

HELLFROST LAND OF FIRE

• REALM GUIDE #19 •

THE AL-WAZIR SULTANATE

Introduction

The Sultanate of Al-Wazir sees itself as the physical manifestation of Suleiman's dream. Were that the case, then the desert would be a far better place. While it is true there is religious harmony between the dual creeds of Al-Shirkuh, positions of power are frequently abused, corruption is rife in the highest offices, and Suleiman's own words have been blatantly misinterpreted as an excuse for war. Here Suleiman's vision of a new order was born, and here it died. Yet there is a faint glimmer of hope. Sultan Abdul-Muta'al, though young and beset by enemies on all sides, is honest and forthright.

The first part covers the Sultanate as a whole, and details only general facts or areas of interest not within the boundaries of one of the nine great cities. Each great city has its own unique section, providing specific information to that territory. This supplement expands on material found in *Hellfrost: Land of Fire*.

WHERE DO ALL THE PEOPLE LIVE?

The populace of the nine great cities and the territories they control accounts for 36% of the total population of the Sultanate. With nomads numbering a further 4%, that leaves over two million souls unaccounted for. The great majority live in villages and towns along the great rivers and coasts, with smaller pockets clustered around wells, springs, and oases in what city-dwellers ignorantly refer to as the "wilderness."

Geography

The Sultanate has a varied landscape. Between Musayid, City of Winds, and Balyana, City of Reflection, the terrain comprises a flat, sandy plain broken by patches of scrub grass. The vegetation is ideal for grazing goats and sheep, but the land cannot support agriculture. Between Balyana and Qarah, City of Learning, the ground rises steeply, with the thin soil rapidly giving way to barren rock of little use to man or beast. The plain between Akhmim, City of the Devoted, and Al-Wazir, City of Spires, has a better quality of grass than further north, but the soil remains too thin for extensive agriculture. West of the Four Jinn and their associated hills, the ground quickly becomes a largely flat, sandy plain.

The coastal strips are cooler and more fertile than inland, allowing for a variety of crops. Similarly, vegetation grows in abundance along the river banks. On the upper stretches

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Author & Layout: Paul Wade-Williams
Editing: Hans Bothe
Graphic Design: Robin Elliott
Special Thanks: Jeff Scifert and
P. Mukundan Pillai



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RULES OF THE REALM

The following setting rules apply in the whole of the Al-Wazir Sultanate unless superseded elsewhere.

* **Honor Nobles:** A hero who wants to be an honor noble begins play as a pasha. He has to take the Noble Edge. He does not gain the Rich Edge, nor does he have any land or people to manage.

* **Human Bias:** The Sultanate maintains a heavy human-centric bias. Cakali and hyaenidae may only hold nomad noble titles and Hadaree honor noble titles during character generation.

* **Religion:** Though the Sultanate is primarily Devoted, characters are free to pick their faith. Those who chose to be Faithful may be from an old family that survived the ancient persecutions, recent settlers, or going against family tradition.

* **Temperature:** The temperature in Alak Paret is Warm along the coast (and for 25-30 miles inland), and Hot in the wilderness. At night, the temperature in the coastal cities drops 1d2-1 levels.

* **Transport Hub:** Save for Medinat al-Jinn, the great cities are major ports. Characters who make a successful Streetwise roll can locate a ship departing for one of the other major southern coastal cities in the next 1d6 days. On a raise, the ship is leaving in half that time. With a suitable bribe (200 dinars per point of the ship's Toughness), the ship can be made ready to sail on the next tide (assume the next morning or evening for ease).

Hiring a ship costs 50 dinars per point of Toughness per week or part thereof if the captain is allowed to trade on the voyage, or 200 dinars per point of Toughness per week or part thereof if not. Allowing the captain to conduct trade is cheaper, but it trebles the journey time unless the characters are heading to the next port anyway.

Caravans take much longer to assemble. A successful Streetwise roll locates one ready to depart in 2d8 days, or 1d8 days on a raise.

the greenery can extend as little as a few yards from the bank, but lower down the main flood plains extend as far as five miles into the surrounding countryside.

Summer winds blow from the south. Hot and moist, they give rise to tremendous thunderstorms over the high peaks that form much of the Sultanate's land border. Even the Four Jinn are sometimes beset by thunder and lightning. Wise men avoid the four mountains on such days, believing the jinn are venting their anger. Such storms are locally known as the Dance of the Khamsin, for many lesser khamsins gather here to ride the thunder and frolic amid the lightning.

The true danger presented by thunderstorms is not the jinn, though travellers must be wary of them, but flash floods. Dry wadis can become raging rivers in a matter of minutes. Within a few days, the thirsty sand has consumed the rain, leaving the ground as dry as before.

Social Hierarchy

The highest authority in the land is the Sultan. Even the emirs, kings in all but name, must answer to him, at least in theory. Too many weak rulers down the centuries has resulted in the Sultan's political authority gradually declining. Though he still makes laws, the emirs pick and choose those they prefer, safe in the knowledge that only a madman would unleash his armies or impose trade sanctions against them. About the only time they pay much attention is when the Sultan makes spiritual decrees. Even then, the emirs carefully pick over the wording to make sure he isn't surreptitiously trying to claw back generations of lost political power.

The Sultan has the authority to appoint his heir as he sees fit. Typically, those who consider themselves potential candidates do all they can to ingratiate themselves with the incumbent. As history has shown, sometimes this works and sometimes it does not. Since he is regarded as the successor of Suleiman, short of assassination, no temporal or spiritual entity can veto the Sultan's choice. The only rule the Sultan must follow is that his successor must be Devoted. To date, few women, no non-humans, and only one non-noble have sat on the throne, despite nothing precluding their nomination.

Although the current Sultan has no children, any offspring he sires would carry the titles prince or princess, as would their children. These titles remain with them for life, even if the throne is handed to another branch of the family or indeed to another family entirely. However, if a family member is passed over for succession, any children born after a new Sultan has taken the throne are not automatically entitled to any noble title, unless their parent holds a title other than prince or princess. This ensures the line, and thus the title, will die out within a relatively short period.

For example, the Sultan has two older siblings, Nada and Osama. Though exiled by their father, he did not formally strip them of their titles. Thus they legally retain the titles princess and prince respectively. Neither had any children when Abdul-Muta'al ascended the throne, nor did they hold any lesser noble titles. Any children they sire would not be entitled to a noble title. Heritage aside, they would be commoners in the eyes of the law.

The next most powerful figures are the emirs (though the Sultan's wazir might argue otherwise). The only persons entitled to use the title are the rulers of the Sultanate's great cities. Together, they and the Sultan form the *muk-battim* social class. The emirs govern over three-quarters of a million citizen between them (around 22% of the population). Everyone else is directly or indirectly beholden to the Sultan.

The titles of sirdar and lower are considered lesser titles. Those who use the title as a prefix to their given name are true nobles, born to noble stock. They are members of the *battim* social class. Their children are always effendis. Those who use it after their given name

are honor nobles, and are numbered among the *mak-shabrum*. Thus, Pasha Ali is a true noble, while Ali Pasha is not. The latter titles are not hereditary, and the children of such those bestowed the honor carry no official title. Only the Sultan or the emirs may appoint honor nobles. Honor titles are normally awarded for long military or bureaucratic service, reaching a certain rank, or for performing special favors.

Most imams belong to the *jaleepa* class. Senior imams are usually classed as *shabrum*, with only the most enlightened imams of the great cities being awarded *mak-shabrum* status. Except where noted in an individual city's entry, the rest of society is as per the rulebook.

Education

The Sultan's law dictates that every child should be schooled from the ages of 5 to 12. For the most part the people obey the law, though the authorities in agricultural communities turn a blind eye to transgressions during planting and harvest, when every able-bodied soul is needed in the fields. Basic schooling is conducted at the nearest madrasa, and comprises study of the *Hamad*, literacy, numeracy, and history. Children pick up folklore from family members and listening to storytellers.

For those who desire, and can afford, advanced education, they must migrate to one of the great cities. Here, at one of the universities, students may learn advanced history, law, commerce, foreign languages, religion, astronomy, astrology, and many other subjects. Most universities are open to anyone with deep enough pockets, while others are more selective.

The sorcerers of Al-Shirkuh have no equivalent of the Convocation of Elementalists or the mage-schools of the Magocracy. There are a number of schools devoted to magic, but these are small scale institutions run by older sorcerers. Most apprentices learn their art at the hands of a master. A lucky apprentice may be his master's only pupil. Less fortunate ones may find they are one of half a dozen students clamoring for attention.

Typically, player characters cannot pick up most Knowledge skills without some form of advanced education or extensive travelling. Either way, it has taken them time. For each die in an arcane or Knowledge skill, a character should be one year older than the typical starting age (around 16, the age of adulthood).

Religion

The animosity with the Caliphate that spawned several bloody wars and two centuries of oppression has been replaced with a more understanding view. Conflict has given way to trade, and cooperation is the new watchword. Wherever there are people with a different view there are bigots, but they are a tiny minority.

HIGHER EDUCATION

There are two types of universities. Most are basic universities. They teach a wide variety of courses at a rudimentary level. For player characters, they provide a starting hero with an explanation of how he picked up some of his skills, especially Knowledge skills. Then there are the great universities. They have a narrow focus, but at an advanced level. It is the latter characters might turn to in play.

Curriculum: Every great university teaches at least one skill. Some offer a wider range of skills, Edges, and/or languages. A pupil has four options when enrolling. A hero may only take one course at a time, regardless of his Smarts die.

Basic Course: Pick one of the university's skills. When taking it as a new skill, the hero learns it at d6, instead of d4 as normal.

Advanced Course: Pick one of the university's skills. The hero treats the skill's linked attribute as one die higher (max. d12+1) for his next advance.

Specialist Course: Pick one of the university's Edges. The hero may lower the Rank requirement by one step, or one of the Trait requirements by one die type.

Language Course: Some university's require a student to speak a language before they can take a course. Naturally, they also teach that language. Learning the language is treated as a raising a skill lower than its linked attribute. This means a hero can learn the language *and* raise a skill lower than its linked attribute in the same advance.

In all four cases the character must devote his next advancement to his chosen subject or all benefits are lost. A hero who wants to benefit multiple times must enrol on successive courses.

Cost: Education is not free, and learning takes time. A basic course takes one month, an advanced course two months, and a specialist or language course three months. The character must devote 8 hours a day, six days a week to study at the university. The financial cost is 500 dinars for a basic course, 750 dinars for an advanced course, and 1500 dinars for a specialist course.

JADID'S GREAT UNIVERSITIES

This replaces the information in *Realm Guide #13*.

University of Mercantile Studies: Skills: Boating; Edges: Expert Haggler (see *Realm Guide #13*).

University of the Sea: Skills: Boating; Edges: Master Mariner.

Every permanent settlement has at least one kada. As well as serving as schools, they double as mediation centers and places of quiet meditation for those seeking answers to life's problems. Although the ruling authority technically has jurisdiction over all matters of law, most elect to let the imams settle civil cases.

Purity & Decay

Fundamental to the Devoted's belief in the opposed forces of Asha and Druj, order and chaos, are the notions of purity and corruption, growth and decay.

Suleiman wrote that the physical form is inherently corrupt. From the moment of birth the body is inexorably drawn toward decay. Though soul and body are separate entities, the needs of the flesh can quickly taint the spirit. Gluttony, vanity, addiction, sexual lust, sloth—these are evils of the flesh, not the spirit. By giving into them, the spirit also becomes impure. Not that the flesh is entirely to blame for man's ills—impure matters of the soul, such as covetousness, jealousy, impoliteness, selfishness, and dishonesty, lead to further spiritual decay.

Even witnessing impure acts and not correcting or combatting them leads to corruption. A person who witnesses a crime and does not try to prevent it, for instance, will suffer spiritual corruption for his sin of indifference. Hence Suleiman's decree that both good thoughts *and* good deeds are required to achieve Oneness.

In the eyes of most Devoted, and as written in the *Hamad*, spiritual corruption is all-but guaranteed if the body is corrupt. It is for this reason they are supposed to practice abstinence from excessive consumption and physical pleasure, avoid eating too much meat (flesh being corrupt) or drinking alcohol (which taints the spirit, as evidenced in the behavior of drunks), and keep their body and clothes clean.

Certain ascetics, branded as odd by the majority of Devoted and heretics by fanatics, argue that cleanliness is actually a physical need, and thus leads to spiritual corruption. Those who follow this belief are easily detected by their long hair, unwashed skin, and pungent odor.

The diseased, those suffering from madness, and citizens whose work involves regularly handling corrupt materials such as dung, urine (tanners), or corpses fill the lowest class in society because they are considered the most spiritually tainted. Of course, no sane person chooses to suffer disease, and someone has to clear away filth for the betterment of the majority. Thus, generosity and kindness toward them are expected norms, especially those who did not choose their current state.

This deep-rooted belief also explains the use of cremations. Flesh can never be entirely pure, for without the spirit it rapidly decays. Even with the spirit it decays slowly, as evidenced by aging. In doing so it not only corrupts the area around it, but gives rise to creatures long associated with Druj, such as maggots and flies. A corpse also attracts carrion eaters, creatures that by their very nature are corrupt. Even mummification cannot stave off eventual corruption of a corpse.

Suleiman wrote that an ordered society promotes growth, and is thus spiritually enlightening. By comparison, a chaotic society fosters corruption, leading to spiritual decay. The two are not mutually exclusive, of course. Few citizen of Al-Wazir doubt the Sultanate is ordered, but most agree the stench of corruption hangs heavily in the air.

Magic

As mentioned in *Land of Fire*, magic is a manifestation of self-belief, not a gift from the gods. Practitioners are without doubt more enlightened in many ways, but they are also constantly in danger of spiritual corruption. Magic is powerful, and power can be addictive. Sorcerers who cast spells like they are going out of fashion, who use their magic to dominate or kill others, or who simply believe themselves better than non-magicians suffer from spiritual corruption to a greater or lesser degree.

Fate

Asha and Druj are not omnipotent gods, nor do they predetermine the actions of the races. Devoted believe that a man's fate is directly influenced by his previous thoughts and actions. One whose spirit is closer to Asha will, in general, have better fortunes than one closer to Druj. As the old saying goes, "One who means well does well." Of course, bad things still happen to good people, and good things happen to bad people.

Individuals are not isolated entities. Suleiman taught that the universe is an endless sea, and the actions and thoughts of individuals are stones. As each stone is dropped into the water, it creates ripples. A large enough stone will generate ripples that affect those of people far away. If a stone represented a good action, others would benefit. A bad action would blight others. What no man knew was where his stone might land in relation to the stones of others. Suleiman also said that men should not seek to forcibly control the actions of others in a bid to prevent evil deeds, for that action would itself lead only to greater corruption. Thus, Devoted are quite pragmatic when it comes to fate, and concentrate more on ensuring their own thoughts and deeds are of good intent.

Prayers

Devout Devoted pray three times a day. Such prayers are made not to Asha or Druj, but in the name of Suleiman. It should be noted that Suleiman the man is not a focus for veneration—Devoted worship no gods or spirits of any kind. Rather, in keeping with their creed, it is his deeds people honor. In this way they remember the path to Oneness—dedication and righteous behavior.

At dawn they pray in memory of his early life. They remember his enforced servitude, and yet honor the drive that saw him acquire great wisdom in the face of adversity. At midday they pray to remember his war against the jinn, when he overcame his greatest foe. At dusk the prayers honor his achieving Oneness, and the writings he left behind so that others might walk the same road.

The prayers are largely formulaic, having been laid down over successive generations. They serve as common mantras, putting the speaker in the right frame of mind to cope with daily life.

Which direction Devoted should face when praying is much debated by imams, as it has been for centuries. Ideally, they'd like to face either Suleiman's birthplace, the place he achieved Oneness, or his tomb. Unfortunately, not even the greater jinn know for sure where these are located. Thus, alternatives were put forward.

One faction claims the supplicant should face east, the direction of Suleiman's Stone (in the city of Akhmim, City of the Devoted), for this is where Suleiman ordered the first city to be created after the former slaves' long wandering in the desert. Another claims Devoted should face north, toward the Mirrorsands, for here the great mage defeated the jinn, an act which paved the way for his new teachings. There is no official direction. Some Sultans favored east, others north, and during their reign their choice became the accepted norm. The incumbent Sultan has wisely ruled that the choice of direction, like the path to Oneness, is a personal decision, and cannot be set in stone by any man.

COMMON FESTIVALS

While every city holds its own festivals and ceremonies throughout the year, there are some that every citizen of the Sultanate recognizes as common to the Devoted faith. These common festivals are listed in order of the date on which they are held.

Day of Oneness (*Baot Yaus al-Maat Amt Alak Arkhet*): No exact date exists in any text for when Suleiman attained Oneness. All that was known is that it occurred some time before Suleiman confronted the jinn and demanded they release the races from slavery. The date was set by the first Sultan. The day is spent reading the *Hamad* and reminding oneself of the difficult road that is Oneness. Citizens also endeavor to solve troublesome problems affecting their lives on this day, believing they have a better chance of success. It has also become a "lucky" day to die or be cremated, for it is said Suleiman will guide those deserving to Oneness in person.

Ascension Day (*Amt Yaus al-Nefar Baot Alak Paret*): Marking the day the first Sultan ascended the throne, and thus the birth of the Sultanate, the festival has become the *de facto* occasion for marking the enthronement of all subsequent Sultans, regardless of the actual date of their coronation. Except in Al-Wazir, City of Spires, the day is marked only by adding the Sultan's name to one's daily prayers.

Suleiman's Birthday (*Anshi Yaus al-Maat Amt Alak Shemu*): No one actually knows when Suleiman was born—the date was chosen by the first Sultan and has become enshrined in teachings ever since. Devoted spend the day reading the *Hamad*, and the evening swapping folklore concerning the great mage.

Liberation Day (*Amt Yaus al-Nefar Alak Suba*): Held the same time as the Faithful festival of the same name, Liberation Day marks the day Suleiman defeated the jinn. It is a public holiday for all Devoted, and even slaves are given the day off (in theory, at least). In many communities effigies of jinn are burned.

Jinn remember this day as well, though for them it is a day of sadness at the loss or subsequent imprisonment of so many of their number. Most choose to spend the day in hiding, and with good reason—all magicians gain +1 to arcane skill rolls targeted against jinn on this day.

Day of Black Ash (*Tamith Yaus al-Maat Alak Suba*): Though the cakali were not Devoted at the time their ancestral homelands were destroyed, many converted afterward. That they once sided with the jinn to ensure their own culture survived is largely forgotten except by scholars and the cakali.

Citizens are expected to burn something precious to them on this day. This serves to help them remember the terrible price the cakali paid for refusing to halt the slaves' progress, and remind themselves that love of material possessions is a sign of spiritual corruption.

Attaining ONENESS

The universe is not a perfect place, and neither are the physical beings who dwell in it. Chaos and disorder, the tools of Druj, are everywhere, and achieving Oneness is a life-long struggle against constant temptation and adversity. It is even harder for most adventurers, for the taking of any life, no matter how evil the creature, corrupts the spirit. Undead, demons, elementals (but not jinn), constructs, most spirit beings, and such like don't count, as they are not truly living creatures according to the *Hamad*. Very few citizens, even those who live sedate, boring lives, are saints, and few who die are ever completely pure in spirit.

Fortunately, Oneness does not require absolute purity—if it did, Druj would certainly have won the battle already. So long as the spirit has more purity than corruption, more order than chaos, more growth than decay, it attains Oneness. Whether or not there are varying degrees of this blissful state cannot be determined by mortals. To those used to struggle, any amount of spiritual cleanliness and freedom from want and suffering is better than the life they left behind. Thus, *gravespeak* cannot be used to find absolute answers to spiritual and philosophical questions.

Faithful & the Sultanate

Faithful citizens are permitted to erect temples and worship their gods without prejudice, and largely without hindrance. In a bid to make money, however, Sultan's of old decreed that taxes would be levied on every temple based on the size of the its ground footprint.

In most small communities, the Faithful opted to construct a single structure shared by many cults. Each cult pays a share of the tax based on the amount of space allocated to it. In the great cities, clerics exploited a loophole, and elected to build temples to a single deity, but with multiple floors. Both practices continue to this day. The Sultanate has chosen to label temples as

businesses as well as religious institutions. Thus, their income is taxable. More recent Sultans have reduced the levy to promote better cooperation and integration. The current Sultan has set it at 10%.

Military

The Sultanate boasts a total of ten major military forces—one commanded by the Sultan and nine by the emirs of the great cities.

Although each city is largely independent in all matters of governance and security, the Sultans were not fools. In order to remind the emirs who truly ruled, laws were passed requiring all cities to garrison part of the Sultan's army. These troops answer only to the Sultan. Given that the numbers are low compared to local troops, and only a madman would unleash them against an emir without extreme provocation, the emirs view their presence as a nuisance rather than a threat.

Lesser nobles are legally entitled to maintain an army to help protect their holdings and fulfil military obligations to their feudal lord. The cost of such an endeavor means they are rarely a threat to the authority of the Sultan or the emirs.

In addition to a permanent army, every settlement trains a militia, and all adult citizens of good physical and mental health are required to join the peasant levy. Exemptions exist—mothers with children under five, single parents who children at not yet adults, and such like.

As the highest authority in the land, the Sultan retains the right to call on any noble to supply troops to bolster his forces, and for any purpose. The last time this was

done on a large scale was in 394 CJ, in preparation for the ill-fated Battle of the Vultures' Feast. The power was sometimes abused in the past, with dishonorable Sultans sacrificing their emirs' troops in large numbers. This was done both to prevent losses to the Sultan's own army, and to weaken the emirs. This in turn led to problems later, when the emirs refused to supply troops or sent raw recruits. Whether the emirs would ever disobey the order today is something the Sultan hopes never to find out. Even if they acquiesced, he is in no doubt they would charge a heavy price for their assistance.

ARMY

The infantry is based around a basic unit of 16 infantrymen of the same type (light, medium, or heavy) or 8 archers (bow or crossbow). These derive from the number and composition of Suleiman's bodyguards. This unit is known as a Saff al-Maqatir (Saff for short) and is commanded by a sub-corporal. Cavalry are based around a five-man unit (light or heavy), known as the Khamash, led by a corporal.

The composition of larger units is shown in the sidebar below. Ranks are suffixed with "of Infantry," "of Archers," or "of Cavalry," as applicable.

Spellcasters are welcomed in the armies. So long as they swear allegiance to the relevant noble, their religious leanings have little or no relevance. A valuable, and rare, resource, spellcasters are not formed into units. Instead, they are assigned to other parts of the army as required. The noted exception to this is the Pegasus Guard—mages who want to serve with the Guard must meet three strict requirements (see *Al-Wazir, City of Spires*, p. 23).

NAVY

Every city in the Sultanate, including landlocked Medinat al-Jinn, City of the Jinn, maintains a navy.

No matter its size, each ship and its crew compliment is treated as a separate entity. Every ship is commanded by a Captain of Sea. Despite the name, his rank is actually equivalent to that of a land-based Sub-Captain. When multiple ships form a small fleet, the captain with the most experience is given the temporary rank of Senior Captain of Sea. Marines may be specially trained troops, or loaned from the army. Regardless, they use standard army ranks.

Primarily used to patrol coastal waters and ward off corsairs and voracious sea monsters, warships of all size double as troop transporters when an army needs to be redeployed in a hurry. In such circumstances, each ship can carry double the usual number of passengers. Thanks to their shallow draft, they can sail many dozens of miles inland, further if the river is navigable for longer stretches.

MILITARY UNITS OF THE SULTANATE

INFANTRY

Name	Sandspeech Name	Personnel	Commanded By
Usbah	Quarter-Company	32	Corporal
Miqnab	Half-Company	64	Sergeant
Kurdus	Company	128	Sub-Captain
Jahfal	Double-Company	256	Captain
Kabahah	Battalion	512	Senior Captain
Zumrah	Double-Battalion	1024	Sub-Commander
Taifah	Regiment	2048	Commander
Jash	Double-Regiment	4096	Sub-General
Khamis	Corps	8192	General

CAVALRY

Name	Sandspeech Name	Personnel	Commanded By
Ashrah	Patrol	10	Sergeant
Kurdus	Company	80	Captain
Kabahah	Battalion	800	Commander
Taifah	Regiment	4000	General

Law & Order

Despite the taint of corruption, the great cities of the Al-Wazir Sultanate are centers of civilization, not lawless frontier towns. Citizens and visitors, even famous ones, are expected to obey both the many laws of the land and the myriad local laws. Those who break the law can expect consequences, and ignorance is not an excuse.

Every noble who governs territory has the right to set his own laws. In theory, his decrees should not go against laws set down by the Sultan. Isolated in the capital, and surrounded by corrupt courtiers, the Sultan rarely hears of what transpires in the hinterlands.

The Watch

Law and order is maintained by the watch. Separate from the military in all respects, their jurisdiction technically ends at the settlement's walls (or agreed boundary). Safeguarding the land between settlements falls under military jurisdiction. The military rarely raises a fuss if the militia decide to hunt down a suspected criminal, as it saves them the task.

The Courts

In the towns and cities, justice is handled by four separate courts—civil, criminal, military, and morality. Judges are members of the bureaucracy and may be of any faith. Lesser cases might be heard by a single judge, while more serious ones require a panel of three judges. Circumstantial evidence is inadmissible. Witnesses to the alleged crime are the preferred evidence, though character witnesses are often accepted in lieu (as are bribes).

Most citizens are ignorant of the nuances of the law and the workings of the various courts. While the Sultanate has no professional lawyers, imams can be hired by followers of any creed to serve in a similar role. Similarly, while imams have no legal authority, honest judges often consult one during cases. Whether he accepts their interpretation of the law or not is the judge's choice, but to flagrantly go against the writings of the *Hamad* (irrespective of his faith) is to invite charges of moral laxity.

Civil: The civil court hears cases relating to finance and business, such as contracts, debts, duties, merchandise, property, and taxes. The only penalty a court can legally impose is a fine. If the fine cannot be paid immediately, the criminal is held in jail for a period of 30 days to give his family and friends time to raise it. Should they fail, the convict is sold into slavery along with his family. As noted in *Land of Fire*, debtors are enslaved only until the debt is paid off in full.

Given the potential penalties, most common citizens prefer to take their disputes before an imam first. Only if he cannot broker an amicable solution does the court

become involved. The courts are happy to allow imam's to intervene, simply because it lessens their case load.

Criminal: The criminal court handles crimes concerning offences against persons or property. These are more serious crimes than civil ones, and no imam has the legal authority to arrange an out of court settlement. Sentences include confiscation of property, public whipping, slavery, mutilation, and death.

Military: Although the watch and army are separate entities, crimes committed by members are handled by the same court. All military cases are overseen by a judge and a senior officer. Flogging, mutilation, and death are the only punishments handed down.

Morality: Crimes against any aspect of the Devoted or Faithful creeds are handled by the morality court. This primarily concerns acts against places of worship, heresy, and blasphemy, and, in theory, any aspect of the *Hamad*. Few minor cases, such as a Devoted drinking alcohol, ever reach court (unless the accused is drunk and disorderly), and over the centuries other courts have been granted authority over specific aspects of the law. Judges must be versed in both law and religion.

Though the courts are impartial, citizens have the right to decide if the judge handling their case is Devoted or Faithful. Most Faithful judges follow Tammuz, but it is not a requirement.

Punishments include flogging, slavery, and death.

APPEALS

Regardless of which court oversees his case, every prisoner is legally entitled to make one appeal. This is always heard by the highest authority in the region the crime took place. In theory, in much of the Sultanate this means the Sultan. However, in order to save him being swamped, ancient laws placed the burden on the actual noble in charge of daily affairs. Thus, if one commits a crime in a town governed by a pasha, then the pasha is the appeal court.

Magic, Miracles, & Law

Mages may be respected by Devoted, but that does not mean they are entitled to walk around settlements with actively Maintained spells. The Sultanate has laws, both criminal and social, prohibiting this very activity. Note that everything below applies equally to clerics, as well as individuals capable of spellcasting through other means (such as the Ancestral Guardian Edge).

In the eyes of the people and the authorities, sorcerers Maintaining spells, especially defensive ones such as *armor* and *deflection*, are trouble. Either they don't trust the authorities to protect them (potentially making them vigilantes), or they're expecting trouble. Maintained offensive spells, such as *smite* or *sphere of might*, are likely to result in a hue and cry. Being *invisible* can mean only that you're a thief at best or an assassin at worst.

Most citizens see the practice as crass and immod-

NEW EDGES

AVOID SWARM (COMBAT)

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d8+, Smarts d6+, Fighting d6+

Swarms of biting or stinging creatures are a threat to even the greatest hero. The character has learned tricks to reduce the chance of injury.

Once per round, immediately after being damaged by a swarm, the character may make an Agility roll versus the swarm's damage total. With success, the character avoids taking any damage. On a failure he takes the rolled damage as normal. He may choose to Soak.

FACE IN THE CROWD (PROF)

Requirements: Novice, Agility d8+, Smarts d8+, Stealth d8+

Some people have a face that doesn't draw attention. Others have learned tricks that enable them to blend into a crowd.

So long as he is doing nothing that might attract attention, the hero has +2 to Stealth rolls to hide from pursuers as well as tail suspects without revealing his presence while in a town or city. If pursued in a chase in a town or city, he adds +2 to his Agility rolls as his pursuers must frequently stop and check they are following the right person.

The bonuses are halved if the streets lack other passersby to blend in with.

IMAM (PROFESSIONAL)

Requirements: Novice, Devoted, Smarts d8+, Knowledge (Law) d8+, Knowledge (Religion) d8+ The character is an imam, a teacher learned in the teachings of the *Hamad al-Shuf*. Though he holds no high social status and has no true legal authority, he is greatly respected by Devoted for his wisdom and high moral standing.

The character has +1 Charisma among Devoted. He receives +1 to any Knowledge (Law) or Knowledge (Religion) roll concerning the Devoted creed. This bonus stacks with Scholar.

est, not befitting one who is supposedly on the path to Oneness. Certainly the sorcerer has a special talent, but that doesn't mean he should rub it in everyone else's face. One wouldn't expect a swordsman to walk around twirling his blade in public without attracting unwanted attention from the authorities, and mages are expected to show similar restraint.

What a mage does in the comfort of his house is his own business, at least so long as his activities do not pose a threat to others. Neighbors may not appreciate

strange odors or loud noises, but you can be sure they'll be running to the nearest guardhouse if they spy lesser jinn or undead walking around.

There are also certain exceptions to the blanket laws. Few citizens can tell whether a jinni accompanying the party is the result of a *summon jinni* spell or not—the jinni might be a servant, for instance. Elementals, on the other hand, are not tolerated—they are too inhuman to be accepted as anything but summoned entities.

Thanks to trappings, it is actually quite difficult to hide most spells. Obviously no one is going to miss a flaming weapon imbued with *smite*, but even "invisible" spells, such as *deflection* with a wind trapping, come with drawbacks. Sand particles are kicked up, loose debris is knocked aside, and people who brush pass the sorcerer are buffeted by the protective wind. More than one mage has been chased away by angry shopkeepers after walking into a spice or pottery shop and sending the goods scattering in all directions.

Invisibility needs a special note. The citizens of Al-Shirkuh are not ignorant. Even the dumbest Faithful peasant knows magic exists, and everyone has heard of the jinn and their unearthly powers. Over the centuries, citizens have learned that odd things are usually down to magic—footsteps appearing in the sand, produce lifting itself off the shelves by no obvious means, and so on all point to an invisible foe.

When an alarm is raised, people react accordingly. A crowd might start waving their arms (or sticks) around in a bid to detect the culprit. Someone may start throwing sand (or similar loose particles) on the floor to highlight footsteps. The guilty party may even find himself having to dodge blankets, carpets, and similar obstacles designed to reveal his location.

ENFORCEMENT OF THE LAW

Naturally, many guardsmen are reticent about approaching a mage with Maintained spells. Fortunately for the citizens, the Sultanate is not without special units trained to deal with such individuals. Officially known as the Arcane Watch (and unofficially as Mage Slayers), these veteran defenders of the peace all have the Improved Arcane Resistance Edge.

Most villages can't afford to pay for an Arcane Watch, so mages have a chance to flee while help is summoned from the nearest town or city. Towns typically boast a half squad (5 members) or a full squad (10 members), depending on their size. The great cities can call on several squads if necessary. A typical squad comprises a captain (treat as a non-Wild Card watch captain with Improved Arcane Resistance), a mage (preferably one who knows *dispel*), and eight watchmen (treat as veteran watch with the above mentioned Edge). Half-squads have either a captain or a mage, but rarely both.

Unlike normal watchmen, the Arcane Watch do not patrol the streets looking for trouble—an elite force, they are summoned from their barracks only when required. As well as hunting sorcerers breaking the law, they are

tasked with dealing with any supernatural menaces threatening the city.

PENALTIES

Being a player character does not exempt one from obeying the law. Mages who flout the law can expect to be arrested. Those who resist arrest are no different to any other criminal, and receive no special treatment. Matters involving spellcasting are handled by the morality court unless the magician used magic in a crime falling under the jurisdiction of another court.

The penalty for a first offence for non-violent use of magic in a settlement is a 500 dinar fine. A second conviction raises the fine to 2500 dinars, and the sorcerer's hands and face are tattooed with his crimes. This gives him the Outsider Edge in most communities (nomadic or settled). Those stupid enough to commit a third offence are mutilated in some way that hampers their ability to work their art. For instance, a jinn mage may forfeit his tongue, while a dervish may lose a foot. A fourth offence warrants death.

Of course, as with non-magical crimes there may be mitigating circumstances that lessen or completely offset these penalties. Using magic to kill someone attacking another person may result in nothing but a severe caution, so long as there are witnesses willing to testify on the mage's behalf.

Special Cases: Not every sorcerer is subject to the law. Agents of the ruling authority are granted dispensation to actively Maintain spells. They are, however, expected to do so only when absolutely necessary. Such individuals carry an engraved amulet denoting their status (except when working undercover).

Trade & Tribute

Aside from Medinat Al-Jinn, City of the Jinn, the Sultanate's other great cities and many of its smaller settlements, are situated either on the coast or the banks of navigable rivers. The majority of trade and passenger traffic, whether internally, to the neighboring Caliphate, or to the foreign lands to the east, such as the City-State of Balkhand, Sultanate of Tabriz, the Shariffs of Tashkand, and the Khazir Empire, is borne by water-going vessels. This is evidenced by the lack of major overland trade routes linking the Sultanate's cities.

The two main overland trade routes are the Wind Road, which runs north to Jadid, City of Trade, providing a link to the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes, the salt mines of the Salt Basin, and the vast riches of the Jade Empire, and Suleiman's Road, which connects (eventually) to the Free Emirate States and distant Rassilon.

The metallic creatures known as Scavengers have begun raiding the Wind Road. So far their attacks have been to the area around Last Water Oasis, limited in scope, and largely held in check by the presence of soldiers in the

newly-built caravanserai. Even so, merchants are fearful that if the Scavengers target caravans further south then the cost of providing extra guards and the potential loss of precious cargoes will cripple trade.

Suleiman's Road is the Sultanate's only direct link to the bustling markets of the Free Emirate States. Were it to become impassable, goods would have to travel through the Caliphate (the shortest route) or across the entire length of the desert. Either way will lead to higher costs. The Sultan would dearly love to strengthen security in the region as a means of protecting caravans from marauding bandits and orcs, but the treaty with the Caliphate binds his hands.

The terms of the treaty do not prohibit aerial patrols, however. Merchants of any race or creed are grateful for the roaming patrols of Pegasus Guard from the Al-Mosk caravanserai. Although prohibited from engaging in any form of military action in the region, including saving innocent lives, they can at least give caravans warning of approaching threats.

All nobles have the right to set their own taxes. While many forms of taxation are fairly standard, certain cities (a generic term that actually covers any settlement) impose unique levies on their population. In theory, even the Bedu who live within a city's greater boundaries are expected to pay taxes, though few emirs bother to send tax collectors into the desert—the nomads have proven very good at moving on at just the right time.

One of the most important taxes the emirs must set are import and export tariffs. This presents them with something of a dilemma—trade revenues greatly swell the city's coffers, but if taxes are set too high then merchants will take their business elsewhere.

Major Locales

The following locales are situated outside the control of the emirs, and thus are part of the greater Sultanate rather than an individual city's territory.

AVENUE OF DRAGONS

In the bleak, rugged hills east of the River Anshur stand two parallel lines of dragon statues. Raised on plinths and crouched in the style of sphinxes, the stone beasts face each other, silent sentinels marking an avenue paved only with sand and rock. The avenue ends at the side of a cliff. Built into the natural rock are a pair of colossal stone doors emblazoned with bas reliefs of dragons rearing upward. Wind and time have weathered away much of the detail on the door and statues, but it is clear the creatures are sun dragons.

The Bedu who raise their flocks of goats on the scrub grass that dots the region claim the statues appeared out of nowhere some five centuries ago. According to their tales, the night sky was filled with a hundred fiery stars, which came from the north. Eventually summoning the

courage to investigate the area where the stars fell to earth, they discovered the statues and stone doors.

The Bedu have never passed beyond the doors, fearing it marks the entrance to the lair of slumbering ifrits. Many explorers have braved what lies beyond, but none have ever returned to tell of what they found. On still nights, the nomads claim faint, rhythmic noises can be heard from within. Whether they are the breathing of great lungs or the pumping of tremendous bellows they can only speculate.

THE BLACK TEMPLE

From the outside, the Black Temple merely looks odd. Its pylon gates are monumental in scale, yet behind them is a building measuring only 10 yards wide and high and twice that in length. Undoubtedly the pylons were once decorated, but the images and writings have been purposefully defaced. The whole structure is built of a black stone that seems to absorb light. Even in daylight, the temple appears indistinct, as if shrouded from the burning sun by a thin veil.

The structure's interior is devoid of any inscriptions or furnishings. The only feature is a spiral stair that descends into the bowels of the earth. At the bottom of these is a labyrinth of passageways and chambers carved by some elder, forgotten race that abhorred sunlight. The same unknown race built the Black Idol (see *Realm Guide #14: The Scorpion Lands of Old*).

Although the catacombs are long abandoned by their creators, the temple is not deserted. Shadow elementals glide through the gloom, while bestial humanoids with unseeing eyes and a remarkable sense of hearing prowl in search of intruders and fresh meat.

Within the lower temple, all light sources illuminate an area no bigger than a Small Burst Template centered on the light source. Lanterns illuminate a line 3" long and 1" wide at the far end. Beyond this, lighting conditions are always Pitch Dark (−4). Magic and miracles with a light trapping, and any version of *light*, suffers a −4 casting penalty. Clerics of Shamash suffer a −2 penalty to cast all other miracles. Conversely, powers with a darkness trapping are cast at +2 to the arcane skill roll.

CARAVANSERAI OF VANISHING SANDS

Once a major stopping-off point for merchants and travelers using the Wind Road, today the caravanserai stands empty, a deserted shell a stone's throw from where the Sultanate gives way to the eastern Jinn Lands of Old. No caravan master who knows its fell reputation will stop here, even under the direst of circumstances, for to do so is to invite a fate worse than death.

The first hint that anything was untoward happened some 20 years ago. A fierce sandstorm swept across the land, forcing several caravans to seek shelter at the busy little caravanserai. Two days later, a caravan found the

building completely deserted. Raiders were soon ruled out, for while there was no sign of life, the possessions of the inhabitants and guests remained untouched. The structure remained abandoned for a year, whereupon a new merchant bought it and reopened it for business. Within a month, it was again found deserted following a sandstorm. After four more such occurrences, the site developed a reputation for being cursed. It was finally abandoned to the elements a mere five years ago.

Bedu, merchants, and storytellers recite many tales regarding the caravanserai, but none are based on hard facts. Many tales involve a renegade jinni who escaped Suleiman's wrath, and who now seeks revenge against mortals. Why it has taken 500 years for the jinni to act, and why it harasses only this one, isolated building, is politely ignored. Another popular one claims a secret temple or tomb was unearthed beneath the structure, releasing a vile undead creature.

Stories told by the Faithful who travel the road speak of a curse laid down by a greedy merchant, who brokered a deal with Iblis to gather him souls in return for immortality. Such tales are similar to those of the black caravan (see *Realm Guide #4: Great Southern Desert*). Others involve a curse laid down by Duamutef was daring to bring city life into the open sands, and a powerful relic stolen from a temple to a dark deity and concealed somewhere in the caravanserai.

Whether the ruin still holds any wealth from the last occupants is unknown. Likely orcs and bandits have plundered it, but no civilized being has entered it in five years out of fear of a sudden sandstorm arising.

CITY OF THE EAGLES

Population: 170

Ruler: Grand Master Daud Airwalker (east side) and Fadlan ibn Altair (west side)

In a narrow, steep-sided valley on lower reaches of the southernmost peak of the Pillars of Suleiman, exactly on the border between the Caliphate and Sultanate, is a peculiar settlement. That the dwellings are built into the cliff and fronted by carved facades is not unusual, for other such sites are documented (such as the City of Stone; see *Realm Guide #17: The Snakelands of Old*).

What makes this place so strange is that the lowest entrance stands some 100 feet up the side of the cliff, and the highest a dizzying 300 feet. All told, occupation covers five distinct level, each separated by some 40 feet. No stairs are cut into the rock, nor are there are wooden platforms, ropes, or ladders to aid entry. Those who desire access must either possess the ability to fly or risk climbing the cliff. Both sides of the valley are occupied. Narrow stone bridges, devoid of hand rails, span the gap at varying intervals.

The city's aerial nature is partly an illusion. Stairs between the various levels do exist, but they are concealed deep inside the cliff, allowing the occupants to move around unseen. The challenge of reaching a level where the stairs exist must first be overcome.

Who built the city is unknown, for it was here, and obviously long abandoned, when the liberated slaves settled the region. The low passageways (5 feet) hint at a smaller-than-human race, but it might be the original builders simply chose to build small for convenience or to hamper any attackers.

Today, the site is both a temple to Upuaut's aspect of wind and a place of learning for jinn mages specializing in khamsin magic. The clerics live on the west side of the settlement, and the mages on the east side. The border between the two nations runs directly down the center of the valley. Relations are cordial, though there are obvious differences of opinion on most subjects.

As in other such cliff cities, most of the dwellings are small houses, and contain anywhere from one to three chambers. Each has an external entrance, and an internal one that connects to the labyrinth of hidden passages and stairs. Outside each house is a small wooden platform, where the occupant can practice his spells in the open air. Large chambers, some of which run deep in the cliff, serve as storehouses, libraries, classrooms, temples, and public gathering places.

Grand Master Daud has found it difficult to strike up any lasting relationship with the clerics due to their practice of moving on at regular intervals so as not to offend their deity. Fortunately, the clergy saw fit to install a member of the laity as the official ruler. Though technically subservient to the highest ranking clerics in residence, he largely governs without interference.

HASHISH FARMS

In most settlements, Devoted citizens can enjoy alcohol and tabac without persecution, despite the *Hamad* proscribing against them. Selling them brings in money, and so long as the user is harming no one else, then it's his choice to pollute his body. Hashish, however, is illegal the length and breadth of the land. Of course, making something illegal does not suddenly destroy the market—there are plentiful addicts in search of supplies, and plentiful suppliers willing to fuel their addiction.

Hashish is usually grown in remote areas. Though accidental discovery is unlikely, it is always camouflaged beneath netting—the sight of crops growing where none should be going to attract attention sooner or later, and greenery stands out like an ifrit in a bath (as the old saying goes) to the watchful gaze of the airborne Pegasus Guard. In more cultivated areas, it is sometimes seeded among other crops to avoid detection.

The penalty for growing hashish is severe. A lenient judge may sentence the guilty party to a life of slavery, but usually it involves a one-way trip to the executioner's block. Naturally, neither fate is particularly attractive.

Growers dislike strangers nosing around. Most who stumble across their illegal activities can expect to spend eternity in an unmarked grave in the desert. Of course, violence is not the only solution. A lone wanderer may in fact be a powerful mage or skilled warrior, and so subterfuge is often employed first.

NEW ARCANES BACKGROUNDS

DIVINATION

Requirements: Novice

Arcane Skill: Divination (Smarts)

Starting Powers: 2

Powers: *Aim, altered senses, analyze foe, corpse senses, deflection, detect/conceal, farsight, insight, precognition, sentry, wandering senses*

While other mages view time as a river that flows in one direction, practitioners of divination understand that all time exists simultaneously—you just can't view it using mortal senses. Their art allows them to peer through the layers of time to specific points, view proceedings, and act accordingly.

For instance, *deflection* doesn't make arrows bend away from the caster. Instead, the caster knows the flight of the missile by having viewed it in the future and leans out of its path. *Precognition* allows them to bring a layer of time forward, interposing it on reality and, to an outsider's point of view, alter the present.

Special: Practitioners of divination are almost all female. Male diviners always treat their arcane skill as not being linked to an attribute, thus making it harder to increase.

Backlash: Divination involves viewing the world through different eyes rather than manipulating magical threads. As such, it is not subject to the Siphoning. Instead it uses, the standard rules for magical backlash. Injuries can still occur, as incautious use can cause brain hemorrhages, fits, and heart attacks due to the intense mental imagery the caster sees.

SHA'IR

Requirements: Novice, must be able to speak Jinn

A sha'ir is a poet and storyteller whose words can enchant jinn into performing minor actions. In game terms, he speaks to jinn and charms them into action, whereas a jinn mage compels them.

Save for the name of the arcane skill, which changes to Sha'ir (Smarts), this Arcane Background functions exactly as song magic.

THE JINNISTAN GATE

According to Devoted and Faithful, scholars and storytellers, wise men and fools, the native realm of the jinn is Jinnistan. An otherworldly realm divided into quarters comprised of air, earth, fire, and water, it has been visited by just one mortal—Suleiman.

After the leading the freed slaves to their new home, Suleiman worked to create a magical portal that would permit him access to the fabled realm. There he met with

the jinn king, Jan ibn-Jan, a monstrous creature who was simultaneously ifrit and marid, khamsin and majin.

In a court crowded with jinn nobles, Suleiman worked a charm of great potency, invoking a seal that would prevent the jinn from ever again entering Al-Shirkuh save through spells that bound them to the summoner's will, or through the great gate he had created. (Suleiman's charm had no effect on the countless greater and lesser jinn already roaming the mortal plane.)

On returning to the mortal world, Suleiman ordered one of his disciples, a woman beyond reproach, to take the key and hide it away, so that mortal men might not be swayed or tricked into unleashing the jinn *en masse*. This she duly did. Heretical teachings (the *Lamentations of Suleiman*) tell that later in life, Suleiman regretted his rash decision. More than once he cried out for his disciple to return the key so that he might unlock the gate, but his pleas were unheard, for she had long since died and had taken the secret of its hiding place to her grave.

The gate, which stands within sight of Suleiman's Road, is cyclopean in scale. It consists of four columns, each as tall and wide as a dozen men, laid out to mark the corners of a colossal square. Each column is made of one of the four elements, its nature frozen in time to produce a solid form. Place an ear against the stones, so the legends go, and one can hear the rush of the wind, the grinding of the earth, the roar of flames, and the crashing of waves.

In the center of the precinct is a smaller stone, carved in the form of a kneeling jinn with aspects of all four races. On the top of its skull is an indentation in the form of the legendary Seal of Suleiman—two squares aligned to make an eight-pointed star.

Imams are divided as to whether the symbol indicates the four greater realms of Jinnistan and the four lesser border domains, or eight magical arts learned by Suleiman. If the latter is true, and assuming he mastered all the arts currently practiced, then he knew two that are now forgotten. Most Faithful believe it symbolizes the first eight gods to accept Suleiman as high priest, though naturally they argue over which ones.

Despite the warnings that unleashing the jinn would be a grave mistake, madmen, the curious, and fools have tried countless times. Every substance commonly found in the desert and known to the races (and a few from other lands) has been used in the construction of keys that fit the seal, but still the gate remains closed. Aside from its shape and size, there are no records indicating what the key was made of, nor descriptions of what magical glyphs might have been inscribed upon it. As for its location, the only legend tells that the disciple headed north, back toward the Jinn Lands of Old. An obscure poem suggests she ended up much further north, but the story exists only orally, and has likely changed much.

