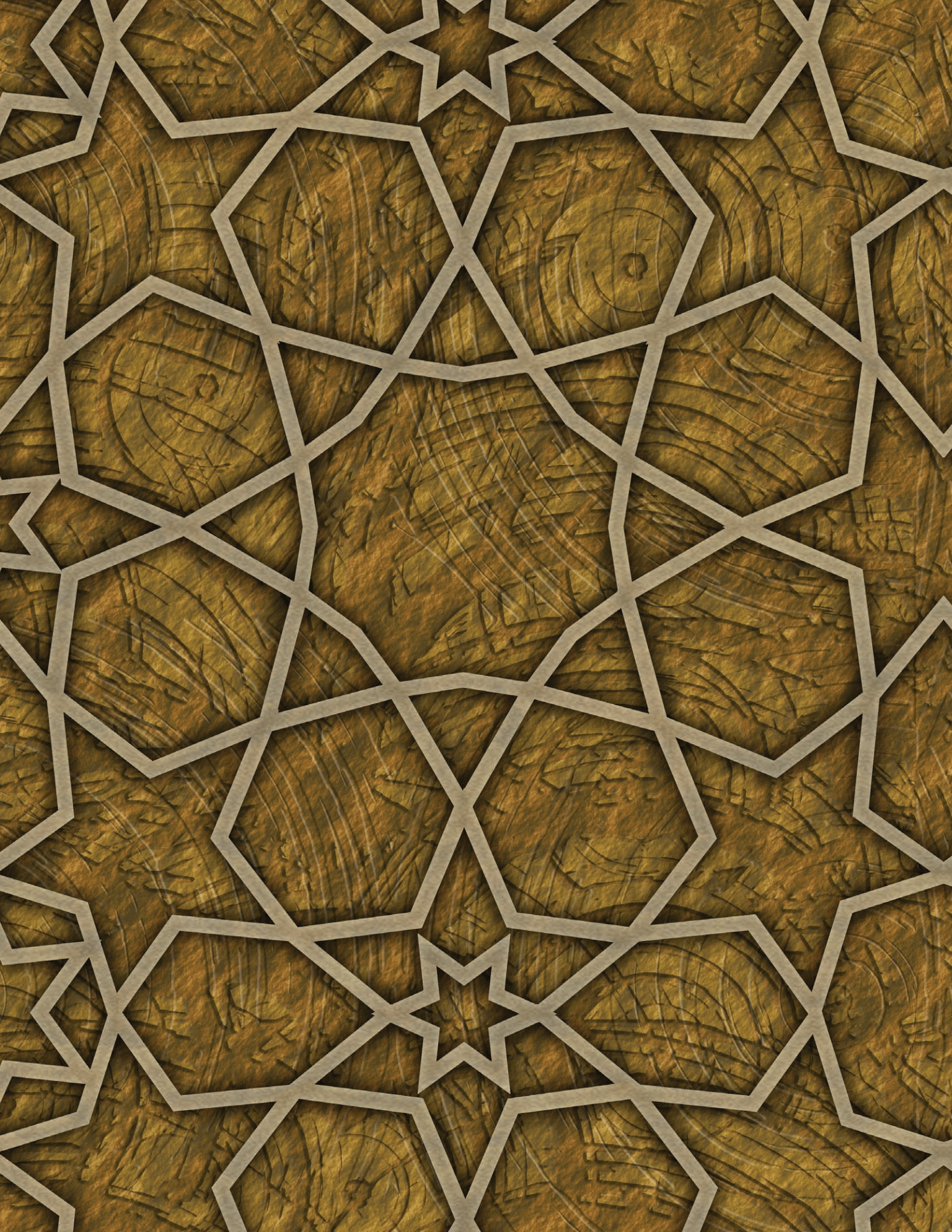


HELLFROST LAND OF FIRE

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS







HELLFROST LAND OF FIRE

by Paul “Wiggy” Wade-Williams

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CONTENTS

WELCOME TO THE DESERT	3	THE LANDS	72
The Land	3	Types of Settlement	72
A Potted History of Al-Shirkuh .	6	Reading the Stat Block	75
CHARACTERS	7	The Al-Wazir Sultanate	75
Making Characters	8	The Caliphate of Al-Shirkuh ...	86
Cakali	10	City of Iron	95
Humans	11	The Empty Zone	96
Hyaenidae	13	The Free Emirate States	98
Jinn Blooded	13	The Grazelands	107
Sand Goblins	15	The Great Dune Sea	108
Hindrances	15	The Great North Desert	109
Edges	16	The Great South Desert	112
GEAR	27	The Heart of Fire	115
Gear Notes	27	Hekata (The Withered	
Vehicles	30	Dynasty)	117
Fortifications	31	Jadid, City of Trade	120
THE DEVOTED.....	37	Jinn Lands of Old	121
The Magical Arts	38	Jubbah, City of Monkeys	126
Trappings	39	The Kingdom of the	
Arcane Backgrounds	40	Sphinxes	127
New Spells	43	Lands of the Lizardmen	138
THE FAITHFUL	45	The Mirrorsands	139
The Gods	46	The Plains of Ash	139
DESERT LIFE	55	Realm of the Medusae	141
Passage of Time	55	The Salt Basin	142
Daily Life	58	The Salt Marsh	144
Organizations	64	The Scorpion Lands of Old ..	145
SETTING RULES	67	The Snakelands of Old	146
Temperature & Water		Southern Ocean	148
Consumption	27	ORGANIZATIONS	151
Movement	69	BESTIARY	155
Other Rules	69	CHARACTER SHEET	188
GM SECTION	71	INDEX	189

Suleiman the Great (Devoted Version)

Hear now the triumph of Suleiman the Great, life, prosperity, health unto him, over the jinn and the downfall of the false gods, as told by Khaizuran the Poet, blessed of Suleiman.

Suleiman the Great, life, prosperity, health unto him now and always, was born unto woman, flesh and blood wrapped around a divine spirit. Great though he would become, Suleiman was born a slave like his father and his father's father before him back to the beginning.

In those dark days, before the Hagg-Bari (Light of Guidance) shone upon us, all beings save for the Sphinxes were slaves unto the jinn, the foulest of dark races.

Low was the lot of man, forced to work in the dark mines so the jinn could grow rich, forced to build vast monuments so the jinn would be remembered in glory, forced to fight wars like pieces on a chessboard so the jinn would not have to soil their hands with blood. For generations before the Prophet of the Light came, the gods of our peoples had spurned our cries for help. Unto this hardship was born Suleiman.

Suleiman, blessed be his name, was gifted with much wisdom, even as a child. Where others saw problems, Suleiman saw solutions. When others saw violence as a means to end disputes, Suleiman saw peace. It is said that Suleiman could speak the language of all races even as a baby, and the language of the beasts was also known to his ear.

So great was his knowledge that even the jinn were in awe, and he was elevated to the position of wizar, advisor to the Caliph of the jinn. Suleiman served the jinn well and learned much magic, but none which rivaled the jinn. As Suleiman meditated on the wonders of the universe, he saw in his mind's eye the Hagg-Bari, the way to defeat the jinn.

Armed with his new found knowledge, Suleiman approached his masters and ordered them to release his people. The jinn laughed and cast their magic, which had leveled cities of stone in the past, but Suleiman was unharmed. Unto the jinn Suleiman in return brought down many terrible curses, until at last they agreed to free the slaves.

Suleiman gathered the slaves and told them what had occurred. Many were blinded to the Hagg-Bari, and praised Suleiman as a priest of the Many Gods, whom men had worshipped in error since the Dawn of Time.

Angered at their blindness, Suleiman invoked the names of the Many Gods and called them to appear before him. By my own eyes, I, Khaizuran the Poet, witnessed the Many Gods appear and bow before Suleiman, calling him "Light of the Light," and "Word of the One." So it came to pass that the false light of the Many Gods fell from the eyes of men, who rejoiced in the Hagg-Bari.

Suleiman sought to lead the slaves into the desert in search of new lands, but the jinn, who speak no truth, sought to destroy them. Suleiman marched ahead of his followers and challenged the jinn. For forty days and forty nights the earth shook and the sky was the color of blood. Only then did Suleiman emerge from the desert, ready to lead his people to freedom, free from the pestilence of the jinn.

On the cusp of victory, Suleiman in his great wisdom, refrained from destroying the mighty jinn elders, for in death they would have no chance to repent their evil ways and find the eternal grace of ONENESS. They were cast into copper jars, which Suleiman sealed with a secret mark. These he cast across the known world, never to be opened again until the Day of Judging, when Suleiman, as chosen by Asha to lead his cause, would return to redeem them.

The lesser jinn he allowed to remain in the world, but they were now slaves to those followers of the Hagg-Bari who knew the words of power to control them.

All this, I swear in the name of Asha, is Truth.

Suleiman the Great (Faithful Version)

Hear now the triumph of Suleiman the Great, life, prosperity, health unto him, over the jinn and the return of the gods, as told by Fazir the Wise, blessed of Suleiman.

Suleiman the Great, life, prosperity, health unto him now and always, was born unto woman, flesh and blood wrapped around a divine spirit. Great though he would become, Suleiman was born a slave like his father and his father's father before him back to the beginning.

In those dark days, when men had turned from the gods, whom they thought had abandoned them, all beings save for the Sphinxes were slaves unto the jinn, the foulest of dark races.

Low was the lot of man, forced to work in the dark mines so the jinn could grow rich, forced to build vast monuments so the jinn would be remembered in glory, forced to fight wars like pieces on a chessboard so the jinn would not have to soil their hands with blood. For generations before the Great Prophet came, we had neglected the gods of our ancestors and suffered accordingly. Unto this hardship was born Suleiman.

Suleiman, blessed be his name, was gifted with much wisdom, even as a child. Where others saw problems, Suleiman saw solutions. When others saw violence as a means to end disputes, Suleiman saw peace. It is said that Suleiman could speak the language of all races even as a baby, and the language of the beasts was also known to his ear.

So great was his knowledge that even the jinn were in awe, and he was elevated to the position of wizar, advisor to the Caliph of the Jinn. Suleiman served the jinn well and learned much wisdom, but none which rivaled the jinn. As Suleiman meditated on the wonders of the universe, he saw in his mind's eye that the gods were waiting his call, and through them was the way to defeat the jinn.

Armed with his new found knowledge, Suleiman approached his masters and ordered them to release his people. The jinn laughed and cast their magic, which had leveled cities of stone in the past, but Suleiman was unharmed. Unto the jinn Suleiman in return brought down many terrible curses, until at last they agreed to free the slaves.

Suleiman gathered the slaves and told them what had occurred. Many were blinded to the teachings of the gods, for they insisted the Many Gods had abandoned them to the jinn.

Angered at their blindness, Suleiman invoked the names of the Many Gods and begged them to appear before him. By my own eyes, I, Fazir the Wise, witnessed the Many Gods appear and saw Suleiman kneel before each save Iblis, who is the Great Deceiver, and welcome them into his heart. So it came to pass that the gods in unison hailed Suleiman as a prophet, and bestowed unto him their power, for he alone had faith in them.

Suleiman led the slaves into the desert in search of new lands, but the jinn, who speak no truth, sought to destroy them. Suleiman marched ahead of his followers and challenged the jinn. For forty days and forty nights the earth shook and the sky was the color of blood. Only then did Suleiman emerge from the desert and lead his people to freedom, free from the pestilence of the jinn.

On the cusp of victory, Suleiman in his great wisdom, refrained from destroying the mighty jinn elders, for in death they would have no chance to repent their evil ways and accept the benevolence of the gods. They were cast into copper jars, which Suleiman sealed with a secret mark. These he cast across the known world, never to be opened again until the Day of Judging, when Suleiman, as chosen by the gods, would return to judge the wicked.

The lesser jinn he banished from this mortal world, though those who saw not the wisdom of the Many Gods sought to traffic with them, for they had learned nothing and sought to be masters as once they were slaves.

All this, I swear in the name of the Many Gods, is Truth..

WELCOME TO THE DESERT



Land of Fire is an expansion to the *Hellfrost* setting. This volume details the cultures and realms of the vast desert region south of Rassilon, a realm known to locals as Al-Shirkuh ("The Land of Heat"). It contains new races, gear, forms of magic, gods, and beasts and archetypes, but it does not replicate material from the *Hellfrost Players' Guide* or *Hellfrost Bestiary*. As such, to fully utilize this book, you'll need the aforementioned volumes as well. The *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion* is useful, but not essential. Many of the generic Edges from that supplement are already included in this volume.

🌀 The Land 🌀

Much of the desert is an expansive wasteland of burning sand and stone, active volcanoes and ash plains, baked mountain ranges, dank salt marshes, and glittering salt flats. Only around the coasts, along the banks of the major rivers, and at the scattered oases does one find fertile lands—and these are highly prized and fiercely defended. Here civilization not only exists, but prospers. Great cities and sprawling nomad encampments offer travelers protection and hospitality, though a friendly welcome is not always guaranteed.

Away from the coasts, which are kept cool by the effects of wind and sea, the daytime temperature of the sands can soar as high 120° Fahrenheit (40° C), depending on the time of year and one's location within the desert. At night, the temperature can plummet below freezing, giving rise to a different set of problems for desert travelers.

The Northern Winter

The region known as the Hellfrost may lie thousands of miles to the north of the desert core, but its effects are being felt in the desert. Temperatures have dropped,

though they are still high enough to kill the unwary within hours, the rains fall more often, and the sands of the desert have begun to encroach faster into the fertile regions. The desert is growing colder, but it is growing larger as well.

The Civilized Races

Within the desert realms dwell many sentient species, though only a few are referred to as civilized, despite their achievements throughout history.

Humans are the most populous of the races and comprise two main types. The Hadaree dwell in permanent buildings. Most live along the coasts and the banks of the rivers, though there are many villages and towns whose existence is sustained by wells or springs. Though once many people, each with their own culture, the Hadaree bloodlines are so intermingled they have become a single race made of many traditions. This is not to say there is no diversity among them, for the great coastal cities have developed unique cultures of their own. Like all the races, they are also divided by religion.

Amid the eternal sands live the Bedu, a nomadic people of tribes and clans bound by blood and oaths of friendship and animosity. Like the dunes, such oaths are rarely static, and a friend one day may be an enemy the next.

The Bedu do not live in the deserts unchallenged, for the jackal-headed cakali, remnants of an ancient empire destroyed by the jinn, and hyena-headed hyaenidae, quarrelsome raiders, make their homes here as well. Resources are scarce, too few to share without blood being spilled on occasion.

Sand goblins, a race many consider vermin, have adapted to city life, and the ways of the Devoted and Faithful. They are lazy and sneaky, both untrustworthy traits to all races except the hyaenidae.

The last race, the jinn blooded, are a branch of humanity, yet many see them as a separate race. Jinn blooded

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

have a natural affinity to one of the major types of jinn and possess strange powers over the elemental force associated with those supernatural entities. To some, they are a blessing from the greater powers. To others, they are evidence of a terrible curse.

DARK FOES

Sharing the desert are many hostile races and creatures. For every member of the civilized races who stands, scores of horrors stand against him.

Gatormen, who avoided the fate of their northern kin, dwell in the salt marshes in the ruined cities of their former empire, alongside small tribes of bufomi. Fire giants make their homes in the hellish inferno of the Heart of Fire and Plain of Ash. Scorpionmen lurk in barren, rocky wastes where once stood an ancient empire. The ophidae (a race of snakemen) haunt ancient cities deep in the burning sands, from where they plot the conquest of Al-Shirkuh. Arrogant sphinxes rule over a realm of human subjects, each plotting its ascendancy to godhood.



Fell undead have gathered their forces in Hekata, where once thrived a human empire. Jinn, survivors of the war against mankind, live in isolated regions, ever-vengeful toward the race of men. Dragons prowl the skies, claiming mastery of all they survey.

Magic & Faith

In Rassilon, those who work miracles are chosen by their god, whereas mages, who may believe and even worship the gods, simply know strange ways of manipulating reality. In the desert, however, both magic and miracles are “spiritual,” and the gap between has divided nations.

THE DUALITY OF FAITH

Long ago, before the age of Suleiman, before the jinn enslaved the land, the races worshipped a pantheon of gods and goddesses in which each deity was responsible for a small part of the universe. Indeed, these times are known today as the Days of Many Gods.

Suleiman, it is said by one creed, believed that true spiritual power came from within, not without. Worshipers needed no temples to honor any supreme force, though two exist in his dualist philosophy—Asha (“Order”) and Druj (“Chaos”). Anyone could achieve Oneness (a state where the soul achieves spiritual perfection and bonds with Asha) by living a life of both good thoughts and good deeds, and without the need for priests to intercede on behalf of the worshipper.

Suleiman also told that everything in the universe is touched by strands of magic. So long as one knows how to pluck the strings, one can literally alter the building blocks of creation and bend reality. Magic, he said, was not an arcane path restricted to just a few, but a spiritual path open to anyone with the strength of will to follow it. So long as one knows how to pluck the strings, one can literally alter the building blocks of creation and bend reality.

The ancient gods, according to Suleiman’s vision, were nothing but massive tangles of magical strands, from which humans who had “faith” could reshape the world. However, these clumps were but a small part of the greater whole.

Suleiman also saw that since everything is linked by magic, magic must be the true representation of the universe. Differences in magic styles had no relevance, for all were a path to the same end.

Despite going against millennia of tradition, the new teachings spread like wildfire. After all, where exactly were the gods when the jinn enslaved the other races? Through this teaching, men gained the ability to not only control their own destiny, but to alter the destiny of the very universe. Those people who follow this creed are called Devoted.

But not everyone agrees with this interpretation of Suleiman’s teachings—the old gods have existed since

Welcome to the Desert

the beginning of time and will exist forever. Although the number and names of the gods has changed over time, they still grant their faithful servants miraculous powers, and thus their existence cannot be denied. More importantly, Suleiman appears in the Faithful creed as a holy prophet who simultaneously worshipped every deity, and was granted miracles by them so as to defeat the tyrannical jinn.

Thus, while stories of his legendary abilities may vary immensely, Suleiman is a central figure in both the Devoted and Faithful creeds.

MAGIC

The art of magic is as rich here as it is in the north, if not richer, and likely far older in origin. Although Suleiman is regarded as the greatest mage who ever lived by Devoted, he was not the first wizard. When the northern peoples were still hunter-gatherers, great empires spanned the desert, and these ancient folk knew much of mystical ways of the universe.

Long before Suleiman's birth there were sand mages, who drew their power from the energy infusing the desert. There were also ushabti mages, who possessed the knowledge of how to awaken inanimate objects to do their bidding. Dervishes worked their magic by spinning like a top, literally weaving threads together through their circular motion. Lastly, there were practitioners of khem-hekau, or necromancy, an art created during the height of the cursed Hekatic Empire.

Though Suleiman mastered all these arts, he is best remembered among mages for developing jinn magic, by which means a sorcerer could command and control lesser jinn. Though the newest form of magic, it quickly became a symbol for Suleiman's new creed—the civilized were free, and where once the jinn were masters, they would now be slaves.

A sixth form of magic, wizir magic, developed comparatively recently. Wizir magicians draw their power from ties to noble bloodlines, using it to advise and protect their patrons.

ANCIENT MAGIC

The civilized races never mastered the art of weaving the strands of magic into solid items. The jinn certainly knew the secret, though they never shared their knowledge. Some scholars believe the ophidae had also learned the craft, though this is an unproven theory at present.

These days, khem-hekau and jinn mages have the ability to create a special form of relic. They bind dark spirits and lesser jinn into mundane objects, allowing those with sufficient willpower to force the captive jinni or spirit to work magic on their behalf. While the entities can produce wondrous powers, their abilities are not permanent. Unlike alchemical devices, however, such relics can be reused many times.

True relics, such as magic swords, flying carpets, suits of armor, and the like, do exist, though they are

SULEIMAN—MAGE OR CLERIC?

Whether Suleiman was a cleric or mage is subject to much argument across Al-Shirkuh. To the Devoted, he is the greatest mage who ever lived, having mastered all the old arts and then discovering the new art of jinn magic. He also founded a new creed, one which told the races were responsible for their own salvation. To the Faithful, he is a holy prophet and a priest of every deity simultaneously.

Only five centuries have passed since his death. To some, this may seem a relatively short period of time for the true teachings of such an important figure to have diversified.

The days following the liberation were ones of great turmoil—creating a new society was more important than how the freedom was actually earned. Storytellers told tales of events as they perceived them, but the first written histories came about many decades later. The division of the two faiths resulted in two sets of history, each altered to make its version the true account. One man's heresy became another man's faith.

At the end of the day, players can argue their characters' personal beliefs as much as they wish. The truth about Suleiman, however, remains a mystery, and neither side is right or wrong.

Reader's should note that Suleiman is loosely based on the figure of King Solomon, who, in Islamic teachings, defeated many jinn thanks to the grace of Allah. The Devoted creed owes its existence to the Zoroastrian concepts of order and chaos, although one term (imam) has been borrowed from Islam and used in its wider sense of a notable scholar.

extremely rare and highly sought after. Many believe the myriad ruins littering the desert contain either the secret knowledge of this art or house vast treasures stacked with relics. Fearsome beasts also inhabit these ruins—few who seek lost knowledge ever return, and those who do return to civilization are usually no more enlightened than when they began their quest.

Cults, Cabals, & Societies

Al-Shirkuh has many secret societies bent on some sinister goal. Assassins strike in the dark of night, their poisoned blades capable of changing the destiny of a city in one blow. Fanatical warriors strike down the remaining jinn and those who would traffic with them, while others seek to rebuild the jinn empire and willingly return themselves into slavery. An organization of women seeks to overthrow the rule of man. Slavers trade in flesh, caring little for what fate awaits their living cargo. Mages plot in secret to replace the nobility of the Sultanate with a magocracy.

◉ A Potted History of Al-Shirkuh ◉

- 5000?: The scorpion men and the ophidae fight a great war. It ends in stalemate, and both sides retreat to rebuild their strength.
- 2400?: Rise of the Hekatic Empire on the banks of the River Ankh.
- 2200?: The Hekatic pharaohs war against the scorpion men, destroying their empire and freeing the humans they had enslaved. The ophidae suffer many attacks in the decades to come, but remain unconquered.
- 2000?: Ophidae experiments to crossbreed with humans creates the medusae.
- 1925?: The medusae attempt to usurp the nagas. After a lengthy civil war the ophidae drive them into the desert, where they quickly settle around the Statue Hills.
- 1915?: Hekata invades the Snakelands. The ophidae retreat underground.
- 1800?: Seeking immortality, Hekatic mages discover necromancy and create khem-hekau.
- 1750?: Refugees fleeing Hekata build cities on the southeast coast, founding the Kingdom of Magor.
- 1334: Rise of the Sphinx Pharaohs. Humans living in the region are enslaved.
- 1187: The Hekatic Empire, already in its death throes, wars against the sphinxes but suffers several terrible defeats.
- 1085: The River Ankh dries up and the Hekatic Empire disintegrates. Empire destroyed by unknown disaster.
- 801: The jinn appear and quickly conquer the central lands, obliterating all who resist.
- 748: The jinn conquer the human lands in the southern desert, destroying their cities and enslaving the people under their tyrannical rule. The Kingdom of Magor ceases to exist.
- 505: Jinn invasion of the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes is thwarted with considerable losses. Jinn expansion is halted for many centuries.
- 492: The Anari Empire rises in Rassilon.
- 302: The Hekatic pharaohs awaken suddenly and launch a brutal but short-lived campaign against the sphinxes and the jinn.
- 232: Anari conquer the west coast of Al-Shirkuh, founding several trading cities in what is now the Free Emirates.
- c. -100: Suleiman is born. Though born a slave, he quickly becomes a trusted advisor to the jinn.
- 5: The War of Copper Jars begins. Suleiman's rebellion begins. Led by the great prophet, humans rise up against their jinn masters.
- 4: The Cakali Confederacy is destroyed by the jinn. The cakali side with the humans, and eventually become nomadic after the war ends.
- 0: The Battle of the Fallen Sun. Suleiman and the jinn elders clash in what is now the heart of the Mirrorsands. Great magic is unleashed, and the jinn leaders are defeated, bound into copper jars and scattered across the lands.
- 2 CJ: The former slaves wander the central desert. Most head south into what is now the Sultanate.
- 15 CJ: Suleiman dies of natural causes. Emissaries from the many tribes come to mourn the loss of the great leader. Suleiman's body is buried in a secret tomb, along with powerful relics taken from the jinn.
- 20 CJ: Anari abandon their southern cities, a result of pressure from hostile natives and growing strife in Rassilon.
- 22 CJ: Founding of the Free Emirate States.
- 23 CJ: Founding of the Sultanate. The Sultan prohibits worship of the old gods.
- 29 CJ: Citizens faithful to the old gods flee from religious persecution in the Sultanate.
- 32 CJ: Founding of the Caliphate. The first Caliph declares the teachings of the *Hamad al-Shuf* heretical.
- 50 CJ: The Ice Rising affects Rassilon to the north and the long winter begins. In the desert, it marks the beginning of a steady decrease in annual rainfall, a cooling of the high temperatures, and increased expansion of the desert. Trade ends with Rassilon. Jinn mages report a maddening wail emanating from jinn relics across Al-Shirkuh.
- 77 CJ: The War of Ideology marks the first hostility between the Sultanate and Caliphate.
- 129 CJ: The War of False Hopes between the Sultanate and Caliphate.
- 181 CJ: The Six Week War between the Sultanate and Caliphate. Both nations are led by military incompetents, and thousands die on the march to the distant battlefields. When the two sides eventually meet, both armies mutiny, slay their commanders, and return home claiming victory.
- 206 CJ: War of Bitter Water marks the last conflict between the Sultanate and Caliphate. Despite their differences, both nations agree to end hostilities. A new age of enlightenment begins.
- 391 CJ: The City of Iron built across the Silk Road. Overland trade to the east ceases.
- 394 CJ: The Battle of the Vultures' Feast ends in disaster for the denizens of Al-Shirkuh, and all attempts to reclaim the Silk Road are abandoned.
- 507 CJ: The ophidae emerge from their subterranean lairs and begin recolonizing their former lands.
- 520 CJ: The Siphoning begins. Tensions flare as the Devoted blame the Faithful's heretical creed for the loss of magic.
- 549 CJ: Current day.

CHARACTERS

We've given you a list of common archetypes to help you get into the right frame of mind. Once you've decided on the type of character you want to play, move straight on to Making Characters.

Assassin: Political intrigue is rife among the desert kingdoms. Daggers-for-hire can always find work, if they are prepared to put aside their morals.

Beggar: Some beggars are truly poor, but others are members of a secret organization dedicated to protecting the downtrodden masses.

Citizen: Pyramids grow from small foundations, as the saying goes, and sometimes heroes grow from average men and women. Whether an escaped slave seeking revenge on cruel masters or a farmer's son looking for adventure, the citizen has become embroiled in adventure.

Dervish: Also known as whirling dervishes, these mages are a blur of motion, capable of working magic by literally winding the threads of magic around themselves. Many are also expert swordsmen.

Entertainer: Jugglers, acrobats, and fire-eaters can make an honest living in the markets and bazaars. Some turn their acrobatic skills to more adventurous endeavors, hoping to achieve fortune and fame their market tricks cannot hope to deliver.

Explorer: Countless ruins from bygone ages litter the desert. Explorers are usually more interested in knowledge than wealth.

Fighter: Fighters cover everything from hardened mercenaries to devout bodyguards to green villagers looking to defend their homes.

Headsmen: Headsmen are professional executioners, trained at delivering well aimed blows to any part of the body.

Houri: A pretty girl can soften the hardest heart, so the nomads say. Houris are attractive women who use their wiles as spies, seductresses, and corruptors. A few are even assassins.

Jinn Mage: The lesser jinn (plural of jinni) are representatives of the four elements. Through bargaining

or intimidation, a jinn mage can use the power of the elements. Mages can master more than one type of jinni, but the jinn are selfish and dislike sharing power.

Khem-Hekau Mage: Also known as necromancers, these mages traffic with the souls of the dead, forcing them into service through words of power.

Noble: Many nobles live lives of opulent luxury, surrounded by servants, a harem, and political intrigue. Others are lesser sons, who seek adventure and glory among the burning sands.

Nomad: Traveling between the great cities and oases, nomads eke a living as traders, slavers, and mercenaries. They are governed by a strict code of hospitality.

Paladin: Whereas clerics guard the souls of the faithful, paladins guard their flesh. Some paladins are permanent residents at temples. Others travel the lands performing deeds in the name of their deity.

Pegasus Guard: Devout soldiers in the service of the Sultan, the Pegasus Guards cross the desert on pegasus, carrying out the Sultan's orders. They are part diplomat, part warrior, and part messenger, as required by their master.

Priest: The ancient cultures worshiped many gods. Today, only a few deities are worshipped, though the powers they grant their servants are no less formidable.

Sage: Those who study knowledge are called sages. There have been civilizations in the desert for thousands of years, and there is much knowledge that has been lost.

Sailor: Despite the vast tracts of desert, there is water. Watercraft regularly sail the many rivers and carry cargo between coastal cities.

Sand Mage: These mages work their magic by manipulating the energy within the desert. Some are defenders of the burning wastes, others seek to increase the rate at which the desert is expanding, regardless of what stands in their way.

Scout: With great knowledge of the dangers of the deserts, scouts hire their services to adventuring parties and caravans.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

KNOWLEDGE SKILL

In addition to the Knowledge skills presented in the *Hellfrost Players' Guide*, one additional skill is useful to those who travel the sands.

Nomads: The hero is learned in the many unwritten practices of the nomads, including their cultures and laws of hospitality. Bedu, cakali, and hyaenidae use Common Knowledge when dealing with other tribes or nomadic races.

CLARIFICATION

The great cities of Al-Shirkuh are part of the four major civilized realms, yet each has a unique history and laws. As such, a character native to one of the great cities uses Common Knowledge for folklore, heraldry, history, and law only concerning his home city. A -2 penalty is incurred for rolls concerning other cities within the same realm.

For instance, Ahmed comes from Akhmim, a city of the Sultanate. When making rolls regarding the city's folklore, heraldry, history, and law he uses Common Knowledge. When seeing what he knows about another city of the Sultanate, these rolls incur a -2 penalty. Outside of the Sultanate, his Common Knowledge is useless. If he wants to know anything about these topics, he needs to purchase the appropriate Knowledge skill.

GUTS SKILL

Land of Fire does not use the Guts skill. Where an existing *Hellfrost* ability grants a modifier to Guts, it now grants a modifier to Spirit rolls to resist Fear. Any reference to Guts in existing monster templates should be ignored. If you are planning to use existing characters native to Rassilon for adventure in the sands, characters with the Guts skill should be allowed to transfer the points invested in it to other skills.

Scribe: Writing documents may not be a glamorous job, but it's vital to the various bureaucracies. Scribes are often masters of several languages. Many have turned their talents to less honest endeavors, such as providing translations of ancient texts for tomb robbers.

Slave: Aside from the cakali, all of the cultures of the great desert practice slavery to some degree. Slaves may serve as warriors, laborers, or even as bedmates.

Street Urchin: Living in the alleys of the great cities are many street urchins, orphans who make a living acting as city guides, cutting purses, or selling information they have overheard.

Thief: There is an old saying that goes, "If the emirs do not want thieves in their cities, they should share their wealth." The markets and bazaars are home to many pickpockets, but the true thieves go after rich merchants and powerful nobles.

Tomb Raider: The deserts are full of half-buried tombs and cities, their inhabitants long dead, their bones turned to dust. Many ruins contain great treasures, protected by deadly traps and fearsome guardians.

Ushabti Mage: These unusual mages have few powers, and all involve the ability to animate objects. While most never rise above animating small statues, powerful mages can awaken colossal statues.

Wizir: Wizirs are counselors to Hadaree nobles. Some are skilled magicians, others merely skilled diplomats and manipulators. Second in power only to the ruling noble of a city, wizirs are powerful figures.

Making Characters

Creating heroes couldn't be easier. The only thing you need is a copy of the character sheet found at the back of this book or on our website, www.triplecegames.com. Once you've got your sheet, follow these steps to make your hero.

1) Race & Religion

In the *Land of Fire* setting, you can play cakali, humans, hyaenidae, jinn blooded, and sand goblins. Each race has its own advantages and disadvantages, as seen starting on page 10. Read through the various racial descriptions, then pick a race to play. Once the game begins, you can't change race, so choose wisely.

DEVOTED OR FAITHFUL

All characters in *Land of Fire* must be either Devoted (those who follow the *Haqq-Bari* teachings of Suleiman exclusively) or Faithful (those who follow the old gods and accept Suleiman as a prophet). Although some races favor certain teachings, player characters are never forced to comply with the masses. These two separate teachings are thoroughly ingrained at the very heart of desert life—a hero cannot elect to be neither or both.

The biggest factor this plays in game terms is for those who want an Arcane Background, for only Devoted work magic and only Faithful perform miracles. Arcane Backgrounds are detailed in the Devoted (p. 37) and Faithful (p. 45) chapters.

2) Traits

Now it's time to figure your hero's attributes and skills. Unless a racial description says otherwise, your character starts with a d4 in each of his five attributes: Agility, Smarts, Spirit, Strength, and Vigor. You then have 5 points to distribute among them as you choose. Rais-

LANGUAGES OF AL-SHIRKUH

Language	Spoken by/in	Alphabet
Al-Waziran	Sultanate of Al-Wazir	Cakali
Anari	Anari descendants, Free Emirates merchants	Anari
Beastspeech	Centaurs, harpies	Cakali
Beduan	Bedu	N/A
Black Tongue	Demons and sentient undead	Runic
Cakalic	Cakali	Cakali
Classical Anari	Scholars (mainly in the Free Emirates)	Anari
Draketongue	Dragons	Runic
Earthtongue	Gargoyles, trolls	Runic
Giant	Giants	Hieroglyphs
Hekatic	Undead of the Withered Dynasty, tomb robbers, scholars	Hieroglyphs
Holy Tongue	Caliphate of Al-Shirkuh	Cakali
Hyaendish	Hyaenidae	Pictograms
Jinn	Jinn; often considered the language of magic	Flowing script
Lesarde	Bufomi, gatormen, harpies, and lizardmen	Pictograms
Magorian	Scholars, tomb robbers (dead language)	Hieroglyphs
Orcish	Orcs, ogres, sand goblins	Hieroglyphs
Roguetongue	Thieves (sign language)	N/A
Scorpari	Scorpionmen	Hieroglyphs
Sandspeech	Humans, merchants, diplomats, Free Emirates	Cakali
Saxa	Spoken by Bedu who trade with Sutmark (rare elsewhere)	Saxa runic
Sphinx	Sphinxes	Hieroglyphs
Sslaniss	Ophidae, medusae	Hieroglyphs
Trader	Free Emirates merchants who deal with northern traders (rare elsewhere)	Anari

ing an attribute a die type costs 1 point, and you may not raise an attribute above d12.

You also have 15 points to buy your skills. Raising a skill by a die type costs 1 point as long as it's no higher than the attribute it's linked to. It costs 2 points per die type to raise a skill over its linked attribute.

All the standard skills are available except Driving and Piloting. Riding covers controlling animal-drawn conveyances, and Agility is used to control flying carpets and similar relics. Characters with an Arcane Background also have access to special arcane skills. These are detailed in Chapter 40.

LANGUAGES

Characters begin the game with a number of languages equal to half their Smarts die. So, a hero with a d6 Smarts knows three languages. Languages aren't rated by dice, and it's assumed a hero speaks the language flu-

ently enough to hold a conversation. Available languages are shown in the sidebar.

The first language a hero learns must be their racial tongue. Many heroes also speak Sandspeech, a language invented to make diplomacy and mercantile activities easier. (Though it shares the same purpose, it bears no resemblance to the common Trader language of the north). They must pick this with one of their available language slots, however.

Once play begins, a character can learn a new language by devoting an advancement to mastering the tongue—assume he's been practicing the language during his adventures, so he doesn't have to spend any "downtime" on this. Heroes learning languages this way can know more than their Smarts allows. Raising a hero's Smarts in play does not automatically grant him a new language.

Unless a character is illiterate (and many folk are), he can also read and write any language he speaks.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

OTHER NAMING CONVENTIONS

The naming conventions listed under each race are not the only ones used. Although the alternate conventions presented here are Hadaree in origin, they are no longer limited to humans.

Rather than listing one's ancestry or tribe, one might simply use "min" followed by one's place of origin. For instance, Azhar min Fashir means "Azhar from the city of Fashir."

Slaves and servants use "abd" followed by the name of their master after their given name. Even wizirs, often powerful men and women, may adopt this naming convention to show their loyalty to their lord. Clerics are permitted to use "abid" ("abida" for females), followed by the name of their patron deity to indicate their devotion to the faith. Abid literally means "worshipper."

"Abu" means "father of." Largely used as an honorific, so noting the father's siring of an heir, it is also used by fathers whose offspring have risen beyond them in reputation. "Umm" means "mother of."

"Beni" means "children or descendants of," and is always followed by the name of a famous ancestor. Rather than listing the male line, a family may adopt this as a sort of familial name. It is most commonly adopted by the children of the Sultans, Caliphs, and emirs of Al-Shirkuh.

DERIVED STATISTICS

Charisma is a measure of your hero's likeability, and is added to Persuasion and Streetwise rolls. Your Charisma modifier is +0 unless changed by Edges or Hindrances.

Pace is equal to 6", unless changed by Edges or Hindrances.

Parry is equal to 2 plus half your Fighting die type. Edges, Hindrances, and some types of equipment can modify your Parry score.

Toughness is equal to 2 plus half your Vigor die type. Edges, Hindrances, and Armor can modify your Toughness. Vigor can, in some cases, go above a d12. In such cases, all fractions are rounded down.

3) EDGES & HINDRANCES

Great heroes are far more than a collection of skills and attributes. It's their unique gifts, special powers, and tragic flaws that truly make them interesting characters.

You can take one Major Hindrance and two Minor Hindrances. A Major Hindrance is worth 2 points, and a Minor Hindrance is worth 1 point.

For 2 points you can:

* Raise an attribute one die type (you may raise your attributes before purchasing skills), or

* Choose an Edge.

For 1 point you can:

* Gain another skill point, or

* Gain additional money equal to your starting funds (if you start with 500 dinars, you gain an additional 500 dinars).

4) Gear

Next you need to purchase equipment. A list of gear can be found in Gear starting on page 27. Unless you've acquired Edges or Hindrances that change this, a hero starts with the clothes on his back and 500 dinars, the currency of the desert realms.

5) Background Details

Finish your character by filling in any history or background you care to. Ask yourself why your hero is where she is and what her goals are. Or you can just start playing and fill in these details as they become important.

Cakali

The cakali (pronounced "yack-AR-li," singular cakal) are humanoid jackals. They have fully dexterous fingers, but retain the legs and feet of jackals.

Originally there were three distinct sub-races of cakali, distinguished by their black, light brown, or reddish-brown fur. Centuries of interbreeding have merged these bloodlines to the point where the three sub-races are now one and the same.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Although regularly used as menial labor, a bondsman has some legal rights under cakali law. While under his master’s dominion, he is expected to serve loyally and without question, however. A few cakali even form true friendships with their bondsmen. A bondsman must serve a minimum of 10 years before he can ask to be released from his status. The cakali may cut the bondsman free at any time.

Cakali live for upward of 90 years.

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

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

RACIAL EDGES & HINDRANCES

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

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

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

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

🌀 HUMANS 🌀

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

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

Bedu

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

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



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

SOME NOMAD RULES

The various nomad races have a bewildering list of rules governing their lives. Here are some of the more common ones travelers should remember.

- * Never eat with your left hand or offer it in friendship (Bedu use the left hand to clean themselves or handle unclean materials).
- * Never leave food on your plate (it implies the food is poor) and never ask for more (which implies the host is not generous).
- * Belching after a meal honors the host (and not belching is an insult).
- * A gift must be answered with a gift of equal or greater value (to offer a lesser value is an insult).
- * Business is never discussed until after coffee has been drunk.
- * Coffee is only drunk after small talk has occurred (it gives the host time to judge your character).
- * Speak only if you have something to say (nomads do not engage in idle chatter).
- * Never ask for a private meeting (it implies you have some bad desire in mind).
- * Never be alone with a nomad woman, married or unmarried, who is not of your family (liaisons must always take place with another member of her family present).

sell captives to the fell undead rulers of Hekata, scorpionmen, orcs, and other evil races, as well as corrupt Hadaree.

All tribes control one watering hole, where the tribal sheikh has a permanent tent encampment. Any visitors who come in peace are welcomed to an oasis as honored guests, though non-Bedu must sleep in a separate tented area to avoid “contaminating” the nomads.

The desert is a harsh mistress, and the Bedu have a strict code regarding hospitality. No one who asks for hospitality is ever refused, and they are treated as guests. However, they are also a pragmatic people, and, given the amount of precious food and water it would take to nurse a person back to health, unconscious travelers found in the desert may be left to their fate. Breaking the laws of hospitality is seen as a grave insult to one’s host and can result in guests being banished to the desert without food or water.

Given where they live, it is perhaps not surprising that sand magic is the most practiced arcane art. Jinn mages are common, as are dervishes. Ushabti mages are extremely rare. Most tribes can muster one wizar, usually serving as an advisor to the sheikh. Khem-hekau is outlawed, and anyone using it around a Bedu can expect to be beaten senseless and dragged into the desert to die.

Like the cakali, Faithful tribes most favor Duamutef and Upuaut, though all gods receive some veneration, for each governs the Bedu’s life in some way.

Names: Abdullah, Irfan, Jabbar, Mahmoud, Nasir, Qadir (male); Aminah, Bisar, Falak, Hala, Randa, Sulafah (female).

Bedu surnames encompass the family, clan, and tribe names, in that order. Each name is separated by “dar,” which means, “of.” For instance, a nomad may introduce himself as “Abdul dar-Farraj dar-Mazzin dar-Duamutishel.” Abishur is the individual’s name, Farraj is the name of the head of his family, Mazzin is the name of his clan sheikh, and Duamutishel the name of his tribe (which translates roughly as “Chosen of Duamutef”).

A mir (head of a clan) uses his personal name, that of his sheikh, and then his tribe. A sheikh uses only his personal and tribal names. The fewer names a nomad has, the more important he is.

Hadaree

Hadaree literally means “person or people of the town,” and is used to denote both singular and plural. Of Beduan origin, it is conferred on any human born in a village, town or city, and applies irrespective of their creed, heritage, and nationality. While some commonality exists between settlements in a given geographic region, the word does not truly describe any exact culture—in the same way Bedu tribes have cultural differences built around common social mores and customs, so the same is true of the denizens of permanent settlements. In essence, it simply means a non-nomad.

When it comes to magic, Devoted Hadaree prefer jinn magic to all other forms, this being the magic of Suleiman. Wizirs, while not found in large numbers, are common in most courts and the houses of the rich and powerful. Khem-hekau and ushabti mages are a tiny minority among the spellcasting community. Sand magic hasn’t been popular since before the War of Copper Jars, and many still treat it as rather backward. The same mentality similarly applies to dervish magic.

Faithful Hadaree have no particular bias, typically choosing a deity who will favor their occupation. The official state religion, however, is Shamash, and his temples can be found at the heart of every city.

Men with money prefer silk clothing, with extremely baggy pants being the current craze, while ladies wear silk dresses and veils. Poorer folk make do with cotton trousers and shirts or dresses, or simple floor-length robes. Footwear also varies with wealth, with the poor wearing open sandals or leather boots, and the wealthier citizens wearing silk slippers or fancy leather shoes.

Names: Ahmed, Azhar, Badr, Farhan, Hazim, Mush-taq, Ra’if, Zarif (male); Almas, Asiyah, Gharam, Husna, Juman, Nadia, Sirah (female).

Hadaree do not use familial names. Instead, they typically use the word “ibn” (“son of”) or “bint” (“daughter of”), followed by the name of their father. Though it is common among the lower classes to end here, nobles often list several ancestors, if only to show the unbroken line of their familial power.

A new trait is developing, however. Rather than us-

ing familial name strings, many folk have begun using their personal name followed by “the” and a self-given title, often relating to an occupation. Thus, one may find Ahmed the Beggar, Farhan the Guide, or Sirah the Wise. Some say this began long ago with a certain famous mariner, though others argue it stems from the mighty nobles who rule the great cities.

RACIAL EDGES & HINDRANCES

* **Diverse:** Humans of any culture start play with one free Edge of their choice or 2 extra skill points. They may not use this to take an extra attribute. The character must meet the requirements of any Edge as usual.

Hyaenidae

Whereas the cakali are jackal men, the hyaenidae (pronounced “high-EEN-eye-die”) are hyena men. Hyaenidae are consummate scavengers. They live a nomadic existence, traveling from oasis to oasis, looting ruins, and generally stealing anything not nailed down. They have been known to loot battlefields for weapons, having no metalworking crafts of their own. Tales of them driving off carnivores so they can steal their food are common in the taverns of the Sultanate, but no one who repeats these stories has witnessed such an act for themselves.

Some families have taken over parts of ruined cities, but since families refuse to cooperate with others of their kin, they have never been able to form their own settlements. Rarely a strong leader has merged families into a cohesive force, but these pacts end the moment the leader dies, is defeated, or fails to provide enough spoils.

Many people accuse them of stealing babies and children. While it is true they practice slavery, the hyaenidae have never resorted to child snatching. Still, mud sticks, and the race has a generally poor reputation.

Hyaenidae are family oriented, though they do not form clans or tribes. Resources are scarce in the desert, and families compete against each other. When two families meet over a valuable resource, be it water, food, or an intact tomb, there is a show of force. Usually one side backs down, but when they don’t violence is the only solution.

Religious views tend to be family oriented, and children who do not want to follow the family tradition leave to find a family of the same faith who will accept them.

When it comes to magic, sand and dervish mages dominate, with jinn mages close behind. Hyaenidae have little interest in courtly matters, making wizards redundant. Likewise, although they raid ruins, they rarely dwell in them, and have little need for ushabti magic. Khem-hekau is frowned upon, but only because it is little understood. As nomads, the Faithful among them favor Duamutef and Upuaut. Many follow Tamarni, in her guise as goddess of stealth and thieves.

Names: Arad, Belkashir, Ikaru, Ligish, Seluku, Uktannu (male); Ama, Erishti, Hamzutim, Sululi, Yalampa (female).

Because the hyaenidae do not form clans or tribes, they have little need for surnames. Every member in the family knows each other by sight, and its a stranger’s fault if he can’t tell one Ikaru from another.

RACIAL EDGES & HINDRANCES

* **Bad Reputation:** Hyaenidae have –2 Charisma when dealing with any race other than their own.

* **Bite:** Str+d6.

* **Greedy:** Hyaenidae hate sharing. They have the Minor Greedy Hindrance. If a character wants to increase this to the Major version, he treats it as buying a Minor Hindrance (since he’s just “upgrading”).

* **Laugh:** Hyaenidae have a yapping laugh, which is both annoying and disturbing. They begin with Taunt at a d6.

* **Low Light Vision:** Hyaenidae ignore penalties for Dim and Dark Lighting.

* **Tireless:** Accustomed to hardship and deprivation, hyaenidae have +1 to all Vigor rolls to resist Fatigue.

JINN BLOODED

The birth of children with strange powers has been reported among Devoted and Faithful humans since shortly after Suleiman’s death, and their numbers have been growing steadily over the centuries.

The origin of the race is open to much debate, and many suggestions have been proffered down the ages. Among Devoted, the most popular theory is that they are the descendants of Suleiman or his first disciples, many of whom were jinn mages. Whether they cavorted with jinn or merely became imbued with their power remains open to discussion. While a jinn blooded might not be a hereditary descendant of these ancient sorcerers, he is seen as a direct spiritual descendant. Most Faithful, and some Devoted, believe jinn blooded are the result of a terrible curse laid down by the jinn as their great empire was being systematically destroyed. While not seen as inherently evil, they are treated with great suspicion.

Jinn blooded are essentially human, but have the power to control very lesser jinn. They tend to have personalities related to the type of jinn they take after.

* **Ifrit blooded (fire)** often develop violent tendencies, which flare up without warning. They prefer to act quickly, throwing themselves into tasks with reckless abandon and little thought for the outcome.

* **Khamsin blooded (air)** are curious by nature, driven by an intense desire to experience new things. They are often imaginative and creative, but rarely finish anything they start, being easily distracted by new opportunities.

* **Majin blooded (earth)** are generally slow to act, preferring to think about matters before reaching a deci-

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

sion. Once they have made up their minds, they stick with their decision for better or worse.

* **Marid blooded** (water) are traditionalists, following in the footsteps of those who came before them. Unimaginative and uncreative, they are sticklers for keeping the *status quo*.

Jinn blooded never form their own settlements, preferring to live instead among the culture into which they were born. Thus, there are Bedu and Hadaree jinn blooded. Jinn blooded mages favor jinn magic above all others, though they are not prohibited from learning other arts. Faithful generally worship the deity whose aspect matches their elemental form (such as Apsu for majin blooded). Again, this is not a firm rule.

Names: As the culture into which they were born.

RACIAL EDGES & HINDRANCES

* **Distrusted:** Jinn blooded are widely distrusted by Faithful creatures. They suffer -2 Charisma among Faithful (should their true nature ever become known).

* **Elemental Weakness:** Jinn blooded who become jinn mages *must* learn the same element as their racial type first. They may not take their opposite element until they have mastered the other three. Fire and water oppose each other, as do air and earth.

Thus, an ifrit jinn blooded must learn fire first, then air and earth (in any order), and finally water. Faithful cannot become clerics of a deity related to their opposite element. Neither khamsin (air) nor marid (water) jinn blooded can become clerics of Geb-Agni, god of fire and earth, for instance.

* **Jinn Blooded:** Jinn blooded have a natural affinity to one element, chosen from air, earth, fire, and water. This must match their elemental nature, and cannot be changed later.

The character can cast the *elemental manipulation* spell using his Spirit die as his arcane skill, but only with regard his chosen element. If the hero ever learns an arcane background which allows this spell, he may use the higher of his Spirit or arcane skill die, but only for his chosen element. A marid (water) jinn blooded must



Bedu



hadaree



Hyaenidae



Sand Goblin

always use his arcane skill if he ever learns *elemental manipulation (earth)*, for instance.

When he reaches Veteran, the character may devote an advancement to learning *summon jinn*. The spell is cast as above. Only lesser jinn *entirely* matching the character's element can be summoned. For instance, a majin (earth) jinn blooded can summon any type of earth elemental. He could not summon a mud elemental using this ability as it is a creature of both earth and water.

Regardless of whether they are Devoted or Faithful, these innate powers are subject to the Siphoning.

* **Still Human:** Jinn blooded still belong to a human culture, and must decide whether they are of Bedu or Hadaree extract. Despite their unearthly heritage, jinn blooded may be Devoted or Faithful.

One cannot be told apart from a normal human until he uses an innate power or he is subjected to a *detect arcana* spell. The latter is not foolproof, since any spell-caster appears supernatural to the spell. When using either of his innate powers, the jinn blooded displays his heritage in some overt manner. For instance, an ifrit blooded's hair may turn bright red and flicker like flame, while a marid blooded's clothes become soaking wet. These effects never have any associated game mechanics or uses—they are merely trappings.

☉ SAND GOBLINS ☉

Also known as camel goblins because of their unusual hunched appearance, sand goblins were once a nomadic race. Many have now switched to city life, finding it more comfortable—not that they live a great life. Sand goblins have an intense dislike of hard work, and so live as beggars, thieves, and scavengers, feeding off scraps and the few dinars they can make by selling stolen or scavenged goods. They tend to live together in cities, forming small, insular communities within the greater community. The crime rate in such areas is very high.

Mages favor sand magic, something the goblins claim to have invented (though this is heavily disputed by other races). A few try their hand at jinn magic, if only because it lets them bully something else into doing their work for them. Dervish magic is viewed as hard work, since it involves intense physical activity. Most other magic simply doesn't appeal to them.

Faithful goblins favor Apsu, god of water, Tamarni, goddess of stealth, and Duamutef, god of nomads, the latter left over from their nomadic days.

Sand goblins stand around 4' high, and have leathery brown skin. Their bodies are covered in coarse, brown hair, which molts during the height of summer. Their three-toed feet are wide, designed for walking on sand, and their strange appearance is finished with a small hump, which stores water in much the same way as a camel's does.

Names: Abid, Bahdin, Hirad, Jahan, Oshnar, Toutak (male); Atanaz, Daneh, Golar, Kotcha, Mamisa, Saba

(female). Sand goblins don't bother with surnames anymore, preferring to use nicknames instead.

RACIAL EDGES & HINDRANCES

* **Banned Edges:** Sand goblins cannot start play with the Noble or Rich Edges.

* **Camel:** Sand goblins require half the daily water intake of other creatures their size (p. 68). One who becomes a Disciple of Apsu (p. 20), requires just one-quarter of the usual amount.

* **Sand Walker:** Sand goblins' splayed feet help them move quickly over sand. They begin with the Sand Walker Edge (p. 19), regardless of their Agility.

* **Small:** Goblins average just 4' high. They are Size –1, which also gives them –1 Toughness. They can take the Small Hindrance, which represents reduced bulk.

* **Sneaky:** Sand goblins are renowned for their stealth, and start the game with a d6 in Stealth.

* **Untrustworthy:** Sensible folk mistrust sand goblins' words and deeds. They have –2 Charisma among races other than their own.

☉ HINDRANCES ☉

Unlike Rassilon, the peoples of the desert have known about lenses for some centuries. Thus, Bad Eyes can be taken as a Minor or Major Hindrance. A character who takes the Minor version is assumed to have a pair of corrective lenses.

The following Hindrances from the *Hellfrost Players' Guide* are prohibited in the desert: Black Sheep and Cold Blooded.

ANIMAL CURSE (MAJOR)

The character has been cursed by some powerful entity or misuse of a relic. For half the day, he lives his life as a normal mortal. For the other half, he transforms into an animal.

This Hindrance functions as per the *shape change* power, except the transformation is involuntarily (and cannot be foiled in any way), and the animal form must be a monkey or a small mundane animal such as those covered by the Small Animal entry in the *Hellfrost Bestiary*. Pick one animal when the Hindrance is taken. This cannot be changed later.

Decide whether the transformation occurs from sunrise to sunset (day) or sunset to sunrise (night). Once you've decided, this cannot be changed later.

CITY DWELLER (MINOR)

The character was born and raised in a large town or city. He has little understanding of the great outdoors. While in the wilderness or a natural subterranean environment (such as a cave system), the hero has –2 to

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Common Knowledge involving country life, Stealth, and Survival rolls.

Each time the character gains an advance, he may make a Smarts roll. With success, he may remove the Common Knowledge, Stealth, or Survival penalty. Once all three penalties are gone, the Hindrance is removed.

HATED TRIBE (MAJOR)

Only Bedu, cakali, or hyaenidae may take this Hindrance.

The hero's tribe is renowned for its inhospitality, wickedness, lies, treachery, and a string of other negative traits. The hero draws two cards when determining the feelings between a nomad tribe and his own and uses the least favorable (p. 69).

Regardless of the result, he always has a -2 Charisma penalty when dealing with other nomads—even his tribe's closest allies are loathe to deal with his people more than they must.

Other nomads with the hero must use the tribe's reaction to him unless there is someone with the Respected Tribe Edge (p. 17) in the group.

HEAT PRONE (MAJOR)

The character suffers badly from dehydration and cannot cope with high extremes of temperature. He has -2 to Vigor rolls to resist the effects of heat and needs to drink an extra 2 quarts of water a day.

INEPT (MINOR/MAJOR)

For some reason the character isn't as skilled as others. He might be lazy, stupid, a slow learner, or just raised in isolation. The hero receives 2 fewer Skill points with the Minor version and 4 fewer with the Major version. Points earned from taking this Hindrance cannot be spent on Skills.

SEA FEAR (MINOR/MAJOR)

Al-Shirkuh is a large continent. For some of those born in the burning wastes, the sight of seemingly endless expanses of open water causes intense terror.

When the character comes across a lake, a river whose opposite bank he cannot see, or the open sea, he must make a Spirit roll or suffer the effects of Fear for the next 24 hours or until the character is on dry land and the body of water is out of sight, whichever comes first. Covering one's eyes does not constitute as being out of sight of the water! If on a long voyage, the poor adventurer must make a Spirit roll each morning to overcome his fear.

Whether this Hindrance ranks as Minor or Major depends on the nature of the GM's campaign. In a game where water travel will be rare, it is a Minor Hindrance. In games where ship travel is to be frequent it counts as a Major Hindrance.

SHORT-LIVED MAGIC (MINOR/MAJOR)

Whether due to his inability to concentrate or correctly focus magic, a flaw in his training, or an ancient curse, the hero is unable to maintain spells for long periods.

With the Minor version, the character's Maintained spells automatically end after one hour (if not ended sooner by other means). Alchemical devices he creates containing Maintained spells end after 30 minutes.

The Major version allows the spellcaster to Maintain his spells for a maximum of one minute (10 combat rounds). His Maintained alchemical devices also last a mere one minute.

Edges

PROHIBITED EDGES

The following *Savage Worlds Deluxe* Edges may not be taken in this setting: Ace, Arcane Background (Psionics, Superpowers, and Weird Science), Brave, Martial Artist, Power Points, Rapid Recharge, Soul Drain, Wizard, or any Edges which list these as a requirement. Healer and Jack-of-all-Trades exist with different names and requirements. Check below and the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* for Edges that have been altered to fit the *Hellfrost* setting.

Desert characters cannot take the following *Hellfrost Players' Guide* Edges*: Augment Staff, Disciple Edges (any), Gray Legionary, Hearth Knight, Hellfreeze, Iron Guild Mercenary, Knight Hrafn, Old Family, Reliquary (any), Road Warden, Shieldwall, Sister of Mercy, Snow Walker, Warm Blooded, and Wood Warden. Any Edges with racial requirements for a race not in this book are also prohibited unless otherwise stated.

* GMs may choose to allow *Hellfrost Players' Guide* Professional Edges to be taken if a suitable backstory is created.

BACKGROUND EDGES

ANCESTRAL GUARDIAN

Requirements: Novice, Spirit d8+, cannot have negative Honor

The hero was visited by the spirit of an important or notable ancestor, who promised to aid him in times of need.

In times of need, the hero can spend a benny to gain a single Novice spell of his choice from *aim*, *armor*, *boost trait* (no lower), *deflection*, *environmental protection*, *farsight* or *warrior's gift*. These spells can only be cast on the hero. He activates the spell using Spirit as his arcane skill (even if he has an arcane skill). The hero only has one chance to activate the spell per benny spent. A

NOBLE TITLES

Anari	Sultanate & Caliphate (m/f)	Nomads (m/f)	Sphinx*
Knight	Effendi/Effenda	Bey/Beyah	Hakar
Banneret	(not used)	(not used)	(not used)
Baron	Pasha/Pashar	Mir/Mirah	Imy-Er
Count	Sirdar/Sirdara	(not used)	(not used)
Duke	Emir/Emira	Sheikh/Sheikhah	Sar-Nesu
Prince	Meliq/Meliqa	(not used)	Iry-Paht
King	Sultan/Sultana or Caliph/Calipha	(not used)	Pharaoh

* Included for reference only.

different spell may be chosen each time a benny is used in this manner.

Should the hero's Glory ever drop below zero, he temporarily loses this Edge, his ancestor being shamed by the character's actions.

ARCANE BACKGROUND

See **Devoted** on page 37 and **Faithful** on page 45 for more details on the types of spellcasters available. Note that some Arcane Backgrounds have other requirements. This Edge can be taken after character generation. A hero may only have one Arcane Background.

Most characters who take the Arcane Background (Miracles) Edge automatically gain the Connections Edge with respect to the specific faith to which they belong. This represents access to the faith's infrastructure, as well as friends and colleagues. This does not count toward starting Edge limits.

In return, the hero also gains the Orders Hindrance with regard the organization. This does not count toward his starting Hindrance limits, nor does he earn any points during character generation for it.

BONDSMAN

Requirements: Novice, Cakali

The character has a bondsman, an indentured servant. The bondsman is an NPC Novice Wild Card character in his own right. The hero is fully responsible for safeguarding the life of his bondsman and for feeding and clothing him. Bondsmen have no starting money of their own, and rely on the character for equipment.

A bondsman may fill any role the character wishes. Some are warriors, but just as many are scholars, entertainers, or healers. A few are just used to carry the cakali's equipment and ensure his household is kept orderly.

If the bondsman is killed, the character is deemed to have broken his sacred oath to protect the bondsman. He receives no bennies at the start of a session until he advances to the next character Rank.

The character may take this Edge more than once in character generation, receiving a new bondsman each time. After character generation, additional bondsmen can only be acquired through role-playing.

DESERT BORN

Requirements: Novice, Vigor d8+

The hero accepts hot weather like he was born of the very desert. He has +2 to Vigor rolls to resist the effects of hot weather.

MERMAID BLOOD

Requirements: Novice

Several heroes of old were attributed mermaid blood, a trait the character seems to have inherited. The character's swimming Pace is equal to his Swimming die. In addition, he gains +2 to Swimming rolls.

NOBLE

Requirement: Novice, cannot come from the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes

This Edge is unchanged from the main rules, but requires a brief explanation on how it fits into *Land of Fire*. Typically, a character with this Edge has the lowest noble title (his father being one or two steps higher up the social ladder) and rules a small village or maybe a well or oasis. Only with the GM's permission may the character begin at a higher social status. See the sidebar above for more details. Further social promotions require family members to move aside (or die) to allow the character to assume a new title, and this should be worked into the campaign.

The "Anari" entry is for comparison only. The entry for "Nomads," covers Bedu, cakali, hyaenidae, and sand goblins, all of which use a similar system. Unless otherwise stated, all titles are used by male and female rulers.

RESPECTED TRIBE

Requirements: Novice, Bedu or cakali

Although tribal alliances are temporary, the hero's tribe is renowned across the desert for its honesty, integrity, hospitality, and other positive traits, earning them many friends.

The hero draws two cards when determining the feelings between a nomad tribe and his own and uses the most favorable (p. 69). So long as the result is Neutral or

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

better, the hero gains the equivalent of the Connection Edge while dealing with the nomads. Note that cards are drawn each encounter, so the Connection is not permanent.

If the hero vouches for his comrades, other nomads in the party may use the tribe's reaction to the hero as their own. This does not apply to heroes who have the Hated Tribe Hindrance, who must always draw cards to determine another tribe's reaction to them. Other nomads in the party do not gain the Connection Edge.

WORLD-WISE

Requirements: Novice, Smarts d8+

Whether the hero journeyed extensively with his parents during his youth, listened to traveler's tales at the local caravanserai or docks, or had a good tutor, he is well-versed in the geography and cultures of Al-Shirkuh.

The adventurer has 5 extra skill points. These must be spent on a minimum of three different Knowledge (Area) skills. Remember, your home region is covered by Common Knowledge. Additionally, the hero may make unskilled Knowledge (Area) rolls for areas for which he has no skill.

At the GM's discretion, the Knowledge (Area) dice may be assigned to locations in Rassilon, instead.

Combat Edges

BODYGUARD

Requirements: Heroic, Agility d8+, Block, Shield-wall, Notice d8+

The hero has learned how to intercept blows meant for others. At the start of his turn the character may nominate one adjacent ally. So long as the ally remains adjacent, he uses the hero's Parry in place of his own. This benefit is immediately lost if the parrying character is rendered incapable of parrying a blow. Bodyguard and Shieldwall cannot be used on the same ally. However, the hero may use this Edge to aid one adjacent ally and Shieldwall to defend another ally simultaneously.

CHARGE

Requirements: Seasoned, Vigor d8+, Fighting d8+

The character knows how to deliver a well-aimed blow at the end of a charge.

If the hero performs a run action and ends his movement for the round adjacent to an opponent, he may make a single Fighting roll as a free action. This cannot be combined with Frenzy or Sweep.

FAST MOUNT

Requirements: Novice, Agility d8+, Riding d6+

Mounting or dismounting a horse counts as an ac-

tion. An adventurer with this Edge can mount and dismount as a free action, but may only perform one of each maneuver per round. Thus, the character could mount and dismount in one round, but he couldn't mount, dismount, and remount in the same round.

FAST AND SILENT

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d8+, Stealth d8+

The character is both fast and silent on his feet, a deadly combination. When moving stealthily, the adventurer suffers no penalties to Stealth rolls for running. Outside of combat, each Stealth roll covers moving up to five times the character's Pace and his full running die.

FIGHTING WITHDRAWAL

Requirements: Veteran, Agility d8+, Fighting d8+

The hero can defend himself even while running away. The character may run while using the Defend maneuver and move up to his Pace when using Full Defense.

LURKER

Requirements: Novice, Agility d8+, Stealth d6+

The character is adept at using any available cover and concealment to bolster his defenses. When the hero uses the Full Defense maneuver, he may use his Stealth die in place of his Fighting die to calculate his Parry.

MOUNTED COMBATANT

Requirements: Novice, Riding d8+

The character has a knack for getting the best out of his mount. The hero gains the benefits of the Ace Edge, but only with regard to Riding rolls and Soaking for his mount. Furthermore, he may make a Riding roll at a -2 penalty (offsetting the bonus from this Edge) as an action to spur his mount to greater speeds. With success, the mount gains +2 Pace for this round. A failure causes the mount to gain no increase to its Pace and it suffers a level of Fatigue due to the exertion.

ONE STEP ONE KILL

Requirements: Veteran, Agility d8+

The hero has learned how to take a lightning quick step to circumvent his opponent's defenses and strike a lethal blow.

If the character moves no further than 1" on his turn, moving adjacent to a foe does not trigger First Strike. In addition, if the hero spends a benny while taking his one step, he gets the Drop on his target this round.

PATHFINDER

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d6+, Smarts d6+, Notice d6+, Survival d6+

The hero is trained to blaze trails for others to follow.

Allies who follow the hero's exact route treat each inch of difficult ground as 1.5" instead of 2" as normal. The hero does not gain any benefit from this Edge, beyond being able to clear a path for his comrades.

QUICK REACTIONS

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility or Smarts d6+

Whether he is always on edge, possessed of lightning reflexes or keen senses, or a survivor of too many ambushes, the adventurer knows how to react when battle begins unexpectedly. If the character fails his Notice roll and is Surprised, he is dealt an action card as normal. However, he may only take free actions, including moving up to his Pace, and use "reflexive" Edges like First Strike during the first round of combat.

RUNNING THROW

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d6+, Strength d8+, Throwing d8+

The hero knows how to use his momentum to boost the range of thrown weapons.

If the character moves at least half his Pace immediately before making a Throwing roll he increases the Range of his thrown weapon by 2/4/8. No other actions may be performed between moving and throwing, and the two maneuvers must be taken in the same round.

SAND WALKER

Requirements: Novice, Agility d6+

The hero has learned to move easily over the worst sands. In ash or soft sand, every inch of movement counts as 1.5" instead of 2". When using Overland Travel, the hero treats sand as average terrain and ash as standard terrain with no trail.

IMPROVED SAND WALKER

Requirements: Seasoned, Sand Walker

The hero treats ash and soft sand as normal ground. When using Overland Travel, the hero treats sand as open plains and ash as average terrain.

SPEAR CATCH

Requirements: Veteran, Agility d8+, Throwing d6+

Snatching a spear from the air is no mean feat, but the hero has mastered the maneuver.

This Edge may be used once per round and off-hand penalties apply as normal.

In order for the Edge to work, an opponent must throw a spear at the hero and score a success on his Throwing roll. The character then makes an Agility roll vs. his opponent's Throwing total. With success, the character catches the spear. On a raise, he may throw it back in the same round as a free action. Should the catcher fail to intercept the weapon, it strikes him as normal.

SPEAR TWIST

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d8+, Throwing d8+

The character knows how to spin a throwing spear in flight, increasing the weapon's killing power.

When throwing a spear, the hero treats his Strength die as being one die higher for the purposes of damage. This is applied *after* factoring in any Minimum Strength penalties. Attempts to catch the spear are made at -2 and the weapon cannot be returned in the same round, even if the catcher scores a raise.

STEADY FEET

Requirements: Veteran, Agility d8+, Strength d8+, Giant Killer

The character knows how to brace properly when struck by large foes.

The hero treats the size difference on the Knockback Table as one level better (for him). For instance, against



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

an ogre (Size +3), a Size +0 character suffers knockback as if the ogre were just one or fewer Sizes larger.

WALL RUNNER

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d8+, Strength d8+, Vigor d8+

The character has learned to run up vertical walls, but only for a short distance. The hero can walk up and along vertical walls, even perfectly smooth ones. While moving along or up a wall he moves as half his normal Pace. He can run as well, but his running die is also halved. If at the end of his movement the hero has not secured a suitable handhold (such as a deep crack or horizontal flagpole) or reached a suitable platform (such as a ledge or balcony) he automatically falls.

Disciple Edges

Not every god from Rassilon has an equal in the desert, though many do share similarities. This means there are some Disciple Edges found in the *Hellfrost Players' Guide* which are identical to ones available to desert priests. However, there are Disciple Edges here that do not exist in the *Hellfrost Players' Guide*.

DISCIPLE OF APSU

Requirements: Seasoned, Arcane Background (Miracles), Vigor d8+, Faith d8+, Survival d8+, follower of Apsu

The character halves his daily water requirements. In addition, the character makes a Vigor roll every 12 hours after the first day without water instead of every six as normal. The hero has a +2 bonus to Survival rolls to find water.

DISCIPLE OF ASHTART

Requirements: Seasoned, Arcane Background (Miracles), Spirit d8+, Faith d8+, must know the *beast friend* power, follower of Ashtart

Once per day, the hero can summon an Extra swarm of bees by making a Faith roll as an action. If the Faith roll is a raise, treat the swarm as a Wild Card. The swarm is under the control of the cleric. However, they still sting every creature under the template save the summoner. The bees do not have to be present—Ashtart sends bees from her own garden to aid her follower. The swarm lasts until the next sunrise or sunset, whichever occurs first. In addition, the cleric may use the Champion and Holy Warrior Edges (as appropriate, and if he possesses them) against creatures with the Plant Special Ability.

DISCIPLE OF DUAMUTEF

Requirements: Seasoned, Arcane Background (Miracles), Faith d8+, Survival d8+, follower of Duamutef

Duamutef rewards his chosen followers with better insight into the workings of the desert. Priests gain +2 to Survival rolls within a hot desert (as opposed to a cold one). They also ignore the penalties imposed by the desert on Notice and Shooting rolls made over 12". In addition, the character may take the Mighty Shot Edge at Seasoned.

DISCIPLE OF GEB-AGNI

Requirements: Seasoned, Arcane Background (Miracles), Vigor d8+, Faith d8+, Survival d8+, follower of Geb-Agni

The hero gains limited resistance to fire and heat. The hero has +2 to Vigor rolls to resist the effects of Heat and +2 Toughness with regard damage caused by fire or heat (such as a fiery *blast* or a lava stream). While underground, they have +1 to all Survival rolls.

DISCIPLE OF IBLIS

Requirements: Seasoned, Arcane Background (Miracles), Faith d8+, follower of Iblis

Disciples of Iblis are expected to act chaotically. As such, their minds are protected against those who would try to enforce their will or any form of order upon them. They receive +2 to resist Tests of Will, as well as mind-affecting powers like *puppet*. This stacks with similar bonuses from other sources.

DISCIPLE OF KARMELOS

Requirements: Seasoned, Arcane Background (Miracles), Strength d8+, Vigor d8+, Faith d8+, Fighting d10+, follower of Karmelos

The character treats his character Rank as being one higher for the purposes of taking Combat Edges. He must meet all other requirements as normal.

In addition, he may cast spells and use Fighting in the same round, treating the combined actions as a single action. Thus, a paladin who runs, attacks with his sword, and casts a spell incurs just a -2 multi action penalty, not -4 as normal.

DISCIPLE OF MARQOD

Requirements: Seasoned, Arcane Background (Miracles), Spirit d8+, Faith d8+, Healing d6+, follower of Marqod

A character with this Edge adds +2 to all Healing rolls, whether natural or magical in nature. Up to five companions traveling with a Healer add the bonus to their natural Healing rolls as well.

DISCIPLE OF QEDESHET

Requirements: Seasoned, Arcane Background (Miracles), Smarts d10+, Faith d8+, Scholar, follower of Qedeshtet

Disciples of Qedeshet are renowned for their wisdom. The hero gains +1 on rolls for Knowledge skills he has at least a d4 in (including those covered by his Scholar Edge), as well as to Common Knowledge rolls. When rolling a Knowledge skill he does not have at least d4 in, he rolls a d4 instead of a d4-2. This Edge has no effect on other Smarts-linked skills. If he wishes to learn a new Knowledge skill, he must purchase it at a d4 as normal.

DISCIPLE OF SHAMASH

Requirements: Seasoned, Arcane Background (Miracles), Faith d8+, Notice d8+, follower of Shamash

The disciples of Shamash halve all penalties for poor lighting. In addition, they gain +2 to all Notice rolls to detect hidden objects or creatures, including those under an *invisibility* spell. Against foes cloaked in such a manner, they halve penalties to hit them (once they have detected them).

DISCIPLE OF TAMARNI

Requirements: Seasoned, Arcane Background (Miracles), Agility d8+, Faith d8+, Stealth d6+, follower of Tamarni

Tamarni grants her devoted followers the grace and stealth of a cat. They have +2 to Stealth rolls and +1 when performing or resisting Agility Tricks.

A character who takes the Beast Master Edge receives a Wild Card cat of some sort. No other form of animal is permitted. It earns experience as a player character and should be treated as an animal Sidekick. If killed, it is replaced after 2d6 weeks, if possible. The replacement has half the Experience Points of the previous cat.

DISCIPLE OF TAMMUZ

Requirements: Seasoned, Arcane Background (Miracles), Spirit d6+, Faith d8+, Fighting d8+, follower of Tammuz

Priests of the Lord of the Dead are expected to wage ceaseless war on the undead, though not suicidally (the undead far outnumber the clergy of Tammuz). Priests learn special combat techniques to help them overcome their foes.

The hero has +1 Parry against undead, and rolls a d8 damage instead of a d6 if he scores a raise on an attack roll against them. Should he have the Favored Foe (Undead) Edge as well, his Parry bonus rises to +2, and he rolls a d10 damage when his Fighting roll is a raise. To qualify as an undead, the creature must have the Undead Monstrous Ability.

DISCIPLE OF UPUAUT

Requirements: Seasoned, Arcane Background (Miracles), Smarts d10+, Faith d8+, follower of Upuaut.

Upuaut is not called the Opener of the Ways for nothing. The "Ways" refer not to any mundane paths, but to

secret, unseen pathways which connect every place in the mortal realm and allow for instantaneous travel. To his most devout followers, Upuaut teaches knowledge of these routes.

In game terms, the cleric can *teleport* considerably further than other spellcasters, even at Seasoned Rank. The distances vary with the caster's Rank, as shown below. In addition, he also reduces the penalties for *teleporting* into unseen or unvisited locations.

Rank	Distance*	Penalties**
Seasoned	50 yards	-2/-4
Veteran	500 yards	-1/-4
Heroic	1 mile	0/-2
Legendary	5 miles	0/-1

* Per success and raise.

** The first number is for teleporting into somewhere the caster cannot see, the second for places he has never seen before.

Leadership Edges

BORN IN BATTLE

Requirements: Seasoned, Smarts d8+, Knowledge (Battle) d8+, Command

A good grasp of terrain and tactics, as well as knowledge of military history and enemy forces, can bring a general victory even when his troops are inferior to his enemy's. The character gets +2 to Knowledge (Battle) rolls. In addition, he gains a +2 bonus to all Common Knowledge rolls concerning military matters.

DROP!

Requirements: Seasoned, Notice d6+, Command

Once per round when an ally within the hero's command radius is targeted by a ranged weapon, the character may order him to drop to the ground. This allows the intended target to fall prone out of turn, even if he has acted already, gaining the benefits of Medium Cover.

FORCED MARCH

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d6+, Vigor d6+, Command

Speed matters in battle, and the character knows how to keep his allies a cohesive fighting force when advancing. When the adventurer runs, all allies within his command radius acting on his action card may use his Running die result.

HELP ME!

Requirements: Seasoned, Command

Once per round when a foe moves adjacent to the

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

THE GOLEM UPRISING

The Golem Uprising which ravaged parts of Rassilon went largely unnoticed in Al-Shirkuh.

Although golems were popular among the old empires, the art had been all but eradicated by the jinn (no sphinxes ever practiced it). Hundreds, maybe thousands, of golems did go on the rampage, but they were never a cohesive force.

The vast majority of golems existed only in ruined cities. A few made their way into the Sphinx Empire, where they were destroyed. Most, however, seemed to answer some strange call, for they quietly made their way east along the Silk Road and vanished from Al-Shirkuh.

Over the past 150 years, however, the art has been rediscovered, and golems are once again seen walking the streets of the human realms. Unlike slaves, golems need not rest, nor do they require food or water, all traits which make them ideal for menial tasks, such as laboring or mining.

hero, the threatened character may call for help. One ally within the character's command radius who has not yet acted this turn may try to interrupt as if he were on Hold. With a success, the ally must attack the opponent who triggered this Edge.

TAKE AIM

Requirements: Veteran, Spirit d8+, Command

A good commander knows when to give the order to fire. By delaying the order to fire for a second, you give your troops extra time to steady their aim.

Those in the command radius add +1 to their Shooting or Throwing damage rolls. If combined with Coordinated Firepower, the hero inflicts 1d6+1 damage per raise.

Power Edges

ALCHEMY

Requirements: Seasoned, Arcane Background (Any except Dervish and Ushabti), arcane skill d6+, Knowledge (Alchemy) d6+

Aside from the requirements, this Edge is unaltered.

DELAY SPELL

Requirements: Veteran, Arcane Background (any), arcane skill d8+, Knowledge (Arcana) d8+

You know how to hold the magic in a cast spell back for a few short moments.

After successfully casting a spell you may choose to

have its effect activate 1 to 6 rounds later. The delay must be chosen once the spell is cast and it cannot be changed. You may cancel the spell before this time as a free action. The spell goes off on the round you designate on your action card, before you take any other actions.

Any modifiers to the casting roll must be determined when the arcane skill roll is made as normal, as must the determination of the intended recipient or target.

If something changes to make the delayed spell impossible to take effect, such as a target moving out of range or dying, it automatically fails.

Dispel and *negate arcana* both work as normal against a spell being delayed. A delayed spell counts as being Maintained until it activates, even if the spell cannot normally be Maintained (such as *blast*).

ENHANCED MAINTENANCE

Requirements: Veteran, Spirit d8+, Vigor d8+, arcane skill d8+

Constant practice allows the hero to Maintain spells even while asleep.

The character can Maintain a single spell while he sleeps. The spell must first be cast using the normal rules and be capable of being Maintained. As the hero falls asleep, he must make a Smarts roll or the spell ends as normal. The character cannot awaken and recast the spell if the Smarts roll fails, but may be roused by others if the spell has visible trappings they can observe. A similar roll must be made if the character is awoken suddenly, rather than waking in his own time.

This Edge provides no benefit if the hero is Incapacitated or rendered unconscious by damage, Fatigue, poison, gas, magic, or other methods—it functions solely for *natural* sleep.

This Edge may be taken more than once. Each additional Edge allows the hero to Maintain one additional spell while asleep, up to the maximum he is allowed to Maintain.

FIRESTORM

Requirements: Veteran, Arcane Background (Any that allows fire or heat trappings), arcane skill d10+, Knowledge (Arcana) d8+

The character's damaging spells with a fire or heat trapping are far hotter than normal. They cause normal damage against creatures with Resistance (Heat) and half damage against creatures with Immunity (Heat).

Damage against creatures with Susceptible (Heat) is doubled (instead of granting a flat +4 bonus), and against creatures with Weakness (Heat) double the damage as normal and then add an extra +4 to the total.

GOLEM CREATOR

Requirements: Veteran, Arcane Background (Khem-Hekau, Sand Magic, or Ushabti), Smarts d10+, Knowledge (Arcana) d10+

The character has been taught the secrets of golem creation, an art lost to the northlanders of Rassilon following the Golem Ban Decree and little practiced in the barren wastes since the days of the old empires.

Basic Golem: Crafting a golem takes time and money. The initial cost is 5000 dinars. This gives the golem a d4 in all five attributes and a Size +0 body. Extra traits and abilities are priced as below. All time increments are consecutive and only one mage may work on a golem at any one time, but the mage may leave long gaps between augmentations (handy when you need to go adventuring to get more money to finish the project). Once a golem is declared finished by its creator, and thus ready to enter play, it may not be augmented through this Edge.

Traits: Each trait die (or point after d12) costs 750 dinars and takes one week to enchant. Smarts is limited to a d4. Skills begin with zero dice as for normal characters.

Size: Negative Size costs 500 dinars and adds one week per point. Size cannot go below Size -2. Each point of Size up to +3 costs 1500 dinars and adds a week to the construction time. Between Size +4 and +7, it costs 3000 dinars and requires two weeks per step. Between +8 and +10 it's 8000 dinars and three weeks per step. Each point thereafter costs 12,000 dinars and takes four weeks per step.

Golems receive the Small, Large, or Huge Monstrous Abilities for free when they reach the appropriate Size. They may never have the Gargantuan ability.

Monstrous Abilities/Edges: Golems receive the Construct and Fearless Monstrous Abilities for free. The Armor Monstrous Ability costs 2500 dinars per point, to a maximum of +3 over the base substance the golem is constructed from. A metal golem, for instance, has a +3 metal body (the same as plate armor) for free, and can go as high as +6.

Combat Edges or other Monstrous Abilities take a week each and cost 2500 dinars apiece. Golems can only learn Combat Edges. They need not meet the requirements, except those of other Edges. A golem must be given Block before it can have Improved Block, for instance.

Wild Card: Golems may be enchanted as Wild Cards. This costs 50,000 dinars and requires an entire year of work.

INSTINCTIVE DISPEL

Requirements: Veteran, arcane skill d8+, Knowledge (Arcana) d10+, must know *dispel*

The character has an instinctive knack for dispelling enemy magic.

Once per turn, the hero gets a free use of *dispel* against a single foe who casts a spell, but only if the spell's immediate effect includes the hero. The foe must be within range of the *dispel* power at the time of casting. This affects both directly targeted spells (such as *bolt*) and spells with a Burst Template effect (such as *stun*). Thus, a character could *dispel* a casting of *blast* if he was a target

under the template, but he could not attempt to *dispel* a *prolonged blast* spell whose template ended 1" away from him.

This automatically interrupts the opponent's action, and does not cost the hero his action if he is on Hold or has not yet acted this round.

POTENT MAGIC

Requirements: Veteran, Arcane Background (any), arcane skill d8+, Knowledge (Arcana) d8+

You have learned how to weave your spells in such complex patterns that they are more resistant to attempts to cancel or negate them.

Opponents receive one less point of bonuses from Arcane Resistance when targeted by your spells. Attempts to *dispel* your magic, including rolls made by Maerathril items or the *negate arcana* spell, suffer a -2 penalty. This stacks with the modifier for trying to *dispel* powers from a different type (i.e., magic vs. miracles).

SPELL FINESSE

Requirements: Novice, Arcane Background (Any except Rune Magic), arcane skill d8+, Knowledge (Arcana) d8+

The following new enhancement is available.

- **Altered Range:** Pick one spell with Range Touch and change that spell's Range to Smarts or pick one spell with Range Smarts or Spirit and change it to 12/24/48. Unlike other options, you may take this one twice for the same spell, allowing you (eventually) to increase a Touch spell to Range 12/24/48.

SPIRIT BINDING

Requirements: Seasoned, Arcane Background (Jinn Magic or Khem-Hekau), arcane skill d10+, Knowledge (Arcana) d10+

Though no mage ever learned how to bind threads of magic into items, the withered mages of Hekata and Suleiman both learned how to bind spirits (lesser jinn for jinn mages) to create a form of relic.

When the hero acquires this Edge and each time the hero has an advance thereafter, he may pick one spell he knows and make an arcane skill roll at -4. With success, a spirit or jinni of a type appropriate to the spell and its trappings is bound into an item and compelled to work its magic on command. On a failure, the mage has failed to bind a spirit, but may automatically try again next time he advances. Each advance he delays making the roll, he gains a cumulative +1 bonus. This roll does not constitute using the advance—it is a free attempt.

Any sentient creature with above-animal intelligence can use the item, though he must first attune himself (even the creator must attune). The user makes a Spirit roll as an action to cast the spell. If the spell has optional modifiers, the hero must declare whether he wishes to use these before making his Spirit roll. Khem-hekau

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

HELLFROST PROFESSIONAL EDGES

Some of the Professional Edges presented in the *Hellfrost Players' Guide* can be used in *Land of Fire*, but under a different name. The name in parentheses is the equivalent Edge for *Land of Fire*.

Lorekeeper (Sage): Although Lorekeepers are present in Al-Shirkuh, the same Edge represents native sages. Sages do not automatically gain the Connection Edge or Orders Hindrance.

Reliquis (Tomb Robber): The Reliquary have yet to fully extend their reach into the desert, but there are plenty of tomb robbers already there. Tomb robbers do not automatically gain the Connection Edge or Orders Hindrance.

Roadwarden (Hunter): There are no Roadwardens in the desert, but hunters can make use of this Edge. Hunters do not automatically gain the Connection Edge or Orders Hindrance.

magicians may use their Khem-Hekau skill when activating necromantic relics and jinn magicians may use Jinn Magic for jinn relics.

If the hero scores a success, the spell activates as normal. With a raise, the spell goes off as if cast with a raise, if applicable. Spells which can be Maintained are Maintained by the user (regardless of whether he has an Arcane Background or not), as he must continually enforce his will on the bound spirit.

On a failure, the spirit refuses to obey the command and the spell is not cast. On a roll of 1 on the Spirit die, regardless of Wild Die, or a critical failure, the user and spirit suffer the Siphoning as normal. The user suffers any physical effects, while the spirit suffers any loss of spellcasting abilities, rendering the relic temporarily inert.

If the Siphoning roll table is ever a 2, the user must make a Spirit roll at -2. With success, the spirit is rendered dormant for 1d6 days, during which time the relic cannot be used. On a failure, the spirit escapes its bondage instead of suffering a loss of arcane skill. This destroys the spirit relic, rendering it a mundane object.

PROFESSIONAL EDGES

Characters who take a Professional Edge marked "*" automatically gain the Connections Edge with respect to the specific organization to which they belong. This represents access to the organization's infrastructure, as well as friends and colleagues. This does not count toward starting Edge limits.

In return, the hero also gains the Orders Hindrance with regard to the organization. This does not count toward his starting Hindrance limits, nor does he earn any points during character generation for it. Answering to more than one master can lead to conflicts of interest.

Heroes who join an organization marked "*" after play begins must earn their Connections (by taking the Edge using an advancement)—it takes time to build a trustworthy reputation. They gain the Order Hindrance immediately, however.

BROTHERHOOD OF ASSASSINS*

Requirements: Novice, Agility d8+, Fighting d8+, Stealth d8+, Assassin

While anyone can commit murder for money, a character who takes this Edge belongs to the much-feared Assassins, a sect of killers-for-hire. This Edge is as much a hindrance, for any Assassin who is identified faces instant execution.

The assassin is trained in deception. Assassins typically operate undercover for weeks or months before striking. This requires them to adopt an innocuous cover profession. At each character Rank the assassin develops one detailed background that will stand up to rigorous scrutiny (so long as it is plausible). The hero makes Common Knowledge rolls relating to the profession as if they were part of his background. For instance, an assassin may pose as a pilgrim faithful to Apsu, allowing him to make Common Knowledge rolls relating to that faith.

