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HELLFROST LAND OF FIRE

Paul "Wiggy" Wade-Williams



Sampler



Cakali

The cakali (pronounced “yack-AR-li,” singular cakal) are humanoid jackals. They have fully dexterous fingers, but retain the legs and feet of jackals. Originally there were three distinct sub-races of cakali, distinguished by their black, light brown, or reddish-brown fur. Centuries of interbreeding have merged these bloodlines to the point where the sub-races are now one and the same.

The cakali once ruled over the now-ruined cities in the Plain of Ash (not to be confused with the Desert of Ash). They based their enlightened culture on the teachings of Anup, a philosopher-king who led the race from barbarity into civilization. They traded with the other races, abolished slavery, and invented the alphabet still used by many races today.

During the War of Copper Jars, the cakali sided first with the jinn, but switched allegiance to the humans when they discovered the jinn intended to use their race as suicide troops to save their own forces. In an act of total retribution, the jinn shattered the cakali cities and turned the sands of their homeland to ash, obliterating any hope the jackal men had of rebuilding their great kingdom.

With their kingdom gone, the cakali were forced into a nomadic existence, which they maintain to this day. Despite the hardships they endured, the race never forgot Anup’s teachings, and maintains a strong sense of righteousness and honor. Suleiman’s teachings were similar to those of Anup, and many cakali saw him as Anup’s spirit, come back to lead the race forward in their darkest hour. For this reason, most cakali are Devoted.

Cakali are a pragmatic race, standing defiant in the face of superior odds, and seeing death as merely another journey the soul must undertake at some point.

When it comes to magic, cakali are first and foremost sand mages, though jinn and wizir magic are not unusual. Ushabti and dervish magic are rare among these nomadic folk, and khem-hekau is considered abhorrent. Those cakali who do follow the gods typically worship Duamutef, god of nomads. Qedeshet, god of knowledge, is popular, as is Upuaut, god of travel.

Although the cakali abolished slavery long ago, they do retain bondsmen. A bondsman is a person (of any race) who has agreed to serve the cakali in return for protection and basic provisions. Some bondsmen are fulfilling a life debt (such as being saved from the burning sands by the cakali). Others may be looking to escape from their past lives or be trying to cleanse their soul of some taint through hard work.

Bondsmen wear a leather bracelet bearing the name of their “master.” This isn’t a sign of ownership, but proof the bondsman is entitled to be treated fairly by other cakali.

Although regularly used as menial labor, a bondsman has some legal rights under cakali law. While under his master’s dominion, he is expected to serve loyally and

without question, however. A few cakali even form true friendships with their bondsmen. A bondsman must serve a minimum of 10 years before he can ask to be released from his status. The cakali may cut the bondsman free at any time.

Cakali live for upward of 80 years.

Names: Abaza, Ajlan, Bayram, Durukan, Fukri, Ilhan, Necip, Oktay, Tabari, Ya’kub (male); Ajda, Denktash, Hanife, Roxelana, Suzan, Yelda (female).

Cakali do not use personal surnames, but use those of their tribe. Tribal names include Aricanli, Cetinok, Kasaba, Sevim, and Yanalak. Names are always given as personal name followed by alim- (“of the”) tribal name, such as “Ajlan alim-Sevim.”

RACIAL EDGES & HINDRANCES

* **Bite/Claws:** Str+d4.

* **Code of Honor:** Cakali live by a strict moral code, though they are swift to punish those who abuse their honor and hospitality. They have the Code of Honor Hindrance.

* **Fearless:** Cakali are immune to Intimidation and Fear, having no fear of death.

* **Nomad Ways:** Cakali have survived for centuries within the desert, and begin the game with a d6 in Survival.

HUMANS

Humans are the most populace race in the desert realms. Just two human branches exist in the deserts, these being the Bedu and the Calimhari. We’ll look at each in turn below.

Regardless of cultural stock, desert dwellers tend toward dark hair and eyes, and swarthy skin. The average lifespan is 70 years.

Bedu

The Bedu (plural and singular are the same) are the least numerous of the human cultures and live a predominantly nomadic existence. They are a clannish people with strong ties of blood. Families are grouped into clans, which in turn belong to a tribe. Clans within a tribe often share a common ancestor, though purely political alliances are not uncommon.

Many Bedu are traders, and their camel trains, which can stretch to over half a mile in length, are frequent sights in the great deserts. They produce little of their own, and serve as middle men between the disparate cities and cultures. A few, however, make a living as slavers, raiding small villagers or attacking caravans, then selling captives in the Caliphate, Sultanate, or the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes. A few of the darker Bedu tribes sell captives to the fell rulers of Hekata, the scorpionmen, orcs, and other evil races.

