the priests wisely incorporated the Sea God in the list of those deities that either remained or sent their valinor to look after His people. The same occurred in Kolkara, where Saluwé was quickly added. For the most part, they have remained unmolested, given their practice of aiding the populace with their knowledge of medicine and arcane protection, such as wards to keep out infernals and the vengeful dead.

The clergy of the religion are trained in the Temple of the Trinity as priests familiar with the ceremonies and rituals of all three of the deities. None are specialized to the worship of one God over another, as is a common misconception by those unfamiliar to their practices, likening them to the priests of the Dark Triumvirate in Canceri. This makes the Deathmongers the only known religion that closest resemble the ancient Pantheonistic practices of the Imperium. They are easily recognized by the rust colored robes they were as well as their unique holy symbol, a candle-lit lantern, fashioned from bones, its glass panes tinted blood red. These are sometimes held aloft in the crook of a large staff.

It is only when leading mass for the faithful that the trio of priests take on specific roles symbolizing the deities of the trinity. When in the role of the Father, representing Neroth, the priest wears heavy, black robes with accoutrements made of bone; when in that of the Mother, representing Beltine, they wear light colored grey robes. Finally, when the priest takes on the role of the Childe, representing Sarish, they wear a raiment of blood red robes with sigils and runes all about the hems and sleeves.

The adherents to this religion in the First City are numerous, being the oldest faith practiced in the ancient capital. Recently, the Tomal Khan put the group under his protection because of the aggressive stance the representatives of the Mother Church and the Milandric Orthodoxy have taken against the resident Deathmongers. The Tomal Khan finds their actions distasteful as the Divine Trinity was here long before any clergy from the Southern Lands rediscovered the ancient city.

One unique aspect of the Death Monger's belief is the reverence in which they hold members of the dark-kin race. The binding and destruction of infernals is a major facet of the Death Monger religion ever since the Time of Terror. As such, they believe that those born as dark-kin are blessed by Sarish, as they bind a demon within them at birth to keep others safe. Such a child born to followers of the Divine Trinity are given to the priesthood where they are groomed to become priests.

The Kalindruhl

The Kalindruhl, literally the Holy Teachings in High Khitani, is the sacred text about which the Empire's religion is based upon. The Kalindruhl incorporates the original text from the Holy Canticle but appends the words of the Sleeping Emperor as given to his Prophet ul'Hsin Yu during the Great Exodus from the First City.

The Mother Church of Coryan labels these additions to the Canticle as apocryphal and thus heretical, publicly doubting that a valinor would dare mar the perfect writings of Illiir with its own ramblings, unless it were one of the Fallen. For the most part, the additional three books of the Kalindruhl speaks of what occurred after the Gods left mankind at the dawn of the Imperium, their setting certain valinor to act as Their eyes and ears over Their favored children, as well as the structure of the Celestial Order and mankind's place within it. Sprinkled throughout these appended tomes are cryptic prophecies that an entire sect of monks dedicated to deciphering. Many point to certain passages as clearly foretelling the discovery of their southern cousins and the two wars that have already taken place. Some believe that another passage points to a third such war and the coming of an anti-messianic being known simply as the Destroyer.

As detailed in the Kalindruhl, the Celestial Order describes a social hierarchy for all of mankind that guarantees happiness and purpose of life. At its apex are the Gods, which studiously omits the inclusion of the Goddess Anshar, followed by the valinor, the ul families, the Lacust, human worshippers of the Kalindruhl, the fallen val families, those humans that live in ignorance of the light of the Kalindruhl, and finally, all other sentient races. Each of these social strata are further subdivided to denote positions within

society, such as priest, warrior, artisan, and so on.

While it is possible for a child born of a common laborer, one of the lower positions in the society, to rise to a higher one by excelling in the military or the priesthood, for example, it is quite impossible to leap up an entire rung up (or down) as most of these are predicated upon race. However, it is possible for a human to become enlightened by becoming an adherent of the teachings of the Kalindruhl and rise above a val in the eyes of Khitani society. Vals are doomed to remain at their lower station, damned by the actions of their ancestors.

At least outwardly, the Kalindruhl clergy resembles the original Pantheonistic church of the Imperium than that of the Mother Church. While the priests appear to tend to the tenets of all the Gods, in reality the teachings of each deity are administered by priests specialized in Their scriptures. It appears that a complete collection of all the holy texts of each of the Gods failed to survive the exodus from the Imperium and the Sleeping Emperor did not rectify that oversight. The eunuch seneschals that tend to the Khitani ruler assure all that this is to test the faithfulness of the people, just as a parent no longer holds a toddler's hand when they attempt to walk unassisted.

The largest temple of the Gods in the empire lies within the sacred city of Khitan. The temple is made up of ten towers surrounding a larger central one said to represent Illiir. The other ten symbolize each of the remaining Gods of the Pantheon in the order of a Celestial Hierarchy detailed in the holy scriptures. It should be noted that another point of difference between the Kalindruhl and the Holy Canticle is that the Khitani do not recognize Anshar as part of the Pantheon. Speaking through his prophet, the Sleeping Emperor's only remark on the subject was that *'There is nothing between the belly of a serpent and the ground, thus when kneeling before such a creature, one should not be surprised when crushed beneath its coils.'*

Much like the Mother Church of Coryan is the patron of the Emerald Society, the Kalindruhl funds the Jial of the Phoenix, commanding it to sift through the dust of ages in the Blessed Lands and ensure that the southern Coryani are not the only ones to uncover holy artifacts and relics of their shared past.

The Contemplation of the Light of Perfection

The Khitani sect of Illiirite worship believes that by contemplating the physical personification of Illiir, the sun, one may gain insights into the perfection that He encourages all to attain. In doing so, these ascetic priests spend every moment of daylight staring into the blazing sun and in turn, are blinded by it. It is only then, these priests say, that one may truly begin to *see* perfection, for first they must be blinded to the imperfection of humanity.

While in their meditative state, the priests, sometimes called the Idiot Priests of Illiir, will forget to drink, eat, wash or perform other necessary functions. Due to this eccentric behavior, every priest is assigned an acolyte, usually a member of their family, who will attend to their every need. To this end, the acolytes are taught a variety of skills, including certain mystical rites and combat, for there will be times when the priest feels the push and pull of Illiir's wisdom and is forced to travel to distant lands or places. It is the acolyte's duty to protect the priest's life even at the cost of their own.

The Three Sisters

Far off to the west beyond the Dailish Isles is a wondrous land known as the Sea of Grass, a verdant plain covered in long blades of grass and stalks of plant life. In these fields are a group of hardy humans known as the Hunai that live in peace and harmony with the environment and who never had a word for war or weapons until the coming of the Ossarion Empire and the Chauni slavers.