The character also has +2 to Stealth rolls.

DESERT SON

Requirements: Seasoned, Woodsman

This Edge replaces the Ranger Edge in the *Hellfrost: Rassilon Expansion*.

He has learned to move with minimal disturbance to the landscape—foes attempting to track him receive a -2 penalty to Tracking rolls. Extensive training and frequent practice gives the character a d8 Wild Die with Tracking, Survival, or Stealth.

The hero picks one skill when he takes this Edge and cannot change it later.

EXPERT HEALER

Requirements: Novice, Healing d8+

A character with this Edge can get wounded soldiers up and fighting again in seconds.

If the healer can get to a wounded Extra by the end of the round in which he was wounded, he can make an immediate Healing roll at -2. If the roll is successful, the patient is Shaken instead of wounded.

HEADSMAN*

Requirements: Novice, Devoted, Agility d8+, Strength d6+, Fighting d8+

Beheading is the favored form of execution, and other crimes, such as theft, also require the loss of a limb. The grisly deed is carried out by headsmen, masked swordsmen belonging to the Guild of Headsmen (p. 64). Headsmen are hired as and when required, and many make a

living as itinerant executioners, though a few rich nobles have an executioner on permanent retainer.

If a headsman remains stationary during his turn and takes no other actions, he halves the penalties when making a Called Shot with an axe or sword. This cannot be combined with a Wild Attack.

A headsman wearing his mask, which protects his identity and keeps him safe from retribution, has +2 to Intimidation but -2 Charisma.

The Guild looks very poorly on others who impersonate them.

MAMELUK MERCENARY*

Requirements: Novice, Spirit d6+, Strength d6+, Vigor d6+, Fighting d6+, Shooting d6+, must have the Loyal Hindrance

Originally, mameluks were slaves raised from infancy to serve the jinn as warriors. Since the War of Copper Jar the practice has stayed alive in the form of independent mercenary companies, though with one major change—

rather than accepting slaves, the mameluks raise orphans within their ranks.

The hero gains +1 to Spirit rolls to resist Fear and +1 to resist Tests of Will because of his training.

When adjacent to an ally covered by the Loyalty Hindrance who has been rendered unconscious in the current battle, the mameluk gains +1 to Fighting rolls and +1 to his Parry. This ability kicks in even if the comrade is dead—mameluks never leave their dead on the field of battle.

MASTER MARINER

Requirements: Veteran, Smarts d8+, Boating d8+, Knowledge (The Seas) d8+

Years at sea and piloting a variety of ships have taught the sailor a few tricks.

He gains the benefits of the Ace Edge, but only with regard to Boating. In addition, any ship he captains has +1 Top Speed thanks to the character's knowledge of the tide and winds, and how to get the best from oarsmen.



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

PEGASUS GUARD*

Requirements: Novice, Human or Jinn Blooded, Devoted, Agility d8+, Strength d8+, Fighting d8+, Riding d8+

The Pegasus Guards (p. 65) are an elite military force under the direct command of the Sultan.

Guards receive a combat trained pegasus (which never earns Experience Points), a pegasus saddle, scale hauberk, open helm, scimitar, lance, and medium shield on joining. Should the pegasus die, the hero must wait until he reaches the next character Rank *and* return to the Sultan's palace before he can acquire another from the Sultan. After Legendary, the hero must wait until he gains another 20 XPs from his current total.

Rider and mount form a close bond of friendship, allowing the hero to spend bennies for his mount and vice versa, but only when the guardsman is mounted. When mounted on his pegasus, the hero also gains the benefits of a +1 Gang Up bonus from his mount. Within the Sultanate, the Pegasus Guard is highly respected, and members have +1 Charisma.

If the hero quits the Guard, he must return his equipment and mount. Failure to do so not only makes him a criminal, it makes him a traitor to the Sultan he has sworn to protect.

Of all the Professional Edges attached to an organization, this one should be the most restrictive in terms of the Orders Hindrance. The Pegasus Guard serves only the Sultan and is expected to answer his summons without delay, though he often sends them on missions to other lands or into the wastes.

SEA LEGS

Requirements: Novice, Agility d8+

The mariner knows how a ship rolls, allowing him not only to retain his balance but also use the movement to his advantage in combat.

The character has the benefits of the Steady Hands Edge and +1 Parry (if unencumbered), but only while aboard a ship or boat.

SIEGE ENGINEER

Requirements: Seasoned, Smarts d8+, Knowledge (Siege Artillery) d8+

The hero has studied ballistics and knows how to spot weak points in enemy fortifications. Siege engineers increases the range of siege weapons they operate by 50%, and add +2 to any AP rating. Only the chief artillerist on a weapon needs the Edge. No increased benefit is gained if multiple artillerists have the Edge.

STORYTELLER

Requirements: Novice, Smarts d8+, Knowledge (Folklore) d8+, Streetwise d6+

Storytellers are popular entertainers with both the

nobility and the masses. They know all manner of tales, from morality tales to religious stories to gripping adventure stories involving magic lamps and flying carpets.

The hero has +1 to Knowledge (Folklore) rolls. In addition, they gain +1 to Streetwise rolls because people are willing to tell them interesting facts. A storyteller may use Knowledge (Folklore) in place of Persuasion when using the Reaction Table. Finally, they are treated as skalds for the purposes of determining Glory awards.

Other forms of entertainer, such as acrobats and belly-dancers can be handled with the Acrobat Edge and a cool character background.

UNFORTUNATE SOUL*

Requirements: Novice, Fighting d6+, Notice d6+, Stealth d6+, Streetwise d8+

Beggars are common throughout the cities of the Al-Shirkuh. Some are truly beggars, down on their luck, crippled in some manner, diseased, or insane. Others are actually members of a vigilante group known as the Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls (p. 64).

Unfortunate Souls disguise themselves as harmless beggars, and are typically ignored by intelligent foes in favor of other targets. Until he takes an action beyond moving his Pace, any foe with above-animal intelligence wishing to attack him must make a Smarts roll versus the hero's Stealth as a free action. With success, the villain detects something "wrong" about the beggar and may attack normally. On a failure, the foe ignores the harmless beggar in favor of "proper" targets. The hero automatically gets the Drop against the first foe with non-animal intelligence he attacks in combat, so long as he has not revealed himself to be anything other than a common beggar. (No one is paying him much attention.)

When a hero takes this Edge he *must* pick one city. Within this city he has many contacts among the lower classes. He gains +2 to Streetwise rolls. Each time he reaches a new character Rank (or every 20 XPs above Legendary) his network of contacts extends to a new city of his choice.

Social Edges

HOURI

Requirements: Novice, Persuasion d8+, Charisma 0+, female

The character knows how to get the best out of the opposite sex, regardless of race, by using her looks.

The character may use Persuasion as a Trick against members of the opposite sex, pitting her looks and charm against a foe's Smarts. Against a different race, the hero has a -2 penalty to her rolls. Because the Test of Wills is no more than a flirtatious smile or wink, or a quick flash of skin, the houri may not add her Charisma bonus to this roll.

GEAR

Now that you've made your character, it's time to outfit him with arms, armor, and other gear. Below is a list of the most commonly sought-after goods and services, as well as armor and weaponry.

CURRENCY

The common coinage of the desert realms is the dinar, a small gold coin. The desert folk also use silver dirhams (there are 10 dirhams to one dinar). Dinars come in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 25, 50, and 100, and dirhams in values of 1 and 5 (being 0.1 and 0.5 dinars respectively). These coins are denoted "d" for dinars and "dh" for dirhams.

Individual cities mint their own coins, though those within a given domain share some similarity. Typically the "head" side has an image of the local potentate. The "tails" side has the city's symbol or a favored deity, and the monetary value.

Unless altered by Edges or Hindrances, your hero has 500 dinars to purchase equipment with. Some of the items for sale are quite expensive because they are rare or on the cutting edge.

AVAILABILITY

Caravanserais keep a stock of supplies, and are considered to be to villages except when there is a caravan stopping over. In this instance, they are treated as towns. Oases are also equivalent to villages, but the price of T availability goods is increased five fold (when they are available). There is no chance of purchasing City goods.

SPECIAL MATERIALS

Only star metal is known among the desert dwellers. Maerathril items must be imported from Rassilon at great expense—quadruple all Maerathril prices. Black ice melts too quickly to be of use in the scorching heat of the desert.

⦿ Gear Notes ⦿

Below are some notes on the gear in this chapter. If an item is not listed, it has no special rules associated with it and its use should be obvious. Many items are described in the *Hellfrost Players' Guide*, and are not repeated here.

BRONZE Weapons & ARMOR

Although iron is used to make weapons and armor, bronze has only truly gone out of fashion in the last 100 years. As such, there are many bronze weapons and armors available from the markets. Weapons and armor found in many tombs (whether as grave goods or in the hands of animated guardians) are likely to be of bronze construction.

ARMOR

Bronze armor is relatively easy to shape to the wearer's profile, but can be dented and buckled. In game terms, any single blow which inflicts 2 or more wounds to the wearer in a single hit has damaged the armor, reducing its effectiveness by 1 point. If the armor reaches +0 Armor, it has been so badly damaged it is useless until repaired.

Repairing armor requires a Craft (Armoring) roll and one hour per point of Armor lost. Heroes with no skill can pay 50 dinars per Armor point to have their armor repaired (this still requires an hour per point).

Cost & Weight: Scale and plate armor and pot and full helms are available in bronze. The cost for these items is 75% of their iron equivalents (rounded down). For weight, subtract 1 pound from the listed weight for each 10 pounds or part thereof, to a minimum of 1 pound.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

ANIMALS & WATER

In order to remain healthy, riding horses require either 80 lbs. of fresh vegetation or 20 lbs. of grain and hay per day, plus four gallons of water. War horses and pegasi require 25% more, while mules require 25% less.

Camels, evolved to survive in arid conditions, can get by on 10 lbs. of food each day. Unlike horses, they are capable of eating tough desert plants. Ideally, a camel needs 5 gallons of water a day, but they can survive without any liquid for a week. When thirsty, they can drink up to 30 gallons at a time.

Characters with elephants need to supply them with 400 lbs. of fresh vegetation and 20 gallons of water every day.

The required food intake also affects travel rates. A camel needs to graze for only an hour to sate its needs, whereas horses and pegasi need 2-3 hours if eating fresh wild vegetation, and twice that if the vegetation is sparse. Elephants need around 10 hours of foraging with wild vegetation. These rates are halved if suitable provisions are available.

For instance, an iron plate corselet weighs 25 pounds, whereas a bronze one weighs 22 pounds.

WEAPONS

Bronze weapons inflict no less damage than regular weapons. Their weakness is not in their ability to deliver damage, but to withstand the pressure inflicted by striking blows.

Whenever the wielder rolls a 1 on his Fighting or Throwing die (regardless of his Wild Die), he has bent his weapon. This doesn't have to be the result of a catastrophic miss, with the weapon slamming into the ground or a nearby inanimate object. Maybe the weapon bent as it impacted the armor (for a Wild Die which indicated success), or perhaps the defender parried the blow in just the right place to damage the weapon. Whatever description you use, the result is the same—an unwieldy weapon. If the Wild Die indicates success, the weapon bends after inflicting damage.

Each time a weapon is bent, it subtracts 1 from the skill used to wield it (Fighting for melee weapons and Throwing for spears and axes). The penalty is cumulative to a maximum of -6.

Straightening a bronze weapon requires the use of brute strength. In pressure situations (any time you're using action cards), a successful Strength roll eliminates 1 point of penalty, plus 1 extra point on a raise. Each attempt takes an action, but during that time the character counts as an Unarmed Defender unless he takes a multi-action penalty. Penalties cannot be reduced below zero (you can never gain a bonus this way).

Cost & Weight: All melee weapons except lances,

snaketooth daggers, and staffs can be cast of bronze. The same cost and weight rules apply as for armor.

ARMOR

Silk: Silk isn't much good for stopping heavy axes or razor sharp swords, but it is very effective against arrows. When struck by an arrow, silk wraps itself around the arrowhead, making it easier to remove without tearing the surrounding flesh.

Rather than create a new set of rules for removing arrows, silk armor simply grants +1 Armor against arrows and other piercing weapons. Because it is so light (and has little impact on overall game play), it can be worn beneath other armors and its bonus stacks with other armor. Multiple sets of silk armor still only grant a +1 bonus, however.

WEAPONS

Chakram: A chakram is a metal ring with a sharp outer edge. It is thrown by twirling it around the index finger, which is then tucked in to release the weapon.

Snaketooth Dagger: Crafted from the tooth of a giant viper, snaketooth daggers can hold 5 doses of poison inside the bone blade, making them ideal weapons for assassins. Their high price covers both the difficulty in finding a seller, as well as the rarity of the materials used in their construction.

SIEGE WEAPONS

Boiling Oil/Hot Sand: Heated over intense fires, boiling oil or hot sand is a defensive siege weapon, designed to be poured over the battlements onto foes massed below. Only the *armor* spell provides protection, as the scorching liquid or particles easily penetrate gaps in worn armor. Natural protection works as normal, as does any form of complete overhead protection (like that provided by a covered ram). This weapon delivers heat damage for the purposes of resistances or immunities.

Flamethrower: Flamethrowers in the desert realms are similar to those described in the *Hellfrost Players' Guide*. Rather than using icewood for fuel, however, they burn oil. One flask of oil (1 pint) is required per shot, and the reservoir can hold 10 pints.

Sunglobe: Only found within the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes, sunglobes are magical weapons. They comprise a large, vertical metal ring with a yellow, crystal orb in the center. Two handles allow a single user to maneuver the sunglobe.

The orb stores the power of the sun, and then releases it in a beam of intense light when a rune on both handles is touched. This weapon delivers heat damage for the purposes of resistances or immunities.

General Gear

Burnoose: A flowing, hooded robe worn over normal clothing. A hero wearing a burnoose when it is Hot or above treats the temperature as one level lower.

Caravanserai Lodgings: The cost is per person or mount. People stay in a common room, sharing with as many as ten others and must supply their own food. Mounts are stabled and fed. The higher price for people indicates the “luxury” of having the security of four stout walls in the wild desert. Caravanserai lodgings are only available in caravanserai.

Corrective Lenses: Held in a metal frame, these ground lenses allow those with visual impairments to see clearly. They offset the minor Bad Eyes Hindrance penalty.

Game Set: The races of the desert play a variety of boardgames. Chess is the most common, followed by senet, a game similar to backgammon, and dogs and jackals (similar to checkers). Each game requires a different set to be purchased.

Goggles: Goggles double the time period before the hero has to make rolls to avoid glare. Notice rolls involving sight are made at -2 because of the heavy tint.

Hashish: Hashish is a narcotic made from the cannabis plant. It is bought in blocks, which are then softened over heat and crumbled into pipes filled with tabac (see p. 30). A pipe of hashish takes 5 minutes to smoke. Once finished, the smoker becomes highly energized yet finds it difficult to concentrate on mental tasks. He gains +1 to bonus to Trait rolls linked to Agility, Strength, and Vigor, but suffers -1 to Trait rolls linked to Smarts and Spirit. The effects last for one hour. Habitual use may lead to the Major Habit Hindrance being developed (GM’s discretion).

Only the temples of Tamarni are allowed to grow and use hashish legally, and then only for religious purposes. Its use is illegal elsewhere, though the substance is commonly available on the black market. The first price is the highly inflated legal price, the second is for illegal hashish.

Icewood: Extremely expensive in the desert, icewood is imported from the frozen wastes of Rassilon. An icewood campfire (uses 1 pound per two hours) lowers the temperature by two levels in a Large Burst Template centered on the fire.

Jinn Relic: A jinn relic is a magic item containing a bound spirit. See page 35 for more details. Khem-hekau relics also exist, but the sale of these is prohibited by the civilized races.

Musical Instrument: Numbers in parentheses are cost and weight. Instruments include flutes (50 dinars/1 lb), long trumpets (75 dinars/3 lbs), mizwad (type of bagpipe; 50 dinars/2 lbs), pipes (35 dinars/1 lb), tanbura (bowl lyre; 55 dinars/2 lbs), drums (varying size; 30+ dinars/3 lbs), rattle/tambourine/sistrum (10 dinars/1 lb), tunbur (long-necked lute) or qanbus (short-necked lute; 200 dinars/3 lbs), and small harps (300 dinars/6 lbs).

Parasol: Leather or palm leaf parasols are used to

provide shade from the merciless sun. Characters using a parasol count as being in shade when making Vigor rolls to resist the effects of heat.

Pavilion: Pavilions are large, open-fronted tents used by nomads. They vary greatly in size, from small ones housing just four to six people, to those of the nobles, which can house over 50 people and have internal partitions. When in a pavilion, treat the temperature as two levels cooler during the day, to a minimum of Temperate, and two warmer at night, to a maximum of Temperate.

Pegasus: Pegasi are very rarely found for sale. Petitioners can apply to the Sultan, who maintains a herd of them.

Rope (10 yards): The rope can safely handle 300 pounds (400 pounds for silk rope) without worry. For every 50 pounds over that, roll 1d6 every minute or whenever the rope suffers a sudden stress. On a 6, the rope breaks under the strain. Silk rope can only be found for sale in towns or cities.

Saddle, Pegasus: A special saddle allowing the rider to remain on his pegasus during inverted maneuvers.



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

A hero using a pegasus saddle, whether on a pegasus, camel, or horse, cannot be knocked from his saddle. However, getting into or out of the saddle counts as an action (in addition to actually mounting or dismounting the beast).

Sand Hood: A sand hood is a long scarf wrapped around the head to protect against sunstroke and keep sand out of one's mouth. Characters have +1 to Vigor rolls to resist the effect of high temperatures. It also grants +2 to rolls to resist gas or similar effects.

Tabac: Tabac is the common name of pipeleaf in Al-Shirkuh. Whether it originally grew in Al-Shirkuh and found its way north through trade or vice versa has been lost to history.

Tome of Learning: For a randomly discovered book in Al-Shirkuh, roll a d20 to determine the Arcane Background of the author.

d20	Arcane Background
1–2	Dervish Magic
3–5	Jinn Magic (Air)
6–8	Jinn Magic (Earth)
9–11	Jinn Magic (Fire)
12–14	Jinn Magic (Water)
15–16	Khem-Hekau
17–18	Sand Magic
19	Ushabti Magic
20	Wizir Magic

Trained Animal: The beast is trained to respond to basic commands appropriate to its use. Only war camels, war horses, and pegasi are trained for war.

Water Trap: A water trap is a specially coated piece of material. It is erected at night, and weighted with a stone to form a cone shape. Condensation forms on the trap at night, and slides into the well, where it can be collected in the morning.

Users must spend 10 minutes setting it up correctly. At dawn, whoever set up the trap may make a Survival roll for each trap. Penalties apply according to the region (see **Finding Good and Water**, p. 69). Add +4 if the temperature drops to Freezing or lower. Success gives 1d4+1 quarts of potable water and a raise 2d4+2 quarts.

Vehicles

Although the races make use of regular ships for sea and river voyages, the natives of the deep desert also make use of vehicles to get across the salt, sand, and glass flats in occasion. Stats for galleys, river barges, sledges, and war sledges, all used by the desert races, can be found in the *Hellfrost Players' Guide*.

Sand Rigger: Sand riggers are fitted with outriggers mounting large skis, allowing the ship to traverse sand and salt. Areas of ash cannot be traversed, the ash being unable to support the weight of a ship, even with skis. The same applies to areas of soft or shifting sand. Sand riggers have three sails, one centrally and one sticking out from each side. The lateral sails are used to control direction.

CHARIOT, RACING

Chariots consist of a wicker or hide covered wooden frame with two wheels connected to a pair of horses or camels via a yoke. Occupants receive Light Cover (–1) when riding in a chariot.

Acc/Top Speed: Half animal's Pace/animal's Pace + running; **Handling:** +1; **Toughness:** 7 (1); **Crew:** 1+1 passenger; **Cost:** 250 dinars (not including animals); **Availability:** T

Notes: Drawn by 2 camels or horses

CHARIOT, WAR

War chariots are similar to a racing chariot, but are powered by four horses (or camels), much sturdier and heavier, and provides greater protection to the occupants. Crew and passengers receive Medium Cover (–2).

Acc/Top Speed: Half animal's Pace/animal's Pace + running; **Handling:** –1; **Toughness:** 9 (2); **Crew:** 1+2 passengers; **Cost:** 500 dinars (not including animals); **Availability:** T

Notes: Drawn by 4 camels or horses

DHOW

The dhow is a lateen-rigged ship, the type used by Sinbad in the movies. It has a covered cabin and hold. It is commonly used by merchants when trading across the ocean, though it handles poorly on the open seas. Reduce Handling by 1 when more than 10 miles from the coast.

Acc/Top Speed: 3/8; **Handling:** +0; **Toughness:** 12 (2); **Crew:** 4+10; **Cost:** 3,000 dinars; **Availability:** T

Notes: —

FLYING CARPET

Although ushabti mages can make carpets fly, their magic is temporary. Most flying carpets in use (such as this one) are jinn relics, inhabited by enslaved khamsin (jinn of the air). Agility is used to pilot a flying carpet.

Acc/Top Speed: 8 (16 if raise); **Handling:** +1; **Toughness:** 7; **Crew:** 1+3; **Cost:** 10,000; **Availability:** S

Notes: See the sidebar Flying Carpets & Jinn Mages

SAND RIGGERS

Sand riggers are used by merchants and the military. Their expense means few owners are willing to risk them

in the open desert, and they are most often found traversing the outback regions of the settled domains. A few orc tribes make use of them, though whether they stole them or have designed their own is unknown.

Acc/Top Speed: 3/15; **Toughness:** 14 (2); **Handling:** +1; **Crew:** 4+20; **Cost:** 10,000 dinars; **Availability:** C

Notes: Sand Rigger

Weapons:

* Ballista, mounted on the prow

SOLAR BARQUE

Used only by the mighty and inhuman nobles of the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes, solar barques are flying ships. Only the jinn, who gifted the sphinxes with a number of ships when the two races eventually made peace, knew the magic used to construct them. They are irreplaceable items. They receive their power from the sun, and can fly only so long as the sun shines.

Acc/Top Speed: 4/32; **Toughness:** 14 (4); **Handling:** +0; **Crew:** 4+30; **Cost:** Not for sale; **Availability:** N/A

Notes: Heavy Armor

Weapons:

* Sunglobe

WARSHIP

This is a large sailed ship, designed for carrying troops across oceans or up rivers.

Acc/Top Speed: 4/16; **Toughness:** 16 (4); **Handling:** +1; **Crew:** 10+100; **Cost:** 25,000 dinars; **Availability:** C

Notes: Heavy Armor

Weapons:

* Trebuchet (mounted forward)

* 2 x ballistae (on swivel mount)

Fortifications

Fortifications do not have an availability code—such edifices are rarely found for sale anywhere. All fortifications in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* save for hill forts can be found in Al-Shirkuh.

CARAVANSERAI

Caravanserais are common along the trade roads. They comprise a stout outer wall made of mud bricks or stone surrounding a large courtyard. Built against the sides of the walls are stables, warehouses, and accommodation blocks, as well as a barracks and a small shrine.

The resource rules presented in the *Hellfrost Rasilon Expansion* or *Resource Management* supplement are ideal for characters who wish to run a caravanserai.

Toughness: 16 (6); **Siege Bonus:** +1; **Defenders:** 40; **Supplies:** 3; **Cost:** 25,000 dinars

ARMOR

Type	Armor	Weight	Cost	Notes	Avail
Leather vest	+1	3	20	Covers torso	V
Leather	+1	10	50	Covers torso, arms, legs	V
Silk	+1	1	75	Covers torso and arms; see notes	C
Chain shirt	+2	10	200	Covers torso and arms	C
Scale hauberk	+2	25	150	Covers torso, arms, legs	T
Plate corselet	+3	20	400	Covers torso	C
Plate bracers	+3	8	300	Covers arms	C
Plate greaves	+3	12	200	Covers legs	C
Pot helm	+3	4	75	50% chance of protecting against head shot	T
Full helmet	+3	8	150	Covers head	C
Blessed Armor					
Blessed robes	+1	5	50	Covers torso, arms, and legs	S
Blessed armor	+3	30	500	Covers torso, arms, and legs	S
Shields					
Small shield	—	8	25	+1 Parry	V
Medium shield	—	12	50	+1 Parry, +2 Armor against ranged attacks	V
Large shield	—	20	200	+2 Parry, +2 Armor against ranged attacks	T
Barding					
Leather	+1	15	200	Covers head & torso; camel, horse, or pegasus	T

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Melee Weapons

Type	Damage	Weight	Cost	Notes	Avail
Blades					
Dagger	Str+d4	1	25		V
Flail	Str+d6	8	200	Ignores shield Parry bonus	V
Great scimitar	Str+d10	12	350	Parry -1; 2 hands	T
Scimitar	Str+d8	8	300		V
Short sword	Str+d6	4	200		V
Sickle	Str+d4	2	25		V
Snaketooth dagger	Str+d4	1	200	See notes	T
Axes					
Axe	Str+d6	2	200		V
Battle axe	Str+d8	10	300		V
Great axe	Str+d10	15	400	AP 1; Parry -1; 2 hands	T
Hammers & Maces					
Mace	Str+d6	2	200		V
Maul	Str+d8	20	400	AP 2 vs. rigid armor; Parry -1; 2 hands	V
Pole Arms					
Halberd	Str+d8	15	250	Reach 1; 2 hands	T
Lance	Str+d8	10	250	AP 2 when charging; Reach 2	T
Sickle staff	Str+d8	12	300	Reach 1; 2 hands	V
Spear, long	Str+d6	5	100	Parry +1; Reach 1; 2 hands	V
Spear, short	Str+d6	3	75	Reach 1	V
Staff	Str+d4	5	10	Parry +1; Reach 1; 2 hands	V

Siege Weapons

All siege weapons have an Availability of City, and even here they are rare items. They are never available for purchase in steads, villages, or towns.

Item	Range	Damage	Crew	Cost	Notes
Ballista	25/50/100	3d6	1	800	AP 3, can be used against individual troops, 1 action to reload
Boiling oil/hot sand	—	3d6	2	200	Medium Burst Template, area effect weapon, ignores armor, see notes
Catapult	50/100/200*	3d10	6	2000	AP 10, 4 actions to reload, Medium Burst Template; Heavy Weapon
Flamethrower	Cone/25"	2d10	1	3000	Ignores armor, as vehicular flamethrower, see notes
Ram, frame	—	1d6/yd	2/yd	750	AP 3; max length 10 yards
Ram, hand	—	1d6/yd	4/yd	400	AP 3; max length 10 yards
Siege Tower	—	—	20	3500	Pace 2; carries 30 troops
Sunglobe	30/60/120	3d10	2	N/A	Fires every other round; see notes
Trebuchet	24/48/96**	3d8	4	1600	AP 6, 2 actions to reload, Small Burst Template; Heavy Weapon

* Minimum range of 25".

** Minimum range of 12".

Ranged Weapons

Type	Range	Damage	ROF	Cost	Weight	Min Str.	Notes	Avail
Bow	12/24/48	2d6	1	100	3	d6		V
Chakram	3/6/12	Str+d6	1	50	2	—	See notes	T
Crossbow	15/30/60	2d6	1	300	10	d6	AP 2; 1 action to reload	T
Sling	4/8/16	Str+d4	1	10	1	—		V
Spear	3/6/12	Str+d6	1	75	5	d6		V
Throwing Knife	3/6/12	Str+d4	1	25	1	—		T



Scimitar



Bow & Arrow



Pot Helm



Shield

Snake-Toothed Dagger



Mace



Dagger



Leather Vest

Short Sword



Sickle



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

AMMUNITION

Ammo	Weight	Cost	Notes	Avail
Arrow, armor piercing	1 lb/5	1	AP 2; may be recovered*	V
Arrow, fleshripper	1 lb/5	1	+2 damage; may be recovered*; see notes	V
Arrow, signaling	1 lb/5	2	May be recovered*; see notes	V
Arrow, standard	1 lb/5	1/2	May be recovered*	V
Ballista bolt	1	4	May be recovered*	T
Quarrel	1 lb/5	1	May be recovered*	T
Sling stone	1 lb/10	1/10	Can be found**	V

* Outdoors, arrows, bolts, and quarrels have a 4–6 on a d6 chance of being recovered. Underground or indoors, the chance is reduced to a roll of 5–6 to reflect the increased chance of breakage.

** Stones can be found for free with a Notice roll and 1d10 minutes searching, depending on terrain

MUNDANE GEAR

ANIMALS (TRAINED) & TACK

Item	Cost	Weight	Avail
Camel, riding	150	—	V
Camel, war	300	—	T
Hawk	350	—	T
Horse, riding	250	—	T
Horse, war	450	—	C
Pegasus (p. 29)	5,000	—	S
Saddle, normal	10	10	V
Saddle, pegasus*	200	10	S

CLOTHING

Normal clothing	10	—	V
Formal clothing	75	—	V
Tailored clothing	250	—	T
Burnoose*	50	3	V
Sand hood*	25	1	V

COMMON GOODS

Backpack	5	2	V
Bandolier	10	1	V
Bedroll	25	4	V
Blanket	10	4	V
Candle	0.5	1/5	V
Climbing gear	50	4	V
Corrective lenses*	50	—	C
Crowbar	10	2	V
Firewood (per pound)	5	1	V
Flask (ceramic)	5	1	V
Flask (metal)	10	1	T
Flint and steel	3	1	V

Game set*	50	1	V
Goggles*	25	2	T
Grappling hook	50	2	V
Hammer	10	1	V
Hashish, per smoke*	15/2	—	V
Healer's bag	100	2	V
Insect net, 1" square	15	3	V
Lantern	25	3	T
Lantern, bullseye	50	3	T
Lockpicks	100	1	T
Musical instrument*	25+	1+	V
Oil (1 pint)	2	1	V
Parchment (per sheet)	1	1/20	V
Parasol*	5	1	V
Pavilion*	200+	30+	T
Pick or shovel	5	5	V
Pipe, smoking	10+	1/5	V
Pouch (holds 1 pound)	2	1	V
Quiver (holds 20 arrows)	10	2	V
Rope (hemp, 5")*	30	7	V
Rope (silk, 5")*	10	10	T
Salt (in waterproof bag)	10	1	V
Sandglass	25	1	C
Satchel, waterproof	50	1	T
Scroll case, waterproof	5	1/2	T
Soap	1	1/5	V
Tabac, per 5 smokes, in pouch*	15	—	V
Tent (2-person)	30	10	V
Tent (4-person)	100	25	V
Torch	5	1	V
Water trap*	100	5	T
Waterskin (holds 2 quarts)	5	4	V
Whetstone	5	1	V
Whistle	2	—	V
Writing equipment	20	1	T
UNUSUAL GOODS			
Alchemical device	100/Rank	1	V
Alchemist's trunk	300	15	C
Herbalist kit	50	3	V
Herbs, dried	5	1	V
Icewood* (per pound)	200	1	C
Jinn relic	5000/Rank	1	S
Tome of learning	1000/Rank	1	C

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Tome of lore (+1 to +3)	200/point	1-3	T
Tome of lore (+4 to +6)	750/point	4-6	T

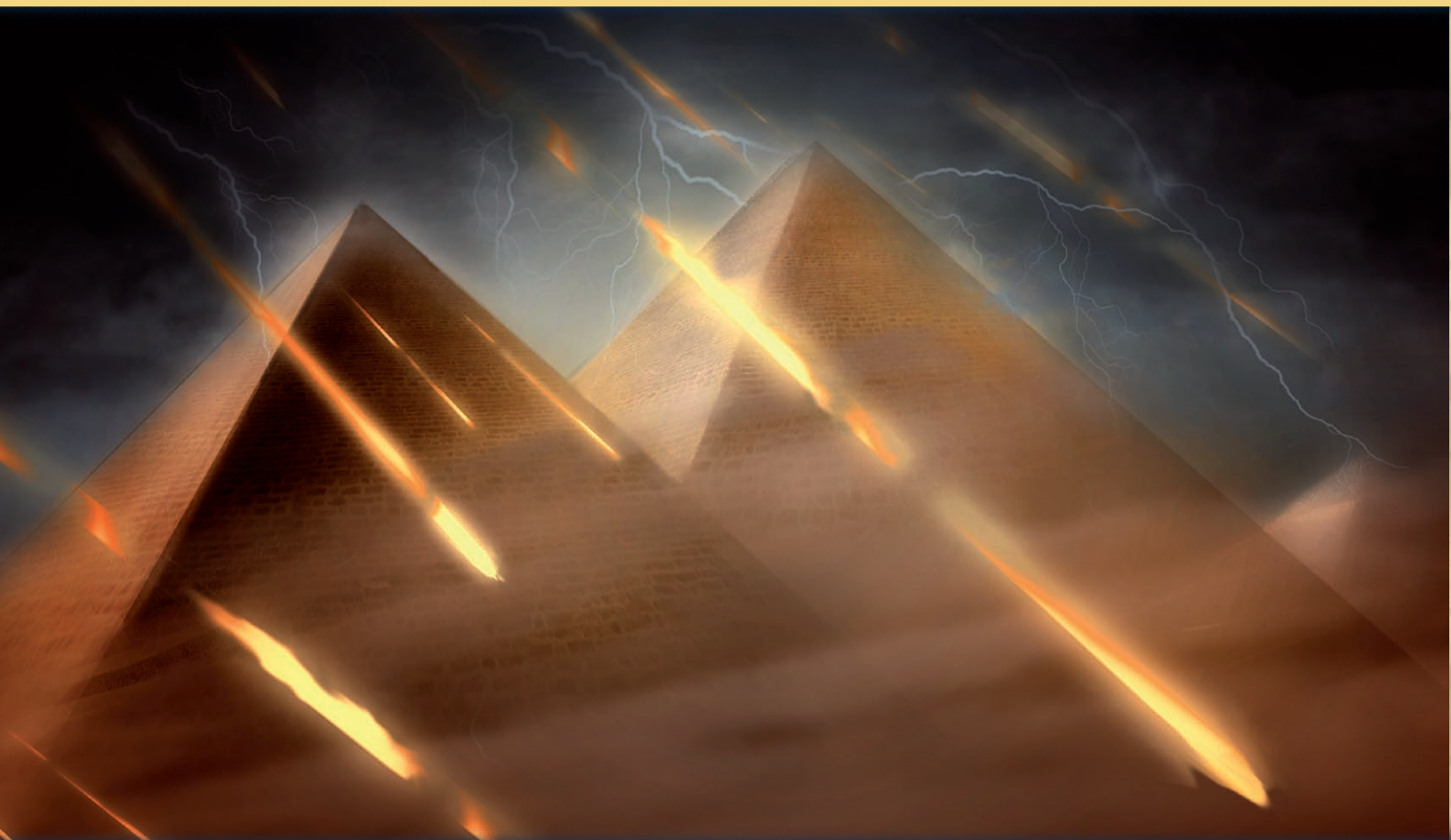
FOOD & SERVICES

Average meal	0.5	—	V
Cheap meal	0.2	—	V
Expensive meal	5+	—	T
Rations (1 week)	3	5	V
Drinking water (1 quart)	1	2	V
Bath	2	—	V
Caravanserai lodgings*	3	—	S

SLAVES

Type	Cost	Avail
Courtesan/bed wife	500 + 250 per point of positive Charisma	C
Domestic servant	200	V
Educated	1000 + 100 per die in Knowledge skills	C
Entertainer	500	T
Eunuch	300	T
Laborer	150 + 100 per point of Strength over d6	V

* See notes



THE DEVOTED

The Devoted are followers of what they see as the true teachings of Suleiman. In many ways, the Devoted follow a dualist philosophical path rather than a religious one, for they do not hold belief in any true gods. The closest they come is their belief in two opposed forces—Asha (“Order”) and Druj (“Chaos”).

These two forces have warred since the universe was created. According to Suleiman, the universe must end one day. If Asha emerges victorious, then the current universe will end and a new time will begin—an eternal age without want or suffering, where even those formerly damned will be reborn as pure spirits. Should Druj prevail, then the universe will be thrown into endless chaos and torment, and every soul will suffer misery.

Though fought on a cosmic scale, the war directly concerns the mortal races, for they have a vital part to play. In the early days, the two powers agreed upon a means of fighting their endless conflict. Druj created physical flesh, which was weak, temporal, and constantly craved. Asha created the spirit, which was eternal and needed nothing tangible to prosper.

Every mortal has a soul, known as the Self. At birth, the soul is completely neutral in its outlook, favoring neither Asha nor Druj. As the mortal grows, so his deeds directly affect his soul, tipping it toward Asha or Druj. Evil thoughts and acts, and succumbing to physical temptation and desires, give strength to Druj and taint the Self. Conversely, a life of abstinence, honesty, generosity, selflessness, and courage strengthen Asha and purify the Self. Given the current climatic changes occurring, many Devoted believe Druj is currently winning the conflict, for nothing else adequately explains the phenomena.

The vast, impersonal powers of Asha and Druj have no need of prayers or offerings, being succored by an individual’s deeds and thoughts. Thus, Devoted have no temples. Similarly, these entities are everywhere and everything, existing as the magical threads that create and bind all objects in the universe together. The inability to show the entire universe in its glory precludes the existence of religious art. The only physical representation

allowed is the word *Shuf* (“The One” or “All-Encompassing,” which refers solely to Asha).

Neither power has priests and therefore grants no miracles. Instead, those with the right aptitude, those who accept what Suleiman called the *Haqq-Bari* (“Light of Guidance”) into their lives, can manipulate the magical threads, and so work magic.

Note that being able to manipulate magic does not equate to righteousness—it simply means one has a deep understanding of the Self and how it connects to everything. In essence, it equates to self-belief and knowledge, not spiritual well-being or purity. As far as Devoted are concerned, priests are simply mages who believe their magic will fail unless they follow a very narrow set of rules. They lack faith in themselves, and use their god as a crutch when things go bad.

The nearest thing Devoted have to a sacred text is the *Hamad al-Shuf* (“Words of The One”). Rather than a true religious work, it covers matters of law, as well as guidelines on how to live one’s life so that after death one may strengthen Asha. Although the powers have no temples, there are kadas (“houses”), places where people gather to listen to readings of the *Hamad*. Imam, a term meaning “teacher or scholar,” is applied to any person learned in the *Hamad* and its greater intricacies.

The old gods of the Faithful are seen as nothing more than powerful clusters of magical energy, but no different from the energy in a palm tree or a stone. The gods are not unique entities, and therefore worshipping them is ignoring the presence of the true dual concepts of Asha and Druj.

Here is an analogy Suleiman supposedly used while preaching the new faith. “One can pick up a stone and say, ‘This is Asha and I will worship it,’ but one must also accept that the hand which holds the stone, the ground it once sat on, the air now surrounding it, are also equal parts of Asha. By picking just the stone to venerate, you ignore the whole picture, and blind yourself to the beauty of Oneness. The Faithful see only their stones; we see everything around the stone as well.”

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Indeed, the Faithful are often referred to as “walking through life with one eye shut and the other blinkered.”

The *Hamad* teaches that by following a path of righteousness and spiritual growth, anyone can find one’s way to Oneness, their version of the afterlife—there is no need to have a cleric intercede on one’s behalf. It is for this reason that many forms of magic exist—no one way of manipulating the magical energy is correct, as all lead to Oneness eventually.

Bedu, cakali, and hyaenidae number among the Devoted, as do the vast majority of citizens within the Sultanate.

THE AFTERLIFE

Neither Asha nor Druj have celestial realms where souls travel after death. Those who follow the teachings of Suleiman are rewarded on death by having their soul merge with Asha. In this state they become one with the ordered universe, and part of the magical field which touches every part of the world. Suleiman described this

state as, “Oneness,” attesting that he had received a vision of this state, and that it equated to a state of total awareness and bliss, free of pain and suffering.

Once the soul has left the body, the corpse is seen as a lump of meat, and is typically cremated to prevent its rot from affecting the world. Grave goods, common among the Faithful, serve no purpose, as those who have achieved Oneness have no desire for anything.

Those who ignore the teachings of the *Hamad* receive no heavenly second chance to repent their sins. They are consumed by Druj, where their spirits are constantly tormented by visions of the Oneness they failed to achieve. Until Asha is victorious, Oneness will be a hair’s breadth away, but unachievable.

These souls can also be stolen by necromancy and forced to inhabit corpses as playthings for necromancers. Though this may sound relatively pleasant compared to endless torment, at least while bound to Druj one could glimpse Oneness—stuck in a shriveled corpse, one loses even that.

☉The Magical Arts☉

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

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

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

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

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



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

Magicians and the Hellfrost Rules

This section looks at how the rules presented in the *Hellfrost Players' Guide* affect magicians in the desert. If a topic is not mentioned (such as the Siphoning), then it works exactly as per the *Hellfrost* rules.

ELEMENTAL REALMS

Unlike their counterparts in the north, the citizens of the desert do not hold any belief in the elemental realms as separate planes of existence.

Regardless of creed, the desert folk see the elements simply as manifestations of the jinn, who dwell in a single plane of existence only jinn mages know how to manipulate. When a jinn mage works magic, he is not tugging at the threads of magic connected to an elemental realm. Instead, he directly calls forth a jinni and forces it to perform a task, the result of which is seen in the mortal realm as the magical effect.

Elemental loci do exist in the desert, but again are not seen as manifestations of an elemental realm. Loci are believed to be places where the jinn held power before the War of Copper Jars, and are seen as sites which still resonate with jinn energy. As such, the rules for dealing with elemental loci are used without change—only the view on how they work is altered.

THE HELLFROST EFFECT

Should a spellcaster with a fire or heat trapping ever travel to Rassilon, he becomes subject to the Hellfrost effect as normal. The modifier also applies on the rare occasions the desert temperature drops to freezing or lower.

HRIMWISARDS AND HEAT

Hrimwisards, supreme masters of cold and ice, are very rarely found in the scorching sands of the desert, and for good reason. As the temperature rises, so hrimwisards find it increasingly difficult to invoke their magic. The Casting Modifier Table below shows the penalties hrimwisards suffer to their Hrimwisardry rolls as the temperature increases. When the temperature drops below 90 degrees, hrimwisards use the regular table from the *Hellfrost Players' Guide*.

CASTING MODIFIER TABLE

Temperature	Modifier
Hot	–1
Sweltering	–2
Stifling	–3
Very Hot	–4
Baking	–6
Scorching	–8
Infernal	–10

POWERS

As in the *Hellfrost Players' Guide*, each Arcane Background type lists the powers available to a practitioner of the arts. Unless otherwise stated, all powers mentioned here which are not found in the *Savage Worlds* core rules are detailed in the *Hellfrost Players' Guide*.

Trappings

The GM has the final word on when trapping bonuses apply, and whether a particular mage or cleric can use any given trapping. For instance, a fire trapping on *bolt* makes perfect sense, but a *confusion* spell shouldn't cause a foe to ignite. It may, though, cause him to be swathed in a harmless aura of flickering flame.

NEW TRAPPINGS

The new trapping is available to spellcasters (magical or miraculous) in *Land of Fire*.

Dust: Also covers ash, sand, and other fine particles. A mage using this trapping must pick one of the following effects when he casts a spell. He does not have to learn the spell twice. If using the Combine Spells Edge, both spells must use the same trapping choice.

Blinding: Anyone hit by an offensive spell must make an Agility roll to cover their eyes. Failure means victims are at –2 to actions related to sight (including Fighting and Shooting) for the next 10 minutes. This effect is cumulative up to a –6 penalty.

Flay: A damage-causing spell ignores any worn armor protection, as the fine particles blast through the smallest chinks. Natural armor (such as a dragon's scales) and *armor* spells are unaffected.

EXISTING TRAPPINGS

Of the trappings presented in the *Hellfrost Players' Guide*, all are usable by magicians and priests in the desert realms, with the noted exception of cold, coldfire, and ice. Naturally, some types of Arcane Background, magical or miraculous, may favor or restrict certain trappings.

ARCANE **Backgrounds**

Heroes who take the Arcane Background (Magic) Edge must pick one of the arcane spellcaster types detailed below. This replaces the standard Arcane Background (Magic) Edge, which is not available to player characters in the *Land of Fire* setting.

Each arcane type has a specific arcane skill. This replaces the Spellcasting skill. The description also details the number of powers the character begins with when he takes the Edge, as well as which powers he may pick. Powers not on the list cannot be chosen. The standard rules for choosing powers apply. Most arcane types also have special rules.

Unless otherwise stated in the descriptions below, a spellcaster is free to pick any trapping available in this setting.

Dervish Magic

Arcane Skill: Dervish (Agility)

Starting Powers: 3

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

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

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

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

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

The extra casting actions don't have to be declared in advance, but cannot exceed a number of actions equal to half the mage's Vigor die. If the mage suffers disruption while casting and fails his roll, or if he fails to spend an action each round spinning between starting and finish-

ing, the spell fails (with no backlash) A Shaken dervish automatically fails his spell—although he can still move half his Pace, he cannot maintain the necessary concentration.

For clarification, dervish may take other actions while spinning, but suffers a multi action penalty. He retains his full Parry while spinning. Note that the casting roll is made as part of the spinning motion. As such, the final spinning action and casting are a single action.

Example: *A dervish mage with d10 Vigor wants to cast sphere of might. If he tries to cast in a single round, he has a -2 penalty. The dervish spends 5 extra rounds spinning, the maximum he is permitted. On the sixth round he casts his spell at +3.*

Spells: Dervish magic is predominantly about seeking Oneness through movement and magic, and that means it is inward looking. All spells are treated as if they had Range Self. All other statistics and effects remain unchanged.

Edges: Dervishes can take the Bladedancer Edge from the *Hellfrost Players' Guide*, ignoring the racial requirements.

Trappings: Dervish spells always have a light trapping. In many cases, the mage actually glows slightly as the magic is drawn into his body.

JINN Magic

When Suleiman grasped the knowledge that magic touched everything, he gained insight into how to defeat the jinn. In doing so, he also founded the art of jinn magic. After the War of Copper Jars, he taught this knowledge to his disciples, who then spread it, and Suleiman's other teachings, across the desert to other cultures.

As the name implies, jinn magic involves forcing lesser jinn to perform some service for the mage. Greater jinn are far too powerful to be bound into service by such magic, though they may be affected by spells. Although the resultant effect is seen as magical, the mage himself works only the magic of summoning the jinn—the actual spell is cast by the enslaved elemental being.

Jinn mages who have mastered just one type of jinn are known as Students. Those who have tamed two types of jinn are called Adepts, three types Masters, and all four types as Grand Masters.

Among jinn mages there is, and has been since Suleiman's death, a constant discussion about their art. It revolves around one thing—in what order did he learn the ways of jinn magic? Suleiman took four Students once the War of Copper Jars finished, teaching each one a single fragment of jinn magic simultaneously, and then instructing them to learn from each other and pass on their knowledge to their own Students in turn. Suleiman never revealed to his Students which type of jinn he learned to dominate first.

Some mages believe that if one follows the same order Suleiman took, one can unlock immense power. Though the order has been forgotten, countless jinn

magicians since Suleiman's age have learned the arts, and in every conceivable order. None have ever professed having any great revelation or surge in power.

Game Mechanics: Jinn magic functions exactly as Elementalism in the *Hellfrost Players' Guide*. The only real difference is that jinn magicians have no organized structure like the Convocation. Each Student is expected to find his own way to becoming a Grand Master.

Edges: The Elemental Mastery Edge is available to jinn magicians, but is known as Jinn Mastery. It otherwise remains unaltered.

Khem-Hekau

Arcane Skill: Khem-Hekau (Smarts)

Starting Powers: 3

Powers: *Altered senses, armor, aura, barrier, bolt, boost/lower trait, confusion, corpse senses, deflection, detect/conceal, dispel, enhance undead, entangle, ethereal/corporeal, fatigue, fear, fly, glyph, gravespeak, greater zombie, heat mask, nightmare, obscure, puppet, sacrifice, sanctuary, speak language, strength of the undead, telekinesis, voice on the wind, wandering senses, zombie.*

Hekau (which simply means "magic") is the oldest form of sorcery known to humans. It dates back to the distant days of the Hekatic Empire, from where it takes its name.

At first, practitioners summoned nature spirits to do their bidding, calling upon their true names to force service. But as the empire expanded so the great pharaohs feared their own mortality and sought to become true gods, immortal rulers over an eternal realm. Masters and students of the art were ordered to find the secret of immortality, and so began the journey down a dark path. When nature spirits could not provide the answer, the magicians turned their magic toward the spirits of the Bottomless Pit, for surely those who had passed beyond could help them in their quest.

From the realm of the dead, the magicians learned the secrets of creating mummies and the fell magic for trapping a soul in the withered husk. They also learned how to force spirits into lesser corpses, how to call forth dark swarms of spirits to protect them and harm others. Within a generation, the art had become khem-hekau ("black magic"), better known as necromancy.

Living students of the art are rare, for the darkest, most potent secrets of khem-hekau were lost when the Hekatic Empire ceased to exist. Current students know only the lesser spells, formidable in their own right, but a far step from the power magicians once wielded. Today, the greatest exponents of this art are the withered kings and liche-wizards of the Withered Dynasty, some of whom actually helped develop the art.

Casting: Khem-hekau magicians must be able to speak to work their magic.

Game Mechanics: When the character is in a graveyard, tomb, necropolis, or other area commonly associated with death, he gains +2 to all Khem-Hekau rolls. In addition, if the character scores two raises on his

NECROMANCY

In Rassilon, necromancy is the sole domain of priests of Hela, goddess of undeath, and never existed before her madness. Among the desert peoples, necromancy is practiced by khem-hekau magicians, as well as by priests of Iblis, lord of evil. Tammuz, the god of death, grants no necromantic powers, and is in fact opposed to undead.

Khem-Hekau roll when casting *zombie*, the undead are permanent, and remain active until destroyed. They cannot be *dispelled*.

Although not all khem-hekau magicians are evil, the art is greatly feared. All practitioners have a -2 Charisma penalty when dealing with the living.

Trappings: Spells must have a necromantic or darkness trapping whenever possible. Spells may also involve the spirits. *Deflection*, for instance, may be a shield of spirits, *fear* may summon a terrible spirit being, and *puppet* may be envisioned as temporary spirit possession of the victim.

Sand Magic

Arcane Skill: Sand Magic (Smarts)

Starting Powers: 3

Powers: *Armor, barrier, beast friend* (desert creatures only), *blast, bolt, bridge, burrow, burst, deflection, dispel, elemental form* (dust only), *elemental manipulation* (earth only), *entangle, ethereal/corporeal* (ethereal only), *fog cloud, hamper movement, knock-down, obscure, prolonged blast, sanctuary, sluggish reflexes, sphere of might, smite, storm* (sandstorm only), *summon demon* (pazuzu and sand only), *summon jinn* (dust only), *teleport, whirlwind, wilderness step* (deserts only).

Sand magic is the understanding of how to manipulate the magical energy flowing through the great deserts. Despite its name, it also covers ash and dust, though not other particulate matter, like snow. In many ways, it is a form of "desert druidism," though the term "druid" is unknown among desert dwellers.

Sand magic is an old art, and one which has been used for both good and evil. Today, practitioners typically fall into one of two camps. Neither is an organized culture, more a mindset shared by individuals.

The first group call themselves the Expansionists. Though they have always been present, numbers swelled when the first signs the deserts were expanding at a greater rate appeared. They believe that the desert wants to expand, and it is their sworn duty to obey those wishes. As such, they often engage in activities most folk see as abhorrent, such as polluting oases and wells, destroying irrigation channels, and so on—anything to prevent the desert being held back.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

FLYING CARPETS & USHABTI MAGES

Flying carpets are a staple of the Arabian fantasy genre. While jinn mages can bind khamsin into carpets, ushabti mages can use *fly* to achieve similar results.

Rather than get into pointless calculations about how many Sizes of heroes a flying carpet can carry, the GM is encouraged this simple guideline—a typical carpet can hold 16 creatures of Size –2, eight of Size –1, four of Size +0 or +1, two of Size +2 to +3, and one of Size +4. This allows for a typical adventuring party to share a single carpet.

Carpets move at Pace 8, or Pace 16 with a raise. Naturally, they ignore difficult ground penalties for terrestrial obstacles.

Their rivals, and the rivalry often leads to bloodshed, are the Protectors. They see the desert as a sacred area, one which must be protected. They focus on combating evil creatures polluting the purity of the desert with their presence, and ensuring that the natural beauty of the wastes is not spoiled.

Casting: Sand mages must have a pound of sand, ash, or dust adjacent to them for each spell they wish to cast. This is rarely a problem in the deserts, but within towns and cities, tombs, or on a boat, however, sand is not always present. If a mage does not have a pound of sand, he cannot cast a spell. The sand is thrown at the target, and consumed in the casting.

Trappings: Spells must have the dust trapping whenever possible. *Entangle* or *sluggish reflexes*, for instance, may cause sand to rise up and engulf the victim, *smite* may coat a weapon in razor-sharp sand, and *teleport* may cause the mage to disappear in a puff of sand.

Ushabti Magic

Arcane Skill: Ushabti (Smarts)

Starting Powers: 1 + *telekinesis*

Powers: *Animate object* (p. 43), *armor*, *barrier*, *bladebreaker*, *blast*, *bodyguard*, *bolt*, *bridge*, *deflection*, *entangle*, *fly*, *knockdown*, *lock/unlock*, *mend*, *speed*, *sphere of might*.

Ushabti mages are gifted with the ability to animate inanimate objects. They learn the secret names of every type of object and the charms necessary to impart a tiny fraction of their own essence into these forms.

The objects they awaken must be solid and non-living. Undead, plants, jinn, golems, and so on all count as living beings for this purpose, whereas stones, cut timber, and non-undead bones are not. While a mage could animate a cloak (a possible trapping of *deflection* or *entangle*), he could not animate a pile of sand for the same purpose.

Casting: An ushabti mage must have at least one hand free and be able to speak clearly in order to work his magic. The item to be animated must be touched as the spell is being cast.

Powers: Ushabti mages automatically learn the *telekinesis* power at Novice in addition to one other power. However, they can *only* use the telekinetic weapon option—they cannot levitate creatures.

Trappings: Ushabti magic should be treated as having an earth trapping when used offensively, purely because the objects they manipulate are solid. There is naturally a lot of leeway in ushabti trappings, however. A mage who wants to wield a floating sword in combat needs to use *telekinesis*, but if he merely wants a bunch of daggers to fly at a foe he can use *bolt* and have the daggers as trappings.

Unlike other types of magic, the mage must have his trapping at hand. He cannot, for instance, claim a cloak as a trapping of *deflection* unless he can touch a cloak. A blade does not spring into existence if he wants to use *telekinesis* to animate a weapon or fire arrows or daggers as part of a *bolt* spell, nor does *bridge* work without some sort of building materials at hand, such as a pile of timber or stones.

In essence, ushabti trappings are physical objects affected by the magic, not summoned manifestations of the magic.

Wizir Magic

Requirements: Novice, Smarts d6+, Persuasion d8+ (Counselor) or Notice d8+ (Guardian)

Arcane Skill: Wizir Magic (Smarts)

Starting Powers: 3

Counselor Powers: *Altered senses*, *beast friend*, *bodyguard*, *boost/lower trait* (Smarts, Spirit, Intimidation, Knowledge (any), Persuasion, Streetwise, and Taunt only), *charismatic aura*, *confusion*, *detect/conceal*, *far-sight*, *fear*, *glyph*, *gravespeak*, *lock/unlock*, *mind rider*, *puppet*, *sanctuary*, *silence*, *speak language*, *summon demon* (librarian and revealer only), *teleport*, *voice on the wind*, *wandering senses*.

Guardian Powers: *Analyze foe*, *armor*, *bladebreaker*, *bodyguard*, *bolt*, *boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, Fighting, Intimidation, Shooting, Stealth, and Throwing only), *deflection*, *detect/conceal*, *entangle*, *environmental protection*, *fatigue*, *fear*, *glyph*, *healing*, *knockdown*, *light*, *negate arcana*, *obscure*, *precognition*, *quickness*, *refuge*, *sentry*, *slumber*, *smite*, *speed*, *succor*.

To the unenlightened masses, wizirs are simply close advisors to nobles. That they can wield magic is common fact, and not treated as anything unusual. After all, what better way to protect yourself than have a powerful magician by your side?

Wizirs come in two distinct types. Those who act as advisors, spies, or similar are known as counselors, and are by far the more common type of wizir. Their magic is geared toward information gathering and courtly activities. Guardians, on the other hand, use their magic to

protect their lord from harm. Most disguise themselves as lesser courtiers or regular bodyguards, so as not to reveal their presence in advance to potential assassins. When a character decides to play a wizar, he must decide which type of mage he will play. Once chosen, this cannot be changed.

Wizirs do not belong to any brotherhood or organization. Individuals serve an apprenticeship under a master, and then go out into the world to find employment befitting their skills.

A character starting as a wizar is assumed to serve a patron (the GM and player should discuss exactly who this is) unless the player opts to be “unemployed.”

Wizirs do not have to swear oaths of allegiance to their patron (though many are made to), nor do they have to act as mindless lackeys or bootlickers (many stories exist about nobles who have had their throne usurped by their wizar). Generally, but not always, a wizar has near unlimited access to his patron, and may speak to him as if speaking to a close friend. A patron may be another player character or an NPC, but a wizar may not be his own patron.

Note that wizirs may be bound into service, forced to work as slaves, or otherwise coerced to serve a patron. Such service is highly dangerous as a hostile wizar could very easily turn on his lord and such an individual still suffers the modifiers and penalties above.

Mechanics: Trained as advisors and bodyguards, wizirs are strangely tied into “noble” blood, and draw power from it. A wizar who does not serve an important person, be it a noble, rich merchant, or such like (in game terms, the patron must have the Noble or Rich Edge) suffers a –1 penalty to his Wizar Magic rolls. When within 5” of their patron, their Wizar Magic rolls are made at +1. A patron may have multiple wizirs, but a wizar may only have a single patron at any one time.

Changing a patron requires one day of meditation in order to attune one’s magic to the new patron. The severed connection is immediately and automatically noticeable by the former patron. Wizirs who switch allegiances frequently may find themselves unable to find future employment—no one wants a counselor or bodyguard they cannot trust.

Casting: Wizirs do not need to make gestures to cast spells, but must be able to speak in a clear voice.

Cross Training: Counselors and guardians each have a specific spell list. A wizar’s starting spells must come solely from the list matching his chosen profession. However, once play begins, it is possible for a counselor to learn guardian spells, and vice versa. When picking a spell from the other

list, the spell’s Rank is treated as being one level higher. Thus, while a counselor can learn *mind rider* at Veteran Rank, a guardian must wait until he is Heroic before he can learn the spell.

Trappings: Wizirs may use any trappings except necromancy.

🌀 New Spells 🌀

All spells from the *Savage Worlds* rulebook are also available. Mages and clerics are restricted in which spells they may actually take by their Arcane Background.

ANIMATE OBJECT

Rank: Novice

Range: Touch

Duration: Maintained

Trappings: Glyphs, words of power, gestures, concentration

Animate object is often considered the signature power of ushabti mages, and only they may ever learn it. Animated objects must be a single object (a single grain of sand could be animated, for instance, but not a pile of sand), nonliving, and capable of some sort of independent movement. A statue has legs, as does a table or chair, which could bend to allow movement, but a sword



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

ALTERED SPELLS

Some spells presented in the *Hellfrost Players' Guide* require a slight tweak for use in the desert. These changes affect both magic and miracle workers equally unless otherwise stated.

GREATER ZOMBIE

Desert spellcasters can use this spell to create flayed, ghûls, headless hunters, and mummies. It cannot be used to create other undead, though powerful NPCs may know more powerful versions of this spell. A desert spellcaster who visits other realms cannot use this spell to create undead unique to those regions. The same applies the other way round, of course.

REFUGE

In the desert, *refuge* lowers the temperature inside the shelter by two or four levels, providing cover from the scorching sun and burning winds, or raises it as normal (most often used during cold nights, though evil NPCs may use it as a form of torture).

STORM

Storm creates and dispels sandstorms, as well as rain storms. It cannot be used to create blizzards, even if the mage moves to Rassilon.

SUMMON DEMON

Two new demons, pazuzu and sand, are available in this setting—statistics can be found in Chapter 159. Pazuzu demons can be summoned with a -1 penalty and sand demons with -2.

SUMMON ELEMENTAL

The *summon elemental* spell is known to the desert mages as *summon jinn*, but the game mechanics are unaffected. Clerics in Al-Shirkuh view elementals as lesser servants of their god.

or lump of rock does not. To animate a sword or other such “static” item, the *telekinesis* power must be used instead. Objects already animated (including golems) cannot be affected by this spell.

To animate an object, the mage must touch it with a hand and make an Ushabti roll. The size of the object determines how difficult the target is to animate, as shown on the table below. Note that the caster's Rank limits the size of an object he can animate.

Objects remain animated as long as the character Maintains the spell. Animated objects follow the mage's verbal orders, but he must spend one action per round

controlling them (all of them are controlled via a single action, even if they take different actions) or they stand idle (Parry 2). They are not subject to Leadership Edges.

Objects with wings can fly at their listed Pace.

ANIMATED OBJECT TABLE

Mod (Rank)	Max Wt.	Strength	Size	Pace
0 (N)	10 lbs.	d4	-2	4
0 (N)	25 lbs.	d6	-1	4
0 (N)	50 lbs.	d6	0	6
-1 (S)	100 lbs.	d8	0	6
-1 (S)	250 lbs.	d10	+1	8
-1 (S)	500 lbs.	d12	+2	8
-2 (V)	1000 lbs.	d12+1	+3	10
-2 (V)	1 ton	d12+2	+4	10
-2 (V)	2 tons	d12+3	+5	12
-4 (H)	5 tons	d12+4	+6	12
-4 (H)	10 tons	d12+5	+7	14
-4 (H)	25 tons	d12+6	+8	14
-6 (L)	50 tons+	d12+7	+9	16

ANIMATED OBJECT

An animated object's Toughness and Armor are dependant on its Size. A Size +4 object would have Toughness 12 (2), for instance.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d4, Strength *, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d4, Throwing d4

Pace: *; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6 + Size (half Size)

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor:** Animated objects generally have armor equal to half their Size (rounded down; minimum of zero).
- * **Construct:** +2 to recover from Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.
- * **Mindless:** Immune to Tests of Will and Fear.
- * **Size (*):** As the table. Objects with a Size of 4-7 are Large, objects of size 8+ are Huge.

HAMPER MOVEMENT

Rank: Seasoned

Range: Smarts

Duration: Maintained

Trappings: Entangling plants, deep mud, buffeting winds, ice, grasping skeletal limbs, rip tide.

Hamper movement creates an area equal in size to a Medium Burst Template. All movement through the temple is treated as difficult ground. With a -2 penalty on the arcane skill roll, the template can be increased to a Large Burst Template. For a similar penalty, the area can be made especially difficult, preventing all creatures from running within the template. With a -4 penalty, both modifiers can be implemented simultaneously.

THE FAITHFUL

The Faithful are worshippers of the old gods. As is the way of gods and time, the number of deities has altered, with some falling from favor and others being raised in their place. Likewise, names change. Still, the Faithful have no doubt that there are multiple gods, and that the gods reward their clerics with miraculous powers. Those who follow the teachings of the gods are rewarded after death by being welcomed into their deity's celestial paradise. The Faithful worship in temples, venerate statues and images of the gods, and have priests to speak to the gods on their behalf. The sphinxes are members of the Faithful, as are the citizens of the Caliphate. Bedu, cakali, and hyaenidae tribes are Faithful, but their numbers are dwindling.

The God War

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

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

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

The Compact

The desert gods also have an equivalent to the Compact. The pantheon long ago decided that mortals would have the right to free will and to fight their own battles. Each deity can give his most devout followers special powers and advice through omens and divinations, but does not involve himself in direct interference, less his fellows turn on him in a celestial war.

Even if mortals are unaware of it, the gods understand that one god alone cannot rule the universe, and all must exist in (relative) harmony if the universe is to run smoothly. Even Iblis, lord of evil, understands celestial balance, for who can be corrupted if everyone is evil? Still, he revels in making life difficult for his peers.

Suleiman

The Faithful accept Suleiman as the liberator of the enslaved races, but they cast a different slant on his religious views. The Faithful admit the gods ignored them during their centuries of slavery, but not because the gods had forsaken the races. After many generations under the lash of the jinn and with worship of the gods forbidden, the races had simply forgotten them. The heavenly compact forbade the gods from forcing the mortal races to worship them. The gods were, quite simply, powerless to act until a mortal asked them to intervene.

Suleiman, in his great wisdom, rediscovered the “lost” gods, and in doing so awoke the collective memory of the enslaved races. Whereas the Devoted insist Suleiman rejected the old gods in favor of one true god, the Faithful hold every god proclaimed Suleiman a high priest simultaneously and thus had access to the miraculous powers of every deity.

After their freedom from the jinn, the Faithful found themselves persecuted by a heretical faith (the Devoted) and fled the tyranny to found the Caliphate. There, Suleiman is still honored by every faith as a holy prophet.

The Afterlife

For the first three days, so it is believed, the soul resides in the body. This allows clerics to prepare the soul for its journey. Written spells are placed on the body's wrappings to prevent the soul wandering off and becoming lost.

Note that although the soul is present, the body is truly dead, and cannot be brought back to true life by magical or mundane means. Necromancers can still use the *zombie* power on the corpse, however. This terrible act forces the original soul from the corpse prematurely, causing it to wander lost forever on the mortal realm as a ghost. In its place is summoned a dark spirit, obedient to the commands of the necromancer.

After the three days, the soul is (hopefully) collected by Djemuti, the Charioteer of the Gods, in his celestial chariot, and carried up to the House of the Gods. It is only with the aid of priests of Tammuz's spells that the spirit can find the safe passage through the web of passages in the House to the door which will lead it to the Afterlife. The corpse is then mummified, for the Faithful believe the soul endures only as long as the body is intact.

Souls which have not been properly blessed are very likely to chose the wrong door, possibly damning themselves to the Bottomless Pit for eternity, becoming forever lost in the heavenly structure, tricked by the souls of the lost, killed by a trap, eaten by some fell spiritual beast, or enslaved by another god and forced to wait upon his followers until the end of time. None of these fates are particularly pleasant.

Even souls which reach the correct door are still not safe, though the hardest part of their journey is over. The desert dwellers have no belief in fate, but do hold true to the concept of cosmic balance, or Maat. Every good deed the soul committed on the mortal realm is balanced against its bad deeds (belief in the divine weighing of souls is a fairly common belief throughout the world). The balance is checked by Tammuz, lord of the dead. The balance can be tipped in favor of a positive result by the blessings of priests of the soul's chosen deity.

Souls found to be pure (or at least not evil) are allowed to pass through to the Afterlife that awaits them. One should note, of course, that a follower of an evil deity passes the test if his sins outweigh his virtues. Each god maintains its own celestial realm, and every Afterlife is different. Those who fail to pass the test are thrown into the Bottomless Pit, a realm of darkness and torment ruled over by demon lords, powerful servants of Iblis.

The guidelines on patron deities in the *Hellfrost Players' Guide* apply to worshippers of the desert gods as well.

The Gods

Although some of the desert gods bear close resemblance to those worshipped in the Hearthlands, the pantheons are completely separate. A cleric of Apsu may follow a similar path to a cleric of Neorthe, for instance,

but the scriptures, prayers, and other trappings of their faiths are vastly different. Despite this, some scholars believe that there is only one pantheon of gods in existence, and that the different names and attributes are merely cultural stamping. Clerics of the various pantheons strongly refute this heresy.

Minor deities may be worshipped as well. Note that when the text refers to temples and shrines being found in cities, it refers only to lands where the gods are worshipped—the Sultanate has very few such buildings.

Apsu

Titles: The Camel, Source of the Celestial River, Lord of the Inundation, Lord of Oases, Soul of the River, Life-giver, the Eternal Spring.

Aspects: Drinkable water, hippos, oases, wells, rivers, springs.

Symbol: A single drop of water.

Priesthood: Jugs of Apsu (priests); Bulls of Apsu (paladins).

Herald: Apsu's heralds appear as hippo-headed humans (see page 169).

Holy Days: Every Yaus al-Ittrou is a holy day. The first day of Amt Alak Arkhet is a high holy day.

Duties: Protect oases, wells and other sources of water, keep water sources pure.

Sins: (Minor) not sharing water with a "good" creature, not drinking your share of water each day, not cleansing a polluted water source, not helping a hippo in distress; (Major) allowing a water source under your direct protection to become polluted, wounding a hippo, failing to offer a quart of water to Apsu each morning; (Mortal) polluting a water source, killing a hippo.

Signature Power: *Elemental manipulation* (water only).

Powers: *Barrier, beast friend* (river creatures only), *boost/lower trait* (Vigor, Boating, and Swimming only), *burst, champion of the faith, elemental form* (water only), *energy immunity* (fire, heat, and water only), *environmental protection* (water only), *etherealness* (watery body, no corporeality), *fatigue, feast* (provides 2 quarts of water per Rank, but no food), *fog cloud, glyph, hamper movement, healing, sanctuary, shape change* (river creatures only), *sphere of might, stun, succor, summon beast* (river creatures only), *summon elemental* (water only), *summon herald, water walk*.

Trappings: Clergy must use water trappings whenever appropriate. They cannot take dust or earth trappings.

Without water, there would be no life in the desert. From the banks of the mighty rivers to the scattered oases, water is the lifeblood of the sands, and Apsu commands all potable water. It should be noted that Apsu has no control over the sea. Apsu is depicted as a human with a hippo's head carrying a jug of water.

Shrines exist at every oasis, even those controlled by Devoted tribes (though they do not worship at the shrine). Even wells are inscribed with the holy symbol to ensure

Apsu protects them. Temples are found in most major cities, as well as along the banks of rivers, and are built around a pool, in which wallow sacred hippos, or spring.

Apsu's clergy protect water supplies, whether they be a city's cisterns or some remote spring, and care for hippos (a somewhat dangerous task). Protecting and maintaining the irrigation channels is one of their most important jobs, and even nomadic clerics are expected to help with this. Many also travel the deep sands, looking for new sources of water or mapping the course of old water channels.

Each morning, clerics must pour a quart of water onto bare ground, in honor of their god. Failure to do so is a major sin, for it is commonly believed that water spilled on the ground helps fill the Celestial River, from which all oases, springs, and rivers are filled.

Most festivals revolve around ritual washing. After the celebrants have finished their ablutions, the water is poured onto the sands, carrying the sins of the washed with it.

Ashtart

Titles: The Celestial Palm, The Celestial Gardener, Plantmother, The Green One, The Bee Queen.

Aspects: Plants, herbs, crops, shade, fertility, birth, marriage, children.

Symbol: A palm tree.

Priesthood: Roots of Ashtart (priests); Stings of Ashtart (paladins).

Herald: Ashtart's heralds appear as a tangle of humanoid vines, but with a bee's stinger (see page 170).

Holy Days: Every Yaus al-Kemi is a holy day. The first day of Amt Alak Paret is a high holy day.

Duties: To bless and protect crops and children, conduct marriage ceremonies, act as midwives.

Sins: (Minor) eating meat, burning wood, drinking anything except water or *nehta*, allowing a child to be harmed (except chastisement), not assisting a childbirth; (Major) willfully hurting a child (except chastisement), allowing plants to be destroyed (except during harvest), breaking up a marriage; (Mortal) willfully destroying plants (harvesting does not count), killing a child.

Signature Power: *Feast*.

Powers: *Altered senses, armor, aura, barrier, beast friend* (bees only), *blast, bolt, champion of the faith, deflection, detect/conceal, elemental manipulation* (air and earth only), *entangle, feast* (no meat), *fly, glyph, healing, obscure, prolonged blast, smite, refuge, sanctuary, sentry, sphere of might, succor, summon herald, voice on the wind, wilderness step* (in vegetation only).

Trappings: Clergy must use plant or bee trappings whenever possible. For instance, *sphere of might* could be a swarm of bees, *voice on the wind* may send a bee messenger, and *elemental manipulation (air)* may create a spectral palm leaf when cooling someone.

Ashtart rules over all manner of plants, as well as the bees which pollinate them. She is also patron of marriage, birth, and children. She has no interest in love, as many marriages

GODS & MAGIC

Are there actually any gods in the desert, or was Suleiman's supposed preaching that the gods are just clumps of magical strands true? The truth, as always, is subjective.

The gods obviously do exist, because they grant their followers magical powers. However, followers of Suleiman would see this as a misguided form of magic, limited by the belief that each god controls only a small aspect of the universe.

As far as those with faith in the old gods go, the views on mages differ. Some Faithful see magicians as working with evil spirits, servants of Iblis, the Great Darkness. Mages are, therefore, evil in themselves. Others see mages as worshipers of the ancient goddess of magic, but ones who cannot see the truth behind their power. At best, mages are misguided priests. Many Faithful are also of the opinion that the Siphoning is evidence of the Devoted's heretical path. Suleiman is returning, they claim, to set the record straight once and for all.

In game terms, however one wishes to view the universe, both magic and miracles exist side by side, as they do in Rassilon and in other realms as yet unexplored.

are made for political reasons, even among the lower classes. When depicted, she appears as a young maiden with wheat sheaves for hair and a bee's stinger. In her right hand she carries palm leaf and in her left a small beehive.

Shrines to her can be found at any oasis where plants grow, as well as in cultivated fields. Her temples can be found in agricultural settlements, and comprise a sacred grove of palm trees. One palm is always painted white, and serves as the center of worship. Temples also maintain beehives, and swarms of bees are constantly present. Devout followers have little to fear, but those who enter a temple with evil in their hearts are likely to be attacked by angry swarms.

Her priests usually focus on blessing crops and children, acting as midwives and marriage councilors, and even as marriage arrangers. In large cities, they even run orphanages. Meanwhile, her paladins protect the crops and children. Those who beat or abuse children or their spouses may find themselves on the end of a severe beating by a paladin. Running to the authorities to report the paladin usually has little effect. Priests of Ashtart brew a mildly alcoholic drink made of honey, known as "*nehta*." It is intensely sweet and drinkable only in small quantities unless diluted with water or wine.

Ceremonies involve burning fragrant plants and incense to please the deity. A feast of fruit and vegetables is common after all major ceremonies. Worshippers believe that queen bees have a direct link to Ashtart. Whispering a prayer to a bee which lands on you is a sure way Ashtart will hear it. Being stung by a bee indicates the worshipper is out of favor and must make amends.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Duamutef

Titles: The Heavenly Sheikh, Desert Master, The Endless One, Lord of the Dunes, Soul of the Desert.

Aspects: The desert, sand, nomads, hunters, archery, hospitality.

Symbol: A sand dune, breaking like a wave.

Priesthood: Sandwalkers (priests); Sandlords (paladins).

Herald: A black-furred cakali armed with a fearsome bow (see page 170).

Holy Days: The first Yaus al-Nefar of each month is a holy day.

Duties: To protect the desert from despoilers, to maintain the ancient customs of the nomads (all races), to protect one's family, clan, and tribe.

Sins: (Minor) allowing a nomad to be harmed (except one's tribal enemies), living in a town or city for more than a month, traveling by ship or flying carpet when one can walk the desert; (Major) unwittingly breaking the laws of hospitality, breaking the customs of one's tribe; (Mortal) knowingly breaking the laws of hospitality, planting trees or other hindrances to the expansion of the desert.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Vigor, Persuasion, Riding, Shooting, Survival, and Tracking only).

Powers: *Aim, altered senses, analyze foe, banish, barrier, battle song, bolt, burrow, burst, champion of the faith, charismatic aura, deflection, detect/conceal, elemental form* (dust only), *elemental manipulation* (earth only), *entangle, farsight, hamper movement, heat mask, obscure, sentry, smite, storm* (sandstorm only), *summon demon* (pazuzu and sand only), *summon elemental* (dust only), *summon herald, wilderness step*.

Trappings: Clergy must use dust trappings whenever possible. They may never use water trappings.

Duamutef is the embodiment of the desert and the hardy folk who live in the sands. Although patron of all nomads, he is not an overly benevolent god, and offers little protection against the scorching heat or waterless wastes. Those who wish to survive the sands must do so on their own merits. Most images of him resemble a nomad of the worshippers' race carrying a staff in one hand and a pair of sandals in the other. Sometimes he is shown with a camel's head.

Shrines to Duamutef are commonplace, but rarely static. The nomadic tribes carry their shrines with them, setting them up outside the local noble's tent whenever camp is made. Most take the form of an heirloom, be it a sword, suit of armor, saddle, and such like. Typically, the item is somehow related to the founder of the family line. Temples are nonexistent, as the entire desert is seen as a temple to Duamutef.

Clergy are loyal to their family, clan, and then tribe before all other matters, and tend to act as advisors to the bey, mir, or sheikh. Priests often serve as mediators in intertribal disputes, trying to find a solution that avoids nomad blood being spilled in the sands. Paladins serve as family, clan, or tribal champions, as well as bodyguards to important personages. When diplomacy fails, it is time for the paladins to

settle matters. Both factions are also expected to be skilled hunters, capable of providing for their kin.

Like Apsu, festivals to Duamutef involve washing. However, followers scrub their bodies with sand, removing their sins while they pray. Going without water is common on holy days.

Geb-Agni

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

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

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

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

Herald: A tall human with black, broken rock for skin beneath which can be seen glowing fire (see page 170).

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

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

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

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

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

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

Geb and Agni were once two separate entities, Geb being the god of earth and Agni the god of fire. After the discovery of the Heart of Fire, the two entities were merged into a single deity. The joint entity quickly attracted smiths, who utilize both earth and fire, as his core worshippers. Although most of his worshippers are metal workers, miners, and fire giants, he also receives adoration from soldiers and crafters who work with stone, clay, or earth.

The god is shown as a dark-skinned, bearded man wearing a smith's apron. In one hand he holds a miner's pick and in the other a smith's hammer.

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

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

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

Iblis

Titles: The Chaotic One, The Dark One, He Who Tips the Balance, Scourge of the Heavens, Evil-Worker, Night Fiend, Tempter of the Righteous.

Aspects: Chaos, evil, undead, destruction, darkness, corruption, disease.

Symbol: A black circle.

Priesthood: Voices of Chaos (priests); Hands of Chaos (paladins).

Herald: A mummified creature of the same race as the summoner carrying a two-handed, rune-etched scimitar (use the stats for a herald of Hela from the *Hellfrost Bestiary*).

Holy Days: The four nights of the new moon.

Duties: Perform evil acts, corrupt others, destroy order, bring chaos to the universe.

Sins: (Minor) performing a charitable act, refusing to aid or working against a Wild Card demon or undead, planning instead of acting, not committing treachery when the chance occurs; (Major) willfully slaying a lesser demon or undead, upholding or promoting law and order; (Mortal) willfully slaying a Wild Card demon or undead.

Signature Power: *Fear*.

Powers: *Altered senses, analyze foe, armor, barrier, bladebreaker, bless/panic (panic only), bolt, burrow, burst, champion of the faith, corpse senses, deflection, disease, dispel, enhance undead, entangle, ethereal/corporeal, fatigue, fly, glyph, gravespeak, greater zombie, heat mask, lower trait (no boost), luck/jinx (jinx only), nightmare, obscure, puppet, quickness, sanctuary, shape change, silence, smite, storm, summon demon, summon elemental (shadow only), summon herald, viper weapon, weapon immunity, zombie.*

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except light. Most favor darkness and necromantic.

Iblis is the only truly evil god in the desert pantheon. Others may have negative sides, but none revel in the chaos their worshippers cause to the extent of the Cha-

otic One. Iblis revels in chaos and upsetting the cosmic balance of Maat. He has no particular desire to conquer the world, only to ensure that universal order breaks down.

Iblis' form varies immensely. Some followers show him as a mummy, others as a demonic entity, while a few represent him with foul-smelling smoke. Iblis seems to care little.

It should be noted that although Iblis sides with the undead of the Withered Dynasty, few there pay him any homage. Their "gods" are their mighty, slumbering pharaohs. While servants of Iblis may strive to support the undead, whose very existence goes against universal order, the pharaohs have little compulsion about ordering their minions to attack or corrupt them.

Shrines and temples to Iblis are usually located in out of the way places, typically underground, so they cannot be easily detected. There is no standard design, of course. Shrines may be a skull in one locale and a mass of swirling lines scratched on a wall in another. Small temples may be a basement in a derelict building or cave, large ones might be a massive complex in the desert, filled with all manner of demonic and undead servants.

Priests are usually charged with spreading discourse through words, corrupting nobles, stirring up the masses, and so forth. Paladins perform chaotic acts, often violent ones, and fight alongside the forces of darkness.

Festivals take on various forms, but almost all involve the sacrifice of sentient beings. Demons are often summoned to take the soul of the victim straight to the Bottomless Pit. Naturally, all festivals are conducted at night and preferably during the new moon.

Karmelos

Titles: Champion of the Gods, General of the Heavenly Armies, The Supreme General, Honorable Victor, Warmonger.

Aspects: Battle, courage, war, honor, strategy.

Symbol: A scimitar dripping with blood.

Priesthood: Advisors (priests); Scimitars (paladins).

Herald: A lion headed warrior carrying a great scimitar (use the stats for a herald of Tiw from the *Hellfrost Bestiary*).

Holy Day: Every Yaus al-Nefar during Alak Shemu.

Duties: To fight with bravery and honor, lead armies to victory, protect those who seek your aid.

Sins: (Minor) showing mercy to an inferior foe, being beaten in combat by an equal or superior foe; (Major) fleeing a fight against an inferior opponent, being beaten in combat without good cause; (Mortal) surrendering without a fight.

Signature Power: *Armor* (Strategist) or *smite* (Scimitars).

Powers: *Aim, arcane resistance, armor, barrier, battle song, bladebreaker, blast, bodyguard, bolt, boost/lower trait (Spirit, Strength, Vigor, Fighting, Knowledge (Battle), Riding, Shooting, and Throwing), burst, champion of the faith, deflection, energy immunity, fatigue, gift of battle, knockdown, prolonged blast, quickness,*

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

sluggish reflexes, sanctuary, smite, speed, stun, summon herald, warrior's gift, weapon immunity.

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except a necromantic one.

Karmelos is the god of warriors and generals alike, granting his faithful the power to lead men into battle and to deliver crushing defeats to individual foes. Virtually anyone who has to fight pays lip service to Karmelos at some point, though the nomads place Karmelos below Duamutef when it comes to warfare. Karmelos is shown as a warrior with six arms, each bearing a different weapon. He often has the head of a lion, a symbol of ferocity, courage, and honor.

Shrines can be static or mobile. Static ones are commonly found in guard barracks or military forts, and typically stand alongside carvings displaying the names of those fallen in battle from the building. This serves as a reminder of their sacrifice, and ensures their names are never forgotten. Mobile ones usually take the form of a war banner or some sort of sacred weapon, and are carried with the army, serving as a rallying point in battle.

Temples stand in most cities. The presence of a heavily armed, well-trained, organized army inside the city walls worries most rulers, and so temples are forced to be small affairs, housing just a few sleeping chambers, a mess hall, an armory, a few workshops, and a training room. Usually the city barracks is located nearby, just in case a rebellion occurs. To date, no cleric of Karmelos has led a rebellion against a just ruler.

Usually, but not always, priests tend to follow the strate-

gic aspect of Karmelos, acting as military advisors to generals and nobles. Paladins are much more inclined to take the hands on approach and join in with the troops. Neither type actively goes out looking for meaningless violence, for Karmelos is not a god of thugs. Once diplomacy has failed, however, there can be only one outcome—combat.

Ceremonies often take the form of ritual combats to first blood (though death has been known to occur). Sometimes these combats are scripted combats, tales of Karmelos' struggles against his demonic foes. Other times they are free-for-alls. Weapons are frequently sacrificed to the god of war by being bent or broken. It is believed such sacrifices go to arm the god's divine army and thus aid in the eternal struggle against Iblis' legions.

Marqod

Titles: Healer of the Gods, Peaceful One, She Who Wars with Words, Woundsoother

Aspects: Healing, protection, mercy, generosity, peace.

Symbol: A bunch of healing herbs.

Priesthood: Caregiver (priests); Cleansers (paladins).

Herald: A dove-headed female of the summoner's species carrying a quarterstaff (use the stats for a herald of Eira from the *Hellfrost Bestiary*).

Holy Days: Yaus al-Nefar.

Duties: To help those in need (not including obviously evil creatures like undead or demons), find peaceful solutions to problems.

Sins: (Minor) inflicting a wound on a creature when other options were available, refusing to heal a good person in need, taking the life of an evil creature, promoting violence through word, deed, or inaction; (Major) taking the life of a good creature, causing sickness or disease; (Mortal) willfully taking the life of a defenseless creature (good or evil).

Signature Power: *Healing.*

Powers: *Arcane resistance, armor, beast friend, bladebreaker, bless/panic (bless only), bodyguard, boost/lower trait (Vigor, Healing, and Persuasion only), champion of the faith, confusion, deflection, dispel, energy immunity, environmental protection, feast, glyph, greater healing, knockdown, refuge, regenerate, sanctuary, slumber, stun, succor, summon herald, warding, weapon immunity.*

Trappings: Clergy must never use a trapping that inflicts harm on others, such as acid, electricity, fire, and such like. They cannot take necromantic trappings.

Marqod is the chief goddess of the pantheon, and is considered the voice of reason in the heavens. Whereas the other gods' fol-



lowers wage war to gain supremacy, Marqod's clerics are there to pick up the pieces, knowing in their hearts that so long as one soul suffers, their goddess will always exist—and suffering is part of being alive.

Marqod is depicted as a young maiden holding a bundle of herbs in her right hand. In most statues, her left hand is held palm forward as a warning to cease inappropriate action. More militant factions show her with a club in this hand.

Temples are sanctuaries of healing and meditation, and often used by arguing factions as neutral grounds when trying to solve their differences. They also serve as doss-houses for the homeless, though “guests” are expected to work for their room and board, often serving as cleaners, gardeners, or orderlies. Every temple maintains a small herb garden, where medicinal plants are grown.

Her priests tend to be the actual healers and herbalists, while the paladins protect the priests and temples, and act as battlefield medics during times of war. While many mock the presence of paladins, knowing full well they will resort to lethal violence only in the direst circumstances, they often forget that Marqod does not prevent her paladins from giving someone a nonlethal beating.

Within the ranks of the paladins is a small group who have fallen from grace, but deliberately so. These few souls understand that while a peaceful solution is to be favored, there are times when violence and death is the only solution. Plague demons, for instance, exist only to spread suffering. No court in the land would dare to bring one to justice, and so they must be eradicated. The paladins, known as the Violent Hand of Marqod, are actually revered by their comrades, and are always given preferential treatment.

Festivals involve burning medicinal herbs and singing songs of peace and harmony. Celebrants often enter a meditative trance during ceremonies, intoning the hymns and prayers by rote while their spirit seeks harmony with the world around.

Qedeshet

Titles: Scribe of the Gods, The Celestial Wizir, Divine Diplomat, The Inventor, Well of Knowledge, Wellspring of Ingenuity, The Divine Trader, Keeper of the Celestial Library, He Who Knows All, Keeper of Lore.

Aspects: Literacy, invention, knowledge, diplomacy, wisdom, trade, divination.

Symbol: A blank papyrus scroll.

Priesthood: Scribes (priests); Quills (paladins).

Herald: An ibis-headed human carrying a huge roll of papyrus and a quarterstaff (use the stats for a herald of Hoenir from the *Hellfrost Bestiary*).

Holy Days: Yaus al-Sesht.

Duties: Preserve knowledge, find lost knowledge, spread knowledge and learning.

