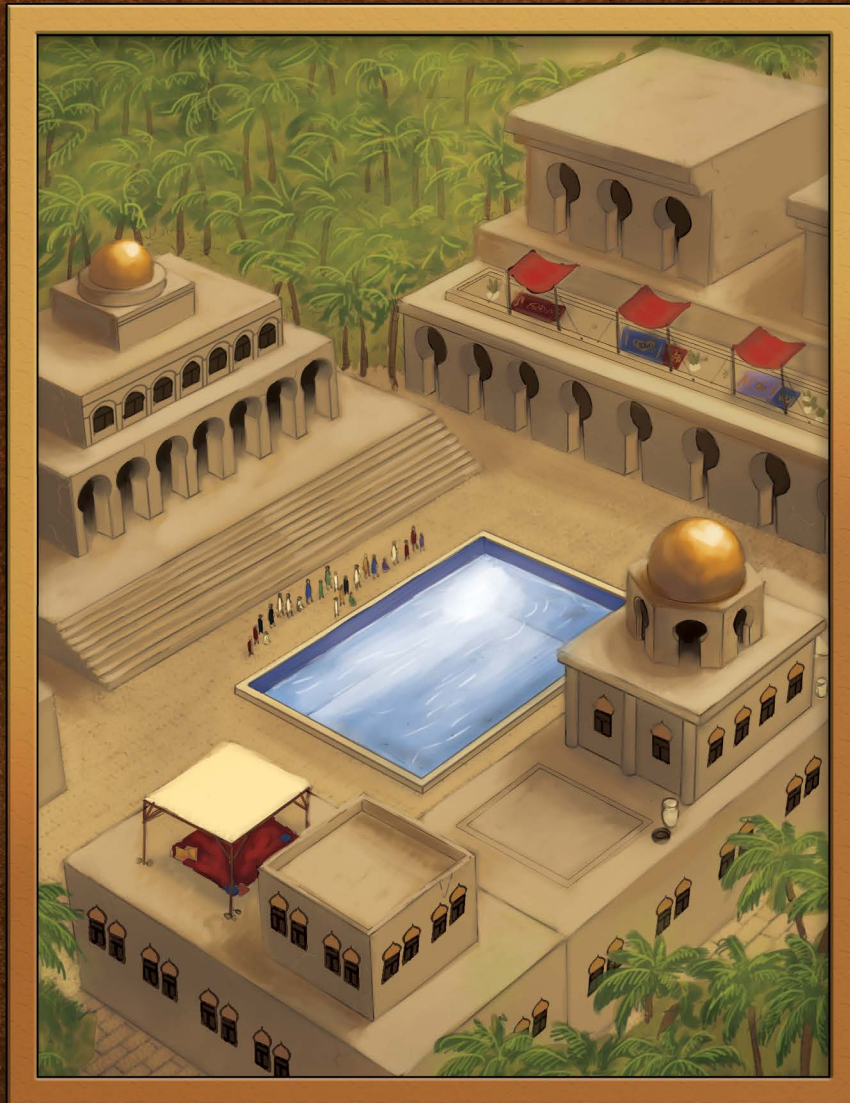


EPIC HIGH FANTASY

Shandar

GUIDEBOOK



DESERT PRINCES

GUIDEBOOK : DESERT PRINCES

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SAND AND MYSTERY

"My friend, this is a worthy trade. You have made the right choice, and dare I say it - the best! May this old parchment bring you as much adventure as you desire, and as much wealth as you can safely carry on your back." ~ Akeed amin Hazred

THE YOULIN ARADI

Welcome to the Desert Princes, traveler; you've come a long way to enter a land of mystery and intrigue where the harshest climate can take your life on a whim, just as quickly as a bandit can with a sharp blade. The home of the Youlin Aradi, the People of the Sun. Where the desert hides ruins beneath the shifting sands, the folk have secrets galore, and water is a precious commodity, even more so than silver or gold.

You'll learn who the Nine Princes are, just what the Ride of Glory is, and take a deeper look at some of the mysteries held by the region than before.

So prepare to enter the desert, claim its riches for yourselves, and embark on the Ride of Glory!

AN OVERVIEW OF THE REGION

A beautiful yet harsh region of Shaintar, the Eternal Desert, land of the Desert Princes, is an incredible place to visit, but not one to tread lightly. Many scholars have written treatises upon the region, but none have ever been able to lay bare all its secrets.

The region borders Dregordia in the west, including parts of the Hellstorm Mountains, the Dwarven Clanhomes in the east, and the Defiant Lands to the north. One major river flows down from the northern edge of the desert, the Lifegiver, to the southern oasis and beyond terminating in the sea by the City of Paradise.

There are many settlements, towns, villages and cities in the region. Yet there's no capital to speak of, the Princes oversee their own territory and have their meetings in territory declared neutral ages ago according to tradition. The closest to a capital city may well be the city known as Al'Tora, which serves as a center of culture and an import/export center for the region and is one of the few places where diverse cultures can be found in one place.

Liner Notes: The Eternal Desert

You can look at many sources for the Eternal Desert, in Sean's words: take pretty much every classic cliché and concept associated with fantastic desert cultures, and it works here. This is true, as I've been writing; I've envisioned Aladdin, Ali Baba, 1001 Arabian Nights, and more. There's smatterings of the recent Mummy, and Scorpion King films.

There's also elements of Prince of Persia, alongside the majesty, grandeur, and ritual of Ancient Egypt.

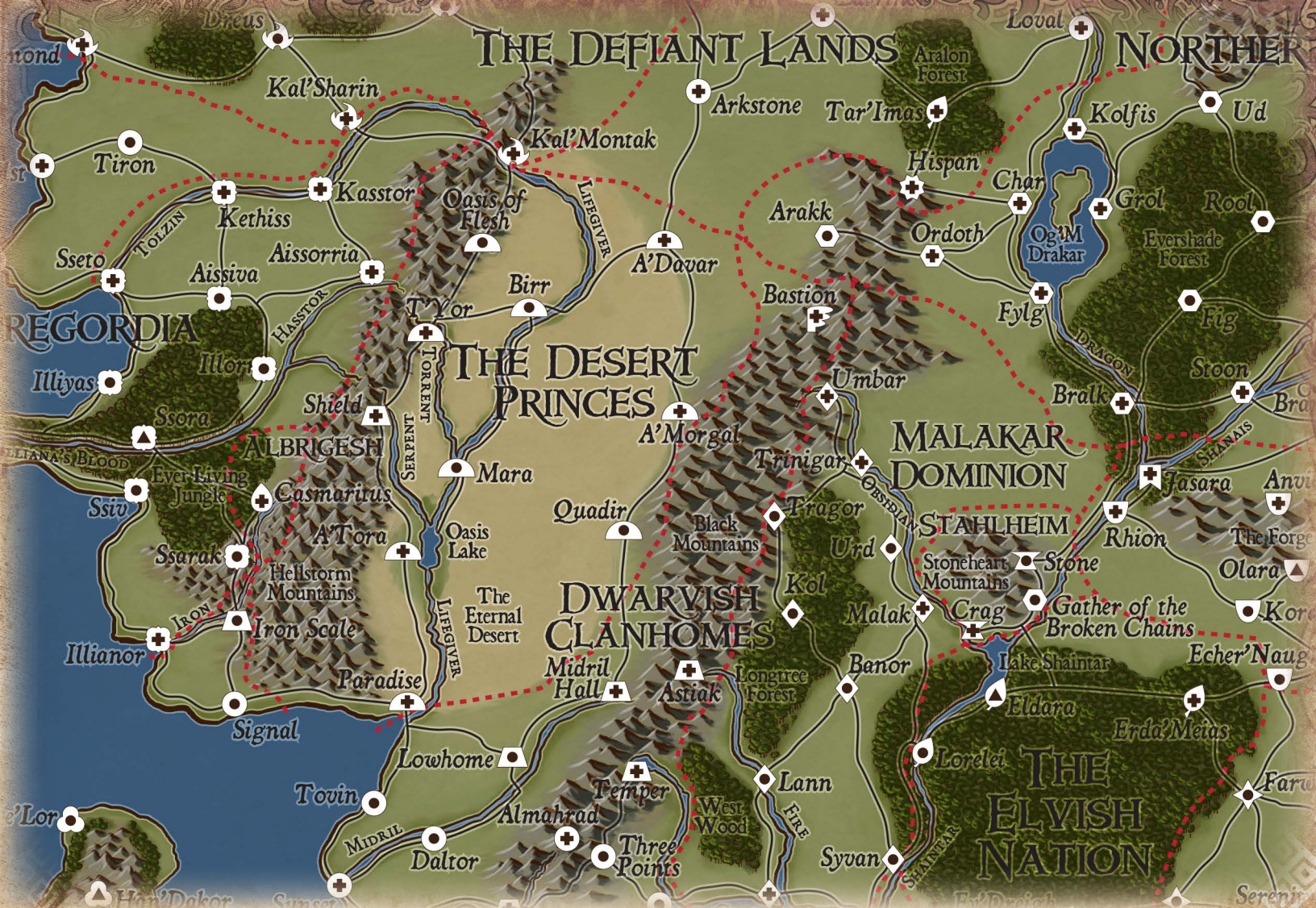
What you need to do to make the desert come alive, is remember, rather like Dark Sun, Dragon Kings, or any fantastic desert setting - the desert is 'alien' and so are its people. The environment isn't your friend, it's your enemy and it'll push you hard, and try to kill you every step of the way.

If it's not the new monsters presented within this book, it's the daily hazards of life and travel in the region. The people can recognize an outsider when they see them, and they often show contempt, or pity for those found struggling with even the basics of their native world. Yet folk are protected by the rules of hospitality, and honor, so great and sacred is this protection that even the most noble of knights from Galea might learn something new about the concept of honor here from the lowliest desert rogue.

Of the 350,000 strong population, the Youlin Aradi make up roughly 80% of this number, with dwarves at 8%, and non-Aradi humans, and other races making up the other 12% - including a fair number of Kalinesh expatriates.

As one might expect with such a population, there's a difference in religious beliefs too. Most Youlin Aradi revere the Paths of Life and Nature, yet some few persist in worshipping Ceynara in her Lady of Might and Queen of War aspect. These are a people who believe tradition and ceremony are the only safe way to peace among them.

The Eternal Desert has a central government, yet no one person rules it as with many of the other lands. Instead, you'll find many areas fall under the autocratic rule of the Desert Princes themselves. Those areas not ruled by the Nine, are usually left to rule themselves, this tends to create anarchy and opportunity though some meeting places are revered for their place within tradition. They are granted neutral status and any who sleep beneath the fronds at these locations must treat all others there as brothers until the sun sets the next day.



There are numerous things to be found here, resources that cannot be found anywhere else, incredible spices from some of the markets, silks, satins, gems that shine brighter than anywhere else on Shaintar. With two mountain ranges to choose from, the wealth of the region produces much in the way of riches which allow the people to prosper.

Many folk import their clothing, their dyes, and their foods to add an exotic twist to their own lives.

This land of proud people could well be the cradle of civilization, with many ruins and treasures buried beneath the shifting sands. They bear this knowledge with a sad pride, feeling the loss of their former power and mourning days gone by. They are a people driven by honor above all, with all social interactions governed by rites and traditions, and a simple exchange of words can end in bloodshed.

In fact, those traditions of words, deeds, and water are the forces which drive these people and their decisions.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND MUSINGS

NEW VS. OLD

Whilst it's tricky to pin down times and dates for the Eternal Desert, the region is rife with history and lore, thus we would be remiss not to recount at least some of it within these pages. So, whilst most loremasters hold that the Eternal Desert was not always the harsh, sand-covered waste it is today, they also cite that it was the home to the first 'true' civilization in Shaintar: the Empire of the Golden Sun, sometimes known as the Empire of the Golden Crown depending on the translation you're reading.