The Hunai are a peaceful and very spiritual people who forego the trappings of organized religion. Instead they practice a unique form of communal spiritualism whereby anyone who feels touched by the spirits may act as their voice or conduit to the others. However, as in all populations, there are some who excel at somethings better than others and spiritual leaders emerge to lead small groups in orations to the Three Sisters.

The Three Sisters refers to the Life Goddess, Belisarda, Her Elder Sister Nayal, Goddess of the Night and the Final Sleep and their youngest Sister, Lyssandra, the green moon that shines in the firmament. The tenets of the religion are very simple and embody those elements that are important to the lives of the Hunai – Belisarda brings life and sustains them through the bounty of the earth; Nayal, jealous of Her younger sister as the life bringer, embodies the night and the primal fear of the darkness, where predators and others, like the Chauni, only serve to bring misery and ultimately death. Lastly, feisty

Lyssandra who at times can shred the web of darkness that Her elder sister wraps Her in and shines Her light as a beacon through the darkness. She is also the Mistress of Dreams and of the magical essence of the world.

Small and simple offerings of food are made to the three goddesses on their holy days. During the time after the cold, thanks are given to Belisarda for the new growth of vegetation and warmth that floods the land; to Lyssandra songs are raised to Her when She is full and bright in the night sky; lastly sacrifices of small animals while the villagers fast are given in hopes that the cold and darkness of Nayal's breath will be short and mild.

As entire villages are taken captive by Chauni slavers and sold in the First City as cheap labor or as pleasure slaves, for the honey blonde hair of the Hunai is viewed favorably among the slave owners, the worship of the Three Sisters has started to change. Belisarda is prayed to for eventual freedom from the bondage they now face; prayers are made to Lyssandra for the strength to endure the hardships of this new life of captivity and, for a small group whose hearts have been hardened by the cruelty they've experienced, they pray to Nayal for the cunning and coldness of heart to kill their oppressors. This act is so repugnant and unthinkable to the Hunai that those that take up arms, even if in defense of others, are shunned and treated as pariahs; violence is anathema to the pacifistic ways of the Hunai. Some of these shunned Hunai prove to be too intractable to be reliable slaves and are either sold to the arena or killed outright.

Appendix B: Weather in the Blessed Lands

During the ancient past, the Blessed Lands were once a rich, forested area fed by numerous rivers flowing out of the Vastwood and the ring of mountains that surround the area. These numerous sources of water allowed life to thrive in the region despite the fact it received very little precipitation for most of the year due to the same surrounding mountains acting as rain shadows. When the elorii Kurenthé death curses ravaged the lands thousands of years ago, the destruction of the soil eventually led to an erosion of the river systems in the region, causing them to run dry. Now only during the summer ice melts does sufficient water flow into the basin to cause the land to bloom, relegating it to the status of a hot, dry desert for most of the year.

Because of the rain shadows created by the Aqtau, Khitau, and Corlathian Mountains, the region as a whole gets less than ten inches of rain every year. In fact, if it were not for the seasonal ice melts from the high Corlathian Mountains and the rivers from the north one wonders if life would even be possible within the region. The one exception to this is the massive storms that blow in as part of the seven-year flood cycle, which smash into the western end of the Blessed Lands with almost hurricane-level force. While this meteorological event can be devastating as roads are washed away, it also allows the entire western half of the Blessed Lands to bloom with a wondrous array of flowering plants that echoes the lush forest that once thrived here.

Like many deserts, the Blessed Lands experiences violent temperature differences daily. During the summer, temperatures in excess of 110°F are not uncommon, dropping down below 40°F at night. It is also not unknown for the central basin area to have temperatures to drop well below the freezing point during the depths of winter. This weather is far more common towards the eastern half of the basin, as the lands closer to the flood plains experience less extreme weather thanks to the tempering effect of the Sea of Lanterns and the warm air blowing in through the western end.

What sets the Blessed Lands apart from anywhere else among the Known Lands, is the self-same Kurenthé death curses that caused the land to be denuded of most life. This immensely powerful arcane rite tainted the entire land mass with a palpable sense of corruption. This effect is vividly exemplified in the infrequent bizarre weather patterns that plague the region. While hundreds of different weather phenomena have been observed over the centuries, the most common ones observed are listed below.

Detecting an Oncoming Weather Event

The strange weather in the Blessed Lands is always heralded by clues that are easy to miss by the unexperienced. 1d6 turns before a storm hits, Heroes may attempt a DC: 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check to notice and identify the oncoming storm. Natives to the Blessed Lands and Heroes who have survived an event previously gain advantage on future chances to notice a storm's approach.

Travelers in the Blessed Lands dot the land with sturdy shelters or trail marked caves and outcroppings that may offer shelter from these terrifying storms. It goes without saying that spells such as *tiny hut* are a great help during these events.

Weather Patterns of the Blessed Lands

Banshee's Wail

This type of storm has only been observed in the past forty years. Centered on the region between the First City and Tultipet, the storm manifests as an intense blast of sound that has been known to burst eardrums and even strip flesh from bone at its height. Strangely, dwarves seem unable to feel the pain and are drawn to the most intense sound, where they are often torn apart by the Wail.

Range: Varied (often 1 mile to 5 miles in radius)
Duration: Varied (10 minutes to one hour)
Effect: At the beginning of every turn any individual caught within the storm must make a DC: 12 Constitution saving throw or suffer 2d6 thunder damage, suffering half damage upon a successful saving throw. Dwarves must make an additional Charisma saving throw or become stunned until the beginning of their next turn.

Black Hail

Also known as *thorn stones*, these hailstones appear to be made of solid obsidian. Each hailstone is covered with razor-sharp edges that can slice through any flesh or armor in but a few minutes. The hailstones dissolve a few hours after the storm dissipates.

Range: Varied (often 1 mile to 5 miles in radius)
Duration: Varied (10 minutes to one hour)
Effect: At the beginning of every turn any individual caught within the storm without shelter must make successful DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or suffer 2d6 piercing damage, suffering half damage upon a successful saving throw. Holding a shield or similar object over their head grants them advantage on their saving throw and reduces damage by half, while maneuvers like turtling, several heroes linking shields over their heads, may reduce the damage entirely, at the GM's discretion.

Black Wind

The Black Wind appears most commonly in the western end of the Blessed Lands near the foothills of the Aqtau Mountains. It typically takes the form of a purplish cloud that drops viscous precipitation, which is immediately absorbed by any surface it falls upon. Within seconds, any corpse that may be buried in the ground is animated, creating several undead creatures. These undead last for the duration of the storm and have an intense hunger for any living creature they can find. These storms can last anywhere from minutes to hours.