The Penitents, who claim the gate is actually a prison constructed by Suleiman to hold back the true gods, are known to be searching for the key. Anyone asking questions about the key in the Sultanate is likely to attract the attention of the Sultan's spies (and the Jinn Slayers).

Each pillar is an elemental locus. The site is also a place of great reverence to Devoted and Faithful, for it marks the final act of the War of Copper Jars and the defeat of the jinn. Unfortunately for jinn mages, it is a popular haunt for Jinn Slayers.

THE LOST ARMY

The War of Ideology did not begin well for the Caliphate. Within a year, their armies were driven back by the fierce onslaught, and the cities east of the Rivers Shalak and Syrah besieged. Despite fierce resistance, Hufrah, City of Idols, was sacked. Fortunately for the citizens, the imminent arrival of a Caliphate army gave the attackers little time to engage in wholesale slaughter and plunder. This is not to say the invaders escaped empty-handed.

Flush with success, and having lost the lust for bloodshed, the Sultanate army began the long march back to Al-Wazir, City of Spires. It is said they carried with them a fortune in coins and gems, but their greatest prize was a golden idol, taken from the high altar of one of the temples. Each cult in Hufrah claims it was the one that suffered the loss, and in the chaos that followed the siege many records were lost.

The army's plunder could have supported the Sultan's cause for many years, had they reached his palace. Instead of returning home to a victory parade, the army disappeared into thin air. That they deserted *en masse* is most unlikely, for no family ever reported seeing their sons and husbands again. Similarly, none of the coins ever reached the hands of merchants or shopkeepers.

Scouts in the region between the border and Al-Wazir reported a sandstorm of unusual size around the time the army would have been crossing the sands. Faithful have no doubt the army met its end there, its destruction wrought by whatever deity whose idol was stolen. Devoted are slightly more prosaic, claiming the army was slowed by the fabulous wealth it has acquired and unable to escape the oncoming storm.

Occasionally a Bedu tribe finds a handful of coins or bones in the desert, but, despite countless expeditions, none have ever discovered the last resting of the lost army or recovered its fabulous plunder.

MAGORIAN TOMBS

Dotted throughout the land east of the Jinn Wall Mountains are circular, brick tombs with conical roofs covered in slate. Most are in a poor state of repair, having lain empty for centuries. These date back to the Kingdom of Magor, and were built as family crypts. Many were destroyed when the jinn devastated the land, and most of those that escaped destruction have long since been plundered of their contents. To find an intact tomb is extremely rare.

Unusually for tombs, they were not sealed. In Magor tradition, the dead needed sustenance as much as the living. As such, the door was left open so that offerings of food and drink might be left. Special prayers were ut-

tered so that any particular offering would last considerably longer than for a mortal.

Those in need of advice would sleep inside the tomb, beside the bones of their ancestors, in the hope a spirit would impart wisdom through a dream. Though the Kingdom of Magor has long since turned to dust and its bloodline withered, the link between the worlds of the living and dead remain strong. *Gravespeak* is cast at +2 inside one of the tombs (+4 if the tomb contains original bones). On rare occasions, a person sleeping inside one might receive a dream vision to help him solve some earthly problem or guide him toward a specific goal. Such visions are always cryptic in nature.

THE OASIS OF MANY WINGS

In the foothills of the Four Jinn lies a small oasis. Its crystal clear waters and the presence of lush vegetation on its banks have lured many a thirsty traveler to their death. Fed by mineral rich underground springs while the surface is constantly evaporating in the relentless heat, the water is saline to the point of being toxic. Treat the water as a lethal poison if more than a pint is consumed.

Despite being dangerous to most creatures, the oasis does serve a vital purpose in the life-cycle of the desert. Swarms of harmless flies, immune to the effects of the toxic water, exist here all year round. Twice a year, in early Alak Arkhet and the middle of Alak Paret, great flocks of migrating birds visit the oasis. Though the water is poisonous to them, the flies provide the birds with both food and water for the second leg of their journey.

Nomads visit the oasis at this time. Armed with large nets, they gather as many birds as possible in the few days before the flocks continue their long migration. A single bird many provide only a meager meal, but many hundreds of them can keep a tribe fed for weeks.

The oasis has long been neutral ground. Ancient unspoken laws prohibit any tribe from settling here permanently. Competition for the best camp sites is fierce, and "accidents" have been known to occur during the frenetic rush to ensnare the birds.

SANCTUARY OF THE ARK

Population: 102 permanent; 1000+ pilgrims

Ruler: Grand Master Abdul-Samad ibn Basil and Mediator Durriyah bint Tamir

Religion: Devoted and Faithful

Imports: Pilgrims

Exports: None

Shortly after the exodus from the Jinn Lands, Suleiman wrote down the laws by which men were to live. These he placed in a golden ark, its heavy lid adorned with four jinn or heralds, depending on one's faith. When the division between Devoted and Faithful arose, both sides naturally claimed the ark as rightfully theirs. Its protection and retrieval was a key issue in every religious war that wracked the region.

As part of the peace treaty following the War of Bit-

ter Water, it was agreed a new sanctuary would be built on the border between the two nations. A small oasis was chosen as the site for the new building. The square structure sits exactly on the mutually agreed border, straddling both sides.

The ark itself is positioned so that the border runs directly through its middle. Surrounding the sanctuary is a high wall topped with iron spikes. Rumors of the sanctuary's potent magical defences are commonplace, but in the last three centuries there have been no reported attempts to them to the test.

By law, only two people may enter the actual sanctuary. The same law prohibits them from leaving the compound until their death. Its two guardians, one of each creed, are both blind. One story claims they are deliberately blinded before taking up their post so that they cannot gaze upon the sacred texts, lest they be tempted to attempt to use the knowledge they gain to promote their faith over the other. A different story says the ark shines with a tremendous radiance, and that the two wardens are initially sighted, but quickly go blind from continually being in its presence. When the incumbent dies, his successor is personally appointed by the Caliph or Sultan, as appropriate.

On Law Day (Tamith al-Sesht Alak Neteru), the ark, covered by a thick, heavy cloth, is brought into the compound for the pilgrims to "see." On even numbered years, it is shown to the Devoted first. On odd numbered years, the Faithful have first viewing. While it is not a requirement of either creed, both consider pilgrimage to the sanctuary an important part of their faith.

Naturally, neither the Caliph or Sultan entirely trusts the other with such an important and powerful object. To prevent desecration of the ark by inhuman forces (and its theft), each nation is permitted a garrison of 50 soldiers. None may be clerics or mages. The barracks are the only other permanent structures.

Pilgrims are so frequent that two tent towns exist, one on each side of the border. While there is no official trade road passing through the region (water routes are much quicker), merchants willing to make the long trek enjoy a good living catering to the needs of pilgrims.

THE SPHINX'S HEAD

Protruding from the burning wastes between Suknah, City of Bridges, and Musayid, City of Winds, is the head of a colossal stone sphinx. Weathered and cracked by the passage of time, it is of uncertain antiquity. Nearby stands a collection of toppled pillars, all that remains of a temple. The evidence strongly suggests the sphinx was the subject of veneration.

The existence of the sphinx was unknown until a mere 20 years ago, when a sandstorm swept through the area, uncovering the edifice after untold centuries (perhaps millennia) of concealment. Since then, adventurers and tomb-robbers have scoured the site in the hope of discovering secret chambers laden with treasure. So far all they have found is sand, grass, buried masonry that

hints at a larger temple precinct than previously realized, and a few pieces of unadorned pottery.

What none of them have realized is that the entrance is quite literally staring them in the eye. The sphinx's right eye is actually a secret door, the pupil designed to roll sideways. The entire statue, much of which remains buried thanks to shifting sands and regular sandstorms, is riddled with corridors and chambers. Inside is a fortune in gold and jewels, ancient texts, myriad traps, and a number of undead, placed here as guardians.

VALLEY OF DANCING ROCKS

The name of this high pass through the Jinn Wall Mountains is poetic, and does little to alert travelers to the peril it poses. Once part of a minor trade road that linked up with Blacksand Oasis, the valley is prone to frequent rock slides and avalanches, from where it takes its name. Even on a quiet day, a scattering of pebbles, and occasionally a huge boulder, tumble from the upper slopes and crash on the pass below. The bleached and crushed bones of unfortunate beasts are a constant reminder of the danger.

No one is sure why the route become so dangerous, for in olden times it poses no great threat. Popular belief is a renegade greater majin has taken up residence here, though investigations have revealed no trace. Rabblers have tried to pin blame on the Faithful, claiming they beseeched Geb-Agni to curse the pass, though again, there is nothing to support this spurious claim. Perhaps, as poets tell, the mountains are simply restless.

Honest caravans rarely traverse the route these days, for there is much to be lost and little to be gained. Smugglers are willing to take the risk, for no sentries watch over the deadly pass.

PERSONS OF Note

FADL IBN IYAD

Fadl is an itinerant peddler. With only his trusty mule for company, he moves between the cities, stopping only to erect his large tent whenever he spies a caravan or party of travelers. Fadl proudly boasts that he has anything a traveler in the inhospitable sands might need, though he apologizes profusely that he has no relics or ships in stock. In can provide mounts up to and including war elephants, though.

When a customer places an order, Fadl disappears inside his tent (customers are never permitted to enter. The tent is magical, but has only one power—no one can enter it by force, stealth, or spell unless invited by Fadl of his own free will (i.e. not under the effects a *puppet*, threats, and so on). After a few moments, the merchant returns with the item they want. Fadl shrugs off comments about his tent and its contents. He claims it is magical, and links to his warehouse in a distant city—he changes

the city to be as far away from his current location as possible. Obviously, no one in the named city knows or a merchant named Fadl, not does searching government records ever locate a warehouse in his name.

Fadl charges 50% more than normal, which he considers cheap, given that his wares might mean the difference between life and death. .

Fadl's wares are stolen, though not by conventional means. He came into the possession of a bound greater khamsin jinni, who is now his business partner. When a customer orders an item, the jinni teleports to a likely place the item can be found, steals it, and teleports back. The whole process takes minutes.

Unfortunately for customers, the theft is sometimes traced back to them—monogrammed items of clothing or weapons with a specific inlay tend to stand out, especially to the former owner. When such an item is brought back by the jinni, Fadl regretfully informs the buyer he only has a second-hand one of whatever they ordered in stock, leaving the decision to complete the sale in their hands. One unlucky person paid hard cash (in gems) for a pegasus, only to be arrested several months later and charged with stealing one of the Pegasus Guard's prized mounts from the stables.

FIKRI WISE-COUNCIL

An elderly Bedu and wizir counselor mage, Fikri wanders the sands of the Sultanate according to his whims. He is a friend to all the local tribes, and is renowned for his practical advice. Who he chooses to advise is his decision, though, and he refuses to be bribed, cajoled, or threatened into providing assistance.

While sheikhs value his limitless wisdom and clear sight, many Bedu are beginning to suspect he is not what he seems. They question whether he has a hidden agenda, a far-reaching scheme of which others see only tiny fragments, or whether he is in reality a greater jinni in disguise. It is true his advice has, on occasion, led to bloodshed between tribes, but the sheikh he advised always prospers from the conflict in some way. Detractors are also curious how Fikri can then walk into the camp of the losing tribe and be welcomed so warmly.

JALEESH DESERTWALKER

Jaleesh can be found in any of the great cities, offering his services at a reasonable price to small parties and caravans seeking a safe route through the wastes of the Sultanate. Few who take him up ever reach their destination, though. Jaleesh, a thoroughly wicked man, is actually in league with a pack of ghûls.

The guide leads unsuspecting travelers to a prearranged site, where he encourages them to make camp. Once night falls, he summons his allies to feast. In return for delivering them a meal, Jaleesh gets to keep his victims' belongings. Assuming his ploy is successful, he then journeys to the next city to sell his ill-gotten gains and find fresh victims.

AKHMIM

City of the Devoted

The first city founded by the liberated slaves, Akhmim was to be the center of Suleiman's enlightened new world. Dreams rarely become reality, though. As the city lost political importance to Al-Wazir, City of Spires, so corruption grew in equal measure. Although the current emir is a man of good heart, his indecision holds the city back from achieving its full potential. While he takes steps to introduce more democracy, others are taking advantage of governmental delays to line their own pockets.

Social Hierarchy

The first emirs of Akhmim were learned men, knowledgeable in the *Hamad* and wise in matters of governance. Each named his successor, and only rarely did it pass to a blood relative. By the end of the 2nd century CJ, that situation had changed. The position became one of true nobility, with emirs passing the crown to favored family members. Many were still wise, but nepotism rarely resulted in the best candidate being awarded the title. With little hope of ever being nominated to the post, other noble families plotted to marry into the emir's family, or staged coups to ensure their dynasty ruled. Things came to a head in the reign of the previous emir, a man so corrupt it forced the nobles and common people to unite in revolt.

Emir Suleiman, who is married but has no children, is keen to see a swift return to non-hereditary rule. While the commoners on the city council are firmly in favor of this, the nobles, who fear a gradual erosion of their power and status, are not. The tyranny of the previous emir's rule is still fresh in people's minds, though, and the nobles must tread carefully, lest the people decide they are cut from the same cloth.

Emir Suleiman's unwillingness to make decisions on his own is mostly for spiritual reasons. He knows that absolute power is spiritually corrupting, even when wielded with the best of intentions. Unfortunately, governing a city requires one to make tough decisions. He does not bemoan his fate, though. The path to Oneness is never easy, and men must carry different burdens.

The overall social structure in Akhmim follows the standard laid out in *Land of Fire*. The key difference is the presence of the new council.

THE COUNCIL

The advisory council on which Suleiman relies is not yet a democratically elected body. The emir chose the ten

nobles, 15 businessmen, and 30 commoners who make up its number personally. Fully aware that having permanent commoner seats would effectively create a second tier of nobility in all but name, Suleiman's eventual plan is to have a mixture of hereditary seats for the nobility and elections for the other members. The emir hopes to hold the first elections within two years.

The division between the numbers of the three social classes was deliberate, and based on two reasons. First, nobles are used to making decisions that affect the lives of many and businessmen understand financial matters, but the commoners are the backbone of society, and bear the brunt of new laws. Their voice is mostly ignored. Second, even by pooling their votes together, the elite cannot outvote the common people. Unfortunately, while the commoners hold the balance of political power, their peers have plentiful money, allowing them to buy votes when the need arises.

Members are entitled to use the title Councilman. Non-noble councilors rank among the *mak-shabrum*. Many lack personal wealth, but their new standing, not to mention their closeness to the emir, has earned them many friends. Not surprisingly, the businessman on the council have found their enterprises have many new customers. The nobles have wisely chosen to put their new title before their hereditary one, thus ensuring a public show of display for the emir's new system of rule.

Abdul-Ta'ir's dislike of the council is public knowledge. Contrary to popular belief, he has no objections to giving commoners a voice. What he rallies against is the interminably long decision-making process that keeps even simple matters bogged down in petty arguments for weeks on end and makes the Sultan look weak.

Education

Given the city's history, it is little surprise early education for Devoted places a strong emphasis on the *Hamad*. Many children can recite long passages by heart. Rather than simply repeating the text parrot fashion, they possess a good understanding of the meaning.

Akhmim boasts three universities. The largest and most popular with locals is the University of Akhmim, a basic educational center catering to a wide range of subjects but in little detail. It serves to provide those with enough money, the right contacts, or the good fortune to earn a scholarship a basic grounding in their chosen areas in preparation for adult life. Details on the other universities can be found under City Locales.

RULES OF THE REALM

The following setting rules apply in Akhmim.

* **Native Heroes:** For the cost of one skill point during character generation, a native Devoted hero gains a +1 bonus to Common Knowledge rolls concerning the Devoted creed. This includes, but is not limited to, Folklore, History, and Law. The bonuses stack with modifiers from Edges.

* **Trade Center:** The docks and markets are full of goods from across southern Al-Shirkuh and the lands beyond. Special availability goods can be purchased outside the usual places, but cost double. Village Availability items cost 50% of normal, Town items 75%, and City items 90%. Legal tabac costs 15 dinars per smoke. Heroes selling goods in Akhmim have +2 to Streetwise rolls to find a buyer.

* **Transport Hub:** Akhmim has an extremely busy port. The characters can find a ship departing in 1d4 days with a successful Streetwise roll, or later the same day with a raise.

Religion

Al-Wazir, City of Spires, may be the political heart of the Sultanate, but Akhmim is the spiritual heart. It was here Suleiman lived, here he finished the *Hamad*, and here he founded the first kada. Though the creed does not require pilgrimages, many Devoted feel it necessary to visit the city at least once in their life. Not surprisingly, it has the most kadas per head of population.

As elsewhere, the four days of the new moon are holidays. Whereas many cities give only a passing nod to the unlucky days by refusing to engage in significant activities, Akhmim virtually grinds to a halt during this time. Craftsmen down tools lest pride in their work taint them, shops close to the owners will not suffer undue avarice, merchants refuse to conduct trade for fear of making a bad deal, and the courts grind to a halt so as not to have their judgments swayed by the forces of chaos. There are always exceptions (there is no legal requirement to stop work and the Faithful are often less inclined to cease all activities as they can pray for salvation afterward), but since these are the only guaranteed rest days in a month, most take the opportunity to spend time with family and friends. The kadas and temples remain open.

Three temples stand within the city walls. The largest is dedicated to the entire pantheon save for Iblis and Qedesht. Despite catering for ten deities, it is a modest structure. Each cult has equal space for worship, though on high holy days an individual cult is allowed to take over the entire temple. Qedesht is fortunate enough to have two temples. The larger and grander of the two is part of the University of All Faiths' campus, and serves as a school and nondenominational library. It is open to the

general public only on Yaus al-Sesht, being otherwise restricted to students. A smaller structure, dedicated solely to his aspect of trade, stands close to the docks.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Coronation Day: The date of this festival changes with each emir. Traditionally, the emir walks from his palace to the oldest kada to say morning prayers. The practice was instituted to give citizens a glimpse of their otherwise distant ruler, and to give the emir chance to display his obedience to the *Hamad*. In the rule of unpopular emirs the streets were forcibly cleared of spectators to prevent them showing their dislike and to thwart assassinations. Emir Suleiman continues the practice of walking to prayers, but insists the people be allowed to make their feelings toward him known.

Day of Sorrowful Departure: Held on the last day of the new moon of Tamith Alak Arkhet, this festival marks the day Suleiman left the city for the final time. Devoted gather at Suleiman's Gate and wail loudly, while the most devout have henna tears painted on their cheeks. It is believed anyone who leaves the city on this day will never return. The gates are closed to traffic from the city all day, and ships are forbidden from departing until dusk.

Day of Purity: The *Hamad* teaches that bodily cravings corrupt the spirit. In order that the spirit might be purified, citizens must refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, engaging in sexual activities, and so on from dawn to dusk. Failure to observe the restriction is a crime of morality for Devoted. The festival is held on Tamith Yaus al-Maat Tamith Alak Shemu.

Founding Day: Held on Anshi Yaus al-Hamala Alak Suha, the festival marks the founding of the city in 8 CJ. After morning prayers, citizens decorate their houses with colored bunting. Citizens use the day to put their homes in order, though for the rich this merely means ordering the servants to work harder. Anyone planning on beginning work on a new structure on this day may write to the emir. One fortunate person, chosen at random by some junior functionary, is sent a ceremonial scroll inscribed with the word *Shuf*. This is placed beneath the first cornerstone laid as a symbol of good fortune.

Military

Akhmim may be the second largest city in the Sultanate, at least in terms of population, but it is geographically isolated. While the river provides a natural barrier against attacks from the north, the upland to the west and plains to the south leave it vulnerable. In order to ensure its protection, the city is forced to maintain both a large standing army and a sizeable navy.

Akhmim has one general and one admiral. As well as military officers, they are also wizirs. They answer directly to the emir, though neither would refuse to obey an order from Wizir Abdul-Ta'ir.

ARMY

Under the old regime, only nobles awarded land by the emir could maintain an army. This allowed the emirs to support a larger force without the city having to shoulder the extra cost, and gave his lackeys the means to enforce their will over their subjects. Many of these nobles still hold power, having quickly disavowed themselves of their old loyalties during the uprising, but their right to train and equip soldiers has been removed. Emir Suleiman, on the pretense of removing the financial burden from them, has placed all matters of security in the hands of the city's army.

The army comprises one infantry double-regiment (4096 men) and one cavalry half-battalion (400 men). The infantry is broken down into one regiment of light infantry, one double-battalion of medium infantry, one battalion of heavy infantry, and one battalion of archers. The archers and half the total infantry are garrisoned in Akhmim—the rest are dispersed around the greater territory. Units are regularly rotated. Of the five cavalry companies, four are patrolling outside the city at any one time. Two are responsible for safeguarding the communities along the River Alar, one patrols the area north of the city, and the other the region to the south.

Akhmim's only special unit is the Stone Fists. Too valuable to waste in minor skirmishes, the 20 stone golems that make up its number are housed in magically protected vaults somewhere beneath the emir's palace until called upon to serve.

The city militia equates to a further double-regiment. Around half the strength is made up of citizens from the outlying farming communities. Military service is not compulsory, but men and women who sign up and commit to four weeks a year (unpaid) training and serving with the army pay reduced income tax. Few ever see military action—much of their time is spent drilling and maintaining the city walls.

Dissenters have long argued that Akhmim should be the political heart of the Sultanate, as well as the spiritual center. Down the centuries there have been calls to crown a new Sultan in Akhmim. To help protect the sacred city, ensure the emir remains loyal, and crush any attempts to install a new Sultan, a full company (100 warriors) of Pegasus Guards is permanently stationed here, as is an entire regiment of medium infantry (2048 soldiers).

While general palace security falls to the army (the old palace guard having been dissolved following the revolution), the protection of the emir and his private apartments lies with his personal bodyguard, a company-sized unit known as the Righteous Shield. Handpicked by the emir for their skill and spiritual purity, they are referred to locally as the Incorruptibles.

NAVY

Akhmim's navy consists of 15 warships and five heavy warships. Each carries a full complement of light infantry under the command of the city's admiral. At least half

the fleet is at sea at any one time, patrolling the coast for pirates and smugglers, or escorting merchantmen to the next port. The city charges for the latter service. The rest are berthed on the north side of the river, so as not to crowd the docks.

Law & Order

Under the previous emir, corruption and crime were rampant. Things are much better today, though far from perfect. One of the emir's first tasks was to dismiss the majority of the city watch. Too many were vicious thugs employed by the previous emirs, in the pocket of corrupt officials or thieves guilds, or demanded bribes from those they were supposed to protect. As a result, public trust in them had reached an all time low.

Since Emir Suleiman took power, policing the city has fallen to the army. Martial law is not intended as a permanent solution—new city watch are being trained. Faith in the powers of law and order is slowly returning, but it is an uphill struggle—the memory of generations of corruption cannot be swept away in a short time.

At any one time there is a double-company walking the streets. The city has 14 districts, not including the emir's palace, which has its own security arrangements. There is one patrol per district, except in the Docks and Market Districts, which have two at all times. Patrols comprise 16 men working six hour watches. The four watches are Dawn (0600 to 1200), Midday (1200 to 1800), Evening (1800 to midnight) and Night (midnight to 0600).

The Arcane Watch survived the removal of the city watch largely unscathed—a few bad eggs were fired, but the majority proved to be honest. Three full squads are kept busy by the regular influx of pilgrims and the stricter enforcement of the law.

All tenets of the *Hamad* are enforced more strictly in Akhmim than elsewhere in the Sultanate. Whereas drinking alcohol and smoking tabac is politely tolerated in other cities, the decision to corrupt one's body being the individual's, in Akhmim they are punishable with a fine of 50 dinars except in two circumstances—Faithful are not prosecuted unless they are drunk and disorderly or selling illegal alcohol and tabac, and drinking and smoking are considered tolerable practices in government licensed premises. Given the steep prices everyone has to pay, the latter is little different to suffering a fine.

The watch's failure to protect the weak gave rise to a surge in activity by the Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls. While the vigilantes support Emir Suleiman and consider him a good man, they continue their work unabated—the patrols cannot be everywhere, and justice for all has yet to be realized.

Akhmim's low customs duty has largely kept smuggling to small scale operations that do little to harm the city's overall finances. The big exception is alcohol and tabac smuggling, which is highly lucrative. Despite Emir Suleiman's best attempts, three thieves' guilds have

survived the crackdown on crime. While each has its traditional centers of operation, the removal of competitors has opened up new opportunities. The guilds are currently engaged in turf wars to extend their territories.

The Midnight Runners operate in the Merchant and Market Districts. The guild master is a respectable merchant with several legitimate businesses (all of which are fronts for the guild). He primarily sends his minions to target business rivals. Naturally, a few of his establishments are regularly robbed to keep suspicion from falling on him. They are the largest guild, and members are quite happy to employ violence to achieve their goals. They protect Hamal's talking mule from other thieves.

The Burdened Souls currently control the middle class residential and Noble Districts, where they work tirelessly to unburden caravans and rich citizens of the material goods corrupting their souls.

The Wharf Rats control the Dock and Warehouse Districts. They run a protection racket, charging merchants a monthly fee to ensure their properties are not targeted. Although criminals, they are good to their word—anyone who robs their clients is hunted down and punished. The Rats are major players in alcohol and tabac smuggling.

Trade & Tribute

Akhmim's primary business is trade. Its location makes it an ideal stopping point for merchant vessels from the Caliphate and the five northern cities of the Sultanate. Goods can be certainly purchased more cheaply in the city of manufacture, but the extra journey time exposes ships to more risks and costs. Thanks to the abundance of traffic, Akhmim's markets offers a wide range of goods at very reasonable prices.

Although it sits on no official overland trade routes and the journey is difficult, a goodly amount of caravan traffic from Medinat al-Jinn, City of the Jinn, destined for the northern cities passes through its gates.

Visiting ships have the choice of selling their cargo to a local broker or conducting their own sale directly to a fellow visiting merchant. The former results in lower profits, but it allows the ship to quickly unload its cargo and purchase a new one, reducing the time it is sitting idle in port. Many of the city's merchants have grown fat by offering this service, and competition is fierce.

Akhmim's fertile agricultural region further upstream produces an abundance of grains (and keeps the city in vegetables and meat), though very little is exported. For as long as anyone can remember, the granaries hold the Sultanate's reserves in case of famine. In return for this, the Sultan levy's a lower tax (5%) on the emir.

COINAGE

Like all cities in the Sultanate, Akhmim mints its own coins. The gold dinar (known locally as a "Finger") has the word *Shuf* on one face and the face of the emir on the

other. It also mints coins worth five dinars (a "Hand"), ten dinars (a "Double Hand"), 50 dinars (an "Arm"), and 100 dinars (a "Leg"). The latter pair are primarily used by merchant in trade transactions. All bear the same design. Defacing any locally minted gold coin is a moral crime.

Supposedly the names relate to the limb one would lose for theft under one of the old emirs. Saying something costs "an arm and a leg" has become local slang for implying an object is beyond one's financial means.

Silver dirhams (called a "Whole") carry their date of minting on both sides. Citizens are allowed to cut dirhams into halves or quarters to pay for low cost items. These smaller "coins" are known as a Loaf and Cup respectively because they allow a citizen to buy a large loaf of bread or a cup of fresh coffee.

LOCAL TAXES

Akhmim's trade revenues reduce the tax burden on its citizens. As a result, it is home to some of the wealthiest people in Al-Wazir. Below are local taxes likely to affect visiting player characters.

Docking Fees: In order to prevent ships that could be moving cargo from loitering too long a docking fee of 30 dinars per day is charged.

Excise Duty: Keen to ensure good morality, Akhmim charges 200% on all alcohol and tabac destined to stay in the city. This has led to lucrative smuggling business and a booming black market.

Sales Tax: While the emirs were willing to give merchants a good deal, they were less generous to their citizens. Sales tax is 10%. Alcohol and tabac are (legally) sold only through licensed stores, and has a 50% sales tax (on top of the already higher excise duty).

Tolls: Akhmim charges only one dirham per two legs gate tax (few visitors arrive by land), but one dinar per two legs for those using the stairs that lead from the docks to the city proper. The toll for using a cargo elevator is a pedestrian-discouraging 5 dinars per leg.

Architecture

Akhmim's architecture is best described as traditional, functional, and tired. Suleiman's creed taught that ownership of property and excessive extravagance was a sign of spiritual corruption. Akhmim is a classic example of a fair form hiding a foul heart. Citizens across the social strata publicly display their adherence to Suleiman's way by maintaining only modest houses with little exterior decoration. Inside, however, they are decorated to the highest level the owner can afford.

The original government buildings were, like homes, designed to be functional rather than statements of wealth or authority. Though those constructed in later years often broke with. Various emirs broke with tradition and added exterior decoration and lavish furnishings in a bid to show Akhmim's status (and thus their

own importance). Much of this has been removed in recent years, as people return to the old method of valuing public austerity and private greed.

Major Locales

This section details locales inside and outside the ancient city of Akhmim adventurers might wish to explore.

ABANDONED FARMS

Akhmim governs a number of small agricultural towns and villages along much of the River Alar, as well as dozens of small farmsteads. Cavalry patrols have recently reported that several smaller farms have been abandoned. Crops still lie in the fields, but the residents have vanished without taking any of their belongings. The only clue is the mysterious holes found in the ground near each farm. More worrying, perhaps, the holes have been cut through the rock from below. No one has yet been brave enough to explore one.

CITY DISTRICTS

Akhmim has 15 official districts. Five are primarily residential areas for lower and middle class citizens. They dominate the east, center, and southwest of the city.

Craft: The Craft District is home to the majority of the city's craftsmen and their workshops. Old laws prohibit the craftsmen from selling goods directly from their workshops unless the wares are custom made pieces for a client (as opposed to general stock).

Docks: Lying along the wide crescent beneath the bluffs are the docks. In order to accommodate as many ships as possible, wharves jut into the river. Noise is a constant feature—visiting merchants seeking brokers, brokers touting for business, captains barking orders, street urchins hawking their services as reliable guides, beggars in search of alms, and the creak of wagons and clatter of metal rimmed wheels along the cobbles. Money is the lifeblood of Akhmim, and work is carried out at a frenetic pace. Adventurers wanting to stop and chat with locals or visitors need a good reason, or deep pockets.

Land is at a premium. The streets are barely wide enough for a single wagon, and pedestrians are regularly forced to dart into doorways to avoid being crushed by the steady flow of traffic or struck by a whip.

The four sets of wide, steep stairs leading to the main city are built in pairs—one to allow visitors up the cliff, and one to let them down. Tax collectors collect tolls at the top of the stairs, regardless of the direction one is traveling. The freight elevators are capable of lifting a fully laden wagon with weight to spare. Whereas the stairs allow direct access to the four districts directly above the bluffs—Craft, Market, Noble, and Pilgrim—the elevators lead only to the Market District.

Dune Slums: The west end of the docks is a maze of low buildings in various states of disrepair, narrow alleys,

and filth. Here lies the Dune Slums, home to most of the city's sand goblin population, plus a goodly number of beggars and other unfortunates.

Akhmites have a saying—the Dune Slums will strip a man of his wealth faster than the *ghibli* will strip him of his flesh. Crime is rampant and law enforcement minimal. For those seeking information of a less than honest nature, the slums are the place to visit. No one pays much attention to sand goblins and beggars on the streets, and thus the inhabitants hear all manner of useful gossip.

Market: By far the busiest part of the city proper during hours of daylight, the market sits between the Craft and Merchant Districts, and is accessible directly from the docks by stairs and cargo elevator.

The northern side, directly above the bluffs, comprises rows of small warehouses. These belong to the various craftsmen and shop owners. Few can afford to rent an entire warehouse, and so businessmen hire only as much space as they need for their stock.

The shopping area is divided into four key zones. The Great Souk dominates the center. To the southwest is the Greater Bazaar, which caters for high-end goods and luxuries favored by rich citizens, while the Lesser Bazaar, in the southeast, sells all manner of basic wares. Between them is the Livestock Market. Thanks to the high levels of trade, the bazaars are open every day.

Merchants: Most merchants and brokers have homes and offices to the east of the market. More salubrious than the middle class residential districts, the homes are still modest compared to those in the Noble District.

Noble: Despite its name, the district is home to all manner of wealthy citizens. Whereas the main residential districts are crowded and have narrow streets, the homes here are spacious affairs, bordered by wide, tree-lined avenues. Most houses are enclosed by a wall to afford the owners privacy and keep out undesirables.

Northside: This small fortified settlement sits on the north bank of the River Alar. It is the headquarters of the city's navy, and houses barracks, storerooms, and workshops. The river front has wharfs, but these are reserved for naval vessels only. The only ferry across the river is located to the east, and sails across to the extreme eastern end of the main port. The ferry is operated by a windlass powered by stone golems. When not in use, the thick chain is kept slack so as not to interfere with river barges that service the numerous farming communities upriver. Ferry tolls are one dinar per leg.

Palace: The emir's palace, a sprawling structure befitting the ruler of the first city of the Sultanate, dominates the southern central part of Akhmim. The emir's personal living space forms only a tiny portion. Much of it is dedicated to civil and military business—bureaucratic offices, courts, the main army barracks, and such like are found within the greater compound.

Pilgrim: Akhmim caters to large numbers of pilgrims seeking spiritual enlightenment. The southwest corner of the city, directly above the bluffs, is where most of them find temporary accommodation. Strangers are commonplace, and it is easy to lose oneself in the throng.

Warehouse: Trade goods intended for export and imported goods waiting to be transported to the smaller warehouses in the city proper are stored here. The district is actually just a thin strip directly behind the docks.

Visitors coming here for the first time are often perplexed by the lack of buildings. In order to save space, it was decided long ago to excavate into the bluffs. Ten wide wooden doors lead to equally wide subterranean roads, facing which are the warehouses. Trade carries on around the clock, and the warehouses are rarely closed. An ideal place to keep grain dry, cool, and away from sunlight, the city granaries are also located here.

CITY LOCALES

The Cat's Paw: A licensed premises selling alcohol and tabac, the Paw (as it is known) is run by Hayam bint Abbas, a Faithful follower of Tamarni. All her staff (male and female) have the Attractive Edge. Despite rumors the tavern is a front for prostitution and hashish smoking, Hayam doesn't dabble in any illegal activities, nor does she permit them on her premises.

Hayam's honest approach to life in the City of the Devoted masks her true occupation—she is one of the Caliph's many spies. The relaxed surroundings and opulent fittings attract a high class clientele. A few drinks and pleasant company is normally enough to loosen tongues. Her staff are a mix of Devoted and Faithful, and have no idea of her true business.

City Walls: The city is walled on three sides, leaving the bluffs overlooking the docks open. Akhmim takes its security very seriously.

Situated at each end of the docks, where the wall touches the bluffs, are two enormous square guard towers. Each of the four floors is open to the elements, supported only by sturdier corner pillars. On each floor is mounted a single ballista.

In addition to the siege engineers and loaders (non-combatants who fetch bolts from the armory under each tower), each tower houses a half-company of archers with access to an armory stocked with alchemical arrows containing *blast*, *entangle*, and *fear* spells. Not wishing to risk incinerating the docks, the spells have earth trap-pings. Sneaking up on the city by sea is difficult—each tower has two *farsight* jinn relics that take the form of long metal tubes with a glass lens at each end.

In the event attackers manage to land troops without their ships being blown out of the water, the bluffs are relatively easy to defend. The elevators are hauled to the top, and archers quickly summoned to target aggressors trying to scale the stairs. The latter is made more difficult by the barrels of oil stored in the guard towers.

The walls protecting the landward facing are 40 feet thick and 30 feet high. Cramped guard barracks, each capable of housing a quarter-company are built into the walls at regular intervals. Rather than risk exposing troops to enemy fire or shattering walls, a narrow tunnel runs along the entire length of the wall. Ladders provide access to the guard towers.

Eight towers watch over the city. The largest two protect the docks, as noted above. Each of the three city gates is flanked by a pair of flat roofed towers that rise 10 feet above the height of the wall. The lower level contains cauldrons for heating sand, while those above have ballistas fitted with incendiary *blast* bolts.

Under the old emir, citizens were forced to march toward the city in ranks while the siege engineers fired *stun* bolts at them to keep them at peak readiness. The practice has since been banned, though regular drills are still conducted. On the emir's birthday, a volley of explosive bolts are fired into the air above the city.

Every battery has a stock of *light* bolts that produce different colors. Red signifies attackers have been sighted by land on the southern side, blue the north side, and green approaching by sea. Any of these immediately followed by a purple explosion signifies the attack is a drill, thus preventing panic on the part of ordinary citizens.

Gates: Akhmim has three gates—the Royal Gate in the west, Suleiman's Gate in the south, and the Sea Gate in the east. Heavily fortified and well-manned, they are opened at dawn and closed at dusk. Postern gates allow the guards to let pedestrians to enter after hours without having to unlock the main gates. During the day, a small tent is erected outside each gate to shelter customs inspectors and tax collectors from the sun.

The gates sit in the center of each gate house. Portcullis can be lowered in front and behind them for added protection, and the roof contains numerous murder holes, down which hot sand can be poured (burning oil is never used, as attackers may use fire arrows to turn the defensive weapon to their advantage).

The House of Screams: Not far from the Royal Gate, in the heart of what is now a lower class residential district, stands an old, decrepit house. It looks oddly out of place, not because of its poor state, but because it is far grander than its neighbors. No one is sure of its age, and few citizens care even to admit it exists. On nights of the new moon, tortured screams are heard from within. Rumors abound as to the cause. A nobleman murdered his family, an insane wizard conjured a demon, the owner's daughter committed suicide when her father forbade her from seeing the love of her life—ask a hundred different citizens and you'll hear a hundred different tales.

Everyone avoids the house, even at other times of the month. Mages are said to have gone mad trying to locate the source of the noise, imams have been driven out by unseen forces for daring to try and purify it, and most who enter on those dark, scream-filled nights never leave, or so the locals claim with hand on heart.

During the majority of the month the house has a sinister feel, but it is not oppressive. On nights of the new moon, characters must make a Spirit roll at -2 or suffer Fear until they vacate the premises. Several attempts were made to plunder it in the past (most of the furnishings and contents are intact), but the perpetrators were found dead the next night of the new moon, their faces frozen in a look of absolute terror. The guilds have subsequently decided it is not worth their lives.

The House of Sweet Aromas: A popular bakery and coffee house run by Mustaf and his wife Fatimah. Customers who know the right phrases can order the house special coffee (alcohol) and special warm bread (contains a smoke's worth of tabac stuffed into a cavity). Prices are 1 dinar per coffee, and 5 dinars per loaf. Expensive, but still cheaper than buying from licensed sellers.

Jaul's School of Magic: A serving Brother of Sinbad and close friend of Jubair (see below), Jaul has devoted his entire life to mastering a new form of magic (see sidebar). Now well into old age, he has semi-retired from adventuring in order to pass on his accumulated wisdom.

Characters wishing to learn his new magical art—ship magic—must devote six months in study time and pay 2,000 dinars (a man has to live).

Jubair's Ships Chandlery: Jubair's isn't the largest ships chandlery on the docks, nor is it the cheapest. A retired Brother of Sinbad missing his right eye, his left hand, and his right leg, Jubair attracts a loyal clientele because he always has a new fantastic story to tell. Though he is the focus of every story, very few are actually his exploits. He quietly offers fellow Brothers a 20% discount on any stock so long as they pass on one of their adventures and keep quiet should they hear him retell it.

The Old Library: It may not be the largest library in the Sultanate, but the collection of scrolls and manuscripts is aptly named. The library is well-stocked, but notoriously hard to use. Rather than grouping the contents by subject or author, records are stored in sections based on the ruling emir at the time they were written. Unless you have at least a rough date, finding a specific text can take days. Even the librarians have difficulty, but they refuse to break with tradition.

Suleiman's Kada: While undoubtedly the oldest kada in Akhmim, the modern building dates from a century and more after Suleiman's death. It does stand on the spot the first kada in the Sultanate was built, though, so its name is not entirely undeserving. It is also one of the smallest kadas in the city, capable of holding just 100 souls. Many Devoted consider it to be the exact spiritual center of the Sultanate.

The interior walls have four large niches, one facing each cardinal point. Above each one is the name of one of the four major jinn—ifrit in the north, khamsin in the south, majin in the west, and marid in the east. Local tradition says Suleiman would sit in these and meditate on the nature of reality. That may not be true, but sitting in them does induce feelings of spiritual wellbeing.

Any Devoted who sits in one and quietly meditates for an hour may make a Spirit roll at -2. With success, he may remove one level of Fatigue from any source, and two with a raise. If he has multiple levels from different sources, he chooses which one to remove. This may be attempted only once every 24 hours.

The Tunnels: The warehouses aren't the only excavations beneath the city. Aside from the sewers, which emerge downstream, not far from the Dune Slum, there are passages cut by thieves. Some of these extend as far down as the warehouses, but most link stretches of sewer

NEW ARCANES BACKGROUND

SHIP MAGIC

Requirements: Novice

Arcane Skill: Ship Magic (Smarts)

Starting Powers: 2

Powers: *Armor**, *becalm*, *boost/lower trait* (Boating and Swimming only), *deflection**, *mend* (only works on ships), *storm*, *water walk** (keeps a wrecked ship from sinking), *zephyr*

A new and thus rare form of magic, ship magic was invented by Jaul the Sailor, a Brother of Sinbad who sought to make waterborne travel safer and faster. It makes use of jinn in much the same way as jinn magic, but has no power over ifrits.

Special: Spells marked "*" affect the entire ship on which the mage is standing, but do nothing to protect or affect the crew. If the mage leaves the ship for any reason, the spell is temporarily negated but still counts as being Maintained. When he boards it again, the spell reactivates automatically.

Expanding the Art: As a new art, Jaul has not yet found the limitations to the effects it can produce. Characters who take the Edge will be at the cutting edge of this art, and may, at the GM's discretion, learn spells not currently on the list. For instance, a mage might be able to learn *invisibility**. Such pioneering experimentation comes at a cost, though—the mage must devote *two* advancements to learning a spell not on the list. In return, he gains 10 Glory as word of his new discovery spreads.

Casting: A ship mage must be on deck, and able to use his hands to work his spells.

Trappings: Mages may use air, earth, or water trappings. For instance, *deflection* might create sprays of water that intercept attacks, or swirling winds that knock missiles off course.

together. At the far end of one of the warehouse avenues, at a point some 100 yards after the last warehouse entrance, is a set of large stone doors. Their great handles are tightly bound with thick chains. No soldiers guard it and no magic wards it, but no one ever goes beyond it. Most citizens don't even know it exists.

University of All Faiths: The population of Akhmim may be staunchly Devoted, but even the most devout emirs saw wisdom in promoting deeper understanding of the Caliphate as a means of bolstering trade links. The university teaches courses covering the tenets of both major creeds. Half the faculty are clerics of Qedeshet.

Skills: Knowledge (Religion).

University of Legal Studies: The university's introductory course covers laws common to most civilized realms, with advanced courses going into specific nuances. It is famed across the Sultanate for being the lead-

ing university in instruction in the legal aspects of the *Hamad*. Many of the city's imams were educated here (after schooling at the University of All Faiths), as are those in other cities who hold higher office.

Skills: Knowledge (Law); *Edges:* Imam.

TOWER OF MORNING

Located at the mouth of the estuary is a tall lighthouse. The blazing light that fills the sky from dusk to dawn is created by a greater ifrit bound into service by Suleiman. During the day (except when there is fog), the jinni is largely free to do what it wants.

Bored by centuries of mindless work, it has developed a taste for strong alcohol, hashish, and tabac. Unable to leave the confines of the tower, it pays double the usual cost for its earthly pleasures. Quite where it gets its seemingly unlimited supply of gold is a mystery to those brave or crooked enough to run errands for it.

PERSONS OF Note

Described below are a few of the many colorful characters visiting heroes might encounter in the city.

ANIS IBN ANIS

Anis (whose name means "Friend") is a young street urchin. He is most frequently found at the docks, where he touts for business as a city guide. He loudly proclaims he knows all the best shops in Akhmim, and can get interested parties big discounts. Unlike the other child guides, Anis is smartly dressed and looks well nourished.

Anis has a deal with several shop owners in the souk. He brings them clients from out of town, and in return is paid 1% of the profits from any purchases they make. It hasn't made him rich, but on top of the dirham a day he charges for his expert guidance around the city, he keeps his belly full and his clothes clean.

BOULOS IBN HUD

Boulos is a highly respected Devoted sage. Quiet and unassuming, mild-mannered and hospitable, few realize he is a jinn mage, yet alone a grand master.

While he could have wielded temporal power or lived like a noble through his arts, he chose instead to devote his life to geography and cartography. Formerly the head of faculty at the University of Akhmim's geography department, his works on the geography, cultures, and denizens of Al-Shirkuh fill an entire shelf in the university library. His treatises on Rassilon and the Jade Empire, while fewer in number, are widely regarded as the best works on those distant realms anywhere in Al-Shirkuh.

Now retired from his teaching post, Boulos runs a small shop in a quiet corner of the souk. From here he sells detailed maps, lovingly drawn by his own hand, and

small pamphlets detailing distant lands to bright-eyed adventurers and experienced navigators alike.

Not all the maps are of the mundane world—several report to show areas of Jinnistan, the native realm of the jinn. Boulos penned a travelogue on the topic some years ago. These days he never speaks of it to anyone, nor does he care to speculate on why every copy in every library has subsequently been stolen. Whenever the topic is mentioned his eyes betray a deep-rooted fear and his left hand involuntarily clutches an ornate gold pendant that is always around his neck.

Akhmites aren't sure whether Boulos is eccentric, a canny businessman fabricating an air of mystery and danger in order to sell beautiful but ultimately useless maps, or, as the Faithful say, one god short of a pantheon.

Though he admits his bones are growing ever weary and his desire to travel has greatly lessened, his passion for learning remains undiminished. His wealth of knowledge has not led to arrogance. Strangers who have something to teach him about the world are welcomed into his home like old friends.

SABAA BINT NAIF

A jinn mage specializing in air, Sabaa is also a popular street entertainer. She tells her audiences she once fought a fierce battle with a rogue khamsin. The only way to defeat the creature was to swallow it, so she did. To prove her point, and get the crowd warmed up, she then belches loudly and briefly casts *obscure*, while squealing the jinni is trying to escape. She then delights spectators by juggling multiple objects. At some point in the routine she goes to flirt with a handsome man in the crowd, leaving the objects juggling in mid air (via *telekinesis*).

There is a more serious side to Sabaa. Her oldest brother moved here 20 years ago (she was just a baby when he left) to study at the University of All Faiths. An outspoken critic of the former emir, he was arrested on charges of sedition, tortured, and executed. Sabaa has only recently learned the truth, and now she wants revenge. The Sultan and his family are dead, but the guard captain who arrested her brother is now enjoying his retirement. She has had little luck tracking him down, and is looking for help.

SAJA MIN AKHMIM

A broker by trade, Saja has a reputation for being able to locate almost any cargo or object at very reasonable prices. She also has a reputation for delivering cargo only at the very last minute, literally as a ship is preparing to weigh anchor.

Saja's reputations both stem from the fact she is a fence for all three surviving thieves' guilds. Each guild believes she works only for them, an illusion she is extremely keen to maintain. The "cheap" cargoes are stolen to order, and moved from their hiding places only when the ship is about to depart so as to reduce the risk of it being discovered by the watch.

AL-WAZIR

City of Spires

Al-Wazir assumed the mantle of capital of the Sultanate in 23 CJ, and has held onto its position for over five centuries. To outsiders it is a glittering paradise, a symbol of the Sultanate's glory and Suleiman's great dream. To many who live there it is a festering sore, riddled with the dark stain of corruption. Poverty and extravagance, virtue and vice, suffering and pleasure, hopelessness and dreams—Al-Wazir is all these things, and more.

Social Hierarchy

The current Sultan is Abdul-Muta'al, a man who has sat on the throne for five years and yet is barely 20 years of age. His position is extremely tenuous. First, he is relatively young and, despite knowing his own heart, is still inexperienced in the intricacies of politics and governance. Second, as the Sultan he is largely cut off from the people. Much of what he hears comes from his chief wazir, a man with dark ambitions. Third, the power of the Sultan has declined to the extent that he has been reduced to a figurehead in the other great cities. A Sultan who wants to bring the emirs back into line and accept his unquestioned authority would have to use force, and it would take a very brave or insane Sultan to engage even one of them in economic or military conflict.

