

EPIC HIGH FANTASY

Shardar

GUIDEBOOK



KAL-A-NAR

GUIDEBOOK : KAL-A-NAR

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FORWARD

Here we are with another book being released and as we wind down to the final few in the kickstarter, I had some thoughts to share. First, thank you to all the backers. Your patience and support have been absolutely amazing and all of us have been excited to tackle each book as it comes along to make it the best product we can for you.

The Justice & Life community (www.shaintar.com) and the backers who purchased pledges that allowed the creation of a bloodline, town, castle or country have been fun to work with. In this book, you'll find Essal's Keep along with other information provided by Betty Law Morgan as part of her pledge.



FOR THE EMPIRE

"The Kal are strong, stronger than steel, fiercer than a storm. We are HER fire, Ceynara's War Cry is our Cry, and it will be heard!"

~ Astrid kes Bjorn ~ Daughter of the Blade

THE KAL-A-NAR EMPIRE

This is the largest and one of the most powerful states in Shaintar, ruthless, brutal, and yet, not without charm. The Kalinesh are consummate warriors, fearless in battle, will not compromise, wicked to their enemies, and comprise one of the most lethal fighting forces on the continent. Within the pages of this book, you'll discover more of their history, learn what makes these people tick, and find out more about some forbidden magical rituals.

You'll also learn about the Unchained, Essal's Keep, and other locations in the Kal-A-Nar Empire which are important foci for events to come.

As might be expected, there are also some new Edges, Hindrances, Fighting styles, and gear. There are also some monsters that have been created from their demonic magic and some adventure shards that help form a greater arc.

Welcome to the northwestern part of Shaintar, where Ceynara's power is strong, and the men and women of the Empire worship demons and conduct rituals of Flame, and worse.

FACTS IN BRIEF

Capital: Kal'Zaketh

Population: Over 15 million (mostly human)

Dominant religion: Worship of Ceynara as the Goddess of War and Might, with other Demon Lords acknowledged as demi-gods.

Government: totalitarian Empire that controls the northwestern portion of the main continent. Very much a military autocracy, with strong feudal practices.

Society: Warlords rule over all with a mighty and feared army, and true societal distinction can rarely be achieved outside of military service. A caste

system exists; it is somewhat fluid at the higher levels, becoming stricter the lower one goes. Slavery is legal and widely practiced.

Economy: Heavy focus on mining and manufacture for war. Kalinesh mercenaries are hired throughout Shaintar as they are excellent at protecting or attacking others for money.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE EMPIRE

The Kal-A-Nar Empire is strong, ruthless and brutal, yet steeped in age-old traditions and with a powerful army at its back. Nothing in the Kal-A-Nar Empire is done without reason, and war is their lifeblood.

The Capital of the Empire, Kal'Zaketh is a dominating city fortress the likes of which is rare in Shaintar. It's massive, brooding, dangerous, and the cornerstone of the Kalinesh worship of Ceynara in her guise as the Goddess of War. Her Demon Lords are considered demi-gods by the Kal, and shrines and small altars can be found all across their land.

"Might makes right!" ~ **Battle Cry, source unknown**

The culture revolves around the belief that 'might makes right', and battle is the grease with which their war machine's wheel turns. This Empire is a autocracy, with strongly bonded feudal practices. It's a warrior society where the strongest rule--in this case, the Kal-A-Nar Warlords and their feared armies.

So deep is their reliance on war that there's very little advancement without military service. There are rare exceptions when the warlord requires certain non-military skills. There's a caste system governing the population of 4.5 million, comprised mostly of humans. In the higher strata of society, the caste system is fluid, but the lowest rarely advance out of poverty.

Slavery is widely practiced in the Empire, and that's about as low as you can get in a caste society. If you're non-human in Kal-A-Nar, you're automatically considered a slave or a pet and can have no other role.

Liner Notes: The Empire

The Kal Empire is the classic "Empire of Bad Guys," in the truest sense of the word. Their leaders worship the Queen of Hell as their Goddess of War. They don't start wars because they're in need of new land, or someone is in need of being put into their place. They start them because they love war. This Empire is expansionist yes, they want to rule all of Shaintar, but honestly they just like drawing steel and charging in to battle for the fun of it. Imagine something akin to the Picts, Vikings, and Gauls of old, gathered under one very powerful and chaotic ruler, who has carved out a huge territory. Now, imagine they just keep on growing in power and influence, using magic and demonic hordes to supplement an already formidable army.

Sean's said a few times that the Kalinesh are a fantasy-version of the Klingon society from Star Trek melded with the most chaotic elements of Norse mythology. It's a pretty good way to look at them, combining the good and the bad; the honorable, clever, strong warrior-heart aspects, with factions inside the Empire that espouse a nobler, if somewhat coarse demeanor, and the demon worshipping, cruel 'take your teeth and make them into a necklace for an evil ritual' Kalinesh.

The bad news for your heroes is that the latter are the driving force in the Kal-A-Nar Empire and are the ones you're likely to see as they come roaring over the hill, chanting and screaming in Ceynara's name all covered in spiky armor.

Yet for all its harshness, the Kal Empire is a place of raw beauty and incredible wealth in terms of nature and raw materials. Fortunately for them, they have their own sources for the perfect ores to turn into weapons of war. Their forge fires are bright, with the smiths and slaves working day and night to make arms and armor for the Kal troops.

Kal-A-Nar tend to be bound to Houses ruled by strong men, with women in lesser roles. This society is not progressive at all, they cleave to old rules and traditions laid down centuries ago - if a woman rises to the top of the proverbial power-heap in the Empire, then she's truly impressive, and dangerous - she'll have the eyes of every Kal Warlord and the Emperor to contend with. Some of these Kal Houses offer their troops as mercenaries to bring money into their coffers, and ultimately into the Empire itself, if you ever meet a female mercenary in charge of a warband - run.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

How did the Kal-A-Nar Empire come to be? It's a good question, and one which can be answered by looking back into the very annals of the past at the mighty Jolokas ki Grilnas. There may not be many events which are chronicled, but the most poignant in Kalinesh history is the one which follows:

ONE SHALL LEAD

There are leaders, there are followers, and there are slaves. Over 2000 years ago, the barbaric human tribes far to the north began to coalesce into groups of something different, a militaristic society ruled by several powerful chieftains along with their clan elders. As time passed these chieftains came to be called warlords and took control of more people and territory, subjugating those weaker within their borders and building even more powerful armies.

They enslaved the dwarf population of the Everwall Mountains after a difficult war, and were then able to obtain better armor and quality forged weapons, again increasing their capacity and capability for war immensely. Again they waged war, and fought amongst themselves, continuing to gain more power, more slaves, and more land until 700 years had passed and one man shone forth in both ability and reputation. Vos-Dair-Az (Grand War Marshall) Jolokas ki Grilnas.

Jolokas' brilliance overshadowed his peers. There was none cleverer and his grasp of tactics left his fellows in the dust and blood. He won every battle he fought - whether against friend or foe - and his charm helped him to forge a nation. He turned his brilliance into stirring words, and swift action, and ultimately created the Eleran m' Kal-A-Nar, which became the Kal-A-Nar Empire.

He took the throne as Emperor, for it was only fitting, and led the "People of Glory." For that is truly what Kal-A-Nar means.

WAR OF IDEALS

Being brilliant and installing himself in power was only part of the battle - what followed for the first Warlord of the Kal-A-Nar people was a period of war. This war was waged against any who opposed the Kalinesh and their new Emperor, it was bloody, brutal, and left countless dead in its wake.

The result?

Expansion into territory after territory, through the vast distances that now made up the Kalinesh Empire and it began to dominate in every way. The Empire's coffers brimmed over with coin, their prisons with slaves taken from the countless battles in the war, and their reputation spread.

KAL-A-NAR TODAY

Most of the northern part of the continent of Shaintar is dominated by the Kal-A-Nar Empire today, they have a new Emperor (who we'll discuss later) and entire societies have been swallowed within the Empire's control. Many of these societies have been turned into slave cultures, including the Everwall Dwarves; the Fae of the Forever Forest; countless Goblinsesh, few of whom are permitted to live in gathers; and more.

At one time the Kal-A-Nar Empire included much of the Eternal Desert along with attempts to enslave the Youlin Aradi as well.

For good or ill, the Empire is thought to be the cradle of human civilization. This is where it all began, though during the Great Exodus many fled the Kal Empire's tyranny, forming the Kingdoms of Olara and Galea, the Malakar Dominion, the Freelands, and the Prelacy of Camon as they spread out and away from their former masters.

ARCHITECTURE

The watch-word for Kalinesh architectural design is defense; they have little time for fancy curlicues and delicate arches. They definitely appreciate art, of course. They just prefer their buildings to be useful, places where they can train in combat, wrestle, beat each other black and blue, and pray to the Goddess of War in private sanctums, as well as sleep, eat, and administer their lands.