Range: Varied (often 1-mile radius)
Duration: Varied (10 minutes to 6 hours)
Effect: While the storm rages, each minute, 2d6 skeletons or zombies rise out of the ground within 100 feet of any living creature. The undead will target these living creatures until the storm ends, after which they simply collapse. This weather event can easily scale up to give Heroes of any level either a terrifying challenge or act as a simple reminder of the dangers of the Blessed Lands.

Blood Fog

Often blowing in from the Flood Plains during Tide Years, this blood-red mist is feared by the skimmers and sailors who ply the waters between Pecinium and the First City. Coming upon ships with little to no warning, those caught within the mist are overcome by an intense thirst for blood. This has led to sailors ripping their fellow crew members apart, limb from limb to sup on their blood, or even to people biting off their own limbs in an attempt to satisfy their unnatural hunger. More than one ship has been found scuttled in the Flood Plain after the tide has gone out, abandoned except the red-stained, gore-covered decks.

Range: Varied (often 2-mile radius)
Duration: Varied (1 hour to 8 hours)
Effect: Any individual that begins their turn within the Blood Fog must make a DC 12 Charisma saving throw or become enraged, attacking the nearest living creature or ripping into their own flesh for the remainder of their turn. When enraged, affected creatures cannot think rationally, attacking once per turn, while utilizing only their teeth and nails. Unless an affected creature possesses some form of natural weapons, such as a ss'ressen's claws, attacks deal 1 + Strength modifier (minimum of 1) piercing damage, as they try to bite and draw blood. If there is no other living creature within 20 feet, the affected individual will begin consuming their own flesh, dealing 1 + Strength modifier (minimum of 1) piercing damage each round. Creatures who succeed in two consecutive saving throws gain advantage on their saves against the fog's effects for the remainder of the event. The spell *protection from good and evil*, shields one from the fog's effects.

Chaos Storm

These storms manifest like thunderheads and may consist of rain, snow, fog, or other weather patterns, often simultaneously. Few have ever experienced a Chaos Storm and lived to tell the tale as anything caught within its fury finds itself changed. Examination of bodies afterwards have found everything from skin melted off bones to multiple limbs erupting from bodies. Some go mad while others simply disappear.

Range: Varied (often 1 to 3 miles in radius)
Duration: Varied (minutes to hours)
Effects: Any individual that starts their turn within the Chaos Storm without shelter must make a successful DC: 15 Constitution saving throw or suffer 8d12 damage, which may be either acid, lighting, psychic, or thunder damage, and gain 3 levels of exhaustion, suffering only half damage upon a successful saving throw. Additionally, any creatures effected by the storm must make a DC: 18 Charisma saving throw or gain an *Indefinite Madness*, or a *Long-Term Madness* on a failed saving throw.

Heat Storm

These storms are characterized by highly localized areas of intense heat, sometimes hot enough to turn sand into glass in their wake, causing the area around them to billow with glowing black smoke and steam. To be caught in one of these storms means certain death to most creatures, and even artificial beings, such as golems, have been known to simply melt under the intense temperature of these storms. Luckily, the billowing clouds of smoke and steam alert those for miles around about the dangers they face, so unless caught in the open, these storms are easily avoided.

Range: Varied (typically 100 to 500-foot radius)
Duration: Varied (10 minutes to 1 hour)
Effect: The temperature within the storm instantly rises by almost 1000 °F, instantly cooking anything that may be in its path. Caves provide the only potential shelter from this storm, and even then, the air becomes so hot as to burn the lungs of the unfortunate. Within 100 feet of a cave opening, at the beginning of each turn, every creature must make a DC: 14 Constitution saving throw or suffer 10d8 fire damage, suffering half damage upon a successful saving throw. After 100 feet this damage is reduced to 10d6, and after 200 feet the damage is further reduced to 10d4 damage, with creatures 300 feet into a cave system being protected from the storm's effects.

Icy Death

Common throughout the Plain of Monuments, this weather pattern is difficult to spot before it strikes. Unlike other storms, the Icy Death storm manifests without clouds, lightning, or winds. It can strike as easily on a hot summer day as in the depths of winter. What one can see however, is the rapid formation of ice crystals on nearby hills as the Icy Death storm rolls across the landscape. When trapped within the storm, temperatures drop over 100 °F within minutes, causing anything within the affected area to freeze on the spot. While survivable during the hot summer months, these storms are deadliest in winter where not even stone walls are enough to keep out the cold.

Range: Varied (typically 100 to 500-foot radius)
Duration: Varied (10 minutes to 1 hour)
Effect: For each minute within the storm, creatures must make a successful Constitution saving throw DC 16 or suffer one level of exhaustion. If the storm occurs during the summer, creatures gain advantage on this saving throw.

Nightmare Storm

This storm is characterized by intense gusts of wind combined with an almost painful silence. Those caught within this storm find themselves immediately knocked to the ground by tornado force winds, potentially causing great injury from the impact and from flying debris. However, those who survived such storms claim that the injury is nothing compared to the horror that is brought about by the wind. While within the storm, you are forced to relive all the most horrible moments of your life, twisted in such a way as to make them even more terrifying. There are many Nerothian asylums throughout the Known Lands filled with those who lost their minds while on a pilgrimage after being caught in one of these storms.

Range: Varied (often 1 to 3 miles in radius)
Duration: Varied (1 to 10 minutes)
Effect: Every minute within the storm, creatures must make a successful DC: 14 Wisdom saving throw or suffer 3d8 psychic damage, suffering half damage if they succeed. Creatures affected by the storm must also make a single DC: 16 Charisma saving throw or gain an *Indefinite Madness*, or a *Long-Term Madness* on a successful saving throw.

Red Snow

Common in the region around the Corlathian Mountains, Red Snow sears the flesh as though it were struck by hot cinders and saps the strength of those caught exposed.

Range: Varied (often 2-mile radius)
Duration: Varied (1 hour to 2 days)
Effect: Any creature exposed to the red snow for one turn must make a DC: 16 DC: 14 Constitution saving throw or suffer 3d8 acid damage and gain 1 level of exhaustion, suffering only half damage upon a successful save.

Saluwé's Caress

This storm manifests as thick, green clouds that begin raining fat, oily droplets. Everywhere they land, from parched soil to human flesh, plants erupt into being. While these plants typically die shortly in the harsh climate of the Blessed Lands, anyone caught in the storm suffers immense pain as they feel as hundreds, maybe thousands of small plants sprout from their flesh and feel their roots sink deeply into their body.

Range: Varied (often 2 miles in radius)
Duration: Varied (10 minutes to 1 hour)
Effect: At the beginning of every turn an individual caught within the storm must make a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or suffer 2d8 damage (resistances do not apply) as plants take root and begin to grow out of their skin. After three successive failed rolls, the character is restrained by the growing and constricting plants. Once implanted these plants deal an additional 1d4 points of damage as they continue to grow into the creature's flesh. These plants can be removed as an action with a successful Intelligence (Medicine) check DC 14, or by pulling them out, dealing an additional 1d6 damage (no type, no resistances apply) for each failed Dexterity saving throw.

