

ANTHROPOMORPHIC FANTASY ROLE-PLAY



IRONCLAW

**The Book of
Horn & Ivory**



INTRODUCTION

What's in this book?

Welcome to Akoma. You came at an interesting time.

Across the Shallow Sea dotted with the Angels' Teeth Islands, lies the kite-shaped continent of Akoma. At the point of the arrow which its jeweled coastline forms is Lygos, seat of the Anatolian Empire, the most powerful state in the world; and in Lygos is the palace of the Caliph, emperor of Anatolia and leader of the fast-spreading religion of Malachism. The world's most disciplined army and most feared navy move at the behest of the Caliph. Already Anatolia has conquered the ancient Deltan Kingdom and secured the vassalage of the nation of Ōyó, the pirate states of the Corsair Coast. Calabria and Zhōngguo, accessible via a short trip over the Shallow Sea via the Angels' Teeth Islands, are next.

Your characters will be at the center of a conflict which will decide the fate of Zhōngguo, Calabria, and the known world, a conflict fought by pioneering doctors, fearsome janissaries, daring pirates, skulking necromancers, and vigilant witch hunters, a conflict in which the stakes are nothing less than world domination.

By the Light of Ascension, which illuminates the page beneath my words and the mind whence they spring.

My name is 吳鈴旼 Wú Língmín. I am a scorpion of seventeen years and I was hatched in Maging, in the state of Zhou in Zhongguo. Last year, after a failed attempt on the Emperor's life, there was a riot in Maging in which many scorpions, spiders, toads, centipedes, and vipers were forced from their homes, injured, or slain on suspicion of commerce with unholy powers. My family, who are no friends of the unholy, took refuge in a mosque built by followers of the religion called Malachism, which comes from Akoma. Despite all the death and destruction which Maging suffered during the riots, the Malachite mosque's guards stood vigil all night, and the building and those within went unharmed.

In the morning, my mother and father snuck away to live with relatives in the country; but I stayed to speak with the imam of this mosque. He did not try to convert me or anyone else who sought asylum in his mosque, but he was happy to answer my questions and teach me more about Malachism. I stayed to work at the temple, and soon converted to this religion.

There was little left for me in Maging. My schooling was finished, my family no longer lived there, and my neighbors no longer welcomed me, I understood; so I sought passage on a ship bound for Akoma, thinking to travel to the homeland of my faith and to seek to understand the people and culture and territory which brought Malachism to the world.

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The Compact of Libertalia

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Dedication

To Ginny Wray, for always believing.

CHARACTERS

If you're reading these words, you've probably chosen to bring Akoma and its inhabitants into your Ironclaw games. Excellent! You have a couple of options here. The simplest way to adventure in Akoma is to start a new campaign, with new characters from Anatolia, Òyó, the Lower Sultanate, or the Angels' Teeth Islands; but you may also have existing Calabrese or Zhōnggese characters whom you want to explore this new setting. That's cool too!

There were foreigners in Majing, but not many; and I spoke no language but Zhonggese, so I could not determine whether a foreigner whom I met came from Calabria, Govorya, or Zhongguō. At one point I attempted to learn Calabrese, but I found it extremely difficult. The language of Akoma, which is called Deltan, was far easier for me to learn, because the writing system resembles Zhonggese slightly more than Calabrese does. There are two Deltan writing systems, called high print and low script; I endeavored to learn both, but I have written this account using high print because I find high print more aesthetically pleasing. The Angelic Codex, most sacred book of Malachism, was written in high print.

Expatriate Characters

Intercontinental migration defines Akoman history. The first settlers of what became the Anatolian Empire were refugee “xī yě rén” (“Western barbarians”) from the region west of Chì in Zhōngguo; and as the world's most active trade hub even during times of war, the city of Lygos has always taken in immigrants from all continents, and shipped emigrants back out to all continents. So, it's perfectly reasonable to play an Akoman character in a game set in Zhōngguo or Calabria, especially in a bustling port town. This kind of origin can be a fun seed for character motivations and backstory. Did your character choose to come to Zhōngguo to study philosophy or military science? To join up with family? To discover new markets for trade? Or are they fleeing a tragic past or a lost love? Don't worry, we won't make fun of your character for a cliché backstory. But the other players might.



Story Hooks for Existing Campaigns

- **Love:** Intercontinental families are a thing—in fact, a rather common thing. It's quite possible that your character's spouse comes from another continent or another religion, and many international moves in real life are the result of one person following a spouse who got a job in some other country. The threat of international war just makes this option more attractive—a forbidden romance between an Anatolian sailor and a Calabrese merchant prince? Awesome!

- **Trade:** Lygos is not the largest city in the world—Majing is larger both population-wise and in land covered by the greater metropolitan area—but it rivals Rūnán and Triskellian for trade activity. Merchants from every continent come to Lygos to do business. Perhaps you want to acquire rare substances such as coffee, or animals like the legendary Akhal-Teke.
- **War:** It's no secret that the Caliph of Anatolia aims to bring all the nations of the world under the standard of the Moonlight Brush, whether those nations like it or not. Each country which Anatolia targets must decide whether to offer the Caliph subservience, defiance, or something more complex. A Zhōnggese or Calabrese diplomatic delegation might head to Anatolia to propose an alliance, negotiate terms of surrender, or (good luck with this one) deter the invaders with threats.
- **Science:** Anatolian natural philosophy and medicine are renowned to be the best in all the world. The Malachite religion's ban on magic and emphasis on understanding the Light of Ascension through its expression in natural law has led to Akoman universities attracting the best scientific minds across all the continents. Perhaps your character has come to Akoma to further their scientific knowledge—or to get a job working for the Caliphate. There's a lot of money to be made building death machines for the Anatolian Army

Names

In a similar custom to other lands, most peasants won't have a last name unless they have some title or nobility. Often, people will be named after their profession ("Mustafa the Mason") or their appearance ("Mustafa the Spotted") their age ("Mustafa the younger") or their personality ("Mustafa the Kind"). And in the Emriates, they might be known by their tribe ("Mustafa of Khorsheed")

- **Female:** Adibe, Almase, Amineh, Arouss, Asile, Barake, Bassira, Bayda, Bizra, Boushra, Dabab, Dahiat, Daliat, Damasat, Dameer, Dirayat, Elfat, Elham, Farah, Farasha, Faridat, Farwat, Faware, Fayrouz, Fidilat, Fulful, Jadwa, Jamila, Jassarat, Jawdat, Jawharat, Latifa, Leila, Majida, Nada, Nashidat, Nashita, Rababa, Rashika, Shabha,

Shamat, Souda, Soumra, Talawat, Tamra, Tehfat, Wardi, Yasmin, Zahrat, Zumurroda

- **Male:** Amir, Ashqar, Aswad, Aziz, Azraff, Bashir, Bazar, Bikr, Boulad, Boulboul, Bourkan, Dalil, Eman, Fadl, Falaki, Fanous, Faraj, Farhan, Fateh, Ferhan, Jabal, Jabbar, Jalal, Jalil, Jamil, Jassur, Jidar, Labib, Lahib, Lama'an, Laziz, Maher, Majid, Marah, Nadim, Nasr, Nazim, Ra'ad, Rabbani, Raja, Rakkas, Sadek, Sayad, Shaheen, Taher, Tawil, Wahed, Yakout, Zaim, Zula

Species

Most species present in Calabria and Zhōngguo are also common in Akoma. The armadillo, bear, coyote, dhole, dragon, gray fox, giant panda, red panda, qílín, raccoon, skunk, yak, and zhūquè are not native to Akoma; but even these are no outlandish sight in busy ports like Lygos, where Calabrese and Zhōnggese immigrants have settled for generations. New species common in Akoma are in the following section.

I traveled From Mǎjīng to Runán by caravan with a Malachite trader From Akoma. Upon hearing my past and my purpose, he offered me free passage, and spent much time correcting my halting Deltan. He was a cobra. In Zhōngguo, there are many snakes and vipers, but cobras are relatively few; most think they are a type of viper. I asked him what precautions I ought to take against the oppression of vermin in Akoma. He laughed and shook his head, explaining that no such prejudice exists. I did not realize the concept of the "Poisonous Vermin" was unknown outside Zhongguo and the influence of Master Hǎn Fēi. I was excited, but also scared: I would shop in the same markets and drink in the same tea houses as vertebrates! I had never done such a thing before.

Antelope



Running free in the great plains of Akoma, the many antelopes value their freedom under the great sky above all else. They tend to avoid the cities, either living in small communities or as nomadic tribes. Many antelopes take a vain pride of the appearance of their eyes, considering it to be their best feature.

There are many species of antelopes, including the gazelle, the duiker, the oryx, the ditibag, the gerenuk, and the rhebox, just to name a few. You can use the rules here for any of them. (For some species, you should change Habitat to Forest, or change Cycle to Dusk.)

Habitat: Plains

Diet: Herbivore

Cycle: Day

Include Antelope Dice with:

- Dodge
- Endurance
- Tactics

Senses: Spot

Weapons: Hooves, Horns

Antelope's Species Gifts:

- Coward
- Fast Mover
- Increased Speed

Cobra



While cobras are common throughout Akoma, as well as foreign lands such as Yindü, popular imagination identifies them especially with the Lower Kingdom which preceded the Anatolian Lower Sultanate. Its last dynasty of increasingly flamboyant (and, some would say, incompetent) pharaohs were all cobras. The cobras' transition from living gods to regular folks has prompted not a few cobra jokes (especially cobra jokes told by snakes and vipers) about individuals who slithered into a group of strangers and expected everyone to bow down and defer.

In addition to the cobra detailed here, the **Forest** cobra has a Forest habitat and replaces Swimming with Climbing.

Habitat: Shore

Diet: Carnivore

Cycle: Night

Include Cobra Dice with:

- Dodge
- Presence
- Swimming

Senses: Listen, Smell

Weapons: Teeth

Cobra's Species Gifts:

- Contortionist
- Ophidian
- Venom

Crocodile



"What do you mean, 'what are crocodiles like'? I'll have you know that very question is essentializing and offensive. A civilized individual would judge others on the content of their character, not the thickness of their scales or the force of their bite. If anything, crocodiles are like the river itself: fluid, adaptable, changing. We bask in the sun and splash in the water. We'll fight bad guys to the death, or we'll watch a play and chill. Whichever. Have you not heard of Sobek, our god? Sobek governs rulership, fertility, and military might. What other god is so diverse in his purviews? Indeed, he is even god of the sun!"

Habitat: Shore

Diet: Carnivore

Cycle: Night

Include Crocodile Dice with:

- Deceit
- Stealth
- Swimming

Senses: Listen, Smell

Weapons: Teeth, Tail

Crocodile's Species Gifts:

- Deep Diving
- Natural Armor
- Strength

Falcon



Falcons trace their ancestry to Horus, the Deltan god of the sun. Horus is the sexy hotshot god of the pantheon, usually the first one anyone thinks of when they think of Deltan religion. Wanderlust characterizes most falcons. Falcons on martial or religious pilgrimages wing their way across the world, meeting new people and learning new things, but rarely settling until it's time for marriage and eggs. The Falcons' capital is Honey Isle, a strategically significant island state amidst the Angels' Teeth Islands. Its mountain citadel, the New Hospital of Saint John, boasts the most impressive fortifications in the world.

Habitat: Mountains

Diet: Carnivore

Cycle: Day

Include Falcon Dice with:

- Observation
- Searching
- Weather Sense

Senses: Spot

Weapons: Beak, Claws

Falcon's Species Gifts:

- Flight
- Keen Eyes
- Prehensile Feet

Giraffe



To hear some tell the tale, the Giraffes once ruled the great plains of Akoma, in the days before the rise of Deltan hegemony. When they can, they avoid the city, mostly out of comfort, since few buildings are designed to accommodate their size. Some take great pride in the color and the variety of the patterns, which may not be obvious to casual onlookers.

(Technically, the knobs on the heads of Giraffes are ossified cartilage. In the interest of simplicity, we're going to call them "Horns".)

Habitat: Forest

Diet: Herbivore

Cycle: Day

Include Giraffe Dice with:

- Dodge
- Presence
- Tactics

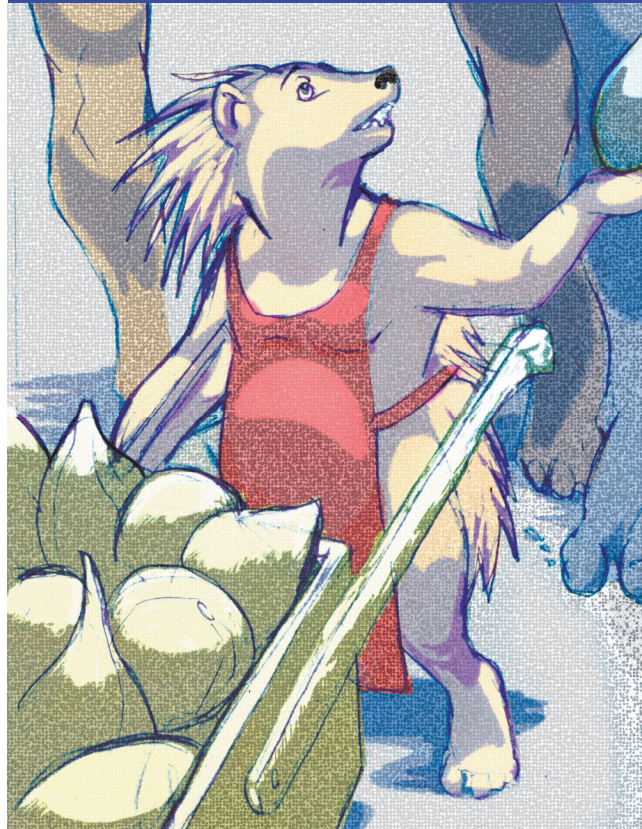
Senses: Spot

Weapons: Horns

Giraffe's Species Gifts:

- Counter-Tactics
- Fast Mover
- Increased Body

Hedgehog



Hedgehogs are a hale, hearty, and industrious breed, found all throughout Akoma. A hedgehog takes pride in patience, hard work, and determination. Any hedgehog will tell you that the best life is one that is enjoyed at a slow pace.

Superstitious and the ignorant believe that if a hedgehog tenses their muscles, they can shoot their spines at deadly velocity. Having heard this story many times, hedgehogs may be polite enough to correct people: "You're thinking of porcupines."

Hedgehogs are a significant population in the Deltan Valley, Namat, and the Kingdom of Oyo. They mix freely with other species and work a variety of different, peaceful jobs.

Habitat: Plains

Diet: Omnivore

Cycle: Night

Include Hedgehog Dice with:

- Digging
- Searching
- Stealth

Senses: Listen, Smell

Weapons: Spines

Hedgehog's Species Gifts:

- Contortionist
- Coward
- Spines

Hippopotamus



Hippopotamoi claim descentance from Taweret, the hippopotamus god of the Lower Sultanate who presides over childbirth and fertility. Her cult train as midwives and broodmothers, experienced in caring for the reproduction of not only hippopotamoi, but also other species; the Sethid pharaohs employed hippo midwives of Taweret to help care for their eggs. Hippos are slow to anger, but when they lose their tempers, they are fearsome in battle, and especially in defense of their families and those they have sworn to protect.

Habitat: Shore

Diet: Herbivore

Cycle: Twilight

Senses: Listen, Smell

Weapons: Teeth, Tusks

Include Hippopotamus Dice with: **Hippopotamus's Species Gifts:**

- Endurance
- Presence
- Swimming
- Deep Diving
- Natural Armor
- Strength

Ibis



Ibes descend from Thoth, the god of magic. Many ibes would rather you forget this fact, because the "magic ibis" has become such a common trope in fiction that everyone seems to expect your average ibis on the street to be a secret sorcerer or a mystical font of wisdom to solve all their problems. But as stereotypes go, that's benign, right? Wrong, because just the other week there was a race riot in the streets of Heliopolis in which flocks of ibes were beaten up or run out of town on suspicion of practicing sorcery—a riot which most locals blame on Sultana Yonca I. At any rate, ibes tend to live by the water, mostly practicing trades such as fisherman or sailor.

Habitat: Shore

Diet: Carnivore

Cycle: Day

Senses: Listen, Spot

Weapons: Beak, Claws

Include Ibis Dice with:

Ibis's Species Gifts:

- Supernatural
- Swimming
- Weather Sense
- Flight
- Prehensile Feet
- Team Player

Lemur



One can trace the origin of lemurs to the mountain region of Tendromaro. But today, many of them have traveled far and wide. (Some historians believe a war happened centuries ago that dispersed their tribes.) The history of the Lemurs has a great share of tragedy, where they have no firm status in any community. It's not surprising that some Lemurs had a spiritual calling, first as guardians of the dead, then later as skilled practitioners of magic.

Among the ignorant and the hateful, a rumor circulates that Lemurs have a prehensile tail with a third eye on the tip, concealed by a fur-covered lid; when alone, a Lemur would reveal this eye and suck out your soul. None of this is remotely true, it's only used as an excuse for terrible violence against innocent people.

Habitat: Forest

Diet: Herbivore

Cycle: Night

Senses: Smell, Spot

Weapons: Grab, Punch

Include Lemur Dice with:

- Brawling
- Climbing
- Tactics

Lemur's Species Gifts:

- Fast Climber
- Increased Mind
- Night Vision

Mongoose



Mongese are famous for the Ichneumon Tales, a series of adventure stories written in Triskellian about the Ichneumon, a mysterious masked mongoose from the Delta who has various adventures in Calabria, usually involving monster hunting. In the most famous of these tales, the tiny mongoose dives down the throat of a rampaging uadh-chrith to slay it from inside. It's a positive stereotype, but it's still a stereotype; and even the most bellicose mongoose will tell you that it gets old to have the drunkest bro in the bar get in your face and challenge you to a fight to show off that he's tough and brave.

Habitat: Plains

Diet: Omnivore

Cycle: Day

Senses: Smell

Weapons: Claws, Teeth

Include Mongoose Dice with:

- Digging
- Dodge
- Jumping

Mongoose's Species Gifts:

- Contortionist
- Fast Jumper
- Springing Strike

Ostrich



Ostriches are to the ground as falcons are to the air: meditative wanderers, always seeking new land and new people and new experiences. This is somewhat surprising because ostriches are also not the most fearless of people. So maybe that's a good encapsulation of the ostrich experience: visit new places, meet new people, get terrified and run away from them.

Habitat: Plains

Diet: Herbivore

Cycle: Day

Include Ostrich Dice with:

- Endurance
- Stealth
- Tactics

Senses: Listen, Spot

Weapons: Claws, Kick

Ostrich's Species Gifts:

- Coward
- Danger Sense
- Fast Mover

Owl



"Peace be upon you. You have come far with very little, to ask so much about things so grand. But there are no lines to enter the gates of patience. You are wise to come to my kin, for we are the nonpareil masters of the night. The wind parts before us without a sound, and the stars shine brighter for us, to guide our way. It is our duty to learn the will of the divine so that we may teach it to the mundane. The happiness we can bring to you will not come from the clamor of swords or the thunder of guns, but to a grip that is measured and sure. Only after you learn to cross the earth without a sound will you be able to hear the chorus of miracles. Now, let us sit and drink our tea."

Habitat: Forest

Diet: Carnivore

Cycle: Night

Include Owl Dice with:

- Searching
- Stealth
- Weather Sense

Senses: Listen, Spot

Weapons: Beak, Claws

Owl's Species Gifts:

- Flight
- Night Vision
- Prehensile Feet

Pangolin



In all of Akoma, no Species is quite like the fearsome Pangolin, with their golden hide of armored plates, their tail what is swift and strong, and the glands that spray most foul.

Habitat: Forest

Diet: Carnivore

Cycle: Night

Senses: Smell

Weapons: Claws, Tail

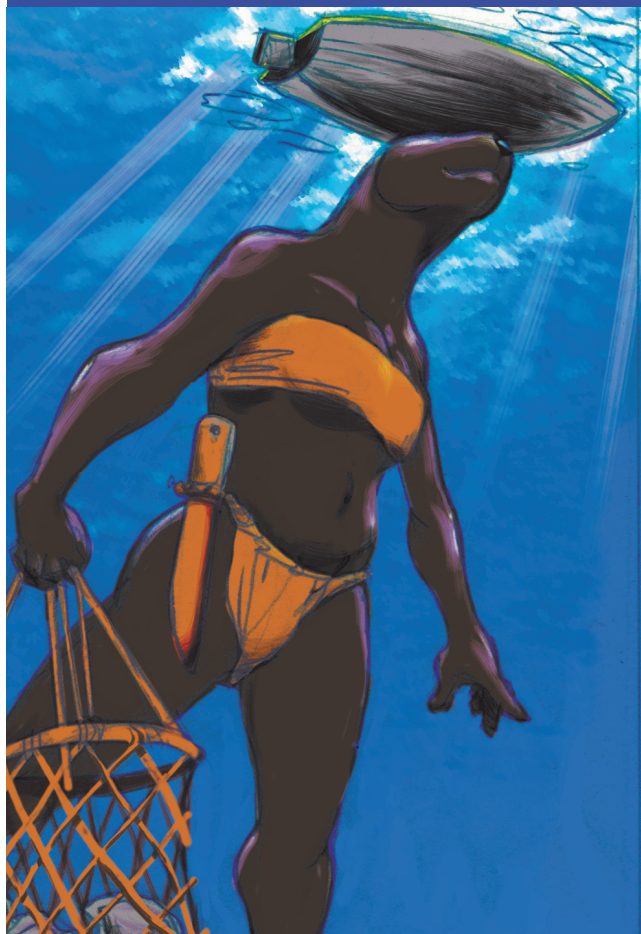
Include Pangolin Dice with:

- Climbing
- Digging
- Presence

Pangolin's Species Gifts:

- Natural Armor
- Prehensile Tail
- Spray

Seal



Seals are mammals, but they still spend most of their natural lives at sea. This liminal existence, always half in and half out, makes them the border guards and psychopomps of the division between sea and sky. Religions and philosophies have grown up around this idea, with shoreline monasteries full of habited seals contemplating their place in the world and their relationships to other species. Seals are frequently sailors, traders, or marines, but they also have a mystic bent.

Habitat: Shore

Diet: Carnivore

Cycle: Day

Senses: Listen, Spot

Weapons: Teeth

Include Seal Dice with:

- Endurance
- Searching
- Swimming

Seal's Species Gifts:

- Deep Diver
- Fast Swimmer
- Keen Eyes

Secretary Bird



From the far coasts to the darkest interior, the Secretary Birds can be found anywhere and everywhere. They take on all jobs, and they serve in every position, from the lowliest Farmer to the esteemed general. Many Birds travel abroad to Calabria or Zhonguo, to learn the languages and laws, and serve as advisors to travelers.

Habitat: Plains

Diet: Carnivore

Cycle: Day

Include Secretary Bird Dice with:

- Endurance
- Presence
- Weather Sense

Senses: Spot

Weapons: Beak, Claws

Secretary Bird's Species Gifts:

- Flight
- Increased Body
- Prehensile Feet

Shrike



As a rule, shrikes want to know if you were looking at them. Does it look like shrikes are talking to someone else? So yeah, were you looking at shrikes? Do you want a piece of shrikes? 'Cuz we could do that, buddy. We could do it right now, just you and shrikes. Right here. Or out back. Or right in the damn street out front. When you are ready to throw yours down, shrikes are ready to hand yours to you.

Habitat: Plains

Diet: Carnivore

Cycle: Day

Include Shrike Dice with:

- Searching
- Throwing
- Weather Sense

Senses: Spot

Weapons: Beak, Claws

Shrike's Species Gifts:

- Flight
- Performance: Singing
- Prehensile Feet

Vulture



"Don't touch that. You don't know where it's been. Me? Of course I know where it's been, I'm a vulture. It's my job. Yes, I'm going to eat it, that's also my job. Yes, I know you think it's barbaric, but that's just how it works over here. This tower here, it's for air burial. Families who follow the old ways of the West bring their honored dead and place them atop the tower, and we vultures come and consume them. It's a ritual. A sacred one, representing the dead returning to the cycle of life and death. And before you rush off screaming and call for the inquisitors, let me remind you that I probably know your religion better even than you do, young lady. ... I suppose that now that I've given my Flock time to cut off your escape, I can tell you I was referring to your real religion. So when you get to where we send

Habitat: Plains

Diet: Carnivore

Cycle: Day

Include Vulture Dice with:

- Endurance
- Searching
- Weather Sense

Senses: Smell, Spot

Weapons: Beak, Claws

Vulture's Species Gifts:

- Flight
- Prehensile Feet
- Survival

Water Buffalo



A significant population of the Deltan Valley are Water Buffalos. In any sizeable operation where there are fields to be tilled, walls to be built, or positions to be defended, there is almost always one Buffalo, and then several more. Most of them have a simple, practical outlook on life... and they have little time for any Foolishness.

Habitat: Shore

Diet: Herbivore

Cycle: Day

Include Water Buffalo Dice with:

- Endurance
- Swimming
- Tactics

Senses: Spot

Weapons: Horns, Hooves

Water Buffalo's Species Gifts:

- Increased Body
- Strength
- Team Player

Wildebeest



It's all too easy to dismiss the Wildebeests as just another inhabitant of Akoma. Their appearance is hardly as exotic as some of the other Folk to be found here. But just so many others, the Wildebeests are a hard-working, resilient people, making up a large share of the population in all regions.

Wildebeests abide by the customs of their place. In cities, they work as stevedores, and builders. In the open lands, they are farmers and miners. They can grow restless when cooped on on ships or in small places for too long. It's always better to be out in the open air.

Habitat: Plains

Diet: Herbivore

Cycle: Day

Senses: Listen, Spot

Weapons: Hooves, Horns

Include Wildebeest Dice with:

- Endurance
- Presence
- Tactics

Wildebeest's Species Gifts:

- Increased Body
- Strength
- Team Player

Zebra



When visitors return from a trip to Akoma, they are eager to speak of the exotic striped patterns of the Zebras that they had seen. A breed apart from Horses and other ungulates, Zebras are far more hot-tempered than their hooved cousins, so it's not wise to threaten or to insult one.

Another species is the *Quagga*, who have black and white stripes on their torso, but their lower half is a plain color, usually brown. Quagga are not actually Zebras, but they are often confused for their more prolific cousins.

Habitat: Plains

Diet: Herbivore

Cycle: Day

Senses: Listen, Spot

Weapons: Hooves

Include Zebra Dice with:

- Dodge
- Endurance
- Tactics

Zebra's Species Gifts:

- Counter-Tactics
- Fast Mover
- Increased Body

NEW CAREERS

If you swap out such localisms as “Literacy: Zhōngwén” and “Piety of Purity” for “Literacy: Deltan” and “Piety of Malachism” where appropriate, you can apply most careers from elsewhere in *Ironclaw* to Akoman characters. Careers from the Wizard category are the exception, because Malachism, Akoma's dominant heterodoxy of s'Allumer, strongly discourages magic of every kind. In Anatolian territory, where the state and Malachism are synonymous under the Caliph's rule, a city watchman who catches you practicing magic will nail you with a steep fine or a weekend in jail—and that's for a first offense. Non-Wizard careers which grant magical Gifts, like Debo Shi and Immortal Sage (*Jade* 452-453), are likewise uncommon. To be clear, playing a wizard in Akoma is permitted in the game--and in fact certain kinds of wizards, such as the Black Angels and the Deltan necromantic revolutionaries, are particularly important to this setting--but will make your character an enemy of the state and a frequent target of fear and social stigma.

Alchemist

You make strange chemicals in your lab, both for harm and for healing. Try not to identify too many chemicals by tasting them.



Include Dice with:

- Academics
- Craft
- Throwing

Career Gifts:

- Alchemy
- Literacy
- Research

Trappings: Leather armor d6, 6 bottles of Aqua Fortis, 6 bottles of Aqua Vitae, 12 bottles of medicine (quack), 6 bottles of medicine (good), acid-stained apron

Almaghnatisia

Since the Cognoscente books are written anonymously, it's not clear where their magical arts were created, though many claim that it began within Akoma.



Include Dice with:

- Inquiry
- Leadership
- Negotiation

Career Gifts:

- Cognoscente Magic
- Cognoscente's Trappings
- Literacy

Trappings: Leather armor d6, Quicksilver Rod (Dmg +1 Critical)

Badjaduya

The celebrated “Wind Wizards” of the Emirates. A Dunwasser alumnus might call their magic “primitive.” They prefer the term “traditional.”



Include Dice with:

- Academics
- Observation
- Supernatural

Career Gifts:

- Elementalist's Trappings (Air)
- Elemental Apprentice
- Literacy

Trappings: Yellow Robe, Oak Rod (Damage +1 Critical)

Black Angel

One who studies Forbidden arts in order to hunt down evil necromancers and the walking dead.



Include Dice with:

- Inquiry
- Searching
- Supernatural

Career Gifts:

- Low Profile
- Streetwise
- Survival

Trappings: Cloth armor d4, knife, battered notebook

Dastani

A navigator of the great desert, using only the stars as their guide. (Since, well, everything else is pretty bleak.)



Include Dice with:

- Academics
- Observation
- Searching

Career Gifts:

- Astrology
- Navigation
- Survival

Trappings: Cloth armor d4, Staff (Dmg +1), comfortable hat

Hospitaller

These seafaring healer-knights are based out of the Honey Isle citadels.



Include Dice with:

- Academics
- Melee Combat
- Vehicles

Career Gifts:

- Medicine
- Piety: Penitence
- Veteran

Trappings: Leather armor d6, Longsword (Dmg +2), wooden shield (Cover d8)

Dervish

These mystics bridge the gap between the common man and the mysteries of Malachism.



Include Dice with:

- Endurance
- Presence
- Supernatural

Career Gifts:

- Performance: Dance
- Piety: Malachism
- Survival

Trappings: Cloth armor d4, Staff (Dmg +1), comfortable hat

Jannisary

Recruited from the Anatolians' vassal states via the infamous Tribute in Blood, these elites are among the world's best infantry.



Include Dice with:

- Endurance
- Ranged Combat
- Tactics

Career Gifts:

- Jezailer's Trappings
- Resolve
- Veteran

Trappings: Leather armor d6, Longsword (Dmg +2), Jezail (Dmg +2 Slaying), uniform

Djed-hakim

Tolerated at best, those who would dare pursue necromancy should know better than to speak of their magic to the commoners.



Include Dice with:

- Deceit
- Presence
- Supernatural

Career Gifts:

- Black Magic
- Literacy
- Necromancer's Trappings

Trappings: Black Robes, Brass Staff (Dmg +1 Critical), change of clothes for going out in public society

Medjey

With their unusual weapons and armor, these mercenaries for hire are unique to Akoma. Most frequently seen in the Deltan Valley.



Include Dice with:

- Dodge
- Melee Combat
- Tactics

Career Gifts:

- Medjey's Trappings
- Resolve
- Veteran

Trappings: Leather armor d6, Kopesh (Dmg +4 Weak Critical), Metal Shield (Cover d8)

Qanundari

The soldiers and policemen of the Emirates, these warriors dispense quick justice and protect the oases and property of their tribes.



Include Dice with:

- Inquiry
- Ranged Combat
- Searching

Career Gifts:

- Jezailer's Trappings
- Resolve
- Veteran

Trappings: Leather armor d6, Longsword (Dmg +2), Jezail (Dmg +2 Slaying), uniform

Tazekar

A mystic of the Great Desert, who can read the stars and knows how to interpret what the divine wants. (This career requires *Book of Mysteries* to use.)



Include Munjam/Munajima Dice with:

- Academics
- Observation
- Supernatural

Munjam/Munajima Career Gifts:

- Blessed Ways
- Pacifism
- Tazekar's Way

Trappings: Leather armor d6, Staff (Dmg +1)

Qäs

As part of the aggressive modernism of the Anatolians, these priests are encouraged to spread the light of s'Allumer with the state-approved religion of Malachism.



Include Dice with:

- Academics
- Leadership
- Supernatural

Career Gifts:

- Cleric's Trappings
- Literacy
- White Magic

Trappings: White Robes, Electrum Rod (Dmg +1 Critical)

Vizier

A high-ranking advisor, usually for matters of state or for war. Some are to be trusted, others have their own schemes.



Include Dice with:

- Academics
- Observation
- Tactics

Career Gifts:

- Nobility
- Oratory
- True Leader

Trappings: Leather armor d6, Dagger (Dmg +1), turban, detailed map of their local area

Sportster

Subjects of the Anatolian Empire enjoy their bread and circuses. Team sports and ball games are popular in the cities.



Include Dice with:

- Brawling
- Endurance
- Throwing

Career Gifts:

- Carousing
- Fast Mover
- Team Player

Trappings: Cloth armor d4, nice scarf

Warlord

In the remote and provincial corners of Akoma, some people are raised to be leaders of their tribe, town, or community.



Include Dice with:

- Dodge
- Leadership
- Presence

Career Gifts:

- Nobility
- Oratory
- True Leader

Trappings: Leather armor d6, Longsword (Dmg +2), turban

GIFTS

Almost all the Gifts from the other *Ironclaw* sourcebooks are available to Akoman characters as well, though you'll want to swap out "Literacy: Zhōngwén" and "Piety of Purity" for "Literacy: Deltan" and "Piety of Malachism" where appropriate, etc. The Wilding Way is alive and well in Akoma, though it's more common outside heavily urbanized areas in Anatolia and Òyó. The martial arts schools of Zhōngguo have either official outposts or local equivalents (possibly renamed for flavor—the Assassins' Guild instead of the Forest Ghosts, for example) in Akoma.

Gifts from Previous Books

These Gifts are uncommon or different in Akoma.

- **Language** (*Ironclaw* p. 55): Just as a native of Calabria probably speaks Calabrese and a native of Zhōngguo probably speaks Zhōnggese, a character native to Akoma probably speaks Deltan. This Akoman international language takes its name from the Lower Sultanate's river delta, where it originated. It has two writing systems: a "high print" of stylized pictures which each have an associated sound, difficult but beautiful to write; and a "low script" based on the high print's stylized pictures, but rendered into easy-to-learn and easy-to-write cursive, now used as the writing system for all Akoma's languages. Modern standard Deltan is heavy with loan words, mostly from Xīwén (the language of the original Anatolian immigrants) and from other Akoman languages. Similarly, the gift of Literacy: Deltan (*Ironclaw* p. 76) grants facility with both high print and low script, though high print mostly just appears on university diplomas and signs for fancy hotels these days.
- **Mystic** (*Ironclaw* p. 55)
- **Cleric's, Cognoscente's, Elementalist's, or Thaumaturge's Trappings** (*Ironclaw* p. 60-63)
- **Magic Save** (*Ironclaw* p. 64) and any other Magic-keyworded Gifts, besides Anonymous (*Ironclaw* p. 84)
- ... a word about Necromancy, though. Necromancy is illegal in Anatolian Akoma, yes; but oddly enough, the legal penalties for the practice of necromancy are actually no more severe than they are for the practice of any other form of magic. In Calabria, the authorities will torture you for practicing necromancy. In Akoma they'll

imprison you. So, it's actually easier to be a necromancer in Akoma than it is in Calabria. The Caliphate would much rather you forget this fact.

- **All Gifts from the *Book of Mysteries***. (The Tezakar career uses the gift of Blessed Ways.)
- **Vermín of the State** (*Jade* p. 438): While certain species (otters in Anatolia, for example) occupy a position of some privilege, Akoman governments have no particular systemic enmity against centipedes, scorpions, spiders, toads, or vipers. A vermin in Akoma with this Gift probably hatched in Zhōngguo — or in a very strange ethnic exclave indeed.
- **Superior Theory of Archery** (*Jade* p. 473-474): The Superior Theory of Archery is popular amongst literate nobles in Akoma, although the magical Gift The Moon Rising in One's Breast is unknown ... or, at least, no one will admit to knowing it in pious company. The popular play *Shooting the Moon* (it's not a pun in Deltan) concerns a young nobleman who falls in love with a "bad girl" who has learned that technique.
- **Volcano School** (*Jade* p. 479-482): This magical martial art has failed to gain much traction in Akoma. One venerable school exists in a Daoist temple in Òyó City's Zhōngguotown, its headmaster an elderly toad of Akoman and Zhōnggese parentage; but few non-Zhōnggese have expressed interest in the Way—let alone Volcano Fighting—for fear of the social stigma such "witchcraft" might bring.
- **Immortal Magic** (*Jade* p. 507-538)

Physical Gifts

Back in the Saddle (Battle, Combat)



Mount and Dismount with Ease

When you mount or dismount, you're not sent Reeling.

Doubling Up on Reeling

If one of you or your mount is sent Reeling, the other isn't automatically. You still have to fight as if you're both Reeling, but maybe this edge case will help in case of spells that only hit people who are Reeling or something.

Mental Gifts

Artillerist (Combat)



With long experience, keen senses, and just a little intuition, you can calculate the trajectory of seige-scale powder weapons.

With artillery, claim Ranged Dice as bonus attack dice

When you attack using an artillery weapon, you may include the Range penalty dice as bonus attack dice.

(The target still gets their Ranged Dice as bonus dodge dice, too. More dice all around!)

Artillery weapons are equipment that has the “Artillery” descriptor.

Cannon Sweep (Combat)



A skilled cannoneer can fire for the best effect, bouncing the cannonball in the most surprising ways.

Sweep with cannon fire

When you hit a target with a cannon, you might be able to Sweep. The sweep distance varies on how far away the target is.