The Sultan's chief wazir, Makin Many-Eyes, has no official noble title. Indeed, he was born a commoner, and crawled up the ladder through a healthy blend of manipulation and backstabbing. His exalted position as the Sultan's right hand man, however, puts him above the emirs in terms of his authority and the respect shown to him (at least to his face).

Rather than allow every noble free access to the main court, the Sultans of old decreed that each noble house could send just one representative. Even so, this still means there are dozens of nobles constantly vying for attention. The other nobles congregate in the lower court, close enough to power to sate their egos, but far enough away that they can do little harm.

The nobility lead lives of opulent luxury. Work is hard to find in Al-Wazir, and there are plenty of commoners willing to place themselves in servitude for a few crumbs and a roof over their heads. Servants often tell tales of debauched and depraved affairs, with nobles forcing the infirm to fight to the death for their amusement, races where the young noble scion's ride servants like horses and whip their hind ends raw, or forcing a beggar to eat rich food until he is sick. Few have any real grounding in reality, but mud sticks. On the other hand, it is very true

that the richest want for nothing, while the poorest lead lives that would make a sand goblin blush.

Sitting uncomfortably between the nobility and the middle classes are the village headmen and overseers. They wield temporal power, but few are well-connected outside their immediate surrounds, and wealth is a matter of perspective—they're richer than those they lord over, but nowhere close to true noble status.

The *shabrum* compete to drag themselves up to *mak-shabrum* status. Money is actually a lesser concern than making the right initial contacts. Perform enough favors for those with power and get your name recognized in the right circles and money will surely follow. Some of the tasks might be odious, but everything has a price.

It's good to have dreams, but most citizens simply lack the ambition, talent, or opportunities to advance socially, especially near the bottom of the ladder. A *jaleepa* craftsman might one day reach *shabrum* status, but unless he is exceptional at his job he won't rise any higher. As long as he can keep his family fed and clothed, he's happy.

The *mushaf* are a growing stratum. Beggars crowd the streets seeking charity from those who got rich by not handing out money to paupers, filthy citizens perform all manner of unclean jobs for a pittance, and disease is rife in the tightly packed slums.

AUDIENCE WITH THE SULTAN

Anyone who wishes to see the Sultan must go through the chief wazir. The lower one's social status, the less likely an audience will be given. Even getting to see Makin is a challenge for those not on official government business, foreign ambassadors, representatives of the emirs, or who lack the necessary contacts at court or gold coins to grease the wheels of bureaucracy. Even the powerful nobles of Al-Wazir must resort to giving the wazir a "gift" to secure a speedy audience with the Sultan, though those the wazir sees as allies, or potential puppets, are always favored above loyalists. The sole exception is on the first Yaus al-Sesht of each month.

On this day, citizens are granted automatic audience to the Sultan from dusk to dawn, though only one at a time. The queue is always long, for the people have many grievances. Makin isn't fond of this radical approach to leadership—he likes to keep his young master in the dark about affairs in the city, and he can hardly do that with peasants whining about the level of taxation right to Abdul-Muta'al's face. He frequently seeds the front of the crowd with his supporters. Their task is to waste as much time as possible, thus preventing those with genuine grievances from airing them in court.

RULES OF THE REALM

The following setting rules apply in Al-Wazir.

* **Audience with the Sultan:** There is no die roll to gain an audience with the Sultan. Such an honor is granted only by the GM, and it should be done so extremely rarely. At *minimum*, a character would need to be the appointed representative of a noble house (which means spending his days at court), have 150+ Glory (at which time the Sultan might summon the hero to regale him with tales of his adventures), or bribe the chief wizar (at least 10,000 dinars).

* **Pauper Packages:** Many citizens are extremely poor. This has forced them to do whatever is necessary to survive. A native hero may opt to begin the game with only half his usual starting funds. He cannot have the Noble or Rich Edges. In return, he may take Intimidation, Lockpicking, or Stealth d4 for free. Alternatively a character may take the Illiterate Hindrance in addition to his normal allotment of Hindrances. He gains Knowledge (any one craft) d6 for free.

* **Trade Center:** The docks and markets are full of goods from across southern Al-Shirkuh and the lands beyond. Special availability goods can be purchased outside the usual places, but cost 2.5 times as much. Village Availability items cost 65% of normal, Town items 85%, and City items 95%.

Education

Education may be free and compulsory, but few lower class families bother to have their children educated. High taxes place a heavy burden on the poorest members of society, and children are put to work as soon as they are able to walk and talk. A lucky few are fortunate enough to acquire a trade through an apprenticeship. Many, though, end up being sent out to steal from the markets, beg, or work long hours performing menial work for a few dirhams. As a result, literacy rates in Al-Wazir are the lowest in the Sultanate. The great irony is that with an education, many people could lift themselves from poverty, or at least have a fighting chance.

For those with the twin luxuries of money and time, Al-Wazir has several universities. Most provide only basic courses. For the middle classes, the best chance for securing steady work and social promotion lie with the University of Noble Servitude and the University of the Pen and Scroll. These are detailed in City Locales.

As part of their charitable duties, every university offers a limited number of scholarship places to intelligent youngsters from poorer backgrounds. Aptitude tests are held in a student's last year of basic education. Having famous alumni boosts enrolment numbers, and the uni-

versities compete to attract the top few percent of these students by offering special packages and additional courses at no extra cost.

Religion

Sultan Abdul-Muta'al has little understanding of the Faithful's many cults, but he respects every citizen's right to worship as they please (so long as the laws of the Sultanate are obeyed) and is keen to maintain friendship with the Caliphate. While some Sultans of old persecuted Faithful and others sidelined them from important posts, the Sultan has followed his father's example and appointed a wizar specifically to oversee matters concerning Faithful affairs of state.

The wizar must be a cleric, but he is not chosen by the Sultan. That honor falls to a conclave of the various faith's high priests. The wizar serves until dismissed by the Sultan (a right he retains over all his courtiers), he retires from or dies in office, or the conclave withdraws its support and elects a replacement. For the last 30 years the post has been filled by a priest of either Shamash, god of order, or Tammuz, god of justice.

Al-Wazir has a temple in every district, even the palace. Each one is a multi-faith place of worship.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Understanding Day: Created after the War of Bitter Water, this multi-faith festival was intended to recognize the end of hostilities and the dawn of a new era of co-operation and understanding. These days it is observed only as a public holiday and an excuse for a feast—while there are always those willing to peddle bigotry and hatred to further their misguided agendas, Devoted and Faithful have lived side-by-side for three centuries. It is held on Amt Yaus al-Niwt Alak Suha.

Military

The army of the city and the Sultanate are one and the same, for the two entities are inseparable. As a storyteller once proclaimed, the Sultanate of Al-Wizir is the body, and the city of Al-Wazir its heart and brain.

ARMY

The Sultan's army comprises five infantry corps and an archer corps, a combined strength of 49,152 soldiers. The infantry are divided into three light infantry corps, one and a half medium infantry corps, and a double-regiment of heavy infantry. All the archers are trained to use the bow. Supporting them are two cavalry regiments (one heavy and one light), which add a further 8,000 soldiers.

Al-Wazir is protected by one corps of light infantry, a double-battalion of archers, and a battalion of light cavalry (as well as the Pegasus Guard). The rest of the army is scattered across the Sultanate. Thanks to the machinations of Makin, many are garrisoned far from the settlements of corrupt nobles. The city has no militia—the thought of thousands of armed peasants right at his door has not sat well with any Sultan. In theory, every paladin living in the capital is duty bound to answer a call to arms should the city be attacked or the citizens revolt.

In addition, there are a number of special units.

Artillery Battalion (512 men): The battalion is responsible for the Sultanate's array of siege weaponry. It is also responsible for providing sappers and engineers.

The Ivory Company: Though it carries the company title, this ultra-heavy cavalry unit comprises just 20 mounts. Given that these are war elephants, no one much argues. As well as the mounts and handlers, the company boasts a half-company of archers trained to fire from the swaying platforms with deadly accuracy.

Palace Guard: Guarding the palace (but not the Sultan's person or apartments) is the responsibility of a battalion of veteran soldiers. They are distinguishable by their blue cloaks and the blue plumes on their helmets. Officers add "of the Palace Guard" to their normal rank. There is a strong rivalry between the Palace Guard and the Pegasus Guard.

Pegasus Guard: The Sultan's elite warriors and loyal bodyguards, their organizational structure differs from both the regular infantry and cavalry. The Guard is made up of 1500 soldiers, divided into three regiments (500 men) commanded by a captain. Each regiment comprises five companies of 100 men led by a sergeant. Every company is made up of 10 sub-companies (10 men) under the command of a corporal. All officer ranks add "of the Pegasus Guard" to denote their membership, and to differentiate them from regular officers. One full regiment is stationed in the city at all times.

Any mage who wishes to join the Guard must fulfil three requirements. First, he must be a jinn mage. Yusef respects all forms of magic, but he considers jinn mages to be the most versatile and best suited to the nature of the Guard. Second, he must know both *farsight* and *voice on the wind*. Sorcerers may think themselves one-man armies, but the Guard primarily use them as scouts and messengers. Third, he must undergo the same rigorous training as any other recruit.

The Guard answers to Sirdar Yusef ibn Sallah, Commander of the Pegasus Guard. Such is the favored nature of the Guard that his status is equal to that of a general. Makin Many-Eyes intensely dislikes Yusef. Not only does the old warrior's position mean he has direct access to the Sultan at all times, but he answers only to Abdul-Muta'al. He may also suspect the wazir—unless he hears an order from the Sultan's mouth he has it verified.

The Sultan's Hands: Serving as scouts and guerilla fighters, they are a loose company of adventurers, spellcasters, rogues, and warriors who do not fit well into ordered military life yet are too resourceful and talented

to cast aside. Having little respect for rank, they work in small groups, taking on missions considered too dangerous for the regular troops, or where stealth is favored over brute force. Each member knows he is an expendable asset, but the Sultan pays well.

NAVY

In addition to his land forces, the Sultan maintains a fleet of 24 warships, eight galleys, and eight heavy warships, plus numerous support vessels. Only half the fleet is stationed in the city. The rest are spread among the other cities as part of anti-corsair patrols, with the majority currently in Jirja, City of Colors.

The galleys' oarsmen are all convicted criminals. Most are serving full-life terms, and are destined to die in service to the Sultan, though convicts may be sent here for as little as a year. Between bureaucracy and corruption, very few are actually released the day their sentence expires. Those blessed with exceptionally poor fortune may be sold as slaves to corsairs, smugglers, or merchants.

Law & Order

Al-Wazir is a city of haves and have-nots, and the latter vastly outnumber the former. Crime and corruption are a cancer that eats away at the city and its citizens.

Policing the 320,000 or so citizens who call the city home at any one time falls to the City Watch. Numbering just 1000 strong, and divided into two divisions (Day and Night), their presence is most keenly felt in more affluent areas and in the markets. They do respond to hues and cries in other parts of the city, but at a more leisurely pace. Many rich citizens maintain a small number of personal guards to protect their property.

In the absence of City Watch patrols, the Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls has filled the vacuum. They are too few to rid the city's poorer districts of crime, but they do make a small difference.

Serving the Sultan as spies are the Unblinking Eyes. It has long been rumored by the general population that anyone could be one of the Sultan's agents—a close friend, your neighbor, even a family member. Although at certain times in history paranoid Sultans did place against in general society to judge the true mood of the people, the modern Eyes primarily work to infiltrate criminal organizations, investigate corruption among the nobles and bureaucrats, track down cultists or Iblis or the demon lords, and gather intelligence on the rulers of other cities (both inside and outside the Sultanate).

Makin Many-Eyes, as his name implies, has his own network of informants and agents. There is no true organization—informants are rewarded for keeping the wazir abreast of matters he might find interesting. Primarily they watch the Sultan's agents, but heroes spending large sums of money or telling stories of their daring exploits will quickly be known the wazir.

Al-Wazir's four major thieves guilds largely settled on their territories decades ago. While members occasionally stray into another guild's territory, there have been no major feuds in living memory.

The Cutters operate in the Market District. They specialize in purse-cutting and pickpocketing. What makes them unusual is that every member is a child, a ward of Mother Wid (see p. 30).

Operating in the Warehouse District are the Shadow Men. They control the import and distribution of all illegal substances, and are heavily engaged in smuggling operations. Despite being classified as a thieves' guild, they rarely partake in mundane robbery and burglary.

The first of the true thieves' guilds are the Alleymen. They target middle class residential districts and rich citizens who make the mistake of entering the wrong part of town without a suitable escort. Their rivals, the Khamsin Hands, target upper class homes.

Al-Wazir also has an organized beggars' guild governed by the King of the Streets. He expects all beggars to pay him 10% of their income. In return, he offers them a place to sleep and food in their bellies. Neither is particularly pleasant, but it's better than the alternative.

Trade & Tribute

Like Akhmim, Al-Wazir is a trading city first and foremost. Akhmim's better geographical position has seen the capital's waterborne trade steadily decline over the years. While the city has traditionally acted as the sea port for Medinat al-Jinn, City of the Jinn, even that is in danger—many goods destined for the greater Sultanate are now carried overland to Akhmim. The journey is not without danger, but by the time a cargo has been transported by barge to Al-Wazir, loaded onto a ship, and sailed around the coast there is little time lost in reaching the markets.

It doesn't help that corruption is rife among city officials. Merchants who want to get their goods to and from market with any expediency need to liberally grease the wheels of bureaucracy.

COINAGE

Al-Wazir's mints produce a small number of coins. The two commonest are the one dinar coin (a "Sultan") and the one dirham coin (an "Emir"). There are smaller half dirham (a "Sirdar") and quarter dirham (a "Pasha") coins. Rather than mint larger coins, the city produces trade bars for mercantile activities. These are valued at 100, 1000, and 10,000 dinars, and have the same weight as the same number of gold coins. In order to have trade bars produced, a merchant must deposit the requisite number of coins with the mint.

All coins bear the name of the Sultan and their date of stamping on one side. The reverse side shows a gyrfalcon on the dinar and a saker falcon on the dirhams.

Trade bars are stamped with the Sultan's name and the name of the merchant who ordered them.

LOCAL TAXES

The Sultan has a large army and bureaucracy to maintain, not to mention a grand palace, and citizens in Al-Wazir must shoulder a modest tax burden to pay for all this. As well as income tax paid annually, they must pay property tax (covers buildings, land, livestock, tools, and vehicles) every fifth year, when the city census is conducted. Most upper class and noble families have mastered the art of hiding their income from tax inspectors, or can afford to bribe government officials to list their taxes are duly paid. Thanks to Wizir Makin's influence, the courts are far more diligent in punishing poorer citizens who cannot pay their dues than richer ones.

Armament Tax: Any citizen not officially part of the army or city watch in the Sultanate must have a license to wear armor or bear weapons. The lengthy form requires the bearer to list every piece of armor and every weapon he owns. He is then charged 5% of the total value (based on the *Land of Fire* core prices). Being caught carrying armaments not on one's license is treated as fraud, while not being able to produce a license on demand is considered to be armed insurrection. Naturally, bribes can quickly sort out any "misunderstandings."

Customs Duty: Although customs duty is only 2%, merchants must resort to bribes amounting to a further 1% if they want to clear customs quickly. Merchants willing to pay an additional 500 dinars straight to the customs officer can often avoid having certain cargoes searched too diligently for illegal goods. Naturally, the city sees nothing of the money raised by these "special services."

Docking Fees: Ship captains must pay 10 dinars per day the ship is moored. Ships at anchor in the harbor are charged half this amount.

Sales Tax: A flat 8% fee. Traders who think they can get away with it charge 10% to strangers, pocketing the extra money to help offset their tax bills.

Tolls: Gate and ferry traffic is taxed at one dirham per pedestrian, one dinar per horse, camel, or similar mount, and ten dinars for an elephant or similar large beast.

Architecture

Al-Wazirans may be predominantly Devoted, but this is the capital, and here displays of wealth and power matter. While the lower classes must make do with cramped, ramshackle homes patched up by successive generations but still long overdue for demolition, those with money rattle around in sprawling mansions that could comfortably house an entire street of peasants.

Even residential districts show the clear divide between those with wealth and power and those without. Lower class areas are unpaved, the narrow streets are

choked with garbage, stray animals roam freely, and water must be drawn from wells. In contrast, wealthier districts have wide avenues flanked by shady trees, water bubbles up from marble fountains, the paved roads are regularly swept, and undesirables are moved on so as not to lower the tone.

Government buildings follow the same general rule. As the heart of the Sultanate, official structures are built on a grand scale and with lavish ornamentation, a bold and very public statement of the Sultan's political authority—and all too often his spiritual corruption.

Major Locales

This section details locales inside the ancient city of Al-Wazir adventurers might wish to explore.

CITY DISTRICTS

Al-Wazir's main residential districts are largely geographically orientated. The middle classes reside in the center, with lower class area nearer the city walls. As a rule of thumb, the nearer one gets to the city walls, the worse the district becomes.

Craft: Like the souk, the craftsmen of Al-Wazir live on streets largely dedicated to a single craft. The buildings are both workshops (on the lower floor) and homes (on the upper floors).

A walled and guarded compound contains alchemical workshops in the service of the Sultan. Mages and clerics toil to produce a variety of offensive and defensive alchemical devices for the army. Access requires a permit from the Sultan, chief wizar, or head of the city guard.

Embassy: Situated next to the palace, this upper class area contains the embassies of the Caliphate and Free Emirates, and houses diplomats to the court from the Sultanate's other cities. Each building is considered to be part of the territory or city it represents—the laws and jurisdiction of Al-Wazir end at their perimeters. Forcing entry for any reason would be tantamount to an invasion, and would certainly lead to repercussions.

The area is patrolled day and night by the City Watch. Each ambassador and envoy maintains a private security force to protect his person, staff, and property.

Lower Docks: A misleading name to mariners coming from the sea (it lies north of the Upper Docks) the Lower Docks has smaller wharfs. Originally built for river barges, it was named because it handled lower class trade items, such as crops and livestock.

The tightly packed wharves and constant flow of traffic make maneuvering large vessels extremely difficult, and long delays are not unusual. Captains keen to berth or depart quickly can pay the city 250 dinars to have their ship towed into a berth or the main channel by a greater marid jinni. Legend has it Sinbad bound the jinni to service as a gift to the Sultan at the time.

The jinni doesn't really mind the workload (though it constantly moans about its sore back), but it has no wish to be reminded of its enforced servitude. Captains who disrespect the jinni may their ship "accidentally" smashed into a wharf or another vessel. City officials merely shrug if the damage is reported, claiming accidents happen and that perhaps fate will be kinder next time. Those who treat it politely or shower it with praise receive quick and efficient service.

Market: Al-Wazir's Great Souk lives up to its name. It is divided into quarters. The northern quarter (which abuts the Craft District) contains shops owned by local craftsmen. The western quarter specializes in raw materials and foodstuffs. The eastern quarter caters for middle class citizens, while the southern quarter has goods of lower quality.

There exists a hidden fifth quarter—the black market. Finding anything illegal in the souk takes time—customers are directed from shop to shop along circuitous routes, giving the criminals' agents (often beggars and children) time to tail the party and eavesdrop on their conversation so they can determine whether the strangers are genuine customers or the Sultan's spies.

Noble: For nobles unable to acquire a home inside the palace district, the next best thing is to reside in the Noble District, which borders the palace. Sprawling, multi-floor mansions with large gardens, ornamental fish ponds, and shaded courtyards surrounded by tall walls dominate the area. The city guard patrols here in force, moving on beggars and other undesirables with more force than is necessary.

Palace: The Sultan's grand palace, replete with marble spires and onion domes, is a fortress enclosing a miniature city. As well as the various offices of government, there are housing districts for bureaucrats, senior officers, wizens, and other important officials, private parks with water features, and barracks for the Palace Guard. The Pegasus Guard barracks and stables are also located here. Since pegasi need to stretch their wings, the soldiers sleep on the lower floors, while the stables are located on the large flat roof.

Slum: Al-Wazir has many poverty-stricken residential areas, but the worst is the Slum District. A warren of covered alleyways, the stench of rotting animals, unwashed bodies, and disease assails the nostrils like a physical blow. Begging is the accepted way of life, as is mugging anyone the locals think they could take in a fight. Like rats fighting over scraps, the inhabitants are just as likely to rob or murder each other as strangers. Locals know it as the Pit—once you've fallen in, you can't get out.

Sultan's Dock: This artificial harbor is reserved for the navy, the Sultan's private vessels, and ships carrying visiting dignitaries. A heavy chain is attached by windlasses at each end of the channel leading to the harbor. It can be raised or lowered in 30 minutes to prevent vessels from entering or leaving.

University: Home to the city's main library and its universities. The district is bordered by cheap student housing. A number of papyrus and ink sellers have set

up shops in the district, so as to be nearer their main customer base.

Upper Docks: Closest to the sea and with wide wharfs, the Upper Dock is the city's main port district. Purpose-built for large trading ships, it can handle up to 50 vessels at the same time.

Warehouse: The Warehouse District dominates the western most part of the city and stretches along the entire city wall. The warehouses are arranged in orderly square blocks facing onto wide roads. While the city watch patrols here, they are primarily interested in protecting warehouses whose owners have bribed them. Those who refuse to bow to corruption hire private guards to watch over their property.

CITY LOCALES

Al-Wazir Royal Military Academy: For the rich, there is the Al-Wazir Military Academy. Spaces are limited, and both money and influence are essential to securing enrolment. Most of Al-Wazir's officer corps and many those holding high rank in the armies of the other major cities have studied at the illustrious academy at some time.

Full-time students must spend three years in the Sultan's army after completing their course, but begin their careers as sergeants (or captains if they pass with honors). Those who undertake shorter courses (such as player characters) must complete a military tour equal to double the number of months spent in class. Such pupils are usually seconded to the Sultan's Hands.

The Military Academy also runs the Al-Waziran School of Artillery and Fortifications, which trains artillerists and siege engineers. Serving and trainee officers who want to learn the nuances of siege warfare or command artillery detachments are cross-trained here.

Officer Skills: Knowledge (Battle); **Edges:** All Leadership Edges except Siege Breaker and Siege Mentality.

Artillery Skills: Knowledge (Siege Artillery); **Edges:** Siege Breaker, Siege Engineer (see *Hellfrost: Rassilon Expansion*), and Siege Mentality.

Avenue of Broken Dreams: Al-Wazir has its fair share of hashish dens, taverns, brothels, and gambling halls, but the Avenue of Broken Dreams (also known as Damnation Alley) boasts the largest concentration. While some establishments on the fringes cater to high class clients, most are wretched places, frequented by those with nothing left to lose (not even hope). Some come here to forget their woes. Many have forgotten their names.

Several corrupt nobles and three of the four thieves' guild have tried to muscle in the lucrative businesses. Unfortunately for them, the various dens are controlled by the cult of Tamarni.

City Walls: Besieged more than once during the Wars of Religion, Al-Wazir's walls have been patched up and strengthened over the centuries. It is surrounded on all sides by walls 40 feet high and 30 feet thick. The bottom of the walls slopes, so as to deflect rams. Guard towers (50 feet high) are posted every 100 yards. In between these are firing platforms mounting a brace of ballistas.

The towers double as barracks. Each one holds a half-company of infantry and a quarter-company of archers, as well as four artillerists. The latter are not members of the artillery battalion. Rather, they are common soldiers trained to a basic level (in theory they will be firing at massed ranks) or trainees from the Military Academy.

A previous Sultan once vowed the city would burn before it fell. To that end, he ordered that the ballistas only be loaded with incendiary *blast* bolts. Times have changed, but the order has never been rescinded.

Embassy of the Caliphate: In order that no misunderstanding lead to another war, the Caliphate has an embassy in Al-Wazir. The current ambassador is Sirdara Yasmin bint Bisar, an experienced diplomat despite her youth and cleric of Isimud, minor deity of communication (see *Realm Guide #10: The Plains of Ash*). The embassy is not there to help visiting natives of the Caliphate who get into trouble. Its function is to increase economic ties and smooth over any misunderstandings that occur along the border or in the neutral zone south of Suleiman's Road.

Though she is loathe to admit it, Yasmin is falling in love with the young Sultan. Wizir Makin, a keen judge of character and not without spies in the embassy, knows of her romantic interest. Rather than trying to thwart it, he is actually doing everything he can to encourage it. Were the Sultan to marry a Faithful, either she would have to convert (unlikely, seeing how she has taken holy orders) or the Sultan would be forced to abdicate (as laid down in an ancient and immutable law designed to prevent a Faithful ever sitting on the throne).

Embassy of the Emirates: Though remote from the Sultante, the Free Emirate States are keen to maintain good trade relations. The ambassador is Pasha Akram ibn Nibras, a Devoted resident of Maqneh, City of Peace.

Akram has served in the post for ten years and has written home several times to be relieved of his duties. Every time he has been refused. It isn't that he's a great diplomat—it's simply that no one else wants the job. The Emirates and the Sultan know full well that trade is never going to stop flowing, especially with the exotic market of Rassilon now open. Being assigned as ambassador to Al-Wazir is not a promotion.

With little to do at court, Akram spends his days drinking in various taverns and telling tales of his homeland. He's make a fine contact for heroes planning on visiting the Emirates, if they can sober him up.

The Fabulous Bakir Brothers' Kitchen: Jointly run by Hana'i and Tamir ibn Bakir, the Kitchen is a popular eatery and take-away, and the headquarters for a catering business. The brothers are master chefs, and cater feasts for the rich and famous (for a price). Such is their skill at turning simple ingredients into a lavish feast that residents only half joke when they say the pair could make a meal out of a rotten donkey and a bag of sour apples.

Their prices are high (5 dirhams for a cheap meal, 2 dinars for an average meal, and 12 dinars for an expensive meal), but no one ever complains about the cost.

Gates: Al-Wazir has six gates—the Jinn Gate (north), Pilgrims Gate (northeast), Desert Gate (east), Sultan's

Gate (south), Upper Docks (southwest) and Lower Docks (west). The gates and gate houses are imposing structures, designed to convey the authority and majesty of the Sultan to visitors. Each gate actually comprises two pairs of doors divided by a wall. The left gate is for traffic entering the city, and the right gate for those leaving.

The Jinn, Pilgrims, Desert, Sultan's gates are open from dawn to dusk. The dock gates remain open day and night, but security is doubled at night.

Protecting the gates falls to the army, not the watch. The towers flanking each gate hold a half-company of soldiers, though only a single shuf is on duty at each separate gate. A small army of customs officers and tax collectors is ever-present when the gates are open.

Harbor Master's Office: While each dock has a government official handling day-to-day affairs, overseeing all nautical aspects of the city is Wakil Sirdar ibn 'Abidin. Managing a busy port is hard enough under normal conditions, but Al-Wazir has a problem.

In the last few months several ships drifted into harbor utterly devoid of crew, but with their valuable cargoes intact. Wakil Sirdar has managed to stop news leaking to the general populace, and the ships are safely moored in the Sultan's Dock. All he needs now is someone willing to investigate the cause of the crews' disappearances.

Hilmi's Sculptors: Hilmi ibn Lu'ay is one of Al-Wazir's most renowned sculptors, famed for his amazingly life-like statues. Hilmi is actually an extremely poor artisan. His brilliance is the product of a medusa chained up in his basement. Several people have learned the terrible truth behind his works over the years, but he has no fear of them talking. They currently adorn the private gardens of the nobility.

The Jinn Market: Outsiders may have a hard time learning of the Jinn Market. It isn't involved in the black market, its location isn't a closely guarded, and it isn't even hard to find once you have directions. Few locals can afford to shop there (even if they can overcome their innate fear at dealing with a jinni), so they simply don't talk about it. Since it doesn't crop up in conversation, outsiders tend not to hear of it.

The store lies behind a plain wooden door in the Great Souk. No sign proclaims its purpose, nor does it have a large open front displaying wares. Stepping inside (the door is never locked—anyone who steals from the shop finds they cannot leave by any means) brings one not into a cramped shop, as the exterior suggests, but a vast warehouse stocked full of curiosities, exotic items from across the planet, items crafted in Jinnistan, and even trivial relics (such a sword that cannot be disarmed).

The Jinn Market is an extra-dimensional space created, owned, and operated by Effendi Asilah bint Abdul-Tawwab, Sovereign of Silkiness, Fountain of Hospitality, and Daughter of Generosity, a greater khamsin. She escaped Suleiman's wrath by vowing to become a citizen of whatever realm Suleiman founded and to answer to mortal authority. That was 500 years ago, and she has been true to her word. She takes the form of an attractive human maiden and wears flowing silk robes. Patrons are

THE JINN MARKET

The Jinn Market exists to allow the GM to divest the heroes of their hard-earned dinars. It also allows him to create weird and wonderful, and sometimes practical, items. Most should be designed as exotic gifts or household items, or leave the heroes pondering how best to use them, rather than objects obviously created for adventuring. The only strict rule the GM should follow is not to hand out relics like candy. A +1 dagger should cost many thousands of dinars, and a wand, even one containing a Novice spell, should bankrupt someone with the Filthy Rich Edge. So what sort of things might exist? Here are some examples.

- * An ifrit's horse. Just like a normal mount, but it has +2 Pace, the Elemental special ability, and hooves that burst into flame when it gallops.
- * A one pint capacity clay flask created by majin jinn. Any item placed inside stays the same temperature as when it was poured into the flask, regardless of how much time passes. Handy for storing ice.
- * A katana from the Jade Empire, with wingless dragons engraved along the blade.
- * A nightingale construct that sings a beautiful tune on command. Not much use in a fight, but very handy if the buyer is seeking a wife or a gift for a powerful lord.
- * A weapon forged in the fires of Jinnistan. Functions like a regular weapon of the same type, but it cannot be broken except by magic.
- * A copy of the *Hamad* written in the flowing script of the jinn. Under the light of the moon, the letters glow silver.
- * A silk kimono. Might start a new fashion trend.
- * Colored glassware that is as light and thin as paper yet as strong as steel.
- * A set of clothes cut in the Al-Waziran style that stay clean no matter what the wearer does. They are not waterproof, but they dry out and shed the toughest stains with a vigorous shake.
- * A glass jar containing the burp, laugh, or fart of a greater khamsin. Good for one use only.
- * An ivory pipe that gives tabac whatever flavor the smoker desires. Doesn't change the substance, just the flavor and aroma of the smoke.
- * The Al-Shirkuh equivalent of a lava lamp. Powered by oil placed in the bottom.
- * A glass eye that functions as a living eye when placed in an empty socket. Good for removing the One Eye Hindrance.
- * A pot containing a greater ifrit's voice. Not much use unless you meet an ifrit who has lost its voice.
- * Coins minted in Jinnistan.
- * A map showing a lost city as it was in its heyday.
- * A monkey that can play chess or backgammon with the skill of a grand master.

invited to refresh themselves with glasses of hot mint tea and a selection of succulent fruit and sweetmeats while they browse the miles of shelves.

Everything in stock is for sale, though prices are extremely high (especially for relics). Asilah does not haggle—if a mortal can find the exact same item elsewhere for less, she will match the price. Given the rarity of the stock, this has never happened.

Asilah may be a powerful greater jinni, but she considers herself a businesswoman and a servant of the Sultan. She pays her taxes in full and on time.

University of Noble Servitude: Power and influence come in many forms. For those not born of noble blood, the next best thing is to find employment as an important servant. The University of Noble Servitude specializes in heraldry (important for ambassadors and heralds) and stewardship (providing a pupil with the basic knowledge he needs to run a noble's estates or businesses).

Skills: Knowledge (Heraldry), Knowledge (Stewardship); **Edges:** Scholar (the +2 bonus must be applied to Heraldry and Stewardship).

University of the Pen & Scroll: Life as a civil servant may not seem glamorous, but it promises steady employment and a chance for social promotion. The University of the Pen and Scroll trains scribes, translators, accountants, and judges, among other professions.

Skills: Knowledge (Law); **Languages:** Teaches all.

THAMARAH

Population: 465

Ruler: Satrap Athil ibn Ward

Imports: None of note

Exports: Grain, vegetables

Thirty-five miles upriver, on the extreme of Al-Wazir's municipal reach, is the agricultural village of Thamarah. The inhabitants are little better than slaves. Satrap Athil makes them work long hours in the fields for little money and encourages them with liberal use of the lash. A long day's march away (no river traffic routinely stops here) is the capital of the Sultanate, and yet no one has managed to alert the authorities to the brutality. Escape has proven impossible thanks to the satrap's personal guard—20 gorillas. Anyone fleeing is mercilessly hunted down and bludgeoned to death by the fearsome creatures.

PERSONS OF NOTE

GUTGUK

A mangy sand goblin resident of the Slums, Gutguk earns a living as a beggar in and around lower class parts of the city. For those seeking assistance, he is much more. Sick of bullies picking on the weak, and figuring it wouldn't count as real work (something he loathes), Gutguk became an Unfortunate Soul. He has built up an extensive network of informants across the city (made

up of people he has helped in the past). He is also a master at wielding the quarterstaff.

MOTHER WID

The bent and frail figure of Mother Wid is well known to Al-Wazirans. Respected across all social strata, she has devoted her entire life to tending for the city's orphans. She relies on the charity of others to keep the waifs and strays fed and secure. To make ends meet, the children are sometimes sent out to work. For a few dinars a gang of urchins will sweep your yard or whitewash your house. All very encouraging and good for the soul.

Mother Wid is actually a devious old crone with a black heart full of spite and greed. She is the guild master of the Cutters, and the orphans are her thieves. Many go on to join the other thieves' guilds when they are thrown out of the orphanage at the age of 12.

TARIQ THE SLAVER

Tariq runs the slave market. He secured the contract to handle all legal slavery auctions in the city with a hefty bribe. Even with Wizir Makin's corruption and harsh sentencing by judges in his pocket, there are never enough slaves to satisfy the demand, especially to the distant mines. In order to keep his less than honest clients in slaves, Tariq has taken to kidnapping people from the streets and their homes

YAKOOTAH BINT MUSLIH

Until six weeks ago Yakootah was a junior scribe in one of Al-Wazir's many bureaucratic offices. An avid lover of puzzles and ciphers, she made the mistake of translating a letter addressed to Wizir Makin Many-Eyes, figuring it was a routine missive. She never got as far as finishing it before her superior unexpectedly called her away, but what she saw implied the wizir was involved in some sort of plot against the Sultan. When she returned, the message and her partial translation were gone.

Feigning sudden illness, she headed straight home. She reached the end of her street just in time to see four burly men banging on the door of her house. Fearful she was being hunted by the wizir's agent already, she quickly decided to go into hiding. Disguised as a beggar, she has lived on the streets ever since.

Yakootah wants nothing more than to leave the city as quickly as possible. She knows her chances of survival are slim if she stays, and she would never be able to gain audience with the Sultan so as to warn him of the viper in his court. Fear prevents her from just walking out of the gates. What she needs are trustworthy strangers willing to smuggle her out of Al-Wazir.

Yakootah is unduly paranoid. Makin doesn't suspect her of anything, and even if he did, it's the word of a lowly scribe clearly suffering from delusions against his. The four men at her house were out-of-town mercenaries looking for a friend. They had the wrong address.

BALYANA

City of Reflection

Balyana, City of Reflection, is mirroring the corruption of its emir. By day it remains a vibrant city of skilled artisans famed throughout Al-Shirkuh for the quality of their colorful glassware. As darkness falls, a pall of fear shrouds its inhabitants' hearts. People have been disappearing, shadowy creatures creep along the narrow alleys, and strange noises echo through deserted streets.

Social Hierarchy

Since Balyana was founded, primogeniture has been the standard method for succession to the emir's throne. When the incumbent dies without issue, any blood relative may nominate him or herself as successor. The final decision is made by a council of nobles. Money tends to buy votes far better than a talent for governance or being the closest relative. During the time the throne is vacant, the chief wizar acts as regent.

Emir Nadhir, the only child of the previous emir, has ruled for 23 years. Much of his early life was spent indulging his interest in ancient Hekata, and he was rarely at his father's side. This, coupled with his excessive vanity, did nothing to endear him to the people he would later rule. Ironically, it was his foray into the darker aspects of khem-hekau that turned public opinion in his favor. Within a few short years of becoming emir his flesh began to wither as his heart turned black, forcing him to don his trademark gloves and mirrored mask.

No one suspects the emir is studying to becoming a lich. Pretty much the only rumor on everyone's lips is he contracted a disease that has left him physically scared. Not everyone is sympathetic. The emir's vanity was legendary, and the spiritual corruption he must surely have suffered has obviously manifested in his flesh.

Emir Nadhir is rarely seen in public, and is frequently absent at court. His studies are at a critical stage, and he has little time for, or interest in, mundane activities. Despite his absence, his popularity remains high. Much of this is due to his chief wizar, Ahmose Pasha ibn Ibana, a wizar counselor mage. Ahmose maintains the illusion Nadhir is still actively engaged in running the city, passing laws and increasing its prosperity despite his illness. In truth, Ahmose handles most of the daily business required of his master. Nadhir's change in temperament has not gone unnoticed by the wizar. Of old he was often distant, lost in thought about Hekata, but he was just and level headed. Now he is prone to sudden rages, making arbitrary judgments, and hiding himself away in his private apartments for months on end.

Balyana's nobility fall into two categories. The old families are those who can trace their titles back over many generations. Haughty and proud, and unwilling to taint their purity by marrying commoners, their glory days are distant memories. Eclipsing them in vitality, and often in wealth, are the new families. Ever since glassware became the city's dominant trade, the emirs have rewarded skilled artisans. If three generations of master artisans in the same family are awarded honor titles in recognition of their talents, the title automatically transfers to a hereditary one. The family no longer needs to continue as glassblowers. Many go on to own prosperous workshops, rather than work in them.

After five generations as a new family, and so long as they have displayed the education and social skills, and have avoided marrying common stock, they are reclassified as an old family—the truly old families need new stock of suitable social class to marry into to prevent them becoming inbred.

In the eyes of the people, glassblowers are accorded more respect than their social peers. Having yet to truly learn anything of the art, apprentices (d4 skill) are *bara-jam*. Journeymen (d6) rank among the *jaleeepa*. Senior journeymen (d8) number among the *shabrum*, while masters (d10+) are members of the *mak-sharum* or *bat-tim* (having earned an honor title).

Education

General education is not as highly prized as securing a glassblowing apprenticeship. Because glassblowing is absolutely vital to Balyana's continued prosperity, basic techniques common to the craft across Al-Shirkuh form part of every child's basic education. Those who display the required level of skill compete at the end of their schooling to be taken on by one of the master artisans. Competition is fierce, as each master takes just one apprentice a year. Exceptional students may be fortunate enough to have more than one master interested in teaching them. This bodes especially well for the child's family, as money is offered to his parents in a bid to sway his decision. For those not chosen but who still desire to make their name and fortune as a glassblower, there is an alternate route into the industry—university.

Balyana has four universities. Two are devoted to general advanced education. The most prestigious university is the Balyana School of Glass, an educational establishment dedicated entirely to the art of glassblowing. The new newest university is the School of Hekatic Studies.

RULES OF THE REALM

The following setting rules apply in Balyana.

* **Cheap Goods:** Due to the number of craftsmen involved in glass production and the cheap cost of raw glass corrective lenses cost 25 dinars, glass flasks 3 dinars, goggles 10 dinars, and sandglasses 12 dinars in Balyana.

* **Fearful Aura:** Anyone who goes onto the streets after dusk must make a Spirit roll or suffer the effects of Fear until dawn.

* **Native Heroes:** Heroes born in Balyana who have Smarts d6+ can take Knowledge (Craft: Glassblowing) d6 for the cost of one skill point during character generation.

* **Respected Craft:** Glassblowers are highly respected in Balyana. Characters with Knowledge (Craft: Glassblowing) d8 gain +1 Charisma while in the city and dealing with its inhabitants, irrespective of gender, creed, race, culture, or homeland. Those with the skill at d12+ gain +2 Charisma.

These modifiers do not stack with those from the Noble Edge unless the emir has awarded the character honor noble status for his talents—the ancestors of true nobles, those from old or new families, may once have been master artisans, but having earned a blood title they are expected to be above performing manual work (except as a hobby).

Religion

Though founded during the height of the religious wars, Balyana played no major part in the conflicts. The fighting was too distant to affect their lives, and many had moved here to escape the fanatical Sultans who ruled during this time. Devoted and Faithful were fully integrated into society since before the wars ended.

Balyana city has three temples. The smallest is located in the Glass District and is sacred to Qedeshet's aspect of invention. Skill, not faith, makes an artisan, and the cult has devoted its resources to producing more efficient ways of melting sand and inventing new techniques for coloring and blowing glass. Its discoveries are passed on only through classes at the Balyana School of Glass.

Technically, the cult is sworn to teach its techniques to any who asks—Qedeshet demands knowledge be spread. An emir of old passed a law requiring the clerics to teach only those enrolled in the school as a means of preventing outsiders from learning the secrets of Balyana's glassblowers and attempting to compete with them. To protect the clerics from being forced to sin, he also made asking a cleric of Qedeshet to reveal his glassblowing knowledge a serious moral sin. The punishment is five years as a slave cutting glass in the Mirrorsands.

The second largest temple, sanctified to Geb-Agni, is also in the Glass District. The priests are all involved in

melting or blowing glass, while the paladins act as an officially sanctioned police force within the district. Their duty is not to enforce common laws, but to protect the artisans and their secrets from outsiders.

The largest temple is located in the largest middle class residential district. It is dedicated to all the remaining benevolent gods, and the wider aspects of Geb-Agni and Qedeshet. The recent fear gripping the city has boosted the cult of Shamash's income—citizens of both creeds are finding succor where they can by purchasing charms and blessings intended to ward off evil.

There is a darker side to religion in Balyana. Whether invited here by the emir in order that he might learn from or drawn here by his corruption, cults worshipping the demon lords have infiltrated the city. The cult of Iblis has not been idle, either. A small temple is concealed in one of the lower class residential districts.

The emir is also the high priest of the Cult of Eternity. A small sect whose clerics have no miracles, it serves in part to help the emir delve deeper into the mysteries of necromancy. It's also something of a cult of ego, for the followers have elevated the emir to the status of a living demigod. Although among equally tainted souls skilled in the dark arts, the emir hides his true identity from his followers simply by not wearing his gloves and mask. Such are the physical changes he has suffered that the vain young nobleman of old is unrecognizable.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Day of Colored Light: Held on Amt Yaus al-Hamala Tamith Alak Shemu, this day is honored by both creeds.

Any craftsman who owns his own workshop may submit a single piece crafted in the year since the last festival for judging. The finished items are displayed in the main square during the day under the watchful eyes of Geb-Agni's paladins (to prevent "accidents"). An hour or so before dusk, the emir arrives to view the pieces. As the call to evening prayers begins, he decides which artisan has produced the best work this year.

Despite his desire to work on his immortality, Emir Nadhir still makes an appearance every year—failing to do so would invite rumors of his impending death or his lack of interest in the artisans of Balyana.

The winner is awarded the contract to supply all the palace's glassware for the next year. Such an honor involves a lot of work, but guarantees a sizeable income. It also guarantees city-wide, and lasting, recognition. The winner is also awarded the honor title effendi. Should he win again another year, that increases to pasha. A third win earns him the highest honor title possible—sirdar.

Military

For its size and wealth, Balyana maintains only a modest army. While it might lack numbers, the army is well-trained, well-equipped, and highly motivated.

ARMY

Balyana's main army strength stands at a single regiment of infantry and one battalion of cavalry, equivalent to just under 2% of its population. The infantry comprises one double-battalion of medium infantry, one battalion of light infantry, one double-company of heavy infantry, and one double-company of archers. The cavalry has one double-company of light cavalry and one of heavy.

The army is garrisoned outside the city, protecting the farms and quartz sand quarries. A large fort sits on the western edge of the city's jurisdiction. As well as holding soldiers, it serves as a secure caravanserai for caravans loaded with Mirrorsands glass. Although the territory between there and the Al-Mosk Caravanserai is the domain of the Sultan, Balyana's cavalry routinely conduct long-range patrols in strength to keep orcs and bandits from growing too numerous. The Sultan is suitably compensated with expensive glass for this breach of protocol.

A force of 30 Pegasus Guard have barracks at the fort. They conduct aerial reconnaissance for the cavalry patrols, and secretly spy on the emir's army to make sure it does not try to extend its reach further than agreed.

Responsibility for protecting the city on a daily basis lies with the palace guard (a double-company) and the City Guard (a battalion).

The palace guards are known as the Spears of Light due to the hardened glass tips on their ceremonial spears. One quarter-company has recently been selected to serve as the emir's personal bodyguards, a duty they share with no one else. Clad in masks and gloves in the fashion of their lord, and wearing black uniforms and ash gray cloaks, they are colloquially known as the Black Guard. Their presence at the emir's side is intimidating, but Wizar Ahmose has assured the people they are merely showing solidarity with their lord.

The City Guard mans the gates and watchtowers. Morale is high thanks to the decent wages and light (but tedious) duties, but none of its members are seasoned warriors. Whether they would stand and fight an invader, even from behind the fortifications, is yet to be tested.

Were the city ever to be invaded, the emir could call upon the Mirrorsands Legion. The grand title describes a force of 50 magically hardened glass golems (see p. 35, but add Armor +2 and change Toughness to 9(2)). They are stored in the armory within the palace.

NAVY

Once a sizeable force, Balyana's navy has, ironically, declined in strength as trading increased. Eager to increase revenues, successive emirs turned much of the harbor to civilian use. Had they possessed an ounce of foresight, they might have put the trade revenue to good use by constructing a naval yard further along the coast. Instead, they left Balyana with just five warships to its name. Visiting ships seeking an escort into Balyana's harbor are forced to rely on mercenary vessels and the navies of other great cities.

Law & Order

The City of Reflection is living up to its name. As the emir continues down the path to spiritual damnation, so his corruption is being reflected in the city.

Fear grips the city at night. Citizens have reported hearing unwholesome noises, spotting strange shadows flitting beneath the lanterns, and smelling noisome odors. The city watch has investigated dozens of reports and discovered nothing untoward. What scares people most are the rising number of disappearances. Citizens talk openly of slavers operating in the city. Lurking in the sewers and darkest corners of the slums are a small number of ghûls. Created by the emir as part of his early experiments into immortality, they were cast into the sewers. Tired of feasting on rats (Balyana's sewers are now remarkably rat free), their hunger has driven them to search for meals on the streets.

Patrolling the streets are the men and women of the City Watch. A mere 400 strong, they are divided into four watches, each working a six-hour shift. By day they are confident and attentive. Daytime patrols comprise five men, with around half the watch actually on the streets at any time. As the sun sets, the mood of the watch changes. Nighttime patrols are double strength, but even then the evening watch is loathe to venture away from streets illuminated by lanterns. Those unlucky enough to be assigned to the night shift quietly huddle around flickering lamps and silently pray for dawn, leaving the citizens to fend for themselves.

Fortunately, help is at hand. The cult of Shamash has voluntarily agreed to police the city by night. The city has only a small number of clerics, and a patrol comprises just one priest or paladin and a handful of novitiates. Their strength lies with their miraculous powers—even novices know *light*.

As well at the Watch, there is one other official police force operating in the city. Paladins of Geb-Agni, as noted elsewhere, are responsible for policing the Glass District. Their total strength is 150, but only 30 are full paladins—the rest are novitiates yet to take their full holy vows and *fadeen*, militant laity who serve the cults in much the same way as soldiers serve the nobility. Locals refer to them as the Glass Watch.

In recent years, the emir has ordered the courts to impose slavery in place of the death penalty (an act that upset the population) as well as for less serious offenses (which pleased the people). Instead of going to public auction, slaves are sent to the distant glass quarries or to work in the sand quarries. At least they are on paper. More than half those convicted end up as experimental subjects for the emir's black magic.

Though he initially sought immortality to preserve his looks for eternity, the emir's research into forbidden lore and the degeneration of his physical form has warped his mind. Now he wants to rule Balyana forever. In order that the people come to accept this, he needs an army

whose loyalty cannot be doubted. Many “slaves” are destined to become skeletons and zombies. Some go insane from their captivity in the secret dungeon the undead have excavated beneath the palace. Others perish as test subjects for offensive spells or on the altar in rites conducted by the cult of Apophis.

In much the same way that glassblowers have come to monopolize trade, so a single thieves’ guild—the Fragile Hold—runs the city’s underworld. They control everything from smuggling to hashish dens to common robbery and burglary. Several thieves have recently vanished. The Hold’s guildmaster suspects a rival gang may be attempting to carve out an empire by using the disappearances of other citizens to eliminate competition.

Trade & Tribute

Glassware isn’t Balyana’s only export, but it’s the only one of any great note. Such is its importance, and the number of artisans practicing the craft, that the city has an entire district devoted solely to all aspects of glass and glassware production. Two very distinct types of glassware are blown.

Commonware is the most basic, as its name suggests. The glass is formed of quartz sand quarried locally. While it can be colored and worked into beautiful shapes, it has natural impurities. Commonware makes up the majority of trade goods and glassware sold in the market.

Highware is made of glass cut from the Mirrorsands. Heavily-laden caravans travel south along the Road of Gods and east along Suleiman’s Road. At the Al-Mosk Caravanserai they cut straight across the hills to Balyana. By law, Mirrorsands glass can only be sold to the city bureaucracy. Attempting to sell it directly to glassblowers is a serious crime. Once in the city, the sheets of pure glass are melted and formed into small spheres of equal size and weight ready to be sold to the glassblowers. Highware derives its name from its superior quality and the price of finished goods.

While merchants are responsible for selling glassware to visiting traders, it is a council made up of master glassblowers (the Guild) who set the prices for buyers and sellers. As a result, the glassblowers have grown wealthy. Their prices and tariffs must be agreed by the emir each year, but this is a matter of formality.

The Guild imposes heavy fines on any glassblower making poor quality glassware. Should that fail to correct any “manufacturing errors,” the Guild has the legal authority to ban the glassblower from operating in the city. Bans range from a few months to a lifetime.

Balyana’s other major export is rice. Originally imported from the Jade Empire as a luxury food, the farmers of the City of Reflection have been growing it locally for several generations. Well-irrigated paddy fields line both banks of the slow-moving River Allit, and rice now forms a major part of the staple diet.

Much of the brown rice (which keeps for around a

year) ends up eaten locally or sold to the other cities. The white rice is prized by the Bedu. Kept dry and free of bugs, it lasts indefinitely. At the last check, Balyana has enough white rice stored in the city granaries to last for three years of poor harvests. The cult of Tamarni is paid to keep it free of vermin.

COINAGE

Every line of emirs has a few mad or bad rulers in it somewhere. During the early 4th century CJ, one of the emirs decided to abolish metal coins and introduce stamped glass disks whose values bore no relevance to their size or weight. The resulting chaos as visiting merchants were forced to exchange their coins for glass disks with of obvious value almost crippled the economy.

Today the City of Reflection uses quarter-dirham (a “Bead”), half-dirham (“Cup”), one dirham (“Bowl”), one dinar (“Plate”), and 20 dinar (“Vase”) coins. The names have no relevance to their modern purchasing power.

LOCAL TAXES

Thanks to the high trade tariffs on exports of glassware, Balyana’s residents pay one of the lowest income tax rates in the Sultanate. This does not mean everyone is rich—except for those involved in the glass industry, wages are also low.

Customs Duty: General imports carry a flat 2% levy. Imported glass sheets from the Mirrorsands are tax free (Balyana is keen to monopolize trade in the precious material). Mirrorsands glass may not be exported from Balyana, except in the form of highware. General exports carry a 1% levy, commonware 5%, and highware 10%. Other cities might produce glassware, but none compares to the quality of the glass of the City of Reflection, and the emir knows that.

Docking Fees: Balyana’s harbor is notoriously small. In order to ensure merchant vessels do not tarry long, ships are charged 50 dinars per day. This doubles each seven days a ship remains berthed. After 28 days, the ship is impounded until a further 2000 dinar fine is paid. If that remains unpaid after another 28 days, the ship and its cargo become the legal property of the city.

Excise Duty: Balyana is keen to keep every aspect of its glass industry local. Imports of quartz sand, raw glass, and glassware carry a 75% excise duty—high enough to make imports financially impractical.

Poll Tax: In return for 1 dinar a year, every citizen is given an identity tag. This enables them to avoid paying sales taxes on glassware.

Sales Tax: Weapons and armor are taxed at 5%, and other goods at 3%. Glassware sold in shops carries a 7% duty for visitors. Meals where rice is the main ingredient are not taxed—Balyana has rice to spare.

Tolls: Officially sanctioned caravans heading to the Mirrorsands or bringing the prized material into the city are charged nothing for using the city gates. Other traffic must pay 1 dirham per leg.

Architecture

Balyana is both cramped and airy. As the glass industry boomed and trade expanded, so residential districts were redesigned. With its small footprint, this resulted in rows of houses built around narrow streets and alleys. What stops them becoming stifling is the presence of glass. Instead of streets lined with plain walls broken only by narrow apertures, homes and businesses have large windows (coincidentally, this also spawned a growing curtain industry). Glass may be cheap, but there are still limits to how much one can afford. As a general rule, the more glass in a building, the richer the owner.

It is also a city where the division between old and new, poverty and wealth, is clearly evident. New civic buildings are constructed on a grand scale, a testament to the success of the glass trade. The increased wealth of glassblowers stands in stark contrast to that of other professions, and even the old nobility. Lack of room within the walls may limit their size, but their homes and businesses are grander in design and far better furnished.

Major Locales

Characters might be drawn to Balyana by its fabulous glassware, but there is more to the city than its crowded market and the chance to secure a bargain.

CITY DISTRICTS

Balyana's lower and middle class residential districts are loosely distributed in concentric circles. Near the city center (the harbor) are the homes of the lower class laborers and apprentices who work in the docks and neighboring districts. Further out are the middle class districts. Travel further toward the city walls and away from the heart of the city, and one once again finds oneself in lower class neighborhoods.

Caravan: Located inside the Glass Gate, this district caters to visiting caravans. Arranged around a large open plaza are several caravanserai, as well as small shops catering to a caravan's every need. When a caravan is present, the plaza becomes a miniature market, allowing the locals to purchase foreign wares.

Craft District: Craftsmen not involved in the manufacture of glass have their workshops and homes to the north of the Caravan District. The district houses caters for everybody from tanners (very lower class) to goldsmiths (middle class). The middle classes mainly live in the east, close to the Merchant District.

Glass District: The powerhouse of Balyana's industry, strangers to the city can always tell when they've entered it by the heat, the cloud of smoke hanging constantly in the air, and the fact that there are no industries other than glass production and glassblowing. There are

GLASS GOLEMS

The normal process of creating these unusual golems requires sticking thousands of glass shard together to form a humanoid shape. Because of this complexity, glass golems are always created as man-sized or slightly smaller. Their arms end in stumps onto which long slivers of razor sharp glass are glued.

Less complex versions are more anthropomorphic, and lack both the Death Shatter and Slash special abilities. They have Strength d10, however, and use a Slam (Str) attack.

As well as guardians, they are used as mobile works of art by those with money to waste.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Arcane Resistance:** +2 Armor against damage causing arcane powers and +2 on Trait rolls to resist opposed powers, except those with a sound trapping.

* **Construct:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.

* **Death Shatter:** A slain glass golem shatters into myriad razor sharp shards filling a Medium Burst Template. All creatures in the template suffer 2d6 damage. This is an area effect attack.

* **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.

* **Slash:** Str+d8.

* **Susceptibility (Blunt):** Glass golems take double damage from blunt weapons, such as clubs, hammers, and maces, as well as spells with blunt trapping.

* **Susceptibility (Sound):** Glass golems suffer +4 damage from spells with a sound trapping.

no shops selling glassware, and strangers peering into workshops or asking questions concerning glassblowing techniques are quickly reported to the Glass Watch.

The Balyana School of Glass, the underground temple to Geb-Agni, and the Mirrorsands Warehouse are the most important buildings in the district.

Government District: Their coffer swelled by trade money, the emirs moved all lesser government functions from the palace into a specific district. Everything from the courts to the census bureau has offices here, as do many bureaucrats and scribes.

Harbor District: Balyana actually sits ten miles inland of the River Allit. In order that it might have a working dock, a canal was cut. This leads to a circular harbor within the city. Unfortunately, the city has grown around it to the extent that it cannot be expanded.

Land of Fire Realm Guide #19

Market: Dominated by the Shining Souk, the Market District houses most of the city's shops.

Merchant: Balyana's merchant families are sandwiched between the Caravan and Market Districts. Richer merchants only have offices here, while middle class ones both live and work in the district.

New District: Balyana is protected by strong defensive walls. As the population grew, living space became limited. In order to relieve the pressure, a new district was created outside the southern city wall. Over time, the city walls were extended to protect the inhabitants, though the original walls were not dismantled. Originally a mix of middle and lower class housing, New District has become the home of the poorest citizens. Its streets are narrow and houses are built up against each other.

Palace: Aside from the homes and offices of the most senior government and military officials, the palace has no governmental buildings or offices. The palace is actually reasonably sized—much of the ground is taken up by ornamental gardens.

With no wife, no children, and no harem to accommodate, much of the palace is deserted. Large parts have not been used in generations, and some sections are now sealed off to members of the court. Hidden here are the emir's private alchemical laboratory, museum of Hekatic artifacts, library of magical texts, and such like. All are dedicated to the art of khem-hekau.

The former courthouse now houses the School of Hekatic Studies, and the nearby barracks are living accommodation for students and faculty.

Rich Quarter: The homes of the rich don't take up a quarter of the city, and the rich definitely have more than 25% of the city's wealth. The district has always carried the name, and no one feels it needs changing. It contains the homes of the city's elite—the old families, the new families, and the wealthier upper class.

Warehouse: Built on the southern edge of the harbor are the warehouses of the merchant families. In order to facilitate traffic to and from ships on the northern and eastern side of the harbor, a wide circular avenue runs from here around the entire length of the harbor, terminating in the Caravan District.

CITY LOCALES

Balyana School of Glass: For those who don't manage to find an apprenticeship to a master, the School of Glass offers an alternative way into the craft. Courses cover every aspect of glass manufacture and blowing.

Skills: Knowledge (Craft: Glassblowing).

Canal: Ten miles long and 30 yards wide, the canal is just big enough to accommodate two ships side by side. Since it leads directly into the heart of the city, two watchtowers were erected at the point the canal breaks the city walls, one either side of the watercourse. Heavy gates can be closed from within the structures to prevent ships from entering, and long, metal-tipped stakes can be winched off the canal floor to further impede progress. At night, two large braziers are lit atop the towers

as a signal to approaching ships. Locals refer to them as the Eyes of the Ifrit.

City Walls: Save for the narrow canal, Balyana is completely enclosed behind walls. Each gate house, even the New Gate, is garrisoned by a quarter-company of City Guards. The remainder are spread out in narrow towers along the length of the perimeter.

Atop the towers, spaced alternately, are a pair of ballistas or a single trebuchet. The guardsmen have only a limited knowledge of operating siege weaponry. Fortunately, that's all they need. While the former weapons fire mundane bolts, the latter launch alchemical projectiles—a cluster of small glass spheres imbued with potent area-effect spells. Each load contains ten spheres, a random mix of *blast*, *fear*, *prolonged blast*, and *stun* spells provided by the city's mages and clerics. The effect is quite devastating. At least it *looks* devastating—none have ever been launched in anger.

Customs Office: 'Anbarin Pashah bint Hijrah, head of the customs and excise department, is concerned. She knows the thieves' guild is receiving regular shipments of contraband, but she cannot fathom their point of entry. So far she has managed to keep the scale of smuggling hidden from the emir and his chief wizar. Were they to find out, she suspects her next career move will be to the glass quarries as a slave.

Unsure who in her own organization she can trust, and worried an underling might use her concerns to secure promotion by reporting her, what she needs are outsiders. Paid outsiders won't do—mercenaries can be bought by either side, and it means an official paper trail. Visitors arrested for minor customs and excise infringements, however, can likely be persuaded to investigate in return for having any charges dropped.

Gates: Balyana has three gates, though only two now lead outside the city. In the western wall, just north of the canal, is the Glass Gate. Caravan traffic heading to and from the Mirrorsands, shipments of quartz sand, and travelers heading into the lower reaches of the Sultanate on foot are the main traffic. In the northeast is the Upper Gate, named because it allows access to the upper Sultanate. The New Gate is in the southern wall, and leads only to the New District.

Each gate is open from dawn until dusk, and is manned by a Shuf of City Guard, along with customs inspectors and tax collectors. Technically the New Gate doesn't need manning, as it opens into another part of the city, but no emir has ever rescinded the order. One of the doors in the New Gate is closed at night to limit the flow of traffic, but the guard doesn't bother to post sentries.

The Glass Emir's Tomb: Every local knows the story of the Glass Emir, but no one takes it seriously. According to folklore, an emir of old had himself encased in a glass sarcophagus impregnated with gold dust. In order his flesh might not rot, and to avoid going against Devoted teachings, he had his veins injected with molten glass.

During the reign of his descendants, the sarcophagus was kept on display in the palace. It was removed to a

vault beneath the city when a new family ascended the throne. Since that time its location has been lost.

Golden Oasis Bathhouse: The Oasis, as it's commonly known, offers a full range of cleaning services—cold plunge polls, hot baths, massages, and a barber. The place is clean, the staff are polite, and the interior is tacky. Run by “Sheikh” Abu al Khayr ibn Mahfuz, a barber by trade, it is decorated to resemble his vision of a Bedu encampment. Sadly, Abu has never left the city. Visitors who know the Bedu find it amusing, but many Bedu find it insulting.

House of the Arcane: A registered business, this shop is concealed in a dark corner of the souk's Glass Quarter. It is owned and operated by three magicians—one jinn mage and two ushabti mages. The sand mage, a competent glassblower, specializes in the creation of alchemical items made of glass. Spells are worked into the object, requiring it to be broken for the magical energy to manifest. The ushabti mages are also glassblowers, but have turned their magical talents to the creation of glass golems that are both functional and beautiful.

The Memorial Stone Coffee House: This tall, granite obelisk stands outside a popular coffee house in what is now the Government District. No one knows for sure who erected it or when. The proprietor, Furat Brown-Teeth (so named because her teeth are heavily stained by the amount of coffee she drinks), tells customers who buy a steaming cup of the bitter liquid it was raised by an emir to commemorate the death of the owner of his favorite coffee house. Since the disappearances began, worried citizens have stuck descriptions of their missing loved ones to the stone.

The obelisk was actually raised by a corsair captain not long after Balyana was founded. Seeking somewhere safe to bury his haul of gems, he bought a house (now the coffee house) and hid his riches where his rivals would never think to look. He never returned to collect them.

The Mirrorsands Warehouse: Such is the reverence shown the contents that Devoted call it place the House of Glass and Faithful the Temple of Glass.

Raw sheets and spheres of Mirrorsands glass are stored here under tight security. The walls are extra thick, *glyphs* protect the reinforced doors, and the building is guarded day and night by paladins of Geb-Agni.

Each week, as the sun rises on Yaus al-Kemi, the city's licensed glassblowers come to the warehouse to bid for Mirrorsands spheres. The glass is expensive. Few glassblowers risk bidding unless they know they have the skill to turn it into something wonderful. The quantity of spheres sold each week is low, thus keeping the price of highware artificially high.

Nazri's Shop of Curiosities: Nazri sells knickknacks, oddities, and antiques from a dingy shop in the souk. He is also licensed by the city to trade in alchemical devices and spirit relics, despite not being a spellcaster. His stock is quite diverse thanks to his many contacts among the city's spellcasters.

He also pays very well for khem-hekau texts and spirit relics. Naturally he keeps this sideline quiet. Characters

WORKING FOR A LIVING

Land of Fire is a game about heroes, not merchants and shopkeepers. That said, characters who have invested points in a Knowledge (Craft) skill should be able to use it. Two options are given below. Note that neither is likely to make the average character rich, and it will certainly cramp his adventuring.

EMPLOYMENT

Sometimes the characters might need to rest up for a few weeks or months. Maybe a comrade is attending university or waiting for an audience with an emir. Characters with a Craft skill can find employment with a successful Streetwise roll made each week. The craftsman doesn't have to make the roll himself—any hero can try to find him work.

No die roll is required when working for someone else. Instead, the character is paid 5 dinars a week times his Knowledge (Craft) die type.

This assumes an 8 hour working day, seven days a week. Workers in Al-Shirkuh get four days off a month (the days of the new moon) and local holidays appropriate to their creed/cult.

A character with Knowledge (Craft: Jewelry) d6, for example, would earn 30 dinars a week, or 1560 dinars a year, before paying any taxes.

SELF-EMPLOYMENT

A character may craft items he can sell himself. Whether or not he can work his art away from a settlement depends on the nature of his craft, and is left to the GM to determine. For instance, a potter can construct a rudimentary kiln from mud or sand, but making a complete forge to work iron to any degree of skill while in the desert is unlikely.

At the end of each working week (as explained above), he makes an appropriate Knowledge (Craft) roll. Success gives him 25 dinars worth of common trade goods, and a raise 50 dinars worth.

This isn't much, and it certainly won't let the hero retire in luxury, but there are several limiting factors to what a single person can produce in a single week with rudimentary facilities.

The craftsman has to source and purchase raw materials (which are taxable). He likely lacks a full set of tools—few heroes are likely to be transporting a forge and anvil around on their camel, for instance—and space to work, forcing him to build or hire them. Without staff to complete basic and/or time-consuming tasks, his work takes time—pots have to be formed, fired, painted, and glazed; creating silver jewelry requires patience and precision; and daggers need to be forged, sharpened, and polished.

with contacts in the thieves' guild will be directed to him if they have such objects to sell. Nazri never sells these objects, no matter what price he is offered. A member of the Cult of Apophis, he hands them to his master (who supplies him with the funds to make the purchase).

Purifying Light Kada: The largest kada in Balyana is in the middle class residential district between the Glass and Noble Districts. Its impressive dome was constructed of Mirrorsands glass at enormous expense. Khamsin jinn are summoned whenever it needs cleaning and polishing. An oculus in the center of the dome magnifies the rays of the midday sun, projecting them onto a scorched patch on the marble floor. The imams say that standing in the beam removes spiritual corruption by purifying the flesh, and that only a man of pure spirit will suffer no physical harm.

School of Hekatic Studies: Funded by a very generous donation from the emir, and holding many artifacts from his private collection, the School of Hekatic Studies is devoted to all thing concerning the ancient land of Hekata. Some citizens question the decision to promote study, what with Hekata having a poor reputation in folklore. Since the emir's "illness" has removed his ability to travel to the remote land, most see it as a means of him being able to remind himself of better days.

The school contains a museum open to the public every Yaus al-Maat. The emir continues to supply new objects—his reputation for paying good prices for genuine artifacts is known across Al-Shirkuh.

The faculty is an eclectic mix. Scholars and sages work alongside storytellers and poets. Three clerics of Tam-muz lecture here part-time. They teach about its early days, and warn against the use of khem-hekau magic. Unbeknownst to them, two of the staff are black-hearted khem-hekau mages. Members of the Cult of Apophis appointed to their positions (so they think) by the machinations of their master, they are tasked with spotting students who take what others might call an unhealthy interest in Hekata's darker history and magical arts. Those who agree to join the cult may receive schooling in khem-hekau. Those who refuse are never seen again.

Special: Students must speak Hekatic before they can take a skill or Edge; *Skills:* Knowledge (Area: Hekata); *Edges:* Detailed Area Lore (Hekata); *Language:* Hekatic.

The Shining Souk: The souk has large glass panes in the roof, allowing sunlight to filter down into the narrow streets and alleys. Keeping them clean is a full-time job. One entire quarter is devoted to the sale of glassware. A long standing tradition means sellers of glassware do not haggle—the prices are cheap already, and to lower them risks not only retribution from the council but weakening the value of Balyana's primary commodity.

JUBALA

Population: 326

Ruler: Headman Dhul ibn Ghayth

Imports: Raw materials

Exports: Fish

Aside from rice, the residents of Balyana eat a lot of fish. Much of it comes from Jubala, a small village located a few miles downstream from the beginning of the canal. Fish and shellfish are gutted, packed in barrel of concentrated seawater, loaded onto narrow barges, and transported to the city's fishmongers. Life is hard and the place stinks, but the locals don't seem to mind.

Although the headman ultimately answers to the emir, the village is virtually autonomous. So long as the people pay their taxes, they can elect their own leader. The emir is informed of any change in government by a messenger, who brings with him word of the new headman's name and his pledge of allegiance. Part of the pledge requires the villagers to maintain and light two braziers that mark the canal entrance (lesser twins to the Eyes of the Ifrit).

One reason the local don't grumble much about their lot in life is that they're neck deep in smuggling goods into Balyana. Ships carrying contraband drop anchor in the night and ferry their cargoes to Jubala, where they are stashed in the fish barrels. No one has any reason to suspect the fishermen, and few guards and customs inspectors care to rifle through barrels of oily fish.

PERSONS OF NOTE

AMSAH FIRESKIN

A jinn mage specializing in fire, earth, and air, Amsah strove to develop new techniques that might let her use her magic to become a master glassblower, or perhaps create a jinn relic to aid existing ones. Unfortunately, her spell went awry. The glass she was melting exploded in the intense heat, showering her face with tiny molten droplets that burned into her flesh. Imbued with magical energy, the orange, red, and yellow droplets grafted to her bones, leaving her permanently disfigured. Amsah is searching for a cure.

RAY OF SHAMASH SHAMS AL DIN

A paladin of Shamash and native of Balyana, Shams al Din suspects that at least one evil cult is practicing in the city. The disappearances, the faint smell of corruption, the emir's fascination with accursed Hekata—they all point to there being evil afoot.

He has kept his suspicions from his superiors, though he has not yet sinned. Shams al Din has no idea how deep the cults' influence might go, or even if they actually exist. Until he has more proof, he dare not risk making accusations or having his peers go off on a zealous witch hunt that might lead to innocents being wrongly persecuted. The paladin is conducting his own investigations, thus (just) avoiding the sin of refusing to fight the forces of darkness. Sadly he lacks any real investigative skills, and has yet to make any real progress. What he really needs is help from good-hearted souls who don't live in the city and who don't follow Shamash.

JIRJA

City of Colors

Initially built as a military city to keep corsairs from troubling the northern coast, Jirja has evolved into an independent city famed for its powerful and well trained navy. It is also a city beloved by coffee drinkers and smokers, as well as followers of high fashion.

Social Hierarchy

Jirja's first rulers were military governors assigned by the Sultan, not hereditary nobles. The Sultans of the late 2nd century CJ were decadent and weak, and courtly intrigue was rife. Following the death of Sultan Muhsin, the court descended into chaos as rival factions fought for control. Taking advantage of the situation, the military governor declared himself emir of Jirja. The victor of the court battle was in no mood to test his navy against Jirja's, and promptly signed an order declaring he has elevated the governor to emir as a reward for his loyalty.

Since then, the incumbent has named his successor. More times than not the title has passed outside the family, usually to the city's grand admiral.

The current dynasty began with the incumbent emira's great-great-grandfather, a former grand admiral famed for his revolutionary and audacious ship tactics. Traditionally, the eldest child of her family joined the navy. As the second child, Rasha opted to enlist in the army. Never one to use her name or status to secure favors, she started military life as a common soldier. By the time her father died (her older brother was drowned in a storm several months earlier), Rasha was a senior captain.

Her husband, Najar ibn Nuri, carries the title Emir Consort. The marriage was purely political, and Rasha has never loved for him. Her three other children are still young—Nadhir (17) is studying at the naval academy, Mash'al (15) is at university studying languages, and Adara (10) is still in basic education under a private tutor. Adara suspects her older sister is a fraud, but the chief wizir has sworn her to secrecy.

The emira's chief wizir is Abdul-Wakir Pasha ibn In'am. Younger than the emira by a decade, handsome by any standards, and a competent wizir counselor mage, he has caught the attention of many female courtiers and the daughters of wealthy citizens. He has broken just as many hearts, for Abdul-Wakir has eyes only for Badra, the emira's oldest child and nominated heir.

Aside from a few trusted handmaidens, he is the only other person who knows for sure that the Badra living in the palace is an impostor. In fact, it was he who arranged for her to be smuggled out of the city so she could follow

her heart. He knows full well that his part in her disappearance would mean his death were it ever discovered. Although he doubts there is any hope of a romantic union with her on her eventual return, he refuses to look at another woman. This has given rise to rumors he is one of the emir's favorites.

Rasha is advised not just by her wizirs, but by a council. Seats are automatically awarded to the grand admiral, the general, the chief imam, the high priests of Ashtart and Sirsir (a great honor for a cleric of a minor deity; see *Realm Guide #5: The Southern Oceans*), and the various heads of the city's bureaucracy. The nobility has long argued it should have a say in how the city is managed. Rasha's reply is always the same—"All you have to offer is money, and if I want your money I'll raise your taxes." The council has no power to veto any decision the emira makes.

Rasha gives her underlings a lot of leeway. All are fully aware that if they place their personal agendas before the good of the city they will find it difficult to continue working without their head.

The city's nobility is entirely made up of landowners. Though they may pass on their titles as they see fit, the emira is their feudal overlord. Back in 395 CJ, several prominent noble families saw fit to challenge the authority of the emir by withholding part of their crops in the hope of weakening his position as city trade revenues fell. Once the blood was cleaned from the marble floors of their grand homes and their freshly ennobled replacements installed, the emir set each estate an annual quota based on its size. If the quota was not met, the nobleman had to pay the difference from his personal treasury or risk his title being revoked and his headless corpse being dumped in the sea. The system remains in place today.

Much of the *barajan* class is made up of agricultural workers, fishermen, and dock workers. Among the *jaleepa* there are many carpenters and coffee blenders. The best of the latter often rise to *shabrum* status, and rival merchant houses compete to employ them.

The city may be primarily Devoted, but clerics of certain gods have long been held in high esteem. Those of Ashtart, Karmelos, and the minor deity Sirsir rank among the *shabrum*. The high priests of these faiths are *mak-shabrum* thanks to their seats on the emira's council.

Education

Sheltered from the worst storms by the hills behind it and lacking bridges between the various settlements that make up the city, Jirja's harbors are used like roads.

RULES OF THE REALM

The following setting rules apply in Jirja.

* **Coffee and Tabac:** Jirja grows plenty of both, and its shops are well stocked with cheap produce. A large cup of fresh coffee costs one-half dirham, but comes with unlimited refills. Tabac is sold in single smokes (1.5 dinars), pouches of five smokes (7 dinars), and large pouches of 10 smokes (16 dinars). Attempting to take more than five pounds of coffee (in any form) or 50 smokes of tabac out of the city counts as exporting, requiring taxes to be paid (10%).

* **Followers of Fashion:** The emira is a dedicated follower of fashion. Naturally, her courtiers and those who consider themselves wealthy try to keep up with the latest fashions.

As well as locally made tailored clothes, locals can invest in tailored high fashion clothing (+2 Charisma, 750 dinars). Unfortunately, the emira is inclined to keep changing her style. After one year (or sooner if the GM wishes), the Charisma bonus from any clothing drops one point, to a minimum of zero. This applies only in Jirja.

Clothes from other cities and lands in the Sultanate are considered passé, unless the emira is wearing them this season. Tailored clothing not made locally grants no Charisma bonus in Jirja.

* **Native Heroes:** Characters born in Jirja who have Agility d6+ can take Boating d6 for the cost of one skill point during character generation.

* **Sinbad:** Children are brought up on tales of Sinbad. Native characters may make Common Knowledge when recounting his deeds.

Virtually every citizen owns, or at least knows how to sail, a small boat. Little surprise that the children of Jirja are as much at home on water as they are on land, and that those raised here number among the best mariners in the Sultanate.

Jirja has long claimed itself to be the birthplace of the Brotherhood of Sinbad. There is no documentary evidence to support the claim (and other cities make similar stakes), but the locals consider it fact. The tales of Sinbad's adventures have inspired generations of children to join the navy or sign up with merchant vessels.

Despite having the third highest population of any city in the Sultanate, Jirja has just one small basic university. Places are limited and tuition fees are high. As with many other universities it offers scholarships to poorer students, but these are few in number and the grades required ensure not every placement is filled.

Jirja's most prestigious university is the Naval Academy. Virtually every child dreams of marching out of its grand entrance as a qualified ship captain or naval officer, though it is only the rich or well connected who have any real hope of realizing this ambition.

Religion

Although it has a population of only 8,500 Faithful, Jirja boasts a lot of temples. Several deities are well represented in Jirja, possessing temples either solely dedicated to them or shared with only one or two others.

The smallest independent temple (the Temple of the Balanced Scale) stands in the Harbor District. Although solely dedicated to Endursaga, minor deity of trade (see *Realm Guide #10: Plains of Ash*), the avenue leading to it is lined with shrines to Upuaut in his guises as god of ships, travel, and wind. It is a place of business as much as worship.

A rundown temple to Anti, minor god of fishermen (see *Realm Guide #7: The Salt Basin*), is located in the Fish District. The sole cleric, himself a retired fisherman, doesn't much care if a fishing vessel is owned by a Devoted or Faithful mariner, and captains of either faith are charitable enough to throw him a few fish or silver dirhams as thanks.

The Naval Harbor boasts a temple jointly dedicated to Sirsir, minor god of mariners, and Karmelos, god of war. Although patronized by civilian students, the temple is actually part of the city's naval academy. In return for its services to the navy, the temple is not charged any business tax. That said, its clerics don't receive a wage for tutoring at the academy, either.

Jirja doesn't export timber, but it grows a lot of trees to keep its naval force in fighting shape and its busy shipyards fully stocked. It also relies heavily on trading its crops of tabac and coffee. Ashtart has a temple dedicated solely to her in the Timber District.

Finally, there is the main temple, which stands in the Old City. All the deities, even those with other temples, have space for worship.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

* **Peafowl Parade:** Even after two decades, the annual parade held on Anshi Yaus al-Nefar Alak Suha is a colorful and bizarre spectacle. Escorted by her bodyguards, the emira leads the procession. She is dressed in whatever the latest fashion at court will be. At her side is her daughter (suitably veiled). Behind them come her peafowl and the Peacock Guard, and then the courtiers.

The parade begins at the palace gates and proceeds down the main avenue of the Old City before turning around and heading back to the palace. Throngs of citizens gather to admire the emira's latest clothes and toss small pouches of grain for the peacocks to enjoy later.

* **Suitors Day:** Although citizens of the Sultanate can marry at 16, the emirs of Jirja long ago decided their children would be subject to stricter control. They would only be allowed to marry after their 21st birthday. This gave them time to learn something of life before starting a family. On each child's 21st birthday, eligible suitors gather at the court. The scion is not obligated to pick a future spouse, though a lot of pressure is placed on the child to sire a suitable heir as quickly as possible.

Effenda Badra's birthday is coming up in a few months, at which point the deception masking her adventuring career in distant lands will surely be revealed.

Military

Located on the island of Djanet, Jirja must look to its own security. Rather than invest in an expensive army, it has turned its focus toward the sea and land-based artillery to safeguard it from aggressors.

ARMY

Jirja is unusual in that it has no sizeable army. Djanet's rugged coastline has only one suitable landing site for an invading army—Jirja's twin harbors—and any fleet daring to attack would first be met by the city's mighty navy, the backbone of its military strength. Should the navy somehow fail, Jirja still has several small military formations it can call upon.

The first line of defense is the Harbor Guard, a battalion of artilleryists and siege engineers. One company is garrisoned on the west bank, one on the east bank, one in the palace, and one on the main city walls.

Protecting the city falls to the City Guard. This meager force comprises one company of medium infantry and a double-company of archers. In times of war, their numbers are swelled by the true militia—a peasant force of double-battalion of archers and a double-company of light infantry. The infantry's shields are painted to resemble the eye on a peacock's feather. When formed up in ranks, the overall effect is quite striking. The unusual design also gives the infantry their other name—the Eyes of Jirja. Given that few citizens actually see them as real soldiers, their swaggering around the city has earned them the derogatory name the Plumed Strutters.

Citizens see the Peacock Guard as a parade company, not a true fighting force. Their duties are to protect the emira's peafowl, and bring to justice those who commit crimes against them. Their helmets are plumed with peacock feathers. Each year of honorable service, a soldier receives one feather.

The Golden Scimitars, the emira's former company, now serve as her personal bodyguard. In recognition of their status, their ranks have been swelled to a double-company. When he joins, every soldier is awarded a solid gold scimitar. He is expected to wear this ceremonial weapon on parade, and produce it whenever asked by a superior. Failure to do either warrants instant dismissal and a new career as a galley slave. Every member of this veteran outfit has the Strong Willed Edge and Loyal Hindrance. The latter extends only to their comrades, the emira, and her family.

In order to earn their status, candidates for the ranks of sub-captain and captain must first spar with the emira. She refuses to let any officer who cannot at least hold his own against her guard her or her family, claiming she might as well do the job herself.

Lastly, there are the Orc Hunters. Djanet's rugged hills are still home to orcs (and other dangers). Though orcs lack the strength to trouble the city, they are a nuisance to outlying agricultural settlements. A double-company of light infantry, the Hunters are trained to live and operate in the wilderness. Around a quarter of them are hyaenidae. In the event attackers do manage to land elsewhere, the Hunters have standing orders to conduct a guerilla war. Treat them as veteran mercenary skirmishers with the Favored Foe (Orcs) and Woodsman Edges.

NAVY

Many cities see the navy as an inferior force compared to their mighty armies. No so in Jirja. Originally founded as a base for corsair hunters, the city has maintained a formidable navy down the ages.

The current fleet is 20 warships, 20 heavy warships, and 10 galleys. The crews are all professional mariners, and every captain is a graduate of the Naval Academy. The galleys' oarsmen are all convicts serving life sentences.

The 50 ships are divided into five fleets of four warships, four heavy warships, and two galleys. Each fleet is commanded by an admiral. Overall command lies with the grand admiral.

The city has marines (light infantry with the Steady Hands Edge) enough only to half fill every ship. Rather than relying on boarding actions, it puts its faith in firepower (every ship has double the usual number of artillery pieces) and spellcasters (every ship has three jinn mages or clerics assigned to it).

In addition to its own fleet, a sizeable portion of the Sultan's fleet is stationed here permanently. Ostensibly this is to protect trade routes to the east and the northern cities. The citizens aren't stupid—they know the fleet is here to prevent Jirja from becoming a threat to shipping should the ruler ever decide to become a corsair chief.

Law & Order

While the City Guard protects the gates and walls, keeping the population under control falls to the City Watch—or rather the District Watches. Citizens and businesses in each district pay a watch tax. Poorer ones pay in dirhams, while richer ones are charged dinars. The money raised is used to fund patrols in their district. It doesn't take a genius to work out that the rich get a better service from this.

Lower class districts are lucky if the entire Watch is stronger than a half-company. Patrols in these areas have a minimal presence on the streets, and many watchmen demand a "tip" *before* investigating a crime. Wealthier or larger districts, or those dedicated purely to generating money, are usually protected by a company at minimum, and more often a double-company.

The exceptions to this are the Palace District, which is protected by elements of the City Guard and Harbor

Guard, the Golden Swords, and the Peacock Guard, and the Naval District, which is policed by a company of watch paid for by general taxes.

Jirja is not immune to crime. Arguably the biggest criminals are the nobles, not the three thieves' guilds. That they have to forfeit 20% of their entire crop to the city has never sat well with them. Braver nobles have taken to falsifying their harvest records. In years when there is a bumper harvest the yields are lowered. The excess is then sold to merchants through various convoluted channels. The nobles make more money, and the merchants have more produce to sell. New land is also being cultivated for a more lucrative crop—hashish.

Jirja is divided into distinct western, central, and eastern areas. Each has its own thieves' guild. Controlling the east are the Street Sharks, a band of cutthroat and petty hoodlums who prey on the poor, extort money from craftsmen, and operate hashish dens.

Serving the central city, the Old City specifically, are the Gilded Fowl. Although they operate from the worst slum in the city, they are more rakish and roguish in their appearance and manners. Burglary and robbery, with minimal violence if possible, are their preferred crimes.

Working the western city are the Bilge Rats. They primarily operate in the residential areas, though they're not above targeting the numerous timber mills and craftsmen's workshops.

The Sharks and Fowl are currently engaged in a turf war. The main upper class residential district and one of the middle class ones lies outside both territories (which are behind walls).

Trade & Tribute

Agriculture on Djanet is possible thanks to natural springs that rise in the high hills. These trickle together to form a small river, which winds lazily north. The river vanishes underground long before it reaches the city (which has its own springs). No one has explored the subterranean river to see exactly where it enters the sea.

Jirja's two main exports are coffee and tabac. Rather than growing crops to feed the city's population, it was decided that these lucrative commodities would bring in great wealth. The plantations are owned by the nobility. Rather than have them cluttering the court, it was decided they should spend their time managing productive estates. By law, 20% of every harvest must be given to the city. The produce is sold to local traders at heavily discounted prices and has no local sales tax, ensuring the citizens would never want for coffee or tabac. The imams took objection to the latter, but since the money made from the traders was pure profit, it only took a few donations to charitable causes to make them see sense. It also ensured the black market would not be able to profit from the substance.

The nobles sell the remainder of the crops to local merchant families for export. Rather than issuing stand-

ing contracts, the produce is auctioned off to the highest bidder. The same thing happens when the merchants sell it on for export—visiting merchants must bid for lots.

Not every field is dedicated to these cash crops. Little space may be given to cereals, but many vegetables are still grown locally. The hills above the city have been artificially terraced. Water is drawn up from aquifers and carried down onto the thin strips by irrigation channels. This land is owned by the city.

Goats and sheep are grazed on other hills. They provide the city with enough wool and meat for its daily needs, but only just. The price of meat is high, and fish is eaten with most meals. The excess catch cannot be exported—Jirja's food supply is tenuous, so fish are persevered in salt or oil, or hot smoked and kept in storage for times of need. Even reserved fish go off, and stocks are regularly sold off at discount prices.

Jirja also grows a lot of trees. The forests are grown in the sheltered valleys, inland from the city. Every last tree must be sold to the city for use in maintaining the navy and building new ships. Local shipbuilders are allowed to purchase fixed quantities for use in constructing fishing vessels and for repairing visiting ships.

COINAGE

Jirja has maintained the same monetary system since it was founded. Over the short reign of Emira Rasha, the names of different coins have gradually changed to reflect her strange passion for peacocks. The quarter-dirham has been renamed the Eye, the half-dirham coin the Feather, a silver dirham a Plume, a the one dinar coin a Tail, the 10 dinar coin the Hen, and the 50 dinar coin the Cock. Currency minted during the emira's reign has a peacock plumage design on one face.

LOCAL TAXES

Jirja's navy and artillery are not cheap to maintain. Citizens can expect to lose around 40% of their gross income in taxation. Since coffee and tabac are ludicrously cheap, and the emira has maintained the tradition of ensuring the nobility pay their fare share, the masses are largely kept subdued. Even so, the treasury is always low, and Jirja just one disaster away from bankruptcy.

Customs Tax: Imports and exports are charged at 3%. Jirja is slowly becoming a transit port between Al-Shirkuh and the lands to the east. Goods can be stored in the city's warehouses for 0.5% of their value per week.

Docking Fees: This is charged at 5 dinars per day. Captains have the option of paying for a week (30 dinars per point of base Toughness) or month (100 dinars) in advance. No refunds are given if the ship departs earlier than its fee permits.

Excise Duty: Coffee and tabac may be cheap when buying for local consumption, but merchants intending to export them must pay a 10% levy.

Sales Tax: Coffee and tabac are tax free. All other goods and services carry a 5% surcharge.

Tolls: Official ferry services are charged at one half-dirham for pedestrians and one dinar for camels and horses. Larger mounts can be accommodated for 2 dinars per point of Size above +2. Jirja has three gates, but only locals tend to use them. The current rate is one quarter-dirham for any form of transport.

Architecture

Asked to sum up Jirja and its architecture in one word, most locals and visitors would say claustrophobic.

The buildings of the Old City have thick walls, cramped interiors, and few windows. The streets and alleys are narrow and winding to thwart attackers' progress. Even the avenue that runs from the palace to the city gates, is barely wide enough to walk three abreast. Things aren't much better in the rest of the city. Lack of suitable ground forced the builders to make best use of the space and dismiss any notions of providing open spaces. Coupled with the high population, even the locals feel claustrophobic. This is especially true in summer, when the heat becomes unbearable in the cramped confines. Even the nobles's houses are smaller than elsewhere in Al-Shirkuh and built closer together than the owners would like.

Major Locales

Described below are a number of places of interest located inside and outside the city that visitors may wish to explore while on Djanet.

Jirja has an unusual layout. The city sits in a wide bay, into which protrudes a long, rocky peninsula. This natural geography gives the city two distinct harbors, something that has worked to its advantage over the centuries. On the downside, the south is bordered by rugged hills used for small-scale agriculture, which prevents further urban expansion.

CITY DISTRICTS

As a rule of thumb, the western side of the city is a mix of lower and middle class businesses and houses, as is the central peninsula. The eastern portion is primarily lower class. At the lower end of the peninsula and eastern city are upper and middle class residential districts.

Corsair Town: No corsairs have lived in Jirja for four centuries, at least not officially. Actually an eastern suburb of the Old City, Corsair Town is a notorious slum. Strangers are quickly detected by the locals—even when the streets appear empty, someone is always watching for an easy target. Victims often end up with their throats slit, an act known elsewhere in the city as a "corsair's shave."

The City Watch doesn't exist here. Shouts for help are routinely ignored by other slum dwellers and those living close to the crime-ridden district. Even the Broth-

TRADERS ARE DOOMED!

As mentioned earlier, *Land of Fire* is a game about heroes, not merchants. Individual GMs are quite welcome to create trading tables and let party's trade their way to riches if they want, but if you read on you'll find there's a much simpler way of handling that aspect of life.

Hang on, you say, what about Sinbad? Most of his adventures began as trading expeditions. That is very true, but they also have another theme, a far more important one—the inevitable destruction of the ship (and loss of the precious cargo), which propels Sinbad to his true adventure. Are we saying that every time the characters try to become active traders you should sink their ship and cast them into a new adventure? In a word, yes. Pirates, sea monsters, storms—use whatever you need to rid them of their need to trade.

Now, we're not saying that the heroes can **never** trade. The rules even provide a very clear and passive way for them to become wealthy traders—the Rich Edge.

So long as someone in the party has that Edge and trapping, the GM can quietly assume the characters are automatically buying and selling cargo as they journey across Al-Shirkuh without interrupting the game to roll for how many tons of goods are available in a city and then having the characters avoid his plot hook because they need to get their cargo to market as quickly as possible.

erhood of Unfortunate Souls doesn't rush to the aid of fools stupid enough to stray here—their focus is on trying to protect the locals from each other.

Craft: As the Old City became ever more crowded and the trade harbor became more central to daily life, so many of the city's craftsmen migrated to the eastern side of the city. Jirja's artisans practice a lot of crafts, but there are very few master craftsmen.

Docks: The docks is located in the eastern harbor. It is actually a peninsula, jutting from the west halfway across the harbor toward the palace. The waterfront is dominated by wharves, customs houses and watch stations, eateries and coffee houses of dubious quality, and ships chandlers. Running the length of the central spine are rows of warehouses.

East Harbor: The eastern harbor is the civilian harbor. Merchant vessels of the Caliphate, Sultanate, and nations further east can be found here waiting for a free berth on the docks or sitting in the deeper water in readiness to leave on the next tide. Captains cannot fail to notice that the artillerymen manning the palace's defenses have their weapons trained on them at all times.

Fish: Located on a spit of land jutting into the eastern harbor, this district is home to the city's fishermen. The stench of fish hangs heavy in the air, the ground is awash

Land of Fire Realm Guide #19

with discarded off-cuts and guts, and the language is colorful. Hundreds of stray cats also live here.

Naval: This district is yet another peninsula, this time jutting east into the western harbor. It is entirely dominated by the navy—wharves and warehouses occupy the waterfront, with barracks for sailors and marines and houses for officers behind them. In the center is the Naval Academy. At the rear of the docks, on a rare patch of open ground, are barracks and stables for a detachment of 50 Pegasus Guard.

Old City: The Old City lie south of the emira's palace. Protected by a curtain wall, it once housed the entire population. Today it is largely middle and lower class housing. The main souk is located here.

Palace: Many emir's palaces are surrounded by walls, but their primary function is bureaucratic, not militaristic. No so in Jirja. Known locally as the Fortress, it sits at the end of the peninsula, overlooking the approaches to both harbors. It is surrounded by thick walls on all sides, breached only by a single gate in the south leading to the Old City. Within the compound is the emira's actual palace, a modest building by the standards of the Sultanate's other cities, the barracks of the Golden Scimitars and Peacock Guard, the houses of powerful courtiers and city officials, the courthouse, and the headquarters of the various bureaucracies.

Rich: As Jirja's population grew, so the Old City became crowded. The nobles, who initially lived outside the palace so as to be close to the seat of power, finally got tired of their lower class neighbors lowering the tone of the area and moved to vacant land outside the southern wall. The district faces onto the lower end of the western harbor. Many nobles have private wharfs. Because it lies outside the city walls, the nobles built their new townhouses behind high, thick walls. Most also own large villas close to their agricultural estates.

Shipyards: The southern end of the western harbor contains the city's shipyards, timber mills, warehouses for timber and other shipbuilding supplies, and the workshops and houses of the most of Jirja's carpenters.

West Harbor: The western harbor, also known as the Naval Harbor, is reserved for military vessels or those carrying foreign dignitaries. These vessels are expected to halt at the mouth of the harbor and wait for a city ship to pull alongside to check their manifest. Vessels of any nation that proceed into the harbor without authorization are given a single warning shot across the bow. Failure to turn around results in a deadly barrage of artillery fire. There are no exceptions to the rule.

CITY LOCALES

Cemetery Hill: Jirja has never had the space to accommodate a cemetery. For generations, the Faithful placed their dead in tiny rock cut tombs in the hills overlooking the city. The practice still continues, but today citizens must use the necropolis—a sprawling labyrinth cut on the orders of the emirs to prevent citizens digging wherever they wanted (several rockfalls resulted in fatalities).

Here, corpses can be interred in simple niches or, for a fee, placed in sealed chambers or family vaults.

No one has ever mapped the extent of the necropolis in recent years, and the blueprints have long since vanished from the city archives. Even now, 200 years after it was constructed, there is room to spare. How much more lies beyond areas of collapsed ceiling may never be known.

City Walls: Jirja actually has three walls. The thickest and tallest encircle the emira's palace (the Sea Wall). Extending from them down the entire central peninsula is the old city wall (the Old Wall). When the western harbor became operational, the emirs decided to enclose that behind a wall, at least on the landward side (the Folly).

The west, north, and east faces of the Sea Wall have numerous firing platforms mounting ballistas, catapults, and trebuchets. These are manned around the clock by artillerymen and archers. While its stocks of conventional ammunition are vast, the city has spared no expense in ensuring the siege weapons have a plentiful supply of incendiary alchemical weapons as well.

The Old Wall has firing platforms as well, but these are spaced further apart than on the Sea Wall. The tops of large, square towers can support an entire half-company of archers in tight formation. Braziers, barrels of lamp oil, and bundles of fire arrows are stored in the interior.

The Folly (named because no army could realistically ever attack for the landward side) has no defensive towers or firing platforms.

Coffee Houses: Jirja has a coffee house on every street, and sometimes more than one. Here citizens can purchase steaming hot coffee, pouches of tabac, and freshly baked bread and pastries. The clientele and the quality of the produce varies immensely by district, but they all share two things in common—the atmosphere is thick with smoke and the scent of coffee, and they are hotbeds of gossip.

Ferries: The fastest way to move between the three different parts of Jirja is by water. Although the Old City has no major gates facing either harbor, there are small wharfs at the bottom of the rocky slope. Wide stairs (they can accommodate a fully-laden camel) allow access from the waterfront to smaller gates in the wall.

While any citizen with a boat or ship can legally ferry passengers or cargo, only those licensed by the city can charge for the service. Giving the ferryman a tip is permitted, of course. Most ferrymen prefer to collect their gratuity halfway through a journey by dropping anchor until coins land in their calloused hands.

The ferries between the Palace and Old City districts to the Naval District are not for public use. A special pass is required to use them. Passes are carefully scrutinized at both ends of the voyage—an arsonist could wreak havoc, and no one wants to be the one responsible for transporting him to the naval docks.

Gates: There are just three main gates. The Peacock Gate (renamed to honor the emira's 40th birthday) separates the palace from the old city. Security is high (a quarter-company is on duty at all times), but since the Palace District handles

many civil functions anyone may enter. Leading out of the old city is the High Gate, so named because it leads to the hills (and the coffee and tabac plantations beyond). The Trade Gate allows entry through the Folly. The latter two gates are each watched over by a Shuf.

All three gates are closed between dusk and dawn. The guards open them only to admit people possessing written authorization from a known senior official.

As well as these major gates, the Old Wall is broken by dozens of smaller gates. These lead down to the waterfront, where there are small wharfs for private citizens to moor their boats. These gates are supposed to be closed at night, but since that duty falls to the City Watch many are either left open, or can be left open in return for a small "donation."

Jannis' Place: Jirja has many excellent coffee houses, but Janni's is widely regarded as the best. A small establishment in the Old City, it can seat only 20 patrons at a time. Fortunately for those in need of coffee it also serves takeouts. Even so, there is always a long queue outside.

Janni, a female marid blooded Hadaree, offers a wide range of unusual flavors—cinnamon, hazelnut, juniper, mint, vanilla, and dozens more beside. The real secret to her success lies in how the beans are freshly roasted—she has a lesser ifrit on staff. The creature is a free jinni, paid for its work. Janni knows it lives in her bread oven at night, but she has no idea why it decided to work for her, or what it does with its wages.

Lighthouses: The city has two lighthouses, but currently maintains only one. The functioning lighthouse sits at the edge of the headland overlooking the entrance to the east harbor, the other on the bluffs above the western harbor. Rising 200 feet into the sky, they are visible from every part of the city.

The West Light, as it is known, has not functioned in years. Being hard to reach, it was kept permanently manned to ensure the light never faltered. On the last night of the new moon, the light suddenly went out. A patrol dispatched to investigate found the keepers missing. The same thing occurred the next month, and the one after that. No one will work there anymore, and even the city's military shun the place. Last month a warship ran aground after misjudging the approach to the darkened harbor. The emira is seeking hardy adventurers to investigate and rectify the problem before there are any more costly accidents.

Naval Academy: The academy was founded to ensure Jirja's naval officers, helmsmen, and navigators were the best in Al-Shirkuh. Regardless of which course he takes, a graduate is automatically enlisted in the navy for five years on completion of his schooling. A separate school, recently opened, trains artillerists.

In order to raise extra income, a second faculty, the Maritime University, was opened in the eastern part of the city several years ago. It provides two levels of education—basic courses open to civilians of modest financial means who hope to become captains one day, and advanced (and expensive) courses for serving captains who wish to improve their knowledge of the seas.

DESERT HARPIES

Harpies have the lower body, wings, and claws of a vulture and the head and chest of an ugly human. They inhabit marshes and swamps. Desert harpies have remarkably powerful and nimble legs, being capable of loading and drawing a short bow. These vile, winged fiends typically smear their arrows in their own excrement.

According to one Faithful legend, they were formerly clerics of Upuaut, god of birds, but were lured into the service of Iblis. When Upuaut discovered their sin, he transformed them into mockeries of birds. Another version also claims they were servants of Upuaut, but in this variant Iblis transformed them into monsters for offending him. Devoted claim they are mortals who have succumbed to total spiritual corruption.

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

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Stealth d6

Pace: 2; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Gear: Bow (Range: 12/24/48, Damage: 2d6 + infection)

Treasure: Meager, in lair.

Special Abilities:

* **Claws:** Str+d4.

* **Flight:** Pace 8.

* **Infection (–2):** Harpies live in unsanitary habitats, and their claws are caked in filth. Any victim wounded or Shaken by a claw attack must make a Vigor roll, or the wound becomes infected. Magic healing has no effect on the wounds, and natural Healing suffers a –1 penalty. This lasts until all the victim's wounds are healed, at which time the infection is cleansed.

Skills: Boating, Knowledge (Area: The Seas), Knowledge (Battle), Knowledge (Siege Weapons); **Edges:** Master Mariner, Siege Engineer.

The Shadow Library: Corsair Town may be a den of scum and villainy, but it has a library. A nondescript three-storey house houses an impressive if disorganized collection of manuscripts, many of which were written before the jinn arrived.

No one knows when it first appeared, who owns it, or who keeps depositing new texts. For these reasons it has been dubbed the Shadow Library. There are no librarians, nor is there any form of obvious security. Thefts are extremely rare, though. Someone pays the locals well to keep an eye on the contents. Generations of thugs have performed this duty, and the watchmen have become very adept at spotting those who have dared to steal as much as a sheet of paper.

Suli's Lost and Found: Jirja's port isn't as busy as those of Akhmim or Al-Wazir, and although the city is

crowded it isn't big. Still, people sometimes come here to disappear into the crowds. Suli is a female hyaenidae who specializes in finding such people. Her prices are steep—even with little ground to cover, trying to find someone in Jirja who wants to remain hidden isn't easy, and Suli knows all the best hiding places. She has connections across the city.

CORSAIR TOMBS

The hills dominating the interior of Djanet are dotted with natural caves. Most are small, little more than a natural crack that has been artificially widened. Others are larger and clearly cut from the rock by hand. They first of them were discovered in the decades after Jirja was founded. It was their discovery that gave the city's Faithful the idea of how to bury their dead in a city short of room for the living. Although they contained only a few pieces of bone, scraps of decayed clothing, and shattered pots, all of indeterminate age, they were immediately named the Corsair Tombs.

Tales of grander tombs, perhaps those of corsair captains buried with their ill-gotten booty, abound in the Jirja's coffee houses. These rumors are fuelled by Orc Hunters' reports of tombs with more elaborate entrances (some sealed). These have only been viewed from afar, and they lie deep in orc territory, and as far as anyone knows they remain unexplored. For reasons currently unknown, the orcs native to Djanet seem to avoid them. Orc superstitions may not be deterrent to treasure hunters, but their arrows have forced several expeditions to abandon their quest.

THE HARPY HILLS

The barren hills and valleys that neighbor the fertile belt along the River Djanet are home to scores of desert harpies. Mostly they keep to themselves, stealing only the occasional goat or sheep. When they dare to attack humans, the Orc Hunters are diverted from their normal activities to take punitive action.

The largest flock inhabit crumbling ruins that predate the arrival of the jinn. Any inscriptions on the remains of pillars and walls are concealed beneath centuries of harpy droppings. The air reeks of fresh filth, and explorers risk catching several nasty diseases.

THE VALLEY OF KHAN

Orc Hunter patrols operating deep in the central hills have reported seeing orcs worshipping crude, anthropomorphic statues. Captives revealed the figure was that of Khan, the orcs' deity. At first the hunters thought it an orc name for Iblis, but the captives all said the same thing—Khan was not only a deity in its own right, but it lived in the desolate maze of valleys at the heart of the island. By their accounts, it took the form of a gigantic gorilla. New spread, and several expeditions set out to discover the truth. None returned.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Jirja's population of yellow-teethed, smoke-reeking citizens contains more than a few interesting characters. A few of them are described below.

CAPTAIN AMJIL

The current captain of the Golden Scimitars, Amjit is a cakali. He served under the emira as a sub-captain for many years. When she ascended to the title he was offered the post as captain of her bodyguard. Though loyal, he refused, claiming that he needed to perfect his art if was to fulfill his obligations. Five years ago, when the old captain retired, he bested the emira in a fight and duly accepted the promotion. As well as a master swordsman, he is a talented wizir guardian mage, a secret only he and his mistress share. (He served as her personal bodyguard even before she became emira).

ERALP

A sand goblin resident on Corsair Town, Eralp has a morbid fear of the ocean and yet is fascinated by ships. With no job requiring his time, he spends his days on the docks, questioning captains about where they have come from or are heading to, recording the times ships arrive and depart, and sketching the various vessels in harbor, paying particular attention to the pattern of their sails and any unusual design features or markings. Anyone trying to track the route of a ship that has visited Jirja need only ask Eralp (and pay him a small fee).

JAWNA' BINT NAMIR

Jawna' runs a small grocery stand in the souk, selling produce her neighbors grow in the allotments. Although many find it hard to believe, the frail, toothless old woman was once a sailor and a stunning beauty. In her youth she visited every major port in southern Al-Shirkuh, leaving behind a string of broken hearts. Normally friendly and polite, she has become more sullen and withdrawn in recent weeks.

Jawna' has learned that several homes have been ransacked and their owners murdered in the last four months. That in itself is nothing unusual, especially since every property was in a lower class district. Even the knowledge that a pair of recent graves were desecrated isn't particularly odd. What scares Jawna' is every victim was one of her former crew mates. She can think of no one reason why someone would want to kill them, nor why their homes should be searched.

As far as she knows, she is the last surviving crew member living in Jirja. Even though she changed her name when she retired (she was born Husn bint Qais) and her appearance is drastically different to her youth, she has a feeling she is being watched.

MEDINAT AL-JINN

City of the JINN

Medinat al-Jinn has long had a reputation for being a city of great wonders, and the powerful jinn relics employed by the city are legendary. Many see it as an ideal of Suleiman's vision, with mortals lording it over their former masters. Others are more concerned, for the jinn grow restless and more troublesome. Could history be on the verge of repeating itself?

Social Hierarchy

Medinat al-Jinn was founded, so local tradition goes, by one of Suleiman's first disciples. Since that day, it has been customary for the emir to be a jinn mage. It is widely believed that the first art the emir learned will determine his personality as a ruler, in much the same way as jinn blooded often display certain characteristics. There is not a shred of proof to support this, and all too often the actions of past emirs are distorted to fit the popular theory.

Although the emir's family has ruled for over 500 years, succession has not been a straight line. Several emirs failed to sire offspring or suffered the pain of their children dying prematurely, resulting in the title passing to siblings or cousins. The only scenario the city has yet to face is one where the emir has no living relatives and produces only a single child who is incapable of learning magic. Until that day of misfortune dawns, the populace and lawmakers prefer not to dwell on the subject, so as not to tempt fate.

Although every emir carries the title Grandmaster of the Jinn, it is purely ceremonial, and has nothing to do with any given emir's talent. Abdul-Bari duly learned the art, as required of him, but he had little interest in magic, and barely mastered his first form—khamsin—before giving up instruction in favor of being a good leader. Not so his children. His son, eldest child, and nominated heir, Qaraja, has already mastered khamsin and ifrit magic, while his younger sister, Ara, is a talented practitioner of ifrit, khamsin, and majin.

Barika, the emir's chief wizir (a counselor wizir mage), has served him for 28 years. Until Abdul-Bari's wife died, she had no true ambition. It was only a year after her death that a lowly courtier (actually a Puppeteer) placed the idea in her head during a casual conversation. Despite being young enough to sire another child, the emir soon proved past his prime in that department. Thus she now conspires to usurp the throne by placing Ara in power and persuading the girl to marry her son.

The city controls all the land between the two branches

of the River Anshur. When Medinat al-Jinn was founded, the emir allocated half this to the city and parceled the rest under the stewardship of certain families. The latter became the nobility. Their wealth and status comes from their great flocks of sheep and herds of goats, on which the city relies for its trading.

In Medinat al-Jinn, many mages work for a living. Regardless of their occupation, they are always treated as *shabrum*. This is true even if they are beggars. Citizens tend to be generous to locals beggars because of this. Ignore a common beggar and you may receive a curse for your lack of charity—ignore one who is a mage down on his luck, and you may find yourself turned into a pig.

While the Sultanate's population is around 4% jinn blooded, the percentage in Medinat al-Jinn is closer to 15%. The birth rate is no higher than elsewhere—despite being welcomed and respected everywhere in the Sultanate many migrate here because they find the city more homely. As with humans, they can be found among the nobility and beggars alike.

The art of magic means different things to different people. Some see it as a spiritual path, a means to Oneness, as taught in the *Hamad*. Others view it as a way to achieve wealth, power, or status. Regardless of their motives, Medinat al-Jinn attracts aspiring mages like flowers draw bees. Many arrive with the mistaken belief they'll walk into the university, or find a tutor within days. Most are bitterly disappointed. Their money soon spent, they slide rapidly down the social scale, inevitably ending up in the lower class districts working as laborers or begging to keep meat in their bellies.

As well as the usual tainted souls at the bottom of society, Medinat al-Jinn has two distinct classes of slaves.

At any one time there are dozens of lesser jinn walking around the city. A small few are enslaved, trapped on the mortal realm since the days of Suleiman and forced to serve mortals. Some are beholden to specific families; others are servants of the city. Despite the constant risk of the Siphoning, jinn mages continue to enjoy lording over the unearthly beings—most of those seen on the streets or in buildings are summoned by jinn mages to perform some menial task. The general population pays them little attention, seeing them only as slaves. No one has conducted a census of the jinn, and thus no one yet realizes there are actually a small number of free jinn permanently resident.

The second group of slaves are golems. Scholars and savants have long argued over whether these constructs are actually sentient or not. Until that argument is settled, the debate as to whether they are slaves or tools continues.

RULES OF THE REALM

The following setting rules apply in Medinat al-Jinn.

* **Golems:** Characters with enough money can (with the GM's approval) purchase golems, though not off-the-shelf. The constructs are made to order, and cost 25% more than the prices listed under the Golem Creator Edge. Artisans require the base price to be paid up front, with the surcharge payable on completion.

* **Khem-Hekau:** Practitioners of the black art are slightly more tolerated in Medinat al-Jinn. They suffer only a -1 Charisma penalty from their Arcane Background while in the city.

* **Languages:** Characters born in Medinat al-Jinn must take Jinn as their second language.

* **Native Characters:** A native character may choose to be a graduate of the Higher University of the Arcane. He treats the Rank requirement for Alchemy and Spirit Binding as Novice, but only during character generation. A character who wants to learn them later must take them as Seasoned Edges as normal, or attend the university during play.

* **The Price of Magic:** Jinn relics can be purchased for 2500 dinars per spell Rank, alchemical devices for 75 dinars per spell Rank, and tomes of learning for 750 dinars per spell Rank. Sales tax must be paid on top.

Characters looking to sell such items receive +2 to Streetwise rolls. Rolls are made every four days, instead of the usual once per week.

Khem-hekau spirit relics, alchemical devices, and tomes of learning can be found with a successful Streetwise roll, made once per week. These items are priced as per the *Land of Fire* book.

Education

Every child, no matter his creed, learns to speak Jinn from an early age. It is almost impossible to get by without it—it is spoken by the lesser jinn who reside here, and the great jinn relics used by the city require orders in the native tongue of their kind. For those who want to attend the University of the Arcane or enter the city's bureaucracy, it is essential—Jinn is the first language of the court and all city officials.

The city has two universities. The largest, the University of the People, teaches mundane courses, such as astronomy, law, heraldry, mathematics, and religion. The second, the University of the Arcane focuses entirely on magic, as the name implies. Contrary to popular belief, it does not train students to be mages.

The Lower University offers courses in the theory of alchemy, arcane lore, and jinn lore, and the language of the jinn, but it does not provide instruction in how to

cast spells. It is open to students of both creeds. The Higher University accepts only qualified mages, and is thus open only to Devoted.

Religion

Although few mages are trained to interpret the *Hamad's* philosophical or legal aspects, many citizens see them as spiritual persons, wise in the deeper mysteries of the universe and well on the way to Oneness. Respected though they might be, they are constantly badgered by citizens seeking advice, or who want them to use their magic to solve a problem. It doesn't help that mages outnumber imams by a hundred-to-one.

Medinat al-Jinn has the lowest Faithful population of any Sultanate city. Except for the most liberally-minded, they find the city abhorrent—the presence of so many mages is considered proof the Devoted are heretics of the worst kind and a lost cause. Despite the low number of Faithful, the city duly constructed a single temple to abide by the peace agreement with the Sultanate. It is dedicated to all the gods (save Iblis). It is currently dominated by the cult of Shamash, the only deity capable of protecting the Faithful from the evils of magic.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Day of the Six: Held on Anshi Yaus al-Maat Alak Suha, this holiday is when mages demonstrate their magical knowledge and understanding of the law. Held in the market square, the contest involves both theoretical and practical demonstrations. Even khem-hekau mages are permitted to attend—binding evil souls is not itself seen as an evil act in Medinat al-Jinn, though it still gives most people an uncomfortable feeling. The six mages chosen by the emir receive the honor title of pasha during their year of service, as well as a decent salary and quarters in the palace. Refusing to serve is a moral crime—entrants are required to swear an oath that if chosen they will serve the emir for the next year.

With so many mages present in the city, the Arcane Watch is sent out to patrol the streets and politely remind visitors the law still applies here.

Military

With a wealth of potent jinn relics and hundreds of mages at its disposal, Medinat al-Jinn has never bothered with much in the way of a military.

ARMY

Despite over half the population living outside the city walls, Medinat al-Jinn maintains just two small permanent army units.

The first is the Outlanders. A battalion of mounted medium infantry, they patrol the outlying regions for sign of, and protect the herding settlements from, orcs and other monsters. Although mounted, they are not trained cavalymen—being mounted allows them to respond quickly to any sighting or attack. One-third of their number are hyaenidae.

The largest force is the City Guard. Whereas the Outlanders are hardened veterans, the Guard, which numbers just a double-battalion, is untested. One battalion comprises light infantry, while the other is divided into a double-company of medium infantry and a double-company of archers (armed with crossbows).

Should the city ever come under attack, city law requires every mage to offer his services free of charge. Failure to answer a call to arms is treated as desertion in the face of the enemy, a crime that carries a death sentence.

Added to the awesome firepower the mages can call forth are the metal golems employed by the City Watch and stone golems that stand around the city acting as spies. All told, the very threat of these combined forces is enough to keep the city safe from large-scale assault.

As far as the public is concerned, the emir is protected by 50 soldiers—the Jinn Shield. While they are competent warriors, they are not his true protectors. That duty falls to a squad of 20 wizir guardian mages. They are disguised as courtiers and functionaries, allowing them to mingle with the rest of the court and eavesdrop on gossip (and plots) without arousing suspicion.

NAVY

The city may be land-locked, but the River Anshur, an important trade route, is only a day's march away. As a token gesture toward fending off river pirates, the city maintains a navy of three warships in Sa'am al-Mirash, the town that serves as its harbor. The crews are poor mariners, having had no experience of any water but the relatively calm river, and equally poor combatants.

Law & Order

Every inhabitant of Medinat al-Jinn is subject to the law. Maintaining law and order among the mortal population are the City Watch. A thousand strong, they are divided into four divisions, each named after one of the types of lesser jinn. The Khamsin Watch patrols from 0600 to midday, the Ifrit Watch from midday to 1800, the Marid Watch from 1800 to midnight, and the Majin Watch from midnight to 0600.

A typical patrol consists of one captain or veteran sergeant (treat both as a watch captain), a sergeant (treat as an Extra watch captain), eight watchmen (four experienced and four typical), and a metal golem. Few citizens realize the city only has 30 metal golems. Having no need to rest, 25 of them are working 24 hours a day. The other five are spares, in case one is damaged.

The inhabitants of Medinat al-Jinn have a far more relaxed view toward spellcasting than those of other cities, at least when conducted by mages. So long as a spell does not cause damage or harm, enslave others against their will, prevent people going about their business, conceal or enhance criminal activity, or generally cause a nuisance to those nearby, people tend to turn a blind eye. Enforcing the law falls to the Arcane Watch. The city has 100 Arcane Watch at its disposal. A full quarter are mages, and 90% of those are jinn mages. Unlike in other cities, the watch conducts regular patrols day and night (primarily to keep an eye on the free jinn).

The city has two jinn-related problems. Both Jinn Slayers and Penitents are a constant thorn in the city's side. The Arcane Watch has a special squad devoted to rooting them out through magical and mundane means and putting an end to their activities with lethal force, but for every individual or cell destroyed, another one takes its place within a few weeks.

The city is a major recruiting ground for the Qabal. Although generally loyal to the Sultan, few emirs have done more than engage in token punishments against those suspected of membership.

As if these weren't enough to keep the city's guardians busy, officials are busily engaged in covering up a recent spate of rampaging golems. Some were stopped only after destroying their owners, others were destroyed as they attempted to escape the city by force. The only thing the golems had in common was a single word etched onto them in Jinn—"Liberated."

The city may be small, but it manages to support four thieves' guilds. Two of them focus solely on the theft of relics and jinn relics, though neither sells or uses the items they steal. One guild, the Many-Colored Hands, is operated by clerics and laity of Ishkar, the minor goddess of magic (see *Realm Guide #2*). The second is actually a cell of Reliquary agents sent from Al-Shirkuh. Being of northern extraction, the latter pass themselves off as foreign students of arcane lore here to learn about native practices. Despite sharing some common ground, the two guilds are bitter rivals.

The oldest, and most traditional, guild is simply known as the Old Guild. While magic items fetch a high price, they lack the talents to overcome most magical protection, and learned the hard way that someone else is after these valuable items. There are plenty of other pickings, and while they have a certain curiosity as to their rivals, they leave them in peace.

Lastly there are the Fifth Element. Relatively new, their number is made up entirely of free lesser jinn. Their profits are funneled into supporting Penitents.

With citizens displaying rare generosity toward beggars, begging is a lucrative line of work. Many beggars have organized themselves into a loose guild, both for protection and to prevent territory disputes. A guild master is elected each year. In return for overseeing the industry, he receives a 10% of every member's takings. The Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls has close ties with the guild.

Trade & Tribute

Ask around the Sultanate about Medinat al-Jinn's major export and most citizens will reply "magic." Despite this common and persistent belief, the city exports very few alchemical devices or jinn relics, though its shops have plenty for sale. The city survives by exporting something far more mundane—goats and sheep, and products made from them, such as bone, cheese, horn, meat, skins, and wool.

The jinn relic industry is actually very small—even the most skilled mage can produce no more than three or four items a year. Most supplement their income by manufacturing alchemical devices. The reason they are so cheap (compared to other cities) is simply that there is plenty of competition, a rarity in other cities.

The locals have plenty of meat—virtually every dish contains goat, lamb, or mutton. Meat is boiled, fried, roasted, or stewed, flavored with a variety of herbs and spices, and usually served with rice. Meat for export is preserved by salting or sun-drying.

The soil around the city is ill-suited to large scale agriculture, though the coarse grass is excellent for goats and sheep. Most plant matter (whether for food or clothing) must be imported. White rice is favored because it keeps indefinitely, and can be used to make bread as easily as cereals. Much of this comes from Balyana, City of Reflection, via Akhmim, to the chagrin of Al-Wazir's merchants. Fresh vegetables must reach market before they spoil, and the city relies on farming communities along the main course of the Anshur for these.

Incense is another popular import. As well as being popular for making houses smell nice, it is frequently used to pay many lesser jinn servants, especially kham-sins, or employed by mages in their spells (jinn of all types seem to appreciate the aroma).

The city currently has three major trade networks. Produce intended for the Caliphate or Sultanate are carried by camel or horse to the river port at Sa'am al-Mirash, loaded onto barges or ships, and sailed to Al-Wazir, City of Spires. Merchants have recently started carrying goods for the northern Sultanate to Akhmim, City of the Devoted, however, drawn there by its busy harbor and low tariffs. Although Qarah, City of Leaning, has no trading harbor, it lies at the end of Suleiman's Road. Medinat al-Jinn's exports aren't of sufficient quality to appeal to the markets of the Free Emirates (which has plenty of sheep and goats), but the nomads of the Southern Desert appreciate them. Both overland routes are taxing due to a lack of suitable watering holes.

COINAGE

Given the city's obsession with the jinn, it comes as no surprise that locally minted coins carry their name. The city mints both lesser (silver) and (greater) gold coins.

The lesser coins are the one-quarter dirham ("Kham-

sin"), one-half dirham ("Marid"), one dirham ("Ifrit"), and five dirham ("Majin"). The greater coins are the one dinar (Kham-sin), five dinar (Marid), ten dinar (Ifrit), and 50 dinar (Majin). Locals use lesser and greater, as well as small and large, as necessary to separate the two names, often dropping the coin's name altogether. Something costing "8 lesser," for example, is equal to 8 dirhams, while "1 large" means a single dinar.

LOCAL TAXES

Medinat al-Jinn isn't a wealthy city. Its primary exports are low value, and, while profitable, its magic industry is more a cottage industry. Even its alchemical device artisans sell only a handful of creations each week. Despite having only a small army and navy to maintain, income tax rates are high, though not excessive. Many basic goods are cheap, especially those from goats or sheep, allowing most citizens to get by on their meager salaries.

Excise Duty: Imports and exports carry a flat 2% surcharge. The city's mages don't produce enough alchemical devices to have a true export business, and sales tax must be paid on such items instead of an excise fee.

Golem License: A rampaging golem could cause a lot of damage before it was stopped. In order to keep the numbers to a manageable number, owners are taxed at 5% of the golem's cost price (less the sales tax) each year. The fee is reduced to 2% if the golem is kept in a herding community, on the condition it never enters the city limits.

Magic License: Any mage manufacturing spirit relics requires a license. This costs 1000 dinars per year. Alchemy also requires a license, but this costs just 200 dinars a year, plus 10 devices donated to the city.

Sales Tax: Products made from goats and sheep are charged at 2%. Other mundane goods carry a 5% surcharge. Alchemical devices and jinn relics carry a levy of 10%, and golems 20%.

Tolls: Pedestrians and mounts are charged 1 dirham.

Architecture

On the whole, Medinat al-Jinn is a fairly typical town in terms of its architecture, despite large parts having been partly constructed by enslaved jinn. Civic buildings tend to be grand and imposing to convey the proper sense of authority, homes vary from one room shacks to multi-floor mansions in walled enclosures, and the streets of the city districts within the walls are narrow except around the Warehouse District.

What makes the city stand out from the rest of the Sultanate is its jinn relics, the likes of which are founded nowhere else in Al-Shirkuh. The locals may be blasé about such things, but visitors cannot help but be impressed by them. Such items do come with a cost, though. With many tasks carried out by these items, the people are growing lazy and complacent.

Major Locales

Once they get over the sight of the jinn relics and empty their purses in the souk, characters will discover a number of interesting locales both inside the city and in its greater territory.

CITY DISTRICTS

Medinat al-Jinn is unusual in two ways. First, the population of the actual city is only around 45% of its total population, rather than 60% as is more common. The rest of its citizens live in villages located in the grasslands. Second, a great deal of the city is actually not protected by walls.

Animal: One of only two major districts located outside the city walls, the Animal District is home to the city's butchers, cheesemakers, dyers, horners, leatherworkers, skinners, tanners, weavers, and other crafts associated with animal products. Renowned for its pungent smells, it is a lower class district, as is the residential area surrounding it. A livestock market is held on the first Yaus al-Hamala of each month.

Caravan: The second major district outside the walls, this area comprises several large caravanserais. The city may be remote, but it offers good facilities. No matter from which direction they arrive, all caravans are required to enter the city from the south, ensuring they pass through this district. It also contains shops and workshops dedicated to providing caravans with all the essentials they require for their long journeys.

Craft: Contains the homes and workshops of craftsmen and artisans whose work does not involve animal products or related to writing materials. Mundane craftsmen and mages alike are found living side-by-side in neighbors that range from lower to middle class.

Market: Dominated by the impressive Jinn Souk, the enchanted dome of which changes color during the day, the Market District lies close to the Craft, Merchant, and Warehouse Districts. One quarter of the souk is dedicated to magical wares and goods a mage might require, such as ink, quills, and paper. Another quarter specializes in products produced in the Animal District.

Merchant: The city's merchants have homes and offices bordering both the Craft and Warehouse Districts.

The Oasis: Situated in the middle of the city is the oasis. It once provided the city's drinking water, but today citizens use standpipes or fountains, many of which are jinn relics constructed to produce water on demand. Surrounding the oasis is a wide, circular, grassed avenue, shaded from the merciless sun by tall palm trees. A number of coffee houses face onto the district.

Palace: The emir's palace is small but magnificent. Its flawless marble walls are seamless, fitted together by majin. Its glittering domes are coated in a single sheet of gold laid by ifrits. Inside there are numerous jinn relics—towers are ascended by means of elevating

LESSER JINN

Lesser jinn, like elementals, are intelligent. As with other sentient beings they have a varying level of intellect. They can understand verbal and written commands, and nothing prevents them being creative in how they perform their duties.

Lesser jinn are often referred to as spirits. This does not mean their physical forms are temporary manifestations of their presence. Lesser jinn are corporeal beings (even khamsin jinn, who can pass through tiny gaps by altering their form, can touch and be touched). The term "spirit" is used by those who do not understand the true nature of jinn simply to describe their otherworldly origin. Though very long-lived, immune to the ravages of disease and poison, and requiring no food, water, or air to survive, they are not immortal. A lesser jinni killed on the mortal world is dead.

Also like elementals, lesser jinn *are* capable of communicating with others. Their silence is a matter of choice—arrogant lesser jinn consider themselves above mere mortals (even if bound to obey them by magic), while humbler ones consider themselves unworthy of conversing with "Suleiman's children." No mortal can compel them to talk, write, mime, or otherwise converse. Even when they choose to communicate (a rarity), lesser jinn are bound by one unbreakable law—they cannot reveal anything of what they know of Suleiman. They can discuss his teachings or engage in speculation, but one who met the great prophet could not describe his features or reveal personal facts.

Jinn mages long ago divided lesser jinn into four general classifications. Note that enslaved, free, and summoned lesser jinn are subject to *banish*. This forces only their spirit back to Jinnistan, leaving them bodiless (the jinn equivalent of ghosts).

* **Bound:** Jinn in spirit relics are bound. Only their spirit is called from Jinnistan—their physical form becomes dormant. They consider this a great ignominy, hence their rebellious nature.

* **Enslaved:** These jinn reside in the mortal world, and have done since Suleiman sealed off the gateway to Jinnistan. Unlike free jinn, they have been bound to servitude. Some were enslaved by Suleiman, others by lesser men. Unlike bound jinn, they retain their normal physical form.

* **Free:** Unlike their enslaved cousins, these lesser jinn retain free will. Some voluntarily enter service with mortals for their own reasons, but they are not slaves. Others roam the wilderness helping or hindering as they see fit.

* **Summoned:** Covers natives of Jinnistan, brought to the world of mortals by magic in body and spirit to serve for a short while. When their task is complete, they return to their native realm.

Land of Fire Realm Guide #19

platforms contains khamsins; secret doors, undetectable to the naked eye except through magic, open only to the commands of the emir (and others who have learned them); and kiosks that dispense food on demand are just a few of the many wondrous items intended to demonstrate the emir's authority over the jinn.

The district also contains the homes of senior bureaucrats, various offices essential to the smooth running of the city, and the law courts.

University: Located north of the oasis, both universities are situated here. As well as faculty buildings, there is purpose-built student accommodation. Many scholars, scribes, translators, and practitioners of other cerebral professions live in this district.

Warehouse: Good awaiting export or recently arrived are stored here. Unlike the major trading cities, this district is largely deserted at night.

CITY LOCALES

Astrological Charts: Roxelana, a female cakali astrologer, sells astrological charts and texts for a living, but has a sideline in making personalized and very accurate horoscopes. Readings take an hour and cost 200 dinars. The customer is then provided with a horoscope chart. This acts as a single benny, and remains until used.

Beggars' Guildhouse: What appears to be a run-down house in the poorest part of the Animal District is actually very well appointed inside. It is the residence of the current guild master, Fawzi.

The beggars hear and see a lot of what occurs on the streets, and know every inch of the streets. The guild's services can be hired for 50 dinars a day. Collectively, the beggars make a d8 Group Streetwise roll. The guild is not above stretching out the return of information, so as to extract more money from clients, or denying it has uncovered anything if it thinks the information might be more profitable to another of the city's residents.

The Cauldron: The creation of golems and failed alchemical research both result in waste charged with raw magical energy. The refuse is transported to a huge pit a mile outside the city. Here it festers, producing not only strange gases, but also spontaneous weird magical effects. On bad days, the gas is blown back toward the city, where it plays havoc with the abilities of mages. Sometimes spells are harder to cast as the mage's spell is imbued with stray strands of chaotic energy. Other days the resultant spell is completely random.

City Walls: Medinat al-Jinn's walls protect around one-third of the modern city's population. Thirty feet high and 20 feet wide, they are broken by four gate houses. The walls are protected by a number of *glyphs*. These are designed to explode outward with a variety of effects and destroy scaling ladders and siege towers.

Ten towers (40' high) are positioned around the perimeter. Their flat roofs each hold a pair of jinn relic ballistas, while a catapult (another relic) sits in a cleared area at the base of each tower. As well as the siege artillery's arcane ammunition, the city's defenders can call upon a

variety of alchemical devices designed to be thrown at intruders to harm or hinder. In addition to *blast*, *entangle*, and *slumber*, there are also *summon jinn* devices.

The existence of the latter is a closely-guarded secret—the jinn obey who releases them, meaning any enemy who somehow managed to penetrate the armory could unleash them upon the city's population.

Gates: Medinat al-Jinn has four gates—the Scholar Gate (north), Royal Gate (east), River Gate (south), and Sheep Gate (west). Each gate is guarded by a single Shuf of City Guard by the day and twice that number at night. Each gate is actually a jinn relic. On the orders of a sergeant or higher, the reinforced gates automatically swing shut, and with surprising speed.

Fazri's Jinn Hire: Fazri has all the airs, graces, and patter of a second-hand chariot salesman. Gaudily dressed so as to attract attention, he hawks his services from a small shop in the souk. For just 20 dinars (yes, just 20 dinars!), he can provide the services of a *bona fide* lesser jinn for four hours.

Fazri claims to be a grand master jinn mage. While its true he knows the theory of magic as well as any practitioner, he is in fact a retired adventurer without an ounce of arcane talent. He owns a magic lamp, a powerful relic he stole from a greater jinni. When rubbed and the correct words spoken, it summons one of the four main types of lesser jinn. Fazri commands the jinni to obey his customer for the duration of the contract. He can maintain only three jinn at any one time.

The Fiery Goat: A popular eatery owned by Jarir and his wife Sunbul. The pair are both ifrit jinn blooded, and use a lot of hot spices in their cooking. There is a standing offer that anyone you can consume an entire plateful of Ifrit's Delight can eat at the place for free for the next year. Even protected by *environmental protection* spells, the most anyone has managed is three mouthfuls.

The House Without Color: Until six years ago this middle class residence was home to Tamadur bint Hannad, the daughter of an influential noble family from Qarah, City of Learning, studying at the University of the Arcane. Neighbors reported hearing a loud argument in the middle of the night, followed by an explosion, though the watch found no signs of damage. They didn't find Tamadur, either, nor any evidence of foul play. Mages were called in to investigate, but all they learned was that the house had become a magical void—none of their spells, jinn relics, or alchemical devices functioned within its walls. It remains uninhabited.

The Jinn Joint: Of all the coffee houses in the city, the Jinn Joint attracts the most mages. Not surprising really, given how only mages are permitted inside. Away from the throng of citizens clamoring for their attention, mages can enjoy fresh coffee, light meals, and comfortable surroundings. For a "little" extra (100 dinars), patrons with unusual tastes in sexual partners can discretely hire one of her staff for an evening.

Although the Jinn Joint is run by Habibah bint Farouk, a marid blooded jinn mage, her eight staff are all enslaved lesser jinn. There are two of each type, and each pair

has one of each gender. Habibah has had to cover up a few scandals in recent months—three of her “special patrons” were murdered shortly after dallying with jinn partners. Habibah suspects either Jinn Slayers or Penitents are targeting them. She is unaware that three of her staff have been replaced by free jinn bent on avenging their kind against abusive mortals.

Mustaf’s Falafel: Mustaf, a portly cook who is a little too fond of his own wares, sells freshly baked flatbread stuffed with spicy falafel (deep fried ground chickpea balls) in tomato sauce. A quarter-dirham’s worth is a light meal, while one dirham buys enough to satisfy the appetite of the greediest soul.

The Royal Bathhouse: The largest and most expensive bathhouse in the city is famous for the enslaved lesser jinn employed here. Ifrits provide steam baths and unlimited hot water, khamsins blow dry customers with cooling breezes, majins give firm massages, and marids swirl the water to create relaxing bubbles.

Saqr’s Puppets: Saqr is renowned for manufacturing exquisitely crafted, brightly painted wooden puppets. It is well known he is an ushabti mage, but no one suspects he is also a golem creator. His puppets are actually miniature golems, and each has a unique name. They remain dormant until commanded to awaken (he uses *voice on the wind* alchemical devices). Some he uses to commit acts of theft; others he tasks with committing murder.

University of the Arcane: The greatest center of magical learning in Al-Shirkuh, the university is the pride of the city. As well as lecture halls and an impressive library of arcane and jinn lore, it has a fully stocked alchemical laboratory and workshops dedicated to the construction of golems. Space in the alchemical laboratory can be hired for 10 dinars per day, and gives +1 to arcane skill rolls to make devices. It is open to mages for just four hours per day, and only in the evening (after classes have finished).

The university is currently seeking tutors. The dean claims that several of its lecturers recently went on sabbatical, leaving them short-handed. It is a well rehearsed lie. The tutors being replaced have vanished, leaving behind nothing but a pile of ash. Divinations have failed to reveal whether the ash is all that remains of the victim, or are a by-product of some powerful spell or manifestation of an otherworldly being.

The university can teach Skills to anybody who understands Jinn. Its Edges are only open to those with an appropriate Arcane Background (Magic).

Library: +3 to Investigation rolls when researching any topic relating to magic or jinn.

Special: Must be able to speak Jinn; **Skills:** Knowledge (Alchemy), Knowledge (Arcana), Knowledge (Monsters: Jinn); **Edges:** Alchemy, Golem Creator, Spirit Binding; **Languages:** Jinn.

The Vault: Alchemists who wish to sell their products are required to donate 10 devices per year to the city for its defense and general use by the army. They are stored in the Vault, which lies beneath the palace. Security exceeds that of the emir’s apartments, with golems and

BEHIND THE SCENES

The jinn relics employed in the city do not conform to the standard Edge rules. If they did, anyone could attune to them (and thus make use of them), so many activation rolls would be required that the jinn would undoubtedly have escaped long ago, and player characters would undoubtedly want to build their own versions. In many ways they function more like golems than true jinn relics, answering to set people or the general public depending on their purpose.

They exist to provide a sense of wonder (and comic relief, if the GM so wishes), and to demonstrate how easily mankind went from slave to enslaver.

What makes them unusual is that their creation involved not only binding a jinni’s spirit, but also its body. The secret of how to create them was never widely known. Everyone who knew the secret, ever scrap of paper containing such wisdom, disappeared on the same night several centuries ago.

The most popular story regarding this mysterious event places blame with the greater jinn, who grew angry at the treatment of their lesser kin. Others say Suleiman reappeared and punished them for their crime of becoming no better than the jinn of old.

The GM should feel free to create any devices he thinks will be fun. Think of Medinat al-Jinn as a modern city, but powered by jinn instead of electricity. Many different types of relic have been described in the core book already, but there are other ideas he can employ—automated puppet show booths may stand on street corners (1 dirham per 5 minute show); rich citizens may have speaking tubes that contain *voice on the wind* spells (that only connect to other such relics); or even *teleport* booths (10 dinars per use) for those who really can’t be bothered to walk (heaven help those inside if one of them decides to go rogue).

THE RELIC INDUSTRY

The Spirit Binding Edge states that a mage may make one roll per advancement. This does not mean the city is full of Legendary mages. First, player characters need a balance to stop them both adventuring (which earns them Experience Points) and churning out relics by the dozen. Second, those artisans working in the city have apprentices to help via Cooperative rolls. The industry exists as a way to give characters new toys, not a reason for demanding to be able to make more of their own.

glyphs employed to protect the valuable contents. Not even the Quartermaster Arcane, the official charged with storing and issuing these devices is entirely sure how many the city has at its disposal.

SA'AM AL-MIRASH

Population: 2,480

Ruler: Pashah Isa' bint Sallah

This bustling little town serves as Medinat al-Jinn's port. Although 25 miles from the city, it is considered a suburb, not a separate settlement. Overseeing on behalf of the emir is Pashah Isa' bint Sallah, the ninth successive member of her family to hold the position and title.

The docks handle shipments to and from Al-Wazir. Goods are loaded and unloaded by tall cranes housing bound majin. From there locals load them onto camels and horses and transport them to Medinat al-Jinn.

There have been several accidents recently, and one death arising from an unfortunate sailor being crushed by a bundle of rice sacks when a crane released its load from a great height. The pashash has not reported these to the emir for fear the crane will be decommissioned and productivity hampered.

PERSONS OF Note

A city of mages and students of the arcane, Medinat al-Jinn has a plethora of interesting, and often eccentric, inhabitants. A small few are described below.

THE HEARTLESS LORD

Generations of storytellers and parents have spoken of the Heartless Lord. He is a bogeyman, an evil mage who achieved immortality by mastering a dark ritual that allowed him to remove his heart from his body. His heart was placed in a clay jar to protect it, for only if it was stabbed could the Heartless Lord be slain. The story goes on that the heart could not survive indefinitely, and so the Heartless Lord walked the land in search of a replacement. Given that children's hearts are young, he prefers to take them from wicked children.

While the story serves to keep children out of mischief (for the most part), it is actually based on a grain of truth. Two centuries ago, an adventurer returned from Hekata with a canopic jar containing the heart of a withered pharaoh. Having recently awakened, the undead dispatched a liche-wizir to locate and retrieve it. The creature has made its lair in the slums, from where it is employing undead and human agents to find the jar. The jar is currently in the private collection of a scholar.

JAFIR THE BARBER

Jafir owns a barber's shop. For a few dirhams a customer can have a shave and trim while enjoying a free cup of coffee. Popular with his patrons for his polite and cheery manner, Jafir smiles politely while listening to their gossip. A subtle manipulator, Jafir always manages to steer the conversation to people he has an interest in. Jafir is an Assassin, and uses his cover to gather informa-

tion on targets. He never commits his acts of murder in his shop—a target will be treated with the same respect as any other patron, even when giving Jafir a free swipe at his neck.

JAWL THE BEGGAR

Jawl is the current guild master of the Beggars' Guild. He is young, handsome, and blind. His eyes have the appearance of glass orbs filled with swirling mist. In order not to scare people he wears a blindfold. His dog, Kalb (the Al-Waziran word for a dog), can tell the value of any coin placed in his master's pot by its sound and even detect fakes. It indicates the amount by the pitch and number of its barks.

Jawl is not a native of Al-Shirkuh, as evidenced by his fair hair, tanned skin, and facial structure, not to mention his faltering grasp of Sandspeech (the only local language he speaks). Many beggars think he is mad. Jawl claims to be the son of a distant Sultana, who rules a land called Mikmakh. The last thing he remembers before arriving in Al-Shirkuh is entering a land permanently swathed in mist. According to his stories, that was in the year 498, which would make him over 60 years old.

Despite being a foreigner, and touched in the head, he was elected to his position because of his excellent leadership qualities.

THE LIBERATOR

The culprit behind the recent golem rebellions calls itself the Liberator. No one has actually deduced his existence, and thus his gender, race, and creed are unknown to the authorities.

He is a "cleric" of the Machine God (see *Region Guide #21: Chalcis*) and formerly an agent of Malkontix, lord of the Iron City. In life he was a soldier, one of many who fought in the Battle of the Vulture's Feast. He had the misfortune not to die on that terrible day. Dragged back to the Iron City, he underwent transformation into something both more and less than human. After a century as a resident of the Iron City he was released in the world of men, charged with bringing back more creatures for conversion. Accidentally entering a patch of shock sand, his mind was scrambled by the powerful discharge a year ago. Suddenly freed from bondage to the Iron Duke yet still able to draw on the power of the Machine God, what remained of his humanity became dimly aware of his enforced conversion. He clutched at a new purpose—to liberate other souls who he believed had been forcibly changed into constructs. In his deranged state he became fixated on golems—spirits bound in material shells.

The shock sand had another unexpected effect—he could now produce a jolt of electricity that elevated the intellect of golems and instilled in them free will. Unfortunately, it also turns them irrevocably berserk.

The Liberator lives as a beggar, hiding beneath voluminous robes to conceal its partial transformation into a construct.

MUSAYID

City of Winds

Musayid, the City of Winds, Gateway to the North, is on the verge of descending into anarchy. Its emira is sick, and many suspect she cannot be far from death. With no appointed heir, those already with power are seeking to make a bid for the greatest power of all—the throne of an important trading city.

Social Hierarchy

Since the day the city was built, each emir has nominated their successor. Assassinations and bloodless coups have sometimes resulted in a sudden regime change, but not once has there been a struggle for succession. That may soon change, for the emira has not yet named an heir, nor does she see inclined to do so.

An only child, she chooses to marry only on taking over from her father. By the time that occurred she was 32 years of age. She sired two children, but both died before reaching adulthood. Her husband passed away soon after, denying her the opportunity to be a mother again. Having met her soul-mate, she opted not to remarry. Unless she names an heir soon, her many distant relatives will be forced to compete for the throne. Whether he ascends by battle or bribe, the victor will still be forced to pay a heavy price, something all potential candidates are keen to avoid.

Shahidah's body may be failing, but her mind is as sharp as it ever was. She has her bad days, when she pretends she cannot remember things, but they are intended only to make the nobles drop their guard or underestimate her true abilities. She did not reach the age of 78, nor rule for almost 40 years, without learning most every trick in the book when it comes to intrigue. Unlike the other emirs, she has never accepted an honorific title, nor does she look favorably on people who shower her with them.

The emira currently lacks a chief wazir, though she has dozens of advisors only too keen to ingratiate themselves with her. The last five chief wazirs all made the mistake of promising to find a cure for her malady—a mistake that saw them placed in a gibbet. The position would surely pave the way to ascension, but no one is keen to apply.

With the emira often too ill to attend court, and no chief wazir to maintain her authority, it has become a hotbed of politics, intrigue, and corruption. The city has not suffered undue harm just yet, but criminal elements (and the grasping nobility) are profiteering from the escalating chaos.

Musayid's nobility is wealthy. Many are said to be

richer than the emira, though this is difficult to prove. During the city's early years, an unwise emir sold land along the River Shim to wealthy families in return for the hard coin. He also offered them the rights to collect berthing taxes and provide warehousing facilities in perpetuity, so long as they paid for the construction of a new sea harbor. Unfortunately for the emir, contact with traders from Jadid, City of Trade, was made a few short years later, guaranteeing the city's status as a major trading hub for exotic goods and swelling the coffers of the nobility. Even those who bought farming land have prospered thanks to the planting of rice crops.

Influence and wealth are strange bedfellows in Musayid. Everyone wants to court the next emir, but at present any one of a dozen contenders could end up seated on the throne, and backing the wrong one could have serious political and economic consequences. Conversely, those same hopefuls are keen to court those with money, in the hope it may secure them the throne. Thus, the *mak-sharum* tend to have their status thrust upon them by those who seek them as allies, rather than having to court it.

Of the many master craftsmen holding *shabrum* status, the great majority are involved in the textile industry. Though respected, they are not held in the same esteem as glassblowers are in Balyana, City of Reflection. Of equal standing are physicians and respected barbers, of which Musayid has an abundance.

Among the bureaucracy and military, social status is extremely fluid. Depending on who is currently in favor with the emira, a bureaucrat with a rich patron may see his fortunes rise overnight, only to watch them plummet the next day. Similarly, officers are frequently pawns, with the nobles and courtiers plotting to have their favorites installed close to the city and those loyal to their rivals posted as far away as possible.

Education

The city's schools have never shown much interest in providing any form of specific education. Although the law of the land requires children to remain at school until they are 12, many leave earlier to work alongside their parents. Many children see the military as a way out of poverty, and the emira sees no need to have well-educated soldiers. Al-Waziran is the native tongue, and is taught to all children. Both Beduan and Sandspeech are favored second tongues, though neither forms part of basic educational curricula.

RULES OF THE REALM

The following setting rules apply in Musayid.

* **Harbor:** Musayid's harbor is difficult to navigate safely due to the wind and hidden sandbanks. Hiring a pilot costs 50 dinars, but guarantees safe entry and docking. The captain must also accept whatever docking fee the pilot offers—they are employees of the merchant-nobles, who own all the wharfs and set their own fees.

Captains who want to avoid the fee and guide their vessel into harbor themselves must make a Boating roll at -4. Anyone on board, even the captain, can use Knowledge (Area: Musayid) or Knowledge (Area: The Seas) as a Cooperative roll to try and reduce this penalty. Failure causes the ship to become grounded until the next high tide (assume 2d6 hours) or a 250 dinar towing fee is paid. On a critical failure the ship also strikes a hidden rock. This inflicts an automatic wound.

* **Native Characters:** A native character may choose to be a graduate of *one* of the advanced universities. Each university grants one benefit, as listed below, but only during character generation and the hero must meet all other requirements.

Barbers' School: The character may take the Healer Edge. This Edge is not normally allowed in *Land of Fire*. The Edge does not stack with the Disciple of Marqod Edge (or Disciple of Eira Edge, either, for foreigner students), which has similar benefits.

Military School: The hero may take Favored Foe (Orc) during character generation, treating it as a Novice Edge.

University of the Sands: The hero may take Desert Son during character generation, treating it as a Novice Edge.

* **Noble Families:** Until the emira nominates an heir, the influence of native noble families waxes and wanes like the tide as the various factions jockey for position at court. Instead of receiving a flat +2 Charisma bonus in the city, a native character who has a noble title through the Noble Edge has +1d4-2 (+2 to -1) Charisma. Roll at the start of each week. Other types of native character represented by the Noble Edge are not affected, neither are outsiders.

* **Trade Center:** The docks and markets are full of goods from across the Sultanate, the Jade Empire, and the lands beyond. Special availability goods can be purchased outside the usual places, but cost three times as much. Village Availability items cost 70% of normal and Town items 85%.

* **Trading:** The citizens of Musayid frequently deal with Bedu, and most shops accept trade goods in lieu of coin. The city also manufactures local trade goods and exports those from other cities. For every 300 dinars spent, a buyer receives a 5% discount, to a maximum of 40%.

Musayid has four universities, though three of them are private institutions, rather than under city governance. Its basic university, the Musayid Royal University, provides a wide but shallow education to the scions of rich families. The other educational establishments are the Barbers' School (which trains barbers, herbalists, and physicians), the Musayid Military School (specializes in anti-orc tactics and warfare), and the University of the Sands (specializes in preparing those who intend to enter the deep desert).

Religion

The citizens of Musayid live on the fringes of the Sultanate. The decrees of the Sultan don't mean much up here, but neither do differences in religion. The city may have been built as a bastion against Faithful expansion, but times and moods have changed.

In order to accommodate the religious needs of Faithful, the city has two temples. One takes up an entire block, with each building being a small temple or shrine, as applicable, to all the benevolent gods. The second was built by a crazed emir who had no real idea of the Faithful creed but was known for executing those who disliked his decision. Raised at great expense, it was dedicated to Upuaut, god of wind and ships. The deity dislikes temples, though, and thus it serves as a shrine. Many Faithful believe it to be the largest shrine anywhere in Al-Shirkuh.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Day of Balms: All barbers, herbalists, physicians in the city are required to own a license. Each year on Amt Yaus al-Ittrou Tamith Alak Arkhet, one license holder is chosen at random to attend the emira. Her condition is incurable, but anyone who can alleviate at least some of the symptoms is guaranteed coin and repeat business. Should the attending physician make her condition worse, though, he faces a one-way trip to the gibbet.

Sky of Many Colors: With the harvest gathered and safely stored, attention turns to the most popular holiday in the region. It is held on Anshi Yaus al-Nefar Baot Alak Shemu. Virtually every business and civic office closes for the day as all thoughts turn to the Musayid 10,000.

Residents risk whatever wind is howling off the ocean and take to the flat roofs of their homes to watch the parade of flying carpets in the morning, the smaller races designed to get the crowd excited throughout the afternoon, and then the grand event in the early evening.

Fuelled with alcohol (locally produced rice wine is very popular), strong coffee, and tabac, they cheer as their favorites tear through the streets, whoop loudly as they navigate the tight turns, and bemoan the vagaries of fate as unlucky or unskilled contestants slam into buildings. It is not uncommon for them to throw things at riders they dislike. The city's barbers and physicians are

always on hand to tend to any injuries, and for this day only their services are free (though only to contestants).

The winner is awarded the title Emir of the Winds for the next year. As well as a cash reward, it bestows +2 Charisma on the victor in Musayid.

Military

Orcs living in the Mountains of Death are a constant threat to the lower Wind Road and the farming communities along the River Shim, hostile tribes raid out of the desert, and Scavengers plague the northern Wind Road. To combat these threats, Musayid is forced to maintain a large army.

ARMY

Musayid's permanent standing army totals 6,000 archers, infantry, and cavalry (4.2% of its population). The emira directly controls only half this strength—the rest answers to the various noble families.

Were they to combine forces, the nobles could present a serious threat to the emira. The division between them, which the canny old woman is actively fuelling by switching her support from family to family, means this is very unlikely to happen. Whereas earlier generations of nobles were loathe to lend military help without reassurances their estates would not be left undefended and their troops would not be used in suicidal charges, those seeking the current emira's favor are falling over themselves to supply manpower whenever she asks. This has enabled her to keep the borders well defended and still keep her troops close at hand.

Defending the city and palace falls to the City Guard. Answerable to the emira, it comprises a double-company of archers, a double-company of medium infantry, and a double-company of artilleryists. Responsibility for the emira's personal safety falls to her loyal bodyguards—the Storm Blades. Although only a half-company in strength, a full one-third of them are wizir guardian mages.

Musayid also has a number of elite or specialist units it can call upon.

Hammers of Musayid: Garrisoned at the Last Water Oasis caravanserai, soldiers in this elite company either quickly become veterans or they die. Although called a company, it actually comprises a half-company of medium infantry, a half-company of archers, two patrols of medium cavalry, and two ushabti mages. Every member has the Favored Foe (Scavengers) Edge.

Khamsin Cavalry: The emira has a specialist unit comprising 10 flying carpets. Each is large enough to carry the driver and five passengers, or several days of rations for a small military force. Every carpet is a jinn relic, though to ensure there are no accidents caused by wayward spirits, each driver is a ushabti mage who knows *fly*. A valuable asset, the Khamsin Cavalry is primarily used to ferry the Mountain Watch deep into the

mountains or evacuate them should a mission turn bad, and carry important dignitaries to and from destinations outside the city.

Mountain Watch: While regular troops from the armies of the emira and the nobles man watchtowers and protect settlements in the lower foothills of the Mountains of Death, an elite, unorthodox double-company, the Mountain Watch, is charged with conducting long range patrols into the rugged peaks with the purpose of assassinating key orc commanders and disrupting orc activities. The unit accepts anyone into its ranks, so long as they can live off the land and handle themselves in a fight. The pay is excellent, the conditions lousy, and life-expectancy short. Currently in command is Captain Almira Effenda bint Rashid, a tough commander who drinks as hard as she fights.

Pegasus Guard: With Musayid being the most distant city, the Sultan is keen to ensure his presence is not forgotten. A full company (100) of Pegasus Guards has barracks inside the city. At any one time half their strength are flying patrols over the foothills of the mountains. Their commander, Captain Abdul-Sami ibn Fawwaz, has a great deal of respect for the Mountain Watch, especially their captain.

NAVY

Musayid's navy comprises three heavy warships and six warships. The former are responsible for protecting the ocean, while the latter serve as a permanent river patrol. The river patrol is especially important—it allows the army to respond quickly to orc attacks along the river, and ensures soldiers are never far away from the nobles' estates should they decide to rebel.

A second river fleet operates out of barges. Disguised like normal barges, their role is to provoke orc raids. When the trap is sprung, archers concealed in the hold and trained to fire accurately from the swaying craft reveal their presence with a volley of arrows.

Law & Order

Musayid maintains three separate police forces. The first, the City Watch, is responsible for policing most of the city. As well as pounding the streets, its members can call on the services of a unit mounted on a flying carpet to help track suspects through the streets. This airborne patrol comprises a ushabti mage driver and a spotter. The latter is equipped with an *altered senses* potion to facilitate detecting criminals after dark.

Each residential and business block has three constables. These are citizens registered by the city to carry arms, paid a small stipend for their services, and given powers of arrest. Their jurisdiction ends at the gates to their block—in the event a suspect flees, they are supposed to alert the watch. Rarely do constables sit up all night in residential areas. Instead, they respond to

cries from their neighbors as and when they occur. They range in quality from brutish thugs who extort money from those they are supposed to protect to over-eager vigilantes willing to give any stranger a beating.

The harbor is patrolled by small numbers of private guards hired by each noble family. Their powers extend only to their master's immediate property and any ships berthed at his wharves. For a few dinars, they happily make themselves available to ship captains who need a little hired muscle.

Smuggling is big business in Musayid. Trade tariffs may not be high, but there are always merchants who don't want to pay, or whose goods are illegal. Much of the traffic comes in by means of the river. Controlling this, and every other aspect of crime, is the Fleeting Shadows, the city's only thieves' guild. Its members routinely carry *beat mask* potions to foil the airborne watch's *altered senses*. Thanks to regular bribes, many constables in lower class residential districts turn a blind eye when a thief needs to hide out from the watch—the guild rarely targets those who have little to steal.

Trade & Tribute

Musayid was founded in 106 CJ, the last great city of the Sultanate to rise from the desert. Though its location quickly proved a major mercantile asset, it was built to extend the Sultan's power as far east as geography allowed, so preventing Faithful driven from the Sultanate from setting up home in the region.

Jadid, City of Trade, was already trading with caravans from the distant Jade Empire, and the fledgling city had no way of competing. Instead of trying, its merchants promoted it as the gateway to the Sultanate. Thus was born the Wind Road (which also carried limited trade from the interior and the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes).

The closure of the Silk Road in 391 CJ and the loss of many of its young men at the Battle of the Vultures' Feast hit the city hard, sending it into a downward spiral that was to last almost a generation. It was around this time, while struggling to find a suitable export crop of its own, that farmers switched from traditional crops to rice, until then a luxury.

Fortunes changed again when Jadid finally opened a sea route to the Jade Empire, and the ailing economy quickly recovered to something approaching its previous levels. As well as relying on rice for steady exports, the city opted to become a center for textiles. Flocks of rangy sheep provide ample wool for carpet weaving, flax was woven into cotton, and its artisans learned to transform rolls of silk into exquisite garments.

Musayid also acts as a distribution center for slabs of salt mined from the Salt Basin. Unfortunately, the Sultan controls all aspects of this trade, and the city has no say regarding prices or trade tariffs.

Unfortunately, trade is again threatened, this time by the Scavengers. Caravans are forced to hire additional

guards, which results in higher prices on both landward imports and exports. Adventurers brave or foolish enough to battle the metal-hungry fiends are always guaranteed work—the city pays 100 dinars per confirmed kill.

Musayid imports many goods, but chief among them are jewelry and pottery. Much of the jewelry comes from Sha'ib, City of Mazes. The River Shim lacks decent clay, and everything from common plates to masterwork vases is brought to its markets.

COINAGE

Despite being a trading city, Musayid mints only three coins—the copper one-quarter dirham (known locally as a Bowl because one can purchase a bowl of rice for that amount), a silver one dirham coin (a Breeze), and the gold one dinar coin (a Storm). Most shops accept trade goods in lieu of coins of equal value, and thus bartering is as popular as haggling.

LOCAL TAXES

No emir has ever managed to strip the nobility of its ancient rights. In a bid to try and limit their wealth, several emirs tried to charge them a higher rate of income and property tax than commoners. In response to these tax rises, the nobles began charging higher prices on the goods and services they controlled—rice, berthing fees, and warehousing costs. Since these threatened the city's greater prosperity, the tax hikes were soon abandoned.

Barber License: Barbers, herbalists, physicians, and spellcasters who know *healing* or *greater healing* must purchase a license before they can practice. The law defines practice as charging for one's ingredients, time, or services. Residents are charged 50 dinars a year. Visitors must also purchase a license, which costs 3 dinars a week. Practicing any form of medicine without a license carries a fine of 500 dinars.

Customs Duty: Imports of pottery are taxed at 1%, jewelry at 10%, and other goods at 3%. Rice exports carry a 2% levy, textiles 4%, and other goods 3%.

Docking Fees: Every wharf in the sea harbor not in use by the emira's navy is owned and operated by a noble family. The rivals compete to offer the best fees, knowing that any merchant vessels who dock at their wharfs must also use one of their warehouses to store their cargoes. As the harbor grows busier during the day, so berths become scarcer, and consequently more expensive.

To account for the busy harbor and the limited availability to cheap berths, docking fees are 1d6 x 3 dinars per day. Once the rate is determined, it remains at that level until the ship leaves. Reroll each time a ship enters harbor.

Sales Tax: Normal clothing is charged at 4%, provisions and clothing for desert travel at 2%, and all other goods and services at 8%.

Tolls: Use of the only gate is charged at 1 dirham for pedestrians and 2 dirhams for mounts (1 dinar for elephants). There is no official ferry to the far bank. Fish-

ermen typically charge a dirham per leg for the “inconvenience.” Their small boats can rarely carry more than four pedestrians or a single horse or camel.

Architecture

Wind has shaped Musayid’s architecture. In summer, hot winds tear off the sea. In winter, frigid air roars down from the mountains. Wind speeds at any time in the year are regularly in excess of 20 mph, and storms with winds reaching 70 mph are nothing unusual. Quite why Musayid should suffer such high winds when other cities do not is a mystery. The locals don’t mind much—it gives them something to talk about.

Because the city is exposed to the full force of southerly winds, many buildings are built no higher than two storeys. Even the emira’s palace follows this unwritten rule, though naturally this means it has a larger footprint than those of other emirs.

Rather than being constructed in rows, most buildings are formed up in squares with a central communal courtyard. The only windows and doors face this space. Entrance to the courtyard is through one or more narrow passages, which are barred by gates. Not only can these be shut to keep out the wind, but each block (as they are known) can be turned into a miniature fortress should the city be attacked. Blocks are placed evenly so as to make the streets to a series of T-junctions to help reduce the impact of strong winds.

Major Locales

Below are a number of locales in the city, within the greater territory it controls, or further afield (yet still relevant to Musayid).

CITY DISTRICTS

As noted above, much of the city is built in blocks. The number of blocks varies by district. Lower class neighborhoods have more blocks spaced tightly together, whereas wealthier districts have fewer blocks because individual homes are larger. Poorer blocks are normally two storeys high. Often different families, or branches of an extended family, occupy one floor. In middle class areas each house usually holds one family; the occupants having wealth enough to afford both floors.

Caravan: Located inside the city’s only gate, this district caters to caravans from Jadid, City of Trade, and the desert regions. The large caravanserais flanking the large square are, save one, all owned by noble families. The quality varies to suit all budgets. As traffic steadily grew, so the number of caravans exceeded the capacity of the caravanserais. Caravans that arrive late are now forced to set up camp outside the gate. Still technically part of the

Caravan District, this temporary area is known locally as the Camp.

Craft: Most blocks are devoted to either a single craft or closely related crafts. Typically the lower floors are workshops and storerooms, with the craftsmen and their families occupying the upper floor.

Granary: Near the river are the granaries. Every noble family with agricultural estates has its own granary. The city also has a granary. By law, every farm must devote 10% of its crop to the city. In theory the produce is supposed to be sold cheaply locally, with a small portion kept back for times of crisis. In the city’s short history, many emirs have sold the contents to visiting merchants in order to boost their own coffers. Invariably this led to higher food prices and civil unrest.

Harbor: As the sole importer of goods from the Jade Empire, via Jadid, City of Trade, Musayid does a great deal of business with the cities of the northern Sultanate, especially Akhmim, City of the Devoted.

Unfortunately, the gusting winds and a maze of hidden sandbanks makes entering the harbor tricky. Vessels that have been here before know to wait at sea for a local pilot. Scores of tiny boats flit too and fro among the anchored ships, their occupants (agents of the noble merchant families) loudly proclaiming they can offer the best berthing and warehouse rates in the city. Once a deal is struck, the pilot boards and steers the ship safely into port. Accidents still happen, but they are rare.

The harbor is enclosed by a curved 20 foot high wall. Rather than being defensive, it serves as a windbreak to shelter ships from the worst of the winds. Two tall stone towers flank the narrow entrance. At night, large lanterns are lit to help guide ships toward the city. Few pilots are skilled enough to try navigating the channel under cover of darkness, though, and ships arriving after sunset are forced to wait at sea until dawn. In summer, dense fog is a constant problem. Every hour, watchmen launch alchemical *blasts* with sonic trappings into the sky to warn ships they are approaching the sandbanks.

Market: Aside from a small open area for livestock sales, Musayid’s shops are all located inside the souk. The souk is arranged so that higher end goods are sold nearer the entrances, while lower quality items are found in the bustling interior. The largest section is devoted to textiles. As well as shops selling finished garments, there are many drapers (sell cloth), haberdashers, hatters, mercers (sell silk and lace trimmings), needlers (sell needles), pinners (sell pins), and silkers (sell silk).

Noble: Whereas lower class citizens live in small houses arranged into communal blocks, each block in this wealthy district is a single residence. Structures are built on three sides of a central, walled courtyard. Opposite the gate is the noble’s private quarters. This is usually two storeys high. The side buildings, normally single storey, contain kitchens, stables, storerooms, guest apartments, and servants’ quarters.

Palace: Rather than extending upward, the palace covers a large ground area. The central area, which rises two storeys, is the emira’s private quarters. The rest is

CITY ETIQUETTE

The player characters may be aspiring heroes, or even famous ones, but they are not exempt from the laws of the land or social etiquette. Most cities don't tax the wearing of armor or carrying of weapons, but that doesn't mean it is socially acceptable to parade around the streets like you're about to match off to war.

As a general rule, wearing armor in any settlement not under attack (or imminent threat) attracts attention and raises suspicions. Wearing armor in public, unless one has official paperwork allowing him to do so, gives a character a Charisma penalty equal to the highest protection rating.

Anyone may carry a dagger in public—daggers are universal tools, and often used for eating. This does not apply to snaketooth daggers, which are a “clear sign” the owner is an assassin. Other weapons should be sheathed, encased in a leather covering (such as with axes, spears, and polearms), or otherwise set to prevent them being used in a hurry. Readying a weapon for use counts as an action, though Quick Draw can offset this.

Walking around with a drawn or unguarded weapon is a surefire way of attracting the city watch. Questions will be asked, time will be wasted, and the heroes are likely to receive an on-the-spot fine (1d20 dinars) and a dressing-down. Sassing the watch or threatening them is going to lead to arrests, time in jail, and possibly more serious charges. Even if the watch don't respond, walking around with a drawn weapon (except a dagger) earns a further -2 Charisma penalty—people get nervous around things designed to kill.

Wearing armor and carrying weapons to social engagements is a definite cause for Glory loss (for every single offense) unless a character has been given express permission to do so. Even daggers should be sheathed out of politeness.

single storey, and contains apartments, civic offices, small workshops, storerooms, libraries, a kada, and so on.

Riverside: This a rough neighborhood of poor quality coffee houses and eateries, cheap lodging, and lower class housing blocks. Riverside's wharfs are mostly privately owned by the nobility. The district is a miniature version of the harbor, tending to the barges that run to and from the nobles' estates along the river. Few captains mind ferrying passengers upriver in return for a handful of dinars. Three wharves are home to the emira's river patrol fleet.

Textile: The Textile District is technically part of the Craft District, but its ever-increasing size has led to it being referred to by its own name. Dyers, fullers, tailors, tanners, spinners, upholsterers, weavers, and woolers (produce woolen clothing) all have premises here.

CITY LOCALES

Ali's Camels: A Bedu, Ali (the only name he uses) breeds camels. As well as common camels, he has several pedigree lines for sale. Prices below are in addition to the basic cost of a camel. These options can be combined.

Durable: the camel has Spirit d8 (+200 dinars); **Elite:** the camel is a Wild Card (+1200 dinars); **Fast:** the camel has Pace 10 and a d8 running die (+300 dinars); **Hardy:** the camel can go 10 days without water (+100 dinars); **Well Trained:** the rider ignores the usual -1 penalty to Riding rolls (+250 dinars).

Ali accepts part exchanges on “used” camels, offering a flat 50% of their price regardless of their condition.

Barbers' School: Any healer who could cure the emira would be guaranteed a rich reward. Though all have failed, and many paid for their incompetence with their lives, healers still flock to the city. The university was founded 35 years ago by a trio of barbers and herbalists who stayed on in the city after failing to improve the emira's condition. In that short time it has become renowned across Al-Shirkuh for producing some of the best healers in the land. Two of the lecturers are priestesses of Marqod.

Skills: Healing, Knowledge (Alchemy); **Edges:** Barber, Expert Healer, Healer (this Edge cannot be taken unless learned here), Hedge Magic.

Cantara's Sails: If there's one thing the natives of Musayid understand its the wind. Cantara bint Taslim has been making sales for more years than she cares to remember, and she is a master at her craft. Lightweight yet strong, they can catch the lightest breeze or weather the worst storm. A set of sails costs 5% of a ship's total cost, but adds +1 to its Top Speed. Her skills mean she is constantly in demand—customers must wait 2d6 weeks for their order to be completed.

City Walls: Musayid's walls protect only the landward side, around one-third of the city. The rest of the city faces the river or ocean. There are no watchtowers for sentries, archers, or artillery pieces. (The flying carpets of the Khamsin Cavalry act as lookouts.) The outer walls are dotted with large wooden hatches. Behind these are recesses (15 feet deep), each containing a single ballista. Access is gained via a narrow tunnel from the city side of the walls and then scaling a retractable ladder. Thick metal hatches at the top of the ladder and in the lower wall ensure that any attackers managing to reach one of the recesses cannot gain entrance to the city.

Embassy of Jadid: Overseeing the continuing flow of trade between Jadid and Musayid, and organizing joint defense of caravans against the privations of the Scavengers, falls to Shukri Pasha ibn Rabi.

Despite his silver tongue, Shukri Pasha isn't a trained diplomat—he's a merchant who bought his ambassadorial status. Keen to grow his wealth, he promotes his own business interests above those of rivals, something that has made him few friends back home. Not that Jadid's emir cares—so long as coins flow into the trading city, his position is safe.

Shukri Pasha is also a major underworld figure, with strong ties to the Fleeting Shadows. He is directly responsible for half the goods smuggled into Musayid.

Gate: Musayid has just one gate—the Great Gate. It marks the official start of the Wind Road. The gate is closed between dusk and dawn, though anyone wishing to leave can have a postern gate opened for a few dinars (1d4). It costs considerably more (200+) to persuade the guards to open the gate to traffic intending on entering the city after dark.

Hanging Gardens: The local name for the public square where prisoners are executed, it derives from the unusual practice of inflicting a slow death in the gibbet. Convicts are left to rot until only their bones remain, and even then it takes weeks for the remains to be removed (unless a suitable bribe is paid). Most days the air is filled with the creaking of rusty chains, the rattle of bones, and the moans of the dying.

Except for those who work here (all *mushaf*), Devoted avoid entering the square whenever possible. It is a place of decay and corruption, and even stepping across the boundary requires one to undergo ritual bathing to rid oneself of the taint.

Hospital: Built on the Barbers' School campus, the hospital has tended to the needs of the city inhabitants for 20 years. Healing is not free, but it is cheap. The main reason for this is that many of the barbers, herbalists, and physicians are students still learning their art.

For 50 dinars a week, a patient can purchase the services of a qualified healer. So long as the patient attends the hospital daily for two hours, natural Healing rolls are made at +2 instead of the usual +1. The hospital's apothecary sells herbal remedies. These are brewed to order, and cost 30 dinars plus 10 dinars per point of negative modifiers to create the brew. For example, a stimulant I (+2 modifier) costs 30 dinars, whereas a regenerative healing tonic (−4 modifier) costs 70 dinars.

Iqbal's Exotic Birds: Iqbal is a fourth generation falconer. From small, agile falcons to magnificent eagles, he has stock to satisfy every budget and need. Every bird is hand reared from a chick and trained to the highest quality. His birds cost 450 dinars for a hawk, but give +1 to Survival rolls when hunting.

He also sells parrots, flamingos, and other exotic birds. He'd dearly love to rear peafowl, but first he needs a peacock and a peahen. The only place he knows that has them in Jirja, City of Colors. Anyone who could return him a breeding pair would be richly rewarded.

He has never left the city, but his reputation is known far and wide among Bedu. Sheikhs with a fondness for hunting birds have been known to travel in person from the Great Northern Desert just to ask Iqbal's advice on a trivial matter. He speaks fluent Beduan.

Musayid Military School: Founded by a retired adventurer, the school specializes in how to fight orcs, a constant problem in outlying communities. Many graduates go on to fight with the Mountain Watch. In the last decade it has expanded its courses to cover tactics and strategy. The nobles keep a close eye on students taking

this course. Promising students are offered positions of rank and good wages if they enlist in their private armies when they graduate.

Skills: Fighting, Knowledge (Battle); **Edges:** Favored Foe (Orcs); **Languages:** Orcish.

The Racecourse: A popular entertainment venue, the Racecourse is a long rectangle with rounded ends. For a single dirham, spectators can enjoy camel, horse, and flying carpet racing all year round. On windy days there are kite fighting events, open to any citizen. The entrance fee is one dinar. The prize for winning a race is 50 dinars.

Sofian's Kites: Sofian earns his living selling kites. Wind is rarely a problem in Musayid, and it's a popular hobby. His prices range from 1 dirham for a basic model to 50 dinars for a top-of-the-line fighting kite.

Sofian dislikes flying carpets (he had an accident on one as a child that left his lame in his right leg), but he loves the idea of being able to fly. More specifically, being able to fly like a bird. He has invented a huge kite capable of supporting an adult. He calls it a wind-rider. It's currently untested, and he's looking for volunteers.

Temple of the Wind: Situated on a small hill near the harbor, this grand edifice and folly was built as a temple to Upuaut. It takes the form of a long, open platform, its roof held aloft by towering rows of columns. Although sanctified as a shrine, it is also home to the city's vagrants. Weather-beaten carpets hang between the pillars, affording the lowest members of society some protection from the elements. It is also a favorite meeting place for local members of the Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls.

University of the Sands: The desert is a harsh environment, and it shows no mercy to the unprepared. The university trains those who look to the desert for their fortunes in how to survive. Course include hunting and water-finding techniques, how to stave off sunburn and dehydration, identifying different hazards, tracking, and so on. Its instructors include Bedu, cakali, hyaenidae, a sand mage, and a priest of Duamutef. The university is a recruiting ground for the Sons of the Sand.

Skills: Knowledge (Nomads), Survival; **Edges:** Desert Son, Woodsman; **Languages:** Beduan, Cakalic.

KUMIR

Population: 427

Ruler: Headman Sumrah ibn Bahij

One of the most distant herding villages under the city's jurisdiction, Kumir lies close to the rugged foothills of the Mountains of Death. Two miles outside the settlement is the rotting carcass of an adult storm dragon. All that remains today are its bleached bones and a few withered scraps of sun dried flesh.

The inhabitants say that the dragon extorted a tribute of gold and silver from them for many generations, leaving them greatly impoverished and unable to pay their taxes. They were saved by a mighty hero who walked out the desert and slew the dragon in a titanic battle. The villagers have hunted high and low in the nearby hills, but they have never found the dragon's lair, which is full of

their ancestors' money. They would be willing to offer a generous share to anyone who manages to find the haul. Whether the dragon's treasure really does belong to the villagers is another matter entirely.

MAGORIAN RUINS

The full extent of the ancient Kingdom of Magor has never been fully mapped. Certainly the great population centers lay further south, but like the modern Sultanate there were remote settlements. The ruins of two partially excavated and explored towns and a temple complex within 50 miles of Musayid have been confirmed as being of Magorian origin. The evidence seems to suggest the towns were trading centers. Given their location, scholars are divided between those who believe the inhabitants had dealings with the nomadic tribes and those who believe merchants from the Jade Empire were walking the desert long before the jinn rose to power. There is still much to explore, and scholars are always willing to pay for genuine artifacts.

Bedu traders brave enough to cut across the barren sands from Blacksand Oasis straight to Musayid have reported seeing larger ruins some four days ride from the city. They claim that although the site lies outside the Sultanate, it is guarded by the Sultan's troops. All attempts to get close are met with force. True or not, such stories have given rise to rumors of a great treasure the Sultan wishes to claim for himself.

The Mountain Watch has located mine workings in the Mountains of Death, but it lacks the manpower to conduct a detailed investigation. Several rival noble families believe the mines might still be profitable. They are willing to sponsor expeditions to map and explore the shafts, determine their long-term viability, and clear out any monsters living there.

ORC LAIRS

The lower slopes of the Mountains of Death are home to numerous orc tribes, not to mention ferocious manticores, feral sand goblins, hungry trolls, towering giants, and rapacious storm dragons.

The true extent of the orcs' holdings has yet to be determined. There are certainly several different tribes, but they have been known to cooperate. Not only that, but assassinations carried out by the Mountain Watch have only a limited effect—the loss of leaders throws the orcs into confusion for anywhere from a few days to a few weeks, but a replacement soon fills the void. This has given rise to stories of a powerful orc king, though others claim the orcs are beholden to something more powerful, like a giant or dragon.

Most tribes live in natural caves. Some are single caverns, but others form labyrinthine networks. Other tribes have taken up residence in old ruins. These are mainly watchtowers, but the Mountain Watch knows for sure there is at least one partially ruined castle of unknown origin under orc rule.

PERSONS OF Note

Musayid may be remote, but it is a cosmopolitan city. Here streetwise travelers from Jadid and hardy nomads from the eastern sands mingle with foreigners whose homelands lie across the sea to the east.

SINAN BIN YUNUS

Sinan works at one the caravanserais. His job is to help caravan masters secure the necessary provisions for their long journeys at the best prices. He is amiable, keen to please his patrons, and has many contacts among the craftsmen and shopkeepers. Sinan is actually a member of the thieves' guild and in league with orc raiders. He is actually unaware his contacts are orcs—he believes he is working with common bandits.

He uses his natural charm to learn a caravan's route, the goods it is carrying, and its security details. These are then passed on to his allies using *voice on the wind* alchemical devices. Once the caravan has been raided, its cargo is smuggled back into the city and sold. Half the money is then used to buy weapons, armor, and alchemical devices, which are smuggled to the orcs. The guild keeps the other half as payment for its services.

VACHIR ILKHAN

Vachir has been in Musayid for several months, and has become something of a celebrity. His facial features are not dissimilar to images of citizens of the Jade Empire, but there the similarities end. Instead of silk garments and neat appearance, Vachir wears rough leather clothes, has long hair, a beard, and weather-beaten features.

In faltering Sandspeech he speaks wistfully of his distant homeland, which he calls Baigur, the Land of Air. He describes it as a rolling grassland populated by hardy nomads who ride the fastest horses in the world and wander as they please. It is Vachir's horsemanship that has earned him his celebrity status—he has entered ten races and won them all with ease. His mounted archery has attracted many admirers, as well.

In truth, Vachir is a nobleman (ilkhan is a title equivalent in status to count or sirdar) from the Kurgan Khanate, a nation of horse nomads on the other side of the Mountains of Death. Impoverished by the closure of the Silk Road (they guarded caravans and exacted tribute), his master is seeking to reopen the road by force. Vachir was sent here by a roundabout route to see what nations lie beyond the Mountains of Death and forge an alliance to smash aside the City of Iron.

He is still learning Sandspeech, and has yet to realize the Sultan exists. He waits patiently in Musayid for an audience with the emira. His efforts are being stymied by the machinations of Jadid's ambassador—he has learned of the foreigner's intention through his contacts at the court, and has no wish to see the Silk Road reopened.

QARAH

City of Learning

Storytellers are exaggerating when they say that everyone in Qarah is educated. Alas, it is not such an exaggeration when they claim that everyone is also corrupt. The emir's son tries to maintain order, but he is one man fighting to hold back a sea of wickedness.

Social Hierarchy

The title Emir of Qarah is not automatically past to a family member. Rather, a council of scholars chooses the successor based on his wisdom and capacity to govern well. Often this is a family member—money has always swayed minds, and emirs can afford to have their children educated to a high level. The system is far from foolproof. Over the centuries, many emirs have been imbeciles. Some were placed in power by the scholars as a means of thwarting unpopular noble families. Others were forced on the scholars by powerful nobles who wanted to milk the city dry through their puppet without being caught with their hands in the coffers.

Emir Muhtadi is certainly no imbecile. Now in his early 90s, yet still sprightly, he is widely regarded as one of the most learned men in Al-Shirkuh. So high is the esteem in which he is held, and so long his reign, that the last three Sultans have all consulted him on important matters.

Unfortunately, the emir has never been a good ruler. His true love is knowledge, not governing a city. In order that he might devote more time to study (a worthy pursuit, as mentioned in the *Hamad*), he gave his wizirs more and more powers. Today, he is the emir in name only. His heart was, and still is, in the right place, but he is blind and deaf to the corruption in others.

Whereas in other city's player characters might be kept waiting weeks or months before being granted an audience with an emir, in Qarah all it takes is for the heroes to make it known one of them is a scholar. Although he has learned much, Muhtadi is not arrogant—he knows there are still many things about which he is ignorant. Unfortunately, being granted an audience doesn't mean the emir will listen to the heroes' problems. Matters concerning any aspect of the city are quickly deflected toward the appropriate wazir.

Believing that no one man can know everything about everything, Muhtadi has surrounded himself with dozens of wizirs. Some are mages and clerics, but many are not. Some are men of good intention, but most are not.

His chief wazir is his eldest son, Utbah. He tries his best to keep the other wizirs in check and thwart their schemes, but he is in his late 60s and grows weary of the

constant struggle. He sent his children and grandchildren to Al-Wazir over two decades ago, so they might not be used against him by his many enemies. He sees them once or twice a year, but mostly he is alone except for a small few trusted friends and his personal bodyguard.

It is the nobles who hold the real power. The wizirs may have political authority, but they dance to the tune of the nobles, whose pockets are very deep. Not every noble is corrupt, of course. Locals say it is easy to stop an honest nobleman—he is poor.

Scholars are greatly respected in Qarah. Regardless of their actual social status, citizens of all social ranks honor them with the title *effendi* after their given name. Even one that has fallen on hard times and resorted to begging is still shown this courtesy. More respectable scholars can expect to be courted by rich citizens—being able to proclaim a scholar, especially a renowned one, as a close friend brings with it a degree of respectability.

Most clerics are placed in the *jaleepa* class. Those of Qedeshet, however, are accorded the same courtesy as *shabrum*. Disciples are afforded the honor title *effendi* as with scholars, and are thus *mak-shabrum*.

In terms of the middle and lower classes, those who work with and sell scholarly materials, such as books, papyrus, parchment, and ink, rank slightly higher than their peers, simply because they are patronized by scholars and well educated citizens. Naturally not every learned man is rich, but perception and truth are often at odds with each other.

Education

Qarah's lower and middle class citizens may have better access to education, but that does not mean they are any better educated. While families at the lower end of the social spectrum desperately want their children to become successful (and thus rich), the more immediate need of earning enough to survive often means children are forced into work as soon as they finish basic education. In many cases even finishing elementary school is considered a waste of time.

Despite this, Qarah boasts six universities. Two are basic establishments, though ones with excellent reputations and large campuses. Its four advanced universities are the Storyteller's Schools, University of Inquiring Minds, University of the Ages, and University of the World. They are renowned across the continent.

Qarah may be called the City of Learning, but advanced education remains expensive. Most of the students come

RULES OF THE REALM

The following setting rules apply in Qarah.

* **Black Magic Market:** The sale of khem-hekau artifacts is not strictly illegal, but few legitimate businesses sell such things over the counter. Qarah has a thriving black market for these tainted objects. Finding a buyer or seller requires a Streetwise roll, made once per week.

* **Buying Titles:** The corruption in Qarah is such that a hero can buy an honor noble title here after character generation simply by forking out a sum of money equal to the weregild value (see *Hellfrost Player's Guide*) of the title he wishes to hold (maximum of sirdar/count). Once the sum is paid, the hero must purchase the Noble Edge with an advancement. Until he does, the "application" is still being considered. As normal with honor titles, the character gains the Charisma bonus, but not the Rich Edge. Neither does he acquire any property or people. However, he also has no responsibilities. The buyer holds this title until his death, but it does not automatically pass to his children.

* **Food:** Food costs double the normal price.

* **Native Characters:** Any character with Smarts d6+ may choose to be a graduate of *one* of the city's advanced universities. Each university grants one benefit, as listed below, but only during character generation and the hero must meet all other requirements (where applicable).

Ages: For one skill point the character may take Knowledge (History) at d6.

Inquiring Minds: The character may take the Investigator Edge during character generation. He lowers either the Investigation or Streetwise requirement (his choice) to d6+ when doing so.

Storytellers' School: The character may take the Master Storyteller Edge during character generation, treating it as a Novice Edge.

The World: For one skill point the character may take two Knowledge (Area) skills at d4 or one at d6. He may not spend more than two skill points on this benefit.

* **Respected Scholars:** Characters with the Scholar Edge are automatically given the honorific effendi in Qarah. This grants +2 Charisma, but only within the city proper (i.e. not its greater territory).

* **Scholarly Supplies:** Sheets of parchment cost 0.5 dinars, scroll cases cost 3 dinars, and writing equipment costs 15 dinars in Qarah. Tomes of lore cost 150 dinars per point up to +3, and 500 dinars per point between +4 and +6. These can be purchased in the souk.

* **Slaves:** Plenty of educated men end up enslaved thanks to corrupt officials. An educated slave costs 750 dinars + 50 per die in Knowledge skills.

from rich, or at least influential, families. Taxes pay for scholarship places, which are awarded, in theory, to clever children from poorer backgrounds. The city funds only a set number of scholarships each year, and these are filled on a first-come first-serve basis. Thus, the universities compete to attract students. Unfortunately, not even the hallowed halls of education are free from corruption. In recent years it has become the norm to sign up any child, regardless of his intellect, just to secure funding. Checks are rarely carried out by the Ministry of Education, and any inspector can like be sent away with his paperwork in order for a suitable bribe.

The universities also raise funds through sponsorship. Rich citizens are encouraged to donate in return for the prestige of having a room or wing named after them, or simply being listed on the Roll of Patrons, which is read out in public every year.

Only around 10% of the students are locals. Here one often shares a classroom with citizens from the Caliphate and Free Emirates, or on rare occasions from the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes (though no sphinx has ever been educated here to the best of anyone's knowledge).

Religion

The largest temple to a single deity in Qarah, perhaps in the entire Sultanate, is dedicated to Qedeshet, god of knowledge, and forms part of the University District. Its priests are respected members of society, and treated as scholars and sages more than holy men. Emir Muhtadi has waived the temple's taxes, though it pays the city a token sum out of respect for the emir.

Emir Muhtadi spends a lot of time in conversation with the clerics, and there are rumors he might convert to the faith. Most citizens, Devoted and Faithful alike, dismiss the notion as preposterous—every emir in the Sultanate has always been Devoted. Still, fanatics are secretly beginning to purchase arms and plot his assassination should the emir ever dare to change faiths.

The only other temple honors all the other benevolent deities. Attendances are best described as modest.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Day of the Word: Exactly when and where Suleiman penned the *Hamad* is a cause for dispute. Akhmim, City of the Devoted, has long held that it was there Suleiman first gave his collected wisdom to the Devoted, though every native of Qarah rejects this in favor of their own city. The first *Hamad*, the one written by Suleiman's own hand, has long been considered lost.

Various tales exist as to what happened to it. Some storytellers say it was given to the Sultan of the Jinn, so that he might read it and repent his sins. Many imams say it was buried with Suleiman, for lesser men handling it would corrupt its absolute purity. It is worth noting that Suleiman was not cremated. Having achieved Oneness

in life, his flesh was deemed to be as pure as his spirit. Whether his corpse was incorruptible or whether it decays without causing corruption is still hotly debated. More fanciful tales say it was locked away, for any man not pure in flesh and spirit would die upon touching it.

Regardless of what happened to the original, the Great Library does hold one of the second generation scrolls, written by one of Suleiman's disciples.

Every year on Amt Yaus al-Sesht Yaus Suha the precious tome is brought out of the library's heavily-protected vault. Throughout the day citizens touch their hands to its protective casing to reaffirm their faith, or touch their personal copies of the *Hamad* to it. The scroll is extremely fragile, and has not been taken from its casing in over 300 years, though it is widely rumored the Emir of Akhmim was permitted to see it unrolled.

Military

Qarah's military was once led by officers well versed in the theory of battle. Though never large, its commanders knew how to wield the men most effectively, making facing them on the field of battle a daunting prospect for any invader. Unfortunately, the last two generations of officers have bought their positions. Few have any grasp of even rudimentary tactics. Morale is at an all-time low, provisions and equipment are often sold off on the black market, and desertions are a constant problem.

ARMY

The permanent army is actually quite small (1.3% of its population). Just a double-battalion of light infantry, a double-company of heavy infantry, a double-company of archers, and a three companies of light cavalry protect the city's greater territory. Though only some 30 miles of Suleiman's Road lies in Qarah's direct sphere of influence, the Sultans have long required the city to protect its length as far as the Al-Mosk Caravanserai.

Safeguarding the city is the Wall Guard. A battalion strong (split into a double-company of archers and a double-company of medium infantry), they suffer from the same problems as the rest of the military. Sirdar Utbah has tried his best to have decent officers moved here, but such men are becoming harder to find and keep—the best officers are poached by the nobles to help guard their remaining estates.

The emir's bodyguard, a half-company known simply as the Royal Guard, remains equipped, paid, and well led only thanks to their commander being the grandson of one Sirdar Utbah's childhood friends. A staunch ally of the wizar, Captain Abdul-Salam Pasha ibn Khalaf is quick to root out any men suspected of corruption and replace them with more loyal soldiers.

Utbah also has a small bodyguard of 16 soldiers. He doesn't yet know it, but one of them (a guardian wizar mage) is actually one of his granddaughters, Faiza (age

19). Her parents moved to Akhmim after falling out with Utbah, and the wizar has not seen the girl since she was a small child. Faiza is keen to reconcile with the grandfather she never really knew, but realizes revealing her true identity would be an unnecessary distraction.

The Sultan has stationed 30 Pegasus Guard in Qarah. Their main duties are to patrol Suleiman's Road from the air and act as back-up for the detachment in Al-Mosk.

NAVY

Qarah's navy is a joke. Though locals call it a fleet, they do so with their tongue firmly wedged in their cheek. It comprises just two antiquated warships. Despite this, one of its two captains has always held the rank of Admiral of Qarah. The incumbent knows absolutely nothing about ships, having purchased his title from the wizar in charge of military affairs. Not that the ships ever go to sea much—the sailors are only paid when they are at sea, and so keeping the ships in port means their wages can be diverted to other resources (like the wizar's coffers).

Law & Order

Law and order is supposed to be maintained by the City Guard. Unfortunately for the citizenry, the Guard has become the tool of corrupt nobles. Instead of catching criminals, they are employed by them. This has resulted in a highly fractured police force, with each squad working for a different noble family (and sometimes different nobles within the same family).

Unless bribed or ordered by their patrons, the Guard doesn't bother to investigate crimes. The cost of this "service" depends not so much on what the victim can afford, but how much work the patrol has to do. The Guard may be corrupt, but it is also stupid. Wily citizens have learned to pay rival patrols off against each other to get the price lowered—solving crimes may mean actually doing some work, but at least it earns money.

Citizens with enough money and the right contacts at court can purchase a special scroll that gives them immunity from arrest and prosecution by any legal power in the city, regardless of their actions. Such paperwork costs 2000 dinars, and has no value or legal status outside Qarah. Most nobles have them as a precaution, though they are usually careful to hide their illegal activities from the few honest officials left in the city.

Every corrupt nobleman has his hand in some sort of illegal activity. Smuggling, hashish dens, khem-hekau artifacts, extortion, prostitution—you name it and a nobleman controls at least some aspect of it. Naturally, this has left the city's actual thieves' guild, the Ignorant Men, rather annoyed. Instead of robbing shops and middle class homes, they focus entirely on robbing the nobility and those known to be their agents. Ironically, they have also joined forces with the city's resident Brothers of the Unfortunate Souls in protecting the weaker members

of society. Many thieves donate a portion of their stolen wealth to the poor through various legitimate outlets.

Qarah has a thriving black market in ancient artifacts, especially those relating to khem-hekau. Though their sale isn't technically illegal, few citizens wish to soil their hands in public by offering such wares for hard coin. As the imams preach, the spirits may be corrupt souls, but they are still souls. The city's artifact dealers aren't having an easy time, though—someone is robbing them. The culprits are actually members of the Shroud of Eternity. They operate as a small thieves' guild under the name the Withered Hands. They steal only Hekatic and khem-hekau artifacts, which they hope to gift to a withered pharaoh in the vain hope he will grant them immortality.

Although its harbor is small, Qarah is home to several corsair vessels. Judicious bribes have ensured certain captains status as registered "privateers." This allows them to attack and sink any vessels they deem to be corsairs. What exactly constitutes a corsair vessel is left to the discretion of each captain. Plundered cargoes are quickly sold to various nobles, who sell them on through the legitimate businesses they control.

Trade & Tribute

Qarah sits at the start of Suleiman's Road, and yet it is not a major trading city. Its harbor is tiny. This results in long queues as merchants line up to deliver goods intended for, and purchase goods shipped from, the Free Emirate States. Sultans down the ages have pushed for Qarah's emirs to build a new port town further along the coast to no avail. Much of this has been down to the machinations of the nobles. Increased trade would undoubtedly bring the city wealth, but that wealth would go straight to the emir. Rather than allow that, they have taken to purchasing warehouses. This allows them to store goods at relatively high rates, ensuring they earn a steady income.

The city's primary imports are papyrus and ink, two vital staples needed at the universities. The city also lacks metal ore within its jurisdiction, forcing it to import what it needs. In return, it makes its money from exporting books and charging for the wide range of education facilities it offers.

The city has a major problem that is growing steadily worse. The shrinking flood plain of the River Benil has resulted in declining agriculture. Food prices have risen steadily, far outstripping wages, and most citizens must devote almost their entire income (after taxes) to filling their bellies. In theory, the farms are supposed to donate 30% of their crop to the city to help ensure this doesn't happen. The contents of the granaries have been systematically sold off by unscrupulous officials, leaving the city one bad harvest away from a major famine. As a result, there is a growing black market in even basic foodstuffs.

To make matters worse, the shrinking agricultural

land has forced many families off their land in search of work (or at least a free hand-out). The city's population is growing at an alarming rate and its capacity to feed the citizens already living there is rapidly diminishing.

COINAGE

Qarah mints copper one-quarter dirham (a "Beggar"), silver half dirham ("Sheet"), silver one dirham ("Scribe"), gold one dinar ("Bit"), and gold 10 dinar ("Blinder") coins. Corruption has led to a wide variety in the metal content of coins in recent years to such an extent that locals prefer to deal in foreign coins.

All the nicknames are slang terms used across the social strata. Beggar implies something is worthless—"I wouldn't give a beggar for that!" Sheet refers to the cost of a single piece of parchment in Qarah, while Scribe is the price a scribe charges to write or copy one page of text. Bits get their name because no one takes a coin's face value seriously. Many have bite impressions. A Blinder is the amount it costs to have a common person or low functionary turn a blind eye to someone's activities.

LOCAL TAXES

While the nobility would dearly love to make the lower classes pay more taxes, it is never wise to stir the masses to anger. As a result, everyone pays around 35% of their income in various taxes. Of course, this only covers legitimate sources of income—the corrupt nobles are very good at claiming poverty while living lavish lifestyles on the immense profits from their various criminal activities.

Bribes: While not a legitimate tax, many city officials demand a bribe to do anything for citizens. Assuming the request is mundane and routine, a typical bribe is 10 dinars. Almost anything can be asked of an official, but the prices rise very quickly for illegal or morally questionable acts.

Customs Duty: Imports of papyrus and ink are levied at 2%, while other goods are 4%. All exports are charged at 4%. These rates are theoretical. Docking fees are high, and captains who want to have their cargo passed by customs officials need to bribe them with as much as 3% of the cargo's value. Those who refuse may be subjected to lengthy delays, detailed searches of every item of cargo, or accusations of being smugglers or corsairs.

Docking Fees: In order to stop ships clogging the small harbor, captains must pay 35 dinars per day.

Licenses: The City Guard supplement their incomes further by charging for fictitious licenses (weapons tax, non-human tax, Faithful tax). They only target strangers, since the locals wouldn't tolerate such nonsense for long. A typical "license" costs 1d10 dinars, is good for one month, and is written out on the spot. Rival patrols never question the validity of these licenses—to do so endangers the entire scam. Instead, they make a show of checking them, and then invent a new license to get more money from visitors.

Sales Tax: 1% on parchment and writing equipment, 2% on tomes of lore, and 6% on everything else.

Tolls: In theory, the ferry toll for passage across the Benil is set at 2 dirhams per pedestrian and 4 dirhams per mount. Gate tolls for the eastern and southern gates are half these amounts, and entrance through the northern gate is supposed to be free. In practice, toll collectors charge whatever they think they can get away with.

Architecture

Qarah's residential and civic buildings are plain, functional structures. The grand structures are the emir's palace and the sprawling universities. Their domes and minarets dominate the heart of the city. As the city's fame for providing an excellent education grew, so the university's expanded. Residential neighborhoods were torn down to make way for new buildings, and existing residential areas altered to make room for houses for those displaced. As a result, the center of the city is quite airy, with wide streets and a small permanent population. In comparison, the outer districts are densely populated with very narrow streets and multi-storey houses.

Major Locales

This section covers a number of locales inside and the city and within the greater territory Qarah controls.

ABANDONED FARMS

Even with irrigation channels to help offset the lack of flooding, the land around the upper reaches of the River Benil has dried up, forcing the inhabitants of many farms to abandon their homes. The incompetency of the army to adequately patrol the region has allowed orcs and bandits to move in. Sirdar Utbah has set aside funds to hire adventurers to clear the scum out of the region, and is prepared to offer land grants to anyone prepared to make a go at reviving the area.

CITY DISTRICTS

Following centuries of gradual redevelopment, the main bustling residential and business districts are located away from the city center.

Craft: Around one-third of the district is dedicated to crafts relating to the manufacture of papyrus scrolls, parchment, and writing equipment.

Harbor: The small, almost circular cove that constitutes Qarah's harbor is the only break in the rugged coastline for dozens of miles in both directions. Set back from the narrow wharfs are rows of shops and workshops dedicated to keeping ships maintained and stocked. Further back are the warehouses of the city's merchants.

SAGE ADVICE

The Knowledge skills possessed by player characters generally represent a broad but shallow area of expertise. The character knows lots of facts, but when it comes to specific details there is often a penalty to the roll. For instance, assuming there is some piece of architectural evidence, any hero can use Knowledge (Area: Hekata) or Knowledge (History) to identify a ruin as being of Hekatic origin with no modifier. If he speaks the language and there is an inscription, then a roll probably isn't even required. Hekata's history spans over 1000 years, though. Trying to date the ruin to a specific dynasty becomes much trickier unless there are clear inscriptions containing dateable facts. If all one has are a few plain stone blocks and fragments of pottery, then determining when it was built, by whom, in what era, and for what purpose becomes harder still.

Don't think pieces of pottery can't be interesting. A broken pot may look like rubbish, but in the right hands it can reveal a lot. If it's a piece of "Late Hekatic funeral ware," for instance, it implies there is probably a cemetery nearby, and that likely means buried treasure (and traps and undead).

Also, the characters also can't be expected to learn every possible Knowledge skill to a competent level (though some might have a good try), and rerolls for Knowledge skills aren't possible, not even with a *boost trait* spell—either you know a given fact or you don't.

Libraries can be useful in hunting down clues, but this can take time, and there's no guarantee the knowledge exists. The chances of finding a reference to one Hekatic ruin are slim, and locating a book that covers every type of pot used in Hekata over a millennium is almost impossible.

For those who need answers on such matters, the best bet is to hire a scholar who specializes in the specific field. Most cities have at least a handful of scholars, though their quality varies.

HIRING A SAGE

Time is money, and sages charge for their services. Rather than creating "random sage tables," the characters get to decide the scholar's competency by the amount of money they are willing to spend. Typical daily prices are shown below. How long it takes a sage to answer a question is up to the GM.

Basic Rate: 5 dinars times appropriate Knowledge die type. Add a flat 10 dinars for each point above d12.

Edges: If the sage has an applicable bonus from the Scholar Edge, add 30 dinars. Each cumulative bonus from other applicable Edges adds a further 10 dinars.

Wild Card Sage: Double the total fee. Add a further 50 dinars if the sage has the Master Edge for the relevant Knowledge skill.

LIBRARIES

Use of the Investigation skill requires access to written material—no written material means no Investigation roll is permitted. Fortunately, libraries are relatively common in Al-Shirkuh—even a nomadic tribe or small village is likely to have a few scrolls lying around. Despite needing a library to be of any use, Investigation is a far more powerful skill than Knowledge skills and Streetwise.

For instance, the odds of learning the burial place of a specific Hekatic pharaoh by questioning people on the streets are ridiculously low. Knowledge skills (especially Area: Hekata and History) would be very useful, but there are likely to be penalties, and failed rolls cannot be reattempted. A collection of ancient tomes penned around that time or by scholars of Hekata, however, may provide the answer, not to mention other pertinent details.

MODIFIERS

Libraries are categorized as small (a Bedu tribe, village, noble's private collection), modest (most towns, typical temples), standard (large towns or temples), and grand (most cities and universities).

Base Modifiers: A small library imposes a -2 penalty to Investigation rolls. A modest library gives -1, a standard library +0, and a grand library +1.

Specialized Libraries: Specialized libraries focus on a specific topic or range of topics over general information. For instance, temple libraries usually grant the bonus on matters related to the deity's aspects, while advanced universities have a modifier for fields they teach. On matters relating directly to the specialization, there is a further +1 bonus. Conversely, on matters outside the specialization, there is an additional -1 penalty.

For example, a temple to Karmelos specializes in warfare. There would be books on folklore, heraldry, history, law, even magic, but all would be focused on war. If you want to track down that pharaoh's tomb, you could try the general section (at -1), though you'd be better heading to a temple of Tammuz or a library with specializing in Hekata.

Specialty Sections: Whereas specialized libraries are devoted to one type of topic, libraries with a specialty are generic libraries that also have a section specifically devoted to one area of lore. These grant +1 to Investigation rolls with regard their specialty, and impose no additional penalty for researching other topics.

A library may have both a specialization and a specialty. These are almost always related. For instance, one might specialize in the Hekata, but have a heraldry specialty. This would give a +2 modifier if trying to tie a heraldic insignia to a specific pharaoh.

Market: Qarah has a small souk surrounded by a wide plaza that doubles as a bazaar. The souk is largely devoted to selling parchment, papyrus scrolls, writing equipment, colored inks, sealing wax, scroll cases, blank books, and other things sages and students need in their work. Tomes of lore can also be purchased openly at very reasonable prices, as can miscellaneous scrolls and books. There are also a plethora of cartographers, calligraphers, illuminators, and seal makers.

Palace: The emir's palace is the center of the city's bureaucracy, home to many civic offices, and a hotbed of politics and corruption. Of the emir's personal apartments, around half is crammed full of books and scrolls. The city granaries are also located here.

The Refuge: Forced from their homes along the Benil, thousands of people have migrated to Qarah in search of work. Shortage of space within the walls has led to the creation of a shanty town on the last leg of Suleiman's Road. Charitable citizens do what they can, but there are simply too many refugees to help everyone. The inhabitants earn a few dirhams selling what few goods they have left in the bazaars or working as day laborers. Disease is not yet a major problem, but without money the refugees cannot buy food or medicine. The City Watch regularly terrorizes the locals. In response, the Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls has founded two safe houses in the neighborhood.

Scholar: Situated adjacent to the University District, this residential neighborhood is home to a great many of the city's scholars, sages, lecturers, and senior students. The quality of housing ranges from middle to upper class. Few sages have business premises. Instead, they entertain clients in their homes.

University: The largest area in the city, it houses all six university campuses, as well as the temple of Qedeset. As well as faculty buildings, there are two parks popular with students and young lovers.

CITY LOCALES

The Bone Library: The Bone Library is found on no maps of the city, no sage has ever admitted visiting it, and many citizens dismiss it as a myth. Supposedly it contains a wealth of texts concerning Hekata, khem-hekau magic, necromancy, demons, demonic cults, and the undead—essentially anything that could relate to the black arts in general. The library exists, though finding it requires dealing with some of the city's most unsavory characters. Many of them are demonists—corrupt mages who draw their power from the demon lords of the Bottomless Pits. They are experts at sniffing out unwanted “undesirables,” such as followers of Shamash or Tammuz.

The curator is a Wild Card librarian demon. Its wears heavy black robes and cowl to disguise its unearthly nature, and speaks in deep tones that give an air of both great knowledge and utter damnation. It is quite willing to let visitors browse the library (though they are forbidden from copying or borrowing texts), and even serve as a sage if asked.

City Walls: The city is completely surrounded by thick walls dotted with watchtowers. Siege artillery still watches over the approaches, but much of their alchemical ammunition (and a good portion of conventional ammunition) has been sold off by corrupt guardsmen.

Gates: Qarah has three gates. In the north wall is the River Gate. Two miles down the road is the ferry across the River Benil. The Harbor Gate, in the east wall, allows access only to the city's small harbor. The Gate of Purity is located in the southern wall.

Security for the gates is provided by the City Guard. All three gates are closed at night and the watch doubled.

The House of Lambs: Ibni, an elderly Bedu, runs the most popular eatery in the city. It opens only one day a week, Yaus al-Hamala, and serves nothing but lamb dishes. Prices are high, the queues are long, but the food is exquisite. The blend of herbs and spices he uses is a closely-guarded secret. Not even *puppet* spells can force Ibni to reveal the ingredients.

The Inquiry Office: This business is run by Temel, a Devoted male cakali, and Golara, a Faithful female sand goblin. The odd pair have known each other years, and while they constantly bicker like an old married couple they are inseparable friends. They work as private investigators, with a sliding scale based on a client's ability to pay. Temel has many contacts among the city's scholars, while Golara has friends at the bottom of the social ladder. They are currently investigating a string of grisly murders among the city's academics and sages on behalf of Sirdar Uthah. What makes the crimes unusual is that every victim's brain was missing.

Messengers' Guild: This private enterprise employs a dozen staff—scribes, translators, cryptographers, and spellcasters who know *voice on the wind*. Using magic, carrier pigeons, and conventional messengers, it guarantees the speedy delivery of any message to anywhere in Al-Shirkuh. Client privacy, the staff insist, is paramount to their operation. Sadly this is a lie. Information that might be worth something is quickly passed on to the relevant people.

Storytellers' School: Storytelling has long been a way of not only entertaining audiences, but keeping memories of people and events alive. It is considered a high art, requiring both good memory and creative flair (no one likes a boring storyteller, no matter how good his material is). Local tradition says the school was founded by none less than Sinbad the Sailor.

Skills: Knowledge (Folklore), Knowledge (Riddles); **Edges:** Master Storyteller, Storyteller.

The Temple of Lore: Dedicated to Qedeshet, this magnificent structure sits in the University District. Though not well stocked as the Great Library, it comes a close second. Although the cult wishes to allow free access, city laws require anyone entering to pay a 10 dinar per day "religious tax." This was implemented to prevent the temple overshadowing the Great Library.

University of Inquiring Minds: This unusual school actually teaches students how to conduct research. The curriculum covers both academic research and asking

LIBRARIES CONTINUED

TIME

The main drawback with Investigation is time. Few libraries have a decent cataloguing system, no books have indexes, and few have detailed tables of contents. If you want to uncover a fact, you need to read the entire text. Likely you'll need to read several texts—no one book in Al-Shirkuh is all encompassing on any subject, and there are always differing views and opinions.

For ease, assume each roll takes 1d4 days. Roll the die before the heroes begin their investigation. For each day less (to a minimum of one day) the characters want to spend in the library, there is a cumulative -1 penalty. In larger libraries this represents skimming multiple books for relevant passages, while in smaller ones it covers detailed study of a few tomes to avoid missing any passing references. As a rule of thumb, characters can reattempt failed rolls. This represents checking other books and sections. There are limits, though. A small library allows no rerolls. A modest library allows one, a standard library two, and a grand library four.

the right questions of people. It is very popular with aspiring librarians—most wealthy citizens in Qarah own a personal library, and every town and city has one. Many students go on to work for sages as assistants in the hope of one day becoming a true scholar in their own right.

Skills: Investigation, Streetwise; **Edges:** Investigator.

University of the Ages: Arguably the most focused university in the Sultanate, this school teaches only one subject—history. The university regularly hires adventurers to act as guides and guardians to field trips visiting some of Al-Shirkuh's many ruins and historical landmarks. Babysitting students whose knowledge of desert life is minimal may not be as exciting as robbing a tomb, but it pays well. The university also buys mundane historical artifacts, such as pottery and scraps of clothing, though it pays a pittance. In game terms, characters can gather these otherwise useless items and sell them to the university as if they were trade good.

Skills: Knowledge (History).

University of the World: While the university prides itself on its reputation for teaching about the known world, its knowledge of the Jade Empire and Rassilon is extremely sketchy. Characters who study here with intent to know more about the northern continent can only learn Knowledge (Area: The Hearthlands) to a maximum of d6 and cannot learn any of the languages. The former barely covers the names of the major realms and geographical features, yet alone any specific details.

Characters with knowledge of individual realms can earn good money passing on their wisdom. The univer-

CREATING TOMES OF LORE

Characters who want to make some extra money without risking life and limb can transcribe tomes of lore. This is time-consuming, and the profits are low once living costs are factored in, but it is something a hero can do between adventures. Such volumes **cannot** be used by the author as a shortcut to getting bonuses to his die rolls, though—he already knows everything in them.

The maximum bonus the book can impart depends on the author's relevant and actual skill die—*boost trait* provides no benefit in this regard. At d6 or lower he doesn't know enough to pen a volume of any use, though he might get a few dinars for his pamphlet. A d8 allows the production of a +1 tome of lore, d10 a +2 text, and d12 a +3 volume.

Writing books with a higher bonus requires a truly great mind. In order to pen a +4 book the character must have d12+1 in the relevant Knowledge skill (through the Professional Edge). A +5 bonus requires a d12+2 (through the Expert Edge). A +6 bonuses requires the Master Edge. In all three cases the author also requires the Scholar Edge for the relevant field.

Writing takes one month (8 hours a day, six days a week) for each +1 bonus up to +3, and then two months for each +1 bonus after that.

Material costs are 30 dinars for each +1 bonus. This covers writing materials, ink, professional binding, and so on.

sity pays 250 dinars per die type for Knowledge (Area) skills covering a specific realm. For instance, a hero with Knowledge (Area: Nordmark) d6 could earn 1500 dinars. Each die type requires the hero to spend two weeks (8 hours a day, seven days a week barring public holidays) at the university writing down what he knows before he gets paid. **Languages unique to Rassilon are worth a flat 800 dinars**, but require the speaker to spend three entire months teaching a scholar enough about the basics that he can mentor others in the tongue.

Skills: Knowledge (Area); *Languages:* Any.

MEDINAT AL-KHAMSIN

Population: 743

Ruler: Pasha Sahl ibn Ubayy, the River of Devotion

Despite its grand title (Medinat means “city”), this settlement is a large village on the banks of the Benil. Its fields are well irrigated and its crops grow lush, but the people are desperately short of clean drinking water.

The village has a source of fresh water. A spring rises up in the grounds of the pasha's palace. Whereas in olden times the water ran through the village to the river, Pasha Sahl has created a series of expensive and elaborate water features not only in the courtyards, but running through the marble halls. From here it flows into under-

ground cisterns, from where it is carefully rationed to the people each morning. The rations are barely enough to survive on, especially since large quantities must be used in cooking food. Often people are forced to steal mouthfuls from the river or irrigation channels, which leaves them open to parasites.

Pasha Sahl is fascinated by khamsins. He employs a jinn mage to cast spells with water trappings on demand for his pleasure, but what he really wants is an enslaved khamsin to live in his water garden. A lesser one will sate his immediate needs, but a greater jinni would be more desirable. The yields from his lands have made him rich, and he is quite prepared to lavish it on anyone who can bring him his heart's desire.

PERSONS OF Note

Qarah is a city of crusty sages, corrupt officials, eager students, and desperate souls. Among their ranks are many interesting people. A few are described below.

JAUF IBN KOMBAS

A lecturer at the Storyteller's School and a Brother of Sinbad, Jauf has a reputation for being a few pages short of a book, as the saying goes. Every time he is encountered he has a new crackpot theory to share—the world is hollow and inhabited by a race of giants, the world is flat and if you sail far enough you'll fall off, the sky is a glass dome that will break if you hit it hard enough, jinn living on the moon send out mind-control rays.

Jauf is sincere in his beliefs, though they change every few weeks. He's always looking for rich patrons willing to sponsor expeditions to prove his theories. One day someone might actually take him up and provide funds. Though people laugh at him, they do so with a certain trepidation that he might actually be right. After all, it was Suleiman who said, “Until you achieve Oneness, you must take nothing as absolute fact, no matter how firm your convictions.”

THE SHADOW MAN

No one in Qarah uses this name, nor do they suspect he exists. The city trains the brightest and richest of the Sultanate's population. This is a natural lure to the Puppeteers. While a small few local officials have fallen under the sway of their agent, most were already walking the path to corruption without his help.

The Shadow Man is cautious. His schemes are carefully hidden behind a veneer of friendship, his manipulations subtle. The friendships he makes with the Sultanate's aspiring scions are intended to bear fruit not in weeks or months, but in years and decades to come.

He maintains many alter egos, mixes with all levels of society with equal ease, and seemingly has access to all but the highest levels of the city.

SHA'IB

City of Mazes

Sha'ib controls the largest number of gold and silver mines in the Sultanate, its jewelry brings in great sums of money, and yet the city is falling into disrepair. Its emir, Haddad, goes by the title Fountain of Wealth, yet only he drinks freely of its metaphorical waters.

Social Hierarchy

Primogeniture has been the accepted method of deciding the next emir since the city was founded. Though gender is irrelevant, there are two conditions that allow the title to skip to the next eligible family member—first born who become Faithful and who are clearly are mentally incapable of ruling are denied any claim to the title. In rare instances where there are no legitimate heirs, it falls to the city's imams to elect a new emir. In the event a daughter becomes ruler, her husband has no claims to the title on her death, incapacity, or such like.

Emir Haddad rules the city as his personal fief. Its vast income is his personal property, and he spends it as he wishes. Unfortunately, that means he spends only the absolute minimum on the city, and then only when given no other choice. Haddad doesn't even bother with a wazir because they cost money. That and the fact he rarely cares to listen to the advice of others—after all, he is the emir, and what he says is law in Sha'ib. His title, bestowed by the people, is only ever used ironically.

His life is one of absolute luxury and extravagance. When his favorite hunting falcon died he had it buried in a golden coffin that cost more than most citizens earn in a year. His evening meal alone regularly involves enough food to feed a family of lower class citizens for an entire month, and the great majority of it goes to waste. The value of the jewelry he wears could fund an entire company of infantry for one year.

His oldest son, Musruq, has never placed any value in material goods. His father initially granted him a generous stipend, but this was withdrawn when he learned it was being channeled to the poor. Musruq hopes his vocal attacks in court will lead others to join his cause to have his father replaced and prosperity returned, but not every noble is against the emir. Some profit from his continued rule, and they have no wish to be stripped of their comfortable lives.

Sha'ib's nobles are among the poorest in Al-Shirkuh. Although tax increases have added to their burden in recent decades, they were never rich to begin with. The ancestral titles were granted in return for them overseeing agriculture land. However, greed seems to be a common

taint among the city's rulers. The first emirs issued only small plots, and even then they demanded the nobles provide the city with a portion of their annual harvest.

Although the nobles have absolutely no chance of becoming emir, they still flock around Haddad's court. Nobles who demean themselves by toadying to him are rewarded with small monetary gifts. Those who retain their pride and dignity go unrewarded.

Many nobles also hold senior government posts. These again are rewarded for their bootlicking. Not only do these appointments give them a sense of power, they also allow the nobles to supplement their income from their estates. Their main goal is protect their status by keeping a careful eye on their inferiors. Anyone suspected of "disloyalty" is quickly reported to the emir.

Sha'ib may rely on precious metals for its income, but those who craft metal are not awarded any special status purely by dint of their trade. Sha'ib is a trading city, and there are plenty of other crafts that are just as important to its overall finances.

Due to high taxes, many citizens find themselves impoverished. For those whose pride can be quietly shuffled off to one side, there is always the option of becoming an indentured servant. In return for food, accommodation, clothing, and basic goods, they work as virtual slaves for citizens with more money or a higher sense of self-importance. The law states that citizens may leave at any time, but are legally bound to repay their master's "kindness" in full. Half their wages after leaving "employment" must be given to their former master. The half is after tax have been paid (these are based on one's full income). Until the debt is repaid, the citizens are forbidden from leaving Sha'ib.

Those truly desperate can opt to work in the mines. Conditions are dangerous, the pay is pitiful, and contracts are for a minimum of five years. Many opt to become beggars instead—citizens may look down on you, but at least there is a slim hope of actually getting enough to eat at least every other day.

Education

Not even basic education is free in Sha'ib. While citizens do not pay a specific school tax, tutors are government employees, and thus paid from tax revenues. Teachers are paid whenever the emir feels like it, and many opt to work as private instructors to wealthier families instead of providing commoners with rudimentary education. Many families don't bother to send their

RULES OF THE REALM

The following setting rules apply in Sha'ib.

* **Bad Food:** The pollution from mining has tainted the local food and water. Characters who eat locally grown food (Cheap or Average meals) or consume locally produced drinks that haven't been boiled must make a Vigor roll each day or suffer a level of Fatigue for 12 hours. They can stop making rolls if their Vigor roll is a raise or after seven consecutive days, whichever comes first.

* **Barter:** Coins are in short supply. As a result, shops accept trade goods in lieu of coins when buying and selling.

* **Child Gangs:** At least once a day strangers will find themselves surrounded by a gaggle of children begging for coins or food. The wretches are organized pickpockets and cutpurses. Have each hero make a Notice roll against the gang's Group Stealth d8. Heroes who fail are robbed of 1d6 dinars worth of coins or small objects.

* **Food:** Cheap meals cost 1 dirham. Expensive meals cost 10+ dinars.

* **Lost in the City:** Whenever they move between locations in the city, the characters must make a Streetwise roll at -2 or an unmodified Knowledge (Area: Sha'ib) roll. Native characters may use Common Knowledge. Failure means the heroes lose 1d4 hours as they wander around hopelessly lost. On a critical failure they blunder into a particularly disreputable part of the city.

* **Native Characters:** Due to crippling taxes, no native character can begin play with the Rich Edge. This applies even if the hero has the Noble Edge.

* **Selling Weapons:** There is a growing black market in illegal weapons. Characters looking to sell such items can find a buyer willing to pay 50% of list price on a successful Streetwise roll and 75% with a raise. The GM should draw a card from the action deck for each separate transaction. Any deuce means the purchase is a sting operation conducted by the emir's secret police. A force of 1d4+4 veteran watchmen make their presence known.

* **Slaves:** Slavery of free civilized beings is illegal unless the sentence is passed by the courts. Most physically fit slaves are automatically sent to the mines. As a result, the cost of slave laborers on the open market is double the normal price.

children to school anyway—better they are put to work at an early age. Even when children do attend school, they must often rely on the goodwill of imams and clerics to provide basic schooling.

The city has one basic university. This is run by the state. Tuition fees are high and there is no sponsorship program. Citizens who can afford to have their children educated prefer to send them to other cities. Since these

other universities accept limited numbers of students each year, Sha'ib's university still does a brisk trade.

The only other higher education establishment is a trade school—the Sha'ib Academy of Precious Metals. Here children can learn to become goldsmiths and silversmiths. In order to work in one of the trades in Sha'ib, a craftsman must be a graduate from the Academy. Since education is expensive, the city offers a form of sponsorship. In return for the state paying for their education, craftsmen are forced to work as city employees until their debt is repaid. The state pays a minimal wage, and it takes a skilled craftsman as much as ten years to clear his debts. Only then may he run his own business.

Religion

The emirs have encouraged open worship of Geb-Agni since the day the mines first opened. Though they have never put any faith in the gods, the emirs request the clerics bless the mines each year—it never hurts to hedge your bets when the city depends so heavily on the precious metals for its survival.

Many priests are employed to oversee the smelting and purification of the ores, and for this they are well paid—offending them could result in a curse been placed on the mines. Others work as private craftsmen, though all have gone through the Academy. Since the cult is one of the wealthiest, none of the clerics are bound to the state. The emir hires paladins to help guard the mines, to safeguard the shipments of ingots, and to protect the city's state-run workshops.

The only other official temple is a small structure hidden down a back alley. It contains shrines to all the benevolent gods save Tamarni. Worship of the goddess of thieves, as the emirs of Sha'ib have long labelled her, is punishable by slavery (it used to be a small fine).

Naturally, this edict has not deterred the cult from setting up a small shrine away from prying eyes. It offers honest gambling games, hashish, prostitutes, and all the usual pleasures its legal places of worship support and encourage. The cult may be small, having just two priests and three paladins, but it turns a nice profit. Since it doesn't officially exist, it doesn't pay any taxes. It has nothing to fear from the Mazerunners—one of the paladins is the guild's current Thief Lord (the guild master).

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Emir Haddad begrudgingly allows all the major festivals undertaken by Devoted (as listed in the general section on the Sultanate). He doesn't much like the idea of citizens not working, since this results in lower earnings and thus lower taxes, but he is not foolish enough to risk an uprising by denying them acts of devotion.

The Nobles' Parade: Each year on Tamith Yaus al-Kemi Tamith Alak Paret, the nobles are expected to visit the emir with records of their harvests. Tradition dictates

they gather at the docks, whereupon they proceed *en masse* through the city to the palace. Since they are being summoned by the emir, they dress in their finery.

Originally the parade allowed the citizens to thank the nobles for their donations of crops to the city granaries. These days the event allows them to display different feelings. While the citizens are rightful fearful about insulting the emir, there are no restrictions regarding the nobility. Frustrated citizens (led to believe the nobles are deliberately providing the city with the worst part of their harvests by agitators loyal to the emir) vent their displeasure by throwing dung (rotten fruit can fetch a few coins among the poor) at the nobles, their stewards, and their escorts.

Military

Emir Haddad may be loathe to spend money, but he is not stupid—without adequate protection he risks losing the mines to orcs or slave uprisings. That said, the army is still very small.

ARMY

Sha'ib's main army stands at just one double-battalion (1024 men), or 1.4% of the total population. Half of these are permanently garrisoned at the mining camps. The largest mines have a full company, and the smaller ones a half-company. The remainder are stationed along the river, partly to keep the waterway free of pirates and partly to keep an eye on the nobles.

Those stationed at the mines are under the direct command of the local governor. They are paid from his expenses quota, and thus their wages are low (though higher than those of soldiers in other postings). They are encouraged to earn bonuses by "recruiting" new workers and ensuring the workers meet their annual work quotas. Most are little better than thugs, and have only rudimentary military training.

The city also employs 20 paladins of Geb-Agni in the army. Four are assigned to each mining camp. They have the honorary rank of captain, and receive good wages.

There is no permanent city guard (that would cost money). Instead, citizens of good health between the age of 16 and 40 are forced to enlist in the militia. Every member must provide his own equipment (which is kept in the central armory when not in use) and perform two weeks of unpaid service per year.

The emir's personal bodyguard is a half-company strong. Dressed in gilded armor, they are known as the Golden Guard. The soldiers wear full visors, plate armor, and gloves—never an inch of flesh is showing. They have never been heard to speak, not even to the emir.

Rumors abound the detachment is paid so well that no one could afford to bribe them. Offers say their strange muteness is because the emir cut out their tongues so they could never reveal the location of his secret vaults.

In truth, the guards cannot be bribed because they are not living beings. Each and every one of the 64 warriors is a man-sized golem coated in magically hardened gold. The cost to produce these is almost beyond calculation. Treat them as metal golems, but with Size +0. This lowers their Toughness to 13 (5).

NAVY

Ships are neither cheap to build or cheap to maintain. This hasn't stopped the emir from building two navies.

The first, the River Fleet, comprises 10 armored barges (treat as warships but -2 Handling at sea). The ships' primary duty is to carry the processed ingots down the River Uriel each year. Ships travel in convoy, and only the governor who dispatched them knows which ones are actually loaded with ingots—the others are decoys carrying a cargo of stones. At other times they patrol the river for pirates.

The second fleet, the Grand Fleet, comprises 20 warships and 10 heavy warships. These are hired to visiting merchants as escorts. Given that cargoes of precious metals are a lure to corsairs, and figuring that it is cheaper in the long run to let Sha'ib risk its vessels and mariners, most merchants are prepared to meet the steep price.

Law & Order

Sha'ib's City Watch is rarely paid by the emir. The few watch captains with enough backbone to stand up for their men's rights were quickly replaced. The official word was they chose to retire from service, but many suspect they ended up in the mines.

In order to make ends meet, many guards impose on-the-spot fines for minor offenses, and are quite prepared to take bribes to ignore more serious infringements. Very few of them are greedy, and the fines are far less than the courts would impose. Though this is blatant corruption, few citizens ever report their activities. The emir has passed laws imposing slavery as punishment for even trivial offenses, and most citizens would rather go without food for a day or two to pay a "fine" than suffer years of enforced hardship in the mines.

The upside to this novel approach to law enforcement is that, on paper anyway, Sha'ib is a very law-abiding city—the courts are far less overworked than elsewhere in the Sultanate. The emir has issued decrees demanding more arrests, but the guards' official response is always the same—no one is breaking the law. Unofficially, they'll gladly do as ordered when they are paid.

Some neighborhoods have taken pity on the watch. After all, these are not strangers—they are family, friends, and fellow Sha'ibites trying to earn a living by protecting them from real criminals. In return for food and small amounts of coin, they adopt watch patrols. As a result, many streets are well policed, but the patrols rarely venture outside their territory.

Some watchmen hire themselves as private guards. Most prefer honest work, but there are plenty willing to bend the law to earn a crust of bread and bowl of soup.

Security for the mint, the state-run workshops, and the warehouses containing ingots falls to paladins of Geb-Agni. Though only 50 strong in total, their presence is backed up by ample *glyph* spells with very deadly miracles worked into them. The emir has made it clear to them that while he would prefer thieves be taken alive, no charges will be levelled against them if the paladins opt to use lethal force.

The last official security force is the emir's secret police. They are charged with rooting out sedition. In Sha'ib, any negative comment made about the emir counts as sedition, and carries a punishment of permanent enslavement. They have the authority to detain any citizen, regardless of social class, and to enter property at any time of the day or night. Although citizens whisper of a vast army, they number only a half-company. While they do perform investigations, they also pay informants to rat on those heard making seditious comments. Unfortunately, the money offered can tempt otherwise honest folk into making false charges.

The Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls has a large presence in Sha'ib. Poverty is high, the watch's presence is low, virtually every neighborhood has gangs preying on innocent citizens, and almost everyone, nobles included, is being tyrannized by the emir.

Despite official records and on-the-spot fines, Sha'ib boasts one of the highest crime rates in the Sultanate. Poverty has forced many to turn to crime as a means of supporting themselves. The Mazerunners' are not only the largest thieves' guild in the city, they are the only true thieves' guild. Robbery and burglary tend to produce only meager pickings (the guild has never successfully robbed the city's precious metal stores), so the guild specializes in hashish and smuggling.

While the others do commit burglary, much of their income comes from violently mugging anyone who strolls into their territory who looks like they may have a few dinars on them. They rarely harass members of their own community—people will not turn a blind eye to that.

Trade & Tribute

Sha'ib makes its money from its platinum, gold, and silver mines. Every mine is run by a governor appointed personally by the emir. Naturally, these are toadies, who earned their positions by courtly displays of sycophancy. Governors are supposed to rule for just one year, but so long as precious metals continue to flow, Haddad is quite content to let the governors remain in post.

Every mine is set a strict quota. Haddad knows his governors are stealing from him, and the quotas are set to allow them this little perk. In order for the governors to meet their master's high demands they must work the laborers long and hard. A portion of the official quota is set aside to cover workers' provisions and wages. Naturally, anything that remains unspent goes into the

governor's pockets. Rations for workers are subsistence level, and rather than pay wages to hired laborers the governors prefer to buy slaves from the state at greatly reduced rates. When legally acquired slaves aren't available, gangs go into the city to "recruit" new workers.

The precious metals are smelted and purified in the settlements surrounding each mine. This is then forged into ingots of varying weights and transported to the city. Much of the metal is exported to the other great cities, primarily for their mints. In order to prevent rampant inflation, the Sultan rules on how much can be exported and at what prices. Emir Haddad duly sends his lord a list of each mine's output every year. Of course, this is considerably lower than the true quotas. The difference ends up in the emir's treasury.

Small ingots are also sold to independent goldsmiths and silversmiths. Worked into jewelry (with or without gems, the city's most valuable import), it is exported to markets across Al-Shirkuh. Craftsmen working for the state don't have to buy their raw materials, but they don't profit from their craftsmanship, either.

Sha'ib is largely self-sufficient in food. Every farm must supply a fixed weight of its harvest to the city granaries, regardless of the total yield. The landowners, the nobility, receive nothing for this. This is then sold to the city's shopkeepers for sale to the general populace. The rest of the crop may be sold to whoever the nobles want and at whatever price they can get. Due to pollution from the mines, agricultural yields are low and of poor quality. Good quality food must be imported by merchants, and that comes at a higher cost to the consumer.

COINAGE

Sha'ib mints one-quarter dirham ("Quarter"), one-half dirham ("Half"), and one dirham silver coins ("Common"), and one dinar ("Gild") and 10 dinar gold coins. The 10 dinar coin is known as a "Dead Man." The name derives from the popular belief that if you see one lying on the ground and stoop to pick it up a thief lying in wait will slit your throat.

The emir doesn't like to waste ingots of precious metal minting too many coins. As a result, there are fewer coins in circulation. Most citizens resort to barter. Trade goods are accepted in lieu of coins, and regularly offered as payment for goods characters may wish to sell.

LOCAL TAXES

Sha'ib is technically a wealthy city, not that one would deduce this by its state of disrepair. Emir Haddad sees the city's finances as his personal income, and has little wish to spend it on road maintenance, repairing walls, paying officials more than a pittance, and other unnecessary expenditures. Regardless of their social class, various taxes account for 60% of the inhabitants' legal income. Food prices are cheap (as is the quality of the local produce), which helps offset some of the hardship and must about staves off open revolt.

Customs Duty: Imports of gems are charged at 3% and other goods at 2%. Exports of precious metal goods are levied at 5%, and other goods at 3%.

Docking Fees: All vessels are charged a flat 10 dinars per day.

On-the-Spot Fines: As noted elsewhere, the city watch has opted to fine people rather than arrest them. Trivial offenses carry a 1d10 dirham fine. Minor crimes warrant a 1d10 dinar fine. More serious crimes are charged with whatever the watch thinks the perpetrator is willing to pay. They are very quick to point out the alternative if the courts find them guilty—slavery in the mines.

Sales Tax: Sales tax is charged at 10%. It only applies if coins exchange hands—another reason why bartering is so common among the locals.

Tolls: Gates and ferry tolls are set at one-half dirham for natives on foot. Strangers are taxed one dinar. Mounts and vehicles are charged at one dirham for locals, and 2 dinars for visitors.

Weapon Tax: The emir doesn't much care if his people want to spend their money on armor, but he draws the line at allowing them anything more dangerous than a standard dagger. Other weapons may be carried if the owner buys a license from the city watch at the gate or docks and registers with the city. A license costs 10 dinars times the weapon's damage die type, and is valid for one week. Officially the fee is 5 dinars, but the guards pocket the extra money to make up for receiving no wages. Every weapon needs a separate license. Failure to instantly produce a license carries a sentence of slavery (no surprise there) for a period of 10 years.

Architecture

As noted in *Land of Fire*, Sha'ib is aptly named. Its narrow alleyways form a winding maze that quickly leaves even the locals confused. To make it worse, the city is built on two levels. Higher levels are reached by small stairwells and alleys are crossed by short bridges.

Thirty five years of near total neglect have left the city on the verge of collapse. The cobbled streets are littered with potholes that are a danger to pedestrians and mounts alike, rubble from partially collapsed buildings and mound of discarded refuse clog the streets, the city walls are dangerously thin due to lack of maintenance, and even important civic buildings are in desperate need of repairs. Stories of citizens being crushed to death beneath walls, vanishing into sinkholes, or falling through floors are commonplace. Usually they are exaggerations of minor accidents, but not in every case.

Citizens don't take much pride in the exteriors of their homes, workshops, or business. Public displays of wealth not only attract thieves, they attract the emir's tax collectors. As a result, privately owned buildings look as bad as the rest of the city. Even rooms used to greet guests are poorly furnished and undecorated. Personal living areas, rooms open only to close friends, are where

CALL OUT THE GUARD!

Regardless of who makes up their numbers or the title they use, the city watch polices the great cities of the Sultanate. How long it takes the watch to respond after a hue and cry has gone up is likely to be important to the characters at some point.

The numbers below are typical response times. In some cities the guards are more vigilant and respond more quickly. In others they are incompetent, corrupt, lazy, or all three, and respond much more slowly (if they bother to show up at all). GMs should feel free to alter these as they feel is appropriate not only to the city, but to the situation. A cry of theft is likely less to be attended quickly than one of murder.

Slum: 5d12 minutes during the day, never at night;

Lower Class: 1d6 minutes during the day, 2d6 minutes after dark; **Middle Class:** 5d6 rounds during the day, 5d10 rounds after dark; **Upper Class:** A single patrol turn up in 1d6+1 rounds. A second patrol turns up 3d6 rounds after that. These times are the same for day and night.

citizens display their wealth. Of course, wealth is subjective. Where a member of the lower classes may be proud of his tatty silk cushions, a nobleman has statues, carpets, and furniture of excellent workmanship.

Externally, every house is roughly the same size. Richer citizens own multiple adjoining houses, and have knocked doorway through the walls to expand their homes. Combined with their dishevelled state, it is very hard for outsiders to guess what sort of neighborhood they are in.

Major Locales

This section describes locations within the City of Mazes and a few locales in the greater territory it's gold-hungry emir governs.

CITY DISTRICTS

Unlike other cities, Sha'ib's chaotic, labyrinthine design has very few distinct districts—workshops and state granaries are found in every residential area, and the network of alleys that make up the souk extends into six different neighborhoods. It is equally hard to determine what sort of residential district one has entered—the city looks much the same from every street corner.

Civic: In order to prevent commoners from gaining access to the palace, emirs of old moved all civic functions to a neighboring district. Courts and various ministries have their headquarters here. It is also home to bureaucrats of all social classes.

Land of Fire Realm Guide #19

Docks: The docks were carved into the river bank to create an artificial cove. A crumbling stone wall sits across the entrance, leaving only a narrow channel either side. Ships enter at the southern end and depart via the northern end. The river is not tidal at this point, though the currents are strong. Behind the docks are warehouses and small shops. Many visitors prefer to stay in this district so as not to get lost in the maze of alleys. It has only lower class establishments, but most sailors are lower class citizens anyway.

Gold: This district is sealed off by a sturdy gate and watched over by paladins of Geb-Agni. Behind the gates are the city mint, the Academy of Precious Metals, workshops operated by craftsmen paying back their fee for studying at the Academy, and warehouses containing bars of platinum, gold, and silver. Every building is reinforced and protected by deadly *glyphs*.

The district has its own wharves. Only barges from the mines are permitted to dock here, and every vessel is searched before being granted access through the gates that separate the small harbor from the river.

Entrance to the district requires a special permit (issued by the emir or the local high priest of Geb-Agni). Those seeking access must strip to their underwear and every item on their possession is recorded. Everyone leaving is again searched, and possessions checked off against the list taken when they entered.

It is common knowledge that anyone found in the district without a pass or trying to leave with extra goods is automatically assumed to be a thief. It is equally common knowledge that the paladins have license to handle thieves in any way they choose.

The Labyrinth: Sha'ib as a whole might be a maze, but the Labyrinth is the most notorious district. Unlit, clearly displaying signs of the abject poverty suffered by its inhabitants, and with alleys barely wide enough for one person to walk down, it is the haunt of murderers, thieves, beggars, and those who can fall no further.

Palace: The highest point in the city, the emir's palace occupies the summit of a hill located in the center of the city. Unlike most other cities, the palace is reserved for the emir, his family, and chosen courtiers. While its rose marble spires speak of wealth, few could truly comprehend the wealth displayed inside—gold and silver are as commonplace as textiles and wood in lesser abodes.

CITY LOCALES

Amani's Seals: Any citizen in Al-Shirkuh may own a personal seal, though the price (500 dinars) deters all but the wealthiest. Seals can have any design, but must be registered with the appropriate city's bureaucracy to ensure there is no duplication. To ensure there is no duplication between seals manufactured in different cities, every seal's design includes the name of the city where it was manufactured. Amani produces the finest seals in the land, and her clients come from far and wide. She made the current Sultan's personal seal.

Amani does a profitable sideline in forged seals. For

3000 dinars she will copy any seal impression shown to her or one she herself has produced. It takes her a week to produce a forgery. Those based on impressions are good copies, but not foolproof—a Knowledge (Heraldry) roll at -4 is required to detect it is a forgery. Using a forged seal carries the death penalty throughout all of Al-Shirkuh. Those based on her own designs cannot be told apart from the originals.

City Walls: Sha'ib's walls are barely fit for purpose. Large sections are structurally weak following decades of neglect, small sections have all-but collapsed, and it takes a brave militiaman to climb one of the towers. The city's siege equipment hasn't been maintained in many years, and would likely disintegrate under the stress if used in anger. At any one time there are no more than nervous 200 militia on duty along the wall.

Cutthroat Alley: The cheapest place to pick up a variety of legal and illegal goods is Cutthroat Alley. It opens only at night, and stalls line both sides of the busy alley. Anything the GM wants to offer the characters can be found here at 50% the usual price. Everything is stolen, and the unofficial market is operated by the Mazerunners. Its name does not just relate to the competitive prices. Patrons displaying too much wealth may end up wishing they had been a little more frugal with their spending.

Gates: Sha'ib has just one external gate—the Gate of Purity. It faces northeast, toward Akhmim, City of the Devoted. Like the walls it has seen better days. The wood is dry and flaking, its hinges are rusted, and one good hit from a battering ram would likely splinter it. No risks opening and closing the gate every day, as the guards just leave it open day and night. No one is supposed to be granted entrance at night. Since no one legally enters, the guards don't feel it is their duty to list tolls and other taxes collected after dusk.

Internally there are three other gates. The Golden Gate leads into the Gold District. The West Gate and East Gate both lead into the Palace District. All three gates are kept closed, admission is by appointment or invitation only, and security is tight.

Gamblers' Alley: Money may be in short supply, but there are plenty of citizens willing to bet their last dirham in the hope of a profitable return. Gamblers' Alley caters to the needs of the desperate. Stalls set up on both sides of the alleyway offer a variety of games of chance, with stakes accepted up to 50 dinars. Invariably the games are crooked. Patrons who get upset at losing are quickly and harshly dealt with by the Mazerunners—this is one of their many business ventures.

The Guarded Gates: Four months ago the army suddenly sealed off an alleyway by erecting a pair of gates halfway down its length. The gates are separated by ten feet, and between them are just the walls of buildings—no doorways or windows. There is no access from above, as the sealed off area is beneath a covered walkway.

Both reinforced gates are guarded by a shuf of heavy infantry day and night. The gates are sealed with heavy chains and magical enchantments. Not even the guards know why they are paid (and paid well) to keep them

shut. Locals reported hearing no screams in the neighborhood, nor any unusual occurrences. Rumors are circulating that two mages were permitted entrance shortly after the passage was sealed. One never came out, and the other emerged completely insane.

The Hole in the Wall: This small coffee house butts up against the northern city wall. The owner, Yarnak, a hyaenidae and escaped slave from the mines whose coffee leaves a lot to be desired, has secretly tunneled under the wall. The narrow passage emerges 200 yards from the city. For 50 dinars per person, Yarnak will let anyone needing to escape or bring people into the city without attracting unwanted attention use the tunnel.

Sha'ib Academy of Precious Metals: There is no doubt the Academy, which is located in the Gold District, trains the best jewelers in the land, but tuition carries a heavy cost for most. Students are virtual prisoners, being allowed out of the district only for festivals. Due to its continued expanding influence, the cult of Geb-Agni has taken on more and responsibility for training students since the emir came to power.

Skills: Knowledge (Craft: Jewelry).

Soup Kitchen: A charitable establishment run by Imam Taj ibn Yahya, the kitchen hands out free soup to the destitute an hour after dawn and bread an hour before dusk. The soup is thin and tasteless and the bread hard, but they stave off hunger. Taj collects produce from grocers and bakers, donations by those with goodness in their heart. While diners savor the meager fare, Taj recites passages from a battered copy of the *Hamad*.

The kitchen operates as a meeting place for the Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls. Taj is not a member, though he fully supports their cause. Brothers new to town will be directed to the kitchen before any official safe houses. Many beggars congregate here as well. Streetwise rolls are made at +1, though only if a patron looks suitably poor (the beggars don't mind sharing news with their peers) or drops a few dinars (five is usually enough) into begging bowls.

MINING SETTLEMENTS

Sha'ib controls a mixture of platinum, gold, and silver mines in the foothills of the Four Jinn. Supporting them are five mining settlements. The mines are separated geographically, and the camps provide workers for more than one mine. Each settlement is divided into separate areas (one per mine), each with its own governor.

Officially the settlements are listed as villages populated by free men working as laborers and miners and slaves sent here by the state. The reality is they are little better than prison camps.

Workers, whether free men or slaves (the difference is minimal), are housed in cramped, dirty barrack blocks surrounded by fences and watched over by guards. On the rare occasion visitors with any political clout elsewhere in the Sultanate decide to pay a visit, the governors spin them a well rehearsed lie that the seemingly draconian measures are purely for security reasons.

RABISU

The word rabisu means "vagabond" in both Al-Waziran and Holy Tongue. Although it can refer to any unsavory person, it more specifically applies to a creature distantly related to ghûls. While ghûls savor living flesh, rabisus hunger for the blood of sentient beings. Whereas ghûls are intelligent, rabisus rely on high animal cunning, lacking the capacity for true thought. To call someone a rabisu implies they are a degenerate parasite.

Rabisus hunt at night, though they are not pained or harmed by sunlight. Possessed of a powerful olfactory sense, they can literally smell the blood pumping through a person's veins. They attack by ambush, lurking around dark doorways or in shadowy alleyways, overpowering their victims before slicing open their flesh with their long, hard nails and drinking their hot blood.

Their form is human, though their yellow eyes burn with a deep, unending hunger that drinking blood can only sate for a short time. Thin and gaunt at the best of times, the wiry bodies of a rabisu require a constant intake of blood. Without it, they become ever more skeletal and pitiful, though lack of blood cannot end their unholy existence.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8(A), Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d8

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

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

Treasure: Meager

Special Abilities:

* **Blood is the Life:** A rabisu must drink blood each night or suffer a one die loss of Strength and Vigor (min. d4). These can be restored at the rate of one die in each trait per quart of blood it consumes.

* **Claws:** Str+d4.

* **Smell Blood:** Rabisus get +2 to Notice and Tracking rolls and ignore two points of darkness penalties against living targets, +4 if the target has an unhealed wound.

* **Undead:** +2 Toughness; +2 to recover from Shaken; Called Shots to no extra damage; Immune to poison and disease.

* **Weakness (Blood):** If a sentient being is Incapacitated or killed within 12" of a rabisu, the creature must make a Spirit roll or immediately move toward the victim and begin lapping its blood. If the victim is Bleeding Out, it suffers an additional -1 penalty to its Vigor roll due to the additional blood loss. The rabisu may defend normally while feeding, but can take no other actions until it has sated its thirst (usually 1d4 rounds).

* **Weakness (Salt):** A rabisu cannot cross an unbroken line of salt. A pound of salt thrown over the creature inflicts 2d8 damage. Offensive spells with a salt trapping inflict double damage.

As well as the worker quarters there are guard barracks, smelters, fortified storehouses for the processed ore, wharves, and the governors' villas. The latter are modestly furnished—the governors have no wish to display their true wealth, and little wish to actually spend their money on a building that may be given to another official the next year.

Ore is brought down from the mines each night in mule trains—the workers proved too exhausted to carry much. Once smelted, purified, and forged into ingots, it is kept in the fortified storerooms until there is enough to summon a barge. Typically a barge calls every two or three months to collect a consignment unless otherwise summoned. The storerooms are protected by paladins of Geb-Agni (the emir doesn't trust the governors enough to leave security in their hands).

PEGASUS GUARD BARRACKS

With no room in the city to house and exercise their mounts, the 40 Pegasus Guard assigned here chose to construct their barracks five miles upriver and three miles inland, near a small spring. While the Guard has no jurisdiction over the mines, it does patrol the river.

Their commander, Captain Hayah Pasha bint Tahsin requisitions a lot of weapons from the central armory in Al-Wazir. Officially this is down to breakages and losses incurred in training. In truth, she is secretly supplying weapons to factions inside the city in favor of overthrowing the emir. She is fully aware of the state of the city and the heavy taxes imposed by Emir Haddad, but knows the Sultan can do nothing to alleviate the population's suffering. A coup, she figures, is the only way to replace Haddad with his son anytime soon.

PERSONS OF Note

Locals often joke that if you want to make the acquaintance of a local, it's best to arrange to meet them at the docks to avoid getting lost. Below are a few residents visiting heroes might come across while trying to navigate the City of Mazes.

DELIAH

A Beduan dervish mage and talented belly-dancer, Deliah was drawn to Sha'ib by rumors the city was laid out as a gigantic mystic symbol. After several months of study she has come to the conclusion that the tale of Nasser the Wanderer is not a fable. She believes the house of gold he found is a metaphor for achieving Oneness and passing from corrupt physical to pure spirit form. Nasser did not return to the world of mortals in order to lead his friends to the house, an act that subsequently led to him being unable to find the location again. Instead, the story evolved because the *Hamad* makes it clear that each mortal must walk his own path to Oneness.

Unfortunately, the city layout has changed greatly since Sha'ib was founded, and the original design is long forgotten. Deliah is convinced a map must exist in the emir's palace, but all her attempts to secure an audience have failed. While she knows in her heart that following the route will not lead her to Oneness (that was Nasser's path), she hopes it will enlighten her in some way.

JOURNEYMAN ABDUL-HADI

Abdul-Hadi is a sinner. He came to Sha'ib by ship and originally planned on staying just a few days before setting off to explore the Four Jinn and the upper Sultanate. That was a year ago. The labyrinth of streets greatly appealed to his senses of wonder and wander, and every day he finds something new hidden down an alley.

Despite having committed a mortal sin by remaining in the same place for a year, Abdul-Hadi has not yet lost access to his miracles (he suffers the effects of a minor sin, though). His continued exploration of the city has offset his god's wrath, as has his fierce opposition to the emir's tyrannical rule.

The priest is no warrior, but he uses his miracles, his cunning, and the network of contacts he has developed to liberate slaves from the emir's grasp before they are condemned to work and die in the mines. He dons a mask to conceal his identity, and goes by the name the Liberator. His one-man war against slavery has earned him many admirers among the common citizens, and a bounty of 5,000 dinars on his head.

UNFORTUNATE SOUL HASHIM

A veteran city watch sergeant turned Brother of Unfortunate Souls after losing his left arm combatting the Mazerunners, Hashim is currently investigating a series of unusual murders. That every victim had his throat slit doesn't worry him—it's a very common way to die in Sha'ib. Although he readily admits he has little skill as a healer, even he knows the crime scenes should be drenched in blood. Instead, the murders sites have been remarkably clean. Hashim suspects a cult of demon worshippers has taken up residence in the city. The killers are actually a small gang of rabisus (see p. 77).

The Brotherhood cannot devote manpower to investigate more fully, and Hashim is seeking outside help. He has little to offer save his friendship and that of his fellow Unfortunate Souls in Sha'ib.

YUSEF THE NUMISMATIST

A retired adventurer and self-taught expert on the currencies of Al-Shirkuh down the ages, Yusef runs a small shop in the souk. His main living is selling antiques (mostly junk sold to him by adventurers and mariners), but he also buys and sells old or foreign coins. Although self-taught, his knowledge of Al-Shirkuh's many different coins covers everything from the modern day to the earliest days of recorded history.

SUKHNAH

City of Bridges

Sukhnah is most famed for its towering buildings. Those who have visited also know it as a city blighted by crime and disease, at least on its lower levels.

Social Hierarchy

Assuming they were legitimate issue, Sukhnah's emirs ascended to the throne by primogeniture. The late emir, Akim, and his sister, Sirdara Hessa, were twins. That Akim became emir was a quirk of fate—he had the fortune to be born a minute earlier than his sibling. The pair were sand and water, as the saying goes. Akim was honest, but weak and ineffectual. Hessa was strong-minded (some might say stubborn), cunning, and keen to increase her fortune through nefarious means.

Whereas Akim always treated his sister with great kindness and generosity, she never repaid him. That one minute between power and obscurity (in her eyes) rankled her soul, making her bitter and resentful. Logically she would have had Akim's body quietly cremated, but she chose to inflict ignominy on him by having it discarded in the swamp, allowing it to corrupt.

While she had no plans to usurp Akim's throne, his untimely death (by natural causes) presented her with an opportunity too good to pass up. Although she has power over the city, it is far from absolute. Indeed, her scheme was born out of immediate reaction rather than carefully thought out. Had she taken the time, she might have opted to inform Akim's son and heir, Majid, bring him back to Sukhnah, and then arrange for his death. Since he is without issue and an only child, the throne would pass to Hessa as the closest relative.

That the ruse went undiscovered for several months was down to Akim's fondness of his sister—he had appointed her as chief wizar. Though he meant this as a sign of affection and trust, it was another thorn in Hessa's heart—she saw herself as a lackey.

Sukhnah's nobility grows fat on the profits from their agricultural estates, mercantile activities, and, in many cases, criminal enterprises. Those few who know Hessa's dark secret and have kept quiet have been richly rewarded for their complicity, with tax breaks on their properties and their criminal businesses suffering no interference by the city watch. This is not to say they have a free hand. For a start someone is blackmailing Hessa. She is also eager to ensure those nobles who have benefitted from her do not tip off others to the free riches she offered them. Furthermore, Hessa has her own illegal activities, and she does not desire competition.

Everyone in Sukhnah is accorded social status based on where they make their home. Those who choose (or are forced) to live at or just above ground level are treated as *mushaf*, regardless of their occupation or true wealth. As one rises up the towers, so one's social status improves. This has led to oddities. Some lesser nobles elect to live in middle class areas because accommodation is cheaper than on the higher levels. This has allowed them to swell their coffers, but at the cost of respect. Similarly, there are middle class citizens who have managed to purchase homes nearer the top of a tower. Though they have little wealth, they are accorded more respect than their occupation would otherwise warrant.

More often than not social climbing is a slow process, taking a mixture of hard work and making the right contacts. Unfortunately, moves down the social ladder are usually far more rapid. Taxes are fixed based on where one lives, not one's income. A bad year can see even the wealthiest merchant slide from the upper reaches of a tower straight to ground level as his property and businesses are sold off to meet his tax bill.

The lowest of the low live on the misfortune and waste of others. Discarded items, whether garbage deliberately tossed out or accidentally dropped, are quickly scooped up and sold off for a few dirhams. Citizens unfortunate to fall from a bridge are surrounded and robbed regardless of their state of health. Richer citizens have taken to throwing a handful of dinars from elevated bridges, laughing in sickening amusement as the filthy inhabitants at ground level literally fight to gather them.

Education

Like everything else in the city, the education one receives depends on the level at which a student lives. Regardless of the quality of teachers, many parents insist their children attend school. A good education may lead to a decent profession. Given time, a child may work his way up the social ladder, dragging his family behind him. For most, this is the only way out of poverty. Still, lower class families are often torn between this dream and putting their children to work as soon as possible.

While some imams and clerics strive to bring schooling to the wretches living at ground level, few parents bother to have their children attend. Better they are put to work as pickpockets or sifting through other people's garbage than waste time learning how to read and write.

Sukhnah has one basic university and one official advanced university. Musayid's Barber School may have

RULES OF THE REALM

The following setting rules apply in Sukhnah.

* **Food & Services:** With the exception of caravan-serai prices, costs for food and services in *Land of Fire* are for middle class areas. At upper class heights prices are doubled. In lower class areas they are halved. It is important to note that quality changes as well as the cost. An expensive meal near the bottom of the city may involve foodstuffs that are only average at higher levels. A cheap meal in an upper class may only be flatbread stuffed with meat and vegetables, but the quality is excellent. A bath at higher levels involves hot water, soap, a massage, and so on. At lower levels it may be a bucket of tepid water thrown over a customer.

* **Food Poisoning:** The food and drink at lower levels is decidedly poor quality and prepared in less than hygienic conditions. For the first week, characters who dine in lower class areas must make a Vigor roll each day to avoid contracting Apsu's Revenge (see *Realm Guide #15*). After a week their stomach has adjusted to the local food.

* **Goods:** At the GM's discretion, goods of all types may be purchased in lower class areas for dirhams instead of dinars. These wares are of extremely poor quality—the reduced price comes with a hidden cost. The exact penalty the goods impose should be determined by the GM, but here are some rough rules of thumb—weapons break on an attack roll of a natural 1 (regardless of Wild Die); armor weighs 20% more due to its poor construction and uncomfortable fit; any item that grants a bonus has the modifier reduced by one point (to a minimum of zero); the owner's Charisma may be lowered by a point or two for displaying such shabby goods. More specific examples can easily be created—lanterns burn for only an hour per pint of oil or cast light in a 2" radius due to the poor quality glass; rope can support only 150 lbs.; sandglasses run very fast or slow. GMs should be imaginative in screwing over tight-fisted characters.

* **Herbs:** Herbalist kits cost 30 dinars and dried herbs cost 3 dinars per dose in Sukhnah.

* **Native Characters:** Native heroes may choose to be a graduate of *one* of the city's advanced universities. Each university grants one benefit, as listed below, but only during character generation and the hero must meet all other requirements (where applicable).

Herbal Arts: The hero may lower one Trait requirement of the Hedge Magic Edge by one die type (his choice).

Thievery: For one skill point, a character with the Poverty Hindrance and Agility d6+ may take Lock-picking or Stealth at d6, or both at d4. A maximum of one skill point may be spent in this manner.

become the finest center of medical training in the Sultanate, but Sukhnah's University of the Herbal Arts is centuries older. Unlike its northern counterpart, it specializes solely in herbalism.

Hidden away is the University of the Thieving Arts. This unofficial school is run by an independent master thief. His activities are not sanctioned by the local guilds, but he pays each of them a small fee to leave him alone. He teaches citizens how to pick locks and pockets and cut purses. For the poorest citizens, this is often the only way they can earn money. In return for passing on a few tricks of the trade, students must serve as his apprentice for one year after graduating. Many go on to join the true guilds, another reason why they allow the "university" to continue operating.

Religion

Suleiman's teachings that all men are equal doesn't carry much weight in Sukhnah. The rich don't want to slum with the poor for any reason, so there are kadas on every level of the city.

The city has just one religious building catering to the needs of the Faithful. It occupies an entire tower (the Tower of Gods). The highest level contains the only actual temple, which is dedicated to Shamash. The other cults have dedicated shrines and worship areas on most levels. In addition to providing places of worship, it is home to many clerics, as well as Faithful laity. As with other blocks it has workshops, shops, and bazaars.

Sukhnah has attracted two vile cults. The Cult of Sarkeb (see *Realm Guide #15: The Salt Marsh*) has a perverted view of the gatormen's deity. Its deranged adherents believe that by consuming the flesh of sentient beings they will be rewarded with enhanced strength and vigor. On the new first night of the new moon each month they partake in unholy feasts, dining on victims kidnapped off the streets in the previous few days. Although located at ground level, several worshippers are members of the emir's court. None of the cultists has access to miracles—their rituals and prayers have no grounding in the true faith of Sarkeb.

The second cult is that of Baalzebul, the minor deity of pestilence (see *Realm Guide #8: The Empty Zone*). His diseased followers wallow in the filth of the city's ground level, seeking to spread misery that, they hope, will creep upward to richer citizens.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Cleaning Day: This is not an official holiday. During summer, the nobles give their homes a thorough clean. Old items or those simply out of fashion are discarded, which means a bonanza for those living at or near ground level—most unwanted objects are just thrown over the balcony. Fights are commonplace (and full-blown riots not unusual) as wretches vie to grab the most expensive items before their neighbors or the city's official garbage collectors.

Military

With no major overland trade routes to guard, Sukhnah's military is concerned with protecting the emir's agricultural lands, scouring the Jinn Wall Mountains for orcs and bandits, and patrolling the dank marshes along the River Bos.

ARMY

Sukhnah has the smallest population (for a great city) in the Sultanate, a fact reflected in its military strength. The main army comprises just a double-company of light infantry (256 men), a double-company of heavy infantry (256 men), a company of archers (128 men), and two companies of light cavalry (160 men).

A separate force, officially known as the River Patrol, consists of a company (128 men) of light infantry armed with long spears. Unofficially they are called the Crocodile Company after their duties—keeping the large population of crocodiles native to the River Bos at manageable levels, or at least away from settled areas. Except where the terrain allows them to make use of flat-bottomed punts, much of their duties involve trudging through the mire and long reeds.

The emir's former bodyguard, the High Guard, were disbanded by Hessa shortly after her brother "retreated from public view." Officially, the emir's absence is explained away as the result of illness caused by poisoning during an attempted coup. The officers were swiftly arrested and executed for treason, while many of the men sold as slaves to corrupt nobles. The charges against them were fabricated by Hessa. The new High Guard is a half-company handpicked by Hessa for their lack of curiosity and loyalty to her.

Charged with protecting the city are the City Guard. A single company of archers cross-trained in artillery weapons, they spend as little time as possible actually patrolling the walls.

NAVY

Sukhnah has only a token navy of five warships. Four of these patrol the approaches to the city, ever-vigilant for corsairs. The fifth vessel is used to ferry soldiers and supplies between the emir's agricultural estates and military camps.

Law & Order

The City Watch doesn't bother to patrol the lowest reaches of the city, claiming the area is simply too dangerous to police. This is a circular argument—as a result of their absence, those dark and filthy levels have become hotbeds of criminal activity. Burglaries, robberies, and

murders are commonplace—the residents may not have much, but there is always someone with less. Wealthy citizens who, for whatever reason, must descend to the city bottom are always accompanied by bodyguards. The Watch does patrol the docks—patrols can make a few extra dinars for ignoring certain ships or activities.

For those at the wretched end of society, the only justice is that meted out by the Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls. Unfortunately, their numbers are limited, and in many cases justice comes too late to save a victim's life.

Citizens found guilty of serious crimes may be sentenced to an unusual death—they are given to the River Patrol to use as crocodile bait.

Sukhnah's unusual layout quickly gave rise to dozens of thieves' guild. Typically dwelling at ground level, the thieves plied their trade on the higher levels and on blocks directly linked to their own. The latter meant rival thieves were often competing for the same territory. This led to frequent bloodshed, saving the Watch from the task of dealing with the criminals. A century ago, the guild masters put aside their differences and formed the Thieves' Council. Between them they now decide the territory in which individual guilds must operate.

Although the resident high priest of Tamarni sees himself as a devout cleric and legitimate businessman (drinking and gambling aren't illegal in Sukhnah), he sits on the Thieves' Council—the cult's other activities often mirror those of the guilds, and it was prudent to avoid aggravating the city's criminal element.

Not every guild is a member of the council. These guilds operate where they want, but do so in the knowledge that guilds with a voice on the Thieves' Council may freely attack them without fear of sanctions. The independent guilds still operating are either strictly small scale or have powerful allies.

Despite certain nobles enjoying special discounts on their mercantile activities, smuggling is big business in Sukhnah. While the thieves' guilds carry out the work, they are paid for their services by rich merchants and corrupt nobles. Having little fear of interfering officials, many of those who know Hessa's secret openly store illegal and smuggled goods in their warehouses.

Trade & Tribute

Like many cities in the Sultanate, Sukhnah is a trading port. Merchants rarely travel from their home port direct to their final destination. Instead, they navigate along the coast, continually buying and selling (at until they reach Akhmim, City of the Devoted, which for many is the last stop before the return journey).

The city's primary export is agricultural produce. The fertile flood plains produce such an abundance that the city can afford to feed its citizens and still export great quantities. Roughly half the estates are the private property of the nobles. Taxes are paid in crops, rather than coin. A quarter are owned by private citizens, rewards

MORE DISEASES

Diseases are listed by their common name. The information in parentheses is the method of contracting the disease and Vigor roll modifiers to avoid infection and rid oneself of the ailment. Other diseases native to Al-Shirkuh can be found in *Realm Guide #15*. The *Hellfrost Bestiary* and *Rassilon Expansion* contain other ailments GMs may wish to inflict on characters.

Note that while *succor* and restorative herbal remedies restore lost Fatigue, they do not remove the cause or alleviate other symptoms. As such, they are short-term solutions. Within 1d4 hours of spell or remedy taking effect, any Fatigue caused by disease returns.

Black Spot (Touch, -2): This deadly disease is greatly feared. Victims suffer from unsightly black boils (-2 Charisma) for the first week. If still infected, they must make a Vigor roll every three days or suffer a wound. A Vigor roll to recover is made each week after the first.

Flake Skin (Touch, -2): A virulent but harmless disease, Flake Skin causes the epidermis to dry and peel off in small flakes. Those infected suffer -2 Charisma due to their unsightly appearance (and the fact they are infected). A Vigor roll to recover is made each week.

Majin's Curse (Airborne, -1): A failed Vigor roll causes muscles to waste. At the end of each week after infection, the victim must make a Vigor roll or lose a die of Strength. The victim becomes too weak to move if his Strength drops below d4. He dies if another weekly Vigor roll is failed. A successful Vigor roll rids him of the disease. Lost Strength dice are recovered at the rate of one per week with total rest, and one per two weeks if active after the infection is cured.

Marid's Curse (Induction, -1): Most commonly spread by the bite of infected animals, the disease causes victims to sweat profusely while simultaneously suffering acute hydrophobia. Victims must make a Spirit roll at -2 each day or refuse to drink any liquid. The disease never causes harm—Fatigue and eventually death come from dehydration. A Vigor roll is made to recover each three days.

Sleeping Sickness (Induction, -1): Spread by mosquitoes and other biting insects, sleeping sickness induces extreme tiredness. Victims become Exhausted the day after infection. A Vigor roll is made to recover each two days.

Stolen Voice (Touch, 0): This disease causes severe inflammation of the vocal cords, rendering those infected incapable of speech. This is extremely serious for clerics (who pray to receive miracles) and mages who must speak to work their art. A Vigor roll is made to recover each four days.

for loyal service to the emir. These estates, like the honor title that is awarded with them, remain in the owner's hands only until his death, whereupon they revert to the emir. The last quarter belongs to the emir. His lands are overseen by satraps.

Sukhnah's secondary exports include pottery and reeds. The former ranges from common goods intended for daily use to expensive luxuries. Reeds are used as bedding material, to cover floors in lower class homes, and to make papyrus.

Much of the city's trade, legal and illegal, is controlled by the nobility. Decades of internecine political maneuvering and open violence finally ended when each family finally agreed to stick to its own particular aspect of trade. They are strongly opposed to ventures that rival their own, especially if the newcomer is undercutting them. Often a not-so-friendly word is enough to have the troublemaker see the error of his ways and amend his prices. Should he prove reluctant to change, his stock and premises are likely to suffer an unfortunate accident. Those who still fail to see sense are likely to take a long drop off a high bridge.

Sukhnah is unusual in that it has no souk. Instead, bazaars exist at every level of the city. The type and quality of goods depends on the height the bazaar is above ground level. For instance, common pottery is found in lower class bazaars, near the bottom of the towers, while expensive jewelry is found only near the higher levels. A shopping trip in Sukhnah, can involve a lot of climbing up and down stairs, another reason why the richest citizens employ servants.

COINAGE

Sukhnah mints silver dirhams and gold dinars. The one dirham coin is known as a "Lower," because it is mainly used at or near ground level. Smaller denominations are the "Bit" (one-half dirham) and "Flake" (one-quarter dirham). The one dinar coin is called a "Higher," but poorer citizens refer to them as "Drops" (because they are only usually discovered after being dropped from higher levels of the city by wealthier citizens).

The city also mints a five dinar coin (a "Heavy") and a ten dinar coin (a "Rare"). The nicknames of the latter coins are used only by residents near the bottom of the social ladder. When used to describe currency there are different rules for these higher value coins.

For instance, a citizen might ask for a Heavy when asking for payment, though he wouldn't care what denomination he was paid in—he simply means five dinars. On the other hand, if he found five 1 dinar coins in the street he'd never say he found a Heavy, as that implies a specific type of coin in this particular context. Instead, he'd say he found five Drops.

LOCAL TAXES

Sukhnah's citizens pay annual property tax, rather than income tax. Prices are fixed based on the height

one lives or works. Hardest hit are the aspiring middle classes—after working and saving hard to move upward (socially and geographically), they often find their new homes and premises carry a higher tax rating than their income can comfortably support.

Bow Tax: Generations ago a paranoid emir made it law for every middle and upper class household to own a bow and 20 arrows. These were to be used by the citizens should Sukhnah ever come under attack. The city has never been attacked, but the law has never been fully repealed. Though failing to possess a bow is no longer a crime, citizens who present their bow (which must be in good working order and engraved with their name to prevent fraud) during the annual audit receive a 10% discount on their annual property tax bill.

Customs Duty: Officially, every merchant must pay 3% duty on any goods entering or leaving the city. Those dealing with corrupt nobles favored by Hessa pay only 1% on imports. This allows the nobles to buy at reduced rates, giving them greater profit margins.

Docking Fees: Ship captains are charged 20 dinars for the first day, 40 for the second, 60 for the third, and so on. Few merchants care to dally long in Sukhnah, meaning the harbor is rarely clogged.

Herbalist License: The city has long been keen to support local herbalists. Locals pay a fixed fee of 1 dinar per year, in return for which they are granted a license to practice the art. Outsiders must pay 10 dinars for a monthly license. The paperwork is required even if they are brewing remedies for personal use. Failure to produce a license if caught preparing a remedy carries a 250 dinar fine.

Similarly, it doesn't want outsiders picking all its fresh medicinal plants. Anyone caught picking plants with medicinal properties within ten miles of the Bos must be able to prove they are a citizen of Sukhnah. Failure to do so means a 500 dinar fine plus confiscation of any herbs and herbalist kits on their person. The odds of being spotted "stealing" plants is minimal, and any soldiers are likely to impose a modest "fine" of 50 dinars to avoid taking the matter any further.

Sales Tax: Sales tax is charged based on the height at which the goods are purchased. The rates are zero at ground level, 1% in lower class bazaars, 3% in middle class bazaars, and 5% in upper class bazaars.

Tolls: Pedestrians entering by gate must pay one-quarter dirham. Mounts are charged at one dirham. Entry by ship is toll free.

Architecture

The ground level is filthy. Barely above the level of the River Bos, floods occur every year almost without fail. The water actually serves an essential purpose—it cleans the streets of uncollected garbage, corpses, and human waste. Every building in the towers has a lavatory chute, which allows urine and faeces to drop to the ground

level. In theory this is supposed to be collected and turned into compost, but the city's garbage collectors are less than enthusiastic about their work. On a good day, the place stinks like an open sewer. On bad days, it is ankle deep in disease-laden filth. Rats and swarms of biting flies live here in great numbers.

Sukhnah's towers vary in height between 200 and 300 feet. While the towers average 100 feet in width, the walkways that surround each level vary in width. At the lower levels they are 10 feet wide, leaving 80 feet in the core for rooms, while higher up they are 20 feet wide (allowing 60 feet for accommodation). Individual levels are an average of 20 feet high.

The lower levels of towers are thick stone (which further limits the amount of interior space). These support the upper levels, which are made of mud bricks. The stonework is undecorated, stained with all manner of substances, and black with mold. Higher up, citizens paint the exteriors of their homes and premises.

Major Locales

Described below are some of the city's more interesting locales, as well as locations beyond the city walls that might appeal to adventurers.

CITY DISTRICTS

Due to its design, Sukhnah has very few distinct districts. Warehouses are found in many towers, for instance, and sit above ground level (to keep their contents from being spoiled and to deter thieves). Upper class residential areas are found at the top of towers, rather than in one distinct part of the city, whereas the entire ground level is one huge slum. Visitors are advised to either hire a local to act as a guide or plan their route in advance. Failure to do so can result in much time been wasted backtracking up and down several flights of steps.

City Bottom: This name is applied to the entire ground level of the city, extending to the next level or two depending on the residents. Visitors looking for black market goods are likely to end up here. Whether they ever leave depends on how quickly they can run or how much violence they care to inflict.

Gods' Town: Although Faithful are not persecuted, many have chosen to make their homes in the towers adjoining the Tower of the Gods. Faithful make up as much as 30% of these tower's inhabitants, a percentage many times higher than elsewhere in the city. For some, living so close to the holy shrines is a sign of their continuing devotion. For others it is simply more pragmatic to live nearer a place of worship so as to avoid having to walk too far for services.

Harbor: Sukhnah's harbor covers both sides of the city. They comprise the wharves and open plazas, from where cargo is lifted to the higher reaches of the city. The center of the estuary is a large island, from which rise

Land of Fire Realm Guide #19

towers. Bridges exist only above the level of standard masts (50 feet) so as to avoid collisions.

Palace Tower: The emir's palace is an entire tower, the tallest in the city. The top levels are the emir's private apartments. Heading down one finds the court, the homes and offices of senior government officials, and finally public offices. The ground level is mostly solid, denying the scum who inhabit the lowest levels of the city access to the palace. The approach bridges, which do not extend to the emir's private levels, are guarded day and night.

CITY LOCALES

Abra's Charms: Falling over in Sukhnah can be fatal. Abra bint Qutaibah, a khamsin jinn mage alchemist, does a good trade in *fly* devices. This has earned her the animosity of the thieves' guilds and many noble families. Rightfully paranoid, she has a henna *glyph* tattoo on her left palm that casts *fly* should she fall more than 10 feet.

The Chimney: This tower has been abandoned following a fire that broke out 25 years ago. The conflagration broke out in the lower levels, but quickly spread to consume the entire structure. That the flames did not spread was down to the quick thinking of the neighboring towers, who destroyed the wooden bridges. Unfortunately, this condemned those trapped in the burning building to an agonizing death. The bridges have since been rebuilt (the citizens didn't like the alternative—making a detour), but no one will live here.

Residents tell many stories about the place. Some claim to have seen wisps of smoke emanating from the burned-out interior, though likely this is just mist from the river drawn up by the wind. Less easy to explain are the cries of torment heard at night, the stench of burned flesh that occasionally drifts on the wind, sudden rises in temperature, and so say claim, the presence of fiery creatures lurking in the blackened interior.

City Walls: The city walls surround the city on both sides of the river, but end at the river. Standing 30 feet high, they are dwarfed by the city's many towers. Aside from the two gatehouses, there are no watch towers—Sukhnah's elevated population makes it very unlikely an enemy force could sneak up on the city unseen. One consequence of this is that the City Guard posts only token sentries, and they are far from alert.

Despite the lack of towers and artillery pieces, the city is far from defenseless. For a start, every tower is a miniature fortress and many citizens own bows. The city's central armory also contains a cache of alchemical *blast* devices designed to be dropped from a height—the stone walls of the towers won't be damaged by the explosions, and no one much cares if the scum who inhabit City Bottom are caught in the blasts.

Crocodile Accessories: Sattar ibn Baligh specializes in goods made of crocodile skin. Shoes, belts, backpacks, bandoliers, purses, pouches, satchels, waterskins, and even tents are available for purchase. Prices are 25% higher than normal wares of similar type (100% more

for tents), but Sattar's offerings are both decorative and hard wearing. His crocodile skin armor costs 75% more than leather shirts and suits, but weighs half as much.

Sattar is always happy to buy crocodile skin. His wife, Shawq, runs the shop next door, from where she sells crocodile steaks and crocodile soup. They pay 50 dinars for a whole crocodile, and 500 dinars for a giant crocodile. Just the skin is worth half these amounts.

Skinning a crocodile properly so as to preserve as much of the skin as possible requires a Survival roll and takes one hour, or four hours for a giant specimen. As a rule of thumb, a whole crocodile weighs around 500 pounds, while a giant specimen weighs in at 2500 pounds. Assume just the skin weighs 10% of these weights.

Gates: Sukhnah has two gates. The one on the northern bank is the Upper Gate (it leads to the upper reaches of the Sultanate), while the southern gate is the Lower Gate. The city doesn't see much overland traffic, and the gates are normally kept closed. Unless a caravan demands entry, the guards don't usually bother opening them for visitors. Instead, they suggest the travellers walk around to the riverbank and hail a passing boat.

Intisar's Tours: Intisar is a khamsin blooded Hada-ree who offers tours around the city on her jinn relic flying carpet. She charges 10 dinars per passenger for a full tour (takes an hour), or 3 dinars to taxi passengers to any point in the city except the palace. Reckless and adventurous, Intisar weaves her carpet in and out of the towers and bridges at breakneck speeds. Paper bags for emptying the contents of one's stomach are available for one dirham each.

The Long Drop: This popular drinking den caters for the needs of the middle classes. The proprietor, a Devoted cakali by the name of Amritsal, maintains a strict no-jinn policy. As well as true jinn, it covers jinn blooded and jinn mages. The rule is enforced by two burly bouncers. Quite how Amritsal can spot those who traffic with jinn is as much a mystery as why he has banned them from his premises.

The business is officially named for its tall glasses and generous measures of alcohol. Storytellers drink for free, so long as they keep his patrons amused with tales. Those who drink their fill but fail to perform quickly learn the other reason why the bar is called the Long Drop.

Prison: Sukhnah's prison lies below the emir's palace. It is reached only by a narrow staircase that spirals down from the court through the base of the tower. Conditions are inhumane. The only ventilation and light is provided by grates at street level. Filth constantly drips through the narrow gaps between the bars, vicious rats drop down, and when the river floods the cells quickly fill up. Lying below the level of the river and carved out of the thick mud, the walls are damp, slick with mold, and cold. Few of prisoner thrown in here to await trial have any wish to linger for long, prompting them to plead guilty and hope for a lenient sentence. The ploy rarely works, but it keeps the courts clear.

The Rose Garden: Neither a garden nor a florists, this upper class business supplies female escorts to rich

clients looking to impress their peers or who simply desire attractive company for an evening. The girls are not prostitutes, though they are free to offer that particular service if they so wish. They set their own rates, but the business takes 60%.

While she has a number of courtesan slaves and free citizens on her books, the proprietor, Zahirah bint Thawban, is always on the lookout for attractive women to work on a freelance basis. She offers 20 dinars per point of Charisma from the Attractive, Charismatic, or Very Attractive Edges for a night's work. Women with the Hourly Edge earn a 25 dinar bonus—not only do they know how to use their natural charms to make their client look good, but they can hold an intelligent conversation. She charges her clients considerably more.

Roughing up her girls is not recommended—Zahirah is the daughter of a powerful thieves' guild master, and her father's cronies receive a hefty bonus if anyone abusing the girls accidentally falls off a very high bridge.

The Sheikh's Tent: This lower class eatery claims to sell authentic nomad cuisine. Its menu includes "delicacies" such as snake and scorpion, desert hare (actually cat), hyrax (rat), antelope (dog), quail (sparrow), and meats of far more questionable origin.

The owner, Uktannu (a hyaenidae), isn't a bad cook, but he doesn't like to pay for quality meat when his contacts on the ground level keep him supplied at very reasonable rates. He disguises the poor quality food with copious amounts of herbs and spices. The Tent does minimal trade, which makes it an ideal place for characters to discuss business without fear of being overheard.

University of Herbal Arts: The dank marshes along the Bos may contain hungry crocodiles and venomous snakes, but they are also the natural habitat of a plethora of medicinal herbs. Though harvests are never enough to export dried herbs in any noticeable quantities, the wide range of plants has allowed Sukhnah to develop a reputation as a center of herbal studies.

One of the tutors is a master at brewing poisons, and friendly with the thieves' guilds. Her services are not cheap, but they are very discrete.

Skills: Knowledge (Alchemy); *Edges:* Hedge Magic.

University of the Thieving Arts: The brainchild of Tabari, a cakali thief outlawed from his tribe after stealing his sheikh's jewelry, the "university" teaches the basic arts of thievery to both the poorest inhabitants of the city and thieves' guild members alike. Paupers pay nothing for their education—Tabari recoups his expenses (mostly his time) by having students serve as apprentices for a year. He takes all their earnings, but gives them room and board. True thieves pay a lot more, but they consider it a worthwhile investment—Tabari is a true master of the larcenous arts.

Contrary to popular belief among the city's criminal element, Tabari is not the independent thief known as the Thief Lord (p. 86). Tabari has no idea who the master thief is, a claim often met with skepticism.

Skills: Climbing, Lockpicking, Stealth; *Edges:* Thief; *Languages:* Roguetongue.

THIEVES' GUILDS

There is no such thing as a standard thieves' guild. Some are informal bands; others operate around a rigid hierarchy. Some have a handful of members; others have memberships in the dozens or hundreds. There are, however, certain titles commonly used by thieves' guilds across Al-Shirkuh.

Apprentice: You can't just walk off the streets into a thieves' guild and expect to be welcomed with open arms, at least not unless you're already a talented thief. Any idiot can commit a robbery—the art is not getting caught.

Apprentices practice climbing, picking locks and pockets, cutting purses, disarming traps, and avoiding detection. Apprentices lack the Thief Edge and typically have the core thief skills at d6.

Thief: A trained thief forming the bulk of any guild. They have the Thief Edge.

Guild Thief: Not every thief is a member of a guild, and not every guild member has this title. This title is awarded to thieves who have proven their loyalty and who have built up a good network of contacts in his home city. In game terms, they have the Guild Thief Edge.

Master Thief: Any guild thief renowned for his larcenous abilities is called a master thief. In game terms, he must have the Guild Thief and Thief Edges, Climbing d8, Lockpicking d10, and Stealth d10. Such individuals are usually Wild Cards, as having a Wild Die for all their traits makes them a cut above the rest.

Thief Lord: The next step up from master thief, a thief lord has a minimum of d10 in the three core thief skills and his Agility, plus the Guild Thief and Thief Edges.

Guild Master: The guild master runs a thieves' guild, but his position is one of leadership and organization, not necessarily criminal abilities. Some guilds elect a leader, while others allow assassination as a means of promotion. In theory, any thief with the Thief Edge can carry this title.

THE MISTY MARSH

The Misty Marsh only acquired its name 30 years ago. Until then it suffered only seasonal mists, the same as the other patches along the river, and wasn't particularly noted as being unusual. These days the mists are more frequent and heavier, and last for weeks at a time.

Over the past three decades locals who fish and hunt among the reeds have reported many weird occurrences. Most revolve around seeing buildings of unusual architecture or hearing voices calling out in harsh, unknown tongues. These events only ever occur when the mists rise. No one has managed to make contact with whoever is calling out or investigate the buildings. This is because

the locals don't have access to *speak language* spells) and lack the bravery to enter the structures. The locals have taken to quickly abandoning the marshes whenever a mist rises—some who are caught in the mists when they vanish are never seen again.

The locals are in no doubt what is to blame—in their minds the cause can only be a greater khamsin jinn. Until it decides to move on, they prefer to leave it in peace.

SAKOOMB

Until two months ago Sakoomb was a small but prosperous farming community of 300 souls. The land was governed by a minor honor noble, awarded stewardship for his years in the city's civil service. News of its grisly fate was relayed to the city by an army patrol.

They found the village surrounded by stakes, on which were impaled the heads of every inhabitant—male and female, young and old, human and non-human. The soldiers didn't bother to investigate further. Hessa sent a second unit to the village to uncover more facts. They found no evidence the village had been attacked (food was on the table, building were intact, and valuables had not been taken). Equally, there were no tracks to indicate the nature of the perpetrators, and not a single body was found. The soldiers were supposed to remove the heads, but they lack the stomach for such a gruesome task.

In theory the estate should have reverted back to the emir. Hessa, in her role as chief wizar, has instead issued a decree that whoever brings the perpetrators of the heinous crime to justice will be granted stewardship in perpetuity and awarded the blood noble title of pasha. So far there has been no interest.

PERSONS OF Note

Described below are a few of the city's many inhabitants the heroes may bump into while exploring the City of Bridges.

IGZIK THE SCAVENGER

A sand goblin denizen of the city bottom, Igzik makes a "living" from other people's garbage. The creature's hair is matted with all manner of filth and he (or possibly she) stinks to high heaven. Igzik doesn't sell everything he finds. Some objects are obviously of real value, and these are stored away in his secret hiding place until he can track down the owner, or at least someone willing to give him a very high price.

Among his collection of valued objects are several pieces of jewelry, a ruby, a severed hand bearing a signet ring (he proudly tells how he had to fight a giant rat to gain possession of this), and several crumpled letters containing incriminating missives. Something in Igzik's collection is attracting interest. Unfortunately for the sand goblin, he has no idea what or he'd give it back.

Several of his known haunts were recently ransacked, and he knows he is been tailed. Fortunately he is very good at hiding. He doesn't have much to offer heroes, but his stash is bound to have something they want in return for finding out what is going on.

LAYLA BINT QUTUZ

Farmers who find shards of pottery or tarnished copper coins bearing crocodile motifs know to take them to Layla. She claims to be a collector of unusual objects, and pays a fair price (5 dirhams for pottery and 1 dinar per coin) for such artifacts. Layla is in fact a Hide of Apsu (see *Realm Guide #15*).

She is semi-retired. Her last appointment was as part of an expedition investigating claims of gatormen ruins in the Salt Basin. After finding nothing, she decided to return home via the Sultanate, a land about which she knew very little (she was born in Hufrah, City of Idols). It was while browsing a small stall she first came across one of the crocodile motif coins. Layla at once recognized it for what it was—evidence of gatormen activity at some point in the distant past.

On hearing such finds were not unusual in the marshes, Layla decided to retire to Sukhnah. Over the past six years she has built up an extensive collection of finds, and is slowly putting them into chronological order. She is quite convinced of two facts. First, the gatormen once lived here in large numbers. Thus it follows that they had a city, the remains of which likely still exist somewhere in the marshes. Second, they are long extinct in this area (the most recent coin is at least 6000 years old).

While too frail to accompany an expedition to search for the ruins, she would happily act as a sage for parties intent on finding, looting, and then destroying whatever buildings still remain. Layla is a skilled alchemist, and works with the River Patrol. She sells the city alchemical devices for 60 dinars apiece. She would extend the same offer to parties intent on searching for the ruins.

THE THIEF LORD

The location of this shadowy figure's office is well known among the city's criminals and those who consort with unsavory types. The Thief Lord only steals to order, and he charges high prices. Strangely honest for a self-proclaimed thief, he demands half his fee up front, but this is returned in full if he cannot complete the job or refuses to accept the contract.

Although independent of the various thieves' guilds, he is on good terms with the Thieves' Council. He pays 10% of his takings to them as a gesture of goodwill. His activities are not limited to Sukhnah, either—pay enough money and he'll travel anywhere in Al-Shirkuh.

The Thief Lord never meets with clients, and his identity is a mystery. Everyone calls him a "lord" and "he" out of habit, but the master thief might just as easily be a lady. Clients must deal with his servant, a blind sand goblin who goes only by the name Underling.

THE PEGASUS GUARD

The Sultan's Bodyguard

The Sultan's elite guard, the Pegasus Guard has helped keep the Sultanate safe for over three centuries. To the common citizens they are heroes, while for young warriors they represent an opportunity for adventure and glory, as well as social advancement.

History

While the Sultan and his emirs have always maintained armies, they could not, and still cannot, hope to adequately protect every settlement, nor respond to every threat along the border. Even if the funds and manpower were available to build and man more forts, the harsh terrain impedes rapid deployment, and supply lines to remote forts are vulnerable.

Following a series of brutal orc raids, Sultan Faisal ibn Ahmed ordered the creation of the Pegasus Guard. Although the date 217 CJ is given as their founding date, the early Guard was a tiny force of courageous cavalry men riding captured pegasi. With the odds attacked against them, they took to the sky initially as scouts for the main armies. While the main armies clashed on the plains, the Pegasus Guard took war to the orcs' rear lines. In daring raids they struck at supply caravans and headquarters' camps, swooping down to deliver the Sultan's justice.

On hearing from his commanders what the small force had achieved, and knowing the citizens adored the small band of heroes for their bravery, fierceness, and devotion, the Sultan ordered the Guard expanded. Vast quantities of gold were pumped into extensive breeding and training programs.

Applications poured in as soon as the stables allowed for a new intake of soldiers, though few made the grade, for the Guard sought not just mounted warriors, but men of strong moral fiber and fanatical loyalty. Realizing that their mobility and popularity could be powerful weapons in the wrong hands, the Sultan publicly honored them by raising their status to his personal guard, and banning all other nobles from possessing a similar force.

Ranks

Recruits undergo a punishing training regime from the day they join the Guards. Long before they ever see a pegasus, they must prove themselves competent warriors and horsemen. Only after passing their exams are they introduced to their true mount. Traditionally, pegasi are not assigned to Guardsman. Instead, the soldiers are lined up, and the pegasi left to those who they wish to

ride them. Sometimes two or more mounts may desire the same human companion. While this does lead to some violence, it is also seen as a great honor for the Guardsman.

In order to reach the rank of corporal, a player character need only have the Command Edge. To attain the rank of Sergeant he must be Seasoned Rank, have a second Leadership Edge, and have impressed his superiors with his bravery and loyalty. In game terms, the latter requires the Guardsman to have 60+ Glory. No specific Professional Edge or advance is required to become a sergeant.

Being promoted to corporal or sergeant does not grant any game mechanic benefits, but it should be treated as a major event in the character's life. He will be recalled to the Sultan's palace (without being told why), where the Sultan will briefly congratulate him in person (along with other Guardsmen being promoted). He is then awarded his new rank, denoted by his blue-dyed horsehair plume, by the Commander of the Pegasus Guard at a very public ceremony.

Reaching the rank of captain requires a heady mixture of social contacts and bravery. Unless the hero has the Connections (Sultan's Court) Edge, his only way to curry enough favor is to roleplay making powerful and influential friends (who many demand favors in return for their support). He also needs a minimum of 140+ Glory, which represents his bravery, battle prowess, and loyalty to the Sultan, as well as three Leadership Edge (his choice). Should he be considered for promotion, he must then buy the Noble Edge as his very next advancement. Until he does, his promotion is still being debated. Once the Edge is taken and promotion confirmed, the character gains the noble title pasha and a red plume.

A hero who takes the Pegasus Guard and Noble Edges during character generation may, at the GM's discretion, begin as a captain. This represents not skill or bravery, but nepotism, favoritism, and possibly onerous favors to be repaid at a later date.

No player character can become Commander of the Pegasus Guard, the highest rank, unless the GM wishes to place that honor upon him. Being granted this title effectively removes the character from play, since his role is largely political, but it makes a fitting way to retire a high Rank character from active play and let him leave his mark on the campaign.

Whatever a character's military rank, whether or not additional soldiers are available for taking on an adventure remains the GM's decision. The men under the hero's command may be loyal to him, but they ultimately answer to the Sultan.

In addition to the Guardsmen, the unit maintains

Land of Fire Realm Guide #19

many hundreds of support staff—armorers, weaponsmiths, stablehands, veterinarians, horse trainers, and so on, are essential to the Guard's daily operations.

Emblem

The Pegasus Guards' emblem is the name of the incumbent Sultan bordered by a pair of white pegasus wings. The emblem is displayed on spear pennants (carried by every Guardsman) and the main battle standard (which is displayed in the Sultan's palace).

Individual soldiers sport horsehair plumes on their helmets to denote their status—common soldiers have white plumes, sergeants blue, and captains red ones.

Playing a Guardsman

A Guardsman isn't just a skilled cavalryman with an unusual mount. You are a servant of the Sultan, bound to his will by your oaths of fealty. Every action you take will reflect on not only on your unit and your superiors, but also the Sultan.

Your role is to do as you are told. Fortunately, the Sultan has need of independent thinkers and special agents as well as yes-men and common soldiers, and this is your specialty. While many of your comrades-in-arms will be involved with caravan escorts, garrison duty, and parades, you are likely to be sent on far reaching expeditions to further the Sultan's goals at home and abroad.

COMBAT ADVICE

Your pegasus isn't just a flying horse—it's an extension of your body, so make sure you take advantage of that. Although the Pegasus Guard isn't trained as mounted archers, your mount's ability to fly means you don't need to worry about enemies closing the gap—just stay airborne, and pepper your foes with arrows.

When you're ready to engage in melee, avoid becoming engaged in a slugging match. Your mount may give you a +1 Gang-Up bonus, but the longer you remain in melee, the greatest the chance it will be attacked. Instead, take advantage of its speed by swooping down to make a charge attack, hit your enemy, and then keep moving past him. Making a Wild Attack exposes you to more danger from any counterattacks as you withdraw, but the total damage bonus adds up to +6. Don't forget your mount can kick as well.

ADVANCES

Since you can spend bennies for your mount, you don't need to worry about taking Beast Bond. Instead, Mounted Combatant should be your first choice Edge. While you and your pegasus can trade bennies as part of the Pegasus Guard Edge, Mounted Combatant gives you +2 to Riding rolls, making it easier to perform stunts

and remain mounted if your pegasus is injured. The additional Pace it grants is very handy for making charges, as well as fleeing battle should the tide turn against you. Fast Mount is useful, though not essential.

Steady Hands is vital if you want to use ranged weapons while mounted. For melee, Frenzy and Sweep are logical choices. Combined with a charge, you should be able to hack down multiple lesser foes with ease. Taking Block and Shieldwall allows you to invest in the Bodyguard Edge. Since your mount is adjacent when you're riding, this is a great Edge for keeping it safe in melee. Two Fisted means you'll be able to hit one opponent, move across the battlefield, and hit another.

Even a common Guardsman should invest in Leadership Edges. Your bipedal comrades may not respect your authority, and so may not benefit from them, but your pegasus does. Even taking just Command gives it an additional +1 to recover from being Shaken, while Hold the Line increases its Toughness.

NPC Reactions

Among law-abiding citizens of the Sultanate, regardless of social class, a Guardsman can expect to receive a Neutral reaction at worst. Most times citizens will be Friendly. Partly this is out of respect for the Sultan, and partly because he is a generous man, and cooperation may be rewarded. Opportunities for a citizen to boast he personally helped the Pegasus Guard are rare, and such support, no matter how slight, can earn a citizen much respect from his peers. Among the Faithful, Guardsmen can at best hope for a Neutral reaction. As servants of the Sultan, they are more likely to receive an Uncooperative reaction in staunchly religious areas. In rare instances, a Hostile reaction will occur without any provocation.

Pegasus Bloodlines

Most of the flying horses used by the Guard are common pegasi. They are easily denoted by their white or gray coloration. Other breeds exist, but are much rarer. When a character takes the Pegasus Guard Edge he should draw a card from the action deck. On a Joker, his initial mount is a rare breed. He may pick from the list below. Any replacements will always be common pegasi.

These other breeds share the same basic stats as their common kin, but have a unique ability, as noted below.

Bloodfury Pegasus (red): The most aggressive breed, they have the Berserk Edge and Fighting d8 (Parry 6). They are ornery beasts. Riders have -1 to Riding rolls.

Cloud Pegasus (blue-gray): The fastest of all the breeds. Pace 12, Flying Pace 16, and a d10 running die.

Night Pegasus (black): Renowned for their stealth. They have Stealth d10 and the Fast and Silent Edge.

Sun Pegasus (gold): These pegasi have sensitive eyes and ears. They ignore penalties for Dim and Dark lighting and have Notice d10.