Appendix C
The Calendar of the Imperium of Man

The people in the First City use the calendar system developed by the Imperium, although the years were restarted with the crowning of the Tomal Khan as Regent of the First City as year 1. Coincidently, this is the same year as the founding of the Coryani Empire.

The Imperium Calendar is divided into twelve months of 30 days apiece with five Intercalary Days that correspond with High Holy Days observed by most religions in the region. The names of the months are symbolic of the God they honor. The year officially begins on the vernal equinox, which coincides with the first day of the Green.

Equating the months in the Coryani Imperial Calendar to the months of the Imperial Calendar is problematic as the former has thirteen months and the latter twelve.

The information in this book is current as of the year the 1st of the Green 1073 I.C. (Imperium Calendar)

Month	Patron Deity	Approx. Earth Equiv.
Green	Saluwé	April
Lady	Larissa	May
Sun	Illiir	June
Coins	Althares	July
Flame	Nier	August
Roads	Anshar	September
Shadows	Cadic	October
Shades	Beltine	November
Barrows	Neroth	December
Staves	Sarish	January
Tides	Yarris	February
Storms	Hurrian	March

INDEX

Abjurers 23
Academy of Epics and Songs 105,127
Achabades val'Holryn 33
Administrata 81,83,90,110,126
Administrative Buildings 82
Aerie of the Griffins 120
Aeson Notonex 122
Agamassi 9,89
Aii 97-98,148,215
Alabaster Throne 40,88
Alethia Olenté 146
Allos, the Blood Star 57
Almeric 42,53,56,151-152
Alrameus Vernico of Plexus 3,88
Altheria 44,67,115,117,151
Altherian 67,87,102,104-105,109,146,151-152
Altherian Embassy 105,109,152
Altherian Republic 105,151
Altherian-Entaran War 151
Amanish of the Bloody Lips 46
Amanth 30-31
Ambassador Tukufu 117
Andai Ascendency 97,148,215
Andyar 42,49-52,73,78,80,110,130,146,154,158-159,172,189,192,208
Ansharan Gates 120-121
Aperio 59
Apothecary 114-115,157,159
Aqtau Mountains 9,42-43,46,57-58,60-61,64,67,170,219
Aqueducts 37,48,80
Archer's Folly 106
Ardakene 34,69,115,157
Arena Varria 87-88,95,145,174
Armind Gerhard Tildighast 90
Asami dec Goshin 92
Ashul 14,78
Ashvan 55,129
Assembly Hall of the First Families 81-82
Assembly, The 21,25,81-82,85-86,102
Aurelia 126
Auvantil ale 130
Auxunites 53
Avenue of Gargoyles 121-122
Awakened 46,152,158,162
Axuni Mountains 53
Aziz val'Abebi 105,151
Azure Way 4,6,8,10,14,34,38-39,47,53,55-56,70,75,78,81,88,91,98,101-102,105-106,108,110-111,116-117,120,132,152,159,194
Balam the Walking Wall 32
Bannin 97,149-151
Baralong val'Holryn 152
Barber 90,110,130,146-147,156
Barber's Guild 110,146,156
Barber's Hall 110
Barracks of the Coryani Legion of the Honorable Accord 88
Barracks of the Khitani Fen of Vigilance 92
Barricade 33,44,83,86,100,110-112,119,121,135,148,205-206
Barusan 68
Baths 87,90,104,126,130,146
Battle of the Four Armies 41
Bearer of Pain 46
Belestor 13,17-18,33-34,75,206
Belisarda 12,16,49,99,217-218
Beltinian Hospitalier 56,165
Benacco 88,91,103
Berokene 14,66,69
Bestiarii 89
Biomancers 9-13,198
Bishop Faustus val'Ossan 135,138,152
Black Coil 8-9,11-13
Black Tower of Gettulus 8,13,124
Blessed Lands 3,35,39-42,44-45,47-56,58-59,61-62,67,69-72,74,79-80,88,91,95,103,106-108,116,121-122,126,133-134,137,143,146,151,154-155,157,160-161,165,180-182,193,197,200-202,204,215,217-219,221,224
Blighted Bog 49,73
Blood Guard 37,82-83,147,155,171-172
Blood Guards' Barracks 83
Blood Pits 112,147
Blood Plains 31
Blood War 18-19,28,95,103
Bloodletter 147,171-172
Blue Cloaks 75,79,82-84,86,89,97,110-114,116,129,148,156,206
Blue Owl sash 151
Breath of the Dragon 64
Broken, the 46,192,195
Brotherhood of the Crimson Shackles 79,141
Bull Dancers of Kolkara 127,158
Bureau of Antiquities 48,111
Burial Crypts 106
Cadwiller 146-147
Caius Labienus Voluntos 130
Calcestus val'Assanté 41,134
Caltin 43-44
Caltin Observatory 43-44
Canticle 8,15-16,38,216-217
Capharra 118
Captain Souliad of the Blue Cloaks 79,148,156
Cathe 32,119,149-151
Cauldron 33,68,125,167,181,215
Cave Giants 107
Celestial Bureaucracy 39
Celestial Emperor 140
Celestial giant 35,44,169
Cha Ning Tea Room 92
Changal 94,112
Chauni 52,60,66,90,99,101,104,119,140-143,149,154-156,197,217-218
Cholko 99
Chonichu 42
Circus Septimus 88,127
Citadel of Althares 67
Citadel of Anshar 67
Citadel of Cadic 67
Citadel of Fate 70
Citadel of Hurrian 66,68-69
