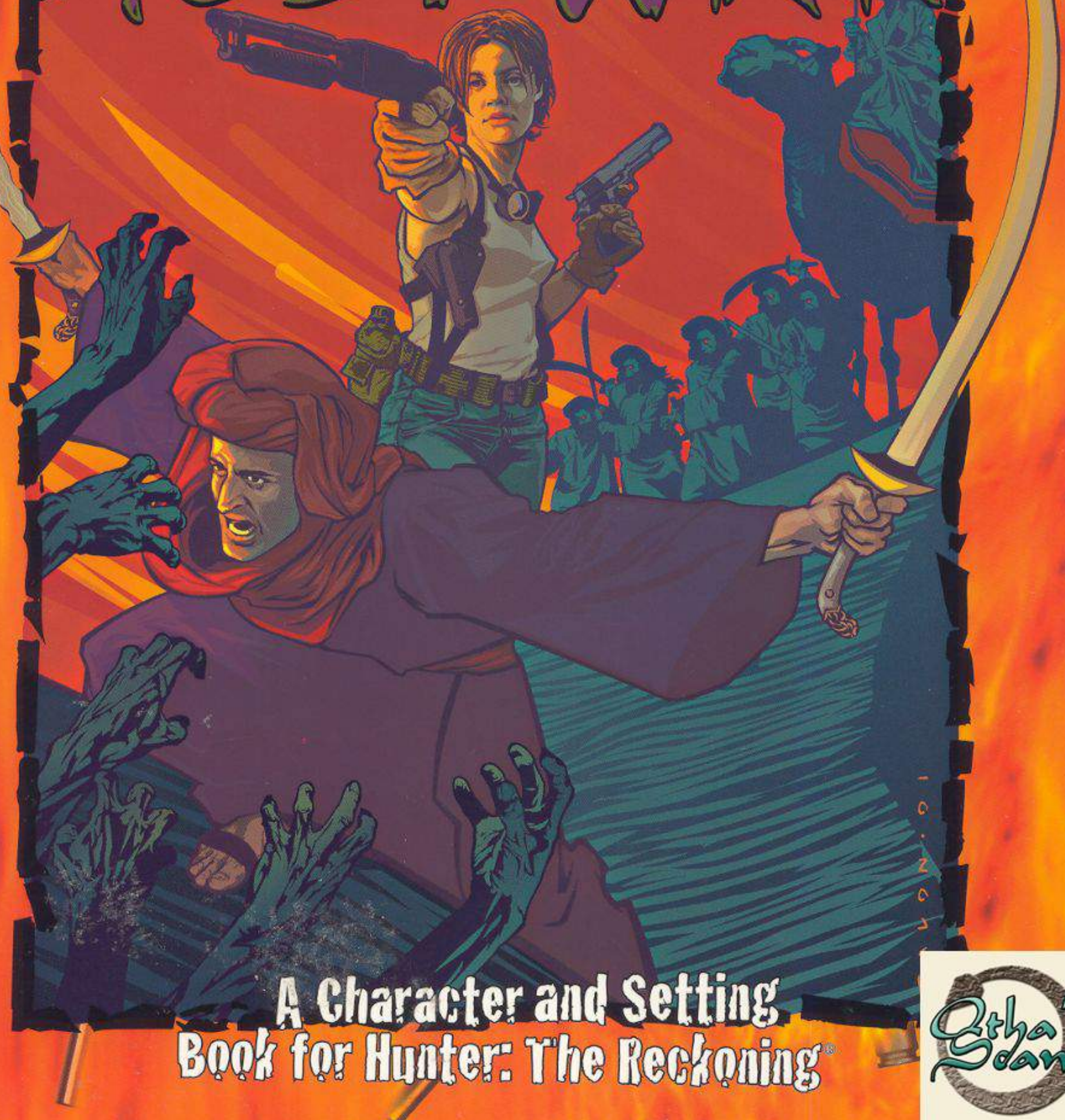
HUNTER

HOLY WAR



A Character and Setting Book for Hunter: The Reckoning®

Otha's Sons

Allah's Blessing

Listen on the day when the Crier will call from near; the day when men will hear the fateful cry. On that day, they will rise up from their graves.

— The Koran, *Surah*: 50:37 [Qaf]

My dearest friends-in-arms,

You know me. I am called Tarjiman220 and I am a translator of words and thoughts. I humbly offer this collection of work to you and to any novice who seeks my help. A rift exists between our cultures, and I find we are all the victims of each other's worst misconceptions. I am an almost solitary voice of the Middle East, one of the few heard in the West since I am among the fortunate with the Internet. I am therefore honored that Witness1 has asked me to be the spokesman for my people. My duty is to present readers with an understanding of Middle Eastern hunters — we call ourselveskiswah — and the specific challenges we face. This collection is part tour guide for the uninitiated and part resource to pool our insights. In essence, to create a community through solidarity and a network of alliances that allows us to share information, advice and resources.

At first, Witness1's request seemed simple, even easy. The more I detail the hunt in the Middle East, however, the more I realize that much more separates our two societies. I cannot explain the hunt, our Word, our capabilities or anything else without a tutorial on our culture and history. Even describing what I believe is simple is actually complicated, and for every question I answer two more arise to confound me.

My first dilemma is deciding what constitutes the borders of the so-called Middle East. If I rely on the principles of language and call the Middle East the bastion of Arabic, then I exclude and insult my Iranian brethren who speak mostly Farsi, or those in Israel who speak Hebrew. What of the Kurds or the Turkic tribes who use a variety of languages but are in every right Arabs as well?

Clearly, language is not the deciding factor, so do I classify the Middle East as those countries following the Islamic faith? Under these conditions, I have to include many African nations like Libya and Sudan, or countries to the west like Pakistan. Also, what of Lebanon or Syria with their strong Christian population, or Hebrew-predominant Israel? While Muslims are passionate followers of Islam, I cannot ignore Christians or even Jewish kiswah who valiantly fight alongside me. They are as much Arab as I and thus a part of the Middle East.

So, for myself, the Middle East encompasses a region that shares a common historical perspective and geographic familiarity. I exclude Turkey because it has long fought for recognition as a European nation, but include mention of Egypt because of its influence over Arab concerns. Now that that is done, it is time to explore the real roots of this endeavor: Arab hunters, our concerns and our enemies, all of which are uniquely "Middle Eastern."

So I struggle to compile this body of work with the help of other Arab kiswah. Some tales come to us through stories, others we obtain or even participate in directly, but every single word is an enterprise. We debate with our wisest in dark Baghdad coffee shops. We participate in tribal wardances with a Bedouin family while confronting nameless beasts in the Empty Quarter. We fight other hunters who follow a false prophet and we share salt with a pious beast who protects Mecca from infidels. Each new tale or recounting I receive from fellow kiswah is like reading a new adventure. I went into this undertaking believing we were far-flung and isolated. I know now that fate brings us close together and that we are a far stronger community for our common struggle.

Through these testimonies and pages, I believe my fellow chroniclers and I understand, appreciate and even learn more about our world and very roles each day. I meet brethren unknown to me before and discover our cause crosses many borders, be they geographical or cultural. Once I might have frowned upon independent women, but have since seen female kiswah fight with determination unknown among many men. Once I might have ignored foreigners as Western barbarians, but have seen Hindu, American and British hunters fight diligently to protect expatriates and Arabs alike.

Unfortunately, I cannot say that everything is milk and honey, or that other kiswah share my understanding of different cultures. We Arabs are singularly individual as with anyone else, and fashioned by our own misconceptions. I try not to judge or censor other contributors and tales here, so this compilation naturally serves as fuel for ideological friction. Like Westerners, we possess a variety of theories and beliefs as to our origins, our benefactors and the monsters we hunt. I warn you that some voices are uglier than others; they're thinly disguised excuses for barbarity. Again, however, I include all voices.

In all, there is a joy among those who contribute to this work. Our words live and they have an audience. If we die, we no longer die alone, for our voices continue on through you. Our struggles and all our experiences are not in vain. We, like you, lose family and friends because of our duties, see our homes fall, our lives shatter, our allies die and the defenseless escape without ever knowing why. We don't seek glory. We seek only the knowledge that we will not die silently — that our struggle (our jihad) still echoes across this world.

First, I want to thank al-Amin208 and Fatwa243 who improve the English of some contributors and make this simpler for me to compile. I know many of us would not sound as eloquent if they did not correct our contributions. The greatest debt, though, goes to Witness1. I began this believing I did you the favor, but end owing you the debt.

Allah be praised for He has already lit your path into Heaven.

The Wisdom That Binds Us

Throughout this text, we rely heavily upon the Surah or chapters of the Koran for guidance. This is hardly surprising, given that 90% of Arabs are Muslim and those who are not know enough about it to be informed. The Koran unites most of the Middle East under a common language, Arabic, and inspires us with a religion that has brothers in Christianity and Judaism. It serves as a binding force, so it is hardly surprising that we rely upon its words given our uncertainty concerning our own existence. We also give you these words so you too understand our intentions, ambitions, hopes and reasons for being. It is as much your guide into our hearts as our guide into Allah's.

The Koran begins with: In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. . . .It is the most fitting beginning, I know, for the words initiate the reader into a world of tolerance and understanding. This is important for we kiswah, for without either quality, we cannot learn. Without tolerance we lack patience and without understanding we lack faith. Therefore, if we cannot learn, we cannot grow. Given our seeming youth and naivete about our nature and place in this world, ignorance is not a luxury we can easily afford. We are born into war, my children, without generals and without frontiers. We have no choice but to learn. It is the nature of our struggle.

Many of my Western brethren fault me for relying on the Koran so extensively. They say I sound like a fanatic, but since when is faith a matter of fear and not celebration? We kiswah call upon the Koran for strength and guidance in a world that lacks these luxuries. With each newly interpreted proverb we also gain footing, a historical relevance to our cause and a greater sense of ourselves. You may not believe the words of the Prophet Muhammad, but I include them because understanding them means understanding us. They provide context for how we see the hunt and how we pursue our duties. They are an introduction to Islam's chosen and even to the nature of our opposition.

Finally, my critics say I use paragraphs from the Koran out of context, and they are correct. The Koran, however, was written years after the Prophet Muhammad's death and after the death of his companions who kept his words alive through discourse and prayer. But we know that many paragraphs are out of sequence, duplicated elsewhere in the Koran or standing alongside unrelated texts. The Koran is not a mere collection of words, but a guide to the heart — accordingly left to the interpretations of the heart. It's my heart that I follow when I bring the Koran to bear on our calling.

Who We Are

Surah 2:1 [The Cow]: Alif lam mim. This Book is not to be doubted. It is a guide for the righteous, who have faith in the unseen and are steadfast in prayer. . .

We faithful — Christian, Jew or Muslim — believe that God knows all and sees all. Islam says that all our actions and deeds are maktub or "written," and that only Allah reads from the book of fate and destiny. This is an important facet of an Arab's psyche, for it justifies our actions and course throughout life. If He knows our life, our struggle, our death, then why worry about the inevitable? We concentrate on improving our condition, knowing we cannot hide from Him. This truth strips away pretense, liberates our concerns and turns our focus inward, on self-improvement. Beyond these "standard" interpretations, Islamic hunters embrace this precept with particular fervor. If it is true, they reason, then is it not so that Allah foretells our eventual arrival within the annals of the Koran? Can we not reason that Allah, who is All Knowing, imparts hidden messages and testimonies within the Koran to guide us?

Westerners look upon Islam as a religion of strife, and the Koran as the instrument of war, but this is far from the truth. Even in relation to our most feared word, "jihad" (a word synonymous in the West with terrorism), Muhammad proclaims — The best jihad is [speaking] a word of justice to a tyrannical ruler. Islam teaches respect, piety, compassion, tolerance, fidelity and charity — all those services we provide as kiswah. Do we fight monsters to kill beasts or to protect humanity? We hopefully fight to guard the helpless. Thus we follow the tenants of Islam in pursuit of our duty. Would it not stand to reason, then, that the Koran holds somewhere the lessons we need to fulfil our obligations? This question strengthens many Muslim hunters.

Surah 36:1 [Ya' Sin]: Ya sin. I swear by the Wise Koran that you are sent upon a straight path.
This is revealed by the Mighty One, the Merciful, so that you may forewarn a nation who, because of their fathers were not warned before them, live in heedlessness.

The faithful kiswah interpret this text to mean one of two things. The more humble among us believe it a lesson, saying it is our duty to protect the fellaheen (the unaware people around us) from monsters because we are they who Allah forewarned. Another lot, more brash in their philosophies, believes this speaks directly of our kind. We are the forewarning and the omen of things to come. We alone can advise our fathers and mothers of the evils plaguing them.

While I advocate both interpretations, the latter carries the danger of elevating us to the status of self-appointed prophets. This is a true danger in Islam, in which the succession of prophets or the choice of a new caliph (spiritual leader) is often the source of infighting and even heresy. Understand that Islam is the hub of Middle Eastern life, and interpretation of the Prophet's words is a philosophical sport. The Koran unites us as a book, but once opened it divides our opinions and sets us at odds.

Our Cause

Surah 6:112 [The Cattle]: We have placed in every city arch-transgressors who scheme within its walls. But they scheme only against themselves, though they may not perceive it...

And...

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful...

Surah 36:7 [Ya' Sin]: It is We who will resurrect the dead.

And...

Surah 4:78 [Women]: ..But when evil befalls them, they say: 'It was your [Muhammad's] fault.' Say to them: 'All is from God!'

We must never forget that everything lives by Allah's grace. There is nothing He does not know or cannot do. This is often a troubling thought for Arab hunters, for if everything exists by His will, then who are we to question our place in this world? Why are we even here if Allah tells us never to dispute His methods? Can our cause exist with this self-doubt? Eventually, many of us come to our own decisions separately. This perhaps serves to divide us in our goals.

Some of us realize we are not the judges of monsters. The supernatural exists and it always has because that is the natural order of things (which we cannot fight anymore than we can reverse the flow of the wind). Instead of judging, we are the protectors of the fellaheen. Our cause shouldn't question whether creatures have a right to exist, but whether they should harm others.

Some of our kind believe that evil survives only to winnow the faithful from the wicked. This is a dangerous undercurrent among Arab kiswah, for they envision their duties as far beyond protecting the defenseless. They see themselves as full Islamic warriors fighting the incursion of the unfaithful, or worse the "taint" of foreign influence.

Our Enemy

Surah 72:1-15 [The Jinn]: Say: It is revealed to me that a band of jinn listened to God's revelations and said: "We have heard a wondrous Koran giving guidance to the right path. We believed in it and shall henceforth serve none besides Our Lord..."

"'Some of us are Muslims and some are wrongdoers. Those that embrace Islam pursue the right path; but those that do wrong shall become the fuel of Hell.'"

Western hunters question and debate the presence of monsters, but it is enough for us to know that Allah wills their existence to understand how they came into being. Unlike you in the West, we Arabs are close to the traditional roots of our ancestors. Tales of the supernatural are a part of us. We read the tales of the jinni from the Koran or from folktales, because they carry the certainty of truth. These creatures are as true as our ancestors are. We knew them before our change.

We also know that not all jinn and monsters are evil. Like man, Allah gives them ears to hear His words and the heart to follow His path. We therefore do not judge these creatures by appearance. We learn to distinguish between the faithful and the heretics. We spare those who pray to Allah regularly and who offer the alms tax, for He is merciful. While you may perceive your struggles to be against all monsters, we know our war is against those who would harm the fellaheen. It is our respect for the akhirra (the supernatural) that marks our hunt from yours. Remember:

Surah 2:190 [The Cow]: Fight for the sake of God those that fight against you, but do not attack them first. God does not love the aggressors.

While this tenet admittedly proves difficult for our kind, many of us try not to kill wantonly those whom we perceive as enemies. We must act with prudence, for Allah seeks warriors, not murderers. This belief also applies to sparing children, women and men who are often the hostages of wicked creatures. I hope we know better than using them to gain the advantage, for to do so risks the fires of hell.

Unfortunately, not all of us are so moderate in our views. Political hatred between the Palestinian and Zionists, for example, sees ally and enemy defined on the grounds of nationality. I know of too many fanatical hunters who wage wars against their political adversaries, using the same heavy-handed techniques that earn all Arabs the unfair title of terrorist. It saddens me that some of our brethren lend their abilities to Herbollah or Hamas guerillas.

Surah 9:4 [Repentance]: Proclaim a woeful punishment to the unbelievers, except to those idolaters who have honored their treaties with you in every detail and aided none against you. With these keep faith, until their treaties have run their term. God loves the righteous.

Again, we must avoid senseless and undirected violence. Not all monsters are our enemies and not all kiswah are allies. We must respect those who respect us.

Surah 54:1 [The Moon]: Let them be. The day the crier summons them to the dread account, they shall come out from their graves with downcast eyes, and rush towards him like swarming locusts. The unbelievers will cry: This is indeed a woeful day!

On a day of unremitting woe, We let loose upon them a howling wind which snatched them off like the trunks of uprooted palm-trees.

These Surahs (chapters) trouble me, for I've heard these words before. A walking ghost named Carpenter recounted a similar tale, and spoke of an evil storm that splintered the lands of the spirits and allowed the dead to return from their graves. Some kiswah cry: If this is indeed true, then Allah's judgment is upon the world and we must act accordingly in these final days. I, however, believe we are Allah's munadi, his criers, who demand the dead to account for their actions. If that is true, some good may come of this storm yet.

Our Tools

Surah 6:109 [The Cattle]: They solemnly swear by God that if a sign be given them they would believe in it. Say: 'Signs are vouchsafed by God.'

Or: Perfected are the words of your Lord in truth and justice. None can change His words.

A portion of our inheritance is the ability to read and impart messages within kufic script, a flourish of word art that adorns our mosques and homes. The very fact that we alone can address and speak to one another through symbols hidden in kufic bespeaks of Allah's faith and purpose in us. He gives us the means to protect our words and our identities from the unbelievers. Some faithful ask: If this is true, then why can the Jews and Christians read these words as well? It is because they too are the children of Him, the one true God. They too are people of the book, and thus blessed with the right to stand in Paradise. Never forget that the Koran is not just for Muslims, it is for those who listen.

We know that kufic code manifests only within the Middle East and portions of northeast Africa. Many of us believe this is because we live in the cradle of the three monotheistic religions, closest to the holy cities of Mecca and Jerusalem. Our Word is not the code you know; it is more complete and it carries our thoughts throughout the region like the call to prayer. Perhaps it is even the call to prayer that acts as the source of transmission. Regardless, some kiswah believe this means Westerners are unfaithful because the code does not reach them. I believe that it has little to do with personal faith and everything to do with the expression of belief. You are not infidels or heretics, but I do believe Western society is uncomfortable with the joyous celebration of religion. Your society ridicules belief and hides it like a blemish. Thus, only a portion of your code exists because you worship God behind closed doors and in hushed voices. Arabs, however, be we Christian, Muslim or Jew, trumpet our faith almost unanimously and earn a greater understanding of the actual code.

Surah 2:239-240 [The Cow]: When you are exposed to danger pray on foot or while riding; and when you are restored to safety remember Allah, as He has taught you what you did not know.

There is a practice called the tagiyya, which is neither an explicit concept of the Koran nor one that Sunni Muslims use. It is a doctrine of the Druze and Shii Muslim as a means of protecting one's religious beliefs or very identity in a hostile environment. The tagiyya states that should a believer exist in a place that persecutes him for his religious beliefs, then he may express his faith in private and is absolved from participating in the pilgrimage to Mecca or from fasting. Although this bothers Sunni kiswah, many of us understand the advantage of the tagiyya given how Ramadan diverts our attention and energies through daytime fasting and dusk-to-dawn feasting. As result, some Islamic kiswah practice the tagiyya and forego fasting to protect the fellaheen with all their strength and resolve. The authorities hunt some of us for our actions, and it is difficult to leave our country to participate in the pilgrimage. To compensate for these unfortunate circumstances, many kiswah such as myself offer more alms tax to the poor or fast for a few days in the month. Others, who call the jihad the sixth pillar of Islamic faith, believe their very activities as kiswah compensates for their other duties. As with everything, however, this is only proper in moderation. The jihad is no substitute for giving alms or prayer. We must balance our duties as hunters with our obligations to Allah. I cannot say in what measurements, though. That is for each person to decide.

Surah 9:15 [Repentance]: Make war on them: God will chastise them at your hands and humble them. He will grant you victory over them and heal the spirit of the faithful.

Many kiswah are understandably troubled by their gifts. Yes, we rely on our faith far more than Western society does, but some kiswah wonder if they themselves are actually jinn, or if their gifts are Satan's craft to deceive the righteous. I can only say that I believe my gifts are from Allah. He gives us these abilities to "chastise" and "humble" our enemies by our own hands. While some may be convinced that their lineage holds jinn blood, the fact remains that everything is ultimately Allah's design. The province of His will mandates our gifts, even if there is something of the creatures within us.

Our End

Surah 84:1 [The Rending]: When the Sky is rent apart, obeying her Lord in true submission; when the earth expands and casts out all that is within her and becomes empty, obeying her Lord in true submission; then, O man, who labor constantly to meet your Lord, shall you meet Him.

Prophets and sages in all religions foretell the end, and in each legend and destruction myth the singular truth emerges that it is the will of the singular God. If this is true, many of us wonder why fight since this world's evils do not truly control the course of human destiny? In the end, Allah judges and Allah decrees. After all, does Allah not proclaim in Surah 29:7 [The Spider] He that fights for God's cause fights for himself. God needs no man's help ? True, but what Western hunters should realize about us is that the Koran's passages are never an invitation to idleness. They are warnings never to doubt His power or His word. We know that Allah demands we account for our actions on the day of judgment. We fight not because we believe Allah ignores or forgets us. We fight as His instruments to prove ourselves to Him and to provide an example for the unfaithful.

Yes, we know of the end. We will die. The world will vanish and the righteous will ascend into Paradise. We do not refute this inevitability. Our quest is not in the resolution, but the journey itself. This is our proving ground. We should never measure our lives by our destinations, but by the roads we choose. Will Allah judge the man by his riches or how he became rich? Will Allah judge the man by his knowledge or by how he acquired that knowledge? So it is with us as well, and when the reckoning comes, Allah will not ask how many monsters we have slain or how many fellaheen we have saved. No, Allah judges us according to our conduct along the way.

And the following is perhaps the truest reason why we fight. To understand a Muslim, you must know this lesson. It is perhaps the only one you need discern.

Surah 4:74 [Women]: Let those who would exchange the life of this world for the hereafter, fight for the cause of God; whoever fights for the cause of God, whether he dies or triumphs, We shall richly reward him.

HUNTER HOLY WAR™

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I Would Like to Apologize

A wonderful artist named Eirich Olson appeared in Hunter Players Guide. He was, unfortunately, not listed in the credits. We are very sorry Eirich. Thank you for your hard work and understanding.

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HUNTER

HOLY WAR™

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PROLOGUE: DIRGE FOR THE LIVING

Does There not pass over man a space of time when his life is a blank?

We have created man from the union of the two sexes, so that We may put him to the proof. We have endowed him with hearing and sight and, be he thankful or oblivious of Our favors, We have shown him the right path.

— The Koran, *Surah*: 76:1 [Man]

When Allah speaks, how can you not listen?

My world is hours away from dying and I am its executioner. As a Muslim, I have always believed that my life was predetermined by Allah's will. He knows all men's lives, from their greatest accomplishments to their greatest failings... all at the moment of their birth. It is muktub... *so it is written. Yet, I cannot help but wonder why Allah chose me for this duty. Surely there are men holier than I? Worthier perhaps? I wonder what is written in the annals of my destiny. I wonder if I embark upon the final chapter of my brief saga as one of Allah's* kiswah — *that black cloth that covers and protects the greatest shrine and cornerstone of Allah's throne, the Kabba, and from which we take our name.*

A thin dagger of desert sun pierced the barricaded window of the abandoned home, lighting its worn interior. The filtered twilight swelled with the unmistakable orange hue of an impending sandstorm. This served the two men inside the home well, for the storm would cover their passage across the hard Negev Desert.

The first man was Fadi Majeed, a wiry, desert-browned veteran of hardship. His peppered hair thinned on top and his face was a patch of rough stubble. His eyes were mired in thought, and he didn't see Yusif studying him casually. When he finally noticed, Majeed cursed himself for looking so distracted and returned to cleaning his rifle.

Yusif also bore his experiences proudly, from his hard-edged mouth to his bushy mustache. Yusif's jutting brow cast his eyes in shadow, and an ugly rope of hard skin starting at his cheek crossed his nose and ended above his left eye. The scar nearly split his face and restricted his expressions through tightened skin. Still, it was testament to Yusif's skill in evading death on many occasions. The scar was simply a trophy now.

Majeed saw Yusif put his weapon down on the rug and stand, but Majeed tried to remain occupied with cleaning his gun, now stripped into a dozen pieces and scattered across an oily rag. The weapon looked far from menacing, but come tonight it would sing a chorus of bullets.

"I spoke to Ali," Yusif said. He paused, waiting, but Majeed did not respond. "He says the Syrians are receiving another shipment. He can sell us some spare parts, but the cost will be much higher this time. Someone's killing off his Beirut suppliers." Yusif paused again, but only silence greeted him. "Do you need anything for your gun?" he finally asked.

Majeed simply shook his head and remained intent on cleaning.

"Fadi," Yusif proceeded, "You look nervous. You aren't worried about tonight, are you?"

Yusif had been like Majeed's older brother since both their parents died in a massacre at a refugee camp

over a decade ago. His question was meant in jest, but it stung Majeed a thousand different ways. Yusif's words shamed him for more reasons than Majeed cared to admit or share. Majeed shook his head in response, fearing his tongue would betray his heart. He concentrated on his rifle. Yusif sat down beside him and embraced him around the shoulder with one arm.

"This is no different than before," Yusif said. "Tonight we avenge the death of a child. We show these monsters that they cannot act with impunity. We are Allah's retribution. We are His *Qadi*, His judges and His executioners. Blood demands blood."

"I know," Majeed finally sighed. "I just pray it won't be like that farming settlement," he said braving a lie. "You nearly died."

Yusif nodded grimly but added nothing to fill the awkward moment. "It's nearly prayer time," Yusif said. He paused again. "I won't abandon you, little brother," he added before returning to his corner of the shack.

Majeed was grateful for the respite and the chance at self-reflection. He did not normally indulge himself with personal thoughts and memories like this before a mission, but tonight was different.

I look at Yusif and wonder what his change was like. I do not even know when it happened. Was he always like this? Or did this happen recently? I only know when I *became* kiswah, *what I've heard Westerners call "hunters."*

I was praying at a mosque, thanking Allah for a great gift, when the kufic *script around me erupted into new meaning. To most people, script is word art, passages from the Koran written in broad flourishes, angular lines and even maze-like designs. To the uneducated it is an explosion of pattern. To Muslims, it is the Koran in beautiful bloom. To the* kiswah, *it is Allah's word and a means of communicating with others of our kind. That is how I first came to know I was a "hunter." Words* within *the intricate script emerged, shifted and danced within the patterns. I simply understood, and then I realized: To my left, a Sudanese* kiswah *did not pray. He sought guidance in fighting a jackal-beast. On my right, an Iraqi announced his victory over a* jinn. *Before me, the script announced:*

I did as instructed, no longer in command of my actions. My world shattered like glass.

And now, what seems like an eternity later, I stand in this squalid shack with Yusif, my "older brother," and I wonder what he thinks, if he knows what has become of me.

* * *

Yusif smiled and enjoyed the warm sunset against his skin. The storm would soon claim the desert. And soon Yusif would know for certain about Majeed, though he had his suspicions. He need only to look at his younger brother to see the weight of the truth in his posture. Majeed sat there distracted, unwilling to meet his gaze and speaking in only short sentences. He cleaned his gun, but Yusif noticed Majeed had been cleaning the same piece for the last hour.

Yusif shook his head and prepared his own weapon for the desert by wrapping plastic bags and electric tape around it. The covering would keep the sand out until Yusif opened fire and punctured the plastic. Still, he found his gaze wandering back to Majeed, who continued cleaning. Tonight would tell the truth, Yusif knew — if Majeed had betrayed them as Ali had claimed. Yusif put his gun down and stood.

"I spoke to Ali," Yusif said. He paused, waiting, but Majeed said nothing. Yusif bit his tongue. After the assault against the monsters in the farming community, Yusif was injured terribly and spent weeks recovering from his wounds. It was perhaps the closest he'd come to death. Shortly afterward, he heard reports through his network of allies that someone was betraying their cause. A cell operating in the town of Arnoun was destroyed. Yusif and his allies knew winged snakes were behind the attack, but now they struck with pinpoint precision and deadly timing. They struck with foreknowledge. One of Yusif's own was a traitor. No one knew who until Ali approached Yusif with his suspicions....

"He says the Syrians are receiving another shipment," Yusif continued, hoping to draw any response from Majeed. "He can sell us some spare parts, but the cost will be much higher this time. Someone's killing off his Beirut suppliers." Yusif paused again, trying desperately to read Majeed's expression. Majeed refused eye contact, which made it difficult for Yusif to determine his guilt.

Ali was among the best weapons dealers in Lebanon, if not the western Arab countries. Ali also led Yusif's cause. It was he who discovered that the traitor lay near to Yusif's own heart. It was Ali who accused Majeed. Yusif wouldn't hear the accusation, but it left the bitter taste of truth. Ever since the attack on the farming community, Majeed was distant and sullen. Majeed argued with their direction and how they treated the enemy. He questioned the need for righteous violence. That was enough to condemn Majeed in the eyes of his fellows. Ali ordered Yusif to administer the final test of loyalty.

"Do you need anything for your gun?" Yusif finally asked, trying a new line of interrogation without revealing his true intentions. Majeed shook his head and remained intent on his cleaning.

"Fadi," Yusif proceeded, "You look nervous. You aren't worried about tonight, are you?" Yusif pushed the concerned brother gambit, a trick that had worked in the past under less dire situations. Perhaps Majeed would respond to kindness where bitter denunciation and guilt might fail. Again Majeed shook his head, but Yusif could see he had struck a nerve by the way his brother furrowed his brow. He seized the opportunity and sat down next to Majeed, embracing him about the shoulders with one arm. "This is no different than before," Yusif offered. "Tonight we avenge the death of a child. We show these monsters that they cannot act with impunity. We are Allah's retribution. We are His *Qadi*, His judges and His executioners. Blood demands blood."

"I know," Majeed finally sighed.

Yusif was elated momentarily. Perhaps he'd finally broken through. He wanted to believe his younger brother was not the betrayer. Tonight was his final test of loyalty. He was to kill a winged snake in the desert, to prove his worth to the cause. If he could not, then Yusif would know for certain that he had indeed betrayed them all to the enemy.

"I just pray it won't be like that farming settlement," Majeed continued. "You nearly died." Majeed stared at Yusif's scar, unable to meet the other man's gaze. Yusif saw through the lie and nodded grimly. His moment of hope passed. Majeed had lied about many things, and if he could now lie to Yusif, after all they'd been through, then he couldn't be trusted.

"It's nearly prayer time," Yusif said, "I won't abandon you little brother." Yusif's path was clear to him now. He would administer the test tonight, but Majeed would fail and Yusif would kill him. He would tell Ali, however, that Majeed died for the cause and his virtue. He wouldn't sully his younger brother's name even though Majeed had already done so. Yusif stood up and returned to his corner of the shack, his heart heavy for the realization. Both men remained silent.

* * *

It is said, "Allah knows all, so pursue your actions to their greatest conclusion, for it is already written." My actions are clear but no less easy. Should I be honored that He demands this duty of me? While I hear many of my brethren are at peace knowing their actions are preordained and thus fate, I find no solace in this. Were I able to look upon my choices and not take responsibility for them, I would be less a man.

I remember studying Muhammad's first meeting with the Angel Jibril, in the caves. Thrice the Angel squeezed Muhammad about the ribs and thrice demanded he submit. Only when Muhammad stopped questioning Jibril, and finally submitted, did Allah's wisdom fill his ears. That is Islam, the way of submission to Allah's word. My duty isn't to deafen and blind myself with fate. My duty is to obey Him in the way I know is right.

The evening sandstorm overtook the desert quickly, turning night's imperial colors into a muddy swirl of browns and oranges. Majeed and Yusif, their faces covered, shouldered their burdens and the storm quietly and plunged into its heart. They crested low-breast dunes and shallow valleys with their legs trapped calf-deep in sand until they finally found a rock outcropping. Majeed was glad to pull his feet from the soft sand. He rested against a boulder and felt the ache in his legs subside to a dull throb. Yusif, born more to the wills of the desert, climbed skillfully up the outcropping's slope. He returned a minute later.

"We're here," Yusif announced. Without missing a beat, he scaled the rocks again and vanished. Majeed remained, distracted by the errant thoughts plaguing him these last few weeks. He tired of hunting and killing. He tired of all the bloodshed. And yet tonight was the blade

that would cleave his life into two very distinct paths. The first was the one he knew for months now. He would continue slaying monsters like the winged snakes that his older brother despised so much. He would throw himself into the cause with blind abandon, killing until killed. The other path was of reconciliation — and betrayal. It meant abandoning everything and everyone he loved, and bargaining with the enemy.

Majeed sat there for a long minute, not knowing his path and not knowing that Yusif sat above him, studying his younger brother carefully. Yusif sensed the turmoil raging within Majeed. Tonight was already decided and now rested in the hands of destiny.

Majeed finally willed himself to move. Whatever answer he sought, it rested at the top of this stone.

Yusif took up a position between two large rocks that protected both men from the wind and sand. Majeed sat down heavily and took in the surroundings. They were over three dozen feet about the desert floor, with a commanding view of the terrain around them. Only the storm limited the breadth of their scope.

"There," Yusif pointed and drew an imaginary line across the desert below them. Majeed saw the faint trace of a road under the moving sands and nodded. Instinctively, he pulled out his rifle from his worn duffel bag. He swiveled and came to rest on his stomach, the gun's image-enhancing, hooded scope to his right eye. The desert blossomed into artificial green with a red dot marking dead center.

It took Majeed a second to realize he was preparing to kill once more, with little thought to his actions. "Is this all I am?" he wondered silently. "Does submission to Allah preclude guilt or doubt?"

"Do you see anything?" Yusif asked. Majeed was nearly silenced by shame and shook his head, then added: "We'll have to wait." He did not see Yusif's grip tighten around his own gun. He did not read Yusif's expression as the older brother screamed the thought, "Do not fail me. I have no wish to kill you."

* * *

The sandstorm continued her angry dance across the Negev, silencing the world with her howl and blinding it with her skirt of biting wind. Majeed, staring through his Russian-made scope, finally spotted the winged snakes moving through the desert, long before Yusif saw or heard them. Now was the time. He had few seconds to make his final decision: left or right, rebirth or betrayal. Either decision was a baptism in blood.

Majeed turned away from the scope to look at Yusif. "The Egyptian Bedu," he said tentatively, "believe that dust devils and blowing sands mark the passage of *jinni*. If that's true, this sandstorm must surely be the wake from the dragon of all beasts."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Yusif insisted.

Majeed recognized his older brother's apprehension by how he gripped his weapon, turning his knuckles white. "So," Majeed thought calmly, "he no longer trusts me. At least I'm not alone in deceit."

Majeed turned back to his weapon. "I see the monsters."

Yusif followed the barrel's line of sight to the approaching target. Suddenly the deep thrum of an engine cut through the sandstorm.

Majeed stared at his target. The so-called monsters: a pair of Israeli soldiers driving a jeep. He could clearly see the wings of the *Sayeret Tzanhanim* — the Winged Snakes, Israel's elite paratroopers — stitched on their sleeves. This was Yusif's enemy.

"There!" Yusif hissed. "There are the Zionist monsters who killed our children."

Majeed stared silently, his aiming dot focused on the chest of the driver, his finger resting lightly on the trigger.

"I told you they'd be here... shoot them," Yusif urged.

Majeed hesitated. If he pulled the trigger, he would remain a warrior for the *intifada*, the resistance to drive the Israelis from Palestinian lands. There was a terrible price for making that decision: his soul. Yet, if he didn't, he became a warrior of a different kind, one whose war superceded border and even religion. It was a war whose sole general was Allah, and whose enemies hid in shadows. It demanded a cruel price, as well.

Now was the time of reckoning. Yusif sensed it, too. He pointed his gun at Majeed.

Majeed brought his head away from the scope. "I'm sorry," he said. "I will not." Yusif gritted his teeth and was about to pull the trigger, but Majeed was quicker. Divinity surged through Majeed's body and erupted in brilliant light like the sun. Yusif screamed and fired wildly.

* * *

I never killed my first monster, the one praying at the mosque, because I didn't know how. It became easier... later, after I learned. The kufic *script spoke and related a wealth of information to any* kiswah *who would read it, but I always believed this was for Muslims alone.*

One day, I braved my first words and greeted all my brethren through the script. They welcomed me with open arms and we shared our pain as brothers. I even befriended another soldier who understood my torment for betraying my cause. He taught me to communicate for the benefit of one person alone and not to make each message a proclamation. What a twist of irony when I learned he was Israeli and not the good Muslim I thought him to be.

The two soldiers were at the far side of rock outcropping. The burst of light and the brief staccato of gunfire drew their attention, despite the storm. The lieutenant climbed while his partner, the jeep's driver, covered him.

Above, Majeed kept Yusif under the watchful muzzle of his rifle. Yusif lay stunned and bleeding profusely from a chest wound, but he possessed enough rancor to spit Majeed an angry look.

"Traitor," Yusif hissed. "You'd betray your own brother to the Israelis?"

"Never," Majeed said sourly. "You betrayed yourself. You betrayed *me*."

"No! You've always been my brother, my own heart. I protected you… saved you. I was your father and your friend. How could you betray your cause to these snakes?"

"You showed me how to fight. But I no longer fight the same war. This new war demands we become enemies."

"What new war?" Yusif demanded, wincing from pain. "What cause makes you spill your brother's blood?"

"I asked myself that many times Yusif, and could find no answer. I still can't, so I ask you."

"You're rambling, Majeed," Yusif laughed. "Quit telling children's riddles and answer me like a man."

"I cannot!" Majeed shouted, "not without knowing why you betrayed me."

"What are you talking about?" Yusif screamed, then collapsed back in pain.

"A few months ago, when we attacked that farm, you nearly… you should have died. That explosion…. But you didn't die. You recovered faster than anyone anticipated. At first, I was grateful. Remember? We both went to the mosque to thank Allah for sparing you. That's when Allah showed me other things. He showed me that I was fighting the wrong war. He showed me that I faced greater enemies, real monsters. He forced me to turn and face *you*, to see you as you truly were."

Yusif's eyes widened, but he bit his tongue. Majeed caught the look and nodded.

"That's right," Majeed continued, "I know about the House of Abominations. I know there are monsters and they are not the Israelis. More so my brother, I know you're their minion."

"You know nothing," Yusif rasped.

"I know you are stronger than a man should be. I know you've survived because you feed from the blood of monsters. I believed you a man of iron for escaping and surviving all those hardships, but it wasn't true. You were simply an emissary of shadows. I… I no longer know you," Majeed admitted.

"Damn you!" Yusif howled. "You know me… you always have! The ones I deal with aren't the monsters. They're devout Muslims, like you and I. They want the Israelis out of Palestine. They want to return Jerusalem to Islam. They support the *intifada*. The Zionists are the true monsters."

"I may dislike — even hate — the Israelis," Majeed responded, "but I've seen real monsters, Yusif. I've smelt their unholy breath and seen them scurry like rats from Allah's power. If you were pure, my gifts wouldn't have blinded you and made you miss me. You're becoming one of them and it won't be long before Ali turns you into a monster like himself. Then you'll be lost to Allah forever."

The clatter of rocks alerted the pair to the presence of the Israeli lieutenant. He was a middle-aged man with chiseled looks, a hardened body and bearded face. With a gun trained on the two, he yelled down to the driver, "Wait there."

There was a flicker of recognition between Majeed and the lieutenant.

"I'm sorry, Yusif," Majeed said, "but you knew about this patrol because I arranged it. This was my trap, not yours. I was hoping to catch Ali or the other tainted, but instead they forced me to confront you."

"So you *did* betray the cause," Yusif spat weakly, eyeing the soldier.

"No, I never betrayed *my* cause."

"But these bastards… they're just… using you." Yusif hissed, his voice weakening against the storm.

"So did you. And Ali used you. I haven't betrayed the dream of saving Palestine, but I won't trade one master for another. I'm sorry my brother, but I had to save your soul. Now I know Ali is your master. I know my enemies… and I know my allies." Majeed glanced at the lieutenant.

Yusif's eyes fluttered and finally closed. Majeed sat silently, praying.

"I'm sorry," the lieutenant finally offered.

"It's small conciliation, Israeli," Majeed responded bitterly. "I betrayed my brother for a cause I barely understand. For an enemy whose sight I can barely stomach."

"I've betrayed my country, too," the lieutenant shot back. "Because of you, I've been using the Winged Snakes to fighting my battles. A dozen men are dead because of my actions against the monsters. I've even shed Israeli blood. All because I followed your advice and attacked your targets."

"Then we are both cursed. At least you have a home tonight. I have nothing but the desert and the clothes on my back."

The lieutenant fished through a pocket and produced a Lebanese passport that bulged slightly with a wad of American hundreds. "Here," the soldier yelled against the growing wind, "You can go anywhere from there, but I suggest you vanish. Contact me when you find a place to settle and I'll help you meet Christian or Druze hunters. They won't try to kill you if they discover who you are."

Majeed looked at the money and nodded in appreciation. The lieutenant turned to leave, but Majeed called after him. "Israeli, I am curious about thing — something we've never discussed. How did you respond to me in the mosques? I thought only Muslims could read Allah's script?"

"I can read it as well," the lieutenant admitted. "Don't ask me how or why, but I can. I don't believe in your God, Arab, but I wish he'd stop talking to me."

Majeed nodded grimly and thought, *When Allah speaks, you cannot help but listen.*

INTRODUCTION:
IN THE MIND OF ARABS

It was to manifest the Truth that We created the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them; We created them to last for an appointed term.

— The Koran, *Surah*: 46:2 [The Sand Dunes]

Mention the Middle East and the imagination clashes with images derived from pop media. Arabs are the camel-riding knights of Persian fairy tales or suicidal terrorists who plague Western sensibilities. They're the height of chivalry or the basest of killers. They're the most pious of sages or maniacal of fanatics. Entertainment mediums paint Arabs in sharp contrasts, because their conceived fame and notoriety encompass two solitary periods in Arab history: Islam's Golden Age, when the religion stretched from Moorish Spain to India's Pindus Range, and the Oil Age, when Islam controlled global trends on the value of crude. This sourcebook deals with those aspects of Arab culture, life and history that have somehow slipped through time's cracks.

Hunter: Holy War explores the Middle East from the point of Arab imbued, meaning that it is a street-level look at 14 countries and the religions, languages, history and terrain that bind them. It is this set of factors that qualifies the Middle East as a unique and strange beast to the uninitiated. This sourcebook, however, hopes to illuminate a culture through the eyes of everyday people who find themselves in unique circumstances. While certain stereotypes are inevitable, the majority of imbued presented herein are surprisingly similar to people all over the world.

This book is a resource for both players and Storytellers, with exception to the last chapter. Chapter 6 is exclusively the Storyteller's since it deals with the mechanics involved in running uniquely Middle Eastern hunters. At the heart of **Hunter: Holy War** is an exploration of the unknown that runs deeper than that theme is touched on in other **Hunter** supplements. By reading Chapter 6, players threaten to demystify stories set in the Middle East. Leave the number crunching to the Storyteller and simply enjoy the ride.

PURPOSE

Hunter: Holy War serves players and Storytellers alike in a completely unique way for a **Hunter** book. The imbuing has already been established as an international, and thus multicultural, phenomenon. Despite the grandiose stage set against the world's backdrop, however, the imbuing always returns to the fundamental struggle of one person against a seeming industry of inhuman opposition. To portray that person, be she a player's character or a Storyteller's creation, that individual's cultural mores and outlooks must play a part. They dictate how the hunter carries out her duties given her surroundings and how she views herself. Culture even influences how her imbuing manifests or how her edges mimic local folklore, mythology, beliefs and religions. It's as if hunters are chosen and empowered in terms that they might understand, based on who and what they were before

being imbued. The Heralds enhance people in ways that the imbued can grasp thanks to their own experiences — and limitations. To understand a hunter, we must therefore understand her culture. To understand a culture, we must understand its religion.

Perhaps this understanding of hunters through their origins is doubly important in the Middle East. It is the birthplace of three different major religions. It possesses a cultural structure that captures the fancy of writers and travelers worldwide. It is a crossroads that has distributed hundreds of civilizations and empires to different reaches of the world, and it has seen some of history's greatest federations rise and fall.

Regardless of the far-reaching effects the area has had on the world, however, people still understand very little about the Middle East. It appears to be a political bog that seemingly drowns reason and swallows logic. It is a land of stereotypes where thousands of fervent commuters drive around with explosives in their backseats, or who strike oil while pitching tents. **Hunter: Holy War** hopes to overcome these unfortunate perceptions while retaining the Middle East's exotic flavor.

The Middle East's true wealth lies in its history and diverse cultures. This book draws upon the region's rich tapestry to create characters and to fuel entire chronicles. Beyond adding another stitch to the international flag, this resource shows how the unique nature of Arabs and Islam opens new facets to the hunt and reveals some potential secrets found nowhere else in the world. Storytellers can feature stories and chronicles set in the region or can introduce visiting Arab hunters to far-flung, established settings. Players can create Middle Eastern hunters with an understanding of their culture, as residents of Arab nations or as émigrés. And this book serves as a guide for foreign hunters planning to visit the area, with an overview of uniquely Arab outlooks, traditions and obstacles.

Hunters are not a solely North American or Western phenomenon. Networks of information interconnect worldwide society on multiple levels. Instead of forcing hunters to visit the mountain, technology brings the mountain to hunters. This also means the world is no longer silent. The Internet ensures that many imbued have voices. Now it is simply a matter of understanding everyone's language. **Hunter: Holy War** is the Rosetta Stone of the Arab hunter's world.

How to Use This Book

Hunter: Holy War falls into six distinct chapters. The last chapter is for the Storyteller's eyes alone, with rules and tools for simplifying uniquely Middle Eastern hunter concepts.

Chapter 1: In Allah's Home begins the tour of the Middle East by discussing the different cultures throughout the region, along with a guide of the major countries from the viewpoint of local imbued.

Chapter 2: By His Breath discusses how Arab hunters see their origins against the context of Islam, and how their beliefs differ according to their interpretations of the Koran.

Chapter 3: To Each His Gifts covers the specifics of the hunt itself, from the moment an Arab is chosen recognize the supernatural to the manner in which they contend with such beings.

Chapter 4: Brothers by Virtue explores the mindset of Middle Eastern hunters, discussing their views of themselves and others against local and international contexts, and seeks to divine the ultimate purpose and fate of all.

Chapter 5: Allah's Servants presents the mechanics to help players generate uniquely Middle Eastern hunters based on information established in the preceding four chapters.

Chapter 6: A Brave New World is strictly for the Storyteller, detailing rules and systems for running a Middle East-oriented **Hunter** game.

Source Material

The Middle East is an admittedly labyrinthine — if not intimidating — subject to tackle given the complexity of its internal mechanisms. **Hunter: Holy War** is a distilled primer into the region that doesn't rely on archetypical (and sensationalist) terrorist movies such as *Navy Seals* or *True Lies*. Unfortunately, the Middle East and horror are rarely two subjects that are intertwined. The region's geopolitical situation — and even the strength of its natural resources — play greater roles in contemporary fiction than in horror.

Literature

The majority of Middle Eastern books listed herein are research-oriented and have nothing to do with fiction. While this may seem dry, these works present valuable insight into history, cultural mindsets and the effects of the 20th Century on the Arab psyche.

• *The Koran* is the voice of the Muslim people and the impetus behind many of their actions. Understanding the Koran is often the first step in understanding Muslim Arabs and the roots of their struggle.

• *Arab Folktales* (translated and edited by Iner Bushnaq) offers traditional Islamic tales from across the Middle East without relying on the popularized *One Thousand and One Nights* brand of storytelling. Most interesting are the anecdotes scattered throughout concerning the role of storytellers and the importance of tales on Bedouin society. These stories are more allegorical and far less magical than *One Thousand Nights*, but they do contain mention of the supernatural and its influences on everyday people.

• *The Arab Mind* by Ralph Patai. Although dated since its release in the 1960s, this book still offers key observations into the Arab frame of reference and experience. It is a great primer concerning the Middle

East's common man in relation to the Koran, history and contemporary politics.

• *Aramco and its World,* by Paul Lunde and John A. Sabini, focuses primarily on the history of Saudi Arabia, material of cultural relevance to Islam, and on the history of her oil-mining operations. "Aramco" actually stands for The Arabian American Oil Company and is a chief employer of American and British expatriates (and their families) working along Arabia's eastern coastline.

• *Fabled Cities, Princes & Jinn* by Khairat al-Saleh. Like *Arab Folktales*, this book offers a wealth of stories and background outside the already common stable of Arabian tales. Even more impressive is that it covers myths of supernatural beings and magic from pre-Islamic folklore (a difficult feat given that little survived the Islamic purge of "pagan" thought and idolatry from that period).

• *A History of the Arab Peoples* by Albert Hourani. This is one of the bibles of Middle Eastern studies, with a wealth of information on the post-Islamic world.

• *Islam: The Straight Path*, by John L. Esposito, presents an excellent and easy-to-read overview on Islam itself, including its chief tenets, the major factions, Islamic thought and obligation, and its history.

• *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam*, by Reuven Firestone, dismisses the accepted Western version of *jihad* as simply meaning war. He studies the phenomena of the *jihad* (struggle) in the context of Muhammad's teachings and as a means to triumph over personal adversity. He brings reason back to the word and offers it in conjunction to compassion and integrity.

• *The Middle East* by Bernard Lewis. Another tome of work on the Arab people, it details the Middle East beautifully as both a historical and cultural phenomenon.

• *The World's Most Dangerous Places* by Robert Young Pelton. A fun and insightful romp into the world's nastier hotspots, this book offers interesting information on regional terrorist groups, drug cartels and ruling despots.

• *Yamani: The Inside Story* by Jeffrey Robinson. While this may appear an unusual selection, this semi-autobiography of Saudi Arabia's former chief and savvy oil minister Zaki Yamani does offer insight into the power of oil as a weapon and its unmistakable influence on Middle Easterners.

Films

Good movies about the Middle East are difficult to find unless they deal with Egyptian relics or terrorist groups. The fact is there are few Western films that treat the Middle East in a non-partisan or non-homogenized fashion. They cast Arabs as the threat, as the backdrop for scenes or as dopey sidekicks to valiant Westerners trying to protect silly Arabs from mystical dangers they obviously can't handle.

For an accurate visual reference to the Middle East, go to any major video rental chain and check out their Documentary section, or watch the Discovery Channel or TLC. There is far more to gain from these educational films than relying on *True Lies*, *Executive Decision*, or *Navy Seals*. Movies such as *The Mummy*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and *Three Kings* do offer some glimpses into the Arab world, but offer very little in the way of exploring its cultures. While this is also true of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* and (shudder) *Mortal Kombat 2*, these two movies are noteworthy if only because they offer glimpses of breathtaking Petra, the ancient Nabataean city carved into Jordan's mountains. Oddly enough, *Malcolm X* contains a significant segment on the man's travels through the Middle East as a Muslim. It offers some rare shots of the sacred Ka'bah and Mecca.

Of Western films, the ones that earn some distinction for their portrayal of Arabs include *The Siege* and *Lawrence of Arabia*. The former deals with the threat of terrorism on American soil. While panned by certain Arab groups, it does stress the point that terrorism is an embarrassing and minor segment of the Middle East. *Lawrence of Arabia* is a perhaps the pick of the litter and an excellent look into the formation of Saudi Arabia and the efforts of T.E. Lawrence to hold the British to their promises.

True adventurers can always visit local Arab video stores and rent some of the higher production flicks to gain a sense of the contemporary Middle East through Arab eyes, though the chance of finding subtitled films is low.

CHAPTER 1: IN ALLAH'S HOME

It was He who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then mounted the throne. He knows all that goes into the earth and all that emerges from it, all that comes down from heaven and all that ascends to it. He is with you wherever you are. Allah is cognizant of all your actions.

— The Koran, *Surah*: 57:4 [Iron]

By: Tarjiman220

Although you may see my name here more often than those of other writers, my voice is only made stronger by the words of others. I think it only fair that you meet my collaborators as much as privacy allows, for they are the voice of the Middle East. They are the stories of their countries and the utterances of those *kiswah* who could not directly contribute to this endeavor.

al-Amin — This Lebanese teacher lives up to his name of "The Trusted One" and represents the best educated among us. His insight into Beirut proves immeasurable, as does his understanding of Christian Arabs.

Fatwa243 — Fatwa is our resident firebrand and a good reminder that we do not all share the same opinions. I thank him for helping me translate some contributions into English without changing the spirit of their voices, as well as for his perceptions into Egypt (adding to Jager51's already insightful contribution to hunter-net).

Globetrotter —Globetrotter is an expatriate hunter who travels the Middle East extensively. In fact, her base of operations is Bahrain — her home for a decade. She is so fluent in Arabic and so well versed in our customs that I often think Allah must have given her an Arab's heart.