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The Faithful

The Faithful are worshippers of the old pantheon, gods whom the races have praised for many millennia. As is the way of gods and time, the number of deities has altered, with some deities falling from favor and others being raised in their place. Likewise, names change as cultures change. Still, the Faithful have no doubt that there are multiple gods and that the gods reward their clerics with miraculous powers. Those who follow the teachings of the gods are rewarded after death by being welcomed into their deity's celestial paradise.

The Faithful worship in temples, venerate statues and images of the gods, and have priests to speak to the gods on their behalf. In essence, the Faithful are a "standard" role-playing game religion.

The sphinxes are members of the Faithful, as are the citizens of the Caliphate. A few Bedu, cakali, and hyaenidae tribes are Faithful, but their numbers are dwindling.

The God War

Clerics of the desert pantheon have a different take on the God War spoken of by clerics in Rassilon. Back before the gods created mankind, Iblis, the god of evil, sought to overthrow the heavenly order and fill the universe with chaos. Though a single deity, Iblis' powers far exceeded any other individual deity.

In order to defeat Iblis and cast him into the Bottomless Pit, the gods were forced to join forces. Naturally, gods of fire, heat, volcanoes, forges, and other heat-related aspects were inclined to side with each other. By the time the gods defeated Iblis, the various camps had developed strict hierarchies.

So, whereas there is now only one god of fire, he covers every aspect of fire. In the eyes of the Faithful, the other gods related to fire are still present, but are lower down the chain. As one worships the main god, so his followers also receive praise. For instance, if a cleric calls upon the god of fire to grant him the power to resist the heat of a lava flow, the god of volcanoes is automatically being worshipped as well—there is no need to pay homage to him separately. That said, it is possible for a cleric to honor a minor god as the sole form of worship.

Geb-Agni

Titles: Backbone of Heaven, Strength of the Gods, Mastersmith, Firestorm, the Burning One, Lord of Incineration, Father of Fire Giants.

Aspects: Earth, strength, fire, volcanoes, lava, heat, smiths, fire giants.

Symbol: A black triangle with an inverted red triangle above it.

Priesthood: Earthlords (priests); Firelords (paladins).

Herald: A tall human with black, broken rock for skin beneath which can be seen bulbous veins of glowing fire (see page xxx).

Holy Days: Every Yaus al-Niwt during Alak Shemu.

Duties: To explore the subterranean realm, to use metal, to rekindle the heat of the desert.

Sins: (Minor) swimming when it can be avoided, eating uncooked food (except obvious foodstuffs, like fruit), washing more than once a week, using non-metal weapons or armor; (Major) damaging a hearth, forge, or other source of heat, sleeping outdoors when there is a cave or dwelling nearby; (Mortal) willfully despoiling a cavern or other underground feature, burying a corpse.

Signature Power: *Burrow* (Earthlords) or *deflection* (Firelords).

Powers: *Armor, barrier, beast friend* (land creatures only), *bladebreaker, bolt, boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, Climbing, and Knowledge (smithing) only), *bridge, burrow, champion of the faith, deflection, elemental form* (earth, fire, and lava only), *elemental manipulation* (earth and fire only), *energy immunity* (air, cold, coldfire, earth, fire, heat, ice, and water), *environmental protection, fatigue, glyph, hamper movement, heat mask, light, quake, refuge, sanctuary, smite, sphere of might, summon elemental* (earth, fire, lava only), *summon herald, wilderness step*.

Trappings: Priests must use an earth trapping whenever possible, and paladins must use fire and heat. Neither may ever use air or water trappings.

Geb and Agni were once two separate entities, Geb being the god of earth and Agni the god of fire. After the discovery of the Heart of Fire, the two entities were merged into a single deity. The joint entity quickly attracted smiths, who utilize both earth and fire, as his core worshippers. Although most of his worshippers are metal workers, miners, and fire giants, he also receives adoration from soldiers and crafters who work with stone, clay, or earth. The god is shown as a dark-skinned, bearded man wearing a smith's apron. In one hand he holds a miner's pick and in the other a smith's hammer.

Shrines are always carved from stone, basalt (a volcanic stone) being preferred. Shrines are common outside mines and deep caves, both gateways to Geb-Agni's subterranean palace. Temples are always built underground, ideally around a hot spring or mud pool. Whether or not these are available, the clergy ensure that roaring fires keep the temperature inside a stifling 100 degrees plus.

Traditionally, Geb-Agni's priests follow his earth aspect and wear brown robes, while his paladins follow his fire aspect and wear red robes. In reality, the clergy worship both aspects equally, the names being a leftover from the earliest days of the union. The clergy are a mixture of stoic resistance and furious rage, as befits their god, and one can never tell how a cleric will react to a given situation.