Citadel of Illiir 69,134
Citadel of Larissa 70
Citadel of Light 67,69
Citadel of Nier 41,55,70,72
Citadel of Saluwé 33,70-71
Citadel of Sarish 71
Citadel of Shadows 67
Citadel of the Gods 62
Citadel of Yarris 62,64-65,67,71
City of Secrets 30
Cleomia 79,91,101,140-141
Clodia val'Dellenov 90
Collection 105-106,108,117,128,150,217
Cool Pools 96
Corlathian Mountains 29,36,38,40-42,47-50,52,54,56,67,70,80,91,144,202,208,218,221
Coryani 4,7,14,18,38-42,50-52,55,57-59,62,66,69-71,75,78-80,82,85-88,90-93,98,100-103,105,107,112-117,119,126-127,130,132-135,137,140-141,143,145-147,151-155,157,160,180,184,193,199,203,205,210-211,213,217,221
Coryani Civil War 41,57,59,69,107,117,134-135
Coryani District 87,105,130
Coryani Empire 38-39,52,57-59,66,71,78,87-88,93,101,107,113,119,137,140,143,151,160,221
Coryani imperial 4,80,87,221
Coryani Inquisition 85-86,98,160
Crawling Shadow 111
Crusade of Light 57,106
Cuhan Islands 92
Cult of the Thousand Eyed Man 73-74
Cyclopes 4-5,8-9,48,59,62,66,71,160,194
Cyclops 9,90,194-195
Daidalis 84
Dailish 26,62,79,83-84,102,119,128,141,147-148,154,216-217
Dailish Isles 26,79,141,148,154,216-217
Dance of Murgath 118
Dar Zhan Vor 141
Dar'algah 6-8,75
Dargosian Isles 26
Darhlost 149-151,216
Dark Treasures Curio Shop 115
Dark-kin 57,67,112,115-116,150-151,166,168,216
Daughter of Yig 89
Death Mongers 160,166,172
Deathmongers 83,149-150,153,215-216
Defender of the Empire 41
Defender of the Gods 68
Defenders of the Faith 135
Delur River 58
Delver's License 82
Demearjiak 112
Deneki dwarf 97
Deronios 115
Desnydle 118
Destroyer, the 2,41,137,139,178,183,216
Diggers 112
Diotym 20
Divine Trinity 86,148-150,153,160,166-169,172,185-187,215-216
Divine Victory Monument 93
Domarr 112
Dorai Nasha 136
Dragon Lady of Changal 94,112
Dreaming of the Lady of Prophecy 28
Duchess Eldora val'Dellenov 103
Duke Konrad I 103
Duoppol 79,101,104,119,142-143,156
Dwarf 4,43-44,46,48,53,55-56,70,82,87,97,102,112,117,119,144-145,155-156,158-159,169-170,183-184
Dwarf's Beard 112
Dwarves 43-44,46,54-55,57,79,97,107,119,144-145,169-170,172,176,178,219
Eaters of the Dead 108
Ebesus 118
Eladru 4,8-9,48,194
Elandré val'Assanté 57,134,153
Elebac 117,145
Elemental Lords 11-12,16,49,74
Elena Madrue 146
Elonbé 66,72
Eloran Empire 13-14,36,50,73,75,131,135
Elorii 3,10-17,32-35,42,48-49,53-54,66,68-69,72-74,99,103,115,119,124,131,133,140,151,155-160,163,172,176,178,181,183,188-189,203,205,218
Elothym Varythrin 118
Emerald Society 4,6,8,10,14-15,25,37-39,48,50,62,69-71,81,105-106,108,110-112,115-116,121,129-130,132-133,135-137,152,156,194,209,217
Emperor Gorvaticus val'Assanté 91
Emperor Haran val'Assanté 50
Emperor Quron 40
Emperor Sahktess 11-12
Emperor Scipio val'Assanté 88-89,133
Emperor Septimus val'Assanté 88-89
Emperor Valerius val'Assanté 51
Empire of Yahssremore 8,10,131
Emporium of Fine Goods for the Faithful 56
Encali 53-55,57,79,102,117,119,144-145
Endless Choir 122
Endless Dark 44,61,74,169
Endless, the 10,34,37,44,47-48,61,74,108,111,122,140,153,169
Enpebyn 58,88,181
Erbo River 21
Erduk 32,184
Erkko val'Ishi 88
Eternal Choir 34-35,78
Eternal Imperator 23
Ethelios 73
Eurynius Amphitheater 94,105,127,151
Executioner's Block 83
Executioner's Square 83,149
Expedition Emporium 112
Eye of the Prophet 93
Far Traveler 51
Farenius Rufus Strabo 130
Fascina Livy 127
Faustus val'Ossan 135,138,152
Felician val'Mehan 114
Fen of Reclamation 39
Fen of Retribution 40
Fen of the Shining Scorpion 149
Fen of Vigilance 70,75,91-92,94,139-140
Fervidite 57-59,143,213
Fervidus Hills 29,39,42,57-59,61,68,70,74,92,102,143,211-212
Festival of the Masks 127
Fire wraiths 82
First Amongst Peers 15
First City 2-4,14,16-17,19-21,23,26,28,30,32-35,37-41,46-53,55-56,58,61-62,64-65,67-71,73-75,78-91,93-95,98-101,103-124,127,129-130,132-161,163-164,172,176,178,180,202,204-205,208,215-216,218-221
First Coryani-Khitani War 39,105,180
First Families 81-82,100,103,112
Flame Priests 30
Flood Plains 36,43,46-49,59,61-62,66,80,90,123,194,197,218,220
Flowered Spear 95
Focaut val'Mordane 101
Followers of the Azure Way 4,6,8,10,14,38-39,53,55-56,70,81,101,105-106,108,110-111,132,152,159,194
Foreigner's District 105
Fort Macha 59
Fortress of the Soldier Saints 50
Forum 91,127
Fountain of the Virtues 88
Four Towers of the Magi 101,108,122
Fragmentos Alenares 13-14
Gaius Maximetos Lorantrus 101,132