Sins: (Minor) allowing knowledge to be destroyed or concealed, allowing knowledge to be twisted, refusing to teach someone, not correcting an inaccuracy of impor-

tance; (Major) willfully concealing important knowledge, refusing to teach an illiterate person to read and write; (Mortal) willfully destroying important knowledge.

Signature Power: *Speak language*.

Powers: *Altered senses, analyze foe, arcane resistance, beast friend, bless/panic (bless only), bolt, boost/lower trait* (Smarts and Smarts-linked skills only), *champion of the faith, confusion, corpse senses, detect/conceal, dispel, farsight, glyph, gravespeak, insight, light, lock/unlock, mimic, mind rider, precognition, sanctuary, silence, stun, summon demon* (librarian and revealer only), *summon herald, voice on the wind, wandering senses, warding*.

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping.

Other: Followers of Qedeshet cannot be Illiterate.

Qedeshet is the source of all knowledge, and is credited with giving the civilized races the skills they needed to build, maintain, and govern civilized societies. Scribes, nobles, wizirs, crafters, scholars, sages, explorers, and astrologers all pay some degree of homage to Qedeshet. The god is represented as a human with the head of an ibis. In his left hand is a quill and in his right an abacus.

Qedeshet has many temples in the cities of the Caliphate, where they serve as schools as well as libraries. Access is available to the public at no charge, but only during the hours of daylight. Scholars are allowed to copy from the books, but removing a book from a library is a serious offense. Given that many wizirs are followers of Qedeshet, and that these wizirs have the ears of the nobility, it isn't too hard for the clergy to get a “thief” punished in the most severe manner. Actual thieves, those who deliberately break in for the sole purpose of stealing knowledge, are dealt with in secret by the paladins.

Shrines tend to be erected by crafters, who place them in their shops, construction workers, who erect them to ensure the measurements are accurate and the walls they build are straight, and scribes, who see Qedeshet as their patron.

Qedeshet's paladins are more explorer than scholar. They scour the numerous ruins of the desert for lost knowledge, salvaging scrolls, copying engravings on the walls of tomb and temples, and talking to old nomads and recording their oral history. Priests are typically librarians, maintaining the temples, copying manuscripts or hastily drawn transcriptions brought back by paladins, and ensuring the wisdom of the ancients is available to future generations. Both types of clergy also serve as teachers, and the temple schools are renowned across the desert realms. Although Qedeshet is the god of trade, few of his clergy are full-time merchants.

The appearance of the Lorekeepers from Rassilon has opened up many new avenues of research for the clergy, who are now faced with recording the lore from another continent. Fortunately, the Lorekeepers have their own archives (though not very extensive compared to the libraries of Qedeshet), and the two factions are involved in a trade of material.

Ceremonies are always readings from the Book of Advancements, the collective teachings of Qedeshet. Hymns and prayers are commonplace. At many ceremo-

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

nies, clergy unveil new inventions to the congregation, asking Qedeshet to bless their work.

Shamash

Titles: The Celestial Sultan, He of Two Eyes, The All-Seeing One, Light of Heaven, Celestial Watchman, Defender of the Faithful, The Burning One, Flesh Scorcher, Thirstmaker.

Aspects: Sun, nobility, vigilance, order, moon.

Symbol: A golden sun disk, partially overlaid by a lunar disk.

Priesthood: Eyes of Shamash (priests); Rays of Shamash (paladins).

Herald: A hawk-headed human carrying a mace (use the stats for a herald of Sigel from the *Hellfrost Bestiary*).

Holy Days: Priests hold a small ceremony each dawn and dusk.

Duties: To destroy the forces of darkness, to promote law and order.

Sins: (Minor) not welcoming the sun each morning, remaining underground for more than a day, performing a minor evil or immoral act, talking with a demon (except to Intimidate or Taunt it); (Major) knowingly befriending a follower of Iblis, permanently blinding a foe, refusing to fight the forces of darkness, not standing up against immoral behavior, committing a major evil or immoral act; (Mortal) willfully aiding the forces of darkness.

Signature Power: *Light*.

Powers: *Altered senses, analyze foe, aura, banish, bless/panic (bless only), bolt, boost/lower trait (Notice and Tracking only), burst, champion of the faith, deflection, elemental manipulation (fire only), energy immunity (cold, coldfire, darkness, heat, fire, ice, or water only), environmental protection (fire/heat only), farsight, fatigue, heat mask, invisibility, precognition, prolonged blast, sanctuary, sentry, smite, speed, sphere of might, stun, summon elemental (fire only), summon herald, wandering senses, warding.*

Trappings: Followers must have a light, heat, or fire trapping whenever possible. They cannot take darkness or necromantic trappings.

Father of the gods, Shamash is referred to as the All-Seeing One and He of Two Eyes (referring to the sun and moon). During the day, he focuses his attentions on the world of mortals, keeping only a cursory eye over the underworld. At night, he travels to the underworld to keep order while the moon watches over men.

Although magic is known to emanate from the moon, magic is not one of Shamash's aspects. That honor falls to Ishkar, Shamash's daughter. (Worship of Ishkar fell out of favor after Suleiman's death. She should be treated as a lesser deity.)

Shamash seeks only one thing for the mortal realm—harmony and order. However, in order for this to be achieved, he must first destroy the minions of Iblis, which basically includes anything evil or supernaturally evil. With

such a wide number of foes, Shamash expects his priests to wage continual war against the forces of Iblis.

Shrines to Shamash are rare, though most citizens have a holy symbol over their front door to ward off evil. Temples are typically rectangular structures aligned east to west. Large doors in the east are opened just before dawn, allowing the first rays of the day to shine onto one half of the altar. At dusk, the western gates are opened, to catch the last rays of the setting sun, which illuminates the other half of the altar.

The inside of the temple is decorated in gold and silver, the colors of the sun and moon, and mirrors positioned with great care and adjustable according to seasonal changes in the orbit of the sun and moon, allow the occupants to see day or night without use of lanterns. Only during the nights of the new moon is the temple cast in twilight, as the light from the stars provides the only illumination. During this time, the temple clergy pray almost continually, trying to ward off any evil unseen by their god.

Both paladins and priests are expected to be capable of martial combat, though paladins do the bulk of actual combat. Priests are required to research evil cults, people, or places, allowing the paladins to come up with a suitable plan for cleansing the stain.

Festivals always occur at dawn, midday, or dusk. Typically these times refer to the sun, but ceremonies under the full moon are also common. Worshippers are generally naked, allowing the heavenly light to cleanse their bodies of sin. Despite being a good god, Shamash accepts evil creatures as sacrifices.

Tamarni

Titles: Lady of Fortune, Claws of Heaven, Lady of Insatiable Pleasure, She Who Hunts in Shadows, Finder of Lost Secrets, Vermin Killer.

Aspects: Cats, pleasure, the home, stealth, curiosity, luck, thieves.

Symbol: A cat's paw.

Priesthood: Eyes of Tamarni (priests); Claws of Tamarni (paladins).

Herald: A cat-headed woman (see page 171).

Holy Days: Yaus al-Niwt.

Duties: Protect cats, discover secrets, enjoy the many pleasures life has to offer.

Sins: (Minor) failure to stroke a cat in your path, making excessive noise, refusing to enjoy a pleasure offered you when you have other obligations; (Major) accidentally killing a cat (includes lions, and such like), refusing to enjoy a pleasure offered you when you have no other obligations; (Mortal) willfully killing a cat (includes lions, and such like), being chaste, poor, or anything else which could deny you pleasure.

Signature Power: *Silence*.

Powers: *Altered senses, analyze foe, beast friend (cats only), bolt, boost/lower trait (Agility, Climbing, Lockpicking, Notice, Stealth, and Tracking only), cham-*

pion of the faith, charismatic aura, deflection, detect/conceal, ethereal/corporeal, fatigue, fortune's favored, invisibility, leaping, lock/unlock, luck/jinx, obscure, quickness, sanctuary, shape change (cats only), slumber, smite, speed, steal, summon herald.

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except a necromantic one. Most revolve around cats in some way, however. For instance, *bolt* may be spectral claws, *fortune's favored* may cause a black cat to appear, *slumber* may lull foes to sleep with gentle purring.

Tamarni is a popular god. Citizens in general praise her for her aspects of home and luck, and farmers pay homage to her to keep down the number of rats and other vermin that gnaw on their crops. She is also popular among thieves, spies, gamblers, and hedonists, as well as cat-lovers. Her form is that of a cat-headed maiden with a beautiful body. Often she is shown in seductive poses.

Shrines to her can be found in many fields, around granaries, in brothels, gambling dens, and in most homes. Her temples exist in many cities, and are generally called Houses of Pleasure, and any physical pleasure (some may say vice) is available—all manner of drugs, drink, and sex can be found here, for a suitable donation, of course. They are also home to a large number of cats, all of which are considered sacred beasts.

Her priests and paladins are a varied bunch. Some devote themselves purely to pleasure, traveling the desert in search of new delights. Others are naturally curious and are drawn toward exploring old tombs, or breaking into places they aren't allowed, just to see what's in there. One faction devotes itself to protecting homes (a sort of security service) and exterminating vermin. A growing number are actually thieves, using their talents to fatten their purses (and buy more pleasure).

Many festivals involve pleasurable activities, be this drinking, inhaling narcotic smoke, or sex. Although often referred to as orgies by outsiders, the general mood is actually very restrained. Acts involving pain to generate pleasure are forbidden. The sacrifice of rats is common among her cat-loving aspect, for this keeps her fed in her heavenly palace.

TAMMUZ

Titles: Lord of the Dead, Guardian of the Dead, Lord of the House, Weigher of Souls, The Final Judge, The Balance.

Aspects: Death, mummification, tombs, justice, balance.

Symbol: A set of balanced scales, one side light, the other dark.

Priesthood: Judges (priests); Executioners (paladins).

Herald: A vulture-headed human armed with a scimitar in one hand and a set of scales in the other (see page 171).

Holy Days: Yaus al-Maat.

Duties: Protect the dead, destroy undead, to maintain the cosmic balance, to ensure the dead receive proper burial rites.

Sins: (Minor) refusing to destroy an Extra undead, engaging in conversation with an undead (except to Intimidate or Taunt it), acting in a biased manner, not blessing a corpse, falsifying evidence; (Major) breaking the law, refusing to destroy a Wild Card undead; (Mortal) knowingly aiding an undead, convicted of a crime (innocent or otherwise).

Signature Power: *Weaken undead.*

Powers: *Arcane resistance, armor, banish, bladebreaker, bless/panic (bless only), bodyguard, bolt, boost/lower trait, champion of the faith, deflection, dispel, energy immunity (necromantic only), ethereal/corporeal (no ethereal), glyph, gravespeak, heat mask, immunity (necromantic only), invisibility, light, prolonged blast, quickness, sanctuary, smite, sphere of might, summon herald, warding (undead only), warrior's gift, weapon immunity.*

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except necromantic ones.

Tammuz is the god of death. The ancient Hekatics once worshipped him as their chief god. However, the Hekatics fell from his grace when their leaders sought to prolong their lives beyond their allotted span. Once the mages began creating undead, stealing souls from the Bottomless Pit, the withered survivors of the empire became Tammuz's sworn foes.

The god's three main focuses on the mortal realm are justice, which maintains the cosmic balance between right and wrong, ensuring the ancient funerary customs are properly maintained, and slaying undead, who are an anathema to Tammuz (and a source of celestial embarrassment). As such, his worshippers include judges and advocates, mortuary attendants, and holy warriors. Even headsmen follow this god, often finding employment as both executioners and slayers of undead.

Tammuz is shown as a mummy. In his left hand he carries a set of scales. In his right hand, he holds a key. The latter represents the key to the heavenly doors of the afterlife.

His temples are common in towns and cities, where they serve two functions. The upper levels, those above ground, are the courts of law, where criminals are brought for judgment by earthly authorities. Below ground are the city mortuaries, where the dead are brought to be prepared for their final journey. Shrines are found only in graveyards and tombs, where they allow the god to watch over the earthly remains of the dead.

Priests are expected to be judges as well as slayers, and should be well-versed in the law of the land. In order to maintain the cosmic balance, they are expected to show true neutrality in any matter. Paladins serve as executioners when called upon, but most serve their god by warring against the abominations which lurch out of Hekata.

Ceremonies are solemn affairs and usually only held at funerals. Mournful prayers and wails accompany the litany of the dead, ancient rites which ensure a soul can reach the afterlife unhindered. In some cases, the execution of legally condemned prisoners constitutes a sacrifice to Tammuz.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Upuaut

Titles: Opener of the Ways, Lord of Winds, Voice of the Gods, The Celestial Wanderer, He Who Cannot be Shackled, He Who Looks into Dark Places, The Unchainer.

Aspects: Travel, wind, birds, secret places, freedom, messengers, personal choice, ships, chariots.

Symbol: A swirl of blue lines.

Priesthood: Journeymen (priests); Pathfinders (paladins).

Herald: A tall, muscular cakali with swirling green eyes and feathered wings (see page 171).

Holy Days: None. Priests make prayers whenever they must undertake a journey lasting two days or more.

Duties: To explore the world, oppose slavery and stagnation, ensure freedom, to bring new ideas to the masses, to ensure routes of communication remain open, to uncover secrets.

Sins: (Minor) owning a slave, sheltering from a storm or any sort of wind, staying in one place for more than a month, unwillingly delaying a messenger, misdirecting

a traveler; (Major) destroying maps or erasing signposts, willfully delaying a messenger, living in the same place for more than a season; (Mortal) supporting rigid and oppressive governments, living in the same place for more than a year.

Signature Power: *Wilderness step.*

Powers: *Beast friend, becalm, bolt, boost/lower trait* (Agility, Vigor, Boating, Climbing, Riding, Survival, and Swimming only), *bridge, champion of the faith, deflection, environmental protection, etherealness/corporeality, farsight, feast, fly, hamper movement, knockdown, leaping, mend, quickness, sanctuary, sentry, silence, speak language, speed, storm, summon elemental* (air only), *succor, summon demon* (steed only), *summon elemental* (air only), *summon herald, teleport, voice on the wind, wall walker, wandering senses, whirlwind, zephyr.*

Trappings: Clergy must use air trappings whenever applicable.

Upuaut is the burning wind from the Heart of Fire, the cooling north wind, the motion of the sea, the wheel of a chariot, the shoes of a horse, the sandals on your feet. He is all this, and much more beside. Any form of transportation falls under the watchful gaze of Upuaut, as does freedom, something not everyone in the desert enjoys. Originally a cakali deity, humans adopted Upuaut into their pantheon after the War of Copper Jars, when both races found themselves lost in the wastes. Today he is worshipped by anyone undertaking a journey, for the desert is a harsh environment and folk welcome any advantage they can get. He is also frequently mentioned in funeral rites, where he is asked to guide the soul on its final journey.

He is always shown as a cakali, with wind-swept robes. In his left hand he clutches a scroll, a symbol of communication. In his right he holds a key, the key to the mysterious routes across space.

Shrines are extremely common, and can be found just inside the gates of every settlement, close to harbors and wharves, next to marker posts along the trade routes, in caravanserais, in nomad camps, at oases, and so on. No temples exist, Upuaut having no wish to be tied to any single locale for long and rebuking his clergy who settle down.

Priests and paladins often serve as guides and messengers, his paladins taking on the more dangerous routes. They are also explorers, for Upuaut is a curious god, and wishes, through his followers' eyes, to see every location on or under the earth.

The god is also opposed to slavery, since this goes against his aspects of freedom and the right to choose. While many clergy are merely outspoken critics of slavery, others take a more militant stance, attacking slaves and conducting raids to free slaves. That some slaves do not wish to be freed is irrelevant to these fanatics.

Festivals are virtually unknown in this faith. Some worshippers dedicate one journey to their god. For every step they take, they kneel and pray. Such journeys are, naturally, very long but very spiritually cleansing. The destroying of manacles, a sign of slavery, is a common sacrifice to the god of freedom.



DESERT LIFE

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

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

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

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

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

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

land, land which the races can ill-afford to lose, will vanish. The desert is changing, and it may be a change the civilized races cannot survive.

◎ Passage of Time ◎

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

Calendar

The cakali, whose astrologers mapped the stars countless centuries ago, laid down the first accurate calendar. Hekata adopted the calendar, their warriors and merchants spreading it across Al-Shirkuh. Despite religious and cultural differences, the civilized races have kept the same calendar, with only minor adjustments.

SEASONS & MONTHS

The year is broken down into three major seasons (see below), and a short “holy” season. The major seasons consist of four months of 32 days each. Within each season, the months are called Amt (First), Baot (Second), Anshi (Third), and Tamith (Fourth).

Holy season is a single 32 day month at the end of the calendar, and is called Alak Neteru (Season of the Gods) by the Faithful and Alak Suha (Season of Contemplation) by the Devoted.

Alak Arkhet (Flood): The year of the desert races begins in what northlanders would call late fall. Early fall storms in the mountains, caused by warm, moist air from the south, swell the rivers and a surge of water flows toward the lowlands. When it eventually reaches the low areas, the rivers often burst their banks, spilling the precious water over the fields. Once the waters die down,

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

LUNAR PHASES BY DAY

Day	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Al-Maat	Teasing	Half Open	Unveiled	Half Veiled
Al-Kemi	Teasing	Flirting	Unveiled	Half Veiled
Al-Hamala	Teasing	Flirting	Passing	Half Veiled
Al-Sesht	Teasing	Flirting	Passing	Glimpsed
Al-Niwt	Half Open	Flirting	Passing	Glimpsed
Al-Ittrou	Half Open	Unveiled	Passing	Glimpsed
Al-Nefar	Half Open	Unveiled	Half Veiled	Glimpsed

The Veiled moon always falls on the four unnamed days at the start of a month.

farmers are quick to rush to the sodden fields, preparing the soil and planting as many crops as sunlight allows.

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

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

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

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

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

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

DAYS & WEEKS

Each month is broken down into four weeks of seven days, plus four extra days at the beginning. The weeks are numbered using the same notation as the four months of the each season.

The seven days of the week are called Yaus al-Maat (Day of Balance), Yaus al-Kemi (Day of Flour), Yaus al-Hamala (Day of Lambs), Yaus al-Sesht (Days of Scribes), Yaus al-Niwt (Days of Houses), Yaus al-Ittrou (Day of the River), and Yaus al-Nefar (Day of Freedom).

The first four days of each month, which always fall during the new moon, are sacred holidays, being considered very unfortunate times to do anything except pray

to the gods (Faithful) or contemplate the *Hamad* in order to ensure one is living in accordance with Asha’s way (Devoted). It is especially unlucky to conduct business deals, weddings, funerals, battles, or anything else of significance during this time. As a result, the four religious holidays have no name, and when citizens must refer to one of the four days, they do in general terms such as, “tomorrow” or “in two days.”

In game terms, the unfortunate nature of these days means characters receive one less benny than normal during the four days of the new moon.

CALENDRIAL NOTATION

In order to give a specific date, a desert dweller lists the week number, the day, the month number, and the season. For instance, Anshi Yaus al-Sesht Baot Alak Paret translates literally as, “The third Day of Scribes in the second month of Harvest Season.”

A year in the Great Desert is 416 days long, the same as in Rassilon. Years are numbered since the end of the War of Copper Jars, as set down by Suleiman, and carry the suffix “CJ” (short for for “After the War of Copper Jars”). The current year is 549 CJ.

TIMEKEEPING

Knowing when the inundation will come is vital to the survival of both the Sultanate and the Caliphate. As such, astrologers, astronomers, and scribes are employed by both nations to keep a careful eye on the heavens and to record the passing of days.

Sundials and moondials are both employed to record the hours of the day, and function remarkably well due to the general lack of clouds. Hourglasses are also utilized, and it is said the Sultan has a magical timepiece which instantly turns itself when the sands run out and chimes to record the passing of an hour. Truly rich citizens might possess a water clock, an immobile timepiece that relies on a supply of running water (a rarity in itself) to track the passage of time.

Astrologers have long known that the day can be divided into 24 hours, each consisting of 60 minutes. Ex-

actly why these numbers were chosen is lost in antiquity. While most citizens have little need for hours of minutes, typically going to work when the sun rises and coming home when it sets, astrologers need such information to track celestial events and to calculate horoscopes.

The Heavens

SUN & MOON

The sun and moon are known to the Faithful as the Eyes of Shamash (the god of the heavens). Devoted refer to them as the Lanterns of Asha. In Sandspeech, both creeds know them as Al-Yamun (The Bright One) and Al-Hemenat (The Cold One).

According to the religious belief of the Faithful, there were once two suns, and light filled the universe. Iblis (god of evil) partially blinded Shamash in one eye, accounting for why the moon is dimmer than the sun and why the night is darker than the day.

The Faithful also believe that Shamash watches over the mortal realm and the underworld, dividing his time, and his eyes, as best he can. He is also said to watch over the entire cosmos, though he uses his weak eye for this.

When the sun and moon are in the sky at the same time, it is considered a bad omen, for it means Shamash is not watching over the underworld, allowing demons to plot in secret. When neither is in the sky at the same time, it is another bad omen, for this means the darker forces of the world can act in secret. The new moon is yet another inauspicious time, for Shamash has turned his attention away from both the underworld and the mortal realm, gazing deep into the heavens. As one can tell, unfortunate days are fairly common in the desert.

Devoted hold that the daily rising and setting of the twin orbs is merely part of the celestial order set in place by Asha. The cold light of the moon exists because were it as hot as the sun, the world would ignite. Thus, the sun warms the world, while the moon cools it down. However, the phases of the moon are a warning that Druj is not yet defeated, and still wields tremendous power.

The months of the year are lunar, following the regular changes of the moon. The eight phases are named in relation to a celestial veil, through which the moon passes each month. To the Faithful, the veil is that of Iblis' servants, who seek to blind Shamash's weak eye altogether. In the Devoted belief system, the veil that falls across the celestial orb is a dark cloud of magical energy created by Druj, which traverses the heavens and through

which the moon passes during its monthly travels. The new moon is an ill time, for Druj's power is said to be at its highest.

The eight phases are known as Veiled (the new moon), Teasing (waxing quarter moon), Half Open (waxing half moon), Flirting (waxing gibbous moon), Unveiled (full moon), Passing (waning gibbous moon), Half Veiled (waning half moon), and Sliver (waning quarter moon).

CONSTELLATIONS

The ancient cakali mapped the heavens before the rise of the first human empires (despite objections by the ever-arrogant sphinxes), their knowledge filtering down through the ages. The patterns formed in the stars, and there are many hundreds in all, have individual names, and many have myths associated with them. Unfortunately, the passage of time and the misery wrought by the jinn has erased the true meaning of these myths, and today they are just stories, often altered to suit the storyteller's beliefs.

Of the many constellations, some of the most well known ones are the Scorpion (the tip of whose tail marks north), the Pharaoh's Daughter, the Chariot (which chases the Pharaoh's Daughter), the Crook, the Flail, the Celestial Pyramid (the rising of which marks the start of Alak Arkhet), and the Jackal (which ancient cultures believed ate and then regurgitate the moon).

The eternal movement of the constellations, combined with the motion of "moving stars" (another name



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

for planets), the sun, moon, and random evens, such as shooting stars, are used by mages and priests to calculate horoscopes, detailing fortunate and unfortunate days.

☉ Daily Life ☉

The desert societies are broken down into social classes. Movement between a social class is relatively fluid, and as fortunes wax and wane so one can climb and fall between strata.

At the bottom are the *mushaf* ("tainted"), considered unclean either by dint of their profession, their finances, or their physical health. People who handle human and animal waste, the homeless, beggars, the lame, and those struck with diseases like leprosy fill this class.

Above them are the *harajam* ("ones who work without skill"), the farmers, laborers, and common soldiery. A vital part of the economy (and defense of the realms), they are nonetheless easily replaced. Next are the *jaleepa* ("talented"), a class dominated by crafters, scribes, and bureaucrats. These two strata form the lower classes.

Above them are the senior bureaucrats, wizirs, merchants, high-ranking military officers, and other folk who are well regarded because of their wealth, power, skills, social position, and such like. Collectively they are the *shabrum* ("favored"). Master craftsmen are often elevated to this level as a sign of their skill. The *shabrum* are the middle class. Among the Faithful, all priests are considered to be members of this caste, while mages fall under the *mushaf* stratum. Among Devoted, mages are *shabrum* and clerics treated as *jaleepa*.

Next are the *mak-shabrum* ("highly favored"), who form the upper class. Typically members are simply more influential members of the *shabrum*, who have powerful friends, vast fortunes, land, or a large business, but no blood ties to any noble house. Most are well connected, however.

Then there are the *battim* ("blooded"), the nobility. This is a fairly wide stratum, covering everything from the equivalents of knights up to counts. Beyond these are the higher nobles, the dukes, princes, and kings, known as the *muk-battim* ("high blooded").

Language

Regardless of race, the civilized beings of Al-Shirkuh are masters of flattery and self-depreciation in equal measure. When addressing someone of undeniably higher social status, greater wealth, or superior intellect or skill, it is expected that the lower personage use lofty phrases and titles toward his superior. One needn't know a luminary's official titles—it is quite acceptable to invent flattering terms. When talking about oneself to such luminaries, it is normal to play down one's importance. For instance, a merchant addressing a noble might start, "Oh majestic one, puissant master of men, hear the plea of this wretched worm!"

Humbleness and understatement is a prized trait and the mark of an enlightened being. A man who speaks of his "humble abode" might be speaking of anything from a simple hut to a lofty palace. Similarly, being invited to a "simple meal" might actually involve a 12 course banquet of exotic and expensive foodstuffs. Of course, the understatement should never be accepted at its depreciated value by the guest, who is expected to praise his host. In return, the host replies with phrases such as, "I do not grumble," or "It is adequate for my needs."

Similarly, people are expected to be humble when their deeds are recounted, thanking gods for their success, or claiming the deed was more trivial than made out by the storyteller. Boasting is seen as the mark of a wicked soul. This has no effect on Glory awards, for it is the telling, not the boasting, that earns recognition.

Diet

In the settled lands, the primary sources of meat are lamb, goat, mutton, duck, goose, and fish. Pigs are avoided because it is believed that pigs carry leprosy and other diseases, and cows are rare because of the resources it requires to raise them. Nomads keep herds of goats for their meat and milk, but also consume desert hare, antelope, mice, snakes, scorpions, and anything else they can kill. Meat is typically eaten only once or twice a week, protein being made up by various cheeses, beans, and eggs.

Cheese and yogurt are both important parts of the diet, being high in fat and protein. Goats' milk is the most popular, but sheep and camel milk works just as well. The staple carbohydrates are rice and unleavened bread. Both can be served plain, or mixed with nuts, dates, or chopped vegetables.

Fruit and vegetable crops are common in the cities and towns. Cucumbers, eggplants, lettuces, melons, oranges, garlic, onions, melons, cabbages, radishes, apples, pomegranates—and many more beside are served daily. Olives are primarily used to make olive oil, though they are eaten as well. Various crops are grown through the year, though naturally not every foodstuff is available during every season.

Dates and figs are part of every meal, especially for the nomads. They are cooked with meat to form a sweet stew, eaten as a dessert, dried for desert travel, and added to drinks as a sweetener. Wild varieties of onion and garlic are also part of the diet, as are a variety of nuts and berries. Most vegetables, however, must be grown at an oasis or bought from the settled cultures.

The major grain crops comprise wheat and barley. Wheat is ground to make bread and pastry, whereas barley is used to make porridge or mixed with hops to brew beer. Beer in Al-Shirkuh is rather lumpy, and more like a soup than a drink.

The Laws of Suleiman forbid Devoted from drinking alcohol, though only the most devote consider this a firm rule. Coffee (served very strong) and tea are the staple

VEGETABLES BY SEASON

Alak Arkhet	Alak Paret	Alak Shemu
Cucumber	Celery	Chickpeas
Dates	Chickpeas	Cucumber
Grapes	Garlic	Figs
Melon	Lettuce	Lettuce
Pomegranates	Lentils	Melons
	Onions	Nuts
	Peas	Onions
	Radishes	Peas
		Plums

drinks. Milk, typically from goats or camels, is popular with adults as well as children, and it can be used to make butter, yogurt, and cheese.

The Faithful have no restrictions about drinking alcohol. Grapes grow well in the warm, dry conditions, and wine is a common drink. Even the masses drink wine, though it is heavily watered down. No spirits are brewed. Mead, an alcoholic fermentation of honey, is also known, but not all that common among common folk.

Education

Education is compulsory in the Caliphate, Free Emirates, and Sultanate for all children between the ages of five and 12, but not exactly all-encompassing. Much of a youth's schooling is religious and cultural. The Devoted learn the writings of the *Hamad*, while the Faithful receiving a basic grounding in all the gods. History is commonly taught, as are the ways to behave in polite society. Children typically study for between two and four hours a day. For most children, when they reach the age of 12 they are sent out to work. Whatever else they need to learn, they learn on the job. Typically, children follow in their father's footsteps.

Only the rich can afford to have their children stay on in education. In advanced education, the child learns how to read and write, as well as the basics of mathematics, science, geography, politics, and such like. Typically a noble youth leaves school at around 17, well rounded in many subjects, but a master of none.

Among the Faithful, schooling is conducted by the priests of Qedeshet, god of knowledge, and usually within the nearest temple precinct. Most Faithful nomadic clans have a cleric of Qedeshet, who acts not only as teacher but as a historian, recalling and recording notable events, and a wizar to the noble.

Those who display a close connection to a deity are singled out and further educated, free of charge, in the hopes they have the faith to become a cleric. Those who pass the grade leave behind their old family and are welcomed into their new family—their respective sect.

Devoted are schooled at a maktab ("school") during their infancy, with advanced students going to one of the many universities which have cropped up throughout the Sultanate. Nomadic children are usually taught by the clan's wizar, if there is one, or some other type of mage, these being considered learned men, wise in the writings of the *Hamad*.

Devoted children who display a talent for magic, regardless of their social class, may be adopted by a mage. The child remains part of his birth family, but is taken away for advanced schooling and magical study. For many parents this is a multiple blessing. First, it is one less mouth to feed, second, it means the child has a strong spirit, and third, the child will hopefully grow powerful and rich, thus being able to provide for his parents as old age creeps upon them.

Marriage

Once a youth reaches 16 years old, the law considers him an adult, allowing him to marry. As with most matters, marriages are different for the Devoted and Faithful.

The Devoted believe that a marriage is a sacred bond that strengthens Asha. Individually, a mortal is chaotic in nature, prone to do as he wishes without thought for others. Bound together, the pair becomes more ordered. In many ways, marriage is akin to magic, for it joins separate strands together to make a more powerful whole, and brings the couple a step closer to Oneness. Marriage is considered a permanent union, and divorce is heavily frowned upon. By law, if a couple divorces, neither can remarry for a period of 10 years. Marriage ceremonies, however, are civil affairs, and can be performed by any imam, noble, or official appointed by a noble to conduct marriages.

Adultery is a serious crime, for it taints the bonding of strands. The typical punishment for adultery is loss of a certain limb for the male involved and banishment for the woman.

Among the Faithful, only priests of Ashtart can perform

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

marriage ceremonies. As with the Devoted, marriages are for life, though for different reasons. To divorce means the union was somehow flawed, and since gods are by their nature infallible, this would mean Ashtart somehow made a mistake in blessing the union. Adulterers suffer similar punishments as for the Devoted.

In all cases, the type of ceremony varies by social class. Commoners may simply exchange vows and small gifts, and then partake of a simple meal together. Nobles, on the other hand, may hold sumptuous feasts for hundreds or thousands of guests, even declaring a public holiday so the masses can join in the festivities.

HAREMS

Citizens of the Caliphate, Sultanate, and Free Emirates and most nomads believe in monogamy, as did many of the cultures which came before them and on whose wisdom the ancient laws are based. However, a noble (and only a noble), may maintain a harem. It is worth noting that while the majority of harems are filled with woman,

no law prevents a female noble having an all-male harem. Since the majority is comprised of females, we refer to male nobles and harem girls for brevity.

Contrary to popular beliefs, harem girls are not usually sex slaves (that practice is more common among the uncivilized races). While it is true most are bought as slaves, as soon as they enter a harem they become “bed wives.”

A bed wife enters into a legal contract with the noble, providing him with physical favors in return for limited freedom. Bed wives have some legal rights (the right to food, shelter, protection, and such like), are accorded great respect among the citizenry and nobility, and must be given gifts worth a minimum of 100 dinars per year of service on the anniversary of their joining the harem. A noble with a large harem needs large coffers.

However, they are never entitled to inherit property or possessions of the noble, nor are any children they sire considered legitimate heirs until the noble names them as such. Likewise, they may place no demands on the noble, nor conspire against him. Despite the latter restriction, harems are notorious hotbeds of scheming, especially when it comes to ensuring a child is named as rightful heir.

A noble may discharge a bed wife from his service at any time simply by declaring this to a judge (or similar legal figure). A bed wife may only leave a noble's service with his express permission. Kidnapping a bed wife or helping one to escape is tantamount to kidnapping a member of the noble's family.

Among the poor it is a huge honor to have a daughter chosen to join a harem. However, society is slowly changing and women are becoming more independently-minded. Although harems are not likely to be consigned to history any time soon, fewer women are keen to accept the position of bed wife. Those who actively seek such a position are usually the ones best avoided, for they are likely to be scheming, greedy, and manipulative souls.

Festivals

The Devoted hold few festivals, though they do celebrate special days. Suleiman's birthday, the day he defeated the jinn, the day he ascended to Oneness, and such like are public holidays for all Devoted. In addition to these, every ruler has the right to instigate his own holidays throughout his domain. Typically these celebrate important matters in his life, or the life of his ancestors. The birth of a child may warrant a celebration, as may a marriage or funeral.

The Faithful have religious holidays. The high holy days of the gods are typically holidays, allowing the masses time to worship. Individual gods also have holy days, though festivals celebrating them are normally held in the evening, to prevent disruption to the working day. The Caliph also adds holidays to the calendar when important matters arise in his household. Typically, marriages, births, and funerals are public holidays, giving



the masses the opportunity to celebrate or mourn, as applicable.

Different races also have their own special days. The cakali, for instance, hold a festival of remembrance on the anniversary of the destruction of their former empire. Sphinxes celebrate Ascension Day, the day an individual noble became head of his house. The hyaenidae hold festivals on the first day of each season, allowing the various clans chance to meet in peace, trade goods, and arrange marriages.

Justice

For the Devoted, justice means following the laws laid down by Suleiman. These laws are harsh, but one must remember that when they were written, Suleiman aimed to shape a nation of repressed slaves into a civilization before they fell to barbarity. This required a hard hand, which Suleiman provided in his writings.

Judges are civil servants, appointed by the local ruling noble because of their in depth knowledge of the Laws of Suleiman. Among the nomads, the ruler of the clan or chief acts as judge, though wizirs advise him. In most criminal proceedings, the judge hears testimony from the accused, the defendant, and any witnesses, and then passes judgment in accordance with the ancient law. He has little leeway to bend the rules or to impose harsher or lighter sentences.

Criminals are allowed one appeal, which is heard by the highest ranking noble in the land. Such appeals are not rushed through the system, however, and until a hearing is convened the criminal languishes in jail. Many a criminal has died of old age waiting for the noble, his son, and even his son's son to hear his appeal.

Of course, money talks in the Sultanate, as does having influential friends. The rich and powerful are often able to escape justice, for the rot of corruption has spread throughout the land, and Suleiman's law applies more now to the poor than the rich.

Jail sentences as punishments are extremely rare. Some crimes, like murder and rape carry death penalties (beheading), whereas others, like theft, are punished by the loss of a limb. Many other crimes carry sentences of slavery, usually working for a state-sponsored project, such as building a new road or working in the mines. Occasionally, a criminal is enslaved for life, and the unfortunate soul can either become the property of the ruling noble or, more commonly, sold off to the highest bidder and the proceeds added to the state treasury (less a little bonus for the judge).

The nomads rarely impose slavery on their own, and instead outlaw the criminal, cutting him off from his support network. Some do find a new life elsewhere, either legitimately or as a bandit, but most wander off into the desert, never to return.

Judges in the Caliphate and among the Faithful tribes are usually priests of Tammuz (also the god of justice), though nomadic mirs and sheikhs can fulfill the role if

they have a good understanding of the law, as can clerics of Shamash at a push. The judges hear statements before retreating into the temple (or equivalent) to consult with the god. Sentence is then passed, and is deemed final—infalible gods do not make miscarriages of justice.

As in the Sultanate, jail time is unusual. It is believed that hard work cleanses the soul of the taint introduced by criminal activities, so slavery is preferred. The two systems of punishment are very similar, of course, as Suleiman drew on the ancient texts when forming his new codes of law.

SLAVERY

Slavery still exists with Al-Shirkuh, though not to the extent it once did. It is true that a few Bedu and hyaenidae tribes kidnap travelers and sell them into slavery, but most slaves within the Caliphate, Sultanate, and Free Emirates are legally enslaved.

Debtors become slaves to their creditors, but only until the debt is worked off. Unscrupulous creditors are careful to charge the debtor for everything—every mouthful of food, sip of water, item of clothing, wear and tear to tools, and so on—ensuring the unfortunate soul remains shackled for as long as possible. Other criminals can, as noted above, also be enslaved as punishment.

Soldiers captured in battle may also be enslaved. Many are actually conscripted into the armies of their captors, where they are treated little differently to native soldiers. In some cases, enslaved soldiers even rise through the ranks to become senior officers.

Slavery is much more common in the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes. Here armies of slaves labor in the fields and construct vast monuments in honor of their sphinx overlords. Although the sphinxes use the methods above to acquire slaves, they are not beyond kidnapping visitors to swell the population.

Slaves have no legal rights, but only a fool abuses them too severely. Hungry and tired slaves make for poor workers and excessive use of the lash encourages rebellion. While a slave has no rights, this does not mean anyone can kill one outright without facing justice. A slave belongs to somebody, and if the slave is killed his master is entitled to compensation. This typically amounts to the slave's initial cost, plus an extra 10% (cumulative) per year of service.

FUNERARY CUSTOMS

As noted elsewhere, the Faithful and Devoted have their own funerary beliefs as well.

The Faithful believe that while the soul joins with the gods, it remains safe from harm only so long as the body is intact. Thus, it must be preserved. The standard practice for nobles is to remove the internal organs, desiccate the corpse using natron (a form of salt), and then wrap it in specially prepared bandages. The body is then placed either in a grave or tomb, depending on the

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

wealth of the individual. For most peasants, their corpse is just washed, wrapped in cloth, and buried in the sand to desiccate naturally.

Suleiman's laws dictate that it takes three days for the soul to unwind itself from the body it once inhabited and rejoin with everything in the universe. Only after this time can the body be wrapped and buried—any earlier, and the layers of bandages hinder progress of the soul. On the fourth day, the day the soul departs the flesh, a celebration is held, as the soul has now achieved its seat among the gods. During this time, prayers are said to Tammuz, god of death, and to the deceased's patron deity. These prayers ensure the soul reaches the Afterlife safely.

The Devoted hold that the body is just a shell, and that only the soul is important. However, they share the belief that it takes three days for the soul to leave the corpse. During this time, family and friends weep for the loss of the individual they knew.

Once the soul has departed, marked at sunrise on the fourth day, the corpse is just a lump of meat. It is cremated on a funeral pyre, and its ashes left to blow away in the wind. According to tradition, if the ashes are caught on the wind, it means the soul has entered a state of Oneness, and the family holds a feast to honor the deceased. If the ashes still remain in place after 24 hours, it is considered a bad omen, and a time of mourning.

Travel & Trade

Paved roads are common in the heavily settled, agricultural regions of the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes, Sultanate, and Caliphate, forming a link between neighboring cities and allowing for steady trade, but are nonexistent in the desert, where the sand quickly covers them.

Around the towns and cities the land is relatively free of bandits, but the guards can only patrol so far. The Pegasus Guard performs routine patrols along the roads, from a great height, but their numbers are too few to guarantee no bandits or desert beasts will threaten travelers. Outside of this area there is only the law of might, and caravans frequently gather at major cities, waiting for other groups to travel with, thus providing security in numbers.

OASES AND WELLS

Every oasis and well in the desert belongs to someone or something. Some belong to Bedu, cakali, or hyaenidae tribes, others to sand giants, some are even "owned" by monsters. Many oases have permanent encampments set up around them, primarily to protect the resource, but others, like wells, may have no signs of life for miles. They may not even be marked to show who owns them, but owned they are.

Most nomads allow strangers to take their water, but under strict conditions. Strangers may not take more than their fill (the water is for everyone), they may not pollute

the water in any way (which includes bathing in it), they must leave the water source and its surroundings as they found it, and they must leave proper tribute. While the exact nature of proper tribute varies from tribe to tribe, in game terms a gift of 1 dinar per quart of water used is considered acceptable. The nomads have a remarkable contact network, and any transgressors of their generosity is quickly found out and harshly dealt with.

Of course, there are some circumstances where taking water without expression permission constitutes an act of theft. Most monsters, and this includes "barbarian" races, may not freely take a tribes' water, nor may members of a rival tribe (and sometimes not even their allies).

TRADE ROUTES

In general, trade follows the roads and trails between cities, caravanserais, or oases. Long lines of camels, heavily-laden with their precious cargoes, make the long and perilous trips across the sands from distant areas, bringing goods such as salt, incense, and glass to the consumers of the cities. Where coastal cities exist, most trade is borne by ships. That said, the Caliphate, Free Emirates, Kingdoms and Sultanate each have their own coastal roads, linking the cities together.

There are several well-traveled trails through the desert, remnants of ancient travel networks. These are no longer true roads in any sense of the word, the sand having buried any paving, but the routes of these concealed roads are known to the nomads. Tall stone pillars, some standing proud, other poking through the top of a mighty dune, are all that is left of these roads. Many of the cities they point toward no longer exist. Although the trade routes are shown on the map, they do not exist on the ground.

The nomads, it is said, never get lost in the desert. It is true that a nomad may suddenly turn slightly east for no apparent reason, march ten miles, then turn slightly north and march another five miles across featureless terrain, arriving at a small oasis which by any other route would be invisible, hidden behind dunes. In truth, they are just more aware of their natural surroundings—what appears to be just another patch of grass or dune to a city-dweller is a major landmark to a nomad.

Several sea routes also exist. The Free Emirates trade with the Magocracy and, to a lesser extent, Drakeport. The sphinxes trade with Ostmark and the distant Jade Empire. Jadid, City of Trade, also has routes to the Jade Empire, much to the sphinxes' annoyance. The Caliphate and Sultanate trade with each other via sea lanes, as well as lands lying further south and east.

CARAVANSERAI

A caravanserai is the equivalent of a roadside inn, somewhere travelers can rest in relative comfort and safety. Within the borders of any of the four main realms, a caravanserai stands every 20 miles along the trade

roads (an average day's march for a camel train). They serve to provide security and act as marketplaces where nomads gather to trade with their city dwelling cousins. Once beyond the borders of the major domains, there are no caravanserais.

A typical caravanserai is a square structure with an open courtyard. Aligned along the trade road, which passes through the structure, the gatehouses are wide enough to accommodate heavily-laden camels or, more rarely, wagons. At night, during sandstorms, or when under threat of attack, the heavy gates are closed and barred.

Surrounding the courtyard are dozens of chambers, all open to the central courtyard. Some are stables for mounts, others sleeping chambers, meeting rooms in which traders can conduct business, warehouses for cargoes, and such like. Guests must provide their own food, but water is plentiful, as all caravanserais are built around a well. Most have both a kada and a temple, for the owners of the caravanserais do not discriminate when money is involved.

One set of rooms, usually those on the north wall, are reserved for the owner of the caravanserai, his family and servants, and the guards who protect the building. As well as sleeping areas, there are kitchens, dining halls, and maybe even baths. Honored guests are invited to dine with the owner.

Trade transactions conducted within a caravanserai typically levy a 3% tax, which is used to maintain the structure, pay the guards, and so forth. Given the risks of travel, even in a civilized domain, it is a tax few merchants complain about.

SOUKS & BAZAARS

Shops are typically located in a souk, a covered marketplace of narrow streets. Individual districts within a city each have small souks, typically selling food, pottery, and other household goods. The main souk is an important building, often located near the city center.

A souk is a square building, divided internally into zones by a network of straight streets. All traders of the same goods are located within the same zone, thus making it easier for shoppers to find what they want and ensuring healthy competition among the traders.

Souks sell a variety of goods, from raw materials (like bundles of cloth, plates of glass, or hides of leather) to food and drink to finished items (clothes, lanterns, tools, weapons, jewelry). Shops dealing with small goods, such as cobblers or jewelers, may have a small workshop attached. This is mainly so they can make repairs or slight alterations. The main workshops are located outside the souk, usually in a specialized manufacturing district.

Most shops open at dawn and close at dusk, though they are closed for two to three hours during the hottest part of the day. During Yaus al-Nefar shops open from dawn until midday only. Some shops are open for a few hours on festivals, but the vast majority are closed.

Weekly markets, or bazaars, are held both outdoors

in most settlements, usually on Yaus al-Kemi. Many local crafters have stalls in the market rather than owning a shop, but most are run by visiting traders, who bring with them a variety of goods. Hawkers walk the streets selling meat snacks (often of questionable origin), cups of water, small items, such as jewelry or daggers (often stolen), and so on. The streets are packed during market days, and pickpockets, beggars, and prostitutes are a common nuisance. Though the city guards patrol in force, they cannot be everywhere.

Bazaars are held daily at oases, even when there is little to sell. Under ancient Bedu law, any place of trade is neutral territory, and bloodshed is not permitted. Thus, having a bazaar always open means rival tribes can meet to swap goods without fear of attack.

MAGIC SHOPS

True relics are as rare in Al-Shirkuh as in Rassilon, and the chances of finding one for sale are extremely remote. Jinn relics are usually reserved for jinn mages (who make them) and nobles (who can afford to buy them). There is no law against owning a jinn relic, but anyone who uses one for criminal purposes faces a death penalty. Within the Caliphate, jinn relics are seen as tools of Iblis, and anyone caught using one in public faces summary execution after a brief trial (assuming a mob of outraged citizens don't tear him apart first). Of course, sometimes such objects may turn up on a trader's stall, but usually when the GM wants to lead the heroes into an epic adventure. Although khem-hekau and jinn relics use the same basic mechanics, those built using khem-hekau are tainted with necromancy. All of the civilized races consider the use of such relics abhorrent.

Potions, scrolls, talismans, and other alchemical devices, however, are relatively common. Throughout recorded history, mages and priests have always had the power to imbue objects with temporary power, and the trade continues to this day. Alchemists are most often found in the major cities, though a town may boast a single alchemist. Among the nomads, an alchemist is a valued member of the tribe (few tribes boast more than one).

COINAGE & BARTERING

The standard coin of the settled lands is the dinar, typically minted in gold. In the Sultanate, they are stamped with their value and the image of the current Sultan. In the Caliphate, the image of the Caliph is carried. Among the sphinxes, coins are minted bearing the image of the local pharaoh.

Coins are actually valued not on the numerical value stamped on them, but by weight. Coins wear down over the years as they pass from hand to hand, unscrupulous folk shave off slivers of metal, devaluing the coin, and inflation in one locale may mean that the face value of a coin is lower elsewhere. Merchants always carry a set of scales with them to weigh coins.

In game terms, however, if a hero has 200 dinars listed on his character sheet, then his coinage is worth 200 dinars, even if the face value of every coin adds up to 300 dinars. Characters are never shortchanged because of the difference in weight and face value, nor do they ever “gain” money.

Coins have little use among the nomads—what good is money a hundred miles from the nearest souk? Instead, they prefer to barter, swapping goods, or, more rarely services, of equal value. Nomads consider haggling a noble art, and refusing to participate offends the nomads’ honor.

Organizations

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

Assassins

The history of the Assassins stretches back to the days when the scorpionmen ruled a large swathe of the desert. Human subjects were dominated through powerful versions of *puppet*, trained as assassins, and sent out to kill the rulers of neighboring tribes, thus allowing the scorpionmen to conquer them with relative ease. When the Scorpionman Empire collapsed, the Assassins vanished from history, though fragmentary texts from the days of the Hekatic Empire mention, “men who could appear as scorpions and who struck terror at night.”

They reemerged during the Anari conquest of the western desert and subsequent subjugation of the native tribes, striking against Anari generals and nobles with impunity. Although the murders were not the sole reason for the eventual Anari abandonment of the coastal cities, they were a key factor.

Since those times, the Assassins have spread across Al-Shirkuh and are now a part of every society, albeit an unwelcome one. Ruled from a secret fortress deep in the desert, the Scorpion’s Nest, by a shadowy figure referred to only as the Black Scorpion, most members live a normal life within regular society. One never knows if the local baker, the friendly merchant, or the shy serving girl who smiles sweetly at you is actually an Assassin. Fear and paranoia are powerful weapons in those who know how to wield them. When their services are needed, Assassins are contacted by magic.

Despite accusations against them, the Assassins are not a truly evil organization. They are in many ways the epitome of strict neutrality, striking down both good and evil figures without thought of morality. If the forces of evil have more money to spend on assassinations, then more good people die, but eventually the balance will be restored, for that is the way of things in the universe.

Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls

The poorest members of society are usually the ones with the fewest rights. Corrupt city guards harass them, thieves target them because they cannot afford protection or security, nobles tax them to excess, and the guards never investigate too hard when one is killed. Even in the most enlightened cities, the poor are downtrodden souls.

The Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls is a secret vigilante network comprised of kindly folk who wish justice and equal rights for all. Beggars are a common sight in the many cities of Al-Shirkuh. Citizens may throw them a few dirhams out of pity, but in general they are ignored by the masses, and the Brotherhood uses this to its advantage.

Disguised as beggars (some are actually insane, diseased, or lame), they shuffle through the crowded streets, their senses alert to any lower class citizens in need of assistance. They fight muggers, thwart thieves, beat up corrupt city guards, rob from the rich to give to the poor, and such like, and just as quickly as they strike they disappear back into the crowd. The Brotherhood rarely helps those above *barajam* status.

No official organization exists, though Brothers do look after each other. Identifying themselves through hand signals and code words, a Brother in a strange city can quickly find a comrade by heading to the poorest sectors of town. Most common citizens know of the Brothers, even if they have no idea how to locate them. Brothers within their home city have a small network of safe houses and contacts among the poor, from where they can acquire food, shelter, and information.

As is often the case, one man’s hero is another man’s villain. Nobles across the desert consider the Brotherhood a threat to their rule. A few nobles, those of good heart, actually support the Brothers (in secret), but the vast majority consider them no better than common thieves and brigands. Unfortunately, the city guards cannot devote the time or manpower to arresting every beggar and questioning them—even if they didn’t mind touching a leper or dragging the scum-covered madman off to jail.

A few nobles have tried sending their own men undercover to root out the Brothers, but with no knowledge of the secret code and little understanding of how the Brothers operate, they stand out like sphinxes at a cakali social function.

Guild of Headsmen

Despite their name, the Guild doesn’t just decapitate criminals—it undertakes all forms of limb removal ordered by the courts or nobility with equal precision and pride. Although beheading is the most extreme form of physical punishment, certain crimes require the loss of

other limbs. Thieves, for instance, have a hand removed, male adulterers become eunuchs, escaped slaves lose an ear, and deserters lose a foot.

The Guild is a leftover from the Days of Many Gods, when they served as paladins for Tammuz in his role as the god of justice. After the Sultanate swept aside the gods, some paladins switched to the new creed and adapted, dumping their religious status and offering their services to the nobles as an independent body. Given their long service to justice, the nobles were quick to take the guild up on its offer. Within the Caliphate, the Guild does not exist as a separate entity, and executioners are a branch of the clergy of Tammuz. Despite their religious differences, the two factions maintain cordial ties.

Some nobles, usually the more despotic ones, keep a headsman on permanent retainer for performing quick executions. Most hire them as required. Many headsman simply wander the desert, offering their services as itinerant workers.

Guild members are required to wear a mask when performing their duties. Some criminals have powerful friends and allies, and the mask protects the executioner from recognition and retribution. The job, while necessary, is also an unclean profession, and the mask also conceals the headsman from family and friends who may otherwise shun him socially.

The Guild maintains a network of safe houses throughout the Sultanate, where visiting guild members in good stead can stay free of charge. They can be located by visiting the local courts and speaking to the Clerk of Executions.

Mameluk

Proud and arrogant, the jinn who once ruled the central desert waged many wars, both against their neighbors and each other. Rather than allow jinn to be slaughtered on the field of battle, they formed great armies from their slaves, armies indoctrinated into total loyalty to their unearthly masters. These obedient puppet soldiers were known as mameluks.

During the War of Copper Jars, most mameluks sided with the jinn. Knowing that they could never be rehabilitated, Suleiman ordered his armies to show the mameluks no mercy. Tens of thousands were butchered. Those who switched sides were generally newer recruits, still being indoctrinated into jinn servitude. They fought along the slaves, forming the core of Suleiman's army.

Although many mameluks later swore fealty to the nobility, a few chose to remain independent and formed mercenary companies based around the concept of total loyalty to one's brothers in arms. Where once they swore loyalty to the jinn, they now took oaths of obedience to their commander. Where once slaves were conscripted, the mameluks now adopted orphans, training them in the ways of battle. Mameluk companies do accept unwanted children (typically from poor families who cannot afford to keep their children), and a few even resort

to kidnapping. Mameluks never accept recruits older than 10 years of age.

Recruits first learn the concepts of obedience and faithfulness. Only when they are willing to die to protect one of their brothers are they taught how to use weapons. Although it is possible for a mameluk to retire, most find it hard to leave the only family they have ever known. Those made lame in battle find employment as strategists, recruiters, trainers, and logistical experts.

There are around two dozen mameluk companies in Al-Shirkuh. Of these, roughly half are in permanent employment. The remainder form independent companies, who hire their services to nobles and merchants as and when required.

Pegasus Guard

The Sultan maintains a large private army to protect the Sultanate from outside aggression, and himself from the ambitions of his emirs. Rated as his elite troops are the Pegasus Guard, highly trained cavalymen famed for



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

their unusual mounts and willingness to engage foes other troops flee from in terror.

Sultan Faisal ibn Ahmed formed the guard in 217 CJ in response to orc raids occurring along the Jinn Wall Mountains. Traditional troops were unable to react to attacks in time to be of any use, and the cost of building, maintaining, and garrisoning a network of forts was prohibitive. Their aerial status allowed them to survey a wide area far quicker than a ground patrol, and terrain was no obstacle when mustering for an attack. After the orcs were driven back, the Guards were quickly elevated to higher status, becoming part of the Sultan's private army (and thus outside any control of the emirs).

A contingent of 500 Guards is permanently stationed in Al-Wazir, City of Spires, where they constantly patrol over the city and its surrounds on their winged mounts. They also act as the Sultan's bodyguards when he appears in public. Smaller forces, ranging from 10 to 100 men, are stationed in the other cities of the Sultanate to remind distant nobles that the Sultan's reach is long. Others are assigned to guard special caravans, escort dignitaries visiting other realms, or protect strategic caravanserai. The most renowned Guards are those tasked with hunting down threats to the Sultanate both within and without its borders. (The latter is the role in which player characters should typically serve.)

Serving Pegasus Guards are forbidden from marrying or siring children—their sole loyalty lies with the Sultan. While in the City of Spires, they can find free room and

board in the Guards' barracks. Elsewhere in the Sultanate, they must rely on their status and the generosity of the local nobility. Most often they are housed for free with the local soldiery, who are quick to gather round and hear the Guard's tales of heroism.

RANKS

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

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

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

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

The highest rank within the Guards is Commander of the Pegasus Guard. Personally appointed by the Sultan, the Commander runs the unit on his behalf. As a sign of his status not only in the military but also in the court, the commander is awarded the noble title of sirdar. His position usually means he is in court far more than he is in the field with his men, and military operations are left to his captains.

The current Commander of the Pegasus Guard is Sirdar Yusef ibn Sallah, a crotchety old warrior who is tiring of court intrigue and political games. He has served the Sultan faithfully for over 40 years, but now wishes to retire gracefully. The Sultan, however, has no wish to lose a close friend unafraid to speak his mind, and has constantly stymied his attempts to resign.



SETTING RULES

This section covers special rules for adventuring in the baking sands. GMs are free to use the rules as often as they wish, though none of them should get in the way of a good story if the heroes are taking sensible precautions.

Temperature & Water Consumption

The key to surviving the scorching heat of the desert is to drink plenty of water, carry a light load, and limit one's exertions to a bare minimum during the hottest part of the day. For convenience, we list temperature as a level defined by a keyword, rather than in exact degrees (though we give you a numerical equivalent in Fahrenheit and Centigrade so you can see what we're talking about). Rather than messing around with raising or lowering temperatures by X degrees, we refer to level changes. We likewise refer to temperatures in areas of

the desert in terms of these levels. The Water column lists the daily amount of water character must drink to resist the effects of Heat. The last column is the penalty to Vigor rolls should this quantity not be available (see *Savage Worlds*). If the entry says "Cold," refer to the *Savage Worlds* rules.

NIGHTTIME

At night, the temperature in the desert drops rapidly. Reduce it by 1d2+3 levels (min. Frigid). Even in high summer, the temperature in some areas regularly drops below freezing, allowing frost to form. In towns and cities and along rivers and coasts it drops just 1d2 levels.

SEASONAL CHANGES

Unless otherwise stated, temperatures are averages for Alak Paret, the time when most folk travel—even the farmers can do little while the crops are growing. During Alak Arkhet, the temperature is one category lower, while in Alak Shemu and Alak Neteru it is one level higher (to a maximum of Infernal).

Level	Temp (F)	Temp (C)	Water (quarts)	Vigor
Frigid	12 to -7	-11 to -21	2	Cold
Freezing	32 to 13	0 to -10	2	Cold
Temperate	33 to 68	1 to 20	2	0
Warm	69 to 89	21 to 32	2	0
Hot	90 to 94	33 to 34	4	0
Sweltering	95 to 99	35 to 37	4	-1
Stifling	100 to 104	38 to 40	4	-2
Very Hot	105 to 109	41 to 43	6	-3
Baking	110 to 114	44 to 45	6	-4
Scorching	115 to 119	46 to 48	6	-5
Infernal	120+	49+	8	-6

Hellfrost: Land of Fire



SHELTER

Whether it is a cave, a house, a tent, or a *refuge* spell, shelter provides protection from the sun and desiccating winds. Shelter lowers the temperature by one to four levels, depending on how windproof and covered it is (min. Temperate). With a suitable fire, the temperature inside a sealed shelter at night rises to a comfortable level.

Water Consumption

Water is essential to life, and in the desert it is a precious commodity. At high temperatures, characters require more water to resist the effects of heat. As stated in the main *Savage Worlds* rules, characters have to make Vigor rolls for Heat only if they don't meet their daily water requirements.

Characters who travel at night and rest all day base their water consumption on the nighttime temperature. This reduces the likelihood of heat stroke, but may cause other problems, such as freezing temperatures and nocturnal foes.

REGION

Travel through certain areas, such as the arid Salt Basin or the windswept Desert of Ash, and jinn-blighted Plain of Ash, requires additional water due to the hot winds, bone-dry air, or choking ash particles.

Not every extra drop is required to be drunk—in the Mirrorsands, for instance, it may be used to wet the skin to encourage cooling, while in regions of ash it is used to wash away grime from one's face—but it still counts toward the daily amount required.

Region	Extra Water (quarts)
Desert of Ash or Plain of Ash	+2
Mirrorsands or Salt Basin	+4

SIZE

When it comes to water consumption, size matters. In most cases, animals and monsters get water from devouring their prey, rather than lapping it out of oases. Ignore them for the sake of fast play. Only horses and camels are important because of their use as mounts.

A Small character (such as a sand goblin) requires half the listed water per day. An Obese character increases the amount of daily water he must consume by +1 quart. This modifiers are applied before the benefits of any Edges (racial or otherwise).

Riding horses require +4 quarts a day, and war horses require +6 quarts. Camels typically require the same quantity of water as a Size 0 creature, but can go for long periods without water, consuming vast quantities when water becomes available.

FINDING FOOD & WATER

In order to survive the harsh wastes, one needs regular quantities of food and water. A hungry man quickly lacks the energy to search for water and a thirsty man has a life expectancy measured in hours.

Finding edible food and potable water in the desert uses the standard rules for Survival (see *Savage Worlds*), but with modifiers—neither food nor water is plentiful in the burning sands. Obviously, if one is at an oasis, well, or along a riverbank, finding water and some sort of food is automatic, and usually in plentiful quantities (though the resource may be owned by someone).

Mod	Region
+2	Fertile region
–2	Open desert (sandy or rocky)
–4	Dunes, Realm of the Medusae
–4	Mirrorsands (only when using a water trap; otherwise treat as N/A)
–6	Hekata
–8	Desert of Ash, Great Dune Sea, Plain of Ash, Salt Basin
N/A	Heart of Fire

MOVEMENT

These rules are used when playing out movement on the tabletop during combats. For tactical combat, all areas of ash, rock, or soft sand count as difficult terrain.

DESERT, MIRRORSANDS, & SALT BASIN

Flat, featureless terrain can easily fool a traveler into misjudging distances. With no landmarks to use as reference and constant heat shimmer, distances can seem much longer or shorter than they really are. In such locales Notice and Shooting rolls beyond 12" suffer a –2 penalty.

Other Rules

These rules cover other situations encountered in the desert wastes. Hazards, such as mirages and some types of deadly wind, are covered in the **Bestiary** chapter.

BASIC HELLFROST RULES

The Divine Aid rules from the *Hellfrost Players' Guide* apply in Al-Shirkuh. The Weregild rules are not used.

Glory works as normal save for one change. Charac-

ters from Rassilon who boast of their deeds, the standard practice of their cultures, suffer a –2 penalty to Persuasion rolls to earn Glory—boasting is seen as shameful, a way of playing up a lesser role. Desert-dwellers who go north and speak of their heroic deeds with humility receive a similar penalty.

Only after earning 20 XPs in the appropriate land is the penalty negated, the character being assumed to have adopted local customs, no matter how disdainful he finds them.

GLARE

The glare from the sun reflecting off the endless sand can blind travelers who do not take precautions. Note that Blind characters do not suffer from glare.

Every four hours of daylight spent in the open desert, two hours in the Salt Basin, or one hour in the Mirrorsands, the hero must make a Vigor roll. There is a cumulative –1 penalty for each additional period of similar length. On a failure, the victim suffers a –6 penalty to all trait rolls involving sight (including combat). His Parry drops to 2.

A hero who rests his eyes for one hour out of every four in the open desert and one hour out of every two in the Salt Basin can avoid this penalty, though it does slow down his progress. Resting one's eyes cannot be done in the Mirrorsands—the glare is too intense.

Recovery: Requires a successful Healing roll, and the hero must rest his eyes in total darkness for 24 hours. This roll may be attempted only once every 24 hours.

HEALING

The doctors and surgeons of Al-Shirkuh are well-versed in anatomy. Natural Healing rolls have a +1 bonus within any major city, so long as the heroes consult a qualified doctor (any healer with Healing d6+).

HERBALISM

The Herbalism rules require a slight change to account for Al-Shirkuh's climate.

Rarity: No plants grow in the Desert of Ash, Heart of Fire, Mirrorsands, or Plain of Ash. Plants in Hekata are toxic and contain no beneficial medicinal qualities. As such, rolls to locate medicinal plants cannot be made in these regions under any circumstances.

Season: In Alak Neteru/Suha and Alak Arkhet, there is a –1 penalty. There is no modifier in Alak Paret, and there is a –2 penalty in Alak Shemu.

Nomad Hospitality

The nomads' rules of hospitality are extremely complex, and few outsiders ever learn every unspoken rule. The situation is made more complex by the fact that every tribe has its own particular rules. One common rule

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

is that of how to treat guests. The nomads have several grades of guest, and honor them accordingly.

How visiting heroes are treated depends largely on whether there are any nomads in the party (see Nomadic Tribal Alliances below). If there aren't any nomads, use the Reaction Table as normal but with a -2 penalty—nomads are wary of “soft” city folk who choose to travel the perilous desert wastes. The entries in parentheses indicate the Reaction Table result required to receive a certain level of hospitality. Note that in all cases, costs for food and drink are after three days of receiving free hospitality.

Honored Guests (Helpful) are typically those from other tribes or peoples currently allied to the local tribe and held in high favor with the sheikh. They are offered room among the tribe's tents (for protection) and welcomed as close friends. They may carry weapons openly, even in the presence of the sheikh. Food and water consumed at the oasis are free.

Welcomed Guests (Friendly) are usually those from other tribes or peoples currently allied to the local tribe. They are welcomed as friends. They may carry weapons openly, but never in front of the sheikh or his family. Space is set aside close to the tribe's tents. Food and water consumed at the oasis is charged at half price.

Accepted Guests (Neutral) are those neutral to the local tribe. They are allowed space within a short distance of the water source but not near the tribe's tents. They may carry daggers for personal protection, but

never in front of the sheikh or his family. Food and water consumed at the oasis is charged at the normal rate.

Tolerated Guests (Uncooperative) are those tribes or peoples hostile to the controlling tribe. These guests are given an area a long walk from the water, often without much shade. They are forbidden from carrying weapons other than a dagger (they must leave other weapons in their tents). Food and water consumed at the oasis is charged at the 150% of the normal rate.

Scorpion Guests (Hostile) are those tribes or peoples extremely hostile to the controlling tribe. As the old adage goes, “The scorpion may be an unwelcome guest, but it is still a guest.” Such guests are given an area of land far from the water, usually next to an anthill or scorpions' nest, and where there is no shade. They are forbidden from carrying weapons (they must leave them in their tents), and cannot go anywhere without an armed escort. Food and water consumed at the oasis is charged at double the normal rate.

NOMADIC TRIBAL ALLIANCES

There are many Bedu, cakali, hyaenidae, sand goblin, and sand giant (p. 163) tribes in the desert. Most are entwined in a complex pattern of alliances, neutrality, and hostility. Attitudes change as rapidly as the wind, and keeping track of them all is certainly no fun for the GM.

Any time a nomadic character interacts with a different tribe (regardless of race), draw a card from the action deck. (Don't bother rolling on the Reaction Table—tribal alliances and feuds go far beyond the individual.) Naturally, the GM can ignore this and simply pick a result—if he needs the tribe to be friendly, then they are friendly.

A red royal card (Jack through Ace) means the tribe is friendly to the hero's. They have a reaction of Friendly on the Reaction Table. A black royal card means the tribe is less welcoming, and has a reaction of Uncooperative. A numbered card of any color indicates neutrality—whether the tribe aids or hinders the hero depends on his actions and words. If a Joker is drawn, draw again. If the next card (redraw again if you get a second Joker) is a numbered card, the tribe remains neutral. A red royal card now indicates Helpful, and a black royal card the tribe is Hostile.

If you have multiple nomadic heroes in the part, you should draw one card for each player. A tribe may be friendly to one hero's tribe, yet hostile to another. Remember that the Hated Tribe Hindrance and Respected Tribe Edge modify these rules.



Read NO further, oh foolish mortal!

**The secrets held within the pages that
follow are reserved for the wise and
Noble Gamemaster.**

**Those who fail to heed this warning
shall be fed to a thousand angry jinn
for their trespass!**

THE LANDS

This chapter details the major political states within Al-Shirkuh, and a number of important locales, such as cities, oases, and ruins. Numerous other ruins, from old caravanserais to temples through to entire cities can be found half buried beneath the sands. Some are desolate, long robbed by tomb raiders or nomads. Others are full of treasures, traps, and monsters, and lie waiting to be discovered.

Those detailed below are the most important or well-known sites and are presented in enough detail to give the GM the basic flavor he needs for his own adventures. They are not detailed locale guides. Neither should they be considered the only places of interest. The desert covers a vast region and few have explored their depths. Who knows what perils and rewards, what remnants of ancient civilizations, lay waiting to be explored by those with the courage, and water, necessary to survive the wastes?

THE TWO LANDS

Al-Shirkuh is often referred to as a land of two halves. The boundary between these areas is usually defined on maps as being the central trade road between Qurqas and the City of Iron. Of course, there is no marked division on the ground, and one can never tell whether one is in the Great North Desert or Great South Desert until one spots a recognized landmark.

THE WEATHER

For the most part, the effects of the weather are something the GM can control to suit his adventure. If the characters are looking to mount their camels to catch a foe you don't want caught just yet, have a sandstorm delay their departure. By the time it clears, the villain is long gone and his tracks are covered.

Sometimes though, it's just fun to let the dice play God. Here's a simple chart which applies to all climates and regions within the desert.

The rules for blizzards, cold snaps, and warm spells can be found in the *Hellfrost Bestiary*.

WEATHER TABLE

d20	Weather
1-3	5% chance of rain* (10% in spring/fall and 20% in winter), otherwise clear skies
4-13	Clear skies
14-16	Overcast (reduce temperature one level during the day, increase one level at night)
17	Desert wind (pick one from the Hazards section)
18	Warm spell
19	Cold snap
20	Sandstorm (use blizzard rules)

* Rain never falls in the Desert of Ash, Heart of Fire, Hekata, Mirrorsands, Plain of Ash, or Salt Basin.

Types of Settlement

As in Rassilon, there is plenty of blank territory on the map to add new oases, villages, and towns. Again, all of the cities are already on the map.

SINGLE STRUCTURE

Temperature: Same as the region in which it stands.

Population: This can vary from as low as a single person to as many as 100 people. Any higher and the single structure becomes a small village. The population is all involved in the structure's purpose in some manner.

Ruler: This depends on the nature of the structure. A

mine may have a supervisor in charge, whereas a temple is governed by a priest of some sort. A noble's summer residence or hunting lodge may be run by a chamberlain when the owner isn't in residence. The most common single structure is the caravanserai, which is operated by the owner.

Religion: A single structure within the Sultanate is usually Devoted, while those of the Caliphate or Sphinx kingdoms typically Faithful. The deity worshipped varies with the purpose of the structure. Unless the building is a temple, it likely contains only a small shrine to one or two gods. Mines may have a shrine to Geb-Agni, hunting lodges one to Duamutef, a toll house next to a bridge one to Qedeshet, and so on.

Imports: Single structures are rarely self-sufficient for all their needs. Most have a source of food and water, but goods like clothing, tools, and weapons must be imported, as must most raw materials.

Exports: Whether or not there are exports depends on the structure's purpose. A mage school or temple might sell alchemical devices or books, for instance, whereas a timber yard usually has timber for sale.

A single structure may be a hunter's cabin high in the mountains, a lighthouse, a mine or other industrial site, an isolated kada or temple, a mage's school, a toll house on a busy road, a small fort, a caravanserai, or even a noble's summer residence or hunting lodge.

The structure may have more than one building, such as a temple having separate buildings for prayers, a library, or stables, but all serve to make the structure a single, focused entity.

OASES

The major oases are marked on the map and detailed in the text below. While there is plenty of space left to add more, the GM should avoid turning the desert into a mass of oases. The lack of water in the desert is one of the major obstacles heroes must overcome, and allowing them to find an oasis every few days removes that obstacle too easily. The GM should also note that oases cannot be found in the Desert of Plain of Ash, the Heart of Fire, Hekata, the Mirrorsands, or the Salt Basin.

Temperature: Same as the region in which it stands.

Population: Permanent population of 30-70 per oasis. Roll a d100 to see which nomadic people control the oasis. Bedu (1-50%), cakali (51-69%), hyaenidae (70-79%), unclaimed (80-100%). The latter may be a seasonal oasis, poisoned, salty, cursed, or home to a ferocious beast. Either way, it is avoided by the local nomads.

Ruler: Oases are the permanent camps of a nomadic tribe, and are thus ruled by a sheikh.

Religion: Roll a d100. A 1-70% means the nomads are Devoted, and 71-100% means they are Faithful. Faithful nomads typically worship Apsu and Duamutef as their major gods. Ashtart may be honored if there are palms or crops at the oases.

Imports: Oases are usually self-sufficient in food and water, but require raw materials and manufactured goods. Most oases do not require vast quantities, though.

A DRYING LAND

Al-Shirkuh is drying and cooling.

Rainfall has steadily declined over the last 500 years. The once-mighty rivers now carry roughly between three-quarters and half the water they did in the days of Suleiman. In particularly dry summers, the rivers become too shallow to carry all but the lowest draft barges.

The annual inundation covers less area, resulting in a shrinking of the fertile plains and thus a reduction in the amount of crops harvested. Oases and wells which have supplied water for millennia are slowly drying up.

Although the temperature is steadily dropping (every region was two temperature levels hotter in the age of Suleiman), the desert is expanding. Inch by inch, the sands move relentlessly onward, burying villages, wells, and small oases in their path. Even the great rivers are in danger of silting up.

The massive walls of the numerous cities keep the sand at bay for now, but huge banks are forming higher and higher against the walls, and no amount of physical labor or magic can stem the tide.

Exports: An oasis rarely has much to export, except for water. A few oases may have spare crops of dates or other fruit, but few have sufficient quantities to sell to merchants.

Oases are the centers of nomadic life. The sheikh of the tribe which has claimed the oases makes it his permanent camp, a focal point for nomads to return to after their long treks across the desert, and somewhere friendly to refill waterskins.

Clans belonging to the tribe are always welcome at the oases, but ancient tradition prohibits individual clans from owning an oasis—one tribe, one oasis is the unwritten rule of the sands. As the old saying goes, "To have some water is to have safety. To have too much water is an invite to war."

Oases may be a standing pool of water, a small lake, or a spring. This is the focal point of the community. Brightly colored tents surround the water, the sheikh's being the largest and closest to the water. If the nomads are Faithful, the local shrine stands beside the water. Next are the tents of the tribesmen and their families, and finally those of the warriors of the tribe.

It is common for the sheikh's encampment to claim about a quarter of the room around the oases, spreading outward in a cone. Nomads leave space for allied clans and honored visitors and for honored visitors (those the nomads allow to share their water in peace) to set up camp when they stop over.

Many oases have date or fig palms, their fruit a staple of the nomadic diet and a valuable source of sugar. Some nomads also cultivate small quantities of vegetables and grains, though only enough for basic subsistence. An irrigation network, usually a series of wood or leather

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

channels raised off the ground on wooden legs supply water to the outlying crops.

WELLS

Whereas oases have access to surface water, wells reach deep beneath the sand and rock to underground aquifers. Wells are circular, and have a stone wall standing around three feet high. Atop this is placed a heavy leather canvas or planks of wood, to keep sand from entering the well.

Wells are most often found without any surrounding settlement (unless nomads are present, of course), and appear unguarded. However, there is always at least one nomad (and often many more) within sight of the well, a guardian who watches to ensure the water is not stolen by enemies or poisoned.

It is common practice to announce oneself loudly when one locates a well, giving one's name and tribal affiliation, if any. One then sits and waits patiently. If four hours pass with no reply, it is safe to help yourself to the water. Sometimes a watcher may approach those wishing to use the water to learn more about them, but mostly they remain hidden.

Visitors are free to fill their skins and water their beasts without restriction, so long as they leave a small gift as way of thanks and recover the well. Word spreads quickly through the sands, even among enemies, and those who fail to follow the correct procedures may find access to wells denied for many hundreds of miles.

VILLAGES AND TOWNS

Temperature: Same as the region in which it stands.

Population: 100-5,000. Typically at least 75% are from the indigenous population, the rest being other cultures and races.

Ruler: Within the Free Emirates, Caliphate or Sultanate, a village is always governed by a headman, an elder loyal to the local lord, or an official representative of the local noble. For a town, the ruler is an effendi (1-40%), pasha, (41-65%), sirdar (66-100%).

Within the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes, the governor is a sphinx hakar (1-60%), imy-er (61-95%), or sar-nesu (96-100%). Villages are typically governed by a hakar.

Religion: Settlements within the Sultanate are always Devoted (though shrines to the gods may be permitted), and those of the Caliphate or Sphinx kingdoms always Faithful (although they may have a kada). Farming villages typically favor Ashtart, fishing ports worship Upuaut, and wilderness villages honor Duamutef.

Imports: Varies. Most villages are self-sufficient in basic foods, but many lack luxury goods, raw materials, and so on. Towns may import basic foods, as well as raw materials.

Exports: Few villages can afford to export much beyond grain and vegetable crops. Some do trade manufactured goods, but only in small quantities. Towns, however, often have at least one export.

Although the major cities and towns are marked on the maps, the GM has plenty of leeway in placing villages or small towns. These are found only along the banks of the rivers or the coast, where there are enough resources to support a permanent settlement of any size.

A typical settlement is open to the surrounding landscape—only wealthy rulers can afford to build and maintain stone or brick walls, and wooden walls present a fire hazard. The roads into town are patrolled by the local watch or militia, who question strangers to their business.

The desert folk rarely build their settlements to any order, and it is easy to become lost in the winding, narrow streets and alleys. Local youths are always quick to approach strangers with offers of being guides.

Houses are built close together, even in villages. A standard house has an open courtyard, where the family spends much of its time, a few proper rooms (somewhere to store food or valuables), and a flat roof, which is used as the kitchen, laundry room, and also for sleeping during the oppressive summers.

A typical village has a blacksmith, a



potter, and a weaver (the three basic crafts of the settled races), though other crafters can be found there as well. There are usually several communal barns and livestock pens, as well as a market square.

Temples to a single deity are rare in villages. In most cases a temple is shared by multiple faiths. Individual shrines are more common, being placed where they serve the village best (so a shrine to Ashtart might be in the fields, while one to Shamash may be next to the ruler's house, for instance). Kadas are typically a room in a house.

In a town, there are more variations in the number and types of crafter, temples, shrines, and other buildings. Larger towns may have public baths, schools, libraries, and such like. Towns typically have a bureaucracy as well, and getting to see the ruler can be a difficult process, especially for those without noble blood or important allies. Kadas are common in towns. Every town has one and larger towns may have as many as ten.

Reading the Stat Block

Every realm and major independent settlement uses a stat block to define its basic traits.

Temperature: This entry details the average spring and fall temperature level of the region. As noted elsewhere, temperatures increase one band from the average in summer, and fall one in winter.

Population: A rough approximation of the permanent population and its racial breakdown. Most cities survive only because of the farming settlements along the fertile river banks on which the cities stand. The population includes both the city and outlying settlements (those within 30-50 miles). Typically, only around 50-65% of the listed population dwells in the city proper.

Ruler: The title and name of the person or organization controlling the domain.

Religion: Lists the major gods, in order of favor, among the locals. Most other deities receive some worship, but are considered of lesser importance. Very few locals worship every deity. An entry of "Mixed" indicates both Devoted and Faithful exist in roughly equal numbers.

Imports: Goods the populace actively seeks out in quantity from merchants or foreign realms. An entry of "Trade" indicates the city buys and sells a variety of goods, or acts as a vast marketplace for traders.

Exports: The goods the region produces in sufficient quantities it can afford to trade them. An entry of "Trade" indicates the city buys and sells a variety of goods, or acts as a vast marketplace for traders.

Geography: A look at the basic geography of the land.

Major Locales: Details major settlements and other areas of interest.

The Al-Wazir Sultanate

Temperature: Hot

Population: 3,500,000 (87% Hadaree, 6% sand goblins, 4% jinn blooded, 3% Bedu, <1% hyaenidae, <1% cakali)

Ruler: Sultan Abdul-Muta'al ibn Fudail, Strength of the People, Scion of Suleiman

Religion: Devoted

After reaching the land beyond the mountains, the slaves quickly began building new cities under the tutelage of Suleiman. The first city leaders were elected by their peers and bestowed with noble titles, though they answered to Suleiman in matters of law and faith.

The Sultanate officially came into being in 23 CJ. When the great mage died, the nobles gathered in conclave to decide how best to continue his legacy. Some argued that mages should govern the land in the form of a council. Others rebuked this, insisting that Suleiman's cousin, Lahab al-Wazir, being of Suleiman's bloodline, should rule. A few even suggested the cities become independent entities linked only by trade agreements, though this idea was quickly quashed.

A slim majority was enough to see Lahab elected as the first Sultan of the Al-Wazir Sultanate. (Within a century, Sultan Saqr ibn Tariq nominated his wife's cousin as heir, and thus the direct bloodline to Suleiman ended. Sultans and Sultanas still carry the title Scion of Suleiman, however.) History records Lahab as both a visionary and a tyrant, the view depending on whether one is Devoted or Faithful. While Suleiman saw followers of the old gods as misguided, he proposed enlightening them through his teachings, not through the sword. Lahab had other ideas, and immediately turned on those who still followed the old gods.

All worship of the old gods was forbidden, temples were ransacked and torn down, and priests who continued to preach were arrested and executed. Witch hunts for "pantheists" affected all strata of society. In 29 CJ, those who still secretly practiced the old faith fled westward to found the Caliphate.

The original Sultanate comprised just four cities—Al-Wazir, Akhmim, Medinat al-Jinn, and Qarah. Eager to expand their power base, the armies of the Sultanate ground slowly northeast, driving out the Bedu and hyaenidae tribes, as well as many terrible beasts. Behind them flowed waves of colonists, each looking for a chance to start again in a new life. By 106 CJ, the power of the Sultan stretched to the new city of Musayid and across the sea to Jirja.

With the majority of the cities lying on the coast, trade goods are carried between the cities by ship. Along the rivers, villages and towns ferry goods to the city on barges or hire passing nomads to transport cargo. Nomadic tribes congregate around Qarah, which lies at the end of Suleiman's Road, the only overland trade route into the Sultanate.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

DIPLOMACY

With the exception of the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes, who refuse to deal with the “lesser races” (and usually other sphinxes), the nations currently maintain good diplomatic relations with each other.

The capital cities of the Caliphate (Hajjad) and Sultanate (Al-Wazir) each have two large embassies, one for the Free Emirate States and the other for their neighbor. Maqneh, City of Peace, is the diplomatic capital of the Emirates and boasts embassies for the Caliphate and Sultanate. Maintaining the current peace is the major duty of the ambassadors.

Consulates, smaller diplomatic offices, exist in the other cities of the Caliphate, Emirates, and Sultanate. Consuls (the senior diplomat) primarily concern themselves with trade. Although the Caliphate and Sultanate have supreme rulers, each city handles its own trade agreements.

Ambassadors and their staff receive certain liberties and concessions in honor of their position, but remain bound by the law of the land in which they reside.

Though answerable to the Sultan, each city within the Sultanate is run as a separate city-state and has its own specific needs. Each city has its own stat block below.

Geography

The Sultanate consists mainly of flat, sandy plains—only the peaks of the Four Jinn break the skyline. Seven permanent rivers flow from the mountains to the coast, carrying with them fertile soil and potable water (not to mention a few nasty beasts). Various crops are harvested along much of their length in regions known collectively as the Green Belts.

DJANET

This large island is primarily a wasteland of sand broken by two ranges of hills, one in the north and the other to the south. Once home to numerous corsairs, the Sultan’s armies swept the island clear in 94 CJ and founded the city of Jirja to deter their return.

THE FOUR JINN

These four isolated peaks are named Khamsin, Ifrit, Marid, and Majin after the four major types of jinn. Shortly after the slaves arrived in the region, four powerful jinn, one of each type, appeared before Suleiman and sought to destroy him. Suleiman bested the jinn, transforming each one into a mountain.

Whether or not the stories are true, jinn mages find the peaks a rich source of power. They gain a +2 bonus to all rolls to create jinn relics so long as the type of jinn

being bound matches the peak they are on. Thus, fire jinn are easier to enslave on Ifrit Peak, while Marid Peak is beneficial to water jinn.

What the jinn mages have not revealed to anyone else is that unbound lesser jinn are gathering in the peaks in growing numbers. Whether the presence of the four bound rulers or the activities of jinn mages’ draws them here is as yet unknown.

Most other citizens fear the mountains, for strange voices can be heard on the winds at night, and the ground rumbles and shifts like some titanic beast trying to break free of its bonds.

RIVER ALAR

Flowing from Majin Peak, the Alar is the lifeblood of Akhmim. Surrounded by fertile plains for much of its length, the banks support many small farming villages. The upper reaches have become dangerous for fishermen and farmers alike, for some strange creature lurks in the water, drowning those who cross its path.

RIVER ALLIT

The Allit feeds Balyana. Its waters are like a mirror, rarely disturbed by wind or wave. Some fisherman claim to have seen strange beasts swimming in its depths, but none have ever been caught and the city dwellers of Balyana scoff at such claims.

RIVER ANSHUR

The mighty Anshur, longest river in the Sultanate, is navigable for much of its length. From Al-Wazir, barges sail along the main river then up the artery to the small ports which serve Medinat Al-Jinn. Along the banks are numerous farming villages, as well as river-side caravanserais, where barges can dock in safety at night.

The Lesser Anshur is a smaller tributary, and has shown signs of drying up. The winter rains are less abundant than before, and during hot summers the river is reduced to a mere trickle.

RIVER BENIL

The flood plain of the Benil once covered much of its length, but in present times it begins about halfway toward Qarah. Each year the fertile region recedes toward Qarah by about a mile, the desert quickly reclaiming the land. Dozens of abandoned villages lie along the banks, many now home to orcs and other fell beasts.

RIVER BOS

Wide and slow running, the Bos meanders lazily through the desert toward Sukhnah. Large patches of crocodile-infested swamp lie along its banks, interspersed with more fertile plains. Farmers digging in adjacent fields sometimes find shards of pottery or small

copper coins engraved with crocodile motifs, which they sell in the city.

RIVER SHIM

The Shim flows down from the Mountains of Death. Heavy rainfall in the mountains constantly feeds the river, and the fertile plains along the banks are rich in thick soil. The settlements along the upper reaches are frequently raided by orcs from the mountains, and the river is now well-patrolled by the soldiers from Musayid.

RIVER URIEL

The Uriel flows from Majin Peak. Several small settlements lie along the upper reaches of the river, each a mining camp inhabited by slaves sent up from Sha'ib and their cruel taskmasters. The local governors are all corrupt, and routinely squirrel away a tiny portion of every shipment for themselves and their hired thugs. Emir Haddad of Sha'ib knows of their corruption, but so long as the purified metals continue to be dispatched on heavily-laden and well-guarded barges he is willing to overlook their "accounting errors."

Downriver, the waters are heavily polluted by the mining operation, and the crops grown along the banks are sickly and withered. Even in Sha'ib, the water must be boiled several times before it can be used to make tea or coffee.

SULEIMAN'S PASSAGE

The Passage is a natural break between the Pillars of Suleiman and the Jinn Wall Mountains. Tall dunes accumulate in the gap as the desert sands trying to push into the Sultanate are held back by winds blowing inland.

Al-Mosk Caravanserai: Marking the border between the Sultanate and the desert wastes is a large caravanserai. Although the structure is independently owned and maintained, the Sultan garrisons a force of 100 light infantry and 20 Pegasus Guards here, for Suleiman's Road, on which the caravanserai stands, is the major land route into the Sultanate.

Ahmed al-Mosk, the owner, is renowned for his overt friendliness toward his guests. Few have the firm politeness required to avoid being plied with steaming coffee and sticky dates without causing offense. Fatima, Ahmed's wife, is also extremely friendly, at least toward male guests. She is a "close friend" of Captain Fazeel, commander of the local Pegasus Guards.

WIND ROAD

The Wind Road runs from Musayid through Last Water Oasis to Jadid, and is the only trade road into the eastern Sultanate. Caravans and camel trains frequently travel the route. Since the construction of the City of Iron, travelers have been attacked by mysterious creatures known as Scavengers, metallic beasts whose sole purpose seems to be acquiring metal in any form.

