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**PBQ**  
SYSTEM

# SERPENTS' TEETH



*A supplement for Jaws of the Six Serpents*



# Serpents' Teeth

A SUPPLEMENT FOR JAWS OF THE SIX SERPENTS

## Silver Branch Games

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**PDQ system design** by Chad Underkoffler, Atomic Sock Monkey Press ([www.atomicsockmonkey.com](http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com)).

The **Prose Descriptive Qualities (PDQ) System** has been designed for evocative simplicity, speed, and flexibility in play. The **PDQ System** is used under license from Chad Underkoffler; the following materials are not necessarily endorsed in any way by Chad Underkoffler, nor is he in any way responsible for the content of these materials unless specifically credited. © 2011 Chad Underkoffler. All rights reserved.

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# CONTENTS

Introduction	3
<i>Understanding PDQ for use with other games</i>	4
<b>Short adventures</b>	<b>5</b>
Ties to Bind	6
<i>an adventure outline by Brenda Hingstman</i>	
Gods of the World of the Six Serpents	17
<i>a setting option by Rachael Hodson</i>	
The Scroll of Misnai	26
<i>an adventure outline by Rachael Hodson</i>	
<b>The Curse of Karak-Azim</b>	<b>39</b>
<i>an adventure setting by Scott Dorward</i>	
<b>The Taming of Khend</b>	<b>81</b>
<i>an adventure setting by Storn Cook</i>	
<b>Red Sands of the Six Serpents</b>	<b>117</b>
<i>a genre guide for sword and planet by James Maliszewski and Tim Gray</i>	
<b>Breaking the Jaws of the Six Serpents Cult</b>	<b>127</b>
<i>a genre guide for pulp action by Tim Gray</i>	







# INTRODUCTION

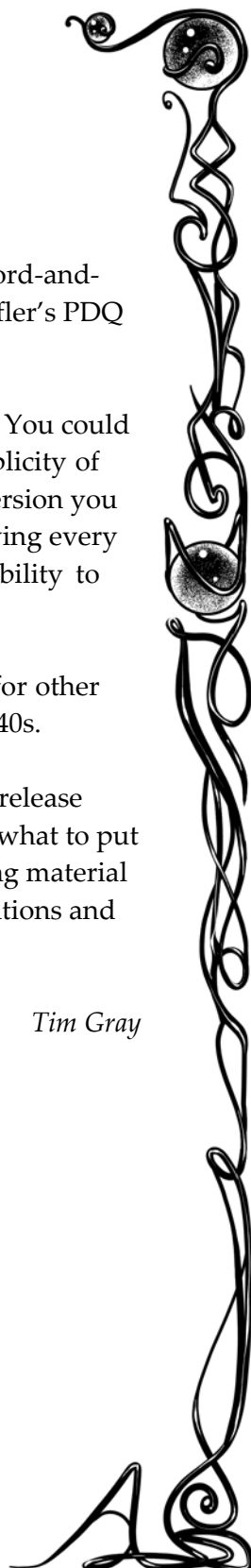
This is a supplement for *Jaws of the Six Serpents*, my sword-and-sorcery-themed fantasy game based on Chad Underkoffler's PDQ rules.

Most of it is made up of adventure and setting outlines. You could easily use these for other games as well – and the simplicity of PDQ character descriptions should help with any conversion you fancy. They're all pretty loosely framed, rather than having every step nailed down, so as a GM you've plenty of flexibility to respond to what the players do.

We've also got some guidance on using the *Jaws* rules for other genres: sword and planet, and pulp action in the 1920s-40s.

This book breaks new territory for me. I wanted to release something for the many fans of *Jaws*, but I didn't know what to put in it. So I tapped in to the fan community itself, collecting material developed by talented and enthusiastic folks for conventions and their own groups. It's fun stuff. I hope you enjoy it.

Tim Gray





## Understanding PDQ for use with other games

You don't have *Jaws of the Six Serpents*? You should get it, of course. But in case the well-known stubbornness of barbarians prevails, here are some notes to help you understand and adapt the content of this book.

In the **PDQ system** everything important about a character is measured by **Qualities**: innate "attributes", skills, personality traits, possessions, relationships, etc. A Quality consists of a **descriptor** that tells you when it will apply, and a **Rank** to show how good it is, or (put another way) how powerfully it affects the story. Ranks go Poor [-2], Average [0], Good [+2], Expert [+4], Master [+6]. Characters are assumed to start at Average in everything normal people can do. (Special stuff like Sorcery\* works slightly differently, hence the asterisk.)

Each Rank has a **modifier (MOD)** number in brackets, and a corresponding **target number (TN)**. When rolls are made the GM sets a Rank for difficulty: add any applicable MODs to the result of 2d6 to try to reach the TN. Conflicts are resolved through single rolls ("complicated situation") or an extended back-and-forth of opposed rolls ("conflict situation"). **Damage** is temporary loss of Quality Ranks, reflecting gradual reduction in story-affecting power rather than simulating cuts and bruises, eventually leading to "zeroing out".

Qualities are freeform, so to use the non-player characters with other systems you'll need an idea of how to map them to whatever set of abilities are available to you there. That could work fine from just a big-picture view of the character – "oh, they're just a Level 3 Rogue with a dual weapons schtick" – especially in rules that are quite specific and tactical, with less room for personality and history traits.

# SHORT ADVENTURES





# TIES TO BIND

by Brenda Hingstman

*Brenda is one of the 'Dutch Invaders' who regularly visit UK gaming conventions, pillaging our dice and tea. For this adventure she's picked on one of the more intriguing places in the world of the Six Serpents – and thought big! It could easily serve as an epic end to a campaign arc.*

Legend has it that once every 300 years the missing half of the once-great city of Ahaan, once thought to be destroyed by a blast from the heavens, will reappear within the realm. Sages declare that within the walls of this city the amulet known as the Eye of Zhe'mhat waits to be found. Bards whisper of the enormous power this amulet holds, saying that it's the key to ultimate good, or ultimate evil. It seems like every faction within the realm will be looking for the treasure; the player characters included.

## Setting

This adventure takes place in and around Ahaan, one of the more mysterious places described in the *Jaws of the Six Serpents* handbook. Ahaan is half of what used to be a majestic city. Now it's all wasted glory on one hand and the crater known as the Empty Cup on the other. What happened to Ahaan all those years ago? No-one really knows, though myths and legends speak of sorcery and demons. These legends also suggest that once every 300 years the Empty Cup will be filled, and the missing half of Ahaan will reappear as it was the day it was destroyed.



But that's not all. Hidden somewhere within the missing half is an amulet that is powerful enough to change the course of thousands of lives. Some say it can bring the dead back to life, and can heal the most incurable disease. Some say it can level and rebuild cities within the blink of an eye. Unimaginable power, within arm's reach once every 300 years. All you have to do is reach out and grab it.

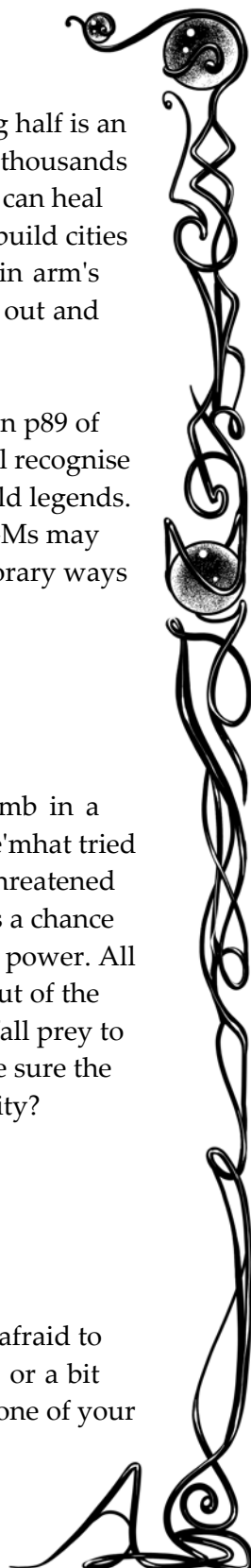
The demon Zhe'mhat (*jer-mart*, roughly) is mentioned on p89 of *Jaws* as the subject of profane oaths. Most characters will recognise the name as referring to a powerful demonic figure of old legends. It's up to them how much they believe in such things. GMs may want to allow him to exercise his power in lesser, temporary ways on an ongoing basis.

## What's really going on?

Truth is, the Eye of Zhe'mhat was locked up in a tomb in a disappearing city for a reason. Ages ago the demon Zhe'mhat tried to escape the Dark Below, and as demons are wont he threatened to destroy the world. Now, once every 300 years he gets a chance to escape his confines through the amulet that holds his power. All it takes is one greedy fool to take the Eye of Zhe'mhat out of the tomb and into the world above. Will your adventurers fall prey to the temptations offered by Zhe'mhat? Or will they make sure the Eye remains locked away in the depths of the missing city?

## Set-up

The adventure is best suited for 4 to 6 players. Don't be afraid to make your challenges a bit easier if the group is small, or a bit harder when the group is large. Make sure that at least one of your





players knows the following at the start of the game. If this is part of an ongoing campaign, you might want to give your players this information at the end of the previous session.

*So this legend, right? Well, you know a guy who knows a guy whose uncle is a seer, and he's seen that if you want to find the amulet, you have to "Follow the Undermen on the day Ahaan is whole and face the Eye". Whatever that might mean...*

Alternatively the PCs could find the same information in some dusty scroll recovered as part of a previous adventure; or in various other ways. That may lead to some time spent trying to decipher the message, and uncovering the legend of the reappearing city. You might want to make sure the news is not *too* secret, so that the players know there's likely to be competition. Perhaps as the time nears seers across the land are struck by powerful visions. (And after all, Zhe'mhat does want visitors...) If they ask how long the city remains, you can be a bit vague: a few hours, till sunrise, etc. In fac, it'll most likely fade at a dramatically appropriate time!

Whatever draws the characters in, they head for Ahaan as the time nears, but quickly encounter the first obstacle...

## *Scene 1 – Soraya's camp*

*You start off in the camp of Soraya, the bandit queen – as captives. Unfortunately you're not the only ones after the legendary Eye of Zhe'mhat. Still more unfortunately, she's somehow under the impression that you know how to get to the amulet. Your weapons were taken from you, now just out of your reach under the watchful eye of your two guards, who leave you with no doubt that waiting for Soraya will only lead to bad and bloody things.*



This gives the players the chance to test out their Strengths and Weaknesses. Will they fight the guards, talk their way out of it, or await their fate as Soraya draws nearer? For the players with good intuition and personal skills it might be easier to talk their way out of the situation, as the guards are probably a little underpaid and not especially motivated.

Assuming they deal with the guards, they're still in a camp filled with bandits, and Soraya is on her way. Do they fight or escape? Remember, this is still early in the game, so give the players plenty of opportunity to stretch their proverbial legs, but don't go all-out on them yet. There will be plenty of time for that later.

Let your players come away from the camp with a new bit of information: the guards have heard from some poor old fool Soraya got her hands on that the missing half of Ahaan is set to appear at dawn, a day and a half from now.

## **Soraya the bandit queen**

**Strengths:** Expert [+4] Bandit queen, Good [+2] Tougher than “civilised” folk, Expert [+4] Cunning, Expert [+4] Intimidating, Good [+2] Dirty fighting

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Greedy

## **Soraya's guards**

**Strengths:** Good [+2] Guard, Good [+2] Scared of Soraya

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Underpaid and unmotivated, Poor [-2] Uneducated





## Scene 2 – Strangers' Square

*After escaping Soraya's camp one way or the other you end up in the city, in Strangers' Square. Cat-eyed folk watch your every step from the shadows. Are they afraid of you, or should you be afraid of them? With hours to go before the lost half of Ahaan is set to reappear, and no Undermen in sight, perhaps you would prefer to take a rest at one of the two taverns in the Square? You have the refined-looking 'Golden Chalice' or the more common-looking 'Red Princess' to choose from.*

The Red Princess is the home of a pair of treasure hunters, **Janos and Naavira**. They would very much like to know what the players know about the Eye, and probably won't hesitate to beat it out of them if they hesitate to answer.

In the Golden Chalice the players will find a tall, willowy fellow by the name of **Lysander**. Despite clearly being one of the cryptic Devilfolk of Ahaan, he will gladly tell them about the tunnels leading under the city, and the Undermen he's seen there. After all, it's not as if he actually expects them to make it out of the Golden Chalice alive. Lysander wants the Eye for himself, and will not hesitate to poison the drinks of weary adventurers who choose to sit with him. You may want the PCs to roll against his Quality's TN to notice the poison. If they drink it, those who resist may have to aid their stricken companions.

Let the players decide where they want to go. There are challenges enough either way. If they want to avoid the taverns completely, that's fine too.: send them straight on to the next scene. Don't be hesitant to let them split up either, and feel free to push them a little harder this time round. You don't want this to feel like a walk-over, after all.





Whatever the players decide to do, let them get on their way with several hours still to go before dawn. As the group travels further into the heart of Ahaan, they will notice that the closer they come to the crater, the more damaged the city appears. The thing that caused the crater seems to have singed the city edges a lot, and it is likely that the buildings close to the edge are uninhabitable. Who wants to live in a burnt-out husk anyway?

## Janos

**Strengths:** Expert [+4] Renowned warrior, Good [+2] Charismatic, Good [+2] Strong as an ox, Expert [+4] Swordfighting

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Greedy, Poor [-2] Not the brightest star in the sky

## Naavira

**Strengths:** Expert [+4] Treasurehunter, Good [+2] Fierce like a lion, Good [+2] Misdirection, Expert [+4] Streetwise

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Pushy, Poor [-2] Curious

## Lysander

**Strengths:** Expert [+4] Poisoner, Good [+2] Silver tongue, Good [+2] Mysterious, Good [+2] Ruthless, Expert [+4] Sly as a fox

**Weakness:** Poor [-2] Vulnerable to temptation, Poor [-2] Outsider



## Scene 3 – Into the dark

*You leave the Strangers' Square, which was aptly named indeed, and go in search of these elusive Undermen that you've heard so much about. The deeper you get into the city, the more abandoned it gets. Strangers and locals alike seem to be wary of this place, and probably with good reason. The once-majestic towers of Ahaan look close to crumbling, and there are things moving in the dark.*

Let the characters spot an **Underman** eventually. A typical specimen is about 5 feet tall, pale and hairless, clad in rags. These seem to be even skinnier than the usual kind (*Jaws* p99), and they appear to shamble. They will ignore the players in favour of moving deeper into the city, towards the crater, until they eventually disappear in the sewer. It's up to your players if they're content to follow the Underman to see where it takes them, or if they want to catch one. Just remember: where there's one, there's more.

This should lead the characters into the sewers underneath the city. Here too the signs of destruction are obvious, and the tunnels are hard to navigate. There's an underground river flowing towards what might be the edge of the crater, and time is running out! Maybe the players want to take that conveniently tied boat down the river? Even though the river keeps running faster and faster, and seems to cascade over the edge of the crater? Make this a challenge for the players. How are they going to reach the edge of the crater in





time, and how are they going to avoid going over the edge? The walls of the tunnel are probably crawling with Undermen at this point too. What are they going to do about that?

End the scene with **the magical reappearance of Ahaan**. Whether they walk, run, boat or swim there, they arrive at the edge of the crater just in time to see the missing half of Ahaan appear before their eyes. Whatever hit the city all those years ago did a good job of destroying it, and the missing half of Ahaan seems to be trapped in time, still burning, still crumbling.

## Undermen

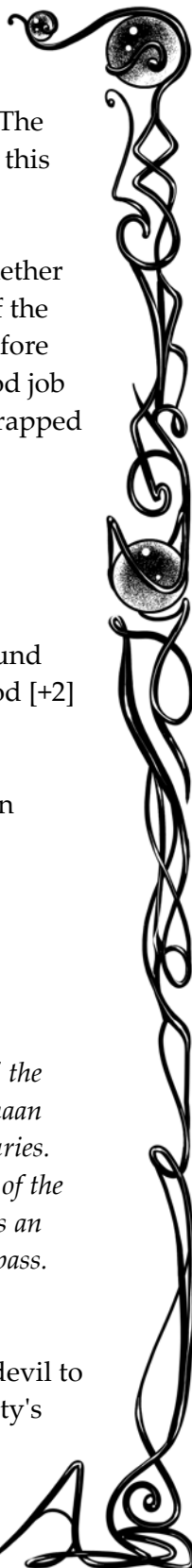
**Strengths:** Good [+2] Earth Urge, Good [+2] Underground dweller, Good [+2] Resilient, Average [0] Darksense, Good [+2] Scavenger, Good [+2] Jagged-edged teeth

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Vulnerable to light, Poor [-2] In Zhe'mhat's thrall

## Scene 4 – The other side

*Stately figures move through the streets, seemingly unaware of the burning buildings around them. Tall, translucent Devilfolk of Ahaan carry on about their business as if they haven't been dead for centuries. The Undermen rush ahead towards a temple situated in the centre of the destruction. The doors of the temple are closed and before them sits an incorporeal man in grey robes. He doesn't seem willing to let you pass. Meanwhile the ghosts converge upon the temple.*

The Grey Warden is the sorcerer who made a deal with the devil to keep Zhe'mhat trapped. He's the one who "arranged" the city's





disappearance. The only concession he had to make is that Zhe'mhat should be given a chance to escape once every 300 years. If the Eye can corrupt the heart of one person, and convince that person to take the amulet topside, then the world will be plunged into darkness. Obviously the Grey Warden is going to try to talk the players out of it.



It's up to you whether he does that with reason or with force. The thing you have to keep in mind is that he made a deal, and he needs to stick with it. He doesn't actually have the right to stop the players. He can just offer them a bit of advice for the road.

The temple appears to be the only thing untouched by the fire. After facing the Grey Warden the doors will open, and both ghosts and Undermen will crowd around it but not enter. Eternally-lit torches guide the way into the depths of the temple.

In a cavernous, circular room the players will find a dais, and on it **the Eye of Zhe'mhat**. It is a triangular jewel, blue like a morning sky, but darker in the centre. Does it speak to the players? Does it try to tempt them? Remember, this is Zhe'mhat's one chance to get out of the temple and into the world, for 300 years to come. Let him be persuasive.

The Eye is a kind of avatar of the demon. Run this as a mental and social conflict situation; at least to start with. If the Eye can zero any PC out, they grab the jewel and head for the surface – unless their comrades stop them!



Keep in mind, though, that the Eye doesn't understand human nature all that well. Soon enough it will show its true nature (as it runs out of weaknesses to tempt). The jewel will grow larger and larger until it fills most of the room, becoming a tentacled monstrosity with a gaping maw. It will try to persuade by force. It only needs one character to escape, after all, and it is in its nature to take what it wants and leave no-one else alive to tell the tales.

This should be the final confrontation. The Eye of Zhe'mhat shouldn't be an easy foe, so don't be afraid to make it a little stronger if combat seems to be leaning towards a very quick victory for the players. And what if they defeat Zhe'mhat? Maybe the lost half of Ahaan starts to disappear again, and they'll have to run for their lives to get out in time.

## The Grey Warden

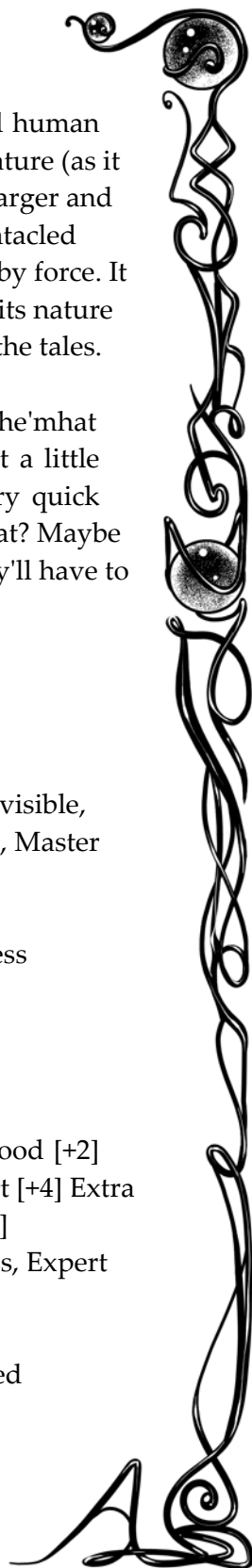
**Strengths:** Master [+6] Incorporeal, Expert [+4] Invisible, Master [+6] Dead, Average [0] Shocking appearance, Master [+6] Sorcerer, Good [+2] Honest

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Dead, Poor [-2] Self-Awareness

## The Eye of Zhe'mhat

**Strengths:** Good [+2] Large, Good [+2] Predator, Good [+2] Shocking appearance, Good [+2] Amorphous, Expert [+4] Extra appendages, Good [+2] Fearsome maw, Good [+2] Underground dweller, Master [+6] Keys to the Abyss, Expert [+4] Silver tongue

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Large, Poor [-2] Single-minded





*Keys to the Abyss:* Zhe'mhat has a unique insight into the dark desires that motivate people. With this, he knows the characters' Weaknesses, and will use them to corrupt their wills. Together with *Silver tongue* this is a potent weapon. (This will be even better if characters have struggled with their darker sides in previous adventures.)

## Aftermath

So you've defeated Zhe'mhat (for now). What next? The lost half of Ahaan will be gone soon enough, but make sure you reward your players with ancient treasures or tomes of knowledge. And adventure seeds, of course.

Enjoy!



# GODS OF THE WORLD OF THE SIX SERPENTS

by Rachael Hodson

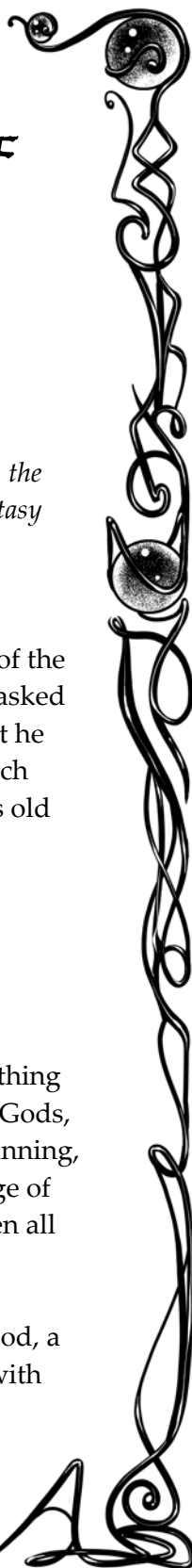
*Rachael is another keen UK convention GM. Here she answers the question: if Jaws had a pantheon of gods, as found in many fantasy settings, what might it look like?*

This is an account of the history of the creation of the world of the Six Serpents. It was donated to the temple of Quilina by a masked figure around a hundred years ago. Curiously it is noted that he asked for no favour from the temple in return for this rich resource. The scroll is thought to be at least a thousand years old and is of unknown origin.

## *From ancient days*

There is a place, a point of light in the darkness where everything and nothing exists. It is here that Zia and Zeyin, the Always Gods, were born. They are the creators and the destroyers, the beginning, the middle and the end. Together they hold all the knowledge of the past gods and worlds and shall be the last to remain when all things fade.

In the darkness, Zia fashioned a world from her hair and blood, a place of beauty and wonder. It was her intention to fill it with





interesting animals, which she and Zeyin could study. Together they left the darkness and took physical forms on the new world.

There they had two daughters, two giant beautiful golden wolves with fur the colour of fire, who they named Ashuli and Selné. The two wolves fought, as all sisters do, and one day Ashuli clawed Selné by accident and her blood fell across the heavens creating the stars. Her fur was bleached a brilliant white. Zia was displeased with her daughters and ordered them to guard her new world, though she allowed them still to fight and play, which is why the sun chases the moon. Occasionally they catch each other and wrestle, thus creating eclipses.

One day, during the creation of some new plants, Zia cut her wrist on a thorn. From her blood sprang forth seven serpents. Each took dominion over a part of the world by populating it with their own servants. They instructed their creations in the key Ways that made each serpent unique. Wars broke out over the different Ways of the Serpent and Zeyin's heart grew heavy. He knew that this could end all the beauty Zia had created.

Zeyin could not hope to defeat the Serpents without destroying the world himself, and so he needed allies. He fashioned a set of five intricate figures from the clay of the world, mixed with a little blood stolen from each of the Serpents. He then begged his wife to breathe life into the figures. So five servitors were born of serpent, god, and clay, and were instructed to help give Man proper guidance and assist Zeyin's great battle.

The Five worked together with the old gods to end the reign of the Serpents. After a great battle, six of the seven serpents were cast into the earth and bound to it, a claw taken from the Great Wolves pinning them down, unable to move. Penith of the Five was unhappy about the devastation that had been caused and swore he would touch no weapon again. It is he who softened the serpents' prison, allowing them to whisper to the people of the world so that





they would not be forgotten. Las the balancer supported him in this task, calling the serpents' remaining power the Urge.

Finally the seventh serpent was found, captured, and bound deeper into the earth than the others, for he was the dark Urge – the evil that people do came from him. What the gods did not know, however, was that he had stolen a human girl, Yetma, and forced her to bear his children before he was captured. From this coupling came all the demons of the world, creatures of hate and despair, and Yetma was warped by their birth. The serpent made her ever-living so she could watch and nurture their spawn. She watches and teaches still, broken in the image of her husband. Zhe'mhat is one of her greatest creations, her first born. Gradually people forgot that there ever was a seventh serpent, and the stories about Yetma were lost.