Gar 4-9,11-12,17,22,39,44,53,72-74,79-80,83,89,91,94,96-97,99,103,113,115,117,119,121-122,124-125,127,135,143,145-146,152,166,173,179-180,188,202,224
Gar Ormal 4-7,9,12
Gate of Shadows 119,122-123
Gate of the Gods 32,34,116
Gate of the Patriarch 81,84,114,116,124
Gatehouses 47,102,116
General Alectos 15
General Hosus 9
Gergan 147,171-172
Gettulus 8-9,13,124,140
Ghunlud 60
Ghurad 112
Gift of the Gods 52
Gihtan 68,207
Gillicar 60,197-198
God's War 18,42,54,74,183
Goddess of Suffering 67
Goddess of the Caverns 40
Godless 149
Golden Court 78-80,82-84,86-87,103,105-106,114,118,126,128,132,136,140,143,152,172
Golden Stack 84
Golon Ti 79,102,145-146,151
Gracchi 143
Granary 107
Grand Arena 89
Grand Bazaar 117,126,128,146
Grand Coryan 40,90,116,126,181
Great Betrayal 69
Great Peace Accord 145
Green Citadel 70
Grey Crone 149
Grey Fist 94,111-113,133,146-147,159
Griffon Riders 120
Gunter Brecht 129
Han Wu 93
Hanakubus val'Abebi 19
Hangman's Terrace 89,97,148,156
Haraden of Plexus 90
Harani 50-51
Haranshee 118
Haras val'Borda 108
Harlequin 23
Harpies 43,119,198-199
Harvesters of Ymandragore 97,158
Heartstone 43,46
Hedge Mages 128,158
Hektor Tensen-Balin 88,133,135
Hierophant 21-22,29
High Holy Days 74-75,80,83,86-91,94,103,116,126,130-131,174,221
High Priest of the Pyre 30,32,130
Hole, the 113
Holy Order of the Twelve Oaks 49
Hooded Company 64-65
Horudai's Peak 43-44
Hostels 64,91,116,126
House Buqa 107
House Lacona 103
House of Blades 117,145
House of Setai 55
House of the Chained 123
House of the Chaste Traveler 129
House Symesa 65,78-80,91,101,127,140-142
House Tartol 143
House ul'Wei 79,102,145
Hun'tai monks 46
Hunai 99,119,141,154,217-218
Ibon 101,118,144,203-205
Idan val'Borda 39,90,143
Idiot Priest (of Illiir) 93,95,135,137-139,217
Igerrus val'Mehan 109
Iguadon 7,11
il'Huan 10-13,188
Illuminated Scrolls 117
Illuminated Texts 15,117
Impai Island 62
Imperator 21-22,25-28,68,81-82,84-85,103,138,200
Imperator Harcarnanus val'Sheem 84
Imperator Menokum val'Assanté 25
Imperial senator 143
Infernal 24,35-37,57,69,71,75,93,100,106,111-112,127,153,166,168,171-74,178,187,192-193,216
Infernal Hells 35
Iron Arch 124
Iron Flute 129
Iron Imperator 124
Ironwood 49,57,59,61,74,92,116
Issori 4-8,47-48,75
Isul Khan 136
Isul Khan Daxio 136
Itawyl 130
Jade Mandarin 93,140
Jade Mandarin's Estate 93
Jade Tiger Tong 94
Jial of the Phoenix 37,39,70,94,110-111,123,137,145,152,156,209,217
Jubalay 104,146-147,156
Jubalay Umboté 104
Judgment of Nier 22,90,124,131
Judicial Court 84,113
Kai val'Shi 124
Kalindruhl 28,86,91-92,94,117,134,138,153,166,215-217
Kalindruhl Temple 91,94,138
Kaltari 14-15
Kelb'Bakari Masalio 115
Kelekene 12,33,69
Keys of Man 27,29,72,108,133
Khitan 28-29,37,39-42,46,50-51,58,61-62,64,66-67,69-71,74-75,78-80,82,86-87,90-95,98,102,105,108,112-113,115-116,126,128-130,132,137,139,141,143,145,147-149,152-155,159-160,166,170,180-181,183-184,210,212-213,215-217
Khitani Empire 39,41,58,82,93-94,105,112,137,139,145,152,154,183,215
Khitani Monastery 46
Khitani Tiger Men 108
Khitani yu 80,87
Kievamn 147
King Bedrosian 144
King of Nothing 97,99,147-148,159
King of Nothing's Palace 97
Kingdom of Milandir 71,101,151,153,162
Kio 64,101,118,137,141-142,156,168,172
Kolkara 127,149,158,216
Kopru 50-51
Kraldjur Morass 13,20,60
Kurenthé 17,35,42,47-48,51,54,73-74,189,218
Labyrinth of Time 52,121
Lady of Fate 70
Lady of Shu 113
Lady's Smile 94,147,159
Lanzhou Island 62
Larissa 28,43,52,64,70,87,91,94,102,106,109,118-119,137,139-140,155,164,174-177,187,221
Larissan 28,87,91,102,109,118-119,140,174
Lashul Symesa 78
Lavintius 19
League of Princes 129,141,156
Legion of Deafening Thunder 58
Legion of Deliverance 59,213
Legion of Grim Lamentation 30,67,121
Legion of Honorable Accord 69,75,88,133,181
Legion of Iron Shadows 130
Legion of Radiant Glory 69
Legion of the Bound Disciples 71
legion of the Cleansing Flame 26
Legion of the Crimson Moon 39,68,90,143
Legion of the Honorable Accord 87-88,133,152
Legion of the Mighty Oak 90
Legion of the Singers of Sweet Savona 126
Legion of the Unrepentant Heart 70
Legion of the Watchful Hunter 105
Legion of Vigilance 88
Legionnaire 7,22,39,56,58,67-69,71,88,90,105,122,126,130,133-134,141,143,146,157,181,213-214
Leola val'Assanté 69,91,103,134-135,138
Leonydes val'Virdan 25-26,29-32,41,55,68,72,82,85,110,129,152,200
Lifewarden 49,151
Lift 22,43,57,80,96,107,112,126,138,175,198,205
Lion's Gate 98,119,124
Litera Scripta Manet 117
Lord Eddings Korvil 64
Lord Moric Tisza 103
Lord of Shadows 90
Lord of the Plate 87
Lost Citadels 39
Lost City of Mattawab 55
Ludi 7,62,88-90,106,108,123,137,145-146,217,224
Ludius Melios 146
Ludus Carnatae 88-89,119
Ludus Polyceti 88-89
Lung Nu Changal 94
Mad Magi of Lakhrion 108,153
Maghir 36-37,75,78,84,99,101,127,136-137,154,164,172
Magra 112
Maien 137-138,152
Malfelan 133,188
Malomomen 85,120-121
Mandai 19
Mandators 26
Manetas 19-24,28,134,138
Marble Obelisk 124
Marketplace 117,128
Mârokene 13,33,69,73-74
Martan Itawyl 130
Massacre at Erbo River 21
Master of the Assembly 82
Master of the Games 88
Master Tolaren 53,55,79,144
Mattawab 55-56
Mausoleum of the Hallowed 107
Menisis val'Tensen 41
Mercantile Assembly 79,102,118,141,143
Mercantile Hall 118
Merchant Cabal 37,39,55,64-65,75,78-80,83,87-88,94-95,101-103,107,109,111,114,116-118,121,132,136-137,140,143,145-146,148,152,156
Merchant House 78,84,87,140,143,209
Messalean Sea 61,66,78,101,118,141
Milandric Church 56,102,135,149
Milandric Orthodox Church 86,102,134,138,152
Moande'e val'Abebi 87
Momar the Blind 97
Monastery of the Perfect Union 56
Monastic Order of the White Tortoise 46
Monti Vargas 146
Moratavia 53
Morven of House Vodik 56
Mother Church of Coryan 38,56-57,86,90,109,130,134,138,149,162,166,180-181,216-217
Mount Caria 53
Mount Dorna 57
Mount Hyperion 54
Mount Nosci 56
Mount Ordura 57
Mount Pelan 43-44,170
Mount Visius 53
Mountain that Walks 139
Mourner in Silence 128
Mournmouth Caverns 61
Murgath 118
Museum of Antiquities 105,108
Myrantian 19-22,36,68,72,113
Myrantian Empire 20
Mythic Age 122
Naga Emperor 140
Naori 128
Narapa 118,157
Narapan Soothsayer 118
Neles Vo 97,99,147
Nevanne 53
Nevatha 32
New Althré 114
Nierite 26-32,41,55,84,110,118,120,130,135,152,183,200,205
Nier's Breath 81
Nightrunner 79-80,205-206
Nol Dappan 144,183-184
Nola 98
Novo Cormata 133
Noz 118
Numaa plant 60
Nykt 99
Oath Maker 82,144,171
Obelisk of the Sun and the Moons 53
Obsidian Cube 48
Obsitus Park 124,190
Odean 103
Onara 15-19,36,46,64-65,78,102,128,198-199,215
Order of the Blessed Heart 114
Order of the Endless Choir 122
Order of the Inner Demon 57
Order of the Ivory Bow 57
Order of the Laughing Viper 91,164,174,176
Order of the Sea Lords 64,71,96
Orhan Vazraka 128
Orthodoxy 131,216
Orumar 66
Osalikene 69,73-74,84
Osalios 74
Ossarion Empire 19,67,71,128,141,215,217
Ossarion Sphinx 102
Other, the 15-17,54,72,103,183
Palace of the Emperor 11,88-89
Palace of the Empress 84
Palace of the Golden Court 83-84
Palace of the Imperator 27,81-82,84-85
Palanzur 20
Panari 20,40
Pantheon 8,15-19,21-22,27,29-30,33-34,37-38,41,51,56,65-66,81-86,90,92,103,113-114,116,121-122, 131,135,149,153,178,182, 215-217
Paradise of the Gods 22,89,131,215