Ceremonies involve fire and sound. Celebrants jump over ritual fires, which release sins from their spirit. Others bang hammers on anvils or rocks to drive away the sins. Fire walking is considered necessary for followers who have committed grave sins.

The Magical Arts

Of all the forms of magic, jinn magic is the most widespread and accepted among the civilized races. With the majority of greater jinn bound into copper jars and hidden, the lesser jinn have little option but to answer the call of the jinn mages and serve them loyally. Although the jinn are mistrusted and despised for what they did in the past, none doubt that their enslavement is not only true providence, but is also eternal.

Sand magic is one of the oldest arts, and is common among nomads. Some sand mages do use their magic to encourage the desert to expand, swallowing whole cities in its path, but these are few and far between, and most sand mages are guardians of the wastes.

Desert dwellers once saw dervish magic as a religious calling, practitioners typically following Upuaut, god of travel. These days, however, it has become part of Suleiman's way. By spinning rapidly, a dervish winds the threads of magic around himself, drawing in power until he is ready to unleash his magic.

Wizir magic, while not common, is highly respected. Its members serve as advisors and bodyguards to nobles, merchant princes, and the like, steering them along the right course of action and ensuring the just remain in power. As with all magic, it is only as good or evil as the practitioner, and some wizirs have tarnished the reputation of the art by using their magic to usurp power.

Ushabti magic is an ancient form, much weaker now than in olden times, but still potent nonetheless. Whereas other forms of magic create effects from nothing, ushabti mages bring inanimate objects to life through a form of spirit transfer. From chairs and swords to colossal statues, the ushabti can bend anything to his will.

Finally, there is khem-hekau, an art most citizens fear. Khem-hekau is the darkest magic, and involves forcing the spirits of the deceased to work the summoner's will. Outside of the desert, such magic is known as necromancy, but within the wastes it is simply "black magic." Khem-hekau is an ancient art, once practiced by the mages of the Hekatic Empire. Today, the greatest exponents of the art are the liche-wizirs and withered pharaohs of the Withered Dynasty.

Dervish Magic

Arcane Skill: Dervish (Agility)

Starting Powers: 3

Powers: *Altered senses, armor, aura, boost trait, burrow, charismatic aura, deflection, dispel, elemental form, environmental protection, ethereal/corporeal (ethereal only), fly, growth/shrink, healing, invisibility, leaping, regenerate, quickness, sanctuary, shape change, smite, speed, sphere of might, succor, teleport, wilderness step.*

Dervishes, sometimes called whirling dervishes, work

their magic by spinning their bodies like a toy top. As the mage spins, his arms initially outstretched, so he winds the threads of magic around him, gathering more and more the longer he spins.

Every spell has a unique style of spinning associated with it, though often these differences are very subtle, such as raising a thumb, or turning the hand a few degrees counterclockwise. When the mage eventually stops spinning, he draws his arms into his body, and the magical energy is released.

Casting: A dervish does not have to speak to work his magic, but he must have his arms and legs free and have room to spin. A dervish who does not spin cannot work magic.

Mechanics: A dervish has a -2 penalty to all Dervish rolls. However, the longer they spin, the greater precision they impart into their spells. For each action after the first spent spinning, the mage gains +1 to his arcane skill roll as he controls the magic to a finer degree.

The extra casting actions don't have to be declared in advance, but cannot exceed a number of actions equal to half the mage's Vigor die.



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Organizations

This section takes a quick look at some of the better known organizations found within the desert realms that characters can join. Other organizations, usually of a truly evil nature, are detailed in the GM section.

Pegasus Guard

The Sultan maintains a large private army to protect the Sultanate from outside aggression, and himself from the ambitions of his emirs. Rated as his elite troops are the Pegasus Guard, highly trained cavalymen famed for their unusual mounts and willingness to engage foes other troops flee from in terror. Sultan Faisal ibn Ahmed formed the guard in 217 CJ by in response to orc raids occurring along the Jinn Wall Mountains. Traditional troops were unable to react to attacks in time to be of

any use, and the cost of building, maintaining, and garrisoning a network of forts prohibitive. Their aerial status allowed them to survey a wide area far quicker than a ground patrol, and terrain was no obstacle when mustering for an attack. After the orcs were driven back, the Guards were quickly elevated to higher status, becoming part of the Sultan's private army.

A contingent of 1000 Guards is permanently stationed in Al-Wazir, where they patrol over the city and its surrounds on their winged mounts. They also act as the Sultan's bodyguards when he appears in public. Smaller forces, ranging from 10 to 100 men, are stationed in the other cities of the Sultanate to remind distant nobles that the sultan's reach is long. Others are assigned to guard special caravans, escort dignitaries visiting other realms, or protect strategic caravanserais. The most renowned Guards are those tasked with hunting down threats to the Sultanate both within and without its borders. (The latter is the role in which player characters should typically serve.)