- If the target is at Medium range or less, you can't sweep at all.
- If the target is at Long range, you may Sweep Short.
- If the target is at Very Long range or more, you may Sweep Medium.

Cannons are weapons that have the “Cannon” descriptor.

Social Gifts

Akhal-Teke Wrangler (Keystone, Plot)



This is the stuff of which epic poems are made. This variant of the Ally Gift (*Ironclaw* p. 70) introduces a special kind of companion. Octopodes who spend a lot of time on dry land often invest in this Gift.

Steed

Your character has an Akhal-Teke as a full-fledged minor character. It now has a Mind Trait of d4 and may be designated as the beneficiary of the Improved Ally Gift. It can't speak, but it can communicate with you (and only you) in some idiosyncratic way. You and the Game Host should negotiate who is responsible for your mount's actions. We assume that you, the player, will decide what the mount does in combat, but you may prefer to have the Game Host or another player decide what it does so that you don't feel like you're talking to yourself.

Austringer (Chapter)



You have a small flying reptile, called a *sahin*, as a pet and helper. It helps you to hunt or fish for food.

You have a cute little pet. Your pet is small enough to ride in your pocket, or in a special pouch. Your pet can also fly.

When your pet is Close to you, it grants you a bonus d8 to initiative and to Observation.

You can use a Control action to order your pet to take certain actions. Your pet can fetch items, pull levers, push buttons, or do other things a pet could do. (Without any hands or a sentient Mind, the pet is somewhat limited. The host may call for rolls of your Will & Tactics dice to order the pet to do things that are more complex.)

X (Chapter)

Trigger: your pet suffers a Dying or Dead result

If your pet suffers a Dying or Dead result, you may exhaust this gift to reduce that result to Sick and Unconscious. If your pet suffers an Overkill result, you may exhaust this gift to reduce that result to Dying & Sick.

The Band Plays On



Play, play, play the soundtrack of the universe. The best Anatolian hospitals frequently hire musicians to help with the healing or therapeutic processes for exactly this reason.

Requires

Performance: [singing or some musical instrument]
Team Player

Inspirational Music

You can help someone just by playing music appropriate to their actions. Playing music is a stunt, every turn, and it's a very loud noise.

While playing the music, all friends within Medium range enjoy the following advantages:

- All friends who hear your music gain a d8 assist bonus to an appropriate task.
- All allies in combat are flanking their opponents (and may claim their tactics bonus).

Trappings Gifts

Alchemy (Respite)



Requires

Literacy
Research

Belongings

You begin the game with:

- ↔ One alchemy kit
- ↔ 6 bottles of Aqua Fortis
- ↔ 6 bottles of Aqua Vitae
- ↔ 12 bottles of medicine (quack)
- ↔ 6 bottles of medicine (good)

X (Respite)

You may craft alchemy items faster

First, you must spend 12 denarii on "essential salts", the materials known only to you. Ask the Game Host if you're able to buy these expensive materials in the location that you're at. (At the discretion of the game host, you may be able to spend days foraging for these in the appropriate places, rolling Mind & Searching vs. 3. ... but these materials are rare and obviously valuable, so they're not usually found lying around on un-owned land.)

Then, tap this gift, spend an hour with your kit, and roll your Mind, Academics, Craft vs. 3. (If you have Chemistry, that's another d12). For each success you score, you may choose one:

- ↔ 1 bottle of Aqua Fortis
- ↔ 1 bottle of Aqua Vitae
- ↔ 2 bottles of Quack Medicine and 1 bottle of Good Medicine.

If you have multiple successes, you can mix and match. (For example, you could use 5 successes to make 2 bottles of Aqua Vitae, 1 bottle of Aqua Fortis, 4 bottles of Quack Medicine and 2 bottles of Good Medicine.)

Jezailer's Trappings (Plot, Trappings)



Belongings

You begin the game with:

- ↔ a jezail
- ↔ a bullet-mold making kit
- ↔ a gun repair kit
- ↔ a powder horn
- ↔ six Steel Bullets
- ↔ a long sword

X (Special)

Action "replace your missing trappings"

If you are parted from your items, ask the Game Host for a plot twist to return or to replace them.

Once exhausted, you cannot recover this Gift until the next game session.

Medjey's Trappings (Plot, Trappings)



Belongings

You begin the game with:

- ↔ a Kopesh Sword
- ↔ a Dagger
- ↔ a Metal Shield (bronze)
- ↔ a fancy hat (miter)

X (Special)

Action "replace your missing trappings"

If you are parted from your items, ask the Game Host for a plot twist to return or to replace them.

Once exhausted, you cannot recover this Gift until the next game session.

Natural Gifts

Ophidian (Natural)



You have the body of a snake.

Requires

Must be a snake

No hands, only Prehensile Tail

You have only one hand – a prehensile tail. You may use this tail as a good hand.

You can use the “Wrestle” attack without any hands, by coiling your body around a single target.

+2 Stride, -2 Dash

Add two to your Stride, but subtract two from your Dash.

Extra action “stand up”

You can take an extra action on your turn: the “stand up” action. Yes, you can be knocked down, flipped, rolled over, etc, but at least you get up much faster.

Magical Gifts

Blessed Ways (Respite, Keystone, Plot, Blessed)



You can talk to the spirits.

Requires

Pacifist

Bonus d8 when working with animals

When working with animals (natural creatures with no Mind Trait), you may claim a bonus d8 to all rolls.

Bonus d8 when working with live plants

When identifying, growing, or nurturing live plants, you may claim a bonus d8 to all rolls. It is considered good practice to ask permission before cutting or reaping a live plant.

Bonus d8 to talk with supernatural creatures

Your communion with the other worlds grants you the ability to talk to any supernatural creature: elemental, undead, shade, etc. When inquiring about their motives, negotiating their wants and desires, or imposing your presence upon them, you may claim a bonus d8.

However, not only is there no bonus to *deceive* a supernatural creature, you also have a d12 penalty. They *know* you.

Clysmian Foul (Magic, Water, Budjaduya)



Requires:

Elemental Apprentice
Insider with the Budjaduyi

X (Battle)

Action “Aim to upgrade Create Water to Clysmian Foul”

To use this ability, you must have a “Create Water” Magic weapon at the ready, and you must take the “Aim” action at a target.

Exhaust this Gift. Your “Create Water” weapon becomes a “Clysmian Foul”, a gurgling ball of water and mud that you toss high in the air and then comes down as a pounding deluge upon your targets.

Sand Geyser (Magic, Earth, Budjaduya)



Requires:

Elemental Apprentice
Insider with the Budjaduyi

X (Battle)

Action “Aim to upgrade Create Earth to Sand Geyser”

To use this ability, you must have a “Create Earth” Magic weapon at the ready, and you must take the “Aim” action at a target.

Exhaust this Gift. Your “Create Earth” weapon becomes a “Sand Geyser”, a fuming spray of dust and sand that you can then hurl at your targets.

Scathefire (Magic, Fire, Budjaduya)



Requires:

Elemental Apprentice
Insider with the Budjaduyi

X (Battle)

Action “Aim to upgrade Ignite Fire to Scathefire”

To use this ability, you must have a “Create Air” Magic weapon at the ready, and you must take the “Aim” action at a target.

Exhaust this Gift. Your “Ignite Fire” weapon becomes a “Scathefire”, a glowing ball of sparks that will spread into a long, blazing arc.

Sirocco Blast (Magic, Air, Budjaduya)



Requires:

Elemental Apprentice
Insider with the Budjaduyi

X (Battle)

Action "Aim to upgrade Create Air to Sirocco Blast"

To use this ability, you must have a "Create Air" Magic weapon at the ready, and you must take the "Aim" action at a target.

Exhaust this Gift. Your "Create Air" weapon becomes a "Sirocco Blast", a whirling ball of air that you unleash onto several targets.

Tazekar's Path (Battle, Plot, Blessed)



Requires

Blessed Ways
Pacifist

X (Battle)

Action "ready an Faint Mirage"

Exhaust this Gift, then use the Attack action to call forth the standard attack of Tezekar Ways, the *Faint Mirage*.

Once used, the spell is spent and you must Refresh the Gift before you may use the Attack again.

Using this ability is an attack. Your Gift of Pacifist Exhausts immediately (if it's not already Exhausted).

X (Battle)

Stunt "call upon the Tazekar spirits"

You may call upon the spirits of a desert for a specific blessing. Declare what it is you're looking for. Roll 2d6 vs. 3, and count the successes. (There are numerous Gifts that will grant you bonus dice.)

The more successes you score, the greater the boon you can request. Here are some suggestions:

- ↔ **No successes:** Nothing.
- ↔ **One success or more:** Dispel any Unreal effect on a target, up to Medium Range.
Or, grant a d8 assist bonus to a target's Deceit dice, up to Medium Range.
- ↔ **Two successes or more:** Remove the On Fire condition from up to five targets, up to Medium Range.
Or, ask that your dreams tonight be prophetic, to give you some insight into your future.
Or, call forth a date fruit, to appear in your hand.

- ↔ **Three successes or more:** Declare a target Near you. Before that target's next Respite, the next time they Fail or Botch a roll, they get one chance to call upon spirits and immediately claim a bonus 2d6. (There's a risk of unholy powers.)

Or, increase the winds in the desert.

Or, spread a blanket or other rectangular cloth before the wind while casting this spell. The cloth attaches to four points in the air, as if to an imaginary mast, and catches its own the wind. Up to 12 people who walk behind this sail have their overland movement doubled for the next 24 hours.

- ↔ **Four successes or more:** Sets up a shimmering, distracting mirage as of water or an oasis in the distance. When casting, you may declare certain individuals immune to this mirage. Until the next day, when those who are not immune first set eyes upon the mirage, they must roll Mind, Will, Inquiry, and Supernatural vs. 3. If they score 3 or more successes, they see the mirage for what it is. If they score 2 successes, they are Confused for the rest of this scene. If they score 1 success, they are Confused until their next respite. If they score no successes, they are Confused until cured. Confused characters will tend to wander toward the mirage and to say all kinds of crazy things.

Or, summon an Air, Earth, or Fire Elemental from the desert sand. (Sorry, no Water.) This elemental is made of a dust devil (Air), sand (Earth), or brushfire (Fire) and cannot leave the desert. It will disappear at the the start of the next chapter.

Or, summon a Water Elemental from a desert's oasis. This elemental cannot leave the oasis proper, which is an area of such arbitrary shape and size that I would try to explain to you why it is, but since this is magic, you wouldn't understand me if I tried. It will disappear at the the start of the next chapter.

- ↔ **Five successes or more:** Open a bridge past this world and into the realm of spirits. Such a journey is dangerous and not without consequence.

Wrestling with Angels



The Light's clarity in your form and essence
Forces spirits to take notice of you.

Requires

Piety of Malachism
Absolutely no gifts that have the "Magic" descriptor

X (Special)

Trigger: benefiting from magic

If you receive any direct personal benefit from magic, exhaust this Gift for 24 hours. If your friend heals you with White Magic, it counts; if your friend lightning-bolts the bad guy who was about to kick your ass, it doesn't. You probably don't want your enemies to find out about this gift.

When unexhausted, benefits to deal with the immaterial

You can speak to, and understand the speech of, spirits such as elementals and shades. You can inflict Weak damage to them with melee or ranged weapons, and full damage with unarmed attacks and natural weapons.

Atavist Gifts

Death Watch (Atavism)



Where death goes, you follow.

Requires

Species Trait of d8 or better
Survival

You Know Death

When someone or something within Medium range of your senses dies, you know it at the exact moment that it happens.



Bonus to Sense Undeath

You can also sense undeath. You can sense all lesser undead within Medium range of you, and you can sense all greater undead within Long range of you. Undead cannot claim concealment bonuses against you.

Eater of the Dead (Atavism)



Cannibalism is taboo for most civilized persons; but corpses you taste don't come back.

Requires

Species of d8 or better
Survival

Stunt "Silencing Bite"

You may take the Silencing Bite action, ritually eating part of a corpse to assist the associated spirit in shuffling off this mortal coil. If a corpse has received the Silencing Bite, it is considered consecrated and Overkilled.

Wilding Camouflage (Atavism)



You can change the pigmentation and texture of your skin.

Requires

Species of d8 or better
Knack for Stealth
A successful roll of Speed & Stealth vs. 3 that scores three successes or more

Stunt: change your pelt

As a stunt, you can change the surface texture and color of your skin. Even complex patterns are possible, as long as the pattern is somewhat regular—most things less complicated than paisley. You get a d12 to conceal yourself from sight in natural surroundings or against any surface where your color change would allow you to blend in.

EQUIPMENT

All too often, someone will assume that a crocodile is some ungainly, lumbering beast. Then they're surprised when the **tail** swipe knocks them off their feet.

There's a long tradition of carving **throwing sticks**, weaponized wood that are hurled with practiced accuracy. They're not much good against armored foes, but they're better than nothing, and they're quite easy to use. (Quick-Draw helps.) Of course, slings are very popular with the frugal fighters, too.

Foreigners are usually fascinated by the weapons provided by alchemical research. A secret batch of chemicals are prepared in glass bottles. (The clay pots of ceramic grenades simply won't work for this.) A wax seal is dripped just inside the spout. The bottles are then corked and scored on the outside. Finally, a string is tied around the spout, to make it easier to hurl the bottle for great distance. The user hurls the bottle in a high, lobbing arc, to break open on a target or near them. **Aqua fortis** is a powerful acid, with an acrid scent more powerful than vinegar but not as terrible as skunk spray; its effect on wood, flesh, and other natural materials can be frightening to behold. **Aqua vitae** is a distilled incendiary; a secret mix of powders and salts is kept between the cork and the wax seal, so that when the bottle breaks open, a spark sets the whole thing alight, burning quickly and hotly. In theory, it would be possible to put these mixtures into siphons to spray on armies and fortifications... but in practice, the expense of making so much chemicals, combined with the danger to the operator of such a device, has the practical soldier using these handy grenades instead of giant siphons.

Small arms and hand-to-hand weapons in Akoma aren't too different from those in Calabria or Zhōngguo. Local names and cosmetic details are different sometimes: the heavy forward-curved yatağan instead of the badelaire, for example. Since most of an Anatolian army is cavalry, melee loadouts tend to favor one-handed weapons—axes, curved swords, spears, lances—and shields. Swords are curved for easy ride-by use. Polearms are relatively rare, the traditional weapon of janissaries.

Some locals still use bronze arms and armor. Bronze can be worked in fires of much lower temperature than steel, and it can be easier to maintain against the elements. Bronze is still used to make brass cannons, which aren't just less expensive than iron ones, but they're also far less likely to explode without warning. However, bronze weapons are heavier, and their edges will deform against even reasonable armor. For some people, the bronze weapons are considered fashionable, as badges of honor or as furniture of office.

The most well-remembered bronze weapon is the **khopesh sword**, a blade with a signature curved shape. Some claim the weapon is better at disarming your foe; others assert that the curve lets one strike around a shield. Neither of these things are true — it's curved to make the blade stronger.

Most people are far more likely to run afoul of the **fan axe**, a heavy bronze blade on the end of a stick, often decorated with jewels, hieroglyphs, and other fancy stuff. No matter what the time and place, a big heavy sharp thing coming down on your head is going to do some damage.

Ranged weapons are even more important. Historically, the most important weapon on the Akoman battlefield was the bow and arrow. Many variations on the weapon exist, but the most successful archers used sophisticated composite designs such as are popular in Hánguǒ, requiring three or four different construction materials and scrupulous maintenance. Even among peoples who have adopted firearms, archery training is an important athletic activity for all ages: an inattentive homemaker's neighbors often criticize her as "not even having enough time to teach her child the bow."

Armies across Akoma adopted firearms quickly and enthusiastically. From the arrival of the first primitive muskets in Anatolia, commanders knew that so complex and finicky a weapon would be an ideal armament for the janissary corps. Wealthy sipahi and high-ranking janissaries often invest in breathtakingly detailed and ornate firearms as a status symbol, items which would become the treasure of the known world's museums four hundred years hence.

Muskets are by far the most common firearm. Blunderbusses are popular with gunmen used to closer quarters, such as the officers who lead marines on boarding actions or who seek to be the first through a breach in a castle wall. Pistols are growing in popularity as a backup weapon for sipahi, especially after a series of popular lithograph drawings of a wolf (presumably a Bisclavret foreigner) leaping out of a charging lancer's path, while returning fire with a pistol in each hand.

Jannisarries are known for carrying the *jezail*, a long-barreled gun with a unique curve to the stock. The jezail has a reputation for firing accurate over long distances, moreso than any other gun... but like many reputations, it's hearsay. The Jannisarries are well trained shooters, and they commonly use expensive Steel Bullets which fly far and true.

The stranger weapons in *Ironclaw* and *the Book of Jade* can be found in Akoma as they are elsewhere. Dropped or captured weapons from Calabrese or Zhōnggese foes are common in Akoman arsenals, as are the results of intercontinental trade. Besides, it's not like flying guillotines are exactly normal in Zhōngguo. You'd be as surprised to see one in Mǎjīng as you would anywhere else, wouldn't you?



Artillery

A relatively recent development in military science, a cannon is an enormous tube of iron or bronze which uses a gunpowder explosion to launch a stone or iron ball. They come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes.

We'll be using the term *cannon* when the which fires forward on a relatively flat trajectory. There's also the portable *mortar*, a tube at a 45-degree angle or more that lobs explosives in a high arc, over walls and other cover. The Anatolians also have the *abus*, a sophisticated howitzer that can fire explosives both directly and indirectly.

Historically, in the known world's military terminology, the term "artillery" referred not to cannon or ballistae, but to wizards. A single wizard could throw an entire squad of troops into disarray in the span of a few heartbeats, just like a modern crew-served weapon. But wizards are rare, expensive, and scary to their comrades-in-arms and commanders alike. They often form their own war wizardry corps as a separate army-within-an-army, with its own rank structure and organization parallel to but separate from that of the regular army.

Wizards are powerful but rare, and they are no more durable than any other soldier in an army. (And very rare is the wizard trained both in the magic arts and in the discipline of riding.) For most armies, the optimal deployment situation has been to embed each wizard in the middle ranks of an infantry formation, disguised as just another infantryman so they don't get shot or beaten down first. Infantry tend to have mixed feelings about this arrangement; on the one hand, it's nice to have someone around to knock your enemies off their feet with a word and a gesture. On the other hand, once the bad guys know you're protecting the wizard, you're gonna have a lot of bullets flying your way.

The lack of spell support on the battlefield posed serious problems for Malachite armies. An infantry section without a war wizard might be in poor shape indeed by the time it engages a section which has one; troops without sufficient drill and morale tend to break and scatter after the first spell goes off. Mounted archers, who can engage wizards from beyond their area of effect—and use their mobility to maintain that range of engagement—are the most effective counter to war wizards hidden in the enemy ranks. This is one reason why the Anatolian army, even today, maintains a two-to-one cavalry-to-infantry ratio.

The Zhōnggese pioneered the use of cannon in warfare. The followers of the Tattooed Master, an ex-convict philosopher who preached a doctrine of utilitarian, impartial care for all people, originally developed the modern cannon as a defensive weapon. They expressed their love for others by travelling to underdog states and defending them against military aggression. They were able to fire these giant weapons from their earthworks with ease.

Cannon weren't a perfect solution to the lack of wizards, but they were much better than nothing. The Anatolian army maintains cannon factories wherever it is reasonably convenient, for use in siege warfare (offensive and defensive) and naval combat. Mounted on rickety two-wheeled carts called limbers, sledges for sand or snow travel, or (most commonly) disassembled on carts pulled by large draft animals, light cannons make up most of an army's artillery. These are fired in groups of one to five from the

caster's deck at the bow of a galley at rival craft; or used to batter castle walls during a long siege. Anatolia also uses great cannon, staggeringly expensive and so large they must be disassembled and transported in pieces on multiple vehicles. These take so long to reload that they are only ever assembled at the end of a siege, to deliver the final blow to a rampart before janissaries charge into the breach with axe and shield.

A light cannon takes a team of at least two gunners to aim and operate. Their primary use is to aid in warfare; if you have access to a battery of cannon, you can make a roll of Mind and Ranged Combat to roll for an advantage in Disposition by firing at enemy fortifications, or Strength or Training by shooting at a formation of soldiers. Enemies might oppose you by using skirmishers or infiltrators to attack your battery with Stealth or Riding; or by shoring up their fortifications with Craft or Digging.

Exotic Weapons

Name	Equip	Range	Attack Dice	Effect	Descriptors
Fan Axe	2 hands	Reach	Body, Melee Combat vs. defense	Damage +5 Weak Critical	Expensive (32Đ), Rare, Bronze
Kopesh Sword	Good hand	Close	Body, Melee Combat vs. defense	Damage +4 Weak Critical	Expensive (24Đ), Rare, Bronze
Tail	None (Species only)	Close	Body, Species, Brawling vs. defense	Damage flat 2, Knockdown	Natural
Throwing Stick	Off hand	Close	Body, Melee Combat vs. defense	Damage +1 Weak	Cheap (1/4 Đ), Thrown

Spells as Weapons

Name	Equip	Range	Attack Dice	Effect	Descriptors
Clysmian Foul	Off hand	Medium	Mind, Swimming vs. defense	Damage +0 Critical, Penetrating Sweep Short	Magic, Water, Budjaduya, Loud
Faint Mirage	Off hand	Short Counters Magic	Species, Academics vs. target's Will, Inquiry	Confused Sweep Short	Magic, Tazekar, Unholy
Sand Geyser	Off hand	Medium	Body, Digging vs. defense	Damage +4 Weak Critical Sweep Short	Magic, Earth, Budjaduya, Loud
Scathfire	Off hand	Medium	Will, Presence vs. defense	Damage +1 Critical, On Fire Sweep Short	Magic, Fire, Budjaduya, Loud
Sirocco Blast	Off hand	Medium	Speed, Weather Sense vs. defense	Damage +2 Critical, Knockdown Sweep Short	Magic, Air, Budjaduya, Loud

Firearms & Alchemy

Name	Equip	Range	Attack Dice	Effect	Descriptors
Abus	Emplaced	Extreme	Mind, Tactics vs. 3	Explosion: Short Resist with Mind, Speed, Dodge, Tactics vs. 3 Damage +5 Slaying, Weak	Extravagant (10,000D), Rare, Proscribed, Reload (crew of 2 × 10 turns), Rare, Extravagant, Proscribed, Gun, Emplacement, Artillery, Lobbed
Aqua Fortis	Off hand	Medium	Body, Speed, Mind, Academics vs. 3	Explosion (Reach) Resist Speed, Dodge, Armor vs .3 Damage +0, Penetrating	Extravagant (225D), ¼ Stone, Proscribed, Thrown, Consumed, Alchemy
Aqua Vitae	Off hand	Medium	Body, Speed, Academics vs. 3	Explosion (Reach) Resist Speed, Dodge, vs .3 Damage +1, On Fire	Extravagant (225D), ¼ Stone, Proscribed, Thrown, Consumed, Alchemy
Heavy Cannon	Emplaced	Horizon	Mind, Tactics vs. 3	Explosion: Reach Resist with Speed, Dodge vs. 3 Damage +4 Slaying	Extravagant (8,000D), Rare, Proscribed, Reload (crew of 4 × 10 turns), Gun, Emplacement, Artillery, Cannon
Jezail	2 hands	Long	Speed, Ranged Combat vs. defense	Spark d12 Damage +2 Slaying	Expensive (240D), Rare, Proscribed, Gun, ½ Stone, Loud, Reload (10 turns)
Light Cannon	Emplaced	Extreme	Mind, Tactics vs. 3	Explosion: Reach Resist with Speed, Dodge vs. 3 Damage +3 Slaying	Extravagant (4,000D), Rare, Proscribed, Reload (crew of 2 × 10 turns), Emplacement, Artillery, Cannon
Mortar	Emplaced	Long to Far (cannot target at Medium range or closer)	Mind, Tactics vs. 3 Target rolls Mind, Speed, Dodge, Tactics vs. 3	Spark d10 Explosion: Short Target rolls Mind, Speed, Dodge, Tactics vs. 3 Damage +3 Slaying, Weak	Extravagant (600D), Rare, Proscribed, Reload (crew of 1 × 10 turns), Rare, Extravagant, Proscribed, Firearm, Emplacement, Artillery, Lobbed

Warships: Galleys of the Shallow Sea

The most important new piece of equipment is the galley. The inhabitants of the Angels' Teeth Islands and the continents on either side accomplish travel, trade, and naval and amphibious warfare with an all-purpose kind of ship called a galley. A galley is a small ship which moves under both oars and sail. The specifics may have changed, but the design of the galley in general terms has not changed in hundreds of years. It has two decks: a top deck, and an oar deck (where other things such as berths and kitchens are found. The top deck has a sheltered area at the front called an artillery deck; historically, wizards would stand here to cast spells at enemy ships and crews, but in the modern day, either a squad of musketeers or between one and five cannon are more likely to be found there.

A galley's movement primarily comes from oars. The oars are arrayed in a single tier, extending from beneath the surface of the ship, where a number of benches support three or more oarsmen each, each oarsman pulling a single oar. Sails are used as "booster rockets" and are most useful when you're trying to escape a battle before the bad guys (or your own commanding officer) catch you.

Before the galley became popular on the Shallow Sea, fleet tactics were based around ramming enemy ships. Galleys changed that. In battle, galleys rely on two primary weapons: cannons and boarding. Galleys are cheap and fragile because in the race to make scarier guns versus tougher ships, the guns are always going to win. Also, because for the most part, these ships aren't fighting each other. A galley is primarily a means of moving your troops from place to place for coastal raiding, or a source of water support for infantry on a coast

Rowing a galley is one of the worst jobs you can get (or more likely, be forced into). An oar deck is a breeding ground for disease and misery, and few things in all the world smell worse. It is the final destination of many unfortunate criminals in the nations on the Shallow Sea. Still, paid oarsmen are preferable to oarslaves, as they're a) better at their jobs and b) capable of picking up a weapon and swinging it at boarders. Most Anatolian galleys have three oarsmen to a bench: one paid rower on the end yelling orders at the other two.

Despite their fragility, galleys are almost always colorfully decorated; the decorations probably originated as dazzle-camouflage to break up a galley's silhouette, but they are just as likely to be lavish illustrations on flagships.

Galleys don't do something in sectional combat so much as allow you to participate in oceanic sectional combat in the first place. Use the Strength assessment to compare how many boarders each side can bring to bear in a melee; use the Training assessment to compare how many guns each side has.

Crafting

Characters may make their own items, or they may repair ones that break. For simplicity sake, use the item's price as the base line for how long it takes to craft the item.

You will need 20% of the item's price in raw materials to start with. Once you have the materials ready, the item is 20% of the way there. For example, if you need a nice pair of 3 \mathcal{D} boots made, then you'll need (3 \mathcal{D} \times 20% =) 0.6 \mathcal{D} in raw materials.

Work is measured in denarii's worth completed. When you've completed the remaining 80% of the item's value, it's ready to go. Better, more skilled workers will be able to get an item built faster.

It might be easier to list broken items by how good they are. For example, a carriage that's only "60% quality" will need 40% more progress before it's standard 100% quality.

When you get the item 100% done or more, it's ready for use. When you get the item 50% done, it might be usable according to the defective rules. An item that's less than 20% done is missing parts. At the discretion of the game host, multiple people might work on a crafting job. A proper workshop, devoted to a single type of crafting, will also grant a bonus d8.

Most crafting rolls use Mind & Craft vs. 3. Physically strenuous tasks might use Body & Craft. Delicate handiwork might be Speed & Craft. Nasty, unpleasant work might be Will & Craft.

Item Cost	Min. Successes	Progress per Hour
Cheap	1	0.1 \mathcal{D} \times successes
Average	2	0.5 \mathcal{D} \times successes
Expensive	3	4 \mathcal{D} \times successes
Extravagant	4	15 \mathcal{D} \times successes
Rare	No change	$\times 2$ progress
Proscribed	No change	$\times 3$ progress

The more expensive an item is, the more skilled of a craftsman you need to be. You need to score the minimum number of successes to make any progress at all towards crafting an item – if you don't meet the minimum, you just wasted an hour. For example, if you want to make Expensive boots, you must roll 3 successes each time you roll, or you make no progress at all.

On any roll, a Botch ruins the job.

The Gifts of Carpentry, Leatherworking, Mechanics, Metalworking, and Painting each give a bonus d12 to a specialty use of Craft. Consult the Gift's description for more details. A character with one of those Gifts will be able to score more successes, and thus they will be able to craft fancier items.

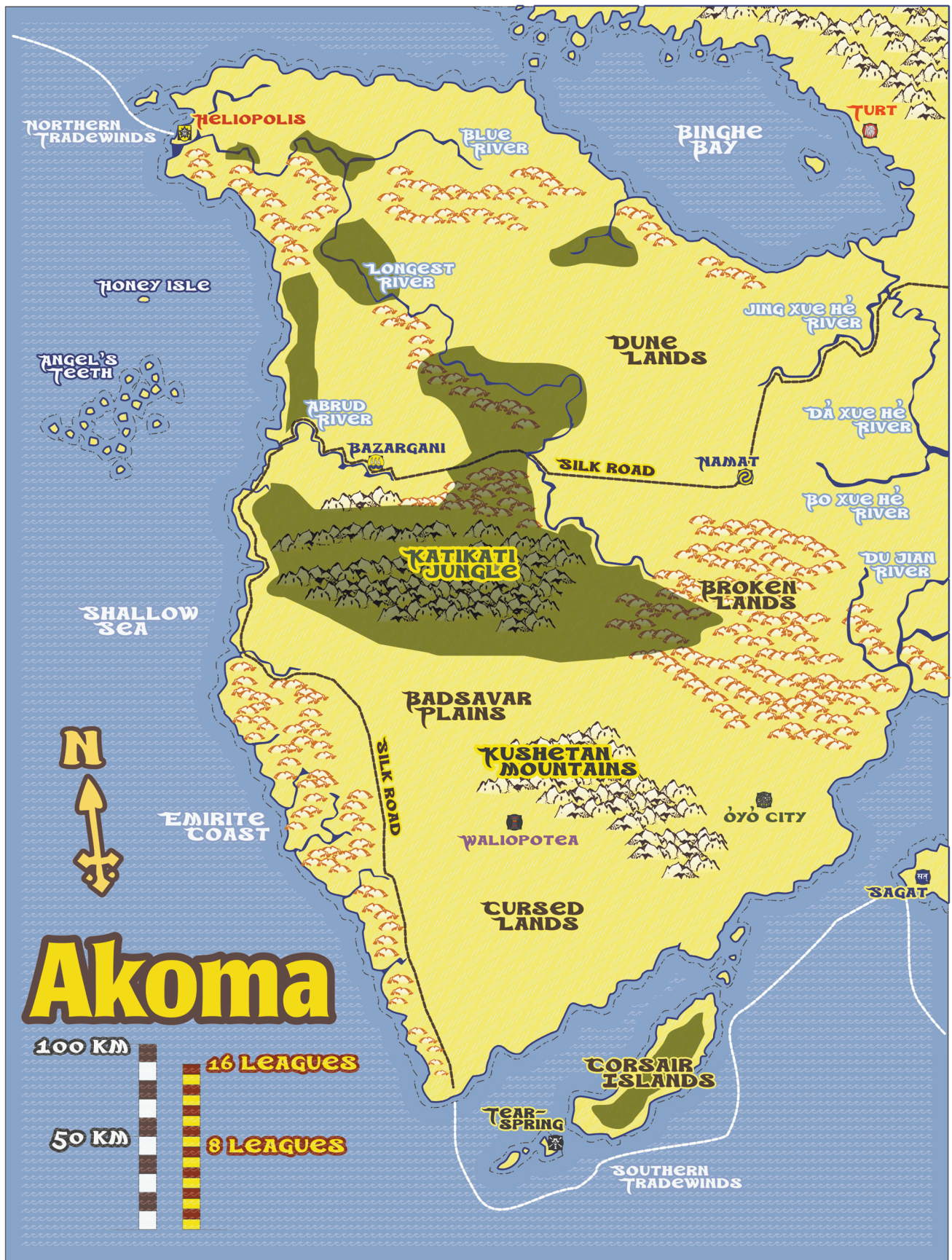
The Gifts of Alchemy can be exhausted to provide you with certain alchemical weapons. It's assumed that you recharge the gift back at your lab, where your materials are bubbling and percolating away.

Why is it faster to make Rare and Proscribed items? Because the raised costs on those items have to do with the materials they use, the demand on the market to buy them, and the laws that make it difficult to obtain those items. Whether an item is rare or proscribed has nothing to do with how fast it takes someone to make the item.

For example, a skilled laborer (Mind d6 and Craft d6, Craft Specialty d12), working in a shop (shop bonus d8) would roll four dice. If they took their rote, they have four dice, halved for two successes an hour. At 2 successes an hour on an average cost item, that's 2 \mathcal{D} worth of progress every hour. Following the previous example of the boots, if you started with the 0.6 \mathcal{D} in raw materials, you'd need 2.4 \mathcal{D} more, which means the boots would be made in three hours.

As a rule, a character can work up to 10 hours a day. More than that and the Host may raise the difficulty target to 4, 5, or more, because exhaustion starts to make for mistakes.

It's beyond the scope of this book to provide precise crafting rules for every item in the game. These rules don't provide for rare materials, unusually difficult items, dangerous substances, and special orders. As always, the Game Host will have to make rulings on a case-by-case basis. If the crafting rules don't make sense, don't use them!



GAZETEER



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The history of the desert is not kept in books or on tablets. It is kept in rhyming poems passed down from each generation of tribesmen to the next, and in the stories the Dastani learn about the stars. Some of our people think that when they look at the night sky they can read the future; when the people of the nine tribes gaze into the night sky, they can read the past.

– Marcus, Calabrese ambassador
to the tribe of Abi-Asman

The Almaghnatisia

The origins of the Cognoscente Magic are shrouded in mystery. When one has the power to cloud minds, to compel the will of others, to alter memories as easily as one erases a page in a book, then one has the power to keep secrets. In Akoma, the secret masters of state-craft, the *Almaghnatisia*, sometimes simply called the Magi, have been practicing their arts in secret, perhaps for longer than anyone can ever guess.



The similarities between the Magi and the Cognoscenti cannot be ignored: the association with the colors green and purple; the study of advanced magic that controls the mind.

The legends of the Magi's influence may be the core reason why the Anatolians ban the practice of spell-casting.

The Angels' Teeth Islands and the Pirate Coast

The Angels' Teeth Islands are the countless rocky isles scattered in the Shallow Sea which divides Akoma from Calabria and Zhōngguo. The Angels' Teeth make the Shallow Sea both easy and hard to navigate. On the one hand, shore is rarely too far away. On the other hand, dangerous reefs and rock-reefs surround many of the islands, making them treacherous to navigate except for seasoned sailors who know the terrain very, very well.

Many of these seasoned sailors are the pirates of the Pirate States. The northeastern coast of Akoma is sometimes called the Pirate Coast (a name which confusingly resembles that of an island south of Calabria) for the savage crews which have established dominance over the area. A constantly shifting patchwork of small states fighting one another for territory, the Pirate States are among the strongest powers amongst the Angels' Teeth Islands.

The Honey Isle and the New Hospital of Saint John

The best-known of the Angels' Teeth Islands is the Honey Isle, historically settled by the falcons of the Knights Hospitaller. The Knights Hospitaller were originally formed as a military order of brother-knights who came to Akoma to protect Penitent missionaries in Anatolia. When the first Anatolian Caliph rose to power and began to restrict evangelism aggressively, the Hospitaller fortress, the Hospital of Saint John, took them in. Unfortunately, the Hospital was built only a few leagues down the coast from Lygos itself, its largest target of evangelism; and so it was not long before the Caliphate threatened to wreck the Hospital if they didn't keep sheltering outlaws. The Hospital refused, and the Caliph showed up outside with the most impressive battery of cannons ever assembled outside of Zhōngguo. When they reduced the Hospital's outer wall to rubble over the course of a day, the Hospitallers and their charges boarded galleys

and bolted for the Angels' Teeth, and the Caliph didn't bother following (he was in the process of conquering the Delta at the time).

Justly terrified of the privateer crews the Caliph had roaming the Shallow Sea, the Hospitallers converged on the Honey Isle, so named for its meadows of wildflowers and bees. Soliciting donations from Penitent nobility and merchants in Calabria and even Zhōngguo, the Hospitallers built a New Hospital of Saint John and hired a crew of Zhōnggese Tattooed engineers to build the most impressive fortifications in the known world. The Hospital of Saint John now stands as a shining bastion of Penitent strength in the Shallow Sea, the focus of much charity and cheerleading from Calabria—and cholera from the Caliphate.



The Knights Hospitaller now deploy to various locations in and around the Shallow Sea, mostly to defend Penitent interests who can't defend themselves. Hospitaller recruits come from many sources; most are Penitent nobles from Calabria, though common-born brothers and sisters called sergeants can come from anywhere: Sister-Sergeant Handan, hero of the retreat from the Akoman Hospital, grew up in a Lygos orphanage.

Anatolia and the Anatolian Empire

The original Anatolians were a holt of otters seeking a haven from Zhonggese expansion. Leaving from Fayadeen, their flotilla migrated slowly along the southern coast of Zhongguo, finding no land in which they could settle until they crossed the sea and landed in Akoma. They settled in the fertile lands surrounding the city of Lygos.