Parmenios 23
Pearl 80,93,95-99,113-114,121,134,147-148,155,158-159,189
Pearl District 97,147-148
Pecinium 40,59,62,64-66,69,71,87,97,105,137,145,160,194,197,220
Pels' Bar 99
Penameel 98,148
Pense-Mar 93,100-103,106,127,130
Petrified Forest 54,70
Phaeron 23
Phaon Prison 113
Phila val'Ishi 114
Philosophic Warrior 105,151
Pilgrim's Pass 44,50-51,53,56
Pinnacle of Achievement and Subsequent Fall 121
Pit Crotalus 140-141
Pit Sseth 140-141
Plain of Monuments 48,220
Plains of Dagha 35
Plateau of Dagha 17,32,34,49,68,111
Plaza of the Goddess 82,85
Plebian Committee 89
Plexus 14,88,90,181
Portals of Anshar 30
Prelate of Illiir 134
Pride of Illiir 19-24,134
Priest of Slaughter 140
Priscus Varro the Elder 102,143
Prophet of Aii 97-98,148
Pulcher Varro 107,143
Qípáo 94
Qoquil lumber mill 49,74
Quintus val'Virdan 135
Ravan'Tindal 66
Realm of Shadow 123
Regent of the Imperium 36-37,40,78,84,172
Rhamul district 52,102,105,114
River Sans 49
Room of Golden Records 25
Rowena 114
Ruhk 93
Rul Marrowdrinker 6-7
Runemaster 118,170
Runemaster Elothym Varythrin 118
Rurick 85
Saam Ur 4,59,62,66,71,194-195
Saamurkond 66
Sacrament of the Receding Tide 96
Salamanka 7
Salantian 71
Salos 13
Salvage Rights 111
Sama 74,82,87,114,143,209-211
Sama Breeding Grounds 74
Samochus the Younger 108
Sanctorum of the Arcane 97
Sanguinus Celebrous val'Assanté 91
Sarish 26,30-31,33,36-37,54,57,69,71,75,82-83,89,93,102,109,112,122,127,144,147,150,153,160-161,166-169,171-174,186-187,215-216,221
Sarishan 26,30-31,57,69,75,82-83,89,93,109,112,127,167,172,186
Sarishan Oath 82,93,167
Sarishan Priest 26
Savonan Red 90,130
Savosh 19
Scaled Empire 10
Scaled Guard 64-65,160
Scyr 112
Scyrgan 112
Sea of Grass 141,217
Sea of Lanterns 36-37,42-43,53,59,61-62, 64,66,80,84,93,119,194,218
Second Blade 32
Second Coryani-Khitani War 39-40,58,70,79,91,105,145,152,180
Selash 15
Senate 89,133,143
Septian Baths 90
Seremasi 151
Serenus val'Assanté 116
Serpent Lake 58
Shabhanu 112
Shadowed Age 25,31,34,38,44,46,70,75,122
Shaldien's Harbingers 79,83
Shaulk Mountains 32
Shey Tywelian 108
Shining Patrol 104-105,146,151
Shrine to Cadic 90
Shu 9,14,73-74,78,85,90-92,98,113-114,218
Simpas Swamps 60
Singarthan troll 11,53,74,188,202
Siren's Call 129
Sisko val'Borda 106
Sisters of the Flame 25,32
Sisters Xang 95
Slaughter Priest 140
Slave Block 119,158
Sleeping Emperor 28-29,39-40,58,93,95,130,137,140,216-217
Sleeping Emperor Rises (hymn) 130
Slide, the 110,113-114,147
Smiling Lady 70
Solani 56-57,117,144-145
Solanos Mor 11,56-57,117,128
Soldier Saints of Dagha 41,49,51, 182
Sorcerer-King of Ymandragore 36,141,153,158
Sorcerer-Priest 144,174,186
Southern Lands 86,97,107-109,130,144-145,148,151,166,216
Spear of the Lohgin 129
Ss'koreth 11-13
Ss'ressen 4,6-13,89,104,119,146,156,158,160,172,176,178,181,220
Ssanu 4,6-12,107,124,140-142,188
Ssatus 140
Ssethregoran Empire 12,60,67,89,119,140-141
Ssethric 4-14,42,48,66,73-74,80,140,203,205-206,209
St. Martan's Tower 130
Stables and Animal Kennel 108
Staluan Baths 126,130
Starry Gate 28
Statue to General Idan val'Borda 90
Stone of Penance 65
Suetonius Varro 79,102,143-144,151
Sundering of Shadow 108
Sutun 113
Sword of the Heavens 25-31,33,41,55,68,70,72,82,85,110,120,129,200
Swords of Nier 30-32,41,68
Talon of the Hawk 97
Tantalus val'Assanté 21
Tattersal 150
Tavern of the Pilgrim's Rest 130
Taverna of the One Eye 90
Teklin 130
Temple of Sighs 87,91,109,147,174
Temple of the Gods 90,217
Temple of the Invincible Hunter 57
Temple of the Monkey God 55
Temple of the Pantheon 22,33-34,37-38,41,56,81-86,90,103,114,116,122,149,153
Temple of the Tempestuous Sea 62,65
Temple of the Three-Faced Goddess 99
Temple of the Trinity 149-150,216
Temple of the Venerator Invictus 57
Temple of Yarris 62,152,160
Thalayin 128
Theocracy of Canceri 151
Theocracy of the Cleansing Flame 25,27,29,31,73,122,125
Thousand Spears Company 59
Thousand Warriors 53
Throne of Man 18,27,29,36-37,78,85,121
Tiasos 124
Time of Terror 4,20,35-36,122,127,146,166,192,216
Timeon val'Borda 85
Timping 94
Tir Betoqi 112,144
Titus Aurelius val'Assanté 126
Tolaren 53,55,79,102,117,144-145
Tolaren's Mercantile Establishment 144
Tolenticus val'Ossan 64-65
Tomal Khan 36-37,39-40,49,75,78-79,83-84,86,88-89,93,98-99,101,106-107,109,111,118,126-128,130,136-137,140,146-149,164,172,216,221
Tomal Khan Ys 75,118,128,136
Tomas Ichoran 146
Tomb, the 114,169
Torveld Enyo 73-74
Tower of Gettulus 8,13,124,140
Tower of the Eternal Scholar 152
Tower of the Ymandrakes 108-109
Trade District 78,114
Trade Gate 105,107,109,126
Traders' Point 107,109-110
Tralia 2,102-103,152,177,205
Travel Times 44
Treasury 10,78,80,82,86-87
Treaty of Pecinium 40,69,71,87,105,137,145
Tree of Serenity 85,121
Triumphal Column Forum 91
Tulpetian 44
Tultipet 43-44,46,107,118,144,169-170,219
Twelve Gifts of the Gods 121
Twelve Oaks Park 49,131
Twin Citadels of Beltine and Neroth 72
Twin Colossi 53,61
Twin Towers 67,72
Tygana River 49
Tywelian family 108
ul'Hsin Kutaku 93
ul'Hsin Xu 134,138,153
ul'Jaya Arun 138
ul'Jaya Dysa 138
ul'Lo 95
ul'Rankin 96,123
ul'Rankin Teil 123
ul'Shi 134,139-140
ul'Shi Dao 134,139-140
ul'Tang Jakas 140
ul'Wei 40,49,79,85,92-93,102,105,145,152
ul'Wei Golon Ti 79,102,145
ul'Wei Tan 85
ul'Wei Tien Ma 145
ul'Zheng 95
Ulfila 53
Umor 32,41,46,61,69,84,94,102-103,110,114,119,121,128,141,148,156,178
Uncleansed Area 52,79,87,110-112,119-120,122,157,159,172,189,205
Undercity 80,82,87,98,110-113,119,122,129,137,205-206
Underworld 90
Undir 129,141,168,172
Unity of Spirit 91
val'Abebi 19,28,40,49,87,93,105,145,151-152
val'Assanté 21-26,40-41,50-51,57,69,85,88-89,91,100,103,116,126,133-135,138,153
val'Borda 39,68,85,90,103,105-106,108,123,143
val'Dellenov 40,71,90,103,120,178
val'Emman 20,24-27,104,183
val'Haupt 19,200
val'Holryn 30,33,152
val'Ishi 72,88,114
val'Mehan 18-19,30,109,114,121-122
val'Mordane 72,101,167
val'Ossan 64-65,71,95-97,135,138,152,160
val'Rankin 95-96
val'Sheem 50,84,91,119,135,176
val'Tai 93
val'Tensen 41
val'Trisin 103
val'Virdan 20,22,24-27,29-32,41,55,68,72,82,85,110,129,135,152,183,200
val'Hsin Yu 28
Valinor 16-19,21-24,27-29,32,52,69,88,93-94,123,134,138-140,216
Valinor of Dreams 28
Vanomir 78
Varn 140
Varro 59,74,79,87,89,102,107,143-145,151,213
Varro Mercantile Concern 59,143,213
Vastwood 11,13,17,33,42,47,49,51,57,59,66,68-70,72-74,163,188-189,193,209,218
Veiled Ladies 114
Vendetta Circle 95,112
Venu Khan 136-137
Venu Khan Forso 136-137
Villa'tavorentes 43-44,46,170
Vincens Lerato val'Borda 105
Viridis 59,123,201
Vispania 88
Vitus Linos val'Sheem 50,135
Volthar val'Holryn 30
Wandering Eye 109
War of Empires 19,67-69,72,207
War of Extinction 6,8-9,11-12
Warriors of the Eternal Flame 30,183
Water Reservoir 80,106
Well of Souls 121,125
Whalka 129
Willem Brecht 129
Wine Drinker 97
Winged Gate 123
Wiscorean Baths 90,104,130
Wiscoreax val'Emman 104
Word of Illiir 57,134
Xiothun 20
Yahssremoran Empire 8-9,11,13,80,106,140
Yahssremore 8-11,13,75,131,140,205
Yarricite 71,96,160,162
Yissera 141
Yunkharoi 136
Zhon Dai 94,112,159
Zocalo 117,126,128-130