Kalinesh cities are impressive to see, with splashes of color and life within their stonework. There's often at least some red or orange in their brickwork, in order to please (or placate) the Queen of Hell, Ceynara, and show total loyalty to the Flame of War. In addition, homes have a tendency to carry the worship of Ceynara throughout with niches for statuary and a fire pit set in a room for worship and sacrifice.

There's little wood used in the main construction of their buildings - due to the risk of fire, and the fact that wood is weaker than stone.

Villages are built around a central hub, a circle of such buildings with doorways pointing inwards toward a well, or gathering place, can easily be protected from attack, allowing the village warriors to turn an attack. This focus in building style has won many a battle before it got started.

Many an overconfident enemy force has been decimated when Kal warriors came pouring out of their homes, armed to the teeth. Even those who managed to enter a home find the women and children armed and prepared to defend their home most aggressively.

In exchange for slightly better living conditions, some favored slaves have imparted building techniques to the Kal builders, allowing them to create incredibly strong town and city walls, along with other defenses.

After learning that triangles are strong when interlinked, a quite sophisticated design for bridges came to be. Circles are also a solid structure, so many of homes are circular - with everything on the ground floor in segmented spaces set aside for specific tasks. They've even developed basic sewer works, and ventilation techniques for their homes, installing chimneys to suck away the smoke from fires.

Of course their buildings lack true artistry on the outside, but no dwarf would be caught dead saying this to their Kal masters. Inside, homes are insulated and warm. Many people have genuinely warm relationships within family and a few close and bonded friends.

KALINESH NAMES

Notes: Kalinesh is trickier than normal: It's got a Scandinavian flavor with variation in the consonants. There's a heavy emphasis on the "hard" consonants, like D, T, G, and K, with a good deal of J and V sounds as well.

Examples

Male

Algot, Arvid, Azor, Bergen, Bjorn, Boril, Dag, Dorgan, Dozir, Egil, Espen, Frenne, Fridjolf, Galar, Grimm, Haken, Harrak, Ilian, Ivar, Johar, Jurd,

Karzan, Kezarin, Leiv, Linnar, Marrik, Nokvi, Odvar, Olav, Ragnar, Rolf, Sigmar, Sarrin, Thalomin, Torvald, Ulf, Velam, Vidkun, Zekol

Female

Alvrida, Astrid, Botilla, Brynja, Dagmar, Daisa, Famke, Frodis, Gerda, Gotilda, Helga, Hilma, Ilianna, Ingifrid, Jorun, Kira, Kjella, Lissken, Lovtena, Odgard, Olga, Ragnild, Sigrid, Svala, Thyri, Tova, Vala, Vigdis, Ziva, Zulya

Surnames

Kalinesh surnames are almost universally patronymics, starting with "ki" (son of) for men and "kes" (daughter of) for women. For example, if a man named Zekol has a son, Marrik, and a daughter, Dagmar, the son will be called Marrik ki Zekol, and the daughter Dagmar kes Zekol.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

These people are broad shouldered, sturdy, and built for battle. They work to maintain their abilities, and when they're not training, they're out maintaining their personal defenses. The older men show echoes of their former glory days, and still display muscle and warlike ability.

Women serve the men, but they've strength in their features, beauty, dynamism, and they work just as hard to make their homes strong for their family. There are a few women who take to the training and become warriors themselves.

Both men and women have very long hair, usually kept braided or otherwise bound. Hair colors range from light brown to black with red hair showing up in both genders. This is often thought to be a mark of the Goddess's favor, and those born with fire-red locks are favored.

Their skin tones are somewhat darker than elsewhere - very few Kal are born with pale skin. The Kal have medium to dark eye colors, with coppery or reddish hues being the rarest - and considered by the priests of Ceynara to be mark of the Queen of Hell's favor, though no one knows if this is true or not.

CLOTHING

When not clad in frightening, bloody, spiky armor, the Kal men and women of all social strata have a variety of clothing. Slaves are expected to wear the

chosen clothing of the house, and woe-betide them if they bring shame upon their house when so attired. It's easy for a Kal to recognize the slave of another house in this way.

Kal commoners wear thick boots, heavy trousers, sturdy shirts, and vests when unarmored. Often a long leather coat is used in colder weather, trimmed with fur. If there's any jewelry, it's often made of red metal, usually copper or rose gold. These clothes have the extra benefit of providing protection as well as keeping the weather at bay. Clothing styles vary for those in the upper caste, with tunics, breeches, soft shoes, and elegant long coats becoming popular amongst the elite, and elegant dresses with flowing or trailing capes for the women.

The colors of these clothes are vibrant and use red, orange, black and other rich colors that are considered unlucky to the rest of Shaintar. The Kal like bright oranges, yellows, reds and ambers. These colors affirm their connection to Ceynara. Jewelry tends to be set in red gold or copper, with rubies, citrine, garnet, or amber, any fire colored gem will do. Opals are very rare and command quite the price due to the fire they seem to contain within.

The Kal are not adverse to borrowing clothing and styles from other cultures though, especially in terms of arms and armor.

FOOD

An old army saying states "you can't make war on an empty stomach". The Kalinesh know this and know how to fill their bellies. Meat is on the menu in Kal-A-Nar, with a variety of dishes cooked and roasted over open fires. There are meals created around pig, lamb, cow, and venison on the home dinner plates, served in large portions, with simple vegetables in thick gravies made from the juices of the meat.

Nothing goes to waste here. They're not overly fond of desserts, and they don't usually break their meals into delicate courses - they go right for the communal eating concept and eat directly from troughs set along the center of the table. If there's a desire to cleanse the palate after a meal, folks dive right into a strong basted and flavored apple, or sip brandy and port - flavored from berries found to the north.

Game birds are often served in wine reductions and, whilst their other fare is usually given a dash of beer or something stronger for flavor.

If they do have any kind of dessert it's usually made with fruit and fermented milk - along with Keyr, a yoghurt-like substance.

DRINK

Drink has become more important than food. The Kal have embraced alcohol in a ritualistic way, with drinks central to their love of battle. This has given rise to the oft heard phrase: "If there's one thing you should fear more than a Kalinesh warrior in battle, it is a Kalinesh warrior in battle who's had a skinful."

There's something about alcohol which provides the Kal greater focus, rather than dulling their mind. They're already fearless, but when they've had a drink or two, they're suddenly capable of bravery that leaves mouths agape. There's even a ritualistic drink which is brewed in secret. Ceynara's Fire, as it's called, is a heady mix of herbs, spices, and alcohol and tastes glorious yet knocks even the most ardent dwarf into a deep daze. Imbibing Ceynara's Fire requires a Vigor check (-6). On a success, the character suffers a Fatigue. On a raise, the character suffers no ill effects. Failure results in 2 levels of Fatigue; whereas a critical failure means instant Incapacitation (Fatigue). The effects are cumulative and characters must roll vs Fatigue with each pot of brew consumed. Lands have been lost over who passes out first.

On these people, though, and those trained for war it has the opposite effect; it ignites an intense battle lust. For this reason it's brewed only by priests, and given to warriors before battles, and kept in special jars due to its unstable nature.

Higher born Kalinesh drink wine as well, though this is a recent thing after trade brought it in from Camon and Galea. They prefer full bodied wines, in red varieties, and find the lighter sparkling varieties that are clear to be weak and thus unappealing.

There's also a heated drink made from goat or cow milk, with the addition of cinnamon or other spices that's used in the winter months for warmth. They also make a huge variety of meads from local honey sources, and have elevated mead-making into an art form.

SOCIETY

There's one thing to remember about the Kal Empire, and it influences everything about their society. The Tor-Eleran ("Army of the Empire") is everything and the true power here - by extension, the Warlords rule over all. There are nobles, but only those with any military rank have any standing whatsoever.

There's a strong caste structure at work within the Kal Empire's society. While once it was observed almost religiously. Recent years have shown change, though things at the low end are still very strict.

Women are a different matter entirely.

If a woman rises to power, she's done so through the military. It's exceedingly rare to see a female Warlord, and bear in mind that if you do, she's likely one of the most dangerous people you'll ever meet. Not only is she capable of defending herself and her family, she's also been holding her own in a male-dominated, warlike society. She has physical skill, determination, and political astuteness at her call.

There's a saying in Kal society, "Female Warlords are the most dangerous - they bring warrior children into this world, and send men to the next."

Choices

It takes not only physical skill, determination, and strength for a woman to succeed in the Kalinesh army, it takes cunning and political savvy as well.

Strong women make strong bloodlines; the Kal know this well. One of the constant battles a woman has to face when she achieves any kind of distinction on the battlefield is that between duty to family and desire for personal glory. Does she do her duty as expected by her House - remove herself from the field of honor to have children - or turn her back on all of it and continue to achieve glory for the Empire? Women don't generally have a choice unless they've earned it in battle. It's not a choice made lightly.

The people of Kal-A-Nar also know the value of structure, for they may be closely linked to chaos and entropy in spirit, but without the necessary elements that make up their culture they'd not last long. To this end everyone has a place, farmers, craftsmen, merchants, and bureaucrats are all valued to some degree within the Empire.

The current lines of nobility remain to ensure a foundation, a status quo allowing the Kal to run their government, whilst the military leaders concentrate on their strategies and external matters. However, it's common knowledge that even nobles are considered to be low if they've not a single shred of military



service in their history, so anyone even remotely capable of wielding any kind of weapon puts their time in the Army to ensure they have as high a social standing as possible

Non-humans, though, are slaves in the Empire. It's possible that a non-human might achieve a fairly high level of value as a slave, particularly if a talent or craft is at a high degree of skill. Alternately, superior skills in the gladiatorial Blood Pits can purchase a relatively comfortable lifestyle for a survivor or a repeat champion. Slavery is slavery though, and there are more yokes in the Kal-A-Nar Empire than anywhere else in Shaintar.

To understand Kal-A-Nar society, just remember that they were once honorable, if excessively violent, warriors with a strict code, but a corrupt Emperor has sat too long on the throne encouraging atrocity. Now, most of the Kalinesh are violent warriors with a rather flexible code. Others are considered lower-than-low if they've no military background. If you're a non-human, you're a slave, even if you're a visitor to their land. There are, however, a few within the upper castes who do still have a strong code and would see their land return to honor. These few protect their citizens and slaves as best they can from the depredations of their fellows and the Acolytes and War Priests of Ceynara.

ART AND ENTERTAINMENT

Like beauty, art is also in the eye of the beholder. This fact is no truer than within the Empire where art imitates life, and life is war, conquest, and bloodshed. Everything is grandiose with large oil paintings and tapestries depicting the Empire's greatest triumphs. Unlike the Olarans, whose images are those of

sacrifice and honor, the Kal portray grisly vistas of gore and death with their enemies broken and bleeding before their triumphant hordes. There's very little that is soft, though there are portraits to be found in the wealthiest of noble homes. And, typical of the decadence of their society, such horrors are displayed prominently and proudly in heavy gilded frames.

Furniture is equally grandiose, but far more insidious. Large and heavy of dark, hard woods, or carefully worked steel, many are upholstered in thick gold, or crimson fabrics. It is popular to have artisans incorporate images of battle and even sacrificial slaughter of slaves into such furnishings.

Musicians and bards in the Empire know that martial sounding music will please their audience. Not surprisingly, much of this music contains religious overtones bringing glory to the Goddess of War, Ceynara. Of course, the performers are aware that should their offerings not please Ceynara, her chosen servants, the Acolytes and War Priests, will be waiting.

RELIGION

The Kal-A-Nar Empire worships Ceynara, the Queen of Hell, and consider her Demon Lords to be demi-gods. The Church of Ceynara is overseen by Acolytes whose terrible nature is on full display. They sacrifice slaves, foreign captives, and citizens in Ceynara's name in exchange for the powers they wield. Of interesting note to those living outside of the Empire is that Ceynara is most often depicted in her guise as Goddess of War. To the Kal she is not evil, but the embodiment of the warrior ideal, the perfect conqueror and warrior queen. There is nothing so terrifying as a zealot, except perhaps a zealot empowered by the Queen of Hell.

It is said that there is no death more horrible, more painful, or more utterly despicable than to be slaughtered on one of Ceynara's altars. Fortunately for most citizens of the Empire, such fates are typically reserved for slaves and captured trophies of war. However, all understand that they are one false step, one disloyal word, or one failure away from meeting an Acolyte's ritual knife.

There is, however, one death worse – to be the makings of Blood Steel – and even that is at the hands of specialized Acolyte smiths.

Redeemable Acolytes?

Sean's said over and over that there's no way to redeem an Acolyte, so just don't go there. Darkness is evil, but it doesn't come close to the level of pure vileness that Flame represents. To achieve any power with Flame at all, an Acolyte must bathe in the blood of innocent sacrificial victims. This is not something one falls into by accident or through mere temptation. It is calculated, cold-blooded murder each and every time, with the greatest power coming after making deals with actual demons.

Once a person chooses to become an Acolyte – a servant of Hell – their only redemption lies in their death.

DEATH

Those outside the Empire often assume that the Kal are little more than a bloodthirsty death cult, but the Kal revel only in the death of their enemies or vanquished fighting slaves in the Blood Pits. For the nobility, how their passing is treated depends largely on how ambitious and victorious they were in life, and the circumstances of their death. Wealth and power, as with so much in the Empire, even death depends on these.

The passing of great warriors, nobles, and lords requires celebration as well as mourning. Lavish gifts are distributed by the family to friends and allies, a sign of wealth and respect, but more importantly this is an attempt to secure their loyalty to the now weakened house. Games are often held in the Blood Pits honoring the fallen warrior's victories in war. Feasts are held and many slaves and prisoners are sacrificed by the House Acolytes to secure favor with Ceynara.

Such honors are, of course reserved for the nobility of the Empire. Those of the merchant and farming classes honor their dead, but lack the resources for lavish displays. What happens to slave is of little concern. Unsurprisingly for a culture of Flame, bodies are cremated in Thaumaturgical fire, a final offering for the Goddess of War. This goes for all levels of society.

BIRTH

Lord, Ledger, Lady and Lance

Daughters are useful for creating alliances via marriage but sons are more important to a Kalinesh family. For centuries, noble families held to a tradition that dictated the occupation of their sons based on birth order. While more modern nobles may not hold their sons to this, the more traditional families still expect their sons to fall into line. The firstborn is heir to the title (Lord) and the second born his second-in-command or steward (Ledger). The third born son enters the priesthood (Lady) and the fourth born the army (Lance).

THE UNCHAINED

The story of the Unchained begins with the story of Jerik Tul. It is told by bards who learned it from the most well-traveled and prolific bard, Michael Longteller:

"The Kal-A-Nar Empire exists under a strict caste system with little opportunity for achievement outside the military. Only the path of a warrior allows one to gain a higher station. Even then, such advancement is often over the bodies of comrades and commanders. The military holds sway over everything, and the demon-enhanced Warlords are supreme over everyone save the Emperor.

"At the bottom of the social order are the slaves – those captured from other lands, as well as all non-humans within the Empire's borders. Once born a slave, there is no escape.

"No escape, save the Blood Pits.

"There, in the arenas scattered across the Empire, slave-warriors and vile creatures battle for the amusement of the Empire's citizens. The Az-Junin and Az-Agkar tamper with beasts and beings alike to create ultimate warriors, so only the most powerful and skilled combatants may ever hope to survive past the first competition.

"These fighters fight for the only prize worth winning in the Empire – freedom. Those humans that last through an entire season are promised their freedom, along with a raise in status and the opportunity to advance in Kal society. Non-humans are simply freed and banished to the Southern Kingdoms.

"Only one man defied this process, choosing instead to use his freedom to win the same for all his brethren, as well as all the Kalinesh people.

"That man is Jerik Tul..."

"The Dregordian warrior Sskolloss, a hero to every member of his species had been enslaved by the Kal, lay at the feet of the one man who had ever beaten him in the Blood Pits. Jerik Tul had just won the Imperial Grand Tournament, and it was his right and duty to slay his opponent and claim the prize

– freedom, and the title of Sadar Nom. Instead, he spared the Dregordian, helping the lizardman stand. As a gasping hush fell on the crowd, he addressed the Emperor himself.

“This day, I take my prize and leave this place. Call me what you will – it means nothing to me. This day, I am free, and every breath I take will be for one goal. One day, I will see all of you free, as well.”

“He turned to walk out of the arena, and as a hundred soldiers moved to stop him, the Emperor stayed them. He told his advisors, “He will not last one month. Let the people hear of his failure after he has been given his chance. It will be a much greater lesson for them.”

Heroes of the Far North

A campaign set in the Empire would likely revolve around joining up with the Unchained and their growing rebellion. Such a campaign would be full of combat, narrow escapes, dangerous rescues, and the freeing of slaves. It would also be very tough, gritty, and have a few disappointments. After all, the Empire is very strong and is not going anywhere anytime soon.

Or is it...?

This was one of the Emperor’s most painful mistakes, for Jerik Tul did not fail. In fact, his rebellion has grown impressively.”

The Unchained began as a small group of talented and dedicated individuals following the only man to ever spurn the Emperor upon winning the Grand Tourney. Jerik Tul has made good on his promise, and instead of failing, he’s managed to gather a real following.

Jerik’s goal remains the same – to free all Kalinesh people and lands from the chains of the Emperor and his Acolytes. Needless to say, he’s become Enemy Number One as far as the Tor Mastak is concerned, and much of their efforts are dedicated to finding and destroying him.

Unfortunately for them, his list of friends is growing larger every day, and now includes people coming from the Southern Kingdoms to offer their services in the greater cause.

PLACES OF THE EMPIRE

ESSAL’S KEEP

HEROES IN THE NORTH

The Unchained have grown from disorganized rabble trying to disrupt slavery operations, to an army of open rebellion. Jerrik Tul has made it clear he intends to continue harassing the Empire from within as well as establishing territory the Unchained can call their own. Fighting the Unchained on two fronts is proving difficult for the Tor-Eleran. One reason the invasion (The War of Flame) of the Southern Kingdoms was abandoned was due to the Unchained.

The Unchained are spreading word across the empire that anyone wishing to return to the days of honor is welcome at Essal’s Keep on the eastern border of the Empire. Many have answered the call and former slaves, dissatisfied nobles, merchants, officers, and common folk have straggled in. As more arrive, more territory will be claimed and eventually the Keep may be able to establish independence from the Empire. This will happen only if they are able defend themselves against the Tor-Mastak and the Tor-Eleran.



Zerin ki Thorim, is the Az-Ri of Essal's Keep. He's a former spy for the Unchained and he keeps the Keep running. Karzai ki Ildrath, a Warlord who switched sides, along with his entire unit, is in charge of the defense of Essal's Keep.

Until recently, the Unchained had been spread out across the Empire, interfering where they could in the slave trade and other workings of the Empire. Now, a portion of them have decided to take a stand and defend territory they chose, taking full advantage of having members of the nobility on their side for a change.

THE KEEP'S HISTORY

Essal's Keep, is on the eastern border, and a defensible location. A longtime member of the Unchained, Zerin ki Thorim, is the heir to Essal's Keep and was forced by circumstances to come out of hiding and lay claim to his inheritance. This gave the Unchained an opportunity they could not pass up. Essal's Keep territory has been declared a free zone and word has spread through all of Kal-A-Nar that those who want to return to the days when Kalinesh was synonymous with honorable are encouraged to find their way there.

A thousand years ago, or so the story goes, Essal and his seven sons got involved in a territory dispute on the border so contentious that the Emperor himself became involved. Two of Essal's sons were such fine warriors they were members of the Emperor's personal guard. The battle lasted three days and during that time all seven of Essal's sons died. Essal himself stepped into his son's place to guard the Emperor. Just as they thought the battle was won, a mage cast a spell at the Emperor and Essal leapt in front of Harkor ki Doman, saving his life. As Essal lay dying at the Emperor's feet, he cried that there was no one to protect his heirs, as his sons were dead and his grandsons too young to hold his keep. The Emperor swore a blood oath to Essal, sworn on that battlefield and in Ceynara's name, that he would protect Essal's heirs himself. The Emperor then took all the property whose lords had died in the battle and gave it to Essal, declaring him Az Ri over those holdings.

That blood oath to Ceynara protected those descendants from everyone until 7 years ago when Zerin ki Thorim was found to be helping the

Unchained. That act of treason gave the Emperor the ability to break his oath and he sent troops to destroy all descendants of Essal. They took the keep during the night and thought they had destroyed all save Zerin, who was slated for execution. Zerin's sister Brynja kes Thorim, escaped with 11 children to the Southern Kingdoms and Zerin was rescued by the Unchained before his execution could take place.

Zerin ki Thorim is the 33rd descendant to be named Az Ri of Essal's Keep. He'd much rather be a spy for the Unchained but since he was the only person available with the correct heritage to hold Essal's Keep, he was convinced to take over and accept reinstatement of the old title Az Ri.

The Emperor wants Zerin and anyone who aids him dead. This is doubly true of his very young half orc/half human nephew heir to Essal's Keep. The idea of an orc bearing any title other than slave inside his Empire has Harkor ki Doman more infuriated than the location of the rebels base. After all, now many of them are in one spot, so they'll be easier to eliminate.

Essal's Keep is the only official outpost of the Church of Light inside of the Empire -- with its own Bishop, known only as Archanon's Vengeance.

THE BUILDINGS

The fortress reflects the convoluted and bloody heritage of its masters. Constructed of slate gray stone, the walls of the Keep hunch over the Dragon River like a brooding giant. First begun over a thousand years ago, the keep and outbuildings are squat, square structures built with an eye for defense, not appearance. Still, there is something solid about the weathered stone walls, scorched so often by Flame, yet never cracked.

At the center of the holding is Essal's Keep, a west facing, three story square bailey tower with sharp crenellations resembling the jagged teeth of some massive beast. Extending north and south from the base of the keep are two large halls that serve as barracks, kitchens, armories, and other incidentals required for running a military fort. On the west face of the keep, extending toward the main gate is the great hall; a two story chamber with vaulted ceilings and room to feed a small army. Here Warlord Karzai ki Ildrath conducts business, entertains dignitaries, hosts feasts, and stages for war.

Newly renovated, to the east, but unattached, stands the only known Chapel of Light in the Empire. Here, the Bishop spreads the word of Light to the faithful. Despite its religious significance, the chapel, like all structures within Essal's Keep, is constructed of thick stone prepared to repel any assault.

Running around the entire compound is a high stone curtain wall, complete with square defensive towers at regular intervals and a heavily reinforced front gate. The gate is actually a system of defenses designed to stand up to even the most concerted assault by the Imperial armies. The inner gate is a massive portcullis constructed of Blood Steel by the Emperor's own Bloodsmiths, reported to be capable

of withstanding even Acolytes' fire! The passage under the wall is lined with murder holes and more terrible traps for hapless invaders. The outer gate, constructed of Blood Steel bound ironwood, stands almost two stories high, and is wide enough to pass two wagons abreast.

Around the fortress the village of Essal's Keep straddles the great crossroads, her people living, working, and dying in the shadow of the keep's walls. In the past, the fortress stood as a constant reminder of the Emperor's oppressive power. But now, the dark and brooding walls offer something far more powerful...hope.



Aevakar in the Empire

There is a reason you will never see an aevakar Vos-Ulin (high slave), and any you see as Dren-Ulin (low slave) will likely only be around briefly. A bloody and vengeful history exists between the Kalinesh people and the aevakar, starting with the death of an emperor's son.

At the Battle of Aralon in the year 1741 AC, aevakar reinforcements swooped in to turn the tide against Erkourt ki Jolokas, the eldest son of the Emperor. The brash yet brilliant young commander had been poised for a mighty victory against the combined forces of the Southern Kingdoms when he was struck down by waves upon waves of arrows shot by aevakar archers. His Acolytes responded immediately, unleashing hellish fire into their ranks and summoning forth gargoyles to fly amongst them and destroy them.

Though the allies of the aevakar won the day, the winged fae never fully recovered from the losses caused by the Emperor's revenge. The Emperor commanded they all be hunted down and destroyed, and soon a great bounty was placed on any pair of aevakar wings that could be presented to Kalinesh officials. After a time, it became a badge of honor to hang wings ripped from aevakar from a war banner, and various Warlords had competitions to see who had more such wings. It was even more greatly prestigious to parade through a Kal city astride a war chariot, aevakar wings hanging from the banner while

the de-winged aevakar trailed along behind, bloody and in chains. Aevakar who've had their wings cut off rarely last more than a week, which is why you almost never see aevakar slaves in the Empire.

Despite all that, there is a secluded aerie of aevakar living in and on the Everwall to the northeast of Kal'Mordoth. The appropriately named Adamant aerie has, in recent years, opened its halls to members of the Unchained and several of their faster fliers act as scouts and messengers for these freedom fighters.

ANDAK-CROS (THE BLOOD PITS)

The Andak-cros or Blood Pits is the favorite recreation of the Kalinesh. It is there that the splendor and horror of the Empire are most clearly shown. Juxtaposed against the fine clothes and excess of food and drink, those of means revel in the horrific deaths of slaves, captured warriors, and beasts at one another's hands and those of demons and magically-altered beasts. Prisoners are condemned to the Blood Pits as a form of punishment. Some of the most notable warriors in the Empire have entered the Blood Pits to prove their mettle against Ulin-Tor (gladiator/slave fighters).

Every major city and most larger towns in the Empire have a Blood Pit, and most of the larger cities strive to make theirs the most majestic and spectacular in the land. Regular events are held at least weekly, with a major festival surrounding huge battles and special contests about once a month. Warlords have stables of warriors that they pit in regular tournaments against each other, competing for to have their warriors present at the Imperial Grand Tournament held every year in the capital.

In many ways, the Blood Pits have become the center of upper caste culture in the Empire. Along with the events are carnivals, feasts, and all-night orgies. For certain events, Acolytes get involved, conducting mass ritual sacrifices and powerful demonic rituals. Needless to say, this suits both the Emperor and the Queen of Hell just fine. It should be no surprise that a gladiator culture has risen from this. The best warriors are treated as heroes and they work hard for it. All they need to do is win and they have relative freedom between events.

The Az-Agkar has challenged the Az-Junin in Blood Pit combat. They've begun fielding altered undead and corrupted creatures to match the demonic monstrosities of the elder guild, making for some rather intense contests that the entire upper crust of Kalinesh society has come to anticipate with great and terrible voracity.

The more famous Ulin-Tor are sought after for other "services," either as breeding studs for other slaves or, much more discretely, as bedmates for the free. Many of their owners make as much money from these other services as from their fights. Since those of high standing wouldn't want it known they

were cavorting with a slave, much of what's paid is bribes to keep owners quiet in addition to these special services.

THE CAULDRONS

While cauldrons have been found all over Shaintar, they're best addressed here, for the Acolytes in the service to the Empire are the ones who've opened them.

Cauldrons are mystical portals, connecting Shaintar to Norcan Darr or the Abyss itself. They are dangerous because they represent physical nodes where the Aether is weak and could be breached again, especially using the destructive forces of Flame.

There are only seven true Cauldrons, and these have been opened three times over the course of Shaintar's history. The first was at the beginning of the War of Fire in 1500 BC. The second time was in 2216 AC, during the Dragon War. The last time was only a hundred years ago, at the height of the Betrayal War in 3021 AC. In each case, all seven Cauldrons opened at the same time, via a massive sacrificial ritual conducted on the isle of Og m' Drakar.

The Southern Kingdoms, and other allies of Light and Life, guard what Cauldrons they can against a fourth such event. Three of the Cauldrons lie within the Empire; one just outside the capital of Kal'Zaketh, one near Kal'Montak, and the third is far to the east, in the forest near Kal'Shair. These sites are completely in the control of the Az-Junin.

There is a Cauldron on the outskirts of the Eternal Desert, in the Black Mountains near A'Morgal. The fifth Cauldron is in the Evershade Forest, near the gobliness gather of Fig. The sixth is guarded by druids, priests, and knights in the Kingdom of Galea, near Eristead. The seventh Cauldron lies in the south of the Lonewood Forest in the Freelands, guarded by the Freelords of Lone Keep.

Disturbingly, more powerful Acolytes have figured out rituals that can open Cauldrons in other places around Shaintar. Through power and huge blood sacrifices, they can breach the Aether almost anywhere, though they usually prefer out-of-the-way places to avoid detection by the forces of Light and Life. The only upside is that these are one-at-a-time operations, unlike when the seven original Cauldrons are opened.

When a Cauldron is opened, a horde of Childer usually comes spilling out. The Acolytes have used mystical means of communication to warn chieftains that a Cauldrons is to be opened. There is plenty of indication on the “other side” when one is being opened; a light and sound show draws creatures from miles around.

The opening of a Cauldron directly into the Abyss is much rarer and far more dangerous. It takes a vast amount of power, with far less predictable results. Opening a hole directly into the Abyss can release gouts of hellfire into the ritual space, unleash uncontrollable demonic monsters, or invite a Demon Lord to waltz in and consume the souls of all who are present as a light snack. Most Acolytes prefer Norcan Darr, where a lesser demon will be waiting with an entourage to come through without eating the folks who just gave them a doorway into Shaintar.

TITLES AND RANKS

To get a truly comprehensive picture of Kal society, one must merely look at the various ranks and social strata, as follows:

ZOVOS-DAIR-AZ (SUPREME WARLORD, EMPEROR OF THE KALINESH)

Harkor ki Doman has held this title for over one thousand years. He’s considered more demon than man (or, perhaps due to his unusual connection to the Az-Agkar, something far worse). He’s almost never seen. Many actually believe he is dead, with a secret cabal ruling in his name. This would be far better for everyone than the actual truth...

Liner Notes: The Mystery of the Emperor

The truth? He very much exists, has a hand in everything, and is every bit as frighteningly powerful as you might imagine. He is without question of great importance to the future of Shaintar and as an agent of chaos, no one knows what his plans are - only that they’ll be bad for everyone. While it is incredibly unlikely anyone not related to him in some way is aware of the true nature of Harkor ki Doman, the secret was revealed in *Magic and Cosmology Volume 1: Light and Life*.

Having said that, when you start running your own Shaintar campaign, this mystery is one that you should feel free to alter as you see fit. Just bear in mind that one of the key elements about the truly powerful entities in Shaintar is that none of them are exactly what they seem.

VOS-DAIR-AZ (GRAND WARLORDS)

There are three Grand Warlords

Farak ki Turosk, commanding the West; Jolokas ki Harkor (Harkor’s son, named after the first Emperor), who commands the Heart of the Empire, the north-central region; and Unikon ki Yolot, who commands the East.

There was a fourth Grand Warlord who commanded the South, in the Eternal Desert. Since the Tantorvosnos (“The Dread Betrayal” of 2562 AC), when the Vas-Dair- Az m’ Surnas (Grand Warlord of the South) Soman ki Akara declared the Eternal Desert his own, he has not been replaced. It is said that the Emperor has declared the title will go to whoever wins the Desert for the Empire.

The Vos-Dair-Az are considered Az-ri (High Lords). They command the vos-daizars, the over-armies of the Empire.

AZ-RI (HIGH LORDS)

This is the highest caste of nobility. The Az-Ri govern the regions, and almost all are also Warlords. Those that are not gained their title from some political maneuver or financial expediency, and are considered lesser than the Warlord that serves that region by most of the populace and other nobility. Though rare, more exist now than have in the history of the Empire.

The increasing influence of the vos-fanar (the elevated merchant class) and the power of trade has steadily improved the lot of many non-military noble houses over the last few centuries. Developing a successful economy has ironically eroded the power of the Warlords over the non-military nobles to a degree, a situation that continues to brew a highly volatile recipe for conflict in the Empire’s future.

DAIR-AZ (WARLORDS)

These are the commanders of the daizars - war clans of the Empire. Many Dair-Az serve also as Az-Fal, and are considered to be of that caste of nobility.

AZ-FAL (LORDS)

The middle rank of nobility. Az-Fal rule over city-states, or oversee larger regions containing more rural areas.

DAIR-KAN (WAR COMMANDERS)

These are who command kantors, the largest unit within a daizar (essentially, a division). Dair-Kan are considered Az-Dren for class purposes.

AZ-DREN (DEMI-LORDS)

This is the lowest rank of nobility in the Empire. They rule towns. Most of the time, they are placed in other bureaucratic positions that are too important or require too much status for non-nobility. Of course, there are many Az-Dren who are in the military or in the Imperial Court.

DAIR-GOL (WAR LEADERS)

This is the next rank down. Dair-Gol usually command yanar, brigade-level units in the daizars.

DAIR-ENDAR (WAR CHIEFTANS)

The next lower rank, often found commanding ultors, the battalion-level units of the daizars.

SADAR-NOM ("CELEBRATED NAME," A HIGH NON-LORD)

Sadar-Nom is the highest caste attainable by anyone not of noble blood. Celebrated heroes, great artisans, or very successful merchants are often elevated to this caste. The Emperor must approve any such appointment.

DAIR-KRON (WAR CAPTAIN)

The rank of those found in command of company-level units, called dren-ultors.

ANDAK-GOL (BATTLE LEADER)

The lowest officer rank in the daizars (the equivalent of a lieutenant). The units they normally command are called mantas.

VOS-FANAR (HIGH MERCHANTS/BUREAUCRATS)

These are truly successful merchants that have attained great wealth. In ages past, this caste could only be achieved by inheritance and blood, though it's always been possible to be awarded it by bringing great wealth to the Emperor. Nowadays, it

How Many Regions? How many Az-Ri?

It's pretty fluid and based on a political climate of a chaos-inspired competition. A war-driven society tends to be mercurial at best, and the Emperor not only tolerates this, but also encourages his lords to compete for power and favor, multiplying the problem.

At any given time, there may be dozens or a hundred regions, it's a matter of expediency for a GM to decide how large or small an Imperial region is and who is currently ruling it.

is increasingly possible to be awarded this status by an Az-Ri or well-connected nobles, making the Vos-Fanar the fastest-growing social group in the Empire.

This caste also represents the highest non-noble functionaries of the government. Those of truly traditional thinking consider that the greatest tragedy of the modern Empire lies in just how many of these people exist.

VOS-INIKAR (HIGH ARTISANS/CRAFTSMEN)

Only the greatest and most successful artisans may attain this title, although the caste is hereditary for a line once it is attained. The only crafts considered worthy of the caste are weaponsmiths, armorers, builders, and engineers.

As an example of how valued a Vos-Inikar weaponsmith can be, a small but very bloody war recently broke out along the south-central borders as an Az-Ri purchased away the services of the renowned Thulmos Clan from a rival Warlord. One of the sons of the clan finally agreed to return to the Warlord's service in order to bring peace.

Though many things have changed in the Empire, these tradesmen and artisans are held in great esteem and are almost zealously defended.

MAS-GOL (SQUAD LEADER)

These are the sergeants of the daizars. They lead units called mas.

DREN-FANAR (LOW MERCHANTS/BUREAUCRATS)

When no one was paying much attention, this caste managed to become the largest in the Kal-A-Nar Empire. It's influence over the day-to-day well-being of the Empire is far greater than those in power would ever believe.

ANDAK-TOR (SOLDIER, "BATTLE SWORD")

These are the rank-and-file troops of the daizars. Any Kalinesh man (and those few women who dare) with dreams of becoming more than what they are will spend time wearing this uniform.

DREN-INIKAR (LOW ARTISANS/CRAFTSMEN)

As a general rule, anyone in this caste (which includes candle makers, cartwrights, thatcher, and an endless number of related pursuits) prefers to remain unnoticed. They do as they are required, get paid for their efforts, and go about their business, much as they do anywhere else.

THOMARIN (FARMING LANDOWNER)

Precious few outside of the nobility own land in the Empire. Those that do usually fall into one of two categories. Either they earned the privilege through many years of excellent service, or they started farmsteads in very difficult or dangerous areas where the Empire is attempting to spread its influence.

Thomarin are all too aware of the tenuousness of their position; at any time, a lord or military official might choose to seize their lands for any reason. They tend to be reclusive and prefer to scrape out what living they can in the far reaches of the Empire, staying out of sight if at all possible. Occasionally, a highly successful Thomarin will find himself assigned a garrison of soldiers and elevated to Az-Dren or even Az-Fal status should his farmland and area become important for some reason.

DREMARIN (RETAINER/SERVANT/WORKER)

At the very bottom of the social order of free folk, the Dremarin usually console themselves with the truth that what they are doing is at least marginally better than dying in a Blood Pit, on the front line of some far-flung war or being a slave.

VOS-ULIN (HIGH SLAVE)

Gladiators, noble servants, and those that work within upper-level positions with some responsibility are of this caste. Vos-Ulin are treated relatively well and are valued by their owners.

Not surprisingly, very few Vos-Ulin are non-human, and those that are usually have some extraordinary gift or reputation associated with their status.

DREN-ULIN (LOW SLAVE)

The lowest of the low, they have no status or worth. The life of a Dren-Ulin is often short. They clean sewers, work the mines and fields, carry heavy loads, and get fed to demons. Upon their backs, the Empire is built. For the entertainment of the decadent nobility, they die in the Blood Pits.

Should anyone figure out a way to raise them against their masters, the Empire would see its end.

THE MIGHT OF AN EMPIRE

MILITARY FORCES

The Empire is a contrast of order and anarchy, and this is particularly expressed in the various factions that dominate its society. There are also other elements of the realm that anyone wishing to understand the most implacable source of conflict and war must grasp and comprehend.

THE TOR MASTAK

An empire as large as this is difficult to control, and a useful tool to attain that control is fear. No organization causes more fear in the lives of the Kalinesh than the Tor Mastak, the "Sword of Truth" that serve as the secret police for the Emperor. Their agents answer only to the Emperor himself, and by their charter, even he is subject to scrutiny (though for obvious political reasons, they avoid making him aware of any interest).

The leader is Vos-Dair-Az, though the agency is the size of a kantor. The same rank structure as the Imperial military is used, but none outside the Tor Mastak would dare assume authority over an agent. A typical unit is squad sized, with Andak-Gols in the "rank and file," led by a Dair-Kron. They do this so even their lowest operatives can assume command of a regular army unit with little trouble.

Tor Mastak officers are ruthless; only the most loyal are accepted. These are the elite, trained in combat, stealth, subterfuge, survival, and counter-insurgency. They're equally gifted in urban and wilderness settings.

Not surprisingly, Adepts are actively recruited by the Tor Mastak. Their ability to read minds serves the goals of the organization perfectly.

Their charter is at once simple and intensely complex. They are charged with seeking out and destroying all enemies of the Empire. Their most infamous task is that of tracking down any escaped slaves or prisoners and slay them. They acknowledge no boundaries in this task, willing to send agents into any nation to execute those who flee the authority of the Emperor.

THE EMPEROR'S HOUNDS

The most talented Adepts within the Tor Mastak become part of an elite group known as The Emperor's Hounds. With masks to hide their faces, they strike terror into everyone. Their mental abilities are rumored to be capable of destroying a mind. One of the most highly prized abilities among the Emperor's Hounds is the ability to see the past when holding an inanimate object. Some of the most talented can read the minds of people who have held the object.

Note: See Scent of the Prey edge in the edges section

THE TOR SADAIS

The Tor Sadais is the Emperor's personal kantor. Only the greatest warriors are permitted to serve in its ranks; members are recruited from each unit of the Empire. This way, the Emperor ensures the best soldiers in his armies serve him directly. Warlords may grumble about the practice, but fully acknowledge the shrewdness of the move.

Within the Tor Sadais is a small elite unit, the Az m' Dair, "Lords of War." These might be the most skilled and dangerous warriors in the world. While there's no knights in the Empire, these warriors the equivalent. Intensely loyal, driven by honor and glory, and each swears a vow to die in battle, every one of these men and women are powerfully dangerous foes.

THE AZ-JUNIN (LORDS OF MAGIC)

The "Lords of Magic" hold a powerful place in the Empire. Functioning as both priests and arcane masters, they influence all of Kalinesh society.

It's a Kind of Magic

Just like those who follow Darkness, some who serve the demonic hordes can achieve limited powers through means other than the formal training of an Acolyte. The most noteworthy example is that of many of the most powerful warlords of the Kal-A-Nar Empire. Choosing to enhance their physical and spiritual prowess even further, many a warlord will undergo the Ritual of Bonding, whereby the essence of a demon is infused into their being forever. This makes a warlord who is able to hold his position without such a joining impressive indeed.

Heat and flames accompany the casting of Flame magic, and often the screams of demonic souls enhance the already intimidating displays. Something must always be destroyed when bringing forth Flame powers, whether it's the target of the spell or a rending of flesh with a barbaric knife as the forces are unleashed.

They're the granters of Ceynara's strength, and the enforcers of her vengeance. The Goddess of Might demands sacrifices, and the weak are culled from the People of Glory to feed her hunger.

The Az-Junin is more like a guild than a priesthood. No one practices any magic in the Empire unless they're a member (with the exception of the hated Az-Agkar). This means sorcerers and Adepts are members, though the vast majority are Acolytes. Non-Acolytes rarely attain positions of power or influence, so most are members only to remain legal. Adepts, in particular, often seek to join the Tor Mastak, where their gifts are far more appreciated.

With their dual roles, the Acolytes of the Az-Junin maintain both temples and chapter halls. Temples are where the faithful gather to worship their Goddess and Empire, and conduct the important sacrificial rites. Chapter halls are where Az-Junin members meet to share information, plan, experiment, and otherwise conduct the business of the guild. The Az-Junin can be found in all levels of the government. They've worked hard to establish themselves as ministers, advisors, and counselors to their leaders. This gives them great influence over the entire political spectrum. Naturally, they like it that way, though it means more than a few outside of their guild see them as rivals, especially the Tor Mastak.

At one point a faction thought it wise to curry favor with the Emperor and the upper castes of society. They chose to enter champions into the Andak-cros – the Blood Pits. Conducting terrible

arcane experiments on beasts and beings alike, they were able to field horrors against the warriors of the Pits. This has proven terribly successful, and many a brave warrior-slave has died horribly at the hands of some Az-Junin abomination.

THE AZ-AGKAR

The very existence of this guild is a great mystery to the Kalinesh people. In 2110 AC, Harkor ki Doman accepted a petition from a group of necromancers fleeing Shaya’Nor. In great disfavor with the rulers of the Shadowlands, they offered their loyalty to the Emperor in exchange for sanctuary and protection. To the shock of his closest advisors, Harkor agreed, and allowed them to form a separate guild from that of the Az-Junin, one headquartered in Kal’Prin.

Rumors as to why he did this have spread. Some believe his greatly extended life has more to do with his alliance with the Az-Agkar – the “Death Lords” - than his powerful demon bond. The Tor Mastak even launched a major investigation. Interestingly, Harkor permitted it to go unchecked for a time. When no evidence that he betrayed his fealty to Ceynara, he had the entire leadership of the Tor Mastak sacrificed to her and the matter was dropped.

The most blatant rejection came in 2562, when Grand Warlord of the South, Soman ki Akara, declared that the Empire had fallen to ruin and shadow and he would separate his lands from it. Even after a civil war was fought over their presence, Harkor has not moved an inch in his commitment to giving them a role in his empire.

It is clear, in fact, that the Az-Agkar enjoy favor in the Emperor’s Court. Grudgingly, the nobility has come to accept them, and their guild is now

The Undying Emperor and the Death Lords

Yes, there is an unsolved mystery here. It’s not as obvious as it might seem, but the Az-Agkar does provide highly valuable support to the Emperor. Support he is willing to risk his rule over.

As for why they left Shaya’Nor, that’s not hard to understand. The constant power struggles there caused them to come out on the wrong end of one. The question is – did they have an arrangement with the Emperor before they arrived, or were they really just rolling the dice when they came to the Empire?

fully integrated within Kalinesh politics. They’ve helped counter no less than six major plots involving Shaya’Nor, as well as ending a trade war with the Malakar Dominion.

There is a huge rivalry between the Az-Agkar and the Az-Junin. Not surprisingly, the older organization sees an upstart with no legitimate claim, while the newer smaller group sees a threat to its survival. The conflict is constant and bloody, which the Emperor tolerates to a great degree because it makes both groups stronger in his service. So long as they avoid open warfare, he will let them continue to struggle against one another (yet another shrewd move on his part to keep challenges to his rule to a minimum).

LAW

Most people try to avoid getting in trouble. In a society that thrives on shed blood, there isn’t much that isn’t allowed as far as behavior is concerned. Everyone is trying to protect themselves from those lower in station while trying to pull down those above so they may take their place. “Might makes right” governs the society so as long as you survive, it probably wasn’t against the law.

There have been a few proclamations handed down by the Emperor and if you break one of them, you can expect a visit from the Tor Mastak or one of the Emperor’s personal enforcers - he saves his daughter for the special ones. Death will follow swiftly - if you’re lucky.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

There are few crimes. If you are working against someone of higher station than you, don’t get caught. If you’re lucky, you’ll suffer a loss of status or be ridiculed, if not, you’ll be the next entertainment in the Blood Pits or a sacrifice to Ceynara at an Acolyte’s altar. Some transgressors get to find out firsthand what being a slave is like though that’s rare.

Here’s a list of some crimes: killing an Acolyte, conspiring against the Emperor, treason, refusing to take the field of battle, killing an officer during a battle, trying to leave the Empire without a permit. In addition, any slave who runs is given to the Tor Mastak to be found and slain.

[illegible]

Entering the outer lands of the Empire isn't difficult for an individual or small group, especially if they maintain a low profile. With so much land, a few people would be extremely difficult to keep track of. There are plenty of border patrols, and many employ ratzin to track newcomers.

Those of the Empire will proudly proclaim to any who care to listen that they are the cradle of human civilization; which, for the most part appears to be true. However, what true scholars only now begin to understand is that the Kal-A-Nar Empire is only the cradle of THIS civilization.

Were they refugees from whatever calamity destroyed the ancient Empire? Or, were they uncivilized brutes, huddling in caves on the fringes of the greatest civilization ever known in the history of Shaintar?! Whatever the truth may be, it must be assumed that the desert still jealously holds great and untold secrets of the time before history, for the Kal and all of humanity.

All of which is doubly curious in that the Kal-A-Nar Empire has successfully held most of its conquered lands, for hundreds of years, all except for the Desert Princes. Try as they might, no Warlord has managed to pacify the unruly warriors of that barren and forsaken land for over long. Is it due simply to the fierce independence of the desert peoples, or is there more to the sands than even they know? Even now, the Emperor covets the hidden tombs and libraries buried these long centuries, for who knows the power of the knowledge just waiting within.

GEAR

ABYSSAL GREAT SWORD

Wreathed in unholy flames, these massive two-handed weapons are feared not just for their sheer killing power, but for the rumors that the souls of those slain by such a weapon are reaped by Ceynara herself! Anyone struck must also roll vs catching fire (flammable). The sword's flames do 2d8 (Damage Field) to any potential wielder deemed unworthy by Ceynara!

Abyssal Great Sword (Str+d12+2, AP 1, -2 Parry, 2 hands, *rending* upon successful Fighting attack, Minimum Strength d10+, Blood Steel).

Cost: n/a; **Availability:** -6; **Cost:** -6; **Weight:** 25

BLOOD STEEL SPIKED PLATE ARMOR

Few visages are more horrifying than Ceynara's chosen Warlords striding across the gore strewn battlefield in massive spiked plate armor. Colored a deep crimson, such armors are almost exclusively reserved for true Kalinesh champions. Each suit is custom made for the wearer, complete with full horned helm (-2 Notice), and as such, cannot be worn by any but that individual without complex and costly refitting.

Blood Steel Spiked Plate Armor (+6, -6 Coverage, Minimum Strength d10+, Str+d4 unarmed melee damage, ignores 1 AP, Fear, Blood Steel)

Cost: n/a; **Availability:** -6; **Cost:** -6; **Weight:** 80

DEMON'S FANG

A Demon's Fang dagger has a metal "fang" extending from each side of the guard. These fangs are hollow metal teeth which contain a lethal poison. Pushing this dagger into an opponent causes the fangs to sink in and deliver the poison to the victim. With a raise on the Fighting roll, the target must roll vs a Lethal [-2] Poison.

Demon's Fang Dagger (Str+d4, Lethal [-2] Poison)

Cost: 350; **Availability:** -4; **Cost:** -2; **Weight:** 1

FIRESTORM

Its origins unknown the floater called the Firestorm has taken hold of those wishing to gain that much more of an edge in battle. Reports suggest that those using it become what has been referred to as 'Bloody Eyed' in which their pupils dilate and blood seems to fill their eyes making them appear as a raging monster more than man. Those who have used the floater have reported that this effect seems to clear up once Firestorm has been flushed from their bodies. All but the most spirited people seem to crave another taste of the drug. There have also been unconfirmed reports of people coming down from the Firestorm only to stay as monstrous as they were when they were under its effects, if not more so....

Duration: Drinking Firestorm lasts for one Scene

Negative Effects: The character under the effects of Firestorm gain the Bloodthirsty Hindrance. Those that have the Hindrance become even more enraged under the effects of the drug and cannot use any skills, Edges, or maneuvers that require concentration, including Shooting and Taunt, but not Intimidation.

Positive Effects: Characters under the effects of Firestorm gain +1 Toughness, +1 Fighting, and Infravision (as the Monstrous Ability). Those races that have Infravision, such as the Golbinesh, instead gain a +2 to all Spirit checks to resist Fear and Intimidation

After Effects: At the end of any scene in which the character takes Firestorm is over the character must roll their Spirit. On a success the character gains the Habit (Minor) hindrance, as they are always looking for that next fix of Firestorm but can fight the need to indulge in it. A raise will allow the character to ignore the Habit consequences. If the character already has the Habit (Minor) hindrance then nothing further happens however they still will always crave the Flame at the heart of the storm.

Failing this roll means the character has succumbed to Ceynara's Embrace and gains the Habit (Major) if they already did not have it. Once the character has succumbed to Ceynara's Embrace a total number of times equal to their Spirit die, they give into Flame and join Ceynara's service.

Special thanks to J&L contributor Steven. C.

SACRIFICIAL KNIFE OF CEYNARA

Few items in Shaintar elicit as visceral a revulsion as the curved knives of Ceynara's Acolyte butchers. Quenched in the blood of the innocents tortured and sacrificed in the name of the Queen of Hell, these knives unequivocally evil. Even just possessing one means death in most kingdoms. Even within the Empire it is a death sentence for anyone not a Minister of the Undying Fire or better to possess one. Those not in service to Ceynara are oft struck down for the affront of touching these "sacred" blades by the weapon's inherent powers as the Queen of Hell rips their souls from their bodies.

Sacrificial Knife of Ceynara (Str+d4, *dispel, draining touch, drain power points (essence), lower trait, Blood Steel*)

Cost: n/a, **Availability:** -6, **Cost:** -6, **Weight:** 1



NEW EDGES

Here's some new edges that a person from the Empire might have

PROFESSIONAL EDGES

SCENT OF THE PREY

Requirements: Legendary, Post Cognition, High Magic (Mind Reading), Adept, Obligations (Tor Mastak)

Using Post Cognition, a Tor Mastak Adept may see people who've owned an object, or past events around it. With a raise at -2 penalty, the Adept may attempt to contact the mind of a living person who has owned the object. That person must be within Spirit x2 miles of the Adept casting the spell for contact to be attempted.

Once contact is made, the Adept may attempt High Magic (Mind Reading) at -4 penalty to discover the answer to one question. The person being read may make a notice roll at a +2. If successful, they are aware of the contact and with a raise, can obscure the answer or lie to the Adept.

Note: The object must be small enough for the Adept to hold (example: brooch, necklace, dagger, child's favorite toy). GM's may wish to assign greater penalties to key pieces of information.

Dogs of War

The Kalinesh have not neglected the possibility of using animals in combat. Trained warhorses are common mounts for mid to upper level officers. However, the Kalinesh War Priests have taken it a step further and recently incorporated a particular strain of Hellhounds in their religio-military practices. These demonic hounds have been summoned for numerous uses, all of which are horrific. Hellhounds are large, muscular, fire-breathing, demonic dogs with broad heads and chests. They go into battle wearing broad, spiked, Blood Steel collars. While one might think this is armor, it is actually to make the Hellhounds as fearsome looking as possible, as well as to further discomfit any fae opponents. The statistics for Hellhounds are in the Denizens section.

PERMIT HOLDER (PERMITTER)

Requirements: Veteran, Smarts d8+, Merchant

A holder of one of the Extended Trade Permits, this person and those accompanying him may enter and leave the Empire at will, ostensibly on trading missions.

HELLHOUND SUMMONER

Requirements: Veteran, Spirit d10+, Smarts d8+, Strength d8+, Thaumaturgy d10

If the old saying "War is Hell" is true, then the demonic animals this subset of War Priests summon are, without question, the definitive dogs of War. The men and women who summon and guide them must contend with large, powerful, aggressive, demonic beasts. Hellhounds are trained to fight as a unit as well as individually.