Major Locales

AKHMIM, CITY OF THE DEVOTED

Population: 158,000

Ruler: Emir Suleiman ibn Salam, Imam of Imams

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Trade

Exports: Trade

Akhmim is famed as being the first city built by Suleiman's followers. Although it has lost virtually all of its political influence, it remains a site of pilgrimage for Devoted. Its reign as the most important was extremely short—the first Sultan was born in the city of Al-Wazir, and on his ascension his birthplace suddenly became the most important city in the realm. Resources set aside to



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

expand Akhmim were diverted, and the city grew at a much reduced rate.

Located on high bluffs overlooking the estuary of the River Alar, the city proved easily defensible from land or sea. Only the side facing the river is exposed, the other three sides being surrounded by a strong stone wall flanked with many guard towers.

The river level is 100 feet below the level of the city. The bluffs form a crescent, leaving a wide area of land directly beneath the city. Located here are the docks—wharves, jetties, warehouses, customs offices, coffee houses, gambling and drinking houses (for foreigners) are crowded together to make best use of the land. Recessed into the bluffs is a small guard post, as well as cells and an armory.

Cargo is hauled up the cliffs on wooden elevators to the Upper Mercantile district. Rather than use slaves or mules, the city makes use of stone golems. Obedient and tireless, the constructs are ideally suited to this work. From here it is loaded onto wagons and distributed to the warehouses and shops.

Emir Suleiman is the first of his family to sit on the throne. The previous emir was a despot, as were his kin before him. Under his tyrannical reign taxes were high, liberties removed, and those who spoke out against him quietly vanished, never to be seen again. Even the nobles suffered, and in the end it was they who led the revolt to depose him. The emir and all those who shared his blood were publicly executed.

Without any legitimate heirs to claim the throne, the nobles could have fallen to infighting in the scramble to ascend the throne. Fearful that all the local nobility had been tainted in the eyes of the public, they took the unprecedented step of offering the throne to a commoner.

Before his ascension, Emir Suleiman served as an imam. His wisdom and understanding of the *Hamad* was renowned throughout the entire Sultanate, and other imams looked up to him for council in matters concerning the Law of Suleiman. A man without ambitions, Suleiman rejected the nobles' offer. Only when the citizens beseeched him did he relent, though he did so reluctantly.

Never groomed for power, Suleiman knew nothing about the complexities of running a city, and so formed an advisory council made up of nobles, prominent businessmen, and common citizens. Though he is blessed with great wisdom and has final authority on any matter, he never acts without first consulting the council. Unfortunately, important matters are often tied up in lengthy council debates as every faction tries to ensure it profits the most, and Suleiman is unwilling to make a declaration until the council makes a united suggestion.

His most trusted wizar, Abdul-Ta'ir, frequently advises him to abolish the council, but Suleiman fears that in doing so he sets his first foot on the dark path of autocracy. A noble and just man, Suleiman is trapped between his own insecurities and what is best for the city.

Though Suleiman remains a popular leader with the citizens (corruption has been reduced, though not stamped out, and they have a voice on the council),

some nobles are beginning to lament placing him in authority. Whether or not they will take any action against him remains to be seen.

Hamal's Stables: Were it not for a certain beast, Hamal's establishment would be just another stable among many selling camels and mules. As it is, it is a place of great wonder. One of Hamal's mules was born with a discoloration which looks very similar to the word *Shuf*. Although that raised some excitement among the family, Hamal almost died of fright when the mule spoke!

Dozens of mages and imams have inspected the mule, but can find no trace of trickery or sorcery—the mule can apparently speak. When the mule does speak, it merely recites passages from the *Hamad*. Many see it as an oracle. Hamal charges 2 dinars to see the mule, 5 dinars to stroke it, and 10 dinars to ask it a single question.

Rumors abound that he has turned down many offers to buy the mule, some as high as 25,000 dinars. The stable is, naturally, a target for thieves, but Hamal is not stupid—half the profits he makes are donated to the largest, and coincidentally most vicious, thieves' guild in the city through one of their legitimate businesses. A dozen or more thieves are always part of the crowd which gathers daily around the stable, ensuring their asset is not harmed or stolen.

Suleiman's Stone: Outside the largest kada stands a large, flat stone, a protuberance of the natural bedrock. Legend claims this is where Suleiman stood when he ordered the construction of the city, and from where he preached the *Hamad*.

Since his death, the stone has become a pilgrimage site. Pilgrims touch the stone in the hope the spirit of Suleiman the Great will impart a solution to their problems through dreams or omens. Earlier pilgrims used to chip off pieces of the stone, but this practice has been banned for almost 400 years, and armed guards are quick to punish those who desecrate the stone.

Rather ironically, the stone has become revered as a holy site, something which goes against Suleiman's teachings on the nature of Asha. However, touching it does offer a glimmer of hope to troubled souls, so the imams keep quiet on the subject.

AL-WAZIR, CITY OF SPIRES

Population: 464,000

Ruler: Sultan Abdul-Muta'al ibn Fudail, Scion of Suleiman, Strength of the People, Enlightened One, Lord of Lords, Most Generous Host, Exalted Noble Son, Sword of Suleiman, Defender of the Realm.

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Trade

Exports: Trade

Capital city of the Sultanate, Al-Wazir is home to the largest population of the realm and the Sultan's family. A vast metropolis protected by stout walls and high towers, Al-Wazir is a veritable fortress and a symbol of the Sultan's awesome power. As well as the city guard, the

Sultan maintains a private army and the Pegasus Guard, his elite soldiers.

Its population includes both the poorest and richest denizens of the realm. Many are drawn to the city by tales of gold-paved streets, but when they arrive they find only the problems every other city suffers. Unable to afford transport out of the city, they live in the slums, begging, stealing, and scavenging to survive.

On the other end of the scale are the nobles, drawn here to be closer to the Sultan and the royal court. Opulent mansions and villas surround the parklands and gardens, each one walled off to prevent the peasants from intruding. While citizens hunt for rats, the nobles drink expensive wine and dine of peahen eggs, dormice stuffed with ostrich tongue, pickled lambs hearts, and other delicacies.

The city takes its name from the myriad needle-thin towers which stand within its walls. Originally it began as a fad among the nobility, who displayed their wealth and piety to the masses by building towers from which the *Hamad* could be read aloud.

The practice ended quickly after one pasha made the fatal mistake of building his tower higher than the Sultan's, an error of judgment which cost the thoughtless noble and his family their heads. To further punish those who would seek to place themselves above his station, the Sultan confiscated all the noble residences with a tower over 20 feet in height and converted them into kadas. These days only the Sultan can order construction of new towers above 20 feet, and he does so only as part of a new kada.

The Sultanate is being attacked from within by the cancer of corruption, and despite the Sultan's best attempts to stamp it out it continues to grow. Barely in his twenties, the young Sultan ascended the throne on his father's death five years ago.

Although born the third child of the previous Sultan, Abdul-Muta'al's father named him as heir because he saw the dark stain of corruption in his older children. Abdul-Muta'al has lived up to his father's hopes, being generous, conscientious, humble, determined, and honest, always thinking about his people before the wants of his nobles.

His older siblings, Nada (sister) and Osama (brother), were exiled by their father shortly before he died. He understood that allowing them to remain in court would be a death sentence for his heir. Neither has been heard from since that time, though those who knew them suspect they are planning something.

Unfortunately, the position of Sultan has lost much of its meaning over the years. The other cities have grown to be virtually independent, the power of the Sultan viewed more as a spiritual entity than a political one. One of the chief culprits behind the corruption is the Sultan's chief wizar, Makin Many-Eyes (so named because he seems to know everything that goes on in the realm).

Makin continually twists reports of corruption to show them in a good light, councils the young ruler in plans which though benevolent on the surface end up making the corruption worse, and alerts his corrupt friends to

any hint on an official enquiry in time for them to conceal their affairs. Makin served under the old Sultan, and worked quietly at corrupting his two older children, a task which worked only too well. Though the Sultan saw their taint, he always trusted Makin, and thus the elderly wizar remains beside the throne.

Makin's attempts to lead the Sultan down a dark path have repeatedly failed. Frustrated by the youth's resilience, the wizar has concocted a complex plan to remove the youth and destroy the fragmented Sultanate in the process.

The Dry Well: In a secluded part of the city stands a well. The well appears no different to any of the dozens of wells elsewhere in the city, save for one noticeable factor—it is heavily guarded by members of the Sultan's army.

During excavation, the diggers broke through into a hive of tunnels and chambers. Preliminary exploration revealed it to be the remnants of an ancient city, long buried and forgotten. Further studies discovered the city in turn had been built on top of a far older city, one predating the Hekatic Empire. Unfortunately, all manner of vile beasts lurked in the shadows, making the retrieval of any treasures extremely hazardous.

The Sultan at the time of its discovery quickly latched onto an idea. Adventurous types pay a small fee (50 dinars) to enter the labyrinth in search of gold and glory. On their return, they must pay a tax of 25% of the spoils they have recovered. Everything else is theirs to keep. Despite the dangers, dozens of adventuring parties descend into the darkness each year. Most never return, but those who do come back extremely wealthy, even after allowing for the steep tax.

The Golden Kada: The grandest kada in Al-Shirkuh stands close to the Sultan's palace. The outer walls and domed roof are coated in sheets of pure gold, which blazes in the day like a terrestrial sun. Following the sun symbolism, eight gold, decorative spikes protrude from the dome at equal intervals.

No local thieves have tried to steal the gold for centuries. Though once a favored source of wealth, a previous Sultan had jinn mages bind a dozen fire jinn into the walls. Those who try their hands at thievery are quickly incinerated for their sins.

BALYANA, CITY OF REFLECTION

Population: 147,000

Ruler: Emir Nadhir ibn Kaliq, Reflection of Soul

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Glass, trade

Exports: Glassware, rice, trade

Balyana is named for both its major trade—glassware—and the strange apparel of its ruler.

Although the city has dozens of glassworks, transforming sand into glass, it also sponsors expeditions to the Mirrorsands, from where large slabs of the perfect glass are hauled back to the city in long camel trains. Balyana glassware is famed in Al-Shirkuh, and fetches high prices in the Free Emirates and Kingdoms of the Sphinxes.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

THE GREEDY MERCHANT

The story of The Greedy Merchant is set in Balyana. According to the tale, a greedy merchant marched his camel train across the desert without allowing his camels or men to rest or refill their waterskins. Naturally, the merchant ensured he had a plentiful supply of water.

Near dead from thirst when they entered Balyana's main square, the bearers mistook the mirror for a pool of water. Their master forbade them to drink before he had washed. Undressing hurriedly, the merchant ran toward the "pool" and jumped, breaking his neck as he crashed into the mirror. Upon his death, the citizens of the city freely gave water to his former servants.

Citizens receive a hefty discount on glass products, and virtually every house has glazed windows and mirrors in every room. In one of the squares is a large mirror, which reflects the clear blue sky. Known as the Window of Reflection, citizens gather here on holy days to stare at their own reflections in the hope of understanding themselves better.

Many stories are associated with the mirror. Some claim that a wicked man who looks into the mirror sees demons flitting around his head. Others tell that a virtuous girl who looks into the mirror at the height of night under the light of a full moon will see the image of the man she is to marry standing behind her. Folk have claimed to have seen Suleiman in the mirror, as well as jinn, strange lights not visible in the heavens above, and even mountains of gold just beneath the surface.

For the last 20 years Emir Nadhir has never appeared to anyone without his fabled mask and gloves firmly in place. Constructed of glass over highly polished silver, the mask has two small holes for his nostrils and a small slit through which he speaks—even his eyes are covered. Anyone looking at the emir's face sees only their distorted reflection. His gloves are leather adorned with tiny silver scales. Many citizens suspect he has suffered the ravages of pox, hence his strange fashion.

A handsome and vain man in his youth (nicknamed "the Peacock"), Nadhir is now a withered husk, with tight skin drawn over wasted muscles and eyes as black as pitch and lifeless as a lump of coal. His bone-white hair hangs limply in wispy strands.

Fascinated with the ancient Hekatics, Nadhir went on several expeditions to the cursed land as a youth. On one trip he discovered a detailed tome of necromancy, which he began to study in earnest, attracted to the possibilities of eternal life. Two decades of necromantic studies later and Nadhir is well on his way to becoming a liche, though it has cost him his looks.

The Seer: Sitting beside the mirror, staring at his reflection all day and night, is a frail and bent old man known locally as the Seer. No one is sure how long he has been there, but elderly grandmothers recall seeing

him when they were young. He is never seen to eat or drink, nor look away from his refection. If asked what he is doing, he replies only that he is, "Searching for himself."

Sometimes, for no apparent reason, he blurts out cryptic sentences or riddles, many of which have proven to be prophecies. Of course, skeptics claim that it is very easy to wait until an event occurs and then find a cryptic phrase to fit the facts. A few months ago the Seer spoke his latest prophecy, claiming, "The veil of sleep shall be lifted from the eyes of those who do not see."

JIRJA, CITY OF COLORS

Population: 85,000

Ruler: Emira Rasha bint-Boutros, Lady of Splendor

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Grain, trade

Exports: Coffee, tabac, trade

Jirja is the only city on the island of Djanet, a city claimed from the corsairs to curb their villainous ways in the eastern sea. The Sultan maintains a sizeable naval force in Jirja to protect ships sailing along the eastern coast of the Sultanate from corsairs and sea monsters. A huge fortress sits at the mouth of the harbor, batteries of catapults and ballistae pointing out to sea.

Although the citizens do not know it, they share something with the town of Sandvik in distant Ostmark. As in the north, strange metal ships with no form of propulsion have been spotted in the harbor. The ships sail in, maneuver around for a few hours, and then depart eastward. When the ships first appeared, the navy dispatched two warships as a matter of routine. On approaching the metal ship, both were struck by metal balls propelled at great speed. One sank with great loss of life, and the other quickly headed back to the harbor. Since then the navy has given the visitors a wide berth.

Much of the fertile soil is devoted to growing trees to ensure the navy always has enough timber. What remains is put aside for planting coffee and tabac, exports which allow Jirja to import as much food as its small populace requires and still make a healthy profit.

Emira Rasha is a very attractive lady in her early forties, and always dresses in exquisitely made and brightly colored silks imported from the Jade Empire at huge expense. She is considered a major trendsetter when it comes to fashion, and whatever style she wears at a formal function quickly becomes fashionable among wealthy citizens.

As well as being a stunning beauty and an astute judge of character, Rasha is also an expert swordswoman. A captain in the guards during her father's rule, she earned her position through her martial skills and leadership abilities. The unit she served with, the Golden Scimitars of Jirja, are now her personal bodyguards. Every last man and woman among them is unswayable in their loyalty to their ruler, and would fall on their swords without hesitation if commanded by Rasha.

Rasha has a love of peacocks, and a great many roam

the streets. Killing a peacock is punishable by death, and even touching one can result in the headsman cutting off the offending hand. Citizens must wait patiently while one crosses their path, must allow them to eat from their table, and on the emira's birthday must give a gift to any peacock they see. Rumors abound that the peacocks are actually intelligent and are used by the emira as spies. Rasha certainly has an almost sixth sense for uncovering secrets, and few locals discuss secrets when there is a peacock in sight.

Grand Admiral Fidar ibn Saad, Protector of the Seas, has quarters in the palace. Many suspect he is the father of the emira's four children, for her husband, Najar ibn Nuri, is an effeminate man who shows little interest in his beautiful wife.

Rasha's eldest child and nominated heir is Badra, a 20-year old woman who takes after her mother in many ways. Badra has been acting strangely of recent, missing important banquets and only visiting her mother wearing the traditional veils. Badra is actually not in court, and one of her handmaidens is playing the role. The heir to the city is in fact off adventuring somewhere in the northern desert, where she hopes to earn her name as a suitable ruler in the same way her mother did.

MEDINAT AL-JINN, CITY OF THE JINN

Population: 96,000

Ruler: Emir Abdul-Bari ibn Jalil, Grand Master of the Jinn, Devoted Son of Suleiman

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Incense, rice, textiles, vegetables

Exports: Cheese, livestock, meat, wool

The only Sultanate city situated inland, Medinat al-Jinn lies 25 miles inland from the River Anshur. Built around a large oasis, the city has grown steadily since its founding, though it is still far smaller than many of the other major cities of the Sultanate.

Although the city boasts a great many jinn mages among its population, the city is a haven for mages of all types. Many coffee houses are closed to those not of the arts, providing mages with a welcome respite from those who seek their services.

Hundreds of would-be students roam the dusty streets in the hopes of finding a master. Exactly how a master picks a student varies considerably—some accept those with the courage to come right out and ask, others



demand the candidate perform a variety of meaningless tasks to show his dedication, while others prefer to have candidates sit outside their homes for days or weeks to demonstrate their patience.

Medinat al-Jinn takes its name from the wondrous and often impressively huge jinn relics employed in the city. The ballistae and catapults which guard the walls are jinn relics capable of throwing great fireballs or bolts of lightning, doors to public buildings open and close by themselves as citizens pass through, majins inhabit the cranes at the warehouses, shifting bulky cargoes in accordance with the verbal commands of the wharf supervisors, flying carpets serve as taxis, carts drive themselves through the narrow streets, khamsin bound into brooms sweep the streets, the city lanterns are all ifrits under orders to illuminate the streets after dark, and even the fountains are marids, commanded to move the water spouts so as to provide entertainment for passersby.

Over the last few years, the jinn have become somewhat rebellious. A gang of rogue brooms savagely attacked a guard patrol, several ballistae opened fire without command, frying a Bedu camel train, dozens of citizens have been drowned in fountains, pulled beneath the surface by watery hands, and so forth. Though all the jinn involved were quickly released from bondage and destroyed, even the grand masters of the art are beginning to wonder if perhaps the vanity of their ancestors is not about to come back and bite the modern inhabitants firmly on the butt.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Dozens of jinn mages own shops, selling a variety of temporary items and jinn relics at very reasonable prices (2500 dinars per spell Rank). The trade is heavily regulated, however, and mages caught operating without a license (which costs 1000 dinars a year) are subjected to heavy fines.

Slavery is outlawed in the city, but this only applies to the civilized races—wealthy citizens make use of golems in place of slaves. Every squad in the city guard has a metal golem in its ranks for added strength, and many of the statues which adorn the public squares and souks are stone golems, placed to act as spies for the emir.

Scrubby grasslands surround the city in all directions, and goats and sheep are raised in huge numbers. The meat, wool, and skin of these beasts provide the city with much of its income. Unfortunately, the vast herds attract all manner of monsters to the region looking for an easy meal.

Emir Abdul-Bari's family has governed the city since the first cornerstone was laid. Every ruler has been a jinn mage, though not necessarily a grand master. His two children, Qaraja, the appointed heir, and Ara, are both powerful jinn mages. Abdul-Bari is getting on in years, and has made plans for a smooth transition of power. When Qaraja reaches 16 next year, the emir plans to appoint him as co-ruler of the city. Ara, a young girl of 14, is a gifted child, but one with a heart of darkness. She aims to replace her brother as heir by fair means or foul.

Each year, the emir holds a contest open to all members of the other magic traditions. Entrants are tested on their magical knowledge and understanding of the law. The victor from each tradition then serves the emir as an advisor for a year. As well as attracting mages to the city, many thousands of ordinary citizens flock here to watch the spectacle.

Abdul-Bari's wife died of plague ten years ago. Since then he has consorted with Barika bint-Muta, his chief wizar. Barika has a 14-year old son, Tahir, by a previous marriage (her husband died suddenly and in mysterious—and some say highly suspicious—circumstances). Though outwardly she is the ideal wizar, totally faithful to her patron, she secretly plots with Ara to put the young girl on the throne. Her aim then is to marry her off to Tahir, and thus begin a new dynasty with her family at the head.

MUSAYID, CITY OF WINDS

Population: 140,000

Ruler: Emira Shahidah bint-Mu'adh

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Jewelry, pottery, trade

Exports: Carpets, rice, textiles, trade

Musayid takes its name from the warm winds which drive north across the southern ocean and clash with the cold currents sliding down from the Mountains of Death. Though the city gets little rain, violent storms rage across the nearby peaks, ensuring the River Shim, and thus the city, is well watered. Sightings of storm dragons are

commonplace further to the north and east, though the beasts have seldom troubled the city.

Sometimes known as the Gateway City, Musayid lies at the start of the Wind Road, which winds its way along the base of the Mountains of Death to Jadid, crossing the East Trade and Silk Roads along its route. Indeed, Musayid once acted as the major trading center for merchants heading along the Silk Road to the Jade Empire (see the entry for the City of Iron, p. 95). These days it is the merchants from Jadid and the salt caravans who profit most from the city's location.

The city maintains a large army, for orcs are a constant danger to the region. Every year, just after harvest, they pour down from the mountains to steal the gathered crops and capture slaves for their mines. Disguised troop ships mingle with the convoys of grain barges heading south to the city, each crammed with 50 archers ready to unleash death at a moment's notice.

Emira Shahidah is a wizened woman in her late seventies. Though she lives a pampered life, life in general has not been kind to her. Disease and accidents robbed her of her father (the previous emir), her husband, and all three of her children. Still sharp of mind, she is now frail of body, being eaten by a wasting disease her physicians have been unable to cure. Several advisors once suggested she seek out a priestess of Marqod, something Shahidah responded to by cutting out the advisors' tongues for their blasphemy.

The line of succession is unclear, the emira having nominated no heir. Within the court, cousins, nieces, and nephews plot incessantly, each trying to win over support should the emira die suddenly without settling the matter. At least two assassination attempts have been foiled in the last year by the emira's bodyguards, many of whom are wizards.

Fadi's House of Carpets: Musayid's textile industry is renowned throughout the Sultanate. Of the many master carpetmakers in the city, Fadi is widely regarded as the best. An old man with failing eyesight, Fadi can always be found hunched over his loom, weaving carpets in the traditional style.

Many jinn mages patronize his establishment, for so beautiful are his creations that khamsin jinn are eager to be bound to such items. A khamsin mage gains a +2 bonus when using one of the carpets to create a jinn relic flying carpet. While most mages would dearly love to purchase one of Fadi's carpets, the price tag of 3,000 dinars is beyond the reach of all but the wealthiest.

The Sky of Many Colors: In summer, when the hot winds howl through the dusty streets, Musayid hosts a bizarre race famed throughout Al-Shirkuh—the Sky of Many Colors, known more commonly as the Musayid 10,000. First formulated by Shahidah's grandfather, the race involves dozens of flying carpets tearing through the narrow, winding streets, the drivers fighting against fierce cross winds, avoiding obstacles along the route, and trying to gather as many gold rings as possible from posts stationed at key points.

The contest is open to anyone who can meet the

entry fee of 5,000 dinars and who has their own carpet. Needless to say, it is popular among the khamsin jinn mages. The winner is crowned Emir of the Winds, and is guaranteed a very warm welcome at any home or establishment in the city. The current Emir is Dabir ibn Azar, a pasha from Sirhan who has won the race for the past two years.

Of the entry fees, 10,000 dinars goes to the winner, half of the remainder goes to the emira, and the remaining half is spent on sponsoring street parties for the citizens. Although Shahidah grows richer each year, her people continue to sing her praises for her generosity.

QARAH, CITY OF LEARNING

Population: 128,000

Ruler: Emir Muhtadi ibn Siraj, Wisest of the Wise

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Ink, papyrus, metal goods

Exports: Books, education

Qarah has always been associated with education and learning. Six universities, dozens of schools, and a score of libraries ensure the citizens are the most educated anywhere in Al-Shirkuh. Education is free to all residents of the city, paid for through taxes. Many mercantile, wizardly, and noble families send their children to Qarah to be educated in subjects ranging from history to astronomy, and politics to geography. Whatever one wishes to learn, it is said there is a sage in Qarah who has mastered the topic.

Emir Muhtadi ibn Siraj has governed Qarah for 50 years in name more than deed. Since his youth, Muhtadi has had a compulsion to study every topic he can. Undoubtedly one of the most learned men anywhere in Al-Shirkuh, he nevertheless lacks the insight to see the corruption that has filled the void left by his absence.

As well as being a city of learning, Qarah has a thriving black market in ancient artifacts. For the right price one can get one's hands on necromantic texts from Hekata, amulets worn by entombed sphinx pharaohs, skulls of long-dead ophidae priests, and even true relics. A few enterprising thieves even hire their services as professional tomb raiders, willing to scour the desert for specific artifacts their clients seek.

The corruption has spread as far as the Great Library (see below), and those who know the right people can find doors open and guards looking the other way. Over the last decade, thousands of magic scrolls and ancient texts have "disappeared." Several of the librarians are even involved in forging ancient texts, selling them to private collectors for large sums of money.

Sirdar Utbah ibn Muhtadi, the emir's eldest son, is trying his best to control the corruption, but many of those advising him on how to combat crime are up to their necks in criminal activities. Rather than fighting crime, the city guard has become a tool of the corrupt nobles, who use it to attack the criminal enterprises of their rivals while simultaneously protecting their own interests.

In the last few months, a masked vigilante has undertaken a one man (assumptions are its male) crusade

against corruption in the higher echelons of society. Large rewards from the nobility have yielded not a shred of information. The citizens have nicknamed the character The Red Phantom after its bright red clothes and ability to seemingly vanish at will.

Great Library: The city boasts the greatest library in Al-Shirkuh, the Qarah Library of Enlightened Understanding, usually just called the Great Library. Founded shortly after the building of the city, the library has undergone many expansions, and is now a mishmash of styles haphazardly blended together. The library boasts over a million books and scrolls spread over six wings and two floors. Each section of the library is organized by broad category, subcategory, and specific topic.

Entrance to the Great Library costs 5 dinars per day, and the money used to maintain the structure and acquire new material. No book or scroll may be removed from the library, but tomes may be copied. Patrons can either perform this service themselves, or hire a copyist, which costs between 3 and 20 dinars a day, depending on the quality of the copy and the number of errors the patron can live with.

Two sections of the library are restricted and guarded by burly mercenaries. The first contains many treatises on magic, as well as spellbooks and spell scrolls. The librarians understand that power in the wrong hands can be dangerous. As such, only mages registered with the city council (costs 100 dinars per year) are allowed access. The second section contains material excavated from ancient tombs. Though none of the subject matter is of a sensitive or dangerous nature, the scrolls are extremely fragile (and worth a great deal of money to private collectors). Entrance is at the sole discretion of the Chief Librarian, and patrons are not allowed to handle the scrolls directly.

SHA'IB, CITY OF MAZES

Population: 73,000

Ruler: Emir Haddad ibn Mazim, Fountain of Wealth

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Gems, trade

Exports: Jewelry, gold, silver, trade

Situated on the east bank of the River Uriel, Sha'ib is also known as the Great Web. Clearly visible from everywhere within the walls, are the magnificent rose marble spires of the emir's palace, which stands on a hill in the center of the city. Beyond the high walls of the palace the city is a sprawling warren of narrow streets and covered passageways, none of which runs straight for more than a few dozen yards.

Many stories exist about the city's origins—the city planners designed it this way to confuse invading armies, the first emir was insane, the city planners were tricked by a khamsin jinni, the city is laid out in a mystical pattern. Which one might be true is subject to much debate in the coffee houses.

Navigating the streets is no easy feat, even for locals, who even after a lifetime of walking the maze can become lost (albeit momentarily) if they do not pay close

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

attention to their surroundings. Storytellers tell of citizens who became lost and starved to death before they found their way home, or about men who set off to work as boys and returned years later as old men.

One legend which has lured more than one adventurer to the city is the tale of Nasser the Wanderer. According to storytellers, Nasser walked through the city streets in such a way as to never walk down the same street twice. When he finished his travels, he found himself outside a house made of pure gold in which lived a hundred and one nubile women eager to please him. Nasser languished in the arms of the maidens for a year. After that time, he decided to share his bounty with his friends, and duly left to fetch them.

Unfortunately, in his absence the emir had ordered new streets constructed, which changed the layout of the city. Nasser spent the rest of his life trying to find the golden house of pleasure without success. Some say he still walks the streets at night, trying every possible route through the ever-changing city. Storytellers say he will share in his bounty if he is aided in his quest.

These are, of course, mere tales to amuse the masses, but for a stranger the city is a very literal maze, with many districts looking like neighboring ones and few street corners with names on them. Worse still, several areas are haunts of vicious gangs of cutthroats and thieves—entering these areas can be a death sentence. The largest thieves' guild is the Mazerunners, who control around half of all illegal activity in the city.

Gangs of children gather around the gates and at the wharves, offering their services as a guide for a “mere” 10 dinars a day. Visitors lacking wisdom or generosity quickly regret their decision to venture into Sha'ib alone.

Sha'ib's fortune comes from the gold and silver trade. While it exports processed metal ingots, its plethora of goldsmiths and silversmiths produce exquisite pieces of jewelry. Gold, silver, and platinum are combined with imported gemstones and semi-precious stones to make rings, necklaces, bangles, and brooches.

Emir Haddad is richly deserving of his title. Taxes in Sha'ib are extremely high, and very little is spent on city maintenance. The perimeter walls are crumbling, the



roads are cracked, and even the guards are paid only when they threaten to revolt. As a result, Haddad has many enemies—even his own son, Musruq is an outspoken critic of his father's behavior, though only around the court. Were the citizens ever to learn of the true scale of the emir's wealth bloody riots would undoubtedly break out.

Haddad has many friends among the nobility who benefit from his being in power. Outspoken critics of his rule tend to meet with fatal accidents or disappear—Musruq has so far been spared this fate by dint of his birth, but his plans to redistribute the wealth once he becomes emir are causing some to wonder if perhaps he should never assume the throne.

SUKHNAH, CITY OF BRIDGES

Population: 60,000

Ruler: Emir Akim ibn Zaim, Highest among Equals (in name only)

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Trade

Exports: Trade, vegetables

At the mouth of the River Bos stands Sukhnah. Eager to enjoy the cool breezes which circulate from the sea and the magnificent views of the lumbering Bos, the citizens elected to build upward, and upward, and upward.

The city is formed from a multitude of square towers, each a hundred feet to a side and as much as 300 feet high. Wide, covered walkways encircle the buildings at each story—the outer rooms of the lower and middle levels are usually shops facing onto the walkway, the citizens living within the tower cores.

Bridges link the towers to their neighbors. Some are covered, some have railings, and some are just bare walkways which leave one open to the dangers of strong winds or slipping. Where they meet, the bridges form large plazas, where the regular markets are held. Curling up around the towers are staircases so one can ascend or descend levels.

Social status within the city is governed by the height at which one lives. Living on the lower levels are the common citizens, the poorest of whom actually walk on the ground. These poor wretches rarely see the sun, blocked as it is by the monstrous towers which rise like thick fingers from the mire and the wide bridges and plazas which hang overhead.

The higher levels are reserved for the wealthier merchants, mages, artisans, courtiers, and lesser nobles. The very top stories are those of the most powerful nobility and merchant princes. Whereas the lower classes are lucky to have a tiny box room in the heart of a dark tower, the upper echelons of society enjoy spacious homes, with massive windows to allow in plentiful sunlight and fresh air. Between these two extremes are the homes of the merchants, bureaucrats, mages, scholars, and crafters who make up the middle classes.

The natives have a saying—"Garbage flows downward, but so does gold." Dropped coins or goods inevitably end up on the lowest levels, where they are quickly scooped up by the wretches who dwell there.

The city spans both sides of the river, along which stand crowded, bustling wharves. Cargo is carried between levels on great platforms, each of which is raised or lowered by a chain and pulley mechanism operated by slaves. Once in the warehouses, cargo must be moved around the city by bearers—only the ground level has enough room for carts. There are no bridges at the lower levels between the river mouth and the docks, meaning citizens have to take a circuitous route to cross to the other side.

Visitors arriving by sea disembark right in the heart of the city. At first glance, it is like being in a forest of gigantic trees, whose branches intertwine to provide shade from the merciless sun. Those who arrive by land arrive at one of the great gates. Rather than walk through the lower levels, visitors can ascend the gatehouses onto the top of the wall, and then cross via bridge into a more pleasant level of the city.

The citizens of Sukhnah have another saying—"As the light dims, so does morality." The lower levels of the city contain many brothels, drug dens, thieves' guilds, gambling halls, and places far worse. Whatever desires a man craves, the lower levels are the place to look. Corruption, unlike most things in Sukhnah, actually flows upward, and it is commonly joked that if one desires to see someone in power, it is best to make inquiries at the bottom. Most of the ruling elite have a hand in at least one illegal activity.

Emir Akim is a reclusive figure who has made no public appearances in the last year. This is hardly surprising, given that he is dead. Never a strong leader, the emir failed to halt corruption in the court, allowing the nobles to grow richer from illegal trade and black marketeering. When Akim dropped dead of a heart attack, his sister, Hessa, acted quickly to keep the news quiet.

Akim's son, Sirdar Majid, the rightful heir to the throne, is away studying law in Qarah. So long as he remains out of the way, Hessa, who has her ringed fingers in many illegal pies, effectively runs the city, illegally stamping documents with her dead brother's seal and passing new laws. A few other nobles and courtiers have learned the truth, but since most are just as corrupt as Hessa they keep quiet, in return for a few concessions. Those who have learned the truth and could not be bribed into silence or conspiracy suffered "accidents" ("Very slippery that bridge. A terrible shame!").

Unfortunately for Hessa, something has gone wrong with her plans. To ensure no evidence would be found, Hessa arranged for Akim's body to be smuggled out of the city and thrown into the swamp further upriver for the crocodiles to eat. The unfortunate slaves who carried out this task were then executed. Several months after the "burial," a cloaked figure made its way to Hessa's quarters. The stranger presented Hessa with a severed left arm, easily identifiable as Akim's because of the crescent-shaped birthmark. Every month since, Hessa has arranged for 25,000 dinars in gold bars to be delivered to a small island in the marsh in payment for the stranger's silence. She has not told her co-conspirators any of this.

The Thirteen Monkeys Coffee House: Popular

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

among the middle classes, the Thirteen Monkeys stands out because of its unusual staff, all of whom are trained monkeys. The animals grind beans, boil water, make coffee, and even serve patrons. For a few dirhams extra, they also dance, screech in time to music, and juggle small objects. The only humans involved in running the establishment are Nadal bin-Yusef, the owner, and a hulking, one-handed brute known only as The Hand (named because he can crush a man's skull like a grape). Nadal is there to make sure the monkeys behave, and The Hand ensures no one tries to kidnap one of the highly-skilled staff.

When the coffee house closes, the monkeys are involved in other activities—thievery. Nadal is the guild-master of the Seven Fingered Guild and the monkeys his most trusted members. The cunning devils never take stolen goods to the coffee house, but instead deposit their booty in a disused warehouse, from where it is collected later. Unlike regular trained monkeys, these cunning beasts can actually pick locks.

The Caliphate of Al-Shirkuh

Temperature: Hot

Population: 3,086,000 (88% Hadaree, 7% Bedu, 5% sand goblins, <1% cakali, <1% jinn blooded)

Ruler: Caliph Amr ibn Imad, Defender of the Faithful, High Priest of Shamash

Religion: Faithful (all except Iblis)

The Caliphate came into being in 32 CJ. After nine years of suffering under the tyranny of Sultan Lahab al-Wazir, the Faithful packed their belongings and fled west. Records within the Sultanate speak of a migration numbering just a few thousand refugees, all heretics who held onto a corrupt and misleading faith. The texts go on to say that worship of the old gods had been virtually eradicated under Suleiman, replaced with a more enlightened view of the cosmos. This is nothing but blatant propaganda designed to conceal a truth the Devoted could not accept—Suleiman did not wish to eradicate the old gods from memory.

Each had their place as part of the great powers, and though worship of one meant not seeing the larger picture of the universe as a single entity, such worship still empowered Asha and Druj. Sadly, Suleiman's great vision, his true vision, quickly became lost after his death, when politics and religion made their unholy alliance.

In truth, the refugees numbered many hundreds of thousands. Conservative figures from Faithful records from the era put the total number at around 45% of the Sultanate's total population. Many have questioned why the Sultan did not pursue the refugees and destroy them. Although Sultanate records indicate he "showed mercy unto the misguided, as Suleiman would have done," the truth is much more banal—he simply lacked the manpower to engage such a large force in combat.

The settlers quickly made new homes, beginning with Hufrah, Marresh, and Fashir. From here they expanded westward and northward, though the mountains provided them with a natural border at which to stop expansion.

The first war with the Sultanate erupted in 77 CJ. Both sides blame each other for beginning the conflict, and perhaps the truth of who ignited the hostility will never be known. What is known is that at this point the two nations were ruled by hard-liners who saw their beliefs as being the only acceptable beliefs. Conflicts continued on and off for the next two centuries, with neither side gaining or losing any significant territory.

Eventually, two wiser rulers came to power. After lengthy negotiations, the two sides reached a compromise. While neither nation had to accept the other's faith as being "right," nor provide places of worship for those of different beliefs, they agreed that all sentient beings had a right to worship as they wished (barring the support of evil entities, and so long as they obeyed the laws of the land). Of course, not every citizen accepted the pact, but the majority quickly became religiously tolerant. Trade between the nations, which had been all-but nonexistent before this time, quickly blossomed as old animosities were put aside, adding greatly to both nations' wealth.

The peace treaty also created the unsettled region around Marqod's Well, the site of the War of Bitter Waters. Both nations had vital trade roads running through the oasis and it was agreed neither side would seek to control the region. The area remains a neutral zone to this day (though that may be changing).

Over the last three centuries the Caliphate has stopped expanding outward (it cannot expand north or east and there is nothing of interest to the west) and concentrated on strengthening its borders, improving its infrastructures, and boosting trade.

Recent tales of dark stirrings in the ruins of Hekata and sightings of the near-mythical ophidae, not to mention the continued attacks of the mysterious Scavengers from the City of Iron, lack of rain, and continued expansion of the sands, worry many in the court. Dark times are undoubtedly coming, and they are coming very soon.

Shamash, god of the sun and universal order, is the principal deity of the Caliphate, though all other gods except Iblis are worshipped openly. The Caliph, regardless of his personal beliefs, is awarded the title of High Priest of Shamash. In most instances, this is purely a ceremonial role, as few Caliphs have actually been practicing priests. The title of Caliph has been passed down through the generations in an unbroken line for 502 years. No political coups have sundered the land, though political machinations to marry into the royal family are part of daily life in the court.

Geography

The major part of the Caliphate lies on the plains south of the Desert Wall Mountains and the western

Pillars of Suleiman. The Caliphate makes no claims of ownership on the mountains, preferring to concentrate on maintaining a secure border on the plains rather than maintain isolated forts in the peaks.

Four major rivers flow through the landscape, creating narrow, lush plains along their banks. Five of the major cities stand in these agricultural regions. Elsewhere, the desert is flat and sandy, with no major dunes or hills to break the horizon.

RIVER GEBRIL

The Gebril feeds Tamarah, the infamous City of Heavenly Sin. Like the other rivers, it is bordered for much of its length by fertile plains, where a variety of crops are grown.

The water levels are around 30 feet lower than a decade ago, and the annual inundation brings less and less fertile soil each year. Barely half the agricultural plains are suitable for planting crops of any kind. Enough food is grown to provide for immediate needs, but none is being stored away for lean times. A single failed inundation, which some scholars predict will happen either this year or next, will lead to wide scale starvation in the region.

RIVER NOARI

The Noari flows past Hamra, City of the Stone. The desert sands are encroaching steadily from the west, and the fertile plains, which once sprawled 20 miles on each bank, have virtually vanished from the western bank. In some places, the desert is already pouring into the river, silting it up and preventing all but the flattest barges from sailing along those stretches of water. In very dry summers, which are very common these days, the river is reduced to a mere trickle. The soil on the banks quickly dries without irrigation water and blows away in the strong winds.

RIVER SHALAK

The Shalak is a branch of the mighty Syrah. Navigable for its entire length, grain barges from Fashir and Hufrah are a common sight during harvest. The river is also an excellent source of fish, and during the summer months, while the crops are growing, farmers turn to the waters to supplement their diet and income.

RIVER SYRAH

The longest river in the Caliphate, the Syrah rises in the Pillars of Suleiman and flows through the desert to the city of Marresh.

Sacred to Apsu, numerous shrines and small temples have been erected on the many small islands along its route. Several of these have been attacked recently, the priests and paladins slain, and their libraries burned. The Caliph is offering a handsome reward to anyone who can stop the attacks and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Temple of Sharks: On a small reef some three miles

off the coast stands the ruins of an old temple. The walls are covered in motifs depicting sharks devouring humans. Parts of smashed statues resemble humanoid figures with shark heads. Scholars believe these are representations of an ancient god, one now long forgotten.

In the center of a temple is a pool which links to a series of underwater caverns. Only a few caverns have been explored, the lack of wealth deterring most divers from risking their lives in the gloom.

SAYHUT

Sayhut is an island in the Southern Ocean and marks the most southern extent of the Caliph's influence. Largely desert with a small mountain range running across the center, the Caliphate colonized the island so as to have a naval base close to the Al-Korsar and to exploit the rich pearl beds. The mountains are home to many ferocious beasts and at least one orc tribe, but these pose no real danger to the city of Mazar.

Major Locales

FASHIR, CITY OF WATER

Population: 157,000

Ruler: Emir Abdul-Salam ibn Hakim, the River of Wealth

Religion: Faithful (Apsu, Ashtart, Upuaut)

Imports: Metal, trade

Exports: Fish, grain, papyrus, timber, trade

Fashir sprawls across two dozen small islands intersected by small river channels and artificial canals. The original parts of the city were constructed on the largest island, which provided natural protection from the armies of the Sultan and other threats. As the populace grew, so the city expanded onto neighboring islands.

Numerous stone bridges link the islands together. The grandest structures are covered, elaborately decorated, and wide enough to provide space for shops along their sides. Unlike other cities in Al-Shirkuh, the roads are not wide enough for carts—the builders deemed housing space to be far more important.

Most citizens navigate the city via its waterways. Rich citizens own their own small boats, while the common citizens make use of crescent-shaped reed boats which function as a taxi service. In a bid to keep the streets relatively quiet, the emir subsidizes the water taxis. For a few dirhams one can travel to any part of the city. Thieves' guilds operate many of the taxi services. While safe enough during the day, it is unwise to use them at night. Many an unwary traveler has been robbed and killed, their bodies found floating in the canal the following day.

All traffic passing up the Shalak and past Fashir must keep to clearly marked waterways. Two lines of tall tree trunks emerge from the water, their tops painted bright red and lit by lanterns at night—any ship deviating from this channel is subject to attack without warning.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

With the waterways being the only way an enemy can reach the city, the inhabitants have taken precautions to thwart invasions. All four sides of Fashir are protected by ballistae and trebuchets mounted on small stone platforms. Sharpened tree trunks tipped with iron spikes have been driven into the river bed, their points concealed just below the water.

Emir Abdul-Salam is a rich and generous man. Fashir is a trading city and its exports bring considerable wealth. Twice a year, on the first day of Amt Alak Paret and the first day of Amt Alak Arkhet, the emir stands on the balcony of his palace and throws gold coins to beggars and paupers massed in the square below. Each year on Abdul-Salam's birthday, every citizen is gifted with a specially minted 1 dinar coin—given the population, this is an extravagant gesture.

Isle of Docks: The main dock is located on a large island about three miles downstream from the city. Wharves and jetties protrude from every side of the island like the rays of a stylized sun disk. The northern side, the face nearest Fashir, is reserved for traffic sailing down the river from Fashir or distant Hufrah. To the east are the military wharves, where Fashir's large navy is moored. The western wharves cater for ships intending to journey further upstream to Hufrah, while the southern docks, the largest, are for merchants who wish to trade with Fashir.

None of the docks are connected to each other directly. Dominating the island is a stone fortress, the Al-Kashir. Its corners, with their tall towers, extend out into the water, leaving each dock isolated on a sliver of land.

Gates lead from the docks into an open courtyard which completely encircles the central keep. Within the inner walls of the fortress are built warehouses, hostleries, temples, government buildings, and such like. The courtyard is divided into thoroughfare and square areas by chains. Merchants and crafters rent out a chained area, paying a small fee for each square yard. From here they hawk their wares to passing merchants.

Fashir's main exports are papyrus and timber, the latter being especially valuable. Further upstream, on the edge of the fertile regions, tall cypresses grow in small copses. Reeds for papyrus are harvested from the muddy banks of the river. During summer, plentiful fish is available at the souks.

HAJJAD, CITY OF THE GODS

Population: 363,000

Ruler: Caliph Amr ibn Imad, Defender of the Faithful, Pillar of the Faithful, High Priest of Shamash

Religion: Faithful (Shamash)

Imports: Barley, meat, papyrus, trade, vegetables

Exports: Illuminated books and scrolls, trade

Capital of the Caliphate, Hajjad sits in the desert, straddling the Road of the Gods. The trade road cuts straight through the city center like a dry river bed. Caravanserais flank both sides of the road, the owners standing outside touting for business with promises of free coffee and dates, cheap rates, and such like.

The western half of the city is devoted to crafts and trade, and houses the bulk of the population. Its narrow streets are a cacophony of noise. Citizens bump and jostle, greeting each other politely and blessing each other, as of the tradition here. In the eastern half are the Caliph's palace, the palaces of the noble houses, temples, the great souk, schools and universities, and many open gardens and parks. The pace of life here is far more relaxed, wide avenues lined with palms allow citizens to pass each other without physical contact, and the air is sweeter.

Equally situated along the towering outer wall are 11 massive guard towers. Each houses 1000 soldiers (plus workshops and stables), who together form the core of the Caliphate's army. The towers are named after one of the major deities of good and the regiments stationed in a tower assume the deity's name. Thus, one finds the Regiment of Apsu, the Regiment of Marqod, and so on. Traditionally, the Regiment of Shamash is the most senior regiment in the army and forms the Caliph's bodyguard.

Numerous springs provide the city with much-needed drinking water. Small springs outside the city are used to irrigate small orchards and fields, all the private reserve of the Caliph. Virtually all of the city's foodstuffs are imported from Hulwan (crops) or Mazar (meat).

As the capital of the Caliphate, it is little surprise that every good deity has a major temple here. Faithful pilgrims come from as far away as the Free Emirates to visit the temples, receive blessings, make donations, and perhaps buy a few souvenirs of their trip. During Alak Neteru, the population swells considerably, as do the prices in the souks and bazaars.

Illuminated books and scrolls are the city's major export. Not all the books are religious tracts, for Hajjad boasts extensive universities and some of the greatest scientific minds in the Caliphate. Though religion and science may seem strange bedfellows, scientific study is one of Qedeset's lesser worshipped aspects.

Caliph Amr is a hulking, muscular man with short gray hair and numerous scars across his arms and chest. Commander of the Regiment of Shamash in his youth, Amr is regarded by many as a natural warrior and leader. Though he keeps fit by sparring each day, he no longer rides out to battle against bandits and orcs, leaving that to his eldest son and appointed heir, Mustafa.

Whether Mustafa will ever inherit the title is another matter, for the youth is an ifrit jinn blooded. While many proclaim this as clear evidence the Caliph is descended from the great prophet Suleiman, some take the view that the Caliph's family has become tainted with Devoted blood, or worse, that of the jinn.

Amr is religious, but not to any great degree—he sees his position as very much a political one. Except when his presence is required, he allows the actual high priest of Shamash and his closest advisor, Rashid ibn Fahalan, to handle religious issues. Though there are no major plots against the Caliph, Rashid's position of trust means he has many rivals in his own church. Many rumors of improper behavior on the part of Rashid have reached the Caliph's ears, but so far he has ignored them as noth-

ing but malicious gossip. Whether or not they actually hold any truth is yet to be seen.

The Caliph is currently in a political quandary. In a recent dream-vision, Marqod urged him to claim the oasis of Marqod's Well as part of the Caliphate. The oasis has long been neutral ground, despite its link with Marqod, lying as it does on a strategic trade road junction. Amr has no wish to offend the gods or lose the support of his people, but neither does he wish war with the Sultanate. Unfortunately, many of his nobles are of the belief the Sultanate is a toothless tiger, decadent from centuries of misguided belief, and urge him to obey the dream at any cost.

The Oracle of Shamash: Outside the Temple of Shamash is a solid gold statue of a naked human male. The statue's mouth is open and there is a slot in his stomach. When one asks a question and places a 1 dinar coin in the slot, the statue responds with words of wisdom, speaking in a deep, hollow voice. The statue does not speak unless both conditions are met. The statue has proven impervious to all attempts to steal it or carve off a sliver of gold. Exactly what happens to the money has yet to be discovered—it seemingly vanishes into thin air.

The statue has sat outside the temple for centuries. According to legend, a shepherd boy (whose name varies with each telling of the tale) searching for a lost lamb in the hills outside the city came across a cave. For no earthly reason the youth promptly fell asleep. On awakening he found the golden statue beside him, along with the missing lamb. The shepherd boy carried the statue back to the city, for it seemed to him to have no weight.

Presenting it before the Caliph, the youth proclaimed the statue a gift from Shamash to honor the Caliph. Other nobles scoffed at the shepherd boy's claims, believing he had stolen the statue from some ancient tomb. The lad swore a holy oath that he was no thief and challenged any man who doubted his word to lift the statue. Many tried, but none could raise the golden figure by so much as an inch. Convinced Shamash had a hand in the statue's appearance, the Caliph humbly accepted the gift. In accordance with the ancient traditions, he gifted the boy in return. Strangely, what the shepherd boy received or what became of him is never part of the tale.

HAMRA, CITY OF THE STONE

Population: 86,000

Ruler: Emir Kaldun ibn Muhaned

Religion: Faithful (Tammuz, Shamash)

Imports: Hashish (illegal), metal, metalworking, tabac, trade

Exports: Dressed stone, trade

Hamra is named after a colossal monolith which now stands in the gardens of the temple of Tammuz. Rectangular and obviously worked by some ancient hand, the black marble stone is engraved with the holy symbol of Tammuz. According to legend, the first settlers found the stone in situ. Priests divined the monolith as an object of great power, but despite their best attempts its purpose remained unknown.

Natural curiosity quickly got the better of one minor noble, who reached out to touch the stone. As his fingers caressed the cold surface, the symbol of Tammuz glowed with an intense white light. A spirit of awesome power dwelling within the stone possessed his body, using his mouth to speak to the frightened onlookers.

The spirit said Tammuz, his patron, had placed the stone as a gift which would ensure the new city the settlers were to found here would remain law-abiding throughout eternity. Those accused of a crime would not be tried by mortals, but by Tammuz himself. Suspects would lay their hands on the stone (force may be employed if they refused to obey the holy command of Tammuz). The innocent would suffer no ill-effects. The guilty, however, would immediately be slain, their physical body consumed by the stone.

Because not every person who committed a crime would be caught by the authorities, however, the spirit continued by saying that a census of all citizens must be accurately kept. Each year, one hundred citizens would be chosen by random lot to touch the stone. Any found



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

guilty of having broken the law would be summarily executed for their crimes. Each year, at sunrise on the first day of Alak Neteru, priests of Tammuz still draw names by random lot and escort those chosen to the stone.

The spirit ended by claiming the noble would become the first emir of the new city. Each new emir after him would have to lay his hands on the stone to ensure he his worthiness to rule before he took the title. Thanks to this, no emir has ever ascended the throne of Hamra through assassination—Tammuz never condones murder, not even for noble purposes, such a removing a tyrant.

Hamra remains, by and large, a very law-abiding city. With such a large population, there are always those willing to commit crimes—and the chance of being named in the lottery is rather small. Of course, should they be caught (or accused by a rival) they are destined for an early death with absolutely no chance of appeal. As one might expect, Hamra is a largely paranoid city, with fear of punishment replacing respect for the law.

It has not gone unnoticed that the names of senior priests of Tammuz, nobles in favor with the court, and their families have never been drawn in the lottery. Junior priests are sent down to the stone every few years as a token gesture, but word of corruption regarding the lottery draw is spreading, and opponents are growing more vocal each year. Strangely, the most vocal have a habit of having their names drawn.

Emir Kaldun was once a decisive ruler beloved by his people and respected by the noble's of the city. Kaldun had no tolerance for political machinations, court intrigue, or weak excuses, believing an emir's word was law. When he ordered something done, it was done without argument and in a timely manner. Those who failed him were expelled from court or had their noble titles stripped from them.

Then, ten years ago, the emir had a fit during a banquet. Witnesses claim the emir's eyes turned jet black and that he spoke in a deep, unhallowed voice clearly not his own, proclaiming a great doom approached Al-Shirkuh. When he recovered a few minutes later, the visibly shaken emir remembered nothing of his ordeal. He soon began to suffer terrible nightmares. In a bid to ease his troubled mind, he turned to using hashish. As time passed the nightmares grew more intense and the amount of hashish he smoked increased proportionally.

His physical health is as good as ever for a man his age (51), but his mental health has devolved into total indecisiveness, and bouts of sulking which can last for days. The emir is lucid maybe one day in three, and then only for a few hours.

Daily life in the court has become a dice with death. The emir may pass an order for work to be carried out one day, only to accuse the courtier who handled the matter of trying to usurp his throne by issuing false proclamations the next. Dozens of loyal courtiers have been beheaded (which goes against the stone's commands that it judges all criminals) for non-existent attempts to overthrow the emir.

Kaldun has withdrawn from the court and his family,

what little is left of it. He ordered all three of his children executed for treason, an act which has left no obvious heir. Many suspect he will nominate his nephew, Hassan, a brown-nosing youth who is never far from his uncle's side.

Kaldun trusts no one save his personal physician, Arif bin Khoury, a thin-lipped waif of a man who smiles only with his lips, never his eyes. Although many nobles suspect Arif is up to no good, any attempt to investigate the man's background or spy on his affairs is quickly discovered by the emir's fanatical mameluk guards. Anyone accused of spying on Arif is given an immediate death sentence (again, not via the stone).

HUFRAH, CITY OF IDOLS

Population: 146,000

Ruler: Emira Adara bint Adel, Daughter of Radiance

Religion: Faithful (all except Iblis)

Imports: Coffee, tabac, Trade

Exports: Grain, livestock, trade, vegetables

Hufrah stands on the eastern bank of the Syrah, centrally placed between the start of the fertile stretch and the juncture where the river divides. The city is enclosed behind dodecagonal (12-sided) walls. Within each wall is a large gate dedicated to one of the 12 major gods. Religious motifs decorate the gate, the supporting walls, and the gatehouse. Outside each gate, except that of Iblis, is a small shrine to the deity.

Although Iblis has a gate, it is kept locked save for an hour before and after midnight. An hour before the gate is unlocked, priests of Shamash walk the streets alerting citizens to the forthcoming event and ordering them to run to their homes. During the time the gate is opened it is believed evil spirits can enter the city. However, if they do not find a host to possess they must leave before the gate closes or be destroyed by the good gods.

Throughout the two hour period the streets are all but deserted—only brave or foolhardy citizens risk their souls by leaving the safety of their homes. Priests of Shamash, safe in the knowledge their god is with them, patrol the city, for even the city watch retreat to their barracks.

Once the second hour passes, paladins lock the gates and seal them with a knotted rope. The ends of the rope are joined with wax, into which a seal of Shamash's holy symbol is pressed. When the gates are locked, the clergy sound the all-clear.

One cannot walk more than a few yards in Hufrah without seeing an idol or statue to one of the gods. They stand or squat on street corners, in the middle of plazas, outside shops, houses, and governmental buildings, on fountains, and even perched on tall poles erected at random throughout the city. Many of the statues are worn almost smooth from the constant touching of hands, for the citizens of Hufrah are the most faithful anywhere in Al-Shirkuh.

On high holy days, life-sized statues of the appropriate god are carried from their main temple through the

streets in a colorful procession. Citizens throw gifts of coins or food to the god, which are collected by the priests. Every now and then the procession stops, and the god is maneuvered so his hand touches a citizen. This is an especially fortunate act, believed to grant a year of luck, wealth, and health to the worshipper. Since Iblis is not worshipped, he has no procession.

On the first day of Alak Neteru, a public holiday in Hufrah, all of the good gods are carried through the streets in a series of simultaneous processions. The streets echo with the beat of drums, the haunting melodies of flutes, the eerie whistle of pipes, holy chants and hymns, and cheers from the vast crowds.

After completing their grand tour, the gods are taken to the emira's palace, where they are guests at an extravagant feast. In addition to the gods, important priests, nobles, businessmen, and military commanders are invited to attend. When the feast has ended the emira receives a blessing from each deity. The gods are then draped in heavy cloths decorated with their holy symbol and carried back to their temples.

Adara is 28 years old but has yet to marry. Despite her vast personal fortune and the chance to marry into a powerful noble house, two things detract potential suitors. First, she is a religious fanatic, favoring Shamash above all other gods. Her personal beliefs extend as far as declaring all Devoted to be spawn of Iblis, words which please a few hard-liners yet cause her father and the royal court much worry. She has vowed to remain unmarried until she finds a man of equal religious belief. Many have tried to con her, but she is an astute judge of character. Second, she is very ugly. Morbidly obese with few teeth (and the ones she has are black), thinning hair, and a face more pock-marked than the surface of the moon, it is commonly joked by less reverent citizens she can curdle milk and wither plants simply by looking at them.

The Pit of Iblis: Contrary to the religious practices in other cities in the Caliphate, Iblis is represented in Hufrah, though he has no temples or shrines and worship of him is prohibited under penalty of torture and death. Long ago, the city suffered a string of misfortunes—famine ravaged the land, the water in the river turned blood red, livestock dropped dead, and such like. Lengthy divinations established Iblis as the cause of the disasters, which were inflicted upon the city because he was not represented among the other deities.

Since allowing worship of Iblis was unthinkable, the then-ruler instead ordered a single statue to be erected to Iblis. At first there was a public outcry, for merely showing a god's image empowered the deity. When the disasters stopped, however, the citizens quickly changed their minds.

Placed in a deep pit beyond the reach of curious citizens, the statue is kept covered in a heavy black cloth except on the day of the grand procession. On this day, citizens gather around the pit to throw stones and filth at Iblis, cursing his name and calling on the other gods to strike him down.

HULWAN, CITY OF GARDENS

Population: 92,000

Ruler: Emira Rihana bint Daud, Shade of the Faithful

Religion: Faithful (Ashtart, Apsu, Shamash, Duamutef)

Imports: Metalwork, jewelry, pottery, trade

Exports: Coffee, flax, fruit, grain, tea, trade, vegetables

Hulwan sits at the southern end of the Southern Trade Road. The modern city sits on the ruins of a much older city, destroyed at approximately the same time the jinn destroyed the Kingdom of Magor further east. Workmen uncovered the foundations of dozens of temples and palaces during the building of the new city, but nothing which could be used to identify the original builders. Fragments of pottery dug up while clearing the sand revealed extensive burning, however, and melted coins found while digging irrigation channels from the oases only added to the conclusion that the jinn had unleashed a terrible fate on the old city.

Hulwan has no river to supply its water. Instead, the city is built around a series of oases. There are seven in all—five inside the city walls and two outside. The architects decided to make as much use of the natural water supplies as possible, and the city has dozens of ornately sculpted parks and gardens. During summer, the scent of a hundred different flowers fills the hazy air and the city is awash with bright colors. Water runs through the city in wide channels, providing gentle, calming background music and cooling the air. Tall palm trees provide ample shade while wide avenues and streets allow the air to circulate.

Although the banks of the Syrah and Shalak are fertile, they pale in comparison to Hulwan, the true breadbasket of the Caliphate. The desert surrounding the city has been reclaimed through extensive use of irrigation channels fed by the two external oases. Where stretched sand, there now grow bountiful fields of various grains, fruit, and vegetables. A small amount of tabac is grown, but only enough to supply the population's needs. Coffee and tea are also grown in sufficient quantities to allow exportation.

Hulwan's reclamation of the desert has not been praised by everybody. The Sons of the Sand despise the expansion of Hulwan into the desert. Attacks against farmers are common, the irrigation channels are regularly clogged or smashed, and crops have been burnt or trampled. So far, the attacks have been little more than a nuisance with negligible effect on the local economy or morale of the people. That said, security around the oases is now tighter to prevent the Sons from poisoning the city's water supplies.

Emira Rihana is only 16 and ascended the throne last year. She has two younger siblings, Yurdan bin Dawud (14) and Mali bint Dawud (10).

Her father, Dawud bin Boulos, never enjoyed being emir, finding the constant bickering with the nobles and priests frustrating. Once his daughter reached her majority, he abdicated in her favor. He still lives in the city, where he is renowned as a poet. He gives advice to his daughter only when she asks, preferring to let her learn

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

from her own mistakes. During a recent hunt he became separated from the rest of the party during a sandstorm and savaged by a pack of hyenas. Though he survived, his right leg never recovered, and he now walks with a severe limp.

Rihana is romantically linked with Pasha Bursik bin Rais, a captain in the guard and head of her bodyguard detachment. Both deny the rumors, but only a blind man would fail to see their looks they give each across the court. Unfortunately, her mother, Janan, believes Bursik, born a commoner, isn't good enough for her daughter. She is trying to arrange a more suitable marriage. Unfortunately, Rihana is three months pregnant. Concealing that fact from her mother (her father already knows) is a major concern to the young emira.

The people of Hulwan love their emira. She is kind-hearted, genuinely concerned for her people, youthful enough not to have become cynical, and devout enough to please hard-liners yet free-thinking to the extent the moderates love her. It is doubtful that many citizens would comment openly on her being an unmarried mother, though she suffers nightmares over the possibility she will lose the people's respect.

The Floating Gardens: The city is dominated not by the emir's palace but by a temple jointly dedicated to Ashtart and Apsu. The ziggurat's seven-tiered form rises hundreds of feet above the city. Each tier is a miniature, lush garden, fed by water pumped up through the core of the temple to a cistern on the roof. Small gates in the cistern allow the water to cascade down carved channels

to each tier. Once the water reaches ground level, it flows down sloped channels into an underground cistern, from where it is pumped back to the top.

The Undercity: Everybody knows Hulwan sits on the ruins of an older city. Rumors of ancient caverns and worked tunnels snaking beneath the city are commonplace, though no one ever claims to have seen them personally. Tales speak of vast mountains of gems, terrible monsters, relics of power, and of statues of gods long forgotten.

MARRESH, CITY OF A THOUSAND GATES

Population: 106,000

Ruler: Emir Abdul-Mu'izz bin Altair, Champion of the Faithful

Religion: Faithful (Upuaut, Qedeshet, Shamash)

Imports: Trade

Exports: Trade

Marresh's first stone was laid in 78 CJ, the year after the War of Ideology. The city is built within a series of five concentric circles of hollow walls, each 20 feet wide internally and comprising two stories. Small slits in the walls facing toward the city center allow in light, but also serve a defensive purpose. Once an enemy enters a section of tunnel, guards (or armed citizens) can fire arrows or thrust spears through the slits. In the event the enemy begins firing back, wooden shutters can be closed over the slits. Shutters are placed only on the outer faces of the walls.

Radiating outward from the outer wall of the central circle are 12 more walls of similar dimensions, placed like the spokes of a gigantic wheel. Within the walls, the city is thus divided into 49 distinct districts.

Two great gatehouses stand in the outer wall at the terminus of the "6 o'clock" and "12 o'clock" spokes. Visitors entering the city thus walk not into an avenue or street but into a wide tunnel within the wall. Where the internal walls meet, a heavily portcullis has been constructed, operated from the upper story. Each internal intersection contains four portcullis arranged around a square (known locally as an "execution square").

A single wooden gate leads from each segment of wall into the various districts they enclose. Each gate can be locked from either side, thus allowing the guards to seal off sections of the city in the event of attack or during riots no matter where the event occurs. To travel between districts one must pass through a minimum of two gates.



The upper story of the walls is reserved for the military. Although barrack blocks stand in each segment of the city, only those within the emir's palace compound allow access to the upper level. Murder holes in the floor allow guards to fire upon invaders trapped within the easily defended sections of wall.

In Marresh, wealth gravitates toward the center from all directions. Within the innermost circle is the emir's palace. Two heavy gates, one located at the start of the eastern spoke and another in the west, lead into the compound. Any attackers, or indeed visitors, must walk a quarter of the way round the innermost circular wall to reach the gate, giving defenders plenty of opportunity to weaken them with attacks from above and through the arrow slits. (The slits in the innermost wall facing the palace are usually kept shut and locked for security reasons.)

In the next circle are the great houses of the nobility. Beyond these are the temples and the accommodations of the priests. Marresh's schools are also located here, as are the hospitals, libraries, and other scholarly centers.

The next two circles are crammed with workshops and the houses of the common citizens. Each district in the outer two circles is dedicated to a particular trade, though some trades may fill two or more districts. For instance, all the jewelers' workshops are in one district, all the blacksmiths in another, and so on.

Sometime around 184 CJ, just after the Six Week War ended, the ruling emir developed a bad case of paranoia. Fearful of attack, he ordered wooden gates to be erected across every street. Within each easily defended district, every street now became a mini-fortress.

Following the signing of the peace treaty with the Sultunate in 206 CJ, the new emir decided the gates were no longer required as a security feature. However, they could be used to make the city money—he imposed a gate tax across the city. Any citizen passing through a gate had to pay 1 dirham. Guards were stationed at every gate to collect the taxes. Given that one could not leave one's street without passing through a gate, the city's coffers quickly filled. The minor street gates were finally dismantled in 476 CJ and the gate tax abolished.

A strange air pervades the city. Almost three centuries of gate tax forced each district to be as self-sufficient as possible to cut down on travel and excess taxation. Every district has a small souk, a small temple (often shared by all the gods), workshops, barbers' shops, coffee houses, and so on. Citizens do not speak of living in Marresh, but within a specific district of Marresh. To all intents and purposes, Marresh is 48 settlements in one (49 if one includes the palace district).

Marresh is the Caliphate's major trading city, being located on the banks of the river Syrah and at the start of the Road of Gods. Two large, walled mercantile compounds stand outside the city, one to the north and another to the south. Both compounds are huge caravanserais with additional wharf facilities for maritime traffic.

The northern one caters for goods on the trade road, as well as traffic to and from Hufrah. The southern one

handles maritime trade from other cities. A great fleet of barges quickly and efficiently transports cargoes and merchants from one compound to the other. Under no circumstances are merchant vessels allowed to sail the busy waterways between the docks. A cargo from Hufrah, for instance, must be unloaded at the northern compound. If it is destined for a coastal port, the cargo is barged to the southern dock for loading onto an ocean-going vessel. Naturally, Marresh charges traders for this ferry service. However, only cargoes which actually enter the city proper are charged import tax, which means the majority of cargo is not taxed.

Emir Abdul-Mu'izz is a popular ruler. Citizens pay low taxes thanks to the steady flow of trade through the docks, his decrees are aimed at promoting the prosperity of the city not just the elite, and he is very much a "people person," visiting the souks and bazaars and hearing what the common man has to say.

The city could be richer, however. Ferry services are charged on the value of cargo, not the weight. Unscrupulous merchants, often in league with the city's thieves' guilds, smuggle high value, low weight items, like gems and hashish, stacked inside high weight, low value items, like foodstuffs or reeds. Inspectors are supposed to check cargoes at random, but many are happy to accept bribes to stamp a cargo manifest without as much as a cursory glance.

The Night of Locked Gates: On the evening of the emir's birthday, every gate in the city's walls is locked tight, to be opened only in the event of a major disaster (such as a fire). At dawn the next day, the emir travels throughout the city personally unlocking all the gates.

This custom dates back to the 357 CJ, when the ruling emir decided the citizens should enjoy his birthday as a public holiday. As an added bonus, the emir suspended the gate tax for 24 hours, starting at dawn. Although gate tax has been abolished, the tradition is still maintained.

MAZAR, CITY OF EYES

Population: 43,000

Ruler: Emir Mufid ibn Omran, Eye of Heaven

Religion: Faithful (Geb-Agni, Upuaut, Shamash, Duamutef, Apsu)

Imports: Gold, grain, silver, trade, vegetables

Exports: Jewelry, livestock, meat, pearls, trade

The City of Mazar has stood on the north coast of Sayhut for thousands of years. Ancient Hekatic records detail visits by pearl traders from Mazar. Unfortunately, the Hekatic documents refer to the traders only as Pearldivers, an obvious label of convenience rather than the true name of their culture. When the Kingdom of Magor rose to prominence in the south, the Pearldivers began trading with them as well. Wealth flowed into the city.

Hekata's demise was a blow to Mazar's economy, but one which it could weather thanks to the continued trade with Magor. When Magor fell to the jinn five centuries later, the death knell sounded. The Pearldiver culture seemingly vanished from history soon after.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Scholars argue over the details, but it seems the Pearldivers had no wish to deal with the jinn, perhaps fearful the beings would destroy their city as they had done elsewhere. With no one to trade with, the economy collapsed and the pitiful fields could not feed the population. Whether the Pearldivers abandoned their city and fled to the mainland or went elsewhere remains yet another mystery of Al-Shirkuh's past.

Explorers from the Caliphate discovered the city in 53 CJ. During their exploration of the city, kept brief by the presence of hostile orcs, they learned enough to realize they had stumbled across the fabled Pearldiver city. The Caliph assembled a fleet and launched an attack in 56 CJ, driving the orcs from the city. Settlers began arriving soon after and pearls once more began to flow from Mazar.

A joint venture by orcs and corsairs saw Mazar fall in 63 CJ. The Caliph responded by launching a massive invasion. At sea, the corsairs lost half their fleet before a storm allowed them to withdraw safely. The orc army on land, now devoid of its reinforcements, was smashed and driven back as far as the mountains, where they largely remain to this day. Large numbers of settlers and soldiers were ferried to Mazar. Mazar's docks were expanded to accommodate large warships. Much like Jirja in the Sultanate, the Caliphate's only inhabited island became the home of their naval power.

Mazar's major export is still raw pearls, though the market for pearl jewelry is growing steadily. A small army of free divers scours the seabed each day. Most work for large-scale mercantile enterprises owned by the nobles—independent divers who find a rich source of pearls have a nasty habit of drowning.

Pearl diving is a dangerous business at the best of times, what with sharks, rays, and sea snakes to contend with. Over the last few months the number of divers disappearing in the warm waters has increased dramatically. Though the losses are yet not enough to threaten trade (meaning the nobles and merchants don't care), the pearl divers are fearful. Talk of "fish men" lurking beneath the waves is casually dismissed by those who do not have to dive for a living.

Such was the wealth of the ancient city that the natives used pearls to decorate their structures, mortaring them into external walls. It is believed that once upon a time the city would have shone dazzling white in the sunlight. Earlier Caliphate settlers removed many of the pearls, leaving large stretches of walls pock-marked. A law was passed in 116 CJ preventing this vandalism. To ensure the pearls were worthless to thieves, workmen laboriously drilled a hole in every pearl, filling it with a blob of black mortar. The pearls now resemble eyes, hence the modern name of the city.

The city is built around an artesian well, its only source of water. Outside the city, the ground is covered with scrubby grass, ideal for grazing livestock. Attempts have been made to irrigate the region but without success. Mazar imports virtually all of its fruit and vegetables, but has a surplus of meat. Most hostelrys have a wealth of goat and lamb dishes at very low prices. Anyone who

wants a few vegetables, however, must be prepared to pay for the luxury. Fish, while plentiful, is not a major export. Fishermen catch enough to feed the city, but pearl diving remains a more lucrative venture.

An accident in his youth left Emir Mufid blind in his left eye. In honor of his city's major export, he has placed a black pearl in the socket. Rumors abound that the pearl is magical, allowing the emir to see auras of magic, detect illusions, see through walls, reveal the secrets of a man's heart, and a hundred other things. None of the stories have ever been proven to have an ounce of truth in them.

TAMARAH, CITY OF HEAVENLY SIN

Population: 142,000

Ruler: Emira Nashwa bint Duqaq, Beauty of the Gods

Religion: Faithful (Tamarni, Marqod, Ashtart, Shamash, secretly Iblis)

Imports: Trade

Exports: Alcohol, hashish (illegal), tabac, trade, wine.

Tamarah's epitaph may make it sound like a center of debauchery, but visitors find the city very relaxed and the citizens friendly, at least during the day.

While there are literally hundreds of tabac dens, drinking houses, gambling halls, and brothels on every street, they are licensed by the temples of Tamarni, who ensure they operate in accordance with the holy laws of their goddess. Pleasure is certainly one of Tamarah's aspects, but debauchery, perversity, and pleasure through pain are not. Establishments offering any form of pleasure must pay taxes to the temples, who in turn pay taxes to the emira.

Hashish is legal here, so long as the smoker has bought his drugs from a temple of Tamarni. In order to curb illegal usage, a special dye is added to the drug, which turns the resin dark red. It has no effect on the drug's potency.

Beneath the surface of open enjoyment of all life has to offer there is a very dark undercurrent. In secret locations one can find all manner of darker passions—masochism, bestiality, and even demon-worship attract those who seek more intense thrills or who have grown bored with the humdrum pleasures of life. These locales rarely operate in the same place for more than a week.

Thieves' guilds operate across the city, immoral tomb raiders sell khem-hekau relics and dark texts to those with an unhealthy interest in the black arts, and citizens regularly disappear, kidnapped for use as human sacrifices in terrible rituals. Few ordinary citizens venture out after dark and granting hospitality to strangers after dark is a rare practice.

The Caliph, alerted to rumors of secret cults of Iblis operating in the city by his spies, recently sent emissaries to the city to investigate. All told the same story when they returned—the talk of corruption was greatly exaggerated. Convinced there is more to Tamarah than meets the eye, the Caliph is considering hiring outsiders to investigate further. With no ties to the court, he hopes they will be able to uncover the truth without raising suspicion.

Though the city still produces crops for export,

trade has dropped off in recent years. More and more fields are growing barley for alcohol, grapes for wine, and tabac—all high value products. Hidden among the crops are illegal plantations of hashish plants, grown by corrupt nobles and the thieves' guilds. The emira's men regularly comb the outlying settlements for hashish crops. When they find one, the farmers are given a simple choice—pay a heavy tax to the emira or have their crops destroyed. Given that some profit is better than no profit at all, few refuse to pay.

Emira Nashwa ranks among the most beautiful women anywhere in Al-Shirkuh, if not the world. Her pale brown skin is as smooth as marble and soft as silk, her long black hair radiates hangs luxuriously down her back in gentle curls, her bright green eyes can stir a man's ardor with the merest glance, her curvaceous figure shames hourglasses, and her full lips are the color of the sunset. Nashwa would seem to be the perfect woman, were she in fact a woman.

Most nobles' children are bored, and that goes doubly so in Tamarah. Drink, drugs, and sex are all freely available in the city. While in other cities these provide suitable distractions, a small number of Tamarah's nobles wanted something more exciting. A priest of Iblis overheard one of their frequent vocal rants and introduced them to the darker side of the world—masochism, perversities they had never imagined, and even demonology.

During one their secret midnight gatherings the foolish rakes summoned a succubus. Whether something went wrong during the casting or whether Iblis directly intervened shall never be known, but the succubus materialized unbound or not compelled to return to the Bottomless Pit. Unaware of its powers, each noble in turn fell victim to the seductive demon.

When she had hidden the bodies, the succubus set out to explore the city. For a century she enjoyed the pleasures of the city, feasting regularly and without care. Then she hit upon an idea which would grant her temporal power and serve Iblis' dark cause.

The succubus entered the palace of the then emira, Nashwa's mother, killed her, and assumed her form. Nashwa was only a baby at this time, and the succubus ruled happily for over 20 years. As Nashwa grew into a beautiful woman, the succubus decided to switch forms before anyone grew suspicious of the emira's continued youthfulness. Nashwa died in the throes of passion and the succubus assumed her form.

Nashwa is taking slow steps to cleanse the temples of Tamarni of hard-liners and replace them with her puppets. She secretly supports the activities of the thieves' guilds' and corrupt nobles' drug smuggling operations, in return for a healthy percentage of their profits. Though she has no idea of the scale of ceremonies dedicated to Iblis taking place each night, she knows the noble houses are heavily involved.

The succubus adores Nashwa's form, finding it more pleasing than any illusionary form she has ever generated using her magic. She has no desire to give it up. Knowing the religious nature of the Faithful, Nashwa

recently decreed that she had been sent a vision by Tamarni. The goddess told her, so the story went, she had given Nashwa an eternally youthful appearance because of her piety. So far no one has officially questioned the matter.

The House of Temperance: Several of the hard-liner priests have grown concerned at the dark nature of Tamarah's nocturnal activities and the growing corruption within the junior ranks of the priesthood. The House of Temperance is a small society of priests of both Tamarni and Shamash, who actively, though secretly, work against the drug smugglers and cultists.

They destroy illegal dens of vice, burn illegal hashish crops, assassinate those proven to be cultists, and destroy dark relics. The members may be religious, but they see their crusade as a holy venture—no mercy is spared against those who follow Iblis.

The emira knows of the existence of the Temperants, as members are known, but has had little luck in thwarting their activities. They remain a thorn in her side, one she wishes removed. Given her vast personal wealth, hiring outsiders to infiltrate and destroy the organization should not present her with much problem. While members suspect the emira is corrupt, no one has an inkling of her true nature.

City of Iron

Temperature: Hot

Population: 20,000+ (advanced golems)

Ruler: Malkontix, the Iron Duke

Religion: The Machine God

Imports: None (from Al-Shirkuh)

Exports: None (to Al-Shirkuh)

Virtually every caravan passing over the Silk Road during 388 and 389 CJ failed to return. Those few who did return from the long trip to the Jade Empire reported the lands immediately beyond the mountains were devoid of life, the towns and cities smoking ruins, fields of bones indications of some terrible cataclysm.

Heavy snow in the winter of 390 CJ saw the Silk Road closed for many months. When merchants began their long trek east in the early spring of 391 CJ they found the pass blocked by a towering wall of iron broken only by a single, albeit colossal, gatehouse. Many turned back, fearful of the huge structure, but a few of braver heart approached the gates and asked for passage through. The gates opened wide enough to allow the caravan through, then closed behind them with a mournful clank.

A month later, a lone merchant staggered into Last Water Oasis, his skin blistered from the heat, his lips cracked and his tongue swollen by terrible thirst. Beyond the help of even healing miracles, he managed to tell a garbled tale before he died.

During his last fevered hours he spoke of men with iron skin and glowing eyes, of arms which ended in terrible tools of destruction, of hollow tubes which spat fire

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

and death, and of how the iron men massacred every member of the caravan. He never had chance to tell how he escaped. Word of this spread quickly across the desert, and all trade along the Silk Road ceased.

Since the sphinxes jealously guarded the sea routes to the Jade Empire and charged massive import levies on trade goods, the loss of the Silk Road dealt a major blow to the economies of the Emirates, Caliphate, and Sultanate. Emissaries from the three great powers crossed back and forth over the desert, differences were put aside, and three years later a huge army gathered at Last Water Oasis, intent on reclaiming the pass.

The Battle of the Vultures' Feast, as it is now known, is remembered as an unmitigated disaster. After a six month siege supplies had run dangerously low, and cracks in the alliance were widening daily. Then, without fanfare, the gates to the city opened, unleashing wave after wave of iron men and strange, metallic bug-like creatures. Even now, reports vary on many soldiers were killed, but conservative estimates put the number at over 100,000. Their mangled remains fed the vultures and jackals for many months, but not a single scrap of metal remained anywhere on the battlefield. Since that fateful day the gates to the City of Iron have remained firmly closed.

Behind the gates lies a city unlike no other. Vast foundries belch out choking black smoke, smithies operate around the clock, processing ore, crafting it into ingots ready for shipping east or hammering it into armored plates, swords, knives, and weapons beyond the understanding of the civilized races. In the center stands a vast metallic ziggurat, a temple to the Machine God, the inhabitants' sole deity. There are no houses, shops, markets, theatres, bathhouses, or granaries, for the tireless constructs who rule the city do not need such things. The inhabitants of the city move like men, but they are not truly alive.

Ruling from the ziggurat is the Iron Duke, the Machine God's representative in the City of Iron. Malkontix is a giant among his kind, and a heartless ruler (in more ways than one). Devoid of any pleasant emotions, his sole aim is to serve the will of the Machine God. Each of his four arms ends in a deadly weapon, a small tube mounted on his left shoulder can shoot deadly bolts of lightning, and a smoke-belching hump on his back allows him to fly, propelling him upward on fiery jets.

For now the inhabitants work patiently to carry out their god's wishes. Those in Al-Shirkuh with knowledge of the city sense a dark stirring over it. Seers claim to see the iron gates opening in the next few years, unleashing a destructive force beyond that seen before. The visions always end the same way—with Al-Shirkuh in flame.

Geography

The City of Iron stands in the foothills of the Mountains of Death and straddles the pass. No river ferds the city nor do the inhabitants have need of water for drinking or irrigation.

MOUNTAINS OF DEATH

Once known as the Wall of Creation, beyond which lie only strange barbarian lands, the mountains were renamed after the founding of the City of Iron and the closure of the Silk Road.

The mountains extend over 600 miles from north to south in Al-Shirkuh, and old records indicate at least the same distance east to west. Here they divide into several distinct ranges. The towering peaks form a natural barrier against the lands to the east, but not against monsters—countless orcs, trolls, goblins, manticores, and other fell beasts inhabit the lower slopes.

The snow line once began at around 10,000 feet, and snow existed at this altitude only in winter—barely half a dozen peaks had snowcapped summits all year round. These days the snowline begins at around 5,000 feet and is visible even in summer. In winter, snow can fall as low as 1000 feet once one clears the desert.

While the temperature in the foothills remains uncomfortably hot, it drops quickly as one rises. At 2,000 feet the temperature drops to Warm, at 4,000 to Temperate, and at the snowline it is Freezing. Few folk have bothered to climb higher, and those who do often return with severe frostbite, babbling incoherent tales of creatures made of ice, and of fire which burns cold.

THE SILK ROAD

The Silk Road is the only known pass through the Mountains of Death. It winds up and down the mountains for hundreds of miles before eventually emerging into a vast plateau that marks the start of the eastern lands. Beyond the fragmented barbarian kingdoms lies the Jade Empire, the Land of Silk and Spice, and the unlimited wealth it promised brave merchants.

In older days, the path never rose about 8,000 feet. While cold, the temperature was at least bearable. These days much of the path is above the snowline, not that anyone from Al-Shirkuh travels its length anymore.

🌀 The Empty Zone 🌀

Temperature: Stifling

Population: Unknown (rumors of undead and orcs)

Ruler: None

Religion: None

Imports: None

Exports: None

The Empty Zone lives up its name, for no civilized creature makes its home in the barren waste. Things were not always this way, though. In distant days the jungle extended further north and east, and the lizardmen were the dominant force in the region. They remained content in their relative isolation until humans began to colonize the areas bordering their jungle homes.

What became of the human cultures is unknown, but

vague legends speak of a terrible war between the lizardmen and humans, a war that in some tales rivaled the animosity and power of the War of Copper Jars. By the time Hekata rose in the north the human cultures had ceased to exist, their cities empty and silent save for the constant howl of the wind. Some sages claim the blemmye tribes were once men—transformed into monsters wielded during the now forgotten war.

The jinn staked no serious claim on the region, and things went unchanged until around five centuries ago. As in the Grazelands, the desert began to creep forward, slowly at first and then with gathering pace. The lizardmen beseeched their deity to protect them from the advancing sands, but no miracle could halt its progress.

Faced with being buried alive, the lizardmen reluctantly abandoned their ancient cities to the desert and fled deeper into the western jungle. Although there is no evidence to support the claim, the lizardmen blame the humans for the loss of their lands. As far as they are concerned, the humans grew more aggressive after defeating the jinn and, using stolen magic, decided to eradicate any perceived threat from other races. The destruction of the cakali homelands is, for them, proof enough.

Although the lizardmen would dearly love to wage war against the humans once more, the Empty Zone acts as a natural buffer between the two races. Regardless of race, only a complete fool would march an army through the Empty Zone and then expect them to fight a strong enemy. So for now the lizardmen plot their revenge, seeking new ways to crush their foes and retake the lands they once owned.

Geography

Like much of the Great South Desert, the Empty Zone is a wasteland of sand, dunes, and rocks, broken only by old ruins. Much of the landscape is flat. Just two small dune seas break the monotony for travelers.

As one nears the jungle so the tops of trees poke through the sand, their swaying leaves mimicking the last gasp of a drowning man. Closer still, the great jungle comes into view, its various shades of green clashing garishly with the yellow sands. The border between desert and jungle is not clearly defined—in some areas the sands flow into the jungle for miles but are only a few inches deep, yet in other tall dunes stand like a dividing wall.

Rainfall is practically zero in much of the region and there are no oases west of the Southern Trade Road. Running out of water here is a near-certain death sentence.

Major Locales

ANCIENT RUINS

There are at least a dozen major ruins and ten times that number of smaller ruins scattered through the Empty Zone. A few remain above the level of the desert, built as they were on tall hills, but the majority are at least half buried. The gods alone know how many completely buried cities may exist here, and they are not inclined to reveal their knowledge.

Those nearest the trade road are of human origin and bare some resemblance to the cities of Hekata. Ancient pyramids and columned temples dominate the settlements. Statues of gods and kings stand half-buried, silent sentinels waiting once more for someone to speak their name and remember their deeds. Further west lay the abandoned lizardmen cities, dominated by their towering ziggurat temples where their fell deity was appeased on a daily basis by bloody sacrifices.

Given their remote location, not to mention the frequent talk of hideous curses, terrible beasts, and fierce blemmye tribes, it is perhaps not surprising most of these ruins have never been explored. The lizardmen ruins are reportedly the most dangerous places to explore, as lizardmen scour their deserted cities for any relics their ancestors left behind so as to deny them to the humans.



The Free Emirate States

Temperature: Hot

Population: 1,231,000 (75% Hadaree, 10% sand goblins, 7% jinn blooded, 5% Bedu, 2% hyaenidae, 1% Anari, <1% Saxa)

Ruler: None (individual emirs)

Religion: Generally mixed (all except Iblis). Even in cities listed as Devoted or Faithful, practitioners of the major belief rarely account for more than 70% of the total populace.

The six cities of the Free Emirates are a blend of two distinct architectural styles. Newer buildings show typical Al-Shirkuh features—flat roofs on the houses of the commoners and minarets and domes on the temples and palaces. The original buildings in the cities' Old Quarters, however, have pitched roofs covered with stone tiles. Many common dwellings lack the central courtyard preferred by the Hadaree. The strangest features are the coastal castles, with their round towers and square keeps.

Before -232, the region was a morass of independent tribes and towns populated by refugees driven here by the jinn advance. Only two cities, Rawdah in the north and Qurqas in the south, existed, both ancient remnants of older cultures. Then invaders came from across the sea. Their warships landed on the beaches unopposed, disgorging heavily armed soldiers. The Anari had arrived.

At first the invaders suffered many losses—chain mail clad soldiers collapsed in the heat, horses and men died of thirst, disease ravaged the ranks, and the solid lines of heavy cavalry armed with long lances were no match for the more agile native cavalymen armed with bows. Determination and weight of numbers were on the Anari side, though, and after two years of bitter fighting they held a thin but stable line of territory along the coast. Both great cities had fallen after relatively short sieges.

Using slaves transported from their homeland and natives captured in Al-Shirkuh, they began to build stone cities on the estuaries of the four central rivers. Within a decade the new cities were sealed behind solid defenses. The natives, who had constantly harried the invaders during those 10 years, found their weapons little use against high stone walls and without ships of their own to stop Anari supply vessels they could not conduct a successful siege. With no hope of driving out the Anari by force, the natives reluctantly made their peace with the foreign nobles.

Traders followed the settlers and the cities grew wealthy. Precious metals, food, gems, and flax flowed from Al-Shirkuh to Rassilon to supply the growing population of the Anari Empire. Within a century, the Anari were trading with the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes. The two nations had few personal dealings, allowing the Bedu to risk the dangers of the desert on their behalf,

and there are no records in either domain telling of any diplomatic ties.