Hajirah252 — Although his words appear in later sections, his contributions bear the wisdom of our experience. Like Jibril, below, he is a beacon to the lost, an *Imam* who guides others through Allah's words and by virtue of his own actions.

Hope123 — Many of you already know our resident expert on Israel. She is also our strongest advocate of female hunters in the Middle East. Unfortunately, many traditional Muslim hunters ignore her advice because she is Israeli (proving ignorance is our greatest enemy).

Jibril — Jibril is our eyes and ears in Syria and Jordan. He also acts as a lynchpin for Syrian hunters, offering advice and help whenever possible without concerning himself with the personal risks involved.

Muezzin318 — Few *kiswah* understand sacrifice as well as Muezzin, the caller of prayers. A fellow Saudi, his experiences transcend all nations, save one: that of Islam. He too represents us to Western hunters, and I can ask for no finer ally in this endeavor.

Muru'a — Muru'a is the Bedouin code of chivalry as exemplified through the traits of bravery, self-sacrifice and loyalty. We often forget we fight a war, but Muru'a is our reminder of the battle and the sacrifices we must endure for the cause. I thank him for making us better men (and women) and for his lessons on Iraq.

Omeed — Omeed represents the changing face of Iran. Blessed with many viewpoints, be it of Iranian and British culture or Muslim and Christian society, it is unfortunate he cannot partake of hunter-net. We would benefit from his understanding of all cultures.

Wildcatter184 — This British expatriate is among the few hunters who moves comfortably between the Arab and Western worlds. He helps us build many

bridges with foreign hunters and voices their concerns well. He knows Kuwait and Saudi Arabia best.

Kiswah Lexicon

While we use these words in the normal course of life, I encourage the other chroniclers to use English when they can (such as interchanging between *kiswah* and hunter) for two reasons. It helps facilitate your understanding of the text and it reminds our Western compatriots that we are not so different.

Adites: One of four principle supernatural peoples we believe exist, each one bearing the name of a race that Allah vanquished in the Koran. A nation of giants who once ruled Ad, Adites built a lofty city and turned to the worship of three beings (Sada, Samuda and Hiba). Allah cursed them with drought and eventually drowned their city in sand. For their thirst, we name them after v*mp*r*s.

akhira: The "other world." A reference to the supernatural world or its inhabitants.

al-Ghariyyan: Meaning "blood-stained." It is one of our terms for "the imbued."

Amalikites: The second of the supernatural races, the Koran mentions these giants who dwelt in Mecca, but who vanished from existence. We both call them spirits.

Bayt al-Shan'a: House of Abominations. This term refers to places of "infestation" or simply to the condition of the world.

dam batlub dam: "Blood demands blood," or retaliation for the death of others.

Dar al... : "House of...." Some hunters identify themselves according to Islam's "six" pillars of devotion (*Jihad*, *Zakat*, *Haj*, *Salat*, *Ramadan*, *Shahada*) and precede their pillars with "Dar al," as in *Dar al Jihad*. These titles simply imply they acknowledge that they belong to a fellowship of like-minded *kiswah*.

dhimmi: Means "protected," or people of the book who also believe in the one God. To many Islamic *kiswah*, it means foreign hunters or those of Jewish or Christian faith. This, of course, is a positive view of other hunters.

dunya: Life in this world. The normal or mundane.

fard: Religious duty or the hunter's responsibility to combat evil and protect the *fellaheen*.

fatwa: "Religious decree," which we use to describe our capabilities as divinely inspired. Not to be confused with the contributor who goes by the name Fatwa243.

fellaheen: Normally a peasant or farmer who tills the soil. Arab hunters use this word to describe those unaware of the supernatural.

gweilo: This term comes to us from Filipino hunters who worked in Hong Kong. It's apparently derogatory for white people, but also means "ghost." We use it to mean an expatriate who vanishes underground in the Middle East, who dedicates himself to the calling and abandons all ties, becoming a ghost to our society and his own.

hija: An insulting poem or verbally cutting an opponent to the quick. It is also one of our gifts that uses words to injure the adversary.

Ikhwan al-harb: While it literally means the "brotherhood of war," this is a communal ceremony developed by many Bedouin to include their families in the hunt. We call it the "wardance" and it binds and strengthens our spirit.

Jahiliyya: Time of Ignorance or a period of idol worship before Islam.

Jihad: *"Jihad"* means exerting the utmost effort, power or attention in dealing with a problem. In the classical sense it means resisting the machinations borne from three archetypical sources: a known enemy, the devil and one's self. For hunters, it is the very struggle of our lives against monsters; it is "the cause."

jinn: Allah created these creatures from smokeless fire, unlike humanity who He created from clay. *Jinn* have the same capacity for good and evil as mortals do and are not devils as some texts portray them.

jiran (singular — Jar): This means dependents and normally applies when a strong tribe protects a weak one. In our terms, *jiran* refers to the people we must protect from hostility. In Western argot, they are your "bystanders."

kiswah: The black cloth covering and protecting the holy shrine Ka'bah. A reference to hunters who protect *fellaheen* by "covering them" from harm.

maktub: "It is written." The belief that because Allah understands all, He already knows each and every person's actions throughout their lives and how we will die from the moment of our birth. Many fanatics use this belief to vindicate their actions, claiming it was already written or predestined. They therefore follow Allah's plan with the fervor that befits the faithful.

Midianites: The third race of the supernatural, taken from the Koran as "the forest people." Allah vanquished them as well. You call them shapechangers.

mujahidin: Allah's (or holy) warriors. These *kiswah* help enforce other hunters who grow careless in their actions.

taqiyya: An Islamic precept whereby a person can hide his religion or practices if in hostile territory. *Kiswah* may invoke *taqiyya* to protect their activities and themselves.

Thalmudites: Another race vanquished by Allah. We now call the walking dead by this name.

thugra: "Monogram" or "insignia." Description of the Word-style tattoos made from henna that some hunters interpret as the source or means to their gifts from Allah or the Messengers.

was'it: *Kiswah* mediators who neither arbitrate nor judge. They simply help both sides reach an understanding without losing face. They are especially necessary when hunters of differing beliefs come into conflict.

The Culture of Arabs

By: Tarjiman220

Mention the Middle East and people are suddenly experts on our history without ever understanding our hearts. We are not simply camel herders or monarchs

living off the profits of oil. We are a fervent and friendly people, given to debate because it stirs our soul, and given to hot tempers because Allah endowed us with passion. Culturally, we find strength and joy through many things, but none are as strong as our concepts of family, hospitality and the arts.

Family — Our sense of family stretches back centuries, when harsh life afforded us few allies. Our greatest strength was blood, those we could rely upon without question or fear of betrayal. Our parents were our teachers, our siblings and cousins were our closest friends and our children were our legacy in a time when the spoken word alone carried the weight of history. That tradition lives on in the Middle East. It is not uncommon for parents and grandparents to live with their married children and for children to support their elders. This, of course, has proved a source for no end of difficulties for Arab *kiswah* who must sometimes abandon their homes to keep loved ones safe. But this is a matter for later discussion.

The father and mother are supreme in judgment and wisdom. They are responsible for their children's actions even when their daughters marry and bear the name of another. If a husband accuses his wife of infidelity, it is typically her father who must punish her, not the married man's family. It has been so since Mohammed's time and it continues in the cultures of traditional Muslims. We refer to our closest friends and peers as "uncle," "brother," "father," "mother" or "son" according to their age. We even call children by the father's name (*ibn* or "son of..."), while the parent takes their child's name (*abu* or "father of..."). While this may sound unusual, these terms of fondness demonstrate the importance of family in our lives.

Hospitality — Another tradition surviving from the days of our nomadic ancestors is that of hospitality. It is a legacy far older than Islam itself and it influenced how we treated others (a Muslim must have been — and must be — hospitable, friendly, generous and proud). The desert was a harsh master and dying by the elements was too cruel a death. The Bedouins found no nobility in allowing others to suffer the torture of the sands, be it heat or thirst, so they created the rules of hospitality for which Arabs are renown. It is important to remember this tradition, for many Arab *kiswah* embrace the laws of hospitality for the sake of solidarity. It is also important that Westerners understand this code, for it places as much obligation on the host as it does the guest. Such respect is the least Westerners can anticipate from many Arab *kiswah*.

The first rule of hospitality says that a visitor, whether stranger or mortal enemy, can expect a host to offer him a place to sleep without fear of betrayal. This courtesy extends for three nights, while the host asks little in return. After the three nights, while the guest is not forced to leave, custom dictates that the visitor must not take advantage of a host's kindness. In turn, the host is no longer required to offer special treatment. *Kiswah* have adopted this practice, though it is especially important that visiting hunters never abuse the offer of sanctuary. *Kiswah* have gone to great lengths to secure homes away from prying eyes. Too many visitors or a guest who stays too long invites scrutiny from neighbors and possibly the local authorities (especially in Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Iran, where the military or religious authorities hold sway).

Another rule of hospitality is offering guests food to warm their bellies. This generosity's joy comes from cooking and from the celebration of a great meal. It is the manner in which hosts demonstrate their "wealth" (in food, everyone is the richer). Bedouin chieftains pride themselves on philanthropy and often slaughter the largest calf in honor of their guests (livestock is a sign of wealth among the Bedu).

Times and practices change in cities, however and a full refrigerator is as acceptable as offering fresh cattle. The practice of feeding (if not over-feeding) guests remains integral to Arabic tradition. Food, like song, is a celebration and at no time is this more evident than during the holiday of *Ramadan*. We fast during daytime. But when the sun sets and the cannon echoes across the city, every home becomes a feast for family and friends from dusk till dawn. I mention this because it is not uncommon for more traditional Muslims to invite the less fortunate to their tables to share in the celebration. Many *kiswah* survive through this charity. The authorities hunt them. They must abandon everything and everyone they know, but they can never escape their own nation's borders or even find new homes. Thus they live and sleep like beggars in an alley, accepting charity from others. *Ramadan* is one of the few times these hunters receive a rich meal for their troubles. Food is a wealth all Arabs share.

I know many Westerners find this following custom troubling ("suicidal," I believe Cabbie22 once said). It is where the host promises his guest's safety regardless of their common history. The two may be mortal enemies, but the request for sanctuary is too compelling to ignore. In promising asylum, the host and his family agree to protect the guest while he remains under their roof. Additionally, should anyone attack the guest while in the host's home, the host defends him, fighting at his side if necessary. There are even those who take the custom to heart and shelter monsters. This is a matter of personal choice and I for one provide protection to only *ins* (mortal people). Some hunters, however, promise safekeeping only if the guest shares salt with them — an ancient custom said to bind the two together in solemn oath. At first I thought this a weak deterrent of betrayal, but I have since learned that these *kiswah* have the power to bind their visitors into a pact. Should the guest break his word, his flesh explodes into righteous flame and consumes him.

Just as the host has responsibilities, the guest also has obligations. I've mentioned that the guest should never stay longer than three nights. Additionally, the guest must never take advantage or betray his host's trust. Word among *kiswah* travels quickly and we learn who to trust and who to turn away. Another custom from our oral roots is the recounting of stories. The guest was expected to

entertain his host with tales of his journeys and with news from abroad. This tradition survives among hunters simply because we are much like Bedouin tribes separated by great distances. When *kiswah* play host to one another, they recount their battles and exploits as a means of keeping their legacy alive, and in hopes of learning something new about our condition. Stories hold power and their recital is a means of sharing that gift.

The Arts — Speak of the arts and Arabs delight in telling you about our music, poetry and paintings. To understand how our gifts and comprehension of the Word works, one must first understand our interpretations of the humanities. To begin with, our art is decorative and not representational. The Koran expressly forbids creating images of man, animal or Allah, because He is invisible and infinite (mind you, times change and artists now draw upon European influences because they have few Arabic predecessors to guide their hand). Because of this proscription, Islamic art has developed into elaborate floral script and intricate geometric patterns. Traditional artwork possesses three general forms: vine art, geometric and Koranic script (in which language and its placement is significant).

"Why is this important?" you ask. Because we *kiswah* are capable of a kind of communication akin to your code. We can convey meaning through a language hidden throughout the infinite geometric patterns and Koranic (or *kufic*) script that adorns our mosques, buildings and artwork. We can communicate through the script merely by tracing our fingers over the relevant *kufic* symbols, thus relating messages to one another over great distances. The style of script (be it *muthanna*, *raq'ah* or *diwani*) or its location is unimportant, for I have heard of women who communicate through henna tattoos adorning their veiled forms; it only works, however, with those patterns carrying the Koran's words. Perhaps this is why few Westerners know of it, for the further one travels from Mecca and Jerusalem, the more difficult it is to read and send messages.

Call it an arcane Internet if you wish, but because language is a celebration of wit and imagination here, our form of communication is rich and evocative. We can send messages and communicate without ever fearing capture. *Fellaheen* and monsters alike are not privy to our code, or at least so we believe thus far. They merely see the original verse from the Koran and are oblivious to other powers.

I believe we can even use our music as code. Traditional Arabic songs use repetition without changing the rhythm or emphasis and without highlights or dramatic turns. It is not representational and it consistently borrows elements from heritage. The composer's goal isn't originality but to refine existing songs. As result, some *kiswah*, especially those of Nubian or Egyptian extraction, are said to hide their stories and legacies within their music. *Fellaheen* listening to the instruments might hear one thing, but hunters perceive the author's true intent.

Perhaps even more frightening is that some pieces sung and played by Bedouin are untouched from those played centuries ago. These rare pieces may hold ancient warnings and even the voices of the past addressing we *kiswah*. They are like ancient record players or the voices of ghosts. Unfortunately, not even the faithful memory of the Bedu has kept these lessons from slight changes and corruption. The recordings are fragmented and frustratingly incomplete thanks to their transmission through *ins*. Unlike *kiswah*, who possess an ear for both the music and its hidden messages, *fellaheen* musicians know only their instruments' cadence. How can they transmit something perfectly if they cannot hear it or even know it exists? Each minor deviation or fluctuation is a lost word, like a fallen water drop that smudges one word in a written sentence.

The Middle East as Religious Entity

By: Tarjiman220

Allah be praised, for the Middle East is the cradle for three major religions dedicated to Him alone, and countless movements that invariably follow the One God. If you find more information here on Islam than Christianity or Judaism, it is because the Middle East is 90% Muslim (this number varies, with some nations boasting higher or lower percentages than others).

The schism between the three religions often confuses my Western compatriots, but I shall endeavor to

The Force of Language

By: Wildcatter184

Tarjiman has already mentioned the importance of words for Arabs, but I don't think he did the notion justice. Words are mythology. They carried Arab history and later united under Arabic, the language of the Koran. I can't stress enough how important words are to these people. Take Saddam Hussein or the late Ayatollah Khomeini. Westerners probably chuckle at these men's "America is the devil" speeches, but you underestimate the speeches' impact. For Arabs, words are action. Repeating the same phrases expresses intention. It took me a while to realise that simply saying "no," meant "perhaps" to these people. It isn't until you say "no" a dozen different ways that they realise you're serious.

People underestimate Arab words and the ability to express them. Westerners use phrases to relate a concept, but Arabic is a language of emotions. Instead of saying, "we missed you," they might say "you made us desolate." Is it any wonder that local leaders are swift on rhetoric? Or that Arabs seem so easily fired up at rallies? It even applies to *kiswah* in the form of the *hija*. This was initially a cutting poem or insult levied against opponents, which was far more damaging than actually attacking. A person's honour often rested in his ability to respond. Now, some hunters have managed to turn the *hija* into the ability to harass and confront monsters.

settle how Judaism, Christianity and Islam all differ according to local perceptions. Simply put, Jews follow the Old Testament or Torah, while Christians added to that through the New Testament. Contrary to popular accounts, Muslims believe in both books and in the Prophets Moses and Jesus. Islam holds, however, that the Jews failed by not recognizing Jesus as a new prophet and that the Christians were wrong for elevating a prophet to the rank of Son of God. Islam was born from the teachings of Muhammad, the third prophet, who gave us the Koran, the final chapter in the trilogy of religious books. It is for this reason that Islam treats Christians and Jews as *dhimmi*, as protected people of the book. Unfortunately, while we respect Jews, many Arabs dislike Israelis (except for those in Jordan and Egypt, who recognize Israel's sovereign rights as a nation) and claim they hate Zionists, not Jews. I, however, refuse to embroil myself in the semantics of this statement. I, or rather we, have greater things to worry about.

Christianity

By: al-Amin

Salaam, my friends, and praise Tarjiman220 for making this possible. In addition to being an instructor, I am a Christian Arab, one of a group slowly dwindling toward extinction for no fault other than declining birth rates and an exodus of Christians to the West.

Christianity began in the Middle East thanks to the teachings of Jesus. It quickly outgrew its cradle and spread to Rome, only to return as the Crusades and Colonialism over subsequent centuries. In all three cases, Christianity had enough influence to create enclaves that survive to this day — peacefully coexisting with their Muslim neighbors. The Egyptian Copts comprise the largest sect of Christians at 13% of Egypt's population. They've lived in the region since Mark the Apostle's missionary work, and even held the status of state religion in the 4th Century. They eventually split with the Byzantine Church, forming an orthodoxy of their own.

Despite this illustrious history, the recent past holds little such dignity for the Copts. Following WWII, Muslim fanatics marked the doorways of known Jews and Christians with animal blood. Sometimes they did it to ostracize neighbors, but some families did not survive the night. A friend of mine once related stories of his childhood, in which his vigilant mother checked their doorway every hour and constantly washed or painted over the blood. Unfortunately, the practice continues; it slumbers and reawakens every decade or so for brief periods of time. I know of at least two Copt hunters who primarily defend "their people" against monsters and Muslim extremists.

The second largest community of Christians lives in Syria, but it represents a mix of Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant influences. Thanks to the migration of Christians from the country to the city, our numbers drop steadily. Syria has already seen an exodus of Jews to Israel (at President Hafez al-Hassad's "insistence") and may yet see Christians escape for the liberal sanctuaries of Australia and America.

Lebanon boasts the third largest Christian population, thanks to her million or so Maronites. Following WWII, the Maronites convinced the departing French to put them in power, thus creating a new country while ignoring Shiite wishes to unite with Syria. This rise caused no end of conflict between Muslims and Christians, since the minority Maronites held political power over the majority Shiites. The result was the 1958 Muslim uprising and the 1975 Palestinian-backed civil war. The latter threw the country into a chaos it has barely recovered from, and created a haven for monsters. While peace slowly returns to Lebanon, old grudges die hard. Maronite and Shiite hunters fight one another as often as they battle creatures. It is rare for either faction to protect any *fellaheen* who do not share its beliefs.

Beyond these groups, the Christian populations across the Middle East drop considerably. Jordan and Iraq's Christians account for 6% and 5% of the people, respectively, while Israel stands at 2.4%. In Iran, it falls below 1%, though many Christians claimed to be Muslim in official documents to avoid persecution. Saudi Arabia states that only Muslims can be citizens and claims to have no Christians in its population. But the Saudis fail to mention the ostracized tribes of Christian Bedouins who survived oppression at the hands of other Bedu, or the thousands of expatriates working within enclosed communities. This unfortunate segregation creates a breed of nationalist hunters who protect their own, be they American, European, Pakistani or even Filipino. Wildcatter184 and Globetrotter are rare exceptions to this trend.

Islam

By: Tarjiman220

If Christianity is a facet of Western existence, Islam is the hub of Arab life. Five times a day, the call to prayer issues across the city. Five times a day, devout Muslims stop their cars in traffic and pray by the side of the road. It is this unyielding observance to Islam that Westerners find curious, if not frightening. But if fear is born of ignorance, then allow me to quell your apprehensions.

Islam is essentially submission to Allah's will, and the third revelation of His wisdom following Judaism and Christianity. Allah sent the angel Gabriel to teach the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet, in turn, spread this knowledge to the Arab tribes. Despite appearances, we too believe ourselves the Children of Abraham and we too believe in the Prophets Moses and Jesus.

The Pillars

Although we follow the teachings of the Koran, our principle beliefs are the Five Pillars, and they guide our daily actions. More than rules, they unite our people. While I intend no disrespect to my Jewish and Christian allies, I believe Islam is a religion of solidarity and compassion, and the singular reason why Muslim *kiswah* provide for one another like no other. The pillars are

not simply instructions telling us how to behave as individuals. They teach us how to act as a community. Islamic *kiswah* are therefore fortunate to come into an existence already borne up by many shoulders.

Shahada — The first pillar is our most basic tenet, for it is the declaration that there is no other God but Allah. An honest and genuine belief in this statement makes one Muslim, after which the remaining pillars become obligation. Knowing this means one is never alone.

Salat — The *salat* is the call to prayer when Muslims face Mecca and pray at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, dusk and evening. While it is common to see Muslims supplicating themselves, some countries such as Lebanon and Syria do not make it obligation. In places like Saudi Arabia and Iran, restaurants and stores might make customers leave until prayer's end (even in the middle of a meal), a prayer screen interrupts television programs for fifteen minutes, traffic stops and cities grow silent except for the call itself. Because of this, hunters do well to curtail their activities during prayer time in these places. Never kill a monster while it performs the *salat* and never hunt in those moments, either. The former reason is self-evident, but the latter is more practical than pious; this is when *kiswah* are likeliest to draw attention from religious authorities such as Arabia's *mutawa* (pious men sanctioned by the government to uphold morality).

Zakat — Better known as almsgiving, the *zakat* is a religious tax that all Muslims must pay at the end of each year. The money goes to the poor, the elderly and the infirm as charity.

Sawm — The ninth lunar month of the Islamic calendar is a time of fasting known as *Ramadan*. From dawn till dusk, an Arab cannot partake of any indulgences, be it food, drink or bodily pleasures. When the cannon sounds at sunset, however, the feasting begins and every man's home becomes a palace of food for friends and the unfortunate. This lasts until dawn, when the cannon sounds again and fasting resumes. *Ramadan* is a time of abstinence, devotion, perseverance, self-reflection and forgiveness that lasts until the new moon. Then it becomes *id al-fitr* or "The Festival of Breaking Fast." Much like Christmas, the *id* lasts for a few days and is a time of celebration and gift giving.

For *kiswah*, the *id* is a difficult time that often takes us from our families and friends. *Ramadan* is very taxing on the body and many hunters discover that they cannot continue the struggle properly when hungry. Others who are forced to abandon loved ones to keep them safe find this month lonely and disheartening. We are forever with hope, though, and often help one another in this time of struggle. Some hunters replace fasting in favor of other pillars such as relying on the so-called Sixth Pillar *Jihad* to fulfill their obligations. Others who are not comfortable fighting often assume the fasting of *Ramadan* on behalf of others, extending their own *sawm* for months at a time. Their sacrifice to protect the moral integrity of their fellow *al-Ghariyyan* is a great service to the cause. Most *kiswah* simply hunt at night, following the feasting and indulgence. To combat loneliness, one hunter in Syria opens his home each year to those *kiswah* wishing to spend the festival among friends. I hear this has become quite the celebration and I may visit it myself next *Ramadan*.

Hajj — Once in a Muslim's lifetime, he must make the pilgrimage to Mecca if finances and health allow. Many of us, knowing this may be our last year on Earth, often fulfil the pilgrimage as soon as possible. This way we continue fighting for the cause without fear that we will not enter Paradise for neglecting our obligations.

I also wish to praise Allah for those of us who have partaken of the *hajj* and now help less fortunate *kiswah* make the journey themselves. I occasionally sponsor a *kiswah*'s pilgrimage when I can afford it, and I know of a Saudi sheik who hunts very little, but who pays for hunters wishing to make their first *hajj*.

Jihad — While unofficial, the Sixth Pillar is a Muslim's duty to struggle against adversity in its many guises. *Jihad* of the heart is a battle against one's sinful inclinations while *jihad* of the tongue not only means forbidding evil, but standing up for good. *Jihad* in the context of *fi sabil Allah* means furthering or bettering Allah's kingdom on Earth through peaceful advancement. *Jihad al-sayf* is the *jihad* of the sword or of warring on behalf of Islam.

Islamic *kiswah* often rely on the *jihad* as a substitute for other pillars that they cannot pursue. Indeed, for many hunters, this is the only struggle they know — and therein lies a danger. Like all things in life, man cannot live by a single code any more than he can subsist on honey or milk alone. These Muslims believe the Pillar of *Jihad* is now their singular pursuit and they ignore the rest because it is easier. This is the mark of the fervent who becomes dangerous to monster and *ins* (normal people) alike.

The Schisms of Islam

I speak of our solidarity as Muslims, but we are not a united front. Islam encompasses many different philosophies, the chief among them being the Sunni, Shiite and even Sufi (although most Muslims discount the last as heretics). The first two factions formed early in our history, when the death of the Prophet Muhammad split us over the choice of his successor, the next *caliph*.

The faction that became the Sunni advocated that Muhammad's scion should be the one best suited to lead Islam regardless of his blood relation to the prophet. To them, the successor was simply the custodian of Islamic religious law. Those who became Shiite said the next *caliph* should be of Muhammad's blood, as the inheritor of the prophet's wisdom and divine guidance. It is perhaps ironic that a political matter cracked the religion that would eventually unite the Middle East under a common philosophy.

Since that time, Muslims count the following factions as major movements within Islam.

Shiite: Since their split, the Sunni and Shiite have developed significant differences in philosophy. At

their heart, the Shiite believe that further interpretations of Islam and the spiritual evolution of Muslims comes from a divine guide known as the *Imam*. These holy leaders draw their lineage from Ali and Husayne, two men related to the prophet himself. Because the Shiite have suffered throughout history, they (perhaps romantically) believe themselves an oppressed and ostracized group of faithful trying to restore Allah's rule on Earth, while trying to repair Islam itself.

Shiite hunters can threaten the cause by seeking answers from *fellaheen* holy men and revealing their belief in monsters. They swiftly find themselves in prison or an asylum for their dedication. Other Shiite *kiswah* who are neither naïve nor brash take to the cause well because it suits their self-image as the religious downtrodden. The Shiite are the political minority in most countries, with Iraq, Iran and Bahrain being the exceptions. The notion that they must struggle to achieve their means is a familiar and even welcome way of life. I must also say many Shiite embrace the *fard* as soldiers and act as though they fight a war. If they know what must be done, they do it.

Sufi: Sufis are not content to merely obey Allah. They want to understand Him as well and transcend their physical selves to become one with Him. The only way to do this is to return to the simplicity of life from the days of the Prophet Muhammad himself. The Sufi movement borrows from many beliefs and groups such as Christian hermits, Buddhist monks and Hinduism, going against the Sunni acceptance of a religious authority. They practice the ecstatic worship of Islam and non-violence, and live in poverty (detaching themselves from the material and thus sinful world). Sufism is the "Zen" of Islam.

Sufis embrace the cause with great difficulty. While some eventually become spiritual advisors and holy guides (serving hunters with an unappreciated wisdom), their ability to brandish weapons or turn words into weapons horrifies others of their kind. Since everything, including the Devil, is from Allah, a Sufi must decide whether Allah tempts him with power or if a war truly exists.

Sunni: The Sunni account for nearly 90% of all Muslims across the world and are the political leaders of Islamic history. Where the Shiite follow the *Imam* for guidance, the Sunni follow the *caliph* as the political (but not religious) successor of Muhammad. The Sunni also place the interpretation of Islamic law and the development of faith in the consensus or in the hands of the *ulama* (religious scholars).

Sunni *kiswah* work best within a collective, and while I am proud we cooperate with one another easily, I recognize our faults as well. Our faith in the consensus makes us prone to over-think situations and debate endlessly on the nature of our existence. Some *kiswah* need to understand their nature before they can contribute to the cause, because their faith in their nature as hunters rests in unified opinion. But there is no unified opinion. Everyone has beliefs and few people share them. This is not to say indecision paralyzes us. Merely that we spend too much time debating and not enough time acting. For this I envy the Shiite their certainty of action.

Judaism

By: Hope123

Shalom. Despite Tarjiman's willingness to make my words better, I begin on what you call a "sour note." The Muslims claim their hatred distinguishes between Zionist and Jew, between politics and religion. But I ask how a bullet knows the difference between the two or how a bomb distinguishes one from the other? I do not say this to insult Tarjiman. I direct it toward those of us who would rather kill my people than save lives. I do not intend these words as accusations or in anger. They are a plea for unity.

When you speak of the Jewish people, you immediately think of Israel, and with good reason. Of the world's 15 million Jews, five million live in Israel, with more arriving each year. In fact, following the Soviet fall, 700,000 Russian Jews flooded into their new homeland and now represent 15% of Israel's Jewish populous. The Arab countries point to such numbers and say we build an army to overrun the Muslim world, but they don't realize they contributed to this flood of refugees. President Assad, for instance, "politely" suggested that Syrian Jews leave his country, and he was not alone. Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and many other countries pressured their own citizens to leave, just because they were Jews. What did they expect? That the Jews would simply vanish into Europe? Of course not! They came to Israel to find a new home and we welcomed them with open arms.

The Dove and the Hawk

We have a saying that goes, "Two Jews, three opinions."

Better quoted perhaps is Chief Rabbi Kook who once asked: "Who is a Jew?" The Jewish people appear shattered. At the heart of the dissension are moderate Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe who oppose the more militant Sephardic Jews. Other splits divide Arab Jews from the Europeans and the religious from the political. We never once believed, however, that these divisions would degenerate into violent infighting until an Israeli Jew murdered Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. The assassination chilled us. How could such a thing happen? We still ask ourselves that question, but perhaps I can clear some of the confusion with a quick historical lesson.

Judaism draws from over 3,000 years of history, but our political drive for a homeland is far more recent. It's called Zionism, but it did not originate after WWII, as many believe. Zionism was born from the lips of Nathan Birnbaum in 1885. He demanded a restoration of our homelands in Palestine. Birnbaum, and later his successors, met with opposition, especially from Orthodox Jews who believed Zionists were trying to bring about the Messianic Era in which a new prophet would lead us. The notion of Zionism did not truly take hold until after a series of events that began with the Balfour Declaration of 1917 (when the British promised to support the Jewish

movement for a homeland). The British then took mandate of Palestine in 1923 to help her toward "independence," but it was a feeble excuse for colonialism. In 1939, the British revoked the Balfour Declaration because of Arab pressure, and the British limited immigration heavily. This act condemned millions of Jews to death throughout Europe, a fact we as a race never forgot.

The Holocaust turned into what I can only call world guilt at our plight. In 1947, the United Nations agreed to partition Palestine between the Jews and Arabs. When the Arabs refused us our homes, the State of Israel forcibly claimed its birthright; we were no longer victims of the world. Since then, Zionism represents the will of Israel to remain a nation despite Arab pressure through diplomacy and often violence. Zionism is an umbrella for differing philosophies, though, not a united front as the Arabs claim. Some of its more radical supporters say God promised us the lands between the rivers Nile and Euphrates, while others wish to return those lands we took from Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. As I said, we are divided in opinion, but not as a people — at least not yet.

Our Political Geography

By: Fatwa243

The "Middle East" is a recent fabrication of Colonial influences (Turk, French and British) and events following World War II. Before the Second World War, only Iran and Saudi Arabia existed and were free of occupation. While the geopolitical history of the region is as ancient as humanity itself, many countries currently in the area have existed for only 50 years or so.

This is important, for while Arabs are nationalistic, we are much prouder of our legacy as Arabs (which dates back to Biblical times). If you want to understand why the Middle East is in turmoil, it's because most major policy-making decisions affecting the region are products of external influences. Foreigners, including the Colonial French and British, demarcated most Arab borders before pulling out, leaving us to clean up their mess. The majority Shiite in Lebanon wanted to be part of Syria when independence came, but the minority Maronite Christians convinced the ruling French to leave them in power of a separate country. More friction erupted with Israel's formation (which is still a source of prolonged regional conflict) and with the scramble by foreign countries to capitalize on our oil reservoirs. If it weren't for "black gold" the world would have left us to be another Third World statistic.

Visiting hunters should bear all this in mind. We are congenial and friendly as a people, but we also know the West sees us as backward and as an exploitable commodity. We aren't stupid and any expatriate hunter coming here to "help the savages" should stay home. We don't like foreigners telling us how to operate and we despise the way Americans and the British act smug and superior around us. Tarjiman220 may talk about community, fellowship and the "Band of Forty," our so-called collective title, but if you want to get anywhere here, drop the pretense and remember you're a target to many Arabs.

Quick Survival Guide

If my warning doesn't frighten you off, you should know what you need to survive here. First, keep your opinions to yourself and don't act like a damn tourist. Smile at people, say *shukran* (thanks) when offered something and don't carry your bags around. Look like you belong here. If you look like a tourist (which can't be helped sometimes), every *suq* (bazaar) vendor and beggar in a ten-block radius will target you for a sale or for alms. In more oppressive countries like Iraq, you'll draw the attention of the local authorities (if informants aren't already following you like vultures). If you know your country has diplomatic problems with an Arab nation, don't visit unless you can actually blend in. Americans aren't welcome in Iraq, and Iran's still debatable. Give local hunters enough credit to handle whatever crisis is in their backyard and play hero for someone else.

If you dislike hot temperatures, avoid the summer months. Even then, hydrate yourself constantly. It's embarrassing and dangerous when a hunter can't continue the mission because of dehydration or low salt. Foreign hunters (and this includes Arabs visiting other countries) should pack strong medicine (to handle potential bowel problems), toilet paper and a filter to process water (unless you can afford the highly priced bottled water). Jordan, Syria and Yemen, for example, don't have the safest drinking water unless you lodge at a fancy hotel, and Lebanon's public restrooms are without toilet paper thanks to constant theft. If you plan a countryside excursion, carry iodine or rubbing alcohol, and research the location of the nearest hospital. We have our share of monsters and even natural animals afflicted with rabies.

If you travel to multiple countries, study them in advance, especially when it comes to visa restrictions. The Middle East is not a big happy family with universal laws across the board. Some countries take weeks to process a visa. It's a matter of hours in others. Some require a letter of introduction, while a few (like the United Arab Emirates) demand that someone sponsors your visit. You can't get a visa to enter Libya from Egypt, for example. Iraq and Saudi rarely, if ever, issue visitor visas, and the borders between Iraq and Iran are closed. Most countries refuse you entry outright if you have an Israeli stamp in your passport. Getting into a Middle East country from any other requires a Byzantine-level understanding of the local bureaucracy and the current political climate. Plan your itinerary in advance.

Anyone bringing equipment should make sure it isn't contraband or restricted in your host environment. Iraq, which suffers under a technology embargo, would love to get its hands on a decent laptop computer (there's a reason why no Iraqi hunters surf the net). Cameras and video recorders are okay, but most countries won't let you photograph anything remotely strategic, including bridges and buildings. Don't forget to carry electrical adapters

specific for your needs, since outlets vary in pin design and voltage from country to country. Additionally, while local authorities might overlook someone carrying a dagger (if it's traditional to the region), carrying firearms is illegal, as is entering a country with electronic surveillance equipment. Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Israel, Egypt and Syria, in particular, are security minded and extremely fearful of revolutionaries, spies and dissidents (and you, my friend, are their first choice for all three).

If you bring in any "shiny toys," make damn sure you can part with them. It isn't uncommon for border guards or airport security to confiscate gadgets or personal items for themselves. Don't fight them. Offer your property with a smile. It may sting, but they'll likely let you through quicker and ignore questionable items. That said, it also means you can easily bribe said officials to look the other way with new cameras or watches. Just look for which guard searches the most bags and pay attention to whether he's assessing the contents or actually looking for contraband. It's vitally important that you don't offer money. That looks like a bribe and it will insult the guard's honor. By offering a trinket, both he and you can justify it as a friendly gift (and Arabs love exchanging "gifts"). The other payment method is to just leave the bribe at the top of the suitcase and let the guard take it. Most often, they're too busy pocketing the "gift" to search any further.

Three smuggling techniques I use require some planning, but they're effective. The first is arranging your arrival near the middle of the month, on *Ramadan*, at the height of the day (when it's hottest). Custom officials, like everyone else, are fasting (which also precludes drinking water). That means both their tolerance and energy levels are low. More often than not, the guards are so exhausted or tired that they wave travelers through with only a cursory examination. This is especially true at border crossings where custom officials work in the open.

My second technique is bribing a truck driver to smuggle material in his rig. This approach is especially useful when sneaking contraband through Syria or Arabia's main border crossings where the backlog of waiting vehicles extends for miles. Officials in this case eagerly clear the traffic and don't search properly. This tactic is tricky, though, since some truck drivers work for the local crime syndicates (the strongest being in Israel, Lebanon, Egypt and Turkey) and demand a high price or a piece of your profit. (After all, nobody smuggles goods without expecting returns).

My third approach runs much along the same lines and involves a safer route if you're Arab. Bedouin tribes may stick to certain regions, but they have no qualms about crossing borders in the deep desert, far from prying eyes. They'll ferry people into a country in exchange for money, weapons or appliances. This is often the simplest way to move between Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia unnoticed.

Finally, dress conservatively. The region may be hot, but most countries have a dress code. It means no shorts unless you're in a coastal region such as Lebanon,

Turkey or Israel. Women should always wear skirts that extend below the knee or they should wear full-length jeans. The demands are even more conservative in countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran. Foreign women don't have to wear the black *chador* that covers you like a tent, but they must have a full-length skirt, socks and a headscarf or a long jacket over their jeans. Additionally, no light blouse or shirt that dips below the neckline and reveals too many curves.

For men, full slacks are a must, though you can wear short-sleeved shirts. The only place this isn't proper is in holy sites such as mosques, where decorum demands conservatism. While these regulations may seem stifling, it's a disguised godsend. Arabs won't blink twice at well-covered tourists, despite the heat, meaning hunters can carry small weapons or equipment beneath their clothing. Women in particular can blend in with locals by wearing the *chador*, which covers everything except the hands and eyes. While Arabs in some countries hover around female tourists like black flies, they ignore "conservative" women. If anyone treats you suspiciously and approaches you, scream. This will embarrass the man and bring everyone's attention to him. Most men quickly back away rather than have their honor or intentions questioned. Actually, I've seen some female *kiswah* use this technique against monsters effectively, as well. It doesn't work all the time, but some monsters are "pious" enough to be shamed.

Bahrain

By: Globetrotter

If you're traveling to the Middle East for the first time, oil-rich Bahrain is your oasis. It's the only island nation in the region and is very progressive for a monarchy (and compared to other Arab states). It is roughly the size of Singapore, with a population of 620,000. Strangely enough, half this number is under 25 years old, while nearly 60% are foreigners. The local work force includes Filipino, Pakistani and Indian shop owners, as well as Western businessmen. The situation is so lopsided that there's friction against the ruling family because local men can't find employment.

Bahrain is the best start for foreign hunters intending to enter the Middle East. You can obtain a two-week visa upon landing at Muharraq Airport, unless you have an Israeli stamp on your passport, in which case it's back the way you came. Fortunately, I have dual citizenship and keep my Israeli sojourns limited to my second passport. You can extend your stay through a five-year, multiple-entry visa by going to General Directorate of Immigration & Passports in Manama (Bahrain's capital, which translates as "Sleeping Place"). You can't obtain visas to enter Kuwait, Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates unless you're a Kuwaiti citizen (additionally, Qatar does not maintain an embassy here due to a dispute over Hawar Island).

Almost everyone in the Manama speaks English, so it's easy to travel around. Two local papers are entirely in English, as are several radio stations. It's also one of the few regional countries that allows the sale of alcohol outside of hotels, in coffee bars and discotheques. While this is good for the occasional drink when the nerves call for it, it also creates a social environment that draws out the supernatural. I've bagged a handful of creatures lurking in the back corners of the dark caves they call local bars. The other advantage of Bahrain's progressive outlook is that during festivals (Muslim or Christian), Arab or expatriate revelers from nearby Saudi Arabia and Kuwait flock there to celebrate in true fashion. Monsters follow as well and hide in the crowds. Many Arab *kiswah* know this and come to Bahrain to help local hunters with the small deluge.

Despite Bahrain's tolerant attitude, don't mistake this place for New York. Bahrain is still 70% Shiite, even though the monarchy is Sunni. Some laws still apply. They still follow the Five Pillars and the dress code is conservative.

The Authorities

Comparatively speaking, Bahrain is one of the safest Middle Eastern countries, though bombings and arson attacks in 1996 and 1997 protesting the foreign labor force increased public security and government crackdowns. The authorities won't look at you twice because of the many foreigners living here, unless you act strangely. None of the attacks ever target tourists and the authorities look for Kuwaiti troublemakers, not visitors. This means you can walk around virtually unmolested, though open fighting and attacking monsters will likely bring in the authorities. They're prepared for trouble, and the island isn't large enough to cause any significant delays in arriving on the scene.

General Needs

As I said, Bahrain is a perfect beachhead into the Middle East. It has an Internet provider through BATELCO and an Internet center in the capital. More importantly, Bahrain is perfect for hunters looking for capital and universal currency. Many hunters starting up, or those forced to leave their homes, often come here to purchase well-priced gold and local pearls. When they travel, they sell the gold or pearls to local merchants for cash, protecting themselves from different currency rates. The trick is knowing what to look for in terms of quality. Fadhel Emporiums on Palace Avenue in Manama is a good start. A local hunter saved the Pakistani owner once, so he's been helping our kind ever since by selling us top-grade pearls and gold at reasonable prices. Simply ask him "Do you hear thunder?" and he'll help you, even if he doesn't fully understand what is happening to the world — he is still *fallaheen*. Don't try to haggle him down. He's already doing us a huge service and he has a short fuse.

The King Fahd Causeway links Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. This is one of the best means to sneaking into Arabia, though finding a truck driver to smuggle you over could be problematic. On the down side, if that can be said, Bahrain isn't a political hotbed. Finding firearms is impossible. The local *suqs* (bazaars) sell cheaply made swords and flashy daggers for tourists, but finding

anything sturdier requires some legwork. Also, nobody plays baseball here, so no bats except for the flattened cricket kind (which is actually easier to hide beneath clothing than your American kind).

The World of Akhira

I won't lie and say all Bahrain is safe, but it is more secure than most. *Akhira* (supernatural) activity seems to be sporadic and increases with the influx of tourists. Most monsters apparently prefer the old portions of the city, several blocks in from the shoreline instead of the new Government Avenue. Since Bahrain is the largest in an archipelago of 33 islands (including the Qatar-disputed Hawar Islands), there are small fishing villages where some *jinn* reputedly dwell. I've spoken with pearl divers who told me they see things in the deep sometimes, like an oil-slick cloud that burns the flesh, or a shark with legs. It isn't unheard of for some divers to never surface. In fact, one fishing village often throws freshly slaughtered fish into the water far from their divers and shore fishermen. They say it lures the beasts away. The last hunters who went diving with spear guns never returned.

Safe Havens

Another reason why Bahrain is an excellent start-up point is its fairly modern and clean medical care. Hospitals likely report suspicious wounds to the authorities, so if you stay at a top-end hotel such as the Sheraton Bahrain or Diplomat, rely on the in-staff doctor. Just claim a local attacked you on hotel grounds and the concierge will probably hush matters up and buy your silence with free medical services and possibly a week's free stay.

If you don't have this option, go to the American Mission Hospital off Khalaf al-Asfoor Avenue between midnight and 7:00 AM. This is the oldest and smallest hospital in the area, and it has decent facilities. The nurses can patch up most wounds quietly and discreetly if you slip them $50 American (approximately 19 Bahraini Dinars).

Old Jetty—North of King Faisal Highway is Bahrain's old jetty. Follow the west pier until you hit an abandoned building marked Uthmanni Ltee and go around back. There's an old boarded up shed with a hole near the ground through which you can crawl. It isn't much, but it has a cot, some non-perishable canned goods and basic medical supplies. On the third Wednesday of every month, at 1:00 AM, a fishing boat called a *dhow* pulls up alongside the Uthmanni Ltee pier. It can smuggle up to three passengers into Arabia. The boat is rarely there for more than a few minutes. It's marked with one of your foreigner hunter glyphs, but the captain doesn't talk. He just takes whatever you're willing to offer and drops you off near al-Khubar (which rests just outside Arabia's largest expatriate compound/city, Dhahran)

Neighboring Countries

As an island, Bahrain has few immediate neighbors beyond Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Bahrain is currently in contention with Qatar to the south over the Hawar Islands. The friction is more a chill than outright fighting.

Qatar—Qatar is a quaint little nation and another decent ingress into the Middle East. I prefer Bahrain, even though Qatar is very progressive and allows women to vote. Despite its size, Qatar is slightly more populous than Bahrain, with 640,000 people, 80% of which live in the capital of Doha. Qatar is the quietest Arab nation and frankly, it's a disquieting place. Nothing seems to happen here. The citizens boast no hunters that I know of, and I have yet to see any true supernatural threats like v*mp*r*s or skinchangers. I've only encountered one shambler and she was killing a rapist. Frankly, Qatar feels like a sleeper village. It has a wholesome, nothing-wrong-here air. I wonder if it's genuine or a disguise for something unthinkable.

Egypt

By: Fatwa243

When I first saw Jager51's write-up on Egypt, I asked myself, "Why is he writing about a nation he barely understands?" The relevant data was accurate, but I'm tired of foreigners (that would be you) treating my country like Disney Africa. Outsiders have taken our culture and our heritage for granted for far too long.

Our history started strong with the pharaohs, but we fell into 2,200 years of subjugation at the hands of Greeks, Romans, Turks, French and British. When each of them left, they stole portions of our legacy and left Egypt in so much chaos that we proved easy prey for the next wave of conquerors. Maybe it isn't our history that attracts all these damn monsters. Maybe it's the mess everyone else leaves behind. Personally, I think the supernatural exists because humans keep stealing the legacy of other people, leaving them weak and directionless. Hunters are the solution, but not in the way everyone believes. We're here to protect our respective cultures from exploitation. We're history's guardians.

Don't get me wrong. I'm just as angry with our government as I am with tourists. Egypt earned independence in 1952 and was instrumental in forming the Pan-Arab League, but Sadat screwed up by signing the Camp David Accord with Israel. Did he deserve to die for recognizing Israel's right to exist? No, but I don't blame the Muslim Brotherhood for assassinating him, either. The West can say whatever it wants to about Israel, but the fact is that British-supported Zionists displaced an entire population of Palestinians who refused to surrender their homes or land. Now, before you start hissing at the PLO or my statements, ask yourself why Britain didn't offer the Jews Ireland, or the U.S. didn't give them Rhode Island. It wasn't "right" to screw over their own people, but it was fine to screw over the Arabs!

Westerners think they know what's best for us, but look at the political minefields you leave behind. If it weren't for outside interference and the West playing the bully, the Lebanese War wouldn't have happened. The Six-Day War wouldn't have happened. The Iran-Iraq War wouldn't have happened. The Gulf War wouldn't have happened. I can trace every one of those

conflicts back to Western intervention, starting with colonialism and ending with oil interests. By signing the Camp David Accord, Sadat validated every action the Americans and Brits did for their own benefit.

Still wondering why Muslim terrorist activity is on the rise in Egypt despite the government's attempts to crack skulls? It's because Egypt, rather than acting as an Arab superpower, plays sidekick to the West and ignores its own people. We are a nation of 65 million living in cities close to bursting. Visit Cairo and see how a city built for a few million deals with a population topping over 14 million. People squat in graveyard mausoleums and on rooftops. Instead of offering relief, the Egyptian government wastes money on events like an opera at the Pyramids to fill the already overcrowded cities with tourists. And when students protest the unemployment rate or overcrowded conditions, the government responds brutally and swiftly so that the Western media never hears about the event (and tourists aren't frightened away).

So now you're wondering why I'm helping write this guide, right? I can't stop you from coming here, but I sure as hell can prevent you from screwing things up. Welcome to Egypt. Stay out of my way.

The Authorities

Egypt isn't as safe as it used to be, so stick to the major cities such as Cairo. Groups like the Muslim Brotherhood aren't worried about mowing tourists down, so avoid the major draws like the Pyramids, too (and not because terrorists might hit those locations). Your problem is Egypt's General Directorate of State Security Service. They keep agents and armed personnel at major sites to protect Egypt's valuable tourist trade. If they see anyone looking suspicious, they'll pull you in for a two-fisted interrogation. If you're wanted in Israel, Europe or the U.S., they'll know courtesy of an information exchange program with MOSSAD and INTERPOL.

Like Jager51 said, avoid carrying around weapons. You'll get into trouble. The police are bad enough, but if the Egyptian government considers you a threat, kiss your ass goodbye. The American government has few allies in the Middle East. If it's a choice between burying you in a crocodile pit or raising an international stink over your arrest, let's just say you'll make some hungry luggage very happy.

Another danger with the authorities is they may be *fellaheen*, or normal, but somewhere up that corrupt food chain are servants of the monsters. If they even smell a hint of what you're really doing in Egypt, they'll come after you. Two *kiswah* allies of mine left the country because these jokers pulled out all the stops to catch them. They even strapped explosives to my friend's mother and conditioned her to blow herself up when she saw him. He barely escaped, but saw his mother commit suicide trying to kill him. That's the scary part about these bastards. They'll never attack you directly, but they will send children to kill you. It's a simple message, too. Die quietly or you'll be responsible for the death of others. Nothing like a little girl holding a doll packed with C4 to make you question your own values.

General Needs

You're fortunate. Egypt is a "liberal" country. Few items are illegal, except firearms. You can pick up whatever you need at most stores or flash some Egyptian pounds at a bazaar like *suq* Mansour in Cairo or *suq* Nokrashi in Alexandria. Thieves might rob you or peddlers might offer you contraband. Either way, you've met someone with contacts in the local black market.

The other option is visiting the Shooting Club in Cairo's Agouza District. If you're lucky, you'll meet a fat old German named Dornier who hosts private gun shows for paying customers. Convince him and he'll introduce you to some of Egypt's prominent gun and drug dealers. Here's the important part: You're dealing with the big boys now — you may even see a monster or two in their circle. Don't confront guests at a gun show. Dornier is the last man you want to annoy (if you escape alive).

The World of Akhira

Jager51 was right about a couple of things, including the monsters. We've got some old things lingering in the ruins and shadows, and they're nasty enough to extinguish you one nerve at a time. Don't come here looking for an exotic Egyptian safari. If you're willing to fight in the trenches, we welcome your help. It's a fact of nature that when a local ecosystem explodes with wildlife, the predator population increases to match. Cities like Cairo and Alexandria have several million prey too many and the monsters flock here in droves.

Jager51 can have his grand conspiracies; I'm concerned about the street-level threats. One disturbing trend we've noticed is building hoppers. We're not sure what these beasts are, but they take an entire apartment building hostage for weeks on end, squatting in the apartments and slowly torturing and killing the tenants. When enough people vanish that the police investigate, the building hoppers move elsewhere while the government hushes up matters to protect its vital tourist trade. Building hoppers always seem to be one step ahead of us and two steps ahead of the police. There's evidence of cannibalism and missing blood among their victims, so we think it might be different monsters working together or a kind we haven't encountered yet.

Safe Havens

Safe houses and havens change rapidly thanks to careless hunters overusing locations or leading monsters back to them. The sites Jager51 mentioned are still safe from what I've seen, but they've been on hunter-net for so long that I'm not sure who else knows about them. These areas are also safe. I can afford to lose them.

Cairo — 247 Nagm al-Din Street in al-Husayneyah District. On the locked rooftop of this apartment building (the key is hidden in a carved groove atop the rooftop's doorframe) is a "maintenance" shed. Like many other buildings in overcrowded Cairo, these apartments are pre-WWII and still rent controlled. Up to six

generations of families live in these complexes, paying as little as 30 Egyptian pounds a month for rent ($12 U.S. or so). That means the landlords make no money off a "generation" building, so they ignore its upkeep. That's the case here; the rooftop maintenance shed hasn't been used in at least two years. I've cleared it out and stocked it with basic medical supplies so you'll have enough space to sleep and tend to minor wounds.

Cairo — Unit 4 Haret Oweis in Al-Giza District. Just north of Cairo University (above Abdel-Salam Arif Street) is a block of buildings separated by alley-sized streets. At Unit 4, go around the east corner and down the alley. You'll find a pile of garbage blocking a side door, but there's just enough space to slip by if you don't mind getting dirty. The door is unlocked. Go in, down the stairs and into a hallway. The fourth door on the left is storage space and is unlocked. You can barricade the door from the inside and crash on the pile of rugs. We've also left some canned provisions and a first-aid kit, but don't leave any trash behind. That's what the pile outside is for.

Iran

By: Omeed

Forget what you hear about Iran. It's probably wrong (knowing how the Western media portrays us). You may find this surprising, but Iran is very safe. In fact, it's one of the safest countries to visit in the Middle East. The locals respect women and treat them well if they follow local customs. Women receive the same education as men and we have many female doctors, family judges and parliament members.

Iran was one of two countries that remained independent from French and British interests following WWI. The Russians occupied us briefly during WWII, even though we stayed neutral, and we managed to convince them to leave once the war was over. Afterward, Shah Muhammad Reza assumed absolute control and pushed Iran toward aggressive reform. He improved the education system, gave women more rights, modernized health care and provided for the needy. Unfortunately, the Shah squandered the country's resources during the 1974 Oil Crisis by stockpiling weapons we didn't need and shooting up inflation. People were unhappy. The conservatives demanded a return to the traditional ways while the liberals wanted further reforms. It all ended in 1979 with the shah's overthrow at the hands of the beloved Ayatollah Khomeini.