After the Great War, Zia's world had paid a terrible price, with vast areas left as little more than wasteland. Heartbroken, she and Zeyin chose to remove themselves from the world and leave their



daughters, and the five servitors they had created, to watch the affairs of Man, with instructions not to take too strong a hand.

With their creators gone, the five had temples and shrines built in their honour, and in time became worshipped as gods themselves. They walk the earth every now and then, challenging the work of Yetma and inspiring people wherever they tread. Sometimes they take human partners and heroes come from these unions, strong men and women who bring new glories to the world. And Zia and Zeyin, in the darkness, watch over all, and wait.

## *The Old Gods*

### **Zia and Zeyin, the Everlasting**

It is said that all of existence is held in balance between them, and that together they bind the world. If they are depicted, which is rare, it is often as a simple double circle, with its edges overlapping slightly. Those who are touched by the power of the Everlasting are often said to be prophets or seers, although many are driven insane by the experience.

### **Ashuli and Selné, the Great Wolves**

The daughters of Zia and Zeyin, they have been set to oversee and protect the world of the Six Serpents. Their symbols are wolves and they are worshipped by forest dwellers and sailors.



# The New Gods

## Hursa

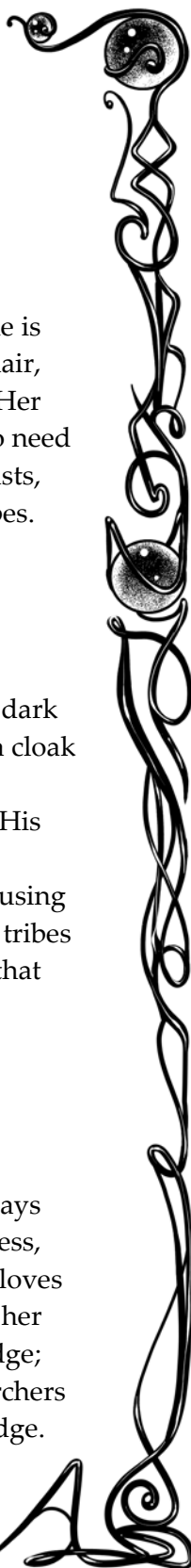
The fire of inspiration; the sustaining earth that provides. She is depicted as an attractive matronly woman with long red hair, carrying a small cooking-pot. Her symbol is a lit hearth. Her priests must travel the world giving martial aid to those who need it. They also inspire and teach. Hursa is worshipped by artists, warriors and travellers, and she is held dear by the Kalet tribes.

## Penith

He who laughs and causes merriment, and provides light in dark times. He is depicted as a tall, stout, laughing man wearing a cloak of many colours. His priests travel as players, providing entertainment for free, but also telling the story of the gods. His symbol is the drum. He is beloved of musicians, drunks, merrymakers and barmen. His devotees are forbidden from using weapons. He is also known as the lord of the winds, and the tribes of the desert pray to him to save them from the sandstorms that plague their lives.

## Quilina

Goddess of the city and of the organised world. She is always depicted as a stern hatchet-faced woman in a rich purple dress, holding a scroll in one hand and a coin bag in the other. She loves merchants and thieves, guilds and councils, and offerings to her must be rich and plentiful. She also is the seeker of knowledge; anything to further her cities. She blesses scholars and researchers with help and scrolls, and her temples are houses of knowledge.





Her priests will pay for news and gossip, tales and stories, songs and poems. For this reason spies also worship her. Her symbol is a gold coin.

## Furtinth

God of nature and the beasts, he is depicted as a short, lean, naked man with wild green hair and dark skin, wearing a cloak of living plants and flowers. All animals are beloved by him and his devotees must swear to hurt nothing to gain their meals. They can only take what is already dead, if an animal, or offered to them by plants. Furtinth is beloved of herdsman and shepherds, and farmers all pray to him to pacify him, as they steal from his domain. Doctors also pray to him to lend strength to the herbs they use to heal. His symbol is the waterfall with a plant growing underneath.

## Las

He who Passes Between; the Quiet One; who walks the veil between realities and assists the dead to pass to their reincarnation. He knows that nothing is ever lost, just changed. For that reason his priests say the burial blessing, and help people find peace. His priests are also the balancers, the ones who will cause justice at the point of a sword or a sharp tongue. He is beloved by anyone who has anything to do with justice or keeping the peace. As he parts the Veil, he is also the god that sorcerers pray to. His symbol is an open hand. He is depicted as a grim-faced man with piercing eyes, wearing a hooded cloak made of shadow.





## Yetma

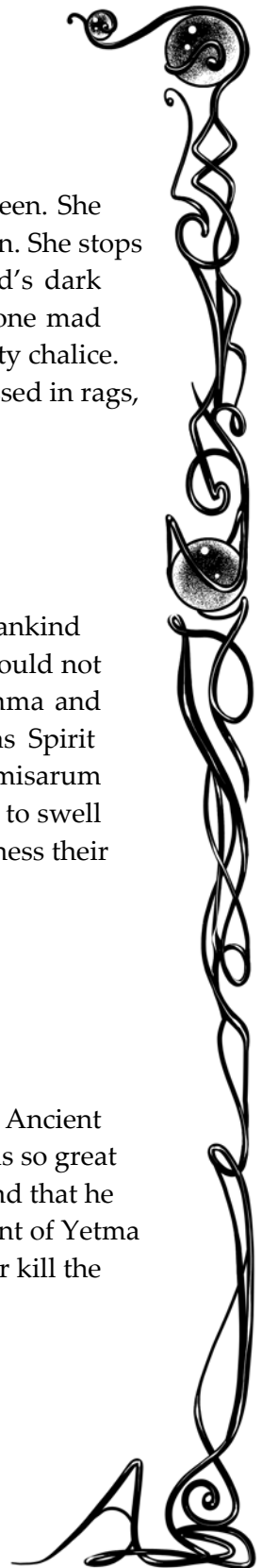
The Dark Mother, the nurturer of evil, the Ragged Queen. She waits in the dark and steals souls from Las when she can. She stops reincarnation and creates new demons in her husband's dark image. Yetma is worshipped by her children and anyone mad enough to pray to her for power. Her symbol is an empty chalice. She is depicted as a screaming black-haired beauty dressed in rags, with a hissing serpent hung around her shoulders.

## Spirit Guardians of Temisarum

Evil spirits released by Yetma have long plagued mankind unchecked; such was their malevolence that even Las could not control them. The Elders of Temisarum saw the dilemma and made a pact with the Quiet One to remain behind as Spirit Guardians rather than be reincarnated. Those of the Temisarum who possess great strength and great purpose continue to swell the ranks of the Guardians, teaching heroes how to harness their power over spirits in order to protect mankind.

## Story seeds

Legend has it that there was once a priest known as the Ancient whose wisdom and understanding of Zia and Zeyin was so great that he was granted the gift to affect the flow of time; and that he guards the resting place of the seventh serpent. A servant of Yetma thinks she has found him. Do you try to find him first or kill the demon servant?





People are beginning to attack Las' priests, saying that they are servants of a dark power. Who is spreading these rumours and what can be done to stop the bloodshed?

Hursa's temple is recruiting brave men and women to go on an expedition over the mountains to discover the land beyond. Will you join them? What will you find?

A scroll of power and knowledge has been stolen from Quilina's temple. You are charged with finding the thief and seeing justice done.

A great plague is spreading across the land from the desert, killing animals and plants. It will soon be the sowing season: farmers and merchants are worried. What is happening in Furtinth's domain?

Two rival pirates have taken up the banners of the Great Wolves. Each tries to outdo the other, and now they threaten the ports. Have the sailors been driven mad by their devotions? Why do the Wolves not stop the bloodshed that's going on in their name?

The chief of a vicious band of brigands has been captured, and was due to be executed. However, every attempt to kill him has failed. He claims to be blessed (or cursed) by Yetma.





Can this monster in human form be slain before the brigands return to free their leader?

A strange dark-eyed child with red and yellow hair is found wandering alone in the forest and brought back to the village. That night, a young wolf with fur the colour of fire kills several sheep, and in the morning the child is found naked and bloodied. Has the child been sired by Ashuli, and what is to be done with him?

The shades of the dead haunt a remote village in the mountains. Why has Las abandoned them, and what can be done to send them on beyond the veil?

A series of bloody murders has occurred in Nilsomar, with the mouth of each victim stuffed with rags. Is the spawn of Yetma loose in the city, and what is the purpose of the attacks?

*With thanks to Richard, Mum and Matt.*





# THE SCROLL OF MISNAI

by Rachael Hodson

*This adventure outline by UK GM Rachael makes reference to the gods she developed in the previous section. Once again, the roads lead us to Ahaan...*

This adventure is for a party of intermediate-level characters, with a few extra Quality Ranks. It will ideally be run for a group of 4-6 players.

There are areas within the story that will allow almost any type of character to shine, however it would be better if they have been working together for a while. They should have a good idea of each others' strengths and weaknesses, and this will become important when the characters get pulled in different directions by the choices they will be asked to make.

## Set-up

The characters have been asked to investigate the disappearance of Lady Raksha's two daughters, Jade and Ebony. Raksha is a wealthy widow who runs the caravan trains from the River Towns to Ahaan. It is suspected that one of her rivals has kidnapped her children, but as yet no ransom demand has been received.





## What's actually going on?

An evil sorcerer known as Verdus has stolen a scroll from the temple of Quilina. It is said to bestow great power to the bearer.

Unknown to Verdus, the scroll's power comes from an ancient demon called Misnai who is bound into the scroll. The demon has the power to transfer the life-force from one being to another, leaving the victim a dried-up husk. The younger the victim, the

more power received. Each time the scroll is used, Misnai also grows in strength. Soon the demon will be powerful enough to break free of the prison that has held it for so long.



By the time the sorcerer realises his mistake, he has already been completely corrupted by the demon in the scroll, and is addicted to the rush of power he

receives each time he does the ritual. At first he murdered a couple of adults to test the power of the scroll, and then he kidnapped a child. Now he has employed a mercenary gang called the Red Snakes collect his targets, in ever-increasing numbers.

The sorcerer has taken over an old building in the desert and has cut a series of tunnels underneath it, in which he lives and holds his captives until he has need of them. The Red Snakes drink and sleep in a tavern called The Axe's Rest in the outer circle of the foreigners' quarter in Ahaan.



## Rumours, clues and asides

Each of the characters should receive a small piece of the overall puzzle as the adventure progresses.

- If there is a thief character, they might receive a request to look into missing young guild members in areas between Ahaan and the River Towns.
- If there is a merchant, they could receive information that young apprentices have been running away with very little provocation.
- An Intercessor character may receive word that the spirit world is upset and spirits are going missing.
- Magi should slowly become aware that a dark power is growing in the desert near Ahaan.
- A healer could be told that there has been a series of strange mummified bodies found.
- A warrior might be asked by villagers to help find their missing children.
- A priest may receive a mission from their temple to find some scrolls that have been stolen from a temple of Quilina.
- An innkeeper may find out that there is a group of mercenaries boasting about the dark deeds that they have completed.

How the characters find out these snippets of information is up to you. Can you have some of the characters overhear something in a bar? Do your PCs regularly get side missions to complete in the name of their village/temple/family? Are some of these facts something that can be dropped in during previous adventures, paving the way for this story?



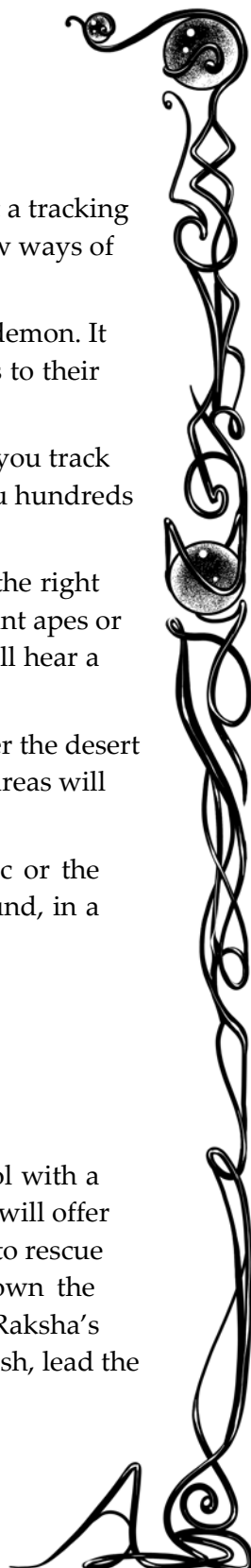
## A note on mages

Mages can be tricky to deal with. They may want to put a tracking spell on Raksha's daughters, for example. Here are a few ways of dealing with them.

- The mercenaries have a shielding spell cast by the demon. It stops any magic finding them, as the spell bounces to their mothers, fathers, and lovers.
- The daughters are covered with a spell that makes you track them and everything they have touched, giving you hundreds of leads to follow.
- Any tracking magic will start to send the party in the right direction, and then will send them into a nest of giant apes or other monsters and the sorcerer or charm caster will hear a demonic laughing.
- Verdus has placed magical copies of himself all over the desert of Ahaan, so anyone searching for high magic use areas will have a problem.
- The scroll is now protected by the demon's magic or the priests put a spell on it to ensure it couldn't be found, in a misguided attempt to keep it safe.

## *First encounter*

You meet Lady Raksha's seneschal, a bumbling old fool with a stutter. He is devastated by the loss of the children and will offer the party anything they want to undertake the mission to rescue them, including Raksha's best guide to lead them down the caravan routes. He should tell the adventurers about Raksha's competitors who live in the River Towns and, if they wish, lead the party to one of them called Trader Tyle.





Tyle is a pompous idiot with a very capable second-in-command called Walker. They will both be highly affronted by any accusation and have no information on the disappearance. If the adventurers question the other townsfolk, they will give alibis for the traders. No-one else has been hiring men.

## *The caravan trail*

When the players have finished searching the town, the guide can lead the party to the area where the daughters were kidnapped. It is a fairly well-travelled area, forest on both sides, and a compacted dirt track road. There are wheel ruts in the road and the sound of beasts in the forest. The adventurers will want to investigate the area and ask questions of their guide. Searching reveals bloodstains where the wagon driver was found dead. There are arrows embedded in trees and, if you have a good tracker in the party, four sets of footprints leading into the forest. If the party tries to follow them the guide will become very anxious. When pressed he will reveal that they lead in the direction of a little-known bandit camp, led by the feared woman Angusta. He will lead the party there, but only if put under extreme pressure.

## *The bandit camp*

The bandits live in a fairly large cave system deep in the forest. There are two sentries posted in trees, high above the little animal trail that the guide leads the characters down. Suspicious party members may believe they are being led to an ambush. If the sentries spot the intruders they will sound the alarm and the party will be attacked. If the party manages to pass the sentries without being seen, the characters end up in a surprisingly homely cave



system, when a child will spot them and call the guards. The resulting melee will continue until Angusta enters the fray: the players could try to convince her they mean her no harm, or continue the combat.

## Bandits

Good [+2] Fighter, Good [+2] Skilled with daggers, Good [+2] Numbers

Angusta has the same, plus Expert [+4] Fast talk.

Should the characters manage to befriend or impress Angusta, she will reveal that she knows of the children going missing, that she didn't do it, and that other children have been going missing from villages all around the trade road. She may speculate that it could be slavers. Angusta will point the characters in the direction of a little village called Green Sticks along the trade path. (If they miss out the bandit encounter, the guide will take them to the village.)



## Twists of fate

The moment Angusta appears one of the party members should realise that she is an ex-girlfriend. Does the fight stop while the lovers reunite? Did they separate on bad terms and she tries to kill him? Will she talk to the party more readily as she knows one of them?



## *Green Sticks*

This is a typical small village, more prosperous than most as it is along the caravan routes. It has a small tavern that the party can stay at for the night. The innkeeper will reveal that there have been many mercenaries spotted with snake tattoos in this area. He thinks they are based in Ahaan, as they spoke about going back there when a job was finished. The innkeeper will also reveal that three children from the village have gone missing. Their parents may try to engage the party to find them.

Sitting in the tavern is a priest of the goddess Quilina who, if talked to, will rather knowingly say that the temple at Ahaan hears all, and that the party might want to consult the priests there. Maybe a priest in the party has suggested this already. Indeed, it is possible for the adventurers to go to the temple of Quilina and then back to the caravan trail.

It may be that the characters want to search some more villages for clues – in which case they will find a pattern of roving mercenary bands, missing children, and horrific tales of mummified bodies being found in the woods.

## *Slave market of Nilsomar*

If the players want to explore the slaver angle, it will lead them on a long journey to a terrifying slave market. This is an excellent side mission to explore, as the players will have to decide if their characters are for or against slavery, and what they should do at the market. You get to have fun deciding how people will react to them if they try to free the slaves. At the market, they should find



out that the Red Snakes gang are known slavers and have been working for someone exclusively for a couple of months.

## *Temple of Quilina*

The temple is an ornate structure just outside Ahaan, with a large statue of a stern woman wearing a rich purple dress, standing in front of a massive metal gate. It is one of the biggest structures the characters have ever seen. At the gate, a portly priest in a white robe with a wide purple sash greets the characters. "You're a little late to try to get the contract, but please feel free to enter the temple and see if you still can." The priest will explain that a thief has stolen a priceless and dangerous scroll from the temple at some point and the theft has only just been discovered. The temple is hiring adventurers to recover the missing scroll.

If the players enter the temple, they will be shown through bright corridors that smell of freshly cooked bread, with strange lights that aren't torches set into bowls on the walls. The walls are covered with scenes from the creation of the world. They are led to a large library with dozens of shelves filled with books. (Most people aren't literate so this is a very impressive scene to most.) A strange collection of mercenaries and adventurers are standing in the library facing a tall, elderly woman wearing a purple robe with a small sash of white. She is the chosen of the goddess and leader of the temple. She will ask for assistance in recovering the scroll and offer rich rewards for its return. She will reveal that a demon is bound into the scroll and that under no circumstances should the scroll be read by anyone; otherwise the demon will attempt to gain its release.



## Ahaan

Ahaan is a hot, dry, sandy city, which dislikes foreigners and puts up with caravans and adventurers as a necessary evil. The gate guard will be surly and will direct the characters to the foreigners' quarter. He informs them that if they cause any trouble they can be sold to the slavers' guild. He says the inns in Strangers' Square would be the best place for the party to stay.

## The Thieves' Guild

If the characters make some initial enquiries while in the city, they will find themselves directed to the Thieves Guild house. It's a small, badly-lit building with peeling paint and urchins hanging around in the street keeping watch. There should be some initial difficulties making contact but eventually the party should get the information that they need to go to the Axe's Rest, which is where the Red Snakes live. If the party doesn't get this from the Thieves' Guild, it could pay a merchant or caravan guard for information, or ambush a member of the Red Snakes in the street.

## Twists of fate

Perhaps the members of the Guild don't believe any of the characters are real thieves and they have to prove it? Maybe the head of the Guild doesn't like a member of the party and calls them out to fight. Maybe someone left the Guild in Ahaan under a cloud of suspicion and has to clear his name before he can get any help from them? These options could be expanded to include all members of the player party and would make nice side adventures.





## The Axe's Rest

This is a dark, dirty tavern at the very edge of the poor quarter. It is filled with Red Snake mercenaries, thieves, women of negotiable virtue, and bad entertainers. There is an entrance at the front and an exit out back, leading to a pit which serves as the toilets and then to a back street. There are close roofs on either side for a quick rooftop exit. Inside there is sand on the floor, a small bar along one wall with a tall, masked barman, and loud mercenaries fighting and drinking heavily.

In one corner the leader of the Snakes, Sebine, sits on a chair slightly raised above the crowd. Every now and then a mercenary approaches and either receives a punch from one of the leader's enforcers or is allowed to speak and then waved away. Sebine is a heavy-set man with long red hair pulled back into a tail and gems entwined in his beard. He carries a nasty-looking jagged-edged sword at his waist. If your players wish to talk to Sebine to get the location of the sorcerer's hide-out they will need a huge bribe. Alternatively they could capture one of his minions.

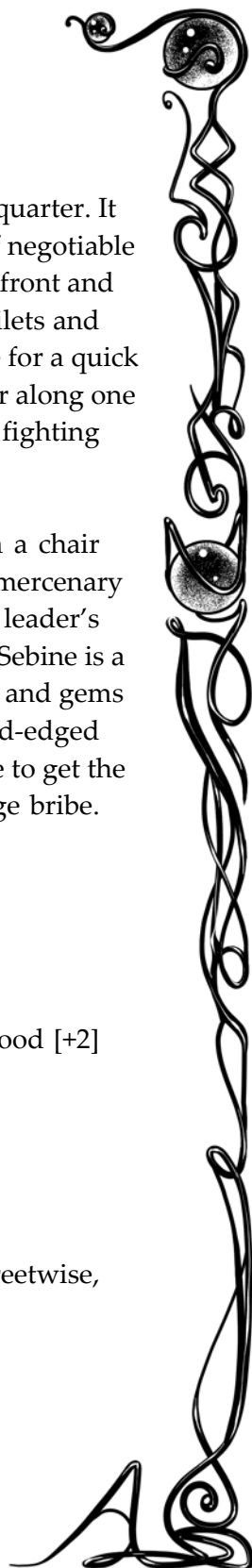
## Mercenaries

Expert [+4] Numbers, Good [+2] Sword fighting, Good [+2] Streetwise

## Sebine

**Strengths:** Good [+2] Sword fighting, Good [+2] Streetwise, Good [+2] Leader of the rabble, Good [+2] Fast feet

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Quick to anger





## *The sorcerer's hideaway*

It's a pile of rocks scattered on the desert, a hot day's travel on horseback away from Ahaan. The ruins are filled with sand but, on investigation, the party finds a route down to the tunnels underneath. There are traps on the door that can be spotted with a search or investigation roll. To disarm them you need a Good [+2] skill relevant to the trap.

The characters descend a well-kept but dark staircase cut into the rock. There are tunnels leading straight forward and to the left and right. To the right there is a small kitchen with a frightened young woman stirring a stew pot over a smoky fire. She will tell the party that if they go straight they will come to the dorm rooms where Verdus holds the children. To the left are Verdus's suite of rooms, which include a library, a meeting room and a bedroom.



## **The final confrontation**

All the noise that the party is making will eventually draw the attention of the sorcerer. They can choose to visit him in the library, or to wait until he comes to them and face a pitched battle in close quarters in the corridor. Verdus is an unassuming-looking man. He is tall and dark-skinned, with bright hazel eyes and a ready smile. The scroll is on a table in the library or, if you are in



the corridor, it is rolled up inside his robes. It is made of pure white vellum with elaborate gold writing. It has red wax seals that are broken into three pieces.

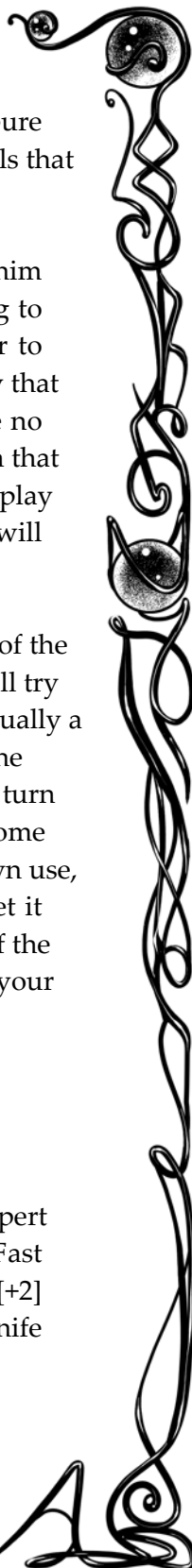
Verdus will try to charm everyone in the party into joining him before fighting. He will try seduction and persuasion; trying to confuse the characters by saying he is only after the power to control the demon, to assist in rebuilding Ahaan. He will say that he now has the demon under control and that there will be no further deaths. He will even offer to give you all the children that you came for back. If the players move to attack him he will play his ace card. He will tell the party that if he dies the demon will automatically be released.

While Verdus is talking the characters should also be aware of the demon Misnai at the edges of their consciousness. Misnai will try to convince the characters that she means no harm and is actually a spirit that is being forced to do evil deeds by Verdus. The characters have to succeed in an Expert (TN 11) challenge to turn down the power/hope/aid being offered to them. *Warning:* some players may decide that they will seize the scroll for their own use, and you may then have inter-party conflict to deal with. Let it flow: it will make the characters' story arcs interesting, and if the character gets away from the party with the scroll you have your next adventure written for you!

## Verdus

**Strengths:** Expert [+4] Sorcery\*, Good [+2] Charming, Expert [+4] Seductive, Good [+2] Highly intelligent, Good [+2] Fast talk, Good [+2] Willpower, Expert [+4] Fire Urge, Good [+2] Enjoys the dark power, Good [+2] Scholar, Good [+2] Knife work

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Addicted to the rush





The scroll acts as an energy source that Verdus can draw power from. He can also draw power from his Fire Urge. Verdus will primarily use fire magic and pain spells of Good Rank to attack the party from a distance.

Verdus enjoys being on the “dark side” and has no regrets about what he has done. Everything he says about just doing it to stop the demon is a lie.

## *The End?*

Will Verdus escape? Does the demon Misnai break free from the scroll on Verdus's death? Will a member of the party steal away with the scroll, for good or evil ends?

If Verdus dies and you decide not to allow the demon to escape, the party should make it back to Ahaan safely with all of the children. They can collect the rewards there. After a few days' travel Jade and Ebony will be back with Raksha, and the adventurers can collect their rewards from her too.

If the party decides to destroy the scroll, the temple will be less than pleased and they will be given another adventure as penance. If they return the scroll to the priests they will be rewarded and offered a permanent job with the temple guarding the scrolls that have been collected and finding new ones.

*Many thanks to all of my playtesters from the Phoenix Games Club, IndieCon and Conception.*

# THE CURSE OF KARAK-AZIM





# THE CURSE OF KARAK-AZIM

by Scott Dorward

*Scott is a UK GM with a reputation for dark convention games, and indeed this adventure has some more mature elements than the others in this book. It is, as they say, wound up and ready to play.*

## About this scenario

*The Curse of Karak-Azim* is designed to be very open-ended. It consists of a charged situation, a number of characters who have a stake in it, some locations and a list of events that may happen during the course of play. All of the player characters have reasons to work together and to mistrust each other, and much of the play will probably come from this tension.

If you want to use existing characters instead of those provided, have one of the factions approach the PCs for help in pursuing their goal. Maybe the PCs have been hired by Cassilda to bring peace to her new kingdom. Alternatively, the PCs may just wish to play the factions off against each other for personal gain.

If you have fewer than five players, it is easy to play one or more of the protagonists as NPCs, using them as foils for the player characters. If you have more players, you can use Matthias of Sermaine or Lutfi-Karak as player characters. A few notes about how to do this are provided with the character descriptions.



Depending on how your players tackle the situation, this scenario will probably take two or three evenings of play to resolve.

**Organisation.** This adventure first sets out the player characters and other important characters and factions, so you can see the connections between them. Then it describes some key locations. Notes on major events are at the end, but most of what happens should flow from the interplay between characters.

## Background

The adventure takes place in the city-state of Gorran Charn, on the coast near Nilsomar. See the *Locations* section for more detail. It's a port and centre of trade. Like Nilsomar, the locals go masked in public.

A little over six weeks ago, a small army led by a barbarian warlord conquered Gorran Charn, killing the sorcerer-king Karak-Azim in the process. The warlord has proclaimed herself queen, but is now finding that taking power and holding on to it are two very different things.

Karak-Azim had managed to maintain his hold on Gorran Charn for almost twenty years, using a combination of sorcery, fear and patronage, funding a number of merchants and community leaders who fostered loyalty to the king. Most of the populace despised him, especially as he suppressed their worship of the moon goddess Selné to avoid the clergy becoming overly powerful, but they still feared him too much to revolt. When the barbarian army struck, the people took it as a chance to rise up, and most of Karak-Azim's troops and catspaws were killed in the battles that followed.





In the weeks since, the mood in the city has become less elated. While the new conquerors are not as despotic as the former ruler, they are still foreigners who have taken the city by force.

The Moonshadows – a newly awakened sect of Selné fanatics – see them as barbarians and infidels and are trying to convince the people to drive their conquerors out. One of the local merchants believes that his chance to profit would be better were he in charge, and is using sorcery and trickery to this end. And, hidden in the darkness, the ghost of Karak-Azim hungers for vengeance...

### A note on names

Local names in Gorran Charn are made up of a given name and the name of the person's father, so the daughter of Farug-Zulema might be called Ahdia-Farug. These are all based on Arabic given names. A few examples are listed below in case you need to make up NPCs on the spot.

**Male:** Nawaf-Faraj, Gamal-Din, Burusq-Hilel, Ishak-Thabit, Omar-Jibril, Muta-Zuhir, Sayif-Qadir, Zafar-Hani

**Female:** Anbar-Yaman, Barika-Wafir, Fatinah-Sadaq, Kawthar-Mufeed, Luloah-Umarah, Rashida-Lahab, Yaminah-Zubair, Zahrah-Kateb

### A note on sorcery

For the purposes of this scenario, Urges cannot be used to power sorcerous rituals. If a sorcerer needs additional power, they will have to use a human sacrifice. All of Karak-Azim's rituals, as well





as any sorcerous defence that Ma'mun-Rakin may mount or any attempt by Asima to resurrect her brother, will require at least one human life.

## *Player characters*

Five player characters are listed on the following pages, separated out to make them easier to give to players. Here's a summary list.

- Cassilda of the Wastes – formidable leader of the occupying forces, claiming the title of queen
- Terom Ironskull – tough, experienced lieutenant who has fallen from favour
- Imad-Fadil – diplomatic high priest of the moon goddess, seeking the best for his people
- Asima-Karak – subtle, strong-willed daughter of the late sorcerer-king
- Morrel of Vasquin – perceptive and quick-witted adviser and spymaster to Cassilda

If necessary, the non-player characters Lutfi-Karak and Mathias of Sermaine can be used as PCs with minor adjustments – see their descriptions.



# *Cassilda of the Wastes*

## **First impressions**

A strong woman in middle-age, with iron-grey hair and fierce blue eyes. She is battle-scarred and sinewy, but moves with a dancer's grace. She has taken to wearing an iron circlet as her crown.

## **Qualities**

**People:** Earth Tribes of Kalet

Expert [+4] Leader of men

Good [+2] Battle-hardened warrior

Good [+2] Uncompromising negotiator

Good [+2] Cat-like reflexes

Good [+2] Fearsome temper

Good [+2] Wide knowledge of myths and legends

Good [+2] In good physical shape for her age

Poor [-2] Too trusting of her allies

## **Character background**

In the twenty-five years of your fighting career, you have been a soldier, a mercenary, a captain of guards, a barbarian warlord and a pirate. You often joked how one day you would be a queen, but now the joke has become a reality, it seems far less funny.

You have known Terom since you were both children in your home camp in the wild wastes of Kalet, and you have fought side by side throughout your adulthood. For many of those years you



were lovers, but ultimately his drinking and casual infidelity wounded you. Finding him and a slave girl in your bed was too much, and even if you had been able to forgive him, the constant gossip would have undermined your authority. You told him he could still fight at your side, but he no longer had a place in your bed. He seems especially bitter that you have appointed your new, younger lover, Matthias of Sermaine, as the captain of your guard, although you have kept Terom on as your trusted lieutenant.

Since taking Gorran Charn by force, you have discovered just how difficult ruling a kingdom is. While many of the populace rejoiced in the death of the sorcerer-king Karak-Azim, some still retain a secret loyalty, using his name as a banner under which to unite those who would see the infidel usurpers driven from their city. You would be minded to kill them all if you didn't fear that this would turn the rest of the city against you.

Your tenuous control is helped by the experience of your new advisor, Imad-Fadil, the high priest of the local goddess, Selné. You also have the unexpected support of Asima-Karak, the daughter of Karak-Azim, who seems grateful to you for freeing her of her father's control and can perhaps be persuaded to act as a bridge to those still loyal to her father. Your main asset, though, is Morrel of Vasquin, your loyal spymaster, who has served you well for many years.



# Terom Ironskull

## First impressions

A hulking, heavily-muscled man in his late forties. He has long, ragged, grey hair and a wild beard to match. The hair is not enough to cover the large scar that dominates his face. He has a booming laugh and is rarely sober.

## Qualities

**People:** Earth Tribes of Kalet

Expert [+4] Master of weapons  
Good [+2] Tough as old leather  
Good [+2] Knows Cassilda better than anyone  
Good [+2] Devilish charm and humour  
Good [+2] Good judge of character  
Good [+2] At home in the saddle  
Good [+2] Drinker, dancer and carouser  
Poor [-2] Low self-confidence

## Character background

You have been fighting and killing to earn your living for longer than most of the troops under your command have been alive, but you are as strong and vital as ever, despite the axe-blow to the face that scarred you so heavily many years back and gave you your sobriquet. You have always been full of life and mirth, with great appetites for battle, drink and women.



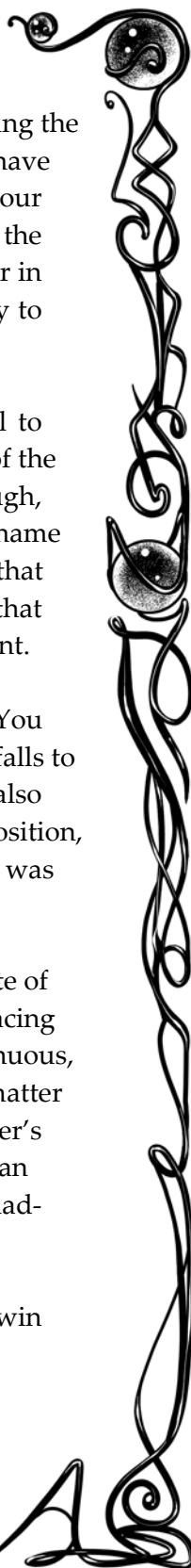
The last of these has proved to be your downfall. Since leaving the cold wastes of Kalet as a stripling to seek your fortune, you have been the constant companion of Cassilda. She has been your comrade in arms, your commanding officer and, for most of the time, your lover. You have no doubts that you could best her in battle, but she is a natural commander, and you were happy to take her orders in and out of the bedchamber.

For all your lust and roving eye, you were largely faithful to Cassilda. Your love for her made it easy to turn away most of the whores and doxies who offered themselves. Somehow, though, Cassilda caught you in her bed with some slave girl, whose name is lost in drink and time, and this turned out to be the blade that would sever the connection between you. The worst part is that you were so drunk that you can hardly remember the incident.

You still serve Cassilda, but only in a professional capacity. You are not even the captain of her men anymore; that privilege falls to Matthias of Sermaine, a younger warrior from Sartain who also warms Cassilda's bed. You would fight to win back either position, but something vital has left you. Maybe your inner strength was only ever borrowed from Cassilda.

As part of Cassilda's forces, you have conquered the city state of Gorran Charm, killing the sorcerer king Karak-Azim and placing Cassilda on his throne. Cassilda's hold on the kingdom is tenuous, though, and she is relying heavily on those around her, no matter how untrustworthy you may think they are: the late sorcerer's beautiful daughter, Asima-Karak, the treacherous Sartainian spymaster, Morrel of Vasquin, and the local high priest, Imad-Fadil, all hold sway in the royal court.

This time of weakness may make for an opportunity to win Cassilda back, if only you can find your strength again.





# *Imad-Fadil*

## **First impressions**

A tall, spare man who habitually wears colourful robes embroidered with silver. In public, he is always seen wearing a wooden mask that is carved into a half-moon shape and highlighted with silver leaf. He scents himself with a pungent rose oil.

## **Qualities**

**People:** Masked Folk of Nilsomar

Expert [+4] High priest of Selné  
Good [+2] Knows everyone in Gorran Charn  
Good [+2] Protective of his people  
Good [+2] Forceful orator  
Good [+2] Skilled staff fighter  
Good [+2] Knowledge of the black arts  
Good [+2] Quick-witted and perceptive  
Poor [-2] Paranoid

## **Character background**

During the reign of the vile sorcerer-king Karak-Azim, accursed be his name, the worship of moon goddess Selné could only be practised in secret. The sole worship that was allowed was to the vile demons from which Karak-Azim reputedly drew his power. Now that the king is dead, the rites of Selné may be practised in broad moonlight once more.



You are grateful to the new queen, Cassilda, for her part in freeing your people from their oppression. At the same time, you are less happy about Gorran Charn being ruled by a foreigner who is both an unbeliever and a barbarian. It is politic to keep her happy for the moment, and she has appointed you as her vizier, but you must not lose sight of the fact that you serve the people of Gorran Charn first.

Your position is made all the more awkward by the fact that your son, Yusef-Imad, is one of the more prominent voices criticising Gorran Charn's fall into the hands of foreign invaders. However much you may agree with him in private, this is a very public embarrassment to you.

Ultimately, the reign of the infidels may be a good thing for the glory of Selné, but a bad thing for her followers. Sooner or later, you will have to decide which side you are really on.

Most of the rest of the new court is harmless, especially the drunken fool Terom, but you fear Cassilda's other advisor, Morrel of Vasquin: he is a dark, manipulative soul, and you see that he is capable of great evil. The other dark force at work is Asima-Karak, the daughter of Karak-Azim, who Cassilda has allowed to remain in the court. She claims to be an ally, but can anyone of that tainted bloodline be trusted?



# Asima-Karak

## First impressions

A young and lithe woman who tends to wear gauzy robes of light silk. Her face is usually covered by her wooden mask, which is a thinner, more delicate version of the leering demonic face of her late father's mask, but she is more free in removing it than is considered seemly.

## Qualities

**People:** Masked Folk of Nilsomar

Good [+2] Sorcery\*

Good [+2] Hidden dagger technique

Good [+2] Subtle and manipulative

Good [+2] Iron-willed

Good [+2] Knows the palace better than anyone

Good [+2] Unconventional beauty

Good [+2] Loyal hand-maidens

Poor [-2] Physically weak and frail

## Character background

Relief was the only emotion you felt when you heard that Karak-Azim was dead. While he was your father and your king, you feared and loathed him for the suffering he had caused you, your people and especially your poor brother Lutfi.





When Gorran Charn came under siege, your father showed terrifyingly little reluctance in sacrificing Lutfi for sorcerous power in order to protect himself. Your beloved brother died, and it was all for naught.

You are convinced now that you are at least as great a sorcerer as your father ever was. You managed to spirit Lutfi's body away to a hidden cell in the catacombs under the palace, and you have been using sorcery since then to find a way to restore him to life. The process is a long one, but you have managed to restore enough of a semblance of life that he can move and even talk like he once did. His flesh is still putrid, though, and you know that you need more knowledge and power in order to make him truly live, and only human sacrifice offers that kind of power.

You have given your support to the new queen, even though many see her as nothing more than a usurper and barbarian. She saved you from your father, which earns some genuine loyalty. More importantly, though, being part of her court means that you still have access to the resources of the palace, improving your chances of saving your brother before he rots beyond all hope.

Working unnoticed in the palace can be tricky, now that it is full of so many unfamiliar faces. The queen's lieutenant and, apparently, old lover, Terom Ironskull, looks easy to manipulate at least, and may make a useful pawn. That meddling priest, Imad-Fadil, has managed to get himself appointed as vizier, and will only interfere with your plans. And the queen's other advisor, Morrel of Vasquin, reminds you of your father in ways that haunt your dreams.



# Morrel of Vasquin

## First impressions

A stern-faced man in his late fifties, balding, but with a ring of dark hair. He usually looks pensive, which is easily mistaken for scowling. He usually wears leather armour when in public, and he has a natural air of authority.

## Qualities

**People:** Citizen of Sartain

Expert [+4] Spymaster

Good [+2] Ruthlessly pragmatic

Good [+2] Quick as a viper

Good [+2] Eyes of a hawk

Good [+2] Skilled with poisons

Good [+2] Courtly customs and etiquette

Good [+2] Empty-hand fighting technique

Poor [-2] Unfamiliar with local customs

## Character background

When Cassilda found you on a battlefield in Sartain, you were little more than an informant, selling secrets for money and with loyalty to no one. In the fifteen years since, you have grown with her, acquiring skills, power and an undying loyalty to the woman who you are now proud to call your queen. You love her, you would die for her, but mostly you kill for her.

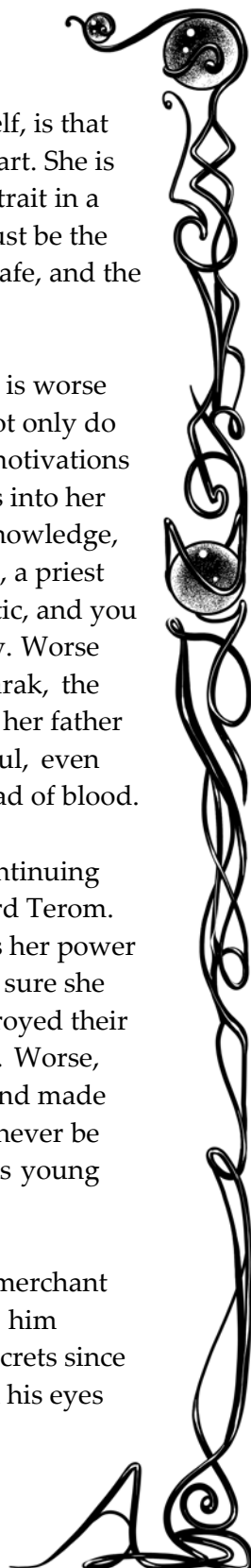


The secret that Cassilda holds, possibly even from herself, is that for all her steel and scars and bravado, she has a soft heart. She is too trusting and forgiving. This is a dangerous enough trait in a mercenary captain, but for a queen, it is deadly. You must be the eye that sees what she cannot, the hand that keeps her safe, and the knife that strikes down her enemies in the dark.

Since Cassilda's forces took Gorran Charn, the situation is worse than ever. This is a strange city in a strange land, and not only do you not know many of the people, but their ways and motivations are still alien to you. The queen has brought some locals into her inner circle, and while you and she rely on their local knowledge, they strike you as completely untrustworthy. The vizier, a priest by the name of Imad-Fadil, seems to be a religious fanatic, and you doubt that his loyalty to the queen is more than a show. Worse still, the queen has forged an alliance with Asima-Karak, the daughter of the old king, who swears that her hatred of her father is greater than any in the land. She does seem useful, even essential, but her veins pump secrets and betrayal instead of blood.

The other complication in the court is the queen's continuing reliance on her old friend and former lover, the drunkard Terom. You knew he made an unsuitable match for Cassilda, as her power grew, and it was simplicity itself to drug him and make sure she caught him in bed with a slave girl. You may have destroyed their romance, but their friendship seems to be limping on. Worse, Cassilda has taken a new lover, Matthias of Sermaine, and made him captain of her guard. While you know you would never be worthy of being her lover yourself, the presence of this young whelp in her bed offends you.

The one new ally you have made for yourself is a local merchant by the name of Ma'mun-Rakim, whose greed makes him refreshingly predictable. He has been a rich source of secrets since Cassilda took power, and seeing Gorran Charn through his eyes helps the place feel less disorienting and alien.





## Non-player characters

Write-ups of the following important characters and factions appear below.

- Lutfi-Karak – Karak-Azim's son, undead through sorcery
- Ma'mun Rakin – a prosperous merchant seeking power
- The Mask of Karak-Azim – magically-empowered artifact
- Mathias of Sermaine – Cassilda's lover and guard captain
- The Guard – Cassilda's mercenaries
- Karak-Azim – ghost of the sorcerer-king
- Yusef-Imad – Imad-Fadil's son, Moonshadow agitator
- The Moonshadows – resistance, seeking local religious rule
- The Palace servants – gossips and traitors everywhere

### Lutfi-Karak

Karak-Azim's son, dead, but sustained by sorcery.

**People:** Masked Folk of Nilsomar

**Strengths:** Expert [+4] Dead\*, Expert [+4] Strong, Good [+2] Hungry, Good [+2] Friendly disposition, Good [+2] At home in the dark

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Rotting, Poor [-2] Craves human flesh, Poor [-2] Afraid of fire

**Fortune points:** 2



When the barbarians invaded Gorran Charn, Karak-Azim sacrificed his own son in a vain attempt to give him the power to repel them. His sister, Asima, attempted to save Lutfi using sorcery and has managed to restore a semblance of life, but he is now little more than an animated corpse. He still has his intellect, and is trying to maintain a cheerful disposition, but his body is rotting and he has a steadily-growing hunger for human flesh. His voice is thick and bubbling when he speaks and his eyes glow with blue witchfire in the darkness.

It is likely that Asima will want to try to bring her brother back to full life. This transgression of the laws of nature will require an Expert success in Sorcery and at least one human sacrifice to power it. Lutfi will be horrified at the idea of anyone being sacrificed on his behalf.

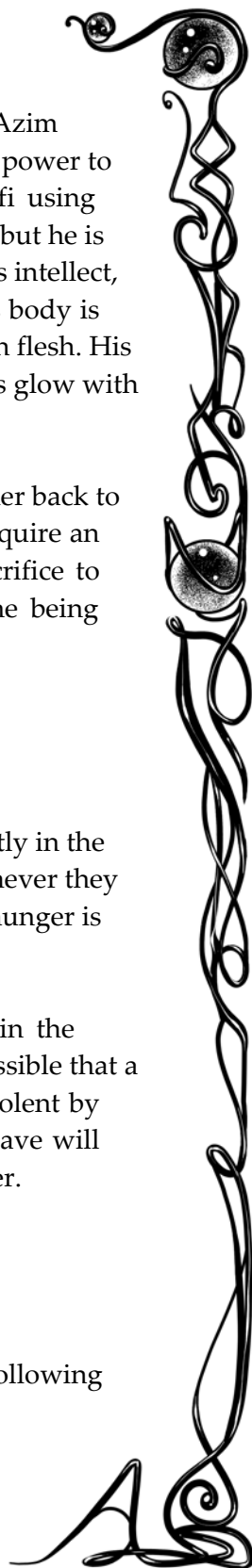
## **What does Lutfi-Karak want?**

Lutfi's main goal is to be restored to life, but this is mostly in the hands of his sister. He will put pressure on Asima whenever they meet, reminding her that he is rotting fast and that his hunger is growing impossible to contain.

Lutfi also wants to be left alone. He is hidden well in the catacombs, and Asima keeps his cell locked, but it is possible that a player character will find him there. While he is not violent by nature, any attempt on his part to convince them to leave will quickly escalate to an attempt by Lutfi to eat the intruder.

## **Making Lutfi-Karak a player character**

You can adapt Lutfi as a player character by using the following set of Qualities instead.





Expert [+4] Dead\*, Expert [+2] Strong, Good [+2] Boyish charm, Good [+2] At home in the dark, Good [+2] Beloved by the palace staff, Poor [-2] Rotting

His background is still the same, but instead of being hidden in the catacombs by his sister, he has been able to pass himself off as living by hiding his glowing eyes with his mask and covering the smell of rotting flesh using perfumed oils. He is still looking for a way to be restored to life before the decay takes him completely.

When introducing him to the other player characters, do mention the heavy smell of perfume masking something unpleasant.

## *Ma'mun-Rakin*

A prosperous merchant who wants Gorran Charn for himself.

**People:** Masked Folk of Nilsomar

**Strengths:** Expert [+4] Wealthy merchant, Expert [+4] Honeyed words, Good [+2] Web of contacts, Good [+2] Vicious when cornered, Good [+2] Powerful wrestler, Good [+2] Bodyguards

**Weakness:** Poor [-2] Power-mad

**Fortune points:** 2

Ma'mun-Rakin has always been an ambitious and greedy man. Even under the rule of Karak-Azim, he managed to build his wealth and influence, cornering the market in slaves. Now that he has had a chance to evaluate the current situation, he has decided that the new barbarian rulers are weak and can be toppled. If he were to take over instead, he would be able to control all trade



in Gorran Charn and accumulate a personal wealth that would pass into legend.



Two weeks ago, Ma'mun managed to acquire an item that he believes will allow him to lead a coup: the mask of Karak-Azim. When Ma'mun wears the mask, he can speak with the voice of Karak-Azim and even draw on some of its sorcerous power. The mask has its own needs and desires, inherited from its maker, and Ma'mun is aware that the power is changing him, but considers it a price worth paying.

In his guise of Karak-Azim, Ma'mun has steadily been drawing together those who are still loyal to their former ruler. He visits the powerful in their homes and places of work, convincing them that he, as Karak-Azim, has conquered death and is ready to once more take his place as the rightful ruler of Gorran Charn. Even those who were enemies of the old sorcerer-king are frightened enough of his renewed power that they are swearing allegiance to him.

Ma'mun plans to strike against his enemies within days, assuming he can weaken them first. His main concern is that Morrel will uncover his plot. His plan to prevent this involves turning queen Cassilda against Morrel, rending him powerless in court.

Ma'mun has used the sorcerous ability of the mask to scry the past, and has seen that Morrel was the one who arranged for Cassilda to



catch Terom with a slave girl. He has now hired an old woman, Majidah-Kedar, to play the role of soothsayer and demand an audience with the queen where she can let this secret slip. See the section titled *How things progress* for details.

## What does Ma'mun-Rakin want?

Simply, Ma'mun wants to rule Gorran Charn. Whether he does this by driving the barbarians away or killing them doesn't matter. He will use lies, trickery or even the truth in pursuit of this goal, taking any opportunity he can to turn the player characters against each other. He will remind everyone how much Asima's mask reminds them of her father's and wonder what else they have in common. He will ask why Terom is not man enough to take his woman back by any means he can. He will hint to Morrel that Imad-Fadil's sympathies might lie with the insurgents, especially as his son is involved.

He is not stupid and is unlikely to lead a direct attack against the new rulers while they have their strength. If their guards are weak or dead, though, or they are busy fighting the Moonshadows, he will seize the opportunity to lead some of his fanatics into the palace through the catacombs and finish the job.

## The Mask of Karak-Azim

**Strengths:** Expert [+4] The voice of Karak-Azim, Good [+2] Sorcery\*

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Insane visions, Poor [-2] Sadistic temper, Poor [-2] Unnatural lusts





Karak-Azim's mask is carved of dark wood, almost black in colour, and its carvings and red-painted highlights make it look leering and demonic. It catches the light in such a way that it almost makes it seem that the features move and change expression.

Before he died, Karak-Azim put some of his sorcerous power into the mask, along with echoes of his personality. Anyone who wears the mask has access to some of his power and speaks with his deep, authoritative voice. They also feel the whispering demands of the madness of its creator, and the more they wear the mask, the more these desires become their own. They will find themselves increasingly drawn to acts of torture, cruelty and sexual depravity. In game terms, all the Qualities of the mask are conferred to its wearer while it is worn.

Each time that someone uses the sorcerous power of the mask, they permanently acquire one of its Weaknesses and are subject to it even when not wearing the mask. The Weaknesses are not removed from the mask and can still be conferred to any new owner.

## *Mathias of Sermaine*

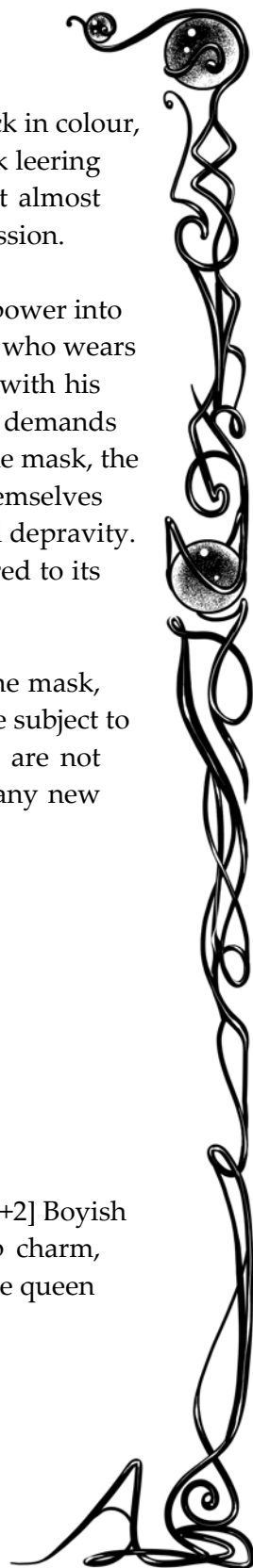
Cassilda's current lover and the captain of her guard.

**People:** Citizen of Sartain

**Strengths:** Expert [+4] Captain of the Guard, Good [+2] Boyish good looks, [+2] Mounted combat, Good [+2] Glib charm, Expert [+4] Quick and lithe, Good [+2] Beloved of the queen

**Weakness:** Poor [-2] Not as smart as he thinks he is

**Fortune points:** 2





Mathias is more than ten years younger than Cassilda, and still filled with the vitality and confidence of youth. He is handsome, headstrong and popular amongst the troops. His goal now is to convince Cassilda to marry him and then rule alongside her as the king of Gorran Charn.

While Mathias has no doubt that Cassilda loves him, he still views her long history with Terom with jealousy. He also suspects that Morrel isn't motivated solely out of loyalty, and is keeping an eye on him.

What Mathias has not realised is that he is no longer alone in his body. Almost two weeks ago, the spirit of the late Karak-Azim, sustained by sorcery, managed to possess him. Mathias's thoughts are his own most of the time, but Karak-Azim does plant ideas and dreams. As his strength has returned, Karak-Azim now finds himself able to completely control his host on occasion, carrying out actions that Mathias is unable to remember.

## What does Mathias want?

After the events in the courtyard (see section entitled *The opening scene*) Mathias's main priority is to clear his name. He knows that he did not give the order to massacre the protestors and wants to find out what actually happened.

Mathias also wants to keep his relationship with Cassilda secure. Maybe he doesn't love her quite as much as she loves him, but she is queen and he should be her king. He especially fears Terom, and will take any chance to belittle him or even put him in harm's way.



## Making Mathias a player character

There are no changes to either Qualities or background required to make Mathias a player character. All you need to do is adjust the opening scene.

Instead of starting with the breach of the palace, open with the aftermath, describing to Mathias's player how he has found himself in the courtyard of the palace, surrounded by dead and dying townsfolk. There is blood on him and his sword, and his troops are looking to him for confirmation of his order to massacre the rest of the intruders. Mathias has no memory of how any of this happened. This is the point at which the other player characters arrive.

## *The Guard*

Cassilda's army is made up of around 200 men and women from every land she has passed through. Many would call them undisciplined, but Cassilda has channelled their brutality into an effective fighting force. Some are fiercely loyal to her and to Mathias, but most are little more than mercenaries. They will fight for their queen as long as they are getting paid well or allowed to plunder, but they are unlikely to fight to the death if the entire city rises up against them or their comrades are being murdered through sorcery. Keeping them under control under such circumstances will require succeeding against a Master [TN 13] complicated situation.





## Karak-Azim

**People:** Masked Folk of Nilsomar

**Strengths:** Expert [+4] Incorporeal\*, Expert [+4] Possession\*, Expert [+4] Dead\*, Good [+2] Shocking appearance, Good [+2] Sorcery\*, Good [+2] Vengeful

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Dead, Poor [-2] Obsessed with regaining power, Poor [-2] Insane

**Fortune points:** 5

While he has no physical form, Karak-Azim can be seen unless he is possessing a host. He appears as a black, cloudy form, with the rough shape of a man, with glints of fire and talons within. His face, which comes and goes, resembles the red-highlighted, demonic face of his mask.

Karak-Azim is not locked into Mathias's body, but he has no plans to move on while Mathias is useful. If he can regain his control of Gorran Charn, Karak-Azim will keep Mathias as his host, as he is young and healthy. If Mathias is killed or maimed, however, Karak-Azim will find a new host. This may be one of the guards or servants, or even his daughter, but if Lutfi is restored to life, his father will see him as an ideal vessel.

Mechanically, Karak-Azim can spend an action to possess a new host, and no roll is necessary unless the target is a player character or if a player character attempts to interfere somehow. If Karak-Azim decides to possess a player character, this will be a conflict situation, with the PC fully aware of the nature of the attack. Even



once he has possessed them, there will still be a complicated situation every time he attempts to force them to perform an action and they resist.

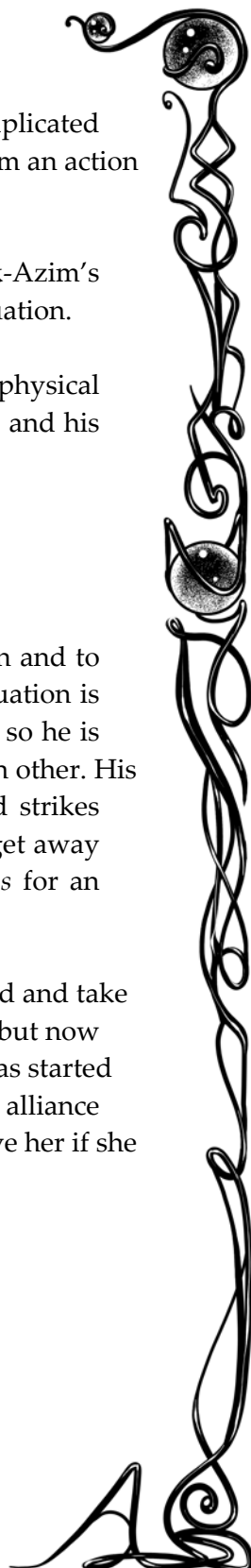
If a player character attempts to interfere with Karak-Azim's attempt to possess an NPC, treat it as a complicated situation.

As a disembodied spirit, he is largely able to ignore physical conflicts. He is vulnerable to magic and social conflicts, and his madness and obsession can easily be used against him.

## What does Karak-Azim want?

Karak-Azim's goal is simply to take back Gorran Charn and to destroy the barbarian usurpers. He can see that the situation is chaotic and that his enemies are potentially in conflict, so he is trying to bide his time and wait for them to destroy each other. His thirst for vengeance will lead him to make ill-advised strikes against Cassilda and her court when he thinks he can get away with them. See the section entitled *How things progress* for an example.

Karak-Azim also wants his daughter to return to the fold and take up her place as his heir. He underestimated her before, but now that he has seen the extent of her sorcerous power, he has started feeling a sense of pride he never felt before. He sees her alliance with the barbarians as a betrayal, but is willing to forgive her if she remembers her heritage.





## Yusef-Imad

Imad-Fadil's son: a political firebrand, nationalist and the prophet of the Moonshadows.

**People:** Masked Folk of Nilsomar

**Strengths:** Expert [+4] Rabble-rouser, Good [+2] Knows everyone, Good [+2] Theology, Good [+2] Sling

**Weakness:** Poor [-2] Fanatic

**Fortune points:** 2

The Moonshadows are a new organisation, and they are led by a council rather than a single leader, but Yusef-Imad is very much their voice. He is the main evangelist in in the Fragrant Market, and where there is a demonstration or action of some kind, Yusef will probably be leading it. He is young, energetic, charismatic and filled with the silver light of Selné. He has suffered too long under the oppression of Karak-Azim and he sees that this is the greatest chance that the faithful of Selné will ever have. Yusef is not afraid to die in pursuit of his cause.

### What does Yusef-Imad want?

The main goal of Yusef is the main goal of the Moonshadows: to oust the barbarian infidels and to establish a system of government based on the priesthood of Selné. He believes that they are close to getting enough of Gorran Charn united behind them to successfully overthrow the queen, but based on the events in the opening scene, he is wary of a direct assault. As with the other factions, he is looking for an opportunity or a moment of weakness



that he can exploit. He has spies among the servants at the palace who can let him know if such an opportunity comes up.

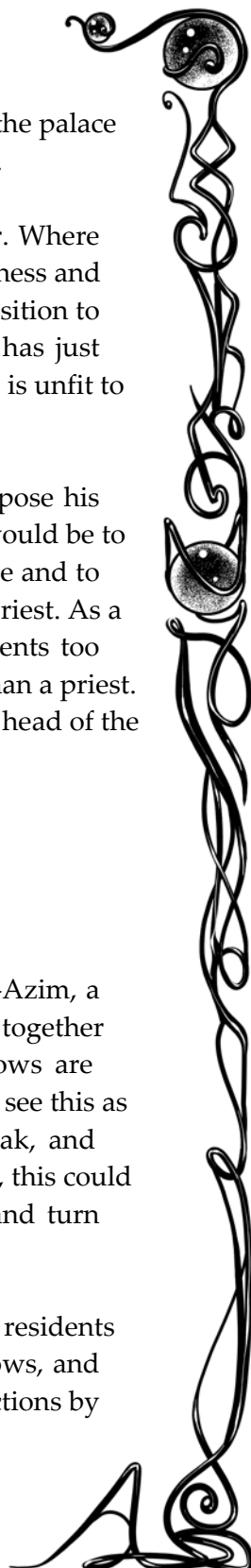
One of the main obstacles that Yusef faces is his father. Where Imad sees the wisdom of compromise, Yusef sees weakness and betrayal. He hates his father for never rising up in opposition to Karak-Azim, and Imad's alliance with the barbarians has just confirmed his view that his father has no principles and is unfit to call himself the high priest of Selné.

The simplest solution for Yusef would be to kill or depose his father, but he sees those as last resorts; his first choice would be to convince Imad of the wisdom of the Moonshadow cause and to join them, possibly even retaining his position as high priest. As a fanatic, though, Yusef will be suspicious if Imad consents too easily, as he knows that his father is a politician more than a priest. He will want to see some proof of devotion, such as the head of the barbarian queen.

## *The Moonshadows*

In the six weeks since the barbarians overthrew Karak-Azim, a group calling themselves the Moonshadows has drawn together around political and religious ideals. The Moonshadows are largely young men, fanatical in their faith in Selné, who see this as a time of trials and opportunity. The infidels are weak, and without the fear of Karak-Azim to hold back the people, this could be the chance for the Moonshadows to take control and turn Gorran Charn into a theocracy.

At the start of the scenario, there are approximately 250 residents of Gorran Charn who consider themselves Moonshadows, and many more who are sympathetic towards them. Any actions by





the new rulers leading to the deaths or suffering of the townsfolk will almost certainly strengthen the Moonshadows.

While the Moonshadows are not well-armed, they make up for this in fanaticism and the willingness to die for their cause. They fight with swords and daggers, where available, but many use improvised weapons. Treat any group of Moonshadows as minions, with the Quality Good [+2] Fanatic.

## *The Palace servants*

There are over 100 servants in the palace, and they handle all the day-to-day activities of caring for the building and its residents. Most of the servants are slaves, and many have known no other life, but they are still growing restless at the treatment they are getting from the naked-faced barbarians. While Karak-Azim was cruel and given to unnatural lusts, the servants knew what to expect from him. The new residents – especially the soldiers – are drunken louts who paw at serving girls and start fights over imagined slights. It will not take much for someone to turn the servants against their new masters.

Some of the servants spy for Ma'mun-Rakim or for the Moonshadows, and some are still quietly confident that Karak-Azim has survived death and will return to lead them again. If anyone thinks to spy on the servants in turn, some of these loyalties are bound to be brought to light.





## *Locations*

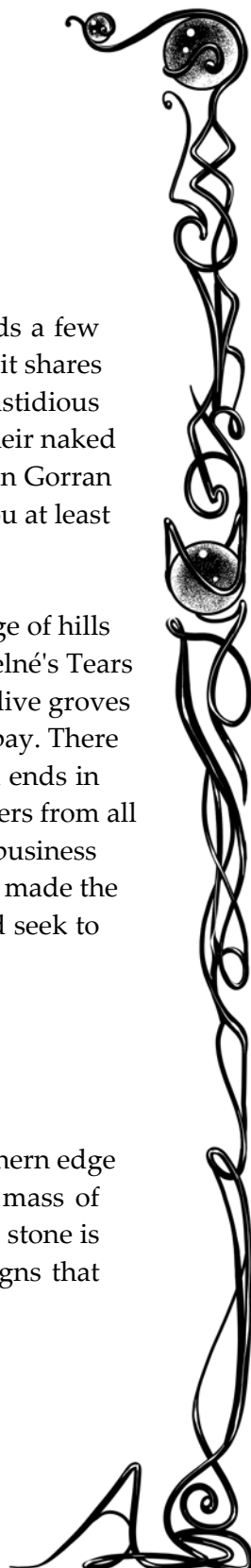
### **Gorran Charn**

The city-state is home to some 10,000 people and stands a few days' travel down the coast from Nilsomar, with which it shares much of the same culture. Its people are even more fastidious about wearing masks, believing it distasteful to show their naked faces in public or the presence of strangers. If someone in Gorran Charn shows you their face, you know they consider you at least an intimate friend.

The city stands on the Bay of Charn, at the foot of a range of hills known as the Bones of the Moon. The river known as Selné's Tears runs down from the hills, watering the vineyards and olive groves that lie below, and then through the town and into the bay. There is a vibrant port, and the main trade route of the south ends in Gorran Charn. The streets and markets bustle with traders from all over the continent, but the locals welcome them as business partners, not friends. Years of fear and oppression have made the people of Gorran Charn suspicious of those who would seek to rule them.

### **The Silver Palace**

Carved into the rock face of the cliffs that form the southern edge of Gorran Charn, the Silver Palace presents a chaotic mass of towers, spires and balconies to the outside. Much of the stone is white and polished, and the intricate geometrical designs that adorn the features are coated in silver and gold leaf.





The main entrance into the palace is through a great stone courtyard, surrounded by natural stone walls. The ground is covered in marble flagstones. There is an iron portcullis which can be dropped at short notice.

Once you get past the edifice of the palace, it is a warren of tunnels, with many dungeons and oubliettes hidden in its depths. Some tunnels extend out under the city, with many secret entrances hidden throughout, and no one person knows their full extent.

## The Throne Room

The throne room is located in a large natural chamber, about fifty yards into the network of tunnels from the main entrance. The centrepiece of the chamber is a limestone throne carved out of a massive stalagmite. The acoustics of the chamber are such that anyone seated on the throne can be heard clearly throughout. Like the rest of the palace, the chamber is lit by blazing torches.

## Personal chambers

The palace holds a great range of living quarters throughout its miles of subterranean tunnels. Some, like the royal chambers, are grand suites of rooms, with silks, pillows and beds as luxurious as any found in the land. Most of the rooms are a bit more crude – either adapted from natural





chambers or carved into the rock – and the worst are little better than the cells in the dungeons below. There is always dampness in the air and the sound of dripping water is never far away.

## The Catacombs

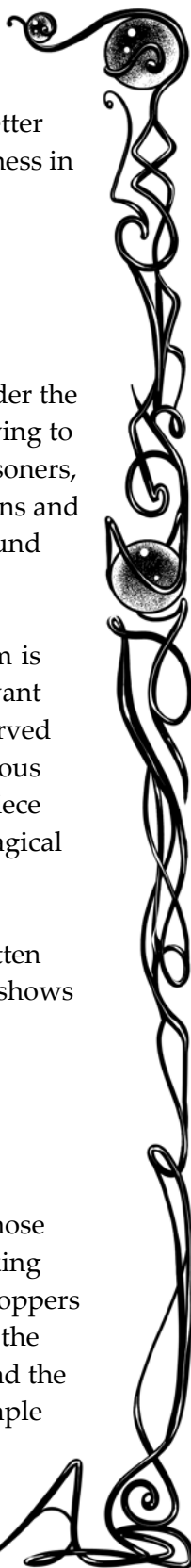
The tunnels and caves spread out in a winding labyrinth under the palace itself, and a careless explorer may get lost for days trying to uncover their secrets. Karak-Azim used these as cells for prisoners, torture chambers, mausoleums and hidden temples to demons and dark gods. Anyone who explores them will find horrors around every corner.

One of the old temples is still used by whoever Karak-Azim is possessing. There is fresh blood and the remains of a servant scattered over a crude stone altar. Ruby-eyed demons are carved on the walls and the air still holds the stench of some hideous incense. Someone with knowledge of the dark arts may piece together that a sorcerer has been using this to try to build magical power, but their goal is uncertain.

Lutfi-Karak's hiding place is in one of the cells in a forgotten prison tunnel. The door is kept locked from the outside and shows signs of recent use.

## The Fragrant Market

The main market square brings together local traders with those from afar, and the air is rich with the smells of spices, cooking meat and live animals. The market is always packed with shoppers during daylight hours. There is a constant cacophony of the shouting voices of vendors, the conversations of shoppers and the music of various street performers. The stalls range from simple





tables to elaborate silken marquees, all made up of rich, chaotic colours.

There is a large wooden podium on the edge of the market, which is used for the regular slave auctions. Since the fall of Karak-Azim, it has come to be used unofficially between auctions by various speakers who speak about politics and religion, or even just out of the simple pleasure of being able to make their voice heard without fear of reprisal. In recent weeks, the Moonshadows have made up most of the speakers, and Yusef-Imad is currently the most popular speaker in the market.

## **The True Temple of Selné**

The Moonshadows meet in Rais-Badr's spice warehouse, just down the main thoroughfare from the Fragrant Market. Rais-Badr has been converted to the cause, and as the meetings have become larger and more frequent, he has largely abandoned his business. There are still sacks and crates of spices shoved against the walls of the warehouse, filling the air with the scent. A wooden podium has been built at the far end of the warehouse, where speeches are given to the faithful.

The warehouse office is now the meeting place for the leadership of the Moonshadows. When Yusef-Imad is not preaching in the Fragrant Market or giving speeches in the main hall, he can usually be found here, planning for the liberation of Gorran Charn.

## **Ma'mun-Rakin's villa**

Much of the land in the foothills of the Bones of the Moon is given over to vineyards and olive groves. The wealthier merchants have villas out here, and Ma'mun-Rakin's is the grandest of them all. It



is surrounded by high stone walls almost as sturdy as those of the Silver Palace, and inside them lie the main villa, a number of outbuildings for guests and storage, and the barracks of his personal guard. The walls can serve as battlements if anyone should attack the villa.



The gardens within the wall are lush and well-maintained, but they have become home to a number of townsfolk who have erected tents to be near the reborn Karak-Azim. At the start of the game

there are only ten such tents, but this increases by at least a half-dozen a day as things progress. These people are fanatics and will die to protect their lord. Treat them as minions, with the quality Good [+2] Fanatic. If anyone asks Ma'mun-Rakin who these people are, he explains them as needy individuals who have been dispossessed by the upheavals in Gorran Charn, and to whom he is offering shelter and charity.

## *How events unfold*

### **The opening scene**

The Moonshadows have managed to gather enough locals to stage a large protest outside the Silver Palace. They have been chanting, waving improvised weapons and demanding that the barbarians leave Gorran Charn immediately. As the game opens, they have just breached the gates. A panicked guardsman runs through to



the throne room, where the PCs are all gathered, to inform the queen.

Mathias is in charge of the guards on the walls and in the courtyard. Under the influence of Karak-Azim, he is preparing to lead the guard on a bloody strike against the mob. The locals may have superior numbers, but the guard are heavily-armed and experienced cavalymen, and will easily win. Karak-Azim knows that an act of disproportionate violence will strengthen the will of the people against the barbarians, making it easier for him to seize control once he has recovered all his powers.

Any player characters heading to the courtyard will arrive just as Mathias gives the order to charge. Any attempt to stop this becoming a massacre will be a complicated situation.

If there is large-scale civilian death, the survivors will try to flee. The story of the slaughter will swell the ranks of the Moonshadows overnight. Even if death is averted, the group will still attempt to capitalise on Mathias's attempt to kill them.

Once the situation has been resolved one way or another, Mathias claims to have no memory of his actions. He is frightened and confused, and looks to Cassilda for protection from any consequences. The player characters will have to decide what to do with him.

## Keeping things moving

The opening scene should present the player characters with a number of problems to tackle, such as what happened to Mathias and who is leading the resistance against them. These, combined with the goals of each character and the change in the status quo if Mathias is demoted, arrested or executed, should mean that the



players all have things they want to do as a result. If the pace slows down, there are a few things you can use to keep things moving.

First, look at the NPCs and what each one wants. Each one of these wants will either put them in conflict with one or more player characters or create difficult situations. Any time an opportunity presents itself for one of the NPCs to pursue a goal, use it and make trouble for the player characters. Some examples follow.

## *Things that can happen*

### **The Guard looks to Terom for leadership**

If Mathias is killed, imprisoned or stripped of rank, the guard will want someone to lead them through these dangerous times. Even if none of these things happen, Mathias has still proved himself to be dangerous and probably insane. In the eyes of the guard, Terom is the obvious choice, as he has led them before. The problem is his history with Cassilda.

Various members of the guard will start cajoling Terom to convince Cassilda to appoint him captain again. Most of this is good-humoured, but there is an undercurrent of exasperation if Terom seems uncertain. Some of the more vocal guardsmen will start mocking his manhood, asking Terom if it was his lack of balls that lost him his place in Cassilda's bed, or is she stripped him of those when she stripped him of his rank.

Of course, if Mathias is still around, he is unlikely to take such a challenge calmly and will assume that Terom is orchestrating it somehow. His first reaction will be to complain to Cassilda that Terom is undermining his authority and ask for her permission to



deal with him. If that fails, he will try to arrange for Terom to be killed, supposedly by insurgents, while on patrol.

## **Yusef confronts his father**

It is likely that Yusef will be arrested and brought to the palace at some stage. His role in the leadership of the Moonshadows is not a secret, and he is willing to present himself as a martyr to protect the others. He will use this opportunity to call for an audience with his father and try to convince him to help depose the barbarians.

If Yusef is not arrested, he will still want to talk to his father. He will use one of the Moonshadow sympathisers amongst the servants at the palace to get a message to Imad to meet him at Rais-Badr's spice warehouse. His plan is to publicly debate his father about politics and theology on the stage at the new temple and try to shame Imad into acknowledging the true path. The crowd will be made up of Moonshadows and their supporters and will need a lot of convincing to change their loyalties. This could be a conflict situation if Imad's player wants to push things.

## **Lutfi feasts**

Some of Morrel's spies have taken it upon themselves to find out the various secrets that the Silver Palace holds in the hope of impressing their leader. One of them, a scrawny young man named Johannes, has managed to uncover Lutfi's hiding place.

When Asima visits her brother, she will discover that the lock on his cell has been forced and the door is slightly open. The cell is still dark, apart from the flickering blue light of Lutfi's eyes, but there are wet tearing noises coming from within. Light will reveal that the floor is covered in blood, and the dismembered,





eviscerated remains of Johannes are scattered around. Enough of the face and clothing remain to identify him as one of Morrel's minions. Lutfi is busy chewing on one of the spy's hands, his expression wild and feral.

When interrupted, Lutfi will come back to himself and be horrified at what he has done. He explains that the man broke in and tried to attack him, and that he was only acting in self-defence. More than anything here, he will want Asima to convince him that everything will be all right; that she can save him from this hunger, she can cover up the murder and that she can forgive him for this unspeakable act. Lutfi seems like little more than a child when asking for this, but he is still covered in the blood of his victim.

It won't take long before one of Morrel's men reports Johannes's disappearance to their leader.

## The fake fortune-teller

As mentioned in the section on Ma'mun-Rakin, he has been using the powers of Karak-Azim's mask to try to find secrets he can use against his enemies. He has hired Majidah-Kedar, a local woman with reputed powers of divination, to seek an audience with Queen Cassilda and to use it to poison her relationship with Morrel. Ideally Morrel and Terom should be present for this scene, as should Mathias if he is still alive and at liberty.

Mother Majidah, as she is known, is a loud, theatrical woman in her late forties, who wears garish, clashing silks and a mask painted in a riot of colour. Majidah turns up at the palace without prior arrangement and demands to see the queen, saying that she has seen some dark omens and needs to warn Cassilda of an impending threat to her life.





If Cassilda agrees to see her, Majidah launches into a dramatic story of how she was burning sacred herbs and divining in the smoke when she saw the bloody murder of the new queen. The details were vague, but she has spoken to spirits and they have told her more. There is a viper in her nest – a supposed ally who has been working against her for years – and this man is destined to assassinate her. The assassin has already worked to bring her pain by destroying her relationship with her one true love by drugging him and leaving him in their bed along with a whore so that they would be caught together.

Majidah tells Cassilda that the spirits have shown her the face of her betrayer, and either points out Morrel if he is present, or describes him perfectly if he is not. She makes a point of defending Terom's innocence and laments the great wrongs done to him.

Assuming this leads to an argument, Majidah will attempt to slip away in the confusion, otherwise she will throw herself at Cassilda's mercy and ask to be protected from the assassin.

It is possible that someone will attempt to find out if Majidah has been put up to this. She will deny it strenuously, but if threatened with violence or imprisonment, will confess the truth if someone wins a simple contest against Expert [+4].

## **Rumours arise of Karak-Azim's resurrection**

While Ma'mun-Rakin has built up a good following among the town merchants under the guise of Karak-Azim, he has been cautious about appearing in public, partly because he fears reprisals from the barbarians, but mostly because he fears the Moonshadows. He does, however, openly visit the homes of the wealthy and powerful in order to gain their loyalty.



A young woman named Johara-Hud, the maidservant of Nida-Ammar, a rich local dowager, has seen Karak-Azim at her mistress's villa and is terrified that the sorcerer-king has returned from the dead. She has sneaked away from the villa and come to the palace to tell someone in authority. She knows nothing more than what she has seen, but is willing to betray her mistress and take people to the villa to question or arrest her.

Nida-Ammar is a proud, headstrong old woman with a strong dislike of anyone who is not a native of Gorran Charn. She also scorns those who would collaborate with foreigners. If questioned, she confirms that she has spoken to Karak-Azim, and that he is gathering his forces to take back that which is rightfully his. She is unaware that she has not been speaking to the real Karak-Azim, and knows nothing of where to find him. Her faith in her returned master is strong, though, and she will rant and rage against all those who would oppose him.

## **Karak-Azim starts killing the Guard**

Once it seems like the barbarians are weak or distracted – chasing after the fake Karak-Azim, for example – Karak-Azim decides to start weakening their hold on the palace. Using whichever vessel he has under his control, he will capture a servant or a member of the guard and take them into his hidden temple in the catacombs and sacrifice them. Using this power, he creates a sorcerous cloud from the damp vapours in the palace. This cloud is dense and dark, and touches on demonic realms.

Anyone within the cloud will be attacked by the claws and teeth of the demons imprisoned within. Someone killed by the cloud looks like little more than chopped meat and crushed bone. If a player character is caught within it, fleeing it is a complicated situation. It can also be fought as a conflict situation.





Cloud Qualities: Expert [+4] Dense and dark, Good [+2] Cold as the grave, Expert [+4] Teeth and claws of a thousand demons, Good [+2] Charged with sorcerous power, Poor [-2] Not of this earth.

Karak-Azim guides the cloud throughout the corridors, picking off lone guards, and then eventually into the main barracks, where the off-duty guards are sleeping. If no one is able to stop this, all but fifty of the guard will be slaughtered before the cloud dissipates.

### **Karak-Azim makes an overture to Asima**

Once Cassilda's forces are looking weak, Karak-Azim will decide that it is time to reveal himself to his daughter. He will possess one of her handmaidens and start making unexpected sexual overtures to Asima. As soon as Asima reacts in any way, the girl breaks into Karak-Azim's booming laughter and says, in his voice, "Did you not recognise my touch, daughter of mine?"

If he gets a chance to say more, Karak-Azim will tell Asima that he has been watching her since his death, and that he underestimated her when he was alive. She has obviously inherited his sorcerous ability, as shown by her attempt to resurrect Lutfi, and she is his true heir. Once they drive the barbarians out and retake Gorran Charn, Asima is welcome to serve alongside him as his wife and queen.

Karak-Azim will not take rejection well. If Asima does spurn him, he will decide that she would make as good a vessel as any, as she is of his blood and a gifted sorcerer, and will attempt to take her body and soul for himself.



## One of the factions attempts to take the Palace

With the royal court fighting a war on three fronts, it is almost inevitable that at some stage, after they have lost much of their strength, they will be ignoring one of the factions that oppose them. Given that the Moonshadows and Ma'mun-Rakin have spies within the palace, they will be alerted if an opportunity to take control presents itself.

Should the player characters decide to raid Ma'mun-Rakin's villa, for example, they could return to find that the palace is sealed tight and under the control of the Moonshadows. They would then be faced with the possibility of having to fight to take it back, or find some other way of undermining the usurpers.

And, of course, Karak-Azim is waiting to possess whoever takes control, or to use his vessel of Mathias, Asima or Lutfi to convince the surviving servants and guards to swear loyalty to him.

## *Wrapping things up*

There is no one right way to end this. Everything will depend on the choices that the players make.

It is likely that the PCs will attempt to take on either Ma'mun-Rakin or the Moonshadows in battle, leading the guard against them. If this happens, there will be more than enough minions in either faction to keep the guards busy while the player characters deal with the leaders in a conflict situation. Don't be afraid to back the leaders up with minions if they are greatly outnumbered.

Any attempt to storm Ma'mun-Rakin's villa will also be met with a sorcerous defence. Ma'mun will sacrifice one of his followers and





summon a swarm of locusts, maddened by sorcery, and use them to try to devour the attackers.

Swarm Qualities: Expert [+4] Devouring, Expert [+4] Flying, Good [+2] Innumerable insects, Good [+2] Maddened by sorcery, Poor [-2] Vulnerable to fire.

Any fight against the Moonshadows will be more straightforward, but will be complicated by the fact that the people of Gorran Charn will gather to watch. If the Moonshadows are defeated violently, their dead will become martyrs and more of the townsfolk will be moved by their cause. The only possibility for control after that will be to become as tyrannical as Karak-Azim was.

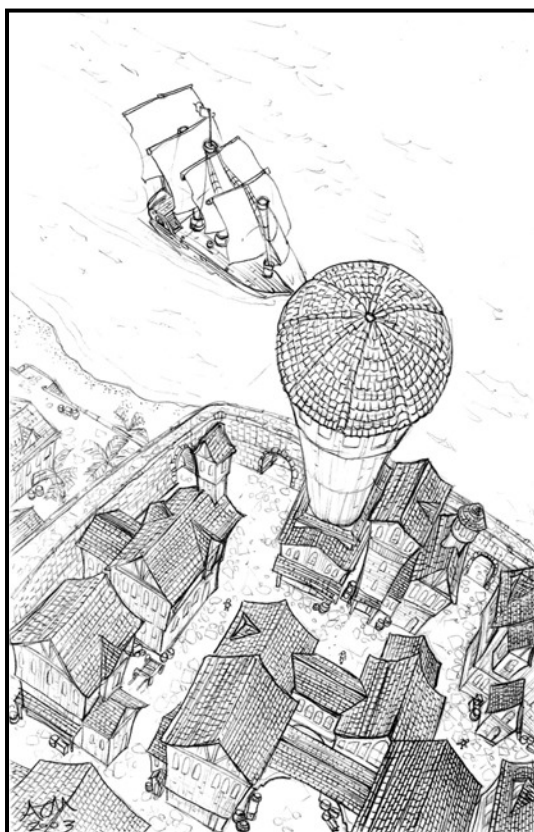
If the members of the court manage to defeat the Moonshadows without making martyrs of them, unmask the fake Karak-Azim and put the real Karak-Azim back in his grave, then there is the chance that they can rule over Gorran Charn peacefully and indefinitely.

Of course, the barbarians may just decide that trying to rule Gorran Charn is too dangerous and difficult, and abandon the town. This is probably the best possible outcome for them.

## *Credits*

Thanks to Louisa McGuinness, Seana McGuinness, Robin Poole and Matt Sanderson for playing the original version of this and helping to shape it.

# THE TAMING OF KHEND





# THE TAMING OF KHEHD

by Storn Cook

*Storn is a talented artist whose work has appeared in many roleplaying games – including the covers of Jaws of the Six Serpents and this book! He's also run a Jaws campaign for his group, altering and expanding the setting to suit his purposes. This is an outline of that setting with plenty of hooks for adventuring.*

## Introduction

In the world of Syazil, the player characters are hired to infiltrate the byzantine politics of the city of Khend to pave the way for a “peacekeeping” Legion to restore order. Khend is an important port town on the river Parrot Run, and it is the gateway to the bay known as “the Maw”.

The default assumption is that the player characters are members of the Grey Legion, a major mercenary company. But any outside force interested in bringing order to Khend could be used. Player characters could run the gamut of personalities, but certainly streetwise, stealthy, politically-savvy characters will be more plugged in.

Taming of Khend is falling back on the “town tamer” trope of many a western with a sprinkling of noir. *Red Harvest*, *Yojimbo* and *Fistful of Dollars* certainly come to mind. Throw in a heap of sword and sorcery flavour and you've got the thrust of this adventure environment.







## The world of Syazil

This section is very heavily based on two campaigns I've run set in a variant of the Six Serpents world called Syazil. The first campaign was "The Grey Legion" and concerned the "town taming" of Khend. The second was more concerned with matters around Ahaan and the crumbling empire in "Swords of a Dying Empire".

One of the things I did was expand the world drastically, wanting a more dynamic map. The geopolitics of where Khend lies is important to the character of the city and the concept of the adventures to come. If one wanted to keep the map on page 74 of *Jaws*, I would suggest placing Khend and the Parrot Run river east of Narrowhome, with the river running into the Sea of the Moon.

You'll see from the map that the geography is quite different from that in *Jaws*, though many of the place names appear. We're focusing on the west: above the jungles of Jasuur lies the bay called The Maw with its many islands, and Khend sits just to the north.

Jasuur is home to the Snake People, an ancient reptilian race. A long and bloody civil war between two factions has just concluded. This conflict drew in mercenary company the Grey Legion, and it found itself on the losing side.

## The Grey Legion

Mercenaries do not come any better than the Legion. It is probably the most sophisticated armed force in the known world. It has combat engineers, scouts, cavalry, archers, heavy and light



## Grey Legion toast

Here's to the Legion  
May it live long!  
Here's to the Sergeants  
Those who make us strong.  
Here's to the Officers,  
Who lead us in the field.  
Here's to the legionnaires,  
The ones who never yield!  
Here's to our clients,  
May we always meet their  
needs.  
And here's to the Grey, my  
lads,  
The colour that never bleeds!

*created by Pete Cornell*

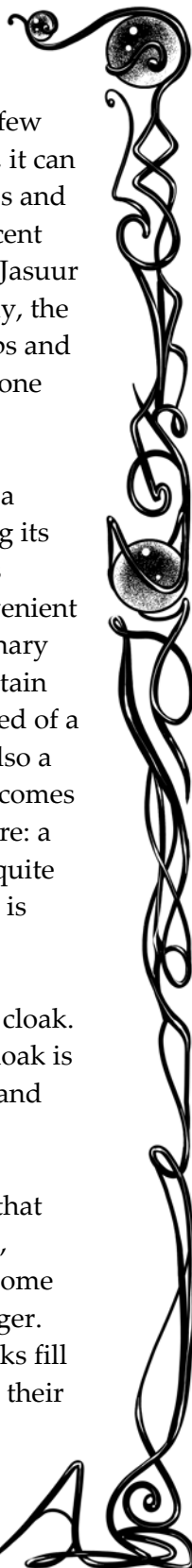
infantry, as well as a few Charmers. Historically, it can handle a variety of roles and variety of jobs. This recent fiasco in the Jungles of Jasuur is an aberration. Usually, the Legion has multiple jobs and contracts going at any one time.

The Grey Legion has a reputation of honouring its contracts; none of this switching sides at convenient times like lesser mercenary outfits. So there is a certain code of conduct expected of a Legionnaire. There is also a certain reputation that comes with being a Legionnaire: a reputation that can be quite

handy when trying to impress or intimidate. The Legion is renowned as being the Special Forces of its day.

The usual Grey Legion kit includes the famous hooded grey cloak. This is actually off-white when given to a new recruit. The cloak is not washed unless it stinks. Eventually, the stains of travel and battle set in and are badges of honour.

The rest of the kit really depends on what the specialty of that Legionnaire is. Infantry tend to have a spear, shortsword, whatever armour they can afford or scrounge, large shield, some kind of bow or javelin and, lastly, a nasty thick fighting dagger. Bedroll, rations, cooking gear, pouches, satchels and rucksacks fill out the rest. Legionnaires are special forces and tend to have their gear customised for themselves.





## Suggested Legionnaire Qualities

When I ran this game, I gave an additional Good [+2] Quality "Legionnaire role" for free. Here are some suggestions: Legion Scout, Legion Officer, Legion Heavy Infantry, Legion Sapper, Legion Surgeon, Legion Archer, Legion Cavalry, Legion Quartermaster, Legion Cook. I also gave one Prop at Good [+2].

Yes, this means your Legionnaires will be a bit more bad-ass than starting Jaws characters. Kind of the point.

## Sample Legionnaires

These are the player characters from my campaign.

### Cyrus, Devilfolk of Ahaan

Good [+2] Grey Legion forward operative

Good [+2] Dark Urge

Good [+2] Searching for an Equal (might be a foe, might be a love interest)

Good [+2] Empathy

Good [+2] Multilingual

Good [+2] Social Chameleon

Good [+2] Ridiculously Fit

Good [+2] Professional Contacts [Good +2]

Weakness: Poor [-2] Addicted to Purple Lotus

Prop: Good [+2] "Go Bag"

### Lt. Freeman Templer, son of Sartain

Good [+2] Grey Legion Light Cavalry

Good [+2] City Boy

Good [+2] Searching for Riches

Good [+2] Rapier Wit

Good [+2] Esoteric Swordplay

Good [+2] Second Storey Man  
Good [+2] Silver-Tongued  
Weakness: Poor [-2] Vain  
Prop: Good [+2] Fast Horse

### **Sgt. Benedek, a Witchfolk of Belimauro**

Good [+2] Sarge  
Good [+2] Perceptive  
Good [+2] Curiosity  
Good [+2] Divination  
Good [+2] Knife fighting  
Good [+2] Forage  
Good [+2] Ambush wise  
Good [+2] History  
Weakness: Poor [-2] Theft  
Prop: Good [+2] Witch knife "Lung Poke"

## *Snake Peoples of Jasuur*

Understanding the Snake Peoples of Jasuur will colour what your Legionnaires went through in the bloody civil war. A player might even want to play one: a Shan who has been adopted or become a full-fledged mercenary in the Grey Legion, or a Shannu who is a traitor to his people, retreating north with his new friends. A Snake Person outside the Jungles of Jasuur is going to seem very exotic.

When the land was warmer in millennia past, the Snake Peoples inhabited most of the southern lands. But as the ice came from the north and the land cooled and humans followed the ice, the Snake Peoples were pushed back. Now the greatest concentration is in the large jungle of Jasuur.



The Snake People call themselves the Shan and the Shannu. The Shan are generally bluish in tint and the Shannu are brownish in tint. They are lithe and quick, and have the ability to see the world through their sense of taste/smell – the flickering tongue is a sure give-away. Their native language even has a component of taste/smell and they claim they can “taste” the words of humans. They are born in clutches of about 10-15, and have very close connections with their egg sisters and brothers.

Snake People are expert architects and engineers. The Jasuur jungle has waterways, aqueducts and engineering projects that stagger the mind. The buildings are long and sinewy, like themselves... but pleasing to the human eye. Their demeanour is proud, but not arrogant: quiet pride in the race's accomplishments and age, but not lording it over others. They do suffer cold greatly, and prefer warmth and wet environs.

There is civil war. Outsiders are not quite sure of the start, but West (the Shannu) has been fighting East (the Shan) for about 150 years. It is a vicious war and seems at odds with the Snake Peoples' usual attitudes. Some say that the Shannu have returned to Sorcery, whereas the Shan believe that only Charms are safe and worthwhile. The jungle of Jasuur is the home of the Purple Lotus, a flower that can be made into a drug highly coveted by the human peoples. These outside influences have contributed to the political unrest. For the Snake Peoples, Purple Lotus is simply a pleasant sleep aid.





## Snake People characters

**Automatic Strengths:** all Snakes must take Good [+2] Amphibious, Good [+2] Keen Senses

**Strengths:** Quick as a snake, Enhanced sense of smell and taste, Exotic spear fighting style, Architecture, Engineering, Carpentry, Jungle survival.

**Weaknesses:** must take Poor [-2] Coldblooded, plus 1 other: Outsider, Civilised, Alien or player's choice.

**Other:** Sorcery is absolutely available, but only to the Shannu (the Western snakes). Charms are possible, and are available to both Shannu and Shan. Wood, Water, Earth Urges.

**Names:** Tesshamon, Shallis, Shonconna, Surgassa... lots of s's and sh's. A clutch are all given the same name, and while they may look very different, it is the scent signatures that set them apart among themselves.

*Coldblooded:* this can be a more severe weakness than the standard. In addition to the -2 due to temperature, Qualities are reduced to reflect sluggishness: below 50F/10C reduce 1 Quality by 1 Rank; below 35F/2C reduce 3 Qualities by 1 Rank. The additional automatic Strengths make up for this.

**GM note.** I wanted to twist the cliché just a bit on the Snake Peoples in sword and sorcery as villains and bad guys. I wanted them as a stand-in for, of all things, the Vietnam conflict, so my PC mercenaries are in full retreat from their contract as the East collapses (instead of the South) and as if it were the last helicopter leaving in 1975.





## The Set-up

The Grey Legion has suffered one of its greatest defeats in recent memory. Having accepted a five-year contract with the Shan, the Eastern Snake People, it has gone all to ruin. The Shan have been defeated in a protracted civil war by their cousins, the Shannu. The Legion hasn't been paid in full, and a lot of its blood fertilises the jungles of Jasuur.

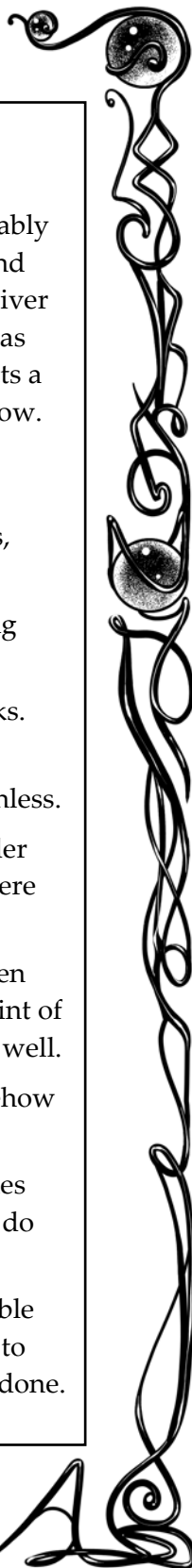
Now in retreat from Jasuur, the Grey Legion has decided to pull its remnants to Sartain to regroup. But in the meantime, a new job and source of funds has come to light.

Colonel Ostacon Pel calls the player characters into his tent. There is a city called Khend. It is a very rough, but profitable, port city, strategically located at the end of a large river that comes out of the inland sea and into the bay known as The Maw. Khend is in the midst of a huge conflict between several criminal outfits. There is no law. Nearby neighbours have got together and hired the Grey Legion to go and "tame the town".

Khend can expect a force of some 700 well-trained men and women in a year's time. While preparations are made it's the characters' job to gather intelligence on the situation in the city and, where possible, to lay the groundwork for a successful operation.

See the box on the next page for a briefing on major factions in the city. You can give copies of this to the players.





## Legion briefing: the city of Khend

We have precious little intelligence. The situation has probably changed anyway. There are three major criminal houses and about seven gangs vying for control of the docks and rich river lands of upriver Varlis. From missives and rumours, it has become all-out war with blood in the streets. No-one expects a quick fix, but the process of settling this down must start now.

**House of Kerlis.** Substantial plantation holdings upriver.

**House of Bennon.** Control prostitution and the markets, including the slave market.

**House of Mondar.** Newcomers from Blood Rock, getting outside money and support.

**Flying Axe gang.** Probably the most in control of the docks. Recently switched from Kerlis to Mondar.

**Ebony Blades gang.** Known for painting blades black. Ruthless.

**Temple of the Purifying Scar.** Quasi-religious military order preaching life and love through beating your enemies. Revere scars and risk-taking.

**Crimson Shadows gang.** Most thief-like gang. Fence stolen goods, smuggle people, drugs and forbidden magics. A point of honour to avoid violence; but deal with it if pressed. Quite well.

**Holy Order of Krang.** Krang is some local demi-god, somehow connected to the Parrot Run river.

**Gallowbeater gang.** Made up of ex-soldiers and mercenaries who have nothing better to do. Run protection rackets and do enforcing for various patrons.

**Masks of the Moons.** Not a street-level gang, but lesser noble and merchant families with an almost cult-like allegiance to each other. Hold decadent masked balls where business is done.





## Why choose this set-up?

I don't pretend that this set-up is going to work for every table. But it has a couple of things going for it. By being a Grey Legionnaire, there is some structure and a sense of belonging, and a bit of history and tradition too. Also, with the Legion desperate for funds, time and recruits, the player characters are cut loose and are on their own. They will be outside of normal chain of command and will have a lot of autonomy. It's not a traditional military campaign and allows for all kinds of "solutions" to what Khend presents.

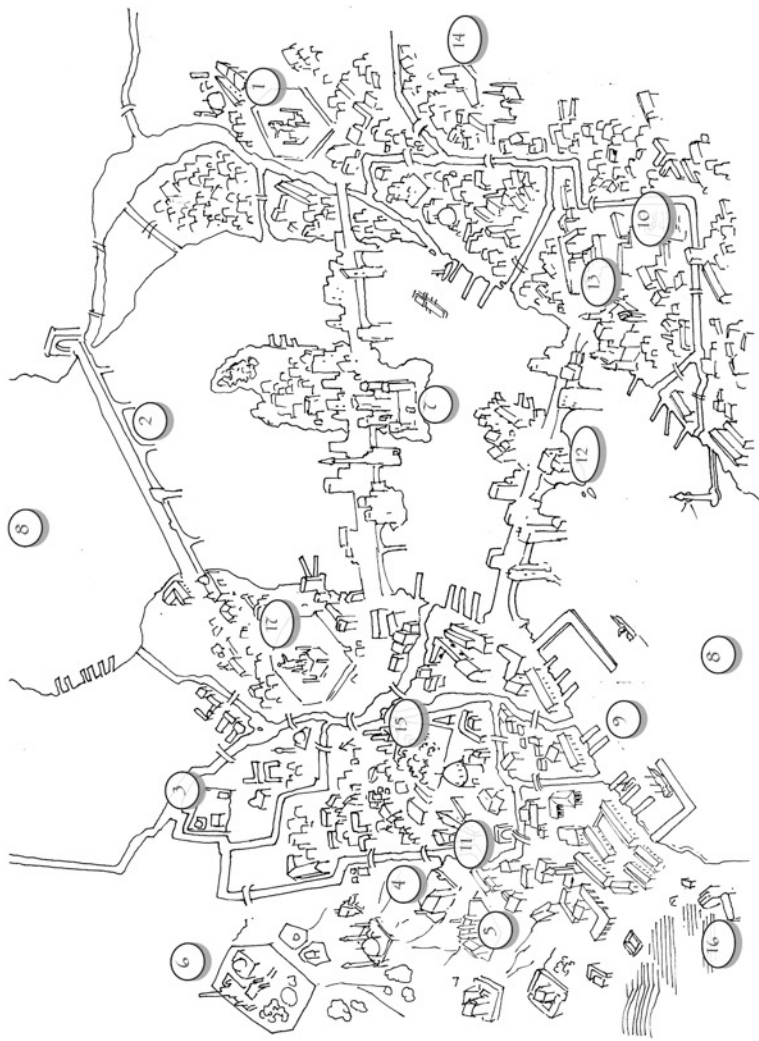
The year's time will give the player characters plenty of time to enmesh themselves into all kinds of trouble. Then the campaign can end, or the table can switch focus elsewhere. Having a finite time-frame also gives structure and sense of belonging.

## *Arriving in Khend*

Khend is a river town, with vaguely Moorish, Mediterranean architecture elements. Man-made canals criss-cross the city, dividing it up into multiple islands. Three major bridges, some having businesses and domiciles, span the Parrot Run river. Punts and river boats dominate the docks and some of the canals. Khend is not walled, although ancient remnants of past defences peek through here and there in alleyways of the older parts.

One of the first things that should concern the PCs is the choice of going in as Grey Legion or incognito. Going in as a Grey Legionnaire should carry weight. Intimidation and cashing in on the Grey Legion reputation are perfectly viable tacks to take in Khend's streets. Going incognito has its own value, not letting others know the Legion agenda.

# The City of Khend



1. Temple of Khend
2. Antontkin Bridge
3. House Kerlis city dwelling
4. House Bennon compound
5. House Mondar compound
6. Temple of the Purifying Scar
7. Holy Order of Krang / Krang Bridge
8. Parrot Run river
9. Primary docks and warehouses  
(Flying dice territory)
10. East Market
11. West Market
12. Antreus Bridge Slave Market
13. Temple of the Purifying Scar
14. Tower of Malbanic the Mad
15. Escallia Park
16. Almia Ranch
17. Court of Pleas



The town is abuzz with news and rumour. Any time spent in the trading places or the taverns or the docks will quickly garner the following information. Don't make the players struggle to get some of this under their belts. It is to demonstrate that Khend is fluid. And perhaps you want some of these news nuggets to actually be false or misleading. That is okay. You can call for social checks. The TN should be low; 7 or 9 should suffice. Failure might mean some kind of temporary "Quality" like "Obvious outsiders" or "Disliked by group X", but the information should be granted anyway. I really suggest trying to get as much information into the hands of the players as possible, so they can start to make choices.

The first major concern of the person in the street is that the current **drought** is the worst Khend has ever seen, and the Parrot Run river is the lowest. Sacrifices to the god Krang seem to do no good. House Kerlis rice fields are dry and rice is dying. Wheat and corn supplies are also hurting. Livestock cannot be watered. This hot spring has only added to the tension and animosity between the powers that be.

The **Crimson Shadow** gang has been all but wiped out by **House Mondar** and the **Flying Axes**. The docks are firmly in the control of those two parties. House Mondar is consolidating its power. It's rumoured to have monies and thugs given by outside sources. (Pick a nearby city or lord who is helping fund House Mondar.)

**House Kerlis** seems to be the most forward-thinking, but its people are hunkering down outside town in the plantations. People keep hoping they will galvanise and ride in and save the town. They are led by "Duke" Arlen Kerlis, a tough-minded but street code of honour type.

**House Bennon** has temporarily suspended trade of slaves until some kind of peace is restored. They recently lost an entire shipment to the Temple of the Purifying Scar, or so it is thought on the streets. An underground market of the Temple's slaves is



supposed to go to auction within the week. House Bennon is led by Damara Bennon. She came up through the ranks as a high-priced lady of the night. She is ruthless on the slave side of her business and quite magnanimous to her girls and the brothels under her control. They have regular check-ups from healers and get vacations and the like. Most of her secondary staff are prostitutes who have shown quick thinking and loyalty.

The **Ebony Blades** gang is stepping up robbing of outsiders, due to being squeezed themselves.

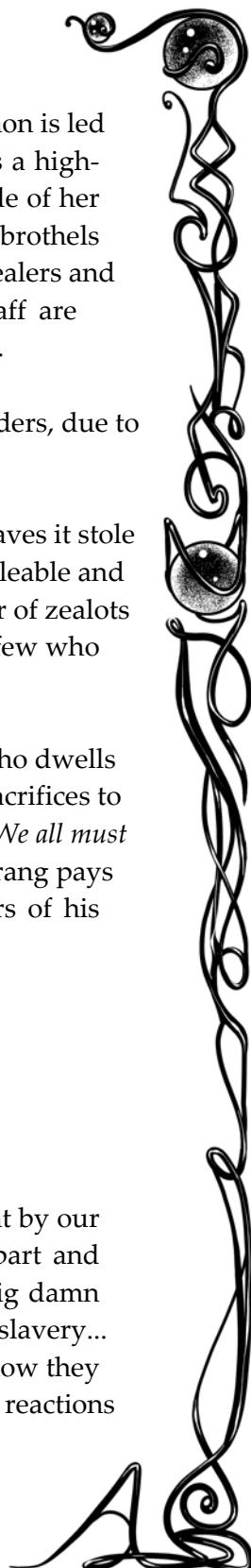
The **Temple of the Purifying Scar** is about to sell the slaves it stole from House Bennon. It's selected out those who are malleable and will make good warriors. The Temple is a military order of zealots believing heaven is only attainable for the select brave few who face mortal peril.

The **Holy Order of Krang** believes in the demon-god who dwells in the river, Krang. The Order has stepped up human sacrifices to the river. The priests are preaching the end times and "*We all must throw ourselves on the mercy of Krang.*" They insist that Krang pays more attention to the people who help line the coffers of his temple.

The **Masks of the Moon** have been quiet. Very quiet.

## The issue of slavery

Khend is a slave economy. While this is quite repugnant by our modern standards, most peoples of Khend find this part and parcel of their environment. However, your PCs are big damn heroes and if they want to rail against the institution of slavery... have at it! I suggest a discussion with your players on how they are going to react to slavery. It will help the GM to craft reactions and situations for the PCs.





## Secret agendas

Here are some suggestions for who is doing what and why.

### House Kerlis

Kerlis has some power, but much of it comes from outside the city. They control lands upriver and the drought is really hurting them. Arlen Kerlis is the one who has gathered his friends and family and bought the Grey Legion contract. This tidbit has been kept from the advance scouts (i.e. the PCs) for deniability's sake. Arlen secretly hopes that when the Legion arrives, he will have enough fighting forces to occupy Khend and cement himself as King.

One problem Arlen has is that he is not the most charismatic of men. He is thoughtfully cautious and patient. He is known to be fair and keep his word. But he does not stir the hearts of followers.

#### Arlen Kerlis – wannabe king

Expert [+4] Pragmatic

Expert [+4] Ambitious

Good [+2] Fair duellist

Good [+2] Keeps his word

Good [+2] Learned horticulturalist

Weakness: Poor [-2] Cold fish

Prop: Good [+2] Superb arming sword

Arlen's wife, Vessa Kerlis, is his right-hand woman. She is shrewd and beautiful and will charm, seduce and spy for her husband's bid for power. They love and respect each other, but are not in love. They both have lovers on the side and are quite open about it with each other. This has always been a political marriage. (In my



game, Lt. Freeman started a dalliance with Vessa and this became a springboard to cementing House Kerlis to the Legion.)

**Vessa Kerlis** – passionate supporter of Arlen Kerlis

Expert [+4] Educated

Good [+2] Shrewd

Expert [+4] Beautiful and Seductive

Good [+2] Worldly

Weakness: Poor [-2] Weakness for roguish men

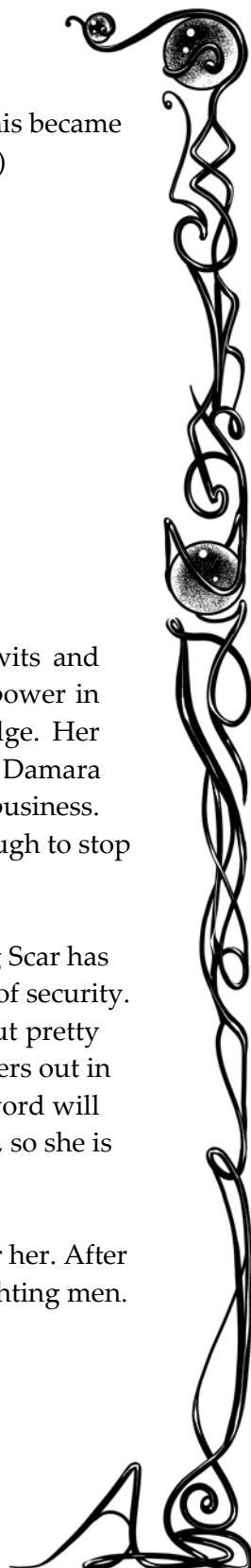
Prop: Good [+2] Custom, tantalising silks

## House Bennon

Damara Bennon came up from the streets with her wits and beauty. Now, in her fifties, she controls considerable power in Khend: either directly, or indirectly through knowledge. Her brothels and “night girls” are renowned and profitable. Damara wants the chaos and fighting in Khend to end. Bad for business. While she has some muscle hired, she doesn't have enough to stop the other factions from spilling blood in the streets.

Having her slaves stolen by the Temple of the Purifying Scar has closed the slave market for the moment due to the lack of security. She has no solid proof as yet that the Temple did it... but pretty much everyone agrees that they did. She does have feelers out in neighbouring cities' slave markets and eventually the word will get back to her. Her vengeance will not be a violent one, so she is looking for any scheme where she can get payback.

700 Legionnaires coming to Khend doesn't really bother her. After all, her businesses will do quite well with that many fighting men.





**Damara Bennon** – former concubine, now Dowager of the Eve

Good [+2] Sharp tongue

Expert [+4] Has ears and hands everywhere

Good [+2] Self-made woman

Good [+2] Dagger and poison-wise

Good [+2] Iron-Willed

Good [+2] Songlark

Weakness: Poor [-2] Soft heart for women in trouble

## House Mondar

Lango Mondar is the head of this very expansionist house. While the House of Mondar has been a multi-generational family of Khend, Lango is new to the Khend scene. He comes from a nearby city or realm (GM's pick). Outside interests are backing Lango's play for Khend and he is well funded, with fighting men aplenty. What he doesn't have is a very good understanding of Khend politics and the streets. But he has surrounded himself with a good supporting cast, including a sorceress lover.







Lango has a powerful secret. He is a distant heir to the last king of Khend. The last king was Jankor Braithewaite, several decades ago. Jankor squandered his throne in a perfect storm of drugs and debauchery, supposedly leaving no heirs. But, unknown to most, a dancing girl did have a bastard. That dancing girl left Khend and was Lango's grandmother.

Lango is reluctant to broadcast his tenuous connection to the throne. Khend has had quite a few years without a ruler and many like it that way. Others might be convinced to throw in with Lango due to the chaos and blood of late. It could go either way. The Grey Legion showing up on Khend's doorstep would not be welcomed by House Mondar.

Since House Mondar is the most likely to be “the villains”, I've included some mooks.

**Lango Mondar** – young, ruthless crime lord

Expert [+4] Ruthless

Expert [+4] Excellent duellist

Good [+2] Politically Savvy

Good [+2] Handsome and Charismatic

Good [+2] Voracious reader

Weakness: Poor [-2] Bad temper

Prop: Good [+2] Matching duelling dirk and arming sword

**Torben Mondar** – older cousin of Lango, solid right-hand man

Expert [+4] Brawny street-fighter

Expert [+4] Street smart

Good [+2] Carpentry

Good [+2] Sailor

Weakness: Poor [-2] Hates to be made fun of

Prop: Good [+2] Weighted cloak





### **Kemi Rayless** – Lango's lover and skilled sorceress

Good [+2] Scholar  
Good [+2] Highly intelligent  
Good [+2] Holds power gently  
Good [+2] Strong will  
Master [+6] Sorcery  
Expert [+4] Alchemy  
Good [+2] Voluptuous beauty  
Weakness: Poor [-2] Overconfident  
Prop: Good [+2] Ring of Souls

*Ring of Souls* – once per scene, the captured souls within the ring can restore MOD Ranks to the wearer. Spend a Fortune point to do this after zeroing out from physical damage and “come back” (if dramatically appropriate).

### **House Mondar retainers (mooks)**

Good [+2] Streetfighters  
Good [+2] Loyal to the coin

## **Crimson Shadows**

The Crimson Shadows used to be the major drug runners of the city. But they have been hunted and attacked whenever, wherever by House Mondar and the Flying Axes. It was a well-coordinated effort, and precious few Shadows remain. Those have scattered into whatever hidey-hole they can find.

The young Calvaius is the nominal leader now. His father, Yamminius, was the gangleader before the attacks, but fell in a skirmish in a back alley with the Axes. Calvaius is hungry for revenge. He will work with anyone who wants to hurt House Mondar.



**Calvaius** – the vengeful son

Expert [+4] Dirty fighter

Good [+2] Scrawny and lithe

Expert [+4] Second storey man

Good [+2] Intense Focus

Weakness: Poor [-2] Recklessly seeking vengeance

## The Flying Axe Gang

Right now the gang leader, Havad, is backing House Mondar. This was a pretty big betrayal of House Kerlis. But Havad thinks he sees the writing on the wall and House Mondar is going to come out of the chaos on top.

While a serious protection racket, the Flying Axe Gang also has a “legitimate” business side. It runs the docks. Many of its members load and unload ships as they come in. Unfortunately, due to the drought, they are not loading much of anything at the moment. That means a lot of time on their hands, a lot of drinking and a lot of trouble brewing.

Havad is looking for some kind of scheme to occupy his men and still make a profit. Being House Mondar muscle solves some of that, but Havad also chafes being under orders.

**Havad** – brutal dock guild leader

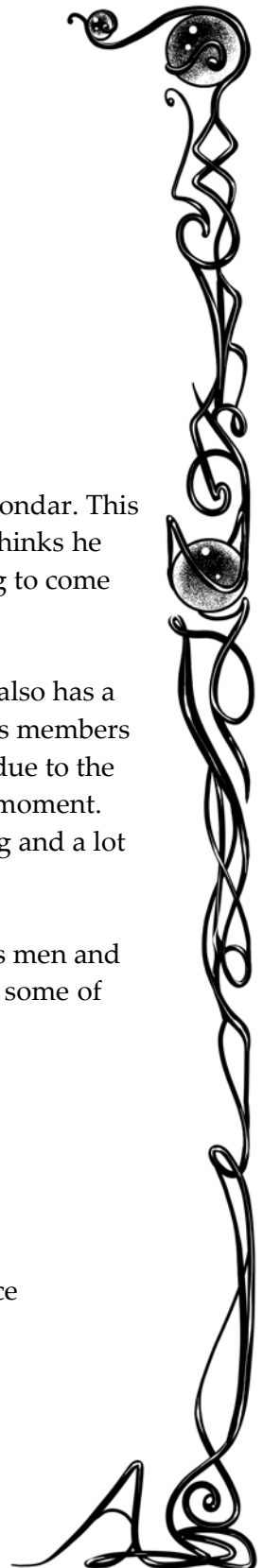
Expert [+4] Twin chained axes

Good [+2] Brawny

Good [+2] Is smarter than he looks (good thing!)

Expert [+4] Knows everyone

Weakness: Poor [-2] Ugly, pockmarked, pimpled face

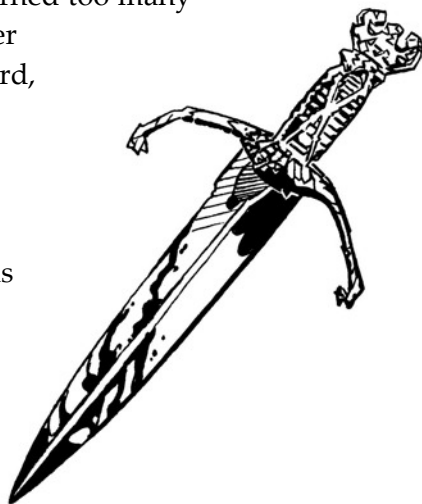




## Ebony Blades

The Ebony Blades are known for their black blades and their black ways. They will do anything for coin, including sell their own grandmothers. However, no-one in Khend trusts them. They have no alliances, they've burned too many bridges with the Houses and other factions. They've not kept their word, botched jobs and are just too unpredictable.

Yala of the Curling Lip is their de facto leader, but only because she is just barely the most organised and forward-thinking. One of their major problems is that they love their drugs and drink. Several are addicted to Purple Lotus. Yala has them going outside of the city and robbing various merchants and farmers coming to market. Then they trade what they can for drink and Purple Lotus.



The Ebony Blades are not known as fearsome killers and would much rather stab their victims in the back. Or rob with overwhelming numbers. If cornered, they will often beg for mercy.

### **Yala of the Curling Lip** – drugged gangleader

Good [+2] High twitch reflexes

Expert [+4] Scheming

Good [+2] Has an eye for weakness

Expert [+4] Knows all the best hiding spots

Good [+2] Always has an eye on where the exits are

Weakness: Poor [-2] Dreams of the big score (but can't seem to do anything right to reach it)



## Temple of the Purifying Scar

The Temple has scored big by ripping off House Bennon in a daring sea raid of a slave convoy in the Maw. The slaves were mostly sold in nearby cities. The Temple has just started expansions of its training yards and restoring giant statues of warriors that adorn the rooftops of the compound.

The head of the Temple is Paladin Okkon Nirl. He is thrilled by the recent success. But he hasn't prepared for the wrath of House Bennon. He thinks that payback will come in some kind of violence; and for that he is prepared. After all, the Temple of the Purifying Scar is a military order.

**Okkon Nirl** – glory-seeking madman

Expert [+4] Leads from the front

Expert [+4] Devastating warrior

Good [+2] Charismatic

Good [+2] Blacksmith

Good [+2] Disciplined

Weakness: Poor [-2] Fanatic

## Holy Order of Krang

This is the most popular religion in Khend, as life is dominated by the Parrot Run river. Krang is the god of said river. His sister, the goddess Inverga, is the goddess of the Lake or Sea upriver. It is she that most blame for the drought, not Krang. The common people think that Inverga and Krang are in a family squabble, and that is why the rains don't come and the Parrot Run river is so low.

Krang likes beautiful women, and the Holy Order of Krang has returned to the practice of sacrifice after some 150 years. Three women have been “married” to Krang – pushed off the bridge near





the temple, weighted down, hands and feet tied, and drowned. Some spectators claimed to see a huge man swimming through the murky river who kisses the drowning sacrifices and frees them.

While most think that being chosen as a handmaiden of Krang is a great honour, the truth is that the women are drugged and are euphoric when thrown off the bridge. The High Priest Akkus shares his god's love of young women... and he trawls the slave markets for the newest "convert". Many of the Temple's acolytes are beautiful women.

The Holy Order of Krang is doing quite well financially, due to all the donations of late. Daily prayers at noon to Krang, and to his sister Inverga, to lift the drought can be heard all over the city.

Akkus is not happy with the Temple of the Purifying Scar. Traditionally allies and quite cordial, the Temple's recent attack on House Bennon's slaves has upset Akkus's procurement plans. Paladin Okkon Nirl has also been very arrogant in his dealings with Akkus of late.

#### **Akkus** – High Priest of Krang

Expert [+4] Shrewd politician

Expert [+4] Charming voice

Good [+2] Skilled with trident

Expert [+4] Charm: Heal

Expert [+4] Charm: Cure Disease

Expert [+4] Charm: Calm

Weakness: Poor [-2] Young girls

Props: Good [+2] Holy trident of Krang

Good [+2] Robes of enchanted river grass

#### **Krang** – demon-god of the Parrot Run river

Master [+6] Strong as flood

Good [+2] Cold logic

Expert [+4] 8 feet tall



Master [+6] Water breathing  
Expert [+4] Ancient and feels justified  
Good [+2] The river has its secrets  
Expert [+4] Charm: Water spout  
Master [+6] Charm: Tidal wave  
Weakness: Poor [-2] Only cares for what touches the River

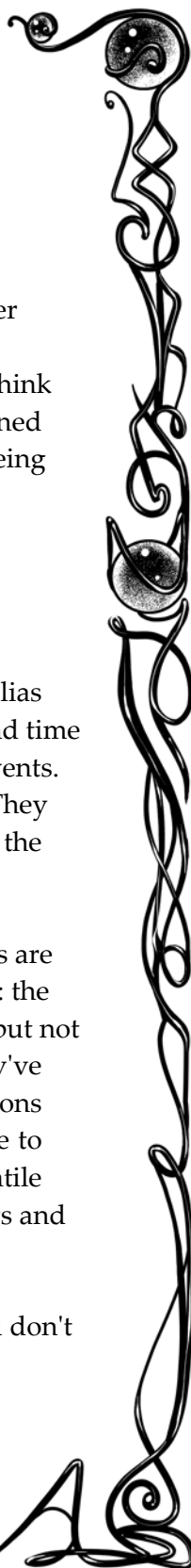
Note that Krang is really, really powerful in his Qualities. I think gods in sword and sorcery should be tough. But a determined group could beat him in a social or physical conflict. Gods being bested is also very sword and sorcery.

## Masks of the Moon

The Masks are an invitation-only cabal. They hold bacchanalias and parties where everyone comes in masks. The location and time changes often. Deals and alliances are struck during these events. The Masks consider themselves the true masters of Khend. They pull the strings of the three Houses and reap the benefits of the chaos that ensues.

Or so they would have you think. The truth is that the Masks are the disenfranchised youth of the noble and merchant classes: the second sons and the odd cousins with wealth and privilege but not much actual power. They want more. Yet it is true that they've made some profits out of the chaos. They've imported weapons and armour, which have been snatched up. They've manage to create new drug supply lines along with legitimate mercantile trade. They've bought up the land of failing freelance farmers and impoverished nobles due to the drought.

They are rich and they are powerful. But they are young and don't have a clear direction of what is next.





## Independents

Khend is made up of lots of different folks from all over. It is a trade town and many seek their fortune. So here are some different personages to help or hinder (or both!) the player characters.

### Skana of Nilsomar

Dancing girl and neophyte sorcerer.

Master [+6] Sensual dancer  
Good [+2] Hidden knife technique  
Good [+2] Canny disguises  
Good [+2] Sharp ears  
Average [0] Charm: Misdirection\*  
Average [0] Sorcery\*  
Weakness: Poor [-2] Scared of losing freedom

*Uses.* Skana dances for House Bennon taverns. She is finally an independent. She is a good contact for gossip and rumours of the street. She is so hungry to continue her occult studies that she might be an ally to the PCs. Just stand back when she's casting, because she isn't very good at it.

### Malbenic Pol the Darkclaw

Reclusive mad sorcerer.

Good [+2] Tall and darkly handsome  
Expert [+4] Well-read  
Good [+2] Powerful and skilled mystic  
Master [+6] Sorcery\*





Average [0] Alchemy\*

Good [+2] Will not bow to another

Good [+2] Fast as a striking snake

Good [+2] Bargaining

Weakness: Poor [-2] Seeks immortality (by having a son -- Malbenic is barren)

Prop: Expert [+4] Staff of Sorcery

*Staff of Sorcery* – once per scene, the user can make a cast of *Sorcery* and raise *one* column on the Effects Table (e.g. Range) to MOD for free. Kind of like supercharged cantrips.

*Uses.* Every sword and sorcery city needs a mad sorcerer or two. Malbenic is more benign than most. He has a tower on the outskirts of town, guarded by four-armed gorilla slaves. He doesn't interact with the city much and cares very little for the politics and shenanigans going on. He is an expert on things mystical and historical and could be approached for that role. He desires a son, but is barren. Note that Malbenic is a fairly powerful NPC and not to be taken lightly in conflict by the PCs.



### **Malbenic's four-armed gorillas**

Master [+6] Quick and strong

Good [+2] Four arms

Good [+2] Agile Climbers

Weakness: Poor [-2] Entranced by Malbenic



## Kumar Kon

Slumlord, fence and information broker.

Expert [+4] Sly merchant

Expert [+4] Loan shark

Good [+2] Shrewd judge of character

Good [+2] Can move quickly, despite his girth

Good [+2] Surprisingly strong

Good [+2] Ruthless

Weakness: Poor [-2] Slimy corpulence

*Uses.* If you need information or a loan, Kumar Kon is your man. But nothing comes cheap from Kumar. Loans come with steep rates. He asks for information before giving information. He looks and acts like a threadbare merchant out of a stall at the market, but he is quite wealthy. He had some kind of deal with the Crimson Shadows that allowed his fencing activities, but that is up in the air now.

## Amia of the Range

Travelling merchant, horse trader.

Master [+6] Born in the saddle

Good [+2] Desert- and plains-wise

Expert [+4] Keen merchant's eye

Good [+2] Horse archer

Good [+2] Desert beauty

Weakness: Poor [-2] Wants to settle down

Prop: Expert [+4] Desert charger

*Uses.* Amia has a ranch outside of town where she brings in desert horses to train, breed and sell. She is gone half of the year. She is



close to retiring from the road: there is something very appealing to this born nomad about settling down in one place. Despite several marriage offers, she is picky about that arrangement – cautious about what marriage would mean to her successful venture. She is useful as a neutral, somewhat rich NPC who has kept out of the fray of recent events. She is respected and admired.

## Palmonius of the Lists

Corrupt lawyer.

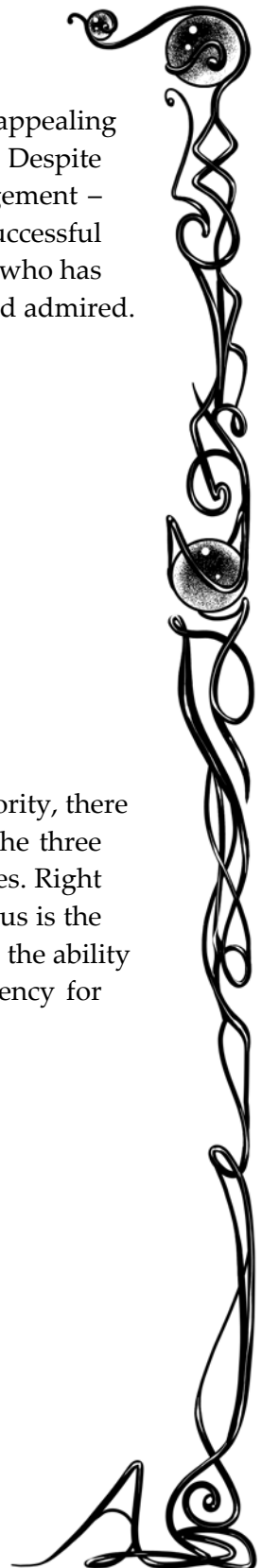
Master [+6] Corrupt lawyer  
Expert [+4] Knows where the bodies are buried  
Good [+2] Born liar  
Good [+2] Surprisingly generous  
Weakness: Poor [-2] Will switch sides in a second

*Uses.* While Khend doesn't really have any central authority, there is a Court that is heard by a triumvirate made up of the three major houses. They hear mostly civil and low-class cases. Right now, the Court is suspended due to the chaos. Palmonius is the court's best lawyer, known for his stirring speeches and the ability to dig up dirt on his opponents... as well as his tendency for blackmail and switching sides.

## Captain Lorraine Gul

Tough captain of the Azure Gull.

Expert [+4] Shrewd negotiator  
Expert [+4] Surgeon with a sword  
Expert [+4] Born to lead  
Good [+2] Wildly beautiful





Good [+2] Pirate queen  
Expert [+4] The Sea is in the blood (awesome sailor)  
Weakness: Poor [-2] Bad boys  
Prop: Good [+2] Azantine sword and dagger

*Uses.* Since House Mondar is being backed by outside sources and river and sea trade is so important to Khend, Lorraine Gul falls smack in the middle of the mess. She is the ex-lover of Lango Mondar and is Not. Happy. With. Him. Perhaps she can provide dirt on Lango for the PCs. Lorraine is half pirate and half merchant. Khend is a safe port of call to unload captured ships and booty as well as take on legitimate cargo.

## Tonsil

Dock surgeon and healer.

Good [+2] Wizard with a dagger  
Expert [+4] Learned surgeon  
Good [+2] Bookish scholar  
Good [+2] Gourmand and knows the finer things  
Weakness: Poor [-2] Gambling

*Uses.* Tonsil operates off a permanently-moored junk. He is well known and respected by all the dock folk, as he has birthed babies and mended limbs – usually in trade. Tonsil is very much a “scientific” healer. He doesn't use Charms. Player characters lead dangerous lives: they will probably need a healer's services at some point.



## Kholati

Athletic jungle girl, escaped slave.

Good [+2] Lithe and fast

Good [+2] Climbs like a monkey

Expert [+4] Beautiful and innocent-looking

Good [+2] Charm: Soothe large cats\*

Weakness: Poor [-2] Barely understands the language, or Khend

*Uses.* Because every sword and sorcery city needs a nubile escaped slave to bump into in an alleyway, while she is running from her masters.

## *Kicking in doors – planning stories*

Because of the way *Jaws* works in story hooks with the first Quality taking damage, it is really hard to write a “standard” fantasy plot or adventure. Much of my campaign evenings' plots and subplots spun off what the players chose to downgrade first in a conflict. Sessions often went in mysterious and fun directions that I never anticipated, because Judd chose to downgrade his PC's Divination or Pete chose to downgrade his PC's Silver-tongued.

For the record, the Divination hook became a series of weird, fantastical dreams and psychic duels concerning Kemi Rayless, Lango Mondar's pet sorceress. The Silver-Tongued hook led to a chance meeting with Vessa Kerlis and an eventual affair. See? I could never predict those events, they were player-driven. Nor did I try, and that is part of the great fun of *Jaws of the Six Serpents*.





But what I can do is provide some story seeds and nuggets. Sometimes, the doors need to kick back. Or rather, the motivations and the events of Khend's supporting cast can put things into motion when the players are stuck or are not being particularly proactive.

## Fathers know best

Malbenic the sorcerer wants a son. The problem is that he is barren, and isn't a wizard in the wooing department either. So he kidnaps a son: Vessa and Arlen Kerlis' youngest son of four. The boy is taken out of an "unscalable" tower, and some strange footprints leave House Kerlis baffled. It turns out four-armed apes are really good at climbing!

The jink is that Malbenic really loves his adopted kid and there might even be an altruistic reason for the kidnapping. The boy is a dreamer, quiet and prone to night terrors. He is gifted and could be a powerful sorcerer some day. Malbenic knows how to raise such a child. Could the pragmatic nature of Arlen and Malbenic's love of this child forge a strange alliance? Malbenic being drawn into the politics of Khend could be very interesting for all involved.

The PCs could get involved by House Kerlis revealing that they hold the contract on the Grey Legion.

## Smuggler's blues

A large shipment of Purple Lotus is coming in. The slumlord Kumar Kon knows it, but not the when and not the why. Purple Lotus is certainly not illegal. But it is so valuable, smuggling does occur to keep it out of the hands of rival drug dealers.



A shipment that large hitting Khend is going to destabilise things even further. Kumar shares what he knows with the PCs, and promises to sell the drug in another city. What he knows is that Calvaius of the Crimson Shadows is coming out of hiding to handle the shipment. This is a dangerous move for Calvaius, but the profit on this shipment is so good, it would go a long way to rebuilding the Crimson Shadows. Kumar knows that Calvaius will be at the Bilge and Anchor bar to make contact with the outside supplier.

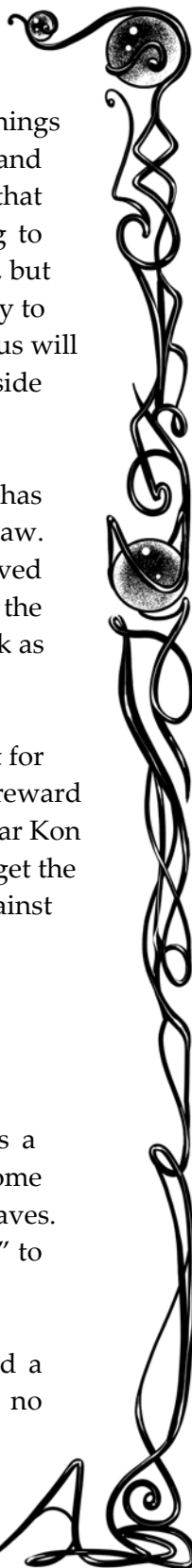
The outside supplier is called Quaddi the Hawknosed. He has three ships lying in hiding among the many islands of the Maw. He will bring them upriver once half of the payment is received and the details of unloading are worked out. The Masks of the Moon are bankrolling Calvaius. He is receiving a large chunk as the middle man.

So much can happen here. The PCs could seize the shipment for themselves. They might turn Calvaius in for the substantial reward or try to acquire him as an ally against House Mondar. Kumar Kon might double-cross everyone to get his hands on the drugs, get the reward on Calvaius and sell the shipment in town, going against his promise.

## Canal genes

The world of punts, water taxis, boats and boat people is a subculture all of its own in Khend. But recently, news of some aquatic monster prowling the canals has been, er, making waves. A collection is taken up by a group of concerned “water rats” to hunt down this monster that hides in the sewers.

The monster is actually a Shan of the Snake Peoples – and a terribly young, confused one at that. He has no name and no

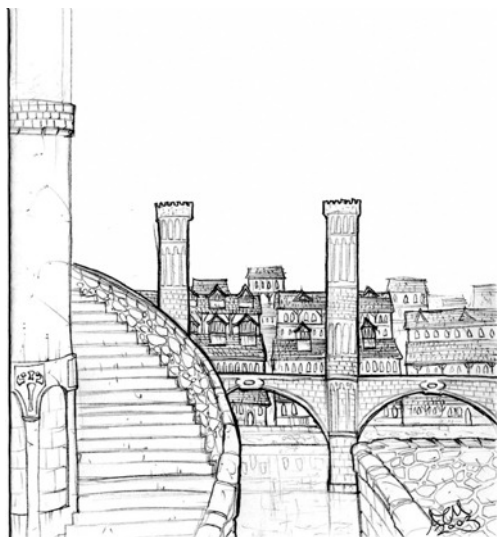




language, because he was hatched from an egg brought from the far jungles of Jaanu. He is the equivalent of six years old and does not even know his own people. Do the fearsome heroes slay the monster? Or get stuck with a scared, young, alien mascot?

## Range war

Amia, the horse trader, is a tough customer. Problem is, she only has a few work hands and crew on her ranch. And the Flying Axe Gang has really been leaning on her to pay protection tariffs. She doesn't like being told she has to do anything, much less pay for a racket. Perhaps with the PCs' help, the Flying Axe Gang can be persuaded to look elsewhere for people to "protect".



## This town ain't big enuff

Before the Grey Legion, or the freelance PCs, got the contract, House Kerlis contacted another group. They are called the Azioch Demons and they are stone-cold killers. They were probably rejected by Arlen Kerlis for not being the most subtle; but the Azioch Demons think of themselves as the best. Now, they have come to Khend to wipe out the shame of losing the contract by taking out the PCs.

They send word to the PCs, threatening to expose the contract with Kerlis and the upcoming Legion plans to the rest of Khend – unless





the PCs meet the Azioch Demons at high noon in the market where everyone can witness the superiority of the Demons when they wipe the PCs out. If the PCs acquiesce, then play up the leering city folk, the dust on the suddenly vacant market, and a real western gunfight vibe. There should be an Azioch Demon for each PC. I've provided four.

### **Jurgens**

Expert [+4] Big, bad halberd technique  
Expert [+4] Stone-cold killer  
Good [+2] Sneaky  
Good [+2] Gourmet cook  
Weakness: Poor [-2] Food and drink

### **Kane**

Expert [+4] Gauntlets of fury  
Good [+2] Fitness and health nut  
Expert [+4] Acrobat  
Good [+2] Streetwise  
Weakness: Poor [-2] Danger Junkie

### **Toth**

Good [+2] Warrior with a whip  
Expert [+4] Cold, calculating fighter  
Good [+2] Beautiful singing voice, baritone  
Good [+2] Ex-cavalry  
Good [+2] Leadership  
Weakness: Poor [-2] Rich men's daughters

### **Swan**

Master [+6] Eagle-eyed archer  
Good [+2] Fleet-footed  
Good [+2] Raised in Cloud Mountains  
Good [+2] Ex-army scout  
Weakness: Poor [-2] Fondness for torture





## Masque of masks

The Masks of the Moon have somehow got wind of the PCs' efforts to pave the way for their employers. The PCs receive invitations, delivered by street urchins, to come to the next Masque. This is at some abandoned temple, no longer in use, its gods and goddesses long gone.

The Masks want the PCs to join them. Noble title and membership in the Masks is dangled as a carrot. All they have to do is eliminate the three Houses, break the Legion contract with House Kerlis, and convince the Legion to support the Masks as the true rulers of Khend.

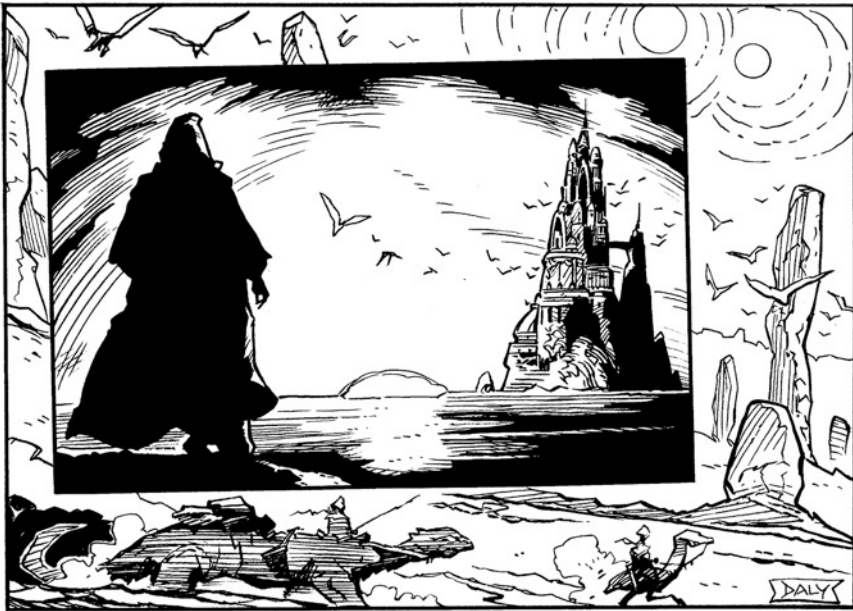
## Legion divided

I used this plot hook in my own game. After the debacle in jungles of Jasuur, the Legion command has had a decisive split. 700 Legionnaires are indeed coming to Khend, but they are under the command of the arrogant, ambitious Major Zavet Kir. He has gathered the troops whose loyalty he can count on. He is marching on Khend, not to honour the contract of pacifying the city for House Kerlis, but rather as a staging point to make himself a king.

Now the PCs have a few choices to make. Back Kir's bid to become king? Try to build a coalition of Khend factions to oppose 700 professional Legion invaders? Or perhaps "Get outta Dodge"?

For the record, my players managed to get an audience with Kir, who wanted their intel for his own purposes. They took him captive in a bloody, quick fight, then tried and hanged him for violating Grey Legion bylaws.

# RED SANDS OF THE SIX SERPENTS





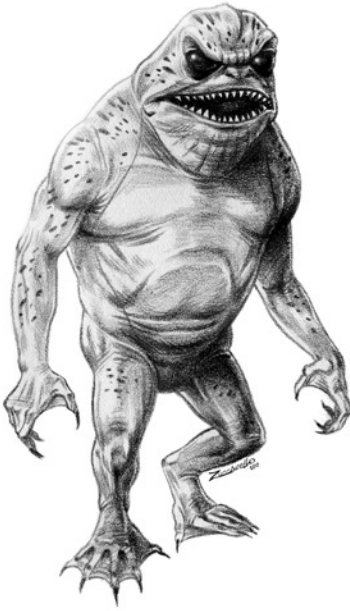
# SWORD AND PLANET

by James Maliszewski

Though the genre of science fantasy known today as “sword and planet” got its start in 1912, with the serial novel *Under the Moons of Mars* (later collected as *A Princess of Mars*) by Edgar Rice Burroughs, it would be a half-century before the genre got its name, thanks to the great Donald Wollheim, who did much to popularise it during the 1960s and '70s. Wollheim coined “sword and planet” in imitation of “sword and sorcery”, a widespread term nowadays but one that only entered use in 1961 thanks to Fritz Leiber. Given that, one might reasonably expect to find certain similarities between “sword and planet” and “sword and sorcery” tales -- and there are many, but, before discussing those similarities, let's look briefly at the history of the genre from its beginnings to the present day.

## *A little history*

Though Burroughs' eleven novels of Barsoom are rightly considered the fount from which all “sword and planet” stories flow, they were not without antecedents. In the 19th century “planetary romances” were popular: a genre focusing on Earthmen travelling to other worlds. Perhaps the most famous of these is Jules Verne's 1865 novel *From the Earth to the Moon*, which was widely imitated and expanded upon by others, including H.G. Wells, who published his *The First Men in the Moon* in 1901. A few years later, in 1905, Edwin Lester Arnold's *Lieutenant Gullivar Jones: His Vacation* described the adventures of a hapless soldier from the American South who travels to Mars by means of a magic carpet.



There, among other things, he falls in love with a Martian princess.

If that brief description of *Lieutenant Gullivar* makes it sound somewhat similar to Burroughs' *A Princess of Mars* and its sequels, that may not be a coincidence. Though it cannot be ascertained for certain that Burroughs read Arnold's work, some critics think it likely. Even if that is the case, there can be no denying that Burroughs took the idea of interplanetary travels in a new direction, one

that set the pattern for much of what would come afterwards. Many planetary romances were lighthearted or satirical in tone, whereas Burroughs' fiction was more serious and straightforwardly adventuresome, in the vein of H. Rider Haggard and Anthony Hope. In addition, Burroughs invested much effort in believable world-building, creating an imagined Mars that had its own history, culture, and even language -- all of which lent the stories a verisimilitude that made it possible for readers to take them seriously.

The success of Burroughs inspired others to follow in his footsteps. Writers such as Otis Adelbert Kline (who also acted as Robert E. Howard's literary agent), Edmond Hamilton, and Leigh Brackett all wrote their own "sword and planet" tales to great success. Brackett would also achieve fame as a screenwriter in Hollywood. One of her last screenplays was an early draft of *The Empire Strikes Back*, the second movie in the original *Star Wars* trilogy, which itself exhibits certain similarities to the "sword and planet" genre.



Though the genre fell from favour (and was often parodied) in the 1940s and '50s, it experienced a resurgence in the 1960s when the original tales were republished and made accessible to a new generation of readers. This in turn inspired new “sword and planet” stories by authors as diverse as Gardner F. Fox, Michael Moorcock (writing as Edward Powys Bradbury), Mike Resnick, and Lin Carter.

## *Heroes in space*

As noted above, “sword and planet” is a type of science fantasy, not science fiction. While science fiction generally focuses on speculation about the effects of scientific or technological discoveries and advances, science fantasy generally uses the trappings of science to present a fundamentally classical tale of heroism and adventure. Consequently, the protagonists of “sword and planet” stories, as exemplified by Burroughs' John Carter, are unabashedly *heroes*. That is, they are men of action who, after having been transported to another world far from Earth, engage in all manner of derring-do. Though not all “sword and planet” protagonists are unambiguously virtuous, most are, living by a code of honour that sometimes makes their lives more difficult but just as often wins them the respect of the beings they encounter on other worlds.

Typically, the protagonist is the only Earth man present on the world on which the stories take place. In a twist, it is *he* who is the alien outsider and he must learn to adapt to the strange – and often primitive and brutal – world into which he has been thrown.



## *Trappings and technology*

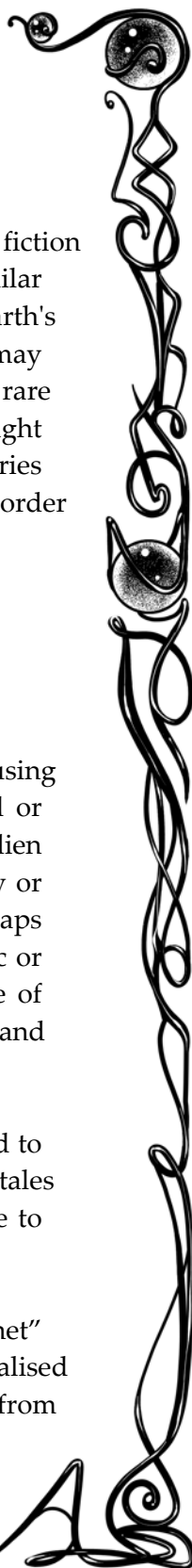
In another nod to fantasy, the worlds of “sword and planet” fiction usually possess pre-industrial technology. Swords and similar weapons are commonplace and warfare resembles that of Earth's past rather than its present. In some cases, high technology may exist, but it is a remnant from an earlier time and is, as such, rare and little understood, functioning much like magic in a straight fantasy story. Socially, the worlds of “sword and planet” stories also recall Earth's past, with monarchies and theocracies the order of the day.

## *Strange and simple worlds*

In short, “sword and planet” is a type of pulp literature, focusing on action and adventure and drawing heavily on the real or imagined past of our own world but transposed onto an alien locale. That is not to suggest that it is necessarily a shallow or unimaginative genre, but it is not a realistic one -- or, perhaps more aptly, it is not one concerned primarily with scientific or social realism. Like other types of fantasy, such things are of secondary concern to the conflicts the protagonist must face and the places they must go while engaging in those conflicts.

Of course, “conflict” is a broad term and need not be limited to fisticuffs and swordplay. Indeed, many “sword and planet” tales derive much drama from the protagonist's attempt to come to grips with the exotic ways of their new world.

Finally, as befits the genre's origins, most “sword and planet” stories are romantic in nature. That is, they often contain idealised and sometimes simplistic portrayals of many aspects of life, from





codes of honour to the nature of primitive peoples to relations between the sexes. As such, they can sometimes be difficult for contemporary readers to enjoy without irony or qualification. On the other hand, the best of the genre are simply excellent fantasies, whose joyfulness and verve are palpable, regardless of any flaws they might be seen to possess.







# MARS WELCOMES CAREFUL GMS

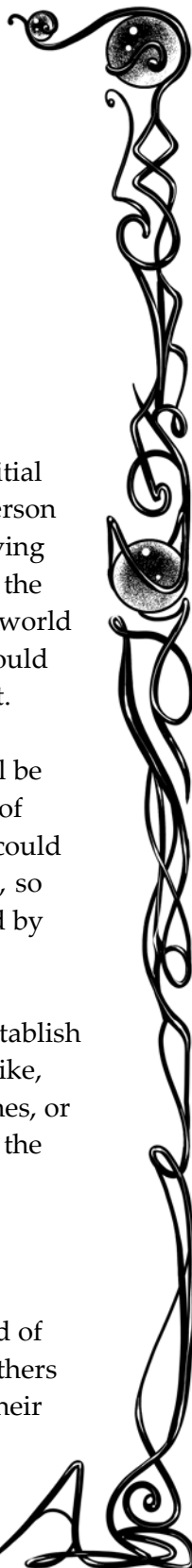
by Tim Gray

To set up a sword and planet game using Jaws, the big initial decision is who the player characters are going to be. One person could play a man or woman from Earth, with the others playing various members of local cultures; or you could break with the convention and bring several Earthers into this strange new world together. You could even run a natives-only game, which would probably be pretty much a sword and sorcery setting variant.

Give some thought to where and when the Earth people will be drawn from. That'll tell you something about the points of connection and contrast between them and the setting. You could even have people pulled in from different times and places, so there are questions of being alien to each other while bonded by their common humanity.

After that, a lot of it is about setting design. You'll need to establish where their new planet is and what it's called. What is it like, overall? Does it have lots of different climate and habitat zones, or is most of it the same? Is it vibrant, or a dying world where the remnants of once-great civilisations need saviours? Is the vegetation and wildlife similar to Earth's but in different combinations, or is there crazy and terrifying stuff?

At minimum you'll need two cultural groups with some kind of conflict that the PCs can get caught up in. Maybe there are others as well, perhaps caught in the crossfire or elsewhere with their





own agendas. Are they basically humans with cosmetic differences, or are they significantly different? It's important to pin down basics of the cultures.

Here are some prompts to help.

- Lifestyle – primitive herders? Cityfolk with specialised craft-workers? Militaristic dictatorship?
- Science and technology – primitives using natural materials? Using science tools, at least some of which are ancient and not well understood? Masters of arcane science indistinguishable from magic? Particular points to pin down are how they travel and how they fight.
- Outlook – tribal, rules of honour, led by the strongest? Class- or caste-based, with strong divisions on who can do what and how people can mix? Think about how they're likely to view outsiders.
- Customs – you may find it useful to come up with at least one or two cultural practices the PCs can get entangled with. Maybe defeating the tribal chief will make you the new leader. Maybe accepting a drink from the girl means you're now betrothed.

## Making characters

The process is basically the same as in the *Jaws* rulebook. Write the native cultures up as Peoples, with lists of common Strengths and Weaknesses. Then character creation works as normal – with required Qualities for People, Faculty and Driver – except that Earthers take an occupation (like Inventor or Cavalry Officer) instead of the cultural Strength.



The list of unusual Qualities in the Monsters section of *Jaws* may be of use in statting up inhabitants of other planets.

You may find it useful to add in racial Qualities, especially when some cultures have significant traits that mark them out. (As in fantasy game “races” like elves and dwarves.) This is a paired Strength and Weakness related to the same thing, which come into play when situations merit it. For instance, if all Crotons are ferocious four-armed ostrich riders who are afraid of heights, Good [+2] Croton, Poor [-2] Croton will act as a nice compact way of giving a bonus or penalty in appropriate situations. You can do this for Earthfolk too, if the setting confers special abilities for them (like John Carter's superhuman strength in the lower gravity of Mars), or to reflect them being clueless outsiders.

## *Technology and magic*

It seems to be a feature of S&P that there is no magic as such. But there can be technological items that function like magic items, doing strange and impressive things in ways that nobody understands any more; perhaps employing weird theoretical energy forms. There can also be technological items that are just everyday tools, like lightning guns and flying ships.

Pretty much all of these are going to be Props, or even just plot devices. It's quite unlikely that you'd take one as a character Quality – though you might well develop skill in using them. For instance, if everyone is shooting with spark rifles that use vorium crystals to create an energy discharge, that's just the thing that enables you to use your Marksmanship or Soldier or whatever.

In most cases you can just give items one or more Qualities for their major effects. The rules for Charms may be of some help. For





major stuff, maybe you can employ the Sorcery rules on gathering power (ambient sixth emanation energy or whatever) as a way of measuring time till Something Happens. It's unlikely that a device would mess up controlling the power, but perhaps its operation is complex and somewhat unpredictable.

You may also want to think about whether characters can bring Earth technology with them, and how it behaves when it gets there. Even if it's superior to something the natives have, don't entertain any ideas of reverse-engineering it and unbalancing society. That's too realistic. It should just be a distinctive prop for the character.

# BREAKING THE JAWS OF THE SIX SERPENTS CULT





# BREAKING THE JAWS OF THE SIX SERPENTS CULT

by Tim Gray

This section is about adapting *Jaws* for the pulp action genre: stories of two-fisted daredevils, plucky reporters, ace pilots and strange mystics in the real world (or something like it) of the 1920s-40s.

Much of what we think of as sword and sorcery source material is actually pulp fantasy from this era; part of a great flow of material to fill the pages of adventure magazines printed on paper made from low-grade wood pulp (hence the name), aimed at exciting the reader (sometimes, perhaps, in more ways than one). The pulps were, perhaps, the gaming consoles of their era.

Run the timeline a little further forward, and the larger-than-life crimefighters evolved into the first superheroes. The rest is - pow! - history.





## An age of fire

It's a time of immense change, shaking off the last trappings of the Victorian era and starting to look more recognisably like the world we know today. It's a period sandwiched between two world wars, though they don't know it. The Great War of 1914-18 rewrote the map of Europe. Millions were killed or injured in the fighting, or affected by the disease, starvation and homelessness that came after. Cultures were shaken in all sorts of directions. Many who could pursued exuberance and hedonism as a counter-reaction. In Europe the seeds of WWII began to grow.

It's the dawn of what most of us would consider the age of **technology**, a step beyond engineering. This involves quite a shift in thinking for us moderns, especially for younger people who've lived all their lives in the digital age. At the beginning of the pulp era the telephone is new, and most likely only the wealthy or influential will have one. If you want to communicate remotely with someone and you can't arrange a suitable phone at both ends, you'll have to send a telegram. Cars for the masses are another recent development. In the early years there's a limited choice of models, the Ford Model T being the most popular with a top speed around 45mph, but by the '40s they are common and varied, with some capable of well over 100mph. At the same time science progresses apace, in directions so strange and new to the populace that almost anything may be imagined.

There's also a sense of **individualism**: that the person and their qualities really matter. Most things are done by people directly, rather than technologically; and you, or people you know have been off at war not that long ago. I have a theory that this aspect of the pulp tales comes out so strongly *because* of the rise of technology and other changes, trying to hold on to the importance of human effort and skill by embodying it in iconic individuals.



Robert E Howard's Conan, with his disdain for civilised men, seems like a strong example.

It's the beginning of the age of mass **travel**, with trains, boats and planes becoming available to take you to all the corners of the world (if you can afford it). The aeroplane is another recent arrival, and still viewed with a kind of awe that seems strange to us now. (For perspective, at least one pulp series hero had ownership of a fighter plane as their special ability.) At the same time there's still a **mystique** about what you might find when you get there. The territory hasn't all been visited by white people, mapped, scanned from orbit. If you head into the depths of the Amazon jungle, who's to say you won't find the temple of the ancient jaguar god?

In real life, the pulp era had some pretty major dark sides. People struggled to come to terms with the new, leading to discrimination against those of different skin colour, against immigrants, against those with unpopular political ideas. In the USA, the Prohibition ban on alcohol led to illegal 'speakeasies' and increased the power of criminal gangs. Later came the Great Depression and Wall Street Crash, bringing massive unemployment and poverty. But most pulp fiction focuses on stories of personal adventure rather than nasty doses of social reality to spoil the escapism.

## *Pulp fiction*

### **Characters**

Pulp heroes are distinctive in two major ways.

First, they're very good at what they do. Their general level of competence is higher than most of us can aspire to, and they





usually have at least one area of endeavour where their skills are world-class.

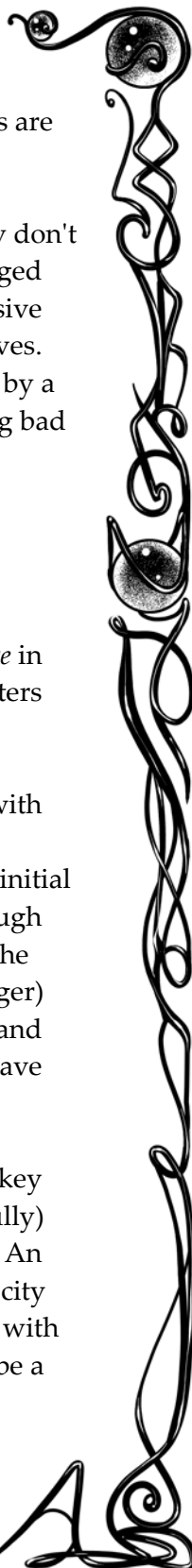
Second, and more importantly, they're not farty like us. They don't worry about whether they left the gas on; they don't get bogged down with parking permits and tax returns. They have massive self-reliance, taking on any challenge with just their own selves. When they encounter an obstacle, they go right at it; usually by a direct and violent route, with little compunction about killing bad guys.

## Peril

Peril is immediate danger of harm. If things go badly, you *are* in trouble. The essence of pulp adventure is to bounce characters from one peril to another.

The adventures they find themselves in will typically start with something odd or threatening happening to a friend or acquaintance. On going to help, they are able to drive off an initial threat. They obtain some clues, left behind or acquired through quite simple investigation. These lead them deeper into the situation, finding that the threat is larger (and perhaps stranger) than they could have guessed. The heroes have to step up and throw themselves into a dramatic and perilous situation to save the day.

The path of the story may involve multiple stages, but the key thing at each one is that the character faces peril and (hopefully) overcomes it, thereby getting a lead-in to the next situation. An early-stage peril might be a fight with fists and/or guns on a city street, facing only modestly competent minions but perhaps with something hanging in the balance. A later-stage peril might be a





similar fight on top of a moving train. Extra points for involving an airship!

As well as fights, perils can be **traps**: not an active opponent, but an inexorable threat that must be escaped before time runs out. In fact, you might want to treat these as if they *are* active opponents, giving them a Quality or three and running a conflict where PCs' actions can target particular Qualities, with the aim of zeroing the trap out. So you could use your Jungle-born Strength against the Strong Ropes so that they no longer add to attacks by the Blood Gibbons.



**Danger levels** fit well with all this, giving you a rules-based way to reflect the ratcheting up of peril. A subtle shading of style is whether you count certain attacks as Risk: fist fights should always be just Drama, pistols are debatable, but maybe when someone pulls out a tommy gun there's the chance of lasting effects. Falling off the moving train would be a candidate for Risk. Falling off the airship is Risk or even Doom, depending on where you fall *to*!

## Weirdness

Perhaps the main area for you to adjust the theme dials is the extent to which your setting can depart from ordinary life. A firefight with a bunch of assassins in an airship over the capital? Well, of course. What about ancient cities in the jungle? Built by



people who weren't human? Inhabited by intelligent gorillas? Dominated by a lost earl who gained mysterious mental powers in the temples of Tibet?

Pulp can be turned up to pretty full-on gonzo, and it can be glorious. The main superhero comic universes milk that idea of "anything is possible; no, really anything". For pulp, you may want to draw a line a little or a lot below that. Lots of adventure and occasional strangeness worked pretty well for *Indiana Jones*. Make sure everyone's on the same page about this before you start.

## Making characters

We alter the standard Jaws character creation for this.

### Required Qualities.

- A **Driver** that will motivate the character to action, taken at Good. *Examples:* Always get the story, Fight the darkness in the hearts of men, Thwart the Six Serpents Cult, Science conquers all, Never back down from a brawl, I can steal anything, Loves Fred Fairbrow.
- A **Forte**: some skill, occupation (but don't go too broad) or innate talent, taken at Expert. This may get boosted up to Master later, and the character may have other high Ranks, but the baseline is that there's at least one thing they're really rather good at. *Examples:* Pilot, Thief, Investigation, Boxing, Medicine, Strong as an ox, Indomitable will.

**Open Qualities.** You get 5 Ranks as usual. If you buy any of the special abilities called Shticks (see below), the first Rank in each taken is Average and you can build up from there.





- **Combat Edge rule.** If your Forte isn't something that will help you in personal combat (armed or unarmed), you must take at least Good in something that can. *Examples:* Former soldier, Fencing champion, Rugged endurance (resists fists but not bullets), Lightning reflexes, Can't lay a hand on me.

**Weakness.** Take one as usual.

## Example

"Omaha" Larry Craft is an action archaeologist type. I've focused on skills, plus one Rank in the Seasoned Traveller Shtick.

**Strengths:** Expert [+4] Archaeologist, Good [+2] Retrieve lost artefacts, Average [0] Seasoned Traveller\*, Good [+2] Guns, Good [+2] Brawling, Good [+2] Athletic, Good [+2] Sneaking and hiding

**Weaknesses:** Poor [-2] Afraid of snakes

## Shticks

It's a pulp staple that characters have one or two special tricks that put them way beyond what normal people can do. These are collected here as shticks. They are Qualities whose first Rank is bought at Average rather than Good, so there's a cost to taking them. Some are Weirder than others, so limit availability if your game's style demands it. Mark them with an asterisk on your character sheet.



For most of these, the MOD for Average counts as 1 when providing special benefits, like a certain number of somethings. If the shtick would give no benefit at MOD 0, do this.

Some shticks say they count for initiative. This means the character acts in the bracket before those with no special Qualities. Work through initiative Qualities in order of Rank before going on to the rest. If a character has more than one you can add the MODs together!

**Ace Pilot** – you're a natural at driving pretty much any aircraft. Add MOD to any piloting roll. In a vehicle conflict (see below):

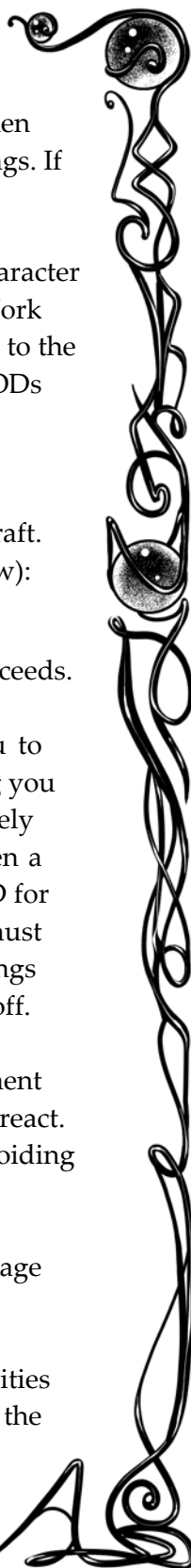
- this counts as an initiative Quality
- a stunt move does no additional damage if your roll succeeds.

**Cloud Minds** – influences the minds of those around you to conceal your presence, or prevent people from remembering you clearly. When using it, minor characters who aren't actively searching for intruders simply don't notice you unless given a reason to be suspicious. Against alert observers it adds MOD for stealth. People trying to remember details you clouded must overcome the TN. This ability doesn't work at all on things without a mind, like cameras, or against people a long way off.

**Danger Sense** – something tells you when you're in imminent peril of injury or death, giving you that extra split second to react. Add MOD for detecting an imminent surprise attack and avoiding sudden hazards like falling objects.

**Fast Healer** – simply, add this MOD to rolls to recover damage Ranks between scenes.

**Gadget** – you own a piece of equipment with special capabilities that may exceed the scope of ordinary science. The MOD of the

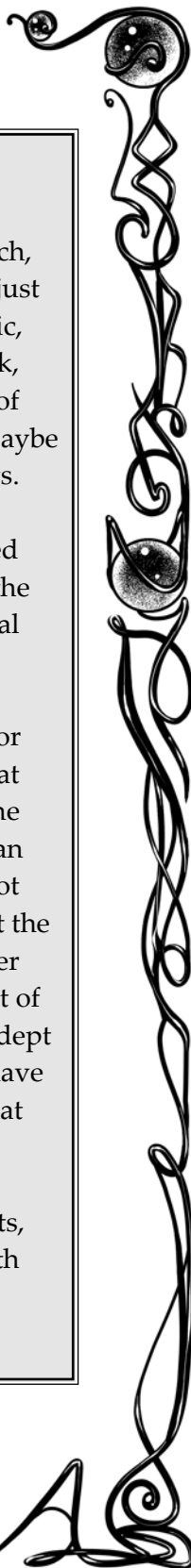




shtick is the number of Quality Ranks you have to describe the object's capabilities, and these start at Good. For instance *Good* [+2] *Gadget – Jetpack: Expert* [+4] *Flight*, or *Good* [+2] *Gadget – Car: Good* [+2] *Armour*, *Good* [+2] *Concealed gun*. (Average counts as MOD 1 for this.) The gadget is part of the character, so it cannot be used up or destroyed. However, a twist of the plot may deprive you of it temporarily. You get a Fortune point for each scene where the GM does so. The GM may allow players to pool some Ranks to get a gadget for the group, like a souped-up ride.

**Indestructible** – this goes beyond being merely tough. Yes, you can add the MOD to resist physical trauma like punches, gunshots and falls. You can also pay a Fortune point to reduce Danger Levels by one – this is effective for the rest of the scene. Fall into a volcano? You stagger out at the end of the scene with smouldering clothes and nasty burns.

**Inventor** – in your scientific and technical areas of expertise (set by your other Qualities) you can build things that go well beyond the cutting edge. Perhaps they are more powerful, or smaller, or based on radical branches of theory like Q-radiation. In rules terms these items are Props, so they're a bit temporary and fragile (a more permanent version would be a *Gadget*). An inventor can carry a supply of devices around, and make new ones to fit a current need. For simplicity, look at the TN of this Quality's Rank: at any time their store of devices can have up to that many Ranks of Qualities. What they're actually carrying is set at the beginning of an adventure (you don't have to use all the Ranks). To change the mix of what they've got the character must spend time (often a scene) in appropriate lab or workshop facilities. The GM may decide some devices are difficult and require a roll to make; they should also be prepared to overrule ones that break your game's style. Most people can use inventors' devices with a bit of instruction, but duplicating or repairing them requires another inventor.



## Pulp magic

You could run a pulp setting where there is no magic as such, just novel kinds of science. Another approach would be to just allow psychic abilities, used to give the appearance of magic, but no actual supernatural stuff. Or you can go kitchen sink, and allow magic to pop up once in a while as just another of those weird things that some people can do. In that case, maybe there really are nether worlds populated by inhuman things.

It's not that likely that a pulp hero will be a full-fledged supernatural sorcerer. They may have psychic abilities, or the *Occult Knowledge* schtick, or a *Gadget* with specific magical powers, or a mixture.

In most cases the biggest chunk of magic will be reserved for the other side. That means you only have to give them what you want them to use. Often that'll be a specific troublesome ritual or two, like using the seven crystal stars to summon an ancient devil-god from beyond space. Well, that's just a plot point really: you can say what happens in response to what the heroes do. Some might have a Charm or two as character abilities. These will usually be thematically collected as part of their particular body of sorcery. Even the most magically adept villain doesn't get the entire wide-open thing: they might have *Sorcery of the Six Serpents*, but you'll need a clear idea of what that includes.

Mechanically it works like Charms for fire-and-forget effects, and like Sorcery if it's a ritual, dramatically important, with interesting possibilities if it gets interrupted.





**Irresistible** – you're extraordinarily attractive, through some combination of looks and raw chemistry. The MOD will add in for a range of social situations. Once per scene, with a little uninterrupted flirting you can get a minor character of appropriate orientation to do almost anything to please you. (Major characters always get to resist your wiles. If they want.)

**Jack of All Trades** – you've been around, and picked up all sorts of scraps of knowledge. Once per scene you can use this MOD for a task based on skill or knowledge for which you have no applicable skill-type Quality. "I saw a bloke in Rangoon do this once..."

**Keen Senses** – add the MOD to ordinary rolls to notice things (though understanding them is another matter), and for aiming ranged weapons. Use this Quality on its own for perception outside the normal human range and up to your Weirdness limit, like detecting heartbeats or seeing detail at extreme range.

**Lightning Reflexes** – this Quality provides superhumanly fast reactions. It's an initiative Quality for pretty much all physical situations. The character can use the MOD on its own to attempt feats like knocking arrows out of the air or dodging bullets.

**Master of Disguise** – you have an uncanny ability to appear as almost anyone with just a few moments' preparation. If the change needs particular clothing and make-up you must have those: for instance acquiring a dress uniform to impersonate El Presidente. Minor characters will accept the disguise without question unless you give them a reason to be suspicious, like seeing an old woman set a sprinting record. Once NPCs become suspicious, opposed rolls are needed.

**Mastermind** – once per scene you can establish some (reasonable) preparation you made before entering the current situation using your strategic genius – "Ah, but many of the houses in this area





have guard dogs, so I took the liberty of bringing this juicy bone.” Also, while you use actions to direct minions in a fight they can add this MOD to their rolls.

**Mighty Strength** – you are capable of feats of strength beyond any normal person. With a roll on this Quality you can shatter wooden furniture, rip a safe out of a wall, lift a car’s back wheels off the ground, or throw a man across a room. For hand-to-hand combat, don’t include this in the roll but add the MOD to damage if you land a blow (Average counts as 1).

**Object Reading** – you can pick up the psychic residue that accumulates on inanimate objects. They retain strong emotions, and occasionally sense impressions of particularly charged events. You can also get a sense of how old the object is. Use the MOD and compare the result to TNs to indicate level of detail.

**Occult Knowledge** – you have devoted years to the study of magic in different lands and eras. You probably have a substantial library on the subject. This Quality’s MOD will help you to understand things like arcane inscriptions or demonic entities. You are not a practitioner, but you can spend a Fortune point to research or remember a working magic ritual for a specific need. (In Jaws terms this works like *Sorcery*, but with a single specified use. You gather power but don’t worry about sources.) This is a one-off plot point: you can’t





then remember the ritual for repeated use, and the GM won't allow it to short-circuit the plot in an uninteresting way.

**Psychic Sensitive** – you are attuned to the vibrations of supernatural forces, able to perceive and sometimes communicate with ghosts, spirits and other entities; notice the presence of magic; and pick up on strange atmospheres in a location. The GM should set a Rank for the difficulty of perceiving the influence and let you have it without a roll if your Rank is higher. This is an intuitive faculty, and you don't necessarily understand what you pick up. You may be able to agree occasional wider uses with the GM, for instance paying a Fortune point to get a useful vision.

**Psychokinesis** – the astonishing ability to move and manipulate small objects from a distance with the power of your mind. The limit is affecting a human-sized object with human-scale strength. As a standard use you can throw a dagger fast enough to injure somebody, or move a light sword more slowly to intercept a blow, but anything larger gives you a failure Rank of fatigue. You must be able to see what you're doing. It takes massive concentration: routine awareness of what's going on around you may require a roll, and rolls you'd normally make (such as noticing someone creeping up behind with a large vase...) are at a downshift. Any rolls to manipulate the object use this MOD.

**Seasoned Traveller** – you've spent a lot of time wandering the world. Anywhere except for the most obscure backwater, you can speak the local lingo well enough to ask directions or order a meal. Once per scene you can do an "I know a place...", for instance to hide, get supplies or find a contact. (Make sure there's going to be travel before you take this one!) Use MOD for outsider-local situations.

**Sharpshooter** – you can use any standard portable firearm. You are faster than any normal thug: this Quality counts for initiative for gunplay. In most situations you can shoot small inanimate



objects like ropes or lights simply by taking an action, but the GM may require a roll using MOD if there's significant stress or opposition. (You could have versions of this Shtick for bows or knife throwing.)

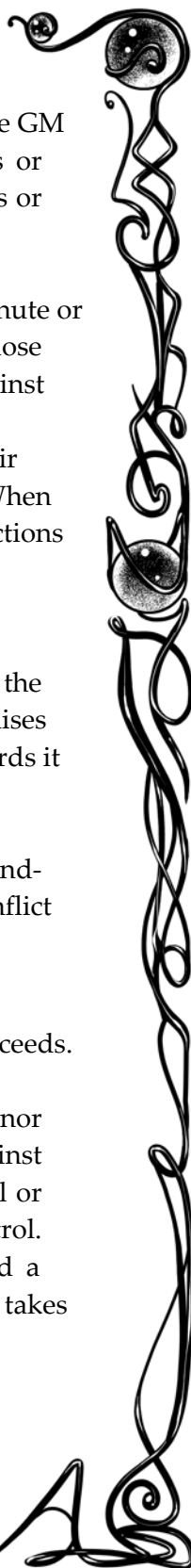
**Suggestion** – this is like souped-up hypnotism. It takes a minute or so talking to a subject (in a language they understand) at close quarters in a setting that's not too distracting. Roll MOD against their mental defences. If successful they will follow one reasonable-sounding suggestion (nothing that violates their strongest principles or self-preservation) for up to a scene. When the effect wears off the subject usually has only hazy recollections of what happened.

**Superior Metabolism** – your body adapts to cope with environmental stresses: the heat of the desert, the cold of the Arctic, even diseases and toxins. This Quality simply neutralises hazards of lower Rank than itself. Against more potent hazards it adds its MOD (Average counts as 1).

**Wheelman** – you're a natural at driving pretty much any land-based vehicle. Add MOD to any driving roll. In a vehicle conflict (see below):

- this counts as an initiative Quality
- a stunt move does no additional damage if your roll succeeds.

**Will of Steel** – your mental power and steely gaze mean minor characters attempting staredowns or other intimidation against you simply fail. In other cases you can add MOD to compel or resist compulsion, including psychic and supernatural control. Also, when you would normally zero out you may spend a Fortune point, once, to continue acting. Any further damage takes you out.





## General rules

**Fortune Points** work as standard. Pulp characters use the narration option a *lot* to get lucky breaks and implausible get-outs. The GM should make sure they get more points when merited.

- **Raising the stakes** – taking an action that escalates peril to a new level for your character or the group as a whole is usually worth a Fortune point. This doesn't include taking stupid risks for no good reason, or copying what someone else just did.

**Dark Learning Points** are not used.

## Vehicle rules

This is a simple set of rules for handling car chases and the like. Adapting it to other modes of transport is left to the reader.

A vehicle is like a mini-character with three special Qualities: Speed, Handling and Body (its durability). The Ranks place it relative to its type. For instance, looking at land vehicles a motorcycle will have a high Handling and a low Body. These Qualities get added to a driver's abilities for relevant manoeuvres. They





also get reduced by damage to the vehicle. If it zeroes out, it's wrecked, stuck or otherwise inoperable.

Contests between characters driving vehicles can be simple, complicated or conflict situations as normal. An extended car chase should certainly be a conflict situation, where zeroing out *either* the driver or the vehicle means dropping out. Remember that damage reflects jockeying for dramatic supremacy: not all of it is dents and scrapes.

## Manoeuvres

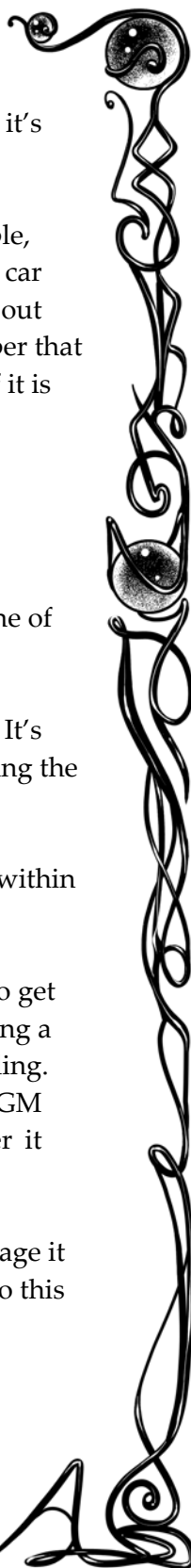
Most things you'll want to do in a vehicle chase fall under one of these moves.

**Race.** You attempt to outdistance or catch the competition. It's primarily about the Speed of the vehicle, and the driver getting the most out of it. You need a reasonably clear road for this.

**Pursuit.** Using driving skill and Handling to catch or evade within a more cluttered environment, like city streets.

**Stunts.** Bold manoeuvres, often making use of the scenery, to get into a better position than the opponent – for example jumping a ramp to get ahead – or force them into trouble. It uses Handling. A well-described stunt may merit an upshift. However, the GM will usually assign you an extra Rank of damage whether it succeeds or fails.

**Offensive.** Making contact with an opposing vehicle to damage it or push it around. This uses Body vs Body. A vehicle can't do this to an opponent with a higher Body than its own.





**Weapons.** If the vehicle itself has weapons, these can be used to attack. The target vehicle's Body is always figured into the defence. Characters can also try using personal weapons against a vehicle, but these can do no more than one damage Rank at a time. (If multiple characters try, just do one defence for the target.)

## Damage

The driver's player decides how to allocate incoming damage.

Each character travelling in the vehicle may be given one Rank of the damage. The group keeps travelling, but is a bit shaken up. On a weapon attack, at least one Rank must go to the vehicle itself.

Most damage to the vehicle and its occupants is failure Ranks. The vehicle takes damage Ranks if another vehicle hits it or shoots at it. (Then it'll take a while to get fully functional again.)

The occupants take damage Ranks if Body goes down to Poor, as they are less protected. (Personal attacks against occupants are separate. It may be harder to hit.)

Vehicles can be minions. In a chase where most of the cars are nameless police or criminals, they can be overcome in one go by beating their Target Number in some suitable action. You could give them a Driver Rank in addition to Speed, Handling and Body.

## Sample vehicles

### Ordinary small car

Average [0] Speed, Average [0] Handling, Average [0] Body



### **Motorcycle**

Good [+2] Speed, Expert [+4] Handling, Poor [-2] Body

### **Tank**

Poor [-2] Speed, Poor [-2] Handling, Master [+6] Body, Expert [+4] Gun

### **Passenger aeroplane**

Expert [+4] Speed, Good [+2] Handling, Good [+2] Body



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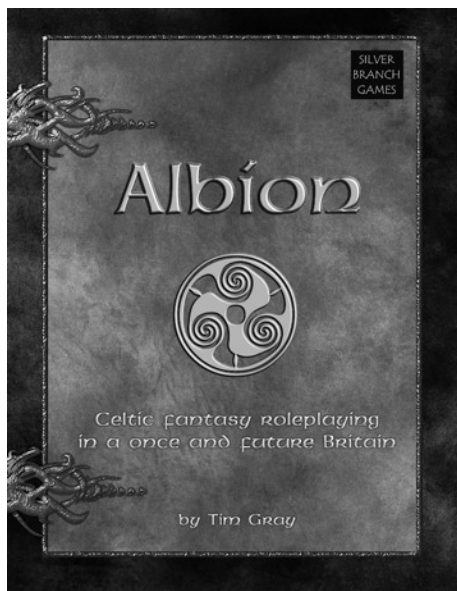
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