During the years that followed, they trained, raised armies, and forged alliances in anticipation of a Zhonggese invasion that never came. But as long as they had such a well-calibrated military machine, they decided to put it to good use. They moved on the city-state of Lygos, laying siege to its venerable walls. For a full month they bombarded its walls, until at last the defenders turned on their own incompetent leaders, threw them in jail, and invited the Anatolians in.

Lygos's transition from independent city-state to Anatolian capital was alarmingly fast, a surprise which may have left the Anatolian leaders too optimistic about their later conquest of Heliopolis. But within a few short years, a great change came over Anatolia: the sultān of Lygos and the noble families of Anatolian otters who supported him converted to the Lygosi religion of Malachism. The Sultān reestablished himself as not only a temporal leader, but also a spiritual leader. He was no mere Sultān; he was a Caliph. And he intended to see the same happen to the entire world.

Anatolia's Relationship with Vassal States

Anatolia's army moved out from far-off Lygos, conquering several small emirates and kingdoms in the Lygos environs. The first major offensive that Anatolia launched, however, targeted the Delta. Its Sethid pharaohs had fallen from favor, and though the Delta's population didn't like Anatolia one bit, they weren't able to circle their wagons around Heliopolis as effectively as the Sethids needed. Upon overwhelming the Delta, Anatolia installed its own Sultāna, Yonca I; but her difficulties in ruling an unruly populace have not been good for Anatolian morale. It turned out that installing

their own governing architecture was difficult, and not a few advisors realized in hindsight that attempting to intimidate and co-opt the Delta's existing ruling structure would have put them in a much better place.

When Anatolia turned to the Corsair Coast, their attitude was different. The Corsair Coast was a fractious series of sometime-fishing villages, sometime-pirate havens with an unruly populace used to self-government, not state dominance. The Caliph at the time recognized that to conquer the Corsair Coast and introduce a sultān or sultāns would only result in an even greater administrative headache than the Delta produced.

In a historic meeting, the Caliph traveled to the Corsair Coast against the advice of his grand vizier and every advisor he had. Unarmed and unarmored, he went to visit the Pirate King Blackpaw and politely requested audience. Blackpaw made him wait for three days. The Caliph waited politely. By the time Blackpaw met with him, the Caliph had befriended most of the pirate court; Blackpaw found the Caliph pouring tea for his chief pirate captains and sharing folk songs. Historical records show that the Caliph was out of tune but had all the lyrics right.

Blackpaw and the Caliph spent the rest of the evening talking. By the time the Caliph boarded his galley to go home, Blackpaw had agreed to convert to Malachism. The model the Caliph and Blackpaw created soon became standard for all the states throughout Akoma and the Shallow Sea which the Anatolian Caliphate met: a state could keep its existing ruling structure if they converted to Malachism, made a show of obeisance to the Caliph, paid taxes, and provided military support to Anatolia's armies, a practice that has the traditional name of the **Tribute in Blood**. The name "Tribute in Blood" has led to a great deal of misunderstanding among Anatolia's enemies, who spread the story that Anatolians take a tithe of living beings from their vassals and devour them in freakish Malachite rituals. This is not the case. Rather, every year, agents of the Caliphate draft board go to every settlement in the vassal states and choose a number of youths to bring to Lygos for special training as agents of the Caliphate. Youths who come to Lygos as part of the Tribute enter one of four Corps Academies, where they learn to read and write Deltan and are catechized as Malachites.

Youths from the Tribute make up the entirety of the Janissary Corps, the Anatolian elite infantry units. Janissaries are not segregated by ethnic origin or species—rather, the Anatolian army encourages diversity within a unit so that janissaries do not factionalize based on their origins. However, carnivorous species tend to be grouped with other carnivores, and herbivorous species with herbivores, for ease of provisioning in the field.

As dedicated heavy infantry, Janissaries historically used heavy polearms in field engagements. The super-heavy fighters dedicated to the closest-quarters

fighting, such as occurs when a castle wall is breached, favor large shields and axes, maces, or swords.

The Strength of the Anatolian Army

- **Discipline.** The Anatolian Empire pours exorbitant resources into training its soldiers. The greater part of this training focuses not on martial arts or tactics or leadership, but on the minutiae of military life: the soldier's conduct when not on duty, the routines of making and breaking camp, the division of battlefield time between fighting and plunder. They're quicker and quieter on the move than any other army—not so quiet you won't hear them coming, but quiet enough that you'll wonder what they're putting in the food.
- **Combined Arms.** The Anatolian army's position between many different cultures' martial traditions has created a truly diverse fighting force. It is not uncommon to see Calabrese slave-infantry, Tartar horse-archers, and Zhonggese siege engineers all deploying from an Anatolian war barge. The seamless coordination of their armies and navies is particularly fearsome.
- **Medicine.** Anatolian doctors spend almost all their lives in school to become healers; Anatolian combat medics are the most dedicated of those. They may not have the miraculous powers of a Calabrese white mage, but they are many and they are reliable, which means that Anatolia loses far fewer soldiers to infection, disease, and post-traumatic stress than comparable armies.
- **Equipment.** There are good and bad Anatolian weapons and good and bad Anatolian armor, same as anywhere else. But the Anatolian military is particularly well-known for three pieces of equipment: ships, steeds, and siege machines. The latter in particular combine Zhonggese design with high-quality Calabrese materials, such that an Anatolian army will show up to a siege with a battery of smaller-weight, faster-loading cannon to wear down fortifications before a monstrous gun delivers the final blows and janissaries charge into the breach.

So, what are their weaknesses?

- **Obvious.** They move fast, sure, but you're gonna see these guys coming. Thunderous claws and cannon the size of taverns don't sneak.
- **Conscripts.** With so much energy spent on training a core of high-quality infantry and cavalry, Anatolia relies heavily on auxiliaries levied from vassal states to fill out its numbers. The auxillary troops have inferior arms and armor, they are poorly trained and harshly disciplined, and they have little or no loyalty to their cruel and foreign masters. If an enemy can

take out the Anatolian officers first, the auxiliaries are much more likely to flee than to stay and fight.

- **Extremism.** They also have the reputation of being religious fanatics. This is not a great description of what is going on. The commander-in-chief, the caliph, is technically the religious leader of all Anatolia (and the entire world, though they aren't always lucky getting converts), but the piety of each individual caliph is a highly variable matter and it may or may not trickle down to his subordinates. Military discipline often follows a religious model, and military discipline is very good, but the actual religious feeling within the ranks is not particularly more pronounced or exaggerated than in a Calabrese or Zhonggese army (and in fact, the mixed nature of the Anatolian army often means soldiers from wildly different faiths have to get along well enough to save each other's lives). The small units of "deli"—actual literal religious fanatics, the guys who "wear the skins of their defeated enemies," deployed as shock troops—do, however, make enough of an impression in combat that Calabrese armies have often come home speaking of vast brigades of turbaned infantry chanting prayers as they charge into cannon fire and rip their foes apart. Ironically, these people are frequently orthodox s'Allumer religious fanatics.

The Martial Arts

In a time of widespread warfare, Anatolia has developed various well-developed martial arts traditions, just like Calabria and Zhongguo; and what is more, the Sublime Porte frequently contracts martial arts instructors from Calabria and Zhongguo to advise Anatolian trainers. You can represent these martial arts, both native and imported, with the martial arts traditions from the Book of Jade. Because of the importance of the formal military, armed and armored fighting styles are a bit more common than unarmed, so a janissary might practice the equivalent of Black Tortoise Style, an assassin or ranger might practice Forest Ghost Style, a noble officer might practice Superior Theory of Archery, and soldiers of other origins might practice sword dancing, Vagrant Warrior Style, or Earth-Sky Fighting or Vast-as-Heaven Weapon Fighting.

Anatolian Culture

It's hard to generalize about Anatolian culture because it has so many influences from across the world. The constant entrance of young persons from Anatolian vassal states into the Anatolian upper classes via the Tribute in Blood guarantees a constant influx of new culture.

Badsavar Plains

Claimed and held primarily by the magical might of the tribe's Badjaduyi, the plains inhabited by the Badsavar are the lushest lands, other than the banks of the Abrud, in the desert. That is not to say there are great forests or farmlands here. To anyone from 'civilized' lands these plains are nearly barren, hardly even worth the trouble of irrigation. The soil is very sandy and only capable of supporting sparse, dry grasses. However, the Badsavar have made do with this land for over a thousand years, through a combination of measured irrigation, careful cultivation of the proper plants, and controlled grazing.



Bazargani

Bazargani is the largest city controlled by the Abi-Asman, and one of the biggest cities in the desert. Located on the Abrud River, it takes advantage of a quirk in the river's floodplain to span the river. Where the fresh river water meets the brackish estuary, the river narrows a little and speeds up, carving itself a channel that never quite overflows, even in the flood season, so the city was built right up to the channel bank. A series of natural wells have been dug underneath the ground, to create lakes and canals.



While relations with the Emirates are peaceful at present, lessons from the past cause the walls of the city to be manned all of the day and night by the governor's elite qanundari. Guards by the great gate and the two docks are responsible for collecting trading fees and import taxes, as well as ensuring that no one without a permit, or a Qanundari armband, enters the city with a firearm. Permits can be purchased at the gate; those unable to pay for a permit have their weapons confiscated for use by the city's Qanundari.

Bazargani is used to hosting foreign merchants, and for this purpose, three large hostels are available, one for people from the Emirates, one for Calabreses, and one for Zhonggese. The hostels act as consulates as well as inns, and each is staffed by an ambassador and guarded by a handful of qanundari. Merchants from elsewhere who do not belong to the Libertalian Lodge can find hospitality at the Palms By Moonlight, the city's only inn.

1. Small God City

On the north bank of the eastern oasis sits the cluster of temples known as Small God City. There is one temple here to each of the six Jan, and one large open-air temple dedicated to Heaven and Earth. Two long barracks-halls house the priests and acolytes, one for women, one for men, who sleep and eat together regardless of which deity they serve. These temples are the exclusive territory of the priests; others who wish to show their respect to the gods must either go through the priests or visit Little Anchor Temple in the main city.

Little Anchor Temple

By the prescription of Suskin the architect god, the very center of Bazargani is occupied by a temple, this one for public use. Called *Mazgat Andak Langar*, or Little Anchor Temple, it is supposed to have been designed to duplicate the temple at the center of the City of Stars in Heaven. It is a very ornate six-walled temple, decorated on the outside with gold and tiles of mica and cobalt blue, topped with a dome of copper. On the inside, each wall holds a statue of one of the six good Jan. The ceiling is tiled to represent Heaven, and the floor to represent Earth. Around each of the Jan, in modern Emirate lettering, are tiled many of their most famous teachings. Since normal citizens are not allowed into Small God City, this is where children come to be taught reading and writing.

Heaven's Gift to Earth

Surrounding Little Anchor Temple is a garden that has been praised by tribesmen and foreigners alike. Planted with beautiful flowers and luscious fruit trees, it is named *Heaven's Gift to Earth*, and few have found tongue to dispute the name once they see the place. Most magnificent of all, at least to eyes so used to the desert, are three fountains placed throughout the garden to fill it with the pleasing sounds and sights of playing water. All three have statues of frolicking hippopotamuses, representations of Asbabi and her attendants. The statues are intended to be a little comical, and to bring a smile to the faces onlookers.

2. Ibis Fields

Just north of Small God City, a patch of land shaped like an ibis has been irrigated and cultivated, and is tended by priests of Parandari. The priests grow herbs, flowers, and decorative plants there, many of which get transplanted to the governor's gardens or Heaven's Gift to Earth in the city when they are large enough. Beside the ibis field is a pasture where the priests of Cabok keep sotor, asbal, and sags for their own use. The pastures run all the way down to the riverbank, and the animals can drink directly from the river.

3. Governor's Pastures

Though called the Governor's Pastures, the sotor and asbal here might belong to anyone. Many of the city's lizards are kept here, including animals brought in by foreigners who wish to stay for more than a few days. They are tended by herdsmen employed by the governor, and watched over by a few qanundari. Animals here are personal property and are not available for sale. People wishing to purchase lizards must go to the marketplace auctions or visit the Herdsmen's Quarter.

4. Freshwater Dock

Boats traveling downriver from the rest of Abi-Asman dock at a stone jetty that stretches halfway into the river. Porters and stevedores load and unload boats that stop here, and carry the goods up and down the seventeen stone steps that lead from the main streets down to the jetty.

Most importantly, many people of the city must come down to this jetty to get their fresh water. (Most people can't afford to live near the aquifers and pay the taxes for the water rights.) Here they can be watched by the guards, and acts that might defile the river can be prevented.

5. Zhonggese Consulate and Guardhouse

Since most travelers from Zhongguo come into the city by the river route, the hostel catering to Zhonggese tastes has set up here by the freshwater dock. It shares its building with the guardhouse for the dock, making it a very safe place for merchants to stay. The ambassador is a morose Chicken named Fa the Thin. He dislikes the desert, and keeps to the Zhonggese quarter as much as he can. He is careful not to show his dislike too strongly to his visitors, however, and does his best to make their stays comfortable and profitable.

6. Zhonggese Quarter

Decades of hosting Zhonggese traders and diplomats have turned this quarter into a little slice of Zhongguo. A few Zhonggese merchants that frequent Bazargani have homes here, and most of the quarter is taken up with their estates and gardens. Weary travelers can find Zhonggese-style tea houses and restaurants here, and there is even a small Daoist temple. The buildings here are made mostly of wood imported at great expense from Zhongguo.

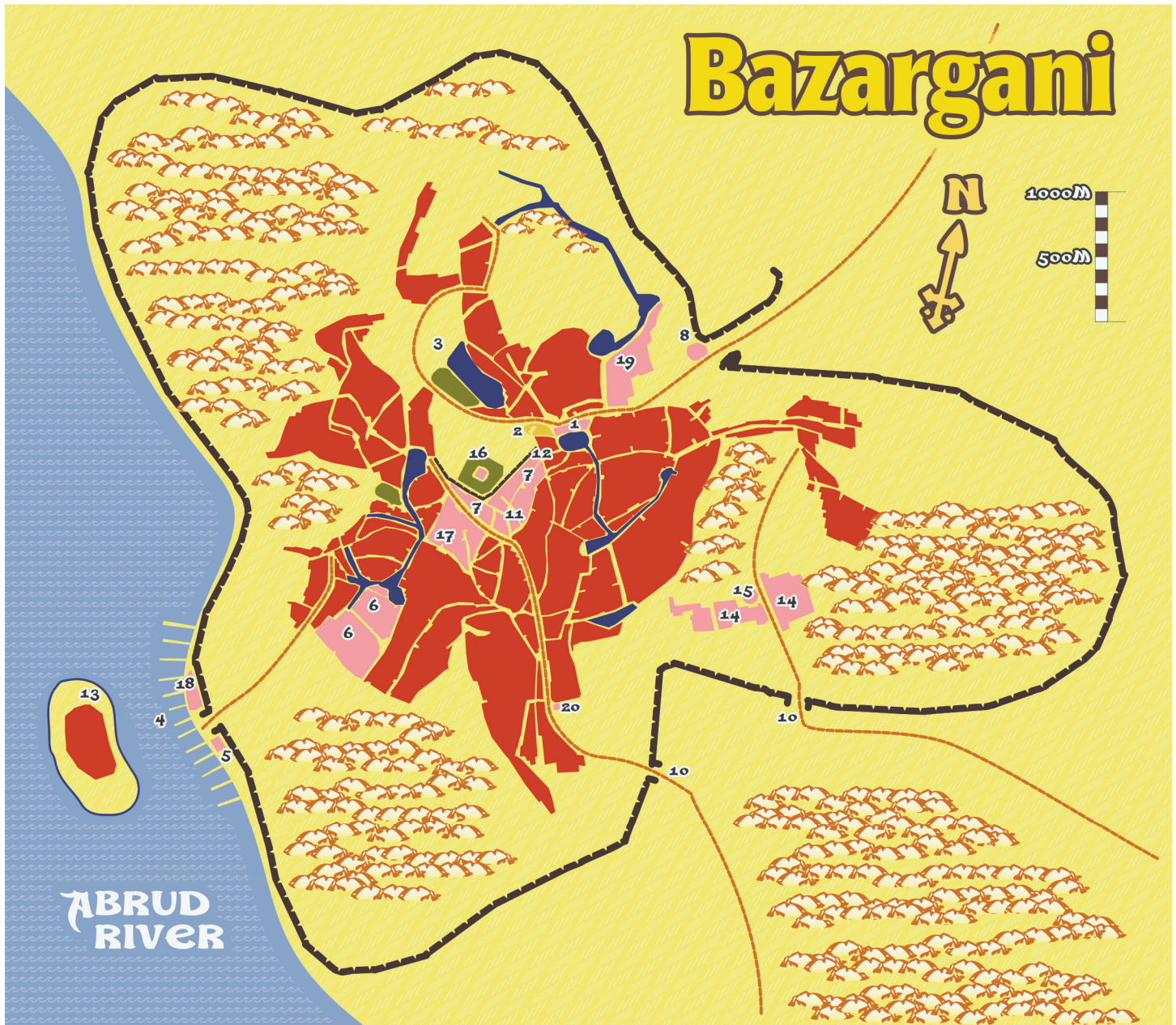
7. Marketplace

The most famous feature of Bazargani, the marketplace is enormous and packed from end to end with stalls. Goods from literally all over the world are traded here. The smell is one of the most distinctive features of the place; on every corner are merchants selling exotic food and drink for the hungry traveler. Nuts roasted in honey are a local favorite, accompanied by drinks made from watermelons and coconuts. Near the center and leading out to the

gate is a vast caravan staging area where wagons are loaded and prepared for travel through the Emirates. Once a week, this area becomes an auction block. Slaves, mounts, beasts of burden, and other expensive goods are auctioned off one by one to the highest bidder.

8. Gate of the River's Tail

The city of Bazargani is surrounded on the eastern side by a strong wall guarded day and night by fifty qanundari employed by the governor. The main entrance to the city is a large building with a huge arched gateway in the middle of it called the Gate of the River's Tail. It acts as the barracks and headquarters for the city's qanundari as well as the entry point for everyone coming by land into the city. Along the arch is a painted bas-relief depicting the journey of the Farramad from the lands of the east to their eventual transformation into the Abi-Asman at the Abrud.



9. Emirate Road

Past the Gate of the River's Tail, the jurisdiction of the Abi-Asman ends and the land officially belongs to the Emirates. So important is this road to the two cities it connects, however, that both Bazargani and Bandar E Lengeh, the Emirate city at the northeast end of the road, send regular patrols to keep it free of bandits and thieves. Officials of the Emirates and Abi-Asman both have learned that business conducted on the road is safe and profitable. Now, inns, small villages, and peddlers line the road nearly from one end to the other, serving caravans passing between the two cities as well as the patrolling guards.

10. Oleander Roads (West and East)

These roads are not nearly as well maintained. They are marked by tall posts, because in the windy season, the desert sands inevitably blow over them. Travellers are often confused because despite the name, no flowers grow here. A popular myth is that the roads are closed when the oleander flowers are in bloom, and toxic clouds of poison make these roads unsafe for travel. The truth is that the gates are just closed during the summer, and travelers are forced to use the western and eastern gates, instead.

11. Emirate Consulate

In the middle of the great marketplace sits the Emirate hostel and consulate. The Emirate ambassador, a Jackal named Andustan, is a keen collector of exotic objects, and can often be found walking through the marketplace looking for new items for his collection. He is very friendly with the other ambassadors in the city and often invites them to his own home, which sits at the edge of the marketplace.

The consulate is also home to the city's library. Andustan requests that visitors with books lend them to him for a short time, and employs a full-time scribe to copy the books for him. The library is housed in the basement of the consulate and currently contains some two thousand books. Most of the books are in the language of the Emirates, but there are a few in just about every known language.

12. Wall of Lovely Women

The builders of Bazargani intended the marketplace and the gardens to abut one another so that merchants coming in from the Emirate Road could be awed by the gardens' beauty, but city officials soon found that the gardens became too noisy. Services held in Little Anchor Temple even became difficult to hear over the din of the marketplace. To alleviate the noise problem, a wall was erected between the gardens and the marketplace. As an afterthought, the city hired muralists to tile the wall on both sides, and the result was so impressive that many of the muralists were hired by the Shah to tile his new palace. The wall depicts various scenes of women contemplating gardens, eating delicacies, and drinking from goblets made of gems.

The women on the wall are notoriously lovely. A famous story involves a foreigner, variously from Zhongguo, Calabria, the Emirates, and even other lands, who came to the wall and became so enamored of one of the women that he set up a house on the edge of the marketplace, and came to gaze at her image every day. When he died, his final request was to be buried beneath the wall, and so he was. Some dismiss the story as mere fantasy; others insist it was true.

13. Barandaz Island and the Estuary Dock

A small island called Barandaz is connected to the main city by one of the only bridges in Abi-Asman. Projecting out from the eastern side of the island is a network of floating piers where ships coming to Bazargani from the sea can dock and unload their cargo. Space along the piers is limited, and ships must sometimes spend several days anchored in the estuary waiting for a space. The governor of Bazargani is considering adding piers somewhere else along the shoreline, because too many ships leave before they dock and go around the coast to Bandar E Lengeh instead, losing the city valuable docking fees and import taxes.

14. Calabrese Quarter

Three small manor houses, belonging in name to three Calabrese houses, but rentable by anyone with enough money, mark the corners of the triangular Calabrese Quarter. Within this triangle a few businesses have been set up to cater to Calabreses who come to visit. A few shops belong to craftsmen with uniquely Calabrese skills; there is a Calabrese armorer here, a draper who weaves cotton, and several restaurants. The buildings here are Calabrese in architecture, but made with local materials; all are made of stone, since wood is considered far too expensive.

15. Libertalian Lodge

This compound and observatory is home to the Compact of Libertalia, an organization of wealthy and influential individuals, mostly from Calabria, that maintain relations with foreign powers.

During the height of the Rinaldi, it was their proper consulate. But years of neglect led to burglary and vandalism. Calabrese merchant companies pooled their resources

16. Governor's Palace

Restricted to the Governor's family, staff, and personal guests, the palace is covered in palm trees and lush greenery. Though not as breathtaking as Heaven's Gift to Earth, the garden around the Governor's palace is still something to see. The Governor's Palace rises from among the leaves, an elegant construction of pale stone decorated with broad spirals of blue paint. Inside, the walls, floors, and ceilings are covered in tiles.

17. Laborers' Quarters

These sections of town are inhabited by porters, stevedores, stonemasons, carpenters, and the other laborers whose work is so little valued, yet so important to the smooth running of the town. The construction here is mostly un-mortared stone with roofs of cloth or leather. The roofs exist only to shade out the sun, since it has not rained in Bazargani in living memory.

18. Fishermen's Quarter

This quarter is inhabited mostly by fishermen who work the Abrud. These fishers do not usually bring their catches directly to the marketplace; rather, fishmongers buy direct from the fishermen at their docks, and then clean and prepare the fish at their stalls in the marketplace. Owners of meyxans often come here to buy directly from the fishermen as well, since the prices are lower, but they have to do their own preparation. The buildings here are like those in the laborers' quarters, stone with cloth or leather roofs.

19. Herdsmen's Quarter

This vast quarter is inhabited mostly by sotor, asbal, sags, and even more exotic beasts like destriers, drays, and cao xi-yi. The herdsmen here are far outnumbered by their lizard charges. Most of the animals here are not for sale; animals ready to be sold are brought to the daily auction in the center of the marketplace. Customers with special needs and a little extra money may speak to the auctioneers to get a look at the full herds.

20. Palms By Moonlight

Near the northeast entrance to the city sits Palms By Moonlight, Bazargani's only public inn. It is run by an Emirate Hyena called Laughing Farhan, who built it with a combination of Emirate and Calabrese styles. Laughing Farhan is, as his name suggests, a jolly host. He has traveled widely – he has even seen Triskellian on the shores of Calabria – and he has a wealth of anecdotes to share. Farhan employs seven cooks, each of whom is an expert in a different style of cookery, and his prices reflect this. However, he also offers cheap bread, beer, wine, and fruit, so even those with little money can enjoy his hospitality.

Broken Lands

Most of the open desert is made up of rolling sand dunes pushed by the wind, but here and there the dunes open up to reveal the jagged bare rocks that lie beneath them. These areas are riddled with holes and pitfalls. Some of them lead to caves like those in the mountain regions. The ground in this area is uneven and rough; vehicles are very likely to get stuck or break an axle, and the area is usually considered bad footing.

The Corsair States

Where there is shipping, there are pirates. But where there are pirates, there are not necessarily pirate kings and queens. The Akoman coast is densely populated by fishermen; and in years when the fishing isn't so good, many of these fishermen take to the high seas to become pirates, attacking Calabrese, Zhōnggese, and Akoman shipping.



Watching the Anatolian army at drill, you'd think the Caliph would smolder with rage at the presence of such disorderly hives of scum and villainy as the Corsair States which dot the coastline. You'd be wrong. Lygos's attitude towards the Corsair States is surprisingly permissive. If the pirate king or queen converts to Malachism and agrees not to attack Anatolian shipping, they don't even need to pretend to be Anatolian vassals.

Tearspring (The Floating City)

The "floating city" of Tearspring is at the mouth of a minor tributary of the Longest River. Tearspring was, unsurprisingly, originally a secluded cove where pirates would hide from Lygos's privateers. A town sprung up, and as the Angels' Teeth Islands and the Corsair States became a bigger and bigger deal, the town grew in tandem.

Modern Tearspring is a city of boats and barges, platforms built on piles sunk into the bed of the Shallow Sea. Bridges made of boats, planks, or pontoons connect platform to platform, structure to structure. Tearspring is constantly collapsing and being rebuilt.

It is in Tearspring that the Pirate Queen Khadija al-Dalāl makes her home. Her great galleass, the *Moon Reflected*, is harbored here, and even though she has a castle of stone built on the shore, she prefers to sleep in her stateroom on board ship. Rumor has it that the Queen is constructing a superweapon in Tearspring: a customized war galleon with cannon on all sides, larger than the largest galley, an innovation which will revolutionize naval warfare

Cursed Lands

Where the Kohani tribe once lived, the sands are said to be grey and black, and the waters tainted and undrinkable. Ancient ruins mingle with dunes and broken lands until it is difficult to tell the difference between architecture and landscape.

Few people have entered these lands and returned. The Peyravi, who make a habit of it, continue to debate whether or not the lands are haunted by the spirits of dead warriors, as so many people like to claim. Certainly the old ruins are rife with danger; the floors are hardly stable, and in some places ancient booby traps still function, with deadly effect. Also undeniable are the herds of wild omnivorous lizards called badkar. While content to live off the sparse vegetation that grows around the tainted wells, these beasts are often happy for a meal of fresh adventurer-meat. The badkar are sometimes exterminated by the Peyravi, but never eaten, for it is believed that their meat is tainted.

The Deltan Sultanate

The Deltan Sultanate is an acrimonious place. Once the proudest civilization in all of Akoma—okay, possibly still the proudest civilization in all of Akoma despite things—the Delta was the first major casualty.



History

The Delta's civilization is one of the oldest civilizations in the known world. Before recorded history, the first settlers of the Delta began to farm the flood plains on either side of the Longest River, raising a god-king called a pharaoh to power and building imposing monuments to their gods and their dead. Many dynasties and rules followed, with the last being the cobra dynasty called the **Sethids**.

The Longest River flows from the central Akoman mountains down through the foothill forests and north, winding through the flood plains before opening like a fan into the river delta which gives the Deltan Kingdom its name. The Delta's farmlands are exceedingly fertile, the source of much of the wheat grown and eaten in Akoma, Calabria, Govorya, and even Zhōngguo. Other crops grown there include cotton, rice, wheat, corn, sugarcane, sugar beets, onions, tobacco, and beans. The high yield of Deltan agriculture led to the foundation of the Deltan civilization early in the known world's history.

To protect their crops and homes from raiders from elsewhere in Akoma, the early Deltans looked to a god-king called a pharaoh. According to legend, the first pharaoh reportedly descended from the sun itself on a beam of light, a scene frequently depicted in Akoman artwork. (The parallel between Deltan divine right and Malachism sun-beams has been the subject of commentary by more than one scholar.) He reported that many gods lived in the sun, but that they had deigned to lend him, the pharaoh, to the people of the Delta for their protection. The pharaoh rode on a device no human had ever seen before: a chariot, a two-wheeled platform towed by two horses. The chariot allowed the pharaoh to move quickly along a road or battlefield. The chariot's adoption allowed the Deltan civilization to expand up and down the Longest River. Other tribes and civilizations quickly adopted the chariot, but none so enthusiastically as the Deltans.

Seth the First was the first pharaoh to convert from the polytheistic Old Faith of the Delta to the Malachite religion which was spreading like wildfire across Akoma. Originally, his motives may have been mercenary.

The Sethids ruled for five more monarchs until the Anatolian Empire crushed them, the first casualty in their war of conquest. The pharaoh and most of his family were captured and killed in the Battle of Heliopolis. The only survivor was a single egg, spirited away by the pharaoh's most loyal servants.

Sultana Yonca the First (Yonca the Usurper)

When the last of the Deltan Army had surrendered, the Anatolian Empire installed Yonca, a young political hotshot from a prominent Lygos family. Yonca received the unenviable job of pacifying a nation which Anatolia had very successfully convinced to despise her. Yonca is very good at her job; she's a strong public speaker, can listen to her critics and integrate their advice without seeming either yielding or bitter about it, has extensive administrative skills, is good at delegating, and has extensive connections amongst the other noble families of Lygos. If Yonca has a weakness, it's her temper and tendency to say exactly what she's thinking instead of what the public ear thinks that a proper Sultāna should say. This would probably be a strength if it weren't for the particularly adversarial circumstances of her rule.

The Princess of the Delta (The True Queen in Exile)

The Last Pharaoh's egg hatched into the beautiful Princess Mariam. Mariam and her guardians sought asylum on, of all places, the Honey Isle. It's hard to say what Mariam is like, aside from pretty—but then again, she's like ten years old. Most of Mariam's public persona is the result of a vast propaganda campaign that's gotten extensive traction in both Calabria and Zhōngguo. Little girls who are the face of opposition to a giant evil empire are apparently a cool and popular thing. If t-shirts existed, they'd be printing t-shirts with stylized images of Mariam on them.



The Deltan Revivalists

The Anatolian conquest was welcomed by some Deltans, but certainly not by all. Sure, the Sethids weren't exactly the resplendent god-kings of the ancient Delta, but...

The Deltan Revival is an anti-royalist political faction. They are armed and dangerous. Their organization is divided into many smaller cells, so that no one person knows everyone in the organization; this way, they can avoid giving each other up, even under powerful sorcery or under torture.

As the lowest-commitment opposition to the Anatolian Empire, the Deltan Revival is getting a good deal of support from both the Calabrese and Zhōnggese. Some support is from merchants, who operate a black market in stolen goods and weapons. But rumors abound that some nobles seek to gain advantage.

The Revival has revived a great deal of classical Deltan concepts. One of these is necromancy. Necromancy was a relatively widespread practice in the pre-Sethid Delta, before Seth the First exterminated every necromancer he could find and destroyed every copy of the Necromicon and other traditional necromantic texts. The "Death of Death," as this extermination was called, destroyed most of the necromantic tradition that existed in the pagan Delta; but certain texts survived, and necromancy and necromancers have this weird way of coming back from certain death.

The Old Faith of the Delta

The Delta has not always been Malachite. In the old days, the Delta worshipped a pantheon of local gods. Chief among these was their sun god. The old Deltan pantheon had many gods, but the most popular ones are the patron or mythic origin of a certain species: Taweret for the hippos, Sobek for the crocodiles, and Thoth for the ibes, for example.

The ancient priests of the Delta, especially the priesthood of the jackal-god Anubis, practiced necromancy. Since the Death of Death (the first Sethid pharaoh's purge of old Deltan religion in general and necromancy in particular), records have been sketchy on what exactly necromancers did and what their function was in the religion and the society in general, but the Deltan Revival movement is working hard to scrounge together what information they can find on Deltan necromancy, once rumored to be the most advanced in all of the known world ... and recreate it, with Calabrese help.

Heliopolis

The bustling port of Heliopolis is the capital of the Delta. It isn't as convenient for Zhōngguo and Calabria as Lygos is, but it is far more defensible.

Right now, Heliopolis is under martial law, by the order of Sultāna Yonca I. Her unit of Janissaries patrols the streets of Heliopolis, maintaining law and order and keeping a vigilant eye out for terrorists. The Janissaries hate this job. Janissary police are seen throughout Anatolia, but police detail in Heliopolis is miserable. The common people hate you and won't help with inquiries unless their tails are directly on the line.

1. Monument Valley

Heliopolis is particularly famous for Monument Valley. Monument Valley is the home of the many splendid tombs of the Deltan pharaohs. Almost every pharaoh, and every dynasty of pharaohs, has a tomb complex here. The belief in an afterlife into which you can, in fact, take things with you led the ancient Deltans to build tombs according to ritual strictures and fill them not only with the dead, but also with valuables and statuary and magical artifacts meant to cross the veil with the dead.

2. Entrances to the Cisterns

Like Lygos, Heliopolis has a coastal city underneath its harbors. This city was built originally by various aquatic species working together. The undercity is known by the locals as the Cisterns, because (in theory) it's to store fresh-water in times of drought. In practice, people live down here. They're not supposed to, but they do.



3. Badjaduyan Library

The official religion of Yonca the Usurper has made the use of magic illegal within the city... but even the Anatolians recognize that not all situations can be dealt with by material means. What once was a sprawling campus of higher learning, the Badjaduyan Library is now under lock and key. The few wizards to be found there are prisoners awaiting trial.

Rumors abound, about what is beneath the complex. Some suggest that the library has a dungeon of exotic monsters, possibly the result of vile experiments by the Anatolian occupationalists. Others believe there are secret tunnels, bored by elemental magic, and that the Badjaduyans still practice their teachings in secret, waiting for their inevitable rise. And, of course, it could be the headquarters for the Almaghnatisia, the original practitioners of the green & purple magic that controls minds.

Whatever the truth is, the building is banned to outsiders.

4. The Palace of Sultana Yonca the First (aka Yonca the Usurper)

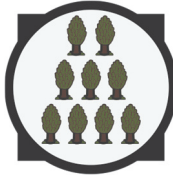
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Dunelands

The clear majority of the desert is covered in dunes that shift with the wind. In particularly fast, steady winds, dunes can move many feet in just a few hours. Tents pitched on the leeward side of dunes for a day may be entirely covered by the next night. Travel over dunes is difficult, and counts as swamp for the purposes of Travel Tests. Dunes are often quite steep; their slopes are considered bad footing.

The Great Desert and its People

Long ago, before the desert people divided themselves into tribes as they do today, there were ten companions who had pooled their resources and were looking for a place to settle. There was a husband, Mugar, his wife, Bezira, and her maid, Abar. There was a wealthy merchant, Baha, and his bodyguard Mehr. There were two brothers, the elder called Nazar and the younger Idaniz. There were two astronomers, both friends, Zirak and Kavos. Lastly, there was a crafty Crocodile named Zar. Between them they had eleven desert pack lizards called sotor that carried all their belongings.



Now, while most of these people were trustworthy and intelligent, one of them was an adulterer, one a thief, one a fool, and one was filled with arrogance. To begin with, the adulterer and the thief remained hidden, and the fool and the arrogant one were tolerated, but the harmony was not destined to last.

Once, when the companions had stopped at an oasis to rest for a few nights, the thief decided his big chance had come. He snuck out to the sotor while the others were asleep and removed the most valuable items he could find from every pack, including his own. Then he buried the treasure in the sand at the edge of the oasis, and returned to his tent.

The next day when the theft was discovered, the first thing the companions did was accuse each other. Baha the merchant, who had perhaps lost the most, was the arrogant one, and he accused everyone else of being envious of his wealth. He mounted his sotor, commanded his bodyguard Mehr to follow him, and rode off to the south.

Zirak and Kavos, being scholars, tried to reason out who had done the theft, but during their investigations, managed to insult every single one of their companions. Frustrated at the misunderstandings and at the way their attempts to help were received, they mounted their sotor and rode off to the west.

Mugar, believing that his wife was not safe among such treacherous people, declared his intentions to leave, and began preparing to do so. His wife Bezira was then faced with a choice, for she was the adulterer, and was secretly in love with the Crocodile Zar. After much agonized thought, she decided that her heart lay with her lover, and begged her maid Abar to come with her. Abar refused.

After Bezira and Zar had left together on Zar's sotor, Abar broke the news to her master. Impressed by her loyalty, Mugar gave Abar her freedom, and three of the four sotor he owned. Then, consumed with despair, he left alone, going north. Abar was well pleased with her gift, and left, going east.

Then Idaniz, the younger brother and the thief, convinced Nazar, his elder brother and the fool, to stay at the oasis one more day and rest a bit more. Idaniz ran to his hiding spot, thinking to put all his treasure into his packs. Zar, however, had not gone far. He had seen sand on Idaniz's claws and seen him looking furtively towards a spot at the edge of the oasis, and so he returned just in time to catch Idaniz digging up his treasure. He stopped him and exposed his treachery to Nazar.

Nazar was furious, and disowned Idaniz, stripping his family name from him and sending him out alone into the desert. Then, taking responsibility for Idaniz's crime as an elder brother must, Nazar got on his sotor and set off alone into the desert to wander, and to find a way to atone for his brother's crime. Zar took the treasure Idaniz had stolen for himself.

The First Settling

After the companions parted, they each went off and had their own adventures, which eventually led to the founding of the tribes. Zirak and Kavos, the astronomers, stayed together, and became the leaders of a tribe of scholars who called themselves the Jostani, or Seekers. Mugar, the betrayed husband, settled in the north under the star Sorkhaziana, the spirit of a famous warrior, and dedicated himself to learning the art of war. He drew many students, who became a tribe they named the Sorkhareh. Abar, the maidservant, traveled for many years, looking for people who would help her realize her dream of owning a vast herd of sotor. In this way, she became the founder of the tribe called the Badsavar.

Nazar, the elder brother, wandered for four years, once going all the way to the ocean, searching for a way to atone for his brother's misdeeds. Along the way he picked up followers with similar desires, who banded with him for a modicum of comfort. This group of people eventually found solace in the harshest, hottest part of the desert, and called themselves the Khorsheed. Idaniz, the thief, in his wanderings, gained the friendship of many people who, through treachery, thievery, or bad luck had

angered their nomadic families. His tribe lived, and still lives, mostly by stealing from other tribes. They came to be called the Damesab, which means Night Vapors.

Baha, the merchant, and Mehr, his bodyguard, followed the Crocodile Zar for a time, for both of them believed Zar to have been the true thief. When at last they confronted him, Zar told them the truth. Mehr believed Zar but Baha did not; because of this Baha dismissed Mehr from his service. Mehr left, but settled nearby, determined to keep an eye on Zar and his movements. He started a family and taught them the qualities of loyalty and teamwork that he thought most important, and in this way founded the tribe called the Derpasdari, the Guard.

Baha challenged Zar to a duel, which he quickly lost. Frustrated, but spared his life, he ventured north. With surprising cunning and humility, he saved a harem of women from an evil Hyena, and with their help began a tribe called the Farramad, the Fortunate.

Using the treasure taken from Idaniz, Zar claimed a great river that he named the Seyl, gathered twelve families of nomads together in his new kingdom, and began to build an empire. Each family took on a different job for the new empire: advisors, architects, warriors, priests, farmers, and so on. One family became Zar's servants, and was led by Bezira, his mistress. As the generations passed, however, this family became the slaves of all the rest, and even came to be considered a different tribe. The tribe of slaves called themselves the Mahsimi, after the moon-spirit. The tribe of masters is known now as the Kohani, the Old Ones. Their true name is lost to history.

The Land of the First River

After the death of Zar, the Kohani had seven generations of adequate Shahs who increased their coffers and pleased their people and in general terms had a pretty prosperous time as Shah, but few of them did anything worth noting.

Then came Tamaddon Shah. Legend has it that he received a visit from the architect-god Suskin the day after his 16th birthday, and ever afterwards was obsessed with architecture and city design. Blessed with a prosperous and growing kingdom, Tamaddon Shah directed the building of three new cities and innumerable huge buildings: some of them temples, others palaces, and one constructed around an oasis as part of its defense. With this zeal for building, Tamaddon Shah established a new tradition among the rulers of the Kohani, and after his reign, Shahs tried to outdo their predecessors by building greater and more wonderful structures and cities.

It was some time during these centuries that the Kohani created the first writing to be found in the desert. Most likely the writing was started by architects who wanted some way to measure and record the dimensions of their creations, for the oldest writings are mostly numbers, given by arranged dots, which were later simplified into line symbols. From there Dastani and advisors to the Shah began to create writing with word meanings, in an attempt to record their history.

In the meantime, the Mahsimi were suffering, as slaves who did most of the work from zealous Shahs often placed high demands on their builders. The Mahsimi came to measure larger buildings by the number of tribesmen who had died in their construction. At last, a benevolent Shah named Hamdardi saw the cruelty and wastefulness of this, and declared that no more buildings should be built at the cost of any lives. For the rest of Hamdardi's dynasty, the Mahsimi received very good treatment, for slaves.

The War of Revenge (Kinejuyi Jang)

When Hamdardi's great-great grandson died without heirs, and the throne of the Shahs changed hands to another dynasty, it was only a matter of time before the tradition of moderation in building was forgotten. By the third generation of the new dynasty, building efforts were back in full swing, and seditious words began to filter through the Mahsimi. For many years they were still too afraid of the power of the Kohani Shahs to attempt revolt, but there came a time when they could no longer be cautious.

Kasdim was the fourth Shah of his dynasty, and had seen enough of his father's sins to know that being Shah and remaining sinless enough to enter Heaven upon death was a near-impossible task. Rather than attempt it, he determined to find another way into Heaven. He knew that entrance by the Three Heavenly Rivers was impossible, since the Crocodile god Marmulak watched over those gateways, but he believed that there must be another way.

One day, the story goes, he was surveying his kingdom under the blaze of the sun, and saw how some of the tallest buildings seemed to reach up towards Heaven itself. Suddenly the knowledge of how to get into Heaven came to him. He would build a structure that he could climb all the way into Heaven. He discussed the project with his architects, who came up with the plan for a stepped ziggurat so large that they said it would take nearly 100 years to finish, under traditional rules. Kasdim, anxious to be alive when the building was complete, asked how long it would take if he made the builders work as fast as they could, without regard for casualties among the slaves. The architects recalculated, and said, with

some apprehension, 30 years. Elated, Kasdim immediately gave orders for the building to begin.

Conditions among the Mahsimi were ripe for a revolt. All they needed was a leader, and they found her in a young Dastani named Hlavar. Led, she said, by a mystical vision, she gathered her people together carefully and secretly. Her fear was that, if the ziggurat were to be completed, not only would many Mahsimi have died from exhaustion and starvation, but also the gods would be angered, and rain vengeance upon the Kohani, probably killing the entire Mahsimi tribe in the process.

The word of Hlavar's vision spread quickly, and it only increased the Mahsimi's desire to free themselves. Hlavar went about the preparations carefully, and they took many years, because as well as arming and training her people, she wanted some of them to learn magic, and that took time. By the time she declared her people ready to revolt, the base of the great ziggurat was complete, and the building was already 10 stories tall.

On a night when the moon was full, and Mah at her height of power, the Mahsimi hid from their masters and gathered together for a short prayer. Thus steeled, they took up their hoarded weapons just as their overseers arrived. The overseers were far outnumbered, had far less training, and were easily overcome. The Mahsimi marched onwards towards the palace of the Shah.

The lower ranks of the Kohani armies had been ordered to work on the ziggurat, while higher ranking soldiers acted as overseers. As a result, very few soldiers were sent to quell the occasional riots in the months preceding the full-scale revolt, and the army was totally unprepared. The early battles were quick and devastating. On the third day of battle, the Mahsimi had reached the building site of the great ziggurat, and unleashed a torrent of magic. The sand beneath the ziggurat became as soft as quicksand, and the monstrous building sank beneath the dunes.

The Kohani fought back as well as they could, and after a few weeks of fighting their superior equipment and supplies allowed them to take the upper hand. By that time, however, the greatest victory had been won. Kasdim, furious at the destruction of his ziggurat, changed his army's strategy. Rather than try to subdue and re-enslave the Mahsimi, Kasdim ordered his army to guard all the Kohani water sources. The great river and all the oases in Kohani territory were surrounded. The Mahsimi attempted a few raids, but they were all complete failures. Hlavar stopped these attempts quickly, and instead brought her people outside Kohani lands and into the vast desert beyond.

Kasdim, however, was not content with simply driving out the Mahsimi. After he was sure the Mahsimi had left his lands, he shut his gates to all outsiders, and then began sending out assassins posing as refugees. One of them was sent to kill Hlavar, but the others had

a broader and far more hurtful mission: to poison every oasis and waterway not under Kohani control.

Other than the Mahsimi, the tribe hurt most by this unforgivable series of attacks was the Farramad, who at the time controlled a few oases to the north of the Kohani territory. The Shah of the Farramad, an intelligent but cowardly Jerboa named Agahn, took in many of the refugee Mahsimi after their revolt. When the poisoning campaign began, and his people began to suffer, he immediately broke his people up into four groups. One was to go west, one northwest, and one north, looking for a new place for the tribe to settle, and on the way, they were to warn the other tribes of Kasdim's intentions. The fourth group was made up of the best warriors of the tribe, who stayed to find a way to bring retribution upon the Kohani for their act.

The Derpasdari were not without their casualties. Their oases were hit soon after those of the Farramad, but they had the benefit of a few days of warning from their neighbors. They were also abler defenders. They caught the assassins sent to attack them, but instead of killing them all, they sent one with each group of traveling Farramad, as proof of the Kohani's crime. Then they turned towards the gates of the Kohani lands, and with the few defenders from the Farramad began to plot revenge.

They were not to be alone. The Farramad warning, and many Kohani assassins, reached the ears and oases of every other tribe in turn, and each tribe dispatched a force of their greatest warriors. The Sorkhareh, still harboring an ancient grudge against the Kohani, were well equipped and trained for war and sent nearly half their numbers. The conflict that followed became known as the War of Revenge.

Together, the forces of all the tribes combined were enough to subdue the Kohani within a month. Simple victory was not the goal of the tribes, however, and after defeating the Kohani army, they set about killing the entire royal family and reducing not just the capital city but all the Kohani cities to rubble. Anyone they found who had anything to do with protecting Kohani water sources was killed, as were all the Kohani architects and overseers. Lastly, as the few remaining Kohani watched in terror, the other tribes carefully and methodically defiled every Kohani water source. The river ran with blood and waste; as far as anyone knows, its waters are still black.

Most of the remaining Kohani nobles died ignominiously in the desert in the years to follow. No tribe would take them in, no matter how repentant they appeared. Innocent Kohani citizens had only slightly better luck; the Damesab occasionally took those who swore allegiance to the tribe, and the Khorsheed accepted a small group who wished to seek repentance for the sins of their tribe. Needless to say, any Kohani that ran into the Mahsimi was slaughtered. The Mahsimi were avenging centuries of slavery.

The Second Settling

When the destruction of the Kohani lands was complete, the Sorkhareh were the first to leave. Of all the tribes that were left, they had the most cities, and were the farthest from home. In addition, they had let their own defense lapse too long, and one of their key forts had been captured by riders from the northern steppes. They marched, therefore, from one war to another across many leagues of unforgiving desert. A number of Khorsheed accompanied them, giving them free and safe passage through their part of the desert. That act shortened the Sorkhareh's return journey by several weeks, and the Sorkhareh have never forgotten it. In return, the Sorkhareh allow the Khorsheed free and safe passage through their lands on their pilgrimages to the northern sea.

The Derpasdari, in contrast, no longer had a home to return to. The few oases they controlled that had not been poisoned before the war were destroyed or defiled during the war. They began a nomadic existence that lasted several generations. The Damesab did not take long in returning to a nomadic existence either. The other tribes still distrusted them, and knowing this, the Damesab vanished into the desert soon after the end of the war.

The Badsavar involvement in the war was limited in terms of actual numbers. Most of their assistance was magical in nature, and while they played a large part in the outcome of the war, by the time it was over there were only nine Badsavar anywhere near the war zone. They delivered a gift of herd lizards and good wishes to the Mahsimi, and disappeared back to their pastures.

Hlavar gathered the Mahsimi together and started them heading west to find a new homeland. Inflated with their victory over their masters, and intoxicated by their new freedom, they traveled carelessly, wasting water and food. Many Mahsimi died in the desert, including Hlavar. Leaderless and disorganized, they lurched west until they came up against the Emirates, where they could go no further, and there they made their home.

The aftermath of the War of Revenge had a dramatic effect on the Jostani tribe. Most of the tribe was convinced that the very presence of the old Kohani buildings and artifacts tainted the land itself and made remaining in those lands dangerous. A few, however, had seen wonders of intellect and technology in the Kohani lands that they had never seen or dreamed of before. Perhaps the thing that impressed them most, other than the architecture, was the writing. None of the nomadic tribes had the secret of writing. Those Jostani that were fascinated by this new discovery made the argument that now that the Kohani themselves were gone, the strong of mind and spirit should be able to withstand the evil influences pervading the land and learn the good things the Kohani had



come up with. After all, a civilization that had lasted so long must have discovered a few things worth knowing.

This disagreement became so heated that at last, the two groups split into two different tribes. The ones that stayed called themselves the Peyravi, the Followers, intending to follow the path to the truth no matter the cost. Those that left called themselves the Dastan-Dastar, the Preservers of Knowledge.

In resettling, the Farramad had the greatest fortune, for in their travels they came across the great, uninhabited Abrud, a river near the west edge of the desert. They learned to grow crops in the fertile floodplains, and began to build permanent villages, then towns, then huge cities made from stone and brick. They expanded all the way up and down the river, and became the most populous and richest tribe in the desert.

Contact with Other Nations

There had always been legends of great glittering cities and lands where rivers ran and rain fell, but hemmed in as they were by mountains on one side and craggy hills and cliffs upon the other, the desert tribes had little contact with the peoples living in the Emirates and Zhongguo before the War of Revenge. After the war, as tribes began to resettle, they began to reach out exploratory fingers to the eastern and western edges of the desert.

One group of Farramad, in their search for a new home, bumped up against the Zhonggese in the province of Chi. While their contact was unpleasant and brief, it triggered Zhonggese interest in the desert nomads. The story goes that a Zhonggese potter found a ceramic dish dropped by one of the tribesmen. It was painted blue, using a dye made from cobalt found only in certain parts of the desert. The color was unlike any the potter had ever seen in ceramics before, and the potter showed it to the governor of Chi, who also became fascinated by it, and sent out a group of diplomats to the desert people to negotiate trade for the new dye. Slowly, trade between the Zhonggese and the nomads grew.

It was the Mahsimi who first came in contact with the Emirates. After they lost their leader Hlavar in their trek westward, they lost organization and continued aimlessly, searching for any place they could settle. When they reached the Emirates they had no food, no water, and ragged clothing. The only thing they had to trade with the Emirates were the asbal the Badsavar had given them.

As it turned out, the Emirate people put a high value on asbal, not having seen any before. The Mahsimi got an excellent deal for their seven asbal, including rights to settle a patch of land with a spring in it. Realizing what a good situation they were in, they ran back to the Badsavar to get more asbal. The Emirate demand for asbal has only gone up, and the Mahsimi are very nearly the Emirs' only suppliers.

The Emirates later struck up negotiations with the Sorkhareh as their defended borders extended to the edge of Emirate lands. The Sorkhareh, whose borders also touched Zhongguo on the other side, were perfectly placed to start trade between Zhongguo and the Emirates. At first they were reluctant, but after the first few caravans came through, and both sides began offering huge rewards for desert guides, the Sorkhareh relented. Since then, their trade route has become so important to them that they have trained entire generations for nothing but escorting caravans.

The Abi-Asman also came in contact with the Emirates at the southern edge of their range. It was a good thing for the Abi-Asman that they had already settled the majority of their river when they met the Emirates at the southern city of Bazargani, or the Emirates might have tried to take it over. In any case, what was then the small settlement of Bazargani was perfectly situated to engage in trade with both the Emirates and the sea traders who came to the Emirate ports. Bazargani quickly grew into the Abi-Asman's largest city.

The Nine Tribes

The Nine Tribes are a widespread, nomadic society with ties to all of Akoma. Their authority is unchallenged on the west coast, and the families and clades of their lineages can be found all about the deserts.

The Abi-Asman

"We have grown beyond the need for the nomadic ways of the other tribes. We do not need to trudge endlessly from oasis to oasis because we control the Blue River, the Abrud, the only river left in the desert. Strength comes not from starvation and thirst, but from plenty. Our people are strong because they have enough to eat and plenty to drink. For as the Blue River runs true, we shall thrive."

Baha and the Hyena's Harem

The founder of Abi-Asman was Baha al Geran, a Hyena merchant. When the ten companions parted ways, Baha had lost the most financially. He was eager just to move on and chalk it up to experience, but his bodyguard Mehr al Bani had another idea. Convinced that the Crocodile Zar was the thief, Mehr convinced Baha to follow him. Baha and Mehr followed about a day behind Zar until the Crocodile had reached the Seyl River. Baha circled around him and stopped about a day downriver from Zar, hoping to keep an eye on him.

When Zar began to build himself a magnificent palace with wealth he never seemed to have before, Baha and Mehr were convinced of his guilt, and went together to confront him. He admitted that he was using the treasure that was stolen, but said that he had earned it by catching the real culprit and taking it from him. He said the true thief was the Jackal Idaniz. Mehr seemed to believe him, but Baha refused. Baha dismissed Mehr for disagreeing with him, and challenged Zar to a fight. Zar defeated him soundly, being the far better warrior, but spared Baha's life, telling him only that if he was seen in the area of the river again, he would be killed.

Baha left alone, going north, not wasting much time in self-pity but looking for a place to live. After some time he came to a small but very beautiful oasis, full of fruit trees. The only inhabitants were a Hyena and a harem of twenty women of many races. The Hyena was fat and ugly, but he wore rich robes and a turban studded with gems such as might be worthy of a prince. Baha saw the Hyena from afar before the Hyena could see him, and judged him rightly to be full of his own importance. Baha therefore greeted the man as a prince should be greeted, bowing low before him. The Hyena was much gratified by this, and was agreeable to Baha's request to stay at the oasis and drink from it for three days, to rest from his travels.

The following day, Baha was awoken by a young concubine from the harem. "Good sir, I do not know who you are, but you must leave this place at once. If you stay any longer the Hyena will surely kill you as he has killed so many others." Baha was much surprised at this statement, and asked the girl to explain. "He has three vicious sag lizards that will kill anyone he tells them to. They kill male travelers and then the Hyena eats them, and takes their women for himself! I lost my brother not three weeks ago in that awful way."

"What a horrible man!" said Baha. "Let me but stop here tonight and the following night and see if I cannot figure out a way to free you all and end his tyranny." The Camel girl pleaded with Baha to get him to leave, but Baha was adamant. He said, "I am not a warrior, but I think I know what kind of man this Hyena is, and I have an idea."

The following evening, the Hyena invited Baha to dinner. Baha accepted graciously, and during the course of the evening, told the Hyena a slightly altered version of his history. He said he had been a rich merchant who had seen half of his treasure stolen. He said that he had then entrusted the other half to a strong friend, a Crocodile named Zar, who lived in a place that only Baha knew about.

Then Baha said, "I know, Hyena, that you wish to kill and devour me, but I am willing to tell you where my money is kept and how to get it if you will swear by Heaven that you will not kill me." The Hyena, completely taken in by Baha's story, agreed, and swore by Heaven not to kill him if he told him where his treasure was. Baha thanked the Hyena and bowed before him. "Take my clothes," he said, "and disguise yourself as me. We are the same race and much the same size, and Zar's sight is not excellent. Follow a path to the star Nafarxonde in the southeast, and you will come upon Zar's city. Ask to see him, and tell the people you meet that you are an old friend of his, but do not mention your name. Some of the citizens of Zar's city are jealous of my favor with him and might carry designs upon my life, so be careful not to mention your name until you meet Zar. When you meet him at last, say your name is Baha al Geran and that you have come for your money, and he will give it to you."

The Hyena took Baha's clothes, and gave Baha a simple robe. Then the Hyena gave Baha one last order. "Now, if no one stays here, my harem will all run away, so you must stay here until I come back. If you are not here when I return, I will hunt you down and kill you wherever you may be, and you can be sure I will not kill you quickly." Baha swore upon Heaven that he would not leave the harem until the Hyena returned. Satisfied, the Hyena left upon his errand.

Baha said to the concubines, "Do not fear; I have sent the Hyena to his death. If he follows my instructions, he will not live much longer. However, I should like to be sure of his demise, but I have sworn upon Heaven not to leave this oasis, so one of you must follow him and tell me what happens to him." The young girl who warned Baha the first day volunteered, wrapped herself up for travel, and left to follow the Hyena.

While he waited for the girl to return with her report, Baha made himself acquainted with all the concubines, and they all came to like him very much. Those that were widows, he promised to set free when he was sure the Hyena was dead. The others he promised to give good homes and find good husbands for. "In any case, even if the Hyena returns, these evil sags shall be gotten rid of; they will eat no more visitors." Then he had the harem girls hold the Hyena's three sags down while he slit their throats.

At length the girl returned, saying that she had seen the Hyena die a most satisfyingly bloody death. The concubines rejoiced, and began to treat Baha as their king. The young girl who had warned him, and who had gone to watch the Hyena die, offered herself to Baha for a wife, as did two others, and Baha married them and treated them very well. Baha settled in the oasis, and he was not jealous of the other concubines nor was he stingy with his newfound wealth and water. His generosity earned him the friendship of many travelers, and those that stayed came to regard him as their king. In this way, Baha started a tribe, which he named the *Farramad*, meaning Fortunate.

The War of Revenge and the Great Search

Relations between the Farramad and the Kohani were never friendly, but they were mostly peaceful. The Kohani never bothered the Farramad unless the nomads bothered them, and the Farramad learned quickly not to enter Kohani lands. Also, the Kohani never traded with any of their neighbors, leaving the nomadic tribes no caravans to plunder, and until Hlavar's revolution, the Kohani kept a close enough hold on their Mahsimi slaves that the Farramad knew as little of them as they did of the Kohani.

As the revolution geared up, however, small conflicts started breaking out all up and down the Seyl River, and some slaves escaped. Many of them came to the Farramad. The first group, led by a powerful Badjaduyi, convinced the Farramad Shah of the time, a Jerboa named Agahn, to shelter the Mahsimi until the revolution occurred.

As a result, Agahn had some warning that the Kohani might turn their anger upon his tribe. He prepared a plan to move the tribe, if doing so turned out to be necessary, and he told his warriors to prepare a defense against the Kohani armies. He expected the Kohani army to come marching out of the gates and demand that the Farramad turn over the escaped slaves. He had no idea what they were really planning.

The three assassins sent from the Kohani to the Farramad lands poisoned the three oases in common use in one night. The Farramad suffered greatly, and many people died before they realized what was going on. Agahn took immediate action. He sent runners to the nearest tribe, the Derpasdari, hoping to warn them. Then he divided his people into three groups, the Somal, who would go north, the Baxtar, who would go west, and the Darunmarzi, who would go northwest. He instructed them each to travel as fast as they could for one month, spreading the word of the Kohani's treachery, and warning other tribes to be on their guard. Then, he said, they should spend three years searching for a place for the Farramad to settle, and after that, meet back as close to their original homeland as possible.

"Now," he said, "I will stay here, with anyone strong and brave enough to stay, for there is one other thing we must do. The death of our people, and the destruction of our oases, must be avenged. I intend to lead a group of warriors into the Kohani lands to kill as many of those infidels as we can. I do not expect that any of us will live, but before I breathe my last, the Kohani will pay tenfold for the deaths of our tribesmen."

Agahn's newfound bravery, and that of his warriors, was well repaid, because they were not alone in the fight for long. The Derpasdari sent many of their own, and the warnings carried by the Somal, Baxtar, and Darunmarzi groups brought help of some form or another from every other tribe in the desert. Today, the descendents of the Farramad credit their ancestors with saving the desert from the evil of the Kohani because of those warnings.

Other than spreading this warning, however, the Darunmarzi had no luck. All the oases they encountered were occupied or defended by other tribes. Less than a year after they had set out, they returned to their homelands to wait.

The Somal also found no suitable place to live to the north, but instead a long mountain chain. While the mountains were not impassable, beyond them lay the carefully defended land Zhongguo. After a short initial conflict which the better-equipped and prepared Zhonggese won hands down, this group spent two years on the edges of Zhongguo's Chi province, searching in vain for a place to settle.

The Baxtal had the hardest time of it. The land they traveled was inhospitable and uninhabited, and they encountered extremes of thirst, heat, cold, and exhaustion. They were unwilling to let their tribe down, however, and pressed on in spite of the hardships. At last it seemed that the gods were to reward their perseverance, for after a year of endless travel, they came to the valley of a huge, wonderful, and miraculously uninhabited river. Rejoicing at this wonderful blessing, they immediately began to claim the river by settling there.

When the time came to return to the east to meet their fellow tribesmen, the Baxtal sent only three, their bravest and best, one Dastani, one Scarab Keeper, and one Qanundari, to meet the others. They listened patiently while the other two groups told their stories. Then the Dastani, a Camel named Rahbar, said, "My brothers, our group, who went west, has had good fortune beyond what you could possibly imagine. Follow me west, and you will see our new home. It will not be a pleasant journey, but it will be worth it." The others pressed him for more information, but he refused to give it, saying that the land his group had found was secret, and he wished it to remain so.

For four months they traveled through the harsh desert, following a complicated path that Rahbar had devised. None of the others, even other Dastani, could quite figure out what star paths he was following, nor was he eager to elaborate. He had set the path such that they traveled nonstop almost to exhaustion point, and just when the tribesmen could go no further, they would come upon an oasis. At last, he brought the tribe over a series of increasingly tall dunes, and when they reached the top of the last, the tribesmen looked down upon the wonderful blue river that stretched from one horizon to the other. So struck by this sight were they that they immediately changed the name of their tribe to *Abi-Asman*, which means Blue Paradise.

Life on the Banks of the Blue River

The Abi-Asman are by far the most diverse and most comfortable tribe in the desert. Also, more Crocodiles live here than with any other tribe. They are the most civilized tribe, in the sense of having permanent homes and cities, and they have the best-developed agriculture and government. The Abrud, and therefore the kingdom, is divided into twenty-five Abbaxes, or water-districts, each ruled by its own governor, and each governor is responsible to the Shah. Each governor also leads an army of Qanundari, who are responsible for keeping the river and the kingdom safe, both from internal and external dangers. They spend most of their time patrolling and maintaining the large intermittent wall that extends the length of the river along the east side of the kingdom. Because of their reliable sources of food and water, the Abi-Asman is both the most numerous and the most besieged tribe in the desert.

The plentitude of water in the lands of the Abi-Asman has forced them to slightly relax the normal laws about water distribution. Normally, only Scarab Keepers can draw water from an oasis, but in Abi-Asman anyone is allowed to fill their jugs in the river. Swimming, bathing, washing clothes, or allowing waste into the river is still prohibited, but families may draw as much water from the river as they like. As a result, the Abi-Asman have gained a reputation the best-smelling tribe in the desert, because they can actually take real baths as often as they like.

Most of the tribesmen of the Abi-Asman are concerned with irrigating, planting, harvesting, and regulating the land around the Abrud, and so Farmers, Laborers, and Scarab Keepers are common. Some are priests, scribes, or advisors, and there are Badjaduyi and Qanundari who help to protect the kingdom. The Abi-Asman cultivate very few Dastani, as they see little use for traveling in the desert when all they need is easily available by the riverside. Also, in the kingdom of the Abi-Asman, landmarks are permanent and can be trusted for navigation, whereas in the open desert a hill you see one day may be twenty feet away the next morning, and gone altogether next month.

Abi-Asman is the one of the few tribes in which writing is common. The Abi-Asman, in building their civilization, found it necessary to use some system of symbols to mark and measure things. They use the elegant phonetic letters developed by the Emirates, but the language is their own Zabani. The Abi-Asman are very proud of the civilization they have built. Architects and engineers are highly prized, and prominent scholars are often treated as minor nobility. There is no organized school system but in some Abbaxes various temples take children in one day a week to teach them reading, writing, and theology.

A Player Character from Abi-Asman may be of almost any Career or Race; even some of the more exotic races from Zhongguo and the Emirates are not unknown here. Merchants are uncommon in most of Abi-Asman, but trade with other cultures is gaining more attention as the Abi-Asman realize how much richer it could make them. Most people are happy to live by the Abrud, but some may be touched by Wanderlust, the ancient calling of the blood that draws them to a more nomadic life. This is one of the few places in the desert where Swimming is an appropriate skill.

Relations with Outsiders

The Abi-Asman trade a fair bit with the Emirates. The city of Bazargani on the mouth of the Abrud is practically within bowshot of the southernmost Emirate fort of Bandar eh Lengeh. While the Abrud is hardly the only passage to the Emirates – and indeed most trade from Zhongguo comes through the Sorkhareh far to the north – it is the easiest and the safest, if you can get to the river.

Because of the location of Bazargani so close to the trade routes used by sea traders, the Abi-Asman have more direct trade with Calabria of any of the other tribes. While most trade from Calabria still comes through the Emirates, some intrepid merchants do enter the lands of the Abi-Asman to trade guns, metal, wood, and meat-lizards for spices, dyes, and linen.

The Abi-Asman have a dim view of the other desert tribes. Enemies who are captured when their raids fail are usually enslaved. The Abi-Asman are the only desert tribesmen to keep slaves on a regular basis. In most of the desert, a slave simply cannot work hard enough to support himself and a master, but on the banks of the Abrud slavery can be quite profitable. However, the Abi-Asman have learned from the example of the Kohani, and are careful not to keep too many slaves of one tribe in one area.

There is one tribe the Abi-Asman do get along with: the Derpasdari. The Derpasdari were the first to arrive to assist the ancestors of the Abi-Asman in bringing down the Kohani, and as a result the Abi-Asman are tolerant of them. The Derpasdari are currently trying to negotiate a treaty of sorts that will allow them to lead travelers from Zhongguo to the gates of Abisahr near the head of the Abrud. The current Shah of the Abi-Asman, a descendent of Agahn named Manesi, sees the potential value of such a treaty, and is trying to get his governors to agree on a way to make it binding.

The Badsavar

"The strongest forces in the desert are the evil sun, the endless sand, and the swift wind. Of these the only one that mortals can hope to tame is the wind. We have not only tamed but mastered it, and because of this, we are the strongest tribe in the desert. With the speed and power of the wind we will conquer the desert, and like a sandstorm bury our enemies."

Abar's Journey

The founder of the Badsavar was a Vulture named Abar az Tani. She had been maid to the unfaithful lady Bezira. In return for her faithfulness to her master Mugar, Abar was given her freedom, and three sotor, one male and two females. With them she traveled for many years, searching the desert for the perfect place to begin her new life. She had a plan to find a spot where plants grew and could be cultivated, and where she could use her three sotor to start a herd.

Abar met many people on her travels. One day, she was stopping at an oasis, and there was a man there with three sotor. Abar knew from experience how hard it was for one person to control three stubborn sotor, and she was impressed with the way he managed it. She invited him to follow her and add his sotor to her herd, and he agreed. At another oasis, she met a man skilled in the cultivation of desert plants; at another, a Scarab Keeper knowledgeable in the ways of water. In the middle of a stretch of dunes she came across a female mystic named Badsorud who had power over the wind, one of the very first Badjaduyi.

When Abar finally reached the fertile land she had been searching for, she had no fewer than thirteen people with her. There they settled, and began breeding a herd of sotor. To this day the Badsavar are known as accomplished herders.

The Children of Badsorud

By the time Abar and her companions found their home, Abar was too old to have any children. Badsorud was some twenty years younger, and already had three. They were adopted by Abar as grandchildren, and became her heirs. Badsorud taught them her magical techniques, and Abar encouraged them to apply themselves to other practical pursuits.

Badsorud's elder daughter, Shaba, learned techniques of breeding and herding. She got quite good at it, and as an adult took it upon herself to direct the activity of all the herders in the tribe. Herders among the Badsavar are called saban, and are led by a Badjaduyi called the Shaba.

Badsorud's son, Barzi, learned how to cultivate plants on which the herds could graze. In later life, he united the Badsavar's farmers and became their leader. Farmers among the Badsavar are called barzegar, and are always led by a Badjaduyi called the Barzi.

Badsorud's younger daughter, Baran, learned by experiment a number of tricks to irrigate land without spoiling the water. She taught all the Badsavar's Scarab Keepers her techniques, and became their leader. They are still led by a Badjaduyi called the Baran.

Badsorud's three children together started the Council of Badsorud, and began calling their tribe the Badsavar, in honor of their mother. Led by the Shaba, the Barzi, and the Baran, and advised by the nine most powerful Badjaduyi in the tribe, the Council of Badsorud makes all governmental decisions for the Badsavar.

Assisting the Rebels

Between the founding of the Badsavar and the War of Revenge, the Badsavar had little contact with other tribes. There were occasional raids by other tribes, mostly the Damesab, but the magical might of the Badsavar made such raids particularly dangerous, and rival tribes have learned to be careful about attacking the herdsman.

It was ironic, then, that they were the first tribesmen outside the Mahsimi to know of the revolt. Hlavar, the leader of the Mahsimi resistance, was a Dastani, a Starteller, and knew many stories of the mystic skills of the Badsavar. Early in her efforts, she arranged for three young Mahsimi to escape Kohani lands and seek out the Badsavar to enlist their help. After many trials, these Mahsimi managed to find the Badsavar, and because they were children, they were not killed outright, and had time to tell their story. They were taken to see the Council of Badsorud.

The Council listened very carefully to the story, declared that the children were telling the truth, and agreed to send one Badjaduyi master back to the Mahsimi with the children. This master was to tell the Mahsimi to expect help from the Badsavar when they needed it, and he was allowed to choose promising Mahsimi and teach them the spells and magical techniques used to control the wind and other powers of the desert. When the revolt was ready, the Badsavar sent eight more Badjaduyi, and it was their power, combined with the power of the Mahsimi wizards, that sank the great ziggurat. These same wizards returned after they heard of the treachery of the Kohani, and helped to lay low the rest of the kingdom. When the battles were over, the Council of Badsorud gave the newly-freed Mahsimi seven asbal and seven sotor.

Riding the Pasture Winds

The Badsavar are the best-known herders in the desert. With relatively fertile land and careful crop cultivation, they keep herds of many kinds of lizards. Most famously, they tend the herds of elegant asbal, proud, swift, graceful beasts bred for speed. They make spirited but loyal mounts, and while they need daily supplies of water, they fare better in the desert than drays or cao xi-yi. The Badsavar also keep herds of sotor, desert-adapted lizards with pale, shiny scales and large sail-like projections on their head and tail. Sotor can last many weeks in the desert without water, as long as they have leafy food. While hardier than asbal, sotor are not nearly so swift.

The Badsavar retain the nomadic existence of their ancestors. Their herds are too large to leave on one grazing land for long, so they move them to a new pasture about once every three months. Herdsmen and their families are careful to keep their herds a few pastures apart from those of their nearest neighbors, so that pastures have a chance to regrow. Just about everything the Badsavar make is made from leather. They live in tents made from the tanned hides of their lizards, and decorations are made of strips of brightly-dyed leather woven or braided together. Families too poor to buy imported linen will even dress in leather robes. They scrape the leather thin and then pierce holes in it to allow air to circulate.

The Badsavar are people of strong will and as such are likely to favor magic, Resolve, and other skills of willpower and strength of spirit. In addition they prize those with swift legs and wings. Vultures are especially welcome, as they have a certain amount of natural mastery over the wind.

Relations with Outsiders

The Badsavar sell many sotor and asbal to other nations, especially the Emirates, where asbal-racing is a popular sport. They maintain good relations with the Mahsimi, who act as middlemen for sales to the Emirates. They also sell to the Sorkhareh and the Derpasdari, although less frequently. Those tribes then pass the animals on to buyers from Zhongguo. Asbal that show up in Calabria usually come through the Emirates.

The Badsavar do sometimes lead caravans through the desert. Their mastery of wind magic makes the trip quick and comfortable compared with traveling with most others, but the Badsavar have developed a bad reputation among the Zhonggese. Stories persist of Badsavar who abduct entire caravans and molest Zhonggese wizards, looking for the secret of making water appear out of nothing.

The Damesab

"Our people are the strongest in the desert. We go where we like and do as we wish. We control every oasis in the desert, though we sometimes let the other tribes drink from them. After all, when you have so much, there is no reason not to share. Do not let the other tribes mislead you into thinking we are thieves; we take only what is rightfully ours, and what others are too weak to protect."

Idaniz and Irana

After being discovered by Zar retrieving the ten companions' stolen goods, the Jackal Idaniz ran into the desert as fast as his sotor could carry him. He traveled the desert aimlessly for some time, getting food and water wherever he could, even stealing it. Wherever he went he encountered rich people unwilling to share much of their wealth with him. He would take what he thought he deserved and what he thought he could get away with, and while he was sometimes caught, he always managed to get away before he was executed.

One night, while trying to sneak some riches out of the tent of a wealthy mine owner, Idaniz bumped up against a young Jerboa named Irana, who was trying to do the same thing. Idaniz suggested they join forces and share the profit, and Irana agreed. Idaniz and Irana got a haul worth over forty jugs of water. Very pleased by their success, they decided to work together from then on.

This kind of coincidence happened several more times, and each time Idaniz and Irana gained a new companion. Idaniz began calling the growing group the Damesab, or Night Vapors, intending to strike fear into the hearts of the people who they might raid. The name did spread, as did the Damesab. Other tribes began to talk about the Damesab as a full-fledged tribe, and members of other tribes with a thieflly bent, or who hoped to disperse the Damesab and gain acclaim at home, began seeking the Damesab out.

Then, one company of glory seekers managed to deal a fair bit of damage to the Damesab, mostly because there were too many Damesab to maneuver and escape quickly. Idaniz split the group into three smaller companies, saying that to survive they must stay small, and that any time a group rose above 20 people, it must split up. He called the small groups *hojri*, and thus set up the structure the tribe uses today.

Greed and Righteous Anger

It didn't take the Damesab long to hear about the treachery of the Kohani. The group of Farramad who headed northwest ran into a Damesab *hojri* within a week of setting out. The Damesab attacked the group, hoping to steal some food, water, and valuables; then they found the jug of poisoned water the Farramad had brought with them as part of their proof to the other tribes. The jug had been painted black as a warning, so the Damesab concluded the Farramad had not poisoned their own water. The question remained, who did. Alarmed, the Damesab roused some of the Farramad and demanded to know the meaning of the jug. After hearing the explanation, and that the Farramad were trying to get help from the other tribes to make war against the Kohani, the Damesab immediately saw the possibilities.