Since then, Iran has suffered the Iran-Iraq War and from friction with America over the Tehran Embassy incident that brought about an embargo. We recently sought more worthwhile alternatives of political negotiation, but the process is slow. Nor are we the richest country in the world thanks to plummeting oil prices and a decrease in demand for Persian carpets. But we are friendly. Travelers, especially hunters with small pockets, can easily afford a visit.

Iran, the truest Islamic nation and defender of the faith, is three times larger than France (or Arizona), with over 70 million people. I also believe we have the greatest diversity of hunters on ethnic and religious grounds. In addition to Christians and Jews, who add up to 1% of the populace, Iran is the Zoroastrian center of worship and has about 300,000 Bahai worshippers (persecuted because Islam considers them heretics). We also draw hunters from Persian, Azaris, Turkmen, Kurd and Lors stock, but distances rather than beliefs keep us divided.

Iran is safe if you're a tourist. That means hunters can enter the country easily, though you must secure your visas before arriving at our border. You cannot obtain multiple-entry visas unless you work here, but extensions are possible and relatively easy. The Iranian government desperately wants to bolster the local economy, so customs often ushers tourists through with little trouble. That's good news for hunters sneaking in contraband, though visitors should be careful with magazines and videocassettes. Customs confiscates anything it believes undermines moral integrity, including pictures of woman not properly dressed, public acts of affection like kissing and hand-holding, or anything depicting the use of alcohol or drugs. This means they scan videotapes for any hint of impropriety.

Not everyone speaks English, but many people in major cities, hotels and restaurants understand enough to help you. We even have English newspapers — though they admittedly espouse anti-Western views — and English street signs, while hotels have satellite dishes with American programming. Unfortunately, while Tehran has Internet centers, Internet service is costly and difficult to obtain.

Iran is a democracy (and, ironically, the most stable one in the region), with its own presidential elections. The last few presidents, while clerics, advocated closer relations with the West. This struck a nerve with older revolutionaries, but reformists have powerful allies who protect them. Islam and Iran do not fear democracy. We fear a disease called Western decadence. More so, we want the CIA and MI6 to stop intervening in our affairs. We fear the British more than the Americans, because MI6 is far more sophisticated and underhanded in sabotaging our affairs.

The Authorities

Iran has several different police divisions, many of which act properly and justly. Don't think of bribing them. They're efficient and methodical, perhaps more so than in the majority of Arab nations. If you dress well and respect local customs, the police ignore you at the very least and help you if you need it. The authorities will search you in certain public buildings, the airport and in train stations. This is perfectly normal for everyone, but be wary. Don't carry weapons or questionable equipment unless you're driving somewhere or walking. Roadblocks and car searches are common near the borders. Prepare for the worst.

The most dangerous police are the *monkeraat*, a sort of religious and moral authority that ensures the virtuous conduct of all citizens. They arrest people and administer lashings to anyone breaking proper codes of

conduct such as speaking on a telephone during prayer time or holding hands in public. They care little for tourism since they follow Islamic law, not the relatively progressive actions of our presidents.

The people dislike the *monkeraat* for its heavy-handed rigidity and have even attacked officers. I would not normally condone such violence, but I believe several *monkeraat* serve the blood-drinking *Adites*. Our attempts to deal with these officers result in government crackdowns and arrests. More hunters have reputedly died at the hands of local authorities than by monsters.

If you think you're protected by virtue of being foreign, you're foolishly mistaken. One American hunter was escorted out of the country, but died of a "heart attack" on the plane ride back West. We believe the *akhira* reached the hunter after he left and waited to kill him to avoid any complications from an American dying on Iranian soil. This tells me the monsters have a firm grip on my country's heart.

If the authorities arrest you and the *akhira* realize you're a danger, they don't have to kill you immediately. They can quietly issue a *fatwa*, or religious decree, for your assassination — days, weeks or months after you've left Iran (and there are enough fanatics in the world to come after you).

General Needs

Carry U.S. dollars. They're the lifeblood of local tourism and they grant you preferential treatment. Just be sure they're not counterfeit. In 1989, Iran forged 10 billion U.S. dollars to support "freedom fighters" in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon. The copies are nearly undetectable since they're on the same paper as the real stuff, but it's said the zeroes in the forgery have flattened tops. Iranians might not accept $100 bills unless the money is newly minted.

Iran is a tough place to find equipment if you're an outsider, but that doesn't mean it's impossible. There has been a rash of men posing as plainclothes police. If anyone demands your identification and is not in uniform, ask him to take you to a hotel or police station and offer your papers there. If he refuses, make a loud public spectacle to scare him away.

The alternative is to confront the imposter and offer him money in exchange for whatever contraband you need. These men generally know where to sell stolen documents and know someone who can help you. This is especially useful if you need forged papers. The other option is to hang around the lobby of an expensive hotel like Laleh International in Tehran and look bored. Iran has a well-developed drug network. Someone might approach you eventually, wondering if you're looking for "excitement." If you're lucky enough to find a drug dealer, you can probably buy more than Egyptian hashish or Afghani opium. Be ready to pay through the nose.

Purchasing firearms in Tehran is tricky business, unless you steal from well-armed locals or you're foolish enough to visit our eastern or southern regions. Thanks to our proximity to Afghanistan and Pakistan,

these two areas serve as major routes for drug and gun smuggling. You can possibly purchase Soviet-grade weapons and equipment from regional tribes in league with these operations, but they might sooner kill you than deal with you.

Afghanistan is part of a new drug trade with Russian and Turkish backing. The Turkish opium lords, the Kurdish PKK, sell drugs to the Sicilian Mafia. The PPK uses networks of Kurds to help pipeline its caravans through Iran and into neighboring Azerbaijan or Armenia. Now, before you think all Kurds are drug dealers, they aren't. The Kurds fight an ugly war with Iraq and the Turks repay their services using Sicilian drug money to buy weapons for their allies. Thus, the Kurds are well-armed. Many local hunters survive using these underworld contacts to procure weapons, equipment and safe passage into other countries in exchange for their "services." These unscrupulous *kiswah* have probably murdered more people than the monsters have.

Finally, don't think of approaching or robbing any convoy. Drug and weapon smuggling is major business and convoys include tank columns and APCs, mercenaries who could teach us thing or five about fighting. The reason for all this protection? The government's war on crime is literally a war, and Iran invests its armed forces to stop the heroin trade.

The World of Akhira

Monsters are everywhere for the hunting in Iran. Your problem remains the authorities, however, and not the *akhira* themselves. Iran is law-abiding, despite news photos showing angry men firing rifles into the air at public demonstrations. The police are a visible and strong presence and will make your life miserable if you don't exercise caution. That said, hunters should stay in Tehran, which seemingly attracts its share of monsters because of pollution and overcrowding. Beware the following:

Demonstrations — Iran throws the occasional demonstration to keep nationalism fueled. This is when you see many people gather and fire weapons. Many monsters gather alongside them, chanting anti-American slogans. If you see a demonstration underway, quietly leave. You aren't safe and you aren't welcome. Additionally, several members of Iran's vaunted Revolutionary Guards, who normally attend such rallies, are suspected blood minions of the *Adites*. Don't ever fight them alone. In addition to their power as minions, the Revolutionary Guards are dedicated to the Ayatollah beyond reason. During the Iran-Iraq War, they walked through minefields to clear a path for the army and to prove their loyalty to the Ayatollah. They are willing martyrs.

Underground — Tehran is building an underground subway system, but the process is slow going and there is no projected finish date. According to what we've seen, the entire project is in upheaval, with work details digging in chaotic directions and no two blueprints matching exactly. At night, we hear crews tunneling but we never find them. Even worse, several construction workers and foremen bear the *Adites*' mark. Tehran *kiswah*, myself included, scout at night when the underground is supposedly empty, but we cannot map it out properly. The tunnels seemingly shift or are even sealed up from one night to the next. We already slew one deformed v!mp!r! and chased away a *Thalmudite* (those you call the walking dead). In return, they killed three of my allies and subjected one to such mental horrors that she's now mad.

Safe Havens

Iran is blessed with many safe havens thanks to *jiran* (bystanders) we've saved or to allies who ensure our well being. You will discover that after saving someone's life here, they are indebted to you, assuming they understand what has transpired. This sometimes means offering you sanctuary or food. Never abuse this relationship and *never* tell them about your nature. They live longer that way, and they can't understand the truth.

Tehran — Mellat Street. North of the low-priced Asia Hotel is the Shiraz Hammam, a public bathhouse. If you stay till closing at 10:00 PM, offer the old custodian $10 U.S. He'll let you sleep there for the night on one of the cots. He's a *jar* indebted to us, but he doesn't know of the cause. In the morning, he'll return with *taftun* bread (unleavened bread as large as a rolled-up newspaper) filled with fresh fruit, steamed rice or even *kebab* (meat strips). If you're in need of medical supplies, pay him a few extra dollars to run to the local pharmacy.

Iraq

By: Muru'a

While I appreciate the concern of outsiders for the plight of the locals, I ask foreign hunters to stay out of Iraq. We have little patience or time to educate and care for visitors. The anarchy here creates an environment of fear, and the *akhira* nestle deep within the government's breast. If being a hunter means defending the people, you'll eventually find your cause shifting to the liberation movement and anti-Iraqi activities. After all, how can you fight one monster and not fight them all?

Iraq's plummet saddens me, for she was once the cradle of civilization and the heart of the Fertile Crescent. A slow madness follows her history, and our political climate grows more deranged each passing month. After WWI, Iraq went from Ottoman rule to British control, but that ended with its independence in 1932. The ruling monarchy fell in 1958, leading to turmoil and coups until 1968 when the Ba'ath Party assumed power. The socialist Ba'ath already ruled Syria and they trafficked regularly with the Russians to protest America's support of Israel. The following year, our troubles with Iran began in a cycle of strife and conflict that sees no resolution to this day. Matters appeared peaceful enough in the late '70s, when Iran and Iraq reached a tentative peace agreement. The oil boom fueled our economy then, and Kurdish became an official language in recognition of the Kurds' importance in Iraqi society. Then, in 1979, Saddam Hussein came to power and the Iranian Revolution ousted the shah.

The rest is history weeping. Hussein rightly feared that the ruling Ayatollah Khomeini would inspire revolution among the majority Shiite sect in Iraq. He initiated one of the longest wars of the 20th Century, in which Iraqi's oil-backed (and thus American-backed) military power received the ecstatic devotion of the entire Iranian people. The eight-year war stopped with a UN peace initiative, but the Gulf War and crippling American-sponsored sanctions broke the back of a weakening country.

Since then, Iraq has become the richest poor country I know. Her oil reserves surpass that of the Saudis, but according to the UN, Iraq can sell only $10 billion American on condition that it pays for food and medicine for its people. How much money do you think actually comes to us? Hussein lives in opulence, rebuilding his over 72 palaces whenever America teaches him a lesson by bombing us. Meanwhile, the dinar plummets and our children die from malnutrition. Hussein executes thousands of his own officers and dozens of relatives whenever fear grips his breast, and he slaughters Kurds and *Ma'dan* Marsh Arabs by the thousands. Tourism is a forgotten word and Westerners cannot obtain visas for entry unless they are journalists, with the Red Cross or using non-American passports.

Avoid Iraq. If you cannot, remember this advice: The Iraq-Jordan border is closed because Jordan was the second nation to recognize Israel. Avoid the Iraq-Kuwait crossing points, because guards detain and delay visitors for the joy of annoying them. Also, do not sneak across the Iran-Iraq frontier. Both sides have planted over 25 million mines along the border. My military friends say Iran's saturation is 25 mines per square mile, while Iraq's is 60. If you must, ask locals to guide you and leave either early at night or late in the day. Soldiers place most mines overnight and the first casualties occur between 9 and 10 A.M. when traffic gets underway. Allow others to lead and walk in their steps 100 feet behind. Most mines wound rather than kill, but they use ball bearings and debris to shred victims' legs. If you find a minefield, walk backward and don't take the risk. Don't try to dig up mines to use them against the other side, either. The new models are too sophisticated for our heavy fingers.

While the Syrian and Arabian borders are open (and the large expanse of desert makes sneaking across easier), travel is best at the Turkish border where traffic is heavy, but orderly. In either case, if you cross the borders with papers, you must provide proof that you are free of AIDS and have had a Yellow Fever vaccination within the last six months. If you manage to cross the border, it's wise to head to Baghdad or Basra. Avoid the UN-protected Kurdish Autonomous Region to the north, since Iraq's eyes are everywhere there.

The Authorities

Expect the police to search, follow and harass you, so for the sake of Allah, do not carry weapons or contraband. The Iraqi police can kill you and there is no American embassy to protect your rights here.

Many Iraqi hunters join the Supreme Council of Islamic Resistance in Iraq (SCIRI) or smaller resistance cells. The fight against *akhira* is the very liberation of Iraq from Hussein's hands. There's also the unfortunate truth that many Iraqi *kiswah* join these groups only to kill the monsters more easily. Instead of hunting alone, they can sometimes direct the SCIRI against mutually beneficial targets. Thus, they hide the assassination of one corrupt person of consequence through the cell's anonymity, instead of drawing the police's undivided wrath on their heads alone.

The actions of one man are the actions of a lunatic. The actions of many are a cause. Within groups, we become faceless warriors with allies. The risks are too great alone. What choice do we have when we must fight our very government?

Finally, some hunt alone in Baghdad, but their methods are questionable. They ambush monsters wearing uniforms by using car bombs, knowing the Iraqis will blame Iran. Iranian Intelligence is eager to kill members of Mujahadeen-e-Khalk (MKO), an anti-Iranian resistance cell comprised of former Iranians. MKO hopes to instate a woman, Maryam Rajavi, as President of Iran when the Ayatollahs fall, but Iran retaliates by assassinating the group's visible members. When the MKO formed following the Shah's fall, it numbered 50,000. After an aborted attempt to reclaim its country forcibly, members dwindled to 20,000, with Iran killing 5,000 and capturing 25,000.

What does this have to do with Iraq's authorities, you ask? MKO operates from Baghdad, a fact that doesn't escape Iran. The Iraqi government supports the MKO as both an ally against Iran and as a propaganda coup. The Iranians, in turn, send assassins to kill members of MKO using car bombs or anything else heavy on collateral damage. This turns Baghdad into an unofficial war zone between Kurd terrorist attacks and Iranians targeting expatriates. Naturally, the authorities are always wary of attacks against their MKO allies and themselves, leaving unscrupulous hunters to take advantage of the crossfire.

The other problem with the MKO is that one-third of its members and two-thirds of its officers are women. Many female *kiswah* want to join the MKO because they believe it empowers their cause as women. Unfortunately, they support our enemy, the very government we fight against, and they widen the schism between the genders. The result is a battle between philosophical and political agendas, with that against the monsters taking lesser importance.

General Needs

You need what we cannot offer. Inflation sends costs soaring well above reason. You'd be an ill-prepared fool to arrive without your own equipment, such as batteries, maps, chargers, flashlights, cameras, film, water filters and hiking equipment. For food, conduct your shopping between 8:00 and 9:00 AM, when shops

open. They close by noon or when their shelves are empty (which is far more common these last few years). Bring your own medicines; pharmacies lack even the most common drugs.

Many of us join groups such as the SCIRI, the outlawed Shiite Dawa Party in Basra or even the CIA-backed Iraqi National Congress to obtain supplies or to provide for our families. These are not services you can simply purchase, though. Calling upon these movements means volunteering your life for their cause. If you are skillful enough to find the black market, be warned that you will pay for their services and their silence. Iraq is a web of informers. Nothing protects you from their barbed tongues. I advise against dealing with these criminals. Use American money or barter with medicines and drugs if you must.

I beseech you, we are in desperate need of whatever provisions you can offer and we can offer you far more in return. If you truly wish to help, go to the Polish Embassy in the Masbah Quarter of Baghdad. It represents American interests in Iraq. Ask to speak with attaché Terrance Podynzsky and tell him you wish to help in the relief effort. Say no more than that, for Hussein's ears are everywhere. Terrance will take care of the rest.

The World of Akhira

Sometimes I think the *akhira* control everything in Iraq. When I see thralls to *Adites* and walking dead in such positions of power that they stand behind Hussein himself and smile for the cameras, it sickens my heart. More so, we cannot attack them directly and must kill from behind the veil of "freedom." If we confront these monsters alone and armed only with our abilities, we become common criminals. By using the tools of political warfare — what you call terrorism — our actions become the products of a movement and we are suddenly faceless.

If you wish to survive here, adopt our practices. Iraq's monsters hide within or behind important people. While it is simpler to slay the common beasts, doing so means we never touch those in real power. If we can attack the head of the dragon, why pick at its tail? It is the reality of our lives.

Safe Havens

Many local hunters fight for the liberation of Iraq. Those who oppose us work for Hussein's regime. Politics touches everything here. Telling you where to find our safe havens betrays our struggle to those *kiswah* who oppose our efforts. I am sorry, but I can offer only one sanctuary that remains neutral in this conflict. Neither side touches this place.

Baghdad — Sharia Haifa Bazaar. Behind the Saddam Art Centre (if you can swallow that bitter irony) is a bazaar that includes the Attabeg Café. It is an old establishment with a simple unadorned door announcing its presence between two floor stalls. Finding it may prove challenging, but inside is sanctuary. The owner is Talib Sama'a, a hunter who lost his leg to a *Midianite* (a shapechanging jackal). He no longer hunts (he barely

started when he was maimed), but the old basement bomb shelter of his humble coffee shop is open to anyone who needs some food and a place to sleep. Talib cannot provide much, but he does his best without involving himself.

Neighboring Countries

It is ironic that I must cover Kuwait as well, seeing as how Iraq's current woes stem from its invasion of that tiny nation. The world hailed the international force that drove Iraq from Kuwait as the savior of the oppressed. I will tell you, though: the United States wouldn't have interfered had Saudi Arabia not felt threatened. Kuwait was spared by virtue of its proximity to America's ally.

Kuwait — Following the Gulf War, Kuwait's attitudes have become more liberal. While no one wears mini-skirts yet, women do not need to wear traditional clothing as long as they dress moderately. Although women can now vote in various elections, Bahrain remains far more moderate. Unfortunately, Hussein smashed Kuwait like an eggshell, leaving behind confusion and destruction that took months to repair. We've heard rumors that during that time there was a migration of sorts into Kuwait, an influx of nomadic monsters that hid in Kuwait City and watched while people rebuilt around them.

Israel

By: Hope123

Welcome, my friends, to a country that doesn't exist. You won't find Israel on any map — at least not any Arab ones. They still call the region Palestine. It is perhaps wishful thinking that one day they will make that true again. Until then, we are surrounded by enemies.

Israel is as old as the covenant between God and Moses, but the Israel history recognizes is a product of the 20th Century's most grievous injustice — the Holocaust. When Jews fled from Nazi Germany, they found little sympathy elsewhere, especially among the Palestinians. Still, with Germany's defeat, international pressure forced Britain (which ruled Palestine at the time) to allow unrestricted Jewish immigration to the region. The Arabs protested. Britain tried solving the dilemma by suggesting that Palestine be partitioned into two new states.

When they could no longer handle the problem, the British turned the matter over to the UN, which advocated creating a Jewish homeland within Palestine. The Arabs refused, Britain pulled out and the Jewish people seized control in 1948. Since then, we've held Israel (despite three campaigns by Arab forces to root us out) and even gained territory from Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan.

Israel managed to forge treaties with her neighbors Jordan and Egypt, and now works towards reconciliation with our old rivals the PLO. But still, we struggle against fanatics, both Jewish and Arab, who refuse to recognize each other's sovereign rights. Our own government shifts between moderates and hard-liners, sabotaging a desperately needed peace initiative with the Palestinians who account for 15% of Israel's population. Civil unrest is a constant threat between agitated Palestinians who attack settlements and buses and frustrated Jews who retaliate with equal venom. At the heart of this struggle lies the war to reclaim Jerusalem, a city holy to all three major religions of God.

If political and ethnic tensions are not threat enough, we have our share of monsters reveling in the chaos and seemingly aggravating the already unstable situation. Still, Israel is easy to reach from the West, especially for Americans. The United States gives us two billion dollars a year to spend on our defenses, in addition to three billion dollars each year in the form of various relief programs and aide packages. You need only a passport to enter Israel at places like Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, unless you're Middle Eastern or African. Upon arriving, you can also ask the custom official to stamp your entry permit and not your passport. This allows you to travel to other Arab countries without the "Israeli Stigma" in your documents. Just be careful. Upon entering Jordan or Egypt from the Israeli border, customs officials mark you with entry stamps indicating that you visited Israel. To circumvent this, you can try and place a false page in your passport after other used pages and throw it away after it's stamped.

When traveling in Israel, carry enough money so customs doesn't consider you an undesirable seeking employment, and carry some proof of your intent to leave the country. Otherwise they can deny you entry. If you pass without trouble, Israel awaits. I suggest you visit Tel Aviv, while avoiding the Occupied Territories along the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Also, stay out of East Jerusalem. Angry Palestinians hold these areas and are not above stabbing or kidnapping you. Driving is not a safe method of travel, either. People in these territories throw rocks at your car and there are three deaths every 100 million kilometers because of bad drivers.

The Authorities

If you believe the Arabs are paranoid, you have not met the Israeli police or military. Israel spends 20% of its budget on defense concerns alone — we are what the U.S. would be like if it were under martial law. At border crossings, the authorities question your visit vehemently and search through everything you own. The police are well armed and very suspicious of visitors with cameras and video recorders. Even journalists must submit their footage to the censor's office, so you can imagine how they feel about strangers snapping pictures of anything not remotely historical.

I warn you not to carry weapons in Israel, for the police have a sixth sense for these things. The government trains them to spot potential assassins who might attack a busload of passengers or open fire on a school. They scrutinize everything, for the cost of peace isn't vigilance, it's paranoia. Nationalities mean nothing to them. Even if you are an American with an Arab surname, expect the police or

even the secret service *Shin Bet* to keep watch over your every move. If they arrest you on suspicion of subversive behavior (including anything related to the hunt), they will hold you without allowing you contact with your consulate, relatives or allies for some time — usually long enough to conduct grueling interrogations.

We've also heard a frightening rumor that *Shin Bet* knows we exist. Police recently arrested two hunters I knew remotely. Observers watching the jail said agents from *Shin Bet* took the hunters into custody after drugging them (even though they were already handcuffed). I fear the implications of this revelation, for it could signal the government's attempts to press us into their service.

Equipment Needs

Finding and buying equipment in Israel might prove troublesome unless you are adept at improvising. Fortunately, we have widespread Internet access, meaning you can contact other hunters and share resources over the net. If you wish to risk black-market avenues, avoid the Palestinians as suppliers. They do not appreciate requests to purchase weapons when they are often limited themselves. Israel has a thriving criminal element, however, the strongest being the Israeli Syndicate and the Red Mafia — which arrived with the Russian refugees. The latter is the most dangerous in my mind for many reasons. It hides among 700,000 Russian émigrés and draws resources from frightened Jews who now constitute 15% of our population. Second, many Mafia members served with Soviet forces and still have allies in East Germany and Russia's military. They possess weapons and drugs — enough, politicians fear, to destabilize Israel. The Russians are also heavy handed and ruthless, torturing and murdering anyone in their way. Finally, Red Mafia lieutenants and other high-ranking members are supposedly marked. There is the taint of rots about them, or some other supernatural influence that pollutes their blood.

The World of Akhira

Egypt claims her share of ancient threats, but Jerusalem draws many creatures as well. In the Old City, where Christian, Jew, Muslim and Armenian Quarters lie shoulder to shoulder beneath the silent gaze of the Dome of the Rock, the shadows move, walls weep and the stone angels in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre turn their heads when you aren't looking. In the streets around the district of Haram ash-Sharif, in the city's Muslim Quarter, hunters say they cannot communicate through the *kufic* script found in the Mamluk's architecture. It supposedly plagues them with words they do not understand and robs them of their sanity. There is a living sorrow engulfing the city, and it stirs religious tensions.

In the Occupied Territories, Palestinian and Israeli *kiswah* war against one another and rarely help anyone outside their community. When there are deadly riots or protests, there is a fair chance the victims will return as rots or shamblers. Instead of stopping them, hunters direct these creatures against one another. The war of politics and religion are all that concerns them. Meanwhile, their actions create more restless spirits and more walking dead to harm the *fellaheen*.

Safe Havens

Universal safe havens are difficult to find in Israel, since few people are actually neutral. Most hunters, including we Israelis, rely on networks within our own communities. The Jewish people alone fall into several groups: the Russians, the Ashkenazi from Central and Eastern Europe, the Sephardi who date their lineage back to 15th-Century Portugal and Spain, Oriental Jews originating from Muslim or Arabic countries and Ethiopian Jews. These groups do not always get along, and language is certainly a great barrier since many are still first-generation refugees. As result, hunters from these groups and from among the Arab Muslims, Arab Christians and Druze all protect their own people. When one group announces a safe haven, the others sabotage it (even, in one instance, going so far as to mine the location). Some of us struggle to change this situation, but until then Israel has no true safe havens.

Lebanon

By: al-Amin

When I hear friends and family tell me Lebanon is reclaiming her former glory, I cannot help but grieve quietly. Nearly 30 years of intermittent war blinds us to many things — a condition a psychologist friend calls prolonged war-trauma disorder. We try and explain the horrors we've seen by creating our own unique rationale. A mortar attack destroys a building and the only thing neighbors can say is: "They lived on the wrong side of the street. Everyone knows that side is bombed more often." Thirty years of struggle and strife with ourselves, with the Syrians and with the Israelis has made my people blind to their reality. This makes Lebanon a utopia for monsters, for we willingly justify any event or tragedy in the quickest and most convenient terms. We stopped asking questions because nobody had answers.

Beirut was once the Paris of the Middle East thanks to Western influences and the city's location as a geographic hub with Europe. During WWII, Lebanon earned independence from the French, but the power remained with well-educated Christians, not with the Muslims who wanted the country to join Syria. This tension served as catalyst for innumerable conflicts, but not before Beirut followed the Western models of culture and society — she was a city of three languages (Arabic, French and English) and 17 different religious sects.

When the Muslims revolted against their lack of representation in the government decades ago, they dragged local Palestinian refugees into the conflict. The Christians asked for Syria's help, and eventually Israel embroiled itself in the war when Hezbollah fanatics launched attacks against the Zionist State from southern Lebanon. We've now seen 30 years of conflict and periodic fighting, but the Lebanese are tenacious if nothing else. The country is still more West than East — with Internet cafes, fashion-minded

citizens, nightclubs and all the latest American films — and would be a perfect beachhead for us into the region were it not a political minefield. Outwardly, Beirut rebuilds from its own ashes with Syria's help, becoming a new Paris, but I can only wonder how the last few decades have taxed our very souls.

Entering Lebanon is simple, whether you request a visa from Beirut airport or arrive at a border crossing (though I recommend obtaining your visa beforehand). Like most Arab nations, Lebanon refuses anyone with an Israeli stamp on their passport; your best option is flying into Lebanon or using the northern border with Syria (but expect to pay bribes). To the south is Israel and the Palestinian Territories, while the west holds the Bekaa Valley. The Bekaa Valley contains beautiful Roman monuments and archaeological sites, but far outside the city of Baalbek are training camps for Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Hezbollah who fight against the Israelis. While tourists are not in danger here, hunters are in peril. I've heard reports from regional *kiswah* who say the training camps have their share of *akhira*-touched guerillas. Attacking them is to hazard death, and they notice strangers.

The Authorities

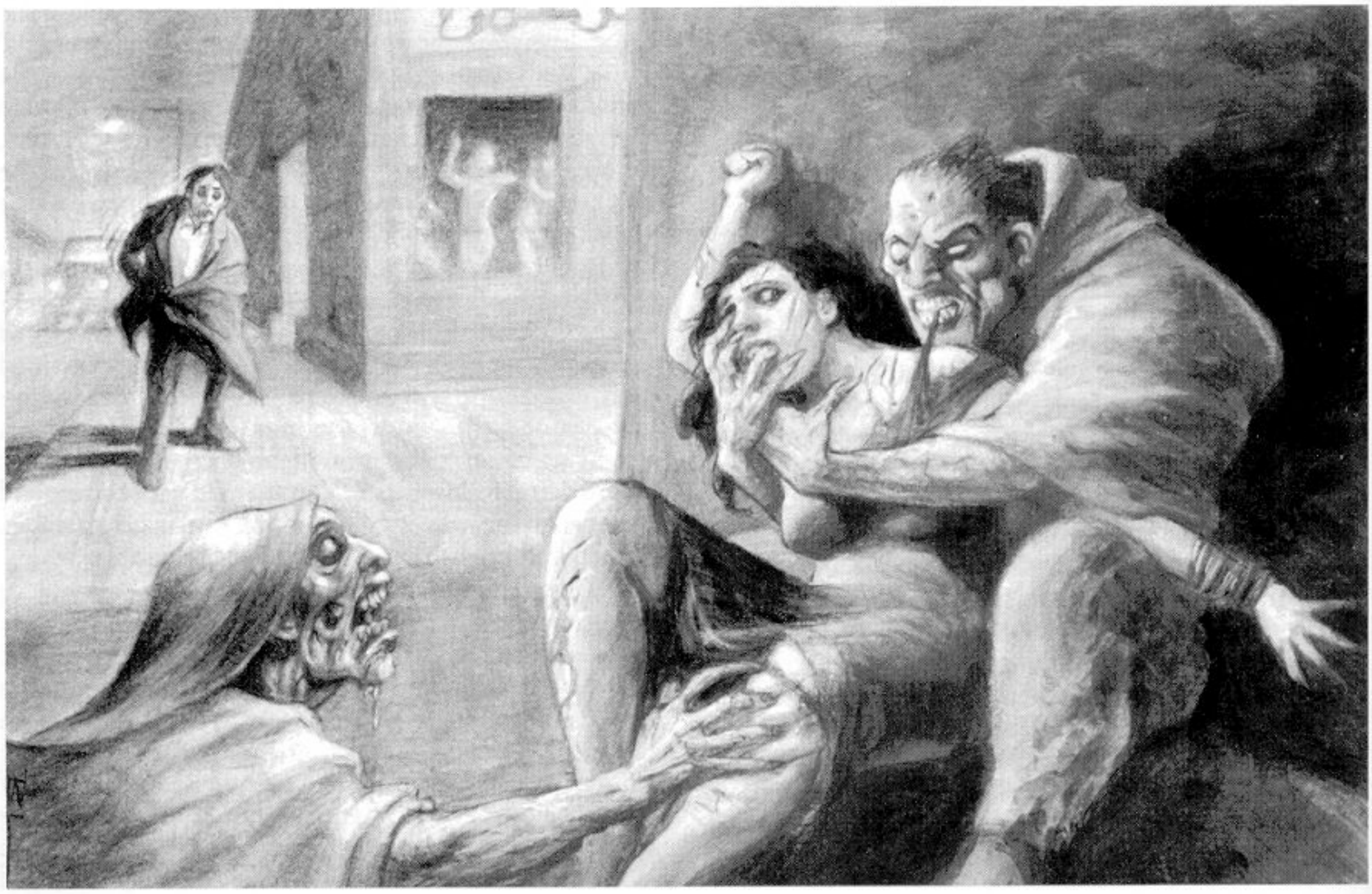
Lebanon's police are a paramilitary force slowly regaining power (we wonder where Lebanon's army ends and Syria's "peacekeepers" begin). When fighting erupted between Christians and Muslims, the police shattered into factions who allied themselves with the different militias. Thankfully, the government disbanded the militias in the early '90s and created a new police force — though old rivalries and vendettas still exist.

Lebanon's police are much like their North American counterparts. You have nothing to fear if you don't break the law. Lebanon's police carry fully automatic weapons because they are a paramilitary force. All Lebanese hunters can tell at least one tale about fighting monsters only to find themselves under fire from well-armed *Gendarmes*. While we hunt only monsters, the police are never certain if another political skirmish has broken out. They shoot to kill.

Equipment Needs

We have nearly every luxury found in the West, and what you can't obtain legally is on the black market. Finding weapons is particularly simple thanks to the conflicts in the 1970s and '80s. I had a friend who gathered the guns and unexploded mortars scattered around his apartment building. He had a large collection — until the Israelis bombed the Muslim half of Beirut and killed him.

Beirut's black-market trade is extensive and easy to find. It ranges from hashish dealers who sell drugs at the American University of Beirut to weapons sellers with connections to Bekaa Valley and southern guerillas. If you are truly desperate for weapons or anything else, visit Antoine's Café on Hamra Road (Rue 31). It serves a very rough clientele, and many people there either hope to buy or sell something. Be warned, though: Few "tourists" visit there — someone may follow you to uncover your agenda.



Your best hope is finding a local hunter through the Internet who can act as your liaison to the underworld (some are even blatant enough to advertise their services through the *kufic* script). Even before we became *kiswah*, many of us dealt with the black market, purchasing generators when the city rationed electricity, medical supplies when the hospitals turned patients away and weapons to protect our families from bands of squatters who took over "empty" apartments.

The World of Akhira

Though it pains me to admit it, mental scarring from over 30 years of fighting has created a psychology of acceptance among the Lebanese that allows us to accept most horrors. We ignore horribly mutilated bodies because we've seen car-bomb survivors or the torture victims of different militias. We ignore the screams at night, because screams are the only thing we've heard the last few decades. This means monsters walk about unconcerned with being caught. But it also means you can hunt at night fearing only the beasts and authorities. Beirut, in particular, has an active nightlife with discotheques and bars, so you're never out of place out at night.

I once spoke with an *Adite* that claimed it suffered during the war, as well. The bombings, rocket attacks and strife killed many its kind, driving the more ancient to such places as Baalbek, Sidon and Tripoli. These older beasts supposedly support the various guerilla movements in Bekaa and southern Lebanon, directing the groups for their own private means. Younger creatures made their homes in the ruins of Beirut and fed from the milk of human misery as mercenaries. This worries me, for the monsters born of Beirut came into their hellish existence learning to fight as we do. Why kill an opponent with fangs when you can use car bombs, fanatics or Russian assault rifles? Learn this lesson quickly, for the monsters of the Middle East might be like any other, but the beasts of Lebanon have fought wars.

Safe Havens

It is easy to find yourself hunted by both police and monsters in Lebanon, so take note of these locations.

American University of Beirut (AUB) —Rue Bliss. Situated in Beirut's *Hamra* district, the AUB's campus is beautiful with its open expanses of green and the Mediterranean shoreline to the north. Along the campus' southern edge is the Penrose Men's Dormitory, which is shaded by trees. Follow the western wall until you reach the fifth window from the southwest corner. The window is unlocked, allowing you to slip into a maintenance room with medical supplies, canned food and a blanket. It isn't opulent, but it's safe if you use it at night.

Baalbek — Rue Abdel Halim Hajjar, Unit 8. Just one block west of the Ash-Shams Hotel is a private residence belonging to Mrs. Dajanni. Her son was a hunter who died while protecting her, so she knows something of the cause — at least that there are other things to out there to fight than man. She cannot host strangers in her home (unless they are women) for it is improper, but she does have a "guest shack" behind her house for travelers. She provides a warm bed and will offer you traditional Arabic food. Don't take advantage of her hospitality for too long and don't lead monsters there. Many *kiswah*, including two regional women, love Mrs. Dajanni as a mother and protect her fiercely.

Saudi Arabia

By: Tarjiman220

Salaam, guests, we now speak of the country very dear to my own heart. Westerners believe oil makes Saudi great, but they forget that our history predates the Roman Empire. Saudi Arabia is home to Islam and is the cornerstone of Allah's throne on Earth in the form of our Holiest Shrine — the Ka'bah. Even without Islam and oil to inflame her eminence, Saudi was one of two nations to remain free from British and French influence following WWI. At the time, the hoary Ottoman Empire ruled the Middle East with a waning fist, but hoped to re-ignite its legacy by allying itself with the Axis powers. The British appealed to Mecca and convinced the young Sa'ud Empire to revolt against the Ottomans. After the war, the British did not oppose then Sa'ud patriarch Abd al-Aziz from consolidating the former Ottoman territories in the Arabian Peninsula under his rulership. In 1932, Saudi Arabia was born (though I wonder — had the British known of Saudi's true wealth, would they have let us go so easily?).

Since 1938, when Saudi Arabia discovered it possessed enough oil to compete in the international market, it has remained one of the greatest oil-producing nations. It is also infamous for being difficult to visit if you are not Muslim. To enter, you must either have a sponsor (a service I cannot offer), a transit visa (valid for three days), you must become Muslim (through the *hajj*, or pilgrimage visa) or you must sneak across the border. There is enough open desert and shore to accomplish the last, but I do not recommend it. Saudi Arabia is wary of Iraq because of the Gulf War and of Iran because Saudis fear the Ayatollah. Thus, we monitor the northern border and eastern shoreline carefully. That leaves the less-defended border along Jordan or the hope that you can find someone to smuggle you across.

If you do manage to enter, welcome. Saudi Arabia is among the safer countries for Westerners because of the many foreign oil and telecommunication companies here. Expatriates have been part of Saudi since they first discovered oil, and very few factions actively seek to excise Western influence.

Still, do not come here unprepared. Know where you need to go and learn the requirements of our five provinces. Find someone to forge your entry papers or plastic identity cards. This is especially important in the Eastern Province along the Gulf, where our principal oil fields and expatriate compounds are located (Wildcatter184 discusses this in greater detail). If you can, avoid the Al Hijaz Province along the Red Sea's mountainous coastline. It holds the principle cities of Mecca, Medina and Jiddah. Few foreigners work out this far, and Mecca

The Foreign Compounds

By: Wildcatter184

By now you've heard Tarjiman or others use "compound," "camps" or "expatriate" and you've wondered what they're talking about. Westerners working abroad are called expatriates. Filipino, Indian and Pakistani workers are simply called by their nationality (sorry, chaps).

"Compounds" are enclosed camps where expatriates live and work. They range in size from an outpost to a small city. The Saudis created these barbed-wire enclosures to "protect" us from the desert wilds or from unscrupulous Bedouins. Truthfully, I think they're protecting their own arses from decadent Western influences, since any animal with the tenacity to survive in the desert can burrow under the fence. Despite how it sounds, the compounds are actually oases of civilisation. The Saudis provide real free-standing homes for families and apartments for bachelors, manicured lawns, company cars, sports fields, schools (for expatriate kids based on the British school system), one movie theatre per compound, a cafeteria or mess hall, a grocery store or canteen and at least one swimming pool. The smallest compound houses as few as 10 to 15 families, while the largest is Dhahran, a city built for several thousand expatriates and their loved ones.

While it's not the ideal setting for most people, there's money here for the taking if you're willing to make sacrifices. Sure, the law requires men and women use separate entrances or to sit in different waiting rooms, but when the government taxes you only 5% of your income no matter how much you pull in, I'll gladly avoid women. I came to the Middle East after the Gulf War when Saddam left 732 rigs burning. At over $700 U.S. a day, working for the Kuwaitis then the Saudis, I could retire now if I weren't so damn greedy.

Most compounds are in the Eastern Province and are the best places for visiting hunters can hide. Getting into the camps is a problem, though, because the Saudi government issues plastic photo-identity cards to all workers. If you want access to a camp, you need an "I" level card. If you want entry into the telecommunications hub in Dhahran, get yourself an "F" through "D" card. The cards aren't high tech, so obtaining forgeries is fairly simple. Abid Hamid, who runs the Shahafi Photocopy Centre in Khobar (a mid-size Arab city 20 minutes outside Dhahran), charges 1,500 riyals (about $400 American) to create a forged plastic ID card. Passports and visas cost much more.

is open to only Muslims. Jiddah, a massive port city, is very industrial and perhaps the easiest place to hide if you know people there.

The Northern Frontier and Central Province are likewise risky. Both are open deserts with scattered towns. The locals will notice you immediately and the authorities will question you. Your best hope in the Central Province is Riyadh, the capital of Saudi, where enough foreigners live and work for you to slip in unnoticed. Obey the local customs and it is unlikely that the authorities will demand to see your papers.

That leaves the fifth province, the desolate *Ar Rub al-Khali*, the infamous Empty Quarter. This vast desert expanse is the size of your Texas, with a permanent population of zero. On maps, it is a blank space of solid color, but this belies the dancing desert of shifting dunes and liquid sands. Even technology fails to tame her. Leave this land to the Bedouins, for the Empty Quarter offers no mercy. If it fails to kill you, the wild monsters plaguing its nights will finish the job.

Despite the great tracts of sand dividing many communities, Saudi Arabia has one of the best-developed telecommunications networks in the Middle East. And yet, the lines of communication are not always safe. Saudi uses the latest American technology and many foreigners report hearing odd clicks over their phones. One hunter foolishly shared information in a phone conversation and found his line disconnected within minutes. He fled immediately. The police were at his door within the half-hour. Few Saudi *kiswah* conduct their business over the phone.

Internet services are almost nonexistent, and are difficult to obtain because the Saudi government fears the web's potential for moral decadence. There is a way around this, however. Next to the Dhahran expatriate compound is the Dhahran Marine Base and American Consulate. They possess Internet connections. Apparently several marines will download and transmit messages if you provide them with a floppy diskette and $100 dollars (325 riyals or so) each time. I do not know their identities, but I believe Wildcatter184 can contact them directly.

The Authorities

Saudi's monarchy lives in constant fear of a revolution. The country owes its birth to the Bedouin tribes that united under the conservative Wahabbi movement and bespoke of a return to a fundamental Islam. With the discovery of oil and the flood of foreign companies, the Saudi government walks a fine line between keeping pace with American sponsors and retaining the traditional values of Wahabbism. Initially, the government followed in Iran's steps of Westernization, but when the Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah, Saudi returned to more moderate ways to appease the conservative Shiite sects. One result was the *mutawwa*, religious police who bear much in common with the Iranian *monkeraat*.

While the *mutawwa* do not carry firearms, they have the government's full blessing to enforce standards of religious integrity. Their threat disturbs many Westerners who still adjust to life here, but expatriate compounds offer refuge because the *mutawwa* cannot venture there. The ordinary police can, though.

Equipment Needs

Saudi Arabia is the land of plenty. Food and medicines are abundant and cheap no matter where you are, and we have the latest electronic devices (except for technology that the government fears people can use against it). Thanks to Arabia's deep pockets, hospitals are well maintained and free, as are most essential services. Again, though, you need identity cards or passports to enjoy these amenities as expatriates.

Finding firearms is difficult for several reasons. Chief is Saudi Arabia's fear of revolt, which was validated when 300 extremists seized the Ka'bah and Grand Mosque for 10 days in 1979, killing 250 worshippers in the process. Since then, the government has enforced strict constraints on firearms, even limiting police officers to six bullets each in one period, according to rumor.

Where there is a will, there is Muhammad ibn-Yousif, a weapons dealer in the town of *Al Jawf* (125 miles south of Jordan's border). The town straddles an old caravan route that once belonged to the ancient Nabataean Empire, which controlled local trade in the centuries before the Prophet Jesus. I mention this because ruined Nabataean outposts still dot the desert. Whatever fate befell them was enough to keep angry spirits around. Ibn-Yousif is a *kiswah* who protects the locals from the growing incursions of *akhira* crossing the Jordanian border. While he remains a businessman and sells only small arms, other *kiswah* knows he is fair.

The World of Akhira

A Western colleague once asked why, if we know where our greatest perceived threats lie, we do not deal with them immediately? If we organized our efforts, the paranoid Saudi government would believe us revolutionaries and turn the military against us. While the Iraqi hide their activities behind a cause, we must do the opposite and conduct our efforts alone or in very small groups, lest we raise suspicion.

Our greatest known threats currently reside in three places.

The Empty Quarter — This desolate region was a corrupt paradise before Allah smote the people of Ad, turned their gardens to dust and drowned their capital Wabar in sand. Since then, the monsters of Ad are said to lurk beneath the desert, but whatever awoke us to our destiny as *kiswah* also awoke their evil. While this expanse remains far from the government's prying eyes, we cannot approach it without the help of the local Bedouin. Hunters who have survived their journey there claim to have seen some tribes of Bedu serving *Adites* that burst from the sleeping sand every night. Another survivor of a doomed expedition saw a dune made of spiders sweep

across his encampment and leave nothing behind but white bone and tattered tents.

Nabataean Ruins and the Jordanian Border — Two thousand years ago, a trading people known as the Nabataean ruled the region now called Jordan and built outposts along their trade routes. Now their once grand city of cliff stone is lost to the ages, but their legacy lives on in ruins and whispers. The Bedouin always believed the Nabataean sites haunted and with good reason. They are. It is as though an entire nation became ghosts and refused to lie silent. They wandered the deserts, angry and hateful.

Now that the dead are awake, the Nabataean "shamblers," those we call *Thalmudites*, return to those places they remembered in life, when the world possessed different borders. They cross the Jordanian frontier into Arabia, following the ancient trade routes and bringing misery with each step. Hunters such as Muhammad ibn-Yousif in Al Jawfa protect the borders to the best of their ability, while others like Abu Qutayba, leader of the Sabah, guides his Bedouin tribe across the sands of Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia, stalking monsters with his entire family. There is no greater honor than performing *ikhwan al-harb* (brotherhood of war) or the communal wardance with his tribe in combat. This shared gift allows us to fight alongside one another as one body, one mind.

Khobar Towers — The Saudis have always provided for the Bedouin, and that has included building them four apartment towers in Khobar. This enclosed complex shares an enormous underground parking lot and its own stores and shops. The Bedouin, however, refused to move into the apartments for fear of losing the open sky, and so the buildings sit empty and abandoned. It is a foreboding and decrepit part of Khobar's skyline. More so, behind its boarded windows and chained gates is a sanctuary for monsters (rots at the very least) and droves of mortal slaves. We cannot attack it openly. The authorities obviously know enough to ignore it. And there are too many beasts within to attack it as fallen compatriots have discovered. Nor can we burn it down without killing the hostages and slaves. The only choice left is what we've been doing for the past few months. We sneak in occasionally during daylight hours when all are asleep and rescue what children we can find.

Safe Havens

We have our share of monsters and we have our share of hope. This is how it should be. Once you are familiar with these places, you will discover more on your own.

Dhahran — 12 Falcon Court. This is a quiet neighborhood of apartment homes linked together around a large courtyard. House #12 belongs to an American expatriate ally and doctor named Mitchell whose family lives in America during the school year. He takes on boarders for a couple of weeks at a time, except for June, July, the beginning of August and at the end of December. You must have a passport, identity card and legitimate visa, because he does not want any hint of impropriety if the police search his home. He knows a little of the cause, but will not interfere in your business or ask any questions. He'd prefer not to know anything. As a doctor Mitchell, can also tend to your wounds.

Jeddah — Al-Qabel, at the Zahab Street Overpass. Just before the juice stand is an old sewer grate hidden in the alley between two old buildings. Lift it and you'll enter Jeddah's ancient and now dry sewer system. Head east, then turn left at the second junction and left at the next one after that. That main line would have brought you directly to the Red Sea had the Al-Faisalia Plaza construction not collapsed the tunnels. Smugglers once brought goods off docked ships past Jeddah's Harbor Authority through this network. Now, the east-west line is abandoned and contains a maintenance room where hunters can hide. In it you'll find a first-aid kit and three cots. Interconnected tunnels are dead ends since the surrounding construction all but destroyed the old sewer lines. That means there is only one way in or out, so be careful.

Neighboring Countries

Saudi Arabia shares borders with many smaller countries, but I thought it prudent that you should benefit from the observations of other writers in the cases of Qatar and Kuwait. The privilege of discussing the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Yemen still falls to me, since these countries constitute the southern crescent of Saudi's peninsula.

Oman — I love the Omani people, but I must say they have a very unusual country. Oman is traditional by the standards of Bahrain or Lebanon, but it allows the Indians to maintain a temple to Shiva (this is almost unheard of among Muslims, who learn that polytheism is anathema to Allah). The landscape itself is mountainous and beautiful, but oddly placed borders with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have created three Omans separated from each other geographically. The largest is Oman proper, which maintains an open border with the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The second Oman is the quiet Musandam Peninsula to the north (at the Arabian Gulf's Strait of Hormuz). The third is Madha, an island of territory within the UAE itself. They are all part of the sultan's territory and under the influence of the country's Consultative Counsel. I hear this geographic puzzle creates an unusual situation in which the smaller "Omans" are actually enclaves for rich Arab *akhira*, while the wilderness of Oman proper is a haven for monsters of the mountains.

The United Arab Emirates — The progressive UAE is a league of seven affiliated nations and is exceedingly pro-West by any Arab standard, even by Israel's. While Globetrotter expounds the virtues of Bahrain, I believe the UAE is a far better starting point for visiting hunters. The two principal cities, the capital Abu Dhabi and Dubai are both bastions of Western architecture and aesthetics. In fact, Dubai hosts the best

nightlife of any Middle Eastern country save for Lebanon, and the price of gold is astoundingly cheap (the UAE is equivalent to a duty-free zone) for hunters bypassing the exchange rates in other countries. With over 1.5 million Asian workers residing in the UAE, you might also expect some hunters from the Far East to protect their people from harm. Fortunately, there does not appear to be a central threat or prevalent danger from monsters there, so hunters may not need to worry about avoiding this location or that neighborhood.

Yemen — My heart cries for Yemen. It is one of the poorest nations in the world, but it still struggles desperately to pull its own people from the mire. Yemen's northern and southern halves, the latter of which was a socialist government, reunited recently. Despite attempts to create a democracy and move toward social enlightenment, the country is near destitute, with little money for badly needed programs. It has among the lowest literacy rates in the Arab world and suffers from occasional riots when finances force the government to lift its subsidies on wood and food. Yemen's politics rely greatly on tribal coalitions and alliances, but are also easy prey for influential or rich monsters. Local hunters find themselves sorely outmatched by *akhira* who reputedly pay the government large sums of money to maintain private estates and palaces away from public scrutiny and free from police meddling. One hunter who recently vanished (May Allah bless his way) told me that the Wadi Dahr palace outside the capital of San'a always throws *qat* parties for Yemen's political and social elite. (*Qat* is a chewable narcotic that's more popular locally than cigarettes.) The palace is a fortress and the in-staff security all appears to be mortals enslaved to *Adites*. It isn't uncommon to see guests leaving in similar straits.

Syria

By: Jibril

Having studied and completed university in the United States, I have an understanding of both cultures and can say that my homeland Syria has earned an undeserved reputation in the West. Syria once included Lebanon, Israel and Jordan. After WWII and liberation from Ottoman and later French occupiers, Syria lost those lands. For nearly a decade, we suffered coups and strife until the Ba'ath finally assumed power in 1954. Since then, the Ba'ath Socialist Party has treated Syria well, despite a tumultuous and bloody 1960s filled with overthrows and revolts.

Westerners never forgave us our "flirtations" with the USSR or Communist advisors. But times change and while Syria is still a military state, it is the friendliest Arab country. In fact, Christians compose nearly 13% of the population. The head of state is Muslim, but Syria has no official religion.

We fought Iraq in the Gulf War, lessened our military stance toward Israel and now try to attract tourists. Unlike Iranians, to whom visitors are still outsiders, the Syrian people are genuine and sincere. If you ride public transports or taxis, you will share your ride with Syrians — most of whom engage you in conversation since English is our second language (older generations also know French). Don't be surprised if a Syrian invites you for tea, dinner, to meet his family or to watch television after speaking with you for only a few minutes. This offer is rarely anything more than a friendly gesture. It isn't uncommon for such hosts to invite you to stay for a few days and expect nothing in return save for a civilized guest. This is the code of hospitality in its purest form. While Bahrain can acclimate you to the Arab world, Syria helps you understand the Arab people. Don't be scared to question a host about our customs, politics or geography. Sharing insights about our own culture delights us.

I admit, Syria is not entirely faultless, but at least I can lay this blame at the feet of our government. Obtain your visa from your birth country well before arriving or customs will turn you away. Internet providers are outlawed here and using adapters to dial long-distance is illegal. This does not mean it isn't possible, just that the government will arrest and deport you. Syria is also home to different terrorist groups including the radical Hezbollah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PPLP), Hamas and the PPK. While our countryside is open to tourists, avoid the regions far south of Damascus such as the *Duruz* mountain range and those villages bordering Jordan and Israel. The PLO once maintained camps there with Syria's consent. With Arafat pursuing more respectable avenues of liberation, these guerilla camps now belong to the Palestinian, and devoutly Islamic, Hamas, the PPLP and Hezbollah. Along the northern border with Turkey, enclaves of Kurds support the PPK movement by fighting the Turkish government for a new homeland. Syria continues to deny the activities or even presence of these groups, but they sufficiently hamper Syria's diplomatic endeavors.

The Authorities

I know Americans don't take Arab military prowess seriously, and perhaps initially for good reason. Syria has always been a military state, however, so never forget that the police are well-armed and well-trained soldiers. I've heard that, thanks to Syria's former contacts with the USSR, many of our newest military trainers are former members of Russia's feared GRU.

Thakfully, Syria's relations with the West are improving. We've never held entire embassies hostage, so even the authorities bear no hostility or suspicion toward visitors. Do not walk around with weapons, which the government restricts heavily, but neither should you fear being detained or searched for no apparent reason. That said, you are in a military state and the authorities can misinterpret your pursuit of the cause as an act of sedition or terrorism. The Syrian government is particularly vigilant, because of the pres-

ence of the Hamas, Hezbollah and PPK and because of potential retribution by Turkey or Israel.