PCI 2602

ARCANIS 5E

THE WORLD OF SHATTERED EMPIRES

Codex Geographica Vol. I
The Blessed Lands

Birthplace of empires and the cradle of civilization, the Blessed Lands is the holiest of places upon Arcanis. Atop a thousand-foot-high mesa lies the First City. This once majestic metropolis served as the capital of no less than four great empires and laid abandoned for millennia. It is now being reclaimed, block by block, from the foul and malevolent creatures that made their lairs within. Half the city yet lies in ruin, its secrets awaiting discovery by the brave and foolhardy. Throngs of pilgrims journey to the region each year and caravans of exotic goods traverse the treacherous landscape in search of fortune. It is a land of danger and opportunity, of ancient curses and sacred temples.

Explore the ancient Citadels of the Gods, journey across the Plain of Monuments, and hazard the Voei-infested Fervidus Hills. Match wits with the canniest of merchants, thieves, and priests from across the Known Lands and the exotic empires and city-states to the west. Negotiate the tense détente between the legionnaires of the Coryani Empire and the soldiers from mysterious Khitan as they try to hold a fragile peace in this most volatile of cities.

Within these pages you will find:

- An in-depth history and survey of the Blessed Lands region
- An exhaustive look at the people and locations within the First City
- New Class Options, Divine Aspects, Fighter Archetypes, and Holy Champion Orders
- New Backgrounds, Feats, and Spells
- New Combat Schools
- A Bestiary detailing some of the bizarre and dangerous creatures that inhabit the region
- Scores of adventure hooks to keep your players entertained

www.paradigmconcepts.com
PCI 2602
PARADIGM CONCEPTS
ISBN 978-1-931374-73-6
ISBN 978-1-931374-73-6
54499
9 781931 374736