

EPIC HIGH FANTASY

Shardar

GUIDEBOOK



MALAKAR DOMINION

EVIL BEAGLE GAMES PRESENTS

GUIDEBOOK : MALAKAR DOMINION

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INTRODUCTION

A federation bound in rebellion. A country forged in freedom. A nation seething in intrigue. The Malakar Dominion is well-known for dark intrigues and vile business practices, but within it are some of the most forward-thinking enclaves in Shaintar. For every snickering merchant with crooked scales, there's a Fae lord living side-by-side with a gobliness. There may be a pile of wealth inside Malak, but there aren't as many slaves to collect it as there are in other countries. Every government structure and noble House has some guiding counsel. Underneath the danger and naked self-interest, there still exists that core formed out of a desire to be something better.

It would be utopia, if you didn't have to sleep with a dagger under your pillow.

-- Olivi Bopilio, *The Malakar Conundrum*

FACTS IN BRIEF

Capital: Malak (although much of the real power has moved to Trinigar with the new Prolocutor)

Population: More than 800,000 people comprise the Malakar Dominion. Much of the population has been moving to the cities and towns.

Dominant Religion: In the cities, the darker aspects of religion clash over the hearts and minds of the urbane. Worshipers of Ceynara (as a Goddess of War) and Vainar (as a God of Knowledge) vie for influence of the increasing urban population. In the more rural villages and communities, the population pay their respects to the rest of the uncorrupted Ascended. All throughout the Dominion, many secret cults have popped up, worshiping vile and benevolent powers alike.

Government: An oligarchy of self-appointed aristocrats working in a loose confederation runs the Dominion. The ruling council is the Chamber of Dominion, comprised of Ministers from each of the ruling Houses and headed by the Prolocutor. However, each of the Houses in question has their own internal structure and organization.

"Everyone Owes Someone Something." The informal motto of the Dominion, this philosophy is the basis of just about everything. Favors and debts owed measure power just as much as stacks of gold, and justice comes to those who can afford it or are willing to get it for themselves. Those with power use those without it as pawns.

LINER NOTES - WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

This Introduction covers the brief facts and geography of the Dominion.

The Historical Overview covers key events of the Dominion, as well as look into how this once idealistic rebellion has become focused on greed and power.

The Society chapter goes into detail about traveling through and living in the Dominion; as well as detailed the many conflicting factions and comprise the powerful Chamber of Dominion.

Of Special Interest goes into more detail about religion, some neutral factions, and the mysterious Merchant.

Matters of Game Play gives you new Edges and tools you can use to make Malakaran characters, while Story Arcs gives you some story ideas to use in your *Shaintar* campaign. Finally, we give you some example Denizens to use as pawns in your own elaborate conspiracy.

Race and Language: The majority of the population (over 70%) are human, but every other race is intermixed throughout the Dominion. Racism takes a firm back seat to classism; what you look like doesn't matter as much as how much money you have. Even their language reflects the cosmopolitan makeup: Malakaran is a mix of Galean, Kalinesh, and Aradish.

Feudalism: The Dominion is rich in resources – crops, mines, forests, and manufactured goods – and it's all controlled by those at the top. The bountiful farmlands are ruled by the whim of the Houses just as much as urban businesses are kept in the iron fist of the Guilds. This confederation is home to the most complex taxation system in Shaintar, all to make sure that money flows to the top as much as possible.

Legal System: Few laws exist over the Dominion as a whole; each feudal landowner or urban guild has their own rules. The guild rules, called Edicts, govern life in the cities, while the House nobles rule their lands with absolute authority and personal desire. Laws that get in the way of doing business, however, leads to the deposition or murder of the authority figure. One of the few things that all the factions in the Dominion can agree on is that "business as usual" is the most important thing to preserve. Everything else depends on the wealth and power of the people at either end of the legal infraction.

GEOGRAPHY

The geography of the Malakar Dominion reflects its history; it is less a cohesive country than a confederation of small city-states that coexist for mutual benefit.

MALAK

Capital of the Dominion, namesake of their savior, and home of the House of Malak. The city of Malak looks opulent, secure, and well-traveled, but underneath it is increasingly hollow and despondent. For over a hundred years the House of Malak owned this area while the House of Shael administered it – the long run of Shael Prolocutors and the Malak insistence that the capital remain unmoved led to this strange sharing of responsibilities. But with the fall of the House of Shael and the rise of Malak's rivals in the House of Norrd, the House of Malak has regained control of their city just as power has moved to Trinigar, the new (but still unofficial) seat of power in the Dominion.

As a result, the House of Malak has done what it always does with problems; it is spending more money to make the city look as if nothing is wrong. There are an increase in museums, restaurants, opera houses, and all forms of sensual pleasures... as well as an increase in mausoleums and graveyards under the auspice of honoring those who have fallen to protect the Dominion. Part of this burst of renovation has been a large church to Vainar and the Sublime Host, at the request of the worshipers of Vainar. This suits the increasingly corrupt Fae of Malak just fine.

TRINIGAR

Further upriver from Malak sits the city of Trinigar, home to the House of Norrd and the current Prolocutor, Zeria Norrd. With Zeria's rise to the highest office in the Dominion, he has slowly used his power to move key governmental offices from the clutches of his house's rivals, the House of Malak, to Trinigar. Recently he has required that his Chamber meet in his fortress in Trinigar "for national security," further cementing the move away from the Dominion's traditional capital.

And Trinigar is, indeed, a fortress. A large portion of the Swords of Dominion are quartered here, along with the infamous mercenary army, the Maelstrom. Both are there to guard the Prolocutor and the Chamber of Dominion at all times, but many of his rivals see it as a consolidation of his control over the Malak military and a slap in the face to the House of

LINER NOTES – THE MALAKAR DOMINION

Imagine families and guilds of thieves and assassins coming together with dark religions and corrupt merchants into a confederation of nobles and businesses all devoted to gaining power and revenge against those that stand in their way. This is the essence of the Malakar Dominion.

It is a dangerous area, full of people with dark ambitions and scary resources, but it's also full of intrigue and adventure for those willing and able to navigate it (socially as well as literally). Characters with a shadowy bent (thieves, spies, bounty hunters, rogues, and investigators) will have plenty to do, as well as those with a desire to overthrow the criminal overlords. However, kicking down the door and swinging a sword won't be as effective as misdirection and subterfuge. The various factions of the Dominion may hate each other, but they hate violent outsiders who disrupt their business even more.

The region is inspired by a number of sources: the Orion Syndicate of the classic *Star Trek* series, the intrigues of Renaissance Italy as portrayed in *Assassin's Creed* and *The Borgias*, and the politics of cities such as Constantinople and Nicea in the Middle East during the Crusades. Even early American politics, such as shown in the movie *Gangs of New York*, play a role in how the Malakar Dominion works.

Malak. The increase in profits for the Prolocutor have spread throughout Trinigar, spurring new building projects such as a large temple devoted to the worship of Ceynara and more barracks to house additional troops.

UMBAR

Umbar is a mining town primarily populated by goblins. It was the site of one gather of goblins that, over time, acquired and merged with other nearby gathers. Umbar is now a fortified city similar to the other key Malakaran cities – both due to the number of goblins that now call it home, and because of the support of the House of Jvorick who "officially" owns the lands and the resources the mines produce. The various gathers have combined into the Gnoshen Cabal who handles the goblin population, while the House of Jvorick governs the rest of the population and manages the mines and small markets.

Because of the unusual history of the area, Umbar is a bizarre blend of goblin and human architecture. Outside visitors of any race are viewed with suspicion, unless they show a sudden and intense desire to work in the mines or spend money. And yet, the Cabal and Jvorick populations co-exist quite well in Umbar, because it's the most productive mine in the Dominion.



OTHER LOCATIONS OF NOTE

Trigor (owned by the House of Jvorick): The goblinish town of Trigor is the counterpoint to Umbar – more of a black market trading post than a mining town. The city caters to caravans, local farmers, and dwarven merchants from the Black Mountains. Naturally, the House of Jvorick has more explicit control over Trigor. Recently, a local cult to the Sun God, has sprung up in the town.

Urd (owned by the House of Borsch): Urd is the main training area for the Swords of Dominion, where they drill on various defense techniques as well as learning how to coordinate with mercenary

companies. The House of Borsch's power is centered in Urd, and they use the army trainees as well as their own considerable militia to make this one of the most easily-defended cities in the Dominion.

Kol (owned by the House of Jvorick): On the surface, Kol is a city firmly in the control of the House of Jvorick, and a key asset to the Dominion. In reality, the various House factions and games that comprise the House are constantly fighting over Kol, making it one of the most dangerous places in the entire Dominion. Anyone not of the House could be swept up in these petty intrigues... often with a fatal outcome.

Banor: Banor is often called “the Malakar marketplace.” Its central location makes it ideal for merchants all over the Dominion (and those outside the Dominion brave enough to make the journey) to meet and trade. It’s a little unclear which House officially owns Banor, and with good reason – because it’s firmly in the control of the Traders Guild. The Order of the Golden River also makes its home here, but is much quieter about their presence.

Lann (owned by The House of Salanad): Lann is a beautiful Fae city that’s only nominally part of the Dominion. The House of Salanad is adamantly against human rule, so they focus on their own problems and only look to the rest of the Malakar Dominion if they need to. Anyone not of human heritage will be welcomed with open arms, but everyone else will be politely asked to leave... at swordpoint.

Centerport (owned by The House of Black): The largest (and only) seaport of the Malakar Dominion. It was “liberated” by the House of Black, and they have maintained control ever since. While it hosts a wide variety of legitimate business (well, as legitimate as the Dominion gets), it is also a haven for pirates and smugglers. It’s known for being rowdy and dangerous, but a savvy sailor with a quick sword can make a lot of money here.

Syvan (owned by The House of Shael): The river port of Syvan is owned by The House of Shael, one of the only holdings left to them after their recent scandal. As such, they are working very hard to make Syvan as legitimate of a port city as they can, the complete opposite of Centerport. As a result, they generally get traffic for small shipments of high-priced goods, as well as the occasional traveler willing to pay extra to avoid Centerport.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Conflict is the scarlet thread that runs through the history of the Dominion. When Vol Al’Daya drove the creation of a unified nation, those that refused to submit were driven to the west, forming tenuous alliances to halt the progress of his army. They failed to hold their lands, but the lords of the Dominion have steadfastly refused to be a footnote to history. Indeed, its story is intimately tied to the history of the Kingdom of Galea; the actions of the Dominion drove the creation of the Kingdom.

And they have continued to define history. The nobles and ministers of the Dominion are proud, greedy, tenacious, and singularly unwilling to let any shard of power fall from their grasp. They may prefer

to live in the shadows, but their whispers and gold have destroyed more men over the centuries than their swords.

A CONFEDERATION BORN IN BLOOD

“When peace flowers, so too do the thorns grow in effort to destroy it.”

That saying is most apt when applied to the history of the Malakar Dominion. From the time dating to the Great Exodus to 2405 A.C., the lands known as the Southern Kingdoms had largely been ruled by warring bandit princes, robber barons, disposed Kal Warlords, and a few benevolent tribal rulers. The Southern Kingdoms were rife with fractured “kingdoms” that warred with each other over land and resources.

When Vol Al’Daya appeared and began to garner support for a unified peaceful nation, this threatened the way of life that had been largely unchallenged in the stranglehold reign of these despots. In 2412 A.C., they gathered to form the Malakar Dominion, under the guidance of Elvish Nation expatriates known as malalakar. The greatest of these, calling himself simply Malak in challenge of his exile, was chosen to lead them (after a brief and violent series of challenges and “negotiations”).

As Vol Al’Daya was a patient and benevolent leader of men, Malak was his equal and opposite in almost every way. Brutal in his leadership, it was said that those who failed Malak were doomed to a short and painful life. Anyone who had feared the leadership of a Fae would be plagued by weakness or too much subtlety soon discovered that Malak was no ordinary Fae. Certainly, every action he took was designed to engineer this view, so that no one would challenge his command.

In 2422, Malak assembled a great army of Gobliness, Kal mercenaries, and the combined forces of what the people came to simply call the Malakar. Were it not for Cyria’s magic saving the day, the dream of the Kingdom of Galea would have perished on 25 Thunder Hawk, 2424 A.C.. That day, Malak’s forces nearly succeeded in killing Vol Al’Daya in a deadly ambush, and the Fae lord’s forces began to steadily press Al’Daya’s army at every turn.

In 2438 A.C., the Northern Hills were the stage for the bloodiest battle yet fought during the campaign, the Battle of the Orcshields. Malak perished in combat against the Al’Daya army even as the Olarans entered the fray and broke the Kalinessh lines completely. While the Goblinessh and Malakar forces retreated, the Kal fought to the death of every last man.

Even though Malak perished that day, the Malakar Dominion did not. Under the leadership of his son, Kryus, the Dominion was able to survive assaults from Olara, the Elvish Nation, and the Kal Empire. For over five centuries the Malakar Dominion remained in its own lands, west of Landra Feya and pressed against the Black Mountains. They recouped and rebuilt from their defeat in 2438 A.C. and the subsequent challenges they faced, within and without, to include the long and destructive Farmer's Rebellion of 2682 and the subsequent purging of the Malakar leaders.

It was not until 2983 A.C. that the Malakar Dominion began to test its might outside its borders. Akhan Syvan began his rule as Prolocutor by building forces to lay siege to smaller kingdoms and city-states in an effort to expand into the area known as the Wildlands. He also had his forces conduct constant raids into the lands, taking resources and people whenever possible.

These assaults led to the formation of Grayson's Grey Rangers in 3001 A.C., in order to thwart the Dominion's attacks and other raids (consult my tome *Anatomy of the Grey Rangers* for more information). Akahn's eye always remained on conquering Galea, teaching the belief to many Malakar that it is their right to rule over the lands that were wrongfully wrested from them long ago. Although he never succeeded in his goals to conquer Galea, his commitment to the making the Dominion the true power of the South survives to this day in the hearts and minds of a great many Malakar.

-- Jonkeph Skein, *Shaintar: Yesteryears and Today*

BETWEEN IDEALISM AND GREED

I always ask myself "How did it all go so wrong?" We had such ideals, and now we have become the thing we fought against. Malak has often been painted as a cruel man, one whose heart was full of violence and chaos, but I wonder if he was always such.

Send your mind back to the 2400s. Yes, the land was fraught with danger as warlords and rulers fought and died. But there was also freedom. Each tribe and band was free to do as it wished, and not all wished ill on their neighbors. Many raised their swords to protect their kin and their lands. When Vol Al'Daya said we were all his subjects now in the name of peace, they saw him as the same kind of threat to their kin and their lands as any barbarian prince. I believe Malak was such a man. He was not a man of peace, but neither was he a man of evil.

When I have read the stories and ledgers and transcripts of the formative years of our Dominion and our House, I often wonder how Malak came upon the

resources to stand up to Al'Daya. He was a powerful Fae, to be sure, but his intolerance of weakness led him to kill more men than his enemies. The men, the weapons, the resources, the pure mountain of gold needed had to come from somewhere. And this is where I fear the sin in Malak's heart came from. Because in the Dominion, if you need money or men or supplies, there's only one thing to do.

You make a deal with a Merchant.

-- "Lady Cassandra," *The Sin in Malak's Heart*

SOCIETY

The Dominion is complicated. It's a collection of pureblood nobles mixed with those who claim noble blood only because they've spilled a lot of it. Bosses of criminal organizations conduct business with corrupt landowners and greedy merchants in equal measure. They all work together and seek to destroy each other in equal measure, and all in the name of profit. In the end, however, this complex blend of power-hungry manipulators breaks down into three groups: the Nobles, the Crime Lords, and the Guild Masters.

The ever-changing web of intrigue and power that permeates the Dominion is shared and fought over by these three groups. Everything stems from this desire for dominance: deals are made and broken, alliances are forged and discarded, and secrets are shared and revealed. Nothing and no one can be fully trusted or relied upon, and the Minister you deal with today may have been replaced by her subordinate tomorrow. The only person you can rely on is yourself, and the only power you really have is what you can convince your allies and enemies of.

In fact, the only thing resembling a stable framework of power is the Chamber of Dominion formed by the Ruling Houses. They guide trade issues and relationships with other nations, but little else, leaving the guilds and land owners to their own devices on day-to-day business. Unless someone interferes with trade, business, and profit, the Dominion doesn't much care.

The Chamber of Dominion's laissez faire attitude gives the average citizen more freedom and opportunity than in most states, but it only favors those who are strong, smart, or rich. It's possible for a Malakar villager to rise up beyond his meager upbringing to make a name for himself, but he has to do so through bold action and a dose of good luck if he doesn't want to find himself bleeding in his own

garden. Even the slaves are treated better, because the Dominion understands the value of a good commodity (although, on the other hand, they're not going to give their "commodities" any liberties or rights). Social mobility is a matter of what an individual Malakar can take and keep for herself, or what value she can provide for someone else higher up the ladder.

Only a small number of people fall outside the three groups. Those who are unaligned are called "free jacks," and are seen as a dangerous disruption by those in power – those that choose to stay within the Dominion are often (correctly) seen as instigators of unrest. The unofficial motto of the Dominion is "everyone owes someone something," after all, and those that don't owe anyone anything cut at the heart of Malakaran business. Free jacks find it hard to get work as a result, forcing them to either indulge in freelance criminal work (risking the wrath of the Crime Lords and possibly ending up as corpse at the end of an Association object lesson) or fleeing the Dominion entirely.

Given how much money and politics is at the heart of the Dominion, it's unsurprising that religion has a very minor role in the daily life of the average Malakaran. Some of the more rural citizens will pay their respects to the Ascended, but they try to hide it from those in power who worship Ceynara or Vainar. Churches to Ceynara and the Court of Glory are increasing, especially with the influx of Kalinesh mercenaries. However, worship of Vainar and the Sublime Host is still strong in many cities, even if it is not as common.

Despite the constant treachery and oath-breaking in the cities, the average rural Malakaran enjoys a stable family life. Indeed, for many farmers and miners, their relatives are the only people they can fully trust, although as families get closer to the dense urban areas, such bonds of blood are less reliable. Glory and wealth are powerful motivators, and more than a few Malakarans have turned on their kin over the lure of power.

TITLES AND RANKS

Much like most of Dominion society, titles and ranks are a complex structure resulting from the organic conflict at the heart of the Dominion. Often a title holds only as much power as one can enforce, and it will just as often make the title holder a target for ambitious subordinates.

LINER NOTES – THE ASSOCIATIONS

This "self-made mobility" is particularly true of the various Malakaran criminal organization (often referred to as merely "the Associations"). Some are small, covering only a town or a particular rural area, but most extend to multiple towns or entire cities, using complex internal structures to keep things organized. The Associations look for a wide variety of talent, ranging from skilled experts, charismatic liars, and rough fighters; anyone looking for fame, fortune, and danger has the chance to make their name in an Association. Associations are utterly ruthless to those outside of their personal fiefdoms, but many are quite good at taking care of the populace they are responsible to. When the trod-upon feel powerless, it's attractive to have a well-organized group protecting your local interests.

The Associations are a lot like the criminal organizations in our world, or at least the popular culture interpretations of them. The Italian-American Mafia, the Chinese Triads, the Japanese Yakuza, the Russian Bratva – they all evoke elements of the Associations. The key to portraying the Associations effectively is to dig back to their common roots of local thugs serving powerful bosses. They use murder and terror just as often as they use lies and betrayal to get their way. Business fronts, money laundering, personal vengeance, and institutional loyalty, all wrapped in the trappings of heroic fantasy. Think "*The Sopranos* meets *Lord of the Rings*," and you have a good idea on how to work with the Associations.

PROLOCUTOR

The Prolocutor of the Chamber of Dominion is the most powerful position throughout the Dominion, and the most vulnerable. Each Prolocutor is chosen by a simple majority vote from the Chamber Ministers and reaffirmed every year by the same vote. However, only three Ministers are needed to call a Vote of No Confidence at any time. If the Prolocutor is not reaffirmed or is removed through a No Confidence ruling, the Chamber is locked in seclusion in its Hall until a new one is chosen. Chamber doctrine claims this is so that the new Prolocutor can be chosen without outside influence, but in reality it's to limit the potential assassination of rivals (although, once in a while, such attempts are still made).

Managing day-to-day trade and military matters, the Prolocutor wields a dangerous amount of control over the entire Dominion. If the title holder isn't strong enough to protect himself or his holdings, it's only a matter of time before the Prolocutor in question is removed – either politically or via "mysterious circumstances." A few have even voluntarily stepped down from the High Seat, choosing to abdicate and remain a Minister instead of remaining and becoming a corpse.

The current Prolocutor is Zeria Norrd, Prince of the House of Norrd, Duke of Trinigar, Earl of Urd, Defender of the Northern Lands. He is an ideal Prolocutor: shrewd, ruthless, and having the right balance of impotent enemies and powerful friends. He has lavished favor on the Malakaran military, making it even harder for any would-be usurpers to enjoy the High Seat for very long.

PRINCE/PRINCESS

The title of Prince or Princess is given to anyone who leads a noble House of the Dominion. While some can claim the title through right of noble birth, others acquire the title through treachery or bloodshed. However, the Dominion doesn't worry about details – if the new Prince or Princess can hold their title, then they deserve the title until someone more worthy comes along. And the title is seductive – each Prince or Princess has near-complete sovereignty over their lands and holdings. Each of the Houses nominally respects all of the others, affording a fragile balance. However, when a conflict between Houses arises, it's usually only the intercession of the Chambers of Dominion that keep things from escalating into a small war.

Note: While not technically a Prince, the Chosen Speaker of the Gnoshen Cabal is considered to be of equivalent rank.

MINISTER

Officially, each position in the Chamber of Dominion is held by the Prince or Princess of each House, with the idea that the confederation is ruled by the noble Houses that comprise it. In reality, however, each Prince or Princess appoints a Minister to represent the House on the Council so that they can focus on their own holdings, intrigues, conspiracies, and personal glory (the House of Malak is a notable exception – they have never appointed a Minister). Over time, the Ministers have gained more influence and autonomy – a fact that has not always worked out well for the noble Houses.

The Minister in question (officially “Minister Regent”) is often someone the Prince or Princess of a House wishes to reward in some way or to move out of their power base. More than once, however, a Crime Lord or Guild Master has been named Minister through bribes, blackmail, or political maneuvering, along with a falsified noble pedigree. By Dominion Law, the Prince or Princess of a House can name anyone they see fit to be their Minister Regent, but in practice each House has their own rules which may

or may not be observed by individual House rulers.

Note: Grand Masters are considered to be “non-voting” members of the Chamber, but are otherwise equivalent to Ministers.

DUKE/DUCHESS

These titles refer to a city or region that a person has rulership over. The Princes and Princesses have their own cities they retain authority over (hence why many of them have multiple titles), but every House has a few Dukes and Duchesses that manage the cities under their authority. Each Duke or Duchess can only be overruled by the Prince they swear fealty to, but in practice they rule largely unchecked by their sovereigns.

As such, many Dukes and Duchesses treat their territories like personal kingdoms, even hiring mercenaries to increase their provincial forces and act as a combination of peacekeeping force and standing army. Unlike the Princes and Princesses, most of these rulers are hereditary nobility, descended from the deposed kings and rulers that reigned before the coming of Vol Al'Daya. Many of them plot and conspire to regain what they believe is theirs by right of birth, believing (correctly) that the Chamber of Dominion has no intention of fulfilling the promise made centuries ago with the formation of the Malakar Dominion.

EARL/COUNTESS

The next lower rank of Dominion nobility, Earls and Countesses oversee the rural estates throughout the nation responsible for the rich production of resources for commerce. Some of these estates are in areas in which more than one House holds influence; the House with the most sway will install a Duke or Duchess as leader, while the lesser Houses will have Earls and Countesses present to make sure their investment is still maintained.

In theory, Earl and Countess are the highest titles that can be bestowed on commoners; higher titles require some record of noble birth. In practice, such noble lineages are often faked or outright ignored, but this title is used for those that the House rulers or the Ministers of the Chamber want to reward without the effort of providing faux nobility. It's also used to put powerful figures far from their support structures by giving them a large (and remote) estate to manage.

Note: The Lord-Commander of the Army and the Lady-Admiral of the Navy are considered to be equivalent to Earl and Countess in rank.

VISCOUNT/VISCOUNTESS

The rank below Earl and Countess, used for those granted full authority over smaller estates and towns. It is sometimes also used by Dukes or Earls who subdivide their fiefdoms and place someone in power over that tertiary estate, and other similarly highly-placed administration positions throughout the Dominion. Even clergy who have influence within the Chamber can earn this rank through loyal service or “voluntary contributions.”

Note: The post of Lord Governor of Tragor is considered equivalent to this rank.

BARON/BARONESS

The lowest noble rank, used for those who rule over the smallest villages and estates, as well as those who serve in positions of notable administrative authority within the Dominion. Most of the Guild Masters and Crime Lords also have the title of Baron (those that haven’t managed to get themselves named as Minister or falsified a higher title, that is). Such Barons naturally claim to have been awarded the title by the Chamber, but investigation into such claims can often result in a violent response. In reality, a baronial title is easily purchased from the Chamber for the right “contribution” – commoners joke that you can’t throw a shovel of dirt without hitting a Baron or Baroness – but the Chamber still clings to the fiction that such titles are earned through meritorious works in the name of the Dominion.

SHERIFF

The Sheriff claims to be highest-ranking enforcers of the law in an area, particularly in rural areas and roads under the authority of a House. In reality, they’re nothing but glorified tax collectors, assuring that the House in authority gets their gold in a timely fashion. Sheriffs are appointed by someone with the rank of Earl or higher, and usually stem from well-bred (if not entirely noble) families. Sheriffs with a little knowledge of math and a vicious streak tend to do well.

CONSTABLE

Originally, the constables were the duly-appointed assistants to the Sheriff who enforced the laws and Edicts of the Dominion and the House in an area. As Sheriffs worry less about justice and more about payment, the constables have taken more authority over the actual day-to-day enforcement of an area. Indeed, most Malakaran rulers allow Guilds and

Associations to form their own teams of constables, as long as they pay nominal respect to the Sheriff (usually in the form of a tariff). In essence, this means that the enforcers of the Guilds and Associations bear some legal authority, and that different groups of constables will have different agendas. It’s not uncommon for large groups of constables to openly brawl in the streets, but Malakaran rulers simply see this as allowing their rivals to reduce their own power bases.

FACTIONS OF THE DOMINION

HOUSE OF BLACK

Leader: Sandara Ninuez Black, Princess of the House of Black, Duchess of Centerport, Lady-Admiral of the Sails of Dominion.

The Dominion has needed a secure sea port for most of its existence. Three potential candidates lie to the south, but Malakar’s forces were unable to take any of them for long. The Black Mountain dwarves drove them out of Westport, while the Grey Rangers and Fae came from the east to make sure they never acquired Eastport. Centerport was less defended, but its anarchic population was too chaotic; the Dominion couldn’t hold for long before it devolved into chaos and fire.

However, Captain Nathan Black, pirate lord and commander of the Black Armada, came up with a new plan for Centerport during the century of peace following the Betrayal War. Instead of trying to acquire the port through force of arms, he used a combination of diplomacy and bribery to win the citizens of Centerport over. The Southern Kingdoms were still reeling from the War, and couldn’t spare enough to prevent the change in Centerport’s allegiances. Finally, the Malakar Dominion had a naval base.

Captain Black quickly realized that running a city was a lot more boring and frustrating than conquering it, so he petitioned the Chamber of Dominion to have his family recognized as a full House. His offer was accepted, and he became the head of the youngest House in the Dominion. Soon after, his wife decided that his philandering ways were too much, and after a mysterious death at sea, Sandara Ninuez Black took over as Princess of the House of Black. She proved to be as good an administrator as a mariner, allowing Black to be one of the fastest-rising Houses in the Chamber. Her family ties to Nazatir didn’t hurt, either.

Sandara runs her House as an autocracy; her family does as she requires, without question, and she will choose her successor when the time is right.

HOUSE OF BORSCH

Leader: Kenner Borsch, Prince of the House of Borsch, Duke of Urd, Lord-Commander of the Swords of Dominion

The House of Borsch can trace its roots back to one of the original noble families. A failed attempt to unseat Olar as ruler of Olara caused the family to be exiled during the days of Vol Al'Daya, causing Olaran history to judge them as cowards and manipulators. In reality, the House of Borsch has historically been known for strategic military planning and prowess, and their logistical capabilities serve the Malakar Dominion well. More than once a battle that nearly overwhelmed Malakaran forces was won by the glorious tactics of a Borsch commander or the bravery of a Borsch soldier. Indeed, the Dominion would not exist if it were not for the military skill of this House.

As a result of this highly-acclaimed skill, the House of Borsch has historically controlled the Swords of Dominion, the Malakaran standing army. However, the Borsch understand the logistical problems of maintaining a large national force at all times. As such, they have often hired mercenaries for specific campaigns instead of committing national forces, so they can keep their standing army at a reasonable size. Further, Kenner Borsch has successfully petitioned the Chamber to allow conscription of House guard units as well as any organized military troops within the Dominion, so he can use constables, Association "guards," Guild enforcers, and other militia groups as needed.

As the House of Borsch gets more and more control over various military forces, the other Houses wonder if it's a matter of time before Kenner makes a play for Prolocutor. Thus far he seems content to support Zeria Norrd, but it's increasingly clear that any political move within the Dominion needs to account for the loyalties of the House of Borsch – a fact that the House of Salanad understands all too well.

The House of Borsch is a feudal monarchy, with the hereditary Duke of Urd as the highest authority. However, the Duke of Urd always serves as a military commander – anyone unable to serve as a soldier or a general usually has a terrible "battlefield accident" before a new Duke is named.

HOUSE OF JVORICK

Leader: Vasstiss na Ssathiss, Prince of the House of Jvorick, Duke of Kol, Lord Governor of Tragor, Warder of the Longtree Forest

The House of Jvorick are, at heart, a confederation of thieves and brutes. Hanz Jvorick, a powerful robber baron, pulled a collection of petty criminals together to work for their collective mutual benefit, as well as to fight for the nascent Dominion. The move brought a number of fighters to the Dominion's cause, but the House of Jvorick wasn't used to taking orders or following plans – they brought as much violence on themselves and others as they did on their enemies. He formed a council (which came to be known as "Jvorick's Council," even after his death) to give each faction a voice in his plans. Even with this loose political structure, things haven't changed much over the centuries: the House is still extremely aggressive and difficult to manage.

This chaos extends to the House structure, if it can be called that. Jvorick is comprised of dozens of clans, families, gangs, and bands with their own agendas that vaguely align with the House. A mutual desire to hold power over the other Houses and a strong streak of vendetta against their common enemies usually get everyone working towards the same goals, but it does mean that the Prince has to keep the various factions focused on external threats, or else internal arguments and conflicts would consume the House. This results in regular raids, usually west into dwarven and youlin aradi lands, or east in Fae and Wildlands territory. Sometimes, however, the House brutes will lean heavily on members of other Houses traveling through their lands if there's a particular issue in the Chamber that needs a few votes cast in Jvorick's favor.

The problem for the House of Jvorick is that when you hammer at every problem, people around you start to feel like nails. Jvorick doesn't have external allies so much as people it's not actively punching in the face right now, and the other Houses have little incentive to make long-lasting allegiances with such a chaotic faction. Vasstiss na Ssathiss, a dregordian of considerable leadership skill from the gobliness-held town of Tragor, has stepped forward as Prince to bring some much-needed stability to the House. So far he's played the game of Dominion politics well, and he's careful to share the profits with Jvorick's Council to show them the benefits of cooperation.

The House of Jvorick is a confederation. Each recognized faction has a representative on Jvorick's Council that advises the Prince. Ssathiss only holds as much power as the majority of factions are willing to give him.

HOUSE OF MALAK

Leader: Daymar Malak, Prince of the House of Malak, Duke of Malak, Earl of Banor, Viscount of Lann

The House of Malak was formed by a group of Fae who rebelled against the support given to Vol Al'Daya by the Elvish Nation. For their crimes, they were outcast and declared mal'alakar ("foul blooded") by the leaders of the Fae. Their leader changed his name to Malak, taking the brand of shame as a badge of honor. Malak and his followers banded with the other groups against Al'Daya, and the House of Malak's power and foresight became a rallying point for the Dominion in those early days. When they won their independence, the Dominion agreed to take Malak's name as their own.

As such, the House of Malak was one of the strongest Houses in the Dominion (along with the House of Norrd). However, the nature of these outcast Fae have eroded their strong foundation. They are more prone to pride and arrogance than their Fae cousins, which weakened their hold on the Dominion and the House itself. Over the years, Darkness introduced by both shayakar from the north and manipulative humans under the Houses' influence has turned the House of Malak into a haven for necromancy and corruption.

Malak and Norrd are bitter rivals, and most of the other factions in the Dominion are swept up in their ongoing conflict. In a way, this conflict has helped strengthen the House, even as the Fae have fallen to dark influences. The constant rivalry has forced the leadership of the House to move away from brute strength to subtle manipulation, criminal espionage, and well-placed assassination. This change in demeanor has helped Malak to survive, with the side benefit of increasing its already sinister reputation to scare off other potential rivals.

A few within the House (led by Strum Malak, a minor noble) want to shake off the necromantic corruption and bring the Malakar back to its original glory, but their voices are far and few between. Strum and his faction have recently started making overtures to the dwarven Kingdom of Stahlheim to the east, under the guise of breaking the Gnoshen Cabal and House of Jvorick of their virtual monopoly over mining. If he gained mining rights from Stahlheim, or outright got the kingdom to join the Dominion, it would give him the political leverage to make real change within the House.

The House of Malak is an oligarchy, and the Prince of the House is chosen to speak on the House's behalf – in effect, acting as Minister for the entire House, but



with all of the privileges of the Prince title. However, Daymar Malak has slowly converted his minor power into a position of real authority and power (if not respect) among the ruling council of the House.

HOUSE OF NORRD

Leader: Prolocutor Zeria Norrd, Prince of the House of Norrd, Duke of Trinigar, Earl of Urd, Defender of the Northern Lands

The House of Norrd was founded by Kalan “The Destroyer” Norrd, a powerful mage notorious for his prowess in battle and destructive magics. He established his House primarily as a private mystical army, subordinate to his will alone. When he died in the Freelands during the Battle of Fortune, the House fell apart due to a confusion in succession: Kalan had named his third child, Jayza, as successor, but she died in battle against her eldest brother. The civil war over the House Seat lasted for two years, until the most powerful contenders negotiated a settlement and called a halt to the fighting. The House of Norrd was then reformed into an aristocracy, solidifying which families and factions would have a say in the future of the House.

Today, Norrd is the other House that holds the majority of power in the Dominion, forever rivaled only by the House of Malak. Kalan’s strength in arms and casual violence remain a defining characteristic of the House; most of the wars that the Dominion have gotten embroiled in can trace the conspiracy back to a Norrd. The House guard, known as the Hand of Destruction, continues to hold the honor of being the best unit in the Dominion because of all the practice they get. Indeed, The House of Borsch has called on the Hand of Destruction many times to act as an elite unit in variety of missions. The current Prince and Prolocutor, Zeria Norrd, came from this esteemed unit, and he still has a fondness for it and the Dominion military.

As mentioned, the House of Norrd is an aristocracy. The Prince is chosen by his peers on the House council, and remains in control as long as they agree he is meeting their collective goals.

HOUSE OF SALANAD

Leader: Rissa Evenshade, Princess of the House of Salanad, Duchess of Lann, Warder of the West Wood, Unias of the Western Fae

Much like Jvorik, the House of Salanad is a collective of factions rather than a unified force. Both mal’alakar and shayakar Fae dominate this House,

making it unique among the Malakar Houses – humans are the minority in Salanad lands. There are also significant numbers of gobliness, brinchie, and dregordians, and even a clanhome of dwarves who claim allegiance to the House.

This unique alliance came about when a Fae named Salanad Malak refused to exterminate a village of gobliness that was encroaching on Malak land. The House rulers threatened Salanad, but she angrily argued that the House of Malak was formed by rebellion against unjust orders. She resigned, vowing to form a new House true to her understanding of Malak’s vision. Salanad died soon after, but her vision lived on.

For many years, the only thing keeping the House together was a mutual desire to resist human rule. Often times, that wasn’t enough; internal strife frequently erupted along racial lines, weakening Salanad cohesion. During one of these conflicts, Malak laid claim to Salanad lands, under the auspice that the House was dead. This drove the Salanad factions together; the House of Malak’s claim was overturned through the course of a few skirmishes, and the House of Salanad was reforged.

The Evenshade clan of Fae stepped to act as the leaders of the Salanad, and they have done well guiding the House in recent years. Rissa Evenshade negotiated a successful alliance with their former foes in the House of Malak, allowing both houses to rise in wealth and power. She is now courting a connection with the House of Borsch – if she’s successful, the three houses could become a powerful bloc that would change the face of Dominion politics.

The House of Salanad is organized as an aristocracy, with the rules of each clan and faction handling their own holdings. The Evenshades lead by the consent of the other leaders; although it is a well-established consent, any hint of betrayal could thrust the House into a new civil war.

HOUSE OF SHAEL

Leader: Fenrik Shael II, Prince of the House of Shael, Duke of Syvan, Defender of the Southern Plains

For the past hundred years, when anyone thought of the Malakar Dominion, they thought of the House of Shael. One of the founding Houses, they effortlessly embodied the twin pillars of the Dominion – aristocracy and trade – and many businesses had Shael tradespeople just as many government offices has Shael administrators. They didn’t possess a glorious history or have any notorious heroes, but

year after year they made sure that things got done. Despite the sheer power of Malak and Norrd, both Houses put in Shael after Shael as Prolocutor, under the belief that each side was controlling the seat while they focused on their rivals. And each Shael did what the House does best: take care of things quietly and efficiently.

Until Prolocutor Fenrik Shael.

Fenrik and a Fae lady in Eldara fell in love, and had an affair for many years. His actions and rulings as Prolocutor were part of an agenda for peace with the territories to the east and better relationships with the other Southern Kingdoms. Spies from the House of Malak discovered the affair and the agenda, and decided to take action: they let the information fall into the hands of the House of Norrd. Fenrik and his mistress were assassinated, and his actions revealed to the Chamber.

The House of Shael fell out of favor. Most of their lands were seized by Malak and Norrd forces, and although the battles were brief and bloody, soon they all fell. The House of Malak spared the House of Shael from outright extermination and put Fenrik's teenage son in as the new Prince. Malak has since offered their friendship and guidance to the new Prince, while the rest of the House licks its wounds and plans to rebuild to their former influence.

Today, the Shaels are a shadow of their former selves. They still hold key positions in businesses and administrative posts, as well as ruling their traditional home of Syvan. They combine traditional aristocratic structures with a guild framework, giving equal weight to nobles and guild masters alike.

GNOSHEN CABAL

Leader: Gresh the Fox, Chosen Speaker of the Gnoshen Cabal, Mak Torkash of the Umbar Gather

Not all gobliness in the Dominion are Salanad. The Gnoshen Cabal are a collective of gathers that refuse to be recognized as a House under the Malakar rule, but still wish to be part of the Dominion. After years of negotiation, diplomacy, and a few armed rebellions, an agreement was reached that gave most people most of what they wanted, and the Cabal was recognized as an autonomous faction.

The Cabal acts like a high-level council of elders (what the gobliness call an Ulersh Gourm). Each gather of gobliness has a leader, which is determined by whatever rules the gather has in place. Those leaders comprise the Cabal. Whenever the three moons are full, the Gather votes on who will speak

for them in the Chamber until the next full equinox. The Chosen Speaker doesn't have any power over the Cabal – he's only a mouthpiece – but the rest of the Chamber still tries to equate the Speaker to a Prince, which gives him a measure of power regardless. Each gather's leader handles their own affairs, only working with the other gathers or the Chosen Speaker on matters of trade and security. This system actually works surprisingly well for sharing resources, although more powerful gathers sometimes raid their neighbors if negotiations are taking too long.

The current Chosen Speaker, Gresh the Fox, is an elderly orc with considerable physical prowess and surprisingly keen political vision. He sees the Cabal as a step towards real power and influence for the gobliness in Shaintar, and he hopes that gathers in other nations will look to the Malakar Dominion and be inspired by it. And perhaps, on that day, he will lead them all.

The Gnoshen Cabal is an extension of local village social and political structures, with an emphasis on trade considerations that hints at a syndicate structure.

ARTISANS GUILD

Leader: Grand Master Bork Hammerson

The Artisans Guild is a union representing numerous Guilds and Associations throughout the Malakar Dominion (and even a few in outside free cities), created in response to the Traders Guild. The traders were working to be the only voice of business and commerce in the Chamber, and a number of influential artisans moved to make sure that the merchants weren't the only ones with a say in the future of the Dominion. As a result, it's a rarity in the Dominion: a (relatively) straightforward and honest institution known for being outspoken. Their purpose is to see that all manners of artisans and craftsmen are fairly represented in the Chamber, making sure their needs and agendas are not being subverted by the Traders Guild or the other Houses.

Unfortunately, the Guild is often its own worst enemy. There are so many competing interests within the Guild that it's nearly impossible to conclusively act on any matter that isn't clearly beneficial or problematic to all members. Over the years an elaborate bureaucracy has evolved in an effort to make things fair for all members, but it's only served to bog down discussion to the point of inertia. In reality, small voting bloc end up dominating the policy of the Guild, shouting down the very same smaller concerns that the Guild was formed to protect. Those

artisans find others of a similar mindset, form their own voting blocs, and the cycle continues.

In recent years, the dwarven ironsmith Grand Master Bork Hammerson had been a good and fair leader. With a subtle gift for negotiation and coalition building, he has been slowly dismantling some of the red tape keeping the Guild from acting effectively. This is causing the Guild to become a more formidable political force – something that is increasingly worrying to the Traders Guild.

The Artisans Guild is structured like a syndicate combined with a trade union. They hold elections for all positions every year, although previous candidates can run for office again. (Grand Master Hammerson has won the past five elections in a row.)

TRADERS GUILD

Leader: Grand Master Tomas Jessup

The Traders Guild started as a coalition of the Dominion's most powerful merchants who demanded a voice in the Chamber. No one is quite sure if it was a negotiation or a threat of financial sanctions, but in the end the merchants were begrudgingly awarded a seat.

This ended up being a good move for the Dominion. With their newly-acquired power, the Traders Guild started pouring more money into national concerns. The roads were improved, bridges were built or reinforced, and many of the towns and cities increased their levels of sanitation, health, and safety. Naturally, this was due to giving contracts to Guild-loyal artisans and businesses, but the Dominion as a whole benefited, so the Chamber turned a blind eye to such biased practices.

Over time, ambition and corruption wore away at the core of the Guild as individuals and conspiracies within began vying for power and influence. Espionage, theft, blackmail, political intrigue, and even assassination became common practice. Eventually, open warfare wasn't unheard of between trading houses, and the Chamber's faith in the Traders Guild eroded.

However, the creation of the Artisans Guild gave the leaders of the Traders Guild pause, and a reason to start clamping down on the internal strife. The admittance of the Order of the Golden River increased the pressure, forcing the Guild to focus on their external foes instead of internal ones. The current Grand Master, Tomas Jessup, has continued to use flattery, blackmail, and occasional "accidents" to unify the Traders Guild. While there aren't any

more open conflicts between trader houses, the Grand Master still has many petty intrigues to deal with.

The Traders Guild is a syndicate. Many of the lesser positions are elected every year, but the Grand Masters and four of the other top masters of the Guild – known as the Circle of Five – hold their positions for three years at a time.

ORDER OF THE GOLDEN RIVER

Leader: Grand Master Manfred Synn

The Order of the Golden River is believed to be a benevolent society of noble and otherwise wealthy citizens dedicated to furthering the prosperity of the Dominion. It's unclear who this fiction is designed to fool, however, since nearly everyone knows the true nature of the Order – it is the most powerful criminal organization in Malakar.

The titular "golden river" refers to the flow of money throughout the Dominion, and no group dips their cup into that river more than the Order. They get a cut of just about every major business transaction ranging from shipping contracts to assassination payments, and they have more debts and favors owed to them than anyone. They are directly or indirectly responsible for most of the criminal enterprises in the Dominion – smuggling, extortion, slavery, heists, drugs, espionage, and more; although most of these activities, aside from slavery and floaters, are not technically legal in the Dominion, most are conveniently overlooked (with the exception of outright theft). The Order makes so much money, though, that even should a Sheriff or Earl decide to press a legal claim against a member, they can be bought off easily. Even outside the Dominion, they can purchase silence more often than not.

The Order of the Golden River is so large and successful that they were able to outright buy a seat on the Chamber, under the guise of a reward for their "charitable work." Continuing the fiction that they are a reputable Guild, they have a Grand Master. The current Grand Master is Manfred Synn (widely believed to be a pseudonym). Synn has been in the position for a couple of years, after his predecessor and mentor, Roger Corbin, was on the losing end of a brief and bloody internal war. For the most part, the Order maintains a quiet presence in the Chamber, focusing their energy on manipulating the other Princes, Ministers, and Grand Masters to get their way. The Chamber fully understands their tactics, but they like the money too much (and fear reprisals too much) to do anything about it.

The Order operates under a mix of syndicate and feudal structure. Lesser Foremen report to higher-level leaders in a complex web of authority and “tithing” of profits. Those Foremen ultimately report to a collection of Grand Citizens who advise the Grand Master.

REMUNERATION

Leader: Comfort

The Red Store is one of the most powerful Associations within the Malakar Dominion – so powerful, in fact, that its reach far exceeds the country’s boundaries. (See *Black Lantern Report 2: The Red Store* for more.) As the Red Store and their mysterious leader, the Merchant, focus their gaze outward on large-scale crimes and violent solutions, they have left behind a faction of their Association to handle the vice in the Dominion. While many people simply refer to the group as “The Red Store,” those in the know have called it simply Remuneration, because everyone in power ends up paying them.

Remuneration is run by a person known only as “Comfort.” Various men and women have all claimed to be Comfort, but they are inevitably revealed to be working for someone higher up in the Association, or imposters seeking to briefly take advantage of Remuneration’s mystique before their inevitable demise. A few whisper that Comfort is just another mask for the Merchant. Whomever Comfort is, he or she controls much of the upscale vice in the Dominion. Prostitution, gambling, recreational floaters, and even pit fighting are all controlled by Remuneration and the Red Store.

But the Dominion always has another layer, more wheels within wheels. In reality, Remuneration uses vice as a shield to discretely control certain influential people within the Dominion. All of them are told that they are specially chosen by the Merchant, and none of them know the other people that Comfort is in contact with. However, once in a while Comfort directs one of his or her “operatives” to move in ways that seem to be contrary to the best interests of the Red Store. Nothing definite, nothing you could put your finger on, but just a bit of grit in the wheels of the Merchant’s great machine.

No one has the courage to find out if Comfort is making a move against the Red Store for his or her own gain. But no matter where Remuneration’s loyalties are, they are the one of the most subtle and hard-to-control Associations in the Dominion, which makes them incredibly dangerous.



Remuneration works in a blind syndicate structure – there are individual Vice Lords and Ladies that control various operations, but they all report to Comfort (or whomever is claiming to be Comfort at that time), and none of them are aware of the other Vice Lords and Ladies. It makes for very slow and dangerous operations, but also very secure ones.

TRAVELING THROUGH THE DOMINION

In short, it's not safe to travel through the Dominion unless you know someone who can protect you or you can do it yourself. Merchants don't do business here unless they've paid the proper license fees to the Traders Guild and arranged for an escort. Farmers and ranchers only move outside their villages under the watchful eye of whatever lord they serve, or at least some paperwork to show that they are under the protection of a House. Even mercenary bands travel in groups as they move from city to city.

The main roads are relatively safe from casual banditry, but every noble and Association that holds claim over the lands the roads cover may demand tolls or other forms of compensation. On the other hand, more remote areas are constantly patrolled by highwaymen who extract money from travelers in different ways. Either way, the more dangerous and important you look, the less likely you are to be harassed for payment.

Once safe arrangements are secured, travelers discover that most people live in relative comfort. Comfort does not necessarily mean prosperity, however. Even though the Dominion has legalized slavery, few lords practice it. Slaves are mainly used in the mines in the west, or for large labor projects such as building castles or fortresses. As such, most workers are vassals, under the protection of a House lord.

The nobility assure that their people have enough food and security to allow them to work and produce, although some drive their people mercilessly, grinding them down to get as much work out of them as possible. Even fewer (mostly in the east) are benevolent, treating their vassals with respect and even allowing them to openly practice their faith in the Ascended. With the influence of the churches of Ceynara and Vainar increasing, however, those travelers with clear allegiance with Light or Life are encouraged to stick to these more tolerant areas – otherwise, they will run into trouble in larger towns and cities. The poorer the person in the Dominion, the more they likely they are to be friendly to strangers from outside the county. What little they have is shared freely, just to spend some time with someone who doesn't constantly have treachery and intrigue on their minds.

Urban areas are particularly dangerous for strangers; gangs patrol the streets of their turf while the local guard will pull people off the streets if they can't adequately explain what they're doing out.

Nothing gets in the way of business, though – anyone who ducks into a shop or marketplace to spend money with a merchant will be left alone. If such a traveler looked around at the streets, however, she'd notice that the buildings are resplendent in the better parts of town, opulent with lavish gardens and visible security meant to display the wealth and power of their owners. On the other hand, the poorer slums are full of devastating poverty, dilapidated buildings, and terrible squalor.

OF SPECIAL INTEREST

RELIGION

For a nation primarily focused on profit and power, the Malakar Dominion has a surprisingly diverse religious makeup. The Ascended are still revered openly in the more distant parts of the land (and not-so-openly in other places). Those that support the goal to make either the Church of Ceynara or Vainar official would like to ban the worship of the Ascended entirely, but the pragmatic on the Chamber realize that this could very well lead to another Farmers' Rebellion.

Diverse, however, does not mean universal. The worship of Archanon in any form (either the Prelacy's Church of Archanon or the Church of Light of the Southern Kingdoms) is completely prohibited. In fact, taking a mission into the Dominion is considered one of the most dangerous and noble things a priest or paladin from Archanaya can undertake. The Prelacy has declared the Dominion as "Hell manifest in the land," though they are not so devout that they are adverse to the number of secret communication channels that exist between the various ruling factions in Shaintar.

The Church of Ceynara and the Court of Glory have been gaining in strength and influence over the years. The House of Norrd's preference toward the Flame is undeniable, and a large temple to Ceynara is under construction in Trinigar. Combined with the presence of the zealots within the Maelstrom, it could be argued that Trinigar is the most influential seat of power for the worship of Ceynara in the entire Empire.

However, the Church of Vainar and the Sublime Host is also building a large temple in Malak, the official capital of the Dominion. Vainar has shrines and smaller temples scattered throughout the country as well, as many within the House of Malak support his worship. The leaders of the Church conceal the

more grotesque aspects of their practices by focusing on the wisdom of Vainar and the power of knowledge.

Banned everywhere else in Shaintar, the Dragon Cult lives on within the Dominion. Although a small religion, a congregation (mainly consisting of dregordians) still worships the Dragon Lords in the shadows of the trees of the West Wood.

Finally, there is a growing contingent of those who follow the ancient ways of the Sun God, an ancient deity that was originally worshipped in the Eternal Desert. Many scholars and priests don't believe the Sun God ever existed, but recent stories from Tragor tell of a few priests creating miracles in the name of the Sun God. These skeptics believe it's more likely that one of the Demon Lords is masquerading as the Sun God... something that's happened before in the lands of the Desert Princes.

THE KEOWLIN ACADEMY

Following the Farmers' Rebellion of 2682 and the subsequent purging of most of the leaders, an Alakar scholar named Dayzim Keowlin realized that the means of educating the new Malakar nobility would be essential to the Dominion's future. The various Houses all agreed to this, and the Keowlin Academy was founded. Located between Malak, Urd, and Kol, the Academy is a town unto itself, built as a walled fortress and defended by a cadre of soldiers comprised of troops donated by all of the Houses and factions in the Chamber.

The Keowlin Academy focuses on academics, politics, diplomacy, and magical theory (primarily sorcery and alchemy). Additionally, all students go through a program of physical conditioning and moderate combat training; the Academy understands that the Dominion is a dangerous place, and wants to make sure the future Malakaran scholars, diplomats, and leaders live long enough to make use of their education.

Any prospective student of the Academy must be sponsored by a House, and like all things in the Dominion, there's a high price involved in admission. However, Keowlin graduates are certain to be proficient in a number of subjects and able to defend themselves well, making them great assets to their Houses and the Dominion. In fact, they're so valuable that they are branded for life. Upon graduation, each graduate receives a ritually-administered brand on their left cheek, a symbol that combined the Academy crest with the crest of the House sponsoring them.

LINER NOTES – MANIPULATIVE, BUT NOT EVIL

Plots and intrigues are possible anywhere in Shaintar. No city is immune from the need for a heroic thief or a noble spy to ply their underhanded trade for a heroic cause. But it's the Malakar Dominion where these characters truly shine. Everyone plots against everyone: Prince against Prince, criminal against criminal, or just rival against rival; it's conspiracy all the way down.

That doesn't mean that all Malakarans are *evil*, however. There are decent, hard-working people in the rural areas, cultivating the rich resources of the Dominion to serve the needs of their Machiavellian masters. In fact, those rich resources are the main reason why Malakar is such a threat to the Southern Kingdoms. But even the "shadier" characters in the Dominion may have good intentions. There are characters at all levels of the Dominion who want to make things better for everyone, and those resources can be used to help people as well as exploit them. However, such idealistic characters are stuck in a system that rewards treachery and greed, so often they're forced to use ignoble tools to bring about real change.

It's easy to present everyone in the Dominion as a moustache-twirling villain, but things aren't so cut-and-dried. Players can absolutely make heroic characters that hail from the Dominion. Game Masters can certainly create sympathetic allies as the heroes try to explore (and possibly exploit) the Dominion. Just don't think that kicking down someone's door and threatening them with a sword will get you very far.

This brand is not only a mark of honor, but assurance that the graduate is seen as the formal property of the House for life.

Because the Academy wants the largest number of potential (and paying) candidates, it has maintained a firm policy of neutrality, remaining outside all political intrigues within the Dominion. Every House and faction acknowledges and respects this neutrality, and students who attempt to pursue intrigues within the Academy are sent back to their House for punishment. Because of this, some families and factions outside the Dominion have recently begun sending students to the Academy. The tuition for non-Dominion students is extremely high, but they do not get the same branding as Dominion citizens, and there are a few classes they do not get access to for security reasons. A couple of foolish nobles who have lied about their attendance at the Academy have found themselves in the center of a series of unfortunately and conveniently-timed accidents.

THE SCHOZIM

Another school was founded at the same time as the Keowlin Academy; a secret school shrouded in secrecy. It is the Schozim School, created by Schozim Keowlin, Dayzim's brother. Much as Dayzim realized the future path for Malakar's leaders, Schozim understood that there would be a similar need for those trained in the arts of espionage, infiltration, and assassination. As the Dominion moved from overt warfare to covert manipulation, it was the students of this school that went out and applied discrete economic pressure or gave the Malakaran diplomats the information they needed.

The Schozim is both a school and an organization whose agents serve under the direction of the Chamber. Schozim agents are cold, efficient, and utterly loyal to the Dominion. Candidates are usually recruited from first-year Academy students who do particularly well, although talented individuals can be selected from anywhere if they have the right characteristics and can be molded. For the first few weeks, the student is told they are in a specialized military course within the Academy. After a few weeks, if she proves apt and worthy, she is given an opportunity to continue, with an understanding that there is no turning back. Those that opt out return to their regular Academy work (if formerly a member of the Academy) or are assigned to the military (if not). For those that pursue, however, the only ways out are graduation or death.

Students at the Schozim are not only master spies, but are also trained in combat, acting, and disguise. Most split their time between studies at the Academy (with suitably forged House sponsorship for non-noble students) and training under different Schozim masters in hidden centers spread throughout the Dominion. Other classes are held in locations that change each time, making it very difficult to track down where they are or what's being taught. Those who show an aptitude for alchemy are given special courses on poisons and explosives, and those capable of learning the Way receive more occult training.

Before graduating, each candidate is tested to her limits. Assuming she survives, she then has her mind read by a powerful Adept in service to the Schozim to ensure her loyalty. If she passes, a tiny tattoo of a spider with an eye on its back is administered to the back of the neck. This small mark is easily mistaken as a birthmark or mole to the uneducated eye. The student is then officially flunked out of the

LINER NOTES – FALSE PROPHETS

Both Vainar and Ceynara like to present themselves as gods of Shaintar, and they have followers who dutifully work to preserve this veneer of respectability.

Ceynara is known as the Queen of Hell by those who follow the Ascended or the Lord of Light, but she is also known as the Goddess of War, Goddess of Strength, and the Lady of Might among those who worship her. This whitewashed aspect of her is what's presented within the Dominion, and the other Demon Lords are described collectively as the Court of Glory.

Vainar is similarly rebranded, presented as the God of Wisdom, the Master of Secrets, and the Lord of Eternity. The Thirteen Necrolords are fashioned as the Sublime Host in his service. When undead manifest within the Dominion, they are presented as symbols of his power over death.

As these churches gain power, more and more people are manipulated into worshipping what they believe are gods. The highest authorities in each Church may be well aware of their duplicity, but there are any number of faithful who sincerely believe that they are doing nothing wrong. It's easy to paint the worshippers of these Churches as cackling, black-hooded cultists bent on evil deeds, but in reality the majority of them are no more evil than the typical citizen of the Dominion (which, to be fair, skews pretty far from "morally upright" to begin with).

Not so of the more explicit cults. The Dragon Lords were very real, and their power was utterly terrible. They were cast out at the end of the Dragon War, however, and are thus completely powerless in Shaintar. Those that worship them don't have any real spiritual connection to them, but there's been more than one Demon Lord who has pretended to be a Dragon Lord to manipulate cultists to his will.

The same is true of the cultists of the Sun God, sometimes called by his ancient name, Raz'Dash. The ancient stories of the Sun God are believed to be inspired by some Demon Lord preying on the people of the time, although some scholars are pursuing research to see if the Sun God may have been an early manifestation of Archanon.

Academy to preserve her cover (and to avoid getting the attention-getting brand), and starts her work in service to the Dominion.

THE SWORDS OF DOMINION

The standing military force of the Malakar Dominion (organized similarly to the Olan Army) is surprisingly small when compared to the forces of its enemies, but it is solid and efficient. This is mainly because of the shrewd strategies and logistics of the House of Borsch, who see the Swords as primarily defense force for the main Dominion cities and holdings. Hardly any time and resources are spent

on training or preparing for offensive operations. Instead, extensive defenses have been constructed around most of the key holdings, and the soldiers of the Swords are experts at mounting a long defense against all kinds of threats. They specialize in resisting and breaking sieges, defending various grounds, and engaging in short-range counter-assaults, with only a few units trained for scouting and raids to harass invading forces.

For most militaries, this would seem like madness, but the Borsch have long understood the value of mercenaries. There are plenty of companies of soldiers-for-hire hungry for work in the Dominion, and the House has the vast resources from the other Houses and factions to tap into. As such, they can hire mercenaries for offensive agendas and other short-term work, which actually ends up being cheaper in the long term than training, equipping, housing, and maintaining a large army. This strategy has the added value of deniability – such mercenaries cannot easily be traced back to the Dominion, or can be plausibly attributed to a specific individual rather than the Chamber or a particular House.

As a result, this means that the Dominion has a number of long-term relationships with a wide variety of mercenary companies. Many such forces actually quarter themselves in Dominion lands, with a few enjoying a retainer from the local lords to watch over the lands they inhabit and aiding House militia in case of emergencies. The most important such relationship is with the Maelstrom, the infamous mercenary army founded in the Kal-a-Nar Empire. A large portion of the army is based in Trinigar, with a detachment assigned to help guard the Prolocutor (an arrangement made by Kenner Borsch and approved by Zeria Norrd). Borsch knows the world sees the Maelstrom as little more than the unofficial arm of the Empire's army, which makes them perfect for any action against the Southern Kingdoms where the Dominion's role needs to be obfuscated.

Despite these well-worn arrangements, the soldiers of the Swords hold most mercenaries in contempt, and especially the Maelstrom. The Prolocutor's



former membership in the Swords has been a particular point of contention – why would a Sword need to have mercenaries protect him when his former brothers-in-arms would do? There have been many incidents involving conflicts between the two forces, which has become a serious problem for the House of Borsch.

LINER NOTES – SPOILERS!

The Merchant, and the mystery around him, is central to the Malakar Dominion. This material references pages 8-9 and 98 of *Shaintar: Legends Unleashed*. Players not wanting to know the details of one of the Dominion's central mysteries should feel free to skip ahead a bit.

THE MERCHANT

The mystery of the Merchant is a powerful one. He has influenced events all over Shaintar for many years, and it all seems to stem from the Malakar Dominion. However, the reality is different – the Dominion actually stems from the Merchant, who laid the groundwork for Malak's rebellion and the ethos of the whole Dominion, corrupting one Fae's ideals into part of the Merchant's master plan: to build an army of agents and soldiers dedicated to controlling all of Shaintar's crysarium.

It sounds simple, but the Merchant's plans are not so straightforward. Creating an army that marches to his every word is more Saiderin's style. The Merchant works on deeper layers, encouraging factions to fight and argue so that the resulting survivors are that much stronger and more self-reliant. He works in such a way that nothing ever devolves into complete civil war (although there have been close calls, such as the Farmers' Rebellion), but he certainly doesn't have a Church devoted to his whims. He even makes sure that no one religion has total sway over the Dominion, allowing him and his agents to work between the cracks of faith and dogma.

Whenever possible, he prefers to work through agents. Many of them are placed in the Red Store (although even here, he has started to encourage conflict between the Red Store abroad and the Remuneration remaining in the Dominion), but he has agents in just about every House and faction in the Dominion, including many within the Schozim. For many years, as he was building up his resources to move outside the Dominion, he let his agents in the House of Shael run things – it's simply easier to control everything when you have control over the Prolocutor. Recently, however, he noticed that the Dominion was becoming idle and content, so he leveraged the Houses of Malak and Norrd to move against Shael.

Once in a while, he takes a direct hand in affairs. Recently, he masqueraded as a fictional desert god just to keep the various churches from growing too powerful. Occasionally, he plays the role of Comfort to muddy the waters of Remuneration's control. More than once, he's even played the role of a priest of Archanon when it suited his needs. But these times are far and few between – most of the time, he is in various places all over Shaintar, pushing his pawns in the right direction toward his ultimate ambition.

Many of the most powerful people in the Dominion have been flattered or cajoled into thinking they are his favorites, his most influential, or keystones to

the stability of the Dominion. A few have tried to impersonate the Merchant, claiming his authority, but their bodies are soon found, usually crushed under heavy mounds of gold. As such, the idea of the Merchant is the Dominion's worst-kept secret – everyone in the halls of power knows of him, but none are so blunt as to say his name aloud. He is a shared dream, a common hallucination, a knowing smirk among those who think they are really running things.

The biggest secret, and the one that even the Merchant isn't fully aware of, is that he's not completely in control. When you encourage people to fight each other all of the time, there's always a chance they'll turn on you as well. Many of the rulers of the Dominion are pliable, but a few have decided to make the country something better than what it is now. Inside a world of intrigue and manipulation are those that use those tools to bring about positive change. They play a dangerous game with one of the most terrifying forces in the entire world, but deep in their hearts, they are patriots. If enough of these rebellious elements ended up working together, the entire Dominion could end up turning into a force for the greater good.

MATTERS OF GAME PLAY

Characters from the Dominion have the potential for backgrounds and training that are rather special (and perhaps consternating) among other Shaintar characters. The culture breeds certain traits, and the unique education system offers interesting – and potentially deadly – pursuits.

EDGES

GMs may wish to allow players to “ret-con” certain Edges into their build, especially Background Edges, if they have a character originally from the Dominion. It's also permissible to allow Background Edges to be acquired after character creation, though a reasonable means to pick up such an Edge must be figured out. The *Dominion Born* Background Edge, for example, would at the very *least* require someone spending a great deal of time living among the people, or possibly being from a similar place in Shaintar.

BACKGROUND EDGES

DOMINION BORN

Requirements: Novice, Smarts d6+, Spirit d6+, Notice d6+

The character should be from the Dominion, or have lived there a long while. Many folks from the Dominion grow up learning to be suspicious and skeptical, always questioning what they see and what they are told. "The trusting man is the first to die," as the Malakaran saying goes.

Dominion Born gain a +1 on any trait roll to see through or resist deception and manipulation. This includes opposing Persuasion and Taunt checks, as well as resisting Powers like *Illusion* and *Phantasm*. Such a character may also make a Notice check at +2 (usually vs Persuasion) to determine if someone is lying to them. Such an attempt may only be made once per a conversation (scene).

KEOWLIN ACADEMY GRADUATE

Requirements: Novice, Education, All Attributes d6+, Fighting d6+, Special

Graduates of the Keowlin Academy are some of the most prized servants any Dominion House can hope to have. This is why they are branded upon graduation and bonded to service, with severe penalties for attempting to leave said service.

Any character with this Edge gains one of two Hindrances (which do not count as towards the usual Hindrances that may be taken for benefits in building a Savage Worlds character) – *Obligations: Malakar Dominion House or Faction (Major)* or *Wanted: Malakar Dominion (Major)*. Most player characters with this Edge will likely have the latter Hindrance, and while being outside of the Dominion may lessen its impact somewhat, the brand on the left cheek will tell any mercenary and bounty hunter that a very generous reward is at hand.

In return, a character with this Edge gains five more skill points to spend on the same Skills named in Education (Healing, Investigation, and Knowledge Skills), as well as a +1 on *any* Smarts-linked Skill and Common Knowledge rolls. Graduates also gain four additional Defining Interests (which may be spent on Languages).

Note – The branding of graduates is such that only *Greater Healing* (the 20 Essence version) will remove it physically. The branding process, however, also leaves a mark on a graduate's spirit, making it possible for a knowledgeable spellcaster with inherent *Detect Arcana* can still see that part of the mark.

COMBAT EDGES

BACKSTAB

Requirements: Seasoned, Fighting d8+, Assassin (or Schozim)

For those who have no honor, or define their sense of honor in terms of a successful kill, a blade in the back is the preferred form of attack. They are always looking to maneuver behind their opponents.

When in melee with a foe against whom the character enjoys a Gang Up bonus (of at least +1), any successful Fighting roll is *automatically* considered a raise. Note that there must be at least a +1 Gang Up bonus; *One Against Many* will negate this Edge, and some other Edges (like *Florentine*) may require at least three people adjacent to the target in order for this Edge to apply.

IMPROVED BACKSTAB

Requirements: Heroic, Fighting d10+, Backstab

Those of the most murderous intent and tenacious nature can seize deadly opportunity against any foe, no matter how well trained they are.

So long as there is at least one other adjacent ally, this character gains the benefits of *Backstab* regardless of whether any Gang Up bonus exists or not.

OPPORTUNITY STRIKE

Requirements: Seasoned, Fighting d6+, Notice d6+, Dirty Fighter

Whether a trained assassin or just a cagey and ruthless street thug, many a Malakaran learns the value of going for the weakest point of defense.

Against any foe that has been successfully Tricked (whether by this character or another), the character gains +4 Fighting, but only to offset any Bypass Armor penalties. If the target has no such penalties (fully-covering Armor), the attack instead gains +1 Armor Piercing.

PROFESSIONAL EDGES

SCHOZIM

Requirements: Novice, Agility d8+, Smarts d8+, Climbing d6+, Fighting d6+, Lockpicking d6+, Notice d6+, Stealth d8+, Special

The Schozim are among the most feared spies and assassins in the world, but only among the very tiny population of people who even know they exist. A loyal Schozim agent will consider revelation of their allegiance and purpose to be the greatest failure, an utter betrayal of everything they trained for and believe in.

Any character with this Edge gains one of two Hindrances (which do not count towards the usual Hindrances that may be taken for benefits in building a Savage Worlds character) – *Vow: Malakar Dominion (Major)* or *Wanted: Malakar Dominion (Major)*. Most player characters with this Edge will likely have the latter Hindrance; they are among the most hunted beings in existence, for the Dominion at large – and the Schozim in particular – will stop at nothing to bring them back, dead or alive. The GM and player wishing to take this Edge should seriously discuss the implications.

This Edge combines the effects of the *Assassin* and *Thief* Edges from the core SW rules; the effects do not stack, so taking this Edge should supersede taking either of the other two. If a GM wishes to let a player retrofit this Edge into their character build, and the character has both of those Edges, a reasonable replacement “second Edge” should be allowed.

In addition to the effects of *Assassin* and *Thief*, a Schozim agent gains the following bonus Defining Interests: Disguise, Forgery, and Poison Craft.

SOCIAL EDGES

BROKER

Requirements: Veteran, Spirit d8+, Persuasion d8+, Streetwise d6+, Connections (at least twice)

Some individuals develop a network of contacts and a reputation for helping make things happen. They are the folks others go to when they need to



hire someone, find something, or otherwise get something done. A character with this Edge is just who they want to contact first.

Brokers gain a +2 on any rolls associated with reaching their *Connections*. They also gain a die level to their Resource Die (and never drop below a d6). When making a Resource check, they gain a +2 on any associated rolls. As well, Brokers gain a +1 Charisma bonus when dealing with anyone who knows who they are and what they are capable of.

This is as much of a roleplaying and story-hook Edge, however, as it is one with benefits. Brokers are called on frequently for help with making things happen; this can manifest as opportunities for the Broker and their allies, but it might also lead to some seriously difficult entanglements and even real trouble.

OTHER CHARACTER ASPECTS

There are a few special considerations regarding existing Edges and Hindrances for some characters from the Malakar Dominion.

CONNECTIONS

A character might take *Connections* with one of the following Houses or Factions:

House of Black

House of Borsch

House of Ivorik

House of Malak

House of Norrd

House of Salanad

House of Shael

Gnoshen Cabal

Artisans Guild

Traders Guild

Order of the Golden River

Remuneration

In addition to the normal benefits of *Connections*, whenever the character is in a location where the House or Faction has any influence (the GM's determination), their Resource Die is treated as one greater. If ever a character makes use of this enhanced Resource die, they owe a debt to the House or Faction in question. It's up to the GM just how that debt manifests.

OBLIGATIONS

A character may have either a Minor or Major *Obligation* with one (or more, if foolish or unlucky) of the Houses or Factions listed under *Connections* above. If they do, the benefits described in *Shaintar: Legends Arise* (page 61) apply, but the character is also considered to have a level of debt and/or favors owed to that organization. This has special meaning in the Dominion (and this meaning extends beyond any borders), and should manifest in interesting ways for the character.

For a Minor Obligation, the character may be occasionally asked to do something odd-yet-innocuous for the faction, with no clear indication of the long-term results. Major Obligations may yield more frequent and more troubling requests; for any

character attempting to walk a hero's path, or at least maintain some sense of ethics, such Obligations may wind up transforming into an Enemy or Wanted Hindrance instead.

DEFINING INTERESTS

For agent-style characters, Defining Interests (*Shaintar: Legends Arise*, page 19) make for an excellent way to express the kind of specialized skills that don't exactly manifest in the main Skills list.

Disguise (Smarts +1) has all the normal uses; it should be opposed by Notice.

Forgery (Smarts +1) is useful for creating false papers, and is opposed by Notice where appropriate.

Poison Craft (Smarts +1) deals with the creation and application of toxins in various ways. Use the Poison Effects Table on page 89 of *Savage Worlds Deluxe* for the effects. The *Crossbows, Crafting, and Ka-ZOT* supplement is also recommended for the actual crafting of poisons; treat Knockout and Paralysis poisons as Expensive, and Venomous and Lethal poisons as Exorbitant.

Players and GMs should feel free to use these as inspiration for other Defining Interests of similar nature. As well, the +2 bonus from the *Thief* Professional Edge should also be allowed to apply when using these Defining Interests.

GEAR

Some special pieces of equipment that have particular meaning (and uses) in the Dominion.

THE POINTER

Favored by assassins who specialize in getting very close to their targets, the Pointer is a kind of cap that goes onto the end of a finger (usually the index finger). A tiny nub can be pushed to cause a spring-loaded needle to pop into place; the needle is covered in whatever toxin is stored in its holding chamber.

The user must make a successful Touch Attack, bypassing any and all armor the target may be wearing. On a success, the poison is administered effectively and will require the usual resistance rolls. On a raise, all such rolls are made at -2. The compartment within holds no more than a single dose.

In normal melee combat, the Pointer is pretty much useless as a weapon. By itself, it doesn't count as one and the wielder is considered Unarmed. Cost 500, Value -2, Availability -4

BURGLAR LEATHERS

A custom-crafted, form-fitting, highly flexible suit of leather armor that has pouches, pockets, and straps from neck-to-toe, Dominion Burglar Leathers are the premium choice for larcenists everywhere. The various concealed compartments, spare tools embedded, modified gloves and boots, and other aspects of the suit grant an overall +1 to Climbing and Lockpicking, as well as any Repair check that relates to burglary. The suit also grants +1 Armor with a -5 Coverage effect. A much more expensive version, incorporating greater reinforcement and some metal plating, grants +2 Armor. Cost 850/1200, Value -2/-4, Availability -4, Weight 8/10

STORY ARC

Here is a short summary of a story arc, intended for characters with a vested interest in the Malakar Dominion.

THE MALAKAR WEB

The Kingdom of Stahlheim has been noticing an increase in strange “accidents” in one of their mines, resulting in an unacceptable number of deaths. They ask the player characters to help investigate them.

Chapter I: The player characters are asked for help by the leader of the Kingdom of Stahlheim. South Mine has had three accidents in the past week, and nearly a dozen miners have died as a result. Foul play is suspected, but Stahlheim can't risk any more men to investigate – they have to make sure the other mines are secure.

Chapter II: An investigation of South Mine reveals that the cave-ins are all the result of time-delayed spells – remnants of the glyphs are still visible. The player characters start to piece together the symbols when another cave-in is set off, ready to trap them in! (This one is set by Schozim who sneak in after the player characters and try to destroy them in another “accident” – if the player characters escape but don't manage to capture one of the Schozim, they keep attacking until one of them gets captured.)

Chapter III: Either from the altercation in South Mine, or after one of the subsequent attacks, the group gets a hold of one of the Schozim. They won't be taken alive (thanks to a convenient death spell enchanted to a false tooth), but they find the tattoo on the back of the neck. They also find a small amount of currency that is only minted in Malak.

Chapter IV: The player characters travel to Malak. How dangerous or easy that trip ends up being is up to the GM, but it's a good chance to show how difficult it is to traverse the Dominion. Upon arriving in Malak, the player characters have to be careful and subtle to uncover what the tattoo is. Eventually, they get the attention of someone in the House of Malak, concerned about their investigation.

Chapter V: The Malak lord has the player characters arrested. The arrest, however, is a ruse – the lord is actually sympathetic to Strum Malak, and wants to know what the player character's connection with Stahlheim is. He explains that he is part of a rival faction that is trying to clean up the Dominion and work against the rampant necromancy of the House of Malak, but they need control over the Stahlheim mines to do so.

Chapter VI: Eventually, the players have to choose between Strum Malak's faction or the dwarves of Stahlheim. Someone's not going to be happy with their decision, no matter what it is.

DENIZENS

This section deals with the kinds of folks characters may encounter and tangle with in the Dominion. Specific write-ups for named individuals are not presented, mainly because most of these beings serve a plot purpose over a combative one. Where needed, however, GMs can simply use stats below or from the core books and modify to their taste.

As with all *Shaintar* Denizen write-ups, no distinction is made for Wild Cards; each write up can serve as an Extra or Wild Card as needed.

For many of those who might be encountered in the Dominion, the core *Shaintar* books already have excellent write-ups to use. Look to the *Criminals* for most urban encounters, while the *Kalinesh* section will provide excellent stats for most soldiers and mercenaries in the Dominion. Acolytes serve for Priests of Ceynara and the Court of Glory, while Necromancers will function as Priests of Vainar and the Sublime Host.

KEOWLIN ADVISER

Effectively property of the House or Faction who purchased their services, Keowlin Academy graduates are nonetheless very well-treated and tend to live lives of luxury and security. That is, unless they fail to serve their masters well and effectively; in such instances, their lives can become very difficult indeed. They are moderately capable in combat, but their main function is to provide their masters with excellent information and advice.

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Healing d8, Knowledge (Battle) d8, