

Courts of Aden



Once, the Known Lands were consumed by war. The Great War. Its cause is not remembered, at least not with any accuracy; some claim one thing and others claim another. Entire nations rose and fell during the centuries that the conflict raged, waning in some places and waxing in others. For more than four hundred years, the continent was not without war. Races were wiped out. The ilithix hives rose to prominence within the mountains, while the mysterious echoes secretly made their way into the mortal realm, never to return to their own lost home. But fortunately for the civilized people of Aden, that period came to an end with the Rose Accords, and widespread conflict was finally extinguished. The Golden Age began, followed by the Age of Thunder, and ultimately the Dark-fall, which ushered in an entirely new conflict: one for survival.

However, despite what the histories say, the Golden Age and the Age of Thunder were not without conflict. Some military skirmishes did take place, albeit on a very small scale, but open warfare was absent. Political conflicts, on the other hand, became much more commonplace, with higher stakes and ruthless tactics becoming the norm. Despite that war has returned to Aden in the form of the never-ending battle with the nocturnals and the corrupted who side with them, political strife has not abated, and indeed the stakes have never been higher. In certain locations throughout the continent, there is ruthless back-stabbing and betrayal on a magnitude rarely ever seen on an actual battlefield, and in many cases, it has a more far-reaching effect. In a world where resources are scarcer than ever, political, economic, and even martial intrigue have taken on greater importance that has not been seen since the days of the Great War more than a thousand years ago.

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FARPOINT

The easternmost settlement in the vast desert nation of the Rhanate, Farpoint is also perhaps one of the most civilized, with little of the open dominance by mercenary warlords that is seen so often elsewhere within the nation's borders. The civility extends to visitors to the city, many of whom will not venture farther into the Sundered Desert and thus limit their interactions with the Rhanate to Farpoint altogether. However, it is something of an illusion, and the deadly environment that dominates the rest of the desert nation is still present, but hidden beneath the surface, where the unwary never notice until it is far too late.

Nobles and other wealthy individuals come from all over the Known Lands to Farpoint, where they can engage in spirited debate and negotiations in the court of the local governor with various representatives of mercenary groups that make their home within the Rhanate. Contracts with mercenaries of such sort normally incurs a percentage fee paid directly to the government of the desert nation, but the governor of Farpoint, who very much enjoys the sense of importance and prestige that comes from his court, reduces the percentage just enough to ensure that the vast majority of mercenaries find it much more attractive to conduct their negotiations in his court, just as he prefers.

On any given day in the court of Governor Abboud, there are a dozen or more petitioners from all across the continent, and half a dozen or perhaps ten representatives from mercenary companies operating out of the Rhanate. Most are responsible for multiple groups and can therefore have numerous contracts in play at once, while others are smaller groups hungry to make a name for themselves and thus offering much more attractive rates, albeit without a proven track record with which to make assurances. Some of the petitioners eagerly compete against one another to secure contracts with the most prestigious companies, and constantly bid repeatedly, with the companies gaining increasing profits with each bid.

Notable Personages of Farpoint

- ❖ **POTENTATE FARAHLA (female elven alchemist 6)** – A cruel, manipulative, ruthless woman, Farahla oversees a settlement in the Rhanate on behalf of the Dust King. She travels to Farpoint to secure her mercenary contracts, she claims, because she finds the spirited haggling entertaining. The truth is that she is so reviled by the people in her home province that she has difficulty securing contracts any other way.
- ❖ **SIR TRYCEN (male human cavalier 8)** – This young knight is a member of the Radiant Order and was recently appointed governance of a small rural province. Unfortunately, it is sparsely populated enough that it will take time to build a suitable militia, and he hopes to secure a small mercenary group to aid in defending his new fiefdom until that happens.

- ❖ **JASMINA (female fighter 7)** – A slightly built woman whose appearance belies her devastating skill as a warrior, Jasmina represents the Seven Dune Brotherhood, a large mercenary company operating out of the city of Tee. She has numerous contracts available but finds most of those seeking to hire her company utterly wretched and wants little to do with them.
- ❖ **SIBAKKA (male lion ferran (predator) ranger 4)** – This clearly uncomfortable warrior represents a group of adventurers currently residing in Farpoint who hope to sell their services as mercenaries and make some money, as they are clearly penniless and in dire need of work.