Pegasus Guards are forbidden from marrying or siring children—their sole loyalty lies with the Sultan. While in the City of Spires, they can find free room and board in the Guards' barracks. Elsewhere in the Sultanate, they must rely on their status and the generosity of the local nobility. Most often they are housed for free with the local soldiery, who are quick to gather round and hear the Guard's tales of heroism.

RANKS

Although part of the army, the Guard maintains a loose structure. One day a five man patrol may be commanded by a sergeant, the next it may be part of a larger unit commanded by a captain. Every soldier is trained to think like a leader, however, and thus the loss of a commander does not cause as much chaos as it does among regular units.

The bulk of the Guard is made up of Guardsmen, the common soldiery. Guards must be capable swordsmen and riders. They must also pass rigorous practical examinations before their pegasus if introduced to them.

Above the guardsmen are the Guard Sergeants. Typically there is one sergeant for every nine guardsmen. Sergeants wear a plume of blue-dyed horsehair from their helmets to mark their status. Few soldiers ever rise above the rank of sergeant. To become an officer requires more than just the ability to lead men, fight like a demon, and serve the sultan faithfully—it also requires powerful connections in the court, if not noble blood in one's veins.

Guard Captains are the highest active ranking officers. A captain usually commands ten sergeants and the guardsmen beneath them. Captains wear red plumes on their helmets. In recognition of their service and duties, they are awarded the noble title of pasha as well. The vast majority of captains are given this rank without having worked their way up from the lower ranks—such is the benefits of noble blood.

The highest rank within the Guards is Commander of the Pegasus Guard. Personally appointed by the sultan,



Desert Life

The lands of the great desert, known locally as Al-Shirkuh, appear at first glance to be largely barren. The waters of the great rivers allow the lands along the banks to be irrigated, and numerous wells and oases dot parts of the desert, but much of the land is sand, rock, or ash, with regions of glass and salt.

Despite their appearance, the deserts of Al-Shirkuh are full of life. From tiny beetles and scorpions to huge sand dragons, life teems on, under, and above the blistering sands. It is also in this harsh, unforgiving environment that the Bedu, cakali, and hyaenidae make their homes.

The desert has changed many times throughout the ages. Flowing sand drowned entire empires whose names are now forgotten. Volcanoes spewed millions of tons of ash into the air, blanketing swathes of desert in black dust. A great lake dried up in antiquity, leaving behind a salt basin. Lush forest petrified over hundreds of centuries to form a forest of columns.

And now the desert is changing, evolving, again. The temperatures have dropped in the last 500 years. Though still scorching hot, the desert is more habitable than it has been for recorded history. Yet with this cooling comes not relief, but despair.

For the last five centuries, the records of dozens of scholars show lower and lower rainfalls. While the lands have always known periods of drought, these were once cyclical, following a pattern of five rich and five lean years. Allowances were made, with surpluses being stored for times of hardship. For the last seven years, each harvest has been worse than the one before, though famine has so far been avoided. Crops wither in the heat, the ground bakes as hard as iron, and the remaining stores are running dangerously low. Another year or two, and the harvests will not feed everyone who relies on them.

The great desert itself also seems restless. The sands have always moved, inch by inch across the millennia, covering all in their path. Yet now, the sands move many miles over the course of a year, and the towering dunes hover like frozen waves above the fertile regions. If the sand continues its relentless march, valuable agricultural land, land which the races can ill-afford to lose, will vanish.

The desert is changing, and it may be a change the civilized races cannot survive.

Passage of Time

All terms used here are the Sandspeech names, the standard among all the civilized races. Different races maintain their own terms.

CALENDAR

The cakali, whose astrologers mapped the stars countless centuries ago, laid down the first accurate calendar.

Hekata adopted the calendar, their warriors and merchants spreading it across Al-Shirkuh. Despite religious and cultural differences, the civilized races have kept the same calendar, with only minor adjustments.

SEASONS & MONTHS

The year is broken down into three major seasons, and a short “holy” season. The major seasons consist of four months of 32 days each. Within each season, the months are called Amt (First), Baot (Second), Anshi (Third), and Tamith (Fourth). Holy season is a single 32 day month at the end of the calendar, and is called Alak Neteru (Season of the Gods) by the Faithful and Alak Suha (Season of Contemplation) by the Devoted.