The wealth of the Kohani was well known among the Damesab, and if all the other tribes were going to be there attacking them, the Kohani wealth should make easy pickings. The *hojri* sent one of its own with the Farramad to spread the word among the Damesab, and then flew towards the Kohani lands to join in the fight.

The word spread quickly, as it does among the Damesab, and within four months nearly half the *hojri* in the desert were at the Kohani lands, killing Kohani refugees and pillaging cities already besieged by warriors from the other tribes. Faced with more wealth and supplies than they could carry, even with all the sotor they could steal, the Damesab started giving water, food, and weapons away to other tribes engaged in serious battles. This flood of generosity kept the other tribes from accusing the Damesab of being at the war only for material gain, at least until the war was over.

The Damesab knew, however, that their welcome was to be short-lived. Within a week of the last battle, the *hojri* were gone, vanished back into the desert as fast as they had come, not daring to stay for fear the other tribes would turn on them with their new weapons and battle-tested tactics and steal their riches away.

Drifting with the Vapors

The Damesab are the most nomadic of the tribes, having no oases that are totally their own. They organize themselves into small groups called *hojri* whose individuals work together to sustain themselves in any way they can. Members of a *hojri* treat each other like a family, and often take the same last name, even if they are not actually related. The Damesab believe that wealth and power belong to those who can take and make use of it. They are a terror to caravans; more often than not, if a caravan is attacked, Damesab are the raiders. The Damesab usually do their raiding, not at night as their name suggests, but at dawn and dusk, when their targets are getting ready to sleep or waking up, and watches are relaxed.

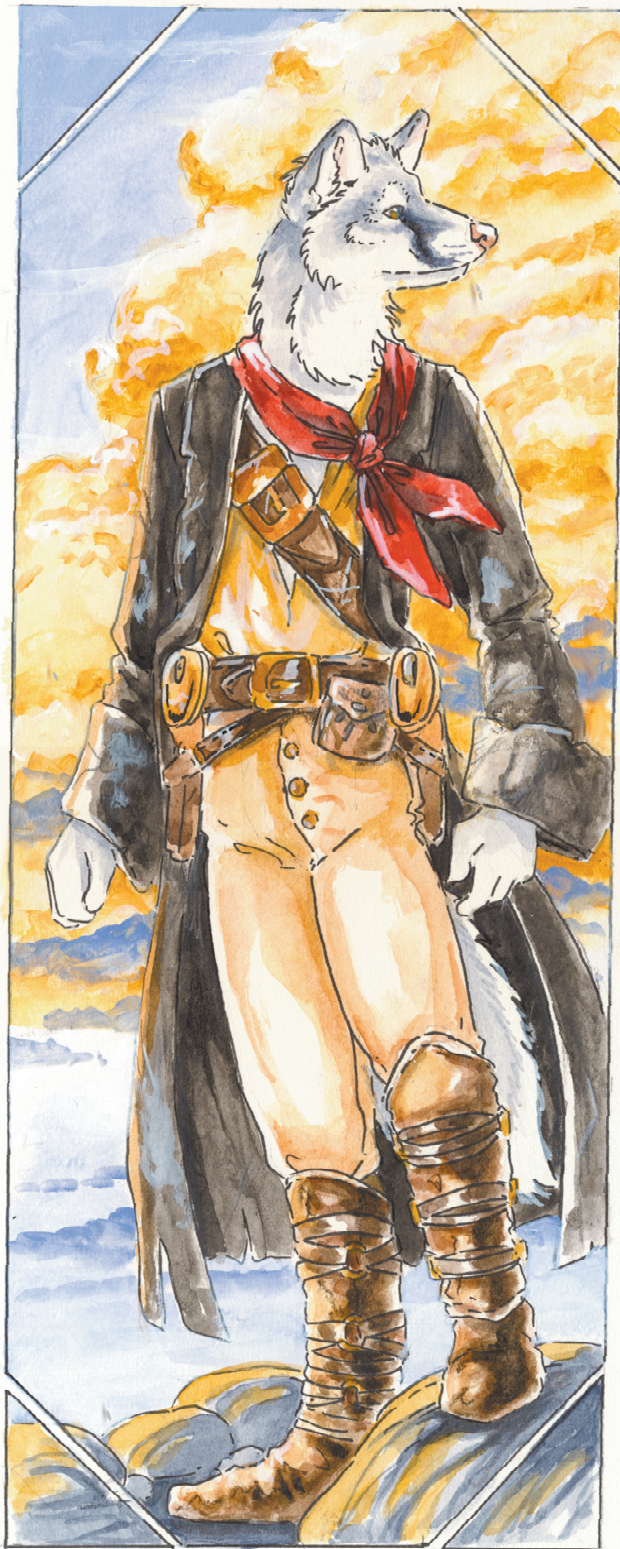
The Damesab have no central governing body; disputes between *hojri* are settled in a ritualized, non-fatal duel between two champions from each *hojri*. The winning *hojri* then has a recognized claim to all the wealth possessed by the losing *hojri*, and may take anything except the clothing they are wearing and two jugs of water.

The Damesab prize endurance and stealth in their members. Roguish careers are good choices for Damesab, as are skills like camouflage, stealth, holdout, hiking, and resolve. Crocodiles are good for this tribe because of their excellent ability to remain motionless, and Jerboas are welcomed for their quickness and stealth. Jackals make good Damesab as well.

Relations with Outsiders

The Damesab raid other tribes indiscriminately, attacking whoever they can whenever they think they can get away with it. As a result, Damesab are mistrusted by all the other tribes. Damesab captured by other tribes are typically killed immediately, even by the *Abi-Asman*, who normally enslave their captives. The Damesab are understandably wary, therefore, of doing anything dangerous without the protection of their *hojri*.

People from other tribes who have committed crimes or caused their tribes to turn against them will sometimes seek out the Damesab, asking to join. Ironically, considering how the other tribes treat them, the Damesab are surprisingly tolerant of these people. They will first carefully test the newcomer to make sure he is not a spy, but if he passes that test, he is welcomed as a member of the tribe. As a result the Damesab are very diverse; a single *hojri* with three or more races is not uncommon.



The Damesab reaction to someone from outside the desert is typically, "Hand over your money and no one gets hurt." It is very rare for a caravan to get through the desert without being challenged by at least one hojri. Hojri living near the edges of the desert will often try to raid foreign settlements.

The Dastan-Dastar

"When strength is measured in its truest sense, ability not only to adapt but to excel and advance, it becomes clear that we are the strongest tribe in the desert. While other tribes overcome the hardships of the desert by strength of will, of body, or of spirit, or by acts of a criminal nature, we overcome them through strength of mind, using our natural talents, taking what little the desert gives us and turning it around to use against that very desert. Our knowledge and ingenuity allows us to defeat the desert."

Study Beneath the Stars

When the Jerboa Zirak al Zir and the Camel Kavos al Jostu learned that there was a thief among the ten companions, they realized that most of the companions slept in double-tents and began to ask people whether they had noticed their tent-mates getting up during the day when they should have been sleeping.

Mugar's reply was, "My wife is pure and has a good heart! She would never steal."

Bezira's reply was, "My maid is faithful and trustworthy. She would never steal!"

Abar's reply was, "My master is a good man, and would never think of stealing from his friends."

Mehr's reply was, "My master is greedy, but he is trustworthy, and would never steal what he could buy."

Baha's reply was, "My bodyguard is well-trained and never leaves his post; besides I don't think he'd have the intelligence to pull it off."

Nazar's reply was, "My brother is as innocent as a baby, and would never do anything of importance without consulting me."

Idaniz's reply was, "My brother is a kind soul, although to be honest I slept too well to notice anything."

Unable to question Zar, and having gotten no real answers from the others, Zirak and Kavos began to look for other clues, but by that time they had angered most of the other companions with their questions. Soon the companions began to accuse Zirak and Kavos of the theft. Indignant and hurt, they mounted their sotor and rode off.

From then on, they traveled. They were truly nomadic, and spent their time studying the stars. In time, they both took wives and had children, and their children had children, and so their two families grew into a tribe. Continuing the nomadic ways of their founders, the tribe, who called themselves the Jostani, studied the stars, and every time they would find out something new, they would trade knowledge of it to the other tribes for water and goods. As the tribe grew, it split up into kardaste. The kardaste would meet up under certain stars after certain astronomical events, such as eclipses, and exchange knowledge.

This was the life that they led when the appearance of a new comet in the southeastern part of the sky brought them together a little earlier than they expected, and it was while they were contemplating the meaning of this comet that a group of Farramad arrived, bringing news of the crimes of the Kohani from the southeast.

In a way, it was lucky for the Jostani that they were gathered together, and in a way, it was unlucky. If only a few kardaste had gone, they might not have survived, but then the rest of the Jostani would probably not have been split apart.

Even combined, the might of the Jostani lay in their minds and not their bodies. They were not trained for war, but they knew enough of engineering and mathematics to help the other tribes build catapults and rams and giant ballistae and other engines of war. Some of them also knew a little of the magic that the Badsavar were so famous for. The Jostani were good with mechanical bows and slings, and used those to back up the forces of the other tribes. None of the Jostani fought in hand-to-hand combat, but the other tribes do not dispute that their help was invaluable.

The Leaving-Behind

During the war, the Jostani saw many amazing things the Kohani had invented. Their architecture impressed them, even as they searched for ways to destroy it. They had war machines that the Jostani admired, studied, copied, and improved to use against their designers. Above all, perhaps, the Jostani saw that the Kohani had covered their walls and banners with patterns of lines that seemed to hold some meaning.

After the war, most of the tribe hastily abandoned their war machines and performed cleansing rituals to purge themselves of the evil influence of using the Kohani's tools. Then they prepared to leave; even the air was tainted, said the wise men. While some might have been skeptical of that, since they breathed the air and felt no ill effects, they received their proof when some of their brothers declared that they wanted to stay long enough to study the artifacts the Kohani had left behind.

Sure that some of their number must have been tainted by the presence of Kohani spirits, the rest of the Jostani tried everything – cleansing rituals, coaxing, cajoling, threatening, even bodily force – to bring the tainted ones to their senses. Some seemed to see the truth but others, those more deeply tainted, refused to budge.

“Leave us behind,” they said, “leave us behind if you will. We will not lose the chance to learn from the wealth of knowledge heaped about us. If you will, then leave us behind.”

So they did. The Jostani left about one in ten of their number behind, and changed their name to the Dastan-Dastar, the keepers of knowledge, and mourned their brothers who had fallen to temptation.

New Knowledge

After the leaving-behind, the Dastan-Dastar sought to distance themselves as much as they could from the old Kohani lands, and traveled northwest. They kept going until they reached the edge of the desert, where they found a pair of oases in a valley naturally defended by rocky walls, and accessible only through a small pass. There they settled.

As it happened, their neighbors to the west were the people of the Emirates. The Dastan-Dastar saw that the people of the Emirates had much knowledge that they did not, and agreed that a system of knowledge trading should be set up. The Dastan-Dastar shunned the old knowledge of the Kohani, but the new knowledge from the Emirates was untainted, and they sought it eagerly. The Emirates seemed happy to exchange it for the Dastan-Dastar knowledge of astronomy – they said that it would help them navigate the seas as the Dastan-Dastar navigated the sands.

Truth through Innovation

The Dastan-Dastar live by innovation. They believe that while old knowledge is important because it can lead you in the right direction, the really important truths are those that you discover for yourself. Experimentation and observation are key; the truth must be verifiable. The Dastan-Dastar have taken up Emirate writing, and are one of the few tribes where books are relatively common. They are building up quite a library of their own works, and they take the works of others if they think there is value in them.

They also trade by innovation. With barely any fertile land, and only enough water to support themselves, and no connection to any of the major trade routes, they have few natural products they can trade. Instead they have turned to the fruits of their intellect. The Emirates trade for copies of their books, but most of all for their inventions. The Dastan-Dastar are credited with creation of the first astrolabe and the first telescope, among other things. To keep trade alive, they have to keep coming up with new inventions and new knowledge, making the Dastan-Dastar settlement one of the most intellectually competitive communities anywhere.

Among the most scholarly of the tribes, the Dastan-Dastar rely on their intelligence and communication skills to protect them. When battle is required, the Dastan-Dastar prefer to use quick, effective magic to end the battle as soon as possible. Magic, lore, research, and other such skills are very appropriate for a member of this tribe.

Relations with Outsiders

The Dastan-Dastar are peaceful, for the most part, and can afford to be so for two reasons. First, they live quite near the western Emirates and trade with them. Second, passage into their land is possible only by three routes: from the western Emirates who guard their side, through a narrow eastern corridor only the Sorkhareh really know about, and from the south, over a very long stretch of waterless desert. The Sorkhareh and the Dastan-Dastar both are on good terms with the western Emirates and neither wishes to anger the Emirs by fighting with their allies. Also, the passage from the Sorkhareh side is easily guarded; the few times the Sorkhareh have made an attempt at invasion, they were easily blocked, despite their strength.

The Derpasdari

"Our people are the strongest in the desert. We are all brothers and sisters, act and think as one herd, all is disciplined and ordered. We may not control the largest number of oases in the desert, but our oases stretch from one end of the sands to the other, from the borders of Zhongguo to the doors of Abisahr on the Abrud. We can survive any hardship as long as we can rely on each other."

Loyalty Until Death

When the thefts occurred in the camp of the ten companions, the Camel bodyguard Mehr al Bani immediately suspected the Crocodile Zar. After the companions parted ways, he told his master Baha of his suspicions, and suggested that they follow Zar to see if they could not prove it. Eventually they caught up with Zar and saw that he was indeed using the treasure gained from the theft, but he told Mehr and Baha that he had gotten it by catching the real thief, the Jackal Idaniz.

Mehr believed Zar's story, and said that if it was true, then Zar had an honest claim to the treasure. Baha claimed that it was still his, no matter whose hands it had passed through or how. When Baha tried to challenge Zar, Mehr stopped him, wishing to protect him. Baha turned to Mehr and said, "I do not need a bodyguard who cannot agree with me. Begone from my sight, al-Bani, and let me never see you again."

Distraught, Mehr backed off, but he stayed nearby, and while Baha and Zar fought, he kept a bow nocked and aimed at Zar, as a warning not to kill his master. When he became Baha's bodyguard, Mehr had sworn by Heaven to protect him until he or his master died. If Baha died before him, he was sworn to follow him into the grave as punishment for his failure to protect him. Mehr had no intention of breaking that oath.

When Baha lost the duel, Mehr followed him from a distance, following his tracks and keeping far enough behind that Baha would not see him. Thus, Mehr was there when Baha entered the oasis of the evil Hyena, and after becoming friendly with some of the concubines, learned the whole story of Baha's triumph over him. Knowing that Baha would be more or less safe in the oasis with the Hyena gone, Mehr went to seek out another oasis, nearby, so that he could have food and water but still keep an eye on his master.

He found one and settled there, and as Baha's wealth and family grew, Mehr found himself getting lonely. The girls of Baha's oasis, who had once been concubines of the evil Hyena, were his only visitors, and at last he asked one of them to become his wife and stay with him so that he might have company and raise a family of his own. She happily agreed, and every now and then another member of Baha's quickly growing tribe went to join Mehr.

Mehr called his tribe the Derpasdari, which means Guards or Watchers, and while he was alive he demanded that they devote themselves to protecting Baha and his people, the Farramad, though from afar. He trained them like an army, and they were disciplined and battle-ready. When Baha died, Mehr gathered the tribe together and said, "I have used you for my own purposes long enough. You are now free to do as you wish." Then he solemnly cut his wrists, fulfilling his ancient vow.

The Contributions of General Ostovan

While the War of Revenge did not take the Derpasdari entirely by surprise, since they received a few days warning from the Farramad, still they were not really prepared for it. The Farramad warning had been brief and mysterious, and many Derpasdari viewed it with suspicion. The general in charge at the time, a Hyena named Agahi, felt it better to err on the side of caution. As a result the Derpasdari managed to catch all three of the assassins sent by the Kohani, but they were not fast enough to save all their oases. Only three, the oases of Abuda Quasar, Abuda Mirhan, and Abuda Aftal, remained pure. Of these, only Abuda Quasar was to survive the whole war.

The Derpasdari turned upon the Kohani with real fury, and with their entry into the fighting, the Mahsimi revolt turned into a true war. They could hardly have won the war on their own, so well equipped were the Kohani, but by the time the other tribes joined in, the Derpasdari were armed with valuable knowledge about the Kohani fighting tactics and their weaknesses.

After the war, the Derpasdari were forced to move. They could not stay in their own lands; one oasis was not enough to sustain them. They became nomads, and wandered the desert finding food and water wherever they could.

When the war ended, the leadership of the Derpasdari passed to the Camel Ostovan. He saw the psychological effect living a nomad life was having on his people, and he knew they could not last without a home. Their discipline was faltering and their battle skills were waning, because it is not possible to train for war if you must spend all your time foraging for food.

He consulted with the Dastani of the tribe, and turned their path northward. Under his guidance they came to a small oasis that, while well-traveled, was not claimed or settled. He divided his people into four groups, one under the guidance of each of the generals. One group stayed at the oasis, two others set out to forage for food to keep the whole tribe going, and the fourth group, led by Ostovan, went east, looking for oases to conquer. Ostovan's plan was to carve a new homeland for the Dastani out of the center of the desert.

Ostovan's efforts as leader gained the Derpasdari two new oases and spotted out two more for later conquering, but his biggest contribution was to give the Derpasdari a direction. The generals that came after him extended the Derpasdari territory west to the borders of Abi-Asman and east to the edge of the desert. With little expanding left to do, the Derpasdari have had to find a new direction. Their current goal is to monopolize the escort of caravans across the desert. If only they could get the Abi-Asman to agree to allow caravans to take the second leg of the trip on their river...

Running with the Herd

Many of the principles Mehr instilled in the tribe remained after his death. His people still begin training, as if in an army, at age 11, and discipline and teamwork are the most important parts of the training. When training ends at age 15 the youngster is initiated into the rank structure of the tribe. The tribe is set up like one great army; once you complete your training you become a Sarbaz under the command of Goruhban, a sergeant from another family in the same kardaste. Each kardaste is led by a Naxodan, or captain, who commands the Goruhbans. The whole tribe is led four Sepahbad, or generals, who rotate duties every five years.

Despite this structure, the Derpasdari are not all fighters. Every kardaste must have its Dastani and its Scarab Keeper and members of other normal careers, but they fall into the structure of discipline just like everyone else. Usually the head Dastani and Scarab Keeper are Goruhbans, and the Sarbaz under their command are apprentices in their craft. Crimes among the Derpasdari can still only be punished by Qanundari, but they cannot punish people of higher rank. If a Sarbaz Qanundari catches a Goruhban committing a crime, for example, she must bring him before a Goruhban Qanundari for punishment.

The Derpasdari prize camaraderie and skilled leadership. Camels and Jackals are common among them, for they tend to have an instinct for working as a team. Hiking, tactics, and leadership are good skills for members of the Derpasdari tribe. Characters who are members of this tribe are assumed to hold the rank of Sarbaz. Higher rank requires the Gift of Rank (p. soandso).

Relations with Outsiders

The Derpasdari have very specific views of the other tribes. The Damesab, for example, are considered the lowest of the low, and are to be destroyed wherever they are found. The Khorsheed are accorded a certain amount of respect because of their strong faith, but like other tribes they must stay where they are; everyone has their place and the place of the Khorsheed is under the Tarik Cargus in the barren center of the desert.

The Badsavar are rarely tolerated, and skirmishes between them and the Derpasdari are common when the Badsavar decide to escort caravans from Zhongguo, as the Badsavar must cross Derpasdari territory. The Derpasdari often try to drive the Badsavar off and take over escorting the caravan in order to show the merchants that they are better escorts than the Badsavar.

The Derpasdari put the Abi-Asman on the ‘good’ list; they are trying to negotiate a treaty with them where they will bring caravans to the doors of the Abi-Asman’s northernmost city, and the caravans can then travel down the Abrud on boats, making the trip much faster and more comfortable than the trip overland with the Sorkhareh. The Derpasdari resent the Sorkhareh very much, and work hard to show Zhonggese traders how much better they are than the Sorkhareh.

The Derpasdari treat foreigners very well. Their escort prices are reasonable, their oases are comfortable, and they try very hard to be polite the way the Zhonggese are used to. Politeness among the Zhonggese and politeness among the tribes are so different that this effort is often comical, but Zhonggese who know the difference do say the Derpasdari are the most polite of the tribes.

The Derpasdari are attempting to specialize in bringing caravans through the desert, because they control a relatively straight line of oases running northeast to southwest. Their routes also bring them close to the lands of the Abi-Asman. Realizing that trade with Zhongguo and the western Emirates is the surest way to ensure their continued livelihood, they are trying to work out ways to keep caravans safe from marauders and get a monopoly on caravans coming into the desert.

The Khorsheed

“We are the strongest people in the desert. Our hardship under the sun has made us so. We spend our lives struggling beneath and appeasing the bitter sun. Upon this Earth there is no perfection; water in abundance is as deadly as water in scarcity, and never a peaceful middle ground will you find in this life. When the spirits mercifully allow our lives to end we are rewarded for our patience by an eternal life in the City of Stars.”

Nazar’s Four Year Pilgrimage

After renouncing his thieving brother Idaniz, Nazar al Kamzur walked out into the desert, alone and distraught. He felt his brother’s fault to be his own, and in an attempt to absolve himself of it, he wandered the desert for four years, seeking out wise men and women and asking their aid and advice.

His wanderings took him to settlements of all kinds, large and small. It is said he visited the lands beyond the desert to the east, to the north, and to the west. He saw many wonders and riches, which made him envious at first, but then he saw that their owners were neither wise nor happy. He began to believe that all the pleasures of the Earthly life are false and hollow, and his belief was solidified in the third year of his journey.

He had traveled north for a long time, through cold, grassy lands. He said later that those lands were also part of his proof; lush as they were, they were almost unbearably cold, especially at night. Then, he came to the sea.

In all his wildest dreams, he had never imagined so much water could be in one place. Despite the cold wind blowing off it, it was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. Nearly forgetting all that he had learned, he ran down to the water’s edge, leaned down, and began cupping water into his mouth as fast as his hands would move. Then he gagged; the water was terrible, saltier than blood, so salty it actually made him thirstier. He got back on his feet and backed away from the water in fear. Then he remembered all that he had learned.

“This proves it,” he said. “What at first looks like Paradise on Earth is as hollow and joyless as the rest of it. Now I know what I must do.”

What he did was to spend one more year traveling and spreading his message to others, trying to get as many of them as he could to see the truth. When the year was up, he had gathered many followers, and he led them to what was to be their final home. He brought them to the most barren, desolate part of the desert, where, he said, a life of hardship would cleanse them from sin, just as a life of luxury had drowned them in it.

Teaching the Kohani a Lesson

When the Khorsheed heard, from the traveling Farramad, of the treachery of the Kohani and the long slavery of the Mahsimi, they decided that the usual punishment for a sinful life – reliving it – hadn’t worked properly there. Too many of the Kohani were being reborn as Kohani, they said, and so living an unfairly comfortable life despite their past sins, or they would have started to change their ways. It was time to drive the lesson home a different way; they sent the few warriors they had to help the other tribes bring the Kohani down.

Living in Hell

The Khorsheed wander nomadically in an exceptionally barren part of the desert, where hot, flat salt plains are dotted with water-holes that are tiny, seasonal, and unpredictable. When the Khorsheed first heard of the concept of Hell as a place of suffering and torment in eternal waste and fire, which was an idea that filtered to them from the west, they decided that they knew exactly where Hell was, because they lived there. According to the Khorsheed, if you live a good life, when you die your spirit rises to Heaven and you live in paradise surrounded by trees and water. If you live a sinful life, when you die, your spirit is reborn on Earth to atone with another life. Thus, all those people living now are paying for sins of their past lives by suffering in the desert.

Daily life among the Khorsheed is dedicated to survival and personal salvation. What time they do not spend keeping themselves alive, they spend cleansing themselves of sin, and trying to appease the torturing sun, whom they see as the biggest barrier to their ascent into Heaven. At dawn and dusk, Khorsheed must kneel before the sun and offer up apologies for all the sins of this life...and all their past lives. The Khorsheed believe that in doing this, they will atone for all that sinfulness and ensure a place in paradise.

The most important event in Khorsheed life occurs once every four years, and is intended to commemorate the four-year journey of atonement undertaken by Nazar, the founder of the tribe. Every four years they make a pilgrimage north to Binghe Bay, where they may swim and feel the cool water around them, but before they leave, every member of the tribe must take a drink of the water. The ritual reminds them that joys of Earthly life are shallow and false, that nothing on Earth is perfect. It is supposed to encourage virtuous living, in preparation for ascent into Heaven, where things are perfect.

This is a tribe full of misery, and only those with tolerance for heat and dryness are likely to live long. Camels and Jerboas make excellent choices; Crocodiles are very rare in this tribe. Resolve, a high Will, and Gifts like Toughness, Robust, or Extra Hit Point work very well with this tribe. Frailty, lowered hit points, and flaws like Failing Health are rarely appropriate, for such a person would quickly succumb to the terrible conditions.

Relations with Outsiders

The Khorsheed have little contact with other tribes. For the most part they remain in their own territory, and other tribes have little desire to enter their lands. Even the Damesab usually leave them alone; they know that the Khorsheed very rarely have anything worth stealing.

The Khorsheed do not like the Sorkhareh, whom they see as far too violent, and the Sorkhareh do not particularly like them, but the two tribes remain peaceful. The Khorsheed must pass through Sorkhareh lands on their pilgrimage to the northern sea, and while the passing is sometimes tense, it has never yet led to actual conflict. The Khorsheed give the Sorkhareh offerings of minerals, such as cobalt and paxun powder, found more plentifully in their part of the desert than in any other, and the Sorkhareh, in return, guarantee their safety in Sorkhareh lands.

The next step in their journey brings them through the lands of the riders of the northern steppes. The Khorsheed trade the barbarians salt for safe passage, and both sides agree to be non-aggressive during the pilgrimage.

The Mahsimi

"We are the strongest people in the desert, for we have come out of the greatest adversity and are making our way to the greatest prosperity. Throwing off the bonds of slavery has freed us to obtain riches beyond the dreams of Peyravi, and power beyond the dreams of Badsavar. We have overthrown our masters; now that we have mastery over ourselves we may prove ourselves the strongest tribe."

Pride in the Name of the Moon

When the Crocodile Zar gathered the twelve nomad families together under his rule at the founding of the Kohani nation, each family was given a distinct job. Zar probably did not intend for some of these jobs to be looked at as more lowly than others. There was no doubt, however, that even at the beginning, the family that became his servants was treated badly by the other families. While Bezira az Sari, Zar's new Jackal wife, was alive, she managed to keep this treatment under control, but when she died it went unchecked.

What began as simple jeering grew, over several generations, into a class separation so large that cultural differences started to appear. By this time they were slave-laborers as well as servants. They wore worse clothing than their masters, ate in different rooms, slept in different buildings, and even went to different temples led by the servants and slaves of 'real' priests.

One of these, an animal-keeper belonging to a priest of Cabok, who was called Al-Mobad, was the first to call the class of servants and slaves the Mahsimi. He did so to draw a connection to Mah, the spirit of the moon who was the slave to the spirit of the sun. He wanted to suggest that all people had their place in Heaven, and that therefore there was some divine spark within everyone. He wished to give the people he called the Mahsimi a little pride in themselves. As the word spread, the Mahsimi eagerly began using it.

In one generation, every slave and servant in the kingdom was using it. In another generation, the Kohani were using it too. A third generation after the word had become common, both sides took it to mean that the Kohani and the Mahsimi were different tribes.

Hlavar's Crusade

As slavery grew more and more common, paid Mahsimi became rarer and rarer, and eventually every Mahsimi was a slave. Even then, storytellers still told of a time when the Mahsimi were free and equal with their masters. These stories occasionally stirred up enough resentment to push the Mahsimi to revolt. Such revolts recurred on an average of two or three times a century, but they were rarely well-organized and never well-equipped, and the Kohani always crushed them within a year.

The coming of the Kohani shah Kasdim was to change everything. On the night of his birth, it is said, all the Mahsimi cooking fires went out all at once. When Kasdim ascended to the throne, the Mahsimi were struck with a strange disease that caused temporary blindness and insanity. The disease swept through the Mahsimi in a month, affecting all of them without actually killing anyone, but it barely affected the Kohani at all.

At last, when Kasdim announced his plans to build his great ziggurat, the Dastani Hlavar was visited by a terrible vision. One night, she had been gazing at the moon and praying. Suddenly she had seen the ziggurat full-built, with Kasdim beginning to climb it to Heaven. She saw the gods, one by one, coming down to meet him, Marmulak the Crocodile god in front, with fury in their eyes. Marmulak struck Kasdim down and began to hew the ziggurat apart, flinging bricks and stone in all directions. Hlavar saw the Mahsimi slaves buried under the debris, and somehow knew that all the Mahsimi were being killed, almost by accident, as Marmulak's wrath spread over the Kohani.

The next night she gave a vivid account of this vision to her friends, and word of the vision began to spread through the tribe. Many people came to her asking what should be done. For a month, all she would reply is, "I'm thinking. When I know, I will tell everyone." Then, at last, she called together all the elders of the Mahsimi.

"My kinsmen, it is time for a revolt. Not a feeble cry of rage and frustration, as all Mahsimi revolts have been in the past, but a true escape from this terrible prison. We must prepare, and we must equip ourselves, and we must train...but above all we must be patient. We cannot strike until the moment is right, and it will take many years for us to prepare properly."

Hlavar then began her preparations. Her first task was to find the best warriors among the Mahsimi and get them to begin teaching all Mahsimi in the ways of war. The Mahsimi worked exhaustingly during the day, and Hlavar was asking them to work even harder after they were done, but they did it, and slowly, their skills grew. Hlavar's second task was to send three children out to seek the lands of the Badsavar. She told them that the Badsavar had wizards who could control the winds with waves of their hands and magic words, and that what the Mahsimi needed was for the Badsavar to teach them their magic. Hlavar knew that

the Badsavar would be likely to kill any adult Mahsimi who dared enter their lands, but she felt the children might be spared long enough to tell their story. Indeed they were, and they returned with a Badsavar wizard who agreed to teach promising Mahsimi the techniques of his magic.

Even with the help of the Badsavar, Hlavar was not satisfied with the state of Mahsimi preparations for years – long enough, indeed, for the great ziggurat to reach enormous size, although it was still nowhere near completion. At last Hlavar felt the Mahsimi were ready, and she gave the word for the revolt to begin. The Kohani were taken completely by surprise, and the Mahsimi were so well prepared, that the revolt itself took a very short time. While the Mahsimi didn't exactly win, neither did they lose, for they did at least win the freedom for which they had fought so hard.

By this time, the Mahsimi had not known freedom in many centuries, and while Hlavar had prepared them well for the revolt, she had not even thought to prepare them for victory. The Mahsimi hardly knew what to do with themselves. At first they lost themselves in revels, living off the food and wine scattered among the remains of the civilization they helped to build. When that ran out, Hlavar knew they needed some direction, and led them west, knowing that the north was mostly inhabited.

The Mahsimi were too unaccustomed to travel in the desert, and were ill-prepared for it. They had no food, and no source of fresh water now that the Kohani oases were all destroyed. They were used to working during the day and sleeping at night, so at first that was how they traveled. Many thirsted to death, or starved. Some fell victim to mirages; others simply got lost. Even Hlavar succumbed, at last, to the terrible desert.

Becoming Middlemen

After the death of Hlavar, the Mahsimi lost what organization they had and continued westward aimlessly, searching for any place they could settle. At last they found themselves at the edge of the desert, looking down steep cliffs at a large city, with architecture very unlike that of the Kohani lands, their original homeland. Exhausted and desperate, they stumbled on into the city, determined to get food and water, even if they had to beg.

They were challenged by two Emirate street-guards in a language they could not quite understand, but one that was still similar to their own. Using hand motions, they managed to convey that they were hungry and desired food. The guards motioned for them to return to the hills outside the city and wait. At first, the Mahsimi refused, until some of the city folk brought out a basket of bread and a large roasted lizard for them.

The guards must have gone to the Emir and told their story, for a few days later the Mahsimi were visited by the Emir and his entourage. At first they were afraid the Emir had come to drive them off, for the entourage was well armed, but they also carried large dishes of food, piles of clothes, jugs of water, and other goods.

A long negotiation in hand signals ensued. It soon became apparent to the Mahsimi that the Emir was very impressed with the asbal the Mahsimi had with them, that were given to them by the Badsavar, and that they were what he wanted above all. The Mahsimi managed to trade one asbal for a month's supply of food, another for rights to a patch of land with a spring, another for enough cloth to make each Mahsimi a new robe, and a fourth for stoneworking tools that they could use to build themselves shelter. The remaining three were each traded for one musket, which the Mahsimi had never seen before. Lastly, one member of the Mahsimi went with the Emir's people to teach them Zabani, the desert language, and one of the Emir's scholars stayed among the Mahsimi to teach them the Emirate language.

The Mahsimi mostly responsible for the negotiations had been a Scarab Keeper named Bahu. Knowing a good deal when she saw one, she sent several Mahsimi back into the desert on sotor to trade surplus cloth and, after some thought, one of the muskets, for more asbal. Regular trading began that continues to this day. The Badsavar seem reluctant to sell their asbal to anyone but the Mahsimi and occasional Zhongguo caravans, and as a result the high Emirate demand for asbal is supplied almost entirely by the Mahsimi.

On the Edge of the Sands

The Mahsimi are used to being led by women. The tribe was founded by a woman, and saved twice by women, once by Hlavar and once by Bahu. As a result, they always have female shahs that they call the Amira, after the leaders in the Emirates, the Emirs. However, they have a strange superstition that demands that the Amira never marry. Bezira, the founder of the tribe, led the tribe into slavery when she married the Crocodile Zar; Hlavar's death was shortly preceded by her marriage to one of the Mahsimi's bravest warriors. Even Bahu was apparently ruined by marriage; she died giving birth to her second child. So the Amira must appoint her female heir, since if she has any children they will be illegitimate.

Life on the edge of the desert is typified by long periods of hardship punctuated, at the coming of the Badsavar caravans, by brief periods of overwhelming plenty. For most of the year the Mahsimi struggle to feed themselves. Then, twice a year for about a week each time, they hold a great festival, where the Badsavar caravans and the Emirate merchants meet in their lands and trade, and when they are suddenly inundated with fresh food, new clothes, tools, and weapons, and other wonderful goods.

As a result of this cycle, the Mahsimi have become masters of food preservation. Scarab Keepers are the life-blood of any Mahsimi village, because they must find a way to preserve as much of the food that reaches them during the festivals as they possibly can, for as long as they can. The very best Mahsimi Scarab Keepers can preserve some of the food well enough that it lasts until the next caravan arrives.

Many young Mahsimi grow tired of the endless boredom between festivals. Enticed by the stories travelers bring of the wide world, they pack up their possessions and set out seeking adventure. Nomads and other adventuresome Careers are appropriate for Mahsimi, and flaws such as Curious, Envious, and Wanderlust are appropriate. Mahsimi that stay in the tribal lands tend to be Traders or Scarab Keepers, or take up art or a craft, to give them something to do between festivals.

Relations with Outsiders

The Mahsimi maintain good relations with the Badsavar and the Emirates because of the asbal trade. Indeed, it is probably the only thing that keeps the Mahsimi alive, for while they have learned from their mistakes, they do not have enough fertile land to support themselves without help. On the whole, the Mahsimi are quite lucky that the people of the Emirates cannot breed enough asbal to supply their own demands.

The Mahsimi know of the Abi-Asman, but are wary of them; now and then, a small group of Mahsimi will venture towards Abi-Asman to steal a few supplies, but they never stay long, even if they get lucky. The architecture and culture, and especially the slaves, of the Abi-Asman bring unpleasant thoughts about the Kohani. The Mahsimi are, for the moment, trying to stay out of the eyes of the Abi-Asman, for fear that they may be pressed back into slavery.

Other than that, the Mahsimi have little contact with other tribes. They are separated from the Sorkhareh and the Dastan-Dastar by a stretch of especially rocky, rough desert that has no oases. The Damesab do sometimes raid the Badsavar caravans that bring asbal to the Mahsimi, but the Mahsimi are rarely involved. The Mahsimi themselves rarely venture outside their small area; any news they get of other tribes comes mostly through the Badsavar, and adventurous members of their tribe who have come home.

The Peyravi

"Our people may not be the best warriors in the desert, but we sit on the edge of a land full of riches. Through careful study, thorough research, and cautious exploration we shall discover them all, and with them, win the allegiance of all the other tribes. After all, is it not the natural order for the wise to rule while the strong protect them?"

The Staying-Behind

Originally part of the Jostani tribe, and retaining pride in their origins, the Peyravi were left behind by their brethren after the War of Revenge. Most of the Jostani were afraid of the Kohani lands. Old superstitions led them to believe that the land and air were tainted, and that remaining in these lands would be dangerous for the soul.

Those who would become the Peyravi said that the only thing that could be proved to be tainted was the water, which the tribes had poisoned with their own hands. There was one oasis left untouched, and the people who wanted to stay said it could be used while the tribe delved the secrets of the Kohani ruins.