SHAN TI

One of the largest cities in Vanora, Shan Ti is also a trade hub for the Dragon Empire as well, where all international trade for the nation is conducted. There is a large port in the capital city of Tanto, where many assume all the nation's trade takes place, but Tanto is relegated to domestic trade, and Shan Ti handles all foreign merchants who wish to deal with the various merchant houses of Vanora. It is an unusual arrangement, one not seen anywhere else in the Known Lands, but it makes perfect sense to the Vanorans regardless of the inconvenience associated with the process, and those who wish to conduct business with the Empire of the Beasts have little choice but to acquiesce to the idea or take their business elsewhere. The tremendous amount of cargo that enters and leaves the city each day, coupled with various exchange rates and competing bids, has ensured that the port city is one of the most significant centers of economic intrigue on the continent.

The merchant houses of Vanora enjoy significant status because of their wealth and because of their tangential service directly to the throne. The Emperor alone can bestow status as a merchant house, and he too can revoke it, but the houses control such a vast majority of the trade that Vanora enjoys that doing so could be risky, even for the Dragon Emperor. No house has ever blatantly defied the Emperor or used their economic power to influence him, but all are aware that such a possibility exists. Patriotism and fear of the Young Dragon's potentially ruthless reprisals has prevented such an event from ever occurring, but other members of the Imperial bureaucracy are much safer and more convenient targets.

The politics of the marketplace in Shan Ti are as ruthless as any battlefield. The scions of the Vanoran merchant houses are intent on gaining resources for resale with the minimum possible expense of resources, while the merchants arriving in the city for business need to make a profitable living in order to remain in business. The houses care little whether any given merchant ever returns to port, because there are always more to take their place. It is not an infinitely sustainable method of doing business, but thus far there has not been enough of a negative consequence to dissuade the houses from operating in this ruthless, often underhanded capacity. The Dairini of Shan Ti, a ferran tigress warrior named Miwauk, has begun to pay closer attention to the events in the marketplace, and she is displeased with what she sees. Still, she has yet to move against the merchant houses, for they are a powerful enemy, even for a Dairini.

Notable Personages of Shan Ti

- ❖ **HIDACHI TOMARU (male elf expert 16)** – Easily the most powerful figure in the Shan Ti marketplace, Hidachi is the head of House Tomaru, one of the more powerful merchant houses. He makes and ruins careers daily, and cares about nothing more than the prosperity of his house. Even the welfare of the Vanoran people is merely a means to ensuring his house prospers. He and the Dairini of Shan Ti hate one another rather virulently.

- ❖ **PACQUES (male gorean rogue 4)** – A pickpocket and Le'Ciel expatriate, Pacques is a teenager who is often hired through merchant house intermediaries to steal information about recently arrived vessels so that the houses can bargain from an informed position. Though he claims to be illiterate and plays the fool, Pacques is quite perceptive and can read several languages.
- ❖ **MIKARI SHAE (female human expert 9)** – Head of a very small merchant house, Mikari is extremely cunning and hopes to see her house advance to a major power during her lifetime. Currently she keeps a low profile among her peers and makes the majority of her most prosperous transactions by waiting to trade until an opportune time and making use of fluctuating exchange rates in doing so.
- ❖ **VIANORA LAIUS (female druid 6)** – A newcomer to the Shan Ti marketplace, Vianora is an Aramystian whose only home is her small ship. She constantly moves along the eastern coast, purchasing cargoes that she finds affordable and then determining where the best market for them might be. She enjoys the cutthroat environment of Shan Ti and is an exceptional haggler.

ST. LUCCA

The people of Carraway are generally a simple sort, working diligently at their jobs every day, having meals with their family, and attending services at the Church of All Saints weekly if not daily, depending upon their level of devotion. A city in this zealous nation seems an odd choice for the site of political intrigue of any sort, but there are always exceptions. In Carraway, the exception is St. Lucca. Viewed as the breadbasket of Carraway, the city is overwhelmingly focused on agrarian pursuits, an exceptionally fertile effort that provides food for a sizeable percentage of the nation. Of those few other pursuits within the city, one is a large academy for scholars and theologians both from Carraway and in other nations. It is one of the most prestigious learning institutions remaining in Western Aden in the wake of the devastation that has struck Aramsyt following the Darkfall. Unfortunately, it is also a strong indicator that the political aspect of academia has survived the near-end of the world completely intact.

The primary source of conflict within the St. Lucca Academy is the result of the school's long history of producing deep thinkers and wise men. Once per year, when the High Theocrat holds her annual conclave, several representatives from the academy are selected to travel to the capital city of St. Chandrey and engage in discussion, debate, and research with other prominent members of the church, many from the capital itself but others from across Carraway, on any number of different subjects. Oftentimes the results of the conclave are the issuance of new theological texts distributed to every clergy within the nation. It is, to say the least, a tremendous honor to attend the conclave, and the opportunity to influence doctrine on a nationwide scale is something that most academics and theologians find almost intoxicating.

Ostensibly, the duty of selecting members to attend the conclave falls to High Vicar Lucca, the administrator of both the city that bears his ancestor's name and the academy itself. However, the High Vicar's interest in such matters is extremely limited, preoccupied as he is with the high-overwhelming task of constantly defending the city's vast fields and livestock from nocturnal attacks. Instead, he allows the faculty of the academy to nominate, vote on, and submit for his approval a list of candidates being sent. To date, he has never taken issue with any of the submitted names as far as anyone knows. The result of this process is an incredibly competitive environment where high level students and junior faculty members constantly jockey for approval and clout in hopes of securing enough support from the senior faculty to be nominated and pass a vote to be sent to the conclave, where they can advance their own interpretation of doctrine and shape the future of the Church in a manner of their choosing.

Notable Personages of St. Lucca

- ❖ **ALEXI BOROVANICH (male human cleric 8)** – A member of the senior faculty who teaches numerous classes in the academy, Borovanich cares very little about the conclave but has somewhat hedonistic tendencies and is happy to grant favor to whoever offers him the most opulent gifts of friendship.
- ❖ **KARIANA OLEGA (female faerkin paladin 5)** – Karianna is a former adventurer who surrendered a life of violence and avarice to embrace the calling of her faith. She is unquestionably brilliant and insightful, but her refusal to play politics and court favor with others has limited her advancement. Nevertheless, some of the junior faculty have begun to take note of her writing.
- ❖ **TATIANNIA KISEV (female half-elf bard 2)** – Life as a clerk to the senior faculty is rarely exciting, but Tatianna finds the months leading up to the conclave more thrilling than she would prefer. She keeps quiet but is an excellent judge of character and has seen the wrong sort of person sent to the conclave repeatedly over the years. This year she has determined to change that, even if she must betray the trust of the Church and alter records to endure the proper scholars represent her beloved academy.
- ❖ **SENN (male human expert 2)** – A simple scribe with no ambition, Senn finds himself in the highly uncomfortable position of being well-known among the junior faculty as having immaculate and beautiful calligraphy, and thus is constantly being pulled in multiple directions when others want him to transcribe their work for submission.

TOP OF THE WORLD

The ancestral home of the dwarves is not where one might expect to find a thriving political environment, but that is exactly what lies beneath its portrayal as a hotbed of mechanical and alchemical innovation. (To be sure, the innovation ascribed to the city does take place, but the other aspects of it are typically not as publicly known.) Since the destruction of the Celestial College in Aramyst, Top of the World has become one of the best-known centers of research in the Known Lands because of the particular interest of the dwarven community there and it has become second only to Mekanus in the pursuit of mechatronics as well. It is a veritable hotbed of research and development toward new and more powerful forms of magical and technological applications, and one that exists within a nation possessing a relatively open attitude about allowing the development of such things, within broad limits. This confluence of factors has resulted in an environment where resources are hotly contested and, as a result, there is a tremendous amount of squabbling between developers for resources, patronage, and even workspace within the city.

Top of the World is ruled by a council of dwarves, headed by Governor Drummel Ironaxe, a man chosen by King Corben from the council to oversee the city on behalf of the throne. Although they rarely discuss the matter with outsiders, one of the most pressing matters of concern the council faces is the constant threat of their distant kin, the so-called "deep dwarves" that never left their subterranean realms for the surface and who view all those who did as heretics and blasphemers who should be scourged from existence. There are periodic incursions against the dwarves at Top of the World, and the limited experience the council has tells them that a large number of deep dwarves are corrupted by the Darkfall, meaning that their ancient task of defending against their fallen kin as become that much more dangerous. The dwarven council is constantly in search of new ways to fight their ancestral enemies, and toward that end they are constantly sponsoring new steamwrights, mechatronics, and others, both arcanists and technologists, in hopes of securing weaponry that can be put to use in this manner. Competition for their sponsorship has become very cutthroat, and the environment in the city is highly competitive as a result.

The council holds periodic opportunities for potential contractors to present their concepts and proof-of-function to the body as a whole, although members may also seek out possible contractors and review their work independently, awarding them one of a small number of member contracts. Those whose work impresses the dwarves can secure contracts that ensure they are paid well and given adequate space to work, as well as first choice of materials. However, these contracts require regular demonstrations of progress, and those who cannot meet the exacting schedule find their contracts abruptly terminated. These contracts are in such demand that there have been numerous instances of sabotage to ensure a contract becomes available, and different hopefuls constantly wage a battle of influence over not only council members but those who advise them, anyone who can influence one or more of the council, and even members of their family. Few are more ruthless than those who are desperate to see their life's work brought to fruition, and they will allow no one to stand in their way.

Notable Personages of Top of the World

- ✦ **PHINNEAS (male jurak alchemist 9)** – A bright arcanist who has never successfully secured a contract, Phinneas is rapidly becoming disgruntled and disillusioned with the system at Top of the World and has begun to consider sabotage as a means of advancing his work.
- ✦ **SSERUNN (female rapacious mechatmage 7)** – Few who have met Sserunn can deny her intensity and brilliance, just as they cannot miss the fact that she is barely capable of carrying on a normal conversation with others. Still, her innovation and past successes with new mechatmagical creations have rendered her a council favorite, and she is rarely without at least one contract at any given time.
- ✦ **HARUMI SHIN (female human samurai 8)** – Harumi is a bodyguard for the council, ensuring that they are not threatened during the course of their work. She finds the political aspect of their work distasteful but understands it is a necessary evil that cannot be avoided. She tries to find subtle ways to encourage the council to avoid the more conniving petitioners when she can.
- ✦ **GUNNAR GOLDHAMMER (male dwarf rogue 9)** – A member of the dwarven council, Goldhammer is interested not only in defeating the deep dwarves but also in enriching himself in the process. He awards his personal contracts not based on merit but upon secret agreements for him to receive a portion of the profits from any new discoveries that come about as a result of the process.

Nobility

In the Known Lands, the concept of nobility is largely a thing of the past. There are some nations where hereditary status as a nobleman is still conferred, but most have done away with this generations ago. Columbey was the most prominent example of this practice, but with its fall and transformation into Urbana, only those few families that offered immediate and overt loyalty and support to Urbane retained their status, and it remains to be seen if the Iron Tyrant will permit their titles to be passed down in the traditional manner.

Most nations use the term nobility to refer to wealthy and influential individuals who play at least a limited role in governance, typically through appointment by a monarch or ruling body. Members of the knights and templars of the Radiant Order in Arasteen, for example, often have assignments beyond their military rank with regard to the government of the nation. Likewise, in Carraway, families with prominent positions within the Church of All Saints or the corresponding bureaucracy that oversees settlements are referred to as nobles, as are members of the Imperial bureaucracy in Vanora. These positions can be handed down along family lines, but are not automatically, and always subject to the ability of each generation to perform their duties well; no government in Aden can afford to permit poor leaders to remain in positions of power simply because their parents did the same job.

Regardless of the circumstances, however, many people in important positions throughout the Known Lands use titles formerly associated with the nobility. In some cases they are awarded the titles along with their duties, while others in less 'civilized' nations, such as the Rhanate and the High Steppes, simply adopt them on their own.

Noble Titles

Archduke / Archduchess
Baron / Baroness
Baronet / Baronetess
Count / Countess
Duke / Duchess
Earl / Countess
Knight / Dame
Marquess / Marchioness
Potentate (gender neutral title)
Viscount / Viscountess



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