Alak Arkhet (Flood): The year of the desert races begins in what northlanders would call late fall. Late summer storms in the mountains swell the rivers and a surge of water flows toward the lowlands. When it reaches the low areas, the rivers often burst their banks, spilling the precious water over the fields. Once the waters die down, farmers are quick to rush to the sodden fields, preparing the soil and planting as many crops as sunlight allows.

Alak Arkhet equates Fogmonan, Wulfmonan, Snaermonan, and Frostmonan in Rassilon.

Alak Paret (Harvest): Paret is the time of the growing season and harvest, when the crops are tendered and irrigated. Typically, the main cereal harvests occur in the last month of the season. Temperatures begin to rise steadily from their winter lows as the months pass.

Paret equates to the northern months of Eostremonan, Plohmonan, Sowanmonan, and Werremonan.

Alak Shemu (Dry): Shemu marks the time in the year when the sun is at its most fierce. The smaller riverbeds dry, irrigation channels shrink to a mere trickle, the soil hardens and cracks, and the hot desert winds scour the land. The season is not a holiday. Far from it, in fact—the farmers are often conscripted into work gangs to help repair state buildings, maintain roads, dredge irrigation channels, and such like until the harvest is ready.

Shemu equates to northern months of Sceranmonan, Hegmonan, Haerfestmonan, and Falmonan.

Alak Neteru (Gods)/Suha (Contemplation): Neteru (or Suha) is the “holy” season, a time when the farmers begin preparing for the rains which will bring the next floods, soldiers commence training. This month equates to Huntianmonan in Rassilon.

DAYS & WEEKS

Each month is broken down into four weeks of seven days, plus four extra days at the beginning. The weeks are numbered using the same notation as the four months of the each season. The seven days of the week are called Yaus al-Maat (Day of Balance), Yaus al-Kemi (Day of Flour), Yaus al-Hamala (Day of Lambs), Yaus al-Sesht (Days of Scribes), Yaus al-Niwt (Days of Houses), Yaus al-Ittrou (Day of the River), and Yaus al-Nefar (Day of

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TOMB HILLS

The Tomb Hills lie on the edge of Hekata, but when they were painstakingly carved out of the rock by slaves the borders extended as far north as the Snake Road, east to what is now the Sphinx Road, and west to the Northern Trade Road.

A series of steep cliffs and narrow valleys easily protected by a small force of soldiers, the Tomb Hills were an ideal spot for the later pharaohs to be entombed. Remnants of ancient guard towers still dot the higher peaks, and crumbling walls mark where valleys were once sealed off to deter tomb robbers.

Tombs of the Kings: While early rulers of Hekata constructed massive pyramids in which their bodies would rest, those of the later dynasties were forced to spend eternity in less grand tombs.

Carved into the walls of the valleys of hills, many of the tombs were opened during the final war against the unknown invaders, when the occupants joined in the carnage. Others were opened during the civil war which followed, their owners conscripted or hacked apart, and their burial goods stolen.

Aside from a dozen or more major kings and queens, there are literally hundreds of tombs of lesser nobles

and courtiers which remain concealed. The majority of tombs comprise just two or three chambers, but grander tombs may number as many as a dozen or more. The tomb of Pharaoh Djedmeser III is said to have contained 99 chambers spread over five levels. Whether this is true or not remains to be seen, for the tomb has never been found and, as far as anyone knows, the pharaoh still slumbers peacefully.

Sealed tombs may contain living mummies, most likely insane after being trapped for over 2000 years, others may have occupants who still rest in peace. All likely contain a fortune in treasure, there for the taking if a tomb robber can survive the deadly mundane and magical traps common to these tombs.

Major Locales

HEKATARNA, CITY OF BONES

Population: Unknown

Ruler: Pharaoh Ramunhotep XI, Administrator of Hekata

Formerly the capital of Hekata, the ruins are most often



referred to today as the City of Bones. Everyone in Al-Shirkuh knows undead lurk amid the ruined temples and palaces, such is the notoriety of the land, but no one suspects that a veritable empire of the damned lurks in Hekata.

The outskirts of Hekatarna are partially buried in sand, but it is clear to all but the blind that someone, or something, has kept the political and religious areas clear of sand. Unlike other cities predating Suleiman, there are no statues of gods anywhere in the city. Long overthrown by the pharaohs in favor of worship of their image, the city is instead full of statues of these tyrannical rulers. Thousands of statues were damaged or destroyed in the civil war, as rival pharaohs sought to wipe the images of their rivals from history, while simultaneously struggling to remove their creaking forms from the face of the world. The only statues which suffered no damage were those of Apophis, though weathering has done what the hand of undead kings would not.