The Jostani tried everything to get their brothers to leave, but a few flatly refused. They said, "Leave us behind! Leave us behind, if you will. We will not lose the chance to learn from the wealth of knowledge heaped about us; if you will, then leave us behind." And so they did, and the Jostani tribe left, going northwest. Those who remained renamed themselves the Peyravi, which means Followers, declaring that they intended to follow the path to truth no matter where it led.

Truth through Courage

A small tribe full of scholars, the Peyravi live as close as they dare to the Cursed Lands, where the Kohani once dwelled. Their only oasis is Abuda Quasar, which originally belonged to the Derpasdari; it was the only one left untouched after the War of Revenge.

The Peyravi exist to learn from the knowledge in the Cursed Lands. They have already deciphered its writing, and so they are one of the few tribes where literacy is common. The Peyravi send out small groups of explorers into the Cursed Lands every few weeks, and if they come back, the artifacts they bring with them are studied and interpreted by expert scholars.

The Cursed Lands hold real danger. Sightings of ghosts and stories of the dead coming to life were once dismissed as superstition but have now been accepted as a common occurrence. The spirits of those who died in the War of Revenge are restless, and many are dangerous. The spirits of Kohani people especially are often hostile to the Peyravi because they see them as part of the reason for their demise. The Cursed Lands are also home to large omnivorous lizards, the badkar, which normally live off whatever they can find but are happy to make a meal of explorers. The badkar themselves are never eaten by the Peyravi; like all living things from the Cursed Lands, the badkar are tainted by the undrinkable water. The Peyravi believe that the tainted water and vegetation, combined with the presence of malevolent ghosts, have caused the badkar to become killers.

The Peyravi value quickness, diligence of mind, and bravery. The scholarly find themselves quite at home here but there is as much need for those of strong arm and quick foot in the explorations into the Cursed Lands. They have had to become experts at discovering and avoiding dangerous ghosts and undead horrors. Good Skills for Peyravi include Observation, Sixth Sense, and Traps for avoiding the traps and pitfalls so common in the Cursed Lands. Also helpful is the Skill of Resolve, for standing face to face with ghosts and mummies. Jerboas make excellent Peyravi.

Relations with Outsiders

Of all the Nine Tribes, the Peyravi are probably the most isolated. The other tribes rarely dare to go near the Cursed Lands, and the Peyravi rarely travel outside them. Occasionally, brave Damesab will come to raid Peyravi settlements, knowing that riches are likely to be found there, but unless they know the value of books filled with symbols they do not understand, they usually leave disappointed.

The Sorkhareh

"Our people are the strongest in the desert. We control the largest number of oases, and we guide the largest number of caravans through the desert. We have withstood the attacks of savage steppe riders, deceitful Damesab, arrogant Derpasdari, and miserable Khorsheed. Guided by Sorkhaziana, the Red Star, we will never be lost, no matter how far we travel."

Mugar the Teacher

After being betrayed by his wife, the Jackal Mugar al-Seta was overcome with despair. The stories say he dug his claws into his hands until they bled, and held his hands up towards Heaven, crying aloud. Then, it is said, he saw in the north the red star Sorkhaziana, and he took her color, the same as the color of his blood, as a sign. He wiped his hands and cleaned them on the sand, and then he mounted his sotor and rode towards the star.

Led by her light, Mugar found a rich and beautiful oasis near the northern edge of the desert. He determined to settle there and take Sorkhaziana as his role model. She had been a strong and powerful warrior, and from the day he settled at the oasis, Mugar began to train himself as a warrior in her style.

Mugar was alone for the first three years. Then his home was attacked by a group of twenty warriors bent on plundering his estate. Mugar swiftly defeated thirteen of them. Impressed to the point of awe, the other seven surrendered, and begged Mugar to teach them his techniques. At first he refused, but they stayed at the oasis, helping him by fetching water, growing a garden, and repairing his house. He found, also, that they were learning little by little just by watching him train. At last, he agreed to teach them.

After learning all Mugar said he could teach them, three of the warriors remained to continue to train with Mugar, and the other four ventured out into the desert. Each of them met other warriors, and defeated them, and word of the battle prowess of Mugar's students spread. Mugar began to get more students. Eventually there were so many that he let his original seven students teach some of them. Some warriors began bringing their spouses and children, and began to build new buildings. The oasis of Abuda Dhabi was becoming a town.

Mugar's dying words declared that his people had become the Sorkhareh, a tribe that followed Sorkhaziana. He said he was very pleased with his tribe, and hoped that they would stay together and continue the traditions he had begun.

Mugar's Successors

Mugar never remarried. He was succeeded by the oldest of his students, a Hyena named Piruzi. Piruzi declared that to keep the traditions alive, the Sorkhareh had to continue to grow. To do this, he said, they must put their battle-prowess to the test and take over more oases. Piruzi began a campaign to conquer other oases. He spread the tribe's influence east and west, absorbing nomad families into the tribe or killing them if they got in his way. In fifteen years the Sorkhareh had extended their borders to the edges of the desert in both directions.

Then Piruzi, having gotten old and pushed his aging body too far, died, leaving the Sorkhareh in the hands of his brother Durandisi, the next eldest student of Mugar. Durandisi was already quite old when he took power, and had no heirs, and so he realized that the succession could not continue like this forever. He set up the rules of succession the Sorkhareh still use, and asked anyone who wished to try for the throne to come to Abuda Dhabi and participate in a great battle. He wanted the first succession to be free to all, to ensure that someone worthy would take the throne.

The winner was the Sorkhareh's first female Shah, the Camel Dorosti, who was a fierce fighter and a demanding leader. Her first act as Shah was to travel from one end of her territory to the other, and what she saw did not please her. In conquering so many people, she said, Piruzi certainly increased the Sorkhareh's land, but he also allowed in the unworthy and the weak. She organized the land into five sections, gave four of them princes to rule them, and instituted mandatory military training for all Sorkhareh. She also ended the military conquests.

The Two Wars of Revenge

A long succession of Shahs all trained for battle, and holding their seats through might and skill in battle, made the Sorkhareh a very battle-ready people. This has turned out to be a good thing for the Sorkhareh. Their main city, Abuda Dhabi, has been attacked more times than anyone can count. Very rarely has a year gone by in which the Sorkhareh have not had to defend it.

When news of the Mahsimi revolt and the Kohani treachery reached the Sorkhareh, things had been quiet at Abuda Dhabi for nearly three years. The Shah, a Hyena named Arzumand, foolishly took this to mean that the northern barbarians had given up for the moment. He led nearly half the Sorkhareh, almost anyone fit enough to go, across miles and miles of desert towards the southeast and the Kohani lands. The Sorkhareh formed the bulk of the forces there, did most of the hardest fighting, and lost the most members in battle.

By the time the first War of Revenge was nearing its end, desperate runners from the Sorkhareh homelands were arriving with news that the Sorkhareh had actually been forced out of Abuda Dhabi by riders from the northern steppes. Furious at himself, Arzumand led his warriors in one last devastating charge against the Kohani, ended the war, committed suicide, and sent his troops back home with a message that a new dynasty should begin.

When the Sorkhareh warriors reached home, the first thing they did was to have the most ceremonial succession battle ever. They dared not lose any of their best fighters right before another difficult war. The winner was the Jerboa Tigtig, who successfully led the Sorkhareh to victory, though it took two years. Once they had their city back, he began the construction of the wall that surrounds it now, and he sent detachments to check on the other four principalities and inform them of the victory.

The Beginnings of Trade

The Sorkhareh met people from the Emirates first, some time near the beginning of the Al-Shanjar dynasty that rules the Sorkhareh now. A detachment from the Emirates had gotten caught in a sandstorm on their way to Mahsimi lands and gone way off course. Their navigator, a foolish, but in many ways fortunate, man, led them in totally the wrong direction and bumped them up against the Sorkhareh.

The Sorkhareh greeted them like enemies, since they were so used to discovering enemies, but their defense force was scared out of its mind by the long exploding sticks the Emirate people carried. The Sorkhareh very quickly realized that the Emirate people were friendly, since they only fired warning shots and did not try to kill anyone. They were surprised to find that some, but not all, of the emissaries spoke their language, and were hungry, thirsty, and tired. The Sorkhareh brought the Emirate people into the nearest Sorkhareh oasis and gave them food and water, a place to rest, and an escort home, in return for a few of those exploding sticks.

Thus the Sorkhareh found the gun. The defenders who had encountered it learned to use it and then went to the palace of the Crocodile Shah Labxand al-Shanjar in Abuda Dhabi to show him the wonder of the new weapon. The Shah immediately gave orders that a group of Sorkhareh should find the Emirate lands and set up permanent trade.

Shortly afterwards the Sorkhareh were visited by emissaries from Zhongguo, who were looking for the Farramad. The Sorkhareh brought them to Labxand, who swiftly negotiated a trade deal that not only allowed free trade between the Sorkhareh and Zhongguo, but also opened the doors to trade between Zhongguo and the Emirates, through the Sorkhareh. These efforts made the Sorkhareh a trade-driven tribe almost overnight, and if anyone needed proof of the value of the trade, they got it a few months later. Then, a tiny Sorkhareh force armed with guns routed a huge invasion from the northern steppes, in just two hours.

The Warrior's Life

The biggest Sorkhareh settlement, Abuda Dhabi, marks the center of their lands and lies between the forts of Al-Shaqri and Al-Wajbah. To reach it, they follow a line drawn in the sky from Mazgat Langar, the anchor star, to the red star Sorkhaziana. Their city is probably the easiest in the desert to find, and as a result the Sorkhareh have had to defend it and themselves vigorously. It has been attacked at least once by every other tribe, and it is almost continually besieged by people from the northern steppes. The city is walled on all sides and defended by Qanundari at all times, day, night, and twilight.

The Sorkhareh as a whole live by escorting caravans. Preferring payment in the form of steel and guns, the Sorkhareh would weaken and be overrun without trade with the east and west. As a result they take protecting caravans very seriously. Qanundari and other guards that escort caravans are sworn to protect the caravan all costs, even the cost of their own lives.

The Sorkhareh are led by a warrior-shah whose palace is in Abuda Dhabi. When the Shah dies, any of his children who wish to take the throne gather in the great square in front of the palace, and battle each other until only one is left standing. The winner takes the throne; the losers, if they live, become advisors to the new Shah. Each city has its own prince who is answerable only to the Shah. The title of prince passes to the eldest child of the current prince when that prince dies; if there is no heir, the Shah appoints one. The Shah may also depose a prince at any time, and it is this power that keeps the princes in line.

The Sorkhareh prize individual fortitude and battle skill. Many Sorkhareh are fighters, and almost all have some skill with the curved Dasan or Samsir. Most will have the Resolve skill. The Sorkhareh are not without their scholars and their Badjaduyi, but Sorkhareh are required to spend four years between the ages of 14 and 18 training for battle in one of the schools in the big cities, so even scholars and wizards will have some fighting skills. All the desert races exist within the Sorkhareh, but some Jerboas and Camels find the Sorkhareh ways too fierce for their liking.

Relations with Outsiders

The Sorkhareh have little regard for people of the other tribes. They kill them when they trespass and ignore them otherwise. They will not make treaties or agreements with them, but expect the other tribes to respect their boundaries or pay the consequences. The one exception is the Khorsheed: in return for rare minerals from the barren salt flats at the center of the desert, the Sorkhareh allow the Khorsheed to pass through their lands once every four years on their pilgrimage to the sea.

Of all the tribes, the Sorkhareh have by far the most contact with people of the civilized east, and their position in the desert practically assures that they are the only tribe who come in contact with the people of the north.

The Sorkhareh have three forts that are hubs of contact. Al-Shaqri in the east connects the Sorkhareh to Zhongguo. The Sorkhareh control the fort but have agreed to allow a small detachment of troops from Zhongguo to be stationed there. Al-Shaqri is the often the first place where people from Zhongguo see any of the desert peoples, but they are given little time to become accustomed to them. Caravans typically enter Al-Shaqri from the east during the day, are given one night and day of rest, and leave the following night.

The caravans are led through the desert by skilled Sorkhareh Dastani and accompanied by many guards, a few of which will be full-fledged Qanundari. Caravans are allowed to stop in Abuda Dhabi and trade with the inhabitants. Then, after many long nights of traveling the caravans reach a break in the desert where sits the fort of Al-Wajbah. This fort acts as a trading post with the barbarians of the northern steppes, and as a place where culture-shocked Zhonggese can rest, eat, trade, and have a real bath (for a high price). Caravans may stay here as long as they can afford to, but most stay only a few days. The Sorkhareh have complete control over this fort, for they have little trust for the people of the steppes. More than once this fort has changed hands, but in the end the Sorkhareh always reclaim it, usually with the help of Zhonggese rockets and Emirate guns, for both the Emirates and Zhongguo have a vested interest in keeping the trade route open.

Upon leaving Al-Wajbah, the caravans traverse a stretch of more hospitable but far more dangerous land. Here, especially along the Zekas River, caravans are often besieged by raiders from all sides: northern steppe riders, sorties of tribes from the desert, and bandits from the Emirates. Many Zhonggese are quite relieved when they catch sight of the fort of Al-Thughb, for it marks the end of their journey with the Sorkhareh. Al-Thughb is held jointly by Sorkhareh and people of the Western Emirates. Caravans are handed over to escorts from the Emirates here.

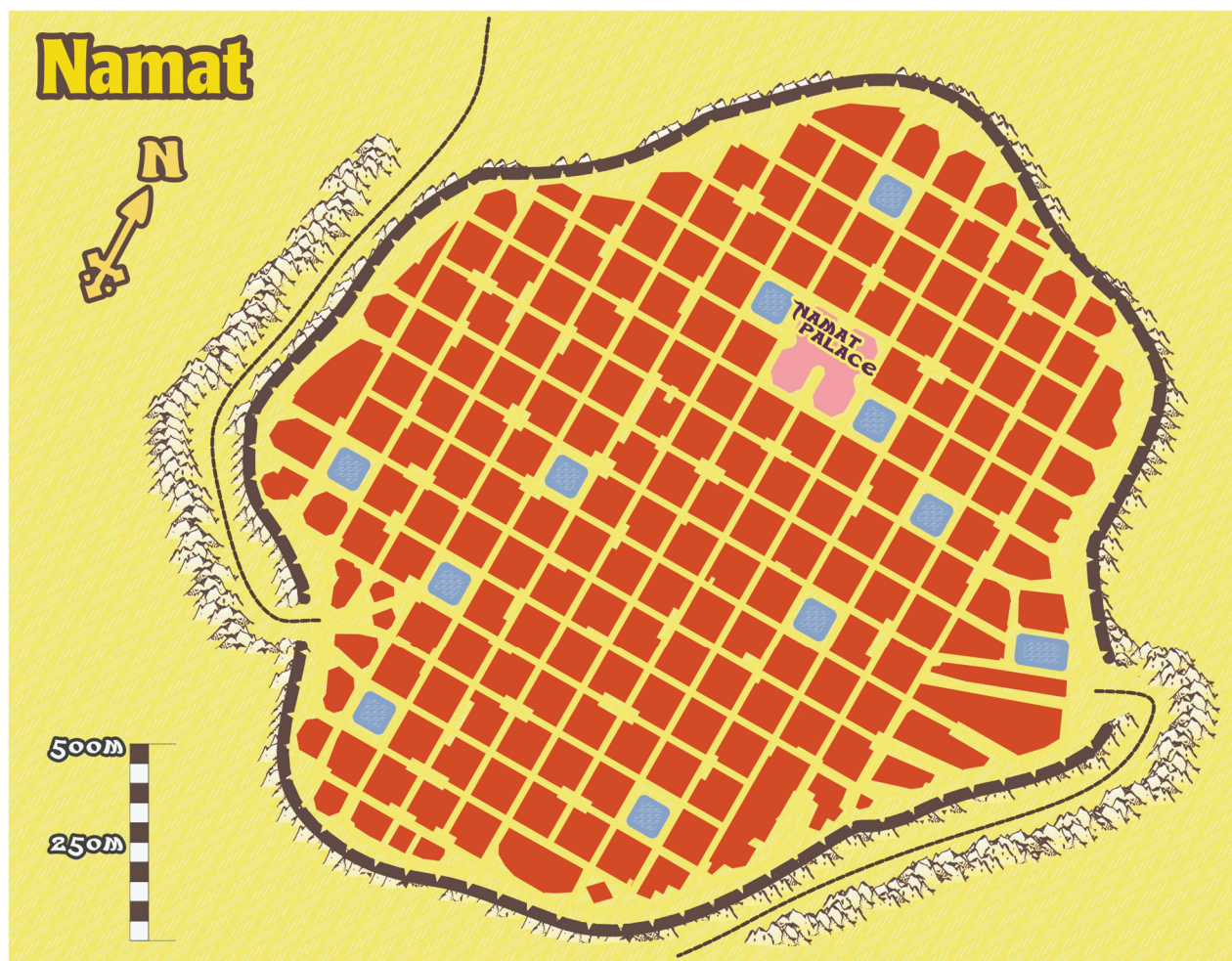
Katikati Jungle

It's said that no place on earth is more dangerous or more beautiful than the jungles of Katikati. (The full name is *Misitu Katikati ya Giza*, but most people just call it the Katikati.) Massive trees five stories tall or more blot out the sun on the lush flora below. Vines cling to great cliffs, next to pouring waterfalls. Mysterious monsters and undiscovered tribes live and die as they did centuries before, shrouded in eternal mystery.

Yes, every now and then someone claims to have some map to the "Lost Mine of King Mtu-wa Umoja" or the "Singularity of Gemmajacula" or some other nonsense that can only be in the darkest center of the Katikati jungles. Such people are dishonest, or mad, or both. Mostly what's to be found in the Katikati are new diseases spread by tiny insects. If one does meet any of the local tribes, they won't speak any of the common languages, and they aren't much interested in money they can't use.

Kuhestan Mountains

Rising from the desert in scattered strings, Kuhestan is the name for any mountain in the desert. For the most part they are sharp, craggy, windblown affairs with no vegetation and no inhabitants. They are extremely difficult to climb, but for weary travelers, or those escaping retribution or capture for crimes, the trek may be worth it. They are often riddled with twisting caves carved by the relentless wind. They make excellent hiding places, as they are usually easy to defend and surrounded by good ambush spots. A few of the older, deeper caves lead to underground reservoirs of water; these are highly prized by the Damesab as hiding places, and fiercely guarded.



Namat the City-State (al-Madinat 'aella Namat)

Sometimes called the “City on the Hill”, “The Great Roost”, and (sometimes) “The Screws”, Namat is a large city located on a large stone butte. Centuries ago, the first king (Namat al-Qunas the First, of course) had the city built by many workers. For centuries, it was a notorious affair of slums and dark alleys, home only to temporary nomads passing through, to the desperate who couldn’t leave, and to birds of all kinds (who had no trouble with the difficult climbs.) All building materials, goods, and services were limited to what could be carried by a single avian at a time, or by using elaborate pulley systems.



Things changed about a thousand years ago, when the sages of the Phylactorium engineered the Twin Roads of Namat.

Centuries later, Anatolia would attempt to annex Namat. Attacking by force was suicide, with only two avenues of approach. And a siege was next-to-useless: the city had large warehouses, its own water supply, and a support network from the air.

Today, Namat is a popular stop among traders moving over-land. Licenses, duties, and other costs are high, but corruption among officials is also rampant, not to mention the gangs and pirates who look to profit from the unwary. Namat is a place to get rich quick or to die even more quickly.

The Twin Roads of Namat (Soter's Screws)

An impressive feat of engineering are the two corkscrew approaches to reach the city. Rather than building one long ramp, there are two that wind around the city, never rising higher than a 5-degree angle. Built out of thick stone and rigorously maintained by the ruling class, the Twin Roads have stood for centuries and will stand for centuries more.

Many businesses have set up along the road, hawking all kinds of wares. Most of these places are illegitimate, to avoid the expensive license fees, but the watch is often too busy taking bribes to keep track of who should be there and who shouldn't. Caravans who stop in Namat bring extra body-guards and minders to keep their wares safe.

The Namat Phylactorium

Founded by someone history only knows as "Soter", the Phylactorium is one of the largest libraries in the world. Only the Royal Libraries of Majing in far Zhongguo is older... and the Phylactorium is larger than Majing's and Dunwasser's together. Books, scrolls, and even tablets in clay are contained within its walls.

By tradition, the head librarian of the Phylactorium is addressed only as Soter. This practice was established by the first head librarian and continues to this day.

The property of the king, the Phylactorium is closed to outsiders, but licenses can be easily obtained (or forged). Different parts of library have different rules. Many scholars speculate that it was the first Soter who discovered the methods of Cognoscente Magic, and that somewhere deep within those sub-basements and scroll tubes is the source of all sorcery. Whether it's true or not, what we do know is that many an *Almaghnatisia* will take a journey to this place to further their craft, to make contact with other Cognoscenti to give them the insider knowledge they seek.

The Wells of Namat

Namat was built on a large aquifer, but the water needs of the local population quickly out-grew what the springs could provide. Again, the Phylactorium engineers devised a solution: enormous water-screws that descend deep into the earth. During the drier times, these screws are turned by beasts-of-burden and by indentured slaves. "Going to the screws" means getting sent deep within the tunnels, where you might be turning these pipes until your last days, never again to see the sun.

The Kingdom of Òyó

Òyó lies southwest of Anatolia. It is the northernmost of the city-states in southern Akoma, the largest of them due to the warlike expansion of the Nameless King. While its military technology lags Anatolia's, it rivals the Delta in agricultural production, and exceeds the Delta in diversity of mineral and agricultural resources.



A hereditary monarch called an oba rules Òyó from the eponymous Òyó City. Òyó's military is strong and excellent at improvising solutions to the problem of lower steel availability and relatively few firearms, but Òyó's citizens would blanch at the thought of military spending like Anatolia's.

There's nothing on the coast of Òyó except for fishing villages, whose inhabitants mostly shrug and go about their business when Anatolian armies land. The shallow-keeled galleys popular on the Shallow Sea are too cumbersome to make it up Òyó's navigable rivers—and when they've tried, the defenders have made the attackers' lives hell by stretching iron chains across the river or lobbing explosives from forested riverbanks.

Second, the terrain of Òyó isn't flat grasslands and desert, like much of Anatolia – it's dense hills and thick jungles. The disciplined formations and lines of gunmen which make Anatolian janissaries so deadly in open terrain and boarding actions are less effective in the misty, forested areas of the interior. Such surroundings favor the shorter effective range of the light bows and javelins which Òyó's skirmishers prefer; even the fastest-reloading janissary can't outshoot an archer at these ranges. Combined with the pirates from the Corsair Islands and the war in nearby Sagat, the Anatolians are unable to maintain supply lines for an invasion. But things might change, any day now....



Sagat

The western-most city of Yindu, Sagat is but a former shadow of itself. A bloody civil war has left many dead and even more starving. Many of the survivors from these battles found themselves on the losing side, with their lords gone and their lands destroyed or stolen. The fall of the city presents a problem to Zhongguo's southern trade routes. Not only is Sagat no longer a safe port, but the southern coast of Akoma is now infested with pirates. For now, the more expensive Silk Road is safer, but much slower.



Many would want to be the new king of this city... but armies cost money, and weapons need skilled hands to fire them. With the city's wealth exhausted and stolen, it's anyone's guess when Sagat will recover.

A generation ago, the Anatolian Empire sought to take this city the same way they would take the Deltan Empire... but their invasion only made things worse. The resistance of the Öyó did not help matters, and without a beach-head or a base of operations, the Anatolian ministers of war are waiting now, to see what develops.

Silk Road

The longest over-land trade route in all the known world, the Silk Road extends all the way from Zhongguo's western border to the far edge of Akoma, and then down along the entire coast to the southern tip. Many merchants, mercenaries, and other adventurers have joined up with one caravan or another, attempting the dangerous route through empty plains, mysterious jungles, unknown hills, and the occasional oasis.

Despite the name, there is no "road" itself, just paths of least resistance, which change with the weather. Sand storms can bury landmarks. The rainy season can bring flash floods. And sometimes the easiest path is also a dangerous place to be ambushed by bandits. The Silk Road isn't entirely barren. New towns pop up, too small for any census and gone in the blink of an eye when the wells dry up and the trade isn't coming. The many nomadic tribes of the savannah are aware of the caravans, and they will often camp out on the major routes. (Whether it's for friendly trade or for extortive tribute is always a gamble.)

Tradewinds

There are two favorable over-seas routes to Akoma. The northern tradewinds go over the great ocean to Calabria. There's a lot of blue water on this route and nothing else. The southern tradewinds pass from the southern cape to Zhongguo... but unfortunately, that region is now rife with piracy from the Corsair states, and the "safe" port of Sagat has fallen into war. As international trade grows, it's the northern parts of Akoma, such as the Deltan Valley, that are reaping the greatest rewards.

Turt

A southern city of the Hanguo Empire, not much is known about this place. Citing the corrupting influence of foreigners, the city limits are closed to foreigners. There doesn't seem to be one reason why the city is closed. Some think it might be because of a recent influx of Zhonggese philosopohers. Others believe it's because the Hanguo Emperor has signed a non-aggressive treaty with the Anatolians, to avoid getting tangled up in the complex Anatolian-Calabrese-Zhongguo politics. Whatever the case, as long as the borders remain closed, Turt is not part of the lucrative trading that drives the imperial economies of this modern age.



Waliopotea (The Forsaken City)

All are equal before the passage of time. Empires rise and fall, families grow and then die out, and even the greatest mountains can grind away to dust.

Waliopotea must have been a city at one time. There's quarried stone, empty canals, and the fossilized remains of garbage to be found in great pits. The city was abandoned generations ago, though it's not clear why. There are as many theories as there are scholars, it seems, and what's probably correct is the combination of all of them. A famine of the crops, a war with the neighbors, a plague that took too many lives, a drought that dried up the water ... something caused everyone who stayed here to perish and everyone else to leave in a great hurry.



People can be greedy and superstitious, and more than one mad foreigner has led some expedition to this place, usually with some dubious map or diary in hand. They always come home disappointed... if they come home at all. Anything that could be looted has been, and all that remains are curiosities of a long-dead civilization, with no monetary value.

'Djed Nakrubulis

One rumor that refuses to go away quietly is that somewhere deep under these ruins is a great subterranean complex to house the dead: vast halls of graves, sepulchers, catacombs and sarcophagi in a mausoleum larger than any other in the world.

On the surface, the story sounds ridiculous: who would have built all of this, if everyone was dead? The more elaborate versions of this story tell of how this city was once ruled by a necromancer whose name is either lost to time, or it might be "Ouai". (Or it might be "Djed", or "Perphredo", or something else, depending on which version of this story that you find). Ouai set himself up as the king of this vast empire of the dead, using his necromancy to command them. Why he wouldn't use this unstoppable, untiring force as an army to conquer the world isn't always clear. But most of the accounts agree that Djed did not die in the conventional sense, but passed on to another state of being. One can still commune with him by way of a giant golden pillar, the 'Djed Nakrubulis. One must prostrate before the pillar and open their mind to the secrets of the universe, the power that is beyond life and death, beyond time itself.

While this story is almost certainly without foundation, it hasn't stopped some rare individuals from claiming that they walk in the footsteps of the great necromancers of the past. The mystics known as the *Djed-hukama* practice their secret and forbidden art, the magic that has dominion over death. More than one Djed-hakim has claimed to have made the pilgrimage to this mythical place to learn the insider secrets of necromancy. Unlike the necromancers of far Calabria, a Djed-hakim takes their craft very seriously, aware of the risks that drawing power from beyond the veil can create. (And, of course, there's the ire of the Black Angels to worry about, too.)

LIFE IN AKOMA

Din Altse (The Religious Beliefs of the Desert Tribes)

The myths of the nine tribes are remembered in stories. Until very recently all these stories were kept only in the oral traditions of Dastani and tribal storytellers, and many different versions of these stories exist among the tribes. With the discovery of writing from the Emirates, the Dastan-Dastar began recording their stories in written form. What follows is a description of some of the most important stories, and their effect upon the philosophy of the desert peoples.



Heaven, Earth, and the Seven Jan

In the beginning there was Heaven and Earth, and Heaven fell in love with Earth and brought rain to nourish her. Earth was awakened by the rain, saw Heaven, and fell in love with him. Nourished by his rain, Earth brought forth the plants, the animals, and the people. Earth and Heaven admired each other from afar for a long time, but they could not keep apart forever. They came together in a close embrace, and Earth was covered over with water from Heaven's happy tears. Before long they had six children, all wise jan, or spirits, named Asbabi, Parandari, Cabok, Mar, Suskin, and Marmulak. While theologians dispute the order in which they were born, their stories are always the same.

Asbabi was a Hippopotamus, and loved Heaven and rain and rivers. She looked around her and saw that people knew not the value of Heaven's blessing. They were wasting water, and defiling it, and letting it spoil. She took it upon herself to teach people the true value of water, and they learned well. However, their waters were still defiled, and they knew not how to cleanse them. They wailed in despair and begged Asbabi to help. She agreed, and with Heaven's assistance dug up a holy spring called Zamzam, that would always be pure and cool and would never run out. The people dug channels and canals to mix the flow from Zamzam with the defiled rivers and oases, and slowly its power and purity cleansed the other waters. Asbabi's image often graces the pillars of bridges, and the walls of canals and oases.

Parandari was an Ibis, and loved Earth and plants and grain. She looked around her and saw that people knew not the value of Earth's blessings, that they were eating

whatever they put their hands to, instead of cultivating plants. She vowed to teach people the value of plants and grains, and how to take care of them. She showed people the principles of the hoe and the plow, of irrigation, cultivation, and harvest, and in this way gave them plenty to eat. Parandari's image often appears in the layout of farms and fields, where they exist. Statues of her often stand guard over herbal and pleasure gardens as well.

Cabok was a Cheetah, and loved people and animals. She saw that some people, those of races, while they could eat what Parandari's crops provided for them, did not like it, and seemed less healthy than others. She went among them and asked them what they thought, and everywhere she received the same answer, that these people hungered for animal flesh, but knew not how to go about getting it. Cabok went among the animals and learned their behavior. She noted particularly that some animals used teeth and claws to kill and eat the others, and that many others always gathered where certain kinds of plants grew. Working with Parandari, she developed the techniques of herding and slaughtering animals for food, and then she set about teaching them to the people. Herders still carve images of Cabok into their fences, or wear spotted robes or masks while they herd. The staves they use are painted like Cheetah tails.

Mar was a Cobra, and loved order and organization. He always asked the permission of his older sisters before doing anything of importance. Mar looked upon the people, and saw that they had no leaders, and no order, and this pained him. He asked his sisters for permission to teach the people about law and order, and to appoint shahs, or kings, to oversee them. The sisters agreed, and Mar set about writing a code of laws for the people to follow. He then appointed a shah to lead each tribe, and created an order of guards to enforce the law. Tribe leaders still wear crowns made like a cobra encircling the head, and Qanundari often wear armbands made like a cobra twirling around their arm.

Suskin was a Scarab, and loved clouds and light and life. He desired to build a great city in Heaven where he and his brothers and sisters could live. So he set about building Setaresahr, the City of Stars on the cloudy banks of Daryaxosi, the Sea of Delight and Se Marud, the Three Heavenly Rivers. When he was done, he was well pleased with his work, and settled down to live in Setaresahr. When he occasionally visited Earth, he taught people he met along the way many of his architectural techniques. Today, Suskin's image is the symbol of Heaven and of Setaresahr, and the paradise good people go to when they

die. It is also placed over the entrances to buildings, that Suskin's good will may help to keep them standing strong.

Marmulak was a Crocodile, and he loved his elder brother's creation, the City of Stars. He saw that there were three ways into Setaresahr from Earth by Three Heavenly Rivers. Worried that these waterways might be used by enemies or thieves as entrances to the city, Marmulak took his samsir and cut himself into three parts – head, torso, and legs – and one part of him went to guard each of the three rivers. Today Marmulak's image is used on doors and gates everywhere to show that they are guarded both by Earthly and by Heavenly might.

Heaven and Earth were pleased with their children, and desired to have more. Before long, Earth's belly began to swell up with the coming of a new child. Alas, the heart of this child was evil, and her intentions hateful. She was born with a poisonous barb on her tail, which she used to cut and poison her mother's womb as she was born. So deeply did she wound her mother that Earth became unable to have any more children. Heaven and Earth named their Scorpion child Kazdom, and drew apart in sorrow. To this day, it is considered unlucky to have seven children.

Kazdom desired nothing but to bring disease, pain, and sorrow to the people. While her brothers and sisters spend much of their time trying to hunt Kazdom down and imprison her, she always manages to evade them, for she is crafty and cunning. Meanwhile, she spreads disease and sorrow wherever she goes. She is powerful, and some desperate people turn to her as a last resort, for she is willing to make deals and use her power to help one person, especially when it involves hurting many others. Her image is often shattered, destroyed, or blotted out in ceremonies involving the curing of disease.

Anahita, the First Star

There is no question that Heaven is a beautiful place. Even when the sun is in the sky and obscures the silky blackness and bright stars, it is pleasing to look at. At night, however, the true nature of Heaven is revealed, and by gazing at it, theologians have been able to describe it in detail.

In Heaven, the soil is so rich that it is deep black, and the water so clear you can hardly see it. It is lush and full of plants that bear succulent fruit, and animals run all around Heaven, and their meat is sweet and filling, and you only have to reach out your hand and they will come to you.

As much of Heaven as we can see, for Heaven is boundless, is covered by Setaresahr, the City of Stars, and through the center runs Daryaxosi, the Sea of Delight. Because the waters of Heaven are always pure, spirits that live there may swim in the Sea of Delight, and so it is always filled with stars.

Daryaxosi is connected to three wondrous rivers, the Se Marud, which are divine and play a part in the lives of all mortals. The first of these is Sirahi Marud, the River of Warm Milk, which carries spirits to life. The second is Abeya Marud, the River of Pure Water, which carries us through life. The third is Asal Marud, the River of Sweet Honey, which carries us from life into Heaven.

Buildings in Setaresahr are made of glass and clear crystal, which is why you can see the stars through them. Most stars are the spirits of dead people, but some of them are fires or magic lights, such as the one that shows where Mazgat Langar, the temple of the gods, stands, at the center of Setaresahr.

To begin with, Heaven was meant as an abode for gods, and Earth as a home for mortals. When mortals died, their bodies were absorbed into the Earth and their spirits were absorbed into the firmament of Heaven. Not every mortal was satisfied with this arrangement. Living on Earth, while not as hard as it is now, was hardly easy, and many mortals longed to live in Heaven among the beautiful buildings and gardens of Setaresahr.

Now there was one humble young maid named Anahita, whose nature concealed great bravery. She devotedly served the great princess of the time, a beautiful woman named Sahbanu. One morning, Anahita found Sahbanu undressed and unwashed, looking disconsolate, and asked her what was the matter.

"I am worried, Anahita, about what will happen when I die. I enjoy living so much; I do not want to simply cease to exist." She sighed. "But not even if I were princess of the entire world could I live forever, for that is a privilege reserved for the gods."

Anahita frowned. "True, my lady, you cannot live forever, but when your spirit rises to Heaven, you will be among the gods. Will that not please you?"

"When I die, my body will be absorbed into the ground, and it will no longer exist. So it will be with my spirit; I will not be pleased when my spirit joins the clouds, because I won't know it. My spirit might as well be absorbed into the fire or the river for all that I will be able to tell."

Anahita was troubled by this, because she very much admired her mistress. "My lady, if anyone upon Earth deserves to have their spirit reside in Heaven after they die, instead of being simply absorbed into the clouds, it is you. Surely the gods will see this if we were only to ask?"

Sahbanu laughed. "You flatter me, Anahita, but thank you." Sahbanu then rose to bathe.

Anahita was not satisfied, however. "If I can convince the gods to take my mistress into Heaven," she thought, "I will be honored, and Sahbanu will get the reward she deserves." She began going to the temple every day to pray, to ask the gods to allow her mistress's spirit to live in Heaven. She asked that the gods give her a sign when they had reached their decision.

After she had prayed every day for three years and received no sign, she decided they could not be hearing her. Not to be deterred, she decided to bring her case to the gods personally. To this end she obtained leave from work for a year, bought a small boat, and hired a guide to show her the way to Abeya Marud, knowing that it led to Daryaxosi and the City of Stars. After a search of many months, she found it, and set sail.

The river took her to strange places and past strange cities. She spoke with giants and demons, was captured by and escaped the clutches of a terrible scorpion, and lived off whatever fruits and nuts she could find on her way. At last her journey brought her to a huge wall of stone. The river passed through the wall under an enormous archway, and standing in the river beneath it was the torso of a crocodile nearly ten stories tall. That is, all she could see was his torso and his arms; he did not appear to have legs, tail, or head. Recognizing this astonishing thing as the middle half of the god Marmulak, Anahita kneeled in her boat, suddenly very afraid of what the gods might do to her for coming this far.

Marmulak reached out his great arm and lifted the boat from the water and placed it gently on the shore. He then removed Anahita from the boat and motioned to her to sit and wait. This Anahita did, filled more and more with apprehension.

After a few minutes, Anahita was conscious of a presence behind her, and she turned to see a Scarab, not taller than her, grinning at her and twitching his antennae. She leapt up in fear, yelped in surprise, and knelt before the god Suskin, thinking that meeting two gods in one day was perhaps a bit much for one mortal, even one who had spoken to giants and demons and escaped the clutches of a terrible scorpion.

"Get up, Anahita, and don't be afraid," said Suskin, in a voice oddly clicky. "I know why you're here. And it is an admirable mission, to be sure...you must have much bravery to come this far for your mistress's sake." Anahita felt heat rise in her cheeks, and her tail twitched in embarrassment, but she remained silent. "Yet you must see that it is impossible. We cannot allow one single person to be allowed into Heaven while all the others languish on Earth."

"But," Anahita began, and Suskin held up a hand to silence her.

"You think that she deserves it. Who are you to judge who is worthy to live in Heaven? Turn and look through the gate over the river. Turn and see the beauties of Heaven for yourself and tell me you are fit to decide who is worthy to live there." Anahita did as she was told, and was the first mortal to see Setaresahr so close. She was overcome by the beauty of the sight and fell upon her knees, crying.

"You see," said Suskin, "only we, who know Heaven's beauties, can judge who is worthy of them."

By this time, Anahita was sobbing, not only at the beauty of Heaven but for the failure of her mission. "However, I do think there are mortals who deserve to live here." At this, Anahita looked up in surprise. Suskin grinned again. "I think, Anahita, that you are worthy of this place. When you die, you shall come to Heaven, and you shall open the gates of Setaresahr for the sun each dawn, and close them again after the sun has set."

Anahita stared for a moment, open-mouthed. At last, she said, "What about my mistress?" Suskin smiled. "She too will come to Heaven, for I think she is good enough. In Heaven she will be your maid, and follow you. You will have served her long enough by then." Anahita's eyes widened further, but she could find no speech.

"But that is all far away, by your mortal reckoning. For now, you must return to Earth and live out the rest of your life. Rather than have you go back through all those perils you faced to come here, I will give you an easier way back." Suskin extended his wings and ran one long antenna down each of Anahita's arms. At his touch, they grew long black feathers, turning them into wings, and Anahita became the first Vulture. "Now fly back to Earth, and when you die, your spirit shall live in Heaven and shine as an example to the people of Earth. Those who live their lives as well as yours will follow you and live with you among the gods and the riches of Heaven."

Anahita, when she died, became the very first star, and she is the last star seen every morning when she opens the gates for the sun to leave, and she is the first star seen every night, when she opens the gates for it to return. Her mistress Sahbanu also became a star, and can sometimes be seen, faint but just visible below Anahita in the sky.

Aftab and Nafarxonde

There is a tradition among the desert peoples that when a woman becomes pregnant, she must find an oasis with a good water supply, food, and housing for herself and her child. She must stay there during her pregnancy and while she is nursing her child, so these temporary settlements, called biarams. The duration of the biaram depends on what tribe the mother is in and how soon her kardaste is likely to return to her settling place. A typical biaram lasts two or three years. The underlying reason for this tradition is practical; a pregnant or nursing woman requires more water and food than others, and it would be dangerous for her or her child to travel far from a water source. The biaram has been a practical necessity for so long that it has turned into a tradition, one that no one would think to disobey.

However, as the tribes say, "It does sometimes rain in the desert."

There once was a woman named Nafarxonde, who lived in Saramad, and who was wed to a wealthy merchant. The way some storytellers tell it, the merchant

was a manifestation of Kazdom, or her son; others say he was her servant or traded his heart to her for wealth. Whether divine or simply greedy, the merchant offered Nafarxonde's family a considerable marriage present, and Nafarxonde agreed to marry him for her family's sake. She endured him quietly and without complaint, even though he was crude and unpleasant. When she became pregnant with his child, however, she said to herself, "I live in this house of my own will, but this child is not being given a choice. I swear before Heaven that when I give birth I will not be in his household." So saying, she left the house with a few provisions and began to wander the city.

For several months she depended upon strangers for hospitality and protection from her husband, who sent out increasingly large groups of men to bring her back. Eventually, dread of her pursuers led her to run into the desert, badly clothed and provisioned. Her husband's men were unwilling to follow her there, and for a time she was safe.

Then came the day of the birth. This was at a time when the moon and sun were only balls of light, rolling uncontrolled around Heaven, and day came upon Nafarxonde suddenly when she was in labor, so her son was born into the hot dry sands under the unforgiving light of the sun. The sands in that part of the desert were very sharp, and cut the child's skin as he was born, covering him in blood that dyed his skin and coat a deep red. The heat of the sun deformed him, giving him twisted horns, long wicked claws, and a tail like a scorpion's.

She took up her child intending to take him back into town to be washed and dried, but as she carried him, he stung her arm, and she dropped him. He stood up where he was and looked up at the sun, which was just rolling towards the edge of the world. Then he ran towards it with open arms, crying out for it. Nafarxonde stared in amazement, and then understood. Her son had seen the sun after he was born and thought it was his mother.

The child chased the sun all the way around the world for days, until at last he caught it, and taking possession of it, he became the spirit of the sun. To this day, he guides the sun around the world, pushing it along with a staff made of obsidian, and his name is Aftab. He takes great pleasure in the pain and suffering his sun brings with it, and he travels around the world every day to see as much of it as possible. His name is rarely spoken except with great fear and a kind of horrified reverence.

Nafarxonde returned to Saramad, and lived a melancholy life, never having any more children. When she died she rose to Heaven to become the star in the southeastern sky that leads travelers to ancient Saramad and the surrounding lands of the Kohani. She is the spirit that watches over births; pregnant mothers and midwives often invoke her name for luck at births.

Mah

Aftab is known to visit Earth sometimes, and walk upon her face. Often it is to sow terror and hatred, or to view terrible battles or plagues. Once, when he was the only spirit running through the sky instead of living peacefully in the City of Stars, he visited Earth on some other business, and saw that the moon ran erratically through the sky, just as his own sun had done before he came to be guardian of it.

Now, Aftab hates disorder that he has no hand in creating, for it makes him jealous. So after looking at the moon for some time, he said, "I must acquire a slave to run the moon. It must not run around so erratically like that." To this end he went to a slave market in Saramad, but all the people ran at his approach, for even then they feared him. The only person who did not get away was a female slave whose name was Mah; she broke her leg on her chain trying to run, and became lame. Aftab snatched her up and took her to heaven, chained her to the moon, gave her a stick made of bronze, and bade her use it to push the moon around the world. Because she is lame, she lags behind Aftab, rising a little later every night.

Mah hates her position, but she is a compassionate spirit, and while she is out of Aftab's view, at night, she will listen to people's prayers and tell the helpful star spirits about them. During the day, however, she is completely under Aftab's power, and can do nothing.

Mazgat Langar, Sorkhaziana, and the Tarik Cargus

"The center of any great city should be its temple," said Suskin to the architect-king Tamaddon. "In Heaven there is the perfect city, Setaresahr, the City of Stars, and in following its form you will create near-perfect cities on Earth. At its center lies Mazgat Langar, the Anchor Temple, which holds the city in place amidst the tides and winds of Heaven. Look to it in the night sky, and you will see that while all the rest of the city turns around it, Mazgat Langar remains permanently still. All the rest of Heaven is measured from it."

"The temple should lie to the northeast of the oasis, and the oasis should be surrounded by trees and foliage, and not crowded around with buildings. People must not be allowed to go there without good reason, and must not linger long, and then only the man appointed to do so must do the drawing of the water, to assure it remains pure and clean. In Setaresahr, the oasis is surrounded by a vast and lush garden, the Tarik Cargus, through which no one but the gods may tread."

Mazgat Langar, the Anchor Temple in the City of Stars, can be seen from Earth as that star that traces no path during the course of a night, but remains in one place. As a result, the navigators of the tribes use it as a fixed point of reference by which to measure the movements of all the other stars. The easiest navigational method

they use is to measure an imaginary line between Mazgat Langar and another star at a certain time of night; the line then points the way to a certain landmark.

For example, a line drawn from Mazgat Langar to the red star Sorkhaziana, who lives low above the horizon, points the way directly to Abuda Dhaba, the largest oasis-city under the control of the Sorkhareh tribe. Sorkhaziana herself was a warrior of some skill and incredible fierceness. She is said to have torn a sator apart with her claws alone. Her determination and valor are idolized by the tribe that took her name.

Most of the night sky is filled with stars from end to end, but there is a patch of sky where no stars live, called the Tarik Cargus. This is said to be the garden and oasis in the City of Stars, and therefore represents the lushest part of Heaven. Ironically, it represents the barest, most barren part of Earth, for it shows the way to the lands controlled by the Khorsheed, near the very center of the desert, where the oases are seasonal and unpredictable. The Khorsheed say that it means that when they rise to Heaven, they will be given homes by the Tarik Cargus where they will be able to drink all the water they desire.



The Three Blue Stars of the East, and the Five Orange Stars of the West

Almost all the stars visible from the desert are spirits of desert people, but some of them are thought to be spirits of others, from other lands. There are the three blue stars of the east – Razda, Barutda, and Dozodrazi – and the five orange stars of the west – Dozid, Al-Dozid, Tupda, Uskari, and Eskenas. As stars, they are markers for cities and entry points into the lands they come from; as spirits they each had something to give or take from the desert.

Razda was a Crane from the land of Zhongguo, a simple painter with an adventurous spirit, who wanted to discover the colors of the desert. She was one of the first foreigners to venture into the desert lands, and she had the good fortune to be taken up by members of the Dastan-Dastar tribe. They were fascinated by the thin, crisp, white sheets she painted her pictures on; they were portable, yet held images as well as stone. She traded the secret of making them for certain native dyes that let her paint in whole new colors. Thus the desert people learned to make paper.

Barutda was a Monkey, also from Zhongguo, an imperial alchemist working to perfect the formula for making gunpowder. Through much research he determined that desert sands were good places to find saltpeter, one of the key ingredients. He ventured into the desert with a small but well-equipped retinue of guards, and met up with the Sorkhareh, who agreed to help him find the mineral if he would teach them the formula for gunpowder. He agreed, seeing no danger in it, and that is how the desert people learned to make gunpowder.

Dozodrazi was a Rabbit, and a lowly thief. She had heard of the treasures of the Peyravi tribe, and her heart filled with desire for them. She managed to sneak into one of their libraries and steal a number of things, mostly candleholders and other trivial objects, but she also knew the value of books, and seeing several that looked particularly valuable, snatched them away and returned with them to Zhongguo. One of them contained a powerful spell capable of creating water out of nothing; the book was the only record of the spell, which is why no magician in the desert can cast it, and why the Zhonggese never want for water.

Dozid was also a thief, but he was a Jackal from the lands to the west of the desert. He had seen desert people keeping their records on the miraculous paper they had acquired from Zhongguo, and at once saw its usefulness. He disguised himself as a member of the Abi-Asman, and traveled among them, all the while professing an interest in paper and a desire to apprentice himself to a paper-maker. Eventually he got his wish, and spent three months learning the secrets of making paper. Once he had learned the trick and proved to himself he could replicate it, he threw off his desert robe and killed his master, and ran back to

the west. Thus the people of the western Emirates learned the secrets of making paper by subterfuge and murder.

Now, Dozid had a son, Al-Dozid, who learned well from his father, but was possessed of an even greater vision. He had been born in the desert while his father was investigating the secrets of paper, and had been fascinated by the wondrous gunpowder the tribe used to celebrate victories, marriages, and births. His father allowed him to become an alchemist's apprentice, and while Dozid studied paper, Al-Dozid studied gunpowder. It did not take Al-Dozid long to discover the dangerous potential of gunpowder, and when his father killed the paper-maker and came to fetch him, he brought with him a jar of gunpowder. Thus the people of the west obtained the secrets of making gunpowder.

Dozid traded the secret of paper for an official pardon of his crimes, but Al-Dozid was more ambitious. He gathered together a number of learned people and military men, and demonstrated the power of gunpowder, and then began the bidding. The highest bidder was the Crocodile Tupda, an inventor and son of a rich merchant. Tupda determined, with Al-Dozid's help, the proper formula for gunpowder. Then, after working for several years, he invented a machine that could be held by a normal person, that used the power of gunpowder to propel a small bullet, as from a sling, but with much more force, to much greater effect. After a few trials of the machine, which he named a musket, Tupda found himself running out of saltpeter. He knew that saltpeter could be found in the desert, and decided to trade the design of this musket to the desert people, in return for enough saltpeter to make twenty more, so that he could sell the idea to the Emir's army. He ventured into the desert and discovered the Derpasdari. Through Tupda, they learned about muskets and other guns, and how to make them. Other tribes later stole guns from the Derpasdari, or captured their warriors, and so the knowledge spread.

Uskari was one of that group of short, stocky Horses that originated in the northern steppes, but her family had long ago settled in the Emirates. However, they kept the family tradition of keeping riding lizards, and they became famous breeders. When Uskari's father died without sons, Uskari took over the family business. Sadly, she made some unwise business decisions, and was soon unable to continue keeping the lizards. She took her last herd, a small group of five beautiful animals, and released them at the edge of the desert. They were discovered by a group of Badsavar, who already knew how to herd sotor. They took the five animals into their herds, and they became the ancestors of the swift, proud asbal the Badsavar are so famous for.

Legend says that the last of these, Eskenas, is a relatively new spirit in the sky. Eskenas the Ibis was a scholar and a scribe, and his chief fascination lay in

people and their customs. It was only natural that he should be interested in the customs of the desert people, his neighbors to the east, and so he ventured into the desert and made a deal with a group of Damesab, who agreed to escort him around the desert for a price. One of the first things Eskenas noticed in his travels was that only one of the desert tribes, the Peyravi, knew how to write. The more he studied the tribes, the more he became convinced that they would benefit from the knowledge of writing, and so he began to teach them. Writing was taken up most fervently by the Mahsimi, who had seen it in the lands of their neighbors and wondered what it was, and by the Abi-Asman, who were looking for a way to keep records of their growing civilization. The knowledge is slowly spreading to the other tribes.

Core Tenets of Din Altse

- **Heterodoxy.** Not only can the tribes not agree on what is canon and what isn't, but sometimes even different families can't agree, either!
- **Polytheism.** If you want the right answer, you must consult with the correct divinity.
- **Astrology.** The future is written in the stars. To follow their patterns is to know the future.

Djed (The Pillar of the Universe)

In long ages past, there was some great civilization who called their rules "gods". These long-lost empires may have been the Autarchs of Calabrese legend... or they might just have been mortals with delusions of grandeur. Most of their civilization has been lost to time. Quarried stone is valuable building material, easily repurposed. And a tomb can only be guarded for so long before they're forgotten, or looted, or both.



Many scholars agree that whoever these rulers were, they commanded powerful magic that gave them dominion over the living and the dead. These were the first necromancers, and their magical traditions persist today, in bowdlerized forms such as and their magical traditions persist today, in bowdlerized forms such as *Ye Book of Black Magic* known to the Calabrese. But were there even greater spells, waiting to be re-discovered?

And what did lay these civilizations low? Were they just lost to time, or did their rulers call up a power that they could not put down? Some cite the Forsaken City of Walipotoea as an example, evidence that some dread power swept through its streets and removed all the people. Was it fear? Plague? Or something worse?

But with any promise of knowledge comes the hint of power, and the promise of power stirs the beginnings of belief. Today, the **Djed-Hakim** seek to unravel these secrets of the past.

With irregular pilgrimages to the Forsaken City as their only unifying ritual, the Sages of the Pillars instruct one another in the arts of necromancy and the scraps of lost history. Many sages believe it is their duty to learn these dark arts so that they can be used in the service of the living. But one or two might have greater ambitions.

When the layfolk must deal with hauntings, or monsters, or other things beyond the pale, they may seek out a Djed-Hakim to put the problem to rest. There has been strong evidence that the Deltan Revivalists are working with the Djed in hopes to thrust out the occupational government of the Anatolian Empire.

The Djed-Hakim have an ongoing rivalry with the **Black Angels**, a cabal of witch-hunters devoted to destroying all necromancers.

Core Tenets of Djed

- **Autarchy.** Those with the greatest power should hold the greatest authority over the people. Djed-Hakim will seek positions of power or to be advisors to those in power.
- **Theophany.** All matter and spirits are expressions of the divine. There are no “gods”, only magicians, spirits, and what is acted upon by magic. To master the power of wizardry is to be a god unto yourself.
- **Temperance.** The power of necromancy is nearly infinite... which means the risks are without limit, too. A proper Djed-Hakim knows that to cast a Black Magic spell is to risk untold wickedness, so they will not use magic if they don't have to.
- **Prudence.** A Sage of the Pillar is aware that their religion isn't very popular. They will freely make gestures, sacrifices, and prayers to other religions, lying about their true faith.
- **Astrology.** All things are expressions of the material and the spiritual, and the stars are no exception. To understand the macrocosm is to know our own microcosm.

Malachism (s'Allumer Heterodxy, and the State-Approved Religion of Anatolian Occupation)

The spider Nur was the adopted child of an Akoman hippopotamus father named Muşafā and a Calabrese falcon mother named Ester. Due to discrimination they experienced for their miscegenation, the family left their home in Port Spar and traveled to pre-Anatolian Lygos to start anew. Muşafā was a calligrapher and Ester was a poet. Nur learned both crafts well, but the family still struggled with poverty. Muşafā and Ester encouraged Nur to study hard, but frequently had to call them away from their schoolwork to help practice the family's trade so they could afford food. The family rationed their food, but could not stave off malnutrition. The family practiced devout Penitence, but Lygos's many churches could offer little in a city full of the impoverished. One night, hungry and tired after a long day of work with little to show for it, Nur went beneath the light of the moon and angrily demanded that the Light of Ascension explain to them why good people like her family continued to suffer. To their amazement, a glowing being descended from the sky on a moonbeam. This being was a spider like Nur, similar to them in its features, but luminous and perfect. It enfolded Nur in its arms and began to sing.

Nur personally transcribed the angel's songs, with their own commentary in verse, in a beautifully illuminated manuscript called the Angelic Codex, now Malachism's foundational text. Then they went from church to church in Lygos and imparted the Codex's core teaching: that in the material world and its natural laws, the followers of the Light of Ascension have the perfection of Ascension already, and it is their task to learn the details of its manifestations in the natural world.



Core Beliefs of Malachism

- **Divine beings.** At its purest and most focused, the Light of Ascension forms entities called angels, who carry the truth to all creatures endowed with reason. These angels sang to the nurse Helloise just before she saved Don Constantin di Rinaldi's life.
- **Materialism.** The material world is composed of the Light of Ascension—filtered, reflected, and refracted into obscurity, but the Light nonetheless.

Somewhere within every material object and being is a kernel of perfect light, which may be refined into an angelic state which that object or being may achieve upon death. To clarify and refine the light, the faithful must practice correct thought and correct action, caring not only for their souls, but also for the Light in its material incarnations.

- **Charity.** Correct actions include caring for the sick or impoverished, defending the weak against those who would take advantage of them, and obeying righteous and faithful rulers.
- **Mundanity.** Magic is the province of angels, not of mortals. The practice of magic is hubristic and should be avoided and discouraged as an affront to correct thought.
- **Tolerance.** Other forms of religion are also valid, except where they directly contradict Malachism's teachings; but they are lesser reflections of the truth, just as angelic light is expressed in lesser form the material world.

Nur's Gender

The Deltan language has a gender-neutral singular pronoun, a borrowing from Xīwén like much of modern Deltan grammar and vocabulary. Canonical references to Nur's gender use this pronoun exclusively; we have chosen the English pronoun "they," commonly used as a third-person singular pronoun since Shakespearean times, as an equivalent. The *Biography of Nur*, a contemporary account of Nur's life written by their younger cousin, records that Nur never identified themselves as male or female in their adulthood, and any records of Nur's childhood which say otherwise are apocryphal at best. Certain scholars have proposed theories as to Nur's biological sex, but mainstream Malachism considers such discussions impolite and disrespectful in the extreme to Nur's identity, memory, and wishes. Artistic depictions of Nur tend to minimize gender signifiers—not a difficult task considering that they were a spider.

The Black Angels

One important group bears mentioning here: the Black Angels. As the specter of necromancy threatens to spread from the Delta across all of Akoma, the Black Angels stand against them. Originally an order of vultures from the Western deserts, the Black Angels are now a potent but controversial entity.



Origin

The first Black Angels evolved from vultures in the Western Emirates. An ancient tradition of burial there requires individuals to build "Towers of Silence" and place the corpses of the dead atop these towers. Vultures come from far away to consume the corpses, ritually returning them to the cycle of life and death. This tradition marks vultures as the single exception to the "don't eat other sentient creatures, even if they're dead" rule which governs most creatures. At some point, someone noticed that creatures whose corpses the vultures consume don't come back from the dead, even if a necromancer goes at them.

The opposition between vultures and necromancers led to the formation of the Black Angels, a secret society trying to end evil necromancy. The Black Angels try to bring necromancers back into the fold; notably, though, they're not trying to exterminate necromancy. They themselves study necromancy, they just study it toward what they consider civilized ends.

In modern days, the Black Angels are active all across the planet, though more in some places than in others. Calabria finds the desert tradition of corpse-eating mostly repulsive, and religious leaders from various traditions have come out in opposition. Moreover, more than one Black Angel has been arrested and tortured in Triskellian.

Organization

Traditionally, the Black Angels are organized into "choruses" of three to twelve individuals who report to a commander called an "archangel." Archangels coordinate chorus activity and report information to the Seraph, high commander of the Black Angels. The Seraph is based out of the Whispering Library, a stronghold hidden somewhere in the deserts of Akoma. The current Whispering Library is actually the second iteration of the building; the original was in the western deserts, but was attacked by the Black Angels' enemies and destroyed.

Methodology

The Black Angels' mission is to bring the practice of necromancy into civilization's service—not to eliminate necromancy or necromancers. To this end, they employ:

- Surveillance: The principal duty of Black Angels at all levels of the organization is surveillance. Where possible, they maintain good relationships with communities and municipal authorities.
- Negotiation: If the Black Angels identify a necromancer, their first move is to reason with them. Most necromancers are rich and well-educated, but take up necromancy in response to some trauma or disenfranchisement: the loss of a loved one, for example, or a bad marriage.
- Exposure: If a necromancer proves resistant to negotiation, the Black Angels go to the omega protocol. In communities hostile to necromancy, this usually means informing the civil authorities of the necromancer's existence.
- Attack: If the Black Angels judge the local authorities incompetent to capture the necromancer, they'll take matters into their own claws.

Enemies of the Black Angels

It's tough to be a Black Angel almost anywhere.

In Anatolia, the Black Angels are jockeying with the Caliphate, trying to prove that they're useful enough in hunting down evil necromancers that the cops should look the other way—but the Caliphate wants necromancy exterminated, not redeemed.

The Black Angels' single most ardent enemy is Lady Amalsand Jakoba, who is single-handedly responsible for the expulsion of the Black Angels from Calabria. She exposed the identities of every Black Angel in Triskellian and motivated local authorities to arrest them as necromancers; her son Vaslov led the charge against them, personally killing the Archangel of Triskellian in battle as the police stormed their tower.

The Black Angels found an unlikely ally in Count Miroslav of Crosswood. As every Black Angel still active in Calabria scrambled for safety, Miroslav extended an open invitation for the Black Angels to take refuge at Shadow Castle. No one actually knows what happened at Shadow Castle, but the next few years saw the Black Angels of Calabria congregating in Shadow Castle before departing for Akoma en masse.

Fun and Games in Akoma

The average Akoman has a good deal of free time outside of work; and the fact that the Prophet Nur was an artist means that little Sarah's mother is less likely to complain than yours when she decides to become a poet.

- Athletic Competitions: Various sports are popular in Akoma.
 - The oldest and most venerable sport in the region is wrestling. Particularly popular as a spectator sport is Anatolian oil wrestling, in which two competitors cover one another with olive oil and then try to shove their hands down each others' trousers. Come on, you'd watch that.
 - A team variant of this game, influenced by the Yindian game of kabaddi, is gaining traction as a spectator sport. Come on, you'd watch that too.
 - There's also polo, a team game where cavalrymen use sticks to knock a ball into a goal, a key element of every sipahi's training.
 - Various pedestrian and aquatic variants of polo (usually called "football" and "water polo"), physically strenuous in the extreme, have evolved for the masses of Akomans who can't afford to ride dinosaurs around.
 - There are also track and field competitions, often highlighting military skills such as the javelin.
- Coffee: Akoma is the sole source of the plant called coffee, a miraculous substance which makes you awake and lively.
- Poetry Circles: The griots of Òyó, traveling bards who maintain elaborate oral histories, represent Akoma's oldest unbroken formal poetic tradition; but even amongst the least-educated commoner, poetry is an important part of Akoman life. The prophet Nur and their mother Ester were both poets, and the Angelic Codex is recorded in verse (and frequently set to music). Poetry is also important in the military, with battle orders commonly delivered in verse form to increase their memorability. Poetry forms the core of humanities education, whether through formal training in imperial schools for janissaries and nobles, or via the village bard in rural areas. Adults from all walks of life participate in poetry circles, whose social and psychological function ranges from group therapy to speed dating.

BESTIARY

Akhal-Teke

The now-extinct Tenth Tribe of Camels in Xi Shāmò domesticated the ancestors of today's Akhal-Teke mounts some millennia ago. When the Nine Tribes exterminated the Tenth, the secrets of Akhal-Teke husbandry almost died as well; but Bahargül, the Tenth Tribe's most expert Akhal-Teke wrangler, traded her knowledge for her family's lives. Since then, camels have bred Akhal-Tekes for long-distance travel, courier work, and raiding. Akhal-Tekes are considered too light and fragile to mount sipahi, but Anatolia deploys wings of raiders on Akhal-Tekes for reconnaissance, harassment, and other light-cavalry duties. With a preferred diet of seafood, an Akhal-Teke takes surprisingly well to shipboard life on the Shallow Sea. Queen Khadija al-Dalāl's heaviest and best-equipped galleys have "Akhal-Teke decks" from which one or two beasts and their riders will fly forth to drop heavy and/or flammable objects on enemy craft—leading to some memorable jousting between Akhal-Tekes and Knights Hospitaller.

Akhal-Tekes are very difficult to acquire. Prices start at 120Ð, and that's if you're local to Xi Shāmò.

Akhal-Teke	Mount
Traits	Body d12, d8, Speed 2d12, d8, no Mind , Will d8 Akhal-Teke d10 (Mountains, Carnivore, Day)
Skills	Endurance d10 Observation d10 Weather Sense d10
Gifts	Brawling Fighter Giant Fast Mover High-Altitude Flyer Flight Improved Strength Flying Fighter Mad Sprint Full-Tilt Movement Strength
Initiative	2d12, d8
Movement	Flying Stride 5, Dash 10, Sprint 2d12, d10, d8, Run 60 <i>With rider:</i> Stride 5, Dash zero, Sprint 4d8, Run 42
Attack	Beak @ Reach d12, d10, d8, Damage +1 Impale
Counter	Beak @ Close d12, d10, d8, Damage +1 Impale
Dodge	2d12, d8
Soak	d12, d8
Loot	Saddle

Asbal

Asbal are sleek, swift two-legged lizards, famed for their speed. When carefully trained, they can be ridden, but they are notoriously strong-willed and typically respond only to two or three masters. They are herbivorous, and built for speed rather than fighting. They can be trained to fight and to carry a warrior into battle, but they are not as dangerous as destriers. Asbal are usually green with bright patterns of red and yellow. They can live in arid conditions but require a daily supply of water and fresh food.

Asbal	Special Mount
Traits	Body 2d12, Speed d8, no Mind, Will d8 Asbal d8 (Plains, Carnivore, Day)
Skills	Brawling d8 Endurance d8 Observation d8
Gifts	Brawling Fighter (can counter with unarmed attacks) Coward (bonus d12 dodge when Afraid) Improved Strength (bonus d12 for Melee) Giant (extra reach)
Initiative	d8
Movement	Stride 2, Dash 7, Sprint d8, Run 45 <i>Mounted:</i> Stride 2, Dash zero, Sprint d8, Run 24
Attack	Talons@Reach 2d12, 2d8, Dmg +1 Impale
Counter	Talons@Close 2d12, 2d8, Dmg +1 Impale
Dodge	d8
Soak	2d12
Loot	Nice feathers × d8

Badkar

Badkar are tall, omnivorous lizards that inhabit the Cursed Lands. They usually forage alone, but have been known to cooperate to bring down large animal prey, such as adventurers foolish enough to wander into their territory alone. Their eggs are somewhat prized as delicacies but they defend their nests ferociously, so obtaining the eggs can be an adventure. Their meat is considered tainted, however, and is never eaten.

<i>Badkar</i>	<i>Typical Creature</i>
Traits	Body d6, Speed d6, no Mind, Will d6 Badkar d6 (Plains, Omnivore, Twilight)
Skills	Observation d6 Stealth d6 Tactics d6
Gifts	Brawling Fighter (can counter with unarmed attacks) Coward (bonus d12 dodge when Afraid) Quadrapped (bonus movement)
Initiative	d6
Movement	Stride 1, Dash 7, Sprint d6, Run 29
Attack	Bite@Close 2d6, Dmg +1 Critical, Grapple
Counter	Bite@Close 2d6, Dmg +1 Critical, Grapple
Dodge	d6
Soak	d6
Loot	At the nest: Badkar Eggs ×d6

Leviathan

“I’ve hunted these waters for fifty years, and I’ve never seen anything like it. Two years ago, we had a record haul. We don’t usually hunt the black-and-white ones, but they were moving slow—illness, maybe—and we got lucky. must have taken an entire pod, all except for an ancient female, oldest in the pod, who got away. She must have had two harpoons and two lances stuck in her, but she broke away, dove too deep. We assumed, bleeding that much, she must have died ... but then, a year later, we returned to the same waters, and she was waiting for us.

“She knew our pathways. She knew our patterns. She knew which ways the ships were going to go, which ways we were going to go if we got caught. And it wasn’t just the black-and-white ones, either; there were monsters of all kinds.

“Now there’s a bounty on her fin. She’s no whale, not anymore. She’s a leviathan.

“It’s almost as if they’re sentient.”

Leviathan Avenger

Sea Monster (Supernaut)

Goals	1. Survive.
Traits	Body d12, Speed d12, Mind d12, Will d12 Leviathan d12 (Sea, Omnivore, Night) Avenger d12
Skills	Brawling 2d12 Dodge 2d12 Endurance d12 Leadership d12 Swimming d12 Stealth d12 Tactics 2d12
Gifts	Counter-Tactics (2d12 bonus vs. flanking Tactics) Improved Strength (bonus d12 for Melee) Brawling Fighter (can counter with Brawling) Charging Strike (move d12m closer as part of any melee) Fast Jumper (jump is action, not stunt) Fast Swimmer (swim is action, not stunt) Frenzy (X to become Enraged) Giant (extra reach) Language: Whalesong Pack Tactics (+d12 attack when Guarding ally flanks) Unshakeable Fighter Local Area Knowledge: the Shallow Sea Toughness ×3* Diehard (+d6 Soak when Hurt, +d6 Soak when Injured) Luck (X to re-roll one die two times) Deep Diving (stay underwater for a long time) Eternal Breath (stay underwater even longer) Echolocation (make supersonic noise to see) Guard Breaker (Target guarding? X for 2d12, Weak Dmg) Mob Fighter (Cause Dying or worse? Sweep Near) Resolve (add Will to Soak) Invulnerable Hide† (X for -1 Dmg, 1/recover action) True Leader (can add Focus when rallying) Militia Leader (remove Afraid from d12 allies) Veteran (Aim and Guard bonus is d12) Bravery (X to negate Afraid)
Initiative	d8, d10
Movement	Stride 2, Dash 8, Sprint d12, Run 38
Attack	Bite@ Near, 4d12, Damage +1 Grapple
Counter	Bite @ Close, 4d12, Damage +1 Grapple Counter Tactics – bonus 2d12 vs. flankers
Dodge	3d12
Soak	3d12 †Invulnerable Hide – X for -1 Damage *Toughness × 3 – X to make Damage Weak
Loot	Precious Ambergris ×d12

Sagg

Saggs are slim, athletic, medium-sized carnivorous lizards usually trained to herd animals. They are fast on their feet, however, and there is a breed called a badsag bred and trained for racing. They are common companion animals even in tribes that keep no herds. One breed, the xunsag, is stronger and bulkier than its cousins, and makes an excellent guard lizard. Saggs, badsaggs, and xunsaggs all have tube-like bones on the sides of their heads that act as flutes or horns, and when excited these animals can emit loud, echoing horn-like calls.

<i>Sagg</i>	<i>Typical Creature</i>
Traits	Body d6, Speed d10, no Mind, Will d6 Sag d6 (Plains, Carnivore, Day)
Skills	Digging d6 Searching d6 Tactics d6
Gifts	Brawling Fighter (can counter with unarmed attacks) Quadrapped (bonus movement) Tracking (bonus d12 to follow trails)
Initiative	d6
Movement	Stride 1, Dash 9, Sprint d10, Run 33
Attack	Claws@Close 2d6, Dmg +1 Critical
Counter	Claws@Close 2d6, Dmg +1 Critical
Dodge	d6
Soak	d6
Loot	Sagg Horns ×2

Sahin

Sahin are small feathered flying lizards, rarely larger than half a stone in weight. In the wild, they hunt insects and small lizards, but they have been trained by some tribes to hunt on command or carry messages. They are favorite companions of Damesab Hojri, who use them to send messages to their friends.

<i>Sahin</i>	<i>Typical Creature</i>
Traits	Body d4, Speed d12, no Mind, Will d4 Sahin d6 (Plains, Carnivore, Day)
Skills	Dodge d6 Observation d6 Weather Sense d6
Gifts	Coward (bonus d12 dodge when afraid) Dead Reckoning (bonus d12 to find their way) Flight (can fly)
Initiative	d6
Movement	Flying Stride 4, Dash 12, Sprint d12, d6, Run 34
Attack	Claws@Close d6, d4, Dmg +1 Critical Teeth@Close d6, d4, Dmg +1 Grapple
Dodge	d6 Coward — bonus d12 when Afraid
Soak	d6
Loot	Tiny Message

INTERESTING PEOPLE

The Knights Hospitaller

Elite warriors of the divine who answer only to the pontiff, these Knights are usually only found on the Honey Isle, though they sometimes make crusades into other regions.

<i>Knight Hospitaller</i>	<i>Falcon Hospitaller (Elite Horde)</i>
Traits Body d8, Speed d8, Mind d8, Will d8 Species d8 (Mountains, Carnivore, Day) Career d8	
Skills Academics d8 Melee Combat d8 Observation d8 Searching d8 Vehicles d8 Weather Sense d8	
Gifts Armored Fighter Flight* Keen Eyes Medicine Pack Tactics† Piety of Penitence Prehensile Feet Shield Fighter Unshakeable Fighter Veteran	
Initiative 2d8	
Movement *Flying: Stride 1, Dash 5, Sprint 2d8, Run 33	
Attack Calendar Sword @ Close, 2d8, Damage +2 Critical, Holy †Pack Tactics: Bonus d12 if friend is flanking & Guarding	
Counter Calendar Sword @ Close, 2d8, Damage +2 Critical, Holy	
Dodge d8 and Shield d12	
Soak d8 and Armor d8	
Loot Calendar Sword ×1, Dinar ×d8	

The Janissaries

Many Janissaries are Hyenas, but they can be of any species. Giraffes, Elephants, and Rhinos are also common. A captain will have Leadership d8 and True Leader.

<i>Janissary Patrol</i>	<i>Hyena Janissary (Elite Horde)</i>
Traits Body d8, Speed d8, Mind d8, Will d8 Hyena d8 (Plains, Omnivore, Night) Janissary d8	
Skills Endurance 2d8 Ranged Combat d8 Searching 2d8 Tactics 2d8	
Gifts Coward Hiking Pack Tactics Resolve Survival Veteran	
Initiative 2d8	
Movement Stride 1, Dash 4, Sprint d8, Run 20	
Attack Jezail @ Long, Spark d12 , 2d12, Damage +2 Slaying Longsword @ Close, 2d8, Damage +2 Veteran — Aim action for d12 bonus	
Counter Longsword @ Close, 2d8, Damage +2 Veteran — Guard action for d12 bonus	
Dodge d8 Coward — bonus d12 dodge when Afraid	
Soak 2d8	
Loot Jezail ×1, Longsword ×1, Dinar × d8	

Queen Khadija al-Dalāl, Otter Warlord

The pirate kings and queens of the Corsair Coast are equals. Khadija al-Dalāl I is the first among equals. The most successful pirate in all of the known world's history, Khadija al-Dalāl's fleet of galleys and galleons is the terror of the Shallow Sea. She commands a full third of the Anatolian Empire's sea power. For now she has sworn fealty to the Anatolian Caliph, but who's really calling the shots here ...?

<i>Queen Khadija al-Dalāl</i>	<i>Otter Warlord (Supernaut)</i>
Traits Body d12, Speed d12, Mind d12, Will d12 Otter d12 (Shore, Carnivore, Twilight) Warlord d12	
Skills Dodge 2d12 Leadership d12 Presence d12	Stealth d12 Swimming d12 Tactics d12
Gifts Administration Armored Fighter Bravery Charging Strike Combat Edge Combat Save Commanding Leader Contortionist Counter-Tactics Deep Diving Diehard Dramatic Disheveling Fast Swimming Guard Breaker Improved Armor Language: Deltan Literacy: Deltan	Local Area Knowledge: Corsair Coast Luck Militia Leader Mob Fighter Nobility Oratory Pack Tactics Personality: Staunch Resolve *Shield Fighter Toughness ×3 Troop Leader True Leader Unshakeable Fighter Veteran
Initiative 2d12	
Movement Stride 1, Dash 6, Sprint d12, Run 30	
Attack Pistol @ Short, Spark d10 , 2d12, Damage +2 Slaying Ambrascura Dagger @ Close 2d12, Damage +1 Critical <i>Veteran</i> — Aim action for d12 bonus	
Counter Saber @ Close 2d12, Damage +2 Critical <i>Counter Tactics</i> — Flanked? d12 bonus! <i>Veteran</i> — Guard action for d12 bonus	
Dodge 2d12 and Metal Shield d12*	
Soak 2d12 and Eryth Armor 2d12 Toughness ×3 — X to make Damage Weak	
Loot Pistol ×2, Ambrascura Dagger ×1, Eryth Armor ×1, Metal Shield ×1	

Caliph Ghanon of Anatolia

There are moments when Ghanon pauses and wonders about the circumstances that led him to his position as master of this great empire. Could fate have put someone else in the spot? Then he thinks, if he wasn't in this spot, he'd have no cause to think such thoughts.

<i>Caliph Ghanon of Anatolia</i>	<i>Otter Minister (Elite)</i>
Traits Body d8, Speed d8, Mind d8, Will d8 Otter d8 (Shore, Carnivore, Twilight) Minister d8	
Skills Academics d8 Dodge d8 Negotiation d8 Presence d8 Stealth d8 Swimming d8	
Gifts Administration Combat Save Contortionist Deep Diving Fast Swimming Language: Xiwen Literacy: Xiwen Local Area Knowledge: Lygos	Militia Leader Luck Nobility Pack Tactics Personality: Ambitious Toughness True Leader
Initiative 2d8	
Movement Stride 1, Dash 4, Sprint d8, Run 20	
Attack Pistol @ Short, 2d8, Damage +2 Slaying Saber @ Close, 2d8, Damage +2 Critical	
Counter Saber @ Close, 2d8, Damage +2 Critical	
Dodge 2d8	
Soak d8 and Alumen Armor 2d8	
Loot Alumen Armor ×1, Saber ×1, Pistol ×1, Dinar ×96	

Count Miroslav of Crosswood

Calabria's most passionate and dedicated defender against the threat of Anatolian expansion is Count Miroslav of Crosswood. From his ancient castle high atop the Shadow Mountain, Count Miroslav rules over a highland realm of staggering beauty, diverse in its animal and plant life and renowned for its majestic peaks, mineral springs, and strategic position. Numerous Anatolian Caliphs have attempted to conquer Crosswood, and each time they have failed: mountain castles are a hell of a drug. Since then they have figured out it's much easier just to sail around Crosswood and land someplace else; but the Count is nevertheless there to contribute advice and aid anywhere Malachites attack Penitents. He's a significant contributor to various religious causes, and he's never missed a Mass in his life, not even while on campaign. He is also, like his father and his father's father before him, a member of the Order of the Wyrms, a semi-secret society (think Freemasons) dedicated to defending Penitence against its detractors in general, Malachism and Heliodromency in particular.

He's also an oupire, which is confusing.

Everyone knows he exsanguinates his victims. The story about him devouring the Anatolian diplomats is untrue, although he did torture and drain the one who turned out to be an assassin in disguise. But it's no secret that the guy is undead. How everyone reacts to this fact varies from person to person. The Avoirdupois are his most vocal enemies, teaming up with him only when the fate of Calabria is obviously at stake. The Bisclavret have been pro-Miroslav for the most part. The Doloreaux are extremely polite and diplomatic but tend to avoid the topic, and the Rinaldi are extremely polite and diplomatic but it's not clear whether they're doing that because they like the guy or because they're planning to stab him in the ... well, probably the heart, with a wooden stake, but I guess you could stake someone in the back.

Miroslav personifies the question of whether the ends justify the means.

<i>Count Miroslav</i>	<i>Vampire Bat Immortal Sage (Supernaut)</i>
Traits Body d12, Speed d12, Mind d12, Will d12 Vampire Bat d12 (Forest, Carnivore, Night) Immortal Sage d12 Undead d12	
Skills Academics d12 Brawling d12 Leadership d12 Observation 2d12 Presence d12	Searching d12 Stealth 2d12 Supernatural 2d12, d4 Weather Sense d12
Gifts *Armored Fighter ×3 Bravery Brawling Fighter Charging Fighter Combat Save Diehard Echolocation Flight Guard Breaker Insider with the Order of the Wyrms Language: Deltan Language: Calabrese Literacy: Calabrese Local Area Knowledge: Crosswood Luck	Magic Save Militia Leader Mob Fighter Mystic: Necromancy Nobility Pack Tactics Personality: Megalomaniac Piety of Penitence Prehensile Feet Replay for Destiny Resolve Shield Fighter Toughness ×3 True Leader Unshakeable Fighter Veteran
Initiative 2d12	
Movement Flying Stride 4, Dash 10, Sprint 2d12, Run 46	
Attack Teeth 3d12 @ Close, Damage +1 Grapple	
Counter Claw 3d12 @ Close, Damage +1 Critical	
Dodge d12	
Soak 2d12 and Leather Armor d12*	
Loot Writing Kit ×1	

THE SPAWN OF KAZDOM

Attention! The text that follows explains in detail an adventure involving mystery, deceit, and even violence. This section is for the purview of the Game Host only. Those players planning to experience the adventure must avert their eyes and must not read this section, lest they spoil their own enjoyment.

What Has Gone Before

Millennia ago, even before the time of the Kohani, a small civilization existed in what is now uninhabited desert. The kingdom thrived; its traditions were rich and its religion strong. Its people believed, and in the midst of their land they built a temple, the Temple of the Nine Steps. Upon one side were the four gods who guide bodies along the path to Purity; upon the other, the four gods who guide souls along the path to Virtue. At the end stood the king of the gods. Those who became Pure and Virtuous would join the king of the gods and have Everlasting Life.

Nothing lasts forever. Corruption set in; the priests had been in power too long. Hiding places were constructed beneath the floors of the temple, used to hide bribes and secret heretical texts. Eventually, the church degraded into nothing more than a society of assassins bent on using their skills and their status for personal gain. When at last the temple devoted to purity and virtue was being used to hide depravity and sin, a disaster struck. Some say the gods became angry, and punished the kingdom.

Whatever the cause, drought set in. The deserts crept northward, engulfing the once rich lands. Monsters of the desert – huge insects, spiders, scorpions, and centipedes – devoured the people and destroyed the buildings. The kingdom was lost beneath the sands.

Erosion has slowly been working on the sands that once covered the ruins of that civilization, and now the ruins are almost at the surface once more. All it would take is one strong windstorm...

The Sandstorm

This adventure works best in the deep, uninhabited desert, days from help, but anywhere at least an hour or so from the nearest settlement will do. How you get the heroes to the desert is your own decision. Most likely they are here as part of a caravan, or on a mission someone from their home country gave them. This adventure works equally well with desert natives, foreigners, or a mix of the two.

The action starts immediately. If it is day, all the PCs will notice the horizon darken, and the darkness begin to get larger distressingly fast; in just twenty rounds (two minutes) it will be upon them. Allow the PCs to roll Mind, Spot, Observation, and Weather Sense vs. 2d8 each round to figure out what the darkness means. If their racial habitat is Desert, they may include their Race as well.

If it is nighttime, you may require Spot checks to see the sandstorm: 2d12 for moonless nights, 2d10 for nights with appreciable moonlight. On a tie or worse, the PCs see the storm with only one round to react before it is upon them. On a success, the PCs get three rounds to react; on an overwhelming success, the PCs get seven rounds to react. Keen Sight will affect these rolls; if one of the PCs has Keen Sight and gets an overwhelm on their Spot Check, give the party ten rounds to react before the sandstorm reaches them.

No matter how much time the PCs have to react, they have four basic options.

- **Running Away:** The storm moves at 50kph – that's over 100 paces each round! It will become clear that even the fastest flyer can't out-run such a storm. If any of the PCs suggest running away from the storm, impress upon them its incredible speed. If that does not deter them, allow them to try running away; they can Run three times their Dash, or fly three times their Flying Dash, each round. If the storm catches up to them, it will likely cause them some serious trouble. See Staying Put for damage, blindness, and penalties.
- **Running for Cover:** Perhaps the wisest thing the PCs can do is look for cover. If anyone decides to look for cover, have them roll Mind, Observation, Spot vs. 3. (Among other things). There is a wall sticking up out of the sand about 50 paces away; it's dun-colored so it's a little difficult to see, but during the day its shadow will be visible. Increase the difficulty to 2d10 at night. The wall is big enough to shelter eight or nine average-size people huddling close together.

The PCs can make for the wall as fast as they can Run – three times their Dash each round. If they get caught in the storm, they may suffer damage or blindness. See Staying Put. Once behind the wall,

the PCs are safe; they can huddle there until the storm passes, which takes about five minutes.

- **Staying Put** The PCs may try to weather the storm. They will probably have a few rounds of preparation time. Tying on a ruband (any version) takes one round; pulling blankets out of saddlebags to cover themselves or their mounts might take the PCs one or two rounds.

The storm is about as powerful as a Fury of the Desert spell, doing 2d10 damage per round. Normal desert clothing (long robes) counts as padded armor for the purposes of soaking this damage. Other armor also helps, but the Host may rule that sand gets into the breaks in less continuous armor and causes itching and chafing until the PC removes and cleans her armor and combs her fur. The PCs must also roll Body, Speed, Will, Dodge, Contortionist, and anything else you deem fair vs. 5d12 **every round** to avoid being blinded by the storm. A normal ruband or scarf tied around the eyes gives the PC a +1 bonus to this roll; a full-face ruband gives the PC a +2 bonus. If they completely cover their head (with a blanket or sack, for example), they get a +3 bonus and only have to roll every five rounds, as they are only in danger when the wind gusts in an unexpected direction.

The storm takes five minutes to pass – the length of an entire Scene. PCs who are blinded by the storm, but who did not botch, recover their sight a few minutes after the storm passes. PCs who botched on their blindness roll have had their eyesight permanently damaged, and gain the Poor Vision flaw. It is the Host's discretion whether such an affliction can be cured by magic or medicine.

PCs in the grip of the storm may still attempt to run for cover (see Running for Cover, above), and will not suffer any penalties for trying to run, although they may have trouble seeing where they are going. If they wish to fly, they will have to make flight checks vs. 5d12 to avoid losing control of themselves in the air, and those checks are at a –1 penalty.

PCs who saw the available cover before the storm hit may roll Mind vs. 2d10 to find their way back to it. PCs who did not see the cover before the storm hit must roll Mind, Observation, and Spot vs. 5d12 every round; if they succeed they've seen the nearby wall through a temporary break in the swirling sand.

Casting Spells

The Calm Wind spell cannot be cast on the sandstorm until it is in range – 72 paces – at which point the caster has only one free round in which to affect the storm. As the storm is not magical in nature, Calm Wind automatically takes effect. One casting reduces its effects to those of a Sandstorm spell – 1d10 damage per round and 4d10 blinding – but it slows the storm down, causing it to take 7 minutes (70 rounds) to pass instead of 5.

The spellcaster can attempt to cast the spell again after the first round, but may suffer from the effects of the storm. The caster cannot cast the spell at the storm with her head completely covered, so she can claim no more than a +2 bonus against the storm's blinding effects, and if blinded, cannot attempt to cast the spell again until the blindness wears off.

A second successful casting of the spell reduces the storm's effect to that of a Duststorm which will last 10 minutes; PCs no longer take damage, and the blindness roll is only 3d10. A third successful casting of the spell reduces the storm's effect to that of a Windstorm, which, while gusty, will not cause damage or blindness, and lasts 15 minutes. A fourth successful casting of the spell dissipates the storm altogether.

Windbreak and Windshield completely shield those in their areas of effect against the storm. The caster of a Windbreak is fully protected from the storm and can then cast Calm Wind upon it with no penalties. The caster of a Windshield cannot concentrate on Windshield and cast Calm Wind at the same time, but a second Badjaduyi in the party can be protected from the effects of the storm and suffer no penalties for casting Calm Wind while in the Windshield.

The Unearthed Temple

The storm uncovers, in its passing, the ruins of an ancient temple. Even if the PCs used Calm Wind to reduce the storm to nothing, a wall and a portion of floor will still have been uncovered – enough to awaken the beast that sleeps beneath the floor.

The temple consisted of nine large alcoves surrounding a central hall. Each alcove contained a statue of a god, and on the floor, a large ankh in small blue tiles. In the loop of each ankh, a secret panel was installed that opened up to 1-foot cubical holes, used to hold the illicit items the corrupt priests and their cronies needed to hide. There were also two secret rooms on either side of the alcove at the head of the hall; now, with the walls struck down and the ceilings long gone, those rooms are hardly secret.

Items remain in some of the floor holes, although few of them are usable for their original purpose. What remains of the walls are covered in pictograms that could be writing, but writing unlike any the PCs have seen before.

Give the PCs 10 rounds, or a minute, to check out the temple before the scorpion awakes. PCs looking at the floor may roll a Spot Test vs. 2d10; allow them to include other appropriate Skills or Careers, such as Engineer or Lore: Architecture. Success means the PC has spotted a panel in the floor. Once they've seen a secret panel once, they should have no trouble spotting the others; make the difficulty for spotting other panels 2d6 or allow the PCs to find them automatically. The contents of each panel are listed in the map key.

1: Strength

This room was the altar to the bull-god of strength. The statue is long gone, and this room is completely wall-less, but the blue tiles of the ankh on the floor retain their color.

The secret panel in this room once contained a jar of weakening poison. The jar remains intact, but the liquid has long lost its potency. It gives off a slightly musty scent but is safe to drink.

2: Swiftess

This room was the altar to the eagle-god of swiftess. One toe of the statue remains, and the room retains its eastern wall.

The secret panel in this room contains six sets of shackles of various sizes, designed to fit creatures with Bodies up to d12, d4. They are iron, and a little rusty, but the dryness of the desert has preserved them surprisingly well considering their age.

3: Virility

This room was the altar to the snake-god of virility and health. Most of the statue's seven coils remain, but the head is broken off, as is the tip of the tail.

The secret panel in this room contained a jar with the blood of disease victims, which was used to cause disease in others. The jar has cracked, and the blood is quite dry, not much more now than a crust on the clay.

4: Purity

This room was devoted to the lion-god of purity, but all that remains of his statue is four toes on a plinth. The walls around him are mostly gone, no higher now than half a foot.

Seven small jars were stored beneath the panel in this room, each containing a different herb which was known to cause internal distress, such as indigestion, internal bleeding, or ulcers. The herbs were devoured long ago by insects, but five of the jars are still intact.

5: Willpower

This room was the altar to the donkey-god of willpower. The statue, its wall, and a bit of the floor beneath it are gone, destroyed millennia ago, and the ankh is faded.

Stowed beneath the secret panel here is a pile of ancient gold coins. It's nearly impossible to tell how much they were worth when they were made, but they represent nearly a pound of pure gold, probably worth a fair bit by weight today. A reputable merchant or goldsmith will pay around 100 Bu-Qian, or Puls, for it, or seven 2-gallon jugs of water.

6: Wisdom

This room was devoted to the tortoise-god of wisdom. Part of the southern wall remains here, and about half the tortoise-god's statue.

Beneath the panel here, the corrupt priests stored dried shavings of hallucinogenic cacti. Stored in a metal box that hasn't even begun to rust, the shavings are still here, though they are so desiccated that they can no longer be used for their original purpose.

7: Tranquility

This room was the altar to the swan-god of tranquility. Of all the rooms, this one is the most intact; its south wall is the one the PCs see when the sandstorm appears, and is the only one big enough to offer appreciable shelter. The statue of the swan-god has not fared as well, but its legs and tail are still recognizable as being from a water-bird.

Beneath the panel here lies a cache of ancient weapons – daggers, spearheads, and arrows. They are all in relatively good condition, as good as the shackles in room 2.

8: Virtue

This room was the altar of the horse-god of virtue. His image is gone – not even his once-proud hooves remain.

Beneath the panel in this room lies an ancient book containing a terribly heretical text. In fact, anyone with Lore: Religion that applies to the desert peoples might (if they succeed on a roll vs. 2d12) recognize some of the symbols as early versions of symbols used in worship of the Seven Jan today. The language is ancient, but someone familiar with Kohani writings might be able to decipher some of it, over time.

9: Everlasting Life

This altar, placed at the end of the hall, was devoted to the chimeric god of everlasting life. The walls surrounding his statue, and the statue itself, were comprehensively destroyed when the temple was attacked all those millennia ago. All that remains are the cracked tiles.

Beneath the panel of this floor, the PCs find a pile of glistening, sticky white balls about the size of marbles, in what seems to be a webbing of sticky strands. They are the scorpion's eggs, and PCs that examine them closely will see dark hints of the curled embryos inside.

10: Lair of Kazdom's Child

This room was used to store the less controversial items belonging to the corrupt priests – orthodox robes, holy symbols, and so on. There is a panel here, but it leads directly to the scorpion's tunnel, and more than likely the panel will have given way to a ten-foot hole caused by the scorpion coming up out of the ground before the PCs reach this area.

11: Lair of Kazdom's Cult

This room was the main headquarters of the assassin's guild which represented the height of corruption in this ancient temple. Beneath the panel in this room is one large clay tablet inscribed with a stylized scorpion, the symbol of the evil Kazdom, and long ago, the symbol of that feared group of assassins.

The Spawn of Kazdom

After the PCs have been stomping around the ruined temple for a minute or so, have them roll a Listen Test vs. 2d8. Success means they hear a quiet rumbling beneath the floor in the northeast corner; overwhelming success means they also hear something chittering. A moment later, the tiles around the panel in room 10 explode upwards and four massive, chitinous legs dotted with hair extend upward from the hole.

It takes the enormous scorpion a full round to extricate itself from the hole, during which time it cannot dodge. Once it has done so, it goes on the attack, going first after any PCs near room 9, where its eggs are stored. Its primary tactic is to grab enemies in its pincers and then sting them until they stop moving. An enemy grappled by the scorpion's pincers cannot dodge, but can attack the scorpion with one-handed or natural weapons, and the scorpion cannot dodge his attacks. Grappled enemies can attempt to parry the scorpion's stinger, or block it with a shield (but not a cloak); such attempts are at a –2 penalty.

All it really wants is to protect its eggs; if the PCs run more than 100 paces or so away, the scorpion will stop following them, and return to sit guard over its eggs.

The scorpion has Natural Armor of d6, but it is fragile. Any weapon that overwhelms on a damage die, or does Slaying damage, causes the scorpion's Natural Armor die to drop to d4. If such a thing happens again, the scorpion loses its Natural Armor until it sheds.

Denouement

If the PCs defeated the scorpion, they may wish to butcher it for meat and useful parts. Its meat can be fed to scarab beetles or cooked and eaten as is. Its taste is not spectacular, but it is palatable. The carapace can be dismantled and brought along. At the outset it is quite heavy, but as it dries it loses weight. Even dry, pieces of the carapace will make acceptable shields, though they have the same problem with fragility as the scorpion itself.

The scorpion weighs 40 stone dead; 20 stone of that is carapace, 20 stone is meat and organs. The carapace will dry to 10 stone over a period of twelve daylight hours if left in the sun. The scorpion contains 10 person-days worth of edible meat.

The PCs may harvest the scorpion's sting and poison sac if they so desire, but you may wish to remind them that in most areas, possession of poison is considered a crime punishable by death.

The PCs may also wish to sell or use the items they retrieved from the panels in the temple. Each room contains a description of the items it contains and how they might be used.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

These are set-ups for other adventures. As the Game Host, you should feel free to add, subtract, or change details to suit the needs and wants of your gaming group.

Expedition to the Jungle Peaks

Alcuina the Believer has come from far off Calabria with a book that she calls “The Monita Codex”. She claims that this book has been suppressed by the Church of Penitence because it details the location of “Mendax”, the city where Helloise the Prophet declared would be her final resting place... and that happens to be deep in the Katikati Jungle.

Alcuina may be a crazy heretic back in her homeland... but Feng Xian, a rich Zhongnese noble with an interest in antiquities, has done his own research and he thinks her manuscript might have some legitimacy. It might not be a map to the holy city, but some other lost ruin filled with treasures, secrets of the Autarch Age of magic, or something else.

The players are recruited to employ their unusual skills and abilities ... and to protect both Alcuina and Feng Xian, who may be the only two people alive

who can make sense of the book’s strange ramblings in ancient Magniloquentia.

Getting to this mysterious location can be as simple as a single line of description, or it can be a complicated enterprise of budgeting for food, bearers, mercenaries, and other supplies. Some groups enjoy the challenge of an expedition. Others, not so much.

The jungle itself can be rife with encounters both magical and mundane. The natives of the jungle could be a help or a hindrance. And rival treasure-seekers could attempt to steal the map and/or to kidnap Alcuina or Feng Xian.

What’s at the end of the journey? Is it a ruined city? Or a thriving, lost civilization, far removed from the rest of the world... and now in terrible danger if anyone discovers all the gold and jewels that they have? Maybe it’s a ruin infested with strange monsters. Or a land that time forgot, full of monsters from a bygone age. And heck, maybe Alcuina’s theory is true, and there are artifacts here from another world.



The Secret of the Templars

Rajul al-Sadiq approaches our heroes. He claims to be a member of the order of the Black Angels, a society devoted to destroying evil magic and necromancy throughout the world. He has the funds to start an expedition to the Honey Isle, where he believes that the Order of St. John is hiding a secret: a few years ago, a tomb in Heliopolis’ Monument Valley was robbed, and Rajul believes an item of dark power was taken to the Order for some unknown and dark purpose.

How to get into the order? Can the players make up a good cover story? Can they disguise themselves? Do they have nobility, wealth, or ordainment that would give them legitimate cause to go there?

This story could play out many ways. It could be just a big misunderstanding – that the real thieves just wanted to frame the “Calabrese infidels”. Or the theft was to hide the real artifact: a mummified, undead corpse of a Barrow Wight, who is kept inside a sepulcher while an Apostate priest attempts to figure out how to control it for their own ends. Maybe Rajul isn’t exactly what he seems to be, and is a Djed-Hakim, a necromancer in disguise, and he wants to control the Wight, using the players as his unwitting dupes.

Red Skies at Night

Rumors are coming in that the Khadīja al-Dalāl, the self-proclaimed Queen of Pirates, has mastered some kind of new magic. Survivors of the latest attacks speak of lightning bolts that light up the sky, burning so hot that they can even set water on fire.

In truth, Queen Khadīja has a new ally: Kalpana Baaba, master alchemist and ex-patriate from Sagat. Before being fleeing her home-land to escape the ravages of war, Kalpana was working on a new weapon: a synthesis of Zhonggese firework and Akoman alchemy, a rocket that carries a napalm mixture of chemicals that still burns after it lands with a sticky mixture. (Both the nature of the rockets, and their manufacture, should be kept secret from the players until they have a chance to discover it through play.)

Naturally, everyone wants to get their hands on this super-weapon. And no one knows that better than Queen Khadīja. But the rockets can be made only under Kalpana's strict direction. Any attempt to copy the results, so far, has resulted in duds or in a dangerous malfunction.

What's Kalpana's motivation in all this? Maybe the Pirate Queen is holding Kalpana's husband and son as hostages to ensure her cooperation. Or Kalpana is hoping her invention is a weapon so terrible that she may finally be able to restore law and order to Sagat. She could also be jaded or amoral, reveling in her genius as it brings havok to a world that turned its back on her people and their plight.

Will the players be able to find out the secret of the manufacture of Kalpana's rockets? Will they be able to get her away from the Pirate Queen? Will agents from a rival power kidnap her first? Or will someone try to kill her? Will the power go to Khadīja's head and she'll over-reach herself, as the navies of the world unite against her? As the Game Host, you can add complications to this story to make it last for several sessions, or maybe you can just play out an action-adventure tale with big explosions in a session or two.

Undermining

Our players get involved in a money-making schemet that can't fail: a secret passage into Namat, the city of trade. Normally, only two gates lead in, but our players have been recruited to help build and maintain a secret tunnel on the north face. Issues include using digging and engineering to keep the tunnel safe and secret... and stealth and skullduggery to avoid beign detected, as untaxed goods and contraband are smuggled in and out of the city.

More complications can arise. A rival gang may discover the tunnel, and they want to use it for their own profiteering, so first they try to scare our heroes off, then later they try to muscle them out. Abolitionists want to use the tunnels to smuggle the indentured slaves of the city out to freedom. The Anatolian Empire, learning of this secret way past the defenses, send an elite force to stage an assassination of Namat's king, sowing chaos and disorder before their army can arrive.

APPENDIX: WARFARE

A lot of the themes of Akoma have to do with international politics and military life, the business of armies and navies in the “continuation of politics by other means.” *Ironclaw* already contains many systems for the subsystems of war, most notably combat and diplomacy. When your campaign decides to zoom out and look at an entire battlefield or larger, you can use the warfare system.

How to Resolve a War

When we play a role-playing game, we spend a lot of time making our focus large or small, general or specific. We might talk about the passage of a week or a month or a year in a few breaths; or we might speak every word of a conversation in-character or follow every cut and thrust of a fencing match. We might discuss and describe the situation until we’ve narrated a resolution which satisfies the players at the table, or we might go straight to the dice to outline our process. Just so, when you look at the clash of armies, you have options as to how to figure out who wins.

The Simplest Option: Talk It Over

You don’t need us to tell you this, but: sometimes the description of a situation will tell you how it’s going to resolve.

Player: As dawn is breaking, I fly up as high as I can and survey the battlefield from above. What do I see?

Game Host: The Knights Hospitaller have hastily constructed earthworks on the hillside south of the town. They’re dragging cannons into place. Your vision is good enough that you see they have a lot of heavily armed and armored knights, but most of them are moving slowly with heavy steps. It looks like many of them have been awake all night.

Player: All night? Damn. The Anatolian janissaries have equal numbers, and they’re well-rested.

Other Player: It’ll probably be a hard fight, but it looks like if we don’t do anything, they’ll overrun those makeshift defenses.

Game Host: It does seem that way, doesn’t it? Would it make sense to everyone to go forward with that assumption—the janissaries will overrun the position and take control of the town?

... and if that satisfies everyone at the table, it’s fine to go ahead with that description of what happened. In this particular case, the fiction indicated to you how a battle was going to end, and everyone was cool with running with that idea.

advantages It’s fast. If you agree, you agree.

Great. The resolution is also guaranteed to fit with your mental picture of the fiction because, well, it’s just your mental picture of the fiction.

disadvantages Resolving a situation solely through talking is an ideal for many role-players; but you may have noticed that more verbally or socially confident players sometimes dominate the narrative under these circumstances.

The Most Complex Option: Close-Quarters Combat

Ironclaw already has a full-featured system for playing out a fight between two small groups pace by pace and blow by blow.

Game Host: By the time your characters ride up from behind, both armies are dug in on either side of the river, keeping their heads down and trading ineffective potshots. The terrain is too muddy to get any big guns in place. On the Calabrese side, you see the ranks part to let the Duchess and her bodyguard marching across the bridge themselves. She looks angry and the moonlight is glinting off her eryth armor. Her troops are cheering, but they aren’t following her onto the bridge—at least, not yet.

Player: Did you set up this entire battlefield to make sure that it would come down to a three-on-three between us and their commander’s people?

Game Host: Aren’t you proud of me?

Close combat is fun and your characters are probably pretty decent at it. If you’re excited to see a battle decided through skill at arms, the game already has you covered.

advantages You probably already know and love the *Ironclaw* combat system, and it ensures that your characters stay in the spotlight. Your characters were probably built with this system in mind. It also gives you a detailed and immersive picture of what actually happens in combat.

disadvantages Close-quarters combat takes a good deal of time out-of-character; and sometimes it’s hard to believe that an entire field engagement went one way or another because your PCs set a dozen bad guys on fire. Also, sometimes it’s cool to play a character who can turn the tide of a battle even though they’re no good at martial arts or marksmanship, like many generals of note.

A Middle Way: The Sectional Combat Rules.

The warfare system presented here attempts to give you a middle ground: a system where your characters' actions are in the spotlight, heavily informed by the theater of the mind. This system models clashes between sections—groups of people working together to achieve a military objective. Based on your needs, you could resolve a clash between two great armies with each army represented as a single giant section.

Sectional Combat Time

Battle time is more like narrative time than combat time. In close-quarters combat between two rival gangs on a city street, one round might take thirty to sixty seconds. In a grand campaign or castle siege, one round might take hours.

The Set-Up: Make Maps Like Crazy

When we think of Renaissance warfare, we imagine hard-eyed generals crouching over weathered maps in drafty tents, or else of noblemen and their aides pushing miniatures around on table-maps in a war room. You *could* run sectional combat without a map, but even if you don't normally use maps for combat, this is a great opportunity to get into the spirit of the moment and do the same. Get some scrap paper or a shared document and make a map of the battlefield! Construction paper and colorful crayons or pencils are ideal for this task, getting everyone to let their inner child out a little (and let's face it, no one gets as excited about a big fight as little kids do).

Start out by collaborating to draw the features of the map which you've agreed on ahead of time in the fiction. If the whole point of the battle is to get control of three bridges over the Longest River, draw your stretch of river and your three bridges. If one side is in a fort on a hill, draw the hill and the fort. Afterwards, split into sides. Take turns having someone from either side add a feature to the map.

I Have a Cunning Plan...

The most important job the players have during sectional combat is to come up with a plan. This plan can be as simple or as convoluted as the players want, but it has to involve everyone. There are some exceptions to the "everyone plays" rule: if the battle is a diversion while the bat ninja sneaks into the castle to propose to her secret lover, then the bat ninja doesn't have to get involved in the battle. If the whole point of the battle is

to bust one of the characters out of jail, the jailed character might not realistically be able to get involved in the fight; the Game Host might offer that character's player control of a tough villain during the fight.

It All Comes Down to This

The outcome of a clash between sections is decided by a single assisted roll, with a great deal of lead-up. Each section assembles a pool of dice and rolls them in contest with the other. The winning roll wins the engagement; the enemy; extra successes can be spent to choose certain effects of victory.

Choose Extra Effects

When you win, your section has proved dominance over the enemy section. Your opponents have to choose between retreat, surrender, and casualties; sometimes the circumstances (like having your back to a river) will choose for them. Major characters in the enemy section must soak damage as if wounded by the most common weapon in the section. If you achieve extra successes in battle, you can inflict various extra effects on the other section.

- Cut off their escape: they may not choose to retreat
- Inflict grievous harm: make an extra damage roll against a specific character
- Take control of an objective which they controlled: a battery of cannon, a fortification
- Intimidate nearby enemies: nearby enemy sections must resist becoming Afraid
- ... or anything else you and your fellow players may think of.

The enemy section may elect to keep fighting; but if they do, they fight at reduced effectiveness. Their assessment dice (see below) start at d4 instead of d6; advantage increases their dice to d6 or d10. Another loss gives them no dice at all; they are in no condition to fight unless advantage increases their dice to d4 or d8.

Section Statistics: The Seven Assessments

When two armies meet in battle, we assemble their basic dice pools based on these seven assessments (cribbed from the first chapter of the *Sūnzi*). Sections are complicated creatures, and people in Ironclaw already have lots and lots of statistics describing them; you can look at the statistics to inform each of these assessments. Sections do not have hard and fast statistics, though their hard and fast statistics from elsewhere in the game may affect the assessments; they only have statistics in comparison to one another.

If the two sections are evenly matched in an assessment, they both roll a d6 for that category. If one side exceeds the other in a certain assessment, the d6 becomes a d8. If the advantage is overwhelming, the d6 becomes a d12.

If the players look at the dice and decide they'd like to improve one side's odds (and they will), they can get with a skill roll—one success pushes the dice in their direction, with extra successes tipping it further that way. If someone on the other side is trying to stop them, the roll becomes a contest, with failure standing to make the situation worse—or hitting them with some personal inconvenience. Generally we can resolve this kind of interference with a single roll or contest, though you can “zoom in” and structure a whole adventure around the action if you have the time and everyone's on board. Under the description of each of the assessments is a list of ways the player characters can affect the outcome.

The Way

Ironclaw is a world in which having the political leader of your nation personally lead your troops matters, a lot. Whichever side has a higher-ranking political figure—or failing that, more high-ranking political figures—personally involved in combat gets the advantage die.

The most direct way for a player character to get involved in the Way aspect is to be a high-ranking political figure and get in there; but it's tough to be king. Player characters who want to push for this advantage might consider intimidating or injuring an enemy noble so they can't participate directly in combat. This is a difficult task, but a wide variety of skills could affect it, everything from using Gossip to blackmail your target to using Ranged Combat to put an arrow in their knee. If you have five dukes to their king and earl and you can take the king out of the fight, suddenly your side is a lot more impressive.

The General

Whichever side has a more skilled commanding officer (doesn't have to be the political figure, but that'd be nice, wouldn't it) gets the advantage die.

Again, the easiest way for the character to get involved in this assessment is to offer their services as a commanding officer. If you command the troops yourself, roll a contest of Will and Leadership with your opposite number. One success gets you the d8 advantage; more gets you the d12. As in the Way, above, you can also impact the general dice by intimidating or injuring the enemy general (good luck with that) or supporting your own commander's leadership roll with an inspiring action.

Disposition

Whichever side has better positioning and is better suited to the weather and terrain gets the advantage die. A large number of factors can affect the disposition roll.

Disposition is a complicated matter. You can get a much better idea of what's going on with Disposition if you draw a map of the battlefield as outlined above; it seems like it'll take a little time, but just like giving someone directions, sometimes the tools actually make the whole process faster.

You can affect disposition directly by forecasting the weather using Weather Sense and preparing for it appropriately; altering the terrain using Craft, Digging, or Supernatural; or suggesting maneuvers using Academics or Tactics.

Logistics

Whichever side has better logistical support gets the advantage die. Logistics is a complicated and diverse subject which we do ill justice by reducing it to a few rolls; but it's one of the most important topics that even an armchair general can study. You can improve your side's logistical support using Academics to keep books, Negotiation to acquire supplies, or Craft to make and cook things your own damn self.

Strength

Whichever side has more troops (that they can get into battle with the other guy's forces) gets the advantage die. Having double the other side's numbers gets you a d12 bonus. Having triple the other side's number gets you a d12 bonus.

You can bid for a Strength advantage using Academics to heal the sick; or Vehicles, Riding, Stealth, or Climbing to lead a wing of troops into battle yourself, bringing them to bear on the enemy from an unexpected avenue. You might also recruit troops ahead of time using Negotiation, Leadership, or Presence to gain their trust and allegiance.

Training

Whichever side has better-trained troops gets the advantage die. Characters can get involved in the training process directly ahead of time. Training troops is a Leadership roll limited by Endurance. You can also affect the outcome by getting involved yourself. If you actually fight in the battle yourself, you can roll the appropriate combat skill (Brawling, Melee Combat, Ranged Combat, Throwing, or Supernatural—Dodge doesn't work here) to lend your own strength to the combat. You yourself get a bonus d12 to this roll if you wield a weapon or spell with the Explosion, Sweep Short (or longer), or group-affecting properties.

Morale

Whichever side has higher morale gets the advantage die. Which side is that?

- If one side lost 25% or more of their resources in the previous battle, the other side has better morale.
- If one side is outnumbered 2 to 1 or more, the other side has better morale.
- If one side is deprived of food, water, or other resources, the other side has better morale.

- If a player can give a rousing speech, using Oratory and other gifts, then with enough successes they can give their side better morale.

The Role of Endurance

Battle is tiring. Endurance dice can be added to any battlefield action, limited by whatever primary skill is being used.

APPENDIX: THE X-CARD

We respect the cultures who inspired the people, places, and things you see in our *Horn & Ivory* book. We want *Ironclaw* to be a game everyone feels comfortable playing. The historical and cultural inspirations are never to be an excuse for behavior that makes your fellow players uncomfortable, nor is it an excuse to keep someone from expressing themselves through their character.

If you're not sure what your group will be comfortable with, discuss it openly and honestly. Establish an understanding, and everything will be gravy.

In a role-playing game, sometimes players will use their role "in character" to say things that someone might find hurtful. Role-playing games can create a dissociative effect, where what someone is saying "in game" is not considered to have any real-world consequences... while other players may not share the same sense of immersion.

It's never fun when someone's feelings get hurt. You and your fellow players may consider using the X-Card.

Each Player gets a card with a big X on it. A standard 3x5 or A7 index card with a big "X" drawn it works great, but any card will do: a playing card, a common trading card, a coaster, etc.

If something happens that makes you uncomfortable, throw your X-card onto the table. whatever is going on stops now.

The player who threw the card doesn't have to explain why they threw the card.

The game immediately pauses, while the players and the Director edit the last event in the game's

fiction. After an X-Card is dropped, the Director should consider declaring a 5-minute break before play resumes.

So: short answer: if you feel it's getting too personal or too hurtful, throw the X-Card.

After using your X-card to stop the game, pick it back up

There's no limit to the number of times you can use it. If you're using your X-Card more than once per game, though, you should really be talking about that in the debriefing, because you're not having fun.

Some groups may find that the X-Card can serve as a quick and easy reminder of the boundaries of what can and cannot go on during your game. The safety net of the X-Card can empower a player to push the emotions a bit further than they normally would, because they trust their fellow players to let them know immediately if they've gone too far.

Other groups may find the X-Card to be too simplistic or formalized. The X-Card is to prevent feelings being hurt – it's not supposed to be used because you don't like how a die roll came up. If you use the X-Card variant, remember that it's about keeping the game fun and exciting as you push the limits of your imagination.

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