A Hellhound Summoner will control 1 - 5 Hellhounds. He will roll Spirit to see whether he has control of the pack and can direct their action. He will then roll Smarts to see how well he has done so. If he fails to control the pack, he will need to roll Smarts at -2 to avoid being attacked by his own Hellhounds. Many a Summoner has been found charred to a crisp after becoming distracted at the exact wrong moment.

DRUNKEN WARRIOR

Requirements: Seasoned, Liquid Courage, North-Born

When the Kal-A-Nar imbibe alcohol, it does not have the same effect as it does on others - they become prone to feats of great bravery, reckless abandon, and battle prowess the likes of which are rarely seen elsewhere.

First, Drunken Warriors immediately gain the Hindrance Habit (Minor): Drinking. Second, when under the effects of alcohol, characters with this Edge gain the benefits of Fearless (Monstrous Ability), and the Berserk Edge. However, Drunken Warriors can use skills, Edges, and maneuvers that require concentration, but at a -4 penalty due to inebriation. Also, they cannot end the Berserk rage with a Smarts roll, all Edge effects wear off naturally when the character becomes sober.

DENIZENS

HELLHOUNDS

These are the trained Hellhounds of the Kalinesh War Priests.

Attributes: Agility D10, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d6

Pace: 8 **Parry:** 7 **Toughness:** 8

Special Abilities:

- **Abyssal Nature:** Hellhounds only suffer half damage from non-magical attacks
- **Bite:** Str+d6
- **Creatures of Entropy:** Hellhounds cannot benefit from any kind of Healing
- **Demonic Hide:** Hellhounds gain +1 to their Toughness
- **Fear -2**
- **Flame Breath:** Hellhounds breathe fire using the Cone Template. Every target within this cone may make an Agility roll at -2 to avoid the attack. Those who fail suffer 2d8 damage and must check to see if they catch fire. A Hellhound may not bite in the round it uses Flame Breath.
- **Fleet-Footed:** Roll a d10 when running instead of a d6.
- **Group Attack:** For every two Hellhounds in the pack, add +1 to their Fighting, Intimidation, and Toughness
- **Infernal Form:** Hellhounds are immune to all diseases and poisons
- **Infernal Stamina:** Hellhounds gain +2 to recover from Shaken
- **Infravision:** Halve penalties for Dark lighting against living targets (round down)
- **Weakness:** Hellhounds suffer +4 damage from White Silver and Everwood

HELLHOUND SUMMONER

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

Skills: Fighting d10, Healing d4, Knowledge (Cosmology) d6, Knowledge (Flame) d6, Knowledge (Magic) d6, Notice d6, Thaumaturgy d10

Pace: 6 **Parry:** 8 (1) **Toughness:** 12 (5)

Edges: Acolyte, Charge, Frenzy, Hellhound Summoner, Magic Proficiency (+2 summon ally)

Gear: Blood Steel Long Sword (Str+d8+2), Enchanted Blood Steel Plate & Chain Armor (+5, -4 Coverage), Medium Shield (+1 Parry, +2 Armor vs. ranged shots that hit)

Powers: armor, bolt, burst, fly, summon ally

Essence: 25

ZERIN KI THORIM AKA JAX THE BLADE AKA ROOSTER

Az-Ri of Essal's Keep and known as "Rooster" by the Unchained as they feel "he thinks he's the cock of the walk". His other alias is Jax the Blade, a mercenary for any who can pay. He's a consummate spy who speaks everything from high Kalinesh to gutter speak with any regional accent he wishes; can blend in with high born or low, merchant, soldier, lord, or slave.

Race: Human

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d12

Charisma: +6 **Pace:** 3 with a run of d10 **Parry:** 15 (5) **Toughness:** 13 (5)

Gear: Enchanted Elvish Rapier (Str+d6, White Silver, +2 Parry, AP 1), Demon's Fang Daggers (Str+d4, Lethal [-2] Poison, hidden in boots), Dagger/Knife (Str+d4, 3/6/12, eight hidden in various locations), Enchanted Cavalier Saber (Str+d6+3), Enchanted Shayakar Night Chain (+5, -4 coverage, +2 Stealth checks at night and in shadowy areas), Enchanted Bracers (+2 Parry)

Edges: Alertness, Ambidextrous, Attractive, Brave, Blood of Heroes, Blood of Legends, Charismatic, Combat Reflexes, Elan, Expert of Forms (Fencing), Fast Learner, Fencing Master, Fleet-Footed, Great Luck, Improved Block, Improved Counterattack,

Improved First Strike, Improved Frenzy, Improved Level Headed, Lunge, Nimble Strike, Noble, Quick, Quick Draw, Two-Fisted, Training

Skills: Fighting d12 (+2 Fencing), Gambling d8+1, Knowledge (Mathematics) d8, Notice d10+2, Persuasion d8, Riding d6, Stealth d10 (+2), Streetwise d8, Throwing d10

Hindrances: Code of Honor; Loyal; Obligations; Quirk (constantly flipping/manipulating a coin)

Defining Interests: Gambling, History, Politics (Kalinesh), Stealth (sleight of hand)

Languages: Kalinesh, Glean, Goblinesh

KARZAI KI ILDRATH, WARLORD

Member of the Unchained and Warlord of Essal's Keep. He and his partner are responsible for the defense and protection of the Keep and planning offensive strategies for the Unchained to carry out.

Race: Human

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d10, Strength d12+2, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d12+4 (d10 Wild Die), Intimidation d10, Knowledge (Battle) d10, Notice d6, Shooting d6, Stealth d6, Survival d4

Pace: 8 (d10 "Run") **Parry:** 12 (0) **Toughness:** 16 (7)

Edges: Battle Hardened, Brawny, Combat Reflexes, First Among Equals, Fleet-Footed, Hero's Company; War Band, Hold Off, Improved Block, Improved Charge, Improved Frenzy, Improved Level Headed, Improved Sweep, Indomitable, Master (Fighting), One Against Many

Hindrances: Code of Honor; Loyal; Enemy; Outsider (choose a fitting reason)

Gear: Enchanted Great Sword or Great Axe (Str+d12+4, +2 Fighting, -1 Parry, 2 hands), Enchanted Plate Armor (+7, -6 Coverage), Bracers (+1 Parry)

Special Abilities:

- **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation
- **Slow Regeneration:** from Enchanted Weapon

SEBASTA KI SEBASTA

Race: Human

Attributes: Agility d8, Smart d10, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d10

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 8

Skills: Boating d10, Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Knowledge (navigation) d8, Knowledge (trade) d10, Notice d8, Persuasion d10, Shooting d8, Streetwise d8, Survival d6, Swimming d8

Edges: Connections, Impressive, Merchant, Permitter, Scrounger, Seafarer, Trader

Hindrances: Code of Honor, Loyal,

Gear: Bastard Sword (Str+d8+1, -1 Parry; if used 2-handed, no Parry penalty, and Str+d8+2), Dagger (Str+d4), Dwarven Crossbow (2d6, 20/40/80, AP 2, 3 shots before reload), Partial Leather Armor (+1, -2 coverage), wagons and ships appropriate to a permitter; including his flagship "Sebasta's Lady"

A KALINESH GLOSSARY

Sean's created a number of Kalinesh words over the years during game play. As it turns out we've got a bunch of terms, phrases, and words for you here that will help give your game or character texture.

agkar - death

andak - battle, skirmish

Az - Lord, Noble

Azkal - The Nobility, those of noble blood

cro - pit, hole

dair - war, conflict

Dair-Az - Warlord

daizar - War Clan, Army

dremarin - servant, retainer, worker, laborer

dren - low, beneath

Eleran - the Empire

endar - chieftan, ruler

esnor - east

fal - moderate, mediocre, acceptable

fanar - merchant, shopkeeper

gol - leader

inikar - artisan, craftsman, performer

junin - Acolyte, spellcaster, strange magical being

junos - magic

kal - people

Kal - The People (the descendants of those who started the Empire)

kan - commander, general

kes - daughter of

ki - son of

kom - heart, center

kron - captain

m' - of the (short for mir-ki)

mas - squad

maris - serve

mastak - truth, fact

mir-ki - of the, belonging to

nar - glory, renown

nok - no

nomas - name

nuras - north

og - eye

ri - high, elevated

sadais - honor

sadar - honored, celebrated, favored

su - yes

surmas - south

tantok - dread, evil, horrible

Tantor-voshnos - The Dread Betrayal

thomal - farming, agriculture

thomarin - farmer, field-owner

tor - sword, blade (colloquially, "honored servant/soldier")

ulin - slave

ulin-tor - gladiator, slave-fighter

vos - great, grand, honored

Vos-Dair-Az - Grand Warlord

voshnos - Betrayal, Dishonor

wesnor - west

zonias - frontier, outland

zovos - above all, greatest

Zovos-Dair-Az - Supreme Warlord, Emperor