Equipment Needs

Finding common equipment such as medical or camping supplies is easy. The difficulty is in procuring weapons or Internet access. You can solve the latter problem by sneaking in a laptop, a RJ-11 telephone connector and a two-pin round adapter for a 220-volt plug. Just be sure you're ready to lose this equipment if your bribe attempt fails (which is rare). If you are outside a major city such as Damascus or Aleppo, you can't call your Internet provider since you must make the call through the operator who phones you back when the line is open.

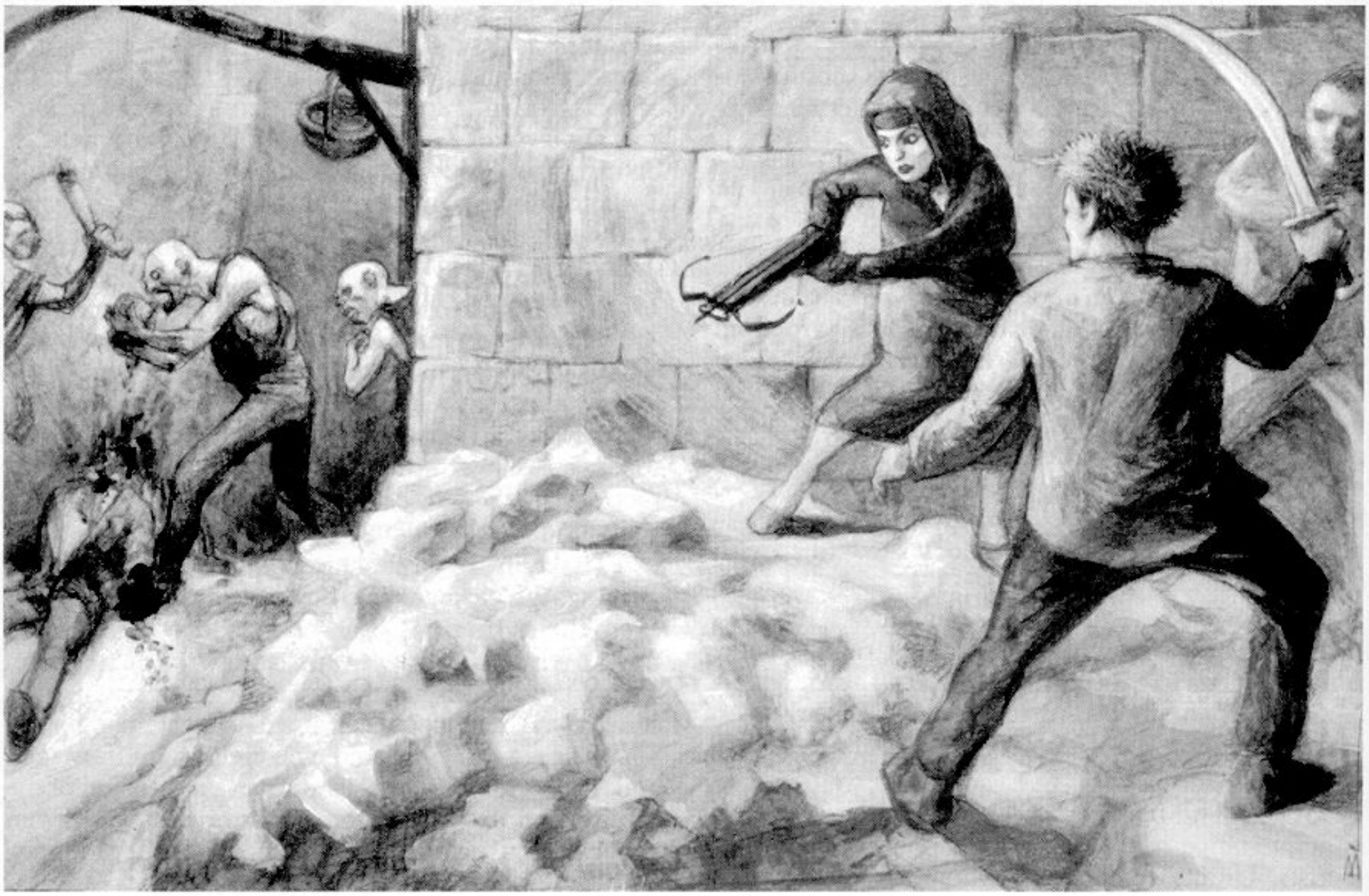
As for weapons, finding and dealing with the Syrian black market is a tricky venture. You need American money to complete transactions. The Syrian black market relies heavily on the Turkish Mafia (the second largest in the world after the Italian). Syria only benefits from its northern neighbor because of its proximity to the drug and weapon pipeline originating in Afghanistan and cutting across Iran before hitting southeastern Turkey. If the Syrian black market is lucky enough, it sometimes profits from a redirected caravan that reaches Ain Diwar or Hassake in northeastern Syria.

In this case, the woman to speak to is Selma Mahra, a supposed lieutenant in Turkey's PKK and a former member of the Kurdistan Free Women's Union (a female suicide-bomber group). People in Ain Dawar know and respect her, but she is also horribly disfigured. She somehow survived her own suicide bombing, but not before the explosion wiped her features clean. Many of us suspect she once served *Adites*, but she is more useful alive than dead. She negotiates the sale of weapons and contraband, but be warned that she often haggles for higher prices in order to force you or anyone else into buying weapons through favors. These obligations include smuggling and potential mercenary work.

The World of Akhira

If I were to chose one place where evil infests, it would be the Old City of Damascus, where the streets wind like a dancing dervish and the lanes are so narrow that overhanging rooftops connect to create alleys of darkness. We've heard rumors that mortal blood cults and ancient walking dead make homes in buildings long forgotten by history. More upsetting are the allies we frequently lose in the city's heart and the rumor that a plague of ants ate one hunter's insides out while he still lived. At best, all we can do is deal with the seemingly abundant number of mortal slaves that serve *Adites* in Old Damascus.

Another place that is less dangerous, but for some strange reason draws creatures such as shamblers, is the cloth market of Khan al-Jumruk in the Aleppo's old district. Southeast of the Great Mosque, this *suq* (also called bazaar and *khan*) dates back to the Ottoman period and is a labyrinth of alleys and stalls. The high-



vaulted ceilings and thick support columns create a dark interior, and the flood of people makes it prime hunting ground for creatures looking to feast on the helpless. If you're new to the city, you can also find other hunters here. Just pay attention to the graffiti or hand-painted signs and you will encounter familiar Western symbols.

Safe Havens

As a foreigner, you have many options for sanctuary, including invitations off the street. If you need to sleep or you're hungry, take a bus ride and you might be lucky enough to receive an invitation from a local. Do not, however, abuse this privilege by overextending your welcome or by leading monsters to your host.

If you're being followed or are injured, try the following.

Aleppo — Khan an-Nahaseen. This *suq* borders Khan al-Jumruk on the east and is even more of a maze than its neighbor. Western hunter markings lead you deep into the bazaar until you find an old, white Suzuki van almost wedged between two permanent stalls. It serves as a makeshift booth for the owner. If you squeeze past the van and neighboring stall, you'll find a doorway out of sight from the *suq*'s foot traffic. Inside is a small room with bandages, iodine and a smelly hole in the ground that serves as a toilet. If the stall's owner knows someone is resting in the room, he'll leave you some fresh bread, fruits and water in a basket under the van's hood (the engine block is missing).

Damascus — Halbouni Street. At the Hejaz Train Station, along the track closest to Halbouni Street, there is an overgrown sidetrack where an abandoned and rusting train cab sits. The doors are chained and the windows are boarded up, but underneath the cab is a hole in the floor that you can crawl through. The accommodations are sparse. A pile of smelly seat cushions makes an acceptable mattress. I also ensure that the first-aid kit and canned foods are well stocked.

Neighboring Countries

Syria shares her borders with many countries, including Jordan. Relations between our two nations shift constantly, but there has been a recent push toward mutual understanding. That said....

Jordan — Avoid this place like the plague. Hunters along her southern borders all report a trickle of monsters passing through. Within Jordan itself, the life span of *kiswah* is shockingly short and brutal, but whether it's because the local *akhira* are organized or because they actually run the small country remains unknown. If you do journey there, restrict your travels to the capitol Amman, where it is safest, and avoid the southern half where our kind vanish quickly.

Jordan itself is quaint enough, but has always wavered between a pro-West/Israeli stance and an anti-West outlook. I believe the reason for this confusion is twofold. Jordan is caught firmly between Israel's flank and its neighbors Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. If a full war erupts between Arabs and Zionists, Jordan knows is the staging ground. Furthermore, 75% of Jordan's population were, within three or four generations, Palestinians. They sympathize with the PLO's plight but they can never truly "understand" the suffering of their homeless brothers and sisters.

CHAPTER 2: BY HIS BREATH

Alif lam ra. These are the verses of the Wise Book: Does it seem strange to mankind that We revealed Our will to a mortal from among themselves, saying: 'Give warning to mankind, and proclaim good tidings to the faithful: their endeavors shall be rewarded by their Lord'?

— The Koran, *Surah*: 10:1 [Jonah]

By: Tarjiman220

A Sufi mendicant once told me of four blind men who encountered an elephant for the first time. The first man grabbed the tail and said the elephant was long and limp like a rope. The second man touched the elephant's foot and said it felt thick and callused like a palm tree. The third touched the elephant's trunk and said it was round and moved like a snake, while the fourth touched its belly and said it was as great and as wide as the heavens.

Salaam, my friends. I welcome you as late witnesses to a great event that transpired across the Middle East a few weeks ago. It was the first time the *kiswah* made a concerted effort to join together at a predetermined time (12:00 noon) to unify our voices and make all our opinions heard. Using the *kufic* script adorning our world, we gathered in Baghdad's *hammams* (baths), Tehran's mosques, Amman's *madrassas* (schools), Riyadh's museums, Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock, Damascus' Umayyad Mosque, Cairo's Ibn Tulun Mosque and the great Ka'bah herself in Mecca. Others, like the Bedouin *kiswah* or those living in villages spoke from their homes through *kufic* script engraved on metal plates or inscribed atop book pages with elaborate flourish.

To those *fellaheen* sitting or standing close to us while we communicated and listened, we appeared the odd and displaced Muslim devotees who meditated intently upon the words of the Koran. Had they seen across the Arab world, they would have known we numbered in the dozens, each as different from the other as each of Allah's breaths. We drew together, men and women, Muslim, Christian and Jew alike all for a single purpose: fraternity.

This great conference was a call for unity and purpose of expression. It failed. Yet it was also successful in a manner we never anticipated. We hoped the conference would serve as a rallying point, but our greatest hurdle was understanding who we were and how we came to exist as *kiswah*. It seemed imperative to everyone that to formulate a consensus of opinion, we should at least realize where we came from. Even in a region seemingly united under a banner of Islam, we disagreed on principles of faith, politics and sadly on principles of ignorance. Within those disagreements, however, came insight and new conjecture as to our existence and our role in the world.

What you are about to read is a privilege. Never forget this. I initially hoped to show Western hunters that their eastern neighbors could reach an appreciation and understanding of one another. I hoped to present us as a unified front. Sadly, that unity is a lie, but this simple truth also brings us all closer together. We are no greater or lesser than you.

I present you highlights of the information several others and I managed to transcribe by the conference's ends. I do not agree with many theories, but I am not a judge of people's hearts. That falls to Allah. I therefore bid you take and reject of this what you will. After all, we are all blind men. It is perhaps in the listening that we may understand what neither sight nor touch alone affords.

Origin Theories

For some, it is enough believing Allah is supreme to know that He created everything within the world. Evil exists for its reasons, as do we. I ascribe to this faith, but I do not think it precludes questioning *why* the world is as it is. Blind faith is a disservice to Allah, for He gave us the ability to reason through our doubts. By simply believing that evil lives because Allah wills it is the same as accepting its presence as meritorious. Obviously, we cannot, for then evil is always justified in its actions.

Everything in Islam, from our laws to our pursuits, remains open to debate and public deliberation. The Sunni built their sect on the precept that the community decides religious practices and the formation of laws, and we must do the same. My colleagues and I pieced together the following excerpts from the conference with this precept in mind. In many cases, we could not discern the origin of certain thoughts. Each argument or point possessed its share of supporters, and eventually each outlook hosted a chorus of voices from multiple writers. We combined these voices into one and named them after Muslim saints and mystics for the sake of facility, so you rarely hear a single voice. You are about to read the dissonant echoes of a fractured chorus.

'Abd al-Latif: While neither a celebrated Sufi mystic nor saint, 'Abd al-Latif was a well-known legal and medical scholar in Baghdad who extolled the virtues of scientific acumen during Islam's Golden Age. We lend his name to those following the sciences rather than religion (even though 'Abd himself was a pious man).

Ahmad ibn Harb: Ahmad "son of War" was a traditionalist and a warrior of the *jihad*. He represents our brethren who do not question their duties, but who fight with unswerving loyalty and a disregard for the defenseless around them.

Al-Fozail ibn Iyaz: This former bandit later recanted his sinful ways and earned great attention as an authority on the traditions. He was a fearless and outspoken orator. He represents those hunters who still fuel their arguments with words from the Koran. Islam proved their beginning and it will serve them in their last days.

Beshr ibn al-Hareth: Once a student of the traditions, he turned his back upon the accepted teachings and lived as a pauper and beggar, learning from meditation and life around him. The Beshr *kiswah* represent those who turn their backs on the traditional interpretations of the Koran and educate themselves through their experiences.

Dho 'l-Nun al-Misri: One of the truest Islamic mystics, he was a master of alchemy and magic, and understood the ancient language of the Egyptian pharaohs. Although imprisoned for heresy, he eventually earned his freedom and sainthood. The Dho 'l-Nun believe the secrets to their existence lies in the *Jahiliyyah* (the Time of Ignorance) before Islam's birth, when the tribes worshipped idols.

Al-Hallaj: Al-Hallaj, a believer in reincarnation and a well-traveled mystic, is still controversial to Islamic thought even after his execution for heresy. It is only fitting we named those with the most disputed theories after him.

Hasan of Basra: Hasan is among the eldest and most revered of the Sufi saints. He was a gifted orator. The *Mutazila* credit him as the founder of their movement. The *Mutazila*, in turn, believed Allah did not control the actions of all, for that dismissed the notion of free will. Instead, Allah created the good and just, leaving humanity and *jinn* responsible for their own fates. These hunters do not hold Allah responsible for their condition.

Ribe'a al-Adawiya: A female saint and a renowned celibate, she endured slavery as a child before finding her way through Islamic mysticism. She represents the pious women who spoke at the conference. (Allah praise their ability to endure their less-chivalrous brethren.)

Somnun: This saint was an authority on mystical love before others denounced his work. He represents those hunters who believe our answers lie in alliances with the pious among the monsters.

While we do not change the spirit of these groups words, we have shortened sentences or compiled them together to fit into specific categories. This way the different arguments do not confuse you, the reader.

The Nightly Visitants (Who Are the Messengers?)

Hasan: How can we claim one voice, one action, when we still do not see who speaks to us? To fight against the enemy we must know our generals, but that fact eludes us. Why are we here? Who charged us with this duty? We've agreed to call them the Nightly Visitants as quoted within the Koran, but that brings us no closer to the truth.

Ahmad: True soldiers need no generals to recognize the enemy. The enemy makes himself apparent by his actions. And by my just struggles, I am apparent to Allah.

Al-Fozail: Indeed warrior of faith, your words ring true. Does the Koran itself not say in *Surah* 22:39: *Permission to take up arms is hereby given to those who are attacked, because they have been wronged. Allah has power to grant them victory*.... Does this not imply that Allah, as author of these words, is in fact our creator? We became *kiswah* because we recognized evil and struggled against it. We affirmed the *jihad* through our actions and Allah granted us the power to fight. We look to the sun and moon, hoping to find the cause of our condition, but the answer lies before us all.

Hasan: An interesting argument. Allah helps he who helps himself. But even this statement is problematic if I rely solely upon the Koran for my arguments. What is your answer for *Surah* 4:34? It says women are subject to men's will, yet here fight alongside us as proven equals. What of *Surah* 33:33 (women's sole duty is to stay home and protect their honor)? By your reasoning, Allah gave them power too, but the Koran states otherwise. Surely this is proof enough that the Koran alone cannot provide all answers. If it could, then what of free will and our ability to chose our destinies?

Al-Fozail: Perhaps their gifts are not from Allah. Perhaps women's powers are of Shaitan?

Ribe'a: Nonsense! I cannot tell you who the Nightly Visitants are, but I will tell you as a woman that I heard

the same voices and read the same words as all of you. If my powers are of Shaitan, then you share my shame.

Al-Hallaj: Perhaps then all our powers are of the Devil. Doesn't the Koran say *Shaitan will sow discord among you?* Isn't that what's happening now with all this dissent?

Ribe'a: That is not what I meant. No, I do not believe we are of Shaitan, either. The Koran says Allah honors His promises, but Shaitan honors none of them. These powers were never offered to us. We had no choice. Neither did anyone promise us anything for our troubles in return. They came to us as duties and obligations and only Allah can make such demands. We put into them what we believe, nothing more.

Somnun: What of *jinn?* We look to God or Allah or Yahweh for answers, but what if our powers come from the very creatures we fight?

Hasan: How so?

Somnun: The Koran says that *jinn* and spirits, like mortals, are capable of sin and redemption. Unlike Christians, we do not believe in an "Original Sin" that Adam passed down, which means all creatures are responsible for their actions. Taking this argument a step further, we know not all monsters are our enemies. Some bear us no ill will at all and have in fact helped us in our cause. So, if this is true, might it also reason that some invested us with their power to help them fight those who would commit evil? Maybe the Nightly Visitants are in fact possessing spirits or *jinn?*

Dho 'l-Nun: Or maybe we are *jinn* ourselves?

'Abd: From religion to flights of fancy? Can you sabotage our efforts at reasonable dialogue any further?

Dho 'l-Nun: Listen for a moment and remember our heritage. Remember the Middle East is far older than Islam.

Al-Fozail: Yes, we call it the *Jahiliyyah* (the Time of Ignorance) for good reason. Pagan worship, infanticide, dishonoring of women. Islam did well to wipe away all knowledge of those dark times.

Dho 'l-Nun: But that's not true, is it! We kept certain traditions from the *Jahiliyyah* alive. The Bedouin customs of hospitality and the folktales are still with us. What if we ignored other truths? Ancient customs tell us of the *maskh* (humanity's ability to take the likeness of animals, trees and even rocks). What of the *Bani-Sakhr* tribe, the "Children of the Rock," who were descendents of a mountain? Or the tribe in southern Yemen whose members could become wolves? What if we are offspring of those tribes and thus supernatural ourselves? What if our Nightly Visitants are nothing but the whispers of our ancestors?

Al-Fozail: Heresy! Allah alone is the voice of our hearts. To suggest otherwise is to worship false idols!

'Abd: This is ignorant. I don't deny anyone his spiritual explanation for the Nightly Visitants, but I can't accept anything that I can't prove. It's a matter of science that certain organs become vestigial after a time, like the appendix and little toe, while others grow more prominent. We might be seeing a new phase of human evolution. The Nightly Visitants might be nothing more than the

ego playing mediator between the reality of our existence and our personal views of the world.

Hasan: I believe in faith as a guide and science as a tool. But if science is such a vaunted quality in your life, then please answer me this: How are you communicating with us right now? Is it through the Internet? Or are you willing your words through Islamic script? Why is it our thoughts work through only Arabic script and not Hebrew or Latin text? I know foreign hunters reading this right now, without understanding Arabic. Does science account for that? I doubt it (which sadly means our opinions of our origins are everywhere and nowhere at once).

The Origins of the Akhira and Our Purpose

By: Tarjiman220

As you can see, the discussion on the Nightly Visitants caused great debate. The origin of monsters was no less eventful. We could not discuss the *akhira* without wondering what tied us together, and thus the truth of our purpose. This created two entirely different arguments and sent us into a chaos that nearly unraveled our efforts to communicate. What we include here is a summarized account of theories supported by the main groups. We could not follow some arguments, which often digressed from their original points (or died when too many voices fought to be heard). Instead, we present these views as statements of belief for each group after compiling their best and chief articles.

Ahmad: Our course is set by another, so why do we waste our breath debating our *al-Ghariyyan*, our gifts or the nature of our enemy? They exist whether we question them or not, so we should fight now and seek our answers when we arrive in Paradise.

Our greatest folly lies in our choice of enemies. We struggle to save the *fellaheen*, but they have nothing to fear if they lead exemplary lives. Allah rewards the faithful with Paradise and the unfaithful with the fires of Hell. The Koran (*Surah* 9:123) says: *O you who believe! Fight the unbelievers who are near to you and let them find ruthlessness in you, and know that God is with those who fear Him*. Our enemies are unbelievers, not simply *akhira*. Our struggle is against heretics, whether they are *ins* (mortal), *jinn*, *fellaheen*, *kiswah*, Christian or Jew. We shall spare none in this war.

Al-Fozail: The Koran tells us all we need to know of the *akhira* and their origins. Allah fashioned the world according to His wishes and He creates new creatures with each breath. Who are we to question why these creatures live? Do we demand answers of the lion or the dove? Do they demand answers from us? The Koran says that all men and *jinn* are born with the ability to think and the capacity for piety or sin. We do not question their existence because it would mean we question Allah's work. Neither do we judge them, for that is His right alone. We do, however, protect the *fellaheen* from harm. And if that means killing, so be it. *Surah* 4:75 says: *And how should you not fight for the cause of Allah, and for the helpless old men, women, and children who say: 'Deliver us, Lord, from this city of wrongdoers; send forth to us a guardian from Your presence; send to us from Your presence one that will help us'?*

Beshr: I do not question the existence of *akhira* any more than I question Allah. I fear, though, that we emerged because we are witness to a new *Jahiliyyah*, a return to pagan ignorance. While the West is not inherently evil, for example, we absorb her worst qualities. We prize income over hospitality and global politics over piety. We do not follow Allah as we once did. We disrespect women's honor and we embrace materialism. Perhaps we are not hunters but keepers of Allah's intentions for the different religions of the one God? Perhaps, as others claim, we are bulwarks against infidels and the unfaithful. We counter the return to ignorance and the renunciation of values.

Dho 'l-Nun: Our answers lie trapped beneath the sands of the *Jahiliyyah*, when the Bedouin worshipped the stars and stones, the sky and water. Before Muhammad brought Islam to us, there was a Bedouin chieftain named Amr who ruled over Mecca. Upon the advice of a *jinn*, he rode to the shores of Juddah where he found great and ancient statues washed upon the beach. He brought them back to Mecca, placed them around the city in a giant ring and summoned all the tribes of Arabia. From each chieftain he demanded an oath to the new gods and then allowed each tribe to take one statue back with it. That is how idolatry spread across the region according to the legends.

You wish to know where the *akhira* come from? Many of us know they are descendents of those tribes who never forsook the idols or false gods Amr gave them. Somewhere across Arabia, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Palestine are these buried idols, protected by bands of their most faithful. To truly vanquish the monsters, you must find and destroy their totem gods. We know this because some of us glimpsed these ancient stone giants resting in Arabia's Empty Quarter or within hidden ruins beneath Jerusalem. Both times, they were too well guarded to approach.

Al-Hallaj: Might it reason that if Allah created man from clay and the *jinn* from smokeless fire, that He created the others from different elements? When we destroy an *Adite* he becomes spent ash. It makes sense that these creatures were born of the cold hearth and from fires long spent. Others like *Thalmudites* might be spirits who found black loam, the soft clay Allah used to make us, and inhabited it to form new bodies.

Hasan: We speak of these creatures' origins, but you do not need to know your enemy's mother to know he is your adversary. Monsters exist in varied forms and with different agendas, and the Koran, Bible, Torah and countless other books speak of their existence as pre-dating ours. Maybe we should take lessons from our Western compatriots and ask what has changed that demands our presence here. If we are to believe folklore and legends, the *akhira* have always lived alongside us and they never followed any doctrines of unity. Perhaps we are the new monsters of the world. Perhaps it is we who are out of place.

Ribe'a: I believe the Westerners rightly question "what changed?" If *akhira* always existed, then what necessitates our presence here and now? The Koran says: *Let them be. The day the crier summons them to the dread account, they shall come out from their graves with downcast*

eyes, and rush towards him like swarming locusts. Perhaps it is not the monsters that are different, but the coming of judgment day that demands our presence. Perhaps the end is upon us and the dead grow bold or swell in ranks because we stand on the cusp of Allah's reckoning. Perhaps then we are the *munadi* (the criers) who demand an accounting for the action of the supernatural.

Somnun: The Bedouins maintained a tradition of mediators to help conflicting sides settle disagreements peacefully and without losing face. We call ourselves warriors and hunters, and these roles may be necessary sometimes. But we must also play mediators between the *akhira* and the *fellaheen*, for even great warriors like Saladin understood when truces and alliances were preferable to confrontation.

Al-Kiswah: The Hunters

By: Tarjiman220

We are divided when it comes to identifying ourselves. Some Arabs, particularly those in Lebanon and Egypt, rely on Western models for definition, while some Zionist hunters name themselves according to the *Sefirot* (or emanations of God). Because the Middle East is overwhelmingly Muslim, I use our most common definitions to spare our Western allies the confusion.

I won't lie to you my friends; our arguments concerning ourselves, our enemies and even the Messengers are tied together in one fantastic, convoluted knot. Who are we? Well that depends on our duty. What is our duty? Well that depends on who blessed us with these abilities. Who gave us these powers? Ah, well that depends on who we are. The cycle of confusion begins anew with no question answered specifically.

It is difficult being atheist in the Middle East. Evidence of all three religions abounds in daily life, and our expression of faith is a public celebration. Ergo, Arabs generally approach the process philosophically and debate the implications of our existence according to religious perceptions. Since the formation of Islam, all Arabs (regardless of faith) have been forced to interpret Allah's (God's) meaning and wishes. The Koran serves as guide and it demands unyielding devotion, but that does not exclude interpretation of Muhammad's words. We know we must obey, but we must first understand the intent of those words. This is why our arguments seem circular, with the existence of ourselves tied into duty and into the very nature of our enemies.

Israeli Sefirot

By: Hope123

Some Israeli hunters draw their names from their religious heritage. I don't follow this practice unless speaking with *Sefirot* hunters, in which case I respect their wishes and naming conventions. The *Sefirot* take their name from *Sefir Behir*, the book of brilliance and a form of Judaic mysticism. One of its tenets is the *Sefirot*, or the emanations of God's inner being. It is like a tree, with God or *Keter Elyon* (Supreme Crown) at the top of the tree. There are ten *Sefirot* with different names and functions according to interpretations, but some Israeli hunters choose the following:

Din: Meaning "Judgment," it describes those who decide a monster's guilt or purity.

Gevurah: Meaning "Power." Warriors draw on this name to signify their strength.

Hokhmah: This describes the quality of "Wisdom," a trait exhibited by our prophets and dreamers.

Nezah: "Lasting Endurance." An appropriate description of hunters who protect humanity from monsters and their fellows who have gone astray.

Rahamim: Also called "Compassion." It is a logical name for those who convert the beasts.

Tiferet: This proved a difficult choice, but eventually "Beauty" seemed appropriate for hunters like myself. We seek the beauty in all.

Al-Ghariyyan: The Imbuing

We call the moment of the change *al-Ghariyyan*, or blood-stained, for once the Nightly Visitants awaken us from our world as *fellaheen*, our hands are never clean again. For many, the voices of the Nightly Visitants warn us of the *akhira*. The remainder are not so fortunate; a quiet awakening does not befall them. Fire or light surrounds them like a cape or winds whip into a fevered pitch, tormenting the poor subjects.

Our imbuing is much the same as yours in the West, from what I interpret, save that I've heard more instances of violent and overt manifestations of the change among our kind than among you. At the heart of *al-Ghariyyan* are three principles that form the foundations of our outlooks. They dictate what we wish to gain from the cause. From there we fashion our purpose, but rely upon the Koran for guidance and assume a role following one of the six pillars of Islam that best exemplifies our actions and choices. These are not names, as hunters understand them, for we are all simply *kiswah*. Instead they are designations or statements of our purpose as we believe it.

Clemency

By: Jibril

Allah is merciful, so why aren't we all as patient as Him? Those of us who want to understand the *akhira* remember the Koran and every *Surah* within that begins: *In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful....* Our *al-Ghariyyan* comes with a light that envelops us and warms our souls, whether others see it or not. It destroys the shadows of doubt and in the moment of the becoming wipes away all hesitation.

At the heart of this philosophy is the knowledge that we must pursue our duties with open hearts and an understanding of our supposed enemy. This is why we choose the *Salat* (Prayer) and the *Zakat* (Almsgiving) as our pillars of strength; they both bespeak of forgiveness and compassion. Those drawing upon the *Salat* (Prayer) for guidance believe we can convert or save the monsters. Whenever we pray, we admit to Allah's greatness and our devotion to Him. We remember that Allah alone judges us all and that we must

treat one another as equals beneath His eyes. Thus, there are no monsters. There is only action and purpose. Unfortunately, some of our more fervent brethren believe this precept allows them to interfere in the lives of *fellaheen* and even foreign hunters, for the true significance of their duties lies with the intent of others.

Those who follow the *Zakat* (Almsgiving) for strength are friends to the world. It represents their naivete and the notion that they do well for others without knowing who or what they help. The *Zakat* is giving alms without question and without judgment, much the same as helping anyone regardless of cost. These hunters are dangerous because they have no true enemy. At their extreme, they can actually join with monsters to fight us, believing themselves champions of the oppressed. There is a thin line between goodwill and blindness.

Aspiration

By: Omeed

Being aspired means you adhere to one philosophy alone: there is "no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet." Everything else is conjecture; beyond this truth, we are truly ignorant. Those of us on this path say their *al-Ghariyyan* was like a chattering wind that blew away their conceptions and filled their heads with new thoughts and realizations. If you truly listened to the wind, you'd know it wasn't a gust of air, but the breath of a thousand voices from the past. Sometimes they speak for our ears alone. Other times, they're like a storm centered on us. Always the winds are the voices of the past and they tell us we're not a new phenomenon. We're simply a new generation. If that's true, then we might not only be seers of the future. We might be links to the past, helping hunters remember where they're from. Now if only the voices could stop talking in unison, I'd understand them. Until then, we serve other hunters by giving them direction and answering their frightened questions. We're almost the new prophets of this existence, filling a niche that religion has left empty and Allah left unanswered.

Hunters relying on the *Shahada* (Profession of Faith) know Allah is our only anchor in the world. It is our one truth, our one certainty. Understanding this means we can face all other obstacles knowing nothing can ever surpass the *Shahada*. It allows us to explore the theories and frightening realizations that other *kiswah* are afraid to admit or confront. And yet, the danger of this realization is staying too close to the anchor itself. If this is our only truth, some say the world itself is illusion. They ignore all other concerns around themselves because the only matter of consequence is Allah.

Fervor

By: Fatwa243

Call it religious fervor if you want, but Arabs are passionate about many things. Islam itself demands we show dedication to Allah through expressions of faith that Westerners have trouble understanding. They believe this makes us fanatics, but I call it having a sense of direction and moral grounding.

So-called fervent hunters rely on three pillars to strengthen their resolve and focus their sense of purpose. They are *Ramadan* (Fasting), *Haj* (Pilgrimage) and finally *Jihad* (the Struggle). These are arduous paths requiring dedication of faith over mind. In the end, we emerge better men for our commitment to our cause and to Allah. Perhaps that's why *al-Ghariyyan* is consecrated in fire. Sometimes our heart is the furnace fueling our passions and forging our strength, while other times it is a baptism of flame that erupts from our very skin, scouring away uncertainty. I have even heard of some hunters unworthy of their *al-Ghariyyan*, who burned to death in infernos of their own making.

Hunters who call upon *Ramadan* or the Pillar of Fasting to bolster their resolve protect humanity first and foremost. Fasting is a time of great sacrifice and introspection. A follower of *Ramadan* embodies these strengths, sacrificing personal well being to ensure the safety of others, regardless of the rigors of his duty. Pursuing this path is a proactive choice, because defending someone means you must be there before something hurts them. Likewise, fasting means actively seeking out that arduous path and staying the course day by day, week by week. The danger in this, of course, lies in giving too much of yourself. These hunters can suffer from starvation because they've forgotten how to feed themselves.

Other hunters are careful while pursuing their duties and rely on the Pillar of *Haj* (Pilgrimage) to draw their purpose. Their participation in the *Haj* demonstrates their ability to plan and make decisions according to informed opinions. Like the pilgrim, a hunter of this pillar recognizes that he doesn't travel alone. He bases his judgment of other travelers on individual merit, not racial misconceptions. The *Haj* is a gathering of Muslims from across the world, be they blond-haired Europeans or dark-haired Asians. They travel with one another, share their meals and pray to the same God. The *kiswah* of this path does not make uninformed decisions concerning other people, and he plans his steps carefully. But these arbiters can go too far by wasting their time planning and judging. They can be so concerned with making the right decisions that they never accomplish anything.

Every war needs soldiers who sometimes act instead of deliberate. Hunters with the Pillar of *Jihad* are such people. They're warriors with intention in action and the force of will given a blade. Don't mistake this determination for blindness, though. No hunter wins wars without understanding the situation and assessing the challenges before him. There must be struggle, but your war should always be just.

Many warriors of *Jihad* such as myself fight a three-pronged battle. The *jihad* against the enemy is our most obvious function. The *jihad* against the devil is to maintain your devout intention and action. And the war against ourselves reminds us to resist the most obvious decisions and to plan. The hunter who fights without direction or care for those around him is a barbarian. Take the Crusaders. When they conquered Jerusalem they celebrated God's so-called faith in them by raping women and slaughtering children. Where's the victory in despoiling your own gains? A wise soldier knows when to defeat opponents through force, piety or even through simple words. Unfortunately,

Where are the Bleeding Saints?

By: Wildcatter184

Some of us back home are said to willingly sacrifice themselves for the benefit of others. Supposedly they have their own capabilities, too. I call them saints, but sorry chums, the Arabs don't consider saints a unique brand of *kiswah*. Islam admires saints because it means they had the religious stones to hurt or kill themselves for the faith, but they aren't a separate brand of people. Every hunter has the ability to martyr himself for the cause. *Kiswah* of the *Jihad* can sacrifice their lives by holding off a horde of beasties while their friends escape. Those who follow *Ramadan* become saints when they lose themselves in their roles, while *Salat* hunters earn that mantle when they assume responsibility for the sins of others. Everyone can be a "saint." You've just got to have a strong enough will (which, by the way, makes you a good Muslim, not a hunter). Some Arabs believe that the fervour to become a saint even grants certain capabilities.

some *kiswah* of the *Jihad* act more like Crusaders than Muslims. To them, the enemy falls into easy categories based on geography, politics, religion or even gender.

Historical Relevance

By: al-Amin

Are we unique to the current day or are we part of a long line of hunters who emerge every few centuries to fight the *akhira*? Before we all treated the ancient legends and myths as fables, but can we afford that luxury now? All mythologies speak of great hunters, warriors and sages who, on the merit of their extraordinary strength or ingenuity, quelled the supernatural. These tales could certainly suit our own exploits if we were exposed to the *fellaheen* of today.

I do believe we possess a history, if not ancestors, from which to draw inspiration. I also know that our proof lies within the ancient songs of the Bedouins. Tribal music relies on repetition and refinement of existing models, meaning that many of the songs played centuries ago still survive relatively intact to this day. The music of the nomads of Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia does not change rhythm or emphasis. It is purely creative and not representational of anything. Like *kufic* script, however, the music carries the message of the musician, even his original voice, in the form of a mystical recording. Tarjiman and I discovered this a few months ago when listening to Bedouins play an old piece. We heard a broken and disconnected voice droning through the *mismar* (a twin-piped clarinet), the tambourine-like *daff* and the stringed *rebab*. Nobody else seemed to hear it. We spoke to the musicians, who must have thought us mad, but they agreed to vary certain notes until the voice emerged stronger. It was still broken like a cup, but a voice spoke of its battles against the supernatural and its struggles against the *jinn*.

We now listen to the vast repository of Bedouin music, but encounter the odd scattered revelation only in Sufi compositions designed to play with repeated notes and that are accompanied by poetry. Nobody knows how to play these pieces properly and we cannot record them ourselves. We don't even know where to start. Was this a *kiswah* ability we forgot, or is witchcraft involved? All we can do is collect the songs like shards of a shattered dish. We have no glue to piece them together. The seeming messages in this music might be the only evidence of our past, and the meaning is infuriatingly incomplete. Because traditional Arabic music relies on a unique quarter-note composition, too many variations have corrupted the original message.

If a song speaks of anything beyond the odd personal victory or the haunting recitation of personal tragedy, it is that we are not alone. I believe the *kiswah* exist like waves against the shore. We are never constant, but emerge when our people need us the most. Perhaps we lived amid Islam's Golden Age, when the legendary Talib worked alongside mystics, poets and sages to preserve the legends of the *jinn* for posterity. Before then, maybe we existed in Biblical times as recounted by the legends of the mighty Samson and the wise Solomon who conquered and vanquished 72 evil *jinn*. Perhaps centuries—even millennia—separate one generation of heroes from the next. We simply don't know.

We may never profit directly from the advice of our predecessors, but that might be for the best. Perhaps their

The Voices

By: Tarjiman220

While I cannot share everything al-Amin and I discovered through our musical research, the following is a good start. It is the best account I can make of the story imparted implicitly to me through the song we heard. It is relatively complete compared to the solitary word or sentence extracted from some songs, but even with our success, you see the shortcomings of our discovery.

The tears fell [unknown] *roses, quenching no blossom,* [unknown] *stone heaven unbroken* [unknown] *for roots of flowers without sunlight... never* [unknown] *sunlight again... am I forgotten in this manner... no* [unknown] *than spent arrows upon the battlefield? ... No, I am the torch* [unknown] [unknown] *world of worms. I am his blade* [unknown] *divine* [unknown]... *let the afreet* [Tarjiman: A type of terrible *jinn*] *come* [unknown] [unknown] [unknown] *him* [unknown] [unknown] *way... I am caretaker* [unknown] [unknown] *warrens beneath this happy Roman* [unknown] [unknown] *Felix* [?]... *I hunt alone, I hunt with* [unknown].

Segments of this song are incomprehensible, but I believe I understand a portion of the text. The reference to *Roman*, *happy* and *Felix* might relate to the Saudi peninsula. The ancient Romans called it *Arabia Felix* or "happy Arabia" (possibly because it was inhospitable), though I'm not certain the word is actually *Felix*. Whomever hid the message within the song might speak about the reputed rivers beneath the Saudi sands, said by Bedouins to link large oases together. If these rivers exist, we've never found them.

words or even actions no longer hold merit in this age of telecommunications and the Internet. Maybe their truth of "an eye for an eye" is no longer necessary in an age when we seek global enlightenment. Perhaps it is Allah's way of teaching us that yesterday's truths are best left to yesterday. I, for one, am intrigued to have learned that we might have existed before in other forms, but it does nothing to still my seeking mind. I am no different for it. Why would I seek answers in a past that holds no relevance for my future?

God's Clever Lies

By: Tarjiman220

The following claim came from the great convention that brought many of us together. You already know we believe Allah gave us these powers, but I thought it unfair to present one viewpoint alone. All voices have a place here. I cannot play judge for what I believe is right or wrong. Although many *kiswah* disregarded this next argument, we listened because the thought behind it was foreign to our experience (if not troubling in its assertions). Alas, I cannot attribute it to any writer, for it emerged from amidst a sea of conflicting thoughts and statements. I therefore list it under the voice of *Dho 'l-Nun*, or those who subscribe to outlandish beliefs.

Dho 'l-Nun: Maybe it is simple for you to accept that Allah brings you these gifts because you do not have to question your reality. What do you fear? Are you afraid your power comes from something not of Allah? Are you afraid you are harbingers of a new faith or even of a new God? You cannot tell me the thought doesn't plague your hearts already. I can tell it does by how quickly you dismiss any argument refuting Allah as your benefactor.

What would you do if you discovered you were the prophet of a new religion? I acknowledge Islam as Allah's third revelation following Judaism and Christianity, but who says it ends there? What if we are the heralds of a fourth or fifth revelation, a contemporary testament to bring the world into the age of technology? Worse yet, what if we are the executioners of a frightened faith unwilling to make way for its successor? Given our talent for destruction and murder, it is entirely possible we are nothing more than slayers killing the acolytes of a new belief or the potential parents of a next prophet. And what better way to do so than make us believe we see depraved monsters. You cannot tell me these Nightly Visitants haven't already crafted illusions for our benefit alone with such words as "THEY DO NOT LIVE" or "IT KILLS." If Allah truly speaks to us, we would know it is Him beyond all doubt. Still, we question and we wonder about the Nightly Visitants. This alone says it is not God, and we should have realized it when we all heard different things. Why say "ABOMINATION WALKS" to some and "IT IS IN PAIN" to others?

Perhaps the voices say different things to confuse us and make us bicker. Our myths already tell us that *jinn* can craft illusions to fool the wisest men, and what better way than playing on our vanity. "Allah chose me to make the world better." "Allah gave me strength to fight monsters." Allah does not confuse his followers. When He spoke to Moses and Muhammad, they knew it was His voice and His miracles beyond any doubt. We, however, have

nothing but skepticism. Something plays with us. I fear we are the true monsters of this world.

You may refute what I say, but I am not alone with these suspicions. Some of us already fear something wrongly guides us to destroy good and spare evil. We fear we are agents of an entirely new but false God. Worse yet, some among us may have probably already embraced this thought and operate in hidden cults. Their worship varies, but I hear some fall upon the pagan influences of the *Jahiliyyah* and worship the ancient Gods Hubal, al-Ussa, Ya'uq and Nasr. Another group believes in a truly alien precept, thanks to a British hunter in the region. They follow a strange fusion of alchemy (based on the treatise of the Book of Ostanes that speaks of the virtues of different planets) and the London-based Aetherius Society (which believes in "Masters" or powerful spirit messengers dwelling on such planets as Venus and Mars). This bastardization of faith coincides with the Aetherius Society's beliefs that members received vivid messages from their Masters as instructions, presumably like our *al-Ghariyyan*. These hunters draw followers and worshippers from Aetherius who believe them new prophets of these alien spirits.

Consider this carefully brothers and sisters. Is something using us to bring about a new Time of Ignorance? Are we hammers to shatter Allah's mirror? Perhaps we fear the voices are not Allah's or those of His angels, because if they were, we wouldn't suffer through these terrible doubts. Perhaps we already know the answers. We just fear the questions more.

Hunter Code

By: Muezzin318

Allah w'Akbar. Allah is truly great and merciful, for he gives us a tool like no other. The language of all Muslims is indeed a diverse chorus, but Arabic (the language of the Koran) alone brings us together. I hear Christian hunters wondering why their religion is not as equally fortunate as ours, but their Church long abandoned their original tongue of Jesus (Hebrew) and even that of Latin. Perhaps, had they kept their roots, Allah would have also blessed Christians with a means to understand one another.

More than a method to understand His words, Arabic is our poetry, our history and our art. It is greater than a language of the faithful. It is the food of our souls. Arabic originates from the script of the ancient Nabataeans, whose ghosts still haunt us to this day. It currently includes 28 letters with up to four different forms apiece. The Koranic script of Iran and Pakistan possesses more letters to accommodate that which Arabic lacks, but we all share similar standards across the Near and Far East.

The two traditions that turned our tongues into art were our penchant for calligraphy, a trait we share with the Japanese and Chinese, and the laws forbidding us from creating representational artwork. Early Islam prohibited artists from recreating images of humans, animals and even of Allah for fear we would return to the veneration of idols. Instead, we found inspiration in geometry and in the words of the Koran. What the West calls "arabesque," for example, is geometric forms or floral patterns we use to create designs. When calligraphers combined these patterns with the Koran and turned entire *Surahs* into artwork, the basis for the language of *kiswah* emerged. In turn, this script art evolved into different forms. Some use angular lines to create complex geometric patterns. Others mirror forms, so one design is a reflection of its other half. A few more rely on imaginative figures to mimic the appearance of certain animals or objects.

I truly wish I could explain how we communicate through our script or why certain styles work better than others, but I cannot. All I know is truly complex scripts, the lines of which overlap and fall into grand flourish such as in angular *kufic* (which appears as a verbal maze or even snowflake), in *muthanna* (the mirrored form of elaborate writing) and in the condensed lines of royal *diwan* or even in *thuluth* (animal-form script), all transmit our mind and will.

I once spoke with a fellow hunter who claimed his awakening was far in excess of others' experience. He claimed to have received revelations from Allah at his change. He said it was not the formation of the Islamic language that laid the foundations for our means of communicating, but the discovery of paper. During Islam's Golden Age, our burgeoning empire spread its wings from Spain, across North Africa and past Pakistan. Following the Battle of Talas, Islamic forces to the East captured a Chinese paper maker and discovered how to mass-produce paper. They took that secret back to Baghdad, where scholar houses — including the House of Wisdom — processed and distributed knowledge and texts translated from Hebrew, Latin, Indian and Greek. My ally claimed that paper was not the only secret taken from the Chinese. The papers and texts included Chinese calligraphy in a complex pattern of symbols pregnant with meaning beyond what was written. The first Arabs exposed to these words, he claims, understood their meaning and became the first *kiswah*. They worked with Umayyad- and Abbasid-dynasty artists and calligraphers to incorporate the symbols into the growing artwork of *kufic* script to preserve its use (a gift seemingly beyond our capacity to duplicate). They never realized other Muslims would engrave this "Holy Geometry" on vessels and upon the onion domes of the mosques, thus serving as ancient lines of communications. I am unsure if any of this idea holds merit, but it is an interesting theory.

We also wonder why our ability to communicate through *kufic* script remains regional and does not extend beyond the Middle East. I believe it is because this region is a three-fold cradle of Allah's faith. Christianity, Judaism and Islam all began here through prophets of the desert, and the ancient centers of faith act as a grounding nexus. Mecca is Islam's holiest city because it holds the greatest shrine of the Ka'bah itself, the base of Allah's throne on Earth. The second site is Jerusalem, the holiest city of the world and the reputed site where the last war would take place before Judgment Day. For Christians, it is where unbelievers tried and executed Jesus before he rose again. For Muslims, Muhammad ascended to Paradise where the sacred Dome of the Rock now stands. For Jews, Jerusalem is their ancestral home, the capital of their promised empire. Is it any surprise the word is strongest here, where the three main religions of God intersect with the force of millions of faithful?

CHAPTER 3:
TO EACH HIS GIFT'S

You see many among them vie with one another in sin and wickedness and practice what is unlawful. Evil is what they do.

— The Koran, *Surah*: 5:62 [The Table]

BRING THE THUNDER

By: Tarjiman220

From *Surah* 2:18 (The Cow) ...*Or like those who, beneath a dark storm-cloud charged with thunder and lightning, thrust their fingers in their ears at the sound of every thunder-clap for fear of death (God thus encompasses the unbelievers).*

Bring the thunder, my children. Bring it crashing down upon the heads of those who would harm or oppose you. The thunder should echo in your every step, for it is His voice. Your actions carry with them the divine retribution of His cause. Your every movement must bear the certainty of thunder lest you fall to the heart's killer: doubt.

Let us assume for a moment that we do not question our purpose or the presence of beasts in this world. Let us assume we recognize good by its merits and evil by its actions. When we hunt, we must believe we understand these questions in our own breasts, lest hesitation rip our beating hearts from our chests. "Bring the thunder" is not just an aphorism to inspire others. It is a personal rallying cry from which to draw inner strength and remember that we must act like thúnder: bold and certain.

Bring the thunder and recognize the world you enter is unlike any other. We have tried to prepare you with insight into who we are and how we think, but experience is the sole teacher of merit. To understand Arab *kiswah*, you must stand alongside us and face what we face. You must grasp how we carry out our hunt and realize it is vastly different from how you in the West operate. We are bereft of certain luxuries, but we also possess unique advantages. Understanding these differences adds another weapon to your arsenal.

Your largest concern as a hunter in the Middle East is understanding local perception. You must give forethought to how others distinguish your conduct, and how that insight alters your course of action. Will the authorities mistake your behavior for the antics of a petty criminal or will they believe you a terrorist and state agitator? Are you attacking someone who belongs to a distinct political or religious group? Your fight with the supernatural could unwittingly create a social backlash and trigger an unintended feud. Think of the ramifications of a Christian seemingly attacking a Muslim in Beirut, or a Palestinian fighting a Jew, or an Iraqi assaulting anyone in Baghdad. The public does not believe in monsters, so its immediate response is to see the attack as religious hatred, clan enmity or even political dissatisfaction. Know when this misinterpretation works in your favor and know when to avoid the threat entirely.

This is perhaps the single greatest truth I can impart before you explore the reality of hunting in the Middle East. Understand this lesson well and you might survive in my part of the world.

Know Thy Enemy

By: Hajirah252

We face an enemy without understanding its true strengths or many facets. We *kiswah* speak of *Adites*, *Midianites* and *Amalikites* as though we know what the beings are, but in truth we know nothing. We simply hang names on them from fables as some means of identifying them, yet we know so very little. And then there are those creatures that simply defy all accounting. Not even legend can contain them. And yet, if you are to know what we face in the Middle East, we must share what we do know, even if it can be held in one hand.

Our greatest obstacle in understanding our enemy lies with the inconsistencies of myths and stories. At first, we thought of simply calling *akhira* "*jinn*" after the spirits of smokeless fire, *dhabi* after the jackal-beasts that prey on desert travelers, *ghuls* after the cannibal monsters of the graveyard, all of which came from our various legends. We soon learned, though, that few enemies fit these molds. Many of us feared (and still fear) that by identifying *akhira* according to classic interpretations, we deceive other hunters into believing these beasts also possess classical weaknesses. Legends claim one blow kills a *ghul* but two bring it back, or that if you compliment a monster and call it "mother" it will treat you kindly. I know of several Bedouin hunters who lost their lives following these suppositions, not only because they believed them but because the monsters used these legends against us!

Once we realized that our presumptions of monsters were trapped in past perceptions, we tried changing them into the fallen races of the Koran. Their inclusion here does not mean everyone uses these identifications or understands the basic distinctions we've established. That means many among us still battle *jinn* and *ghuls* and call them as such. I have also met hunters who claim they can force these creatures back into their mythological roles and slay them using their classical weaknesses. I have yet to see proof of such deeds, however.

The following supernatural "species," as best as we have identified them, bear the names of fallen races — giants from to the Koran who became too arrogant for their own good. Many Muslims realize the people of *Ad*, *Midian*, *Thalmud* and *Amalik* were probably tribes that worshipped pagan gods and died before or during the arrival of Islam. The Koran turns them into object lessons, and we try to turn them into monsters to continue the lesson. Then again, maybe there was truth to these people's existence. Maybe they were the giants of old.

Thalmudites

By: Hajirah252

My fellow *kiswah* possess skills in fighting the walking dead, thanks to their jobs or where they live. The following are not my tales. Instead, they come from various sources (with their assent) and represent the different manners in which we combat or deal with the restless in the Middle East. I have transcribed them as best I can, but the spirit of the author is still there.

By: Sedat

Hajirah asked me to give testimony of my hunt, so I offer this to my Western allies whom I'll likely never meet. I work as a paramedic for the Red Crescent, the Middle East's Red Cross, and I own an ambulance which local Red Crescent chapters help me stock with medicines for emergencies. I also realize that knowing where and when to hunt is critical. My job is to offer humanitarian assistance in war zones or as disaster relief, which means I have traveled to nearly every Arab country. Frankly, these are the best hunting times. When war or disaster strikes, it throws the local authorities into chaos and occupies their attention. This is also when I see the greatest number of walking dead emerge from among the victims.

With the Turkish earthquake that killed 17,000, the earthquake in Afghanistan and India, the drought in Iran, the Iraqi-Kurd conflict, cholera outbreaks in Syria and Israeli rocket attacks on southern Lebanon, we have our hands full, either helping victims or destroying the walking dead that appear with increased frequency. We visit the mass burial sites where unidentified victims are processed. We may not encounter *akhira* immediately, but a local worker might relate a story of a victim "mistaken for dead" who left under his own power.

The dead are strong and seemingly oblivious to pain. To fight them, I have reinforced the front of my ambulance with an army truck fender. I run *akhira* over when I can. If anyone sees me, I merely tell the authorities I saw the man looting from a nearby store or home. The police turn a blind eye to killing looters in times of emergency. If the situation prohibits me from such action, I rely on local (and well-armed) soldiers to help me. I find an army jeep or anyone else with a military vehicle and point them at the monster with accusations of looting. When they confront it, I reveal a glimpse of the creature's true nature through my gift and frighten them enough to open fire with their heavy weapons. If the creature is about to overwhelm them, I intercede as best I can.

In this fashion, I appear the hero and not the aggressor. This is a useful technique even outside of disaster zones. If you call the police or military's attention to something, then help them put it down, you protect your involvement in the situation as strictly humanitarian. Often, the police or military allow you to slip away quietly, partly out of gratitude, partly because you shamed them by helping them and partly because they do not understand how you accomplished acts or how you made events transpire.

By: Fatwa243

I hate the walking dead, because it's hard as hell to stop them. One technique a friend and I use involves a length of piano wire, tied on either end to a thick shaft of wood or a metal bar about six inches long. After locating what you call a rot or shambler, we follow it in

Humanitarian Services

By: Sedat

I became *kiswah* while providing disaster relief during Turkey's recent earthquake; my partner became *jar* — a witness to the supernatural — then as well. Since Turkey, we travel together in our ambulance and can reach most disaster zones in under a week. The local authorities always let us through without stamping our passports, and we are invisible thanks to the deluge of relief workers. We hunt with near impunity.

Foreign *kiswah* wishing to hunt in Middle Eastern countries can benefit by joining the United Nations Volunteers or the Red Cross/Red Crescent Volunteers. When either war or disaster strikes, which is often, offer help at the border or petition the local chapter of your organization. They expedite your entry into the afflicted region, often with few questions, since they are always short-handed. While helping victims, you should find plenty of predators to eliminate. The supernatural seems drawn or fueled by misery. One warning, though: Fulfill your duties as a volunteer first. If you give the Red Crescent a bad reputation for your actions, you make it more difficult for others hoping to help the needy.

two cars until it's alone or on a relatively quiet street at night. We then toss the length of piano wire between the two cars and loop each end around the open door frame. Shut the door, and that holds the wire and bar in place. Then we drive at the walking dead, headlights blazing so it doesn't spot the wire. Damn thing doesn't really react in most cases because the two cars are passing on either side and Egyptians are crazy enough to drive this way normally. We guillotine the bastard at 60 to 80 kph. If it goes down, we run out, douse it with gasoline and light the match. If it's still up but hooked on the wire, we pass on either side of another vehicle and smash the thing into the back of someone's car. That snaps the wire in most cases.

Two things to remember in this drive-by guillotining are to always wear hoods so nobody sees your face, and to always switch plates with other cars so the police don't trace you. It may not work all the time, but we've killed our fair share of the dead this way.

Amalikites

By: Hajirah252

These words come to me with the blessing of Abu Qutayba and *Yammah* Selma. Abu Qutayba leads a tribe with the Sirhan Clan of Saudi Arabia. He travels with his Bedouin kin across the deserts of Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia, hunting monsters in the wilds of the Middle East. He's also indicative of *kiswah* who "conscript" their own families to fight the supernatural. *Yammah* Selma, in turn, is a wise woman from one of many tribes belonging

to the great Bedouin clan, the 'Aneza of Syria. *Yammah* means "mother," but it is also an exclamation of fear. In the case of this old *sheikha* or wise woman, she warrants her title. I sat in her tent long into the night, drinking sweet tea with mint, eating salted melon seeds and listening to her wisdom with the other female hunters who've sought her help. Hers is a remarkable existence, for she claims she was *kiswah* long before any of us.

By: Abu Qutayba

The greatest weapon a *kiswah* possesses is his family. Even before the Prophet Muhammad and into today, the tribe is family and the tribe shares responsibility. Because of this, a feud against one is a feud against all. It is only right that *kiswah* inform their kin concerning any enemy who might murder them in retribution. This is why I hunt with my tribe, for if my conduct condemns them, then at least they deserve to face the enemy on their feet.

My family and I protect the northern territories of Arabia, Syria and Jordan, where ghosts plague the ancient routes and oases of the Nabataeans. They move across the desert, forming dust devils and storms in their wake, but they do not frighten us. Fear is their milk and honey, and knowing that allows us to rob them of nourishment. Instead, we make homes of their ancient ruins and wait at night, repeating their names. There is power in this, for like *jinn* and *ghuls*, they dwell just within earshot and know when someone speaks ill of them. We call them by recounting stories of their misdeeds, and with tales of magic. When they attack us, we perform our wardance and fight their evil together.

This is the only way to battle ghosts, for they do not fight alone. They possess a legion of cohorts, so why struggle without the benefit of others? These creatures wallow in misery and fear. A man without family is bereft of his greatest strengths and subject to the spirits' poisons. When you fight alone, there are times when death seems welcome, even pleasurable, compared to the hardships of life. It is easy to surrender knowing misfortune ends with you. But when you fight with your family and see your uncles and brothers in danger, then death is no longer appealing. You continue fighting with every pinch of clay Allah fashioned to create you, because you cannot envision or accept that death awaits your family. This is the way it should be. Perhaps this is why we band together, whether with family or allies, because we seek strength outside of us. We must care for someone other than ourselves. If it cannot be family, then we form new tribes with other *kiswah*. In turn, this strength of unity robs ghosts of their ability to frighten us while we rob them of nourishment. By strength of will, we help kin understand that there are other evils out there beyond man and *jinn*.

By: Jibril

Sometimes it's simplest to leave angry spirits alone, as I recently discovered. About eighteen years ago, there was a large village on the border with Lebanon called Hammas. It was an old community with few amenities in the way of clean running water or electricity, but the villagers knew that others enjoyed these luxuries. So they demanded that the government improve their condition. Syria's President, Hafez al-Assad, retaliated by sending in soldiers, tanks and bulldozers. The military murdered the entire village and flattened it into the earth. Today, there's no proof that it ever existed, and nobody knew about the atrocity until two years after the fact.

Spirits seeking retribution for their murders now haunt Hammas. From what I've seen, they're like a cloud of wasps, acting as one and overwhelming anyone foolish enough to stay the night. After the spirits slaughtered several soldiers, the military stopped sending patrols to investigate the complaints and disappearances of travelers. The army now turns a blind eye to the region, and we can do nothing. Hammas is a nest of angry hornets. It remains an open sore in Syria until we're strong enough to gather an army of *kiswah* against the spirits.

I can only treat Hammas as a lesson about understanding the nature of our opposition. Had I not known the history of this village, I would have wandered in blindly, not realizing what fate awaited me. One trick for *kiswah*, foreign or domestic, is that all Arabs, especially the Syrians and Lebanese, are a chatty people. If you want the unofficial history of any region, neighborhood or even building, ask the locals. They gladly share any gossip they know (over coffee and Arabic pastries), including strange occurrences, murders and rumors of ghosts. Even in this age of television, Arabs are still avid storytellers and are often receptacles of decades worth of local "unofficial" history, thanks to their parents and grandparents. If you suspect a creature infests a location, talk to the locals and see what insight they offer. They might know who haunts a place and how that person died. Knowing that goes a long way toward diminishing risks.

ADITES

By: *Yammah* Selma

Leave men to rule the day, for this is the time Allah demands they provide for us. Nighttime has always belonged to women, for only we can speak of the supernatural in these hours without drawing its attention. It is appropriate that we fight the *jinn* and the *ghul* beneath the moon, while leaving the men to fight those beasts that do not fear daylight.

Of all the walking dead, the ones best left to us are those that flush their cheeks with warm blood. Remember that once before, they too were living. They remember Allah's laws and they remember what it means to be pious. Because of this, you can use their *ird* ("sexual honor" or a man's responsibility to protect a woman's integrity) against them. As *ghul* who feed on blood, they may not believe in *ird*, but their memories as Muslims are enough to give them pause. Strike in that moment, for you do not have a second chance.

When you confront a *ghul*, bear these lessons in mind. You must be circumcised and chaste, for Allah does not protect women who fail to safeguard their honor and reputation. You must always fight alongside other women,

Satih

By: Muru'a

Not all legends are fables. I hunted after a beast whose very identity remained a mystery until only recently. This was when I uncovered a myth from the *Jahiliyyah* (Time of Ignorance) concerning a sage named *Satih* who was boneless except for his skull. I do not know whether my monster and this *Satih* are one and the same, but the similarities are too great to ignore.

This modern "*Satih*" is nothing but a sack of thin skin. You can see straight through it like the frail carapace of a grasshopper. Its body is devoid of bones (except for the skull, which shines clearly through gossamer flesh), organs, muscles or even blood. I have seen this *Satih* in two forms, the first with its body folded beneath its skull like a pillow. It spoke to a cult of pagan worshippers and offered them heretical advice. In this fashion, it is a mouthpiece for the pagan gods and it speaks in many voices depending on whether one seeks answers from *Al-Lat*, *Al-Zuhara*, *Hubal* or *Wadd* (all ancient tribal deities).

Its second form, which is far more dangerous, is when it uses a decapitated corpse as a vessel (it often uses the bodies of executed criminals). Its skin becomes a glove for the rotting body and its skull sits atop the severed stump of the corpse's neck. It is a chilling sight made more frightening by *Satih*'s ability to unmake its enemies mentally or physically by speaking to them (in a woman's voice). I believe this power comes from the star-goddess *Al-Zuhara*, who according to legend learned the true name of Allah and ascended into the sky to become the constellations. I believe *Satih* uses Allah's name to drive her enemies mad or to kill them by uncreating them.

Satih currently hunts and kills Islam's wisest philosophers, sages and holy men in a quiet campaign of terror against all Muslims. I've have tried to stop this creature, but it travels through the Middle East protected by a cult of devout mortal acolytes.

for it is improper to associate with men who are not husband, brother or father. Use your gifts and your *ird* as your shield, but always carry with you wood from the pomegranate, cedar, banana or palm tree that is sharpened to a point. Because these trees are in Paradise, plunging them into the black heart of a *ghul* often paralyzes it with fear of Allah's retribution. You may then burn the beast afterward with hot embers or may leave it to the sun.

By: Hajirah252

Praise Allah for his beneficence, for he provides us with a haven from *Adites* and protects His faithful. I know this is true through the words of a faithful v*mp*r* who says that Saudi Arabia is anathema to their kind. They call it "The Keening," and say the sun troubles their sleeping daytime with an unceasing lion's roar. Mecca is also safe from infidel *Adites* and in fact protected by *Thalmudites* who embrace the words of the Prophet. In turn, Allah halts their decay and keeps them in a state of balance so they do not rot further.

The words of this *Adite* hold true with another confession: They cannot enter mosques, because the ground burns their hearts and boils their blood. If you seek sanctuary from an *Adite*, find refuge within a mosque. Allah's power is great within its walls and only faithful *Adites* can enter. If they are truly pious, they will not fight you there, but neither should you instigate combat. The Koran clearly states in *Surah* 2:191 — "*...but do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque unless they fight you there. But if they fight you, kill them. Such is the reward of the unbelievers.*"

Midianites

By: Tarjiman220

I've confronted shapechangers and wizards before, and often feared for my life before their terrible arts. Their power to change form and cast spells is dreadful, indeed, but they seem the most human of our enemies and the most familiar with mortal customs. Do not let this deceive you, for these wizards can cast spells, take the form of towering wolves and dogs and even control the insects and snakes around them. A few even corrupt animals to serve as their minions and impart the beasts with powers while rotting their flesh. In this fashion, perhaps the *Midianites* are truest of the *jinn*.

Never confront these beasts alone and always carry weapons against them. If you cannot procure weapons, you're better off avoiding them at all costs. Some of my brethren advocate tricking the military or local tribes into confronting these *akhira*, but I cannot condone this flagrant disregard for *fellaheen* lives. Your best hope lies in ambushing *Midianites* before they can react.

You must also fear the mortal allies of these fallen giants. It appears several tribes across the Middle East pay tribute to these creatures for protection and receive it in return. It is an ancient tradition among Bedouins by which large clans defend small ones in exchange for money or livestock. The tradition also survived in the form of a religious tax when ancient Islam required that Christians and Jews pay a tariff to safeguard their right to worship God in their own churches and synagogues. It appears that several *Midianites* still turn to this practice of protection. I myself attacked a shapeshifter only to flee from a tribe of angry Bedouin. This is a reminder that not all enemies are monsters.

By: Hajirah252

I do not know who spoke the following words, for they appeared late one night while I spoke with Tarjiman using the *kufic* script. Between the two of us, we remembered what was said, but before I present it, you should know that we consider spiders good luck. According to Islamic folklore, when Muhammad fled to Medina from Mecca, he hid in a cave to avoid his rivals. A spider covered the cave entrance with a web, fooling his

pursuers into believing the cave was abandoned. Since then, the spider has held special status for us.

By: Unknown

You think you understand this world and all its glory? You sleep and dream the slumber of fools! I was like you, blind and oblivious to my place in this world. I slaughtered indiscriminately and reveled in the blood of those I believed guilty. I was so blind. Somewhere in my heart of hearts, I knew what I did was wrong, but I didn't realize it until I stumbled upon the Mosque of Webs.

For weeks, I'd been stalking a killer who drained his victims of their blood and encased them in a cocoon of spider webs. Slowly, I realized these so-called victims were nothing more than killers and idolaters themselves. They took women and dishonored their integrity, they murdered and stole from honest people, and they worshipped gods other than Allah. By the time I found the culprits, I had little intention of killing them. They were pious Muslims like myself and, I discovered, the holiest of creatures — spiders. Are you surprised? Did Solomon not say ants possessed a kingdom not unlike man? There are more nations than our own and I choose another allegiance, one humbler and more devout than ours.

I have now begun recruiting other *kiswah* and *fellaheen* to the spiders' cause, ridding the world of sinners and heathens. We recognize the true monsters and we struggle justly. We fight alongside the spider-people, killing the undeserving and protecting Allah's holiest creatures, be they ant or man. I tell you this in the hopes you will join us. If you refuse, then we know you cast your allegiance with our enemies and must pay.

By: Hajirah252

This isn't the first time I've heard of the Mosque of Webs. In fact, I believe I've seen it in visions… and I am not alone. I know of a few *kiswah* who report seeing the place in their dreams, but we cannot agree on its location. I believe it is within the heart of ancient Damascus, while others point to Cairo, Baghdad, Alexandria and even Mecca itself. Our visions are the same, however. Each time, we see an ancient mosque, perhaps once beautiful with an ornate onion dome, golden minarets and marble floors. Now it is a bleak place, hidden behind a tight maze of ancient streets, and shut away with a sealed gate, darkened windows and spider webs as thick as jungle vines that cover it like a net. People hurry past, not seeing it or ignoring what their minds scream cannot be there. They apparently forget its presence a footstep or two later, but the mosque never leaves. The most terrible of all terrors are the thousands of tiny spiders covering the place, which run in and out of its darkened windows like insects skittering into a corpse's mouth.

I wish I knew where it is or could relate the overwhelming sense of foreboding that issues from the place, but I cannot. Even if I could find it, I doubt I'd have the courage to enter, whether alone or with a host of allies.

Know Thyself

By: Tarjiman220

Regardless of your belief, whether you profess that Allah, Shaitan, *jinn* or ancient gods did this to us, a terrible duty has fallen upon our shoulders with no warning or regard. It strikes us with the irrefutability of a terminal illness, but we do everything in our power to believe that nothing has happened to us, that we are still who we always were. Yet, here we are, gifted whether we wish it or not, seeing *akhira* whether we want to or not, and fighting for our lives regardless of our hopes of yesterday.

It's funny in a way. Many *kiswah* consider their capabilities a curse for reasons other than what you might suspect. We do not believe in Christianity's Original Sin, under which we are born bearing the weight of Adam and Eve's actions. Instead, we believe Allah cursed Adam with manual labor. Where Paradise once offered him a life of luxury, Allah turned Adam mortal and forced him to work for his fruits. Since then, Arabs have held an ingrained suspicion of anything requiring one to sully his hands with soil and sweat (hence why we inadvertently use *fellaheen* or "tillers of the soil" to mean ignorant or backward — and the people who don't know the truth). Some contend this outlook is simply a reaction to working beneath the hot Middle Eastern sun, but in any case it explains why Arabs (mostly those of the Arabian Peninsula) rely on foreign workers for their manual chores.

Since we as *kiswah* must now toil to serve the Middle East's people and protect them from the creatures, some of us believe being *kiswah* is Adam's curse inflicted upon us. Where we once lived comfortably, we are suddenly beset by hard labor, tilling the harshest and most barren earth of all. Of course, many of us know there is no such curse and we work for the gratification of self-worth and to save our loved ones. But others still view drudgery and toil as a fate unworthy of their standing. As testament to our spirit, however, almost all *kiswah* silence their complaints and bear their duties honorably. And yet, I also know of at least one rich Saudi and one Kuwaiti who pay Filipino, Pakistani and Thai hunters handsomely to fight the cause for them, as though this was simply a manual-labor issue. Many of us find this behavior sickening, but cannot deny that such practices occur. As a Western expression states: It takes all kinds.

Before Us There Was Us

Regardless of piety or sense of familial bonds, irrelevant of past accomplishments or failures, the imbuing makes us all equal through our common ignorance. For one brief moment, we are brethren and sisters in confusion. Then we reclaim our individuality by how we contend with our new existence. Most often, we must deal with our past lives, for therein lie our greatest concerns. Rather than simply take my word on faith, hear these testimonies and know that I echo the pain of others.

Family

By: al-Amin

I believe Lebanese, Iraqi and Iranian *kiswah* enter the cause with the same advantage, if it can be called that. We've already known a life of war and hardship, so our condition changes little upon becoming soldiers on a different front. This is simply a new threat to our survival, and we fall back upon old practices such as stockpiling food and medical equipment, staying away from windows, keeping the lights off at home, and most importantly, remaining close to family.

If we've learned one lesson from past strife it is that loved ones are important, even necessary for our survival. Lebanese, Iraqi and Iranian *kiswah* may not approach the issue with the same dedication as those who bring their families into the wardance, but we still live and rely on parents, brothers, sisters and even children. It stabilizes our sanity and reminds us we do not fight alone. Nobody survives a war on his own. Conversely, it is not uncommon for Arabs to live with their families, even after marriage. In war, this becomes increasingly prevalent since families flock together for mutual protection, support and socialization. If a relative's house is bombed, you cannot refuse him a roof. If there is fighting in your brother's neighborhood, you must play host to his family. It is the way of Arabs.

So if family is important, how do we protect them while still fulfilling our duties? We cannot usually reveal to our beloved what it is we have become or what we know about the world. Our families would not understand and would think us mad. Alternatively, they would seek to become involved in a conflict they cannot understand and would be harmed or killed.

Some of us simply maintain contact with our families from afar, for comfort, but keep quiet about our expeditions. This is perhaps the best solution in the end, because nobody is at risk. In these situations we remove all addressed envelopes, address books, family pictures and even phone numbers on speed-dial from our homes. If we can survive without identification, we hide important papers in a safe-deposit box as well. The less connecting us to our loved ones, the better.

Some *kiswah* dare to live with their families, which means loved ones can scrutinize the hunters' activities, and trouble may be led back to the home. If moving out is impossible because a *kiswah* is married, owns his house or provides for his family, one option is to lie. Some hunters claim they've found nighttime employment and blame all bumps and scrapes on accidents at work. This is a short-lived solution when the household sees no extra money from this supposed job (and trust me, they are nosy enough to notice). A rare few live in politically charged homes and claim membership with movements like the *intifada* or Hamas. These supposed connections explain injuries, weapons and poverty.

A very select few among hunters confide in their families. They believe doing so liberates them from familial obligations — that their cause is more important than their connections to their loved ones — but this is a dangerous course. Assuming the family listens and doesn't hospitalize the hunter, he has just changed their perception of the world, even if just for the little that they can understand. Consider the impact of the hunt on us for a moment. We confront the supernatural with minimal instruction, innate weapons to keep monsters at bay and with some wherewithal to remain sane. Our families have none of these assurances, yet can be subjected to all the frightening burdens of truth, even if they can't actually grasp the enormity of the truth. Just a glimpse at the horrors can drive them mad. Why sacrifice them unnecessarily? Just for the sake of not being alone?

To me, anyone who dreams of using the wardance on loved ones is an even greater fool. They expose *fellaheen* to grievous mental and physical danger, all for the sake of unburdening their isolation. We are supposed to protect the *fellaheen*. No, I believe it would be better to vanish from our families' world than try to confront them with a truth that can only overwhelm them.

Work

By: Fatwa243

You have been shown that monsters walk the world. Your world has been ruined and you wonder what to do. You have a job and a home, and you don't want to part with either. They help define who you are — or who you believed yourself to be. Thankfully, the Middle East offers one blessing to help *kiswah* maintain some semblance of their lives and minds. In our restricted society, we can't usually afford to hunt in broad daylight. Allow me to explain. The Middle East is a powder keg of political and religious tension. Most public attacks are bound to draw police fire (the only time Middle Eastern authorities yell "stop" is when telling their men to cease firing). Some of us believe that the monsters can prowl without being seen and by tricking *fellaheen* into forgetting the creatures' passing. Thanks to Allah's blessing, our minds are no longer clouded and we see. And yet, our fellow people still do not see. So when we act against the beasts in the street, who do onlookers see and remember? Us. It doesn't matter if we are trying to help them. We're suddenly scapegoats. Save a baby from a *ghul* and witnesses tell police you kidnapped the child after killing her mother. You can't win, so you might as well turn things to your advantage.

The first thing Arab *kiswah* realize is that it's better to hunt at night; it's easier to hide from the authorities, there are fewer *fellaheen* on the streets and it's too dark to identify you properly. Also, why hunt during the day when temperatures dehydrate you quickly? Because the heat soars between 12:00-1:00 PM through to about 3:00 PM (5:00 PM in Persian Gulf countries), most stores and private businesses close for the afternoon and stay open late at night.

If you absolutely must answer Allah's call by day, it can be done when the sun is highest and many people

seek shelter. I'm even told it's easier to track the walking dead by their stench during the high temperatures of midday. Just be sure to stock up on water and salt tablets. Heat exhaustion is a silent killer.

What does all this have to do with a job and your home? Simply this: Most Arab *kiswah*, knowing it's suicidal to hunt by day, maintain their jobs and homes. Pursuing the cause is best done at night, during their free time. Sure it's difficult, but the alternative is even more so: no income, forced to abandon your residence, being transient in countries under heavy police supervision, and relying on handouts. The first piece of advice we offer new *kiswah* aside from "don't involve your family" is "keep your job." It may be boring and trivial after your nocturnal experiences, but it offers stability, it reminds you who you fight for, it puts food in your mouth, it keeps you strong and the hunt doesn't become your sole purpose. That's most important; few hunters survive by living for the cause alone.

Extreme Measures

By: Sedat

As a paramedic, I've seen my share of stress-trauma victims. The Nightly Visitants may offer us strength against the supernatural, but at what price? Despite our accomplishments before — friends, family, home, job, religious fulfillment — nothing prepares us for our change or for the first few weeks afterward. Alone and frightened, we fall back into familiar patterns to make sense of our lives. I, for example, distracted myself with work until I could deal with the psychological ramifications of my existence. Others withdraw or worse, try to share their experiences with *fellaheen* such as priests, *imams* or rabbis. At best, these people think *kiswah* suffer from anxiety or stress. Worst is when they believe you insane and send you to an asylum (fortunately, based on the Islamic models of compassion, Arab health care stresses the ethical treatment of patients and tries to help the insane, not exclude them). The worst fate I've heard is from hunters of uneducated, rural or even nomadic families. I've met hunters who were forced to fight against even their own friends and family because those people believed the *kiswah* possessed and tried to capture our brethren for their own good.

Eventually, most of us manage our state in a variety of ways, from the practical to the emotional. Most of us. I've heard some hunters who spiral out of control. They embrace the most extreme methods in some twisted logic of right and wrong. Supposedly one *kiswah* in Syria slaughtered his entire family "to keep them safe" and burned their bodies so they wouldn't return as walking dead. Another man hid his family in an old bomb shelter in the Egyptian desert with enough canned food and books to last for years. He then buried the shelter beneath the sands to keep his loved ones imprisoned, hidden and safe while he fought the *akhira*. He confessed this to one of us while suffering from a grievous injury. He died before he could reveal where he had imprisoned his family.

Rumors allege many things these days. A woman walked into an Iranian mosque with a handgun and opened fire on the script-carvings, because she believed the words haunted her. A hunter threw a party for his friends and gassed everyone including himself with carbon monoxide from a hose leading from his car's exhaust into his home. According to the suicide note, "their souls were in danger." A teenaged Syrian *kiswah* reputedly killed the girls in his class because they distracted him from the cause. These stories flourish with the suspicious fertility of gossip and rumor, but I cannot deny the stress on the faces of my comrades. Most of these war-weary, hollowed-eye stares come from our newest members, who have no guidance or mentors to teach them the way. I can't help but wonder how many *kiswah* we've lost to suicide or asylums or to their own uneducated mistakes. The greater question is how can we reach them in their earliest and most dangerous hours? Is this perhaps our weeding process, whereby the Nightly Visitants see who is strongest? I dread the answer.

Foriegners and Disappearing

By: Globetrotter

Sorry, but if you're an expatriate hit with *al-Ghariyyan* while living here, you're in it deep. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait (just off the top of my head) provide subsidized homes and apartments for foreign workers (mostly Western) like doctors and engineers, while labor usually gets the short end of the stick with poor accommodations. In either case, you're on record. You can't move without informing the housing bureau and you can't hide unless you go underground.

Knowing the truth is bad enough on its own. But us expats have to be doubly careful. If you're here with family, do everyone a favor and move back to your country of origin. Your spouse and children don't need this grief, especially if you place them in danger. If you want to send them off and stay behind because your job pays well, know your limitations. If you're convicted of *any* crime, you'll be shipped back (and lashed in Saudi or Iran to remind you of your visit). If you miss too much work, it's the same deal. If you want to hunt without worries, relatively speaking, then your options are to be extremely careful or to become *gweilo*. That's Chinese for ghost, but it's also derogatory for white foreigners. Some Filipino hunters working in Hong Kong picked up the term from a monster there and adapted it for expats who went underground in another country — becoming "ghosts." We considered using the Arabic derivative *ruh*, but realized it might be confusing if we identified ourselves with the enemy.

Becoming *gweilo* is easy. Staying one is hard. You need liquid assets that don't rely on banks (gold, pearls, US dollars). You need friends or at least allies to shelter you without question. You need false documents if you intend to vanish, because your old passport is now flagged. And you need to keep moving. Understand that you can't go back home and reclaim your identity, ever. You've effectively committed suicide. Your former life is past. The Middle East maintains strong connections with Western powers like the U.S. and Britain. Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Lebanon maintain extradition treaties with the superpowers. If you vanish, the authorities will spot your passport across the Middle East, North America and Europe. Egypt, Arabia and Israel also share data with INTERPOL, meaning if you're a criminal in one country, you're a criminal everywhere.

If you're determined to become *gweilo*, remember these three rules: plan, plan, plan. That means take the time to acclimate yourself to your new existence, consider all the hardships of being a drifter and the ramifications of abandoning your life, and make sure you've secured your resources well beforehand (in other words, don't improvise or enter this blindly). Finally, hold onto your old life as long as possible. Going rogue should be your last option when your back is against the wall and you hear police sirens approaching. Prepare everything in advance, so when you become *gweilo*, a safety net and new identity awaits you. That means liquid assets, contacts to take you over borders, a new passport and ID cards, safe houses and supply caches.

I can't tell you if anyone's gone underground successfully for long. I've heard of only three expat hunters who went *gweilo* and they all vanished. Maybe their efforts proved a rousing success, but they might also be in shallow desert graves. Proceed at your own risk, because you're pioneers here.

The Hunt

By: Hajirah252

No doubt, the other contributors for this pandect of uncertainty have offered a wealth of information concerning the hunt. I hope I am no less insightful with my observations. There are many problems associated with becoming *kiswah*, outside the mortal dangers of the cause itself. How we deal with friends, family and indeed with our lives dictates our actions in all things to come. Compassion breeds compassion. Misery begets misery. Our responses may differ, but the hunt remains the same — or does it?

In leaving our existence open to interpretation, the Nightly Visitants leave us to answer our questions alone and to pursue our duties with scattered intentions. Perhaps Allah tests us with offers of power or perhaps we bear multiple fathers: Allah for the righteous, Shaitan for the wicked and *jinn* for the unbelievers. The fact remains that we are a broken force.

On one side stand those *kiswah* who remain noble, despite the temptations heaped at their feet. They fight the *akhira* and judge the supernatural by their actions, not appearance. On the other are hunters who believe they follow personal destiny. As long as they have the power, they perform Allah's work. This "right" excuses many horrors. Those in the middle believe our struggle is Islam's answer to the Christian Inquisition and they see this as opportunity to cleanse Allah's house of both *jinn* and *fellaheen* they believe are evil. It is no longer a war

against the preternatural, but a fight against a conceptualized enemy, whether by destroying wicked men and women or removing the influences of the colonial West. Such is free will in undisciplined principle.

Clemency — The Correct Tools

By: Jibril

Everyone shares how they carry out the hunt, but I've seen few *kiswah* consider how they wish to conduct themselves or how they hope to succeed before they pick up their first weapon. We seem to fall into our decisions, arriving at them as each predicament arises. We never ask ourselves the hard questions until they're before us. Are we willing to kill *fellaheen* if the situation demands it? How many are too many deaths? Do we hunt with no regard to the nature of our adversaries or ourselves?

Questions demand answers, but the easy ones are never worth asking in the first place. More so, can we spare the time for soul-searching? Perhaps we should formulate our answers in the crucible of battle. After all, no theory is sound until tested in critical moments. What's the solution? Permit ourselves our questions, carry them in our hearts and act without wavering when we must, even if the task is unsavory? No matter what, hesitation kills. Perhaps there is always tomorrow to reconsider your actions and ask God for forgiveness.

Turning Disadvantages into Advantages

By: Fatwa243

If you are *kiswah*, the first thing you should know is that your greatest tool is cunning. Knowing this means there's no such thing as a disadvantage — only unrealized potential. Some Arab hunters complain they don't have access to the Internet, or that they live in a country where a political office censors the news. Little do they realize that those "weaknesses" are actually blessings.

In the US, when the police are subject to scandal, everyone knows about it. It's on the news, because news agencies are responsible for their own conduct. That gives them carte blanche to air anything they want to as long as it's newsworthy. Not true here. The Middle East knows its own abuses and corruption every day and it all goes unreported. If someone witnesses, reports or even records an abuse of power and delivers the record to a television studio, they collide with censorship. Most news agencies in the Middle East must submit their material to a government agency for "approval." Guess what never airs and guess whose material vanishes? When fanatics attacked the Ka'bah in Mecca, for example, Saudis didn't hear all the details until after international agencies covered the incident.

I'm sure that's why neither we nor the *akhira* appear on news programs or in newspapers. That's a good thing, because it means we can hunt without becoming the enemy of the state. The public doesn't know about us and if the authorities censor the news, they won't tell anyone they're after us (the best lie is the one never told). This way we still interact publicly without fearing someone will recognize us. The real problem rests in avoiding the authorities, which may or may not know of us, but isn't that always the case?

This same principle of turning disadvantages into advantages applies to everything we consider a drawback. We don't know who or what we are? Good. Maybe Allah left that to interpretation so we'd support the cause by whatever standard seemed right to us. We leave our lives behind? That means we don't have to worry about drawing loved ones into the conflict. We live a nomadic existence? A moving target is harder to kill than a stationary one. We don't have the proper weapons to fight the beasts? We are the weapons. Maybe we should stop focusing on finding guns and worry about honing our personal skills. Besides, guns draw attention to us, making us an enemy to man and beast alike. Maybe by concentrating on subtlety, the authorities might leave us alone, too. The police are still after you? Well, maybe that's a warning to the rest of us not to be so stupid.

It's truly amazing how much easier the hunt becomes when you treat everything as a benefit and nothing as a hindrance. It doesn't mean underestimating your opponent. It means squeezing the potential out of every situation.

The Greater Code

By: Tarjiman220

You've heard mention of our word in the form of *kufic* script. You know it adorns our mosques and somehow allows us to speak with one another. Yet, I still sense we have not explained it properly, if only because it remains a mystery to us.

In Iran, there is the earliest expression of an exquisite art form combining science and design on the surface of a centuries-old tower. At certain times of the day, the carved and raised designs appear ornate, but hold no significance to the questioning eye. When the sun hits certain portions of the tower just right, the play of light and shadow across its surface reveals a prayer to Allah. While breathtaking in ingenuity, there is nothing magical in its existence. It simply combines contrast with sculpture to create a message. Perhaps this is the best way to describe our Word. It is more than simple lines of interlocking *kufic* script. It includes the empty spaces between words. Understanding our code entails studying the script as a whole, contrasts and all, rather than focusing for individual patterns. Otherwise, it's like trying to discern the nature of a complex sentence by studying one word.

Our code is not rooted in Arabic save for using *kufic* script as a medium. It's only vaguely similar to the Western Word of simple geometry. Where your code is singular and two-dimensional, ours possesses depth and seems more a full branch of patterns than the twigs of your designs. We read *into* the script rather than from right to left (you read and write English in reverse of Arabic), because each symbol imparts a flurry of meanings and intent. It is more emotive than literal, though we sometimes grasp actual phrases and specific words (addresses,

numbers, names) when they are important to the message's meaning. The true tragedy of this means we cannot duplicate the code with our own hands. We can read and even speak through it using a form of quiet meditation, but we must rely upon the Western Word to impart written messages. This is why Western hunters find familiar codes scrawled in graffiti above doors and alleyways in the Middle East. It seems we *kiswah* understand both means of communication inherently upon being changed, though we don't know how. Our Word, while perfect for transmitting thoughts and intentions, cannot preserve the message any more than the wind sustains our voices for long. We cannot recreate it, either, because we understand our Word in contrasts, not simple lines.

You already know we believe Allah gave us the script as a gift and that it is limited to the Middle East because of Holy Mecca and Jerusalem. I believe there is more, however. I recently spoke with Violin99 concerning his treatise on a hunter named Fyodor. While we disagreed on many points, Violin99 proposed an interesting possibility based on the eclectic opinions of his mentor. What if the code was Islam's attempt to fortify the world and imprison the deadliest of *akhira*? Unlike the unwieldy architecture of Stonehenge or the Giza Pyramids, the code might be Allah's stamp, an Islamic mandala spread through the light of knowledge. The hub is therefore our most sanctified cities, with the code distributing the power of the faithful throughout the Middle East using mosques as pinions (creating a web of "power lines"). We know the *Jahiliyya* was a period of darkness and pagan benightedness. Might the code be the prison bars to keep the "Time of Ignorance" at bay? Was it more than an era, but a directed and driving force meant to suppress humanity's faith and ideals? I can certainly see Violin99's argument, even though I disagreed when he said the code was a prison to keep a greater evil contained *inside* the Middle East. He called it "The Second Sign."

Nobody Is a Tool

By: Hope123

I hear hunters speak of the defenseless like they're tools in the war. This attitude frightens me. I look for reasons why this happens, but few answers make sense. Is it a result of war? Iraq, Iran, Israel and Lebanon have seen terrible conflicts for over two or more decades, and it leads me to believe that this tension creates an environment of acceptance. When anyone can die crossing the street thanks to a stray bullet or errant shell, life loses value. We understand people perish in wars all the time. It's never about death, but a matter of acceptable losses.

When I hear about an attack on a bus that kills several passengers, I often catch myself being thankful for those who survived and give little thought to those who died. Is this the trick? Do hunters like Abu Qutayba, Sedat and even the man Fyodor mentions in Bur Dubai risk the lives of the defenseless, or even kill them, believing they fulfill an overall good? Do they count their victories by the men and women they do not harm? Isn't that like beating one child so the rest do not suffer?

I know some hunters who believe their war a holy cause and their means justifiable because everything is preordained in God's eyes. Follow this logic: "God (or Allah) knows and sees all, including the course of our lives down to the individual action. He knows how we will use our gifts, and that includes using the defenseless to our advantage. If He does not want us to fight the cause in such a manner, He would leave us ignorant like the *fellaheen*. Yet, knowing we must use the defenseless to accomplish our tasks, He gives us these gifts anyway, obviously signifying He approves our methods!" How someone can twist God's message into this monstrous philosophy is beyond me, but some hunters subscribe to the belief.

Another justification for using the harmless is more politically charged. Some *kiswah* retain old hatreds and grudges simply because they still live in the same environments they've always known. It takes a strong will to abandon everything you once held dear and forge a new path, but I believe that when you are willing to start anew, you're also willing to reevaluate your philosophies. I am not such a woman, for my son and husband anchor me to my world in all the best ways. Others are the same, but their anchors continue feeding them animosity and reminding them of who they were, not what they can achieve. This is particularly deadly when old routines include hatred or an active vendetta toward a group of people (Palestinian versus Israeli, Kurd versus Iraqi, Turk versus Greek, Arab versus Westerner). How can we face a new threat when we cannot lay our old ones to rest?

Aspiration — Planning the War

By: Hajirah252

Hajirah, my acolytes say, *what tools do we need to hunt?* I say, you need what the situation demands. Yes, tools exist without judgment and in fact serve as the medium for our message. If we use fire in anger, it burns. If we use it in kindness, it warms. If we use it together, it illuminates. It's true our tool remains the same, but our purpose for it does not. The danger is believing that each situation relies on the same apparatus that served you well the last time. That is laziness. If you do not know what you require in a situation, you didn't plan properly. Shortsightedness serves no one. While we cannot prepare and provide for every contingency, we should at least plan for the expected.

These words are especially important to help you choose your fights. We could tell you how to find evil, but the truth is it finds us all too easily. We do not lack a choice of opponents; we simply don't know who's most dangerous. Our greatest mistake, though, lies in our impatience, in our desire to kill that which we know is unnatural. What does that serve? Does acting impetuously help the cause? Or does it serve our own egos?

Find Other Hunters

By: al-Amin

Never fight alone. Each hunter possesses a unique set of abilities that serves he and his comrades in battle. Some may act as artillery pieces (staying back and providing ranged assistance), while others are foot soldiers, who function best when toe-to-toe with their adversary. Yet, how do we find one another? There was nobody there to welcome us, because we are the first as far as we know. That doesn't have to hold true for new hunters. They shouldn't fear alone. It's our responsibility to show them the way and protect them in the yawning nights that would kill them for their inexperience.

I'll dispense with the most common advice on locating others through the the *kufic* script adorning our mosques and art. That seems the easiest way to reach our brethren and sisters, but it's not always effective. Some hunters encounter the code easily, while others never fully understand its possibilities. I know several *kiswah* who deliberately ignored it, either because they thought they were mad or suspicion of it silenced their tongues. I cannot blame them. The *kufic* Word, while a blessing, is a tool useful only to those willing to know it. Even I stayed quiet after my *al-Ghariyyan*. Other *kiswah* who communicated through it were nameless words and less real to me than the monster I killed.

That said, it's our responsibility to find and mentor new hunters who believe themselves alone. Speaking to them through the code is not the answer. I suggest the following methods, instead. But be warned: They require diligence and patience.

• Street Gossip — We're like newborn infants in that we rarely arrive into our world without terrible fuss and thunder. Sometimes we wait patiently for the proper moment to strike. Other times we simply act. The end result is that we make noise. Knowing this, experienced hunters should foster closer ties with various neighborhoods so that when such events occur, we know about it immediately. Don't rely on the television to relate unusual occurrences. It seems strangely quiet about our activities. Gossipy neighbors serve as better sources of information — telling us about a recent skirmish, police visit or outbreak of violence — and may inadvertently steer us toward a hunter.

• Religion — No matter how far a man ventures from God, *al-Ghariyyan* draws him back, even if only for a moment. The nature of the Nightly Visitants and the existence of *akhira* throws our beliefs into question. I know few *kiswah* who can resist traveling to a church, mosque or synagogue at least once to ask "why" or "how." The nature of our experience also drives us there for simple solace, as a reminder of the simplicity of our past lives or to gaze at the building's artwork. I frequent the local mosques and churches, studying those entering and leaving. I've met two *kiswah* allies in this fashion.

• Medical Care — I am fortunate that I have contacts within the American University of Beirut Hospital and the *Hotel-Dieu de France*. They inform me when they treat someone (either victim or hunter) for unusual injuries. Posing as a reporter for *The Daily Star*, I "interview" the victim if I can reach him, determining whether the person or event elicits my interest. When you hear the news saying people were hurt, but reports are sketchy or odd, check local clinics or hospitals. You sometimes stumble across an injured *kiswah* or *akhira*.

• Place the Signs — There is a utilitarian simplicity to the Western code, often making me wonder if the *kufic* script is our cryptography and the Western symbols our street signs (one-word directions). I find them useful tools, especially when disguised as political declarations to steer other hunters to me.

Understand Your Enemy

By: Muru'a

You see the beast or ghost that hides as a man. He walks upright and without a shred of monstrosity betraying his demeanor. He seems comfortable in the world of humans and does not appear dangerous. So how does it serve you if you attack him? You jeopardize the *fellaheen* around him and yourself, all for a *jinn* who might simply vanish or tear you apart like paper at another time. He might even be pious, like the walking dead who protect Mecca. Patience, my friends, that's the trick to winning while ensuring your survival.

From my experience, *jinn*, monsters, the walking dead, *akhira* or whatever else you call them all share a common trait, with yourself and with me. I believe we all possess a motive or reason for existing in a daily routine. We all have places to go and it always pertains to our immediate surroundings. Even the free Bedouins chart their course in familiar deserts. Very few people or creatures are truly nomadic. Everyone needs to do something or be somewhere. If you can understand where and what that is, you comprehend your adversary.

This is not North America, where rapid transit allows for comfortable travel everywhere. Certainly we have buses, taxis, trains and cars to take us where we need to go, but we shop and we conduct our business close to our homes for the sake of convenience or familiarity. The supernatural is the same way. If it lairs somewhere, it often remains close to its home or point of interest. One of the only times this isn't true, from my experience, is when a creature hunts, stalks or scouts. Then it might venture to other parts of a city. Even then, it might rely on some conventional method of transportation, making it easy to follow.

If you see a supernatural creature, take a moment to study its actions in the context of its surroundings. This tells you much about its intentions. If it strolls and wanders about streets, there's a good chance it nests nearby. Ask yourself: Does it appear familiar with the area or people? With whom does it associate? Does it appear in the day or night? Does it walk with purpose or wander around ignorant of time? (If it walks with

purpose, wherever it goes bears some significance in the creature's life.) Does it appear bold, furtive, humble? How does the creature study others? (Predators, even when they aren't stalking, often cast avaricious glances at their favorite prey.) What does it do during prayer time? Does it merely parrot the actions of the faithful or does it truly prostrate itself to Allah?

Young *kiswah* often wonder why we resort to such surreptitious maneuvers when some of us possess the power to question these creatures directly about their ways? I know far too many hunters who rely solely on their divination or insight or ability to demand answers. They confront monsters directly and insist on information, then they wonder why the *akhira* react negatively. You would be adversarial and belligerent, too, if a complete stranger stopped you in your tracks and demanded that you account for your existence. Remember that we prize the notion of "face" as greatly as the Japanese or Chinese. Remember that you can force *akhira* into a fight because you question their honor. Know when this serves as a deliberate ploy to goad a beast into battle, but also realize this action should be a last step, not your absolute and most critical tool of analysis. By using your gifts too early, you may alert monsters to your existence, forcing both of you into unnecessary conflict. If you employ your powers near the end of your investigation, you already possess some forewarning of the subject's nature and its likely reactions. Use your abilities only if you're ready for a confrontation.

By understanding your adversary's patterns, you might comprehend it better. If you can glean where it lives or its daily routine, then you possess one advantage in the hunt. You have time to choose your tools for the job and can set up an ambush where it's most convenient to your intended task. Knowing the battlefield in advance allows you to establish escape routes, hiding spots, plans of attack and even booby traps, if necessary.

Robbing the Undead

By: Omeed

I don't advocate this style of hunting, but I know a group of *kiswah* who claims it works well on anything but *Amalikites* (ghosts). They pickpocket a target, hard, either by slamming into it from behind or by running past and grabbing anything available. Then they bolt for the closest alley where their friends wait with weapons. The *akhira* usually gives chase, anger clouding its judgment, not realizing that a trip wire is strung across the alley and several covered boards with spikes pointed up await. Then they attack the beast. These *kiswah* claim they can set up everything in under three minutes and that they've killed several *akhira* this way. But they also admit to grievously hurting a normal person who thought he was helping out a robbery victim. The strategy seems haphazard and I told them to change their tactics. Somebody will eventually figure out their tactic and turn the tables on them. I doubt they'll listen, though.

Fervor – Carrying out the Battle

By: Tarjiman220

Everyone speaks of planning and determining the inevitabilities of Allah's mission, yet it all flies out the window in the heat of battle. I think preparing is a good thing to minimize interference from authorities and to help prevent tragedies, but I also know that if you plan too much, you're less prepared for the unexpected. Knowing even your adversary's tribe is little help since we often deal with individual beings. They make decisions just as we do and appear just as unpredictable. I have never seen two walking dead react exactly the same way. Could this mean the enemy is also scattered and driven by motivation? I'm not sure, but I do know we must fight our battles in quick strikes and end them or die.

I don't believe this a war like so many claim, but a guerilla war. If Allah truly wanted an army, He would have created a legion of us and designated a hierarchy. Instead, we're scattered, remote, few and afraid. This tells me I'm not a soldier in some grand battle. I'm fighting a handful of small skirmishes against the unworthy, perhaps even dueling against one opponent or a small group of them. Maybe this is Allah's way of saying war is indiscriminate, so we should be, too. Maybe we're scalpels to Allah's blade, cutting the cancerous from the healthy tissue? Regardless, we can afford to fight only one battle at a time and survive the course from day to day. Perhaps our blessing is the ability to consider each action before we commit it.

Beasts of Burden

By: Abu Qutayba

I recently met with other Bedu *kiswah* from among the *Bani-Sakhr* tribe. We shared many secrets beneath the smiling sun. I told them of the wardance so their family might partake of the cause and they spoke of the ancient whispering ways, which they claimed allowed them to command animals. It is no secret that the Bedouin have always walked with the four-legged beasts from before Muhammad. We measure prosperity by our camel herd, our food by our sheep, our drink by our goats and our hospitality by the biggest ewe we slaughter to honor our guests. Such accounting says that we are skilled enough to survive the desert and to fatten our livestock on nothing but the sand and wind. The *Bani-Sakhr* claim that they and some *kiswah* living within the cities can instill their dogs with their own courage, thus teaching them to fight at their side. Where once these loyal companions betrayed us to the *akhira* out of fear, they can now supposedly face down the most hideous beasts. Can this be true, or are these Bedouin in fact harsh taskmasters who beat their animals into a frenzied hatred so they attack anything?

Deals with the Devil

By: Muru'a

How important is your cause? Is it worth your family, friends, home, luxuries, morals or your very integrity? Many *kiswah* answer the call believing they can emerge intact, without sacrificing anything of their lives. Perhaps that is even true, if they acknowledge that the less they relinquish the more *fellaheen* suffer. Is that fair? No, this life isn't fair, which is why we call the next Paradise. As a hunter, you must decide which Eden you'd prefer: the one of your choosing or the one of His making.

You learn this lesson quickly in Iraq, far quicker than anywhere else in the Middle East. Can you sacrifice your ideals for your reality? Tarjiman, al-Amin and the others tell you how to act in this war. They say your journey is far more important than your goal. That's fine if you aren't starving, or weaponless, or alone or aren't blessed with their luxury to philosophize. We are hungry, alone and weaponless. Facing this reality means you must continue the fight by making sacrifices. Allah understands this, or else His title of All Merciful is meaningless. Where do you stop, though?

Some *kiswah* were members of a "liberation front" (a much prettier name than "terrorist group") before *al-Ghariyyan*. They might be involved with al-Quds trying to remove Western influence from Saudi Arabia, or in the Hezbollah struggle against Israel. They might be one of the Kurdish PPK fighting for a homeland, members of the Islamic groups seeking to topple Egypt's Zionist-friendly government, one of the Hamas who seek a new Palestine, or among the Zionist Kach and Kahani Chai who fight for Israel, regardless of Israel. These hunters can claim their motives are noble and selfless even while they perform despicable acts, because they support a cause they believe with their hearts. Others hunters, however, do not have the luxury of idealism to justify their actions and must find employment with Arabian slave traders, the PPK heroin pipeline, the Israeli and Lebanese Mafia or numerous black-market profiteers to supply and back their causes. These *kiswah* seek to do good, but must condone performing some evil for the greater good. I cannot tell you whether this is right or wrong, for the answers are not often simple. They always depend on personal values. Maybe you can accept the murder of a *fellaheen* because he didn't pay your boss drug money, but can you endure the sight of women or children shackled into prostitution or slavery? Is your personal war against the *akhira* justified then?

In exchange for our services, we can procure weapons, equipment and even the support of allies, but is it worth the pain and suffering? Compromising one's self is a danger when allies are no longer your tools but your masters. Your pursuits have turned truly selfish when they add misery to the world rather than diminish it.

The River at Your Back

By: *Yammah* Selma

Sometimes it happens. Your back is against the river and the only escape is forward, where your enemy lies. There is naught to do but thank Allah for this chance to prove your worthiness, dig your heels into the sand and fight with His name on your lips. In these

times, only Allah and the gift of His beneficence may save you, so know which of His powers to call upon to serve you best. In these days of war, I have seen many pass beneath my tent, each displaying the heart of one animal or another. Know your heart and may these words carry you to the next morning.

• Falcon — Since before Muhammad, the falcon is only second to the camel in nobility and as a harbinger of longevity. Those who carry its gifts are like a bird riding the winds, hiding against the sky, blinding opponents who must stare into the sun to find it. Those from House of Falcon should let their spirits soar and either vanish from sight, as though high in the cloud, or blind their opponents with equal fury to those who would foolishly gaze at the sun. It is in these moments of your enemy's confusion that you can either slip away, or wait to attack again when the advantage is yours. Should others fight by your side, then surround them within your wings if you can and serve to protect them.

• Dove — To the dove, there is always hope. Did Noah not send it out to find land, to find hope that there was indeed a place where the olives were still plentiful? Those of this house always seek peaceful recourse, even a way to bring reconciliation between themselves and their adversary through Allah's word. The dove is white for a reason, for blood rarely touches its pristine coat. To these *kiswah*, I say that Allah gives you the chance to bring hope to empty lives. You are the mouth for His words. Save yourself then by offering your opponent salvation, for Allah is merciful. If your words do not affect it, then distract the creature while those of sharper fangs and tongue mete out justice to the infidel beast.

• Fox — This cunning creature knows it cannot outfight its adversaries, so it outthinks them. Those from House of Fox, like myself, possess sight beyond mortal reckoning and are blessed with an estimation of what is to come. We are soothsayers and seers who divine the future. It is the foolish fox who fights the enemy with her back to the river. You should have fought your battle long before confronting the *ghul*. You should know better. If you find yourself in this predicament, draw upon another animal's power, for the fox's only benefit now is eluding the hounds at its tail, and perhaps licking its wounds.

• Dog — Of Allah's blessed creatures, the dog is the most honest, loyal and perhaps our most ancient ally. Those of this merit are equally protective of the *fellaheen* and confederate alike. Like the *saluki* who watch our tents at night and keep the darkness at bay, so too do these two-legged greyhounds protect us with their wards and burning touch. Those of this house serve best when they can protect their allies. I have even heard of those who mark the *ghul* in such a manner so that their own dogs may later track the beasts down.

• Eagle — The keen-eyed eagle watches from the clouds, flying closest to Allah's feet and judging those beneath. For the unworthy, it dives and plucks the offending creature from the earth within its talons and returns to the sky where Allah passes judgment. Fear the scrutiny of these *kiswah*, for their gaze pierces the soul and impales the *ghul* to the ground. Those of you calling the House of Eagle yours, know that few creatures can withstand your sight if you are righteous and just. Never fear the river at your back, for your direction is forever forward, toward the *ghul*. You never serve your heart by shying away from your duty. Your power demands eagle-eyed certainty.

• Lion — Once, our ancestors believed the lion knew evil spirits and never feared their actions. Travelers moving through the lands of a pride would call out to the beast, begging it for safe passage. The lion exemplifies courage, so it is no surprise that *kiswah* who share its heart are never fearful. You should relish the battle and leap upon your prey with a throaty bellow; the roar of the river at your back is nothing compared to the thundering of your heart. Any moment you press the attack, you possess the advantage, for few opponents expect their prey to possess teeth, much less turn and fight with courage. They must and will falter. Then they are yours.

CHAPTER 4: BROTHERS BY VIRTUE

We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you might get to know one another.

— The Koran, *Surah*: 49:13 [The Chambers]

By: Tarjiman220

How many labels do we ascribe to ourselves? Do we use one cloth to sew together the sum of our identities, or do we more likely describe ourselves according to the situation? I am Saudi to the American. I am a son to my parents and brother to my brother. I am a translator to my employer. I am hunter to monsters and I follow the Pillar of *Salat*, to those hunters who believe they understand my obligations.

Perhaps I oversimplify matters. The truth of the situation is that our identities are the product of others' perceptions. We are friends to people we never intended and enemies to others by virtue of philosophy or even mere existence. This truth has a dangerous aspect among *kiswah* who share a mixture of ideologies, whether spiritual, analytical or political. There is no escaping the fact that we cannot make one friend without the counterbalance of creating one enemy. Perhaps worse, in this balance we do not know who assumes the roles of our enemies or even our allies. There are hunters who would see me dead for writing these words and there are monsters who might applaud my actions for their own reasons. So what am I left with outside confusion and uncertainty? I am left with a need to categorize everyone into neat little parcels and create a universal method of identification. I am left with doomed ambition, for the hopes of uniting us under a common language and terminology rely on the cooperation of everyone. I know my enemies will never allow me that ideal out of spite or pride.

Read these words and realize that each is a grain in a handful of sand. However other contributors or I identify our brethren or our agendas, we do so blind to any greater truths to our existence. These are our best suppositions and they change with each situation and each person. Some hunters are comfortable with Western-held beliefs and axioms, while others identify themselves according to historical or cultural heritage ("I am Lebanese," or "I am Jordanian though my father was Palestinian"). Few people hold the same truths, and if they do it is because of efforts such as this to create a standard.

THE THREE PATHS

Clemency, aspiration and fervor. These three words impart far more significance than their dictionary meanings. They seemingly encapsulate our varied beliefs succinctly. I am not so naïve as to believe that they are the sole qualifiers of our lives, but they are the basis on which we build our identities as *kiswah*. They resonate with the truth of our being and our intended direction in the cause. They are our core philosophies in how we interpret the Koran, in our actions and in our conduct — or so I hope.

Aspiration

By: Hajira252

Some say we are prophets of the war, the *Imams* or holy men of the cause. Islam has no priests, but it relies upon *Imams* to perform prayers and to act as sages. *Kiswah* often look to us to solve their dilemmas and answer their questions because we are supposed to possess insight. When we still their panicked hearts, they hail us as holy and wise, but when we cannot answer their questions, they cast us down as heretics and false prophets.

I cannot tell you what those of aspiration do or know, but I can tell you about myself. The future distracts me and sets my sight so far ahead toward the horizon that I often miss the sharp stones at my feet. Thoughts I barely fathom plague my waking days, and dreams I have no wish to share plague my fitful nights. For these troubles, others call me a seer, a wise man and perhaps even holy in my madness. Many hunters beg of my company and ask that I relate some mysterious truth. They buy me plane and train tickets so I can grace them with some nugget of wisdom. The truly lost seek me out and follow me around, as though I am some messiah. One group of hunters already wishes to kill me because they believe I invite this "heresy," this adulation. I do not. "I am only a man!" I scream to those *kiswah* who dote on my every word. They whisper back, "So was Muhammad."

I can resist such temptation for only so long before I too contemplate their words. And I am not alone in this ordeal. I know of *kiswah* who succumb more readily to such adulation. It is easy to offer advice when the answers seem so obvious to us. Unfortunately, our eloquence is inadequate to encompass what I believe is the truth. Invariably, while trying to help others, we confuse those questing souls who seek us out. Others of us hide this shortcoming behind a mantle of enigma and mystery, playing the cryptic wise man who wraps his answers in riddles. In this fashion, we slowly lose our perspective to the honeyed words of our followers. After all, the Middle East spawned three major religions from the words of three different humble men. Why not four religions or a fourth prophet? Isn't this how all heresies begin?

Pursuing the Jihad

We face a two-fold enemy, the one outside ourselves and the one inside ourselves. We may not covet the role of mystic, wise man or *Imam*, but the fact remains that we may be suited for the job. We may take our duties lightly and merely act as guides for other *kiswah* or we may be serious and blaze new ways where none existed before. One seeks out those paths already traveled while the other becomes the road itself. Both are meritorious endeavors, but both carry grave risks for ourselves and for those who would follow us. With the former, we uncover already existing paths and allow others to traverse those avenues with which they are most comfortable. We may encourage and direct, but we never force. This also means that with fewer risks, there are fewer rewards of significance. The latter, the trailblazers, brave new directions in places where forests of thorns and brambles wait, but both they and their followers emerge stronger for the experience. But these second *kiswah* can be too thorough and create in their acolytes naught but sheep and lambs who follow blindly. I've seen this happen too often in those who would call themselves prophets and who would demand holy wars against all "evil."

Our Attitudes Toward Others

• Clemency — Like the wise Suliman (Solomon) who led his army around an ant-hill rather than trample the industrious and humble insects, those of clemency remind us to look at our feet once in a while. Without them, the distant trumpets would draw us forward and we would forget for whom we fight and why. Now, if only we could convince them to look up once in a while and not protect every insect in their path.

• Fervor — Every nation needs its Saladin, a warrior willing to forego personal peace for the security of his people. *Kiswah* of this stock neither look forward nor at their feet. Their enemy encompasses the whole of their vision and anything in between them and their adversary is an obstacle. While this perspective is good for fighting wars, it limits their awareness to the dangers around them. Perhaps that is why they rely on us and despise us in equal measure. We warn them of the dangers of too narrow a vision, but that sometimes means we become the obstacles.

Dangers of Hubris

As aspired, it is easy for us to renounce the physical world entirely and seek self-enlightenment. The call grows stronger with experience and age and eventually becomes too powerful to ignore. We are still young. I know of only two *kiswah* whose perceptions and understanding soars above the clouds. While a soaring eagle's vision encompasses the world along the breadth of its horizons, few people can hear or understand its call. Such are the aspired who soar above our understanding, for they become too distant to hear or too foreign for us to understand. Isolated by their perceptions, these keen-eyed eagles eventually settle upon a remote aerie and grow detached from their fellows, if not humanity itself. They become the hermits and monks of the desert, the Sufi mendicants and Dervishes ecstatic who exist in a hole of self-concern and exploration. They become anchorites.

I believe the greatest threat lies with those who refuse to insulate themselves. They represent a danger borne equally from the importance of religion in the Middle East and from the beliefs of *kiswah*. I met one such aspired in Tadmur who perceived matters so clearly that, to him, his ideas seemed the absolute truth. There was no road but his road. When he spoke to others, he shared his beliefs with such force and vigor that others believed it could only be reality (I nearly fell myself, until I remembered my own truths and resisted his alluring tales). His

experiences as a Muslim and his knowledge of the Koran provided him with ammunition to draw other faithful men and women into his cult, as well. He believed himself a new prophet sent to reinterpret the *Surahs*, which he did freely. He endangered the cause by sharing tales of the *jinn* with *fellaheen* and threatened to bring the thunder down upon his own head.

He is still at large, his influence in Tadmur grows and it is near impossible to extricate him without harming his naïve followers. Eventually, the Syrian government will notice his cult. When they try to remove him from power and encounter stiff resistance, they will send in the tanks and bulldozers again. It is therefore our responsibility to remove him before he endangers the cause.

Philosophical Conflict

While I thank Allah for providing me with a virtuous heart and strong morals to see me through these trying times, I also know of some hunters whose beliefs collide violently with the nature of their existence. Being aspired means suddenly understanding truths never believed possible. The world becomes open to personal interpretations and Allah presents Himself in the most unlikely vessels. In short, this is not a world for the stubborn hearted. Yet faith in Islam, Christianity or Judaism breeds many people who believe a specific way — who think they know the world. I have seen several such individuals become *kiswah*. I have also seen a few stumble when the world that God promised them in the Bible, Koran or Torah was not the world they discovered.

The nascent Kharijites, for example, were a sect of radical Muslims who were absolute in their judgment. Life existed in states of black and white for them, and anyone who was not a true Muslim was the enemy. They demanded virtue and prohibited evil. Acts were either righteous or taboo. The Koran was not open to interpretation and only Allah sat as judge. While the Kharijite movement is now a shadow of its historically violent birth, the fanatics are inspiration for terrorist groups such as *Takfir wal Hijra* in Egypt. They exist in a state of absolute certainty.

It is not uncommon for someone of Kharijite-like doctrines or beliefs to become aspired. Where they once lived life in absolute terms, they suddenly discover a myriad of truths exist. How they react to such realizations differs, but their road is the most difficult of all *kiswah*. Not only is their world different, but they can no longer ignore what they see. There is no commonality with their friends and loved ones, people who shared and partook of their former philosophy. They are truly stranded and isolated. Those who cannot handle their new sight blind themselves with the same intensity as before. There is power in self-delusion, and they throw themselves into their old lives with abandon, becoming mindless avatars of who they remember themselves to be. Their shame, however, is a private war that eventually claims their hearts. Something gives under the pressure, cracking their resolve (whereupon they set out to explore themselves and the world) or their minds (which is when someone puts them down like a mad dog).

Another lot, of whom I have met a couple, seemingly lose their very identities. They search for guidance, for someone to tell them what they see. If their former world was a lie, what do they believe now? "Perhaps this is madness?" they say. "Perhaps Allah punishes me for not having enough faith in Him." This kind easily falls to manipulation and deceit at the hands of others because they want to believe *something*. I know one *kiswah* who works for the *akhira* because they provide him with answers he wants to hear. Imagine an aspired who doubts himself so greatly that he relies on others to interpret his own sight.

Clemency

By: Hope123

Clemency, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, charity, humanity. I know of no better place where these words are more sorely needed than in Israel and the Middle East. I believe I possess these traits, and like many *kiswah* struggle with far more than just the cause. I serve the "cause" beyond fighting and see the suffering of humanity at its own hand. The Middle East is a series of open wounds (some dating back centuries, others spanning the history of religions) that refuse to heal. Actually, "refuse" implies the wounds never close. People here won't let the injuries heal. They pick at and reopen their grievances and feuds, deliberately hurting themselves because it is easier to hate than to forgive.

I look around me at the bomb threats, the gunfire, the angry mobs; I see only my son. I don't want him to experience this world, this hatred. I believe many hunters who follow the dictates of compassion feel the same. They see their loved ones and their friends struggling, trying to survive the rigors of old hatreds, repressive regimes and the toil of daily life. We tire of the war and therefore pursue the greater good, hoping to bridge the misunderstandings between us and to protect humanity, one person at a time. This is difficult, because we walk a thin line between sacrifice and suicide.

We recognize the world is in pain and is suffering and we want to help. We must help, because nobody else will. There is such a thing as feeling too much, though, and I know we sometimes cross boundaries. Some of us empathize with others' pain to the point of feeling sick. I have even heard of some hunters who manifest the wounds of other people. Still, if feeling pain is the only way to understand someone else's plight, I welcome this cursed intuition.

I believe we are the conscience of *kiswah*, a reminder of whom they fight for and why they fight. Most *kiswah* think they must "prohibit" evil to complete their duties, but I believe we must protect the helpless first and foremost. To forget this is to forget one's own frailties and condition. We keep our brethren and

sisters anchored to their own humanity, no matter how empassioned they become. I guess we see ourselves as the proverbial candle in the window, leading the lost home, reminding them that someone still cares. We are the bridges between so many extremes.

Pursuing the Jihad

Those of us who follow clemency are more than simple protectors in the Middle East. We are engineers, building bridges of peace between different factions. We serve as intermediaries for philosophical misunderstanding, trying to settle the differences between hard-liners and moderates, Arabs and Israelis, men and women, humanity and monsters. But this is more a self-appointed title than our official designation. The Middle East proceeds upon millennia of tradition and misconception, and few *kiswah* ask for our intervention. Instead, they treat us like meddlers, nuisances and, in some cases, traitors when we seek to help monsters. But there can be no other way. We cannot build peace for some and subjugate others. Peace comes to everyone or no one. If we don't fight to restore harmony for everyone, then why do we bother? The Middle East is already a powder keg because countless nations enforce stability at a cost to someone's freedom. These "achievements" prove hollow victories and the source of countless struggles.

Bearing this lesson in mind, many of us seek an understanding with our so-called enemy. I believe the supernatural exists much the same as us. They love and hate, venerate and fear many of the same issues that humanity does. I believe them affected by fate and circumstance. Despite what some hunters say, I truly think they too are victims of this world's whims. Many *kiswah* liken them to animals, but even animals love and care for their mates and offspring. Who's to say the supernatural are any different? Armed with this belief, we strive and hope to convert the redeemable, knowing there can be no war without enemies, no obstacles without bridges.

Our Attitudes Toward Others

• Aspiration — For a group of *kiswah* so blessed with insight and wisdom, I wonder how they can be so blind. They talk like generals sometimes, speaking in conjecture and theory, planning their moves so far in advance that they often overlook the moment. Their insights are invaluable, but I often think we may lose them to their goals. We work hardest to keep them grounded.

• Fervor — In some ways, I think we understand them more. While the aspired speak of causes in the abstract, these warriors deal in the present and the tangible. Unfortunately, we seek to act and they only react. They lash out at the strange or at whatever hurts them, never pondering or investigating the situation fully. The Middle East's history is filled with the fervent. Look at what that's achieved.

Dangers of Hubris

I once met a hunter, a Muslim who nearly died stopping a skirmish between Israelis and Arabs on the West Bank. He moved among the mob, healing the injured while ignoring the blows that rained upon him. I believe he represents the danger of crossing the line between sacrifice and suicide. This same hunter is now bedridden, near death because he gives others his strength to fight the rigors of their lives. The locals believe him a saint and visit him constantly, asking him to heal or strengthen them. He turns no one away, even if he remains ill for helping them.

I've heard of another hunter who truly believes herself a saint of monsters. She plays an apostolic role, deliberately seeking out monsters to redeem them. In presenting herself as divine, she manifests a "Holy Nimbus" (an ability I am familiar with), which keeps the supernatural at bay. Few monsters can approach her with the intent to harm her, though I hear she wields a powerful flashlight whose beam burns like an open flame. In both cases, these two hunters' intentions are altruistic, though their methods exceed even the extreme.

I've also heard of a third instance, however, in which altruism doesn't apply. There is a hunter who so thoroughly believes in the righteousness of his cause that he thinks others are capable of the same sacrifices. If he is willing to sacrifice himself in suicide attacks, he believes others should follow him willingly. He never warns his victims of their noble sacrifice, though. Upon finding a victim of supernatural malice, he booby-traps the person's home or car and destroys monster and victim in the same stroke. He supposedly justifies his actions by claiming that victims would have willingly martyred themselves if they were truly put to the test.

Philosophical Conflict

One religious sect whose members are present throughout both Israel and the Arab world is the secretive Druze. While considered heretical by both Shiite and Sunni, this group follows Islam and maintains puritanical practices. It does not demand the Islamic Pilgrimage or Fasting outside its communities, however, because other Arabs distrust the Druze. Essentially, they practice the *Taqiyya* to protect their faith when living outside their communities. They are also the only "Muslims" allowed to serve in the Israeli Army. They believe in reincarnation, are "xenophobic" (they don't accept converts) and always supposedly speak the truth among their people.

I have met a Druze hunter who operates within her community. She must keep her activities secret. Her community requires solidarity with little outside contact, but her very actions as a hunter require her to rely on outsiders. She must even cooperate with others who would consider her a heretic if they knew the truth about her religion.

Anna (not her real name) lives with too many secrets. She hides her nature as a hunter from her community. She hides her religion from other Muslims. She lies to almost everyone she knows, except to two others and myself. She understands her duties as *kiswah*, but she acts with a hundred hesitations. She knows she might die, but if anyone discovered any of her secrets, she could lose her community's support, which is a very important facet of Middle Eastern society. How does she handle abandoning every precept she holds dear in the name of the calling? I have no answers for her, for I often wonder what would happen if I lost the love of my husband or son. I can't conceive such loss.

Many like Anna who believe in clemency but are limited by their environment often remain within their communities, protecting them as much as possible. This is understandable, but dangerous because they live between worlds, partaking of neither. Anna cannot support or receive the support of other hunters, because her community prohibits contact with others or because she's afraid someone will eventually uncover her secret. She is no longer part of her own sect either, for her actions and very nature set her apart. I mourn hunters from the many different sects, such as the Druze, Yezidis, Bahai and our own Ethiopian Jews. Their beliefs or languages frighten enough ignorant people to ostracize these individuals. Many such hunters remain isolated and die terrible, lonely deaths.

Fervor

By: Fatwa243

We're at war. "How do I know?" some hunters ask me in an attempt to draw me into some argument of circular reasoning. That's when I raise a smoldering wooden club and smash large stones or building blocks and reply, "Allah didn't give me this gift to make more sand." Powers like that tell me what I have to do, and what other *kiswah* say we fervent are good at doing.

We're the most effective hunters and the most outspoken advocates for the *Jihad* of the Sword. Maybe that's because we don't stand around debating our nature. Maybe that's because we leave the questions to Allah and serve Him with the tools He gave us. The fervent know there's a war out there, and we know we must act now if we're going to win. I don't doubt that some monsters are "good" or righteous, or that we have to protect the *fellaheen*, but many *kiswah* use these arguments to forestall the inevitable. Actually, I think they dawdle in the hopes that we will perform their dirty deeds for them. Whatever does the job.

Being fervent doesn't mean being stupid. It just means we're willing to make the necessary sacrifices to fulfill the cause. We don't charge into battle because we can't think of anything better to do. We do it because it's often the last thing these smug bastards expect from humans. The others debate the nature of monsters, but we're the ones who judge them and determine who's good or evil, one *akhira* at a time. The others talk about protecting the *fellaheen* when we're the ones standing

between the *ins* and the bloodsuckers. They talk about the cause, but we're the ones fighting it. Being fervent has nothing to do with mindless action and everything to do with being the hunter willing to stand in harm's way. We aren't afraid of getting our hands dirty or bloodying our noses. It's a fact of our existence.

Pursuing the Jihad

We are the warriors of *Jihad al-sayf*, or *Jihad* of the Sword. We're probably the most diverse of *kiswah*, running the gamut from full-fledged warriors to mediators to protectors. Many of us believed in a cause and stood by our principles before the *al-Ghariyyan*, so we're not inexperienced when it comes to confrontation. The main problem is that many of us refuse to abandon old habits. Having principles and beliefs is fine, but when your politics tell you to slay infidel foreigners with your potent abilities, we have a problem. I despise the Zionists and won't lift a finger to save an Israeli in uniform. If I see a defenseless Jew *fellaheen* being stalked or hunted, however, I will save them. Let the governments rot. I'm here to save lives.

The fervent also bear the task of policing each other when we can, because some fanatics pride themselves on hurting foreigners or minorities. Thanks to Tarjiman and a few others, the fervent play UN to our own people in unofficial roles as *was'its* (mediators) and *mujahidin* (Allah's warriors). These are unofficial titles, but we try to force other hunters to respect these positions as legitimate. I can't say it's entirely successful. Old hatreds die hard and many *kiswah* don't support these groups, but we're gaining enough supporters that it will hopefully be worthwhile in the end.

Our Attitudes Toward Others

• Aspiration — I think the word "aspired" says it all. It means they hope to accomplish something without actually making concrete strides toward it. It's like the dreamer who tells you what he plans to do, but who never actually does it. Talking about it apparently makes him feel like he's accomplished something. It's easy to fall into that trap with Arabs. The more eloquent the speaker, the likelier people believe his words to be true. Some of these fools become prophets for *kiswah* who fall for their rousing speeches of a better tomorrow. That's when the cause truly suffers. Don't get me wrong, a properly motivated leader can take armies to victory or men to revelation. Most, however, don't.

• Clemency — I'm tired of their incessant nagging and complaining about settling matters peacefully or saving the supernatural. I'll admit, maybe there is reconciliation for us in the future, but right now we have to grab *akhira* attention. If these creatures wanted to coexist, there would be no need for hunters. Yet, here we are. So, we fight and listen to our brethren's hypocritical sermons. They ask us to meet them halfway in the cause, but I don't see them budging. When they're willing to stand on the battle lines with us, maybe I'll consider their words.

Dangers of Hubris

Some hunters embrace the cause, becoming its self-appointed and supreme wardens. The results of this psychotic path vary greatly, but none are worthy from everything I've heard or seen. Fervent hunters at their extreme are a terribly violent lot. One, who we recently killed, waged the war regardless of cost to the *fellaheen* or even to other hunters. All that mattered to him was the continuation of the struggle, the bloody sword of the Jihad, whether it meant bombing a building to destroy an *akhira* nest or murdering anyone who came in contact with the supernatural.

Another *kiswah* who I've heard of survives in Amman and deems himself magistrate of his own kind. He oversees

Policing Other Hunters

By: Fatwa243

The Middle East has longstanding traditions of using arbiters or mediators to solve disputes. It allows both sides to save face during negotiations and to retreat from a conflict without appearing weak. It's also probably why American negotiators fail so badly at settling conflicts in our part of the world. Tarjiman, with the help of a few supporters, has sponsored the role of *was'its* to help "police" our own kind and stop internecine fighting from breaking out. These arbiters adjudicate questions of conflict within the *kiswah* community, helping bridge the gaps between opposing philosophies.

When someone steps out of line, another group of hunters called *mujahidin* goes in and prohibits evil ("evil" including harming *fellaheen*, exposing the cause unnecessarily and hunting other hunters without a legitimate reason).

The problem with this approach to solving our differences, and the reason why many *kiswah* don't recognize *was'its* and *mujahidin*, is that they don't believe anyone has a right to police or monitor their activities. No one ever thinks himself a villain. We all have legitimate reasons or grievances for our actions, whether other hunters agree or not.

As much as I'd like to give Tarjiman credit for the idea of creating these two roles, he isn't the first *kiswah* to encourage them. The same tightly knit groups that complain about our methods of policing also practice self-enforcement rigorously. Out of all the factions, I'd say Tarjiman's *was'its* and *mujahidin* are the fairest. This doesn't mean they're the only hunters handing out their brand of justice. Some *kiswah* belonging to Hamas have no problems killing Israeli settlers or dealing with Palestinian traitors. The same applies for Kurd hunters operating in Iraq and Turkey, and Zionist hunters living in besieged *kibbutzes*. The Middle East is so torn apart that everyone polices everyone else, sometimes for the wrong reasons.

other hunters and kills those whom he believes commit the slightest infractions. We can't reach this madman due to the blanket of shadows that smothers the Jordanian countryside. This is not the only situation in which a *kiswah* has become an avenging angel. I hear that some hunters in Afghanistan and Iran fight a deadly fervent imbued who follows ultra-orthodox beliefs. He kills foreigners, improper women and those of Bahai faith because they are "enemies" of Islam. The trouble I see is that some hunters who call themselves fervent also believe themselves protectors of their own. They forget that everyone deserves refuge, not just "their people." The more dedicated they become to the cause, the more narrow-minded they become. It isn't a large step from disdaining one group or another to treating them like an enemy.

Philosophical Conflict

Saladin was perhaps our greatest general, but the man had a wicked streak. He used to round up pacifist Sufis, give them blades and force them to fight under threat of death. I heard he used to howl in laughter watching these mendicants and philosophers try to wield swords or hurt one another. Sounds pretty funny to me, too, actually, but it's an interesting example of how certain people aren't cut out for their roles. Sufis shy away from material goods and conflict. They seek to transcend the temporal world through spiritual purity. They're the last candidates anyone wants as *kiswah*, much less as fervent warriors whose very nature demands their participation in the *jihad*.

I've spoken with a couple of fervent Sufis who acted more like the aspired than warriors. They sit around debating if Allah tests them or wonder if this is fate's cruelest joke? I have no answers for them, but I do believe that being fervent doesn't mean you embrace violent ideals. As the name implies, being one of us says you are dedicated to whatever cause you pursue, in which case it makes perfect sense that some Sufis, Bahai or simple pacifists join us.

The other option is that these particular hunters deny their natural warrior instincts because the senses frighten them. Either way, it's a problem when they can't accept who they are. Many of them retreat into meditation or seclusion, believing Allah tests them or hoping abstinence will help them control their passion. It's a dangerous course, because these lost souls can easily become our enemies. If they think they've been offered temptation to resist it, how do they see us, who embrace what we are? Do they think we've surrendered to our vices? Once they believe we're evil, how long will it be before they decide they've been given their gifts to fight us? We already encounter some *kiswah* who follow something called the Mosque of Webs, and others who follow false prophets. How many of them were initially like Sufis, denying their existence, believing it all a test?

The Band of Forty

By: Tarjiman220

We Arabs are social creatures. We love speaking and recounting tales, haggling, debating and interact-

ing with our peers. There is community in our interactions, religion, artwork and even in our worship. We pray together, in public and without shame, and part of our supplication is to shake hands with the person seated next to us. We are of the *ummah*, a universal community of Muslims. Our unity lies in the words of Allah and the holy language Arabic. This was not always so, however.

Once, the spoken word provided the root of culture and transmission of the Koran. By the 20th Century, the Middle East consisted of scattered island nations isolated by colonial rivalries between the English, Turks and French. European languages acted as the tongues of states. Regional Arabic dialects were nearly incomprehensible to their very neighbors. Our sole commonality was Islam. Radio and newspaper breached the colonial borders better than any army could by transmitting the language of the Koran, Arabic, so that all listeners would understand the news. Arabic became the common voice of the Middle East, with remnants of European argot and regional dialects helping paint an odd linguistic mosaic. The result was Arab people united through language, religion (somewhat) and a common history born of Islam's Golden Age and colonial domination.

This legacy of experiences shared through faith and language unites Arabs and brings us closer together. We have a common imperative to belong to something greater than ourselves, whether it is family, community or religion. The same applies to *kiswah* all of whom have a mutual experience through *al-Ghariyyan*, but who lack a common history to fuel their purpose or to impart pride. We therefore seek to create a common heritage that brings us together: The Band of Forty.

It is tradition here that any number verging on "many" becomes forty. The flood that lasted *forty* days and nights, Ali Baba and the *Forty* Thieves, the band of *forty* who took Riyadh from the Rashidi governor. All these tales mean to say "plentiful" or "too many to bother counting." We *kiswah* therefore gather within what we call the Band of Forty. That number signifies a sense of history and legacy, connecting us to countless ancestors and predecessors we have yet to uncover and know. It speaks of all the allies and friends who will join us in our future journeys and those we've lost along the way. It signifies that we hold no specific nationalities, colors or experiences within our gathering of confederates, just a loyalty to one another and the commitment to work toward a common goal.

The Band of Forty is our best hope for a unity that has yet to exist among us, a day when all *kiswah* will belong to a single body. Know that any foreigners or women who encounter the Band of Forty have nothing to fear from our membership. We allow all to participate on the basis of our common struggle. Joining our community also entails that you leave old rivalries, political enmities and even misconceptions behind. Within the Band of Forty, there are no women, Jews, Arabs, Filipinos or Westerners. There are only *kiswah*.

Cross-Boundary Groups

The Band of Forty is our hope to unify all *kiswah* under a common banner, but we face many obstacles. Some are facts of geography or politics while others are matters of language or tradition. The great conference, for example, proved that simply reaching any common ground requires much work, but it also inspired the formation of the Band of Forty. With the support of many *kiswah*, including the chroniclers of this document, we now boast a small network of hunters. Perhaps we are not more numerous because of the following issues.

Issues of Language

Arabic is widely spoken throughout the Middle East and is so prevalent that many hunters in countries with different state tongues such as Israel (Hebrew), Turkey (Turkish) and Iran (Farsi) speak it as well. A language barrier still arises, though, because the Band of Forty welcomes all into its ranks, including European expatriates, diverse Iraqi and Iranian tribesman of Kurdish and Turkic stock, and Asian workers who don't understand a word of Arabic. Where Arabic fails, educated Arabs speak English and French, thus bridging the gaps further. Still, many expatriates are reticent to join us, indicating that the barrier of language is deeply rooted in other fears.

North Americans and Europeans face animosity here on several levels, the first of which reaches back to the colonial years. Westerners were the Middle East's more recent invaders (albeit 50 years ago) and some Arabs begrudge them this fact. Others blame Western civilization for the moral decay of the Islamic people, or they believe foreigners are resource predators and would prefer to see them barred from the Middle East or even killed. While the Band of Forty tries to rise above such pettiness, the fact remains that Western expatriates believe we still bear such grudges. I cannot blame them, especially with the Beirut kidnappings in the '80s and '90s, Osama bin Laden's terrorist attempts to drive Westerners from Saudi Arabia, and the recent fanaticism in Egypt. Westerners fear us and the language gap does nothing to alleviate their concerns. So, they stick to their communities and protect other Westerners, leaving Wildcatter and Globetrotter to play intermediary on our behalf.

The opposite problem holds true for Asiatic hunters. There are some hunters from the Philippines and India in the Middle East. These two countries alone provide the region — especially Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait — with a huge domestic work force, creating near-invisible ghettoes of Filipinos and Indians. These hunters are virtually blessed by their relative anonymity within Arab society, allowing them to move where American and European hunters cannot. They work in hospitals, power stations, drilling facilities, homes and anywhere else that needs affordable manpower. Because of their "low-status" treatment at the hands of Arabs, these people remain within their own

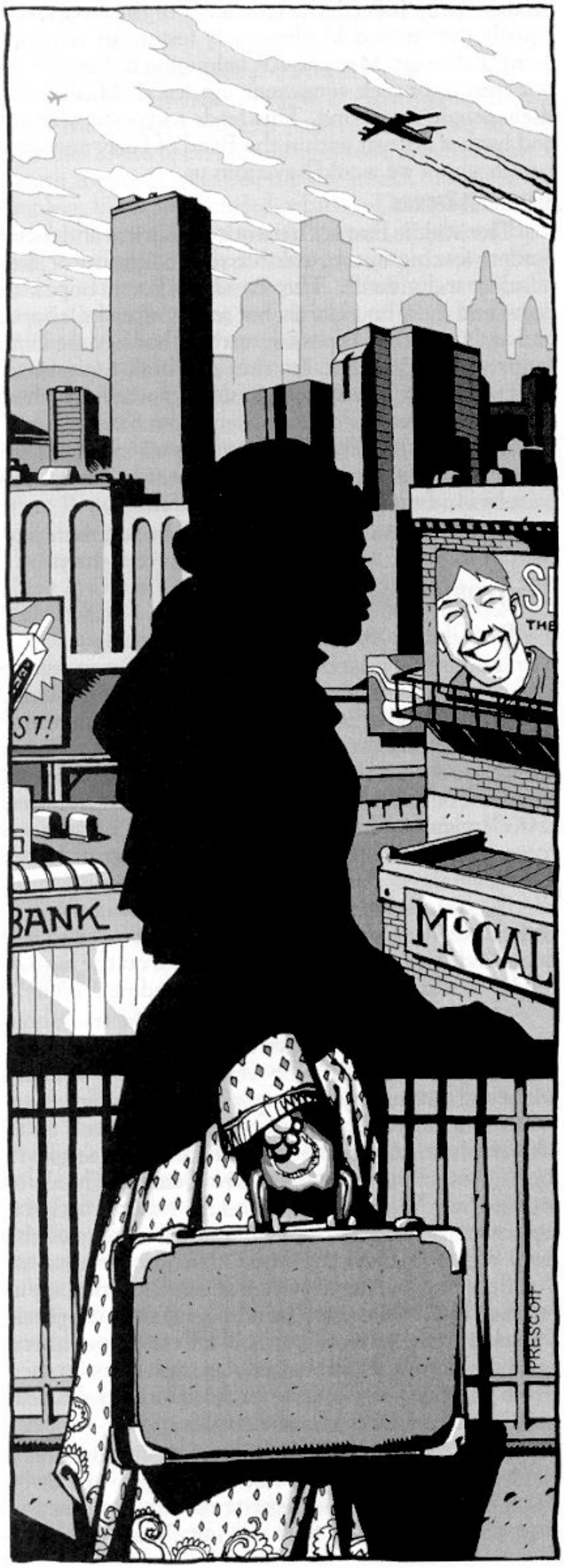
communities, protecting their own kind from supernatural threats. Actually, I understand their reasoning in this matter. Many support their entire families back home and cannot afford to lose their well-paying jobs (and often state-paid apartments). They are replaceable, thanks to the many seeking work visas, so they work hard in the day and try to ignore what they see around them. At night, they return to their communities where they feel welcome and uninhibited. It's only natural that they would protect their own people instead of helping Arabs who mistreat or ignore them.

Issues of Religion

Many Arabs can accept Christians, Zoroastrians and even Jews among them on the basis that we are all people of the book. The problem with religious barriers does not always stem from these faiths, though, but from Islamic heresies that many Muslims grew up hating. I find myself embarrassed by this admission, but the more I tried to learn of the "heretical" beliefs, the more I realized how little I understood them. In my ignorance, I was willing to call them enemy. Now, in my greater ignorance, I realize I have no right to call them such. Over the centuries, the struggle to create a centralized and legitimate line of succession for the leader of the Islamic people did more to fracture our religion than heal it. The Shiite alone split into Zaydi, Ismaili and Imami. The Ismailis, in turn, formed such groups as the infamous Assassins of the Crusades and the Lebanese Druze.

For one reason or another, Islam does not condone movements like the Druze, Yezidis, Bahai or even the Sufi. The Sunni distrust the Druze for their supreme secrecy and because of their practice of hiding within the Sunni community. The Druze are also the only "Muslims" required to serve in the Israeli military, adding to our further distrust of them. Yezidis, in turn, are often mistakenly called demon worshippers for their refusal to accept certain Shiite laws. The Bahai, formed from the Babism movement in 19th Century, are widely condemned and persecuted in Iran because they claimed that a successor of their founder Mirza Husayn Ali would be "He Whom God Shall Manifest" (they also advocate the merging of all religions). Sufism, in turn, seeks physical transcendence and advocates becoming one with Allah, which flies in the face of many Islamic beliefs.

Upon *al-Ghariyyan*, many *kiswah* condone these so-called heresies, because they have greater concerns now or because they understand what true apostasies mean. Many of us realize that if these splinter faiths were truly evil, they would be affected by all our abilities (I know *kiswah* who have tried to brand these *fellaheen* or hold them at bay with their light, for example). And yet, others who espouse more fanatical viewpoints still hunt these *fellaheen* acolytes down, believing them the enemy. We've tried stopping such abusers, but eventually discovered that the Druze in Israel and Lebanon, the Bahai hidden throughout Iran and the Yezidis who are strongest in Yemen all have their own hunters to



protect them. Indeed, the treatment of the fanatics by equally determined Muslims only fosters an environment of distrust. Many *kiswah* belonging to heresies do not trust us or seek vengeance against all Muslims for their people's suffering. This leads to greater friction and further distrust within the Band of Forty and with *kiswah* whom we would have join us.

Restricted Regions

The Middle East is a network of political and social borders, forcing most *kiswah* into regional groups of like-minded individuals. The Band of Forty hopes to transcend these boundaries, but reality often kills hope. Our only tools for bypassing various borders are *kufic* script and the Internet, but they still limit the spirit of our cause. How can we rush to the aid of an ally when Iraq does not readily allow citizens from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait or Iran to cross her borders. Or when Israelis are not welcome in many Arab countries. Or when Arab travelers in Israel are supervised carefully?

Dozens of limitations impede our hopes, thanks to the tensions that bind the Middle East so tightly.

Attitudes Toward Women

By: Globetrotter

Personally, I'm glad I wasn't a hunter 10 years ago or even earlier when reforms were almost nonexistent. While the Middle East's attitudes toward women improve slowly (almost crawling in some places), there's a fundamental shift among some groups for more radical change. The Iraqi-based *Mujahidin Khalq* Organization (MKO) maintains a 35%-female membership, and women comprise 75% of its chief officers, including its leader Maryam Rajavi. The Kurdistan Free Women's Union (YAJK) and the liberation army/drug barons of the PPK both rely on female suicide bombers to fight for a Kurdish homeland. Not even Israel discriminates on the basis of gender (or sexual orientation) in its standing military.

All this obviously flies in the face of the traditional Islamic notion of *ird*, or sexual honor, which established the precept that a man's job was to protect a woman's honor and a woman's job was to safeguard her own virtue. While fundamentalist sectors of Islam desperately try to preserve this tradition, the wider Middle East struggles to join the rest of the world in the 21st Century. Thanks to pressure from Western society and the realization that it cannot remain isolated in an age of global economies, the Arab region is changing faster than fundamentalists would prefer. Satellite-television and the Internet pipe in equality 24-7, while more families send their daughters abroad to study in the respectable universities of liberal Lebanon, Europe, Australia and America. Many women return with degrees, a taste for freedom and the self-confidence to stand up for their rights.

At the forefront of the fight against emancipation is Saudi Arabia and Iran. While Iran improves slowly, Saudi Arabia enforces segregation in public places and even prohibits women from driving. That's bound to change, though, given the impending threat of oil shortages when OPEC's coffers run dry and the Arabs can no longer dictate policy. Many Arab nations are trying to advance themselves and change their economies, if only because they fear becoming Third-World countries. By improving conditions for women now, they have a better chance of appealing to Western investors.

Even if certain parts of the world don't change, the same doesn't hold true for hunters. The imbuing is a life-altering experience. While hunters can retain old prejudices and outlooks, necessity can demand that they be relinquished. Many *kiswah* quickly accept women in their ranks when they see us hold our own in a fight. In fact, Bedu tradition says women command mysterious powers, lending credence to our presence in the struggle as both warriors and wise-women. Whatever misconceptions most male hunters have before the imbuing generally vanish and may turn into mutual respect afterward. Women like Hope123, *Yammah* Selma and countless pioneers are to thank for this growth.

Henna Tattoos

As I've mentioned, the Bedouin believe that only women can tell magical tales without incurring the wrath of the supernatural, because they possess "powers." Normally, I'd dismiss this as drivel or superstitious nonsense, but the fact is there may be some truth to the belief. Islamic culture's differences between men and women are so acute that the two sometimes exist as separate societies. I've heard that in places like Saudi Arabia or among Bedouins, some female hunters reputedly bear or manifest abilities that are unique from their male counterparts'.

One such tale that I've heard deals with henna tattoos. Arab women have worn the intricate designs for centuries, painting their hands and foreheads with red henna and black *kohl*. Since Islam required women to cover themselves from head to foot, chained jewelry and henna were the only ways they could express individuality or "beautify" themselves. Seemingly as result, female *kiswah* raised in this restricted environment are able to manifest their gifts through their jewelry and tattoos in a myriad of startling fashions.

I visited with the venerable *Yammah* Selma, the Bedouin *sheikha*, or wise-woman, who trains female hunters. I witnessed what no man is ever allowed to see. *Yammah* Selma's best students showed me a stunning array of tricks. One caused her almost gauntlet-like *kaff* (a collection of chains, bells and rings that cover the back of the hand) to erupt in flame. She broke steel with her hand. Another used her *kirdala* (a choker with a row of weighted pendants) like a flail, ripping through taut cloth with the toss of her head. Others caused their henna tattoos to explode into blinding light or to burn like fire. They also claimed they could transfer their henna tattoos to enemies by touch, allowing them to track beasts to their lairs or to deny the creatures their powers. I cannot confirm if this last claim is true or not, but it seems amazing.

An End to War

By: al-Amin

I hear many *kiswah* claim that the end to our efforts will coincide with the end of the world. The signs are all around us in whatever faith you profess, they say. This battle is the final war, when we, as God's servants, reap the risen dead and prepare for judgment. I do not believe this. I do not believe God gave me the tools to help change the world knowing it would make no difference in the end. We must be here to change something. We must be here to help right the world. Nobody fights the *jihad* believing they cannot win or that there is no goal worth achieving.

Indeed, I hear others talk about the sacrifices they're willing to make, including suicide bombings in the name of the cause. For many Arabs, this struggle isn't simply against the supernatural. This is their "ticket" into Paradise, a chance to prove their worth to Allah. I foresee two dangers on this path. The first is that each *kiswah*'s death robs us of another teacher or perhaps some insight into our existence. Needless suicide only diminishes our resources in this cause, and for what? I've never seen the supernatural gather in some large enterprise or at least in great enough numbers to justify such suicidal action. They almost appear as scattered and lost as we are, so at best we sacrifice one chess piece for one of theirs. This is madness.

The second danger with absolute commitment is that many *kiswah* realize the supernatural exists across the world. Wiping out or defeating the *akhira* here may draw in more from elsewhere. The struggle might have to be a coordinated labor. Hence, such efforts as hunternet and the Band of Forty.

Some fanatic *kiswah*, however, wish to take this war a step further and launch their suicide tactics worldwide. They claim that hunters of other nations are not as resolved in dying the "righteous death" as they are, so they plan to show by example. They eagerly speak of visiting other countries — especially North America — and continuing the war by drawing *fellaheen* terrorists into the fray and creating suicide bombers to attack monsters. I fear what their actions may do to East-West relations, my friends. I fear because I've heard some Middle Eastern hunters are already in North America, ready to fight the war their way, regardless of the cost.

Aspiration

By: Hajira252

I am an Arab and a Muslim. I wear these titles as proudly as a general bears his medals. But even I recognize that the Arab world cannot win this struggle alone. Our war is international, not simply limited to our region. Were any of us to fight alone, we would scatter ourselves unnecessarily and lose through attrition. By uniting together, we occupy the enemy on multiple fronts and stop him from ever concentrating in one part of the world.

I will also share with you a truth I hold dear, a truth that changed my heart. Before *al-Ghariyyan*, I hated Westerners with a spiteful passion, believing myself superior. Then, upon becoming *kiswah*, Allah revealed a truth to me. He showed me the world, draped in its simplest blues and curled whites. That's all I saw. That's all I needed to see. Afterward, I realized that each continent, each culture must hold some vital clue to our origin and purpose. After all, we Arabs possess a unique thing in our *kufic* script, a language unlike any other (and not surprising given our passion for words), while Westerners bear the spirit of revolution, the ceaseless energy to uphold what you call "inalienable" rights.

Perhaps Allah scattered His wisdom in many people to force us to work together and understand one another. Perhaps we seek clues still hidden across Australia, Asia, Europe and South America. Scoff if you will, but I believed in this enough to visit the Temple of Lord Shiva in Oman. It is the only recognized temple in the Middle East I know of that belongs to a polytheistic faith. I spoke to a Brahmin *kiswah* who claimed hunters were avatars of the Vedic gods and that each hunter bore the potential to become aspired, fervent and forgiving, depending on the situation. He then seemed to manifest multiple illusory, glowing arms like his Lord Shiva. Is this hunter's lesson another we have yet to learn, but dismiss because Asian worship is different from ours? Is it the Nightly Visitants who withhold their secrets from us or is it our own ignorance?

I still believe in Allah, but I also believe He speaks in different voices and in different tongues. We should learn to hear them all. Perhaps then we can hope to win.

Clemency

By: Jibril

The others speak of war, but I see no victory in death. Nor do I believe that destroying monsters is the answer. By virtue of logic, we can no more eradicate them than they can us. Our history is proof that the wholesale genocide of a race or ethnic group eventually fails — and for good reason. Aside from such an effort being inherently wrong, the universe establishes enough checks and balances to prevent such things from happening often (not always, but enough times). If God meant for us to be holocaust-mongers, he would have given us the tools for wholesale slaughter. Instead, our powers are surgical at best and not entirely destructive.

I take my lessons from Islam's Golden Age, when Damascus and Baghdad served as seats of learning. Back then, we collected knowledge from across the known world, including India's advanced understanding of astrology, Greece's mathematics, Rome's architecture, China's papermaking and Egypt's chemistry. We introduced new fruits and vegetables into the European diet

and employed revolutionary surgical techniques while stressing the need for cleanliness. We discovered a treatment for the bubonic plague. We even treated insanity compassionately and as a disease, not as an indication of possession.

I often wonder if we're actually doctors tasked with healing humanity, as Arabs were in our bygone days? We could misinterpret the scalpel as a weapon, not a tool of healing. What if we're humanity's physicians or some complex system of antibodies? Regardless, the duty falls to us to diagnose the world's symptoms and understand the disease, much as Islam's physicians advanced the comprehension of medicine in their time. This doesn't mean killing or converting monsters, but healing them. Simply wiping the supernatural out serves no purpose and brings us no closer to the truth. Understanding the *akhira* and why certain portions of them are malignant, while other aspects are seemingly benign is crucial to surviving and thriving. It's the key to coexisting and learning. That's why we can win this struggle only by grasping the nature of our so-called adversaries and exploring that nature. When it's evident that "treatment" or alliances are out of the question, we can rely on our surgical tools to excise the bad in the hopes it makes the patient stronger.

Fervent

By: Abu Qutayba

I do not question the existence of the *jinn* any more than I dare demand Allah to explain His actions. They exist and I will not deny them this right as long as they uphold their integrity as pious Muslims. The fervent, as some refer to other warriors and myself, can believe in the struggle to prohibit evil in all its forms. We also recognize this is a never-ending struggle. I know of no warrior who fights believing he can end all wars, or no doctor who works to end all illnesses. We may hope for such dreams eventually, but it will not occur in our own lifetimes. We fight and struggle to ensure our children grow strong and virtuous through our efforts. We fight and struggle in the hope that they will take our place when the time comes. We also fight and struggle to earn our place in Paradise. After all, it is Allah, not us, who ultimately deals with sinners. We should merely protect the *fellaheen* and stop the wicked.

Our extended struggle does give me cause for worry, though. I fear the "Lebanon languor"; a protracted war might lead to complacency in the same way some Lebanese seem to ignore their predicament, like sheep. I fear our society will eventually accept the presence of beasts and grow soft in the fight. That is why I recite *Surahs* from the Koran with my children every day, in the hopes that their duties to Allah will keep them keen-eyed and strong. Where others falter, the alert will lead by action and example. There is no other way.

The End Times

By: Tarjiman220

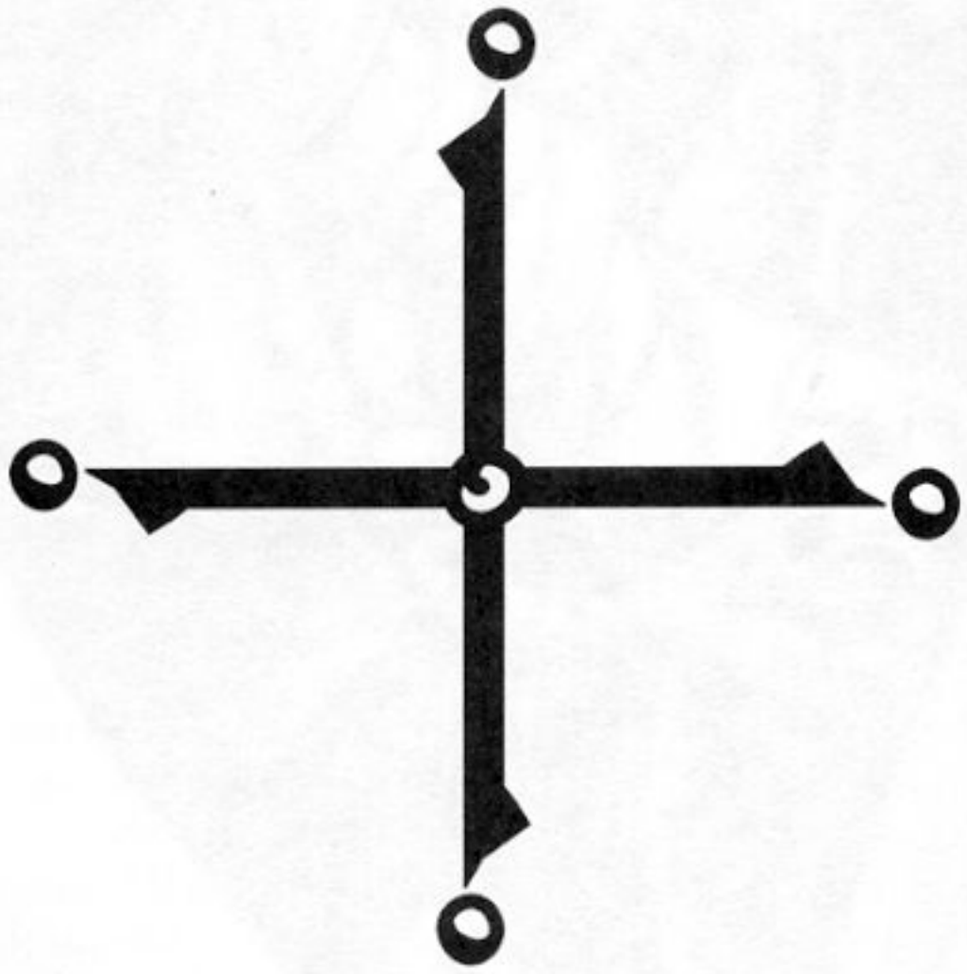
It is said that a soldier's very purpose is to ultimately destroy a need for his own existence. In all likelihood, when we win, it will mark the End Times when Allah judges the guilty and rewards the good. I fight to help, but I think I also hope to improve my standing in the afterlife.

What awaits us in the final accounting? I know I fight believing it is for the greater good and that I secured my place in Paradise. But my all-too-human heart and questioning soul wonder if I'm wrong. An ancient writer, Omar Khayyam, shocked, thrilled and eventually changed society's views with his poems. Unlike others who derived their inspiration from the greatness or beneficence of Allah, Khayyam questioned life's seeming futility, the joys of hedonism and the bliss of existing for the moment. He believed we are worse off than embers flickering at the edge of a campfire, for we were aware that we were dying. It is funny that his words, not the Koran's, come to mind now. Perhaps it is because someone once said something about "the unexamined life." Omar, in turn, once penned of God:

But helpless pieces of the Game He plays,
Upon this checkerboard of Nights and Days.
Hither and Tither moves and checks and slays,
And one by one back in the closet lays.

If understanding Allah is so far beyond our capacity to reason that we must obey and not question, I often wonder if the answers that await us are terrifying in the reckoning. What if we are pieces in a majestic chess game, no more important than our roles as pawns, rooks or knights? If Allah knows all, does He not shape the course of things to come? Are we therefore important to him as individuals or as pieces? The questions terrify me enough to stop asking. Faith, after all, is not knowing. If this ignorance is the truth, then we humble men and women are Allah's most pious servants.

Salaam a'laykuum. May you bring the thunder, my friends.



CHAPTER 5: ALLAH'S SERVANTS

Recite In the name of your Lord who created – created man from clots of blood.

Recite! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One, who by the pen taught man what he did not know.

— The Koran, *Surah*: 96:1 [Clots of Blood]

As far as the imbued know, they are an international phenomenon. At least, contact has been made among the chosen from across the world, thanks for the most part to the Internet and web sites such as hunternet. Rather than inspire solidarity and draw common lines, however, communication among such widespread people has quickly led to a pervasive confusion about exactly who and what hunters are and what they're supposed to do in the world. All have different perspectives on their origins and intentions. All have different ideas about how to deal with monsters. And, most perplexing, the world's imbued claim to demonstrate a wide range of bizarre and inexplicable capabilities, even among those whose outlooks on and beliefs in the hunt the run similarly.

The rainbow of interpretations and manifestations of the calling would seem to be based on each individual and what he brings to the mission. All imbued had lives, faiths and lifestyles before. Now that they've been changed and offered no instruction on what to do or what to be, all they can do is draw from their past experiences and value systems for guidance. The result is a different answer to the call for almost every culture, country and religion to which people belong. And given different worldwide understanding and even uses of some seemingly familiar powers, it would appear that the Heralds adapt their gifts to each recipient's talents and awareness rather than force one agenda and set of tools on all of the chosen.

Thus far, **Hunter** has addressed a general perspective on the mission, on the edges that the imbued display and on the ways hunters interpret their mission. The game's sourcebooks have illustrated a common denominator of how the hunt is carried out across the world. Yet those same books have alluded to cultural and regional differences in the calling, whether in ways to use powers or in the appearance of otherwise unknown capabilities. This chapter details the unique rules behind the hunt as carried out in the Middle East.

BEING KISWAH

Your character, as one of the *kiswah*, is in many ways similar to a Western hunter. Both have caught a glimpse of the real world around them, the one most people don't know about or don't want to know about. They both have goals and aspirations and both are forever changed by the calling. The game's "normal people" theme applies just as well in a Middle Eastern setting as it does anywhere else in the world. Most characters are street vendors, students or waiters, not special military operatives or "Arabian Night" warriors. They are real people caught up in a struggle that they do not fully understand.

A **Hunter** game set in the Middle East does have a flavor all its own, though. Most Arab countries are described as "developing," a euphemism for the Third World. Computers exist and are in broad use by companies and schools, but few people own them. Many own cars, especially in large cities, but people often prefer to walk rather than drive simply because they were brought up that way. Family values are much stronger than those of the West. Children often live with their parents until marriage, and may not move far even then. Families stay close, both geographically and emotionally, and most people can trace out their family trees to cousins several steps removed. Political correctness has not run rampant as it has in the West. Racism and sexism are common, though many men see themselves as women's protectors.

In this unique society, a variety of hunters have sprung up to hold back the night. Some allow their vigor to guide them, while others envision a better future. Still others walk the path of peace. The personalities and character types found here are as varied as those that populate the West. *Kiswah* may seek to attack, protect, destroy or aid on the hunt according to their personal views on the calling and on the world in general.

This chapter contains new rules for running a game with Middle Eastern hunters. It includes hints on playing a character from what may be a very different culture, it offers modifications to the character-creation process that help you design people who are true to the region, and it provides a description of the unique Middle Eastern hunter code. This chapter helps you introduce your Western characters to the Middle Eastern world, transport your *kiswah* to the West, or to play in a chronicle based on Middle Eastern hunters in their native land.

Roleplaying Kiswah

Roleplaying is a predominantly Western pastime. For the most part, it's enjoyed by middle- to upper-class young men. We comprise a specific world demographic and we typically have a number of traits in common — educated, affluent and raised on Judeo-Christian principles. That's largely the context we know in life, and that's often the perspective from which we create and portray our characters. While authors write what they know, we typically roleplay what we know.

So, when a sourcebook comes along that's dedicated to possible characters from another part of the world, we're challenged to depict those people realistically. Our characters have a different frame of reference than we do. Their part of the world, upbringing and values can be extremely different than ours. Playing a character with a foreign religion, for example, can be difficult enough without having to deal with a separate cultural backdrop, as well. Many of the Middle East's hunters are Muslim. How do we get into such characters' heads without doing exhaustive and extensive research into their faith and cultural experience? In the real world, people study foreign cultures and mindsets for years to immerse themselves into those environments. But we want to start playing at some point, right?

The big thing to remember is that hunters, whether Western or Arab, are human. They're fragile, fearful and paranoid. Although Middle Eastern absorption of and respect for folklore may make the supernatural world easier to accept than it is in the pragmatic and secular West, hunters there still have no more inherent understanding of the real World of Darkness than do other imbued. The *kiswah* are ignorant of the greater truth. More importantly, they *know* they're ignorant. They can slap the label "*jinn*" on a supernatural creature, but that doesn't mean they have any idea what it really wants or how to make it go away.

Playing a Muslim *kiswah* is, at its core, not that different from portraying a hunter of any origin or faith. The character is still human, she still risks her life on the hunt, and she upholds some things such as family that are important to her, and she is willing to sacrifice other things such as wealth for the cause. In terms of religion, Muslims are no different from anyone else of faith. A set of core beliefs is meant to guide them through their spiritual and mundane lives. Some people adhere to these tenets strictly, while others can dismiss their relevance. Some obey the Koran to the very letter, while others apply an interpretational reading, using their own experience to construct a personal meaning for their faith. Still others pay lip service to Islam and rarely follow any of its primary tenets, let alone try to incorporate religion into their daily lives. We can all sympathize with these outlooks here in the West.

There, just as here, it's important to decide how big an influence religion has on your character. Differences in observation can be subtle. A woman who lives conservatively and who is quiet and demure may not be religious at all, while a street punk might make all five prayers every day. Nobody wears a patch on her arm declaring her faith, how seriously she takes it or what form her worship assumes. The external appearance of your character's beliefs has to do with her personality. If she thinks of herself as devout, does she pray daily and wear a head covering? Does she reject conservative dress as old fashioned and speak her mind whenever she feels like it? Does she worship and give alms in private, but leaves the trappings of religion at home when she ventures into the world?

At the same time, people can act faithful only for appearance's sake. Does your character carry a *masbaha* (similar to a rosary) around everywhere and mention Allah's name constantly? This same character might never pray or fast. Does she pretend to be a true believer while rejecting or ignoring the faith in her heart? She might have decided that prayer and fasting are unim-

portant — that she can live best by performing small acts of kindness and acting devout to encourage others Muslims. The character's outward appearance and inner feelings make sense to her, while someone else who hears her opinions on faith could call her a hypocrite. She might, in fact, lie to the world about how important religion is to her; her friends and family call her devout while faith, in fact, plays no role in her lifestyle. Each Western person and character also exercises her faith (or chooses not to) according to her own values.

During character creation, decide how comfortable your character is with religion. This is her personal feeling; what everyone else sees comes later. Does she pray daily? Does she fast during *Ramadan* and give alms? Is it enough to think of herself as a Muslim and to hold faith in Allah in her heart?

How does your character feel about expressing her faith? Some people wear religious jewelry and clothing associated with a particular faith, while others walk around in jeans. If she prays, does she do so in public? Will your character pray in a mosque if she can't get home in time? Does she make it a point to pray at a mosque with the rest of her community? People can lie anywhere on a range from those who enjoy starting religious discussions to some who categorically refuse to go into the subject. Where is your character in terms of her public actions and what she is or isn't comfortable talking about? Religion, along with politics, is a favorite subject of the Arab people. Those who are uncomfortable talking about either can stand out in a social setting. A character's way of expressing her faith may influence the makeup of her social group. Fundamentalists may choose to associate with those like them or may purposely associate with the less devout in an effort to bolster others' faith. Meanwhile, the non-religious often shun those who openly express their beliefs, feeling that the subject is best left for private discussion.

Finally, think about how your character views people of other religious persuasions. Does she think of spirituality as a personal choice or is everyone else clearly wrong? How tolerant is she of others? Many — if not most — religions include the tenant that the faithful should accept those of other beliefs in spite of their differences. Amazingly, some of the most "devout" members of these faiths are the ones who curse members of drastically different religions. In fact, many different factions exist even within a single faith like Islam. Some people are able to accept those who fall under the broad definition of Muslim, while others say that those who do not share their exact beliefs are heretics. The same is true of Christians and Jews within their own sects.

Religion aside, Arabs do tend to have different hopes, dreams and cultural norms than Westerners. A job is never just a job. It's a point of pride to support one's family and to bring dignity to one's name by being an upstanding member of the community. Neighbors are themselves a kind of family, and most Arabs know everyone for three blocks in any direction, unless they live in a crowded city. Their sense of community is extremely strong, and a threat to a neighbor is a treat to oneself. Be sure that you establish your character's priorities and goals along with her personality, since these define her identity as much as her faith does.

With all these ideas set down, you have a solid start on how your *kiswah* character carries herself and treats others. Now add in the details of her upbringing and cultural experience. Does she come from a conservative family where everyone is expected to follow the party line? Perhaps she grew up in a family to whom appearances were important. This can affect how she presents and expresses herself. Does she make it a point to wear the best clothes? Is she a showoff, talking about her big house and expensive car whenever an opportunity arises? Your character could have grown up to a family of farmers. This origin might give her a completely different set of values and sensibilities. Does she think it more important to say as much as possible or to try to limit her speech to what's important? Is she more impressed by material possessions or a work ethic? How does this value system tie in with her religious beliefs and self-image?

Remember that the bottom line is this: Your Middle Eastern character has a personality *before* she has a creed, and that personality may be markedly different from anything seen in the West. Although priorities such as family, wealth and faith are found everywhere, Arabs have a different way of expressing them. It is this personality that determines your character's way of life and her style in pursuing the hunt. Given that a character holds her family's safety above all, does she stay with them for their protection or leave, hoping to take any trouble with her? Hunters the world over face challenges like this, but Middle Easterners are in a unique situation. Travel is more difficult and jobs are harder to come by. Technology is limited and theft is quickly noticed in any community. In many cases, stealing just to save one's own hide is unthinkable and *kiswah* must find other means to survive.

As you can see, playing a Middle Eastern hunter can be very different from playing a Western one. At the heart of your character is a person with different beliefs, biases and values. She may or may not be spiritual, she might appreciate appearances and she has a way of presenting herself to the world. When you start building your character's concept, think about her inherent beliefs and what she upholds as important. Then decide her more superficial qualities: her lifestyle, appearance, sense of community and job. Although religion is important, it's only one facet of your character. Her religious beliefs come out in how she lives and addresses the world and underlie her personal choice of lifestyle. When you've incorporated your character's religion into her personality, you have a much easier time playing her.

Character Creation

The process for creating a *kiswah* character is the same as that for any **Hunter** character. It begins by defining who the person is and by establishing her personality and motives. *Kiswah* creeds are marginally different than their Western counterparts, but the basic Virtue structure of Mercy, Vision and Zeal is the same. The major difference is that the *kiswah* do not recognize the general concepts of Martyrs as unique individuals within their ranks. All Arabs are assumed — expected — to be prepared to sacrifice for their religion or cause. The tenets of such a lifestyle are therefore spread among all people, and the possibilities of the Martyr creed are available to all *kiswah*, as is explained later.

You can also select edges from the standard sets in the **Hunter** rulebook or in any of the creed books for your character, no matter what his creed is. Middle Eastern hunters have manifested certain edges rarely found outside the Arab world, however.

There are also a few differences between certain Abilities applied in the Middle East and in the West, and your selection of starting Backgrounds and Abilities is somewhat restricted.

Let's go through the process step by step.

Step One: Character Concept

Choose your character's concept. As always, this can be almost anything. We recommend that you keep both **Hunter**'s "everyday people" theme and the Middle Eastern setting in mind. "Displaced Refugee" or "Electronics Repairman" might work well, while "Media Tycoon" is a slightly more unusual type of character and might not suit your game's focus and environment very well.

Next, decide on a creed for your character (or your Storyteller may assign one to you based on your character's reaction or motives at the imbuing). Creed should reflect your character's philosophy and way of thinking; it's the "why" behind what she does. Remember that assignments are broad categories and there is room for a lot of different kinds of people within each. Two *Mudafieen* (Defenders) might react totally differently to the same situation if they have a different Nature or Demeanor. Also, don't let your choice of creed pigeonhole your character's identity. It's the personality that dictates the creed, not the other way around.

Creeds for the *kiswah* are similar to those of their Western counterparts. The major difference is that there are no Martyrs, per se, in the Middle East. Thanks to the devotion Arab imbued bring to the hunt, any one of them can give their all for the cause. It's part of their upbringing, culture and religion. Although no *kiswah* are considered pure Martyrs, all Middle Eastern hunters martyr themselves to some extent. So, you can't create a character of this creed.

The Martyr edge path is still available to characters of the other creeds, however. *Kiswah* of the other two primary Virtues — Zeal and Vision — can acquire Martyr edges as follows: At least one point in Mercy must be dedicated to manifest the edge, but any others required may be from your character's primary Virtue. For example, you want your *Mudafi* (Defender) to manifest the level-three Martyrdom edge. You must spend one point of Mercy to do so. The other two points required to rise from level two to three may both come from Zeal, one from Zeal and a second from Mercy, or all three can come from Mercy. Characters still cannot acquire an edge outside their creed path of a higher level than the highest edge they have in their creed path. So, to acquire the level-three Martyrdom edge, your *Mudafi* must have at least a level-three Defense edge.

Merciful *kiswah* — the *Uutafa'* (Redeemers) and *'Awlad* (Innocents) — may choose a Virtue other than Mercy with which to acquire Martyrdom edges. At least one point of Mercy must still be spent, though. An *Uutafa'* player may spend Vision in addition to Mercy to acquire a level-three Martyrdom edge, for example. She could spend one Mercy and two Vision, two Mercy and one Vision or three Mercy points.

The choice of a Merciful character's "supplementary" Virtue from which points can be drawn to acquire Martyrdom edges is usually permanent. One of Vision or Zeal must be chosen. Thereafter, points are not usually drawn from the other Virtue to acquire powers from the Martyrdom path. This choice reflects part of your character's philosophy on life and the hunt. Zeal suggests an inner toughness and willingness to bear down, combined with your character's inherent compassion. "Tough love," if you will. Those who resort to Vision are typically willing to look beyond misconceptions to seek higher truths in their quest to help people and beings.

A Merciful character who undergoes an extreme perspective shift during the course of a chronicle — say, an Innocent with Vision as his "secondary" Virtue who is wronged horribly and becomes more violent thereafter — might be allowed to change supplementary Virtues. The choice is ultimately up to the Storyteller. The change depends on how the character would use Martyrdom edges thereafter. If they'd be applied to stop creatures aggressively, a shift to Zeal as a complementary edge might be appropriate. If Martyrdom edges would now be used to suffer personal loss to give others insight, a change to Vision as a supplementary Virtue might be right for a primarily Merciful character.

The Creeds

The following are the Middle Eastern interpretations of the creeds. As in the West, these groups are not formally recognized institutions or societies. They simply reflect common patterns of thought, beliefs and goals on the hunt. As in the West, each creed has various names by which *kiswah* tend to refer to people with these mentalities.

Sample Character Concepts

Taxi Driver — You spend your days in an old, hot car driving people from one end of town to the other. That suits you fine, because you can earn a living without having deadlines or a boss looking over your shoulder all the time. Of course, you still have a boss; the only way to be competitive was to join up with one of the transport companies in town. "Company" seems like an awfully big word for seven people with five cars, a tiny office and a phone line, but it's nice to get to know people around town. You have the most interesting conversations with strangers, and you don't have to listen to the annoying ones for more than a few minutes. Besides, it's as good a way as any to put your kids through school and to keep food on the table.

Shopkeeper — Dad used to sell trinkets and souvenirs to tourists, but you decided to turn the place into a leather-goods store. You're lucky to have a shop near the middle of town; the late-afternoon rush usually brings in enough business to cover the whole day. Haggling can be downright fun, especially when you know you're going to turn a profit no matter what. You had a hard time starting out, but then you found a quality supplier and managed to get word out about your shop. Tourism fills the pockets, but doing business with regulars is much more satisfying.

Citrus Farmer — A few years ago, you bought a few plots of land near your house and combined them into an orchard. Even though it took several seasons for the new trees to come in, this has been your best year for lemons yet. You make the weekly trip to the *hisbah* vegetable market and get what you can for your harvest. Lately, it's been harder and harder to make ends meet thanks to longstanding debts, and you've been raising a few chickens and rabbits to keep meat on the table without paying extravagant prices. Your family pitches in and your youngest boy is turning out to have quite the green thumb.

Student — School is a pain, but you try to remind yourself that your parents couldn't afford to get much of an education when they were young. Next year, you'll take the *tawjihi* exit exam, which will tell you if you can go to college and what you can study. And yet, you're not sure if you want to spend four or five more years in school when you're able to make a small salary as a car mechanic right now. Even if you do score well, where are you going to get the money to move away and pay for tuition? You aren't sure whether to keep going and hope Allah shows you a way or to quit now and try to make enough money to send your little sister to school, instead.

Pillar of Hajj: Hukama'/Hakeem (Visionaries) — These *kiswah* are often educated, but some can be found who have little or no formal schooling. The single bond between Arab Visionaries is that they try to think beyond the immediate situations they face and look to the long-ranging effects of the decisions they make. However, many get caught up in making choices that benefit them yet hurt others. For example, as a hunter, a *Hakeem* is better suited to fight the forces of darkness than a normal person is, but does that oblige her to place her own safety over that of the defenseless? The *Hakeem's* foresight becomes a curse on those rare occasions when the only way to help those she cares about is to sacrifice some or to cause them harm. *Hukama'* rarely have a hard time figuring out their options and laying down long-term plans; living with the consequences and trying to keep from sacrificing too much is where they run into trouble. Some say that a *Hakeem's* greatest failing is regretting what had to be done.

Pillar of Jihad: Muhajimeen/Muhajim (Avengers) — As with their Western brethren, the *Muhajimeen* have generally had some crime committed against them by the supernatural and seek revenge. They tend to be even more reactionary than their foreign counterparts, however. Living in a harsh world where family is supreme and the government turns a blind eye to any crime that doesn't concern it, *Muhajimeen* live by two laws: act on behalf of your own and return every insult. The largest moderating factor in a *Muhajim's* life tends to be her family. Although these Avengers can lose themselves in the hunt just like anyone else, family unity is so ingrained into these *kiswah* that they can sometimes be brought back from the edge by those they love, even when other hunters have long ceased to care.

Pillar of Salat: Muhakimeen/Hakam (Judges) — In a world where religion and tradition are at the forefront of society and culture, extremism runs rampant. Those who see it as their place to decide who acts correctly according to their set of values can become *Muhakimeen* when imbued. Deciding which monsters should live and which should die comes naturally when you've spent much of your life passing judgment on others. As usual, there are many ways to interpret the role of Judges in the hunt. Some evaluate monsters and let others carry out the sentence, while some *Muhakimeen* take matters into their own hands. Once in a while, every *Hakam* turns her watchful eye to her companions. Although most realize they survive night to night thanks to their comrades' help, a *Hakam* may decide that a particular *kiswah* is unfit to be part of Allah's army and either tries to talk her into changing her ways or decides the ally's fate for her.

Pillar of Sawm: Mudafieen/Mudafi (Defenders) — Middle Eastern Defenders sometimes concentrate their energies on protecting a charge or place, as do Westerners. Most, however, spread their protection among people, places and ideas they consider to be of supreme

value. For example, a teacher's priorities may be divided among guarding her home and family, the school at which she teaches and her students. As a result, the *Mudafieen* often spread themselves very thin, having great difficulty prioritizing which of their charges is most important. These *kiswah* can be caught flat-footed when forced to decide whom to protect and whom to abandon. The stresses of the hunt mount more quickly on the *Mudafieen* than on perhaps any other creed members due to the losses they can suffer when they can't protect everything they hold dear. Their typically stoic nature, however, make them very good at hiding their pain.

Pillar of Shahada: 'Awlad/Walad (Innocents) — Unlike Western Innocents, those of the Middle East are rarely dismissed as foolish or childish. Rather, other *kiswah* do their best to protect these people, recognizing that they represent the best qualities of humanity. This intervention is infuriating to regional Innocents, who usually want nothing more than to do their part in the hunt. They hate being made to feel helpless and being talked down to. Many an *'Awlad* has gone off on her own to prove that she can make a difference, only to find herself rescued and chided by her friends. This treatment further irritates these people, and episodes of "running away" are often repeated. *'Awlad* are often stuck in an ongoing struggle to prove their worth both to their allies and to themselves.

Pillar of Zakat: Uutafa'/Aateef (Redeemers) — These hunters are in many ways akin to evangelists. Though they do not necessarily preach religion, they believe that the way of moderation is essential to the world and that it is their duty to show humanity and the supernatural the way to coexistence. Unfortunately, as they see more of the "real" world, the *Uutafa'* can become jaded about their ability to affect real change. Some bemoan their fellow hunters' inability to treat the "monsters" around them fairly, while others turn against fellow *kiswah* to help those creatures they believe to be worth saving. The hunt can be very confusing for an *Aateef*, and her conscience can easily drive her around the bend, if she survives that long.

Archetypes

For a list of Archetypes, see p. 97 of **Hunter: The Reckoning**, or the various creed books.

Step Two: Choose Attributes

With your character's concept established, decide on how to rate her Attributes. There are two important distinctions to be aware of between *kiswah* and Western hunters.

Stamina — The Middle East environment is harsh. Although most Arabs live in towns and cities away from the swirling sandstorms of the desert, temperatures routinely exceed 100-degrees Fahrenheit. People do a lot of walking, and in some countries a five-minute drive is considered a waste of gas. Few buildings have amenities for the elderly or handicapped that are common — even the law — in the West. All this means Middle Easterners are relatively hardy. When creating a *kiswah* character, you must assign at least two dots to Stamina, in excess of the one you receive automatically. These Stamina points are still drawn from the pool with which you have to spend for your character.

Appearance — Foreigners in the Middle East stand out like a sore thumb. The locals have a walk (literally) and a look to them that outsiders can rarely duplicate. Even though skin color can range from black to albino in the Middle East, it generally has a certain quality unique to Mediterranean people. This does not mean that *kiswah* are necessarily more or less beautiful than anyone else. But you should make a note next to Appearance that your character can blend into the Middle East. Characters with foreign origins are unable to do so. Even those outsiders who have spent years in Arab lands are distinguishable, and the way Storyteller characters interact with your hunter is affected by whether they think she is a local or not. Merchants target foreigners as marks and try to take advantage of them, and people in the street may not treat your character seriously (+1 difficulty on all Social rolls when a foreign character tries to convince a local of something).

Step Three: Choose Abilities

The Abilities available to the *kiswah* are the same as those for any hunter. There are a few unique features to be aware of when creating a Middle Eastern character, though.

Intimidation — As with any pair of cultures, Arabs and Westerners have different definitions of what is "intimidating." While the latter are often impressed by a large build and an emotionless face, a quick, sharp tongue is often enough to earn respect in the Middle East. Additionally, physical intimidation can take many different forms, some more effective in one society than another. Gesturing and yelling are normal parts of a heated debate in the Middle East, while picking up a potential weapon or invading a character's personal space are immediately considered hostile actions. As a result, *kiswah* are at a disadvantage to intimidate Westerners, while visitors can have the same problem. A character attempting to use Intimidate on someone from the other culture loses one die from the pool. This penalty does not apply when the character tries to intimidate someone from her own culture.

Expression — Islam is a required course in the public-school systems of all Arab countries, and in most private schools. One component of learning about the faith is instruction in the proper, melodic reading of the Koran. Students can also learn calligraphy and a variety of other art forms. Although it is not required, most Arab characters should have a dot of Expression. Not having this point probably means the character was taught these skills but only acquired enough knowledge to pass her classes, and then forgot what little she learned.

Streetwise — This Talent implies more in the Middle East than it does in the West. First, Streetwise is used to determine how easily a character can find public transportation, in the form of a taxi or "Service" car. You choose a destination, then roll Wits + Streetwise, difficulty 7. The number of successes achieved determines how fast and cheap the transportation your character finds is. The exact interpretation of the roll is left to the Storyteller, taking into account the size of the town the character is in and how remote her destination is. No successes mean your character doesn't find a way to get where she wants to go. In general, a single success means the character arrives within a few hours, while paying a little too much. Three successes get the character there quickly and at a reasonable price.

Streetwise also represents your character's skill at barter. The cost of most items and services (excepting cab fare, groceries and government exchanges) can be haggled up or down. When trying to agree on a price, make a resisted Wits + Streetwise roll, difficulty 7, against the same made by the Storyteller for your character's opponent. The difference in the number of successes achieve by the winner is multiplied by 10. The result is used as a percentage that modifies the cost of the item. For example, a character wishes to argue the price of a lamp (which originally costs 30 Dinars) with a shopkeeper. Dice pools are rolled for both. The player gets three successes and the Storyteller gets only one. The character wins by two successes, so the cost of the lamp is reduced by 20%, to 24 Dinars. If the Storyteller got, say, four successes, she would have had one more than the player and the lamp's price would have risen to 33 Dinars. Such a price increase is possible because prices are rarely listed on items. People working in stores know what their stock is worth and gauge buyers' gullibility while making an offer.

A few important points should be noted about bartering. Non-Arab characters who attempt to haggle are at a severe disadvantage; players can roll only half their Wits + Streetwise pools, fractions rounded down. If your character tries to argue a price, you are obligated to make a roll. A person can't start negotiations, then decide she doesn't like how they're going and ask for the original price again. Finally, it's considered bad form to haggle a new price and then refuse to pay it. It's assumed that some characters will threaten to walk out of a store if the shopkeeper doesn't give them a better price — that's part of the negotiation. But a character who arrives at a price and then decides she doesn't like it and leaves is not treated well if she ever returns. She finds that the base price of everything in the store rises just for her, and nearby shops may be resistant to offering her good prices, as well. Once again, since prices aren't normally predetermined, a shopkeeper can change them at will. Haggling is a game. One of the unwritten rules is that if you lose, you should do so gracefully.

Drive — Although the Drive skill works the same as it does in the West, driving in the Middle East is quite different. Drivers are much more aggressive, and many roads have no speed limits. Any Western driver in the Middle East has an effective rating of one dot below normal. The opposite is also true; Arabs take the same penalty when trying to drive in the West. A foreigner reduced to zero Drive is left trapped at the side of the road, too afraid or confused to pull into traffic.

Firearms — Middle Eastern hunters should never start with more than one dot in Firearms. Guns are difficult to find in most Arab countries (outside the military) and are illegal in many. Sport hunting is all but nonexistent. Even if a character is able to obtain a firearm, she has nowhere to practice with it. The maximum starting Firearms rating for Middle Eastern natives 1, and freebie points cannot be used to purchase any dots in the Skill beyond the first. Spending experience points can still advance a character's score during play.

Step Four: Choose Advantages

As usual, advantages help flesh your character out. Virtue points and edges are chosen normally, and a character's first edge manifests at the imbuing. Background selection is also the same for Middle Eastern characters, with the following exceptions.

Arsenal — *Kiswah* cannot start with any points in Arsenal. Although a character may begin with a single firearm and a small supply of ammunition at creation, remember that the items are contraband in most of the Arab world. Those with a lot of money and connections can obtain some weapons, but the average person has nothing with which to fight except what she picks up and swings. Since it is as difficult for thieves and bandits to obtain weapons as it is for those they attack, there is not a great need for firearms where self-defense is concerned. *Kiswah* who have traveled outside the Middle East may be exceptions to this rule. When they return, however, they are probably unable bring their weapons with them. Not even a very large bribe keeps a border guard from sounding the alarm if blatant smuggling is discovered or she feels the least bit threatened. Baggage and personal searches are common.

Contacts — Every *kiswah* must start with at least one point in Contacts, dedicated to family. This point must be purchased; it's not free. The tight-knit structure of the Middle East makes it all but impossible for anyone to grow up without strong bonds to certain family members. Even refugees and orphans become close to those with whom they live, and they consider these people their extended families. Further points may be invested in Contacts to represent more family members who are willing to help your character, or they may be dedicated to non-family members.

Fame — Although a point does not need to be spent in Fame, make a note of your character's hometown. Whenever he is in that city or village, he

Transportation

Most countries in the Middle East have networks of taxi cabs for both local and long-distance travel. Local cabs can be found in any major commercial or business district. Companies range in size from one person with a car to a fleet of 15 vehicles and a maintenance garage. Large cities with over one million residents tend to have many firms, while smaller towns are served by fewer, larger companies. Groups of more than five drivers usually own a small office and have a telephone line that can be used to request a cab, while smaller companies subsist on the fares they pick up in the street.

Almost anyone can be licensed to operate a commercial cab. A driver's license, vehicle and special commercial certification are all that's required. Since vehicles themselves need only be in good working order, they range in size and shape from small new Nissans to 30-year-old Mercedes Benzes. Local cars that cruise the streets looking for fares are always yellow. By-request, or *talab*, cars can be any color.

There is a well-known network called the Service (sair-VEES) for traveling from town to town. These cars drive a regular route, looping between two towns several times each day. Routes are well known locally, and anyone who wants to take a trip to another city can simply wait somewhere on that particular route for a car. Drivers who see people waiting on the road flash their lights and pull over to pick them up if flagged down. The passenger pays en route and gets off wherever he or she wants to. Fares for particular routes are also well known locally, and there is no need to write them down anywhere.

Service cars, unlike local cabs, are almost always large. Many are Mercedes four- or seven-seaters, new or old. In the last few years, drivers have begun using 10-seater vans. Particularly busy routes, especially those between large cities, have hub stops where drivers wait their turn to pick up passengers. Criers work these hubs, indicating which cars are headed to which towns. It's sometimes easier to find a seat at a hub than along a route, since cars that have left their hub are often full. Some countries such as Lebanon and Saudi Arabia have begun using buses, but these are often slow and uncomfortable.

Fares depend mainly on what kind of trip a passenger wishes to take. Local trips cost a flat rate of less than the equivalent of one or two American dollars. Some cities such as Amman and Jordan have moved to a meter system, though fares are still quite cheap. Service trips tend to be a little more expensive. Exact cost depends on how far the destination is. Passengers who wish to travel from one end of a country to another can expect to pay a substantial amount; the alternative is to make several short Service trips from town to town, losing time waiting for a new car in each city. Trips to an airport or land border are often quite expensive, up to $100 American, since drivers often need special permits to be hired or to even drive a vehicle at those sites.

effectively has one point of Fame beyond his true rating. (If he has no Fame score in general, he has one point when visiting home.) This bonus is due to the close relationship between neighbors and friends. Most people live in one neighborhood for a significant part of their lives, and neighbors and shopkeepers watch them grow. People often feel proprietary about children in their neighborhoods, so they pay attention to their safety. There is a strong sense of community among members of a town as a result.

Influence/Resources — There are generally two ways to gain political power in the Arab world: wisdom and wealth. Truly influential characters have a combination of both. A Middle Eastern character can never have more dots in Influence than represented by her Wits and Resources ratings. In order to determine a character's maximum Influence rating, add her Wits and Resources, then subtract two. So, a character with three dots in Wits and one in Resources can never have more than two dots of Influence. If she wishes to acquire more Influence, you must first raise either her Wits or Resources score. Note that her Influence rating does not automatically rise to her new limit. You must still spend freebie or experience points to raise Influence after improving Wits and/or Resources.

Step Five: Last Touches

Your *kiswah* is almost finished. By now, the details of her personality should be well developed in your mind, and you have a good idea of where her strengths and weaknesses lie in terms of her capabilities. The last step is to spend freebie points and to fill in her Conviction and Willpower scores. Starting Conviction for *kiswah* is the same as that of Western hunters; *Muhajimeen* (Avengers) start with 4 dots, *Mudafieen* (Defenders) with 3 and so on. However, Middle Eastern hunters start with four points in Willpower instead of the usual three, and this "extra" point is free. This increase represents the harsher lifestyle they have to endure compared to most of their Western counterparts.

Edges

Although *kiswah* can manifest edges similar to those of their Western brethren, some have displayed powers that seem to be all their own. Those who have noticed these differences usually ascribe them to a different attitude and mindset among these hunters — life, faith and upbringing in the Middle East creates opportunities for capabilities among *kiswah* that are unique to them or rare among hunters of other lands. The following are a few of the edges available to the *kiswah*. They can also be used by Western hunters in some cases, but you should take care that your character has a good reason for manifesting one of these capabilities.

Other imbued who develop these effects are usually Arabs who were raised abroad in fairly traditional families. For practical purposes, they are Westerners, but their outlooks on life, religion and the hunt lean toward

those of the Middle Eastern experience. It should be rare for a non-*kiswah* to display one of these powers. Ultimately, the Storyteller decides if a foreign hunter's mindset or perspective on the hunt makes him a candidate for one of these powers. Perhaps an imbued professor who has studied and taught about the Middle East in the West for several years could develop some of these capabilities. Or a foreign hunter who is allied with a *kiswah* for some time, during which cultural and ethical values are taught and exchanged, could manifest a unique edge.

Remember, too, that triggers are typically different among Middle Eastern and Western hunters. Just as those from the West draw on their own beliefs and cultures to wield their edges, *kiswah* do the same based on their own context. They might pray to Allah, face West momentarily or rely on an appropriate Middle Eastern physical trigger, such as a henna tattoo. The last is a body ornamentation believed to have personal and religious meaning. Such designs could also be considered the source of or means to edges. Only women wear such decorations. A character with Demand may believe that the tattoos on her arm help channel power into her blows. Without those tattoos, she cannot activate the edge, so she must constantly keep the illustrations fresh. Although the edge is mechanically the same as any other character's Demand, it feels unique to the *kiswah* thanks to her particular culturally based trigger.

Variations in triggers and in the manifestation of powers between West and Middle East can also make ostensibly familiar edges seem considerably different to hunters and *kiswah*. While a Western bearer of Ward might seem to crackle with energy, a Middle Eastern user might cause sand to buffet creatures to keep them at bay. The results are very similar but their means are quite different, and the same trick might seem alien to the divergent wielders. Another excellent example is the *kiswah* interpretation of any number of effects that involve scorning or verbally lashing out at monsters, called *hija*. Western hunters might interpret the very same effect as anything from Bluster to Insinuate to Shame (**Hunter Book: Redeemer**, p.76) to Vow to Confession (**Hunter Book: Judge** for the last two). The point is, hunters' collective misunderstanding about themselves, combined with different manifestations of powers and capabilities across the world, makes answering the call both a regional and personal phenomenon.

Pillar of Hajj (Visionary) 2 — Return

Much like Delve, Return allows an imbued to cast back for visions of the past. Return is based on an object, however, rather than a location. Your character can search for the last time an item was used for a specific purpose, or to determine whom the last person to hold the item was. She can also try to see events that occurred around an object, although this last effort is very challenging for the inexperienced.

Using this edge is much like having a dream. Your character's surroundings fade out of view, replaced by a vision of the relevant object-related situation. There is no sense of self while the edge is in effect, and the *kiswah* feels more than a little disoriented. She can move only slowly through the scene around her, but cannot influence events witnessed. The more detail she wishes to uncover, the longer she must remain in her trance. She remains "out of body" until the effect's duration expires, she decides to come back to the real world or until another person touches her. Being brought out of the trance artificially is like being woken up from a deep sleep by a punch in the face. Your character is woozy and confused and is unable to do more than walk slowly for some time.

System: Declare exactly what event associated with the object concerned that you want your character to view. Roll Perception + Vision, difficulty 6. Your character sees one minute of the event for every success achieved. If the event occurred over a month ago, add one to the difficulty. If your character wants to see something that happened over a year ago, increase the difficulty by two, and increase it to 10 if the event is over five years old. If the object has been severely damaged you must either add one to the difficulty or spend a Conviction point for your character to see the vision. Your character may see and *hear* past events if you spend two extra Conviction points.

As with Delve, the exact nature of the vision is left to the Storyteller's discretion. Since an object is used instead of a location, the scene is clustered around the item. Anything that occurs or moves more than a few feet away is blurry, confusing or shrouded in darkness. The size of the area seen depends upon the size and mobility of the object. A knife that's carried and used in a murder might reveal only who was killed and some clues about the attacker, while a stationary sofa could reveal most of the room in which it sat. If the object is moved during past events, the vision follows regardless of what happens in the item's original locale.

Second sight or observation edges can be activated before or while using Return to see possible supernatural events or beings in the past. If a monster seen uses a mind-, body- or emotion-control power in a vision, your character is not affected even if second sight is not active.

No living things, people or monsters can be the objects of Return, although animate or mobile unliving objects, such as cars or wind-up toys, can be.

A character roused forcibly from her trance — against her will or before the duration of the effect expires — cannot do more than respond slowly to others' orders for as many minutes as she spent using Return (add one to the difficulties of all actions). You may spend a point of Willpower to throw off this effect and your character becomes fully conscious immediately.

Return can be used only once per scene.

Pillar of Jihad (Vengeance) I — Wardance

Some Bedouin tribes have been known to prepare for battle by enacting a ceremonial dance. It is also known as *ikwan al-harb* (brotherhood of war). These spirited events often involve large groups of men and women circling a fire pit, arm in arm, singing loudly as the undulating chain moves faster and faster. Others stand back and clap or stamp their feet rhythmically, raising their own voices to join the dancers'.

Kiswah can perform a similar ceremony when they ready themselves for the hunt. The practice usually requires at least three hunters or non-imbued people, one of whom must possess this edge and leads the dance. Other participants do not need to know the song and dance; they can be taught a few basic steps to be involved. Once the event begins, all the *kiswah* involved enter a state of deep concentration that usually lasts around half an hour. No special preparations need be made, except that the hunters must have clear ground to dance on and must suffer no interruptions. When the dance is completed, *kiswah* report a feeling of euphoria and empowerment along with a strong urgency to hunt.

System: Each player with a character involved in the dance rolls Stamina + Zeal, difficulty 6. Even a single success means the character receives the full benefits of the ceremony. She gains two points of Conviction and one point of Willpower. These points persist for as many hours as the player scored successes on the roll. After that, the extra points disappear. If the points are spent before they expire, the character loses no further Conviction or Willpower as the effect wears off.

Conviction can be risked on a Wardance roll by each *kiswah* participant to his own benefit or detriment. Hunters don't have to be the one with the Wardance edge to risk Conviction on their participation rolls.

Note that while only one participant needs to have this edge, only hunters can receive the full benefits of the ceremony. Normal people or bystanders may participate, but they gain only one point of Willpower for their contribution, without making any rolls to achieve it. The dance is an empowering immersion in their culture and community.

A character with the Wardance edge can perform the ceremony by herself. She must have some source of traditional Arabic music and enough room to dance. No character, imbued, bystander or ordinary person may perform the dance more than once per week and gain points from it, even if she does so in different company. A character with this edge who has performed the wardance

once in a week cannot confer its benefits on others by doing so again. Nor may a participant join another wardance a few days later and gain more Conviction and/or Willpower.

If the edge bearer is Incapacitated before the ceremony ends, no participants gain the dance's benefits.

Pillar of Salat (Judgment) 2 — View

By using this edge, a hunter can suddenly see through solid material. Staring at a wall, she gets a momentary "snapshot" of what lies beyond. Though often hazy and unclear, this glimpse can give the character the insight she needs to plan her next move. *Hakam* describe the sensation as "seeing," for lack of a better word. They somehow have the information given to them but can be at a loss to explain where it comes from. Since it tends to be only visual information, *kiswah* associate acquiring the knowledge with sight, although it does not have anything to do with the eyes. Many *kiswah* believe Allah blesses them within divine knowledge when they need it most.

System: Roll Perception + Zeal, difficulty 7. Your character can "glimpse behind" any solid objects within Zeal in yards. The effect requires one action to perform. The more successes rolled, the thicker or larger an object she is able to see through, and the clearer the picture. One success allows her to see through into a wooden box and the image is muddy. Two successes let her see through a normal door and the image is hazy. Three successes allow her to see through a plaster-and-wood wall and the image is clear, as if observed directly. The effect lasts for only an instant, so your hunter doesn't know if any objects or people beyond a barrier are moving unless she can infer such from their positions. One use of View typically allows your character to glimpse beyond a single object.

Second sight can be activated before using View to gain their benefits simultaneously. Your character is able to see everything she might normally see with second sight, only beyond a barrier of some kind. View cannot be used concurrently with any other observation-based edges such as Discern, Witness, Illuminate, Delve or Return (see p. 97).

Pillar of Salat (Judgment) 3 — Condemn

Every supernatural bears within it the force or presence that makes it what it is — inhuman, unnatural. Some hunters believe this inherent "wrongness" comes to bear through second sight. This effect is similar, they say, to the instinct animals have for the fear or ill intent of others. Some *kiswah* believe they can actually enhance creatures' "wrongness" and make it detectable to normal people.

Simply by speaking with a monster, a hunter can somehow reveal an aspect of the beast or create a chink in its armor. The exact phenomenon is difficult to describe, since a being affected by Condemn does not appear different to hunters, with or without the second sight. And yet, normal people and bystanders somehow know that the thing is different or wrong. They do not

gain any sort of insight into the monster's true nature, but people can tell that there is something unacceptable about it. They shun the creature's presence; even a creature's mundane family or loved ones, if any, are affected. Perceptions range from fear to disgust, depending upon the exact nature and mood (such as violent tendencies) of the monster.

System: A character using Condemn must speak at least a few words to the target as an action. These statements are generally threatening in tone such as, "They will know you for what you are," or, "You cannot hide from righteousness." Roll Manipulation + Zeal, difficulty 6. The effect lasts for a number of hours equal to the number of successes scored. This edge causes normal people and bystanders to feel uneasy around the creature. The monster is no more noticeable than usual to other hunters, although the monster may be easier to spot thanks to people's reactions to it rather than by a hunter's instinct.

Although the monster cannot directly tell that its illusions or defenses against detection are faulty, it quickly notices that people look at it more warily than usual. Their reactions tend to have to do with what the monster really is. Rots seem somehow unclean and disgusting, while shapechangers might be treated with fear. Any Social rolls a monster makes in regard to normal people while Condemn is in effect are increased in difficulty by a number equal to the successes achieved in your roll.

Not even those monsters that can make themselves invisible can escape the effects of this edge completely. People and bystanders — but not hunters — are able to sense such a creature's presence by its unusual aura. A person in the vicinity of a ghost might feel a gnawing dread until she gets away from the spirit, even though it is otherwise incorporeal and undetectable. The intensity of a person's reaction, say between a feeling of unease and blinding terror, should reflect the power of the creature, but that's ultimately up to the Storyteller's discretion.

A particularly ancient or powerful creature may be allowed to reduce the duration of the effect. The Storyteller can roll the creature's Willpower rating, difficulty 7, and reduce the number of hours the edge lasts by the number of successes gained.

Note that although normal people get a sense of the monster's presence and abomination, they certainly do not leap to the attack. The average person on the street simply steers clear, spits a curse or shies away. However, if the creature's appearance or manner is already distasteful to people — say, the thing appears to be an Israeli and is in a community of Muslim Fundamentalists — people might have more incentive than ever to react with hostility now that the newcomer also seems intuitively "wrong" or "unacceptable."

Any creature that reveals its true nature — a ghost, shapechanger or goblin, for example — to normal people still invokes any confusion or memory loss that it normally would in their presence (see the **Hunter Storytellers Companion**). Condemn does not allow people to overcome monster-induced mass hysteria.

Multiple applications of Condemn imposed simultaneously on the same creature are not cumulative; only the first one applies. If a curse is shouted at a group of creatures, they are not all condemned. Only one is, as chosen by your character. If any other creatures in the group are to be similarly affected, the edge must be activated again for each.

Pillar of Sawm (Defense) 3 — Stand

By activating this edge, a character can step back from death's door for a time. Though severely injured, she is able to keep fighting or moving. Some *kiswah* have been seen to take devastating blows that should have killed them, only to strike back or cover someone else's escape . Unfortunately, this effect is temporary and hunters who seem resolute one moment can collapse or die the next.

System: Spend one point of Conviction and roll Stamina + Zeal, difficulty 6. Your character's health level is fixed at its current position for a number of turns equal to the number of successes scored. She must concentrate for one action to activate the effect. Although she can ignore any damage taken for the duration — whether bashing or lethal— full damage is incurred once the edge wears off. You must therefore keep track of the damage your character should incur. If your character takes three health levels of bashing damage while standing, they immediately go into effect when the edge fades, with all the appropriate wound and movement penalties.

Accumulated wound penalties cannot be resisted with the expenditure of Willpower point (**Hunter**, p. 126) when Stand ends. Your character can stave off the effects of Incapacitation for a time with this power. She can perform any actions she likes at this time, until the power expires.

The duration of the effect can be terminated by your character any time before it ends naturally. Stand does not influence the effects of mental or emotional attacks or derangements. Only bodily harm is "delayed."

Characters with the Iron Willed Background (**Hunter Book: Defender**, p. 71) cannot possess this edge, and vice versa. The two qualities are mutually exclusive.

Pillar of Shahada (Innocence) 2 — Conceal

The ability of some hunters to hide themselves from the eyes of the supernatural has been noted among *kiswah*. Surprisingly, some have learned to hide others from prying eyes, as well, even in what would normally be considered plain sight. Those people concealed can be confused by a hunter who suddenly pulls them aside, often with a few hushed words such as "be still" or "don't move." These people rarely know that they're being

followed or are endangered in the first place, but for some reason they find themselves trusting the *kiswah* and doing as he says.

Hunters using this edge have found that it works on only normal people and bystanders, not supernatural creatures or fellow imbued. They also note that they can hide *themselves* by only mundane means while using Conceal, and must be careful not to betray their charge's presence or must distract monstrous attention elsewhere.

System: By activating Conceal, your character can hide a single person or bystander from the senses of any monster. The trigger for this edge often includes saying something reassuring to the subject. Unless that person has particular reason to mistrust the *kiswah* or is extremely afraid or paranoid, she does not immediately resist. If the subject does have reason to revolt, make a Wits + Mercy resisted roll against the subject's Wits, both at difficulty 6. If you achieve as many or more successes, the subject is calm and Conceal goes into effect. If the subject gets more successes, she recoils and Conceal has no effect. The Storyteller may also spend a point of Willpower on the subject's behalf to resist the effects of the edge automatically if any reaction between she and your character would be downright violent. A Muslim Fundamentalist is not likely to react well to being grabbed by a Rabbi, for example. The edge cannot be used against an actively resistant subject again in the same scene.

Once Conceal has been activated, any supernatural creature in the area rolls Willpower, difficulty 7. If you have not already rolled Wits + Mercy to calm the subject, do so now to determine the effectiveness of the hide attempt. (The successes achieved from any previous calming roll are used again now, too.) If you get more successes than the Storyteller does, a creature does not notice the subject of the edge for a number of turns equal to your character's Mercy score. Otherwise, Conceal has no effect — the subject can be detected normally. Monsters with special abilities such as improved scent or heightened hearing that allow them to sense their target should roll against a difficulty of 6, instead of 7.

The subject must not attract special attention to herself for Conceal to remain effective. She can move slowly or talk quietly without being detected. If she makes a lot of noise or does anything to make her presence obvious, such as touching a creature, Conceal fails. Once one creature detects the subject, all monsters in the vicinity do thereafter. Subsequent uses of Conceal in the same scene do not make the subject suddenly disappear again.

The edge cannot be used to hide objects or animals. If your hunter is rendered Incapacitated while a subject is hidden, she remains so until the edge expires normally. The power cannot be used multiple times on the same subject simultaneously; the first application is the one that applies. If more than one subject is to be hidden, this edge must be used separately on each.

As suggested previously, if a *kiswah* currently uses Conceal on a person, he cannot activate Hide on himself. The edges do not work cooperatively for some unknown reason. If Hide is currently active and Conceal is used, the latter will not function unless the hunter deactivates Hide first.

Truly ancient or powerful creatures may still see through Conceal at the Storyteller's discretion.

Pillar of Zakat (Redemption) 3 — Preserve

People, whether defenseless civilians or imbued, die in the hunt. Monsters prey upon them, and they're sometimes the incidental victims of the struggle between *kiswah* and monsters. Those lucky — or unlucky — imbued who somehow manage to survive night after night see many loved ones and comrades die. Sometimes, however, the injured survive long enough to receive medical care. There are those among the *kiswah* who manage to bring the dead and dying to healers just in time, keeping them alive almost as if by will alone. These hunters may have saved allies time and again, even though the wounds of the fallen seemed mortal.

Imbued who are capable of Preserve do not necessarily understand what they do to keep victims alive, or even if they do anything other than what's required in the moment. They simply urge their fellows to hang on long enough, and pour so much attention into the subject that the experience is noticeably painful, often with headaches. Those they've saved perceive miraculous results. They claim to have felt death's icy touch for an instant, only to awaken, alive, sometime later. Surely Allah expresses his mercy through his most humble followers.

System: By using Preserve, a *kiswah* can keep someone who has been severely injured from dying. If she can reach a person who has sustained damage beyond the Incapacitated level, she can restore him to Incapacitated. The *kiswah* must reach the subject and activate Preserve within a number of minutes equal to her Mercy rating from the time when the subject received his debilitating wound.

Spend a Conviction point and roll Stamina + Mercy, difficulty 8. Your character suffers one level of bashing damage automatically — it cannot be soaked — and can keep the subject at Incapacitated for a number of minutes equal to the number of successes rolled, multiplied by Mercy rating. Once this period expires, your *kiswah* can discontinue using Preserve or can incur another level of bashing damage and spend another point of Conviction to keep the edge active. This time, the subject stays at Incapacitated for a number of minutes equal to the number of successes rolled earlier, multiplied by Mercy rating, minus one. Thus, if your character gets three successes and has 6 Mercy, she can keep someone alive for 18 minutes. When that time passes, renewal of the power lasts for 15 more minutes [3 x (6-1)].

Your character can continue extending the edge's duration until she runs out of Conviction or reaches

Incapacitated herself. On becoming Incapacitated, the hunter falls unconscious and her subject probably dies. Conviction can be risked on only the first roll in a series. Preserve cannot be applied to a subject, discontinued and applied again in the same scene.

If a subject suffers further damage once sustained by this edge, he remains at Incapacitated. The "patient" isn't killed outright and suffers no more harm. He's in a form of stasis. Blood loss also ceases.

Assuming an *Aateef* manages to stay conscious and get a subject proper medical aid, the patient can be tended to using whatever skills, aid or edges are available. Regardless of what health levels are restored by that treatment, the subject remains unconscious for 24 hours after being preserved while his body recuperates from the near-death experience.

Preserve can be used to sustain animals, humans, bystanders, hunters and even living, breathing monsters with material bodies. The user can do nothing but walk or run at a trot and carry a subject while sustaining him. No other actions or attacks can be performed. The edge cannot be used on more than one subject at a time. Preserve cannot be used on one's self.

Al Ha'it

Those *kiswah* who travel the world bring back stories of strange creatures and even stranger phenomena. Here and there, hunters claim to find places that seem protected from monsters' influence, sites guarded over by people of strong faith. It comes as no surprise, then, that many Islamic holy sites appear to be unmolested by the creatures of the night. That, or the monsters' touch is extremely subtle and beyond even chosen recognition.

Though these places of "safety" were originally thought to be protected by individuals — mundane, hunter or even in one case, pious *monster* — some *kiswah* have reported finding refuge in abandoned mosques and, surprisingly, some burial grounds. Most of their brethren dismiss these tales, believing that the tellers either got lucky and shook their pursuers or that they unconsciously invoked Allah's blessing in a place, warding creatures away.

The *kiswah* who have been so protected, however, swear that repelling the creatures that followed them was not their own doing, but something inherent to the places in which they hid. The have come to call this phenomenon *Al Ha'it*, literally "The Wall." But even this name is inappropriate, since no one has claimed to see a physical barrier to the sight or by any more intense perceptions. And yet, hunters who claim to experience the phenomenon report a feeling of unusual calm, although their fears are never alleviated completely.

Even stranger, *Al Ha'it* seems to come and go from certain places. A *kiswah* may find monsters storming a mosque where she had found safety the previous day. At the same time, *Al Ha'it's* protection seems to extend

over many different kinds of holy places — mosques, churches and synagogues alike. The older and better regarded the place, the stronger the protection appears to be. The areas around Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia and Jerusalem seem to be particularly strong, keeping out even potent beasts. At the same time this protection can be fleeting, and powerful creatures have walked into holy places while their lackeys have been stopped outside.

The one point upon which *kiswah* who have experienced *Al Ha'it's* protection agree is that it is strongest during the day. Many report that it is not limited to the walls of a structure such as a mosque or church, but that the protection seems to extend to the areas around these buildings. Not only do supernatural creatures have difficulty approaching protected areas, but their strength seems to dwindle within it. *Kiswah* using capabilities allowing them to see monsters' true forms claim that the creatures seem to breathe more heavily and tire quickly, even though their appearance does not change to normal sight.

The most striking feature of *Al Ha'it*, and the one which leads some hunters to give credence to the whole concept, is the supposed change that occurs during *Ramadan*. During this month, almost no monsters can be found in Islamic holy places. Some speculate that the creatures simply wish to avoid the mass of people, that they fear being stuck down by Allah's warriors while fasting, and that prayer increases *kiswah* power. Christian and Jewish hunters, however, have noted similar phenomena during Lent and Yom Kippur. Those few monsters that can be found in holy places at these times inspire intense feelings of dread; their age and strength can be sensed by the imbued using second sight. It is thought that these are the greatest of monsters, and not even the most foolhardy *kiswah* approaches them.

Communication

While some Western hunters use the Internet freely to gather information and coordinate their movements, the *kiswah* cannot. Local telephone calls are billed by the minute, making net connections expensive to maintain. In addition, computer equipment can be hard to come by, and free Internet service providers are a myth. Some countries have even gone so far as to ban Internet use beyond the needs of the government, schools and businesses. This means that email and hunter-net are used to communicate with hunters in different countries or even on other continents (when they're used at all), but electronic messages are useless or too dangerous for talking to those nearby.

Kiswah talk to each other the "old-fashioned" way, instead. They meet face-to-face or make brief telephone calls. Cellular networks in the Middle East have grown to the point of competing with traditional phone nets for sheer volume of users, and in Lebanon the old land-line system is being phased out in favor of a countrywide cellular telephone system. Most Arabs who can afford to do so invest in a cell phone. Of course, no one has any illusions about the security of those devices, so *kiswah* generally prefer to arrange one-on-one meetings to handle important or delicate business.

The Middle Eastern Word

Unlike their Western brethren, the *kiswah* have another communication option: their own unique version of the Word. By studying pieces of script-based Arabic artwork, Middle Eastern hunters can communicate instantaneously and over great distances. Messages are transmitted to *kiswah* studying similar art elsewhere, seemingly instantaneously. Sender and receiver contemplate the art and its message before them, and then intuitively interpret their own messages within that script, as if a piece of art studied has overt and covert meanings at the same time. The second is somehow encoded within the first, and the covert one changes each time a hunter receives a message.

Those who have learned Arabic calligraphy can create scripted pieces of art for communication. For some reason, the artwork in question must be Islamic in style. This leads some Christian and Jewish hunters to mistrust the regional Word, wondering why that faith was chosen over theirs. Muslim scholars among the *kiswah* surmise that the reason has to do with how closely the language is tied to the Islamic faith. Although the three religions are seen as equal, Muslims believe that only the Koran is truly in its original form and language. Thus, they say, artwork derived from Koranic writings are expressed truly in Arabic, whereas Christian and Jewish art is too far from God's intent to carry the Word.

Strangely enough, *kiswah* do not actually need to understand Arabic to read the Word. Jewish hunters who grew up in isolated *kibbutzes* report being able to read the code within a piece of art, without knowing a word of Arabic, as if conveyed messages are gleaned intuitively rather than consciously. Westerners who visit the Middle East can also use the *kiswah* Word once they're informed of its powers or they stumble across it for themselves. Non-Islamics therefore say that any connection between the Word and the Muslim faith does not validate Islam as the one true religion. Naturally, this argument began around the time the first Muslim and Jewish *kiswah* met. The one

Rating	Time	Conviction Required	Willpower Required
1	One day	0	3
2	One week	0	7
3	One month	0	15
4	Six months	5	30
5	Two years	10	50

thing these hunters can agree upon, however, is that understanding the code does not depend upon a *kiswah*'s native language.

Each piece of artwork is assigned a rating from 1 to 5 that reflects both the effort put into creating it and how well it works for transmission of the Word. The amount of creation time required varies according to the item's rating, as does the number of Conviction and Willpower points that must be invested into the piece. Total creation time can be spread over a broad period; a piece of art rated 1 can be made in one full day of work, two half-days, or over six days with four hours of work each. Art rated 3 or lower doesn't require a Conviction investment, so it can be created by non-imbued artisans and still be used to communicate by *kiswah*. The higher rated an object, the larger and more beautiful it is.

Artists can collaborate on a single piece of work if it is rated at least 2. They must all know Arabic and have Expression (Calligraphy) — see below. Each contributor after the first reduces the creation time of the object as if the piece were rated one lower than it is. Thus, if two artisans work on a piece that's normally rated 3, it's consider to be rated 2 for creation-time purposes (it can be completed in one week instead of one month). No collaborative effort can reduce an item's rating by more than two levels, regardless of how many people contribute, and no rating can be reduced to less than 1 for creation-time purposes.

The size and beauty of an object reflects the amount of time required for its creation. A small silver medallion bearing a passage from the Koran is rated 1, while a two-foot scroll painted in gold and silver might be rated 2. An ornate painting or detailed, purely geometric design rated 3 is usually quite large, perhaps the size of a tapestry. In order to have a rating of 4 a piece must be at least the size of a wall and contain intricate detail. Artwork rated at 5 is huge and majestic, representing years of hard work by several skilled craftsmen. These last pieces are found only in places of worship or in religious colleges.

Characters who wish to create a piece of artwork for transmitting the Word must have at least one dot in Linguistics (with Arabic being one of the languages known), two dots in Crafts, and at least one

Communication Situations	Difficulty Modifiers
Stressful situation (running from a monster)	+1 to +3
Receiving and sending piece created by the same artisan	-1
Receiving and sending piece created by the same group of artisans (at least two members)	-2
Character has 3+ Linguistics and knows Arabic	-1
Piece used is a permanent part of a large religious building	-1

dot of Expression (dedicated to Arabic Calligraphy if a specialty is called for). Finally, the character needs to acquire the right materials: paint and paper for a drawing, a chisel for woodwork. These tools can be mundane, but must be of good quality.

The character or group of characters then spends the appropriate amount of time creating the piece. The actual work is conventional and can be done by anyone with enough Willpower. One point is spent when the character starts work, and the rest must be set aside over the creation period. Points allocated to the art cannot be drawn upon by the creator again; they accumulate in a "creation pool" which should be updated whenever points are invested and time is spent on the project. The same process is used to fill a Conviction pool for items created by *kiswah* that are rated 4 or 5. Any contributor can donate Willpower and/or Conviction to the pool.

Once completed, an item appears unremarkable to second sight and to any means of supernatural detection. However, any hunter with at least one dot in Linguistics (and who knows Arabic) is able to see between the swirling lines of script and intuitively divine the object's use — he might even receive a message spontaneously. Those who do not understand the language must roll Intelligence + Linguistics, difficulty 6, to gain the same recognition. A single success allows the character to begin using a piece of art to send and receive messages.

An alternative to creating items that bear Arabic script is locating ones that have already been created by ordinary craftsmen. These pieces include jewelry and plates, copies of the Koran that are ornately engraved — all of which can be purchased — or the walls of mosques or holy sites in public places. Most *kiswah* who communicate through Islamic art do so through such "acquired" pieces; why build a telephone when you can use a pay phone? And yet, hunters truly dedicated to the calling or who are passionate in their faith might still be inclined to create items through which the Word can be conveyed.

Acquired items must be of good quality; only handmade pieces will do. In general, an item rated 1 may cost the equivalent of $20 to $50 American. The more ornate the object, the more expensive. Artwork rated 2 can cost up to $500, while those rated 3 usually cost several thousand. Also, since the merchant or artisan involved knows the quality and often the rarity of a given piece, attempting to bargain is challenging (+1 to your difficulty roll). Pieces rated 4 and 5 are always custom-made and must be commissioned individually. These objects are usually immobile.

A large, immobile piece of art such as an engraved mosque ceiling would normally be rated 5 according to this system. However, if it was created by ordinary (non-imbued) artisans, the piece is limited to a rating of 3. The same is true for any piece that's large and complex enough to be rated 4 or 5, but that was created by ordinary human hands. In order for such an item to realize its full communication potential, imbued praying at it or studying it must invest Conviction into it over time, as if they were creating the piece themselves, as detailed above. The only stipulation is that twice the number of Conviction normally invested to create an item must be dedicated now to "upgrade" an existing piece of art. That would be 10 points for an item rated 4 and 20 points for an item rated 5.

These points can be invested all at one by one or a group of *kiswah*, or over time with points going toward an investment "pool." Such points assigned are for the express purpose of "upgrading" the art alone, not for using it for a short-term transmission (see below). A point can't be dedicated to the art to raise it to its full 4 or 5 rating, and also be used to send or receive messages in the moment. There's no duration over which an object must be upgraded; points are simply accumulated until the required 10 or 20 is met. Once points are invested to get the most out of a piece, they cannot be used by you again. Once a piece has been upgraded to its full rating, it functions at that level for all hunters who communicate through the item.

Furthermore, a "mundane" piece that would normally be rated 5 does not function as "4" when 10 Conviction have been dedicated to it. The process of increasing rating is not incremental; it must go directly from 3 to 5 after a total of 20 Conviction points have been assigned.

Sending and Receiving

When your character wishes to transmit or receive a message through a piece of artwork — whether created or acquired — spend a point of Conviction and roll a die pool equal to the art's rating plus your character's Expression score, difficulty 6. Your roll may also be modified based on the circumstances surrounding the transmission (see chart). Your hunter can then use the piece for a number of minutes equal to five times the number of successes achieved.

The clarity of any message sent or received is also determined by the successes rolled. One success means

that short, halting statements can be sent ("help, sister, quick") in the duration over which your character can send. Five successes represent fluid dialogue. ("I need help. A spirit has possessed your sister. Come quick.") Note that your character is unaware of how strong her link through the artwork is; you choose how to phrase each message as if it is sent in full, and the Storyteller decides how much gets through based on the number of successes rolled.

A receiver — a person who studies a piece of script-art elsewhere at the same time — makes the same roll to get "incoming" messages. Her successes determine how clearly she understands senders' messages for the duration that she studies a piece. If the receiver scores as many or more successes than the sender, she gains no extra understanding beyond that transmitted by the sender and his successes, but she realizes that messages may be garbled somehow and that more information is implied. A receiver who has fewer successes than a sender gets a garbled message herself and is left to interpret its full meaning as best she can.

When beginning a message, your character may decide to whom she wishes to send it. She can choose an individual she knows or with whom she has used the Word to communicate before, or she may simply send the message to a certain piece of art. She can also send a message to multiple *kiswah* at once. The number of hunters she can send to simultaneously equals to her primary Virtue score. They can be designated individuals, fellow kiswah within a specified range — say, one mile — or completely random hunters scattered across the Middle East. Potential recipients must already be looking at an appropriate piece of art, ready to receive any messages. Sending a message does not set off an alarm or alert an unwary receiver to its presence; the *kiswah* must be watching for a message. The process often requires establishing a preordained time at which (and perhaps a place to which) messages are sent.

Those who are novices with this system sometimes perceive messages without consciously expecting them, but they are the exception rather than the rule. Some *kiswah* say Allah truly means for these people to receive word from their brethren, and He intercedes on their behalf.

Messages cannot be "left" for fellow hunters by this means of communication. If a transmission is not received the moment it is sent by another *kiswah*, the information is lost immediately. The equivalent is a statement made over a phone when the recipient doesn't have the receiver to his ear.

While your *kiswah* studies a piece of art, he can both send and receive messages throughout the duration determined by your die roll. Much as in a conversation when two people speak simultaneously, if a messages comes in while your character sends one, one voice can be lost. The message sent with the highest number of successes overwhelms that with the "weaker" voice. The latter is lost, but the message can be repeated if transmission time permits. If messages collide and were sent based on the same number of successes, both are made indecipherable.

Once duration of communication has expired for a particular effort (or a hunter breaks it off prematurely), messages stop appearing through his piece of art and the imbued cannot send any more. The swirling lines and images simply come to a halt and the *kiswah* can no longer divine any hidden meanings. A single piece of art can be activated and used a number of times each day equal to its rating. After that point it simply seems inert. Trying to communicate through pieces that are available publicly can therefore be frustrating for hunters in an emergency, when other imbued have already exhausted the objects for the day.

If a roll to communicate fails, no Conviction is spent on the effort. Nor is one of the item's uses wasted. Another attempt can be made immediately. If an attempt to communicate botches, a point of Conviction is lost and all of the item's potential uses for the day are wasted.

Kiswah communication through Arabic script also suffers another significant limitation. Messages cannot be transmitted or received beyond the Middle East, even if a hunter studies an appropriate piece of art in a foreign land. Many Arab *kiswah* interpret this limitation as further evidence of Islam as the one true religion; the Middle Eastern Word cannot range far from the faith's holy sites. And yet, other hunters point out that some of Islam's sacred locations are also important to other religions such as Christianity. So, there is no definitive explanation for the bounds seemingly imposed on *kiswah* contact. Their existence, however, cannot be denied.

If a piece of art is ever marred, its rating decreases as determined by the Storyteller based on the amount of damage done. If a piece is destroyed, it can no longer be used to communicate the Word.

While using pieces of artwork to communicate, *kiswah* enter a trance-like state and become almost completely unaware of their surroundings. They appear to be in deep meditation and can be roused only by being touched. Some mumble prayers and sway slowly from side to side, while some are completely silent. Others must actually touch the piece of artwork to initiate communication. Fortunately, such behavior is not out of place in most houses of worship. However, a *kiswah* using a simple piece of art in a non-religious place may have a difficult time explaining why she "prays" to it. Islam is a non-iconic religion. Directing prayer to an object is widely considered a form of sacrilege. Hunters involved in communication think, whisper or speak the words they wish to send, and hear responses as faint whispers. Some describe it as a kind of telepathy. People, including

other *kiswah*, in the vicinity of a receiving hunter do not overhear the recipient's message.

The "Western" Word

Aside from their dynamic form of the Word, *kiswah* also know and can create fixed messages like their Western counterparts. Those of the *kiswah* are portrayed slightly differently, however, with symbols combined to make a statement flowing together rather than being independent of each other. The difference can confuse Western hunters at first, but they usually catch on quickly since the code is fundamentally the same. Yet many Arab hunters frown upon the use of this form of contact. Yes, it's effective when no scripted art is available through which to speak and some kind of message must be stated. Each sign is more permanent than the transmitted Word, but the symbolic code carries less meaning than communication through Arabic script. The symbol code can also be understood by foreigners. It is referred to as *Kalam Alfuqara'*, the "poor ones' speech," primarily for the last "deficit" cited above.

CHAPTER 6: A BRAVE NEW WORLD

We Have given you a glorious victory, so that Allah may forgive you your past and future sins, and perfect His goodness to you; that He may guide you to a straight path and bestow on you His mighty help.

— The Koran, *Surah*: 48:1 [Victory]

ESTABLISHING THE SETTING

If you think playing a character from a distant or foreign culture is tough, presenting the culture itself and making it believable to your players is even more challenging. It's especially intimidating if you've never been to the region in which you plan to set your chronicle. And yet, if you intend to set off a Middle-Eastern-based **Hunter** chronicle, or simply want to send foreign characters there briefly or want to have *kiswah* visit your native setting, you have to portray another part of the world and its people convincingly. The big question is: How do you get past the mystery of far-off lands and people to build a distant setting that doesn't feel like just another place where people have funny names?

The answer is research. That doesn't necessarily mean reading lots of books about the region, although that's certainly an option. Research can mean just about anything, from talking to a friend who's been there to surfing the web for international news that covers the area. News coverage on the Middle East is certainly easy to find, although it should be taken with a grain of salt; if it isn't written in Arabic, it's probably been reported by a non-local source and carries its biases.

That said, one of the first pieces you want to put in place is the physical setting of your game. Large Middle Eastern cities tend to be crowded, although each deals with the problem differently. Amman, Tripoli and Beirut are filled with high-rise apartment buildings, while other towns have no buildings more than five stories tall and the centers sprawl out horizontally. The weather also varies from area to area. Towns near the coasts and in the Al Arz Mountains between Lebanon and Syria have cooler climates than landlocked, low-elevation cities. The closer to the equator you go, the dryer and more given to sand the earth becomes. Areas close to the coasts such as Palestine and Lebanon tend to be made up of a red clay, suitable for planting some kinds of trees and brush. Don't make the mistake of turning everything into a desert by default.

In general, snowfall is rare in the Middle East. Heavy rains in January and February make up most of the region's precipitation, although the Al Arz Mountains usually get a few inches of snow. As a result, agriculture is mostly of the citrus variety, and herd animals tend to be sheep and goats, since they are better adapted to the dry environment than are cattle. These flocks pass right through small towns, and it is not unusual to see a shepherd and her small company cutting down a side street instead of going around a village. The natural vegetation, aside from trees, is mostly a low, spiky kind of bush and thistle. Bluegrass is unheard of except in certain parts of the Gulf, Amman and Israel, because of the

amount of water needed to maintain it. Portraying up this unique climate and terrain goes a long way to giving your chronicle a distinct feel.

Next, remember that Islam is all around. The call to prayer is issued from every mosque five times each day. Only in the middle of the desert can characters escape its stirring sound. Some mosques are even built along lengthy roads that do not run through towns, just to give travelers a place in which to pray should they find themselves on an extended trip. The majority of the population is Muslim, but there are significant Christian populations in many places such as Bethlehem, Nables and southern Lebanon. A relatively large number of Yemenis are Jewish, and perhaps surprisingly, the indigenous inhabitants of the area have coexisted fairly peacefully for centuries.

Of course, reality is not a perfectly rosy picture. There is always the potential for disagreements to become conflicts, especially given the number of sects of all three religions that populate the Middle East. The continuous fighting between Muslims and Jews in Palestine/Israel is the most obvious example, but Iraqi oppression of the Kurds and the poor treatment of the Druz in Lebanon and Syria should not be discounted. For more specifics, do a quick search through a periodical database for the latest news about recent conflicts focused on religion. As a rule of thumb, you can always add religious strife in a community, whether subtle or overt.

Another major difference between the Middle East and some other parts of the world is the wide network of connections and gossip there. Family structures are broad in scope, and news (rumors) gets around quickly. Characters who think they can cause trouble in one part of a town, go elsewhere and pretend it never happened have another thing coming. The authorities may be called, or the hunters may be spurned or perhaps even confronted by a mob, depending on the severity of any acts committed elsewhere. If characters pay any kind of attention to the local people — or are local themselves — you can assume they recognize how quickly gossip spreads. You might want to warn your players before their characters make a lot of noise. Or you could leave them to their own devices and make them learn the hard way.

Bear in mind that business tends to be conducted on a smaller scale in the Middle East than in many other parts of the world. Most Arab countries are considered to be "developing," which means the average person has limited access to technology, and lifestyles are often simpler than those of Westerners. Many people, especially those who do not live in big cities, do not own cars and most don't use computers regularly, let alone own them. There is no reason to own a lot of equipment when everything you need to live is within a half-hour walk, and there are taxi and Service networks to take you wherever you need to go. So, there are no Middle Eastern equivalents to mega-corporations like Sony and GM. Most large high-tech companies are based outside the Middle East; the largest local companies are usually importers or dealers in food supply and delivery. And even these tend to focus locally rather than abroad. Small shops and merchants are staples of the economy.

With regard to technology, even telephone communication is considered frivolous by some. In small towns, as few as one in three homes has a phone. By contrast, city dwellers have a line in every home, along with cellular phones. The Internet is an educational and business tool, and has not come into fashion as a form of entertainment. Those who keep a personal email account generally access it in a cybercafe rather than spend a large sum on a personal computer and expensive local phone bills.

Once you have your setting roughly put together, go back to the **Hunter** rulebook and decide what kind of theme you want for your chronicle. All are applicable in the Middle East, but be prepared to tailor the setting to the theme and vice versa. If your chronicle is about courage, you might want to start the characters in a small town with limited means and little contact with the world outside their village. A chronicle set in a large city should have appropriate antagonists such as small-time businessmen turned monsters (or just evil), and corrupt politicians. Also make sure that your players' characters fit your setting. Don't just assume that they will; a shepherd is really out of place in the middle of a large developed city such as Bahrain. And why would there be a computer-repair shop in a village of 2000 people?

The devil is in the details. Use the skills you've developed Storytelling chronicles set outside the Middle East to keep track of the little things. Because of the strong family structure in Arab countries, antagonists can recur even more frequently than in the West. Did the characters beat up a street tough for harassing them? If they aren't careful, he comes back with five of his cousins — or 10. Describe the scenery around the characters carefully. Paint a solid picture of where the characters are physically and your job is half done. Finally, draw on real news and events. The World of Darkness is a world much like our own world, and the best place to find out about reality is reality.

The Word

Although the symbolic code of the Middle East is similar to the Western code, that which is communicated through script-art is unique to Arabia and its hunters. Koranic writings can convey real-time messages as well as carry a depth of meaning that's impossible for the Western code to achieve. The nature, origins and seeming exclusivity of this unique tool is a mystery to most hunters, East and West. Several theories have been proposed, though, from the greater evolution and development of artistic Arabic script to Arabic being "God's language."

The truth is that the *kiswah* Word is something much more fundamental than the symbolic or "West-

ern" code. The Western code is imposed by the Messengers as a simple means of communication and has purposely been made into a neutral set of signs unrelated to known languages. This system allows hunters worldwide to communicate without the normal barriers of language. In the Middle East, however, Islamic writings can be found everywhere. Moreover, with the vast majority of the population being Muslim, a communal faith lies behind the language. This religious, unified symbol structure is much more intricate and self-contained than many foreign equivalents, and the Messengers immediately turned it into a versatile tool for communication among *kiswah*.

While this means that almost any hunter in the Middle East is able to use the calligraphic Word — whether he understands or speaks Arabic or not — hunters throughout much of the rest of the world are at a decided disadvantage. Such a useful tool simply doesn't expand far into regions where language and belief aren't so thoroughly intertwined. Indeed, *kiswah* who leave the Middle East find themselves sitting in foreign mosques or studying scripted personal possessions and wondering why they can't raise their allies or receive messages from them. These emigrants can attempt to create pieces of script-art of their own, and although their efforts produce works of beauty and value, the items are completely nonfunctional in terms of transmitting the Word. Even artwork created or acquired in the Middle East for the purpose of conveying the Word is useless when studied abroad.

The Imbuing

Although a *kiswah*'s imbuing has a distinct flavor, it is not wholly dissimilar from that of a Western hunter. Arab chosen rarely understand what exactly happens to them. They are left confused and unsure of whom to trust. They most often turn to those, if any, who were imbued with them, but most begin to doubt even their friends' motivations and sanity before long. Surely all these inexplicable experiences have driven everyone involved mad.

The major difference in regional imbuings is in what an episode seems like to the hunter. As with the Middle Eastern Word, the Messengers draw upon the faith and imaginations of those they imbue. In fact, you could say the imbuing looks like whatever would make sense to an individual hunter. Even the most jaded of people hold a series of basic tenets and beliefs, and the imbuing is most powerful when it inspires action through that faith. Even though they don't really know what happens in the moment, *kiswah* are empowered by their often-passionate faith to explore the world around them and to try to understand what they have become, rather than denying the event and trying to pretend nothing happened.

So, the biggest thing to remember when planning and then describing a *kiswah* imbuing is that the scene is extremely personal for each. Group imbuings work well for getting several characters started and giving them a reason to work together, if only temporarily. Make sure that each character has a unique experience, though. Each player should be left feeling that her character is a distinct individual, rather than part of the homogenous whole.

To accomplish this, you should ideally imbue each character separately. But this isn't always possible. During the group imbuing, stop periodically and take a player aside to go through the personal part of her character's revelation. Although the characters' actions are real and affect the outcome of the scene, you should describe what each goes through psychologically to the player. That way, no player knows what the others went through internally. The experience of each is very intimate. Let players have their characters describe what they went through to the others if they choose to do so. Since you aren't doing the talking, the players and characters have to worry about how truthful everyone is, as well as about what the others' real motivations are.

A character's psychological experiences at the imbuing should reflect what you and the player decide the character's motivations are. Start with the character's creed. A Zealot's imbuing could involve fire imagery and pursue a self-actualizing theme. Or the scene might have to do with a spreading inferno, representing the character's developing desire to wipe the world clean of supernatural influence. Visionaries may be surrounded by winds and watch as they blow back the cloak of lies hiding a supernatural creature. A Merciful character could simply see some kind of heart-aching scene, such as a monster facing a loved one from its past. The reality that the Merciful hunter has ignored for so long is forced upon her,

Optional Rule: Foreign Artwork

If you want to allow further freedom abroad for *kiswah*, a Middle Eastern hunter journeying outside Arab lands may be able to acquire or create a piece of artwork to communicate with hunters back home. The item must be rated at least 3. It then functions as a piece of art two levels lower in power and can be used to communicate with only hunters using artwork in the Middle East (no outside-art to outside-art contact). The character can go through the standard creation routine, although it is sometimes made difficult by a lack of proper materials and aid. You, as Storyteller, decide when such an exception to the rule is possible — perhaps when an emergency must be communicated that has direct bearing on events or lives back in the Middle East, and perhaps with the blessing of Allah, the Heralds or whatever other force a transmitting hunter believes is responsible for her new existence.

as if under a spotlight. The emotional scene skews the character's perception, eliciting a response and personal sentiment appropriate to the person's values.

With the general idea behind the scene taken care of, think about what each character's reaction to the imbuing is likely to be. Will she jump immediately to the attack? Will he sit back and watch? How long will it take for a character to do anything? Is a character's motivation fear and hate, or will she be concerned for the safety and freedom of others?

Based on what you think a character might do in response to monstrous presence — or what you witness her do during the event — give her some kind of avenue for pursuing that action. This course probably involves awarding the character her first edge. If she sits and watches, give the character some kind of ability that lets her stay out of the way or observe the scene from safety. An aggressive *kiswah* who leaps into a fight or tries to save a victim could get an edge that lets her lash out or deflect harm. The important point is to let each character get through the scene with the notion that there is some kind of hidden world out there and that she can play an active part in it — perhaps make a difference in it — which might inspire her to explore that world.

But this "psychological empowerment" approach to the imbuing isn't necessary a culturally unique take on it. It's high time to put a more overt spin on it that makes a *kiswah* imbuing different, not just from those of the other characters, but from the kinds of changes that Western hunters undergo. Grant distinctly Arab-feeling edges. You can do so with those presented in Chapter 5 or by modifying those in other **Hunter** books. Say a *Muhajim* (Avenger) is imbued and her first edge is Cleave. Rather than having her weapon simply vibrate with energy or even smolder, Arabic words might appear as if drawn or carved along it, and she feels strength flow from them up her arm. The character may later remember the exact words revealed and decide to write them on her striking arm in henna tattoos.

The winds that envelop a burgeoning Visionary might whip up grit and dirt like a desert sandstorm. Images like those of fabled *jinn* might even seem to appear in the cyclone.

Or a Koranic *surah* about showing mercy and healing the weak might suddenly spring to a promising *Aateef's* (Redeemer's) mind and inspire him to acts of kindness toward the creature he witnesses.

The point is to give each character's imbuing a unique, exotic feel, something totally original and maybe a little weird, even from the conventional **Hunter** perspective. Doing so helps capture the unique flavor of the *kiswah* experience.

Also remember that the characters might see each other's imbuing. The event can mean one thing to the character being imbued and something completely different to an observer. That onlooker may have just been imbued herself, so she may already be driven, upset or confused by her own experience. You can use the imbuing of others to immediately complicate characters' relationships, adding an extra element of mistrust and confusion to the chronicle.

Say, for example, two friends are imbued together, one an *Aateef* (Redeemer), the other a *Hakam* (Judge). The *Aateef*, a kind, quiet man, sees his old friend engulfed in flames, unleashing shimmering heat at a pitiful-looking creature. While the *Hakam* looks at the monster and sees an unnatural beast that feeds on humanity, his friend has the insight granted at his own imbuing: that what they face is as fearful of them as they are of it. What does the *Aateef* think when the *Hakam* smashes the creature's head open and continues to beat its bloody corpse? Doing so seems just to the Judge. The Redeemer interprets things differently and it may be a long time before he trusts his old friend's values again.

Also, use the terrain around the characters to create a regional feel. If they are outdoors, you have lots of visual imagery with which to work. The olive branch is a traditional symbol of peace. Maybe an *'Awlad* (Innocent) character activates Conceal and sees, in her distorted mind's eye, the limbs of a tree gently encircle and protect her subject. An *Aateef's* sharp words could seem to intensify the very light of the sun and pierce the soul of an unsuspecting monster.

Finally, don't forget the gossip factor. If the characters' imbuing is public, someone saw something funny happen and chances are he tells five of his closest friends about it. Make the characters worry about who thinks what and how many people are suspicious. *Kiswah* need to exercise a lot more restraint and subtlety than their Western counterparts; one can never expect to keep business personal. If a character keeps coming home at three in the morning, injured, the neighbors notice. And once one person knows, everybody hears some version of what's going on. The result is an imbuing and subsequent hunter lifestyle that very different from those experienced in the West.

Al Ha'it

The truth behind this strange phenomenon is something most characters will never really understand. Like the Middle Eastern Word, this mystical "barrier" is powered by communal faith. It is linked to all types of houses of worship — Muslim, Jewish, Christian — as long as a sufficiently large regional community patronizes the mosque, church or synagogue concerned.

One of the reasons for all the conflicting reports about the effect is that *Al Ha'it* affects only the undead — shamblers, walkers, hidden and vampires. Shapeshifters, warlocks and nightmares are rarely even aware of its presence, and though ghosts can sense that something unusual is going on, it does not have the same kind of power over them as it does the *living* dead — those that possess or control bodies. Few hunters

have the time or presence to figure out exactly what kind of creature chases them when they seek sanctuary. So none has yet made the connection between the type of monster involved and the extent of *Al Ha'it's* protection. The fact that some powerful rots and vampires can resist its effects adds to the confusion.

As a rule of thumb, when an undead creature comes near a place of worship that is thoroughly patronized and supported, roll the creature's Willpower, difficulty 7. Anything less than two successes indicate that the monster is completely barred from entry. If the creature achieves exactly two successes, it may enter the grounds for a number of minutes equal to its Willpower. The difficulties of all actions performed by the creature in that time are increased by one, and the monster is overwhelmed when the duration expires. It must flee at that time. Three or more successes mean the creature is unaffected by the place's mystical protection. You may wish to decrease the entry roll's difficulty according to a monster's age or power, or increase it if a deeply religious person such as an *Imam* or Rabbi is present.

To the undead themselves, the presence of *Al Ha'it* is more like an oppressive weight than a barrier. Those able to bear it have great difficulty concentrating, and only the strongest can stay for long. The phenomenon is so powerful in the holy cities of Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, Baghdad and Damascus that weaker rots may be unable to set foot in those towns at all. That means the undead who actually live in those cities are more than "average" creatures. Characters who think that *Al Ha'it* provides them a safe zone may soon realize that the effect is selective, and that the undead they do encounter are truly powerful.

Secret Police

Collectively known as *Al Shurta*, the *was'its* and *mujahidin* are a subtle part of the *kiswah* world that few hunters are aware of. Those who do know about these groups are usually members of them or targets of their investigation. Others may hear rumors about the groups, but since being the focus of their attention is embarrassing and potentially dangerous, few hunters are willing to share their experiences with the societies.

Members of *Al Shurta* claim to be keepers of the peace among hunters — arbitrators of disputes who hold themselves responsible for dictating "acceptable" behavior for their kind. For the most part, members' behavior is consistent with this ideal. The greatest question, however, lies not in their motives but in their ability to be fair and to understand the situations they seek to judge. The hunt is fraught with moral confusion and ethical dilemma, and very few *kiswah* take to meddling outsiders dictating what they should and shouldn't do.

An investigation is usually initiated by a local member of the *was'its*, who reports to the nearest group of *mujahidin* what she believes to be an abuse of power by a hunter — perhaps harm inflicted upon common people, theft or attacks on other hunters. The *was'it* then takes a more detailed look into the activities of the accused, sometimes with the help of another of her group. The accuser is obliged to complete her investigation and be ready to render a conclusive decision for the *mujahidin* on its arrival. These judgments are often hasty and the *was'it's* information incomplete. Worse, the accused is rarely informed of the investigation so has little or no chance to defend himself.

When the *mujahidin* arrive on the scene, the *was'it* presents the information she has been able to gather, as well as her evaluation of the situation. The *mujahidin* make contact with the accused and brief him about the investigation and its outcome. This is usually a total surprise to the hunter. Those whose methods are found acceptable rarely hear from *Al Shurta* again, adding to the paranoia and mistrust that the groups engender. The guilty are usually given a chance to repent. Turning down this opportunity results in a death sentence. Most hunters found guilty put up a fight whether given the chance to appease their accusers are not, since they understand neither the reason for *Al Shurta's* decision nor its right to render one in the first place.

Of the two groups which comprise Al Shurta, the *was'its* have the more scattered membership. The only way to join is by personal endorsement from an existing member. Naturally, an investigation ensues before the "applicant" knows she is considered. If the hunter is found unfit, she never finds out that the *was'its* were interested in her in the first place. Those who are accepted are initiated on a trial basis and can become full members after a year of service. Considering the uncertain nature of the hunt, there are few set rules. The *was'its* tend to live by paranoia, suspecting abuse and offensive behavior almost everywhere they look.

The *mujahidin*, on the other hand, are much less selective in their membership. They are divided into roving bands, usually of two to five *kiswah*, which respond to the call of local *was'its*. Membership is determined almost entirely by individual group leaders. The leaders are themselves screened as carefully as the *was'its* are. Once accepted, they are granted a certain amount of autonomy. Since the role of the *mujahidin* is to receive the *was'its'* judgment and carry it out, more brawn is necessary among members than analytical thought.

At the "head" of *Al Shurta* is Tarjiman220. Due to the group's loose structure, his role is usually limited to making sure new members are investigated thoroughly, and to relaying communiqués from the *was'its* to the *mujahidin*. With the wide accessibility of cellular telephones, communication is quick and expedient. Once

Tarjiman has put a *was'it* in contact with a few groups of *mujahidin*, the *was'it* becomes capable of calling in their services without the figurehead's assistance. So, although Tarjiman technically runs *Al Shurta*, the group's members are able to operate without much involvement on his part. In fact, he is aware of few of the specific cases that *Al Shurta* deals with, and keeping a record of them to review is too dangerous to pursue in case such documents should fall into the hands of the authorities or monsters.

Characters in the Middle East are much more likely to be investigated by *Al Shurta* than they are to be approached to join. When introducing *Al Shurta*, remember that operating procedure is up to the particular *was'it* and *mujahidin* group involved. Some *was'its* actually approach their targets and give them a chance to justify themselves before rendering judgment, while others turn their cases over to the *mujahidin* without ever speaking to the accused. *Al Shurta* can increase characters' feelings of paranoia about the world; their fellow imbued can seem no more trustworthy than any person or monster.

JINN

Although the supernatural creatures inhabiting the Middle East can seem as different from Western monsters as the *kiswah* are from their brethren, they are, in fact, very similar to the rest of the world's inhuman inhabitants. Some are mindless drones, while others are completely conscious and sentient, with motivations and drives of their own.

As with any other part of the world, certain kinds of creatures predominate the Middle East. The walking dead (Thalmudites) and spirits (Amalikites) make up the bulk of the supernatural population, with a few shapeshifters (Midianites) and vampires (Adites) making up the balance. Warlocks are rarely seen, perhaps because of Middle Eastern society's increasing disbelief in magic (just one of the corrupt influences of the Western world, purists say), and because of wizards' skill at hiding their presence. There are some nightmares to be found in the region, but they are often confused with spirits.

The generic term for supernatural creatures is "*jinn*." It is commonly believed that a person or creature with supernatural powers must be inhabited by a *jinn*. Most *kiswah*, especially those with a traditional upbringing, start out thinking of anything that appears to second sight as *jinn* and do not learn to separate monsters into types until much later, assuming they survive at all.

THALMUDITES

Not surprisingly, the walking dead are the most populous of the supernatural in the Middle East. Just as in the West, everything from decayed corpses reenacting their deaths to intelligent, malevolent zombies can be found. Being a very spiritual people, Arabs can easily accept the idea of a loved one surviving a grievous injury or returning to them from near or certain death. This acceptance gives the newly dead a lot of chances to insinuate themselves into the population and start scheming. However, just as *kiswah* priorities differ from those of their Western counterparts, Arab rots often have goals that would seem strange to those outside the Middle East. One of the walking dead might simply want to re-assert itself as the head of its family, while another seeks to avenge its death by eradicating everyone from the same ethnic group as its killer. The less sense these motives make to normal people, the more difficult it is for the characters to deal with the creatures.

And yet, don't neglect the presence of shamblers in your chronicle just because of the "availability" of sentient rots in the region. These simple drones make up the majority of the walking dead and you can give them as much or as little intelligence as they require to hide within humanity. A garbage collector needs only to know how to walk his route and empty the barrels along the way. As a rot with supernatural strength, he is a dangerous combatant to face. But can *kiswah* just let him keep doing his job, knowing that he could become violent at any moment? If they decide to destroy him, how do they do so without attracting attention? How do they keep people from asking questions about his absence?

The existence of *jinn* is an accepted part of Arab folklore and Islam, but the walking dead are poorly understood. One of the few traditional points of agreement regarding *jinn* is that although they are not necessarily malevolent, they should be avoided. The creatures are believed to be extremely powerful, but their natural place is not on earth. Any zombie encountered might therefore be considered a traveler or of incomprehensible motives, and best avoided or dispensed with. It's unlikely for one of the Thalmudites to play on the emotions of former loved ones' when those people are more likely to send the being on with a prayer for its safe journey than to actually listen to it.

In recent months, some *kiswah* have reported encounters with exceptionally potent and vigorous Thalmudites. The beings seem, for all intents and purposes, alive and well, except that close inspection proves them better off in the earth. And yet these beings walk and even breathe, going about business that evades hunter understanding. If these creatures are so potent, why immerse themselves in humanity so thoroughly and yet wreak so little damage or cause so little harm to the unwitting masses? Some *kiswah* who have dared speak with these lingering beings describe them as "more alive than even the living," as if the beings exceed life, death *and* immortality.

Amalikites

Spirits come in a close second to the walking dead in terms of their numbers. In fact, one could say that there are more spirits, since each Thalmudites is arguably a ghost trapped inside a body. The term "Amalikites" generally refers to those spirits that have not taken permanent form. Many cities in the Middle East have old, worn-down districts, which make perfect breeding grounds for ghosts and goblins. Arab ghosts tend to be extremely curious and can be observed by hunters watching or harassing normal people for lack of anything better to do.

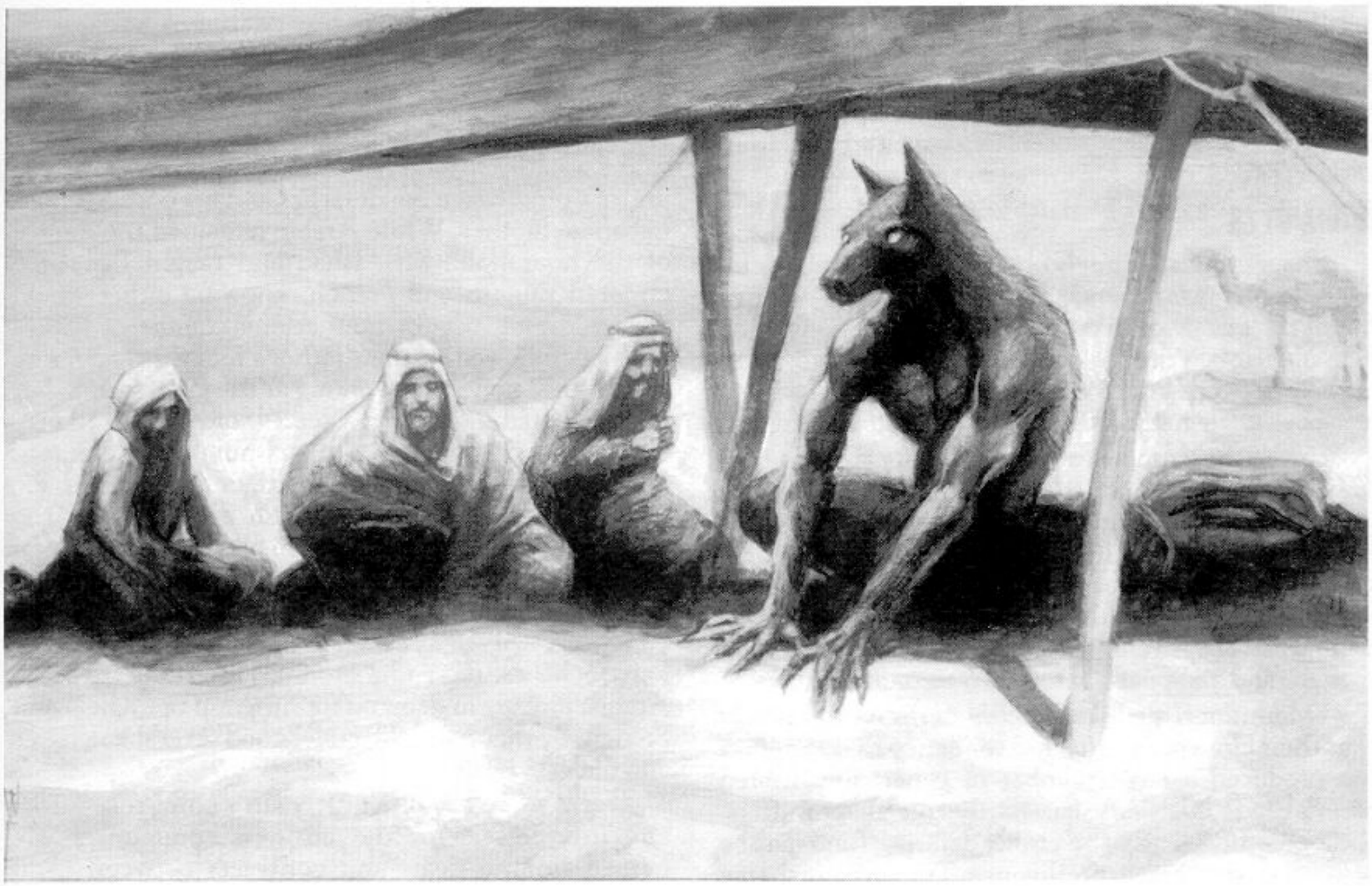
If your main antagonist or antagonists are not Thalmudites, ghosts can be used to set a tone of your chronicle, in keeping with **Hunter**'s predilection toward spirits as the primary enemy of the imbued. Ghosts are everywhere, popping up when characters least expect (and want) them to. Spirits and poltergeists enhance the fear of hunting because the imbued could join the beings after death. The ghosts of the newly dead may in some cases seek to help characters, perhaps in return for taking care of a loved one or for the return of some cherished item. Of course, *kiswah* have no reason to trust these spirits and can easily believe that some kind of deception is involved. Spirits also make good minor guides and can complicate the characters' ethical views on the supernatural — ghosts don't have to be malicious or even threatening.

Tales of possession are not unusual in the Middle East. A certain part of the population readily accepts the idea that a spirit can take over someone's body. Even more believable is the idea that a ghost can control physical objects, although such acts are often limited to poltergeist-like effects (flipping light switches and pushing over potted plants). Many believe that the spirits who inhabit houses are kindly *jinn*, and people are not terribly disconcerted by objects' tendency to move or fall off tables. These spirits are accepted as protectors of house and family, and some residents may actually try to defend the ghosts from *kiswah* who wish to see the spirits banished.

Note that although *kiswah* rarely recognize nightmares (goblins) as distinct from possessing spirits, nightmares are mechanically the same as those found in the **Storytellers Companion**. The only type of monster more rare than a goblin is a warlock, so be careful not to use too many of these creatures. Their presence in the Middle East is minimal. Introducing a nightmare just for the sake of throwing in another monster type may complicate your chronicle unnecessarily.

Adites

Of all the supernatural creatures in the Middle East, vampires tend to be the oldest and most powerful. This is because the weak among their ranks are either quickly weeded out or journey elsewhere to avoid the oppressive presence of *Al Ha'it*. This also



means that their gross numbers are small and that each bloodsucker's influence is limited to an area that it and its servants can oversee.

Be careful using too many vampires in a Middle Eastern chronicle. For all their power, these creatures' small numbers keep them from maintaining the kind of presence found outside the Arab world. Middle Eastern vampires must be content with less control over people and territory than creatures of equivalent power could attain elsewhere. As a result, most of these creatures have some kind of specific tie to their surroundings, such as ancestry or plans they cannot carry out anywhere else. It's also difficult to recruit new vampires to their cause, since disappearances of people are noticed by their communities, and the disappearances of lesser leeches are noticed quickly by those bloodsuckers' creators. Furthermore, the consumption of blood is strictly prohibited in both Islam and Judaism, so newly created vampires can seek to destroy themselves or starve before accepting their new existence, especially if they were strong in faith before undeath.

Those leeches that manage to endure find great difficulty in acclimating themselves to their new existence. *Al Ha'it's* continuous presence weighs heavily upon them, and these creatures are likely to lose their focus or temper with little provocation. In addition, it is challenging for them to find victims from which to draw blood without endangering themselves. Although areas of squalor and poverty exist in the Middle East, even the most run-down refugee camp is a community. The mysterious death or injury of several individuals draws considerable attention. In order to prevail, a newly made vampire must either travel far and fast or must band together with established undead, learning their tricks and gaining access to a large territory from which to feed.

Midianites

Shapeshifters are rarely observed in the Arab world. Those hunters who do encounter them do not usually live to tell the tale. Most hide in isolated villages or among Bedouin tribes. These skinchangers are just as dangerous as their Western kin, possessing the ability to assume a fearsome battle form and the ability to perform magic.

Due to the strong sense of community and family in the Middle East, those shapeshifters who breed with humans become sedentary and found extended families of their kind. Normally, only one in four (or fewer) family members are true shapeshifters, while the others are simply humans with a weak investment of supernatural powers. All are considered family and important, though, and all appear "wrong" to second sight.

One interesting feature of shapeshifter families is that their close proximity and tendency to intermarry has produced a large number of genetically inbred creatures. Though not necessarily true shapeshifters, these creatures tend to be visibly deformed and may be of lower than average intelligence. They are the shame of their kind. Unmerciful patriarchs may ostracize them from their communities completely. Other skinchangers or family members may treat these beings as they would a retarded child, although the fouled offspring are often much more capable than their relatives admit. These twisted creatures may venture out of the protection of their communities and try to live among the normal population.

Warriors of the Faith

Although the Middle East's version of the Word creates seemingly optimal conditions for hunters to share and gather information, the very nature of the region works against this advantage. Arabs and Israelis are particularly proud of their heritage, faith and ideology, often at the expense of any hope of solidarity. If left alone, these groups isolate themselves from each other on point of pride.

The following individuals recognize the dangers of a fractionalized front and serve as pinions for the *kiswah* community, seeking to gather hunters under a common banner — any banner. Theirs is a difficult task, for they must often fight or support old hatreds, including their own, and play conciliator for disparate factions. Worse yet, any hint of affiliation with one group automatically places these mediators at odds with others. And yet they continue at great risk to themselves, because nobody else will do it or because they believe they're best suited for the job. Either way, the following hunters' influence earns them mention here.

Tarjiman220

Farid Ishaq never saw himself as a great man destined for anything other than quiet anonymity. Born into a wealthy Riyadh family of bankers, Farid thrived under a progressive Saudi father and his cosmopolitan Lebanese mother. While Arabic remained the tongue of the household, Mrs. Ishaq also taught her three children English and French, knowing either would serve as the language of international commerce. Farid's brothers followed in their father's footsteps, adopting his business savvy and working at the family bank, but Farid adopted his mother's demeanor. He proved erudite, cultured and a polyglot, grasping many different languages easily. He spoke French, English and Arabic fluently, and understood Spanish and Tagalog (the Philippine's official tongue) from his Filipino nanny by the age of 13. While his brothers attended the prestigious King Saud University, Farid studied at the American University of Beirut and at the University of Paris for his masters and doctorate. He returned to Saudi Arabia, already in demand for his grasp of English and French. By that point, he understood several languages and dialects easily.

Farid served as one of Riyadh's chief translators and interpreters for the business community. He helped finalize deals and contracts between local

companies and international customers, and even attended trade shows on behalf of clients. His expe-rience and quiet manner eventually earned him a spot in the interpreter's booth for a convention on international commerce hosted in Riyadh. During one presentation, when an American broker spoke to the Arab delegation, Farid heard the speaker's voice emerge dry and gravely, as if the man's vocal chords were on the verge of snapping. Worse yet, Farid heard what the American said, but he also heard the lies in his voice. Words like "investors" sounded like "vic-tims" and "partnership" was "rape." Then a voice in Farid's headset roared, "THE LANGUAGE OF LIES." Farid excused himself under the pretense of illness and left a number of delegates oblivious to the decep-tions being preached at them by the *thing* that spoke.

Farid regrets his cowardice for not doing more. When the convention ended, some attendees spoke of the American's speech and their willingness to invest with the broker and his clients. Farid could hear the greed in their voices, their eagerness to sell out their own people for a promise of wealth. He realized they seemed stricken by a frenzied avarice. That is, those who could understand the speech were influenced. Those who relied upon Farid to translate it were spared by his quick decision to abandon his post and refuse to spread the "language of lies."

Despite sparing some diplomats from deceit that day, Farid swore afterward that he would never allow someone else to suffer because of his inaction. He would observe and learn about this new world as he had the false one, but he would commit himself when the moment demanded action. Perhaps as a result of that determination, Farid dedicated his time to sup-porting the cause, and he listened more to those he once ignored. He initially relied solely on *kufic* script to communicate, because it felt like an extension of his culture and thus comfortable. Over a few months, however, his work allowed him relatively inexpen-sive access to the Internet, through which he discovered hunter-net. The thing that impressed him most about this endeavor was Westerners' ability to form communities regardless of prior affiliations. Farid, posting as Tarjiman220, wrote at length to Witness1 many times on this issue, during which Witness asked Tarjiman to compile a primer on the hunt in the Middle East.

Work on the document took months to organize, during which time Farid adopted "Tarjiman" as his alias in both cultures. During the process, he relied on his closest allies, but made more friends (and enemies) in the endeavor. The primer grew beyond its original mandate and slowly served as a rallying point. Many *kiswah* desperately wanted to belong to something — anything — that would give them purpose or an outlet for their new existence. They thrust Tarjiman into the role of leader.

If being imbued isn't frightening and confusing enough, Tarjiman finds himself in an odd predica-ment. He believes *kiswah* can benefit from Westerners' example of solidarity, but sees himself as only an interpreter between East and West (the unassuming role with which he's most comfortable). He never imagined himself a leader or rallying point, and believes the charismatic al-Amin better suited for the role. But because no one gives him the chance to say no and because he's afraid to let people down again, Tarjiman accepts his role with some discom-fort. He finds he must surrender personal opinion and even passions to better play the statesmen. Fortu-nately, he enjoys the friendship of al-Amin and the grudging support of Fatwa243, both of whom possess a strong following of their own.

Profile

Creed: Judgment

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Cha-risma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence (Insightful) 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics (History) 3, Alertness 2, Aware-ness 2, Bureaucracy 1, Computer 2, Dodge 2, Empathy 2, Finance 1, Firearms 1, Leadership 1, Linguistics 4, Melee 2, Occult 1

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 3, Destiny 2, Re-sources 3

Edges: (Judgment) Discern, Burden, Condemn; (De-fense) Ward; (Redemption) Bluster, Insinuate

Mercy: 3, **Vision:** 0, **Zeal:** 7, **Conviction:** 3, **Willpower:** 5

Derangement: Indecision (**Hunter Book: Judge**, p. 75)

Fatwa243

There are few memories in Rafiq al-Isfahani's history that he'd call pleasant. The Cairo of his

childhood was every bit as polluted and overcrowded as the bustling city of today. He lived between the open gray skies, filled with the smog of vehicle exhaust, and the soot-covered ground. Rafiq and his family were occasional squatters then, earning enough money to live in an apartment for a few months at a time before his father's drug addiction forced them to move. They stayed atop building rooftops, in mausoleums and even in the homes of vacationing families for days at a time before picking up. They scavenged food from piles of garbage often left exposed to the hot sun for weeks, and stole from vendors at the local bazaars. By the age of seven, Rafiq and his gang of friends would swarm tourists for money and pick their pockets. He'd also let men "touch him" for five Egyptian pounds ($2 U.S.). By 10, he was robbing graves for valuables and selling fresh cadavers to criminals who sold them to medical students at Cairo University. Rafiq might have lived and died in this miserable life, except....

Rafiq's mother, the sole anchor of his life, was dying of lung cancer thanks to Cairo's pollution, while his father spent his days and meager earnings on hashish. Knowing her son would probably perish on the streets, Rafiq's mother approached the Makram *Madrassa*, a small and charitable Islamic school, and pleaded with the family patriarch Sharif Makram to care for her son. He eventually agreed and Rafiq entered the school as domestic help, where he worked by day and learned by night. It wasn't a glamorous life, and Rafiq often endured beatings for his disrespectful tongue, but he eventually accepted the Makrams as family. In turn, Sharif Makram, an ex-officer who once served with the local British army, kept Rafiq under stringent discipline while teaching him the Koran, Humanities and English.

When Rafiq was old enough, Sharif even pulled strings with friends at the British embassy to get him work. Rafiq's grasp of English became near fluent, as did his hatred for the English and Americans. All his life, he'd seen how Western tourists looked down on Arabs, how Cairo's government kowtowed to foreigners, and how outsiders plundered Egypt's rich heritage. Working at the embassy only enforced those views. Still, Rafiq stayed with the consulate because the pay was good, and he continued learning things he sometimes preferred not to.

One afternoon, an explosion rocked the embassy. The car bomb never made it past the reinforced gates, but it still shattered windows for several blocks around. Dead and dying lay strewn about the road when Rafiq arrived. Smoke drifted through the streets like a thick blanket. Surviving British soldiers fired on a man advancing toward them. Rafiq saw and heard what he still believes were the spirits of the angry dead pointing and wailing at the juggernaut. That's when Rafiq saw the hollowed-out eyes and decaying flesh of this beast. Rafiq leapt into the fray while the rot killed the last of the soldiers.

Rafiq counts his blessings from that day. The explosion knocked out the consulate's cameras and the smoke kept most witnesses from seeing the battle. Those who did witness it appeared to suffer from an odd amnesia, leaving Rafiq's actions a secret. He also explained his injuries away as a result of the explosion, though his emergence into the hunter community forced him to quit the British consulate for fear that his nature would eventually be uncovered.

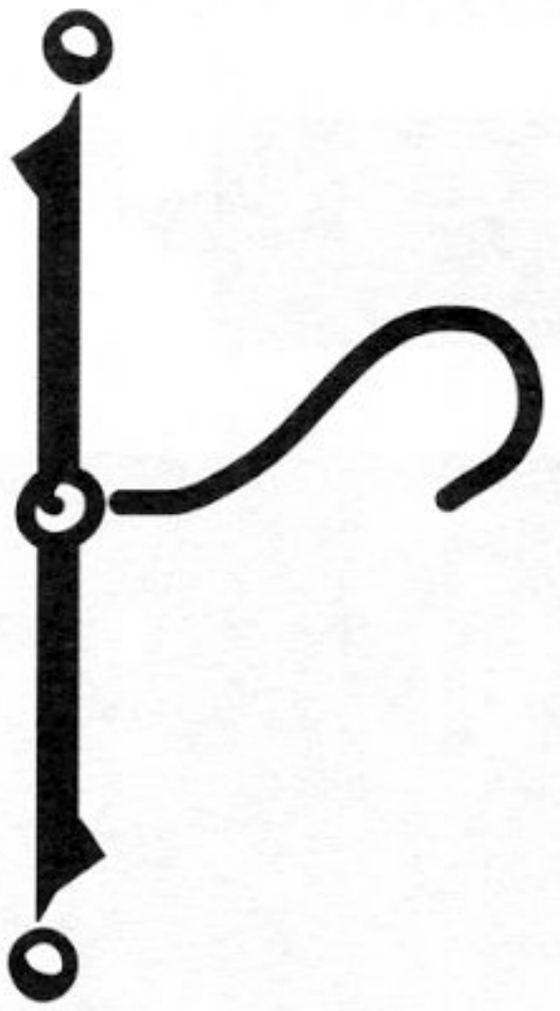
Since that time, Rafiq, as Fatwa243, has become instrumental in local efforts against the *akhira*. His adopted father had already taught him to fight, and even now it takes little coaxing from Rafiq to convince the old veteran to regale him with war stories. Rafiq learns many lessons in this fashion, and what he can't learn covertly he asks his friends in the Muslim Brotherhood. Meanwhile, Rafiq often enjoys the patronage of rich *kiswah* who hire him to train them or help deal with daunting monsters. In this manner, Rafiq becomes increasingly familiar with the Middle East's black-market trade.

Al-Jazzar

Few hunters know the Visionary *al-Jazzar* (the Butcher), and even less so by name. His voice occasionally emerges in the *kufic* script with warnings and omens. He spoke during the great convention, some of his thoughts finding their way into the transcripts of the Dho 'l-Nun and al-Hallaj factions. He railed against Hajirah252 and Tarjiman220, warning them of the Mosque of Webs. Hajirah and Tarjiman were right to fear his words. He represents a growing band of heretical *kiswah* allying under the banner of this spider prophet. This lot of acolytes believes it has discovered

the "true path," thanks to al-Jazzar's charisma. Little do they know that their prophet is equally lost. In seeking out the horizon, he has forgotten his way back and the very reason why he underwent his journey in the first place. He believes he has found truth again in the Mosque of Webs.

Al-Jazzar is on the verge of becoming infamous among *kiswah* if only because he's uncovered a terrible new gift upon hitting the pinnacle of "understanding" as a Visionary. He's learned how to transmit portions of his terrible dreams to other *kiswah* through the *kufic* script, and already torments other hunters with dreams of the mosque. This effect of his influence spreads slowly. Unless stopped, al-Jazzar could afflict many of the Middle East's *kiswah* with a mental illness, forcing the remaining few to rely on outside help to deal with him and his movement.



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