Although the jinn had suffered heavy losses against the sphinxes in -505, their strength and resolve had recovered sufficiently by the time the Anari were reaching their zenith in Al-Shirkuh. Yet they made no hostile moves toward the Anari. Some historians claim the jinn were fearful of expanding westward lest it weakened their northern border and allowed the sphinxes to invade, but many see this as a common misconception—the sphinxes had already grown insular by then, a fact the jinn would have known only too well.

Few doubt the Anari posed a threat to the jinn. Actual Anari made up a tiny portion of the populace, the well-trained Anari armies were not suited to campaign in the deep deserts, the native contingents would sooner have mutinied than face the jinn in battle, and, to cap it all, the Anari blatantly stopped all major expansion at the edge of the nearby mountains.

Legends that the jinn sent ambassadors to the Anari cities shortly before the War of Copper Jars are common, but being based on word of mouth handed down over five centuries, many historians doubt their authenticity.

As the Anari grew rich and the empire more decadent, the natives suffered more and more deprivations. Food rationing came into force to ensure the grain ships were as full as possible, more lands were taken by force to expand the Emperor's domain, and taxes rose higher and higher to support the burgeoning army and its military campaigns in Rassilon. To the say the Anari were never popular is a gross understatement.

Slave rebellions were frequent and had to be put down with lethal force. Guerilla groups waged constant war, attacking caravans or outlying settlements. Of these the most feared by the Anari were the Assassins, a group of fanatics who struck down Anari nobles, military commanders, and priests with impunity.

By -20, the Anari's grip on their territories in Rassilon was slipping. The armies of the Liche-Priest were ravaging the land and the conquered Saxa tribes were rebelling more frequently and more openly. In Al-Shirkuh the Anari were steadily losing any support they once had. Raids, riots, and murders were increasing rapidly in number and intensity. With no additional troops available from the north to protect them, the Anari citizens of Al-Shirkuh found themselves surrounded by an increasingly hostile population.

The War of Copper Jars went largely unnoticed behind the mountains, at least until it finished. Freed from jinn enslavement and with the core jinn lands a wasteland, refugees flooded out toward the coasts. While the majority ended up in the south, a large group headed west, crossing or bypassing the mountains, eventually being accepted into the Anari cities in 2 CJ. Only around Qurqas did violence occur.

In 19 CJ, the Emperor suddenly ordered the cities of Al-Shirkuh abandoned—the armies and nobles boarded their ships and left. Unbeknownst to the citizens of Al-Shirkuh, the Liche-Priest's final, ill-fated campaign had

been launched. Although the Anari would return (as traders, not aggressors), the memory of their conquest lingered through the intervening centuries through their blood. Even today, children in the Free Emirates are sometimes born with fair skin and blond hair.

New ruling families were quickly established in the cities. Laws were laid down proclaiming each city would henceforth be a free city, subject to no outside authority. Though politically independent of each other, the cities formed mutual trade and protection pacts to ensure no aggressor could topple them one by one. The Free Emirates came into being in 22 CJ.

The Anari rulers had, over the centuries, switched faith from their own gods to those of similar ilk from Al-Shirkuh's pantheon. Thus, the cities were predominantly Faithful during the early years of the Free Emirates. Suleiman's teachings were known, carried to the cities by survivors of the War of Copper Jars, Bedu traders, and missionaries. By 135 CJ, the populace was evenly divided in faith but the two sides lived in harmony—the emirs' laws allowed for the worship of any good gods or spiritual powers. The distant wars between the Caliphate and Sultanate caused minor ripples of discontent among staunch supporters of the two faiths, but minimal open hostility.

Traders reached Rassilon shortly after the Emirates were founded, but found the land devastated. With no chance of profiting from trade, the merchants turned their attention back toward Al-Shirkuh, and opened trade routes with the Caliphate, Sultanate, and the Kingdoms. Ships made sporadic visits to Rassilon, but only a century ago did the northern people begin to trade in sufficient quantities to make the trip worthwhile.

Suddenly the Free Emirates were thrust into the political limelight of Al-Shirkuh. With the loss of the Silk Road and sea trade to the east dominated by the insular sphinxes, the markets of Rassilon were a major boon to the southern nations. Once mere trading backwaters, the cities of the Emirates became major players overnight.

Each city within the Free Emirates is an independent state and thus each has its own stat block.

Geography

The Free Emirates is a stretch of scrubby desert on the western coast of Al-Shirkuh. The presence of the two mountain ranges means there is sufficient rainfall to keep the rivers filled, and the encroachment of the desert is greatly slowed by the natural barrier.

DUSTY MOUNTAINS

The westward side of the mountains still sees sufficient rain for grasses to grow on the lower slopes, making them ideal pasture for goats and sheep. Many rural villages dot the hills. The eastern slopes are arid and wind swept, the valleys between the foothills filling with sand, and the ground dry as bone. Snow sometime falls on the highest peaks, but only during exceptionally bad winters.

Focused on their trade, the cities have inadvertently allowed orcs and ogres to grow in number. Raids are on the increase, though it is the rural villages which suffer the most. Each emir makes a token gesture of sending out troops to sweep the lower foothills, but the higher slopes remain densely populated by ferocious tribes.

Wind Pass: The only easily accessible pass through the mountains lies on no trade road and is only poorly defended by a small caravanserai-style fort populated by soldiers from Qina. A few Bedu tribes use the pass, but any shortcut across the western desert entails traveling perilously close to the Realm of the Medusae.

The emirs of Qina and Sirhan would both profit greatly from a trade road through Wind Pass. Such a route would open landward trade with the rest of Al-Shirkuh while avoiding Qurqas on the outbound trip. A series of tax incentives would undoubtedly benefit merchants willing to make the longer journey into the cities. First, of course, the medusae threat must be dealt with—a threat neither city wishes to tackle directly.

NAZIR RANGE

The Nazir Range snakes around the top of the Emirates. Its angular, narrow peaks protected the city of Rawdah from the expansionistic dreams of the Hekatic pharaohs, whose forces were channeled into the southern pass and defeated on more than one occasion. Rawdah's resurgence as a military city have curbed the orc tribes into submission, and those that live here rarely raid westward of the peak. Several hippogriff families live on the highest peaks.

Castle of Knights: Atop a high, flat-topped hill, stand the ruins of a former Anari fortress, constructed to guard the gap between the Nazir Range and Dusty Mountains. Once considered impenetrable, time and nature have achieved what no mortal force could. The towers have crumbled, walls have collapsed, and many of the wooden supports now lie as piles of dust, eaten by woodworm.

The remoteness of the castle, lack of foes to guard against, and high cost involved in reconstructing the defenses deterred the Emirates from stationing troops here. As such, it is just another ruin of a bygone age, one among many in the great desert.

Monument of Fallen Heroes: A small temple, now mostly weathered away by wind and sand, stands on the slopes overlooking the southern pass. Placed here after defeat of the last Hekatic invasion, the surviving defenders buried their dead beneath the structure. Legends claim the dead will rise to defend their homes once more if an invading army should ever try to pass beneath the southern slopes of the Range. Of course, if the undead rulers of Hekata should try to invade, on whose side the skeletal warriors would end up fighting is anyone's guess.

RIVER AL-GIB

For reasons no one can fathom the northern bank of the Al-Gib has never been fertile. Though there is ad-

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

equate soil, crops planted here simply fail to grow. The southern bank, by comparison, has rich, deep soil, ideal for growing a variety of crops.

Several ruins stand close to the bank, remnants of structures abandoned long before the Anari settled here. Locals speak of these being former temples to Iblis, but not enough stones remain to form a factual opinion. Still, few locals are willing to explore the derelict buildings, despite the tales of buried treasure.

RIVER AL-SHUM

The Al-Shum is the Free Emirates' southern natural border. Wide and deep, the slow-flowing river acts as an obstacle to attackers, but provides bountiful resources for the farmers and fishermen who live along its banks. Though the upper stretch could easily be bridged, the emirs of Qurqas have always refused to build one, thus forcing all trade to come through their city by ship rather than skirting around the city to link with the Free Trade Road.



RIVER ARUN

The Arun, like most rivers in Al-Shirkuh, provides suitable water for irrigation of crops. Until three years ago, the river was insignificant in the stories of men, just another life-giving watercourse in an otherwise arid landscape. Then, one spring day, the river suddenly began boiling.

Fish and other animals in deep water at the time were boiled alive in seconds, animals and people nearer the banks suffered hideous burns before they could drag themselves to safety on the banks, and several ships capsized in the bubbling, steaming waters, killing the unfortunate crews.

Naturally, the water is undrinkable straight from the river. Even when removed from the river, the water continues to boil for many days in winter and weeks in summer. Drinking and irrigation water pulled from the river is stored in vast cisterns or pools and allowed to cool before it can be used. Although it has an odd taste, the water is quite palatable, even medically beneficial in some cases.

Sulfur is a vital element for plant growth and the crops along the banks have actually prospered from being irrigated with sulfuric water. The high level of sulfur in the plants also acts as a natural pesticide and fungicide, an added boon for the farmers.

Exploration further north has revealed the rains still feed the streams and the streams still feed the river with cold water. Within a few miles, however, the water temperature instantly rises from a few degrees above freezing to boiling point. Jinn mages and priests of Apsu and Geb-Agni have performed lengthy divinations, but the cause of the boiling remains a total enigma.

What most folk find strange is that despite constantly boiling, the river maintains its pre-boiling levels. While lower in summer than in winter, levels are no lower than they were four years ago.

RIVER MOSAK

The Mosak is wide, fast-flowing, and turbulent. By the time the streams which feed it descend from the mountains the river is already too wide and tumultuous to bridge. Likewise, no ferries cross its waters, nor do fishermen sail or barges sail its waters. As a result, the southern bank, though fertile, is largely unpopulated, the natives having no easy access to the city of Rawdah to the north and Qina being too far to journey across the sands.

RIVER MUSHTAQ

The wide water of the Mushtaq is well-traveled by heavily-laden barges carrying ores down from the mountains to the furnaces of Salih or empty barges returning to the mines. By law, only official ore barges are allowed to travel the river by day—passenger ferries, grain barges, and fishermen must sail at night.

RIVER TABAZ

The Tabaz is the opposite of the Mosak (p. 100). Slow, meandering, and narrow, the river is reduced to a mere stream of muddy brown water in summer. Pools form in deep basins, ideal watering holes for animals, but deadly because of the crocodiles which inhabit them. Only a narrow stretch of the banks is fertile enough for agriculture. Even here, the farmers prefer to grow lucrative crops of herbs and flowers for the perfumers in Qina rather than foodstuffs.

Major Locales

MAQNEH, CITY OF PEACE

Population: 160,000

Ruler: Emir Yusef ibn Ziyad, Voice of the Emirates

Religion: Mixed (Ashtart, Marqod, Qedeshet, Tammuz)

Imports: Trade

Exports: Cereals, trade

Maqneh is the birthplace of the Free Emirates, for it was here the new rulers gathered to sign the treaty of independence and cooperation. Outside the temples of Marqod, Qedeshet, and Tammuz stand tall, polished marble monoliths, into which are inscribed the words of the treaty.

The city remains heavily involved in politics and diplomacy. Diplomats and nobles from the Emirates, Caliphate, and Sultanate meet here to discuss trade agreements, settle disputes, socialize, spy on each other, trade gossip, and even arrange marriages. Naturally, the city is a hotbed of machinations. It is commonly joked that for every honest citizen there are at least two spies.

The city has two concentric walls. The outer wall protects the city from attack and the desert. The inner wall surrounds the Diplomatic Quarter, a fortress of typical Anari design. Under the Anari, it served as the imperial governor's residence. The main keep of the old fortress is now the emir's palace. The embassies are located in out buildings (the Caliphate uses a former stable and the Sultanate an old storehouse).

Only the city guard, paladins, nobles, and staff attached to one of the embassies may carry weapons in Maqneh, and even then they must have a permit signed by the emir. Visitors must hand their weapons in at the city gates, for which they receive a receipt. No receipt, no return of weapons. There are no weapon shops anywhere in the city. Carrying a weapon without a permit is punishable by a 500 dinar fine, confiscation of the weapon, and enforced slavery for up to 3 years.

Since nature abhors a vacuum, the thieves' guild fills the market niche by operating a successful weapon smuggling ring. Illegal weapons cost three times as much as normal, ten times if the buyer wants a signed permit as well. There is also a steady trade in stolen receipts. A thief steals a receipt, leaves the city, collects the weapons, and smuggles the stolen goods back inside to be sold.

Emir Yusef comes from a long and distinguished line. His ancestors negotiated the foundation of the Emirates, secured the trade routes with the Caliphate and Sultanate, expanded trade into Rassilon, and ended the threat of Rawdah's pirates. Although a gifted diplomat, Yusef became enamored with a female khamsin jinn blooded dervish mage, Bashira bint Maimun, and lost his focus.

He neglected important meetings to write her poetry, took dance lessons when he should have been attending state dinners, and spent a vast fortune on gifts. Bashira spurned the emir more than once, several times in public. Desperate to make her his, the emir had her kidnapped from her lodgings. Her disappearance did not go unnoticed, and Yusef made a public statement, claiming she had left the city because "she felt unworthy of his attention." Bashira currently languishes in the harem, her arms bound to prevent her working magic, while Yusef searches for a way to "win her love."

Unfortunately for the emir, Bashira is the cousin of a Sultanate pasha with powerful friends. Were her cousin ever to discover the reason for her disappearance, there would undoubtedly be serious political repercussions.

Yusef recently revealed his indiscretion to his chief councilor, Pasha Nasir ibn Mubarak. Having no wish to see this error of judgment spiral out of control any further, Nasir plans to have the girl kidnapped from the harem and taken to the deep desert, where she will meet an unfortunate accident. As far as anyone else will be concerned, the girl did leave the city, exactly as the emir stated.

Bashira, however, has an ally in the court—a young courtier, Effenda Yumu bint Shakir. Bashira dictated a letter to the courtier, asking her to deliver it to her cousin. The girls' meeting did not go unnoticed, however, and Yumu went into hiding. Unable to leave the city, she hopes to find a group of travelers who can aid her friend.

QINA, CITY OF SMELLS

Population: 89,000

Ruler: Emira Ghadah bint Seif, She Whose Breath is Rose-Scented

Religion: Mixed (Marqod, Tamarni, Upuaut)

Imports: Cereals, tabac, trade, vegetables

Exports: Perfume, trade

Qina is a foul-smelling cesspit of a city and the poorest of the Free Emirates. The city originally housed a population of around 20,000 people within its walls and had an infrastructure suited for that number. Once the Anari left, citizens flocked to the city to make a new life. Available living space rapidly filled and the populace spilled out into the surrounding desert, creating new suburbs without any order or town planning.

Although generations of emirs expanded the walls to protect the increased population, they made no provision for the city's sewers. The waste of a bustling city flows into the narrow tunnels and quickly rises back out of the grates into the streets.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

The slime covered streets are a breeding ground for swarms of vicious rats and vile diseases. It has long been tradition that anything dropped in the filth stays there—picking it up is a sure way to catch some virulent disease. An army of slaves walks the streets armed with wide-ended brooms, sweeping the sewage toward the river, but they fight a war they cannot hope to win. Wags often comment that the riverbed holds more treasure than the emira's coffers but is far better protected from thieves.

During summer, when the Tabaz drops to a trickle, the riverbed through the city is coated in a deep, foul-smelling layer of slime and sewage. Vast swarms of biting flies hover along the length of the river and the well-traveled bridges become a veritable buffet. Mages who know spells suitable for dispersing swarms can earn a tidy sum. Spellcasters should note that fire spells have been banned in the city since 329 CJ, when an explosion of gases singed the emir's hair. Use of a fire spell (heat is fine) is punishable by a 1000 dinar fine and a month sweeping the streets.

The stench of the sewage is matched only by Qina's sole homegrown export—perfume. Using natural oils and plant extracts, the city's numerous perfumeries manufacture a bewildering range of scents and fragrances, even making custom scents to order. Every master perfumer boasts of a secret recipe better than those of his rivals. Industrial espionage is big business in Qina, for each year the emira hosts a grand contest in the palace gardens (see below).

Cheap perfume sells for around 5 dinars a quart and smells not unlike vinegar. Higher quality perfumes begin at 100 dinars a bottle (three ounces), the truly masterful ones selling for as much as 500 dinars an ounce.

Truly wealthy citizens pay jinn mages to create relics containing khamsin. On command, the jinni creates a puff of actual fresh air, untainted by the stench of raw filth or the competing odor of perfumes.

Emira Ghadah's life-path should not have led her to the throne. The position of emir should have gone to her older brother, Tariq. The day their father died, Tariq vanished from the palace, leaving Ghadah as the sole heir. Many stories abound about Tariq's vanishing act. Some say Ghadah had him murdered, others claim slavers kidnapped him for ransom (though no ransom has been demanded), and others that he thought himself unfit for leadership and fled into the desert. In her brother's absence, Ghadah ascended the throne. There she has remained for the past 42 years.

Were Tariq to return to Qina during her reign, he would legally be entitled to claim the title of emir. Should Ghadah die before his return, however, the title would pass to her heir (currently her eldest son, Qudamah bin Ma'n) and Tariq would have no claim.

Ghadah's chief advisor is her wizar, Zafar al-Hadi. A decade her senior, Zafar has been the emira's constant companion since she ascended the throne. Rumors abound he spirited away Tariq or is the true father of the emira's children, but nothing can be proven.

Contest of Bouquets: All of the master perfumers are

invited to bring one perfume to the contest, which is a public spectacle. The emira used to test each concoction personally, but this practice ended five years ago after an assassin masquerading as a visiting perfumer used a contact poison concealed in a perfume spray.

Fortunately, the emira survived—the assassin was captured and sprayed with his own poison, enduring a lingering death. Nowadays, the perfumers must spray or dab their perfumes on their own skin and allow the emira to merely breathe the scent.

Whichever perfumer wins receives the emira's patronage for the year, and where the emira shops, so does the rest of the court.

Ratcatchers' Guild: Ratcatching in Qina is an ancient occupation and one which has, over the years, enjoyed noble patronage. An obscure law allows licensed ratcatchers to demand compensation from non-members who kill a rat, either deliberately or by accident. As well as hiring actual hand-on ratcatchers, the guild also employs "watchers," typically children, to report anyone who kills a rat to the guildmaster. The current penalty for "unlawfully killing a rat" is 1 dinar.

QURQAS, CITY OF SLAVES

Population: 166,000

Ruler: Emir Ubaid ibn Qasim, the Sword of Freedom

Religion: Mixed (Qedeshet, Upuaut, Karmelos)

Imports: Trade

Exports: Mameluks, trade

Qurqas sits on the southern bank of the Al-Shum. The river here is roughly half a mile across, too far, and too deep, to bridge. By dint of its location, Qurqas developed into a major trading center during the Anari occupation. The invaders modified the layout of the city to accommodate the increased trade their expansion brought to the region.

Following the War of Copper Jars, a large number of slaves approached the city along the Free Trade Road. The Anari nobles mistook this for an attack and massed their army on the plains. Veterans of a brutal campaign and led by mameluks who had forsaken their oath of loyalty to the jinn, the slaves were no ragtag rabble, but a fighting force more than a match for the decadent Anari, who had faced no major foes in centuries. The battle was swift and one sided. The citizens of Qurqas, now undefended, opened their gates to the victorious slave army.

The mameluks, trained as warriors and leaders, assumed control of the city. The first emir was Ahmed ibn Mustafa, a former general in the jinn army and then a general under Suleiman. Before his death, he named the commander of his former company, the Swords of Suleiman, as his successor. The practice continues to this day.

Many mameluks regard Qurqas as their spiritual home. The city guard comprises eight mameluk companies. The Swords of Suleiman act as the emir's bodyguard. Six independent companies retain strong ties with the city, and often return here after campaigns to resupply and recuperate.

Qurqas is the only city in Al-Shirkuh where slavery is

illegal. (The city received its title in honor of the former jinn slaves who gained control). Any slave who sets foot in Qurqas automatically becomes a freeman. Their former masters receive no compensation for their loss. As such, visiting merchants leave their slaves shackled on their ships or under guard outside Traders Gate to prevent them gaining access.

The only land access to the city is through Traders' Gate, a well-fortified, heavily-manned double gate protected by a barbican. Unless there is an approaching sandstorm, the gates are open during daylight hours. All visitors to the city must register with the guards, pay an entrance tax (1 dirham per leg), and subject themselves to an inspection of any trade goods.

Beyond the gates, a wide avenue leads to the center of the city, within lies the Trading Square. Surrounded on all sides by warehouses and caravanserais, the square is the financial and geographical heart of the city. A small temple to Qedeshet stands in the center, and functions as an administrative office as well as a religious site.

The square is divided into a maze of pitches and thoroughfares by brightly colored slabs. Merchants rent a pitch in which to display a sample of their goods—actual cargoes are stored in the warehouses and caravanserais. The pitches around the edge of the square are larger and more expensive than those in the interior.

In the hours before sunrise, merchants erect their stands and drag their display goods on their pitches. At dawn, a gong sounds from the temple, signaling the start of the trading day. Great throngs of gaudily-clothed merchants haggle from sunrise to sunset, squawking and flapping like angry gulls as they seek to purchase cargoes at the best prices. At dusk, the gong sounds again and trading ends. As darkness falls, the merchants hastily dismantle their pitches.

Pickpockets are a constant nuisance, as are drug pushers, prostitutes, and other ne'er-do-wells. Under an ancient law, all security for the Trading Square is handled by paladins of Qedeshet. Fanatical in their duty, citizens caught breaking the law risk loss of limbs and enslavement (often both).

Extending from the western side of the square, the avenue continues through the city to the docks. Qurqas' docks have been extensively expanded over the centuries. Originally built along the river bank, the docks now curve round along the coast, though the shallow sea and sandbanks limit ships docking here to low-keeled vessels.

The southern city districts, hemmed in between the docks and the central avenue, are the poorer districts. A warren of narrow streets and covered alleyways strewn with garbage, visitors are warned to avoid the area if possible. North of the avenue are the homes of the wealthy—the senior priests, mages, merchants, and nobles.

Emir Ubaid, like his predecessors, served as captain of the Swords of Suleiman before ascending the throne. Like many emirs before him, Ubaid is a man of action—bureaucracy and finances bore him senseless. He leaves such matters to the priests of Qedeshet, who revel in such details.

THE QURQAS BUREAUCRACY

Outsiders who wish to sell goods in Qurqas must purchase a merchant's pass (10 dinars per different type of cargo per visit) on entering the city. Even visitors who might want to sell some booty scavenged off orcs they slew are legally required to purchase passes.

These ornate scrolls are available from trading offices located in the docks and inside Traders Gate. Officials record the trader's name, the specific cargo, and the total quantity brought into the city on each pass. Once a merchant has his pass, he then pays his import tax (5%).

When a trade transaction is completed, the buyer records the quantity he purchased and the price he paid on the seller's pass and then signs and dates it. On leaving the city, passes are handed in to officials and the numbers tallied. Any discrepancies can result in a lengthy delay while the matter is investigated.

Visitors wishing to buy goods for export (defined as "any goods purchased in Qurqas intended for use outside the city") must purchase a different form of pass. This costs a flat fee of 2 dinars. The buyer's name is recorded, but no other details regarding goods are filled in. When a buyer purchases goods for export, the seller fills in the quantity purchased and signs and dates the scroll. These are taken to one of the trade offices and export tax (5%) is calculated.

Ships' crews, caravanners, and visiting adventuring parties may purchase a single export pass between them, but all names in the group must be recorded on the scroll.

Selling goods or trying to export them without a properly filled-out pass is punishable by confiscation of all goods (including ships, caravans, and personal belongings) and public flogging.

As a bustling trade city, every rumor in Al-Shirkuh eventually reaches Qurqas. Disturbed by reports of potential trouble between the Caliphate and Sultanate, sightings of ophidae, talk of skeletal hordes in Hekata, tales of unruly jinn, and a host of other problems across Al-Shirkuh, Ubaid has ordered his spies to travel to other cities and gather information on any strange happenings. Meanwhile, he has increased the size of the city guard and stepped up training. If war is brewing, Ubaid intends to be prepared.

RAWDAH, CITY OF HEROES

Population: 154,000

Ruler: Emira Kalila bint Tayyib, Lady of the Sea

Religion: Mixed (Karmelos, Upuaut, Tamarni)

Imports: Trade, tribute

Exports: Hired ships, mercenaries, timber

Rawdah is perhaps the most naturally defended city in Al-Shirkuh. North and east are the mountains of the Nazir Range while to the south flows the wide, turbulent

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Mosak. Locals proudly boast that no invading force has ever crossed the Mosak to attack the city beyond (the Anari landed by ship north of the river, a fact the locals conveniently forget).

The city rose to prominence long before the Anari conquered the region. Formerly a militocracy (a state governed by soldiers), Rawdah's legions stood firm against Hekata's armies more than once, thwarting several pharaohs' dreams of expanding their empire to the west coast.

Despite their proud warrior heritage, Rawdah gradually declined over the centuries. By the time the Anari legions landed, corruption and decadence had stripped the army of its leadership and morale. The Anari had little use for the city—they conquered it simply to remove the possibility of Rawdah becoming a threat in the future. Rawdah began as a city of soldiers and ended up as a city of unwanted slaves.

The end of the War of Copper Jars saw only a marginal increase in population. Rawdah's position far to the north and the formidable barrier of the Mosak deterred potential settlers. Insular, with little to trade, and often ignored by its peers, Rawdah seemed in danger of fading into obscurity, a ruined city waiting to happen.

Then trade began with Rassilon. Frustrated at not being included in the trade agreements with Rassilon, the emir's great-great-grandfather took the decision to rekindle some of Rawdah's past military glories. He put a long-term plan into place, one which would see Rawdah recognized once again as a major player.

Crops made way for trees, workers extended and fortified the docks, and iron armor and weapons replaced the bronze ones the ragtag army current wielded. The emir employed an army of navigators and master mariners to train his commanders and sailors, mages specializing in air and fire magic received vast sums in return for tutoring a new generation of wizards, and priests of Karmelos and Upuaut received special privileges if they signed up to the new army.

A generation of famine, tireless work, and huge expenditure shattered Rawdah's already poor economy, but it gave them a mighty naval force and some of the best trained and equipped soldiers anywhere in Al-Shirkuh. Without warning his peers, the emir unleashed a vast fleet of pirate ships into the ocean with orders to capture any trade vessels they spied.

Heavily laden trade ships proved no match for the fast, sleek warships of Rawdah. Vast sums of ill-gotten wealth flowed into the city. The five other major cities rallied their maritime forces in a bid to break Rawdah's hegemony over the seas, but without success. Highly trained and with the best ships afloat, Rawdah swept the sea clean of all opposition. With little option left, the other emirs sued for peace.

Modern Rawdah no longer terrorizes the sea, but it remains a rich city. Its great shipyards sell expertly crafted, highly seaworthy vessels, the navy hires out its services for escort duties, and its mercenaries, though not mameluks, are regarded as among the finest anywhere in Al-Shirkuh. In addition, the other cities pay an annual

tribute to Rawdah to ensure the navy does not slip back into old habits and take up piracy again. Though it took many centuries, Rawdah is once again a city of heroes.

Emira Kalila is an attractive young lady, possessed of sharp wit and an insatiable desire to explore. Unfortunately, she also suffers from a wasting disease. During a recent trip to Hekata to look for evidence of Rawdah's victories over the ancient Hekatics, she fell victim to a particularly nasty curse. Each month her life force slowly ebbs away, leaving her a bed-ridden, skeletal figure. Not even repeated ministrations from clerics of Marqod have slowed the disease.

But there is a glimmer of hope. Jafrah al-Bani, her wizir, has heard tale of a healer in Rassilon, one Mother Felise, who can cure any sickness. At present, very few in the court know of the emira's sickness. As far as everyone else is concerned, Kalila is simply away on another expedition and has left Jafrah in charge, as is her want.

Kalila is unmarried and the last of her line. Were the nobles to discover the truth, they would no doubt begin plotting their ascension, possibly even hastening the poor lady's death. Jafrah thus seeks trustworthy outsiders to visit Rassilon and visit Mother Felise in the hope of curing his mistress.

Mariner's School: Appropriately, Rawdah has one of the best nautical schools in the land. Characters who enroll on the three month course (1,000 dinars fee), receive Boating at a d6 if they do not already possess it. Heroes with Boating may increase it one die type, to a maximum of d10, instead. Neither increase requires an advancement slot to be used.

Shipyards: Rawdah's shipyards produce some of the best ships anywhere in the world. A typical ship costs 25% more than normal, but has +1 Handling, +1 Toughness, and +2 Top Speed (under sail). Due to a lengthy waiting list, it takes one month per point of Toughness (including armor) to build a ship for heroes wishing to become mariners.

SALIH, CITY OF FIRE

Population: 139,000

Ruler: Emir Abbas ibn Abbas, Hammerhand

Religion: Faithful (Geb-Agni, Qedeshet)

Imports: Coal, flax, hashish (illegal), pottery, timber, trade

Exports: Armor, metalworking, trade, weapons

Viewed from afar by day, the city sits beneath a choking pall of black smoke, which hangs over the city like a gigantic vulture waiting to feast. At night, it glows like a city of wheezing dragons puffing dark smoke and brilliant sparks into the sky.

Virtually the entire city's economy is dedicated to metalworking. Huge foundries dominate the east of the city. Ore from the mountains is unloaded at the river bank and hauled straight into the foundries, which lie nearby. Metal is extracted and smelted into ingots, which are then sold to the hundreds of smithies, armorers, and weaponsmiths located in the city's industrial quarter.

Operating 24 hours a day, the various industrial centers burn great quantities of wood imported from Rassilon. Smoke continually pours out of the chimneys, forming an acrid cloud over the city. Despite the coastal breeze blowing inland, the cloud refuses to budge. Hacking coughs and reddened eyes are commonplace among the city's poorer inhabitants—those with money can buy curative tonics from the alchemist and herbalists.

The waters of the Mushtaq within the city are polluted with spoil from the foundries. Gritty, oily, and black at the best of times, the water is so polluted that a thick layer of sludge forms on the surface during summer, when the water warms and reacts with the chemicals. Citizens drink from wells, though the pollution is beginning to filter into the water table.

Emir Abbas is high priest of Geb-Agni and apprenticed as a blacksmith during his youth. Abbas' arms and torso are hugely muscled, his hands are covered in leathery calluses, and his face is pitted with small burn scars. The emir's physical prowess is legendary in the Free Emirates and is the focus of many tales.

Among the more popular tales are how he once split a chain mail shirt simply by flexing his muscles, how he carried a red hot iron bar in his hands without burning them, and how he foiled an assassin by parrying the thug's blade with his bare hands and then bent the sword double. Whether or not these tales are true no one knows—when asked the emir just shrugs.

Abbas has recently had several meetings behind closed doors with his military commanders, the high priest of Karmelos, and a mysterious hulk of a figure wrapped in a thick, heavy cloak. The contents of the meetings have never been disclosed nor has the identity of the stranger been revealed. All that is known about the latter is he obviously wears hobnailed boots, because his footsteps clank on stone.

Hashish Trade: The local thieves' guild operates a major hashish smuggling operation. Most of the ore miners are free citizens and are paid according to how many cartloads they produce each day. In a bid to increase their productivity, some miners began using hashish. The practice quickly spread, and now almost three-quarters of the workforce use the drug regularly. Production has increased, but so has the number of accidents due to lack of concentration. So long as productivity remains high, a blind eye is turned to the practice.

Industrial Compound: Located ten miles upriver of the city is a large compound. Constructed amid great secrecy six years ago, no one ever goes in or comes out. Likewise, while ore barges have been seen unloading their cargo at a small wharf extending from the compound's wall, nothing ever comes out of the small town. Outside stands a small temple to Geb-Agni, manned by a squad of paladins. Their sole task appears to be keeping the curious away from the town.

Even the laborers who built the settlement know only scant details about the interior, for after they had finished erecting the hollow shells of the buildings they were ordered to leave the site. Telltale columns of smoke

THE EMIR'S CAMEL

A favorite story among the citizens of Salih is *The Tale of the Emir's Camel*. In this tale, Emir Abbas went out into the desert on his favorite camel. On the way back to the city the camel sprained its leg and could not walk. Without pausing, Abbas lifted the camel onto his shoulders and walked back to his palace. By the time he reached the gates, he was exhausted, badly sunburned, and dehydrated.

When his advisors saw this they said to him, "Lord, why do you carry this camel?" Abbas smiled and replied, "I am the emir. I carry the weight of the entire city on my shoulders each day. The weight of one camel is refreshingly light."

Then the courtiers said, "Lord, you should have killed the camel to save yourself the burden," to which Abbas replied, "A man who kills a friend who has failed him once soon has no friends."

Then the courtiers said, "Lord, you are wealthy beyond measure and could have bought a thousand new camels." Abbas turned and replied, "Save one creature's life and he is your friend for eternity. Buy a creature's life and he will only feign friendship."

At this the courtiers finally fell silent.

reveal the site is heavily industrialized, but without workers, who is operating the foundries and forges?

Agitators have proclaimed the emir is experimenting with automated foundries using bound jinn and that if the experiment works all the living workers will be redundant. The emir has publicly denied this on several occasions, but mud sticks. Even his nobles are demanding he explain the purpose of the new compound. So far he has stalled them, but pressure is mounting in the court.

SIRHAN, CITY OF STARS

Population: 103,000

Ruler: Emir Muttalib ibn Ihsan, the Glittering Emir

Religion: Faithful (Geb-Agni, Apsu, Qedeshet, Tamarni)

Imports: Precious metal, trade

Exports: Gems, jewelry, sulfur, trade

Sirhan is renowned for its gem mines and the quality of its jewelry. The Anari first exploited the natural resources of the mountains—the emirs who ruled afterward simply continued in their footsteps. Gemcutters and jewelers dominate the souks and bazaars, selling raw stones, polished stones, cut stones, and a fantastic array of rings, earrings, bracelets, amulets, buckles, and pins. Exports bring in huge profits, which in turn have made the citizens quite wealthy.

An earlier emir, a renowned mystic, foretold a prophecy that "Sirhan will never fall while the Stars shine." The words are engraved over the Souk of Stars, located in the Gemcutters' Quarter, in tall, gold letters. Gems have

Hellfrost: Land of Fire



continued to flow into the city from the mines and the city has remained prosperous.

As a result of the city's wealth, there are several large thieves' guilds operating in the city. The thieves' guilds are all vying for supremacy. At night, gang wars erupt through the narrow streets as rival factions seek to eliminate their opponents. The city guard at first responded quickly to quell the violence. These days, they are paid handsomely by the guilds to look the other way and let them handle the situation in their own way.

Sirhan was, until recently, a pleasant city, cooled by the waters of the Arun which run through the center and the sea breezes. These days, thanks to the boiling river, it is a huge sauna. The temperature in the city is sweltering, buildings, clothes, even citizens' teeth are stained yellow from the sulfur in the air and water, and the constant steam makes the air uncomfortably humid, especially near the river. In winter, when the hot river water meets the cold sea, dense fogs rise, completely blanketing the area and preventing ships from reaching the city. Fortunately for the citizens, the sulfur in the water is relatively pure and emits no discernible odor.

Despite the constant steam and heat, the citizens have benefited from the river in several ways. Crops yields along the banks have actually increased. Bath and steam houses have sprung up along the banks, as have health spas for those who wish to enjoy the vapors. Hostelrys and homeowners save on fuel for their ovens by lowering bags of fish, rice, and vegetables in the boiling water to cook or hanging them over the bubbling surface to steam.

With the only other source of sulfur located deep in the Heart of Fire, entrepreneurs were quick to begin harvesting the yellow mineral. Large metal frames are lowered into the water and left for several weeks. When they are hauled out, they are encrusted with yellow crystals, which are then dried, powdered, and exported, all at a fraction of the cost of importing sulfur from the Heart.

However, not everything from the river has proven beneficial. Strange, ephemeral creatures, possibly a form of jinn, have been seen drifting through the foggy streets at night. Fortunately the continuing thief wars keep innocent citizens off the streets and there have been relatively few casualties from encounters with the beasts.

Emir Muttalib is more popular with the citizens now than he was in the previous 15 years of his reign, despite the presence of a river of boiling water. Crop yields have increased over the last three years, resulting in greater returns for the farmers and sulfur powder is a valuable export. Even the

constant battles between rival thieves do little to tarnish his popularity.

No wiser to the source of the boiling river than anyone else, Muttalib has been quick to thank both Geb-Agni and Apsu for blessing the city with its new resource.

Royal Observatory: Although the city is named after its gem mines, it also boasted the best observatory anywhere in Al-Shirkuh (and will again in a few months). Formerly set in the dome above the temple of Qedeshet, a new building was erected out of town and the long telescope moved after the steam from the river began to affect viewing.

Sponsored by the emir, the new Royal Observatory lies three miles southeast of the city in an old caravanserai, modified with the addition of a rotating dome (powered by mules). Although still under the auspices of the clergy of Qedeshet, astrologers, astronomers, clergy of other deities, and mages can rent time on the telescope (100 dinars a night).

A sage by the name of Arhan ibn Mahmoud recently booked two whole months on the telescope, paying the entire fee in advance. During the first month he began to get very agitated and became noticeably paranoid. Whereas once he enjoyed sharing his discoveries with his peers, he now started locking away his scribbled notes in a small chest. Each morning, as the sun rose, he moved the position of the telescope to conceal which portion of the sky he had been viewing.

A week later, he wrote to the emir asking for an audience in a cryptic missive. Emir Muttalib, a learned man and amateur student of the heavens, acquiesced.

Three days later, the night before audience, Arhan disappeared.

Priests of Qedeshet responsible for maintaining the observatory entered the dome shortly after sunrise to find the observatory smashed—furniture lay broken, shreds of astronomical and astrological charts littered the floor, and the telescope's precious lenses found shattered into a thousand pieces.

The emir's agents have scoured the city looking for Arhan, but so far there is no sign of him. The temple of Qedeshet is also seeking the sage, demanding he pay compensation for the damage caused and the loss of income. Lensers (crafters who grind lenses) estimate it will be another six months before new lenses are ready for installation.

For now, there is little the emir can do except wait patiently. While he does, he stares at Arhan's missive and its single line of scrawled text—"The stars are fading in Sirhan."

The Grazelands

Temperature: Warm

Population: 180,000 estimated (85% Bedu, 15% hyacinthidae)

Ruler: None

Religion: Faithful (Duamutef, Ashtart, Apsu, Qedeshet, Upuaut)

Five hundred years ago, grass and gentle hills covered the region. Nomadic tribes would visit in summer to avoid the heat of the desert and to graze their goat herds on the plentiful vegetation.

Today, it is a sandy waste, largely devoid of anything save scrub grass except after the sporadic rains. The desertification of the region began slowly at first, barely noticeable for a century. Then, without warning, the desert dunes began to roll forward, like a tide which never recedes. Mile after mile vanished beneath the relentless sands. Within 300 years the sands were lapping at the foothills of the Sandwall Mountains to the north.

Few tribes bother to graze goat herds, except to provide basic sustenance, for during the blistering heat of summer there is still money to be made hauling cargo beyond the mountains to Rassilon, although with ever-dwindling returns. The only remnant of the "old days" is the nomads' preferred use of horses rather than camels.

Dotted around the region are hundreds of stone cairns. The nomads claim these monuments existed long before they settled the region and believe them cursed. Most of the cairns are indistinguishable from small dunes. It is only after a wind storm that their true nature becomes apparent. Crumbling ruins of ancient design, many little more than low piles of stone, give testimony that a later, more civilized culture dwelt here after the cairn builders. Who they were is as yet unknown, for no inscriptions have been discovered.

Geography

Outside of the developing dune seas, the ground gently undulates for as far as they eye can see. No hills or mountains break the skyline until one nears the far north and no rivers cut through the landscape—those that once existed are now sand choked.

The only signs of vegetation are clumps of withered grass where the wind has scoured away a thin layer of sand and the shrubs of Sandwall Oasis.

Major Locales

SANDWALL OASIS

Population: 2,525 (100% Bedu)

Ruler: Sheikh Yaman of the Suhayb tribe

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Trade

Exports: Trade

The last oasis along the Northern Trade Road, Sandwall sits on the edge of the desert. The oasis was once a great lake fed by underground streams, but each year more sand blows into the oasis. All that remains of the lake is a pool about 100 yards across surrounded by quicksand and mud. The disappearance of the oasis in many ways mirrors the loss of trade with Rassilon.

In olden times, the nomads traded with the citizens of southern Rassilon, carrying goods on behalf of Hekata and the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes. Then the Anari arrived on the west coast and built their trading cities.

There was a brief resurgence in trade after the Anari abandoned their colonies, but the Blizzard War caused a total cessation. Merchants looked to the lands of the east for new markets. Rassilon became a land of legends, a land of terrible bipedal lizards that lived like men, of endless swamps, of worms that breathed fire that chilled rather than burned, and of men with fair skin who lived like animals and ate human flesh. Overall, Rassilon became a place to be feared.

Keen to see these fearsome man-beasts for themselves and perhaps best them in combat, warriors from the tribes headed north. They returned several months later with tales of wooden cities and strange gods, but also with saddlebags weighed down with unusual items. Further expeditions quickly followed and a trade route established soon after.

Although the overland trade route resumed just two centuries ago, trade really only began to flow heavily in the last two decades, and then thanks mainly to Jarl Bosi of Dusthall. With the sphinxes refusing (at the time) to deal directly with the inferior humans and the Free Emirates high taxation on goods from the Caliphate and Sultanate, overland trade boomed.

Then trade began to fall. The Free Emirates secured trade agreements with the Magocracy and Drakeport and

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

lowered their taxes, thus encouraging sea trade through their cities. The sphinxes, after centuries of isolation, opened a sea route to Sandvik. Two years ago, the caravans to Rassilon began to return with fewer and fewer goods, claiming that a great war consumed the land and its resources.

Unless something changes quickly, the last leg of the Northern Trade Road is certain to close and Sandwall will be buried beneath the relentless sand.

☉ The Great DUNE Sea ☉

Temperature: Sweltering

Population: 9,000+ (70% Bedu, 15% jinn blooded, 10% hyaenidae, 3% cakali, 2% sand goblins)

Ruler: None (tribal)

Religion: Mixed (Duamutef, Upuaut, Apsu)

Imports: None

Exports: None



The Great Dune Sea is an area of high sand dunes and raging winds. The dunes radiate outward from the center of the region. Thus, whichever way one approaches the center, one is always forced to climb the steep face of the dunes. The tallest dunes are those on the edge of the Sea, which can rise to heights of over 500 yards. Near the center, the highest dunes rise 100 yards, but the majority are half this height.

The jinn erected several small outposts in the region, and the Southern Trade Road actually marks their old border. Although many of the ruins are buried beneath hundreds of feet of sand, storms do sometimes expose an area, revealing the structures beneath. Adventurers seeking to explore the ruins are urged to be quick, for they are quickly concealed again.

Geography

A constant wind blows from the center of the Sea, radiating outward in all directions. The wind is strongest close to the source, which is why the sand dunes are smaller—the gale prevents them from reaching any decent height. The wind began blowing suddenly in 12 CJ, and has never relented. In fact, in recent centuries the wind has increased in intensity. For the past few centuries, the dunes have spread outward at a rate of some 20 miles every hundred years.

Many expeditions have tried to reach the source of the winds. The sensible parties turned back in the face of the raging storms long before reaching the source. Those of a more curious nature or foolhardy attitude perished, their remains quickly buried by the sands.

Major Locales

BLUE WATER OASIS

Population: 1,323 (90% Bedu, 7% jinn blooded, 3% mixed others)

Ruler: Sheikh Akbar of the Almari tribe

Religion: Faithful (Apsu, Duamutef, Upuaut)

Imports: Trade

Exports: Trade

Blue Water Oasis lies roughly halfway along the Southern Trade Road, close to the edge of the Great Dune Sea. The oasis gets its name from its unusual water. Visitors quickly find that the water is not just blue when viewed in the oasis, but retains its vibrant sky-blue color when taken out.

The Almari tribe, led by Sheikh Akbar, controls the oasis. Blue water is priced at 5 dinars per quart. Although this is more than double the standard rate, Akbar reminds travelers that since the waters have such marvelous properties, they need to carry less, so sparing their camels a heavy burden. Surely, he says to protesting merchants, such a blessing is worth a few extra dinars?

Blue Water: Every pint of water drunk from the oasis counts as two pints, which makes it a favorite stop for those exploring the Great South Desert or planning an expedition into the Dune Sea or Empty Zone.

The Great North Desert

Temperature: Stifling

Population: 230,000+ (80% Bedu, 11% hyaenidae, 4% cakali, 3% sand goblins, 2% jinn blooded)

Ruler: None (various tribes)

Religion: Mixed (Duamutef, Upuaut, Shamash, Apsu, Ashtart)

Imports: Trade

Exports: Trade

The Great Desert is, technically, just another name for Al-Shirkuh. In current times, however, it has come to refer to the area outside any of the desert realms which lie above the line formed by the Free Trade and Jinn Roads.

Many great empires have risen from the sands of the northern desert only to sink beneath them again. The cairn builders of the Grazelands, the kingdoms of the gatormen, ophidae, and scorpionmen, the Hekatic Empire (who once controlled virtually the entire region) are just the ones remembered today. Who knows how many smaller realms were conquered by these great builders, their memory erased from history?

Today there are no major powers in the core region of the Great North Desert, though the ruins of those who came before are still here, a fading reminder of days of glory now consigned to the deepest depths of history. Until such time as a new empire rises, as surely one will, the desert is the domain of nomadic tribes and fearsome beasts.

Geography

Life struggles to survive here, yet survive it does. Aside from the oases, patches of scrubby brushes can be found among the rocky plains and even in areas where the sand is not excessively deep. Even in the hottest areas, which lie close to the Heart of Fire, snakes, scorpions, lizards, and even rodents survive by hiding during the day and emerging to eat when the sun has set. Life here is primarily nocturnal.

Rainfall is less than an inch a year and typically falls during winter or early spring. During the short rainy season, flash floods are a constant danger. Travelers are advised to avoid using wadis during the wet season.

FREE TRADE ROAD

The Free Trade Road connects the Free Emirates with the central trade roads, joining the nexus at Clearwater.

Once one of the safest roads in Al-Shirkuh, increased trade to the Emirates has drawn orcs, bandits, and other lowlives to the desert it runs through.

MOUNTAINS OF FEAR

Ancient writings of the Late Hekatic Empire are the first to mention the mountains by this name. The texts record that beyond the peaks lay “a land of fearsome beasts who lived like men.” Given the dates involved, this is likely to refer to the sphinxes, who had risen to power just before that time. However, some scholars now suspect the later writing is merely a copy of an earlier source. Perhaps, they muse, the “fearsome beasts” were another race altogether?

The River Nyl, which flows through the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes, has its headwaters here. A few seasonal rivers flow from the north facing peaks during winter and early spring.

THE SIX SISTERS

Named for the six major summits, the mountains sit south of the Salt Marsh. Rainfall is sporadic, but enough to keep the water of the southern marshes relatively fresh. The Bedu claim the mountains never existed before the age of Suleiman. Shortly after the War of Copper Jars ended, six powerful jinn sisters danced here, mocking Suleiman for having missed them. Suleiman promptly appeared before them and turned them to stone for their sins. Of course, the mountains have stood for many eons—ruined watchtowers of gatorman and Hekatic design stand testament to this fact.

SPHINX ROAD (SOUTHERN ARM)

The Sphinx Road begins at either the city of Jizah or Jawf (depending on which sphinx you ask), runs to Lost Tomb Oasis, and then takes a sharp turn south as far as the Oasis of Dates.

VALLEY OF THE ANCIENTS

Close to the center of a barren, rocky stretch of desert is a deep, dead-end valley. There is no evidence water ever flowed along the valley—its formation appears to be a result of an earthquake in the very distant past.

Dotted along the valley are numerous tombs—some are built at ground level, while others have openings many hundreds of feet up the cliffs. At the narrow end stands a low, flat structure. Stone columns rise to support the roof, which is an overhang on the cliff face against which the structure stands. Three flights of steps, a narrow set at each end and a wide set in the center, lead to the top of the structure. Built into the cliff face is great doorway sealed with bronze doors. Standing in niches on either side, are gigantic statues of men and women with the heads of bulls. The great doors have not been opened in thousands of years.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Minotaurs, who claim the center of their once-great civilization stood here, consider the Valley and its surroundings sacred. Whether this is truly holy ground or not, any interlopers found here are quickly hunted down and slaughtered.

Perhaps minotaurs did erect the great structure at the end of the valley in honor of their kings and queens, but maybe the builders simply worshipped a bull god and anthropomorphized it in the same way the Faithful do today. Only by opening the bronze doors is the truth ever likely to be known.

Major Locales

THE BRONZE HORSEMAN

Bedu speak in awe of the Bronze Horseman, a 20 feet tall statue cast in solid bronze. Although words of mouth legends indicate it is undoubtedly many centuries old, it shows no sign of weathering or tarnishing.

The statue appears to show an armored warrior mounted on a horse. Strangely, the rider has no legs, giving the impression the human upper body is sprouting directly from the horse's back. In its right arm is couched a long lance, while its left grips a shield on which are inscribed instructions in the language of the jinn telling how to activate the spirit within. The statue has proven resistant to all attempts to damage or move it, whether by mundane or magical means.

Faithful nomads believe the site is sacred to Upuaut, for the spirit that resides here is a guide to those lost in the sands. Devoted argue it is a mighty majin, an abomination that was both man and horse, a general of the jinn army transformed into bronze by Suleiman. To both creeds, it is a sacred place.

Regardless, what both agree on is that the statue is capable of movement, for each night it thunders across the desert, halting its progress at sunrise. One legend says it is searching for Suleiman's tomb, the only location to which it is not privy. Here it must bow before Suleiman's corpse (or what remains of it) and beg forgiveness for its many sins. Faithful believe that Upuaut cannot abide to remain still for long, hence his constant movement.

Spirit Name: The Bronze Horseman.

Ambience: While first-time viewers may react with awe, the area immediately surrounding the statue has little ambience. The spirit spends much of the time dormant, unaware of its surroundings and unable to influence them.

Deity/Jinn: Upuaut/majin jinn.

Senses: Notice d4.

Communication: When suitable sacrifice is made, the Horseman speaks in a deep, hollow voice. It speaks only to ask travelers, "Where do you seek?" It cannot be coerced or forced to engage in other conversation.

Powers: The spirit is a guide. When a traveler names his intended destination, the entire statue swivels on

its base, the lance pointing directly toward the site. The one exception is the tomb of Suleiman. Although greatly sought, its location remains a mystery to all.

The statue is not omniscient—it requires a site's proper name, not a vague notion, a description (no matter how detailed), or specific contents. For instance, it can point the way to the "tomb of Pharaoh Ankhhotep," but it cannot indicate the direction to "the nearest pharaoh's tomb" or "the place containing the Dread Book of Summoning." If a destination the Horseman cannot reveal is asked for, it returns to its dormant state. Awakening it again requires another sacrifice.

Unfortunately, the route indicated by the Horseman's lance, while entirely genuine, is always as the hawk flies. It does not take into account dangerous terrain, cursed lands, or other hazards travelers may face.

According to nomad legend, the Horseman animates at midnight, thundering across the desert in a random direction. It halts its progress only as the first rays of the sun strike the land. Such is its speed that it can travel from one end of the continent to the other in a single night. Nomads claim the strange booming sounds that echo across the sands on clear nights are the sound of the Horseman's hooves.

In truth, the statue teleports at midnight, reappearing somewhere else in Al-Shirkuh a few minutes before dawn. However it never does this while being directly observed. But all it takes is the blink of an eye for it to vanish or suddenly appear within line of sight.

Sacrifice: The instructions written on the shield state that 10 pounds of metal must be placed in the horse's open saddlebags. There is no clarification on the exact type or nature of the metal. Thus, coins, armor, weapons, and trade ingots are all acceptable. Metal deposited in this way disappears the instant the supplicant lets go (it bonds with the statue, keeping it in pristine condition). Until the metal is released and absorbed, the Horseman remains silent.

LOST TOMB OASIS

Population: 592 (100% Bedu)

Ruler: Sheikh Hadi of the Sabur tribe

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Trade

Exports: Trade

The Sphinx Road, which takes a dogleg at Lost Tomb Oasis, once marked part of the border of the Hekatic Empire. Originally the Empire stretched further east, but a series of disastrous wars against the newly emerged Kingdoms of the Sphinxes forced them to cede land to the new power.

The ruins of a Hekatic town, a former trading colony, lie ten miles west of the oasis. Eight miles east, along the Sphinx Road, are the remnants of an old sphinx outpost, built after the early wars with Hekata to safeguard against further incursions.

Legends of a lost tomb in the region have circulated the desert since before the War of Copper Jars. Every tale

claims the tomb belonged to a powerful sphinx lord. Sphinxes give the site a wide berth, for a ghostly sphinx haunts the site, bringing death to any of its kin who sleep there for even a night.

The nomads claim the sphinx is Hamapta, the first sphinx pharaoh, who briefly united the warring factions. According to legend, Hamapta had many children, all of whom plotted against their father. When he died, Hamapta was buried in secret, taking his vast treasury and many powerful jinn-created relics with him. His children tore the desert asunder looking for the tomb, but were never successful. According to legend, Hamapta's ghost still protects the land around his tomb from his descendants, which in his eyes includes every sphinx.

The Sabur enjoy the protection of "Hamapta" and leave offerings in the desert to appease the ghost. All those who visit the oasis are warned never to walk the desert at night and never to dig in the sands, lest they anger the spirit.

Not all of the Sabur are happy with the arrangement, however. The sheikh's wizar, Karif abd-Hadi, seeks more power. He believes that if he can locate the tomb and recover the artifacts, the sphinxes will shower him with gold and elevate him to a position of power. He secretly hires small adventuring parties to comb the desert sands for evidence of the tomb. When they have defeated any traps and guardians, he plans to have them removed—permanently.

Unfortunately for Karif, several important sphinxes have spies among the tribe and each has uncovered his plan. When Karif's puppets are successful, the sphinxes plan to swoop on the tomb and claim the treasures for themselves, elevating their houses. If the timing is right, the desert could quickly become a battlefield as several armies descend on the region.

There is a tomb in the region and it does contain a sphinx whose ghost haunts the region, but it does not belong to Hamapta. His true tomb lies far to the north, in frozen Rassilon.

NORTHERN TRADE ROAD

The Northern Trade Road runs from Clearwater all the way into distant Rassilon. Caravans and camel trains still make the long journey to avoid the taxes charged by the Emirate for transporting freight by ship and to avoid the numerous pirates which prowl the waters, but things are not well in southern Rassilon. Overland trade has dropped dramatically in the last few years.

OASIS OF DREAMS

Population: 684 (100% Bedu)

Ruler: Sheikah Fayruz of the Abraha tribe

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Trade

Exports: Trade

At the juncture of the Northern Trade and Snake Roads lies the verdant Oasis of Dreams. Until recently,

merchants heading to Rassilon stopped here for supplies in great numbers.

The decrease in trade along the Snake Road and general decline in overland trade with Rassilon has not gone unnoticed. Indeed, thanks to the current trade shortage the Abraha are on the verge of giving up their ancient lifestyle and becoming settled.

The land around the oasis is very fertile, but at present only around 5% is actually cultivated—more than enough to meet the tribe's needs. By encouraging settlers to move here and expanding the irrigation system, the oasis could quickly become a major agricultural exporter. Sheikah Fayruz, the only child of the previous sheikh, actually proposed the change, but she is having a tough time convincing her people it is the only way to guarantee their continued survival.

The Sons of the Sand (p. 154) have many followers among the tribe and vocally object to any change. While Fayruz could easily force the change by making a decree, she has no wish to see her tribe divided. Until she can persuade the conservatives to adopt the new way of life her plans cannot be carried out. All the while the sands creep closer, consuming what could be a great source of wealth.

Two recent attempts on her life have both been attributed to the Sons. Fayruz now goes everywhere with one of her handmaidens, a very powerful guardian wizar with the sense of humor of a corpse.

Although Fayruz's plans remain a dream, they are not the source of the oasis' name. Her family has ruled the oasis since the time of Suleiman, when the old Faithful dynasty was expelled. Ever since, the eldest female of the sheikh's family has always suffered from strange visions and dreams, usually involving a battle between five dragons. One has white scales of a type unknown in Al-Shirkuh. Arrayed against it are marsh, sand, storm, and sun dragons.

OASIS OF FISH

Population: 556 (100% Bedu)

Ruler: Sheikh Saqr of the Othman tribe

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Trade

Exports: Fish, trade

Unusually, the oasis is not a single pool or spring, but a dozen pools, spread out over an area of 30 square miles. The Othman tribe claims the entire region as their territory, which stretches the ancient law of "one tribe one oasis" as far as neighboring tribes are concerned—they see each pool as a separate oasis.

As one might guess, the Oasis of Fish is named because its waters are teeming with fish. The fish are caught by great nets, smoked or salted to preserve them. These are then sold to passing merchants. Guests staying at the oasis are free to catch their own supper if they so desire, but any fish they catch must be eaten before they leave—if they want preserved fish for the journey, they have to buy it from the locals.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

The sheikh has a personal cook, Fazir, who is a master of fish recipes. His centerpiece, served only when the sheikh has honored guests to dine, is fish glazed in honey and stuffed with minced lamb, figs, and palm leaves. Fazir always catches his own fish. Strangely, he does not use a net or hook—he simply wades into the water, sticks his head beneath the surface, and fish swim to him, willingly allowing him to carry them to his pot. Jinn mages with knowledge of marids claim this is nothing special, for they too can communicate with aquatic beasts. However, what makes Fazir unusual is he is mute—his former master cut out his tongue.

Sheikh Saqr has had the pools explored by marid jinn mages, who report that not only are the pools linked together, but the waters actually descend deep into the bowels of the earth. One mage returned with hideous bite and claw wounds. With his dying breath he described how after swimming through a series of tunnels he emerged into an air-filled cavern. There, on a shore of crushed shells, stood a wondrous, intact city. He died before he could reveal any more. Saqr fears the city might be home to a powerful marid lord. He has ruled that the city must remain undisturbed.

The Great South Desert

Temperature: Stifling

Population: 75,000+ (78% Bedu, 11% hyaenidae, 5% sand goblins, 3% cakali, 3% jinn blooded)

Although the Great South Desert technically covers the southern half of all Al-Shirkuh, the natives always refer to the Great Dune Sea, former jinn realm, and the Empty Zone as unique areas (as they do the Caliphate and Sultanate). As such, the “Great” Southern Desert as the locals know it covers barely a third of the southern landmass and is actually more to the west than in the true south.

This region has remained largely unsettled throughout Al-Shirkuh’s long history and acted as a buffer zone between the various kingdoms. Today the core is rarely traveled, for no ruins attract adventurers and no trade routes run through the sands. Only along the western fringe, where the Southern Trade Road runs, is there any sign of civilized life.

Geography

Bordered in the north and south by mountains, the central, eastern, and western expanses of the Great South Desert consist of large swathes of rolling sand and barren rocks broken periodically by high dunes.

Once one leaves the mountains behind there is little water to be found in the desert. Two major oases, Clear-

water and Marqod’s Well, mark the only major sources of water in the region controlled by the civilized races, but these lie at the extremes of the region. In the core, there is only the Well of Marids. Only those driven mad by the heat drink from that accursed place.

With no water supplies, there is little to attract travelers to the core. As a result, the region is largely deserted. One can travel for weeks, it is said, and never see another living creature save for the vultures, patiently watching over their next meal.

DESERT WALL MOUNTAINS

The southern slopes of the western and central range mark part of the border of the Caliphate. Clouds blown in from the Southern Ocean drop their precious cargo high in the peaks. The heads of the Rivers Noari and Gebriel rise here. Although the mountains do act as a barrier to the encroaching sands, the range does not extend far enough west or east to truly encompass the lands to the south.

Pass of Prayers: The only pass through the mountains is rarely used by nomads, for no trade road crosses the mountains and the sole oasis across the burning sands, the Well of Marids, is cursed. A lone fort stands at the southern end of the pass, manned by soldiers from the Caliphate as a deterrent to orcs and nomadic raiders.

According to stories told in the Caliphate, the walls of the pass are inscribed with countless prayers to the gods, a remnant of some ancient migration. One popular tale tells that any man who reads out every prayer will be blessed with immortality. Several ruins loosely identified as temples stand along the trail, but few have bothered to explore their depths for vicious orcs control the higher stretches of the pass.

LIZARD TAIL MOUNTAINS

Northeast of the Great Dune Sea stand the tall, barren summits of the Lizard Tail. Rising only a few thousand feet from the sand, these rounded, weathered hummocks appear similar to the ridges on the tails of many species of lizard, hence their name. Seasonal rivers once formed here in winter, but the rains have not fallen in the last few decades and the region is extremely arid.

PILLARS OF SULEIMAN

Legend has it that when Suleiman first saw the majestic peaks of the Pillars he turned into the desert toward what is now Suleiman’s Passage, thus leading the slaves into the lands that would become the Sultanate.

Once the people were safely ensconced behind the mountains, Suleiman spent many months wandering the slopes of the Pillars, studying the ways of Asha, and writing them down in the form of the Hamad. Several caves show evidence of occupation from that period. These have become sites of pilgrimage for Devoted.

One popular story, known as the “Distracted Jinni,”

tells how Suleiman, fearing the fledgling nation he had founded might be easily destroyed, decided to record the words of the *Hamad* on five tall, stone pillars to ensure his message could never be lost. Unfortunately, a powerful jinni discovered him and smashed the pillars out of malice. Suleiman bound the rogue jinni with magic and ordered it to engrave the pillars with one letter of the *Hamad* a day—only when it had completed the task of copying the entire book would it be freed. Suleiman was no fool, however, for he knew this particular jinni of old and knew how easily the slightest thing distracted it from the task at hand. Every time the jinni lost concentration, even for a second, all the words it had inscribed were erased, forcing the creature to begin again from scratch.

In recent months, pilgrims lost high in the mountains reported seeing the jinni carving the stone pillars. According to their testament, the creature had fashioned itself blinders to keep its eyes from wandering and blocked its ears with bales of goat's wool to avoid being distracted by sounds. The pilgrims claimed the jinni had barely two dozen lines left of the *Hamad* to inscribe, meaning it could be loosed from its bond any time soon. Many suspect it will seek a terrible revenge on the people of the Sultanate.

PLATEAU OF THE DAMNED

Rising steeply from the sand is a wide, flat plateau, its sheer sides a more formidable defense than any castle or emir's palace. A narrow trail, treacherously thin for most of its length, winds up and around the southern face to the summit.

The remains of a great city, long abandoned by the living, stand atop the plateau. Stone blocks as long as a man and weighing many tons were used to build the city, which has given rise to the tale of the builders being a race of giants.

The rest of the plateau is barren rock. Rain has not fallen here in many centuries—nothing grows or lives here.

Dragon-Demon Temple: In the center of the ruins stands a great temple, its sloped roof held aloft by immense pillars of basalt and black granite, hauled here from the Heart of Fire. Within the temple stands a colossal statue of a humanoid with four draconic heads—the heads are those of a marsh dragon, sand dragon, storm dragon, and a sun dragon.

According to stories, the giants who lived here worshipped a powerful demon servant of Iblis who took the shape of a dragon. In retribution for

their blasphemy, the gods struck down the inhabitants, turning them into the darkness they so craved. Stains on the walls of many buildings have an eerie resemblance to shadows, perhaps the victims of divine anger.

SOUTHERN TRADE ROAD

In ancient times, the Southern Trade Road was the major route to the now empty cities of the Empty Zone. Today, it carries traffic between the Caliphate, the Free Emirates, and the distant land of Rassilon. It also marks the border, at least on maps, between the Desert and the Empty Zone.

There is a long tradition of never looking to the west on the stretch between Blue Water Oasis and the city of Hulwan, lest one catches sight of a denizen of the accursed wastes or spies a weathered pillar of some dead city rising through the sand like some skeletal finger clutching for freedom.

THE SPIRES

The Spires are a low range of mountains inhabited by orcs and bandits. Cyclopean watchtowers, remnants of the Jinn Empire, stand on the highest peaks and give the mountains their name. Most are held by rival orc tribes, who raid the trade roads and each others' holdings.

Reports that the orcs are massing for a coordinated offensive against Clearwater are as yet unconfirmed, but continue to circulate.



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Major Locales

CLEARWATER OASIS

Population: 919 (90% Bedu, 10% Hadaree)

Ruler: Sheikh Caspar of the Nikkal tribe

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Trade

Exports: Fruit, meat

Clearwater marks a great junction in the trade network, for here the Northern Trade, Southern Trade, Free Trade, and Jinn Roads meet. The regular trade from the Caliphate and Sultanate heading into the Free Emirates, not to mention the steady flow of goods from Jadid, has made the Nikkal tribe, and especially Sheikh Caspar, extremely wealthy. There has been a decrease in overall trade, however, as the sphinxes now have a sea route to Rassilon, but the loss is minimal as overland trade from the Kingdoms usually went along the Snake Road and north into Rassilon.

Clearwater is the only oasis with a caravanserai built at the edge of the water. Realizing how vital trade is, Caspar has spent a fortune protecting his tribe's wealth. An entire company of mameluk mercenaries, 300 strong, are on permanent retainer at the caravanserai. They are primarily here to protect visiting merchants, but as the strategic value of the oasis grows with each passing month they are also a deterrent to anyone seeking to usurp his tribe.

Sheikh Omar of the Black Palm's plan to create a trade route through Hekata (p. 117) would lead to Clearwater losing the trade it has gained from the Snake Road. Naturally, Sheikh Caspar is opposed to this endeavor. He plans to sabotage any expeditions into Hekata to find a useable route and has even gone as far as making an agreement with living agents of the Withered Dynasty (though he believes the agents to be bandits). With his immense wealth, he has also bought many allies among Omar's Sharhirar tribe.

MARQOD'S WELL

Population: 1,011 (55% mixed pilgrims, 40% native Bedu, 5% transients)

Ruler: Sheikh Fazir of the Amanzi tribe

Religion: Faithful (Marqod, Apsu, Duamutef)

Imports: Pilgrims, trade

Exports: Fruit, trade, vegetables

Nestled in lower slopes of the eastern Desert Wall Mountains is Marqod's Well. Although other areas of the region are bone dry, the oasis and the small valley in which it sits are verdant all year round. The Bedu grow a wide range of fruit and vegetables, selling them to the great caravans traveling between the Sultanate and the salt mines further north.

The waters of the oasis are available to anyone who is willing to pay the standard price, but these are not the waters for which the area is named.

Located in a valley near to the oasis is a spring, from which bubbles water with healing properties. The nomads consider the water sacred to Marqod and have erected a shrine here. Drawn by the miraculous waters, the population of the oasis is permanently swelled by hundreds of pilgrims, not to mention those suffering crippling injuries and disease who seek a cure. No sooner is one person cured, than another arrives to take their place.

As a result, a tent town has developed close to the oasis. The tribe maintains its resources by asking pilgrims and the infirm to make a donation of some sort. While they accept hard currency, they also accept goods of any sort. Each week, the sheikh divides the tribute among his people.

Sheikh Fazir considers the water a gift, there for all desert dwellers who come to the oasis in peace. Despite being a devout follower of Marqod, he cares little for religious differences between Faithful and Devoted, believing "every man is entitled to his make his own judgments while he lives, for in death will he learn the truth." Unfortunately, the Caliph has hinted that the oasis would be better protected if it fell inside the Caliphate's borders.

Such an expansion would not be too troublesome for the Caliphate, though it would go against the terms of the peace treaty with the Sultanate. Even if the Caliph grabbed only the land between the Road of the Gods and the Desert Wall, it might encourage hardliners in the Sultanate to look at grabbing all the land enclosed by the Road of the Gods, Suleiman's Road, and the Pillars of Suleiman.

Such an act by either side could rapidly devolve into a power play for the entire region, for Marqod's Well sits on a strategic junction in the trade roads—whichever side controlled Marqod's Well would effectively sever the major overland trade route for the other nation.

Healing Water: Sheikh Fazir sometimes sells the water for 500 dinars a vial. Each vial heals one wound and any temporary crippling injury associated with it, regardless of when the wound occurred. Instead of healing a wound, it can be used to heal one permanent crippling injury.

MIRAH, CITY OF TRAPS

The deserted city of Mirah has lain empty since before the jinn came to power. According to legend, Mirah was once called the City of Wealth, for its citizens were wealthier than the other cities of Al-Shirkuh combined. No one in the city knew poverty—even the beggars were said to wear gold rings and dress in expensive silk robes.

Yet for all their riches, the citizens grew more and more covetous and more and more fearful of thieves. History has left no record of how it began, but storytellers speak of how fear turned to true paranoia. In a bid to safeguard their riches, the citizens began constructing traps around and within their homes. The practice spread across the city like wildfire. Soon leaving one's home became a gamble with death—pits, spear traps, falling blocks, slicing blades, and magical glyphs covered every square yard of the city.

So the story goes, the trap building pandemic reached such heights that no one could leave their home and merchants avoided the city for fear of the deadly, concealed devices. Crops withered in the fields, food stores ran out, and the entire population, save those who did not meet their deaths trying to escape, died of starvation.

Mirah has sat silent ever since. Its paved streets remain clear of sand, for even the great desert seems fearful to enter the City of Traps. Countless stories exist of the fabulous wealth of Mirah, but just as many stories exist of curious or greedy souls who entered the city and never returned.

WELL OF MARIDS

Although referred to as a well, the low stone wall which holds back the water measures over 50 yards in diameter, making it more a pool or small lake. Nomads never water their camels here, for the water is supposedly cursed—anyone taking water from the well is attacked by large numbers of angry marids.

The nomads also speak of a great marid who lives in the pool. If properly addressed and gifted with enough wealth (some tribes claim at least 1000 dinars is required, others claim a relic or alchemical device is the minimum payment), the marid deigns to talk to lesser beings. When the jinni speaks, the waters form a gigantic face.

The marid is a powerful oracle and can answer questions about the future with uncanny accuracy. Unfortunately, it only speaks in riddles and cryptic clues, giving no hint as to their meaning. Legends claim that Suleiman bound the jinni to the Well shortly before the War of Copper Jars. In return for its services, the great mage saved the creature's life but bound it to endless servitude.

Another legend tells how Suleiman consulted with the jinni shortly before his death and came away visibly shaken. The words, "Those who seek to know the future must accept the consequences for their misjudgments," are engraved around the Well in all the civilized languages. Many believe these were put here by Suleiman after his final visit.

Naturally, the Well is a focus for jinn mages with knowledge of marids. Mages crafting a marid jinn relic at the Well gain a +2 bonus to their roll. Unfortunately, the jinn here are rather temperamental and dislike being abused. If the mage fails his Jinn Magic roll, the jinni immediately attacks him.

☉ The Heart of Fire ☉

Temperature: Infernal (Pit of Fire), Baking (the mountains), Stifling (Desert of Ash)

Population: Unknown (mainly fire giants and orcs)

Ruler: King Surtur, Lord of Fire Giants (nominal ruler)

Religion: Faithful (Geb-Agni)

Imports: None

Exports: Ash, basalt, granite, pumice, sulfur powder

SPRING OF LONGEVITY

Known to storytellers' audiences across Al-Shirkuh, the waters of the Spring of Longevity supposedly contain the power to extend a mortal's life.

The Hekatic pharaoh Apophis knew of the stories and sought them out in his quest for immortality. His agents scoured the desert, but found no clues to the Spring's location. Suleiman, it is said, was offered a drink from the waters by powerful jinn, but declined, choosing instead to pass on to Oneness when his allotted time was up.

Scholars and laymen debate the existence of the Spring. Many agree that the healing water of Marqod's Well is the likely origin of the stories. A few others lean toward the Well of Marids as the source, though this flies in the face of common sense—the Well did not exist in the age of the Hekatic Empire. Wherever it may be, the Spring does not grant eternal youth or reverse the aging process. Its waters simply delay aging for a short time.

The Heart of Fire has always been geologically active. When Hekata's pharaohs still ruled as beings of living flesh, the eruptions of the volcanoes led to the naming of the Firebarrier Mountains. However, violent eruptions were sporadic and rarely lasted more than a few days.

Since shortly before the War of Copper Jars the volcanoes have been constantly active, spewing great black clouds of ash into the sky and oozing thick streams of molten rock. The orange-red glow of the towering volcanoes is clearly visible for hundreds of miles at night and serves as a landmark along the Jinn Road and the Sphinx Road.

Of course, anything even remotely connected to the era of the jinn's demise has been attached to Suleiman. The Devoted claim Suleiman first learned of jinn magic here and subsequently fought a great battle against an ifrit pasha and his army. The Faithful say that Suleiman came here to awaken Geb-Agni in preparation for the war of liberation. As such, the entire region is holy to both faiths, though few pilgrims ever visit.

No empire has ever claimed the territory, despite the many natural resources it offers, though it has been exploited over the millennia. Even the fire giants who have lived here for time immemorial limit their activities to only a small region.

Geography

The Heart of Fire encompasses the eastern end of the Firebarrier Mountains and the Mountains of Malice, as well as the choking Desert of Ash. It is a barren, blasted landscape constantly wracked by earth tremors. Temperatures regularly rise to over 150 degrees in the height of summer, the seemingly hard rock one is walking over may give way at any moment and plunge one into a

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

hidden river of lava, and the air is poisoned by choking clouds of sulfurous fumes and volcanic ash.

Although there is little vegetation and virtually no free-standing water anywhere in the region, there is plenty of life. Fire giants are numerous, but there are also plentiful lava dragons, hydras, fire salamanders, fire sprites, unbound ifrits, and sulfur clouds, among others.

DESERT OF ASH

The prevailing winds carry the clouds of ash from the volcanoes southeast, where it settles over the desert like a gray-black blanket. The ash is extremely hazardous to breathe, for it mixes with fluid in the lungs to form cement, which in turn leads to a painful death by asphyxiation. Even with a sand hood in place the air is hot enough to scorch the lungs.

There is no vegetation, animal life, or standing water anywhere in the region. Bedu traveling to the many mines face a difficult task, for the only alternate routes to their destination involve passing close to the volcanoes, which presents its own set of problems (not least raiding fire giants and the hellish creatures made of living flame that dwell there).

ELEMENTAL LOCI

Whether the infernal heat of the region opened the many elemental loci related to fire or whether the loci

somehow caused the region to become hellishly hot is open to debate. What is known is that at least a dozen standard loci exist in the mountains. Rumors continue to circulate of a locus whose boundaries cover a hundred yards (or more), but no mage has ever claimed to have visited the place.

THE PIT OF FIRE

In the center of the Heart of Fire, surrounded by volcanoes and vents, is a deep crater 20 miles in diameter. Legends which were already ancient when Hekata dominated the region speak of a mountain which fell from the sky and drove through the earth to form a deep hole.

The lava streams from the volcanoes all feed into the Pit. No one is sure of the Pit's original depth. The gap between the lava lake and the rim is now only 50 yards and it gets shorter with every passing day. Once it reaches the top, the lava will have no option but to spread outward.

The temperature between the volcanoes and the Pit's edge is extremely high. Unprotected skin blisters, breathing is extremely difficult as the air burns the lungs, and the precious contents of waterskins begins to steam, making it dangerously hot to drink.

The entire region is home to dozens of lava dragons and flame-breathing hydras, swarms of fire sprites and hosts of fire salamanders. Although the fire giants can withstand the terrible heat, they avoid the area because of its fell denizens.

The Black Tower: In the very center of the Pit is an outcropping of granite, its top level with the rim. Atop the granite spire stands a strange tower, seemingly unaffected by the heat of the lava lake nearby. *Farsight* spells have allowed mages to study the outside, which seems to be formed from a solid piece of stone—not a single joint can be seen, neither can any windows or doors.

Despite the location, the tower is inhabited. Several mages have reported seeing a solitary figure emerge onto the flat roof and appear to take astronomical readings. Descriptions of the figure vary from a black figure with no visible features to a thin, dusky-skinned man to a hulking ebony-skinned goliath. Whether or not it is the same figure is unknown, as all attempts at communicating with the figure have failed thus far.

Every mage who has tried to reach the tower using an *environmental protection* spell has failed. Before the mage gets halfway across the lava lake he is subjected to extremely powerful *dispel* magics. Whether his magic holds or not, this is followed closely



by relentless attacks by a trio of adult lava dragons and swarms of fire sprites which erupt from the lava below.

Major Lcales

BASALT FORTRESS

Population: 300 fire giants and 3000 orcs (estimated)

Ruler: King Surtur, the Living Inferno

Seated at the eastern end of the Firebarrier Mountains is a squat fortress. Built of basalt blocks as large as a wagon slotted together like some elaborate three-dimensional jigsaw, the fortress is home to the fire giant court in Al-Shirkuh.

When the castle was built has yet to be discovered. The giants claim they erected the structure long before humans settled the deserts, though such boasts have never been backed up with any evidence. Hekatic texts refer to a “dark and grim fortress wherein dwell a race of giants,” but whether this is the Basalt Fortress or some other structure is hard to discern from the scant clues.

For the most part the giants kept to the mountains and the volcanoes. Over the last 50 years, however, they have taken to raiding the southern stretches of the Sphinx Road. Aided by orc minions and summoned beasts, the giants seem more interested in destruction than in theft. No pattern to their activities has yet emerged—a caravan may be destroyed one day, yet another carrying the same goods is allowed to pass in peace a few days later.

Most races think Surtur’s title is rather arrogant, for his domain is limited to a 30 mile area around his fortress. The giants may share similar traits with the fiery beasts of the region, but the average denizen is no friendlier to the giants than it is to the other races. In truth, Surtur’s power stretches far across the world and all fire giants hail him as their rightful king.

An enormous brute even for a giant, Surtur’s skin is black as coal, his hair and beard are living fire, and his eyes are infernal maelstroms of swirling red and orange. Ancient fire giant texts claim he has ruled over the race for nearly 600 years. Most other scholars suspect the name Surtur is actually a title.

MINING OUTPOSTS

The region’s exports are not sold by its inhabitants—they have no desire to aid the other races. The Caliphate, Sultanate, and sphinxes each maintain heavily fortified outposts and mines here. Neighboring Bedu tribes are hired to transport the resources back to their native lands.

Life here is extremely hard. The blistering heat and choking fumes, not to mention regular attacks by fiery beasts, give rise to a high turn over in workers. Virtually all the workers are slaves, for no sane man would chose to work here. Most of the slaves are convicts, but there is

a growing trade with the nomads of the Oasis of Dates to supply slaves via alternate channels.

Marid mages and priests of Apsu are paid handsomely to use their powers to protect the mines and stores of resources and create water (not that there are ever enough spellcasters to provide the latter). Ifrit mages and priests of Geb-Agni can also find steady employment here.

Hekata (The Withered Dynasty)

Temperature: Very Hot

Population: Unknown (none living)

Ruler: Apophis, the Divine Pharaoh

Religion: Worship of Apophis

Imports: None

Exports: None

GM’s Note: Historical notes in the timeline (p. 6) regarding Hekata are what are believed to have occurred. The information in this section represents the actual truth.

Two thousand years before the birth of Suleiman, the Hekatic Empire was the largest, most powerful, and most advanced human civilization in the great desert. The Empire rose from a collection of small farming settlements in the land of Hekata, but by the time of its demise its influence dominated the northern desert regions.

The pharaohs, hereditary rulers of the empire, were always considered to be living gods, but their allotted time in the mortal realm was no longer than that of their followers. Pharaoh Apophis, named “the Conqueror” during his reign because he had expanded the borders of the Empire, had long prepared for his death. Under his tyrannical reign, tens of thousands of citizens worked beneath the baking sun and under the whip of overseers to construct a pyramid tomb which would stand until time itself ended.

As the years of his reign grew longer and his pyramid grew taller, Apophis pondered his mortality more and more. He ordered the priests of Tammuz to ask for divine favor, to grant him eternal life, so the empire would remain strong under his rule. The priest prayed as requested. Each received the same answer, “Those born mortal would pass in their allotted time.”

In a furious rage, Apophis slew the priests and ordered his magicians to seek for the secret of immortality in “the dark places of the world where men fear to look.” Years passed, but eventually a magician entered the court and told the elderly pharaoh what he had longed to hear—a way to make him immortal existed, but it came with a heavy price.

Priests mummified Apophis alive, as the ritual demanded, decorating his corpse with powerful talismans of an evil nature to bind his soul to his corpse. The magic failed and Apophis was entombed in his pyramid as his forefathers were entombed in theirs.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Research into necromancy continued for many centuries, consuming the hearts and souls of the magicians, twisting them into liches. Priests and paladins of Tammuz rose up against the abominable practices being carried out and a brief civil war ravaged the land. The pharaohs won, and retribution was swift and harsh. Worship of the old gods was prohibited, replaced with worship of the divine pharaohs. Ancient temples were looted then pulled down, the clerics who did not escape died by the sword. From this day forth, the nobility, while no longer mummified alive, had their souls ritually tied to their corpses in preparation for the day when their bodies could be reawakened.

The empire began to crumble from within, the darkness of necromancy eating away its foundation. As its strength waned, so others began to look upon it as a prize to capture, for its farmlands were rich and its trade networks extensive.

Exactly who invaded the empire is lost to history, for no buildings or inscriptions survive from this period. Some claim the ophidae or scorpionmen were responsible, seeking revenge for earlier defeats imposed upon them. Others looked toward the jinn, whose power was on the rise to the south. A few look toward the sphinxes, ancient rivals of the Hekatic pharaohs, the mysterious lands to the east, or even the lizardmen from the south.

What began as another war of conquest quickly became a campaign of total extermination. Vast armies slaughtered each other, salting the land they conquered to deny it to the enemy—hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, died by sword, starvation, and disease. Eventually the armies of Hekata were surrounded, their rallying point the pyramid of Apophis.

The remaining liches began a dark and terrible chant, which echoed through the heavens, shaking the foundations of the universe with its unholy power. The sky darkened and great, black droplets of rain began to fall. As each one landed, a skeletal warrior, one of the countless souls buried in the sands, rose from the ground. Lightning the color of midnight ripped the sky asunder, striking the tombs and pyramids of the many necropolises, each strike imparting unholy energy into the slumbering corpses within and giving them unlife.

The invaders were soundly defeated by the freshly risen undead, but the spell which the liches had invoked had disastrous consequences. The massive release of necromantic energy drained the life out of the soil, the animals, even the people. The mighty River Ankh, the source of life in Hekata, succumbed as well, its waters turning black and rank with the stench of moldering corpses. The only things “living” in Hekata were the undead.

Freed from their tombs and imbued with unnatural powers by the fell spell, the numerous pharaohs began to war among each other, for each claimed the throne as his own. The war stretched on for over a century, each undead pharaoh using more and more necromancy to call forth the long-dead bodies of the empire's citizens.

The war could have continued until the present day, but it did not. As the unleashed necromancy built up in the soil and air of Hekata so something vast and terrible stirred—Apophis had finally awoken. His power was beyond that of mortal reckoning, for in his centuries of slumber his spirit had escaped its earthly bonds and wandered the darkest recesses of the universe, gathering knowledge of subjects so terrifying that even to speak of them would slay a mortal with fright.

Filled with rage at what had become of his once mighty empire, Apophis turned his anger on the lesser pharaohs, slaying dozens with his own hand. Before he could slay them all, the surviving pharaohs fell to their knees and swore allegiance to him. Had they waited a few months longer, they may have escaped without swearing fealty.

The magic which gave unlife to Apophis quickly faded—only when the stars were right would the necromantic energy permanently fuse with him. Only then could the unholy one walk the earth for eternity.

Before he returned to his tomb, Apophis granted each pharaoh a small domain, which they were to rule while he slumbered. The surviving liches were appointed to the status of wizar. They would act as Apophis' eyes and ears, reporting everything the pharaohs did during his slumber. When next he awoke, he promised, the Hekatic Empire would rise from the ashes—once more the hand of Hekata would rule the desert.

Though the pharaohs launched invasions of the surrounding lands in -302 after a sudden and unexpected surge of necromantic energy washed across the desert, awakening yet more undead, their dreams of conquests were short-lived. Those who survived now watch the skies with dread, for the wrath of their lord will be terrible indeed.

The liche-wizirs have watched the stars every night since Apophis' last awakening. The stars are almost in the predicted alignment. Preparations are under way to welcome Apophis back to the mortal realm, a realm he plans on conquering with an army of the dead.

Geography

Southern Hekata is a region of high upland desert broken by numerous canyons and ravines. As one heads down the River Ankh, so the land quickly flattens, until it reaches the sandy plains of lower Hekata.

Before the fall of Hekata, the plains were rich farmland, irrigated by the nutrient rich waters of the Ankh. The desert quickly claimed back the land when the waters became toxic. Today only black, scrubby grass grows in the plains, and then only close to the river. Little other vegetation grows in Hekata, nor will any ever thrive here until the taint of necromancy disappears.

Likewise, the only animals found there are long dead skeletal horses, dogs, and camels, mindless servants of the undead nobility. Even the vultures and jackals, once symbols of the pharaohs, fear Hekata.

Black Obelisks: Standing along the borders of Hekata at regular intervals are towering black obelisks imbued with symbols of death and misery, perception and understanding. Erected by the liche-wizards, the obelisks are a warning to those who would dare defy the rule of Apophis. The obelisks are joined together by an invisible field, which flows along the border (a *detect arcana* spell reveals its presence). Passing through it alerts the liches that a living entity has dared to enter Hekata.

Living creatures in Hekata are quickly hunted down by skeletal soldiers. With no need to concern themselves with supply lines, Hekata's generals want the biggest army they can raise—and that means "recruiting" from the living.

FIREBARRIER MOUNTAINS

The peaks of the Firebarrier form Hekata's southern border today as they did at the height of the Empire. Even during the first reign of Apophis they were regarded as an evil place, home to countless monsters and tribes of "beast men," most likely orcs judging by the ancient inscriptions found in tombs. Orcs do indeed live in the higher peaks, as do fire giants, but they are as afraid of the stories of Hekata as the more civilized races.

The ancient Hekatics believed the mountains held the Heart of Fire at bay. From Hekata, the eastern peaks do glow orange and red at night, backlit by the volcanoes of the Heart, appearing like a constant sunset where no sun should rest.

HILLS OF THE DAMNED

Rising along the banks of the River Ankh, the Hills of the Damned were once ancestral tombs of lesser nobles, priests, and magicians. During the undead pharaohs' civil war, rival factions repeatedly ransacked the region and numerous battles were fought in the dusty hills.

Many of the undead who haunt the region are hostile even to the minions of Apophis, warped and twisted as they are by the powerful necromantic aura left by the ages-long warfare. Apophis may have the strength of will to bow these abominations, but it is just as likely his first act of conquest must be to cleanse the hills.

Despite the century of looting, dozens, perhaps hundreds, of tombs remain concealed, their treasures awaiting those brave enough to enter the twisted heartland of Hekata.

RIVER ANKH

The River Ankh once carried water from the mountains to the sea. The water in the river has never been cleansed of the taint of necromancy, even after nearly two millennia of seasonal rains. Boats still sail the Ankh, though, ferrying undead soldiers around the empire on ships of bone with sails of flayed skin, and undead crocodiles and worse swim in the mire.

Once beyond the borders of Hekata, the river ceases

to exist, its course sinking beneath the sands, as if the desert could not bear to carry the stinking water. The course of the Sphinx Road from Lost Tomb Oasis eastward actually lies along the original riverbed.

TOMB HILLS

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

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

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

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

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

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

Major Locales

HEKATARNA, CITY OF BONES

Population: Unknown

Ruler: Pharaoh Ramunhotep XI, Administrator of Hekata

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

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

The outskirts of Hekaterna are partially buried in sand, but it is clear to all but the blind that someone, or something, has kept the political and religious areas clear of sand. Unlike other cities predating Suleiman, there are no statues of gods anywhere in the city. Long overthrown by the pharaohs in favor of worship of their image, the city is instead full of statues of these tyrannical rulers.

Thousands of statues were damaged or destroyed in the civil war, as rival pharaohs sought to wipe the images of their rivals from history, while simultaneously struggling to remove their creaking forms from the face of the world. The only statues which suffered no damage were those of Apophis, though weathering has done what the hand of undead kings would not.

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

Bureaucratic Center: One building which does have "life" is a small temple dedicated to Apophis. Built long after his death, the temple houses the current bureaucracy of Hekata, mummified scribes who work tirelessly to prepare for the coming war. While agents scour the countless tombs dotted throughout the land for suitable corpses and long-lost khem-hekau relics, the scribes tally troop numbers and dispositions, keep an accurate account of the wealth uncovered, and ensure that everything is ready for Apophis' return.

Overseeing this endeavor is Ramunhotep XI, Apophis' chief administrator. In life he was a miser, who recorded every single dirham his government spent. Apophis has put his talents to good use in death. As well as the withered pharaoh, there is a single liche-wizir, Apepmoses, a dozen royal guards, and a hundred skeleton warriors stationed here both to protect the records and remind Ramunhotep that he is only a servant of the Divine Pharaoh.

The Necropolis: Once the resting place of the early kings, the Necropolis of Hekaterna is now a center of activity in Hekata. Lying some ten miles from the former city, the Necropolis measures over a dozen miles across and contains hundreds of pyramids and tombs, as well as temples dedicated to the pharaonic cults. Near the center stands the pyramid of Apophis.

Only a slight wind stirs the sands, for most of the undead rest in their tombs until called upon to serve the pharaohs. Should their sleep be disturbed by the living, however, the dead are quick to rise and repel the intruders. Some of the tombs' occupants have long since risen, but the majority of pyramids and tombs have been resealed, their occupants waiting for Apophis' call to arms.

Pyramid of Apophis: Rising over 600 feet from the desert sands, the pyramid of Apophis is the true center of power in Hekata. Its limestone casings are weathered by sand and wind and blackened by the necromantic energy unleashed during the final, cataclysmic battle, but it has otherwise weathered the millennia remarkably well.

The pyramid supposedly contains ten levels, each comprising numerous chambers stacked with wealth, magical and mundane, and guarded by cunning and fiendish traps. The pyramid is not sealed. The handful of tomb robbers who have survived a foray inside reported giving up after just a few chambers, so great were the losses to their expeditions.

Somewhere within the pyramid lies Apophis, his corpse resting in a sarcophagus of black gold emblazoned in silver with protective spells. Some legends state he lies at the very top of the tomb, while others tell that his burial chamber is in a hidden subterranean level. It is unlikely any mortal will ever discover exactly where the demigod sleeps.

The Divine Pharaoh may be slumbering at present, but his time of awakening is rapidly approaching. He has already begun communicating with his liche-wizirs through visions.

Jadid, City of Trade

Temperature: Sweltering

Population: 167,000 (89% Hadaree, 4% sand goblins, 3% Bedu, 2% hyaenidae, 2% jinn blooded, <1% cakali)

Ruler: Emir Hassan ibn Hamal, the Goldentongue

Religion: Mixed (Qedeshet, Upuaut, Shamash)

Imports: Trade

Exports: Trade

Jadid stands on the coastal plain between the God-home Mountains and the Mountains of Death, at the northern end of the Wind Road, an independent city amid the powerful realms of Al-Shirkuh.

Before the War of Copper Jars, Jadid was a small Bedu camp built around a series of springs some five miles from the coast. Neither the sphinxes nor the jinn saw any gain in conquering it. After the War, refugees fleeing east were welcomed here by the Bedu, an act of charity they came to regret. Within a generation, the nomads were displaced and a mud brick town grew up around the life-giving water.

When the Silk Road opened, Jadid's location made it an ideal trading center. Crafters began to mass produce goods for sale in the Jade Empire. Silk and spices flowed back into Al-Shirkuh, the sale of which to the Caliphate, Sultanate, and Free Emirates made Jadid a wealthy city. Although merchants from the Sultanate quickly began using the Silk Road, Jadid's enormous wealth and its merchants' desires to seek out new markets has assured its survival.

In 400 CJ, seeking to circumvent the closure of the Silk Road and bring in wealth by alternate sources, intrepid mariners from Jadid risked colossal storms, aggressive sphinx patrols, and dangerous sea monsters to find a safe maritime route to the distant Jade Empire. After many failures, the first shipments of goods arrived back in 412 CJ.

Quick to exploit the new route, the emir of Jadid ordered a new city to be built on the coast. Great stone wharves extended into the blue water, and warehouses and bureaucratic buildings rose on the shore. Behind these, residential zones quickly grew. In 440 CJ, messengers carried the glad news across Al-Shirkuh—the last stone had been laid. Traders quickly began to flock to Jadid, rekindling its flagging economy.

A settlement of barely 20,000 souls when it was constructed, the new city received fresh water through a network of subterranean pipes from springs. This proved sufficient at first, but as the population of the new city rapidly expanded it quickly became clear a larger source of water would be required. In an engineering feat which rivaled the ancient monument builders of Hekata, convicted criminals toiled to construct a massive network of *qanats* connecting the city's cisterns to the streams that flow from the mountains. Easy targets for those who wished to see Jadid fail, the emir ordered a network of forts constructed. These are populated by soldiers and miners. Orcs have damaged the system more than once, but full service has always resumed within a week.

A smooth talker with a strong head for business and pockets deeper than his arms, Emir Hassan is the envy of other nobles, both in Jadid and without. He has a vast number of fawning courtiers, a harem full of the most beautiful women money can buy, but he has no true friends—indeed he has more enemies than most of the other emirs combined.

Steadily growing paranoid, Hassan has surrounded himself with a small army of highly-paid wizards and jinn mages. No one is allowed into his direct presence. He even holds audiences concealed behind ornate ivory screens. Not even his wives and children are above suspicion, and he has barely seen his family in the last two years, preferring to keep them at his summer palace in New Jadid.

Nadine, his wife, suspects some dark magic has taken a hold over her husband. She now seeks aid in ridding her husband of its taint. Unwilling to trust those closest to the emir, many of whom will profit if he dies or is declared insane, she sends her agents across Al-Shirkuh to find noble souls willing to investigate her claims.

Jadid has long been a thorn in the flanks of the sphinxes. Were Jadid to fall, all trade to the Jade Empire would have to come through their ports. Unfortunately, Jadid is a strong city with defenses more than capable of seeing off a single sphinx army. Should the sphinxes ever put aside their differences and join forces, it is unlikely Jadid would survive long.



The Golden Road: Modern Jadid is a city of two parts. The industrial and mercantile center is on the coast, in New Jadid. The bureaucratic center is in Old Jadid, five miles inland. A wide paved road, large enough to carry four carts side by side, links the two cities together. This road is currently being widened to accommodate the growing traffic.

Trade Fort: Halfway along the Golden Road is a heavily defended fortress, through which all mercantile traffic must travel. Two huge gates provide access to walled compounds, where cargoes are checked for contraband, shipping manifests are checked, and the emir's import and export surcharges are paid.

Many smugglers have tried to bribe guards and officials to look the other way on many occasions, but no amount of money has proven enough to corrupt them. Rumors that the guards are brainwashed are common but groundless—the emir simply pays them well enough that none are willing to throw away their careers for a few extra coins. Trade along the road is increasing yearly, so much so that the fort is being expanded so as to be able to process merchants quicker.

⦿ JINN LANDS OF OLD ⦿

Temperature: Sweltering

Population: 200,000+ (70% Bedu, 10% hyaenidae, 10%

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

jinn blooded, 6% cakali, 4% sand goblins)

Ruler: None (various tribes)

Religion: Mixed (Duamutef, Upuaut, Shamash, Apsu, Ashtart)

Imports: Trade

Exports: Trade

The area marked on modern maps of Al-Shirkuh encompasses the core lands of the former Jinn Empire. Here they arrived from whatever otherworldly realms they inhabited. Here they built great cities of stone. Here they gathered together vast numbers of slaves to serve their every whim. Here they were defeated by Suleiman and his ragtag army of slaves.

Where the jinn originated has never been discovered. Fragmentary ancient records simply indicate they appeared in Al-Shirkuh from “a realm beyond our own.” No matter where they called home, the outsiders made a lasting mark on Al-Shirkuh.

With the collapse of the Hekatic Empire centuries earlier, the central and northern deserts were a collection of independent cities. The only powerbase lay in the northeast, in the lands of the sphinxes. Within a few decades of their arrival the jinn began carving out a small empire in the center of the land before expanding outward to swallow neighboring states.

At the height of their power, the jinn dominated the land from the Mountains of Death to the Dusty Mountains and from the borders of the sphinx realms down to the coast of the Caliphate. Though they had crushed many cultures, the Kingdoms were never conquered. After a series of costly invasions, the jinn left the sphinxes well alone.

Scholars agree the Jinn Empire had reached its zenith when the War of Copper Jars erupted. Why the jinn never attempted to subdue the entire desert or expand into neighboring lands are questions historical texts cannot answer. What is clear is that the jinn grabbed a chunk of land and began consolidating their powerbase, as if preparing for some great event.

Suleiman's act of rebellion caught the jinn totally by surprise. After eight hundred years, the great empire's destruction came not at the hands of a great nation on their borders, but by the will of one human being. For all their power, the jinn elders were helpless against Suleiman, who had reportedly mastered every form of magic ever known.

The War of Copper Jars was not a war to gain territory, it was a war to exterminate another race and everything they had created—a war of total genocide. Cities were not ransacked—they were totally wiped from the face of the planet, their memory erased from history. Soldiers and civilians on both sides (not everyone supported Suleiman) died in such great numbers that every vulture and jackal in Al-Shirkuh was bloated for a year and still meat was left to rot on the bone.

An ancient text written shortly after the War of Copper Jars, the so-called *Temptation of Suleiman*, tells how the jinn elders pleaded with Suleiman to spare them from destruction or bondage. They supposedly showed him visions of the future, a future in which all civilization

had been destroyed, a future which could be avoided if Suleiman left the jinn alone. As history has shown, Suleiman resisted temptation and the jinn elders were bound into copper jars, leaving only the weakest of their kind as slaves to jinn mages.

A heretical text written around a decade after Suleiman's death proclaimed that the great mage wanted to be buried in the old jinn lands and that his last words were, “My arrogance has damned us all,” something his closest worshippers denied vehemently in later texts.

Geography

Though the Jinn Lands were once much larger, modern maps show it as stretching from the Mountains of Death in the east to the lower part of the North Trade Road in the west, and from Suleiman's Road and the Jinn Wall Mountains in the south to the edge of the Desert of Ash and Scorpion Lands in the north.

Much of the region is open desert, sandy save for the rock strewn Wastelands and the Mirrorsands (the latter being treated as a separate area, see p. 139). Dune seas lie in the northwest and southeast corner. While the region sees little rain, there are several major oases.

BONE FIELD

There are scholars who say that history must never be forgotten, lest its errors be repeated. In the jinn lands of old, even the desert seeks to remind its denizens of this, for there is one area which the sands have not yet encroached upon.

Located in the western wilds is an area known as the Bone Field. Sprouting from the thin sand like bleached and desiccated plants are bones, some intact, others merely fragments. It is impossible to say how many creatures died to sow the field with its grisly crop, but estimates run as high as a million.

Few nomads will enter the region, for their ancient tales, passed from generation to generation, speak of swarms of angry ghosts who attack those who would disturb their physical remains. Scavengers, mainly hyaenidae, sometimes pick over the area, dredging up old coins, bent weapons, buckled armor, and such like. A few relics do turn up now and then, but most have proven to be one-shot devices, similar to modern alchemical devices.

EAST TRADE ROAD

This short trade route runs between the Oasis of Dates and Last Water Oasis. It serves as the link between Jadid, the eastern Sultanate, and the rest of the central trade network.

JINN ROAD

The Jinn Road marks the boundary on maps between

the two great deserts of Al-Shirkuh. Running from Clearwater Oasis across to the Oasis of Dates, the trade route ran through the center of the Jinn Empire, a great highway of trade and commerce. These days it forms the core of the trade network linking the civilized lands together.

JINN WALL MOUNTAINS

The ancient peaks of the Jinn Wall were named by the Magor Empire. When the jinn rose to power, the citizens of Magor, knowing little of the jinn's true power, believed the mountains would be a natural barrier to any attempts at conquest. They were wrong—their empire fell and their people were enslaved.

Several ruins dating back to the days of Magor supremacy in the region remain standing. At least three temples and the remains of a network of watch towers stand in the mountains, but their remoteness, not to mention plentiful rumors of jinn who escaped destruction and ghosts of Magor warriors, keep sensible folk well clear of them.

There are no known passes through the mountains.

ROAD OF THE GODS

Although the Road of the Gods begins in the Caliphate (at Marresh), its greatest length runs through the old jinn lands. The key overland trade route for the Caliphate, caravans and camel trains are common sites on the dusty trail.

THE JINN'S CAMPFIRE

In a remote spot between the Jinn Road, Ash Road, and Mirrorsands is the Jinn's Campfire—a column of roaring flame which rises over 1000 feet in the sky and which has burned continuously since the War of Copper Jars. At night, the fire illuminates the skyline, acting as a landmark for those traveling the sands.

Jinn mages specializing in ifrit magic have spent many man-years studying the phenomenon, but have been unable to find a cause for the flame. Hot enough to melt objects thrust into the column within a matter of seconds, the fire radiates no heat beyond a few inches from the edge of the flames. Even on cold nights, there is no comfort to be gained from the Campfire.

Tales of fire giants worshipping the flame, salamanders spawning in the inferno, yellow eyes appearing in the column, crackling voices speaking unintelligibly at night, and of fiery hands reaching out to drag people to a fiery death are told across Al-Shirkuh. Where such tales spring from is anyone's guess, for even the jinn mages have reported seeing nothing unusual in or around the Campfire.

THE RUINS

Scattered across the sands are remnants of the former jinn cities. Some are little more than a few stones or a

toppled pillar, any markings long since weathered beyond recognition. Others are near intact cities, though they are frequently all-but buried under the sand. Many treasures and many dangers lie undisturbed in these ancient places. No discernible ruins stand in the Wastes.

THE WASTES

The Wastes is a region of rocky desert. In days of yore the greatest jinn cities stood here, in a region many scholars consider to be the hub of their domain. Fearful magics tore the cities apart, shattering their colossal walls and mighty temples.

Tens of thousands of folk have walked the Jinn Road through the Wastes, but none have ever realized the rocks along the trail are actually the remnants of the jinn cities, so complete was the destruction. Occasionally a nomad stumbles across part of a statue or a fragment of stone with writing on it, selling them as curiosities to collectors in the cities.

THE WIZARD'S TOWER

Rising from the sand to a height of 600 feet is a thin, stone tower. A staircase, cracked and broken in places by the passage of time, winds up the outside of the tower to the roof, an open platform marked with weathered magical runes of air and transportation. No doors or windows allow access to the interior of the tower, and many scholars claim it is in fact a solid structure, rather than a true tower.

According to stories, slaves under the lash of a cruel mage of the Kingdom of Magor constructed the tower over a ten year period. While the slaves toiled, the mage worked on a mighty enchantment, one which would allow him the permanent power of flight. At long last, the mage ascended the tower and stood in the center of the platform. By the light of the moon he worked his magic, and as dawn broke, he looked east and saw the sun surrounded by a rainbow, an omen, or so he believed, that his magic had succeeded.

Without hesitation, the mage jumped off the tower. Six hundred feet later his experiment and his life ended rather suddenly. The slaves, now freed from the tyrannical master, returned to their homes, taking the story of the mad wizard with them.

Jinn mages sometimes visit the tower, for khamsins are known to flit and weave around the platform, whistling and singing to each other in their lilting voices. While mages agree that spells using air trappings are more powerful, none have dared use *fly* to descend from the tower, fearful that whatever tainted the great mage's magic may well still lurk in the stones and in the surrounding air.

THE YOKE

The Yoke is the actually the southern arm of the Godhome Mountains. The range is divided, on maps, at Salt

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

A KNOCK-ON EFFECT

Dry Water is a vital stopover for merchants using the Jinn Road, the busiest trade road in Al-Shirkuh. It lies almost equidistantly from Clearwater, the Oasis of Dates, and Marqod's Well, and is the only watering hole along the road. Were it to dry up completely, the effects on trade would be disastrous.

Caravans would require more water, which means either carrying less trade goods or buying more camels to carry the extra water. The former means shortages in the markets and souks. The latter means longer camel trains, which leads to a slower journey (and more water consumption), and more guards to safeguard the merchants in the wild lands.

All of these lead to lower profits, which forces the merchants to hike up their prices. In turn, the buyers raise their prices, and the end user pays more for his goods. Trade suffers as citizens can no longer afford to buy goods, which leads to reduced profits, and the cycle goes on and on until trade dies altogether.

Pass—everything north is the Godhomes and everything south the Yoke. Averaging 5,000 feet in height, the range saw no snow before the desert began to change. During winter, the snow now lies as low as 3,000 feet.

Named for its unusual shape, the peaks are home to many bands of orcs and giants, many of whom were driven out of the Mountains of Death by the occupants of the City of Iron.

Major Locales

BLACK PALM OASIS

Population: 532 (100% Bedu)

Ruler: Sheikh Omar of the Sharhirar tribe

Religion: Faithful (Ashtart, Apsu, Qedeset, Duamutef)

Imports: Trade

Exports: Dates, trade

Situated on the Northern Trade Road, Black Palm Oasis is noted for its date palms, all of which have jet black bark and leaves. The fruit is extremely juicy and the nomads make a comfortable living selling dates to merchants and passing travelers.

Sheikh Omar rules from here. He has declared the palm trees a sacred gift from Ashtart. Dates may only be harvested by clerics of Ashtart under pain of death. Indeed, a permanent guard is stationed around the palms, with strict orders to use any means necessary to protect the dates.

Black Palm saw a dramatic rise in the number of traders passing through as overland trade developed with Rassilon. However, the deprivations of the lizardmen are stifling this trade, and the number of visitors is quickly dropping as merchants opt to use the ports of

the Free Emirates instead. Likewise, the sphinxes now trade with Rassilon via the sea, thus missing out Black Palm altogether. What overland traffic there is avoids the Snakelands and takes the southern route, avoiding Black Palm altogether.

Omar's father once intended to forge a new trade road through Hekata to join up with Lost Tomb Oasis. This link would have circumvented the Snakelands and allowed traders from the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes a faster route across the desert to the markets of the Free Emirates. However, every expedition he sent failed to return. The tribal priests speak of a darkness rising in Hekata, but faced with the possibility of trade ceasing, Omar is desperate to open the new road. He is willing to offer great wealth to any adventurers brave enough to forge a trail through Hekata.

Black Date Wine: Omar sells a thick, syrupy wine made from the dates. A single bottle (4 glasses) sells for 200 dinars. Each glass provides the benefits of the *succor* spell as if cast with a raise.

Black Dates: Omar sells the black dates for 10 dinars a pound. As well as providing a day's food, a pound of these succulent dates also counts as two quarts of water. To be gifted dates by Omar is considered a great honor among the nomadic tribes.

DRY WATER OASIS

Population: 477 (100% Bedu)

Ruler: Sheikh Raghi of the Ain Jalut tribe

Religion: Faithful (Apsu, Duamutef, Shamash)

Imports: Trade

Exports: Trade

A vital link along the Salt Road, Dry Water is living up to its name. For the last 500 years water levels have been steadily dropping. The oasis now barely provides for the needs of the permanent population, yet alone providing for the great number of merchants who pass through every year on the way to and from the great cities. The irrigation channels to the fields are a scant trickle at the best of times, and much of the surrounding vegetation is now dead. The once fertile soil is slowly being reclaimed by the encroaching sands.

Last year, Sheikh Raghi ordered priests of Apsu to perform a divination to find the source of the problem. The priests all confirmed some sort of powerful magic had a part to play in causing the fall in water levels. After a further divination that caused three priests to drop dead, their flesh frozen solid and a strange name on their dying breath, the priests pinpointed the source of the enchantment—it originated far to the north, beyond the desert, in the land of the pale-skinned barbarians.

Raghi has no idea how to deal with the problem. He is currently offering a sizeable sum to anyone willing to travel north and investigate.

LAST WATER OASIS

Population: 900 (60% Bedu, 30% Hadaree)

Ruler: Sheikh Mutahdi of the Amjad tribe

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Trade

Exports: Trade

Last Water stands at the juncture of the East Trade Road and the Wind Road. Further east lie the Mountains of Death, through which wound the old Silk Road, a route which crossed many lands before ending in the Jade Empire.

The Bedu prospered by brisk trade until 395 CJ. Merchants from Al-Shirkuh traveled to the east, transporting gems, gold, and salt. They returned with iron ingots, bundles of silk, and jars of fragrant spices. Then trade suddenly ceased, the great caravans never returning. Fortunately for the Amjad, Jadid's expeditions to the east opened a sea route to the Jade Empire within a few decades, saving the tribe from poverty.

Last Water remains a vital link along the Wind Road. It is the first stop for merchants heading west to the Kingdoms, Emirates, and Caliphate and the last stop before Jadid on the return trip. Sheikh Mutahdi hires out scouts and guides to passing caravans. His men escort merchants as far as Jadid in the north, the Oasis of Dates in the west, and Musayid in the south.

The savage deprivations of the mysterious Scavengers are a constant threat to the oasis. The sheikh's father negotiated with the emirs of Jadid and Musayid, persuading them to build a fortified caravanserai some five miles from the oasis, but under Amjad jurisdiction. Naturally the two cities at first refused to provide the Bedu with a fortified camp, but as the victims of the Scavengers piled up they quickly saw reason. Although the caravanserai is run by the Bedu, both Jadid and the Sultanate provide an extra garrison of 150 soldiers.

Visitors approaching the oasis from any direction are informed that they must stay at the caravanserai if they are carrying any metal item. They may visit the oasis, but may not carry as much as an ounce of metal on them—this is punishable by death, a sentence sanctioned by the emirs of Jadid and Musayid as well. Even the tribal warriors are armed with wooden staffs and stone axes and flint-tipped arrows.

OASIS OF DATES

Population: 358 (94% Bedu, 6% mixed slaves)

Ruler: Sheikh Abdullah of the Al-Jarar tribe

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Various goods

Exports: Dates, slaves

A major trade route nexus, the oasis is also the last major stop for explorers planning on entering the Salt Basin. The oasis is a fertile watering hole renowned, unsurprisingly, for its dates. While not as delicious as those of the Black Palm Oasis, they are a welcome purchase for travelers, especially those who have journeyed along the dusty Ash Road.

While caravans are treated cordially, small groups of travelers are treated like kings by the nomads. Such

guests are feasted with the finest foods available and served by nubile maidens (treat as Honored Guests, p. 70). Many of these travelers are drugged and kept in chains until a slave auction can be held. Most slaves end up shipped north to the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes or to labor in the Caliphate and Sultanate's mines in the Salt Basin or the Heart of Fire. The truly unfortunate ones are sold to human agents of Hekata, to be used as sacrifices or converted into undead soldiers.

Neither the Caliph nor the Sultan know of this practice. The overseers of their salt mines have no wish to inform them either—production must be kept up, but the supply of convicts sent to mine salt never keeps up with the losses due to the appalling conditions in which the miners work.

The oasis is governed by Sheikh Abdullah, head of the small but wealthy Al-Jarar tribe. The sheikh pays several hyaenidae bands to watch over the trade road and report back if they see any small groups approaching.

OASIS OF THE JINN

Population: 374 (100% Bedu)

Ruler: Sheikh Gazi of the Kozer tribe

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Trade

Exports: Alchemical devices, ancient texts, minor relics, trade.

At the meeting of the Road of Gods and the Ash Road lies the Oasis of the Jinn. The nomads always have strange and wondrous goods to sell—treasures looted from ancient jinn cities, the location of which are known only to them, and which they never reveal to outsiders, no matter how friendly, rich, influential, or famous they might be.

Although Sheikh Gazi appears to be in command of the tribe, he is in fact a puppet ruler. Several years ago a group of nomads discovered a copper jar. The seal was damaged and the nomads cracked it open, perhaps remembering old tales of how releasing a jinni compels it into service. The jar did contain a jinni, but it had no intention of bowing before its liberators. Instead, it tore the nomads limb from limb.

Severely weakened by its long imprisonment, the jinni assumed the form of one of the nomads and retraced their steps to the distant oasis. Once there, it quickly surveyed the situation and decided to begin its revenge against the humans. It killed the sheikh's wizar and assumed his form.

Here it has stayed for the last five years, gathering its strength, learning about the modern world from travelers, and using its magic to subdue Gazi. Under the ruse of collecting relics to sell, it secretly conceals the most powerful relics in preparation for the day it begins its war of retribution.

Jinn Magic: The oasis is named because jinn magic works exceptionally well here, a result of the close proximity of the jinni. Jinn mages are +2 to their Jinn Magic rolls while within sight of the oasis and gain the benefits of the Improved Focus Edge.

Jubbah, City of Monkeys

Population: 20,000 (estimated; 99% baba, 1% others)

Ruler: His Exalted Majesty, King Jubbah

Religion: Yeowri (a minor god of apes and monkeys)

Imports: Trade, raw materials, rice, wheat

Exports: Trade, craft goods

Jubbah's title of City of Monkeys is a misnomer—the inhabitants are actually intelligent apes known as baba (singular babi).

Baba closely resemble baboons. Supposedly their racial name gives the baboons their name, though this is unlikely. When standing fully erect, which they only do when trying to intimidate others, they are a little under five feet tall. Their normal stance is hunched forward. Baba walk with a rolling gait, are slower than humans when moving on the ground, but are far more agile. Their prehensile tails and feet make them excellent climbers.

Despite their appearance and sometimes apish behavior (such as communal grooming), the baba are a sentient, civilized race, albeit a minor one in terms of numbers. They live much as humans, dressing in clothes, going to work, running businesses, growing fruit in their orchards (within the city), and so on.

Their society is based on bartering rather than hard

currency. The markets and souks are a constant babble of high-pitched yaps, low growls, and frantically waving limbs. The native tongue of the baba has proven impossible for other races to learn due to their inability to reproduce certain sounds—a *speaking language* spell is essential if one wishes to communicate with them. They have no written language of their own, nor do they use those of other cultures and races.

Baba worship a single god, Yeowri, whose image is of a crouched baboon holding its knees. According to oral tradition, the baba once worshipped many gods, but these were false deities and Yeowri showed them the error of their ways. Though Devoted are quick to point out the similarities with Suleiman and the old gods, the baba deny any knowledge of the great mage ever having visited their city. Strangely, baba also claim no knowledge of the sphinxes, the jinn, or the Hekatic Empire, all of whose empires at one stage ruled this territory. Conversely, the ancient empires make no mention of Jubbah in their old records, and even the Bedu make mention of it only since the War of Copper Jars ended.

Mystery shrouds the city's origins—even the baba do not know the real truth. Human scholars have postulated many theories as to the existence of both the city and its inhabitants. The most popular theories revolve around the idea the baba were once human and the city built by human hands. Whether the baba's current form is a result of a curse by the jinn, one or more gods, or even Suleiman depends on which scholar you listen to.

The baba claim they are a unique species, and that their civilization predates humanity. To the baba, it is humans who ape their behavior, not the other way round. Tales about Jubbah's origins and inhabitants are plentiful—every storyteller knows at least half a dozen.

Regardless of its origins, Jubbah is the only city the baba call home. Indeed, the entire race is fearful of stepping out into the outside world, though they happily welcome the traders through their great gates. Jubbah isn't a major trading center, but the small quantities of craft goods they export fetch good prices elsewhere. In return, they import raw materials and bushels of grain and rice.

Jubbah is a large city by most accepted standards. Buildings fill only around a third of the area enclosed by the high walls, however. Orchards and nut bushes take up roughly a quarter of the remaining space, and the rest is pasture for small herds of goats and sheep.

King Jubbah (every king takes the name Jubbah), a hugely obese member of his species with a habit of dribbling



when he isn't speaking, is the latest in a line of kings stretching back for over 2,000 years, if one believes the priests whose task it is to memorize such things. Jubbah has a love of sweet foods, strong coffee, and human women. His harem contains two dozen human slaves.

Jubbah mistakenly believes that human men own women in much the same way as they own goats, and have large herds of them. He always offers males a good price to sell him an attractive female from their herd (2,000 dinars per point of positive Charisma). No one in the court is quite sure how he came to this conclusion, but no one corrects his error.

Jubbah has no sexual feelings toward his harem—he simply views them as a sign of wealth and prestige. Although forbidden from leaving the city, the women are treated extremely well and continually pampered.

Though among humans the king might be labeled decadent, among the baba he is infallible—whatever he says or does is acceptable behavior. Much of this comes from the belief that the king is a living incarnation of Yeowri. Although only a handful of kings have bothered to learn priestly powers, the king is also the high priest (and head of the army).

The Kingdoms of the Sphinxes

Temperature: Warm (north and east coast), Hot (Jizah, Mizdah, and inland regions)

Population: 2,474,000 (85% Hadaree, 10% Bedu, 4% jinn blooded, 1% sand goblins, <1% sphinxes)

Ruler: None (each city has its own pharaoh)

The origin of the sphinxes has been lost to history. All that is really known is the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes came into existence in -1334 (Year Zero in the Royal Sphinx Calendar). Before this time, three separate human cultures dwelt in the region. The Hittari governed the territory between the Rivers Damasc and Nyl, the Assarites ruled from the River Harad southward, and the Haranites occupied the middle land. Little else is known about the cultures—the sphinxes have had almost 2000 years to erase all memory of the cultures they conquered, and their names are known solely from ancient Hekatic records.

Hazy records seem to indicate the sphinxes were once a tribal nation living between the Mountains of Fear and Godhome Mountains. Possessed of great wisdom, it appears the early cultures adopted the sphinxes as some sort of divine avatar, worshipping them as living representatives of their gods. Over the centuries they gained more power, eventually replacing the human nobility with a theocratic style government.

Sometime around -1200 CJ (134 RSC), the fledgling sphinx nation briefly united under the rule of Pharaoh Hamapta. For almost three centuries (sphinxes are long-lived), he ruled as sole pharaoh. Unfortunately,

Hamapta's seven children were quarrelsome, greedy, and treacherous. When he died, Hamapta denied his offspring their inheritance by having his vast treasury buried in a secret tomb (see Lost Tomb Oasis on p. 110 for more details). Hamapta's death is tentatively placed at around -900 (434 RSC) by human scholars.

Hamapta did leave his offspring a will—in which he ceded all his lands back to the humans. His children quickly destroyed the will and erased all knowledge of it from the records. Without a clear line of succession, Hamapta's children lead the country to civil war. No side had the power to win on its own and none would make a pact with their siblings—the war fizzled to a rapid conclusion. Each child settled for grabbing control of one of the major cities and declaring itself true pharaoh.

The first independent records of their existence date from -1182 (152 RSC), when Hekata threw its armies against the united sphinx nation. Severely weakened by centuries of khem-hekau corruption and internecine feuding, the war was an attempt to reunite the fractured country in a common goal. Sadly, poor leadership, feuding, and a strong defense lead to a crushing defeat. Hekata fell to ruin barely a century later.

The next external threat came from the jinn in -505 (829 RSC). Having subdued much of the lands in the central and southern desert, the jinn looked to bring the sphinxes to their knees. Despite their fearsome magic and vast slave armies, the jinn fared no better than the Hekatics five centuries before. Such was the devastation wrought on their armies that the jinn were forced to cease expansion for almost 300 years. The sphinxes also suffered heavy losses, though there are no known records of this remaining.

Hekata launched another attempt to conquer the realm in -302 (1032 RSC). Rising up from their musty tombs, undead soldiers marched into the Kingdoms, only to be soundly thrashed one again.

Since this time, the sphinxes have never faced a serious threat to their borders, neither have they ever sought to expand their territory (see below).

Modern sphinx society remains highly fractured. Each city is a separate political, religious, and military state governed by its own royal house. The royal houses are named after Hamapta's children, though interbreeding and numerous coups mean not one of the current ruling sphinxes is directly descended from Hamapta (though of course they refute this bitterly).

The head of each royal house has the title pharaoh. The pharaoh is believed to be the divine representative of whatever god he or she favors, and is thus the high priest of the faith (at least within that city). Within the pharaoh's domain, his chosen god is the chief deity—all others are considered subservient to him.

Beneath the royal houses are the noble houses. The head of each noble house carries the title Sar-Nesu. As well as marking them as nobility, the title is also that of the high priest of each of the "lesser" faiths worshipped in the city. Such sphinxes are not seen as divine beings made

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

SPHINXES & MAGIC

As a race, sphinxes favor the gods and their miraculous powers over magic.

Sphinxes generally don't see mages as being evil in any way or particularly misguided, but they do see them as a threat to their rule (as they do any powerful individuals). As a result, known mages are frequently tailed by spies to ensure they are not planning sedition.

Magicians of other races within the Kingdoms must be licensed. A license costs 200 dinars per year, but one is required for every individual city. Mages caught working magic without a license are subject to a variety of punishments designed to curb their activities—a dervish may have a foot amputated, for instance, to thwart her spinning, while a jinn mage may lose his tongue, and thus his ability to command jinn.

The only exception to this is in Mizdah. Here mages are banned under penalty of torture, banishment or death. See p. 135 for more details.

manifest, simply favored mortal servants. Of course, the noble houses are continually plotting to become royal houses. Marriage and usurping the throne by force are the time-honored favorite methods of ascension.

There are no sphinx commoners—every sphinx is automatically a noble because of its superiority to all other races.

The reason the sphinxes have never sought to expand their territory lies in their fractured nature. Each royal house fears that if it begins to stretch out into neighboring territory its rivals will see it as a threat to their hegemony and ally against it. Expanded territory also means dividing one's forces to secure them, weakening internal stability, and in so doing leaving the realm open to assault.

Thus the sphinxes remain insular even to each other and non-expansionist. Rather than war on the battlefield, which again leaves one open to assault by neighboring cities or external forces, each city seeks to weaken its rivals through trade—a war of money, sabotage, and backhanded deals exists between all seven cities. Were they ever to unite again under a single ruler (unlikely given the current state of common mistrust) and look outward, the sphinxes could pose a serious threat to the other races of Al-Shirkuh.

Daily life in the Kingdoms is little different to the other civilized regions of Al-Shirkuh. The sphinxes rarely appear in public, except on religious or civil occasions, and when they do it is always in the presence of armed guards. Citizens who do not show the proper respect, such as bowing when a sphinx passes by, are quickly arrested. Such individuals are usually sold into slavery.

The stench of rebellion wafts through the cities of the Kingdoms. Taxes are high and the markets often short of food, resources being diverted to the palaces

so the sphinxes can live in the opulent luxury their status as “divine beings” requires. Petty crimes are punished by enslavement. Slaves are typically sent to the mines or to work on the various grand construction schemes. Non-sphinxes are generally forbidden from holding power.

Each city-state has its own stat block below. Only the faith of the ruling house is listed—all other gods are worshipped to lesser degrees (except Iblis, whom even the sphinxes dislike).

Geography

The Kingdoms is predominately a coastal region. Although the borders lie further inland, the space between them and the cities is regarded as a buffer zone more than territory worth exploiting. In the north, the parallel ranges of the Prophecy Hills and Mountains of Fear straddle the border. Further south, the Godhome Mountains form a natural border. A small dune sea dominates the central plains between the mountains.

Three centuries ago much of the region was rocky. Today, sand covers everything. The depth of sand varies, and after a powerful sandstorm great areas of barren rocks may be uncovered for a short while before the next storm covers them again.

Biting cold winds sweep down from the distant Hellfrost, battering the northern coast. The five northern cities, Muglad round the coast to Jawf, are the coldest cities in Al-Shirkuh, and during cold winters suffer brief blizzards and freezing rain.

GODHOME MOUNTAINS

The magnificent peaks of these granite mountains stretch from the northern tip of the Salt Basin and continue southward along its eastern flank, ending on most maps at Salt Pass (after which the range becomes part of the Yoke). Ancient beyond mortal reckoning, the sides of the mountains have been worn smooth by wind erosion, leaving razor-thin ridges and near-vertical cliffs in their wake.

The tallest peaks rise to a height of 15,000 feet and are snow-capped all year above 10,000 feet. During harsh winters, the snow descends as low as 6,000 feet.

Several ancient ruins dot the mountains. Built of cyclopean block of granite, the sheer size of the structures led ancient explorers to believe they were palaces built by the gods. Their location and elevation make them difficult to reach, and examinations have been at best cursory. No engravings, statues, or archaeological remains have ever been unearthed, but there is evidence the structures extend deep underground. Perhaps clues to the nature of the builders lie here, in the pitch blackness of the mountains' core.

Tribes of orcs inhabit the middle part of the range, congregating in the “bulge” before the mountains thin and run along the coast. Far from any major settlements, they live in comparative safety, raiding small sphinx

towns down into the Salt Basin, but never in enough numbers to warrant a crusade against them.

PROPHECY HILLS

Although labeled as hills, the peaks are in fact mountains, rising to an average height of 8,000 feet. Ancient sphinx legends, tales nowadays scoffed at, tell that Hamapta was walking the region when he heard a voice from the heavens. The voice told him of his destiny to unite the sphinxes and forge them into a great empire.

Cold winds warm as they cross the northern plain, and rise up when they hit the peaks. Rainfall on the northern slopes is higher than in other regions, and the three major rivers which begin their journeys here are rarely short of water, even in the hottest summers.

The Great Sphinx: To honor his discovery, Hamapta erected a colossal statue of a sphinx over the site where he heard the prophecy. Although once a site of pilgrimage, sphinxes no longer visit, and the site has fallen into ruin. Sand has drifted over the statue, leaving only its

head exposed. Attacks by giants, orcs, and ogres have resulted in the destruction of the sphinx's nose, ears, and much of its headdress. The bright paint used to decorate the head has been sandblasted away, leaving only scant traces of the statue's former majesty.

Two great pillars lay toppled nearby, barely a third of their length protruding from the sand. Carved on the pillars in the ancient hieroglyph language of the sphinxes is the tale of Hamapta and his glorious reign.

Surrounding the statue at a distance of 100 yards are the remnants of 11 small temples, each one dedicated to one deity of the sphinx pantheon (every god except Iblis). They are arranged in a circle, spaced evenly like the marks on a sundial. There is no temple in the southernmost position (6 o'clock). A great avenue flanked by statues of sphinxes with a variety of heads once ran along this route, leading from the edge of the precinct right to the feet of the statue. Many of these statues no longer exist, having been stolen to decorate the halls of sphinx palaces, eroded to dust by the howling wind, or smashed by invaders.



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

RIVER AL-SHADU

The sphinxes of Kharijah have recently constructed a series of caravanserais-cum-forts and military-grade wharves along the navigable stretch of the river. Although they claim these are merely deterrents to raiders and protection for the annual grain barges, their rivals suspect they are up to something more sinister.

The favorite supposition is that the Al-Shadu will become a heavily fortified frontier, cutting Talawdi and Muqlad off from the rest of the Kingdoms. Combined with a naval blockade, this will allow the cities to be attacked without any hope of receiving reinforcements.

RIVER DAMASC

Though not a long river, the Damasc has large fertile plains on either bank. Whereas many other rivers are in danger of drying up, the Damasc has a habit of flooding. Though this does help spread valuable nutrients across the plains, a series of recent floods caused more harm than good, washing away vast swathes of soil and leaving the bare rock beneath exposed to the encroaching sand.

The city of Muqlad, which straddles the river, has suffered several severe floods in recent years, which have led to outbreaks of disease from waterborne parasites.

Several canals were being built parallel to the river, but funding has been delayed. When they are finished, they will be joined into the river system. The sphinxes hope the canals will prevent excessive flooding, widen the fertile regions back into the desert, and protect Damasc from overland attack.

RIVER HARAD

The Harad has held the title of the longest river in Al-Shirkuh since the Ankh disappeared beneath the surface. Wide, fertile plains exist along much of its length, making it a valuable resource.

The fertile stretch is navigable, though there is little trade along it. Most vessels are agricultural barges or warships. The barges carry crops to the two major cities along its banks, while the warships protect the barges from raiders and rivals.

RIVER NYL

The fertile plains were once the breadbasket of Faraf. However, for the last two years the flood waters have been jet black and highly toxic. Crops grew sickly when they grew at all, and citizens who drank the water became seriously ill. Many died in the first year of the black flood, their bodies covered in boils and weeping sores. Though there is little evidence as to the cause, some suspect the Ankh has altered its underground course and is contaminating the Nyl.

The sphinxes have employed jinn mages to cleanse the water, but every spell they have tried has failed. Large pillars were driven into the river bed, each containing a

marid, but the jinn became corrupted by the black water and all had to be destroyed—those that didn't escape first, that is.

RIVER TAMIL

Like the Damasc, the Tamil has a habit of flooding. The upper reaches flow through a wide, deep valley, and engineers are building a dam at the end nearest Talawdi. This would allow flood waters to be contained in the valley. It would also provide a valuable resource during droughts—opening the dam gates would allow the water stored in the new lake to flow freely. Work on the dam should be finished in the next year.

RIVER YEMUNI

The banks of the river are barely fertile, and crops tend to be withered and stunted. The cause is undoubtedly toxins deposited in the river near its source, where the sphinxes of Mizdah have built dozens of mines and smelting facilities. Unfortunately, the gems and minerals produced by the mines are worth more in trade than the crops, so while the sphinxes grow richer (and stay fat), rural citizens starve.

SPHINX ROAD (EASTERN ARM)

The east-west stretch lies in a dry river valley, all that remains of the course of the once mighty River Ankh, which flowed through the desert as far as Jawf. Ships from Hekata sailed the river to Jawf and perhaps out into the ocean to the lands beyond the horizon.

Within a few years of the Ankh changing course to flow underground the riverbed became rock hard, sun dried mud, an ideal surface for caravans to travel over. The eastern arm of the Sphinx Road is thus the only trade road through the desert with a clearly marked surface and course. The road typically lies some 10–20 yards below the level of the surrounding sands.

Many ruins lie along the edge of the road, former fishing villages and trading towns belonging to the Hekatic Empire and the ancient peoples who inhabited the eastern coast before the sphinxes took control. Caravans and nomads use the ruins as camps, as do bandits, minotaurs, orcs, and other creatures.

Major Locales

FARAF, CITY OF VOICES

Population: 134,000 (83% Hadaree, 10% jinn blooded, 4% cakali, 3% sand goblins, <1% sphinxes)

Ruler: Pharaoh Ankh-Psamtek, Font of Knowledge

Religion: Faithful (Qedeshet)

Imports: Ancient artifacts, books, trade

Exports: Papyrus, trade

Faraf is the major center of learning in the Kingdoms, and indeed rivals distant Qarah for its numbers of universities, schools, observatories, museums, and depositories. Faraf and Qarah maintain a fierce rivalry when it comes to ancient lore, and adventurers willing to risk life and limb raiding old tombs for lost lore can always find employment here.

The city takes its name from its unusual practice of allowing teachers to teach peasants on street corners. Across the city, masters shout out their lectures, trying to be heard above the daily din and the lectures of rivals.

Since most truly learned creatures receive employment in the schools and universities (which cater only for the wealthy), those who teach on the streets are often crackpots, idealists, self-taught sages, or believers in very unusual “facts” (such as the sun being pushed through the heavens by a giant dung beetle). In Faraf, the phrase “educated on the streets” refers to someone with minimal schooling and a complete lack of true knowledge.

Although street education is supposed to be free, thugs “encourage” students to donate money and food to their teachers. Indeed, the thieves’ guilds make a decent income from extorting “tuition fees” from the crowds and protecting teachers against unsavory elements (often the guilds’ own members).

The largest building in the city is the royal palace. As well as the pharaoh’s apartments, harem, and court, the sprawling enclosure also houses the main temple of Qedeshet, the principal library, a university, an observatory, and several smaller schools of learning. Dividing walls, heavily guarded day and night, mean citizens are allowed into the public areas without gaining access to the pharaoh and his court.

Pharaoh Ankh-Psamtek is extremely old even for a member of his species, and is due to celebrate his 400th birthday later this year. Planning for the celebrations began two years ago. The accountants have placed a conservative figure of 100,000 dinars for the cost of the celebrations, a figure which has angered the peasants who are expected to pay for it through their taxes yet who will get little reward save for a public holiday.

Ankh-Psamtek suffered a strange sickness five decades ago which destroyed his mind. Once one of the wisest and most learned beings in Al-Shirkuh, the pharaoh is now a gibbering, drooling idiot. Unfortunately, his status as a divine representative means he cannot simply be shoved aside and his heir enthroned. During his brief moments of lucidity a glimmer of the old genius shows through, but the sphinx spends much of his time ranting about a “great war beyond the heavens” and other such nonsense.

Sadly, the pharaoh went mad before appointing an heir. His three children, Aakheperkare (male), Ipwet (female), and Redjedet (female) all see themselves as the next pharaoh. Each has claimed Qedeshet has visited them in dreams and bestowed them with the legal authority to rule. When they bicker in court and in private, the kingdom slowly grinds to a halt.

While they quarrel, several noble families are sharpen-

ing their claws in preparation for a coup. Of the contenders, Houses Bunefer (favored by Marqod), Djenutymes (Shamash), and Ikeni (Tamarni) are the most serious threats. Each house is slowly gathering support among the army and the court, both of which are vital for a successful claim on the throne.

Ankh-Psamtek is still the pharaoh and his decrees are absolute law. Sadly, his decision-making has been less than ideal. His last law ordered the treasury to be emptied and divided among the populace. While it earned the old coot some measure of popularity with the peasants, it has left the city destitute. The economy has all but collapsed, the military is divided into rival camps, and even the priesthood of Qedeshet is sundered by the rivalries of the three royal children. Unless someone acts quickly to secure the throne, Ankh-Psamtek’s kingdom may well implode.

The Map Room: Within the sprawling temple of Qedeshet is a chamber known as the Map Room. Thousands of maps, some dating back to the era of the great gatomen kingdom, are stored here. Scholars and explorers are welcome to browse the maps for 20 dinars a day per person. Unfortunately, the maps are not stored in any logical order, and it can take several days to locate a suitable map.

In game terms, locating a map requires an Investigation roll at -4. One roll may be made per day, but this can be a Co-operative or Group roll. Each day after the first, the searcher gets a +1 bonus to a maximum of +4. Should he decide to search for a new map, all bonuses are lost.

The Map Room is the private domain of Amenope, an elderly sphinx librarian, priest of Qedeshet, and the pharaoh’s second cousin. Amenope knows the location of every map in his charge, but gets a perverse pleasure from watching his customers scurrying around scratching their heads. A fellow priest of Qedeshet can convince him to help with a Persuasion roll at -2.

The old librarian dislikes noise and spent a small fortune hiring jinn mages to bind khamsin jinn into the walls and supporting pillars. Each morning, the jinn are ordered to cast a *silence* spell. Due to their number and placement, every inch of the library is covered by the spells.

JAWF, CITY OF WAR

Population: 247,000 (87% Hadaree, 8% jinn blooded, 5% sand goblins, <1% sphinxes)

Ruler: Pharaoh Kauakht, Slayer of Infidels, Shield of the Righteous

Religion: Faithful (Karmelos)

Imports: Metal, trade

Exports: Armor, trade, weapons

Jawf sits on the estuary of the River Hamad. The city was heavily fortified even before the sphinxes were elevated to power, but since that time has become a veritable fortress-city. Thick outer walls flanked by dozens of tall towers encircle the city. The outward facing walls

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

of the towers above the height of the bastion wall are wooden and hinged to fold outward like great doors. From the platforms within the tower ballistae can then fire on approaching foes from a high vantage point.

Two long, high, curving walls, each with a small fort bristling with ballistae and trebuchets at the seaward end, protect the harbor approaches. Tunnels run through the walls and dozens of arrow slits face both out to sea and into the harbor. Artificial islands have been constructed on both sides of the sea defenses, forcing invaders to take a slow, circuitous route to the wharves.

Jawf's main trading partner is Mizdah, from where it gains much of its raw metal imports. Jawf's rulers have long sought to acquire territory closer to the Godhome Mountains, thus gaining access to the raw resources they require. Unfortunately, Jizah has blocked every attempt. In revenge, the sphinxes of Jawf charge merchants from Jizah higher taxes to use their port facilities. Import taxes are high anyway, for Jawf marks the start of the Sphinx Road as far as the other cities are concerned, cities which must transport goods to Jawf before they can make the long journey overland to the other realms of Al-Shirkuh.

The city's chief deity is Karmelos, god of war, and the native sphinxes have always had a militant bent, preferring military strength and intimidation over diplomatic solutions. Renowned as a military commander, Pharaoh Kauakht lead several successful campaigns against orc raiders threatening the mines of Mizdah.

Although the city maintains a sizeable permanent army and navy, every male citizen is required to perform two years military service from the ages of 16 to 18. Males below the age of 40 are automatically conscripted in times of strife.

Kauakht has little patience for diplomatic niceties and prefers to deal with bold ambassadors not quailed by his hulking frame, steely glare, and fierce voice. Many times over his long life Kauakht has rewarded courtiers and guests who have stood up to him and held their ground in negotiations—an act other sphinxes would reward with a painful death.

The pharaoh's spies have informed him of the military build up along the River Al-Shadu, something which greatly pleases the pharaoh. He feels the current stalemate between the cities is stymieing the Kingdoms' potential. If the sphinxes of Kharijah are preparing a blockade of the northern ports, then Jawf's well-trained permanent army and navy is just the force required to break it—at the cost of the other city's giving up certain trade rights and areas of land. All Kauakht requires to unleash his army is sufficient excuse and a covert nod from his rivals. However, the pharaoh has no wish to show his willingness to go to war just yet and openly maintains an air of nonchalance regarding the situation. Meanwhile, his agents secretly meet with the sphinxes from Muqlad and Talawdi to discuss restitution for their liberation should a blockade be imposed on them.

In addition to the situation developing with Kharijah, neighboring Jizah is on the verge of total economic collapse. Kauakht's political advisors (many of whom are

"friends" of a highly manipulative and well-placed sphinx Puppeteer) have urged him to prepare a full invasion to "free the citizens from their tyrannical master." If he acts soon, they say, there is a good chance he will be seen as a liberator rather than a conqueror. Even better, with the people of Jizah behind him, he need not weaken Jawf by dispatching troops to enforce his rule.

Kauakht is an honorable sphinx, and has not made any underhand moves against Kharijah or Jizah. However, his eldest son and appointed heir, Wendjeb-en-djed, has no such scruples. Eager to prove his worth in battle, and ensure his father is killed in battle, the young prince has taken matters into his own hands with regards the northern crisis. (He feels Jizah will fall any day now, and is unlikely to involve a major conflict.)

He secretly hires outsiders, through human agents, to enter the Kingdom of Kharijah and attack caravans and ships, desecrate temples, and so on. Evidence is always left behind indicating either Muqlad or Talawdi in the attacks. Wendjeb-en-djed is not a fool, and there is never any evidence that could implicate him in a scandal.

Jawf's armies, although nominally controlled by the pharaoh, are run on a day-by-day basis by a human. General Harkhuf (an adopted sphinx name) began his life in the Kingdoms as a captured corsair. Sold into slavery and conscripted into the army, his natural leadership talents and eye for complex strategies saw him quickly promoted through the ranks. Despite being a mere human, he commands great respect in the court and has the pharaoh's ear. Wendjeb-en-djed sees him as a serious threat to his plans, but has yet to decide how best to arrange for his death.

JIZAH, CITY OF THE SPHINX

Population: 263,000 (87% Hadaree, 7% jinn blooded, 6% sand goblins, <1% sphinxes)

Ruler: Pharaoh Horhotep, Divine Light of the Heavens

Religion: Faithful (Shamash)

Imports: Gold, slaves, stone, trade

Exports: Trade (very little)

Jizah was the first ancient city to elevate sphinxes to positions of adoration, and thus has become regarded by outsiders as the "capital" city of the region. The ancient Haranites were sun-worshippers long before they adopted sphinxes, and the great beasts have continued the custom. Every ruling house has adopted Shamash as its patron, even after coups.

Temples to Shamash are commonplace. Their tall spires were once covered in gold, which reflected the sun as it moved across the sky. Today, however, the gold is gone and bare stone warms to the sun's passing. Likewise, the gold from the interior has been stripped away for use elsewhere.

Life in the city is grim. Famine has stalked the land for several years and many have succumbed. With no slaves to clean away the growing piles of corpses (see below for why), the city is a stinking, festering sore on the face of Al-Shirkuh, rife with disease and swarms of hungry,

vicious rats. Few citizens own anything of value, having been forced to sell their belongings to buy what meager supplies reach the city and meet the ever-increasing tax burden placed on them by the pharaoh.

With no direct access to the sea and the pharaoh of Jawf charging Jizah's merchants higher taxes, all traders are forced to use alternate ports. Though relatively safe routes, the extra time it takes to deliver goods hasn't helped the current situation. Despite frequent pleas to the pharaoh of Jawf (made behind Horhotep's back), the tax levy shows no signs of being lifted anytime soon.

Pharaoh Horhotep is a religious fanatic. Totally convinced he truly is a living aspect of Shamash, he is preparing for his eventual transcendence to heaven (the death of his mortal body) by constructing an enormous pyramid as a memorial to his divinity.

Measuring over 500 yards to a side and estimated at standing 300 yards tall when finished, the pyramid will be the largest single structure in Al-Shirkuh, if not the entire world. At present, it is roughly half finished. The pharaoh's architects and overseers estimate it will be another 15 years before the structure is fully completed.

Since building began 30 years ago, an army of workers has labored in the desert beyond the city walls to construct the massive edifice. At first the workers were all slaves, diverted from other projects in the city or bought from visiting slavers. However, countless thousands have died due to starvation, dehydration, cruelty, and industrial accidents.

Draconic new laws were introduced a decade ago to provide additional workers. All crimes are now punishable by slavery, and the courts are encouraged, despite protests from the sphinx priests of Tammuz, to avoid lengthy trials. The prisons quickly emptied, the courts filled, but still there were not enough workers.

Over the last five years, Horhotep's army has been rounding up peasants and forcing them into the work camps. Without peasants to work the fields not enough crops have been planted or gathered to feed the entire population. The city granaries are bare, and the current harvest is likely to provide barely a tenth of what the city needs to survive. The pharaoh cares little for the suffering of the common people, however—his only desire is to achieve his destiny. Unfortunately, his views are not shared by either the masses or his fellow sphinxes.

Civil unrest is on the rise. Riots erupt every time a food caravan enters the city, not that many caravans carrying food reach the gates these days. Fleeing into the desert to avoid conscription, gangs of peasants now

roam the sands, willing to risk death at the hands of caravan guards to get a mouthful of food. Attacks on caravans have risen three-fold in the last year alone. Horhotep has refused to divert soldiers away from the work camps to curb the problem, however, and the kingdom is regarded elsewhere as lawless outside the city and its immediate environs. Adventurers walking into the city along the trade road face the risk of being murdered for a few crumbs of bread.

Violent assaults against tax collectors are on the rise as well. Even military units sent in to enforce conscription have come under attack. The entire kingdom has reached boiling point and is only one major incident away from exploding.

Taxes across the kingdom have rocketed to help pay for the pharaoh's greatest extravagance. Rather than use limestone to face the pyramid, as was traditional among the ancient cultures, he demanded it reflect "the divine light of the sun that I shall become when I ascend." In short, he wanted the entire outside surface to be covered in solid gold plates. Somewhere in the deep desert, in a location known only to the pharaoh and a few trustworthy subjects, is a complex where slaves melt down gold and beat it into plates the shape of sun dragon scales.

Despite increased taxation, the city's coffers are virtually empty. The pharaoh's daughter and appointed heir, Ankhnes-Pepi, has no wish to inherit a kingdom bankrupt and wracked by internal strife. Worse, she fears that a popular uprising would lead to the overthrow of the



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

sphinx race altogether. She is currently seeking to hire outside adventurers, through agents, to kill her father. Naturally, the assassins would be discovered seconds too late to save her father. After a brief period of mourning, the sly sphinx intends to have them executed.

Of course, this plan is all well and good, but it doesn't take into account the intentions of the noble houses or other interested parties. All of the noble houses have independently reached the same conclusion as Ankhnes-Pepi—the pharaoh must die for the good of the kingdom—but only one of them has the courage to act openly. In typical sphinx style, the others are afraid of what others may do to them in return.

House Setka, favored by Karmelos and with many friends in the military, have recently been in contact with the Puppeteer agent from Jawf (not that they know he is a Puppeteer). He has led them to believe that if they kill Horhotep and claim the throne, the pharaoh of Jawf will drop the taxation on merchants using the port. House Setka, seeing a chance not only for gaining power but to create a Karmelos-backed alliance with Jawf, has begun planning the assassination. As is always the case when Puppeteers are involved, things are not as black and white as they first seem.

KHARIJAH, CITY OF CLAWS

Population: 104,000 (92% Hadaree, 4% jinn blooded, 4% sand goblins, <1% sphinxes)

Ruler: Pharaoh Ankhnesmerire, Upholder of the Law

Religion: Faithful (Tammuz)

Imports: Armor, grain, rice, stone, trade, weapons

Exports: Trade

Kharijah sits on the eastern bank of the River Al-Shadu estuary. Built by the ancient Hittari as a fortress-city, Kharijah is surrounded by thick walls. The walls alongside the river are breeched by six great gates, each large enough to accommodate a galley. Each gate leads into an enclosed dock, a vast building housing a small souk, custom's house, warehouse space, a military garrison, and carpenters' workshops.

When the sphinxes took control they realized the docks were fine for military vessels or to serve a limited number of merchant ships during a siege (the purpose for which they were built), but if the city was to grow it needed larger wharves. A smaller town was erected on the western bank, complete with two dozen wharves, warehouses, mercantile houses, and so on. Port Kharijah, as the suburb is known, is only lightly protected by a low stone wall, but houses a large garrison. Should the city ever be besieged, the river remains a viable channel to ferry in supplies and troops and take out civilians and the wounded.

A wide, arched, stone bridge links the two settlements together. Small market stalls flank the road across the bridge. Most sell food and drink as well as a variety of tacky souvenirs. The eastern side of the bridge passes under a great arch cut in the perimeter wall, allowing traffic to pass straight into the city. At night and in times

of trouble, a huge portcullis is lowered and the gates firmly closed.

Kharijah has begun fortifying the western bank of the River Al-Shadu, erecting a series of forts and military wharves along the entire length. Pharaoh Ankhnesmerire ordered the military build up in response to greatly increased raids against farming communities along the river. While it is true orc attacks have dramatically increased, a dark and unseen hand guides their activities.

As is the way with sphinxes, Ankhnesmerire's peers in the Kingdoms have not openly asked her to dismantle the fortifications (royal houses very rarely have any dealings with each other). Instead, each has made their own conclusions about what is really happening and plans accordingly.

The recent raids have caused minor famine, but not enough to cause wide-scale panic. Merchant ships ferry in grain from Ostmark and rice from the Jade Empire, and the fertile banks of the Al-Shadu still produce enough to feed the rural population. However, the cost of imports and financing the expanding military machine has forced price hikes in the city markets, and there are grumblings of discontent among the populace.

Ankhnesmerire is the youngest pharaoh in the Kingdoms and highly attractive—even other races have commented on her leonine beauty. Aged only 57, she is the sphinx equivalent of a teenager. Her father died four years ago, suddenly dropping dead in front of his courtiers. Many suspect poisoning as the cause, for he was in good health the day before. No evidence has emerged to support this theory. As his only child Ankhnesmerire ascended the throne. Though groomed for power from birth, the young pharaoh lacks confidence in her abilities, and frequently turns to her courtiers and advisors for aid.

One of the most important issues in the court is the continuation of the family line. Ankhnesmerire's father had no siblings, and she is the last sphinx of the royal house, save for her elderly mother. Should anything untoward happen to her, a noble house would ascend the throne. Though too young to marry at present, Ankhnesmerire reaches her majority in just over a year and the cultures are beginning to circle.

All of the noble houses of Kharijah and a few from outside have expressed interest in forming a blood union with the royal house—which would give them power once a child is born. Ankhnesmerire, however, is currently more interested in governing her city than marrying. Of course, she also realizes marriage would secure the dynastic line and ensure a smooth succession after her death.

The Temple of Law: As the last of her line and the high priest of Tammuz, Ankhnesmerire should, in theory, oversee all criminal court matters. She is well versed in the workings of the court, having held the title of Chief Judge under her father. Despite her young age, she is a gifted sphinx and already well versed in the law of the land. Of course, such a position would prevent her from running the city effectively.

On her ascension, Ankhnesmerire took the highly

unusual step of promoting a cakali to the position of Chief Judge. Bayram alim-Suzan's appointment caused outrage among the noble houses, but was well received by the commoners. Although born a commoner, Bayram has shown no favoritism towards his peers and fiercely upholds the law.

The Temple of Law is the grandest building in the city, outshining even the royal palace in its external beauty. Inside, however, the building is starkly furnished, with no sign of any extravagance. The stone walls are not decorated with tapestries, rugs, or paintings, but with quotations from the Books of Law, the sacred texts of Tammuz. Judges sit on the same plain wooden benches as the lawyers, defendants, prosecutors, and witnesses.

All legal cases are heard here by Chief Judge Bayram. Due to the city's strict adherence to every law, the judicial service is overworked. Suspects can languish in jail for months before receiving a hearing.

MIZDAH, CITY OF POWER

Population: 179,000 (88% Hadaree, 7% jinn blooded, 5% sand goblins, <1% sphinxes)

Ruler: Pharaoh Montjuhirkopshef, the Iron Flame

Religion: Faithful (Geb-Agni)

Imports: Food, trade

Exports: Gems, metal, precious metal

Before the rise of the sphinxes, Mizdah's claim to fame was its mage school. Its students rivaled those of Hekata in power and far exceeded them in diversity. Fearful of the mages power, the sphinxes ordered the school closed. When the mages refused to comply, the sphinxes sent in the army to enforce their ruling. After a bloody battle which raged throughout the complex for several days, the surviving mages gathered what treasures they could carry and retreated to the inner sanctum. Heavily warded with *glyph* spells, the army suffered terrible losses storming the corridors and battering down the doors. When they finally breached the chamber they found it empty—the mages, their most powerful relics, even their spell tomes, had simply disappeared. The school was converted into a temple to Qedeshet.

Since that day, mages have been banned from the city. Anyone caught practicing magic is subject to immediate arrest, torture, and execution without trial. Even being found out as a mage is punishable by public flogging and eternal banishment under pain of death.

Today, Mizdah is renowned for its mineral wealth. Located high in the Godhome Mountains, numerous mines produce copper, gold, iron, silver, tin, and other metals. Raw ore is smelted into ingots, and then barged down the river. Most of the "war metals" (iron, copper, and tin) are sold to Jawf, Mizdah's main trading partner, while the precious metals are shipped elsewhere.

Several large caravans loaded with ore have vanished in the past few years along the southern Sphinx Road. Mysteriously, the caravanners for all of these shipments were not Bedu, as is standard, but slaves from Mizdah escorted by a small number of soldiers. Though the loss

in trade revenue has been considerable, the pharaoh's coffers seem fuller than ever.

The kingdom is desperately short of food, more so in the rural areas than the city, which receives regular imports of grain. Its woes are a direct result of the extensive mining operations. Toxic materials from the smelting process are washed into the river, and from there enter the soil. Crops are withered and stunted as a result of the poisons, and anyone eating them has a good chance of becoming ill. Drinking river water without boiling it several times is suicidal and even then there is no guarantee it is potable. Worse still, the toxins have leached into the water table, tainting the pools and oasis of the region as well.

Montjuhirkopshef is a red-furred sphinx. He claims the unusual coloring is a sign of his divinity, but his critics whisper that he dyes his fur to aid weight to his claims. As befits his patron deity, Montjuhirkopshef has a fiery temper and resolute nature—once he has made up his mind no force in the mortal realm can persuade him to take a different course of action.

The pharaoh has a harem of sphinxes, noble females sent here in the hopes of giving birth to a child Montjuhirkopshef nominates as his heir. Montjuhirkopshef has sired a dozen children, but considers them all illegitimate. His wife, Nuru, has yet to present him with a legitimate heir.

Formerly hale and hearty, Montjuhirkopshef has suffered several severe bouts of illness, the last of which almost killed him. Now frail and gaunt, Montjuhirkopshef has been warned that another bout of illness could kill him. Without a legitimate heir, the kingdom would be throne into turmoil as the noble houses fight to ensure their candidate ascends the throne.

Temple of Qedeshet: The story of the disappearance of Mizdah's mages is well-known across Al-Shirkuh. Rumors abound that the mages fled to a secret subterranean complex beneath the city. Despite the heavy penalties for being caught in the city, dozens are drawn each year to the old mage school in search of the labyrinth and the treasures it holds.

If there is a secret area, it is well protected, for no *detect* spells have revealed an entrance, nor located any great source of magical energy beneath the floors. Not even the priests of Qedeshet, who have spent centuries combing every inch of the temple and praying for wisdom, have found the supposed depository.

MUQLAD, CITY OF WOES

Population: 162,000 (94% Hadaree, 3% jinn blooded, 3% sand goblins, <1% sphinxes)

Ruler: Council of Regents

Religion: Faithful (Ashtart)

Imports: Food, trade

Exports: Trade

The City of Woes is the western-most city in the Kingdoms. Originally a small Hittari frontier town, it has greatly expanded under the sphinxes into a bustling, problem-beset city.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

The Damasc, which flows through Muqlad, was once a source of great wealth. The rich soil along the banks provided for plentiful crops and bountiful harvests. Choosing Ashtart as the city's patron deity seemed to have been a very wise choice.

Since the gradual decrease in temperatures and the start of the heavy rains in the mountains, the Damasc has been prone to flooding. In the early days this actually helped spread soil further into the desert, and the river banks were a swathe of crops and orchards. In the last few decades, however, the floods have actually swept away much of the soil, leaving the region prone to rapid desertification. The agricultural plains are now barely a mile deep at best, and what soil remains is thin and weak. Muqlad must now import food to feed its starving population.

The streets and buildings of the city were once finely paved in pure white limestone. Today the streets are coated in a thick layer of slime and the walls are black and filthy to a height of two feet, the result of numerous floods. Outbreaks of disease are commonplace, especially when the river overflows its banks and runs through the streets, carrying raw sewage with it.

A dozen sewage workers sent down to unblock the pipes after the last flood never returned. A brief search uncovered no signs of their bodies and the matter was forgotten. Just last month, another team vanished, while elsewhere in the same part of the city workers reported seeing "strange and sinister shapes" stalking them in the

gloom. No one in power is particularly interested in discovering what is happening below the city.

To add to its list of woes, Muqlad currently has no pharaoh. The incumbent pharaoh, Djedamunhotep, and his entire family were returning from a hunting trip in the Great North Desert three years ago when a sandstorm rose out of nowhere. Dark clouds blanketed the sun, and the solar barque carrying the royal family nose-dived into the desert somewhere near the western end of the Prophecy Hills. One of the escort barques managed to avoid crashing, but was unable to remain in the area due to the storm.

A rescue mission was swiftly launched. The wreckage of the barque and the corpses of the royal family were recovered, but there was no sign of Djedamunhotep—no body and no indication it had been taken away. Slaves excavated hundreds of tons of sand from the area, but found nothing.

Under the old laws, no one could assume the throne until Djedamunhotep was proved dead. Some noble houses argued that the pharaoh had ascended to heaven, leaving no earthly remains, and that a successor should be named. Tradition won out, however, and a council of regents was hastily assembled by the heads of the noble houses.

Three years of council rule has not been kind to the city. With the likelihood of the pharaoh's body being found diminishing daily, the regents vie for power, each trying to secure enough support to ascend the throne.

Sooner or later tradition will have to give way to common sense, and when it does the regents intend to be ready to act quickly and ruthlessly.

Political bickering and one-upmanship has meant projects such as the building of canals to alleviate the flood waters have stalled as funding agreement is held up in pointless debates or quietly siphoned off into the coffers of the noble houses. A city-wide drainage system long-planned by the pharaoh has not been started, despite warnings of a heavy flood due in late winter or early spring of next year. The military, once loyal to the pharaoh, has been bribed to support individual noble houses—such is the wide scale corruption in the military that some soldiers have sworn oaths of allegiance to and taken bribes from multiple houses.

However, there may be a glimmer of light at the end of the dark tunnel. Sar-Nesu Akhnetre, head of House Nebkhepre (favored by Upuaut) has discovered an entry in a musty tome from the library which may elevate him to the status of pharaoh.

According to an obscure and long-forgotten law, the house which finds



the body of the pharaoh would automatically be seen as divinely guided by the spirit of the dead pharaoh and legally entitled to claim the throne. While Akhnetre doubts he can actually find the pharaoh's body, he can arrange for his minions to find a sphinx body wearing symbols of the pharaoh's office. First, however, he needs the royal regalia, which is under lock and guard in the palace vaults. Rather than risk his house's status in a potential scandal, he plans to arrange for a party of outsiders to steal the treasures—then if they are caught no one can point the paw of blame at him.

TALAWDI, CITY OF SAILS

Population: 140,000 (91% Hadaree, 6% jinn blooded, 3% sand goblins, <1% sphinxes)

Ruler: Pharaoh Weret-Imtes, She who is Clothed in Gold

Religion: Faithful (Upuaut and Qedeshet)

Imports: Trade

Exports: Trade

Talawdi is unusual in that it has two port districts. The main port lies along the coast, where the ancient Hitari built it. As trade expanded, the sphinxes constructed more wharves along the banks of the River Tamil. In order to provide a better infrastructure, much of the city was torn down and rebuilt around a century ago.

The mercantile and crafting districts, as well as the main souk, were relocated toward the northeast corner, where both ports had easy access to them. Adjacent to these areas were placed the crowded residential zones, and beyond them the homes of the merchants, artisans, and wealthy citizens. Far from the noise and stench of the docks stand the walled palaces of the sphinxes, built at regular intervals bordering the royal palace and its extensive gardens.

Talawdi's ports and markets are the busiest anywhere in Al-Shirkuh. Each day many dozens of ships bring in cargoes from Rassilon and the Jade Empire or depart with cargoes destined for those distant realms. Vast wealth flows into the pharaoh's coffers, a fact which has not gone unnoticed by her peers. Protecting the merchant fleet is a powerful naval force.

Although Talawdi dominates the eastern waterways, it does not hold a total monopoly on sea trade. All the other coastal cities of the Kingdoms maintain their own fleets (combined they barely match Talawdi's), and the free city of Jadid remains a thorn in their side. Were the latter to fall, the other lands would be forced to look to the Kingdoms for their trade with the Jade Empire. With the largest fleet, Talawdi hopes it can claim the largest share of such trade.

Of course, Talawdi faces another problem to trade expansion—its location. While ideally placed to service eastern Rassilon, the western continent is unreachable by sea from the Kingdoms, and thus trade with the Free Emirates is blocked. Hundreds of thousands of dinars in trade revenues are "lost" each year because of this.

As such, the pharaoh is considering making a per-

sonal visit to Rassilon to encourage traders to ship their goods overland to the east coast port of Sandvik and then through her city. Tax reductions would serve as an incentive. Naturally, the rulers of Sandvik are highly supportive of this proposal, as the increase in trade would greatly profit them as well.

Unfortunately, the location of the city then stymies overland trade to the Caliphate and Sultanate, for no major trade roads go through the northern Kingdoms. Several plans were put forward, but eventually the pharaoh decided on an audacious and costly scheme—to excavate a vast tunnel through the Prophecy Hills, creating a trade road to link up with the eastern end of the Snake Road. From there, trade would flow down through Lost Tomb Oasis to the central trade network.

Though not the most cost-efficient solution, it serves multiple purposes. A trade road arcing up from the Snake Road and behind the mountains would mean passing through the lands of Muqlad, and any increase in trade would also benefit them. Heading east to loop around the Prophecy Hills would likewise profit Kharijah. Neither route offers much in the way of water, either. Second, a new trade route to the north would cripple trade along the eastern Sphinx Road, thus hurting the economies of both Jawf and Jizah. At present, goods destined for elsewhere in Al-Shirkuh must be shipped to Jawf and then along the trade road—and Jawf charges high import taxes on ships from other cities.

With several cities' economies left in ruins by the new road, Talawdi is guaranteed to increase its power and prestige. One of Weret-Imtes key advisors has also suggested that perhaps she is destined to emulate Hamapta and reunite the sphinx race under a single, powerful ruler. Hungry for more power, Weret-Imtes is slowly coming to believe this idea.

Work began on the tunnel a few years ago, under the pretense of being a large-scale mining operation, and proceeded well. Unfortunately, attacks by orcs have slowed progress to a crawl. With Kharijah fortifying the Al-Shadu, the pharaoh has been forced to divert troops to the eastern border in preparation for a likely attack and to the navy to act as marines should a blockade of the port be attempted. Kharijah's move has angered the pharaoh, and some of her close advisors believe she is about to declare war.

The first sphinx dynasty of Talawdi was allied to Upuaut. With his patronage their explorers discovered the routes to the Jade Empire, and later Rassilon, which the merchants exploit to this day. As trade grew, it became clear that the patronage of Qedeshet, in his role as god of trade, would also be required to ensure continued growth. In an unusual move, the royal house (favoring Upuaut) and a noble house favorable to Qedeshet intermarried. The first child born to the union was proclaimed to be the living avatar of two gods simultaneously. In order to keep both gods satisfied, alternate pharaohs worship different gods. Weret-Imtes father worshipped Upuaut, so she became high priest of Qedeshet.

Still, her house is partially bound to Upuaut, and

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

because of that Talawdi has a slightly skewed view of slavery compared to other sphinx cities. For a start there are no slaves—at least not officially. Those others would call slaves sign a contract with their employer and are referred to “limited citizens.” The limited citizen is actually paid a small wage—just enough to exactly cover his room and board. A limited worker can leave his master’s “employment” at any time, but without savings they cannot afford to leave the city, thus leaving them with being a limited citizen as their only option. Upuaut has yet to show disapproval toward the system.

Pharaoh Weret-Imtes is interested in just two things—money and power. The former she has in abundance. The latter yet eludes her, for she is stuck in the sphinx mindset that if she acts too quickly she will be seen as a threat to the status quo, thus potentially forcing her rivals to ally against her. For this reason, the extent of her plans to monopolize trade by constructing the new trade road is veiled in secrecy.

Land of the Lizardmen

Temperature: Sweltering

Population: Unknown

Ruler: Unknown (rumors of a lizardmen king are common)

Religion: Ssslak, the Ground-Shaking Thunderlizard King

Imports: None (with Al-Shirkuh)

Exports: None (with Al-Shirkuh)

Wise men learned in the history of Al-Shirkuh believe the entire desert was once a swathe of jungle in the south and grasslands and swamps in the north. They talk about two great empires of scaly humanoids, one in the distant northern continent known as Rassilon and one in the jungles of Al-Shirkuh. The latter race is commonly known today as lizardmen.

Listen long enough and you will hear tales of how the northern race invaded the jungle, capturing countless slaves and razing many cities. The northern race grew strong and prospered, before suddenly vanishing from the history books in the blink of an eye. In the south, the scaly folk retreated as the world changed and the sands which now blanket the land formed.

Driven back further and further by the sands and by early human cultures, who had risen in the east, the lizardmen eventually found their former homelands settled by the humans, whose lost cities predate those of Hekata by many centuries. Unleashing fell magic, the lizardmen cleansed the sands of their foes, but at a terrible price. The magic they wielded proved too powerful to control and it destroyed vast areas of jungle, leveling the lizardmen’s own cities in the process. Once highly learned in the ways of science and lore, the lizardmen

rapidly descended into utter barbarism, the state the race exists in today.

Few people actually care whether any of this is true or not. Since the age of Suleiman the lizardmen have been more myth than reality, confined to the far reaches of Al-Shirkuh and posing no threat to the domains of the civilized races. A few foolhardy explorers and curious Bedu venturing into the Empty Zone have reportedly been killed by lizardmen, but these are isolated incidents and cannot be reliably confirmed.

In fact, most of the story is true. The only real bugbear is that lizardmen never truly mastered the sciences in the same way the ophidae did, and they have not reverted to a state of barbarism—that’s just a perception based on cultural and racial differences. The lizardmen understand astrology and astronomy, mathematics, and geometry—their temples and observatories are testament to this knowledge.

Since being forced to abandon their outlying cities, the lizardmen have grown to hate humans even more than they did already. Any humans caught within the dense, steaming jungle are liable to end up as sacrifices or, if they’re really unlucky, as dinner (sacrifices are killed, but food is eaten while it’s alive).

The lizardmen are at best a very minor threat to Al-Shirkuh at the moment, and the jungle is not truly a part of the desert realm. Their lands are therefore mentioned only in brief and no major locales are listed. As such, the area is ripe for the GM to set his own adventures here. The jungle provides players with a break from journeying over endless sand and is ideal for presenting them with new challenges in the form of different monsters (such as rampaging thunderlizards) and hazards.

Geography

The area shown on the map represents a tiny fraction of the vast jungle which lies west and south of Al-Shirkuh. None of the desert’s civilized races have plumbed its depths to any noticeable degree, and thus its true extent is unknown. Even coastal exploration has proven difficult due to the presence of lizardmen galleys and colossal sea monsters.

The cooling of Al-Shirkuh has not gone unnoticed here, but it has had less effect so far. Rainfall is greatly reduced (though it is still far higher than in the deserts), the temperature has dropped, the soil is thin, and the trees no longer provide a barrier against the desert, but the jungle remains hot, sticky, and oppressive once one stands beneath the canopy.

Vast swarms of mosquitoes hungry for blood, huge lizards with teeth like daggers, great featherless birds with wicked claws, pools of quicksand capable of swallowing an elephant, disease-ridden flies and bugs, snakes whose venom can kill a man in seconds, and giant crocodiles are just a small few of the dangers awaiting those who enter the dense jungle.

The Mirrorsands

Temperature: Infernal

Population: 1,000 permanent, plus 1,000+ pilgrims at any one time

Ruler: None

Religion: Devoted and Faithful (all gods)

Imports: None

Exports: Glass

Just north of the Plain of Ash, and slowly being swallowed by the desert, lays a great expanse of glass known as the Mirrorsands. During the War of Copper Jars, Suleiman fought a number of jinn elders here. The powerful magic both sides used turned the sand into a solid mass of glass.

The heat from the sun is reflected back, giving rise to very high temperatures during the day. Glare and sunburn are constant dangers here, as is dehydration, for no water can be found within the Mirrorsands.

Most travelers avoid the Mirrorsands for it has nothing to offer them except sunburn and dehydration. Bedu tribes harvest slabs of glass from the edges, selling them to caravans who transport them to the great cities where they fetch a high price. Balyana, City of Reflection, currently dominates this trade. Pilgrims from across Al-Shirkuh come here to visit Suleiman's Isle, where the great mage stood alone in battle against fearsome jinn elders, and where legend says Suleiman won the War of Copper Jars.

A small group of Lorekeepers from Rassilon has learned of the Mirrorsands and are studying the area. The similarities between the Mirrorsands and the Glass Sea of Rassilon have not escaped their attention, and they are trying to determine if the two areas were formed in a similar manner. The group is led by Roderick ap-Gwin, an elderly sage who has been fascinated with desert life and its rich history.

Geography

The Mirrorsands is an expanse of perfectly flat glass averaging five or six yards deep. Only a single hill breaks the surface. No plants grow here and no animals call the region home—the Mirrorsands is a true wasteland.

THE FOREVER TOMB

Lying southwest of Suleiman's Isle is an area known as the Forever Tomb. Beneath the smooth glass, which has never been scoured by the harsh desert winds, can be seen the corpses of Suleiman's soldiers who fell in battle against the jinn. Why they were not vaporized when the sand turned to glass is a mystery.

Travelers have reported hearing ghostly voices in this region, seeing strange lights, and some even claim the corpses have opened their eyes and moved inside their

glass sarcophagi. To most city-dwellers, such talk is just the result of dehydration or sunstroke.

A few explorers have dared to try and excavate the dead, chipping away at the glass. Most give up, finding the glass too tough and the sun too harsh. The few that have managed to recover an artifact have always been found dead within a few weeks, a look of utter terror on their faces and their eyes turned to solid glass.

SULEIMAN'S ISLE

In the very center of the glass stands a rocky outcropping known as Suleiman's Isle. It is small, no more than a mile in diameter, a pinprick of dark in a shining realm. According to legend, this is where Suleiman stood while fighting the jinn elders.

Although protected from the worst of the jinn's magic, the rock on which the great mage stood is smooth as if from intense heat. A single set of footprints, melted into the smooth rock, are said to be those of Suleiman himself. Pilgrims come to stand here, and a small tent town catering to their needs stands on the lower slopes.

Jinn mages also consider this site a place of pilgrimage, many making the journey in the hopes of discovering writings etched by Suleiman into the rock, receiving a vision from the great mage, or other such discoveries. So far none have ever been found, but that doesn't stop them searching.

The Plains of Ash

Temperature: Stifling

Population: Unknown (no permanent settlements outside the oasis)

Ruler: None

Religion: Devoted

Imports: None

Exports: None

Cakali civilization began long before the Hekatic Empire rose on the banks of the River Ankh. The barbarian tribes were brought together by Anup, a philosopher of great wisdom, who invented many things still in use today, such as irrigation, writing, and the core of the Faithful pantheon.

Never an aggressive race, the cakali grew in isolation, founding several cities and welcoming all those who came in peace, for many strangers came to study at their schools. Their influence spread throughout the desert, and the cakali became renowned for their great knowledge and wisdom.

When the War of Copper Jars began, the cakali sided with the jinn, whose borders lay close to their own, promising not to allow the escaping slaves sanctuary. The jinn, however, had their own plans. The human army headed south, toward the cakali lands, which just happened to lie in their way. The jinn quickly moved to cut off their escape route, annexing the cakali lands and

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

forcefully conscripting large numbers of citizens into the army.

Unwilling to live as slaves and die for the vile jinn, the cakali rose up within months of the annexation, slaying the regional governors and expelling the meager forces the jinn had placed in the cities. Scouts hurried into the desert in search of the human army, with offers of friendship and support.

Fearful that the cakali and humans would combine forces, and seeking to close the human's escape route, the jinn used terrible magics to punish the cakali. Cakali legends tell of a monstrous storm which raged for a month. Black rain which corroded everything it touched fell continually and balls of fire descended from the heavens, razing entire cities to the ground. When the storm ended, the ground was sterile, reduced to a thick layer of ash with barely any evidence a major civilization had once stood there.

The surviving cakali rapidly abandoned their lands, fleeing into the desert. Even after the War ended and the jinn were destroyed, the cakali chose to remain in the sands, turning down Suleiman's offer to join forces with the humans and build a new civilization.

Suleiman's teachings were quickly adopted, though, for the cakali saw wisdom in his words, having long been students of the magic arts. They also recognized in Suleiman the soul of Anup, reincarnated to lead them to a new life, a life of endless wandering.

Today the Plains are largely deserted, even by the cakali. They serve as a permanent reminder of the awesome power and diabolical nature of the jinn and a testament to the sacrifices one must pay to live in freedom.

Geography

The Plain of Ash was never verdant, but before the War of Copper Jars it had agricultural land, irrigated by a network of subterranean tunnels known as *qanats*. Water from the scattered oases and deep aquifers fed into vast cisterns. From here it flowed into the *qanats*, which snaked for hundreds of miles beneath the sand, bringing life-giving water to the flat plains outside the cities.

Nowadays, the surface is just a swathe of fine, black ash, and the *qanats* are choked with centuries of ash and sand. It is as if the entire landscape has been scorched in some terrible inferno.

ASH ROAD

The Ash Road runs from the Oasis of the Jinn in a curving arc along the edge of the Plain of Ash and up through the sands to the Oasis of Dates. Before the Silk Road closed, great camel trains wandered the route, carrying goods to and from the southern lands.

Though trade along the Silk Road has ended, camel trains, much reduced in size and more infrequent, still walk the road on the journey between the Caliphate and Sultanate, and Jadid, City of Trade.

Major Locales

BLACKSAND OASIS

Population: 2,565 (75% Bedu, 25% cakali)

Ruler: Sheikh Jamal of the Yalarfal tribe

Religion: Devoted

Imports: Trade

Exports: Cheese, trade

Blacksand lies approximately halfway along the Ash Road, on the edge of the Plain of Ash.

Named because of the fine ash which blows from the Plains and settles here, Blacksand Oasis is governed by the Bedu Yalarfal tribe, though a number of cakali dwell here on a permanent basis, watching over their former homeland and continually mourning its loss.

Visitors approaching from the Plain of Ash cannot help but notice a constant wind blowing away from the oasis, a wind which seems to originate from a line of colored carpets strung out facing the ash. In order to keep the water from becoming polluted, the tribe had jinn mages bind khamsin into the carpets, with orders to blow any ash back onto the Plains.

Sheikh Jamal, head of the tribe, is considered a friend of the cakali people as a whole. Cakali visitors always receive a warm welcome and are invited to dine in his tent. Any cakali automatically receives an honored welcome, as do human companions without the Hated Tribe Hindrance.

Travelers heading into the Plain of Ash are closely questioned in person by Jamal. If he suspects they are tomb robbers he raises the price of water to 10 dinars a quart.

The Yalarfal tribe is well-known for the size of their goat herds, which dine on the lush grasses growing around the oasis. The milk is used to make *yajbel*, a strong cheese, which is smoked over grass and dung fires to preserve it and add extra flavor. Large blocks of cheese are sold to merchants along the Ash Road.

CARLOS, CITY OF ASH

The former capital of the cakali was once a jewel of the desert. Situated atop a low mound and fed by underground cisterns, the city was an oasis of civilization, where scholars, priests, mages, and philosophers from all the civilized races would gather to discuss matters of science, religion, wizardry, astrology, and such like.

Now it a shattered city, its broken and scorched walls half buried, its streets lost beneath toppled structures and choking ash, its libraries burnt to dust, and the voices of the scholars and philosophers mere echoes on the constant wind which swirls amid the debris.

The cakali nomads who still wander the Plain of Ash avoid entering the city. Though they have no fear of the countless ghosts said to inhabit the ruins, their race has moved on—digging around in the past serves no purpose other than to stir painful memories. Explorers of

other races still scavenge its ruined walls occasionally. Sometimes they find an ancient object of value, but more often they find nothing but ash and death, for the cakali (living and dead) are quick to take vengeance on those who disturb their dead.

Every year on Baot Yaus al-Nefar Amt Alak Paret, the local cakali tribes gather outside the walls of Caklos and sing ancient songs of remembrance for their ancestors. Beginning at sunrise, the mournful howls echo across the ash until sunset, when the tribes fade into the darkness, leaving their ghosts behind.

Realm of the Medusae

Temperature: Very Hot

Population: 15,000 estimated (mainly orcs and hyaenidae)

Ruler: Syraxix, Queen of the Medusae

Religion: Faithful (Ss'esslis)

Imports: None (acquired by raiding)

Exports: None

Throughout history, the hills making up the greater part of this realm have been settled by many cultures. The names of the majority are unknown to even the most erudite scholars, but faded murals and cracked clay tablets indicate the cultures were mainly human. Both the scorpionmen and ophidae once had outposts here. These were destroyed comparatively recently by the fledgling Hekatic Empire, who subsequently settled the area for a brief period before abandoning it to the savage orcs and hyaenidae.

Contrary to popular belief, the medusae who dwell here are not a natural species. Seeking to find a way to rid themselves of their human enemies forever and more rapidly increase their own numbers, the priests and nagas of the ophidae worked together to formulate dark magics which would enable ophidae to mate with humans, and so produce a new species of creature, one faster breeding than the ophidae and less detectable than even the drones.

The results were a spectacular failure and resulted in the creation of the medusae—humanoid in form but with scaly skin and poisonous snakes for hair. More deadly still, their gaze could petrify a living being (although ophidae were immune). Manipulative and cunning, the medusae quickly dis-

covered they could breed like other ophidae. In secret, they began increasing their numbers. (The experiment also failed because the medusae were all female—the ophidae sought a male race, able to spread its seed far and wide and impregnate scores of women in a short period.)

When they felt the time was right, the medusae demanded the nagas relinquish control of ophidae society to them, or face their wrath. The nagas reacted with unparalleled force. Those medusae not instantly slain in the assault quickly fled into the desert, eventually reaching the craggy wastes of the Statue Hills. Had the Hekatic Empire not stormed northward and attacked the ophidae a short while later, the snakemen may have gathered their forces, tracked the medusae down, and completed the genocide that had begun earlier.

The orcs and hyaenidae native to the Statue Hills reacted angrily to the new intruders, but after witnessing the power of the medusae they did what they do best—throw down their arms and beg to be spared in return for loyal service. For the last 3,500 years, the region has been known as the realm of the medusae.

Since those early days of conquest the number of medusae has slowly dwindled. Although naturally long-lived, the disappearance of the ophidae removed their breeding stock. In order to preserve their existence, the medusae entered a state of deep hibernation, awaking only every few decades for a short period to kill a few of



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

their minions to ensure the rest remained loyal in their absence.

In the last few decades, however, scouts have reported sightings of ophidae amid the ruins of their former lands. The medusae have already abducted warriors, and several clutches of eggs are close to hatching. With new breeding stock available, the true threat of the medusae may soon be realized by the civilized races.

Medusae society is (naturally) matriarchal, the eldest female receiving the title of queen. Other medusae are ranked strictly in order of age—only the death of an elder can promote one up the social ladder. Although assassinations occurred frequently in the olden days, a royal decree banned this practice once it became clear the race was in danger of extinction. With numbers set to grow, the old ways may soon become popular again.

Geography

The lands of the medusae are a baking realm of barren hills and narrow valleys, constantly scorched by the sun. Even in the shade of the valleys and among the pillars of the Forest of Pillars the air is blisteringly hot and bone dry. During the hottest part of the day, exposed flesh touching the rock quickly burns, and breathing without a mouth and nose covering can scorch the throat and lungs. Even the natives prefer to move during cooler periods of the day.

Very little standing water can be found here, though beneath the rocky surface lie murky puddles of brackish water. A variety of waxy-skinned plants grow in the shadier spots, their thick leaves bloated with water and protected by long, sharp thorns. Rainfall is extremely rare. When rain does fall, it often evaporates before it hits the ground.

FOREST OF PILLARS

Nestled in the crescent formed by the Statue Hills is an unusual forest. No forest of bark and wood, leaves and branches, this is a forest of petrified wood. While many of the trunks (there are no branches or leaves) are standing, giving the impression of a colossal temple whose roof has been snatched away, just as many lie toppled and shattered, making the ground extremely uneven and hard to cross.

Explorers familiar with the region are usually quick to blame the hateful gaze of the medusae for the forest's unusual form, but those who take time to research old records learn that the forest predates the rise of the medusae by some millennia. A few sages suspect the forest is a natural and little understood phenomena. Most, however, argue that only jinn magic or a god could petrify a forest in such a manner.

The maze of pillars makes the area extremely dangerous to travel through—orcs, basilisk, or medusae could easily be hiding behind one of the great pillars, ready to

attack the unwary. Unfortunately for adventurers, there are a few choice sites within the heart of the forest and few parties have the resources to avoid the long walk required to reach them.

STATUE HILLS

The hills rise an average of 1000 feet above the surrounding desert, a crescent of bare, rocky escarpments amid a landscape of yellow sand.

Many ruins lie scattered among the hills, remnants of forgotten civilizations that once called the wasteland home and of the ophidae, whose scaly reach once extended this far. Some ruins are single structures, ranging in scope from simple shepherds' hut to many-leveled temple complexes. Others are remnants of towns and cities, their sun-baked buildings covering many acres. Amid these larger ruins live tribes of orcs and hyaenidae, servants of the medusae who rule this landscape.

Hundreds of statues stand and lie in the region. All are victims of the medusae. Some date from the time of the medusae rebellion and their subsequent resettlement to the region, others are more recent, minions who failed their mistresses or adventurers caught unawares by the medusae.

The Salt Basin

Temperature: Baking

Population: 4,000 estimated (94% mixed slaves, 6% Hadaree)

Ruler: None

Religion: Mixed (Apsu, Duamutef, Geb-Agni, Upuaut)

Imports: Water

Exports: Salt

The Salt Basin is a natural depression measuring roughly 300 miles by 175 miles across at its widest points and 200 yards below sea level at its lowest. That it was once a lake or perhaps part of the ocean is clearly evident by the ruins along the western "shore" and the remains of preserved timbers jutting from the salt flats. Several of the ruins display evidence of wood or stone jetties, marking them as waterside settlements.

Exactly how the Basin formed, however, is a source of contention among scholars, priests, and mages. The most popular theory states terrible earthquakes wracked the region in the distant past (usually the gods did this), which caused the mountains to the east to rise, cutting a bay off from the sea. Over time, it simply dried up, leaving behind the salt. Others look to the jinn as the cause, for their former lands lay around the Basin, or hint that perhaps sand mages of old used fell magic to evaporate the water.

Were it not for the fact that salt is a precious commodity, used to preserve food, as well as to season cooking and replace salt lost in sweating, the Basin would be

shunned. A number of vile creatures, the salt basilisk perhaps being the worst, make their home here. Orcs from the mountains make sporadic raids, both to acquire salt and to deny it to others. There is even talk of a dragon living deep in the wastes.

Regardless of risks, Bedu caravans travel to the Basin to collect blocks of salt from the salt mines, transporting them to the Al-Wazir Sultanate, the Caliphate of Al-Shirkuh, the Kingdoms of the Sphinx, and even across to the Free Emirates.

Attacks on these caravans are common—bandits, orcs, and even rival nations all seek a monopoly over the lucrative trade. Although salt can be harvested from sea water left to evaporate in great pits, the salt from the Basin is extremely pure and highly sought after. A pound of salt can fetch as much as 5 dinars wholesale and sells for much more in the markets. Such prices are enough to drive men to take great risks—risks the Bedu call “the white madness.”

During a particularly bad winter the rains breach the mountains and water the Basin. Oases form briefly, but the water is far too salty to drink—even camels won’t touch it. In order to survive the high temperatures and arid air, water must be imported from oases outside the Basin.

Geography

Though most people think the great deserts are flat, they are broken by dunes, some of which can rise to heights of over 100 yards. The Salt Basin, by comparison, is a pancake. No hills larger than a few dozen yards at most break the swathe of gleaming white salt.

Aside from the occasional hardy bush which has managed to extend its roots into a pocket of salty mud beneath the surface, little natural life exists here. Only the salt basilisk dwells here in any numbers and they, fortunately, prefer the deeper wastes. Toward the fringes, the dangers lie with thirst wights, salt mummies, and the much feared salt stealers.

THE CRACK

Located near the center of the Basin is a feature known as the Crack. Twenty miles long and five miles wide at its greatest width, the Crack descends deep into the earth. The near-vertical sides descend seemingly without end—no one has explored what may lie at the bottom. Those who have seen the Crack have noted the sound of crashing waves emanating from its gloomy depths, but most folk attribute this to dehydration and sunstroke.

SALT PASS

The only route through the mountains surrounding the eastern and southern edges of the Basin is Salt Pass. The pass rises in the eastern sands, winds up and through

the southern arm of the Godhome Mountains, and then down into the white landscape of the Basin.

Only salt merchants from Jadid use the pass with regularity, though this does not mean the pass is unimportant—the extra cost of transporting salt along the East Trade Road around the mountains proved enough to warrant the construction of a small fort at each end to safeguard the route from orcs and other mountainous denizens.

Major Locales

SALT MINES

Salt is a valuable commodity—dozens of salt mines stand testimony to the value of “white gold.” Both the Sultan and the sphinxes maintain salt mines here, populated by slaves and convicts, and guarded by a garrison of cruel guards (the dregs of the armies usually are sent here). The miners work upward of 12 hours a day in baking temperatures to cut salt blocks from the ground. Due to the cost of importing water (what with the necessary guards, camels, and so on), the convicts are given barely enough to live on. The average life expectancy of a slave in the salt mines is a little over three months.

Jadid operates a single mine, but unlike the other nations the workers are not slaves, but paid freemen who work here because they choose to.

The mines are typically located a minimum of 30 miles inside the Basin. The sphinx mines are located in the north, the mines of the Sultanate in the southwest, and Jadid’s sole mine in the east, twenty miles from Salt Pass.

Salt near the edge of the desert tends to be tainted with sand. In addition, the distance to the nearest oases is a deterrent to slaves looking to escape. That said, some slaves still prefer to take their chances against the sun rather than face certain death in the mines.

A few Bedu tribes operate independent mines. Productions is small scale, typically just enough salt is gathered to provide for the tribe’s needs with a little left to export, trade, or give as a gift. Unlike the permanent mines, the Bedu are happy to take salt from the edges.

THE WHITE CITY

Whether the White City truly does exist or not remains a favorite topic in the coffee houses of Al-Shirkuh. The only reference to it comes from a scroll found beside the bleached bones of an unknown explorer who met his death in the Salt Basin.

According to his tale, he and his comrades were mapping a route across the Basin from the Oasis of Fish to Jadid, when they came across a wide plateau. Atop this outcropping they found a city made completely of salt. Everything looked as if it had been suddenly turned to salt, for even the inhabitants were statues of solid salt.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

The journal has a garbled entry about a “salt monster,” which apparently turned several of the explorers to salt statues, but little more. Most learned men who know of the tale are in agreement that the monster is just a salt basilisk. It seems the traveler fled the city in terror, leaving behind the camels and their load of waterskins. Apparently he died a few days later from dehydration.

Although not a vast geological feature, the terrible heat and lack of water is enough to deter most people from entering the core region. Whether or not such a city does exist is still a matter of debate.

☉ The Salt Marsh ☉

Temperature: Warm

Population: 40,000+ (mainly gatormen and bufomi)

Ruler: Tyrannus Sornak, Mouth of Sarkeb

Religion: Sarkeb

Imports: None

Exports: Game meat (by the Bedu)

Long before the civilized races rose to prominence, before even the ophidae and scorpionmen formed powerful nations, the marsh formed part of the great gatorman empire which dominated the continent of Rassilon. The swamp at that time flowed west across the Grazelands to join the seas together, and the gatormen held power across the entire region.

When the lizardmen rebelled in the north, their kin in the south followed suit. Here, however, the gatormen cities were little more than colonial outposts and had far fewer slaves than the metropolises in the north. The gatormen thoroughly crushed the rebellion, though by the time victory was secured messengers had arrived to tell the priests the terrible news of the empire’s collapse. Attempts were made by the lizardmen to march south and finish their uprising and by the gatormen to push north and retake their ancestral lands, but neither side gained any headway.

As the centuries passed and the swamps retreated, both nations forgot about the other, more concerned with consolidating their remaining territories in the face of new enemies.

The gatormen still hold power in the Salt Marsh, though for how much longer remains to be seen. The greatest threat to their survival is the desert, which is encroaching from the south and west, but it is not the only danger. Birthrates are falling, the sphinxes send raiding forces to capture gatormen to fight in their arenas, slaughtering those who resist, and the imminent rise of an undead Hekata places an army which sees any living being as a potential recruit close to their southern border.

Captured Bedu who have been to Rassilon report another serious problem—a vast lizardman army batters at a human city, the only city preventing their mass migration into Al-Shirkuh. At the moment, the gatormen do not know what drives the lizardmen, but many suspect they are coming to finish the job their ancestors began so long ago.

Tyrannus Sornak (“Tyrannus” is a title, equivalent to king) has ruled his people for a hundred years. As the list of problems facing his people grows, so Sornak is finding it harder to control the population. Priests talk of appeasement, making alliances with the other races to ensure the survival of the gatorman race, or rallying their forces and driving south to the jungles and swamps currently inhabited by the lizardmen, there to fight a glorious war in the name of Sarkeb and start a new civilization, greater than the one of old.

For now the king bides his time. But his time is running out—if he does act soon he may find his people divided by bloody civil war.

Geography

The majority of the marsh lies a few dozen feet below sea level. Toward the coast the ground rises steeply to form



coastal bluffs, which form a natural barrier preventing the area from mass flooding except during the highest tides. Rainwater from the Six Sisters flows into the southern end, and great torrents of salt water enter each day along the wide, coastal river channels that cut through the bluffs into the depression beyond.

Much of the southern region consists of shallow, wide, slow-flowing rivers bordered by expansive patches of deep, sticky mud and quicksand. In between these are salt flats (on elevated ground) and islands covered in scrubby grass, reed beds, and clumps of acacia trees.

Wildlife in the region is diverse, ranging from gazelles and big cats to great flocks of birds and colossal swarms of biting flies and mosquitoes. Nomads native to the surrounding desert consider the marsh prime hunting territory, but they must always keep an eye open for the more dangerous denizens, which include saltwater crocodiles, harpies, gatomen, and bufomi, not to mention fearsome marsh dragons and hydras.

Major Locales

SARKEB-GAR-NATTRA, CITY OF SARKEB

Population: 25,657

Ruler: Tyrannus Sornak

Within the depths of the Salt Marsh stands the ancient city of Sarkeb-gar-Nattra, a city of stone dominated by the great stepped temples of Sarkeb's many aspects. Even when the marsh covered the western plains, the city stood as the capital of the southern gatomen. Though not as large or as splendid as the cities further north, it was the greatest city in Al-Shirkuh during its heyday.

Sarkebra, a contraction of the name (which coincidentally means "Big City") rises from a large island surrounded on both sides by great rivers heavily populated by crocodiles. Strong walls flanked by towers protect the inhabitants against invaders, not that there have been any since the lizardmen rebellion ended. Four gates, each fashioned like a great crocodile's open mouth, allow entrance into the narrow streets.

The Scorpion Lands of Old

Temperature: Sweltering

Population: 8,000+ (100% scorpionmen)

Ruler: The Venom of Chactinax, the Scorpion King

Religion: Faithful (Chactinax)

Imports: None

Exports: None

Scorpionmen once dominated the central regions of Al-Shirkuh. An abomination of a race, with the upper torsos of humans melded through some dark and powerful magic with the bodies of scorpions, their armies slowly carved out an empire. Countless civilizations, whose names are known only in whispers on the desert winds, fell before their might. With each city they conquered their arrogance grew. But they were not the sole race with designs on dominating the entire desert.

In the north, the ophidae were reaching their zenith. It was inevitable the two great nations would clash, and when they did it was a titanic encounter. In a war which raged for a century, the two powers threw everything they had against each other. When the war ended, neither side could truly claim any sort of victory.

Both nations were exhausted, their resources drained, armies slaughtered, and cities smashed. The end result was a disastrous stalemate—all they had succeeded in doing was weakening each other to the point their empires began imploding. In the south, away from the main battlefields, city after city fell to rampaging slave armies. Without their resources, the core began to wither and factions arose in the once unified ranks of the scorpionmen. Civil war raged.

In the intervening power vacuum, Hekata had grown to prominence. The scorpionmen could do little but watch in horror as human armies swept south around the mountains, destroying everything in their path. The intervening centuries had proven too short a time to rebuild any sort of unified society and the scorpionmen were enslaved, their cities destroyed and temples ransacked.

Fifteen hundred years passed before the scorpionmen gained their freedom. As Hekata crumbled under the onslaught of the unknown invaders and its own dark beliefs, the scorpionmen retreated back to their old haunts. Here they planned to rebuild their strength, but before they could begin the lengthy process the jinn arrived in Al-Shirkuh and the scorpionmen were enslaved again.

Another 800 years passed before they were free again. As the humans migrated south, the scorpionmen crept unseen back to their ancestral lands. But old rivalries flared up again, and while the humans built their cities, the scorpionmen fought each other.

Their death knell rang once as the conflict turned extremely bloody. Skirmishes turned into pitched battles and raids into conquests—all they had rebuilt teetered on the brink of total and final collapse. It rang out twice as the church of Chactinax diverged into rival factions, each proclaiming to represent the true will of the deity. A unified priesthood, had it played its cards right, could have ended the war, but personal greed consumed the hearts of the faithful. It did not ring a third and final time, for a black, scaly hand reached out and grabbed the warring factions by the throat.

Out of the warring factions had arisen a powerful, charismatic leader known only as the Venom of Chactinax. He had seen how close his race had come to extinction, and he made others see. Over a generation the civil

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

war ground to a halt—those who would not follow the rapidly growing single faction were viewed as a disease, a disease which had to be totally and utterly destroyed lest it infect society again in the future. For the first time in over two millennia the scorpionmen bowed before a solitary ruler.

The Venom of Chactinax has warned his followers of a terrible war brewing just beyond the horizon—a war which the scorpionmen cannot avoid, a war which could bring about the total destruction of their race. Away from prying eyes, in caverns ancient and deep, have arisen new cities and temples. Here the scorpionmen patiently rebuild their numbers and pray to their evil god for renewed vigor for the battles to come.

Fortunately, the scorpionmen live far from any other civilization. As a result, their reemergence has gone largely unnoticed. Though still few in numbers, their unification and the Venom's vision have given them new purpose, and all is proceeding to the mysterious ruler's slowly unfolding plan.

Geography

The Scorpion Lands encompass the Scorpion Hills, the Mountains of Malice, and the territory in between these and the southern slopes of the Firebarrier Mountains as far east as the Heart of Fire.

Though the sands and hills are barren save for the occasional hardy bush or tuft of tough grass, the mountains see sporadic rainfall. Some of the precipitation flows off the slopes into turbulent seasonal rivers that quickly wither to dusty channels, but far more seeps down through cracks into a vast underground lake—a hidden source of water which the scorpionmen have exploited for millennia.

MOUNTAINS OF MALICE

The mountains lie south of the Firebarrier range, and together form the walls of a wide valley which terminates in the Heart of Fire. Although rainfall is scarce, colossal lightning storms rage across the high peaks in summer, illuminating the sky with brilliant, white-blue flashes and deafening travelers within the sandy valley as the rumbles of thunder smash against the twin mountain ranges.

Storm dragons dance and whirl amid the raging storms, their breath and roars mixing with the storm to create a primitive song of raw power. On rare occasions, one may catch sight of a free greater khamsin jinni flitting through the storm clouds.

The last remaining tribes of cyclops inhabit the region, using their strange magic to craft lightning javelins from the very essence of the raging storms.

SCORPION HILLS

The wind-eroded, bare hills mark the former center

of scorpionman power in Al-Shirkuh. Atop the large, flat hills once stood many cities, fortresses, and temples, symbols of the scorpionmen's ancient strength. Only low stone walls, stumps of pillars, and broken statues of gigantic scorpions remain today.

There is plenty of activity here, however, but it is concealed deep beneath the earth. In secret caverns of immense proportions the scorpionmen grow in strength and purpose, waiting for the day the war prophesized by the Venom sweeps across Al-Shirkuh.

The Snakelands of Old

Temperature: Sweltering

Population: 100,000+ (100% ophidae)

Ruler: The Scintillant Council (nagas)

Religion: Ss'esslis, the Snake God

Imports: None

Exports: None

Before the rise of Hekata, the race of snakemen known as the ophidae held power over much of the Great North Desert and the Grazelands. Magically and scientifically advanced, though excessively cruel and completely inhuman in their thoughts, the ophidae saw their race as superior to all others.

They mastered magic before the earliest humans learned how to make fire, mapped the heavens while the cakali cringed in terror at the sight of shooting stars, forged metal while the other races beat each other to death with sticks and stones, and understood scientific principles still unknown by the greatest modern scholars and sages of Al-Shirkuh.

Their expansionistic nature and superiority complex brought them into contact with the scorpionmen. This in turn led to a terrible war and the eventual decline of their power. Though not as technologically or magically advanced as the snakemen, the scorpionmen were skilled warriors and knew something of metalworking and magic. The costly war broke the ophidae's will, and they retreated to their cities to lick their wounds.

Hekata's growth, though slow, had long been ignored by the ophidae, a fact which cost them dearly when the human empire swept north and south into the sands. Surviving the onslaught far better than did the scorpionmen in the south, the ophidae sought revenge. Their priests labored long and hard to create a new race with which to destroy the humans, the medusae, but the experiment ultimately failed. Arrogant and power-hungry, the medusae sought to overthrow the traditional council of nagas, the ophidae's elite caste.

The resulting civil war proved fatal—no sooner had they expelled the medusae when Hekata's armies were unleashed against them once more. Weakened by the kin strife, the ophidae, for all their scientific and technological superiority, could do little to halt the advancing tide

of humans. To avoid extermination, or worse, enslavement by a barbaric species, the ophidae abandoned their cities and fled beneath the surface.

Deep underground, in the great caverns and tunnels of the underearth, the ophidae raised new cities, rekindled the sciences the many wars had come so close to destroying, and conquered new territories.

Long thought wiped out by the surface races, and little more than a dark memory to all but the most learned mind, the ophidae have recently emerged from their subterranean homes to begin rebuilding their empire.

Perhaps if the sphinxes still required the Snake Road for trade the ophidae would have been driven underground again. But the sphinxes had developed new routes, and so the ophidae's growth went unchecked. Jafar is once again inhabited by snakemen, travelers through the wastes are attacked, slaughtered where they stand or enslaved as in the days of old, and the nagas cast their cold, serpentine eyes into Hekata, where dark stirrings go largely unnoticed by the other races.

Why the ophidae have chosen to return to the surface world after so long has yet to be discovered, but one can be sure their motives are hostile to other races.

Every naga that has reached its majority is entitled to sit on the Scintillant Council, the governing body of the ophidae race. At present, there are just a dozen of the powerful fiends in office. Their word is law, deemed to come directly from the ophidae's sole deity, Ss'esslis, itself portrayed as a naga of monstrous proportions.

Geography

The Snakelands are a sandy wasteland broken by high hills and dunes toward the center. Although there are no oases of any great size, several varieties of deep-rooted hardy plants and shrubs grow on the sandy plains, and there are springs in the hills. Desert hares, lizards, snakes, and scorpions, as well as small herds of desert antelopes, are common here. Sandstorms, whipped up by northerly winds, scour the region during summer, making travel dangerous.

Amid the sands are the broken and long abandoned cities of the ophidae. While the surface ruins have long since been picked clean by scavengers, many of the cities extend deep underground into a series of natural caverns. Few of these have ever been explored beyond cursory inspections. Many who venture into them do not return to the world of sunlight.

Watchtowers: Large, stone watchtowers, erected on the borders of their former heartlands, the current extent of the nagas' reach, are once again inhabited by the fell race of snakemen. Each hosts a priest, two dozen warriors, and three dozen drones. The towers communicate with their neighbors via large signal mirrors, known as Scales of Ss'esslis. At night, they use magical lights to illuminate the mirrors.

During daylight, the Scales can be used to destroy foes through harnessing the rays of the sun. Treat them as sunglobes (p. 28).

SNAKE ROAD

The Snake Road joins the eastern and western trade arms together. Until recently it provided merchants from the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes with an overland route to Rassilon. Since the sphinxes switched to waterborne trade and the ophidae began to stir after centuries of exile, trade along the road has all but died off.

Major Locales

JAFAR, CITY OF SNAKES

Population: 20,000 (estimated)

Ruler: The Scintillant Council (nagas)

The ancient city of Jafar is one of the oldest in Al-Shirkuh, and most certainly the oldest inhabited city. Though the Hekatic pharaohs conquered the city and looted its many treasures, they did not raze it to the ground like the other ophidae cities. Many legends exist as to why Jafar did not meet the same fate as the other cities, but none have any real grounding in historical fact. Whatever the reason, Jafar remained intact.

Jafar lay empty and silent for over two millennia. Its strong wall resisted weathering, its buildings echoed only to the footfalls of treasure hunters, and the sand flowed around rather than through the open gates. In all this time, no other race ever settled the city. Legends grew that the ophidae still haunted the city in spirit form, driving out intruders or slaying them as a warning to others. As cities rose and fell elsewhere, Jafar remained standing as a monument to a near-forgotten race.

In 507 CJ, ophidae suddenly reappeared in Jafar. An army of drones immediately began to clear the city of debris, rebuild the walls, and strengthen its defenses. Statues were erected, plaza mosaics repaired, and buildings furnished. Within a decade, the city looked as if it had never been deserted.

Temple of Ss'esslis: In the heart of Jafar stands the temple of Ss'esslis, the political and religious heart of the old empire. Flanked on all sides by pillars resembling serpents reaching toward the heavens, the temple building is a warren of small chambers built around and under a vast, colonnaded central worship area.

When the Hekatics stormed the city, they discovered a huge golden statue of Ss'esslis in the temple, its two eyes sparkling emeralds the size of a man's head. These were promptly stolen and became part of the pharaoh's ceremonial garb. Though hugely valuable in and of themselves, the gems were also extremely powerful artifacts, something the Hekatic pharaohs never discovered. The nagas are desperate to reclaim them from whatever dusty tomb in which they now lie.

The statue met an ignominious end, being melted down into coins marking the defeat of the ophidae. A new statue has been erected, but its eye sockets are gaping voids, waiting for the return of the two huge gems.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

☉ Southern Ocean ☉

Temperature: Hot

Population: 40,000 (80% Hadaree, 10% sand goblins, 8% jinn blooded, 2% hyaenidae)

Ruler: None (individual communities)

The Southern Ocean has long been part of Al-Shirkuh's trade route system. Even before the cities of the Kingdom of Magor rose, earlier cultures built here and traded with each other, and with other realms, via the ocean.

Geography

Hundreds of tiny islands, reefs, and rocks litter the northern waters of the Ocean. The waters are generally calm, though summer storms can rise with little notice in the deeper water, producing waves which tower over a ship's mast. Sharks, whales, dolphins, schools of fish,

and rays swim the clear, warm waters, as do colossal sea serpents. Mariners throughout the ages have reported seeing "fish men," but few take these tales seriously. Most suspect they are sightings of mermaids, shy creatures found only near the reefs.

CANNIBAL ISLE

The pear-shaped island is swathed in tall grasses and jungle. Only the line of mountains along the northern coast is devoid of vegetation. Hot and humid, Cannibal Isle is home to many predators and biting swarms of insects, but none are as feared as the ever-hungry cannibal tribes.

Visitors to the isle would be non-existent save for two resources. First, the island is a rich source of timber. Second, whereas miners elsewhere must toil laboriously to recover a single gem, on Cannibal Island gems can be picked off the surface like stones on a beach.

Both the Caliphate and Sultanate tried to colonize the island several times. Each time, supply ships arrived to find every colonist gone. In 375 CJ, the Sultan ordered a major invasion of the island. His metal clad army equipped with iron weapons flushed the cannibal tribes out of the grasslands and high into the mountains.

The bulk of the army then withdrew, leaving behind a garrison of 2,000 soldiers to secure the arrival of colonists. When the colonists arrived two months later, the bodies of every soldier were missing. Only the skulls were found, grouped together in neat pyramids. Each one showed the signs of cut and scrape marks, where tools had been used to peel off the flesh. Since then, neither nation has sought to establish a permanent presence here, preferring to let independent traders and entrepreneurs take all the risks.

HILLAH

Hillah is a steep-sided island with no suitable beaches for landing ships. The northern and southern coasts are a vast jumble of rocks and boulders which crashed into the sea in ages past. Some of the outcroppings show clear indications of having been shaped by intelligent hands. Anyone wishing to reach the plateau must fly or have the bravery or foolhardiness to sail up to the accessible cliffs and then begin the long, treacherous climb.

Few mariners bother to visit, however, for Hillah has no water, no flora or fauna, and no mineral wealth worth exploiting. However, it seems things were not always this way.

Atop the barren, windswept hills on either side of the plain are the remains of a tall, curving wall. Indications are the wall once encompassed much of the island, but some great cataclysm sent the northern and southern arcs crashing into the sea. When it was in pristine condition, the wall would have measured about 5 yards wide and 10 yards high. Conservative estimates place its length at over 100 miles. These days, little more than a dozen miles of wall stand intact, and all have succumbed to centuries of weathering.



In the center of the basin are the scattered remains of a vast, ruined city. When intact, the city would have dwarfed all the cities of the Caliphate and Sultanate combined. Today, the city is a jumble of fallen pillars and walls which rise a mere foot above the sand. Explorers have unearthed no engravings, statues, coins, or pottery. Likewise, no records exist anywhere in Al-Shirkuh of undoubtedly advanced culture who built the city. Whoever they were, the builders vanished long, long ago.

ISLE OF GOLDEN FLOWERS

Many are the stories of magical isles. This particular island lies somewhere in the extreme south of the Southern Ocean. It appears on no maps (at least not accurately), and is known only through the stories of Sinbad.

According to the stories, bright yellow flowers grow on the island. At night, they reflect the light from the moon and stars, turning night into day. Each fall, the petals drop to the earth, whereupon they transform either into gold dust or true leafs of gold, depending on which tales the storyteller recites.

In the center of the island stands a temple to Shamash. Supposedly it is built of bricks of solid gold, forged from the dust left behind by the leaves. At least one priest of Shamash has claimed that the sun passes into the underworld through the temple, and that beyond it lies only an ocean cloaked in permanent night. Sinbad said that golden-skinned women of radiant beauty lived in the temple. They spent their days tending the trees, and lived on nectar and sun-gold peaches.

Some mariners question whether the isle has been mistaken for the semi-mythical island of Deriaba, which is also known only in legend. Others dismiss it out of hand as a tall tale. Still, plenty of brave or foolhardy explorers believe it enough to set sail from the Caliphate and Sultanate each year in the hope of locating the island and returning with riches beyond their wildest dreams. Most return hungry and thirsty, with only tales of terrible storms, ever-increasing heat, and ferocious sea monsters.

ISLE OF THE RUKH

Little more than a mountain whose top towers 6,000 feet above the waves, the Isle of the Rukh named after its only known inhabitant. At least one of the colossal birds nests on the mountain slopes, though scholars suspect there could be an entire family.

Although the rukh has never flown over a major city, the creature terrorizes the shipping lanes along the coast ever few decades. Exactly why it does this is unknown, but scholars are beginning to suspect the beast hunts in different areas of the ocean in some bizarre cyclical fashion.

Though it (or they) usually feeds on whales, there are many eyewitness accounts of the creature snatching ships from the ocean. Sightings of rukhs go back many centuries, and no one has a clue as to how many ships

may have met their fate on the island. Since rukhs don't eat wood, scholars hypothesize the bird realized its mistake sooner or later and dropped the ships. While many undoubtedly crashed into the ocean to be lost forever, more than a few are likely to have landed on the mountain.

Several expeditions have visited the island over the centuries. A few came back with handfuls of gold coins dating back as far as the Kingdoms of Magor. Most, however, simply never returned.

QAL'AT, ISLE OF BONES

Qal'at is a barren island of broken hills and steep valleys. Qal'at would be simply another dot on most maps, were it not for one thing—the profusion of bones. Arranged in neat piles with a skull placed atop each one, the bones have been accurately identified as those of lizardmen. Newer piles are perhaps a few years old, but those closer to the center of the island date back centuries. Sages believe that there are probably a few bones which date back a thousand years or more.

The bones have given rise to a belief that the island is a graveyard for lizardmen, a supposition supported by the large number of lizardmen galleys which patrol the surrounding waters. The lizardmen attack any ship they encounter without warning and offer no quarter. While a few folk believe the island is sacred, most suspect there is a vast treasure stored here, guarded by the ghosts of long-dead lizardmen warriors.

TABAL, ISLE OF BEASTS

Tabal is the largest island in the Southern Ocean. Tall mountains in the north eventually give way to a range of hills before the ground descends to grassy plains. Jungle dominates the southern tip. Despite the ample rainfall and lush grass, there are no permanent settlements here.

The island is home to many species of thunderlizard and giant animals. Indeed, there are virtually no normal-sized animals here. Stories abound of gigantic apes as tall as the Sultan's palace, terrible lizards whose teeth are like scimitars, mosquitoes as large as eagles, and snakes which can swallow a man whole.

Each year, after the summer storms have abated, ships from the Caliphate and Sultanate make brief stopovers to hunt the gigantic beasts for their hide, teeth, bones, and flesh, or chop timber. Living in temporary camps erected each season, the hunters and lumberjacks venture deep into the interior in search of their quarry. Though dangerous work, the rewards are worthwhile compensation for those who return alive.

Hunters tell of finding crude buildings in the upland region, but no intelligent life has ever been discovered. Perhaps they are the remains of a now dead culture, as sensible folk suggest, but that does not explain why there are often human skulls nearby—skulls which are at most a few years old.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

THE HORNS

Concealed reefs among the many islands of this chain make the waters extremely dangerous. Ships traveling to Tabal from the western cities must either sail along the coast or risk the deeper waters close to Al-Korsar.

THE PAW

A small clump of barren rocks shaped like a sphinx's paw. A single obelisk, devoid of markings, stands atop the largest island. Some stories say it marks the site of an old tomb. Others tell that the obelisk once marked the edge of the Kingdom of Magor. Few folk actually care either way.

Major Locales

AL-KORSAR, CITY OF CORSAIRS

Temperature: Hot

Population: 48,000

Ruler: Grand Admiral Adham Al-Tair, the Eagle

Religion: Mixed (Upuaut, Karmelos, Tamarni)

Imports: None (acquired by theft)

Exports: Captured goods

Sultan Lahab's tyrannical rule offended both Devoted and Faithful. Devoted who held to the belief Suleiman sought to unite the gods with his vision of Asha and Druj were appalled by the destruction of the temples and subjugation of the old religion, something Suleiman never advocated. Along with Faithful wise enough to see where his reign of terror would end, they fled, settling on the island of Djanet, where they founded an independent state based on the rule of an elected council of priests and mages. After the exodus of the Faithful, Lahab briefly turned his attentions to Djanet and its dissident population. Weakened by the loss of so many citizens, the Sultanate made several token attempts to invade. Each attack failed in its objective. Rather than being crushed, the citizens merely strengthened their fleets to ensure future attacks would not succeed.

As trade began to flow between the southern coastal cities, the citizens of Djanet turned to piracy, primarily because the Sultan had forbidden merchants from trading with the island. For decades, their fleets plundered merchants along the entire southern coast, caring little for whether their victims were Devoted or Faithful. To the corsairs, both nations' governments were based on a flawed system of belief, where the rich minority governed the poor majority, and where faith had become a cast-iron shield which reason and common sense could not penetrate.

As the Sultanate grew more powerful, the corsairs knew their days were numbered. In secret, they began moving their people to a deserted island far from Djanet. Here they began rebuilding the ruins of an ancient city.

In 94 CJ the Sultanate made its long anticipated move. The Sultan organized an immense fleet whose sole objective was the complete annihilation of the corsairs. Djanet fell and the Sultan rejoiced at his victory. His victory was short-lived, for within a generation the corsairs once again terrorized the Southern Ocean.

Fortunately, the religious wars between the Caliphate and Sultanate meant the corsairs could operate virtually unmolested. By the time the two nations made peace, the corsairs were a major force, too powerful to be crushed without huge loss of life. Both incumbent rulers have discussed assembling a joint force, but events elsewhere have distracted them from this venture.

As well as piracy, the corsairs engage in smuggling. From Hulwan to Musayid, corsair ships ply the sea lanes, often flying false colors to avoid unwanted attention. They have contacts with virtually every thieves' guild in the Caliphate and Sultanate, and some say their influence stretches even to the Kingdoms.

Al-Korsar is a city surrounded by water. Constructed on a narrow spur, its numerous wharves stick out into the ocean like the spines of a porcupine. Positioned an average of 10 yards back from the wharves is a tall, stone wall. Every 50 yards along the wall stands a flat-topped tower. Three gatehouses provide access to the city proper. The short, narrow streets behind the wall form a labyrinth designed to confuse and slow down invaders.

A Grand Admiral now rules the city, though he must still answer to a council. Unlike the old days, corsair captains now form the council (many of whom are actually priests or mages). When the grand admiral dies, the council elects one of its members to the position. Family ties carry little weight on the council—bribes and threats are the usual methods of securing election.

Grand Admiral Adham is a gray-haired man approaching his 85th birthday. He has ruled for 50 years, buried three wives, outlived all but two of his 14 children, and survived several assassination attempts. Though he no longer captains a ship, in his youth his infamy stretched as far as Rawdah, itself a corsair haven for part of its history. These days he is content to let younger seadogs roam the seas in search of fame and glory.

The current top corsair captain is Fadi the Black, a cruel man tipped to replace Adham when he eventually dies. Viewed as a living legend by many corsairs, Fadi believes the corsairs should exult in their nautical prowess. He has visited Rawdah several times and has become enamored of the now reclusive emira. His goal is to marry her and return Rawdah to its former corsair glory, thus creating a pirate nation with assets on two of Al-Shirkuh's coasts. He does not know of the emira's wasting disease.

Guard Towers: Atop each tower is a ballista seated on a circular wooden platform. Turning a large wheel in the room below rotates the platform, giving the weapons a 360 degree field of fire. Barrels of thick oil are stored in the basement, along with bolts covered in cloth wadding. Should a fleet attack, the ballistae can unleash a hail of flaming bolts.

ORGANIZATIONS

This chapter details organizations the GM can use as adversaries for his party. Of course, these aren't the only such organizations in the desert. GMs are encouraged to use them as a template for their own unique creations.

Typical Members: This entry gives the GM an idea of what archetypes from the *Hellfrost Bestiary* or the *Land of Fire* bestiary section he can use for typical members of a given organization.

HANDS OF FREEDOM

Certain writings attributed to Suleiman supposedly reveal the great prophet's true vision for the races once they were freed from the jinn's yoke. In what was to be a new age of freedom, the races were to live as equals, governed by representatives freely elected by the people rather than hereditary nobles. Naturally, these texts have been branded as heretical forgeries by both the Caliph and Sultan, not to mention the various emirs.

The Hands of Freedom demand a return to Suleiman's ideal. They insist on nothing less than the removal of the nobility as the ruling authority, the equal sharing of wealth and power, the right to speak one's mind without fear of imprisonment or torture, to have a voice in how their settlement is run, and to live as free men.

In the eyes of the establishment, such talk threatens the stability of every settlement from the greatest city to the smallest village. Naturally, the Hands of Freedom are outlawed wherever nobles rule. Suspected members are routinely arrested, tortured into confessing their crimes, and publicly executed as traitors. Such displays of noble power and tyranny have done more to boost membership than any demagogue's fiery rhetoric ever could. It is a lesson the nobility has yet failed to grasp.

Most members use words and non-violent protests to get their views across. For some, these are never going to be enough to change the *status quo*. Violence has become a regular tool, though to date there have been few successes—many members are unskilled fanatics from

the lowest echelons of society, and nobles can afford both bodyguards and elaborate security measures.

Typical Members: Any archetype except noble can be used for members of this organization.

JINN SLAYERS

The jinn have had a bad name among the civilized races since their arrival in Al-Shirkuh and they continue to have one in the present era. While most Devoted see the lesser varieties as slaves bound to the will of jinn mages, and therefore no threat in and of themselves, among the Faithful they are viewed as an evil influence. Jinn mages may claim to be masters of the jinn, but without the jinn they could work no magic. So who needs whom the most?

The Jinn Slayers are a fanatical group of Faithful (and some Devoted) dedicated to the total destruction of the jinn, those with jinn blood, and those who "worship" the jinn (jinn mages). While it is true some are priests, most are simply citizens who rabidly believe jinn are the servants of Iblis or the scions of Druj, and that they are plotting to regain their former empire.

The organization was founded in the early centuries after the War of Copper Jars, during the violent division between the Devoted and Faithful. At first, members were little more than street-corner preachers, berating those who trafficked with jinn. Militancy came later, when it became clear the Devoted were not going to go away any time soon.

Though they number only a few hundred souls, what they lack in strength they make up for in zeal and magical protection. Upon initiation, jinn slayers are tattooed across the chest, arms, and face with ancient magical symbols which protect them from jinn magic. In game terms, this gives them the Improved Arcane Resistance Edge.

The Slayers also have allies in places of power in the Caliphate, the Emirates, and even the Sultanate willing

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

to provide aid in the form of weapons, safe houses, and sometimes even the itineraries of visiting jinn mage dignitaries. Keen to rid their enemies of one of their greatest weapons, the sphinxes happily sponsor the Jinn Slayers, providing money and equipment through a multilayered system of contacts.

Although superficially similar to the Justiciary of Rassilon, the Slayers have no grievance with mages other than jinn mages. Indeed, mages rank among the Devoted members of the organization.

Typical Members: The *Hellfrost Bestiary* stats for Justicars make ideal elite jinn slayers. The Favored Foe (Jinn) Edge should be added, which covers jinn, jinn mages, and jinn blooded.

The Penitents

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

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

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

First, of course, they need to find some greater jinn. The locations of a few are known, but most of these are considered impure, having been tainted by Suleiman, and therefore Iblis, when they were bound to the mortal realm. The only pure jinn are those who refused to bow before Suleiman/Iblis and who were imprisoned in copper jars for their "crimes." Agents of the Penitents scour old libraries and brutally torture jinn mages for any clue that may lead to copper jars or the elusive secret of how to open them.

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

While it is likely the jinn would jump at the chance

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

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

Typical Members: There are no typical members of the Penitents; membership ranging from misguided Faithful priests to wishful peasants to deranged mages. Any archetype with the exception of jinn mages can be used to represent a member.

The Qabal

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

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

Slowly and secretly, like-minded mages began to share their dream of transforming the Sultanate from a society governed by unelected nobles, many of whom were not fit to rule, into a magocracy. Within a few years, the Qabal was born.

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

With half their membership dead, the Qabal has been forced to rebuild its strength before it can act. Members actively seek out other mages, questioning them on their attitude toward a magocracy. Those who voice open disdain are permanently silenced to ensure the Qabal's plans remain secret. Those who express interest are

questioned in more detail. Only when a Qabalist is totally convinced of the mage's support (which may require active surveillance for many months) is he invited to join their ranks.

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

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

The Sisterhood of the Seven Veils

Scripture, ideology, and wishful thinking aside, society in Al-Shirkuh is not equal. Aside from the rich/poor divide, there is also an issue of gender inequality. Yes, females can join the military, run businesses, and even rise to the dizzy heights of Sultana or Calipha, but individuals filling these positions are rarities. To date, there have been just two Sultanas and a single Calipha in over 1200 years of combined history. As the sole Calipha once wrote, "Women are expected to have lower goals than men, but must work twice as hard to achieve them."

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

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

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

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

Men who have heard of the organization generally mock it, referring to it as a "gossip circle." None know just how deep the Sisterhood's membership extends into the courts and temples of the land. If such knowledge were ever to become common, noblemen would dismiss



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to the organizations presented in this chapter, several organizations from Rassilon (see the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*) can be found in Al-Shirkuh (though in smaller numbers than in their homeland), or have local equivalents that can be modeled on their northern cousins to save repetition.

Ashen Veil: Although the Ashen Veil has no true influence in Al-Shirkuh, the liche-wizards founded a similar organization known as the Shroud of Eternity. They serve the withered pharaohs in the same way the Veil serves their undead cousins in the north.

Convocation of Elementalists: The Convocation is fascinated by the similarities between the elementalists and jinn mages. More importantly, they seek to discover whether elementalists could learn spirit binding. Emissaries are currently visiting Al-Shirkuh to make contact with the jinn mages and try to convince them to join the Convocation. A few jinn mages have expressed interest in the idea of the Convocation, but none have actually enlisted.

Gray League: Al-Shirkuh has its own version of the Gray League—the innocuously named Sandtraders Guild.

Justiciary: Urit Biscali is slowly gathering information on the jinn mages of Al-Shirkuh. At present he is unsure whether elementalists and jinn mages truly share a common heritage. He has sent agents south, hidden among the Convocations' representatives, to investigate their art. If he dislikes what they report, he may order his assassins to remove jinn mages he feels are a threat to his position.

Puppeteers: The cities of the four major realms of Al-Shirkuh are virtually independent entities and each is a hive of intrigue. The Puppeteers have found many puppets here. Their operatives exist in every court, slowly stirring up trouble.

Reclaimers: Though presently concerned with rebuilding the Anari Empire in Rassilon, agents are scouting out the situation in the Free Emirates, many of whose great cities the Anari founded.

Reliquary: As trade increases between Rassilon and Al-Shirkuh so the Reliquary is learning more about the mages of the desert and their spirit relics. Reliquary numbers are too few to launch a wide scale assault on the magical storehouses of Al-Shirkuh. At present the Reliquary is content with ensuring no southern relics end up in the hands of folk in Rassilon. The Reliquary has dispatched a few agents to gather information, however, and a small cell exists in Medinat al-Jinn.

Seekers of the Black Key: Unsure where all the parts of the Black Key ended up, the Seekers scour the desert in the hopes of finding a missing piece.

Velvet Shackle: Slavery is rife in Al-Shirkuh and the Velvet Shackle has many adherents.

their female wizards and sleep clad in armor, far from their wives and female children.

Typical Members: Any archetype can represent a Sister. Add the Hourly Edge.

SONS OF THE SAND

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

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

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

It is not just Bedu who support the Sons' cause. Some city-dwellers have become dispirited with civilization, sensing that Suleiman's dream will never be fulfilled. Others have simply become enamored with the romantic ideal of nomad life.

Typical Members: Most members use the Bedu archetype. Sand mages of the Expansionist faction and fanatical priests of Duamutef can also be used to represent more important or powerful members.

The White Lords

The cooling of the desert has not caused everyone in Al-Shirkuh to worry about the future. A small sect has not only embraced the idea of falling temperatures—it openly seeks to drive them even lower.

Unlike the northern Iceblades, the sect has no hostility toward mages and clerics who specialize in fire and heat trappings—such mortals are viewed as wielding trivial power in the grand scale of things.

The White Lords believe that a permanent cooling will result in devastation. Unable to feed themselves, the people will overthrow the existing order and descend into a state of barbarous anarchy. Once the population has suitably decreased, the White Lords will rise up from the shadows (being protected from the biting cold by their new deity) and claim lordship over Al-Shirkuh.

Ranging from misguided to completely insane, the Lords have regular contact with the cult of Thrym. Unfortunately, the still scorching temperatures prevent the northern cult from providing more assistance in carrying out the sect's long-term goal.

Typical Members: Any archetype can be used. Clerics of Thrym should be used for the rare few members who have adopted the faith of the northern god of winter.

BESTIARY

This chapter contains foes and allies the heroes may encounter on their adventures. Unless otherwise stated, all archetypes are presented as humans. To create a cakali city guard or hyaenidae jinn mage, for example, just add the appropriate racial Edges and Hindrances to the stat block.

Babi

Babi (plural baba) are similar in appearance to baboons, though they are around five feet in height when standing fully erect. They are found only in Jubbah, City of Monkeys.

Despite their appearance and ape-like behavior (communal grooming, propensity for climbing, and suchlike), they are sentient beings. The other races have never mastered their native tongue, a rapid, gibbering language punctuated by deep growls. A *Speak Language* spell is required to communicate with the baba.



PRIEST

Babi society is run by the nobility, though the priests of Yeowri wield considerable influence. The signature spell of Yeowri, the baba's only deity, is *boost/lower trait*.

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

Skills: Climbing d10, Faith d8, Fighting d6, Notice d6, Throwing d8

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5

Gear: Staff (Str+d6, +1 Parry, Reach 1, 2 hands)

Treasure: Worthwhile

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite:** Str+d4.
- * **Climbing:** Pace 8. Baba add +2 to Climbing rolls due to their prehensile tails and long fingers and toes.
- * **Powers:** Priests know the following spells: *beast friend* (apes and monkeys only), *boost/lower trait*, *fear*, and *Speak Language*.
- * **Totally Clueless:** -4 to Common Knowledge rolls regarding anything happening outside the city walls.

SOLDIER

Soldiers serve much the same function in baba society as they do in any other race.

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

Skills: Climbing d10, Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Throwing d10

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5

Gear: Short spear (Str+d6), small shield (+1 Parry), bag of rocks (Range: 5/10/20, Damage: Str+d4)

Treasure: Meager, per every 5 baba

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite:** Str+d4.
- * **Climbing:** Pace 8. Baba add +2 to Climbing rolls due to their prehensile tails and long fingers and toes.
- * **Totally Clueless:** -4 to Common Knowledge rolls regarding anything happening outside the city walls.

Bedu

The Bedu a human nomadic culture. Empires have come and gone, but the Bedu retain their old way of life based on hospitality, honor, and respect for the desert. Some tribes retain their belief in the old gods, typically following Duamutef, but most are now Devotees.



SHEIKH

A sheikh is the leader of a Bedu tribe and his word is law. Despite his autocratic position, most sheikhs have a priest or mage to advise them, valuing their wisdom and greater understanding of the mysteries of the universe.

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Law) d8, Notice d6, Persuasion d8, Riding d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Survival d6, Tracking d6

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 6



This symbol denotes a Wild Card.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

HELLFROST BESTIARY MONSTERS

The following monsters and archetypes presented in other supplements may be found in the desert lands.

MONSTERS

Avatar of Sarkeb, Basilisk, Bufom, Chimera, Corrosive Rot, Deer, Demon, Dragon (all except Hellfrost dragons), Elemental (see lesser jinn, p. 173), Ember sprites, Fungal, Fury, Gargoyle, Gatorman, Ghost, Giant (cliff and fire), Giant Animal (centipede, eagle, leech, mosquito, rat), Glitterbug Swarm, Golem (all except ice), Griffin, Harpy, Hawk, Hazard (avalanche, cold snap, crevasse, fog, mage storm, quicksand, warm spell), Hellhound, Herald of the Gods, Horse (except elven), Kreana, Lizardman, Manticore, Mountain Lion, Mule, Ogre, Orc, Orm (fire only), Red Mist, Scavenger, Sea Serpent, Sentry Skull, Skeleton, Small Creature, Snake (except Hellfrost and slime), Spirit, Strix, Stymphalian Bird, Swarm, Trap, and Zombie.

ARCHETYPES

Assassin, Bandit, Citizen, Elementalist (jinn mage), Lorekeeper, Mercenary, Noble, Puppeteer, Reliquary, Sailor, Thief, and Town/City Watch.

HELLFROST RASSILON EXPANSION

MONSTERS

Bufom, Demons, Dragon (sea and shadow), Dread Wraith, Elemental (fire and storm only), Finfolk, Fungal, Giant (sea and storm), Giant Animal (lockjaw centipede), Golem, Knowledge Eater, Kreana, Lightning Sprite, Lizardman, Manticore, Ogre, Ooze, Orc, Shadow Wight, Shark, Skeleton, Spirit, Wraith, Wyvern, Zombie, and Zombie Lord.

ARCHETYPES

Bodyguard, Entertainer, General, Herbalist, Inquisitor, Librarian, Merchant, Messenger, Pirate/Sea Raider, Siege Engineer, Slaver, Standard Bearer, Torch Bearer, Torturer, and Waggoner.

Hindrances: Various

Edges: Block, Command, Noble, Very Rich

Gear: Scimitar (Str+d8), medium shield (+1 Parry), burnoose, sand hood

Treasure: Treasure Trove, in tents

TYPICAL BEDU

Bedu are typically cautious when approaching strangers, offering greetings of friendship but never letting their hands sway too far from their scimitars in case the strangers are hostile. Once one befriends a Bedu, one has a friend for life.

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

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Riding d6, Shooting d6, Stealth d6, Survival d6, Tracking d6

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6

Hindrances: Loyal

Edges: —

Gear: Scimitar (Str+d8), medium shield (+1 Parry), bow (Range: 12/24/48, Damage 2d6), camel or riding horse, saddle, burnoose, sand hood

Treasure: Meager

Blemmye

Blemmye are a race of warlike humanoids that inhabit the sandy wastes of the Empty Zone. They are dark

skinned and lithe, their main distinguishing characteristic being their lack of a head. Instead, eyes and mouth are set into the breast, with tufts of frizzled, coarse hair protruding from between the shoulder blades and upper back.

The Blemmye were once far more widespread and common than they are today. The Anari colonists found them an elusive and intractable foe, and were never able to bring them to battle. Instead of directly confronting their enemies, the Blemmye have always preferred hit-and-run tactics and lightning fast raids.

Warriors are extremely swift and surefooted, though they also ride camels into combat. A primitive people, Blemmye do not make use of armor or shields, instead wearing only wild animal skins into battle. Weapons include spears, swords, bows, and poison-tipped arrows. Their skill with the bow, in particular, is legendary. Ancient chroniclers claim they could routinely shoot an arrow through a helmet's eye-slits!

Blemmye live a largely nomadic existence in small, extended family units. Some have retreated into deep caverns to hide from man and rarely if ever emerge. For those that remain on the surface, raiding human settlements and caravans for goods and slaves remains a way of life.

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

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d6, Shooting d10, Stealth d6

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

Gear: Bow (Range: 12/24/48, Damage 2d6), short sword (Str+d6) or spear (Str+d6, +1 Parry, Reach 1)

Treasure: Meager, per 3 blemmye

Special Abilities:

- * **Deadly Precision:** With a raise on their Shooting roll, a blemmye hits the targets least armored spot.
- * **Fleet-Footed:** Blemmye roll a d10 running die, instead of a d6.
- * **Low Light Vision:** Blemmye ignore the lighting penalties for Dim and Dark conditions.
- * **Marksman:** A blemmye which does not move gains +2 to its Shooting roll.
- * **No Head:** Blemmye have no peripheral vision. They take a -2 to their Parry and Notice rolls for anyone approaching or attacking from the sides or behind.
- * **Poisoned Arrows (0):** Anyone Shaken or wounded by an arrow must make a Vigor roll or be paralyzed for 2d6 rounds.

Brain Beetle

Brain beetles prefer to eat their victims' brains—from inside the skull. Although small, once they burrow under a victim's skin they can cause great damage.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d6, Stealth d12

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 4 (1)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +1:** Carapace.
- * **Bite:** Str+d4.
- * **Burrow:** If a beetle scores a raise on its Fighting roll, it has burrowed under its victim's skin and begins heading for the brain. Victims must make a Vigor roll every round for three rounds or suffer Str+d4 damage per round (against which armor offers no protection). During this time, they are Shaken, and cannot attempt to un-Shake. On the fourth round, the beetle reaches the brain, instantly killing the victim.
Beetles can be cut out using a small, sharp object (such as a dagger). Removing the beetle requires a Fighting roll. On a success, the beetle is removed but the victim takes 2d4 damage. With a raise, the beetle is removed without harming the victim.
- * **Size -2:** Beetles are only a few inches long.
- * **Small:** Attackers suffer a -2 penalty to attack beetles because of their size.

Camel

Camels are often viewed as uncomfortable beasts to ride, but once one learns

the right way to sit, the ride is very pleasant. Camels are better suited to travel and survival in arid regions than horses, but are ornery creatures.

RIDING

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d12, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d6

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

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Camel:** Camels do not start making Vigor rolls for heat or dehydration until the 8th day after water runs out.
- * **Improved Sand Walker:** Camels treat sand as normal ground in tactical combat and as Average terrain when using overland movement.
- * **Kick:** Str.
- * **Ornery:** Camels are contrary creatures. Characters must subtract 1 from their Riding rolls when riding them.
- * **Size +2:** Camels are similar in size to riding horses.

WAR

War camels are the same breed as regular camels, but are bred for their aggression. War camels count as trained mounts.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d12, Vigor d8



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Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 8
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

- * **Camel:** Camels do not start making Vigor rolls for heat or dehydration until the 8th day after water runs out.
- * **Improved Sand Walker:** Camels treat sand as normal ground in tactical combat and as Average terrain when using overland movement.
- * **Kick:** Str+d4.
- * **Ornery:** Camels are contrary creatures. Characters must subtract 1 from their Riding rolls when riding them.
- * **Size +2:** Camels are only slightly larger than riding horses.

CARRION VULTURE

These fiendish birds are undead mockeries of the standard vulture. They appear much as do their mundane brethren, but their eyes have decayed, leaving only emptied sockets. Most feathers have long since dropped, revealing rotting flesh. Carrion vultures are large birds, standing 3.5 feet tall and with a wingspan that averages 8 feet. Most carrion vultures live in Hekata.

They feed upon carcasses and seem to multiply as the supply of food increases. Voracious, even insatiable feeders, they can work their way through a carcass in an incredibly short time and few are foolish enough to go near one when feeding.

When not feeding, they are actually extremely placid and lazy. They spend days without moving except to groom what few feathers remain—it's a sick parody seeing such ugly and bloodthirsty creatures preening themselves. Carrion vultures can't fly in bad weather, since there are no thermal currents with which to take off or soar, and it is at these times when they are most vulnerable.

Carrion vultures are prophetic and can divine beforehand any place of battle, where they congregate in apprehension of the inevitable bloodbath.

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

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

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

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Berserk:** For reasons unknown, carrion vultures fly into a vicious frenzy of pecking beaks and flying feathers when confronted by reptiles. When within 12" of a reptile, including dragons, they automatically go berserk, as per the Edge.
- * **Bite:** Str+d4, plus poison.
- * **Feathers:** Legends say that their feathers, if burned, can drive off any reptile, including dragons (treat this as a *fear* spell cast with a d12 arcane skill).
- * **Flight:** Pace 10.
- * **Poison (0):** Anyone Shaken or wounded by a carrion vulture's bite must make a Vigor roll. This is a paralysis poison.

- * **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from Shaken. Called Shots to no extra damage. Immune to poison and disease.

CINDER MOTE SWARM

Cinder motes are tiny creatures related to fire sprites. They thrive in the heat of the Heart of Fire. Here they travel the wastes move in great swarms, appearing as a dark cloud of broiling ash illuminated by raging flames from within.

Cinder motes fill a Medium Burst Template.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d12 Strength d8, Vigor d10

Skills: Notice d8

Pace: 10; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 7

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Burn:** Swarms inflict hundreds of tiny burns each round to their victims, hitting automatically and causing 2d4 fire damage to everyone in the template. Creatures have a chance of catching fire.
- * **Split:** Mote swarms are clever enough to split into two smaller swarms (Small Burst Templates) should their foes split up. The Toughness of these smaller swarms is lowered by -2 (to 5 each).
- * **Swarm:** Parry +2; Because the swarm is composed of scores, hundreds, or thousands of creatures, cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area-effect weapons work normally, and a character can stomp to inflict his damage in Strength each round.

CROCODILE

Crocodiles can most often be found in the rivers of the desert realms, as well as in remote oases and even the salt marshes.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Swimming d8

Pace: 3; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9 (2)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +2:** Crocs have thick skins.
- * **Aquatic:** Pace 8.
- * **Bite:** Str+d6.
- * **Rollover:** Crocs are notorious for grasping their prey in their vice-like jaws and rolling over and over with their flailing victims in their mouth. If one of these large reptiles hits with a raise, it causes an extra 2d4 damage to its prey in addition to its regular Strength damage.

CYCLOPS

Cyclops (plural and singular) are a race of one-eyed giants. Despite raising herds of goats, they have a taste for

human flesh. According to legends, they were once a slave race of the jinn, for whom they crafted lightning bolts.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d12+3, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Throwing d8

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

Gear: Big club (Str+d10; 2-hands); 3 lightning bolts

Treasure: Meager per 3 cyclops

Special Abilities:

- * **Lightning Bolts:** Lightning bolts resemble short spears, with a crackling head of electricity instead of a blade. Range: 5/10/20, Damage 3d6, Small Burst Template.
- * **One Eye:** -2 to all trait rolls involving depth perception, such as Throwing.
- * **Size +2:** Cyclops stand over 8' tall.

DEMON

In addition to demons common to other lands, Al-Shirkuh has two species found nowhere else. Both are greatly feared by those who must track the endless desert wastes.

PAZUZU

Pazuzus have the head of a man with a lion's mane, leonine claws on its hands and feet, the wings of an eagle, and a scorpion's tail. They are said to be masters of illusion and desert nomads believe mirages are their work.

They enjoy cruel and often lethal pranks. One common trick is to appear to desert travelers as a nomad. It then questions them about how much water they have. If they are low, it offers to lead them to an oasis in return for money. In reality, it leads them deeper into the desert and then abandons them to await a lingering death. Once its victims have died, it returns to feast on their flesh.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d8, Persuasion d10, Stealth d8, Taunt d12

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9/11

Treasure: None

Special Abilities

- * **Claws:** Str+d6.
- * **Cunning:** Pazuzus are masters of deception and are not subject to Tests of Will.
- * **Demon:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; immune to poison and disease; +2 Toughness against non-magical attacks, except for star metal.
- * **Fear:** Anyone seeing the creature must make a Spirit roll.
- * **Flight:** Pace 12.
- * **Illusionary Appearance:** Pazuzus can assume the form of a human or nonhuman race with a Smarts roll. This counts as an action. Changing back to their native form is a free action.
- * **Improved Frenzy:** A pazuzu in the air may make two Fighting attacks each round at no penalty.

* **Size +2:** Pazuzus stand over 9' high.

* **Weakness (Star Metal):** Demons have lower Toughness against star metal weapons.

SAND

Sand demons manifest as dusty humanoids, but can spin rapidly, causing whirling clouds of flying dust and grit to cloak their form.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d12, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8

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

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Deflection:** Attacks aimed at the humanoid form within the whirlwind suffer a -2 modifier for its thin size and rapid movement. Ranged attacks that miss with a 1 on the skill die are deflected and spit out in a random direction (roll a d12 and read like a clock face). They strike the first target in that direction as if he were an innocent bystander.
- * **Demon:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; immune to poison and disease; +2 Toughness against non-magical attacks, except for star metal.
- * **Immunity:** Half-damage from all non-magical attacks.
- * **Sand Blast:** Sand demons can send directed blasts of sand-saturated air at foes using the Cone Template and a Shooting roll. Foes may make an opposed Agility roll to avoid the blast. The damage is 2d8.
- * **Seep:** Sand demons can squeeze through small gaps as if it were Difficult Ground. Unlike water jinn, they cannot travel through porous substances—there must be an actual hole through the obstacle (such as a keyhole).
- * **Slam:** Str+d4.
- * **Weakness (Star Metal):** Demons have lower Toughness against star metal weapons.
- * **Whirlwind:** The sand demon is the size of a Medium Burst Template. Everything inside or adjacent to the template is attacked by the whipping spines of the thing and automatically suffers d12+d6 damage. Those who are actually inside the template are blind as well (-4 to most actions), unless they wear protective garments of some sort).

DERVISH

Dervishes work their magic by winding the threads of magic around their spinning bodies. Their graceful movements are as much a form of dance and expression as a method of spellcasting.

TYPICAL DERVISH

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

Skills: Dervish d8, Fighting d6, Notice d6, Stealth d6

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Hindrances: Various

Edges: Arcane Background (Dervish)

Powers: *Armor* (solid light), *entangle* (robes entangle foe), *fatigue* (foe gets dizzy), *quickness* (blur of motion)

Gear: Staff (Str+d6, +1 Parry, Reach 1, 2 hands)

Treasure: Meager

TYPICAL WARRIOR DERVISH

A warrior dervish is a blur of motion, his blades dancing and weaving through the air as he moves among his opponents, each movement designed to wind the threads of magic tighter and tighter. More experienced warrior dervishes may have Acrobat, Combat Reflexes, and Improved Sweep.

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

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

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 4; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 7 (1)

Hindrances: Various

Edges: Arcane Background (Dervish), Bladedancer, Sweep, Two Fisted

Powers: *Armor* (solid light), *deflection* (dazzling light), *healing* (glows), *smite* (razor edged weapon), *speed* (blur of motion).

Gear: Leather armor (+1), two scimitars (Str+d8)

Treasure: Meager



DRAGON

Dragons are rarer in Al-Shirkuh than in the north and comprise different species. Of the species that dwell here, sand dragons are the most prevalent.

SAND

Sand dragons are generally covered in light brown scales. They are rarely encountered outside of the deep deserts, where their coloration aids in camouflaging them, vital protection against the privations of larger dragons (few other things hunt dragons). They aren't the most intelligent of dragons, nor are they a particularly large breed. However, they know spellcasting (albeit at a rudimentary level) and have fiery breath.

Elephant

Elephants are now a rarity in Al-Shirkuh. With the desert encroaching into fertile land and food required for human survival, the raising of elephants for work or war is on the decline.

BULL

Elephants were once common in and around the Empty Zone, but today are limited to the oases and fertile river plains. In both locales they are considered a menace because of their huge appetites. Elephants can also be used as mounts.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d8, Strength d12+5, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 13 (1)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +1:** Leathery hide.
- * **Large:** Attacks are +2 to all attack rolls when targeting an elephant.
- * **Size +6:** Elephants weigh several tons.
- * **Trample:** Elephants can trample creatures of Size +3 or smaller. If the elephant runs, anyone in its path must make an Agility roll or be run down. Victims take to d12+11 damage and fall prone.
- * **Tusks:** Str+d6.

WAR

War elephants are much larger than standard bull elephants and are bred purely for battle by the Caliphate. In war, they carry a wooden platform on their back, housing the steersman and three soldiers.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d12+8, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d4

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 18 (2)

Treasure: None

SAND DRAGON TABLES

D-E

ATTRIBUTES & SKILLS

Age	Attributes					Skills		
	Agility	Smarts	Spirit	Strength	Vigor	Fighting	Intimidation	Notice
Hatchling	d8	d4	d6	d12	d8	d6	d8	d8
Juvenile	d8	d6	d6	d12+3	d8	d8	d10	d10
Adult	d10	d6	d8	d12+6	d10	d10	d12	d12
Old	d10	d8	d8	d12+9	d10	d10	d12+1	d12
Ancient	d10	d10	d10	d12+12	d12	d12	d12+2	d12

SECONDARY TRAITS

Age	Pace	Parry	Toughness	Treasure
Hatchling	6	5	7 (1)	Meager, in lair
Juvenile	8	6	10 (2)	Worthwhile, in lair
Adult	8	7	13 (2)	Rich, in lair
Old	10	7	17 (3)	Treasure Trove, in lair
Ancient	12	8	19 (3)	Two Treasure Troves, in lair

VARIABLE COMMON SPECIAL ABILITIES

Age	Armor	Bite/Claws	Breath	Fear	Flight	Size	Tail	Wing
Hatchling	+1	Str+d4	2d6	0	10"	+0	1" x 2"	0"
Juvenile	+2	Str+d6	2d8	0	15"	+2	2" x 4"	1"
Adult	+2	Str+d8	3d6	-1	20"	+4	3" x 6"	d2"
Old	+3	Str+d8	3d8	-2	24"	+6	4" x 8"	d3"
Ancient	+3	Str+d10	4d8	-4	24"	+8	5" x 10"	d6"

OTHER SPECIAL ABILITIES

Age	Special Abilities
Hatchling	Burrowing (6"), Frenzy, Immunity (Heat), Weakness (Cold)
Juvenile	Burrowing (8"), Frenzy, Immunity (Heat), Level Headed, Weakness (Cold)
Adult	Arcane Resistance, Burrowing (10"), Immunity (Heat), Improved Frenzy, Large, Level Headed, Spellcasting, Weakness (Cold)
Old	Arcane Resistance, Burrowing (14"), Immunity (Heat), Improved Frenzy, Large, Level Headed, Spellcasting, Weakness (Cold)
Ancient	Burrowing (18"), Fearless, Hardy, Huge, Immunity (Heat), Improved Arcane Resistance, Improved Frenzy, Improved Level Headed, Spellcasting, Weakness (Cold)

SPELLCASTING ABILITIES

Age	Die	Power Edges	Spells
Hatchling	None	None	None
Juvenile	None	None	None
Adult	d6	Spell Finesse (1)	<i>Deflection</i> (swirling sand), <i>obscure</i> (swirling sand)
Old	d8	Focus, Spell Finesse (1)	As above plus <i>whirlwind</i> (sand twister)
Ancient	d10	Concentration, Spell Finesse (1)	As above plus <i>storm</i> (sandstorm)

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +2:** Thick hide.
- * **Berserk:** War elephants have a tendency to go berserk when wounded.
- * **Hardy:** War elephants do not suffer a wound from successive Shaken results.
- * **Head Butt:** Str+d6. Heavy Weapon. A war elephant cannot head butt anything of Size +3 or smaller.
- * **Huge:** Attackers have +4 to attack rolls against these beasts due to their size.
- * **Platform:** The wooden platform provides Light Cover (-1) to anyone riding in it and grants +2 Armor.
- * **Size +8:** War elephants weigh over 20,000 pounds.
- * **Trample:** If a war elephant takes a run action, it tramples everything in its path. Make a single Fighting roll against all targets. Victims suffer d12+16 damage. The war elephant may only move in a straight line while performing this maneuver.
- * **Tusks:** Str+d10 The tusks of a war elephant are fitted with spiked, metal caps.

Entertainer

Entertainers are commonplace in the markets, on street corners, and in noble courts. Belly dancers, jugglers, fire eaters, and storytellers regale rich and poor with their skills.

ACROBATIC TYPE

This stat block can be used for belly dancers, jugglers, tumblers, and contortionists. More specific types can be created with a minimum of work. To make a typical belly dancer, for instance, add the Attractive Edge (+2 Charisma). A knife thrower should have of at least a Throwing d8 and a handful of throwing knives.

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

Skills: Fighting d4, Persuasion d6, Notice d6, Stealth d6

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Various

Edges: Acrobat, Charismatic

Gear: Various tools of the trade

Treasure: Meager (entertains commoners), Worthwhile (entertains nobles)

STORYTELLER

Storytellers regale audiences with tales of adventure, political satires, humorous anecdotes, and parables. While most are honest sorts, pickpockets and cutpurses make use of their spellbinding tales to ply their trade among the crowd. A few are even members of a thieves' guild, deliberately distracting targets.

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

Skills: Fighting d4, Knowledge (Folk Lore) d10, Persuasion d6, Notice d8, Streetwise d6

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Various

Edges: Charismatic, Storyteller

Gear: Staff (Str+d4, +1 Parry, +1 Reach, 2 hands), book of tales, writing gear to record new tales

Treasure: Meager (entertains commoners), Worthwhile (entertains nobles)

Fire Sprite

Fire sprites are tiny fire elementals, found in swarms near the volcanic vents of the Heart of Fire. A sprite resembles a tiny winged humanoid swathed in flame. Individually they are of little danger, but as a swarm they have the power to incinerate large targets. They fill a Medium Burst Template.

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

Skills: Notice d6

Pace: 10; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 7

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Elemental:** No additional damage from Called Shots; Fearless; immune to disease and poison; suffers no wound penalties.
- * **Fiery Touch:** 2d4 damage. Victims have a chance of catching fire.
- * **Immunity (Heat):** Immune to background heat. Takes no damage from heat or fire attacks.
- * **Invulnerability:** Fire sprite swarms are immune to all non-magical attacks, but suffer 1d6 damage when doused in at least a gallon of water, +2 per additional gallon. They take double damage from cold, coldfire, or ice magic.
- * **Swarm:** Parry +2. Cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area-effect weapons with a water trapping work normally.

Flayed

Flayed are the skeletal remains of unlucky travelers whose flesh the dreaded *ghibli* tore from their bones (p. 169). Although they appear as normal animated skeletons, they can harness the power of the *ghibli*. Flayed are immune to the *ghibli* and indeed often travel in such storms, searching for more victims.

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

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

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

Treasure: None

Special Abilities

- * **Bony Claws:** Str+d4.
- * **Fearless:** Flayed are immune to fear and Intimidation.
- * **Flay Wind:** Flayed can summon, increase, and project

the power of the *ghibli*. This uses the Cone Template, and extends out from the flayed. Victims caught in the template must make an opposed Agility roll vs. the creature's Shooting or suffer 2d8 damage.

- * **Swirling Sand:** Flayed are surrounded by a swirling *ghibli*. This fills a Medium Burst Template. When the flayed finishes its movement, any creature under the template takes 2d6 damage, against which only the *armor* spell protects. Attackers inside or attacking through the template suffer a -2 penalty to their attack rolls. The flayed does not suffer this penalty.
- * **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from Shaken. Called Shots to no extra damage. Immune to poison and disease.

Ghul

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

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

These hairless, gangly creatures know no masters. Some live like solitary hermits among caves and sewers, venturing out at night to terrorize anyone within their hunting range. Others form packs that create impenetrable warrens and infest ruins.

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

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

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

Treasure: Meager per 3 ghûls

Special Abilities:

- * **Claws:** Str+d4.
- * **Infravision:** Ghûls halve penalties (round down) for bad lighting when attacking living targets.
- * **Keen Nose:** Ghûls get +2 to Notice and Tracking rolls against living targets.
- * **Paralysis:** Anyone Shaken or wounded by a ghûl's claw attacks must make a Vigor roll or be paralyzed for 2d6 minutes.
- * **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.

Giant, Sand

Sand giants are lesser cousins of fire giants. Whereas

fire giants have ruddy skin and red hair, sand giants have brown skin and sandy hair. Sand giants are slightly smaller in stature.

Nomadic by nature, they wander the desert in small clan groups, meeting up only every few years to trade and arrange marriages. A small few families have settled down at oases, raising vast herds of goats and even planting crops. A clan unit normally comprises the mir, one priest or sand mage, half a dozen warriors, an equal number of females, and a handful of children.

Unlike their aggressive kin, sand giants are quite hospitable to the civilized races, and welcome strangers who come into their camps in peace. Many Bedu and cakali tribes have alliances with one or more sand giant tribes, though the hyaenidae see them as merely another competitor for resources.

Most families follow Duamutef, god of the desert and of nomads, but a few have adopted the teachings of Sulaiman.



MIR

A mir is the head of a sand giant clan. He is the sole ruler of the clan, though wise mirs take advice from their priests or sand mages.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d12+4, Vigor d10

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d10, Intimidation d12, Notice d6, Throwing d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 14 (3)

Edges: Berserk, Block, Command, Fervor, Natural Leader

Gear: Plate corselet (+3), monstrous scimitar (Str+d12, -1 Parry, 2-hands), thrown rock (Range: 5/10/20, Damage Str+d12)

Treasure: Worthwhile

Special Abilities:

- * **Improved Sweep:** Sand giants can attack all adjacent foes at no penalty.
- * **Large:** Attackers gain +2 to attack rolls against sand giants due to their size.
- * **Resistance (Heat):** Immune to background heat. Half damage from heat and fire attacks.
- * **Sand Born:** Sand giants know several techniques for blinding foes with sand. As an action, a sand giant can blast a Cone Template of swirling sand at his foes. Anyone in the template must make a Vigor roll or be Shaken. They gain +2 to Agility Tricks which use sand in some way.
- * **Sand Walker:** Treats every inch of movement in sand or ash as 1.5" instead of 2".
- * **Size +4:** Sand giants are over 15' tall.
- * **Susceptibility (Cold):** Takes +4 damage from cold-fire, cold, and ice attacks.



PRIEST OR SAND MAGE

Sand giants are normally devout followers of Duamutef, god of the desert. Most clans contain at least one

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

G

FIRE GIANTS

The stats for fire giants can be found in the *Hellfrost Bestiary* (p. 52).

Fire giants are the most powerful giants in Al-Shirkuh. They are usually found in and around the Heart of Fire, but have been known to roam much further afield on occasion.

Clan chieftains are referred to as emirs (not jarls, as in Rassilon), but otherwise have the same stats. Somewhere in the Heart of Fire is reportedly a gigantic fortress of basalt, from where rules the Sultan of the fire giants, leader of all their race.

Fire giant priests normally follow Geb-Agni, the god of earth and fire, father of the fire giants. Very few follow the teachings of Suleiman. For those rare few who do, any reference to elementalism should be replaced by jinn magic. Aside from these cosmetic changes, the same stats apply.

priest. Some are students of Suleiman, however, and practice sand magic.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d12+1, Vigor d8

Skills: Faith or Sand Magic d10, Fighting d6, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Survival d8, Throwing d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 10

Gear: Great scimitar (Str+d10, -1 Parry, carried in one hand), thrown rock (Range: 4/8/16, Damage Str+d12)

Treasure: Worthwhile

Special Abilities:

- * **Improved Sweep:** Sand giants can attack all adjacent foes at no penalty.
- * **Large:** Attackers gain +2 to attack rolls against sand giants due to their size.
- * **Powers:** Sand giants, whether priests or sand mages, typically know the following spells: *bolt* (sand blast), *burrow* (sand parts), *deflection* (swirling sand), *elemental manipulation* (earth), *summon elemental* (dust only), *wilderness step* (terrain flattens and hardens under foot).
- * **Resistance (Heat):** Immune to background heat. Half damage from heat and fire attacks.
- * **Sand Born:** Sand giants know several techniques for blinding foes with sand. As an action, a sand giant can blast a Cone Template of swirling sand at his foes. Anyone in the template must make a Vigor roll or be Shaken. They gain +2 to Agility Tricks which use sand in some way.
- * **Sand Walker:** Treats every inch of movement in sand or ash as 1.5" instead of 2".
- * **Size +4:** Sand giants are over 15' tall.
- * **Susceptibility (Cold):** Takes +4 damage from cold-fire, cold, and ice attacks.

WARRIOR

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d12+3, Vigor d10

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Shooting d6, Throwing d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 12 (1)

Gear: Leather (+1), monstrous scimitar (Str+d12, -1 Parry, 2-hands), bow (Range: 12/24/48, Damage 2d6), thrown rock (Range: 5/10/20, Damage Str+d12)

Treasure: Meager

Special Abilities:

- * **Improved Sweep:** Sand giants can attack all adjacent foes at no penalty.
- * **Large:** Attackers gain +2 to attack rolls against sand giants due to their size.
- * **Resistance (Heat):** Immune to background heat. Half damage from heat and fire attacks.
- * **Sand Born:** Sand giants know several techniques for blinding foes with sand. As an action, a sand giant can blast a Cone Template of swirling sand at his foes. Anyone in the template must make a Vigor roll or be Shaken. They gain +2 to Agility Tricks which use sand in some way.
- * **Sand Walker:** Treats every inch of movement in sand or ash as 1.5" instead of 2".
- * **Size +4:** Sand giants are over 15' tall.
- * **Susceptibility (Cold):** Takes +4 damage from cold-fire, cold, and ice attacks.

Giant Animal

Giant animals are simply beasts of unnatural size. While some theories point to the gods playing a part in their creation, many common citizens consider them as monstrous as giants or basilisks.

CRAB

Giant crabs live in the swamps and on beaches, hiding under the detritus and ever ready to leap out at passing prey.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d8, Stealth d10, Swimming d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 10 (3)

Treasure: Meager, in lair

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +3:** Giant crabs have thick shells.
- * **Claws:** Str+d6.
- * **Size +1:** These creatures weigh over 400 pounds.

CROCODILE

Giant crocodiles are, thankfully, rare. Most are found in the salt marshes, where the gatormen revere them as children of Sarkeb, their bloodthirsty deity.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Swimming d10

Pace: 5; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 17 (4)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +4:** Crocs have thick skins.
- * **Aquatic:** Pace 10.
- * **Bite:** Str+d8.
- * **Large:** Attackers are +2 to attack rolls due to the creature's size.
- * **Rollover:** Crocs are notorious for grasping their prey in their vice-like jaws and rolling over and over with their flailing victims in their mouth. If one of these large reptiles hits with a raise, it causes an extra 2d6 damage to its prey in addition to its regular bite damage.
- * **Size +6:** Giant crocs measure as much as 25'.

HIPPO

Giant hippos swim only in the deepest parts of the River Anshur, areas avoided by river dwellers who wish to live to see another sunrise.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d8, Strength d12+7, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Swimming d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 18 (3)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +3:** Thick, blubbery hide.
- * **Berserk:** Hippos immediately go berserk if they sense intruders in their territory. While berserk, Parry is reduced by 2 but add +2 to all Fighting and Strength rolls, and its Toughness.
- * **Bite:** Str+d6.
- * **Capsize:** Hippos can capsize small boats. The hippo makes a Strength roll and compares the total to the boat's Toughness (including Armor). If the hippo's total is higher, it has capsized the boat, dumping the passengers into the river. Boats with Heavy Armor cannot be capsized by a hippo.
- * **Dehydration:** Giant hippos must immerse themselves in water (salt or fresh) at least one hour out of every 12. Those who don't are automatically Fatigued each day until they reach Incapacitated. The day after that, they perish.
- * **Huge:** Attackers gain +4 to attack rolls against a hippo due its size.
- * **Semi-Aquatic:** Pace 6. Hippos aren't fast underwater, but they are surprisingly graceful. Giant hippos can stay submerged for about 10 minutes.
- * **Size +8:** Giant hippos weigh up to 20 tons.

HYENA

Giant hyenas are far more cunning, aggressive, and dangerous than their lesser kin. To the hyaenidae they

are avatars of the gods, and the nomadic tribes leave offerings of food whenever one of these beasts is spotted. A small few have "adopted" one, and actually worship it as a living aspect of the gods. To other travelers, they are just dangerous foes best avoided.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8(A), Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d10, Taunt d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 9

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite:** Str+d8, AP 3.
- * **Fleet Footed:** Hyenas roll a d10 when running instead of a d6.
- * **Size +3:** Giant hyenas are the same size as large horses.

SCORPION

Giant scorpions are usually found in the deep deserts,



Hellfrost: Land of Fire

G

EDIBLE ANIMALS

The deserts of Al-Shirkuh are largely regarded as lifeless, at least by city-dwellers. Nomads know the desert is a veritable larder, if one knows where to look and how to hunt. Characters using the Survival skill to gather food might hunt or trap antelopes, bats, cattle, dormice, foxes, gerbils, goats, hamsters, hedgehogs, hyraxes, jerboas, ostriches, porcupines, rats, sheep, or voles.

though they have been known to encroach into more settled lands. The scorpionmen use them as beasts of burden and living war machines. Unlike their normal-size cousins, giant scorpions are fierce predators.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d8, Strength d12+1, Vigor d10

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11 (3)

Treasure: Meager, in lair

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +3:** Chitin.
- * **Grapple:** A scorpion may grapple a foe with one or both pincers. If it uses both, each must make a successful opposed Strength roll. Escaping from a double grapple gives the prey a -4 penalty to his Strength roll to escape. A stinger attack against a grappled foe is made at +2 or +4 if the victim is held in both pincers.
- * **Hardy:** Does not suffer a wound from being Shaken twice.
- * **Improved Frenzy:** Giant scorpions may make 2 Fighting attacks with no multi-action penalty.
- * **Pincers:** Str+d4.
- * **Poison:** Anyone wounded or Shaken by a stinger attack must make a Vigor roll or suffer the effects of lethal poison.
- * **Stinger:** Str+d6, AP 1.
- * **Size +1:** Giant scorpions measure 7' in length.

VIPER

Giant vipers typically lurk in ruins, where they make their nests beneath the burning sand or in the cool shadows of a half-buried, forgotten building. Their poison is extremely potent. It is sometimes harvested by nomads, who sell it to assassins.

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d12

Pace: 10; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite:** Str+d6.
- * **Poison:** A character Shaken or wounded by a giant viper must make a Vigor roll at -2 or suffer the effects

of venomous type poison

- * **Quick:** Snakes are notoriously fast. They may discard action cards of 5 or lower and draw another. They must keep the replacement card, however.
- * **Size +2:** Giant vipers average 15' long, but are barely a foot in width.

WASP

Giant wasps are considerably larger than regular wasps but fortunately do not form large swarms. The same stats can be used for giant hornets.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d8, Stealth d4

Pace: 3; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 4

Treasure: Meager, in lair

Special Abilities:

- * **Flight:** Pace 8.
- * **Poison (+0):** Any creature Shaken or wounded by a sting attack must make a Vigor roll or take an automatic wound.
- * **Size -1:** Giant wasps are 3' long.
- * **Sting:** Str+d6, AP 1.

GOLEMS

The ancient cultures of the desert perfected the art of golem creation long ago, using stone golems (and sometimes others) to protect the tombs of the honored dead. As time passed, experimentation led to many other types of golem being created. The art was once thought lost, eradicated by the jinn, but old records were found in dusty tombs and the magic relearned after many centuries of experimentation.

Because the Golem Uprising and the subsequent Golem Ban Decree did not affect the desert cultures, a revival started. Today, golems are viewed as useful tools, though they remain rare. A mage from Rassilon who visits the desert may learn the techniques required to imbue life into a golem.

LAVA

Although superficially similar to stone golems, lava golems have fiery ichor running through their rock bodies. Their eyes glow red and their fists are superheated. Lava golems can be constructed by ushabti mages with the Golem Creator Edge.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d12, Vigor d10

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

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11 (3)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +3:** Magically hardened stone.
- * **Construct:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. No ad-

ditional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.

- * **Fearless:** Golems are immune to Fear and Intimidation.
- * **Improved Arcane Resistance:** +4 Armor against damage-causing arcane powers and +4 on trait rolls to resist opposed powers.
- * **Size +1:** Lava golems stand over 8' high and weigh 2,000 pounds.
- * **Spit Lava:** Lava golems can spew a glob of molten lava. Range 6/12/24, Damage: 2d10, Medium Burst Template. Targets under the Template may make an Agility roll at -2 to escape the glob. Victims have a chance of catching fire.
- * **Superheated Fists:** Str+d10. Victims have a chance of catching fire.

SAND

Sand golems appear very similar to stone golems. The sand used to make their bodies is held together by magic, but the creature can temporarily suspend this magical field, allowing it to pour through tiny gaps. Sand golems can be constructed by sand mages with the Golem Creator Edge.

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Shooting d6, Stealth d6

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

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Construct:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.
- * **Fearless:** Golems are immune to Fear and Intimidation.
- * **Immunity:** Half-damage from all non-magical attacks.
- * **Sand Blast:** Sand golems can send directed blasts of sand at foes using the Cone Template and a Shooting roll. Foes may make an opposed Agility roll to avoid the blast. The damage is 2d8.
- * **Seep:** Dust golems can squeeze through small gaps as if it were Difficult Ground. Unlike marids, they cannot travel through porous substances—there must be an actual hole through the obstacle (such as a keyhole).
- * **Slam:** Str.



STONE, GIANT

Giant statues are typically colossal humans. Ushabti mages who take the Golem Creator Edge can build these creatures.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d12+4, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 16 (4)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +4:** Magically hardened stone.
- * **Construct:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison. No wound penalties.
- * **Fearless:** Golems are immune to Fear and Intimidation.
- * **Hardy:** Does not suffer a wound from being Shaken twice.
- * **Large:** Attackers are +2 to attack a giant golem because of its size.
- * **Size +4:** Giant golems stand 12-15' high.
- * **Slam:** Str.

STONE, MULTI-ARMED

These statues have more than one pair of arms. Statues of Karmelos are often displayed with multiple arms, each holding a different weapon. Ushabti mages who take the Golem Creator Edge can build these creatures.

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8 (2)

Gear: Various melee weapons (d10+d8)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +2:** Solid stone.
- * **Construct:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.
- * **Fearless:** Golems are immune to Fear and Intimidation.
- * **Multiple Arms:** The statue has four arms and may make an attack with each arm at no multi action penalty. If multiple arms attack the same opponent, the statue gets a gang up bonus of +1 per arm. It has the Ambidextrous and Two Fisted Edges. In addition, it can fight four opponents at once without suffering a gang up penalty. Additional combatants gain a gang up bonus as normal.
- * **Slam:** Str.



Guardian Serpent

Many different ways of protecting tombs have been employed over the years. Traps are the most common, but are usually one-shot devices, while the tombs of the Withered Pharaohs are protected by all manner of undead. The most deadly form of protection, however, is the guardian serpent.

A form of golem (the secret of manufacturing these has long been lost), guardian serpents are gigantic, iron snakes capable of delivery a powerful bite and potent venom. The venom is designed to weaken rather than kill, stripping agile tomb robbers, inquisitive mages, and rival priests of their powers. The venom has lost much of its potency over the years and most victims quickly recover.

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

H

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d8, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d12, Swimming d10

Pace: 10; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 20 (4)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +4:** Metallic scales.
- * **Bite:** Str+d6.
- * **Construct:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison. No wound penalties.
- * **Fearless:** Golems are immune to Fear and Intimidation.
- * **Improved Arcane Resistance:** +4 Armor versus magic, and +4 to rolls made to resist magic effects.
- * **Large:** Attackers are +2 to attack rolls against the creature due to its size.
- * **Poison (-2):** Guardian serpents can deliver one of two types of poison. Anyone Shaken or wounded by a bite is subject to one of the poisons, as the creature decides.
 - * **Anti-Magic:** Victims must make a Vigor roll at -2 or suffer a temporary one die reduction in their arcane skill. On a critical failure, the loss is permanent. Effects are cumulative. A skill dropping below a d4 means the victim cannot use his arcane powers. One die is returned every 24 hours.
 - * **Numbing:** Victims must make a Vigor roll at -2 or suffer a temporary one die reduction in Agility and

Agility-linked skills. On a critical failure, the loss is permanent. Effects are cumulative. A skill dropping below a d4 means the victim cannot use the skill. Agility cannot drop below a d4. One die is returned every 24 hours.

- * **Quick:** Guardian serpents may discard action cards of 5 or lower and draw another. They must keep the replacement card, however.
- * **Size +6:** Guardian serpents average 30' long, and are 3' wide.

Hazards

Hazards are natural dangers which can spring up to hinder the unwary traveller and can be found all across the lands of Rassilon. Unlike monsters, one cannot bargain safe passage with a sandstorm or wield a sword against a crevasse. Brains and resilience are the ways of "defeating" these natural perils.

MIRAGES

In the real world, mirages are natural phenomena caused by the bending of light waves. Typical mirages are of oases or cities, and their true location is often many hundreds of miles from the site of the mirage. Other mirages are distortions of closer objects—a patch of grass may appear to be a swaying forest or a nearby rock a mountain.

To the inhabitants of the great desert, however, these are not natural events, but the work of pazuzus, or, more rarely, rogue jinn. They serve to lure travelers from their path, tempting them further into the barren wastes in search of non-existent salvation or with the false promise of treasure in the vaults of an ages-lost city that appears on no maps.

In game terms, most mirages are mere illusions, useful in pulling parties toward a destination they may otherwise have missed or ignored, or driving them away (a mirage of a nomad army, for instance).

A hero may make a Notice roll at -2 to tell a mirage for what it is, but only once he is within 18".

SHIFTING SANDS

Some areas of the desert comprise fine grains which slip easily underfoot, often sinking travelers up to their ankles. Characters walking through shifting sands must make a Vigor roll every hour to avoid acquiring a level of Fatigue due to the extra effort involved.



WINDS OF THE DESERT

There are many different types of wind in the desert. Depending on the direction, strength, and season, some winds are welcomed, while others are cursed. For regular sandstorms, use the rules for blizzards in the *Hellfrost Bestiary*.

Those caught in any of the winds listed below must make a Vigor roll at -2 every hour until they find shelter (Survival at -4, one roll per group) or suffer the effects listed below under the individual entries. A typical storm lasts 1d4+1 hours.

FLAY WIND (GHIBLI)

The flay wind is a particularly strong wind which carries fine particles of sand. Such is the ferocity of the wind, the swirling sand can strip flesh from bone and scour away metal.

Victims not in shelter suffer 2d6 damage per hour as the flesh is literally stripped from their bones. Those who die return to "life" in 1d4 days as flayed (p. 162). Furthermore, the damage is applied to any exposed items, such as weapons. If armor is exposed, it loses one point of protection for each wound the victim suffers. When it reaches zero protection, it has been destroyed.

HEAT WIND (SHAHALI)

Whereas the *irifi* blows from the salt desert, the *shahali* tears north and south across the desert from the Heart of Fire. The scorching wind is hot enough to sear flesh. Victims not in shelter suffer a level of Fatigue every hour from burns and blisters, one level of which is removed after 24 hours of rest.

Headless Hunter

Those who dispense justice are not infallible and sometimes fatal mistakes occur. A headless hunter is the headless corpse of an innocent person wrongly executed by the preferred "civilized" method—beheading.

Given unlife by their intense desire to seek vengeance, they use their unearthly senses to hunt down any humanoid creature in their path, slicing off its head.

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

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 9

Gear: Scimitar (Str+d8)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Furious Vengeance:** Headless hunters always attack Headsmen before other prey. When they detect a Headsman, they instantly go berserk (as per the Edge), focusing their attention solely on the executioner. They may still use their Headhunter ability while berserk.

- * **Headhunter:** Headless hunters suffer no penalties when making a Called Shots to the Head.

- * **No Head:** Headless hunters are not subject to Called Shots to the Head under any conditions.

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

HEADSMAN

Headsman are executioners tasked with the grisly but lawful practice of amputating limbs according to the ancient laws. While most serve in this role, others put their talents to use as adventurers, scouring the wastes for vile abominations to introduce to their whirling blades.

TYPICAL HEADSMAN

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Healing d6, Notice d6, Stealth d6

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Orders

Edges: Connection (Guild of Headsman), Headman, Sweep

Gear: Leather mask (+1, head only), scimitar (Str+d8)

Treasure: Meager



EXPERIENCED HEADSMAN

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

Skills: Fighting d10, Healing d6, Notice d8, Stealth d6

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6

Hindrances: Orders

Edges: Block, Connection (Guild of Headsman), Headman, Improved Sweep, Mighty Blow

Gear: Leather mask (+1, head only), great scimitar (Str+d10, -1 Parry, 2 hands)

Treasure: Meager



Herald of the Gods

Heralds of the gods of Al-Shirkuh share the basic common special abilities of those from Rassilon (see *Hellfrost Bestiary*, p. 69).

APSU

Apsu's heralds appear as hippo-headed humans. They are rarely interested in any mortal matter unless it involves protecting a water source.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10

Skills: Faith d12+2, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Swimming d10

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11 (3)

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

H

Gear: None

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +3:** Thick, blubbery hide.
- * **Awaken Water:** Heralds of Apsu know the following spells, all with a water trapping: *barrier* (wall of water), *beast friend* (river creatures only), *bolt* (water bolts), *burst* (jet of water), *fatigue* (target's lungs fill with water), *knockdown* (jet of water), *summon beast* (river creatures only).
- * **Bite:** Str+d6.
- * **Semi-Aquatic:** Pace 10. Can stay submerged for 20 minutes.
- * **Size +1:** Heralds stand 8' tall.

ASHTART

Ashtart's heralds appear as a tangle of vines woven into humanoid form. Their eyes appear as two flowers, whose petals open and close when the creature blinks. A bee's stinger attached to a long, snaking vine curves up over their shoulder.

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

Skills: Faith d12+2, Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Stealth d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9 (2)

Gear: None

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +2:** Thick vines.
- * **Awaken Nature:** Heralds of Ashtart can use the following spells: *barrier* (plant wall), *bolt* (swarm of bees), *deflection* (swarm of bees), *entangle* (vines), *stun* (bees buzz around victims), *summon beast* (bee swarms only), *wilderness step* (in vegetation only).
- * **Forest Born:** Suffer no difficult ground penalties in forests or marshes.
- * **Plant:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. Called Shots do no extra damage. No wound penalties.
- * **Poison (-2):** Anyone Shaken or wounded by the stinger must make a Vigor roll at -2 or be paralyzed for 2d6 rounds.
- * **Size +1:** Heralds stand 8' tall.
- * **Stinger:** Str+d8, AP 2, Reach 1, plus poison.

DUAMUTEF

Duamutef's heralds are virtually indistinguishable from mortal creatures. They have the appearance of black-furred cakali and dress in traditional nomad style. They carry only a long, compound bow made of black wood.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d12+1, Vigor d10

Skills: Faith d12+2, Fighting d8, Notice d8, Riding d8, Shooting d12+2, Stealth d8, Survival d12, Tracking d12

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7

Edges: Coordinate Fire, Improved Dodge, Marksman,

Master (Shooting), Mighty Shot, Steady Hands

Gear: Blessed huge long bow (Range: 24/48/96, Damage d12+d6+1, see below)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Awaken Desert:** Herald's of Duamutef can use the following spells with a dust trapping: *barrier* (wall of sand), *bolt* (sand blast), *deflection* (swirling sand), *entangle* (encased in sand), *obscure* (mini-sand storm), *storm* (sandstorm).
- * **Bite:** Str+d6.
- * **Blessed Bow:** The weapon ignores all armor, mundane or magical. Each time the bow is used, the herald may attach a trapping to the bow, as if it were a spell.
- * **Desert Born:** Ignores all difficult ground penalties in the desert.
- * **Hunter's Instinct:** The herald ignores all penalties for Cover or Darkness when using its blessed bow.

GEB-AGNI

Heralds of Geb-Agni appear as tall humanoid figures with black, broken rock for skin, beneath which can be seen glowing fire. Their eyes are deep, fiery pits. The air around them shimmers from the heat their bodies emanate.

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

Skills: Faith d12+2, Fighting d8, Intimidation d10, Knowledge (Smithing) d12+2, Knowledge (Stonecraft) d12, Notice d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 12 (4)

Gear: None

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +4:** Rocky skin.
- * **Aura:** Geb-Agni's heralds radiate intense heat. At the end of its movement, all adjacent creatures suffer 2d8 heat damage.
- * **Awaken Earth:** Heralds of Geb-Agni can use the following spells with an earth trapping: *armor* (stone skin), *barrier* (stone wall), *bladebreaker* (weapon snaps), *burrow* (earth parts), *quake* (earth roars in anger).
- * **Awaken Fire:** Heralds of Kenaz know the following spells, all with a fire trapping: *bolt* (fire bolts), *blast* (fireball), *burst* (jet of fire), *deflection* (heat shimmer), *heat mask* (target radiates no heat).
- * **Burrowing (12"):** Only through earth or stone.
- * **Earthborn:** Heralds suffer no difficult ground penalties for hills, mountains, or when underground.
- * **Fiery Slam:** Str. Anyone Shaken or wounded by the weapon has a chance of catching fire as if they were a flammable object (see *Savage Worlds*).
- * **Immunity (Fire):** Heralds take no damage from background sources of heat, or from direct heat or fire attacks.
- * **Size +1:** Heralds stand 8' tall.

- * **Weakness (Cold & Water):** Heralds take double damage from cold, coldfire, ice, and water attacks.

TAMARNI

Tamarni's heralds appear as cat-headed women with perfect bodies. They are extremely sensuous creatures, and enjoy sexual relations with mortals. Such an experience is said to be extremely powerful and never forgotten.

Attributes: Agility d12+1, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d12, Faith d12+2, Fighting d6, Lock-picking d10, Notice d6, Persuasion d12, Stealth d12+2

Charisma: +4; **Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6

Edges: Fleet-Footed, Hourly, Improved Dodge, Level Headed, Quick

Gear: None

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Claws:** Str+d6.
- * **Distracting:** Despite their feline head, Tamarni's heralds are extremely alluring. Male opponent suffer -2 to attack rolls when targeting a hourly.
- * **Mistress of Luck:** After initiative cards are dealt, the herald can make a Faith roll opposed by the Spirit of a single foe within 12" as a free action. If successful, she swaps initiative cards with his target.
- * **Naturally Lucky:** Heralds of Tamarni receive 2 bennies. These may only be spent to affect the herald's trait rolls.
- * **Purr of Pleasure:** As an action, the herald can emit a pleasing purr. Place the thin end a Cone Template touching the herald. Any creature within the template must make a Spirit roll opposed by the herald's Faith. On a failure, a victim is Shaken for 1d6 rounds as waves of pleasure wrack his body. He may attempt to unShake only after the effect expires.

TAMMUZ

As lord of justice and death, Tammuz sends his heralds to the mortal realm in the form of vulture-headed humans armed with a scimitar in one hand and a set of scales in the other.

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

Skills: Faith d12+2, Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Persuasion d10, Streetwise d8

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

Gear: Blessed great sword (Str+d10, -1 Parry, see below)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Blessed Great Sword:** Any creature with the Undead special ability takes double damage from the blade. Any creature Shaken or wounded by the great sword must make a Spirit roll or be Shaken for 1d6 rounds as memories of past crimes, no matter how small,

flash before their eyes. This Shaken condition does not count as a physical attack, and cannot be negated by spending a benny.

- * **Size +1:** Heralds stand 8' tall.

- * **Truthseer:** Heralds can automatically detect lies. However, if a person truly believes what they say is true, the herald cannot detect any lie.

UPUAUT

Upuaut's heralds appear as tall, muscular cakali with swirling green eyes and feathered wings. They carry a quarterstaff engraved with runes of movement and freedom.

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

Skills: Faith d12+2, Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Riding d12, Stealth d8, Survival d10, Swimming d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 7

Edges: Fleet-Footed

Gear: Blessed quarterstaff (Str+d4, +1 Parry, Reach 1; see below)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Blessed Quarterstaff:** If the herald makes a Touch Attack (+2 Fighting) against a foe bound by magic (such as *entangle*) the herald casts *dispel* against the power as a free action. Using this ability does not inflict regular damage for the staff. If he touches a foe bound in some mundane way (such as manacles or a rope), the binding object is immediately broken.
- * **Flight:** Pace 12.
- * **Ground Walker:** Suffers no penalties for difficult ground.
- * **Immunity (Immobility):** Heralds are immune to grapples, automatically breaking free as a free action. They are immune to any magic which prevents movement, such as *barrier* or *entangle*.
- * **Lord of Movement:** Heralds of Upuaut can cast the following spells: *becalm* (inhales deeply), *bridge* (sand forms a bridge), *fly* (lifted on winds), *leaping* (powerful legs), *quickness* (superhuman reflexes), *speed* (legs are a blur), *wall walker* (handholds appear), *whirlwind* (column of whirling wind), *zephyr* (exhales).
- * **Teleport:** The herald can teleport itself and up to four adjacent creatures anywhere in the world as an action. An unwilling passenger can resist with a Spirit roll opposed by the herald's Faith. No die roll is required for locales it cannot see, nor does the herald ever suffer any form of backlash. As soon as the herald uses this power, it disappears back to its celestial realm.

Hippo

The most dangerous animal in the desert, in terms of killing humans, is actually the river dwelling hippo-

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

H

potamus. Hippos are extremely territorial and will attack small river boats to defend their territory. They are considered sacred beasts by followers of Apsu.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d8, Strength d12+3, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Swimming d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 11 (1)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +1:** Blubbery hides.
- * **Berserk:** Hippos immediately go berserk if they sense intruders in their territory. While berserk, its Parry is reduced by 2 but he adds +2 to all Fighting and Strength rolls, and his Toughness. The hippo ignores all wound modifiers while berserk.
- * **Bite:** Str+d6.
- * **Capsize:** Hippos can capsize small boats. The hippo makes a Strength roll and compares the total to the boat's Toughness (including Armor). If the hippo's total is higher, it has capsized the boat, dumping the passengers into the river. Boats with Heavy Armor cannot be capsized by a hippo.
- * **Dehydration:** Hippos must immerse themselves in water (salt or fresh) at least one hour out of every 24. Those who don't are automatically Fatigued each day until they reach Incapacitated. The day after that, they perish.
- * **Large:** Attackers gain +2 to attack rolls against a hippo due its size.
- * **Semi-Aquatic:** Pace 6. Hippos aren't fast underwater, but they are surprisingly graceful. Hippos can stay submerged for about 5 minutes.
- * **Size +5:** Hippos weigh up to four tons.

Hippogriff

A hippogriff has the body and hind quarters of a horse, and the head, wings, and forelimbs of a giant eagle. They are natural enemies of griffins, but are no less fond of flesh than their rivals.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8(A), Spirit d6, Strength d12+2, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d12

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11

Treasure: Meager, in lair

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite/Claws:** Str+d6.
- * **Flight:** Pace 8.
- * **Improved Frenzy:** Hippogriffs may make two Fighting attacks each action at no penalty.
- * **Size +3:** Hippogriffs are comparable to war horses.

Husk

A husk is a human who has been lost in the desert and taken to any means possible to survive. As salt and water

deprivation twisted his mind he began to abandon the distasteful in favor of survival. The man soon found that blood gave him quick energy.

After an extended period of time stranded in the sands, the husk took to only drinking the blood of whatever he could find and his body began to change. First his skin shriveled and leathery, protecting it against the elements. Then his eyes dried and sank into his head, allowing him to see in even the worst sandstorm. Last, his nails grew long and hard like claws, allowing him to tear open his victims.

As time ate away the last of the husk's humanity, he finally turned to humans to quench his thirst. Now the husk stalks his hunting ground collecting the blood of those who haplessly wander in. The husk is still full of wit and cunning, even mumbling lost phrases to the ghosts in his mind as he hunts down his victims and chops off their head to gain access to the precious ruby fluid inside. Still, he is only a shadow of the human he was before.

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

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Survival d10, Tracking d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8 (1)

Gear: Scimitar (Str+d6)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +1:** Leathery skin.
- * **Bite/Claws:** Str+d4.
- * **Immunity (Sandstorms):** Husks suffer no hardship in sandstorms or desiccating winds. They prefer to hunt in such conditions, for their prey has nowhere to run while the wind howls.
- * **Improved Sand Walker:** Treats ash and sand as regular terrain.
- * **Infravision:** Husks halve penalties (round down) for bad lighting when attacking living targets.
- * **Quick:** Husks have superhuman reflexes, and redraw initiative cards of 5 or lower.
- * **Resistance (Heat):** Immune to background heat. Half damage from heat and fire attacks.

Hydra

Hydras are multi-headed beasts, akin to dragons. Some breathe fire, others can grow new heads to replace ones lost in combat. Fortunately most are more mundane. The number of heads varies. They are found everywhere from the open desert to dank marshes.

All of the various abilities known to hydras are listed here. The GM should decide which ones an individual creature possesses.

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

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d10, Notice d6

Pace: 5; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 13 (2)

Treasure: Worthwhile, in lair

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +2:** Scaly hide.
- * **Bite:** Str+d6, Reach 1.
- * **Fire Breath:** Hydras breathe fire using the Cone Template. Every target within this Cone may make an Agility roll to avoid the attack. Those who fail suffer 2d8 damage. Individual heads may not attack with bite in the round they breathe fire.
- * **Immunity (Fire):** Immune to background heat. Takes no damage from fire attacks.
- * **Multiple Heads:** Hydras have between four and ten heads. Each head may make a Fighting roll in a round without incurring a multi-action penalty, though no more than four heads may attack a single target, regardless of its size. Every head has 1 wound and is severed by a single wound. Damage caused to heads does not affect the hydra, though it dies when the last head is severed.
- * **Regeneration:** Each round after a head is severed, the hydra makes a Vigor roll. On a success, any severed heads are replaced by a new one. Damage caused by fire prevents regeneration, as does cauterizing the wound before a new heads grow. This requires a successful Fighting roll with a torch or other flaming object.
- * **Size +5:** Hydras are large creatures. Most weigh over 3,000 pounds.
- * **Weakness (Cold):** Takes double damage from cold, coldfire, or ice attacks.

Hyena

Hyenas are scavengers and hunters, though the former is preferred, as it's generally easier. Hyenas have incredibly powerful jaws, voracious appetites (they can digest skin, flesh, and bone), and are brave enough to face off against lions. Their Taunt skill represents their unique "laugh" and rather unsettling bark.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d10, Taunt d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 4

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite:** Str+d6, AP 1.
- * **Fleet Footed:** Hyenas roll a d10 when running instead of a d6.
- * **Size -1:** Hyenas are relatively small creatures.

Jinni, Lesser

Lesser jinn are incarnates of the four main elements, as well as sub-elements caused by jinn interbreeding. The four main families of jinn are the ifrit (fire), majin (earth), marid (water), and khamsin (air). In game terms, they use the same stats as elementals. In Al-Shirkuh, ifrits

were once the most common, for it is they who ruled the Jinn Lands of Old.

Unlike elementals, jinn appear in a form more akin to that of humans. They retain all their special abilities, but always have noticeable, and obviously supernatural, traits based on their element. For instance, an ifrit has hair made of living flames and ruddy-colored skin, while a khamsin's legs may trail into smoke. They can never be mistaken for mortals. Similarly, it is possible to tell a jinni from an elemental at a glance.

The following elementals from the *Hellfrost Bestiary* can be used in the desert realms as lesser jinn, and may be summoned by those with the appropriate spell: air, dust (a mix of khamsin and majin), earth, fire, lava (a form of ifrit and majin), mud (a form of majin and marid), steam (a form of marid and ifrit), and water. No mage has been able to summon jinn related to cold, coldfire, or ice, or any variants thereof, nor of shadow, though such creatures are known to exist.

Note: Elementals and jinn share stat blocks, but are different creatures. Elementals are summoned using *summon elemental* and are considered to be divine servants of the lowest order. Jinn are summoned using *summon jinn*, and are servants of the greater jinn. Since one type is summoned by miracle and the other by magic, the -2 modifier for a target power of a different type applies where applicable when trying to *dispel* one.

Khem-Hekau Mage

Khem-hekau mages traffic with the souls of the dead, binding them through words of power. Universally despised by civilized beings, these dark magicians work their fell charms under cover of darkness and in places only the dead consider pleasing. Despite Suleiman saying that all paths of magic lead to Asha, many Devoted are convinced khem-hekau mages are nothing less than servants of Druj.

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

Skills: Fighting d6, Healing d6, Intimidation d10, Khem-Hekau d10, Notice d6, Stealth d8

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Various (often some mental problem)

Edges: Arcane Background (Khem-Hekau), Concentration

Powers: *Armor* (spiritual guardian), *aura* (necromantic), *enhance undead* (names of power), *entangle* (spectral hands), *fear* (fearsome wailing), *sacrifice* (drains soul), *zombie* (dark spirit infests corpse).

Gear: Dagger (Str+d4), 1d4+2 skeletal guards

Treasure: Meager

Lava Ooze

A lava ooze is a living blob of molten rock. They haunt the Heart of Fire, where they are indistinguishable from

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

natural lava. A typical lava ooze fills a Small Burst Template, but sightings indicate larger specimens exist.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d12, Strength d12+2, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d8, Stealth d8

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 10

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Camouflage:** A lava ooze hiding among the volcanic rocks of the Heart of Fire has +4 to Stealth rolls.
- * **Engulf:** A lava ooze may make a grapple attack against every creature under its template. On a success, it has engulfed its foe. Each round the grapple is maintained thereafter, the victim suffers 2d8 damage from heat. Victims have a chance of catching fire.
- * **Immunity (Heat):** Immune to background heat. Takes no damage from fire or heat attacks.
- * **Mindless:** Immune to Fear and Tests of Will.
- * **Sticky:** The molten body of a lava ooze is extremely viscous. On a roll of 1 on the attack die, regardless of Wild Die, the weapon has become stuck in the crea-

ture. It suffers 2d8 damage per round until destroyed or freed. Freeing the weapon requires an opposed Strength roll.

- * **Susceptible (Water):** A lava ooze takes +4 damage from water-based attacks. A gallon of water causes 1d6 damage.
- * **Weakness (Cold):** Takes double damage from cold, coldfire, or ice attacks.

Liche-Wizir

While the pharaohs of the Hekatic Empire were mummified to preserve their form, the liche-wizirs gained immortality another way. As their masters slept through the ages, the wizirs' bodies became naturally corrupted and preserved through the potent magic they wielded. However, their immortality is not true—they may have life spans numbering thousands of years, but they will one day die of old age. Liche-wizirs appear as withered, skeletal husks, with pale, gray eyes devoid of any warmth, and are clad in armor decorated with powerful runes of protection. Although liches use the title “wizir,” it represents their current status and position in the courts of the Withered Dynasty, not their magical background.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d12+2, Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d12, Khem-Hekau d12+2, Knowledge (Occult) d12+2, Notice d10

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 14 (5)

Edges: Arcane Background (Khem-Hekau), Improved Concentration, Improved Focus, Master (Khem-Hekau)

Gear: Magical armor (+5)

Treasure: Treasure Trove, in lair

Special Abilities:

- * **Death Touch:** Instead of a normal attack, a liche may make a touch attack (+2 Fighting). Every raise on its Fighting roll automatically inflicts one wound to its target.
- * **Powers:** Liches know most every spell available. Spells have a darkness or necromantic trapping.
- * **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. Called Shots to no extra damage. Immune to poison and disease. No wound penalties.
- * **Zombie:** Liches are necromancers first and foremost. The undead they raise through the *zombie* spell are permanent, so they are usually surrounded by 4d10 skeletons or zombies as they choose.

Lion

Lions are fierce predators, particularly in the open grassland along rivers, where prey cannot seek refuge.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d10, Strength d12, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d8, Tracking d6

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

Treasure: None



Special Abilities:

- * **Bite/Claw:** Str+d6.
- * **Improved Frenzy:** Lions may make two Fighting attacks each action at no penalty.
- * **Pounce:** Lions often pounce on their prey to best bring their mass and claws to bear. It can leap 1d6" to gain +4 to its attack and damage. Its Parry is reduced by -2 until its next action when performing the maneuver however.
- * **Size +2:** Male lions can weigh over 500 pounds.

Mameluk Mercenary

To create a mameluk mercenary, use the three Mercenary stat blocks from the *Hellfrost Bestiary* and make the following changes.

- * Add the Loyal Hindrance.
- * Add the Mameluk Mercenary Edge.
- * Common mercenaries have Strength increased to d8.
- * Veterans receive a scale hauberk instead of a chain hauberk. This does not affect their Toughness.
- * Mercenary captains do not receive chain limbs. This does not affect the listed Toughness.

Medusa

Medusae are the result of a failed attempt to breed ophidae with humans. Possessed of terrifying powers, the medusae quickly grew in arrogance, demanding they replace nagas as head of the ophidae society. Following a bitter war the medusae were driven out into the desert. Most settled in the Statue Hills and Forest of Pillars.

All medusae are female. They resemble scaly humanoids with writhing snakes instead of hair. Their eyes, not that many have actually seen them and lived, have the appearance of a snake's eyes, but are always a brilliant green. Medusae can breed with male ophidae of the warrior caste or higher, but not with other races.

Every medusa in existence today has been alive since the failed rebellion. Though long-lived, their lifespan is measured in centuries, not millennia. In order to prolong their lives, they can enter a deep hibernation, a state which can last for hundreds of years.

Cunning and cruel, their lairs are usually decorated with numerous, lifelike "statues," victims of their baleful gaze. Their petrification power does not affect ophidae or other medusae. Orcs, hyaenidae, and other scum typically serve them as guards around their "palaces."

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

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

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

Gear: Long sword (Str+d8), bow (Range: 12/24/48, Damage 2d6)

Treasure: Rich, in lair

Special Abilities:

- * **Petrify:** In combat, a character may avert his eyes by taking a penalty to his attack roll. The attacker may take a -1, -2, or -4 penalty to his attack roll (his choice). Whether the attack is successful or not, he must then make a Spirit roll with a bonus equal to the penalty he took to his attack roll (if any). A berserk character cannot avert his eyes, and his Spirit roll is made at -2. On a failure, he catches sight of the medusa's face and is turned to stone—permanently. A character Surprised by a medusa must make an Agility roll at -2 to quickly avert his gaze.
- * **Snake Hair:** The writhing snake hair of a medusa can attack all adjacent foes with no multi action penalty. The bites inflict 2d4 damage, and also deliver poison. Anyone Shaken or wounded must make a Vigor roll or suffer the effects of venomous type poison. As an action, a medusa may drip venom from a snake onto an arrow. Used in this manner, the poison is good for one shot.

Monkey, Trained

Trained monkeys are often used by pickpockets and spies. Monkeys "befriend" soft-hearted heroes and then lead their masters to their hideout at the first chance.

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

Skills: Climbing d10, Fighting d6, Notice d8, Stealth d10, Swimming d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 3

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite:** Str+d4.
- * **Harmless:** When attacking creatures of Size -1 or greater, damage rolls from these creatures can Shake a foe, but never cause wounds. This includes inflicting successive Shaken results.
- * **Size -2:** Monkeys are only 1' tall.
- * **Small:** Attackers suffer a -2 penalty to attack monkeys because of their size.

Mummy

Mummies are the preserved remains of humans and animals. Once, the process was popular with the early races, but following the corruption of Hekata it fell into disuse. Many mummies were specifically created using costly arcane and religious rituals. Others are the result of natural dessication.

MUMMIFIED CROCODILE

The pharaohs of Hekata once entombed their ancient leaders with mummified crocodiles to protect them on the journey to the afterlife. In later eras, khem-hekau turned these spiritual guardians into physical ones. Gatormen have long practiced mummification, though

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

M

whether or not they ever used khem-hekau on the corpses is unknown.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d8, Strength d12+3, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6

Pace: 3; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 12 (2)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +2:** Crocs have thick skins.
- * **Aquatic:** Pace 5
- * **Bite:** Str+d6
- * **Fear:** Anyone seeing a mummy must make a Spirit roll.
- * **Rollover:** Even mummified crocodiles are notorious for grasping their prey in their vice-like jaws and rolling over and over with their flailing victims in their mouth. If one of these large reptiles hits with a raise, it causes an extra 2d4 damage to its prey in addition to its regular Strength damage.
- * **Shuffling Gait:** Mummies roll a d4 running die.
- * **Susceptible (Fire):** +4 damage from fire.



- * **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. Immune to poison and disease. No additional damage from called shots.

ROYAL GUARD

Royal guards are the mummified remains of the withered pharaohs' greatest warriors, brought to unlife to serve their masters for eternity. They form the core of the undead armies, often acting as unit commanders and elite units.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d6, Spirit d10, Strength d12+2, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Battle) d6, Notice d6, Riding d8, Stealth d6

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 13 (3)

Hindrances: Loyal

Edges: Block, Command, Dodge, Frenzy.

Gear: Bronze corselet (+3), bronze greaves (+3), bronze scimitar (Str+d8), medium shield (+1 Parry)

Treasure: Worthwhile, under bandages

Special Abilities:

- * **Fear:** Anyone seeing a royal guard must make a Spirit roll.
- * **Mummy Rot:** Anyone touched by a mummy, whether he takes damage or not, must make a Vigor roll. Failure means the character has contracted "mummy rot." While infected, wounds can only be removed through natural Healing. A *healing* spell applied within 10 minutes cures the rot. Victims may make a Vigor roll every week to rid themselves of the rot.
- * **Shuffling Gait:** Royal guards roll a d4 running die.
- * **Slam:** Str.
- * **Susceptible (Fire):** +4 damage from fire.
- * **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.

SAND

The sands naturally desiccate anything containing moisture left buried there for any length of time. For those killed in the dunes or buried in great sandy patches their anger and fear at their death imbues their blood with energy that transforms the sand and later empowers their broken bodies.

The sand absorbs the blood, bodily fluids, and spiritual energy, desiccating the body and mutating it into a ghastly shadow of the human it used to be. The sand not only dries out the corpse but crystallizes parts of their bodies into a hardy, leathery substance, making them more resistant to damage from all types of weapons. Their hardened skins tend to slow them down, however.

Although they aren't wrapped in the linen associated with traditional ancient mummies, sand mummies still present a frightening sight. They emerge from the sand and shamle about, moaning, howling, and venting their rage against those more fortunate to remain alive.

Salt mummies are a related species, formed when

travelers succumb to the desiccating effect of the salt desert. These use the same statistics and differ only in appearance—having skin encrusted with salt crystals.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d12, Vigor d10

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

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 11 (2)

Treasure: Meager per 3 mummies

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +2:** Hardened skin.
- * **Burrowing (4"):** These mummies can burrow through sand. They can make a surprise attack at +2 to attack and damage (+4 with a raise) by making an opposed Stealth vs. Notice roll.
- * **Desiccating Touch:** Anyone touched by the mummy, regardless of damage inflicted, must make a Vigor roll. Failure means the hero's flesh desiccates. He suffers a level of Fatigue. If he is Incapacitated by the touch, he must make a Vigor roll or die. Anyone killed by this means returns 1d4 rounds later as a sand mummy. Fatigue recovers at the rate of one level per 24 hours of rest, so long as the victim has ample water.
- * **Fear:** Anyone seeing a sand mummy must make a Spirit roll.
- * **Shuffling Gait:** Mummies roll a d4 running die.
- * **Slam:** Str.
- * **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.



SCROLL

When the Hekatic Empire became corrupted by necromancy, the liche-wizards created many terrifying weapons of war. One of these was the scroll mummy, created from the corpse of a mage and given the ability to use magic even in unlife. Rather than being wrapped in linen, corpses were instead wrapped in long rolls of papyrus soaked in moon rock dust and specially prepared oils. Onto each roll mages inscribed a potent spell. Unlike regular scrolls, these ones required the user to have an understanding of magic in order to draw out the magical power. Scroll mummies activate the magic simply by speaking the ancient words of power on a scroll, using Spellcasting as their arcane skill. They suffer no penalties for maintaining multiple spells.

They suffer no backlash—on any failure, the spell is simply wasted, its magical energy having actually dissipated over the centuries.

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

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

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 9

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Fear:** Anyone seeing a scroll mummy must make a Spirit roll.

ANIMAL MUMMIES

Many ancient cultures mummified their dead—only Hekata turned them into undead mummies. As well as mummifying their nobles, priests, mages, and warriors, the Hekatics also mummified cats, ibises, baboons, and crocodiles, though this practice largely ceased after the advent of khem-hekau magic. To create a mummified animal, apply the following modifications to the regular stats.

- * Reduce Agility by two steps (min d4).
- * Increase Spirit by one step, or two for a Wild Card mummy.
- * Increase Strength 4 steps, or six steps for a Wild Card mummy.
- * Increase Vigor by two steps.
- * Add Fear (0). Truly horrifying creatures may warrant Fear (–1) or even (–2), though the latter should be rare.
- * Add Shuffling Gate Special Ability (–2 Pace; d4 running die).
- * Add Susceptible (Fire) Special Ability (+4 damage from fire attacks)
- * Add the Undead Special Ability.
- * Remove any Regeneration Special Ability.

- * **Final Retribution:** When a scroll mummy is slain, it automatically explodes, causing 1d6 damage per spell it has remaining (a mummy with 4 spells causes 4d6 damage, for instance). This fills a Medium Burst Template.
- * **Improved Arcane Resistance:** +4 Armor versus magic, and +4 to rolls made to resist magic effects. This ability does not inhibit spells they cast on themselves.
- * **Shuffling Gait:** Mummies roll a d4 running die.
- * **Slam:** Str.
- * **Scrolls:** A typical scroll mummy has 2d6 scrolls left on its corpse, each containing a spell chosen by the GM. Each spell is one-use, but they may carry duplicates. Each wound a scroll mummy takes destroys one of its remaining spells, chosen at random.
- * **Susceptible (Fire):** +4 damage from fire.
- * **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison. No wound penalties.

SWARM

Externally, swarm mummies appear like regular banded-corpses. But writhing within their withered husk is a mass of biting insects, centipedes, beetles, cockroaches, and such like.

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

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d10, Notice d4, Stealth d6

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 8

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

O

Treasure: Meager per 3 mummies, under bandages

Special Abilities:

- * **Fear:** Anyone seeing a swarm mummy must make a Spirit roll.
- * **Insects:** An adjacent attacker who Shakes a mummy in melee combat must make a Vigor roll to avoid being Shaken as creepy-crawlies emerge and crawl over his hand. This ability only works on an individual attacker once per fight. After this, he quickly becomes jaded.
- * **Shuffling Gait:** Mummies roll a d4 running die.
- * **Slam:** Str.
- * **Susceptible (Fire):** +4 damage from fire.
- * **Swarm Host:** When a swarm mummy is wounded by any means except fire, coldfire, or cold, the swarm within bursts forth, destroying the creature. Replace the mummy with a Medium Burst Template-sized insect swarm.
- * **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.

Ophidus

Ophidae (sing. ophidus) are a race of snakemen. Ophidus society is broken down into four castes, each caste having different physical features. These are detailed below. Familial ties mean little to the ophidae. All clutches of eggs within a settlement are incubated together by specialist drones. Once the hatchlings emerge, their physical features are recorded by a priest and they are sent to nurseries as appropriate to their caste. Naturally, drones are the most common caste, then warriors, priests, and finally the naga.

Their deity, Ss'esslis, is considered by Faithful to be a servant of Iblis, though to the ophidae he is the god of knowledge, wisdom, magic, war, and racial superiority.



NAGA

At the top of the social ladder are the naga, the living representatives of Ss'esslis. Naga have long, serpentine bodies, no arms, and human heads. Nagas practice astrology magic, a form of magic that involves manipulating the magical threads through their close understanding of cosmic alignments and the interplay of celestial objects. Whereas most creatures use star charts to calculate the complex interactions, naga have memorized millennia worth of celestial movements.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d12, Vigor d10

Skills: Astrology d10, Fighting d8, Intimidate d12, Notice d10, Stealth d4, Taunt d8

Pace: 7; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 10

Treasure: Rich, in lair

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite:** Str+d6.
- * **Constrict:** A naga may choose to constrict a single

foe in its coils and does so by making a Fighting attack. Each round after it entangles it causes Str+d8 damage. The prey may attempt to escape by getting a raise on an opposed Strength roll. Given its large size, a naga may constrict and bite in the same round, suffering the standard multi-action penalty.

- * **Powers:** *Armor*, *boost/lower trait*, *deflection*, *fortune's favored*, *gift of battle*, *precognition*, *quake*, *warrior's gift*.
- * **Quick:** A naga is frighteningly quick for its size, and redraws cards of 5 or less.
- * **Size +3:** A naga is 15' long and about a foot in diameter.
- * **Strong Willed:** A naga cannot be swayed by threats or taunts. It receives a +2 bonus to defend against Tests of Will.
- * **Transfixing Gaze:** To look into the eyes of a naga is to become its slave. Naga can cast *puppet*, using Spirit as their arcane skill.

PRIEST

Priests are humanoid in form, but have the heads of cobras and a long, thick tail. Unlike the lower castes, priests wear clothing, favoring full length silk robes decorated with coiling serpents. Priests serve as scholars, advisors, and military commanders. The favored spell of Ss'esslis is *quickness*.

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

Skills: Faith d10, Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Astrology) d12, Knowledge (Any other two) d10, Knowledge (Battle) d8, Notice d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Tracking d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (1)

Hindrances: —

Edges: Combat Reflexes, Quick, Scholar

Gear: Scimitar (Str+d8)

Treasure: Worthwhile

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +1:** Scaly hide.
- * **Bite/Tail:** Str+d4.
- * **Poison (-1):** Ophidae inject deadly venom through their bite. A character Shaken or wounded by an ophidus' bite must make a Vigor roll. This is a lethal poison.
- * **Powers:** *Armor* (hardened scales), *bolt* (fires small snakes), *puppet* (rocking motion), *quickness* (super reflexes), and *speed* (blurry motion).

WARRIOR

Warrior ophidae are similar in basic form to priests, but lack a tail and have a viper's head. Their skin is covered in thick scales, they have cold, lidless eyes, and their fangs are more pronounced. They do not have tails. Warriors wear little more than a loincloth and belt, at which hangs their sword and quiver.

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

Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Survival d6, Tracking d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (1)

Hindrances: —

Edges: Combat Reflexes, Quick

Gear: Scimitar (Str+d8), bow (Range: 12/24/46, Damage 2d6)

Treasure: Meager per two warriors

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +1:** Scaly hide.
- * **Bite:** Str+d4.
- * **Poison (+0):** Ophidae inject deadly venom through their bite. A character Shaken or wounded by an ophidus' bite must make a Vigor roll. This is a venomous poison.

DRONE

At the bottom of the social ladder are the drones, near mindless minions who can pass for humans if not examined too closely. A closer inspection reveals lightly scaled skin on their torso, yellowish eyes, and enlarged canines. Most go around naked.

Drones are physically strong, primarily used for menial labor or basic crafts like pottery and weaving. A small few have greater intelligence and typically learn a more complex craft, such as armoring or glassblowing.

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

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d4, Knowledge (one craft) d6, Notice d6, Survival d4

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5

Gear: Dagger (Str+d4)

Treasure: Meager per five workers

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite:** Str+d4.
- * **Poison (+1):** Ophidae inject weak venom through their bite. A character Shaken or wounded by an ophidus' bite must make a Vigor roll. With success, the bite area swells, but there is no true effect. With a failure, the victim becomes Fatigued for 24 hours or until he receives a successful Healing roll.

Orc, Desert

Desert-dwelling orcs use the same stats as in the *Hellfrost Bestiary* with two notable changes—their priests, and they are not equipped with furs or boot spikes.



PRIEST

Orcs generally worship Iblis, though a few tribes do follow Geb-Agni, Karmelos, and even Duamutef (as god of archers). The actions of priests devoted to chaos are notoriously hard to predict, even by their own tribes.

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

ORC TRIBAL TRAITS

These are some of the more infamous orc tribes inhabiting the wastes.

* **Black Swarm:** Fanatical followers of Chactinax, the god of scorpions, chieftains, priests, and elite warriors wear armor made from giant scorpion chitin (+2 Armor, 15 pounds). They also allow scorpions to sting them to build up immunity to their venom, and have +2 to Vigor rolls to resist poison. A few clans have domesticated giant scorpions to use as mounts.

* **Fireblood:** Among the most savage tribes, the Fireblood serve fire giants as soldiers. They have the Resistance (Heat) special ability.

* **Fury of Iblis:** Infamous for their chaotic nature and wanton destruction, chieftains, warriors, and elite warriors have the Bloodthirsty Hindrance and Berserk Edge.

* **Sand Pirates:** This tribe roams the sands, raiding oases and outlying villages using war camels as mounts. Their chieftains and elite warriors have the Steady Hands Edge. Chieftains, priests, and elite warriors have Riding equal to their Fighting skill. Scouts and messengers have Riding d8. Other orcs, except berserks and runts, have d6 Riding. Riders replace warriors in this tribe.

* **Splayed Foot:** All members of the tribe have their feet mutilated at birth, causing them to grow like a camel's splayed foot. They have -1 to Pace, but gain the Improved Sand Walker Edge. The Dune Runners tribe has a similar practice.

Skills: Faith d8, Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Shooting d6, Stealth d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6 (1)

Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles)

Gear: Leather armor (+1), long spear (Str+d6, Parry +1, Reach 1, 2 hands)

Treasure: Worthwhile

Special Abilities:

- * **Powers:** Priests typically know *armor* (skin covered in dark spirits), *bolt* (black electricity), *fear* (howl), *obscure* (cloud of dark spirits), *smite* (crackling black electricity), and *summon demon* (demonic soldier and lasher only).

Pegasus

Pegasi (singular: pegasus) are horses with great, feathery wings. Once they roamed the grasslands in great herds, but hunters and poachers have reduced their number to less than a few hundred. The Sultan maintains a stable of these magnificent beasts, gifting them to his Pegasus Guard as mounts, but also breeding them to ensure the survival of the species.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d6, Strength

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

P

d12, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d6, Stealth d6

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

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Flying:** Pace 12.

* **Kick:** Str+d4.

* **Size +2:** Pegasi weigh around 800 pounds.

Pegasus Guard

The Pegasus Guard, named after their winged mounts, are the Sultan's elite military force. A large contingent protects the capital, Al-Wazir, City of Spires, while smaller companies are stationed around the Sultanate to remind the emir's of his authority. They can be found beyond the borders of the Sultanate, carrying out all manner of hazardous missions to ensure the land remains safe from a variety of threats.



TYPICAL GUARD

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Riding d8, Shooting d6, Stealth d6, Throwing d6

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8 (2)

Hindrances: Loyal, Orders

Edges: Connections (Pegasus Guard), Pegasus Guard

Gear: Scale hauberk (+2), open helm (+3), scimitar (Str+d8), medium shield (+1 Parry), lance (Str+d8, Reach 2, AP 2), pegasus, pegasus saddle

Treasure: Meager

EXPERIENCED GUARD OR SERGEANT

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

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Battle) d6, Notice d6, Riding d10, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Throwing d6

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 9; **Toughness:** 9 (2)

Hindrances: Loyal, Orders

Edges: Block, Combat Reflexes, Command, Connections (Pegasus Guard), Pegasus Guard

Gear: Scale hauberk (+2), open helm (+3), scimitar (Str+d8), medium shield (+1 Parry), lance (Str+d8, Reach 2, AP 2), pegasus, pegasus saddle

Treasure: Worthwhile



GUARD CAPTAIN

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d10, Knowledge (Battle) d8, Notice d6, Riding d10, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Throwing d6

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 10 (3)

Hindrances: Loyal, Orders

Edges: Command, Connections (Pegasus Guard), Feror, Inspire, Noble, Pegasus Guard

Gear: Plate corselet (+3), open helm (+3), scimitar (Str+d8), medium shield (+1 Parry), lance (Str+d8, Reach 2, AP 2), Wild Card pegasus with leather barding (+1), pegasus saddle

Treasure: Rich

Phoenix

Clad in fiery feathers of yellow, orange, and red, the immortal phoenix is seen as a representation of the sun god. The desert cultures all consider the bird sacred, but its feathers contain magical power and thus the bird is often hunted. The greatest gift a phoenix can bestow is one of its tail feathers. Although the magic in them is temporary, the phoenix forever weakens its life-force with the gift, and thus such a gift is not given lightly.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d10(A), Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d10, Spellcasting d12

Pace: 2; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Flight:** Pace 12.
 - * **Powers:** A phoenix knows the following powers: *barrier*, *blast*, *bolt*, *burst*, *light*, and *prolonged blast*. All powers have a fire trapping.
 - * **Rebirth:** If a phoenix is killed, it explodes into flame filling a Large Burst Template. Creatures within the Template suffer 3d10 damage and have a chance of catching fire. During the explosion, the body of the phoenix transforms into an egg. A new phoenix hatches 2d6 days later.
 - * **Size -1:** A phoenix is the same size as a large eagle.
 - * **Tail Feathers:** Every phoenix has 35 magical tail feathers, each acting as a one-shot spell. Each of its thirteen yellow feathers contain *bolt* (one bolt, 3d6 damage), the twelve orange feathers have *burst*, and the ten red feathers hold *blast* (3d6 damage in Medium Burst Template). The powers are cast using the phoenix's Spellcasting—all the user need do to activate the power is throw the feather toward the target (an action). Using the feathers generates no backlash—the feather simply fails to work and is consumed in flame.
- Removed tail feathers do not grow back. Furthermore, every seven feathers removed or lost permanently reduces the bird's Spellcasting by one die (this has no affect on the Spellcasting die of the feather). When the last feather is removed, the bird explodes (as above) but is not reborn.

Priests & Paladins

Priests and paladins are devout servants of the gods, receiving miraculous powers in return for their service.

The stats below represent typical foes rather than allies. They are tough opponents, designed to be a challenge for Seasoned or Veteran groups. Weaker versions can be easily created by lowering Faith and reducing the number of spells.

PALADIN OF IBLIS

Iblis' paladins work to promote chaos through physical deeds. They may serve as commanders for undead or demonic hordes, commit assassinations, or be involved in the criminal underworld.

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

Skills: Faith d8, Fighting d10, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Battle) d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 10 (3)

Hindrances: Loyal, plus various others

Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Block, Champi-

SPIRIT RELICS

As mentioned elsewhere, true relics are no less rare in the desert than in Rassilon. However, unlike their elemental counterparts in the north, the jinn mages of Al-Shirkuh have mastered the art of binding elemental spirits into objects. As a result, *wands of bolts* and *rings of invisibility* are available in the desert.

Creating a spirit relic for the heroes to discover in their adventures requires a few very simple steps.

First, decide whether a khem-hekau or jinn mage created the relic. This step affects the available spells, the trapping, and possibly the object's appearance as well.

Second, pick a single spell. Khem-hekau relics may use any spell from the khem-hekau mage spell list. For jinn relics, pick a spell from one of the four spell lists.

Third, determine the spell's trapping. Jinn relics must use air, earth or dust, fire or heat, or water, as determined by the spell list from which the spell is taken. Spells found on multiple lists, such as *elemental manipulation*, must be fixed to one element. Khem-hekau relics typically use a necromantic trapping, but darkness may be appropriate as well.

Last, choose a suitable object to contain the spirit. This may be a ring, item of clothing, wand, skull or other bone, or even a weapon.

Note that heroes from Rassilon who acquire a spirit relic and use it in public back in their homeland will attract the attention of the Reliquary sooner rather than later.

on, Combat Reflexes, Disciple of Iblis, Frenzy, Improved Nerves of Steel

Powers: *Armor* (inky darkness), *ethereal/corporeal* (shadowy form/target adopts demonic form), *fear* (feel of death), *panic* (horrific hallucinations), *smite* (object is shrouded with necromantic energy), *strength of the undead* (cadaverous appearance), *summon demon* (dark litany, usually summons demonic soldiers), *zombie* (dirge)

Gear: Blessed armor (+3), scimitar (Str+d8)

Treasure: Worthwhile

PRIEST OF IBLIS

Iblis' priests work to corrupt others and sow dissent through words rather than physical deeds. They are well known for starting malicious rumors about corrupt nobles, simply to stir up the peasants.

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

Skills: Faith d10, Fighting d6, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Streetwise d10

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7 (1)

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

R-S

Hindrances: Various

Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Connection, Disciple of Iblis, Unholy Warrior

Powers: *Aura* (necromantic energy), *bolt* (black skulls; necromantic), *enhance undead* (dark runes), *fear* (touch of death), *obscure* (darkness), *puppet* (dark litany), *summon demon* (spills blood), *zombie* (dark prayers)

Gear: Blessed robes (+1), mace (Str+d6)

Treasure: Worthwhile



Rukh

These massive birds are large enough to pick up small ships and whales. Most roost in isolated aeries, searching for large prey for their feasts. Sailors and city guards have sometimes managed to fend off these beasts with siege weapons, but even these weapons rarely penetrate the rukh's lizard-like skin.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d10, Strength d12+10, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d12, Notice d10, Stealth d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 19

Treasure: 1d6 Treasure Troves, in and around nest

Special Abilities:

- * **Bash:** Rukhs can pick up objects with a total Toughness of 16 or lower (if inanimate) or Size +8 or smaller (if living). It takes the rukh a full round to properly grasp a ship, which is a Fighting opposed by the captain's Boating roll. With a raise, the rukh lifts the boat in the air and ascends 12" per round afterward. After 1d6+4 full rounds, it drops its prey, automatically smashing any boat it can lift. Characters suffer damage according to the height.
- * **Flight:** Pace 24.
- * **Gargantuan:** Heavy Armor. A rukh's attacks are Heavy Weapons.
- * **Huge:** Characters add +4 when attacking a rukh due to its great size.
- * **Size +12:** Rukhs are huge creatures with wingspans of over 120'.
- * **Talons:** Str+d12, AP 4, Heavy weapon.

Sand Mage

Sand mages are one of the oldest forms of magician in Al-Shirkuh. They draw their magic from the desert, manipulating the sand through force of will and enchantments. Most sand mages are Bedu.

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

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Riding d6, Sand Magic d10, Stealth d6, Survival d8, Tracking d6
Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6

Hindrances: Various

Edges: Arcane Background (Sand Magic), Sand Walker

Powers: *Armor* (sand skin), *burrow* (walks through

sand), *burst* (sandblast), *fog cloud* (sand storm), *obscure* (sandstorm), *wilderness step* (sand hardens beneath his feet)

Gear: Scimitar (Str+d6)

Treasure: Meager

Sand Worm

Massive worms tunneling beneath the earth to gobble up unsuspecting adventurers are sometimes found in lonesome dune seas. The things sense vibrations through the earth, hearing a walking person at about 200 yards. The stats below are for a monster some 50' long.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d10, Strength d12+10, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d10, Stealth d10

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 22 (4)

Treasure: Treasure Trove, in stomach

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +4:** Scaly hide.
- * **Bite:** Str+d8.
- * **Burrowing (20"):** Sand worms can disappear and reappear on the following action anywhere within 20". When they erupt from the ground, victims must make a Notice roll opposed by the worm's Stealth. If the creature wins, it gains +2 to attack and damage that round, +4 with a raise. They can only burrow through sand, however.
- * **Gargantuan:** Heavy Armor. Attacks against a worm by man-size creatures are made at +4. Worm's attacks are Heavy Weapons.
- * **Hardy:** The creature does not suffer a wound from being Shaken twice.
- * **Huge:** Attackers add +4 to their Fighting or Shooting rolls when attacking a worm due to its size.
- * **Resistance (Heat):** Immune to background heat. Half damage from fire and heat attacks.
- * **Size +10:** Sand worms are usually well over 50' long and 10' or more in diameter.
- * **Slam:** Sand worms attempt to rise up and crush their prey beneath their huge bodies. This is an opposed roll of Fighting versus the target's Agility. If the worm wins, the victim suffers d12+20 damage. A slam attack affects all foes within a Cone Template.
- * **Susceptibility (Cold):** Takes +4 damage from cold, coldfire, or ice attacks.

Scorpion

Scorpions can be found in many deserts. There are many species, ranging from tiny creatures to the Emperor Scorpion, which can grow to a foot long. Regardless of size or species, these stats can be used for all types of scorpions.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d6, Notice d6, Stealth d12

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 2

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Poison:** Scorpions do little serious damage with their sting, but may inject venom. A character stung by a scorpion must make a Vigor roll. With success, the bite area swells and becomes numb. The victim becomes Fatigued until healed. With a failure, the victim becomes Exhausted.
- * **Size -2:** Most species of scorpion are less than 6" long.
- * **Small:** Attacks suffer a -2 penalty to attack scorpions because of their size.

Scorpionman

Scorpionmen have the upper bodies, arms, and heads of humans and the lower bodies of scorpions, including a set of pincers. Their human flesh is black and covered in thick scales, their scorpion half is encased in chitin.

Scorpionmen prefer hot, dusty environments, but can survive for long periods in more temperate conditions. Scorpionmen are hostile toward all other species, whom they see as slaves waiting to be shackled or offerings to their venomous deity, Chactinax.

WARRIOR

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

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Shooting d10, Stealth d6, Survival d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8 (2)

Gear: Scimitar (Str+d8), bow (Range: 12/24/48, Damage 2d6)

Treasure: Meager per 3 scorpion men

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +2:** Chitin.
- * **Fleet Footed:** Scorpionmen roll a d8 for their running die, instead of a d6.
- * **Marksman:** Scorpionmen are expert archers. If they do not move in a turn, they may fire as if they took the Aim maneuver.
- * **Poison:** Anyone wounded or Shaken by a stinger attack must make a Vigor roll or suffer the effects of venomous type poison.
- * **Stinger:** Str+d6, plus poison.
- * **Wall Walker:** Scorpionmen can move their full Pace, and even run, along walls and ceilings.

Siren Bush

Siren bushes are carnivorous plants. They appear similar to an acacia bush, but are surrounded by a web of roots covered in long, sharp thorns. When they detect living prey, they emit a hypnotic hum, which lures the victim into the web of roots. Once close enough, the thorny

roots rip into the target's flesh, saturating the surrounding ground in blood, which the roots then absorb.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d6

Pace: —; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Treasure: Meager, around base

Special Abilities:

- * **Plant:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. Called Shots do no extra damage. Not subject to Tests of Will.
- * **Roots:** Str+d4. Extending from the siren bush to a range of 3" is a tangle of surface roots, each covered in sharp thorns. The roots are mobile and can attack everything within range with no multi-action penalty.
- * **Siren Song:** Siren bushes emit a subsonic, hypnotic hum when a living creature approaches within 12". All creatures in range must make a Spirit roll. Those who fail are subject to the *puppet* power. Normally the tree uses the power to draw its prey close enough for its roots to attach themselves, though if the need arises it can order them to defend it from attackers.

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Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Snake

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There are many snakes in the desert and all of them dangerous. Animals must kill quickly to avoid their prey escaping, and snakes are no different.

CONSTRUCTOR

Pythons, boa constrictors, and other snakes over 15' long. Most are found on river banks or in salt marshes.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d10, Stealth d8

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite:** Str.
- * **Constrict:** Large constrictors have very little chance of entangling active man-sized prey in the real world—they must attack while their victim is sleeping, stunned, paralyzed, and so on. Constrictors in this setting are far deadlier. These creatures bite when they succeed at a Fighting roll, and entangle when they succeed with a raise. The round they entangle and each round thereafter, they cause damage to their prey equal to Str+d8. The prey may attempt to escape on his action as per resisting a grapple.

PHARAOH COBRA

Pharaoh cobras are very large cobra snakes found in the deep desert. They have rudimentary intelligence. They are usually found near ancient Hekatic sites, often caves or old tombs. It is rumored among the Bedu that Hekatic sorcerers created these creatures thousands of years ago to guard their secrets. Pharaoh cobras are as much as 20' long and six inches in diameter. The inside of their hoods are striped gold and blue, like the head-dresses of Hekata's ancient pharaohs,

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d12, Shooting d8

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite:** Str+d4.
- * **Hypnotic Sway:** A pharaoh cobra can rhythmically move its head and upper body back and forth, causing anyone looking at it to make a Spirit roll. Those who fail become hypnotized. Victims are effectively paralyzed, and can take no action. Each round, on their turn, the victim may make another Spirit roll. This continues until he snaps free of the charm or one party is slain.
- * **Poison (0):** A character Shaken or wounded by a pharaoh cobra must make a Vigor roll. With success, the bite area swells and becomes numb. The victim becomes Exhausted until healed. With a failure, the

victim suffers 2d6 damage per round, ignoring all armor, for the next five rounds.

- * **Quick:** Snakes are notoriously fast. They may discard action cards of 5 or lower and draw another. They must keep the replacement card, however.

SPITTING COBRA

Spitting cobras are venomous snakes that usually attack by spitting a toxin in the eyes of their prey, then striking with their fangs while the prey is blinded.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d12, Shooting d8

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 2

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite:** Str.
- * **Poison:** Snakes this size do little serious damage with their bite, but may inject deadly venom. A character Shaken or wounded by a cobra must make a Vigor roll or suffer the effects of venomous type poison.
- * **Quick:** Snakes are notoriously fast. They may discard action cards of 5 or lower and draw another. They must keep the replacement card, however.
- * **Size -2:** Cobras are four to six feet in length, but only a few inches thick.
- * **Small:** Anyone attacking a snake must subtract 2 from his attack rolls.
- * **Spit:** Spitting cobras can spray blinding venom to a Range of 1/2/4. A raise on the attack means the victim has been struck in the face. He must make a Vigor roll at -2 or suffer blindness for 2d6 hours. While blinded, he suffers a -6 penalty to all physical trait rolls.



Sphinx

A sphinx has the body of a lion, the head of a human, and feathered wings. They are extremely clever, enjoy riddles, and savor the taste of human flesh. Most sphinxes are found with the Kingdoms of the Sphinx, where they rule over non-sphinx subjects. All sphinxes are blessed with priestly powers.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d12+1, Spirit d10, Strength d12, Vigor d10

Skills: Faith d10, Fighting d8, Intimidation d10, Knowledge (Riddles) d10, Notice d6, Persuasion d10, Stealth d8, Taunt d12

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 14 (3)

Hindrances: Sphinxes have at least one Hindrance from Arrogant, Bloodthirsty, Greedy, Overconfident, Stubborn, and Vengeful

Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Combat Reflexes, Concentration, Disciple Edge (appropriate to faith), Focus, Level Headed

Gear: Gilded corselet (+3)

Treasure: 1d4 Treasure Troves, in lair

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite/Claw:** Str+d6.
- * **Flight:** Pace 12.
- * **Hardy:** Does not suffer a wound from being Shaken twice.
- * **Large:** Attackers are +2 to attack rolls against a sphinx due to its size.
- * **Powers:** Sphinxes know 2d6 spells from the appropriate deity's spell list.
- * **Size +4:** Sphinxes are the same size as elephants.
- * **Strong Willed:** As masters of trickery, sphinxes get a +2 bonus on Tests of Will.
- * **Wise:** Sphinxes are renowned for their wisdom. They get +2 to all Common Knowledge rolls and roll a d8 for all Knowledge skills except Riddles.



SWARM

Swarms comprise hundreds or thousands of individual creatures. Together, these beasts are easy to squash, but together they present a formidable threat. Swarms fill a Burst Template, as noted in their individual descriptions.

CARRION FLY

Carrion flies resemble blood red house flies. Despite their name, they attack any warm-blooded creatures they sense, swarming around the target, biting, and then injecting powerful digestive enzymes which dissolve the flesh of the still-living target. They can reduce an adult human to a skeleton in less than a minute.

Carrion fly swarms cover an area equal to a Small Burst Template and attack everyone within each round.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d10

Skills: Notice d6

Pace: —; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite:** Swarms inflict hundreds of tiny bites every round to their victims, hitting automatically and causing 2d6 damage to everyone in the template.
- * **Flight:** Pace 6.
- * **Small Swarm:** Toughness -2; Parry +2; Because the swarm is composed of hundreds or thousands of creatures, cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area effect weapons work normally.

FLESH EATING BEETLE

Flesh eating beetles are usually found in ancient temples or tombs, where they scavenge on rats, centipedes, and other vermin. The swarm fills a Medium Burst Template.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d12, Strength d8, Vigor d10

Skills: Notice d6

Pace: 10; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 8 (1)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +1:** Carapace.
- * **Bite:** Beetle swarms inflict hundreds of tiny bites every round to their victims, hitting automatically and causing 2d4 damage to everyone in the template.
- * **Split:** Beetle swarms are clever enough to split into two smaller swarms (Small Burst Templates) should their foes split up. The Toughness of these smaller swarms is lowered by -2 (to 6 each).
- * **Swarm:** Parry +2; Because the swarm is composed of scores, hundreds, or thousands of creatures, cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area effect weapons work normally, and a character can stomp to inflict his damage in Strength each round.

USHABTI

Ushabti are small carvings of servants and soldiers, placed in ancient tombs to work for the deceased in the afterlife in lieu of actual followers. Most are only a few inches tall, but are very lifelike.

In truth, they were placed in the tomb to protect the corpse and its burial goods. Ushabti figures may be small, but they exist in large number. When they sense intruders (which include anything moving) they animate, swarming to defeat the intruder while brandishing tiny axes, spears, and swords.

Legends abound that ushabti mages can awaken the ushabti figures, causing them to transform into life-size replicas under the command of the mage. Sadly, while ushabti mages could once do this, the bodyguard spell is the only remnant of this lost part of the art.

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

Skills: Notice d6

Pace: —; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 8 (1)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +1:** Ushabti figures are usually carved from wood.
- * **Construct:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison. No wound penalties.
- * **Split:** When an ushabti swarm is wounded, it splits into two smaller swarms. These are Small Burst Templates with a Toughness of 6 (1).
- * **Stab:** Swarms inflict hundreds of tiny stab wounds every round to their victims, hitting automatically and causing 2d6 damage to everyone in the template.
- * **Swarm:** Parry +2; Because the swarm is composed of hundreds or thousands of creatures, cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area effect weapons work normally.

UNFORTUNATE SOUL

The Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls is a vigilante

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

U-W

group dedicated to protecting poor citizens against corrupt nobles and other lowlife who prey on them. These stats represent a skilled member, beloved by the peasants and hated by the nobility.

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Healing d6, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Local) d8, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Stealth d8, Streetwise d8, Taunt d6

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 6

Hindrances: Heroic, Orders, Wanted

Edges: Block, Connection (Brotherhood), Improved First Strike, Sweep, Unfortunate Soul

Gear: Staff (Str+d4, +1 Parry, Reach 1, 2 hands)

Treasure: Meager

Ushabti Mage

Ushabti mages are gifted with the ability to animate inanimate objects. They learn the secret names of every type of object and the charms necessary to impart a tiny fraction of their own essence into these forms.

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

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d4, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Stealth d6, Ushabti d10

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Various



Edges: Arcane Background (Ushabti), Improved Concentration

Powers: *Bolt* (hurls objects), *bladebreaker* (causes weapon to bend and twist), *telekinesis* (physical objects)

Gear: Short spear (Str+d6), dagger (Str+d4)

Treasure: Meager

Withered Pharaoh

The corruption of the Hekatic Empire came about because the pharaohs wanted immortality. They got their wish, though not as they envisioned.

The Hekatic Empire may have ceased to exist as a political entity many, many centuries ago, but the Withered Dynasty which has risen in its place is vibrant and strong. Where once sat living men now sit the bandaged husks of the Withered Pharaohs, their mummified flesh creaking as they gaze over the endless sands, plotting the rise of their future empire—an empire of the dead. But until the stars are right, the greatest of the preserved pharaohs sleep the sleep of the damned, leaving their lesser kin to rule in their stead.

These stats are for one of the lesser pharaohs, those that are currently awake. The name is misleading, however, for any of these creatures, while shadows of their masters' power, is more than a match for even a high Rank group of heroes.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d10, Spirit d12, Strength d12+4, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d12, Khem-Hekau d8, Knowledge (Battle) d10, Knowledge (Occult) d6, Notice d8

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 16 (6)

Hindrances: Arrogant, Vengeful (major)

Edges: Block, Dodge, Frenzy, Level Headed, Sweep.

Gear: Enchanted ancient bronze armor (+6), scimitar (Str+d8)

Treasure: Rich on person, 1d4 Treasure Troves (or more) in tomb

Special Abilities:

- * **Amulets of Power:** When they were mummified, magical amulets were placed under their linen wrappings. These provide the pharaoh with great power. For each wound the pharaoh takes, one amulet is destroyed (starting from the top and working down). There is no way to remove the amulets from the mummy and have them retain their power (they only work for undead).

- * **Scarab (Immunity (Fire)):** The withered pharaoh ignores all heat and fire damage so long as he still has this amulet.

- * **Cobra (Improved Arcane Resistance):** +4 Armor versus magic, and +4 to rolls made to resist magic effects. This does not inhibit spells they cast on themselves.

- * **Hippo: (Combat Reflexes):** +2 to recover from being Shaken (stacks with Undead ability).

- * **Canopic Jars:** A pharaoh's life force is spread among

four canopic jars. So long as these are intact, the pharaoh can be Shaken, but never wounded (by any means). Each canopic jar has Toughness 12. When it is destroyed, the pharaoh suffers an automatic wound, which he cannot Soak. See sidebar on p. 187.

- * **Fear (-2):** Anyone seeing a withered pharaoh must make a Spirit roll at -2.
- * **Fearless:** Pharaohs are immune to Fear and Intimidation.
- * **Mummy Rot:** Anyone touched by a mummy, whether he takes damage or not, must make a Vigor roll. Failure means the character has contracted “mummy rot.” While infected, wounds can only be removed through natural Healing. A *healing* spell applied within 10 minutes cures the rot. Victims may make a Vigor roll every week to rid themselves of the rot. Victims who die while infected may be brought back as mummies through the *greater zombie* power.
- * **Powers:** Withered pharaohs are not as skilled in necromancy as their liche-wizards, but they know the following spells: *barrier* (wall of skulls), *bolt* (screaming skulls), *deflection* (bandages flap about), *fear* (unearthly cry), and *obscure* (area of darkness).
- * **Ruler:** Withered pharaohs are the lords and masters of the undead inhabitants of Hekata. They have the Command, Command Presence, Cry Havoc, Fervor, and Hold the Line Edges with regard to undead only.
- * **Shuffling Gait:** Pharaohs roll a d4 running die.
- * **Slam:** Str.
- * **Susceptible (Fire):** The chemicals used in the preservation process mean mummies take +4 damage from fire. Note this does not apply until the pharaoh has taken his first wound.
- * **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.

Wizir

Wizirs are a form of mage who draw power from the bond they share with a rich or noble patron. Wizirs come in two distinct types.

COUNSELOR

Counselors are trusted advisors to their patrons. They have their lord's ear, know most of what is occurring at his court, and can often speak freely in his presence.

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

Skills: Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Arcana) d10, Knowledge (any one) d8, Knowledge (any two) d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d10, Streetwise d8, Wizir Magic d10

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Loyal (various others)

Edges: Arcane Background (Wizir), Charismatic, Connection, Scholar

Powers: *Boost trait* (increased confidence), *charismatic*

CANOPIC JARS

Canopic jars are small ceramic pots, about six inches long, with removable heads representing four of the gods. Ashtart is represented by a bee, Karmelos by a jackal, Marqod by a dove, and Shamash by a hawk.

During the mummification ritual used to create withered pharaohs, the deceased's organs were removed, preserved, and placed in the jars. Into Ashtart's pot were placed the lungs, Karmelos watches over the brain, Marqod the liver and kidneys, and Shamash the heart.

So long as the pots are intact, the pharaoh is effectively immortal. However, his spirit is bound to the pots and their destruction brings about the pharaohs.

In order to function, a pharaoh must remain within 250" (500 yards) of *all* his canopic jars. For each one removed from this range, the pharaoh suffers one level of Fatigue, falling into a helpless but conscious state at Incapacitated and a death-like hibernation at Death. Removing the Fatigue requires the pots to be brought within 250", in which event one level per pot is recovered instantly.

On campaign, the canopic jars are usually given to four very trusted royal guards to protect. Within his tomb, the pharaoh typically hides them in secret chambers guarded by deadly traps.

aura (increased confidence), *fear* (shouts loudly), *silence* (claps his hands), *speak language* (stares at target)

Gear: Dagger (Str+d4)

Treasure: Worthwhile (lesser noble), Rich (emir or higher).

GUARDIAN

Guardians serve their masters as trusted bodyguards. They are expected to cast their spells to protect their patron before they think of protecting themselves.

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

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Riding d6, Stealth d6, Wizir Magic d10

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 8 (2)

Hindrances: Various

Edges: Alertness, Arcane Background (Wizir), Block, Concentration, Level Headed

Powers: *Analyze foe* (keen eye), *deflection* (swirling robes around target), *healing* (glowing hands), *precognition* (keen senses), *slumber* (waves hand).

Gear: Chain shirt (+2), scimitar (Str+d8), dagger (Str+d4)

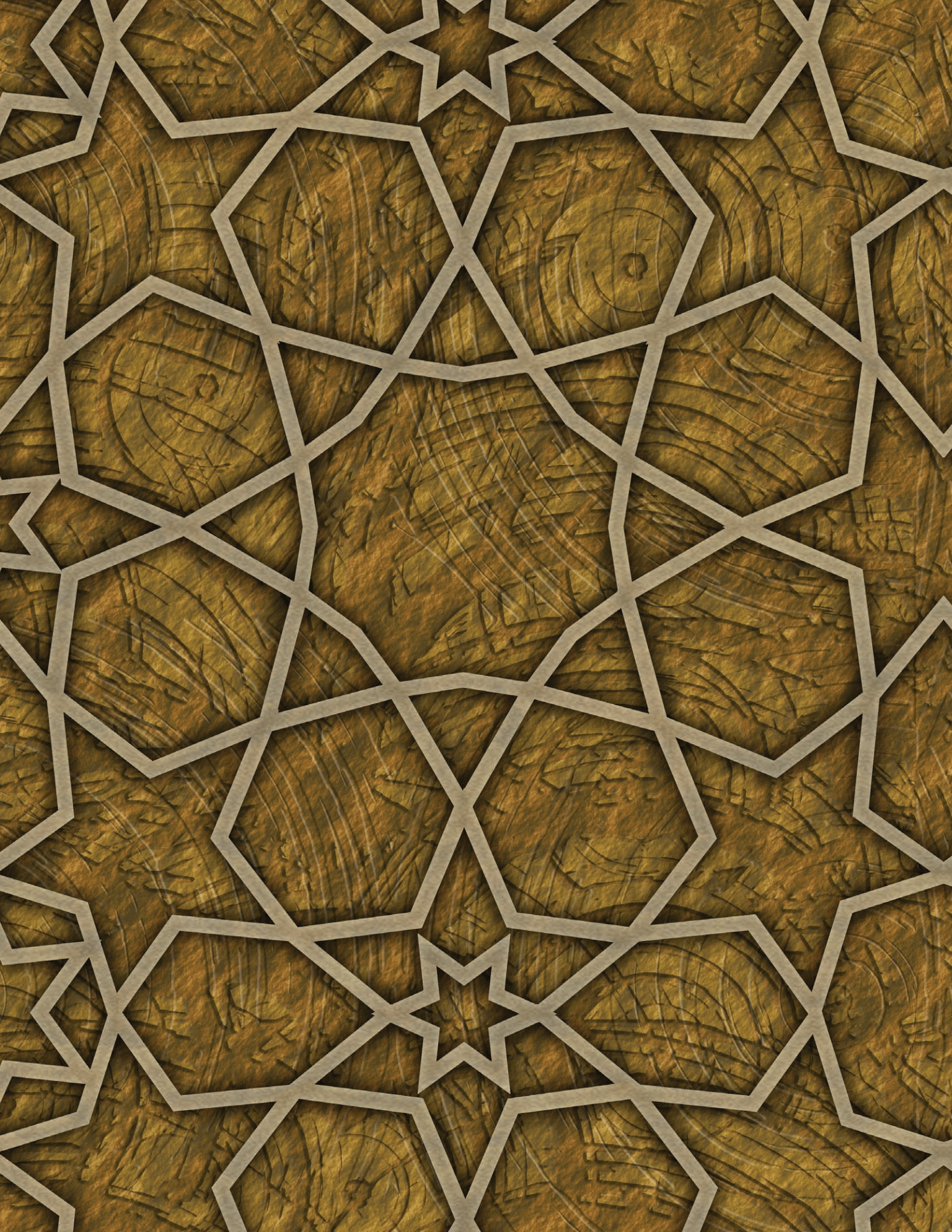
Treasure: Worthwhile (lesser noble), Rich (emir or higher).

INDEX

Afterlife.....	38, 46	Currency.....	27	Viper.....	166
Akhmim, City of the Devoted.....	77	Cyclops.....	158	Wasp.....	166
Al-Korsar, City of Corsairs.....	150	Demon.....		Godhome Mountains.....	128
Al-Wazir, City of Spires.....	78	Pazuzu.....	159	Gods, The.....	
Arcane Backgrounds.....		Sand.....	159	Apsu.....	46
Dervish Magic.....	40	Dervish.....		Ashtart.....	47
Jinn Magic.....	40	Typical Dervish.....	159	Duamutef.....	48
Khem-Hekau.....	41	Typical Warrior Dervish.....	160	Geb-Agni.....	48
Sand Magic.....	41	Desert of Ash.....	116	Iblis.....	49
Ushabti Magic.....	42	Desert Wall Mountains.....	112	Karmelos.....	49
Wizir Magic.....	42	Devoted.....	8	Marqod.....	50
Archetypes.....		Diet.....	58	Qedeshet.....	51
Assassin, Beggar, Citizen, Dervish,		Disciple Edges.....		Shamash.....	52
Entertainer, Explorer, Fighter, Headsman,		Disciple of Apsu.....	20	Tamarni.....	52
Houri, Jinn Mage, Khem-Hekau Mage,		Disciple of Ashtart.....	20	Tammuz.....	53
Noble, Nomad, Paladin, Pegasus Guard,		Disciple of Duamutef.....	20	Upaut.....	54
Priest, Sage, Sailor, Sand Mage, Scout.....	7	Disciple of Geb-Agni.....	20	Golems.....	166
Scribe, Slave, Street Urchin, Thief, Tomb		Disciple of Iblis.....	20	Guardian Serpent.....	167
Raider, Ushabti Mage, Wizir.....	8	Disciple of Karmelos.....	20	Hadaree.....	12
Armor.....		Disciple of Marqod.....	20	Hajjad, City of the Gods.....	88
Silk.....	28	Disciple of Qedeshet.....	20	Hamra, City of the Stone.....	89
Ash Road.....	140	Disciple of Shamash.....	21	Harems.....	60
Babi.....		Disciple of Tamarni.....	21	Hazards.....	168
Priest.....	155	Disciple of Tammuz.....	21	Headless Hunter.....	169
Soldier.....	155	Disciple of Upaut.....	21	Headsmen.....	169
Background Edges.....		Djanet.....	76	Heat Wind (Shahali).....	169
Ancestral Guardian.....	16	Dragon, Sand.....	160	Hekaterna, City of Bones.....	119
Arcane Background.....	17	Dry Water Oasis.....	124	Hellfrost Effect.....	39
Bondsman.....	17	Dusty Mountains.....	99	Hillah.....	148
Desert Born.....	17	East Trade Road.....	122	Hills of the Damned.....	119
Mermaid Blood.....	17	Edges.....	16	Hindrances.....	
Noble.....	17	Education.....	59	Animal Curse.....	15
Respected Tribe.....	17	Elemental Loci.....	116	City Dweller.....	15
World-Wise.....	18	Elemental Realms.....	39	Hated Tribe.....	16
Balyana, City of Reflection.....	79	Elephant.....	160	Heat Prone.....	16
Basalt Fortress.....	117	Emir's Camel, The.....	105	Inept.....	16
Bedu.....		Entertainer.....	162	Sea Fear.....	16
Sheikh.....	155	Faithful.....	8	Short-Lived Magic.....	16
Typical Bedu.....	156	Faraf, City of Voices.....	130	Hippo.....	171
Black Palm Oasis.....	124	Fashir, City of Water.....	87	Hippogriff.....	172
Blacksand Oasis.....	140	Festivals.....	60	Horns, The.....	150
Blemmye.....	156	Firebarrier Mountains.....	119	Hrimwisards.....	39
Blue Water Oasis.....	108	Fire Sprite.....	162	Hufrah, City of Idols.....	90
Bone Field.....	122	Flayed.....	162	Hulwan, City of Gardens.....	91
Brain Beetle.....	157	Flay Wind (Ghibli).....	169	Humans.....	11
Bronze Horseman, The.....	110	Forest of Pillars.....	142	Husk.....	172
Cakali.....	10	Forever Tomb, The.....	139	Hyaenidae.....	13
Caklos, City of Ash.....	140	Four Jinn, The.....	76	Hydra.....	172
Calendar.....	55	Free Trade Road.....	109	Hyena.....	173
Camel.....	157	Funerary Customs.....	61	Isle of Golden Flowers.....	149
Cannibal Isle.....	148	General Gear.....		Isle of the Rukh.....	149
Canopic Jars.....	187	Burnoose.....	29	Jafar, City of Snakes.....	147
Caravanserai.....	31	Caravanserai Lodgings.....	29	Jawf, City of War.....	131
Carrion Vulture.....	158	Corrective Lenses.....	29	Jinn's Campfire, The.....	123
Cinder Mote Swarm.....	158	Game Set.....	29	Jinn Blooded.....	13
City of Iron.....	95	Goggles.....	29	Jinni, Lesser.....	173
Clearwater Oasis.....	114	Hashish.....	29	Jinn Road.....	122
Combat Edges.....		Icewood.....	29	Jinn Wall Mountains.....	123
Bodyguard.....	18	Jinn Relic.....	29	Jirja, City of Colors.....	80
Charge.....	18	Musical Instrument.....	29	Jizah, City of the Sphinx.....	132
Fast and Silent.....	18	Parasol.....	29	Justice.....	61
Fast Mount.....	18	Pavilion.....	29	Kharijah, City of Claws.....	134
Fighting Withdrawal.....	18	Pegasus.....	29	Khem-Hekau Mage.....	173
Improved Sand Walker.....	19	Rope.....	29	King Jubba.....	126
Lurker.....	18	Saddle, Pegasus.....	29	The Al-Wazir Sultanate.....	75
Mounted Combatant.....	18	Sand Hood.....	30	Languages.....	
One Step One Kill.....	18	Tabac.....	30	Al-Waziran.....	9
Pathfinder.....	18	Tome of Learning.....	30	Anari.....	9
Quick Reactions.....	19	Trained Animal.....	30	Beastspeech.....	9
Running Throw.....	19	Water Trap.....	30	Beduan.....	9
Sand Walker.....	19	Ghul.....	163	Black Tongue.....	9
Spear Catch.....	19	Giant, Sand.....	163	Cakalic.....	9
Spear Twist.....	19	Giant Animal.....		Classical Anari.....	9
Steady Feet.....	19	Crab.....	164	Draketongue.....	9
Wall Runner.....	20	Crocodile.....	164	Earthtongue.....	9
Constellations.....	57	Hippo.....	165	Giant.....	9
Crack, The.....	143	Hyena.....	165	Hekatic.....	9
Crocodile.....	158	Scorpion.....	165	Holy Tongue.....	9

Hellfrost: Land of Fire

Hyaendish.....	9	Pillars of Suleiman.....	112	Boiling Oil/Hot Sand.....	28
Jinn.....	9	Pit of Fire, The.....	116	Flamethrower.....	28
Lesarde.....	9	Plateau of the Damned.....	113	Sunglobe.....	28
Magorian.....	9	Power Edges.....		Silk Road, The.....	96
Orcish.....	9	Alchemy.....	22	Siren Bush.....	183
Roguetongue.....	9	Delay Spell.....	22	Sirhan, City of Stars.....	105
Sandspeech.....	9	Enhanced Maintenance.....	22	Six Sisters, The.....	109
Saxa.....	9	Firestorm.....	22	Slavery.....	61
Scorpari.....	9	Golem Creator.....	22	Snake.....	184
Sphinx.....	9	Instinctive Dispel.....	23	Snake Road.....	147
Sslaniss.....	9	Potent Magic.....	23	Social Edges.....	
Trader.....	9	Spell Finesse.....	23	Houri.....	26
Last Water Oasis.....	124	Spirit Binding.....	23	Southern Trade Road.....	113
Lava Ooze.....	173	Priests & Paladins.....	181	Spells.....	
Leadership Edges.....		Professional Edges.....		Animated Object.....	44
Drop!.....	21	Brotherhood of Assassins.....	24	Animate Object.....	43
Forced March.....	21	Desert Son.....	24	Hamper Movement.....	44
Help Me!.....	21	Expert Healer.....	24	Spells, Altered.....	
Take Aim.....	22	Headman.....	24	Greater Zombie.....	44
Leadership Edges.....		Mameluk Mercenary.....	25	Refuge.....	44
Born in Battle.....	21	Master Mariner.....	25	Storm.....	44
Liche-Wizir.....	174	Pegasus Guard.....	26	Summon Demon.....	44
Lion.....	174	Sea Legs.....	26	Summon Elemental.....	44
Lizard Tail Mountains.....	112	Siege Engineer.....	26	Sphinx.....	184
Lost Tomb Oasis.....	110	Storyteller.....	26	Sphinxes.....	128
Lunar Phases.....	56	Unfortunate Soul.....	26	Sphinx Road (Eastern Arm).....	130
Magical Arts.....	38	Prophecy Hills.....	129	Sphinx Road (Southern Arm).....	109
Mameluk Mercenary.....	175	Qal'at, Isle of Bones.....	149	Spires, The.....	113
Maqneh, City of Peace.....	101	Qarah, City of Learning.....	83	Spring of Longevity.....	115
Marqod's Well.....	114	Qina, City of Smells.....	101	Statue Hills.....	142
Marresh, City of a Thousand Gates.....	92	Qurqas, City of Slaves.....	102	Sukhnah, City of Bridges.....	85
Marriage.....	59	Qurqas Bureaucracy, The.....	103	Suleiman.....	45
Mazar, City of Eyes.....	93	Rawdah, City of Heroes.....	103	Suleiman's Isle.....	139
Medinat al-Jinn, City of the Jinn.....	81	Rivers.....		Suleiman's Passage.....	77
Medusa.....	175	Al-Gib.....	99	Sun.....	57
Mirages.....	168	Al-Shadu.....	130	Swarm.....	185
Mirah, City of Traps.....	114	Al-Shum.....	100	Syraxix, Queen of the Medusae.....	141
Mizdah, City of Power.....	135	Alar.....	76	Tabal, Isle of Beasts.....	149
Monkey, Trained.....	175	Allit.....	76	Talawdi, City of Sails.....	137
Moon.....	57	Ankh.....	119	Tamarah, City of Heavenly Sin.....	94
Mountains of Death.....	96	Anshur.....	76	Temperature.....	67
Mountains of Fear.....	109	Arun.....	100	Timekeeping.....	56
Mountains of Malice.....	146	Benil.....	76	Tomb Hills.....	119
Mummy.....		Bos.....	76	Towns.....	74
Animal.....	177	Damasc.....	130	Travel & Trade.....	
Mummified Crocodile.....	175	Gebril.....	87	Caravanserai.....	62
Royal Guard.....	176	Harad.....	130	Coinage & Bartering.....	63
Sand.....	176	Mosak.....	100	Magic Shops.....	63
Scroll.....	177	Mushtaq.....	100	Oases and Wells.....	62
Swarm.....	177	Noari.....	87	Souks & Bazaars.....	63
Muqlad, City of Woes.....	135	Nyl.....	130	Trade Routes.....	62
Musayid, City of Winds.....	82	Sayhut.....	87	Unfortunate Soul.....	185
Nazir Range.....	99	Shalak.....	87	Ushabti Mage.....	186
Necromancy.....	41	Shim.....	77	Valley of the Ancients.....	109
Noble Titles.....	17	Syrah.....	87	Vehicles.....	
Nomad Hospitality.....	69	Tabaz.....	101	Chariot, Racing.....	30
Northern Trade Road.....	111	Tamil.....	130	Chariot, War.....	30
Oases.....	73	Uriel.....	77	Dhow.....	30
Oasis of Dates.....	125	Yemuni.....	130	Flying Carpet.....	30
Oasis of Dreams.....	111	Road of the Gods.....	123	Sand Rigger.....	30
Oasis of Fish.....	111	Rukh.....	182	Solar Barque.....	31
Oasis of the Jinn.....	125	Salih, City of Fire.....	104	Warship.....	31
Ophidus.....	178	Salt Mines.....	143	Villages.....	74
Orc, Desert.....	179	Salt Pass.....	143	War of Copper Jars.....	122
Organizations.....		Sand Goblins.....	15	Water Consumption.....	67
Assassins.....	64	Sand Mage.....	182	Weapons.....	
Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls.....	64	Sandwall Oasis.....	107	Chakram.....	28
Guild of Headsmen.....	64	Sand Worm.....	182	Snaketooth Dagger.....	28
Hands of Freedom.....	151	Sarkeb-gar-Nattra, City of Sarkeb.....	145	Well of Marids.....	115
Jinn Slayers.....	151	Scorpion.....	182	Wells.....	74
Mameluk.....	65	Scorpion Hills.....	146	White City, The.....	143
Pegasus Guard.....	65	Scorpionman.....	183	Wind Road.....	77
Sons of the Sand.....	154	Seasons.....		Winds of the Desert.....	169
The Penitents.....	152	Alak Arkhet (Flood).....	55	Withered Pharaoh.....	186
The Qabal.....	152	Alak Neteru (Gods)/Suha (Contemplation).....	56	Wizard's Tower, The.....	123
The Sisterhood of the Seven Veils.....	153	Alak Pareit (Harvest).....	56	Wizir.....	187
The White Lords.....	154	Alak Shemu (Dry).....	56	Yoke, The.....	123
Paw, The.....	150	Sha'ib, City of Mazes.....	83		
Pegasus Guard.....	180	Shifting Sands.....	168		
Phoenix.....	180	Siege Weapons.....	28		





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