This brought about considerable argument as to who the dominant race of this ancient empire truly was. Some believe it was the Fae; this is often seems supported by ancient writings from the region. Their reasoning is that some writings have linguistic links to the elvish language. On the other side of the argument, scholars, most notably Alvorad Brandle

of Galea's historical society, have postulated that dwarven culture is the dominant one, his reasons for this stem from the study of ancient tablets, where dwarven construction techniques are prevalent; this is reflected in the archeology from the many dig sites found in the region.

Annoyingly for the scholars on both sides of the fence, neither the Fae nor the dwarves can point to any references within their own historical documents to support either claim.

There's a small but growing contingent of loremasters and delvers of knowledge that holds another idea in their hearts (and writings). This younger branch of the scholarly archeological and historical movement believes that humans were the founding race of the Empire of the Golden Sun, thus making them the primary civilizing race of the ancient world.

Traditionalists hold this idea to be ludicrous, and once they cease laughing, point to the fact that races such as the Fae, and dwarves brought their social and technological gifts to humans as civilization developed on Shaintar not the other way around.

THE PEOPLE OF THE SUN

The new school of thought aims to prove that the people living in the Eternal Desert now, the Youlin Aradi, are the remnants of the founding race of the ancient world. To support this, the new scholars use archaeological evidence within scrolls to support their claims. Their chief claim is that the other races never lived there in the Empire in great number, whilst many ruins point to high concentrations of the People of the Sun.

This is further cemented by the discovery that many of the Fae, and dwarven influences are an amalgamation. They must have been collated by

someone, and the new scholars are eager to point out that humans have always been at the forefront where other racial influences being integrated together are concerned.

NEW EVIDENCE

During the "Hundred Years' Peace" that followed the War of Betrayal, a historical expedition exploring ruins found somewhere between Mara, and Quadir discovered an incredible secret beneath the sand. What they found was a perfectly preserved tomb, complete with tomb guardians: mummies. Many of the expedition members were killed in the resulting confrontation and all of the artifacts were destroyed save for a series of scrolls which are currently being studied at the Zayid Library.

ZAYID SCROLLS

The Zayid Scrolls are an interesting find; via the use of a combination of scholarly, scientific, and magical means the historians have determined that this evidence is indeed thousands of years old. The scrolls tell the story of a family of nobles, the very ones which were interred in the tomb. The language of that time seemed to use many pictures, incorporating sketches and diagrams along with the scrolls themselves.

Studying these wondrous artifacts paints a clearer idea of the people of the time, a people who were not Fae, or dwarven, but very clearly of human origin. For every depiction upon the scrolls, pottery and tablets refers to these people, and their god. A being known as Raz'Dash - the Sun God, he too appears as a human figure in their writings.

Needless to say this has given scholars everywhere some pause.

A FALLEN EMPIRE

Whoever ruled the empire thousands of years ago, the 'Sky Basin' is a mile-wide crater some 50 miles to the southwest of A'Morgal, that leads many folk to believe that a great cataclysm caused terrible devastation that caused the end of the civilization millennia ago. Scholars have found evidence to support this, including fragments of a great stone which is believed to be the cause; the stone fell from the heavens and with it brought destruction, and changed the face of the empire.

Liner Notes: Raz'Dash

For those of you who want to dive deeper into Raz'Dash, the Sun God, here's a couple of things you can do. First, here's a little secret - Raz'Dash is a splinter of the Star Father, who in turn became Archanon. Archanon still grants spells and magic to priests of this Raz'Dash - after all, Sun Lord and Lord of Light are the same thing.

It also changed the climate of the region, destroying the wildlife, and turning fertile ground into desolation. What few communities remained who survived, clung to the single river that flowed through the land, eking out some kind of life in the wake of the fall of the spire.

BEYOND THE GOLDEN SUN

Nearly 2000 years after the old empire fell the former lands of the Golden Sun are rife with warfare, as warring factions and tribes formed under powerful and charismatic leaders battle over what arable land and resources still remain. Water is the key to life.

The Youlin Aradi fought each other tooth and nail, until the Kal-a-Nar Empire invaded in 1753, when they came together to try and resist the invaders, but were swiftly conquered. They would not be free again until a Kalinesh Warlord fell for an Aradi woman and set the people free in 2562.

They were briefly unified and then fell once again to infighting, and the struggle for power.

In 3008, in the invasion called the “Gold War,” the Malakar Dominion invaded the lands, seizing the gold mines of the northeast. This stopped the clash of blades and ideals, forcing the Princes of the Eternal Desert to put aside squabbles, wars, feuds, and rivalries to work together and combat the threat and forge a more unified peace and understanding which continues to last, barring the odd flare up of course.

ARCHITECTURE

Many scholars might point to the aforementioned elvish and dwarvish elements in the style of the Youlin Aradi’s buildings, but in truth their architecture (as previously mentioned) hails from an ancient time and place. The Empire of the Golden Sun’s influence echoes down through the ages, no more so than in the many great cities which comprise the cultural locales of the region.

The buildings of the Youlin Aradi, when they’re not travelling with their great tent cities in the unforgiving wastes of the desert, are glorious. They have incredible curves, minarets, and towers made of their local white or sandy colored stone. Some of them have flat rooves, on which are erected small rooftop gardens, or balconies where the folk sit

under a shade during the hottest part of the day. It is a foolish mortal who remains out under such burning radiance for long without some sort of protection from the heat.

Most of the Youlin Aradi buildings are designed to take advantage of shade from the desert sun by day and the cooling effect of the wind by night. They are spacious, featuring arches, domes, and pillars with very little glass. In fact glass is usually kept for the more expensive buildings and the homes of the Princes and their families, many have shutters for when sandstorms might strike, and all have curtains for doors to encourage air flow.

In some regions of the Eternal Desert, the Youlin Aradi have begun to use recently uncovered ancient techniques to light the interior of the homes and the sanctums of religious places. By placing highly polished metal mirrors in key areas, they can draw the light of the sun down to the darkest depths. These devices were first discovered in the ancient tomb that led to the discovery of the scrolls studied in Zayid.

A relatively new discovery, which requires some knowledge of rudimentary alchemy and water traditions, can give a dark room light during a very hot day. They mix certain powders with a special type of water in blown glass bottles. These light bottles are set in wood or metal in the roof with the top part exposed to the sun, filled with water, and a special chemical. The chemical prevents the water from becoming clogged with algae, and when the sun hits the top of the bottle, the resulting light shines through the water in the lower part of the bottle and lights the room.

For those who can afford it, there’s also a few expensive magical means to light their homes, and other alchemical paths to follow.

Furniture tends to be made of wood and stone, with pillows and rugs replacing the traditional chairs, and tables.

Youlin Aradi tombs are often grand affairs, and bear mentioning here, since the tradition of the Empire of the Golden Sun to bury their dead in pyramid shaped structures, or beneath vast, impressive, animalistic guardian statues lives on in some of the regions of the Eternal Desert to this day.

THE SUN STONE

A curious element of the culture indeed, the concept of a Sun Stone also dates back to the time of the Empire of the Golden Sun. A brick, either made of gold, or painted the color of the sun is usually blessed by a priest and then inlaid next to the cornerstone of the newly constructed home. Some of these Sun Stones can also be made of precious jewels, or beautiful amber, set in the highest point of the home which catches the most sun during the day. It's said to be good luck to enter the home, walk into the rainbow circle cast by this kind of stone and be blessed by the Sun God.

ARADI NAMES

Notes

As the Eternal Desert is an analogue to the Middle East and northern regions of Africa, inspiration should be taken from the Arabic, Persian, Semitic, and Turkic languages. (Characters from the southern coast are likely to have Nazatiran influence; characters from the northern desert are likely to have a more Kalinesh influence.)

Examples

Male

Akeed, Almaris, Badr, Bahjat, Cami, Changeez, Dalal, Dekel, Esmayel, Evazir, Fahim, Fandir, Faramarz, Ghalib, Gulzar, Hajim, Haroun, Harradas, Inayat, Izanoor, Jahandar, Jibril, Kezid, Khalil, Latif, Liaqat, Mazin, Mansoor, Naser, Nezam, Omeed, Osman, Parviz, Piruz, Qadim, Qimat, Rahul, Rashid, Shakil, Sohrab, Taher, Tamir, Tooraj, Undeel, Usmah, Vafa, Varshab, Waled, Yaqub, Yusri, Zahir, Zayid

Female

Akilah, Almira, Ashraf, Aziza, Bahira, Basma, Chalipa, Chunna, Dayifa, Delkash, Ehaleh, Elaheh, Elnaz, Farnaz, Fatima, Fukayna, Ghaliya, Golnaz, Hala, Husni, Imani, Inayya, Jabbareh, Jamila, Jinan, Kalsum, Kokab, Laily, Latifa, Lizann, Maryam,

What's in a Name?

Basically everyone is a "child of" someone in the Eternal Desert (hence amin), so all you need to do to get the name flavor right is pick a given name, that sounds fantasy Arabic, Persian, or Egyptian (or a similar culture) and then pick another which is appropriate for a character's father. Just slap amin in the middle and there's your Youlin Aradi name!

Maliheh, Naeela, Nasrin, Ofra, Orkideh, Parveen, Pouri, Qadira, Qubilah, Ramesh, Ruqayya, Sadia, Samira, Shiklah, Taqiyya, Talayeh, Ulayyah, Uzma, Vanda, Wafiya, Wasima, Youlara, Yusra, Zayida, Zuhair, Zuleika

Surnames

Like the Kalinesh, the Youlin-Aradi tend to use patronymics as surnames. Unlike the Kalinesh, the connector is unisex: most Youlin-Aradi are known as (Given Name) amin (Parent's Name). In some regions- particularly among nomadic families- it's common to add several generations of family to the surname. For example, Zayida amin Mezatha amin Lellaufey amin Zamer amin Hazred, or "Zayida, whose father is Mezatha, grandfather is Lellaufey, Great-Grandfather is Zamer, and Great-Great Grandfather is Hazred."

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Youlin Aradi are somewhat shorter, darker of skin, roguish, and beautiful to behold. These are just some of the words used to describe them from outsiders; they tend toward darker hair, sultry eyes of darker hue and strong features. They're not a stick thin people, though you can find all body types amongst the People of the Sun.

Tattoos and body art are a part of the people of this culture, usually understated and done in dark ink, though there's a particular type lighter ink which creates some of the most stunning works of art upon the darker hued canvases that can be found amongst the tribes. Piercings are also common among wilder tribes, though these are always made of bone, as metal can be rather uncomfortable and heats quickly under the desert sun.

CLOTHING

As you might expect from such a hot climate, the people of the Eternal Desert do not go in for tight fitting clothing. They find that leather is too fatiguing and metal becomes life-threatening very quickly. So they wear very soft hide, laminated armors, and wear silks, cotton, and other light weight clothing.

Cloaks, burnouses, capes, and diaphanous robes are the staple clothing for many a man and a woman out and about in the region. Shirts, loose fitting pants, and soft open toed shoes (especially sandals) are usually

worn as well. It's a common thing to see hoods, face coverings, and even turbans amongst the population, anything which can block out or attenuate the sun. Tighter and more revealing clothing is used when indoors and many wear layers designed to handle the severe weather found in this region.

In some of the more wealthy areas, the traditional shirtless male, with a simple silk waistcoat is a regular sight, as are women dressed in some kind of halter, with an attached gown, or separate skirt, with bone or jewel ornamentation. The raks sharki dancers (belly dancers) use loose pantaloons and short vest to entertain when dancing on stage.

Food

One can find an almost bewildering and alien array of food to tempt the palate when exploring the Eternal Desert's many regions. Many scholars believe that wheat was first cultivated here, followed by barley, figs, dates, pomegranates, and other such tasty regional staples.

Dumplings brought in by another culture can be found here, and a lot of poultry dishes. These are delicately flavored and carefully spiced, usually served with rice or garlic, and often accompanied by a side dish or dip, a hummus (made with chick peas), and other delicacies like a falafel (a small patty made with fava beans or chick peas).

They have a lot of vegetable dishes too, and stuffed vegetables are a staple of their main diets, with many variants on that particular kind of meal.

They also slow cook a huge amount of meat compressed onto a metal pole; this is rotated and sliced into various cuts, served into soft bread layered with a sweet but hot sauce, lots of greens, and some more spices.

It can be said that their food is experimental yet since family is very important their dishes are designed to be shared.



DRINK

A thick coffee-like drink is a popular beverage in many of the regions of the Eternal Desert, this kaffa is made by boiling finely ground beans in water, letting them settle and distilling a very dark brew from this mix. Yarak is a drink which appears to be milky-white in color, usually mixed with water to reduce the alcohol content. It has a flavor akin to aniseed.

There are many other drinks found in the region, including common drinks such as amerze, which is made with apricots and sugar. It's thick and sweet, and favored at festive communal gatherings.

SOCIETY

The Eternal Desert is a region made up of two distinct cultures, and understanding both of them is key to survival in the socio-political environment of the region. The cities are where the Desert Princes can truly show their rule, and many of them are as complex and dangerous as any other city in Shaintar. Those families from ancient times, those who can trace their ancestry back to the glory days of the Empire of the Golden Sun, gather in these cities to negotiate and struggle for greater power.

There are those who bring in trade from far off lands, these folk are often heroes and nearly princes in their own right, knowing well the power they hold, and the influence they wield over the region. Master crafters, those who create the things that the nobles and aristocrats crave in those same distant lands, also enjoy great respect, and influence here, for it is by their wares that the Eternal Desert is enriched by foreign goods, and of course let's not forget the gold.

Outside the cities and their more leisurely lifestyle, life is harder; it's rougher, and tougher for the folk beyond the walls. Every day is purchased with blood, sweat, and tears under a harsh sun. As ruthless, and as hard as life can be outside though, the social structure becomes somewhat simpler and in many ways easier to understand.

Towns are gathered along clan lines, and strong and charismatic leaders can use their influence to protect everyone in their clans alive, the knowledge of local issues and opportunities to keep everyone alive and striving for greater prosperity. More valuable than any gold or foreign trade goods, are the simple pleasures of a decent meal, or the glow of a beautiful sunset, or a full set of water bottles.

FAMILY

Family is a word you'll hear in the Eternal Desert a lot; it's the be-all and end-all of society there. Family is the mortar on which everything is built. Who a man's father or mother are determines his place in life, and who his family in turn serves determines his obligations. A man who has no family is an orphan to be pitied, and a man without a tribe is a lost soul, to be feared or shunned. Knowing the history and litany of one's blood is the key to having a role, or a say in anything. It's the key to being accepted as part of their greater world.

HONOR

Honor and tradition is another key facet, important to remember when travelling the region. Honor, respect and courtesy are key to this society. An Aradi warrior would cut off his arm before he broke his word. If a person cheats one of these people, beware that the wheel of retribution does not crush you next time around.

Ill spoken words are more dangerous than any weapon in the Eternal Desert; they've lead to duels, street fights, and even outright wars. There's a saying here: What is thought may roam many paths, but what is spoken must remain straight and proper, lest the speaker bring great shame upon his family and his tribe.

An example - a man may well be a thief, and it may be common knowledge that he is such a thief. If he's caught, he'll be punished as one might expect, in the harshest of ways, losing fingers, hands, eyes, or even in rare cases his life. Another man dare not call that man a thief, however, unless he can prove in that very moment that the accused has stolen. If he can't then the shame is now upon the accuser and not the thief, the accuser's family honor is now lessened for his rashness and discourtesy. Everyone will now support the thief (no matter how much he may have stolen from them) to recover his family's reputation and honor. The debt must be discharged.

Obviously, matters of such strict honor mean blood feuds aren't rare in the Eternal Desert, which goes a long way towards explaining the factionalization that has plagued the Youlin Aradi and kept them from uniting more completely.

HOSPITALITY

In the Eternal Desert there's another tradition which is paramount to survival, it's that of hospitality and it has many subtle variations, rules, and social cues one needs to learn to follow. For example one can welcome a hated enemy into one's home, this man could be the most despicable of curs, and yet he must be treated with the utmost respect, not scorned, or discomforted in any way. He must be well fed, comfortable, and protected from all harm whilst in the family's care.

There's no greater shame that can befall a family than a guest to come to harm while in their home and protection. Even if the guest acts out of turn, in ill fashion, commits a crime against the family, or is otherwise bad mannered, ill tempered, or downright objectionable. He must first be asked to leave by the Patron or Matron of the family before any harsh words can be spoken to him, or violence directed to him. Failure to adhere to this can have grave consequences for all members of the household.

WATER GIFT

This tradition is one of the life-blood traditions of the region, one of the most important, and one which strangers (outlanders) are wise to learn. When entering someone's home one must be prepared to pour an offering of water, from a receptacle, jug, or water skin into the ceremonial basin or jug.

As an example, typically when people call on each other in a Youlin Aradi tribe, they first visit the spring or well and gather up water in a vial or jug carried for just this purpose, then with great ceremony they pour the offering into the basin, whispering a blessing upon the household usually in the name of Raz'Dash (though in some cases Archanon is used). This entire tradition is based on the fact that there's nothing more valuable in the Eternal Desert than water, and thus there's no greater honor than to share water with another.

MANY WIVES

An odd tradition to the outlanders (the name given to outsiders beyond the Eternal Desert) is the practice of polygamy. This tradition, mostly amongst men of station is often practiced in many of the regions of the Eternal Desert. A man's status in many of the traditional tribes is often measured by how

many wives he can support. In the more progressive areas, which have come under influences from other kingdoms and cultures in Shaintar, this tradition is less prevalent, and is practiced quite differently within the matriarchal tribes, yet still remains an important part of tradition to the people who dwell here.

In such houses there is usually a First Wife, who has primary status, the best room and other perks, but is responsible for seeing to the well being of the rest of the household.

TRADITION VS. CULTURE

All of these external traditions are just as important within the cities, and not just reserved for the outlying areas and tribes. They can take on different meanings in the different city cultures, and there are variants across the whole cultural spectrum, with more complex agendas in the bigger population centers. Honor often becomes a tool, a means to an end to achieve political gains, and sometimes is turned to a darker purpose with manipulation of a person's honor to perform something akin to a targeted assassination.

Maneuvering an opponent into rash action, ill-mannered speech, or a dishonorable act is considered somewhat of an art form amongst the higher social circles. Especially amongst the many advisors, courtiers, and hangers on who hover around the various sultans, emirs, and sheikhs.

The average Youlin Aradi tribe lives a fairly free and self-fulfilling life, always expected to honor and obey the Patron or Matron of their family, and the sheikh and elders of the tribe. There are many similarities to the gathers of the gobliness in this way; both cultures rely on the community coming together as a whole to contribute to survival and prosperity. Each person serves the tribe in the capacity that most suits their individual skills and abilities.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

The woman's role in a tribe depends on what skills they have, everyone has a job to do in order to survive and it doesn't matter who does what job. Each tends to do what they do best and view women as the equal of men in all things. Families can have a Matron just as easily as a Patron, there are female sheikhs (called shakhiras), and one of the Princes is a woman.

ART AND ENTERTAINMENT

Art in Youlin Aradi culture is very physical, paint is a tricky medium to work with in such heat, and whilst there are a few masters of the art, there are far more sculptors, potters, and weavers compared to those who create their work upon canvas. Many homes are festooned with statues, mosaics, tapestries, and works of sculpture, those which resemble important facets of their life style, and beliefs. There are a few statues of the Raz'Dash found in the each city.

The horse is also a central figure to the Youlin Aradi art; there are numerous tales of the great horse lords and the cavalry they led. Such riders are can be found during the Ride of Glory for example. There are rumors of a great cavalry army of the desert but most think they are just stories and choose to concentrate instead upon the race called the Ride of Glory. Heroes and their legendary mounts are often immortalized in stone or wooden statuary.

Music, through song or dance is vastly important to the culture. Dance itself is considered an art form and the raks sharki (belly dance) as mentioned before perform a deeply moving and sometimes erotic performance. A skilled dancer can captivate entire rooms of people, leaving them spellbound and enthralled. Men have proposed to many a woman after being entranced by her dance. Stringed and wind instruments are used most the Eternal Desert, along with tambourines, drums, and bells or wind chimes to create hauntingly beautiful music, music with a beat to it, combined with a captivating vocalist - either male or female.

RELIGION

Like the Church of Light, the Eternal Desert has the concept of the priest, in addition to a shaman or druid. This comes from the ancient past, when the Empire of the Golden Sun stretched across what is now the Eternal Desert - whilst some facets of Youlin Aradi culture do hold to a druidic path; most don't. Some have said this is further proof that Archanon is the living embodiment of Raz'Dash.

The people of the Eternal Desert revere Raz'Dash, as previously mentioned. They remember the Sun God of old, almost as a cultural memory. Raz'Dash's gifts are granted by Archanon today - yet it does not stop these people choosing the Sun God as their

patron, chanting rituals in his name, there's even a large temple in A'Tora, though it's been said there are not too many who go regularly..

Whilst Raz'Dash isn't always considered a god, he has quite a significant following throughout. Illiana, the bringer of water, the key to all life in the Eternal Desert is most favored amongst the Ascended. Zavonis is blessed for the cool winds, but cursed during sandstorms.

Spoken in whispers, only worshipped in the form of Queen of War, or Lady of Might, is Ceynara. She's usually worshipped by the more warlike and strange tribes of the Youlin Aradi, and even then her worship takes place behind closed doors and is the stuff of rumors.

DEATH

Death to some Youlin Aradi is but a door, perhaps as a holdover from the ancient Empire of the Golden Sun. Many of the ceremonies come from information gleaned from the old scrolls, tablets, writings, and pictures of the time deal with death as a transitional state.

The afterlife is prized as a place where one is judged by the weight of their deeds and not wealth. They hold that a great judge will sit over their soul at the end of their lives, a being who guards the gateway between life and death. He will test their deeds against a grand scale, upon which is placed a single weight which is the weight of a normal life's level of misdeeds.

The guardian in question is thought a benevolent and understanding judge, but without mercy. Should the deeds be found to be heavier than the weight, then the soul is sent to a place of torment, or in rare cases oblivion.

Should the heart be found to be lighter, the soul is free to pass on to the afterlife and be reunited with their loved ones eternally.

Some of the elders practice mummification, and burial in a tomb, but these tombs are not constructed by slave labor. Often communal or familial, the tomb's a good place for families to be community in the afterlife. A pyramid-shaped building acts as both tomb and protection for the interred, with the entrances hidden to others to ensure the remains are untouched.

BIRTH

There are facets of Youlin Aradi culture who adhere to another aspect of ancient ceremony, that of the important birth. In the days gone by, when the Empire of the Golden Sun was at its height, they celebrated an important birth in a household, or great ruler's home by bathing the child in light.

This was to signify their connection with Raz'Dash, as well as bring a great blessing upon their house. In some Youlin Aradi homes today, there's a small room where a circular window allows sunlight to fall upon a specially constructed crib - so that the family can adhere to this old tradition.

Some Youlin Aradi families are known to invite a Priest of Archanon to bless the child, in lieu of an actual worshipper of the Sun God.

IT'S A KIND OF MAGIC

As one might expect, the Eternal Desert is a mystery and is steeped in ancient traditions. These traditions extend to magic which is also a force of mystery, with many of the people having a wary respect for those who practice it. The elemental forces of Life are especially of interest to the people of the desert, with anyone who can bring forth changes to weather, or cause water to spring from nothing being incredibly valuable to the people and community.

It's a rich man indeed who can summon such a bounty from nothing, and they might find themselves standing before any one, or more, of the Desert Princes.

The sorceress Juliana amin Jazarad was said to be able to command forces that could still the rage of a sandstorm, and whilst no one has seen this in action, there's no one who dares try to disprove her claims.

As long as magic remains a clouded mystery, a force of pure wonder, the Eternal Desert's folk will always see it as something special.

ARMY OF SAND

It's said that Juliana amin Jazarad could command an army, an army that was formed from the very sand beneath her feet. These soldiers were loyal to her, unbreakable in bond, and tireless. Her arrival was often heralded by the sound of marching feet as a dozen or so of these warriors flanked her.

Rank: Novice

Essence: 4+

Range: Smarts

Duration: 3 (1/round)

This power allows the caster to form sand in obedient servitor constructs, not unlike golems, that are basic human shape and size with little detail. Somewhere between Animated Objects and true Summoned Allies, these Animated Sand Warriors serve well as disposable troops. They are intelligent enough to follow simple commands like "Defend", "Attack", or "Hold", but lack sufficient intellect to understand complex battle plans.

With a simple success, the caster can summon forth 1d4+1 Animated Sand Warriors. On a raise, these constructs would gain the Hardy ability.

Much as with the Summon Ally power, higher level casters may summon additional Animated Sand Warriors for an increased expenditure of essence. For each increase in caster rank, they may summon 1 additional Warrior for 1 additional essence. For example, a Veteran caster could summon 1d4+3 Animated Sand Warriors for 6 essence. Legendary casters can summon a total of 1d4+5 Animated Sand Warriors for a total of 8 essence.

ANIMATED SAND WARRIOR

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6

Pace: 5; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Special Abilities: Construct: +2 to recover from being Shaken, no additional damage from called shots, does not suffer from disease or poison

Fearless: Animated objects are immune to Fear and Intimidation

Sand Form: Animated Sand Warriors only suffer half damage from non-magical attacks

SANDSTORM

This magic is able to summon or still the rage of a sandstorm, one of the most destructive forces in the desert in a matter of a few minutes. There are rumors that Juliana amin Jazarad crafted this potent Trapping of the Storm spell, to summon a raging sandstorm to smash her enemies.

Sandstorm is not a stand-alone power, but a Trapping for the Storm power in Legends Arise p. 106) {insert link to product here: <http://savagemojo.com/store/singleProduct.cfm?pid=2533&catID=36>}

In addition to those Hazards presented in Legends Arise for the Storm power, sandstorms also have the following effects:

While within a sandstorm, treat Illumination as Pitch Darkness. However, all notice checks to hear or smell are also at -4. Every hour a character spends trapped in the full fury of a sandstorm, they suffer 2d6 damage (in addition to any Fatigue levels suffered). Lastly, within 10 minutes, all tracks are completely obliterated making Tracking attempts useless unless the target leaves some evidence behind. If a character has proper gear (face coverings, head wraps, etc..), they gain +2 on their Vigor checks versus Fatigue (every 10 minutes) per rules. The Sandstorm Trapping costs no additional Essence, but may only be used in desert conditions.

SAND WEAPON

With a handful of sand, the sorceress Juliana amin Jazarad was said to be able to bring into being weapons -- swords, axes, bows, and more. It meant that her followers were never unarmed, and she was able to turn a handful of sand into a knife. In this way she was able to take her enemies by surprise, even when they thought she was without a means to defend herself.

Liner Notes: Creative Applications

The Army of Sand is typically only appropriate for The Eternal Desert setting as it requires sufficiently large quantities of sand. However, creative casters could use this power on beaches or other sandy places. No other type of soil or substance can be substituted for sand. Army of Sand is usable by Sorcerers.

A creative caster could also combine Sand Weapon with Conceal Arcana to create a highly effective assassin's weapon in the right circumstances...

Rank: Seasoned

Power Points: 3

Range: Self

Duration: 3 (1/round)

On a successful roll, the caster may conjure a small weapon such as a knife, throwing spikes, or goblin-like bow (no more than d4 damage die). With a raise, they may create larger weapons like short swords, axes, or handbows (no more than d6 damage die). Creating ammunition (arrows, bolts, etc) is a second casting. Due to their weak nature, Sand Weapons break, reverting to sand, on a natural 1, whether rolled on the Fighting die OR the Wild Die. If dropped, Sand Weapons instantly dissolve, although they can be passed from caster to another character.

THOSE WHO TRULY RULE

The social structure of the Youlin Aradi, especially the higher ranks of the nobility, is at once simple and complex. On the one hand addressing anyone believed to be important as "sheikh" is a fairly safe bet, it's almost impossible to actually know who might be nobility or not, especially for those not steeped in the culture of the land. It is nigh on impossible for such a person to know every facet, all possible titles, and positions of an Aradi nobleman.

Instead of titles, most nobles prefer to be known as sheikh (shakhira), and then by a descriptive title for their role. For example, a man who serves as the majordomo of a noble house would be introduced in the following way: Sheikh Anhek amin Jandir, Master of the Royal Quarters of Prince Youli amin Ekhim, Caliph of T'Yor. Those connections confer greater status.

To outlanders, this kind of naming convention for titles doesn't really do much to show a clear line of precedence. The pecking order just doesn't seem clear, especially to those from Galea, for example. To the people of the Eternal Desert however, it is perfectly easy to follow. They know that the strength of a man's position is entirely dependent on his task and family connections. This does provide wonderful opportunities of course for insults, intrigue, and conflict built into the system.

PRINCE

There are three traditional titles of great power which are recognized as being mostly equal in stature in the Desert -- Sultan, Caliph, and Emir. Each one has very deep roots in the ancient history of the land and refers to a position of great authority and majesty.

There are literally hundreds (if not thousands) of men and women who claim to be Sultan of This, Calipha of That, or the Emir of All. Some tiny percentage of these claimants can even provide some kind of credible proof of their claims, allowing them to use the title if only just barely.

Only nine, however, THE NINE, are the true Desert Princes. No single one of them can claim to be ranked higher than the others without triggering dire consequences for all clans in the Desert. There's a very delicate balance at work which enables the peace that the Desert is currently enjoying.

Most of the terrible wars that the Youlin Aradi fought in the past come from times when one of the Nine tried to subvert the others. More than a few battles have been fought because an outside nation thought to treat one of the Princes as lord over the others.

The current Nine Princes of the Desert are: Prince Morok ki Anzher, Emir of A'Davar; Prince Fenira amin Bayim, Calipha of Birr; Prince Youhli amin Ekhim, Caliph of T'Yor; Prince Wakheem amin Lurzhem, Emir of A'Morga; Prince Abduras amin Abinah, Sultan of Mara; Prince Hesham amin Jomil, Emir of A'Tora; Prince Omar amin Sharhem, Sultan of Quadir; Prince Romar amin Romar, Supreme Amir of the Desert Riders; and Prince Esteban amin Firenzo, Lord of Paradise.

SHEIKH

Anyone who is not a Prince, but is suitably noble be addressed as Sheikh or Shakhira. This includes town governors, merchants of the highest standing, tribal chieftains, military high commanders, and certain elders.

To claim a title and have no proof is dishonorable to the extreme, and carries a severe penalty. Of course it's also considered dishonorable to dispute the claim without clear evidence that can be presented

immediately. The dunes, the streets, and the very sands themselves have been red from the blood of dueling nobles, fighting over the right to the same title.

Outlanders are accorded leeway, those with any wisdom, experience, or advance warning will simply know to use the term at the outset with anyone who appears to have status. If it's used wrongly, they'll get a polite smile from the person addressed, who will then gently correct them with thanks for the unbidden honor. Inversely, if one fails to call someone a sheikh who expects it, then they can expect a rather stern and firm discussion of their mistake.

Some of these mistakes can be costly indeed, so most travelers will hire experienced guides from the area they're traveling to in order to avoid unnecessary complications born from sheer ignorance.

THE NINE

They are the one *true* power in the Desert, the overriding rulers over all who claim the title of sultan, caliph, emir. These men and one woman are the reason for the saying - "The sun has no mercy. Pray the Nine do."

They don't function as one might expect, as a typical oligarchy, or even as a true confederation. The Nine do however gather once a year, at the end of the winter season as what has come to be known as the "Meeting of the Nine." This meeting is often, by tradition alone, held in A'Tora (though some of the Nine are trying to change this to reduce that Prince's influence over their number). They usually maintain diplomatic communication all year long to ensure they can respond to matters that affect them all.

The Nine are as follows:

PRINCE MOROK KI ANZHER, EMIR OF A'DAVAR

In the north of the Desert, anger at the Kalinesh remains strong. Though most of the army of Soman ki Akara remained at this side when he rebelled against the Emperor and declared the Desert free of the Empire's rule others treated the slaves badly. Soman married a Youlin Aradi, and most of the bloodlines of A'Davar and the surrounding lands are a mix of the Kal warriors who supported him and their Aradi spouses. It's been so long since those of Kal blood

committed to the concept of honor in the desert culture in a very special way; for most of them, there is a belief that they represent the last truly honorable Kalinesh anywhere.

The family A'Davar has maintained the Kalinesh convention of using "ki" rather than "amin," but despite this minor trait, the people love and respect their Prince. He is respected, as he's brought much honor to his people. His family has always done this, and won't change this tradition, thus many in the northern region will claim that the Line of Soman has always been the best line of rulers the Desert has ever known - full of honor and caring of his people.

Morok maintains a standing force of arms, organized along traditional Kal military structures, and well trained. The fighters of the local tribes are considered part of this militia and can be raised rapidly to deal with an invading force. Morok sends out his top men to help train these warriors.

A'Davar, of course, places emphasis on the more fertile lands to the north and east, where farming is good, herds of cattle graze well maintained, and excellent horse-breeding happens. In fact, Prince Romar and Prince Morok have a long-standing alliance which is founded on Romar being able to always obtain fine horses from Morok. Together, they might well be the reason the Desert remains free. Morok also enjoys good relations with Prince Fenira, Prince Abduras, and Prince Omar. He shares the others' suspicions of Prince Hesham, is contemptuous of Prince Wakheem and Prince Esteban, and utterly despises, with every breath - Prince Youhli.

PRINCE FENIRA AMIN BAYIM, CALIPHA OF BIRR

The only female of the Nine, Fenira amin Bayim is the pride of her mother's eye. Most of the tribes of the Birr region are matriarchal. Fenira's bloodline has had to struggle for many hundreds of years to hold its place, and finally, in recent years, they've begun to reap the success their hard work earned.

Fenira is a shrewd and wise woman for one so young. At 28, only Prince Esteban is younger than she among the Nine. The previous prince, her mother, is still very much alive. She stepped down as Calipha knowing she could advise her younger and stronger daughter to greater heights of success.

A competent warrior and excellent tactical thinker, Fenira has proven herself in numerous engagements, earning the respect of such notable figures as Princes Romar and Morok (and the undying enmity of Prince Wakheem, whose forces she recently defeated).

A skilled diplomat - the fact that she is exquisitely beautiful does not hurt at all - Prince Fenira enjoys friendship with Romar and Morok, but also courts the rest of the nine. As well, she actively pursues whatever contact she can manage with outlanders of importance; travelers to her region can normally expect excellent hospitality, especially if they are on the business of anyone of note.

Birr is at the crossroads of two major trade routes, and is major port on the Lifegiver River. Fenira relies on advisers with strong business acumen to see that these assets are exploited appropriately, ensuring her region's prosperity without driving away trade. Fishing and agriculture are the strongest sources of sustenance for her people, but the flow of trade is, as the old saying goes, a "river of silver" for her.

Fenira maintains an elite personal guard, made up of both of men and women. She also has a mercenary army on retainer in Birr, comprised of an Olaran-trained battalion of mostly Wildlanders, with a company of Dregordian shock troops (who double as palace guards when important visitors come to Birr).

In addition to the honest friendship she shares with Prince Romar and Prince Morok, Fenira has established excellent diplomatic relations with Prince Youhli, Prince Abduras, Prince Omar, and Prince Hesham. She is currently fending off marriage proposals from Prince Esteban (even as she finally sees him as more than a preening man-child), and a state of undeclared war exists between her and Prince Wakheem.

PRINCE YOUGHLI AMIN EKHIM, CALIPH OF T'YOR

"The brittle reed breaks in the wind and the torrents, while the supple lily survives all." This is the philosophy of Prince Youhli, as was his father's and grandfather's. His "supple ethics" ensures the security and prosperity of his house and his lands, but at the price of honor as far as the rest of the Nine are concerned. Though he would never say such a thing out loud, Youhli is of the opinion that his chests of gold and gems will buy far more than his honor ever would.

Prince Youhli is a decadent man who indulges in whatever whim come to mind and enjoying the luxury and prosperity of his station. He generates bribes, taxes, and licensing fees from those wishing to sell and trade in literally anything; T'Yor is a den of inequity the likes of which is almost impossible to match anywhere in Shaintar (with the possible exceptions of the Oasis of Flesh, Camden, and parts of Lanthor).

Slaves from every country, drugs, stolen goods, vile services – anything can be had for a price. All are welcome in T'Yor, so long as they can pay the gate price and the bribes. T'Yor has a long-established “understanding” with Kal `Montak, and Imperial agents and Kalinesh traders go unmolested there. Many unpleasant actions conducted against the other Nine by the Kal have begun in the hidden places of T'Yor.

Youhli also enjoys the bounty of T'Yor's position on the Western Road and the Torrent River. As well, he owns a number of mines in the Hellstorm Mountains, most of which were forcibly taken from dwarven clans by his family hundreds of years ago. Despite that history, Youhli is one of the three wealthiest men in the Eternal Desert.

With that wealth, he has a large, well-equipped personal guard; hand-picked and highly trained mercenaries of all races and origins. It is a poorly-kept secret that he also has an arrangement with the Seven Masters (see the Oasis of Flesh below) that will enable him to field a sizable slave army very quickly. Finally, it is fairly common knowledge that the Assassin's League of T'Yor serve Prince Youhli directly.

Prince Youhli has no illusions that any of the other Princes hold him in any real regard, but he appreciates the attempt at courtesy he receives from Prince Hesham, Prince Esteban, and Prince Fenira. Prince Wakheem and he enjoy a certain understanding about the future and who their mutual enemies are – Omar, Morok, and Romar.

PRINCE WAKHEEM AMIN LURZHEM, EMIR OF A'MORGAL

While others of the Nine will cloak their ambitions in courtesy and honor, Prince Wakheem's ambition is out in the open and will not be ignored. He is the first of his bloodline to hold the title of Emir, having killed his predecessor and taken the throne in a brutal coup. Wakheem was one of the war leaders



of A'Morgal's largest tribe, and he plotted (with the aid of a cadre of supporters, many of whom saw him as a malleable instrument for their own goals) in which he was able to claim the previous Prince had dishonored his entire tribe.

When the dust and blood had settled, Wakheem was Prince and those left weren't in a position to remove him. Three years into his rule, Wakheem finally presented himself at the Meeting of the Nine; after much argument and a bloody duel that left Prince Omar permanently maimed, the Nine acknowledged Wakheem as one of them.

The mines around A'Morgal are the source of Wakheem's wealth and power, and he has undertaken campaigns to expand his holdings. He also sent forces out into the desert west of his region to take control of various oases and ruins; Prince Fenira led her own forces against these parties and obliterated them, determined to not allow his expansionism reach into her domain.

Prince Wakheem is attracting malcontents from tribes all over the Eternal Desert. They answer his call hoping he will fulfill his promise to return the Lands of the Sun God to power and glory once more. It is possible he is even beginning to believe that; he has ordered a temple to Raz'Dash to be erected in A'Morgal. His army is growing and it makes the rest of the Nine very nervous.

Prince Wakheem is in a blood feud with Fenira and Omar, and he has all but publicly vowed to kill Romar personally. He cannot stand Morok and his "smug superiority." Prince Youhli is a valuable (if disgusting) ally, and Wakheem has been instructed by his cadre to try and cultivate a relationship with Prince Esteban. He won't even call Abduras a Prince, considering him weak and unworthy.

PRINCE ABDURAS AMIN ABINAH, SULTAN OF MARA

Called the "Sultan of Sand" by many so-called wits behind closed doors or in snarky whispers at court, Prince Abduras is the least ostentatious and least ambitious of the Nine. While tastefully clothed, it's on par with what a reasonably prosperous chieftain might wear. His manners are humble and unassuming. His home is elegant, yet understated.

He works in the field with his family at harvest time, a farmer to the core of his soul, and he loves to go fishing whenever he can get away.

Mara is another crossroads community, and it enjoys mild prosperity from the flow of trade (especially that coming out of A'Tora to the south). Located at the juncture of the Lifegiver and Torrent rivers, the river trade brings plenty of wealth through the region, as does the rich farmland along the river banks. It is only here, where the waters converge in a way that enriches the land with certain minerals and other gifts, where the s'taya spice can be grown in great abundance, and s'taya is highly valued. All of this is worth preserving and protecting, of course.

The ruling bloodline learned long ago that the best way to protect the land and the people from the ambitions of others was to be humble whenever possible, and quietly craft a strong defense in case of need. The former tactic works well to keep the others of the Nine at bay; and Mara has friends who will not stand idly by as others attack. The Prince is more than capable of meeting any lesser threats.

Years ago, Prince Abduras' ancestors befriended the dwarves of the Black Mountains and hired engineers to build defenses and shelters in the surprisingly solid bedrock beneath their city. Though not walled (by design, to maintain the façade of humility), every building and home is a small fortress by itself. Beneath the homes, there are tunnels that connect to underground shelters (called "havens"), where classic dwarven defenses are set up to resist long sieges and punish invaders. Underground springs and streams diverted from the rivers ensure endless water, and the people of Mara maintain constant food stores to ensure survival in the havens. There are also concealed tunnels to get outside, so sorties can be sent to conduct raids against attackers among other things.

There's a community of dwarves living in Mara, and they maintain and improve these defenses and structures. Though Abduras maintains no mercenaries, he has all of the tribes of Mara ready to defend their lands with skill and dedication. He has even begun hiring elves to train his people with the longbow, enhancing combat prowess and ability to defend... should any seek to claim what is seen as an easy prize.

Of all the Nine, Abduras thinks he understands Prince Hesham the best, though he does not agree with that one's philosophies. He is wary of Prince Esteban, but finds the young man genial. He holds Prince Omar in the highest esteem, and greatly respects Morok and Romar as warriors for the Youlin Aradi. He is too fond of Prince Fenira, but worries that she will play the games of the Nine to well and fall too deeply into the webs of lies and intrigue, losing the best of herself.

PRINCE HESHAM AMIN JOMIL, EMIR OF A'TORA

Another classic saying of the Eternal Desert – “The royal blood of A'Tora invented the games the Nine play.” There is no more politically-minded or courtly member of the Nine than Prince Hesham amin Jomil, Emir of A'Tora, Sultan of the Great Oasis, Caliph of the Port of Gold, Sheikh of the Sun Tribe, and Bearer of the Sword of Amir Rakheem the Just. He takes no public action without purpose, nor without a sense of ostentatious presentation. His words are honey, sweet upon all ears, or else they are venom, delivered with the strike of a viper. Every move is calculated, every decision strategic, and all he undertakes to achieve his families' long held goal; uniting the Eternal Desert, once and for all, and restoring the Empire of the Golden Crown.

This goal is no secret; the rest of the Nine, and anyone of rank or station in the Desert, is fully aware of the dream of Hesham. What few know, however, is how far he has come to reaching that goal. Considerable parts of his family's vast wealth have been poured into finding the lost sites of the ancient empire and recovering the treasures and knowledge from that time. Only his closest advisers are aware of just how successful he's been in recent years; most of them believe this is due, in part, to the relative peace of the last century. While that is partially true, even they are unaware of the aid he has received from outside sources – sources who seek what he seeks, and have knowledge no one else has.

It will not be knowledge or treasures, however, that will achieve Hesham's goal alone, and he knows it. He plays a constant game of diplomacy and politics, both with the Nine and with outlander factions, to position himself and his lands at the center of what will become a great kingdom.

He is not evil; that would be too simple an term. In his heart, Hesham amin Jomil knows it is his destiny to restore his people to greatness. He will pursue this goal with honor; in that there can be no greater honor than to again bring about the Empire of the Golden Crown, however, many lesser sins may be acceptable in the long course. Thefts and deaths lie on his hands, and there will certainly be more before he is through.

He is not wanton, though, and can be a kind and gracious host to travelers. He is charming, loquacious, and generous. He takes good care of his people, and genuinely seeks the well being of all Youlin Aradi.

A'Tora is a marvel to behold, truly the Jewel of the Eternal Desert. The most modern public works are present, to include one of the greatest sewer systems in the known world. Aqueducts keep water flowing to all, there are libraries, gardens, museums, and facilities for the needy and injured.

Hesham also has the largest personal guard of any of the Nine, rivaled only by that of Prince Youhli. He has dwarven engineers, Olaran weapons masters, Fae archery masters, and even a Frelander river warfare specialist in his employ. The palace guard features a platoon of ogres in gleaming golden armor, and Hesham goes nowhere without his four favored consorts – impossibly beautiful women who are trained in the arts of killing.

Overtly, Prince Hesham makes it a point to be respectful and courteous to all of the Nine, and shows no outward favoring or disfavoring towards any of them. The only exceptions are Ferina, to whom he is contemplating a proposal of marriage, and Abduras, who he seems to have a respect for that runs deeper than his normal admiration for all his peers.. He is somewhat concerned about Prince Morok and Prince Romar, though he hopes he will one day be able to convince them to join him in his greater cause.

If not, well... others can rise to take their place...

THE DREAM OF PRINCE HESHAM

Yes, there is something very major happening here, and the mysterious “sources” of knowledge and aid that Prince Hesham is receiving are part of a very deep and powerful mystery.

One that cannot be revealed... just yet.

PRINCE OMAR AMIN SHARHEM, SULTAN OF QUADIR

Called the “Old Sand Devil” by friends and enemies alike, Prince Omar is by far the oldest of the Nine. No one knows for sure, but he is believed to be at least in his fifties, and may be much older than that. He is in remarkable shape for his age, still able to ride and put up a decent fight when called to do so (though his left arm is permanently damaged from his duel with Prince Wakheem five years ago). With seven sons and four daughters, and a horde of grandchildren, many have long believed he should step aside for one of his younger progeny. Yet he holds the reins of power in Quadir with strength, craft, and wisdom, and none will gainsay him.

A traditionalist in most things, Prince Omar has softened his stance in a couple of areas, allowing for progressive changes in his lands to strengthen them. Women serve in positions of authority, including those who prove themselves capable in a fight. His eldest granddaughter, Satima, is well known to be the best rider and sword-wielder in all of Quadir, a source of great pride to Omar.

Quadir greatly benefits from the large tracts of arable land in the region; Prince Omar provides the vast majority of foods and agricultural wares to the rest of the desert, and even has enough to trade with the clanhomes in the Black Mountains. In fact, Quadiran cattle are accounted by many to make the finest sources of beef in Shaintar (though the cattlemen of House Lyonn would disagree). The population of the Quadir region is the largest any of the Nine can claim; in truth, many of the Quadir citizens know little of desert life, having grown up in arable, green land.

One area in which Prince Omar remains staunchly traditional is in the makeup of his military might. He scoffs at the idea of hiring mercenaries, insisting that no one can defend the land and honor of Quadir better than Quadirans. Fortunately for him, he has plenty of able-bodied people to arm and train, and the funds to provide it all. Those who become Quadiran fighters are required to train in the desert, learning how to survive and fight as though the sand and rocks were their native ground. Omar uses his considerable wealth to give his fighters the best equipment, and his cavalry ride the finest horses.

Prince Omar is fondest of Prince Abduras, seeing him as very much a kindred spirit (and recognizing that one’s craftiness too). He admires the fierce independence and honorable nature of Prince Romar, seeing him as a fine successor to Omar’s dear friend of the same name. He likes Prince Morok in spite of himself, overcoming years of entrenched hatred of anything to do with the Kal. Ferina reminds him very much of his granddaughter, though he worries about her willingness to associate with a worm like Youhli, who he hates with a deep fire. The only man he hates more than Youhli is Wakheem, who he calls simply the “Wild Dog” and refuses to acknowledge as a Prince. The matter between them is far from concluded. Prince Esteban is an ostentatious, preening puppy who may grow into a leader one day. As for Prince Hesham...

Omar knows far more about what Hesham is about than the latter realizes. He knows, and he is saying nothing, yet. After all, how could one not wish a greater glory for the Youlin Aradi?

PRINCE ROMAR AMIN ROMAR, SUPREME AMIR OF THE DESERT RIDERS

The Desert Riders are an army, and they are a nomad tribe. They are a wind that blows across the Eternal Desert, and they are a sandstorm that crushes any foe who gets in their way. They are led by Romar, son of Romar, Lion of the Dunes, Bearer of the Three Moon Pennant and Supreme Amir.

Romar is a powerful, charismatic warrior-prince who rides always at the front. He’s the first into any trouble, and the last to leave the field. He is a master of strategy, a competent administrator, a poet and musician who will play for kings and paupers as it pleases him. He drinks hard, plays hard, fights hard, and will no doubt die hard. He has many lovers, but only one wife – Jassima, a woman every bit his match. Those in the know are aware that she leads (from behind the scenes, of course) almost as much as he does, and when he is incapacitated for any reason, his closest men know her voice is as his.

Though his people are nomads, Romar followed the measures his great-grandfather began with faithful adherence. Refusing to rely only on the tribute paid to the riders by the others of the Nine, Romar’s great-grandfather established camps and villages at many

oases where tribes, considered part of the Riders, reside throughout the year, maintaining farms, herds, and stores of food and water. Sheikhs under his banner complain bitterly - "Planting of seeds means rooting us in the dirt; this is not the life of a Rider!" However, past trials have proven the wisdom of this tactic, ensuring that the Riders have means to survive that do not require them to return to their raider ways or become slaves to the support of the other Princes.

Not that there aren't foes enough to raid. Slave caravans and Kalinesh war parties to the north, Malakar Dominion outposts in the east, and others seeking to exploit the hidden riches of the Desert have the Riders to fear. As well, Romar has begun testing the forces of Prince Wakheem; a brutal war is just on the horizon between those two, allayed now by the fervent diplomatic efforts of Prince Hesham. It may be that the Riders will one day take on Kal 'Montak and the Oasis of Flesh, too. If so, it seems likely Prince Morok will be along for the campaign. If that happens, it seems unlikely that they would forget to deal with T'Yor while they are at it.

Many believe Romar and Morok will unite the Desert under their combined rule, or at least act to eliminate those of the Nine they don't approve of. This would not fit Hesham's view of the future at all. Unless, of course, he can guide those events himself.

It is said that anyone who can ride and keep up, is willing to work for his keep and fight for the tribes, is welcome among the Riders. No one is quite certain how many Riders there actually are, though it is clear there's at least a brigade's worth of capable cavalry warriors. Not all of them are Youlin Aradi, either; wanderers of all races who have the skill to ride have taken up with the Riders. As his bloodline has always believed, Romar feels this strengthens the Riders by adding new ideas and tactics to the mix as the Riders learn about different weapons, different riding styles, and other ways of life.

Prince Morok and Prince Romar are as close as brothers. Romar also admires Prince Abduras and idolizes his father's old friend, Prince Omar. He has stated on more than a few occasions (usually while drunk), that he might consider a multiple marriage if he can convince Prince Ferina to wed him; this often results in a knife wound of some kind from Jassima and much laughter. When sober, he laments her association with his despised fellow Prince Youhli

PARADISE LOST AND FOUND

The port city of Paradise has long been a tantalizing prize that the Desert Princes craved but could never possess. Founded and built many hundreds of years ago by enterprising merchant barons to bring trade to the region, numerous attempts over the centuries to take it have always failed. For one thing, the defenders could always more men and supplies in by sea. For another, the Youlin Aradi were uneducated about the sea or running a port, and any extended period they held Paradise resulted in the city falling nearly to ruin.

They finally gained the city in 3031, this time with advisors from Galea and the Freelands employed to aid them in setting up a proper administration of the port and the city. Sheikh Pakteh amin Piresh was raised to Prince status when he was able to open the port for regular business in 3032.

The port was almost lost in 3046 when the Crimson Serpent Consortium (a powerful criminal guild with vast resources), employing a fleet of pirate ships and a small army of mercenaries, launched an attempt to take the port for themselves. Only the timely arrival of the Nazatiran, Gonzales de Marcel, saved the port.

As Gonzales had been the secret lover of Pakteh's eldest daughter, Syan, his reward was her hand in marriage and to be named Pakteh's heir. Thus began the reign of Nazatiran blood over the only seaport of the Youlin Aradi.

bitterly. He does not trust Prince Hesham, believing the assassins that killed his father might not have been sent by Wakheem as most believe. He has ridden with Prince Esteban, an accomplished horseman, and the two have had many good conversations that lead Romar to believe there is more to the young man than most credit him for.

As stated, war between Romar and Wakheem may just be a matter of time.

PRINCE ESTEBAN AMIN FIRENZO, LORD OF PARADISE

A primping peacock. A boy playing at politics. A dandy with delusions of grandeur. Prince Esteban amin Firenzo has been called all of these things, and worse. He is fine with that.

It is, in fact, an image he has worked hard to cultivate. Far more intelligent than anyone knows, and far wiser than his years, Esteban has learned from the examples of his elders and his betters. For example, he has learned a great deal from observing Prince Abduras gain advantage by crafting an image of weakness. He paid attention when visiting Prince Youhli, seeing the importance of a skillful network of informants. He studies the strategy and tactics of

Prince Romar and Morok, and the diplomatic skills of Ferina, and the thousands of things one must know to manage land and people from Prince Omar.

He recognizes he has a great deal to learn from Hesham, but also a great deal to fear. From Wakheem... well, he sees in Wakheem a shining example of what not to do.

While he studies and learns, the world watches him dance and laugh, drink and smile, recite poetry and sniff flowers. Few have taken him seriously, which is just fine. However, he is now moving to the next part of his plans, as he begins to take a more active role in politics. To this end, he has finally begun revealing his deeper nature to potential allies – Ferina and Romar, to be exact. To them, he has suggested certain ideas and theories, and they have been pleased to see this new side of him. Thankfully, they have also kept this knowledge quiet.

His gambit has enjoyed a high potential for success, the rest of the Nine believe they can ignore him. Paradise is the gateway between the Eternal Desert and the rest of the world, a trade port of vital importance. The ruling family of Paradise has vast wealth and influence. While it has looked as though Estaban was going to use the wealth in trivial pursuits, it turns out he's been working on numerous civil improvements, social programs, and expanding trading opportunities.

He has a keen interest in history and archaeology, focused on the Eternal Desert. Like Prince Hesham, he's been sending teams into the desert to find the lost places and gather their treasures. In fact, his people have had a couple of conflicts with those sent by Hesham, alerting him to the Hesham's efforts. Further investigation has shown that Hesham is up to something large in scope, and Estaban has begun planning to deal with what comes next.

Prince Estaban has hired himself a navy out of Nazatir, and he's even got a shipyard constructed, manned by Nazatiran boatwrights, to increase the naval forces. He hired a retired, highly decorated Glean commander by the name of Rembroke Payne to build him a military force, which is destined to be full battalion by the time he is finished (and is hiring

on mercenary companies looking for steady work and to put down roots). Estaban's own personal guard is a platoon of brinchie warriors who are renowned masters of kalinata and counter-espionage.

As explained, Estaban is expanding his friendships with Ferina (who he has begun courting for marriage) and Romar. He also hopes to solidify ties to Princes Abduras, Omar, and Morok. He continues the charade of pleasant, courteous exchanges with Prince Wakheem (who he abhors) and Prince Youhli (who he fears). He plays the game that Prince Hesham has begun, but he worries greatly about the outcome.

THE ETERNAL DESERT

MILITARY FORCES IN THE DESERT

For the most part, there is little in the way of a truly organized military force that serves the lands of the Desert Princes. Actually, it is more accurate to say that the native folks are not gathered into what is considered regular military units. The tribes have members who are recognized as those who will fight under command of the chieftain.

In the cities, the Princes usually have a combination of native-born warriors who serve as their personal guard and a larger force of outlander mercenaries under long-term contract. These forces are organized in traditional Desert style which confuses outsiders as the warriors are considered brothers. The only true military faction is the Desert Riders. They are described in greater detail under the heading of their leader, the Supreme Amir, Prince Romar, as well as in the "Of Special Interest" section. It is important to note here that the Riders are the most powerful military force in the Desert, and they may well be the greatest cavalry in the world.

LAW

The true masters of the Law here are the Desert Princes; they're the ones who make the laws, and hold low, middle, and high justice for their people. The laws tend to be simple and transparent, the punishments are well known. Outlanders are wise to know some of the rules and regulations of the Nine so they're not caught out.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

The Eternal Desert is harsh, and the punishments for those who break its laws can be harsher still. For example, a man who is found guilty of theft is likely to lose the offending hand the first time, the second time, the second hand, and after the third time he risks imprisonment, exile, or depending on the person he stole from: death.

One who dares sleep with another's mate is in danger of losing more than a hand, and the mate could well be executed or imprisoned.

TRAVELING THE DESERT

Rather than a blow by blow account of the Desert's cities, we've decided to take a deeper look at the Desert itself, revealing some of the secrets of the region and allowing you to delve deeper into the Desert Riders.

The Eternal Desert is massive, with little more than sand and heart, and vast swathes of nothingness for miles and miles. It's beneath the nothingness that you can find hidden treasures, lost dunes, pockets of beauty, oases of water brimming with exotic (and dangerous) flowers, outcroppings of strange and wondrous rock formations, and communities of desert nomads or stalwart tribes eking a living out of what they can find.

Without a guide, an outlander is at a distinct disadvantage, and any outlander who dares to travel beyond the main trade routes risks getting lost, death comes swiftly after.

Horses are common mounts, but one not from the region will quickly tire and suffer from the heat. Camels are common as well and far better suited to the environment of the region. It's not recommended that you walk, though some have done so in the past - and regretted every step.

It's wise to travel in groups, loners or small parties are susceptible to the many predators that roam the lanes looking for easy pickings. There are very large and well protected caravans that regularly run the trade routes through the desert, and most travelers pay for passage in special wagons designed to accommodate passengers, or else sign on to work as guards until they get to their destination. The largest caravans are almost never attacked directly, though enterprising thieves might sneak up on them during the night to raid a single wagon.

Liner Notes: DESERT SURVIVAL

You need to make sure you read and are ready to apply the rules for Fatigue and Hazards in the core Savage Worlds rules. Even when staying on the main roads, characters will have to contend with excessive Heat and Thirst during the day, and will often have to deal with Cold at night as well.

It would be appropriate to apply the Bumps and Bruises Fatigue effects if characters are navigating the dunes poorly, either. Getting lost may also result in any number of issues.

The point is to make travel in the Eternal Desert dangerous and difficult; that's an important part of adventuring in such a hostile environment. Otherwise, it's just the same as roaming the woods, but with different scenery. Done right, the players will feel like their characters are really enduring something, something that normal folks wouldn't risk.

If the group has a proper guide (either an Ally hired on or asked to go, or else a member of the party with good Survival skills), the trip should be easier, but not a cakewalk. This is a perfect opportunity to make the Survival Skill stand up and be noticed.

One particular danger is that of sandstorms. Sudden and terrifying, a sandstorm will obliterate visibility in such a way that even those with darkvision or thermal vision will be helpless (though the Mind's Eye power would help in navigation). Choking to death is a real concern; out in the middle of it, a person must make a Vigor check at -2 every round, suffering a Fatigue level for every failure. If he can get some kind of protection over his mouth and nose (a wet cloth, for example), he makes the check without the penalty. Getting behind some kind of windbreak or into some sort of shelter is the only way to enhance your chances of survival (though it make take a couple of additional Vigor checks and a Strength check to dig out, depending on how much sand you are covered in). Survival is a key skill here.

Native guides and those who are knowledgeable about weather and the wind might have a fair chance of sensing an oncoming storm more than a few seconds before it hits.

TRIBAL WELCOME

The smaller tribal camps on the outlying regions are prone to a variety of reactions to their outland visitors. Some few will view their arrival with suspicion, being wary of the travelers and even their guides. Some will welcome them with open arms, seeing new opportunities for trade, or advancement and friendship. There are those tribes who will take great amusement at an outlander's lack of savvy with their customs.

Well-dressed or well-armed outlanders may need to watch their backs, and belongings, as the tribes' people covet those possessions. The best thing any

outlander can do is make friends with someone local and come under the protection of their hospitality; it's a brave or foolhardy soul who dares to cross that line and cause harm or insult to someone so protected.

TOWNS AND CITIES

Outlanders will find that the towns and cities are more amenable to them, with entire areas specifically set aside to welcome travelers. Many of these areas are especially welcoming to those who bring in trade, information, or outside goods - offering better hospitality and reduced prices. Every Prince likes to make sure they take an active role in ensuring outlanders are treated well; often a part of the house guard or hired mercenary force is assigned to patrol and secure the "Outlander Quarter" of the city. Money changers, translators, and outfitters are all as easy to find as inns and taverns in such areas, and the Outlander Quarter of a town is always adjacent to the central marketplace.

You can find guides for the right price, always stalking potential customers, watching for new arrivals to offer services to. Your average guide will

charge 3-5 copper a day, whilst a guide of real value, with real knowledge and true skill will insist on 10 or more, including money for meals and lodging. You get what you pay for, with the poorest often working with bandits and robbers to lure outlanders into bad situations and places.

Depending on the political climate at the time, both the towns and cities can be even more dangerous for travelers; it's often wise to be presented to the local town leader or Prince as soon as possible, so one can take advantage of the Hospitality Tradition.

Outlanders who dare to scoff or disrespect local customs will find themselves quickly ostracized (and quite possibly in peril), whilst those who endeavor to learn, support, and adhere to those customs will engender support and goodwill.

THE SECRETS OF THE DESERT

The Eternal Desert is a place of many mysteries, and these are just a few of the ones outlanders find of special interest.

THE DESERT RIDERS

Hundreds of years ago, they were raiders... feared and hated across the Eternal Desert by all other Youlin Aradi. Like a ruthless storm they swept the sands, into villages and towns, swarmed the largest



caravans, killing and destroying those who stood in their way. Their mastery of horsemanship, their fearless tactics, and their sheer weight of numbers were impossible for anyone to withstand.

Then the Kal-a-Nar Empire arrived and took the Desert and all its treasures, sweeping aside tribe after tribe aside with barely a single casualty. The Riders then knew that their days were numbered, that they were no longer the true power in the Desert. Naturally this infuriated them, and they struck at the invaders in every way they could using guerrilla tactics and their superior knowledge of the land.

Yet it was not enough...

The leader of the Riders, Sheikh Abullek amin Ibinar came to understand that his people would die as slaves if he did not rise above his traditional role... He reached out to those chieftains who remained free and convinced them that their shared enemy should at long last unite them. For the entire time the Kal ruled the desert, the Riders never capitulated, ensuring there were always free Youlin Aradi.

Following the Trantor-voshnos, when the Warlord of the South rebelled against the Empire, freed the Youlin Aradi, and led a successful war to take back the Desert, the Desert Riders became heroes. They never went back to their raiding ways; instead they became part of the greater culture and worked to ensure the Youlin Aradi will never again be enslaved by outside forces.

As one might imagine this change took time to effect; the very nature of the riders make them nomads, incapable of settling in one place for too long. To combat the need for raids, the eight princes grant a tribute to the Desert Riders so they can create small towns in Oasis that allow the riders to remain nomadic. The Supreme Amir sees to it that they are equipped, trained, and always prepared to defend the Desert against those who would prey on its people.

THE RIDE OF GLORY

The Riders are also responsible for an epic race. Overseen by the Nine, only those invited may compete. These invitations are sent to riders all throughout Shaintar who's reputations have trickled to the ears of the Desert. Every year, the Desert Riders host a special race from A'Davar to Paradise and back again, over 800 miles across the

Desert. Known as the "Ride of Glory," this race is an incredible feat of knowledge, horsemanship, and endurance, with riders from all over Shaintar invited to compete. All politics, fighting and alliances are ignored for the duration of the race. It's extremely rare for a non-Aradi to win the Ride of Glory: the last one to do so was an Alakar Freelanders known as Sharina Windchild, riding her horse and constant companion, Galindor.

THE OASIS OF FLESH

Slavery.

It's an institution reviled throughout Shaintar, but still very much alive and well in some places - the Eternal Desert has rare pockets of slavery such as the Oasis of Flesh. It's a sad truth, but the Oasis of Flesh is a haven for slavers, infamous for the sheer volume and variety of its merchandise. Agents come from the Malakar Dominion, Shaya'Nor, the Kal-a-Nar Empire, and the very worst parts of the Wildlands to acquire specially-trained slaves as well as cadres of workers and warriors.

It's here amidst the clank of chains, the rattle of iron, and cries of despair that children are born into slavery. They are raised from birth to understand their places and indoctrinated. The indoctrination is so absolute that it's possible to purchase those who will fight without question, yet serve faithfully with minimal supervision. The method of indoctrination is steeped in rumor but only the slavers know the truth.

The Oasis also employs magical collars that help ensure the loyalty of the more specialized slaves. Thus slaves from the Oasis of Flesh are of high quality and extremely expensive.

SEVEN MASTERS OF FLESH

There are Seven Masters of the Oasis, the leaders of the six slaver guilds and the mysterious Seventh Master of Flesh who ultimately controls the trade.

Guildmaster Ogchar is the Master of Servants, providing those who serve households in whatever function that might be required. He is an ogre, both short and extremely fat for the race. With sibilant speech patterns and an effeminate demeanor, he can come off as simpering and weak, but it is dangerous to underestimate him. Some think him the most brutal of the Seven Masters.

Guildmaster Kezeed is the Master of Labor, and his guild trains crafters. He is known for producing highly competent laborers who can ensure a fortress is built in two-thirds the normally required time (even if a few are worked to death to accomplish it), and he also has a reputation for producing skilled armorsmiths and weaponsmiths, making his “goods” highly valuable to a building military forces. He is a businessman; cold, calculating, and heartless.

Guildmaster Kasir is the Master of Fields, and Kezeed’s brother. He produces slaves trained for gardening, farming, and field work. Unlike the other Masters, he resides on an estate with considerable farmland. He lives a very ostentatious life, playing the role of the gentleman farmer, lavishly attended to by his servants and hangers-on. He is warm, genial... and absolutely ruthless.

Guildmaster Youlara is the Mistress of Lust, overseeing the training of courtesans, concubines, and consorts. Not only does she raise and train young women and men to tend to the sexual needs and desires of their masters, she also educates companions to serve as bodyguards, observers, business aides, and advisers. She is under a great deal of scrutiny from the other Masters, due primarily to the change in demeanor of her predecessor just before she died and Youlara’s intention to continue the old Mistress’ controversial new practices; the Mistress of Lust will not sell slaves to anyone who is believed likely to abuse the slave, no slave is sold until fully adult, and slaves are welcome to return to Youlara’s care when they age past being of useful service. Some think she may alter the business further, which would go against the practices of the rest of the Oasis and could damage business with larger clients.

Liner Notes: Plots within Plots

As might be imagined, there’s a lot going on here. More’s going to end up being revealed in future releases, especially after I’ve talked to Sean a lot more and found out all his plans for this particular area. But for now we’ll share this much: Masters Warrick, Youlara, and Rayoul are not entirely what they seem - especially Master Rayoul.

None of the collars they put on their slaves actually work, yep, that’s right. They’re enchanted to look like they work, but they don’t work at all. So no one they have in their charge, or that gets released into bound service is actually BOUND by those collars.

As for the subject of the Seventh Master... let’s just say that this is the same one who founded the Oasis of Flesh. Many hundreds of years ago...

Guildmaster Warrick is the Master of Swords, responsible for building and training slaves for military and combat service. An expatriate of the Kal-a-Nar Empire, Warrick originally signed on as a trainer with the previous Master. When he insulted the man one too many times (insisting he could do a better job), he ended up killing him in a duel and taking his job. He proceeded to bring in other Kal warriors and has undertaken to improve the overall defense of his enclave, which has caused more than a few raised eyebrows. He has expressed to the other Masters, however, that this is merely an additional security measure against the day the Nine might strike against the Oasis of Flesh. After fulfilling two small contracts to Prince Youhli, Warrick has sold no slaves in over a year. He is building an army, and claims it is for a major figure in Kalinesh politics.

Guildmaster Rayoul is the Master of Experts; his is the smallest guild by far, and yet his house is the wealthiest. One of his slaves sells for as much as ten courtesans or a hundred laborers. The most intellectually gifted slaves are trained as expert scholars on any number of subjects, and then bound to the service of the wealthy who wish such a person in their house. Those who are magically gifted are also trained for bound service to men willing to pay for a mage or an adept. Rayoul is a Nazatiran who came to serve the previous Master of Experts, apparently sent as an apprentice by his father. He inherited the Guild when the previous Master died, and he has run the house practically, but with flair and style. Always well dressed, Rayoul is a charming and clever man who no one knows very well.

The Seventh Master – the Master of Flesh – has always been a mysterious and unknown figure. Few have ever seen him, and no one knows how many there have actually been over the years. A small cadre of people interact with the Seventh Master and see that his will is done, for all slave trade and other business is the business of the Seventh Master. The other six serve at his pleasure, and they know it. The Seven Masters may serve as a syndicate in ruling, but the Seventh is the ultimate ruler of them all. Any who have opposed him have simply died – painfully, violently, and in a manner that assures no one else questions authority. So long as he gets a share of profits and his agendas are met, however, the other six Masters are pretty much left to their own devices.

The Oasis of Flesh enjoys a great deal of support from those Princes who have business there, and the Kalinesh City of Kal'Montak. It's a small fortress, though quite a sprawl has built up around the fortress. There're brothels, gambling dens, bloodsport arenas, drug dens, and exotic and dangerous goods and services aplenty. There's also a Blood Pit coliseum, rather like those found in the Empire, and this draws thrill seekers from all over Shaintar to indulge in the gambling, the vices, and the darkest parts of their own nature.

THE SANDY SEA CARAVAN

Caravans are the primary means of traveling and transporting goods through the Eternal Desert, and there is no larger, or more famous, cavalcade than that of the Sandy Sea Caravan.

Sheikh Hajim amin Harradas is the Master of the Sandy Sea today, and his family has been running the caravan since it began its trek across the dunes hundreds of years ago. He is a shrewd businessman and ruthless when dealing with enemies and thieves. He claims that he would give his life for any who enjoy his hospitality, and he has nearly proven this enough times for it to be a well-known story throughout the desert.

The Sandy Sea Caravan never truly stops, though it will pause for a few days to a week in places where there is a need to unload and load goods. It makes two complete circuits around the Eternal Desert each year: Paradise to A'Tora, then the dwarven city of Shield, T'Yor, Birr, A'Davar, A'Morgal, Quadir, the dwarven stronghold of Midril Hall, Lowhome, and back to Paradise. This is known as the Grand Tour, and it is the same route most other caravans take. There are smaller caravans that specialize in running to Mara, and other shorter routes, so no major area goes without caravan attention too long.

When small caravans arrive at a city, it is an event. When the Sandy Sea arrives, it is a festival. The Sandy Sea Caravan is famous for carrying the newest and finest wares. Sheikh Hajim's wagons hold much, but his caravan supports merchants and traders who also join his when they can, knowing they will enjoy the best protection on the road, as well as the best sales when they pause.

Those seeking to travel with the caravan have a choice. They can charter seats in special passenger wagons; the cost ranges from a copper a day for a bench seat in a common cart (meals and water not included) to a silver a day for a semi-private carriage (holding up to six). The latter option includes dining with the Master and honored guests for meals and a quick shower in one of the special wagons designed for it once a week. Greater service and benefits are afforded those who want to pay more.

The other option is to work for passage and meals. These folk can either apply their skills as laborers, teamsters, farriers, and the like (which they will be required to prove they have the skill for), or be caravan guards. The Guard Captain of the Caravan, a dregordian by the name of Fulkoss, sees to the testing of all would-be guards, making sure his best men spar with each one or checks their skill with a bow or crossbow before allowing them to serve. Anyone displaying magical arts that is willing to use them for the Caravan can easily earn their way as well.

KAL'MONTAK

The last outpost of the Kal-a-Nar Empire in the Eternal Desert, Kal 'Montak is fairly atypical as far as Kalinesh cities go. More cosmopolitan by far than most Imperial holdings, there are actually sections of Kal 'Montak where non-humans can travel openly, without fear of enslavement.

This is more a matter of practicality than official policy; in truth, the law of the Empire still stands in the city, and if there is a conflict between non-citizens and Kal citizens, it is certain that that the matter will be judged in the favor of the Kal. However, the Az-Ri who rules the city and surrounding area, a non-warlord named Fenrikas ki Arkor, has a great deal of support for his tolerant policies within his city.

The main reason Fenrikas has not lost his head taken and a more traditional ruler installed is the sheer volume of useful information and trade that comes through Kal 'Montak. It has become a key center of trade for anyone who is willing to do business with the Empire, yet would never dare to enter another part of its lands.

Everyone who lives in Kal 'Montak understands the unofficial rules that allow the culture to remain in place, and flouters of the system will be dealt with to ensure business can continue as usual.

Even the Tor Mastak, feared secret police of the Empire, operates within the accepted culture of the city. This is, of course, a matter of some convenience for them; for in Kal Montak they can learn much they need to know to serve their mandate to protect the security of the rest of the nation.

THE ZAYID LIBRARY

Among the great libraries of Shaintar, the Zayid Library and Artifactory in Paradise is the newest and most innovative. Employing archaeologists, treasure hunters, sages, art historians, architects, engineers, and a host of specialists in other fields, the mission of the Zayid Library is to uncover the mysteries of the Eternal Desert and surrounding regions.

Not surprisingly, the greatest emphasis is placed on recovering all that can be learned about the Empire of the Golden Sun. To this effort, Prince Hesham has contributed considerable sums, as has Prince Esteban, who considers the Library to be one of the greatest treasures of his land. There are other projects, such as a rather eclectic group that is following up on indications that the builders, a race very like dwarves, who created amazing machines and devices powered by mystical crystals may have had an enclave here.

Prince Esteban has numerous agents working throughout Shaintar to establish good relations with other libraries, universities, and repositories of research and knowledge. He even has connections with the infamous Filikene College of Magic in Shaya'Nor, though he works hard at keeping this fact hidden. In return for their assistance, the Filikene College has access to all knowledge attained about the mighty mummy lords who once ruled the desert during the darkest times.

A DEADLY RIDE

Remember the Ride of Glory? Well, this set of story hooks takes place during this momentous race -- perhaps the heroes are part of the ride, perhaps they've been called in to investigate as the ride continues on. These four inter-linked adventure shards are designed to key into a larger overall narrative which will become apparent as the heroes investigate to the end of the arc.

Agents are loose upon Shaintar; a small group of Warrior-Assassins have come to the Desert seeking Hasuf amin Yadak - A Youlin Aradi rider who is taking part in this year's Ride of Glory. Hasuf has the spark of a Hero: the flicker that marks him as a legend to be, his wears a mystical, sparkling ruby ring around his neck, given to him by his sister.

The Agents are looking for him; they require him for a sacrifice to some unknown power. It's up to the heroes to stop the Shadowy agents and save Hasuf.

THE FIRST LEG, THE WORST LEG!

This adventure seed assumes that the heroes are actually called in to investigate, they've made a name for themselves, and they're the kind of people the officials would look to, especially in the case of four murders in the first one hundred miles of the Ride of Glory. They're taken to one side by Zayida amin Mezatha, a official who's in charge of this year's race. She tells them there have been four murders; she suspects it might be another rider who seeks to win at any cost and asks them to look into it.

- They'll find signs of a fight, along with signs that magic was used, but they'll also find a chunk of metallic armor that doesn't match any known armor design on Shaintar. It looks like four fought six here, and the four were ambushed.
- They'll also find some hidden tracks; the warriors have done their best to try and disguise their passage as they stole horses and raced off after Hasuf.
- If the group wants to examine the bodies, Zaydia has them stored in a tent in the camp, they're under some sort of preservation magic.
- The bodies show signs of injuries inflicted by sharp weapons which left a cauterizing edge to them, as if they'd been burned by extreme flame.
- It should be obvious to the heroes, they need to get a moving and track those horse prints before someone else gets killed.

TRACKING THE MEN

The heroes set out on the Ride of Glory, heading toward Paradise across the desert, hot on the trail of the unknown murderers. Along the way they'll get impeded by a minor sandstorm, and attacked

by the restless spirits of the desert. These attacks are not random; they're the result of a powerful Necromancer who was left behind to make sure the agents weren't followed. After a tough battle with Makadi the Necromancer they'll be able to pick up the trail again.

If they try and take Makadi alive he will turn his power on himself. Makadi's body ignites with a sickly green fire and he vanishes in a cloud of ash and smoke. If they kill him, the same happens as his soul is pulled back across time and space.

THEN THERE WERE FIVE

This should be the finale of this escapade, no more than three hundred miles from the finish and the Agents have caught up with Hasuf. The heroes are going to come across the man fighting them off, trying to escape, with three more dead riders around him, their horses blackened and charred from the intense heat of magic from one of the five remaining Agents - a woman who wears a suit of dark green armor, the breastplate carved with a skull-like jackal or dog head.

Anasamun is a Mage and she's extremely dangerous, she the leader of this capture squad, and her orders are simple. Kill everyone who isn't a Hasuf and capture Hasuf alive. Her team is expendable; everyone except her is expendable, since she's the one who can get them home.

The heroes should have a tough fight of it, and if they fail to save Hasuf, then Anasamun will open a portal and drag him through. Should they try and follow her they'll be unable to and will get lost in the desert and will need a survival check at -1 to get back to civilization.

If they manage to save the man and defeat the bad guys, then they'll be able to gain a few more clues regarding who they were up against.

- Written in a strange tongue, but one which can be translated by Hasuf, a missive from some High Commander gives them orders to find and kidnap Hasuf to fuel a strange magical machine.
- Any armor, weapons, and magic gear that the Agents have decays once they're dead; another one of those little tricks to limit the mastermind involvement in other worlds, or rather limit his discovery.

- Trying to capture any one of the Agents results in a deadly light-show similar to the one they encountered with the necromancer.
- Hasuf will be extremely grateful, offering them a substantial reward, and will ask them to escort him back to Zayida. These events should be troubling for the heroes, and it should give them a feeling that whatever happens, there's a larger plot just out of reach... or is it?

ANASUMUN (NECROMANCER MAGE)

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Knowledge (Magic) d8, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Shooting d8, Necromancy d10+1, Taunt d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7 (2); **Toughness:** 10 (5)

Essence: 20

Edges: Combat Reflexes, Elan, Necromancer, Rapid Recharge

Powers: Armor, Barrier, Bolt, Smite, Stun, Summon ally (see Spector, Legends Arise pg 179)

Gear: Enchanted Settite Staff (Str+d4+1, +1 Necromancy, +2 Parry, Reach 1, 2 hands, Telesma), Enchanted Settite Arcanus Armor (+5 Armor, Full Coverage, ignores AP, +2 to all rolls against environmental effects)

DEATHBRINGER

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d10, Notice d6, Shooting d8+1, Stealth d10, Throwing d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 7 (2)

Edges: Acrobat, Assassin, Block, Dodge, Fleet-Footed, Marksman, Martial Artist

Gear: Set Blade (Damage: Str+d6, Reduces target's Parry by 1), Enchanted Dwarven Crossbow, Hammerbolt Modification (2d6+2, 25/50/100, +1 Shooting, AP 2, 8 shots before reload, Lethal Poison), Partial Scale (+2 armor, -2 coverage)

ASSASSIN ELITE

(There are 2 Elite Assassins)

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d10, Notice d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d10, Throwing d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 7 (2)

Edges: Acrobat, Assassin, Block, Dodge, Extraction, Fleet-Footed, Steady Hands

Gear: Set Blade (Damage: Str+d6, Reduces target's Parry by 1, Lethal Poison), Partial Scale (+2 armor, -2 coverage)

ASSASSIN

(There are 2 Assassins)

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Notice d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Throwing d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6 (1)

Edges: Acrobat, Assassin, Fleet-Footed, Steady Hands

Gear: Set Blade (Damage: Str+d6, Reduces target's Parry by 1, Lethal Poison), Partial Leather (+1 armor, -2 coverage)

NEW EDGES

DESERT RIDER HORSEMANSHIP

Requirements: Veteran, Cavalryman, Mount must be trained for combat

These Youlin Aradi are some of the finest horsemen in Shaintar, they have a command of their mounts that really has no equal. They can make them perform tricks which seem almost magical, and push their stamina to the limits in such as the Ride of Glory.

Desert riders are trained to guide their mounts with their legs freeing their hands to fight or shoot. These riders may use two-handed weapons, one weapon in each hand, or any other combination without

suffering the One Arm Hindrance for riding with no hands, though they are still subject to Unstable Platform penalties.

Furthermore, this bond between horse and man allows the rider to stay in the saddle even while resting. Riders with this edge may attempt to sleep in the saddle once per day (24 hours) by rolling a Riding check at -2. If successful, the character is considered to have sufficient sleep (though likely still sore). Failure means the character must roll Vigor as normal (see Sleep in Savage Worlds Deluxe). Each day after the first a rider attempts to sleep in the saddle without stopping for proper sleep, the Riding check is at a cumulative -2 (total penalty -6). The mount, however, still requires sleep and cannot run while the rider is sleeping.

LEAVE NO SIGN

Requirements: Human, Desert-Born

Moving through the Desert for an outlander is a tricky thing, they do not know the subtle variations in the dunes, and they don't know the secret paths one can take. The Youlin Aradi know this, and more, some of them are skilled at wiping any trace of their passing to confound trackers.

The Youlin Aradi with this edge has the effects of Wilderness Walk as a permanent ability, granting him +2 Stealth in the desert, as well as being impossible to track.

SECRETS OF THE DESERT

Requirements: Background, Special

There are those who are born in the Eternal Desert who know its secrets, they can guide you across the endless sands, out of trouble, into long forgotten ruins, and more. They have an almost mystical connection with the land around them - allowing them to find things which many thought lost.

This could be used as a narrative Edge. The GM may use it to help a party uncover hidden places. In this instance, the Edge would be given to a NPC.

Like Edges such as Connections and Noble, this Edge grants a number of narrative benefits. First, the character gains a Contact within The Endless Desert.

This individual is ultimately up to the GM, but the player is encouraged to offer input. This Contact can provide forgotten lore, unique items, and various plot hooks for the character related to mysteries of the sands. The Contact is not a Follower or a Sidekick and does not join the character on adventures. This individual counts as a Contact for Day in the Life.

Second, a character with this edge gains the Defining Interest: Ancient Desert Lore providing +2 on all Knowledge, Investigation, and Streetwise checks specifically to find and uncover these lost legacies. This stacks with Bard.

Finally, the character receives a +2 Notice when attempting to locate ruins in the dunes. GMs are encouraged to allow the character a Notice check whenever in the vicinity of any desert ruins even when the character is not actively searching. The GM is the final arbiter on what constitutes ancient mysteries for the purpose of this Edge.

THE ART OF THE DEAL

Requirements: Coin Wise (Serenity, p.20), Merchant

There are those who can talk money, then are those who know the language of money. The Youlin Aradi pride themselves on their skill at barter and trade. They have elevated it to an art form and this Edge models this aspect of their culture, allowing those within and without to benefit from an increased understanding of all kinds of trade.

When using the Resource system, characters may add their Charisma modifier to their Resource check. This bonus applies to Availability and Value rolls only. This bonus cannot exceed +6 and does not apply to any other rolls used improve the Hero's Resource rating on the Condition chart.

Furthermore, haggling is held in such high regard within the Eternal Sands that those with this Edge may substitute their Resource die for their Wild die on Persuasion checks in situations where affluence and negotiation are prized (subject to GM approval).