Perhaps when Apophis' war starts, intrepid scholars and spies will enter the city and study the images of the surviving statues to identify the withered pharaohs who command the armies of darkness. Maybe their identities will lead to the discoveries of weaknesses—the heavens know that the civilized races will need all the allies they can muster once the dead march.

Bureaucratic Center: One building which does have “life” is a small temple dedicated to Apophis. Built long after his death, the temple houses the current bureaucracy of Hekata, mummified scribes who work tirelessly to prepare for the coming war. While agents scour the

The Penitents

The Penitents are misguided souls who believe the greater jinn were the true gods of good, who manifested on the mortal plane in preparation for leading their chosen followers to the Afterlife. Their enslavement of the races was an elaborate test, a way of determining mankind's devotion—a test mankind failed by initiating the War of Copper Jars.

Whereas even the Faithful accept Suleiman as a savior figure, the Penitents view him as the supreme heretic, a dark servant of Iblis whose task it was to lure men from the true faith. Jinn mages, who use magic to enslave lesser jinn, the heralds of the true gods in the eyes of the Penitents, are viewed as followers of Iblis. Many have met their death at the hands of fanatical Penitents.

The Penitents basic goal is to bring about a Second Jinn Empire. After a lengthy period of suffering, which mankind truly deserves for having lost its collective faith and converting to the worship of false idols and beliefs, mankind will then ascend to the heavens, guided by the hands of the benevolent jinn.

First, of course, they need to find some greater jinn. The locations of a few are known, but most of these are considered impure, having been tainted by Suleiman, and therefore Iblis, when they were bound to the mortal realm. The only pure jinn are those who refused to bow

before Suleiman/Iblis and who were imprisoned in copper jars for their “crime.” Agents of the Penitents scour old libraries and brutally torture jinn mages for any clue that may lead to copper jars or the elusive secret of how to open them.

The Penitents have gathered a handful of jars from across Al-Shirkuh, which they store in a secret temple in the Mountains of Malice until they work out how to break the seals. Protected from the machinations of the servants of Iblis, the jinn trapped within the jars are worshipped as gods by their insane devotees. Powerless to respond thanks to the enchantments placed on the jars, the jinn can do nothing but bide their time and wait for their release.

While it is likely the jinn would jump at the chance to reap revenge on the descendants of the slaves, it is less likely they would reward the Penitents in any way. As the old proverb goes, “A crafter may love and cherish his tools while he works with them, but after he has finished his work he casts them aside.”

Note that while Penitents and Jinn Slayers share a hatred of jinn mages, there the similarities end. The Slayers believe that the jinn and everything touched by them (including the Penitents) are evil.

Qabal

When Lahab Al-Wazir ascended the throne, many mages thought they would be elevated to positions of power. While it is true some became valued advisors and courtiers, most were simply ignored in favor of non-spellcasters. The majority of mages actually cared little for positions of temporal power, preferring to invest their time and effort in mastering their art. Among those who sought power, there was no unification—individuals simply schemed to sit on the throne of an individual city. Few met with much success.

Trade with Rassilon brought the denizens of Al-Shirkuh into contact with the Magocracy. As word of the nation of mages filtered along the trade routes, desert mages began to prick up their ears. If a ruling body of mages could exist in the barbaric north, why not in the enlightened desert?

Slowly and secretly, likeminded mages began to share their dream of transforming the Sultanate from a feudal society into a magocracy. Within a few years, the Qabal was born.

The early Qabal sought to gain power through marriage, planning a long but ultimately bloodless coup. Once a mage loyal to the Qabal sat on every throne, the organization planned to declare the foundation of the Magocracy of Suleiman. Sadly, that dream never materialized. As time passed, younger, more aggressive members slowly replaced the moderates (who favored the marriage route). These upstarts berated their peers for their failure to achieve a simple goal. Where a hundred years of marriage failed, they said, force would succeed. The moderates' vocal outrage at this proposal led to divisions

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in the Qabal, divisions which ended suddenly on the Night of Silenced Voices, when the old guard met their doom by blade and spell.

With half their membership dead, the Qabal has been forced to rebuild its strength before it can act. Members actively seek out other mages, questioning them on their attitude toward a magocracy. Those who voice open disdain are permanently silenced to ensure the Qabal's plans remain secret. Those who express interest are questioned in more detail. Only when a Qabalist is totally convinced of the mage's support (which may require active surveillance for many months) is he invited to join their ranks.

The Qabal's membership nears the "magic number" the leadership considers necessary to take and secure power. Across Al-Shirkuh, their members sharpen their blades and hone their minds in readiness for the coming revolution.

Typical Members: Any archetype with an Arcane Background (Magic) Edge.

Sisterhood of the Seven Veils

Scripture, ideology, and wishful thinking aside, society in Al-Shirkuh is not equal. Aside from the rich/poor divide, there is also an issue of gender inequality. Yes, females can join the military, run businesses, and even rise to the dizzy heights of sultana or calipha, but individuals filling these positions are rarities.

To date, there have been just two sultanas and a single calipha in over 1200 years of combined history. As the sole calipha once wrote, "Women are expected to have lower goals than men, but must work twice as hard to achieve them."

The Sisterhood of the Seven Veils seeks to redress that imbalance by any means necessary. Political intrigue, bribery, seduction, even murder are acceptable methods of empowering females.

The Sisterhood is run on a cell system, with one cell per city. Within whatever secret meeting place the Sisters use, all females are equal, and their goals and dreams no less valid than others. Here they work together to aid each other, to help each other move further up the social ladder. As one Sister rises, she is expected to use her new influence to aid her fellow members.

Some members suspect there is a supreme leader. Though most believe the leader is a prominent noblewoman, perhaps the young Sultan's mother, she is in fact a Puppeteer by the name of Nadine bint-Mustaq.

A master of disguise and mind control, Nadine appears before suitable candidates in whatever guise she thinks will appeal to them best. What Nadine hopes to achieve by empowering the women of Al-Shirkuh remains a mystery to all but her hidden masters.

Men who have heard of the organization generally mock it, referring to it as a "gossip circle." None know just how deep the Sisterhood's membership extends into the courts and temples of the land. If such knowl-

edge were ever to become common, noble men would dismiss their female wizens and sleep clad in armor, far from their wives and children.

Typical Members: Virtually any archetype can represent a Sister, though the *houiri* stats (p. xxx) are particularly suited.

Sons of the Sand

The Sons are fanatical Bedu who wish to return all the people of Al-Shirkuh to the simpler life they lived before the rise of the great empires.

Though the Bedu are free to travel the wastes with virtually no restrictions, most tribes have become shackled to the cities, reliant on the trade goods they carry for their continued survival—the old ways are being forgotten and the Bedu are slowly losing their cultural identity as they adopt Calimhari ways.

The Sons may come across as merely a bunch of hard line traditionalists, but they represent a true danger to the cities of Al-Shirkuh. Their members poison water supplies in cities, sabotage irrigation systems, burn crops, and raid caravans, all in the name of "removing the taint of false civilization from the sands."

Flayed

Flayed the skeletal remains of unlucky travelers whose flesh the dreaded *ghibli* flayed from their bones (p. xxx). Although they appear as normal animated skeletons, they can harness the power of the *ghibli* to slaughter their foes. Flayed are immune to the *ghibli* and indeed often travel in such storms, searching for more victims.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d4, Shooting d6

Pace: 7; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7

Treasure: None

Special Abilities

- * **Bony Claws:** Str+d4.
- * **Fearless:** Flayed are immune to fear and Intimidation.
- * **Flay Wind:** Flayed can summon, increase, and project the power of the *ghibli*. This uses the Cone Template, and extends out from the flayed. Victims caught in the template must make an opposed Agility roll vs. the creature's Shooting or suffer 2d8 damage.
- * **Swirling Sand:** Flayed are surrounded by a swirling *ghibli*. This fills a Medium Burst Template. When the flayed finishes its movement, any creature under the template takes 2d6 damage, against which only the *armor* spell protects. Attackers inside or attacking through the template suffer a -2 penalty to their attack rolls. The flayed does not suffer this penalty.
- * **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from Shaken. Called Shots to no extra damage. Immune to poison and disease.

Land of Fire Sampler

Ghûl

Ghûl is the Calimhari term for evil spirits that haunt the night, abducting and eating babies, consuming flesh, and striking terror in peaceful souls. Bedu refer to them as qutrubs. Various legends claim they rise from the unburied bodies of murderers, torturers, and the perpetrators of unspeakable crimes.

These corpse eaters pick over battlefields, burrow through hastily dug graveyards, and prey on those foolish enough to venture into the night when the smell of burned flesh and spilt blood wafts thick through the air. In their cowardly demeanor as nighttime scavengers, they subsist on the dead flesh that abounds in places of death. If pressed, however, they gladly prey on the living, often the weak, witless, dying, or helpless.

These hairless, gangly creatures know no masters. Some live like solitary hermits among caves and sewers,

venturing out at night to terrorize anyone within their hunting range. Others form packs that create impenetrable warrens and infest ruins.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Stealth d10, Tracking d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 8

Treasure: Meager per 3 ghûls

Special Abilities:

- * **Claws:** Str+d4.
- * **Infravision:** Ghûls halve penalties (round down) for bad lighting when attacking living targets.
- * **Keen Nose:** Ghûls get +2 to Notice and Tracking rolls against living targets.
- * **Paralysis:** Anyone Shaken or wounded by a ghûl's claw attacks must make a Vigor roll or be paralyzed for 2d6 minutes.



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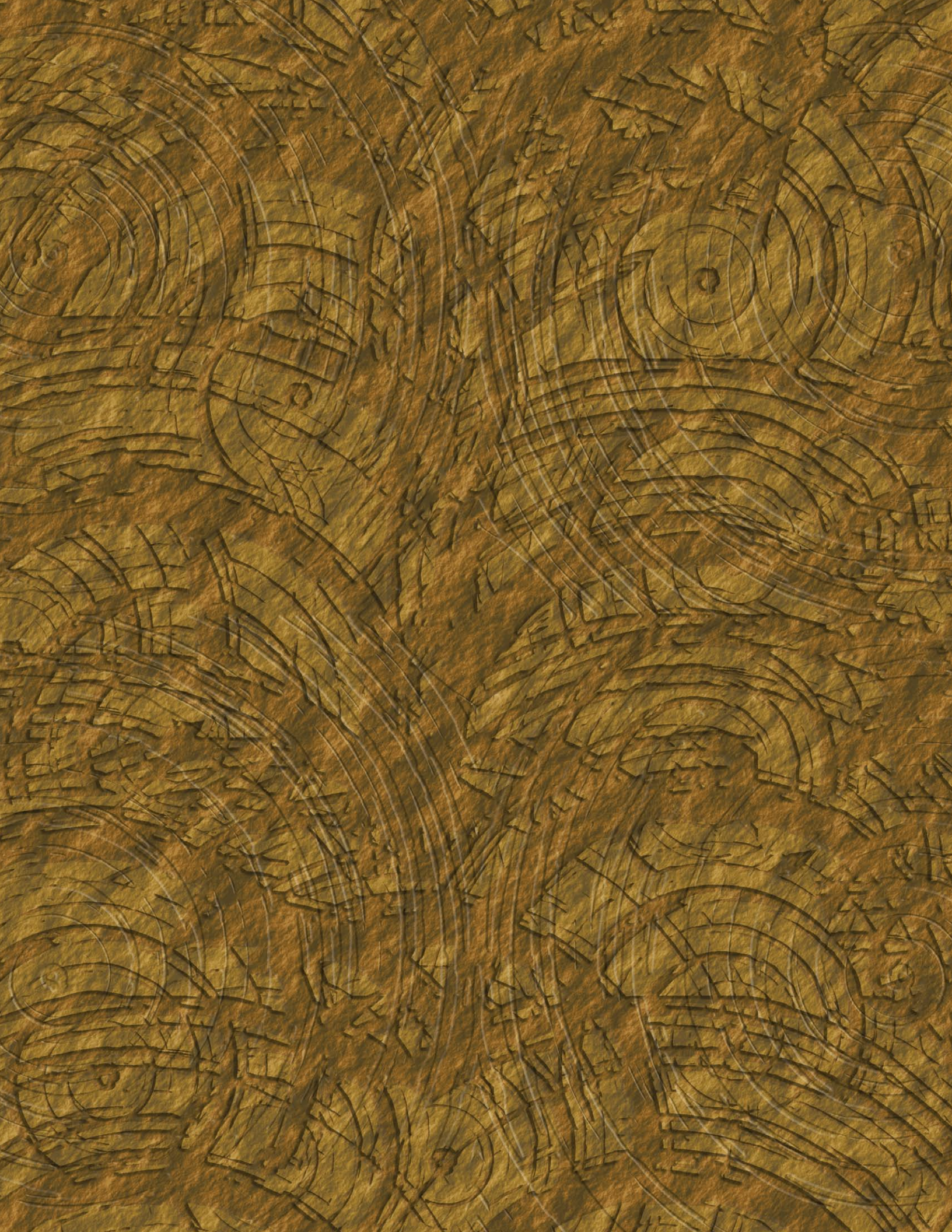
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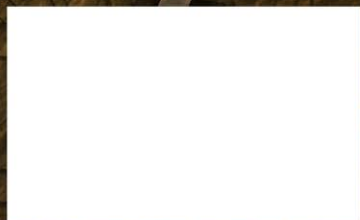
But Al-Shirkuh is changing. The temperature grows colder, the rains fall less often, and the desert is encroaching on the fertile lands. The jinn, once defeated, are gathering their strength; fire giants are raiding with impunity; the naga have returned to reclaim their homeland; and the withered undead of Hekata stir in their majestic pyramids. Soothsayers bemoan the multitudinous dark omens, and silently pray for intrepid heroes to right the many wrongs that have befallen the land.



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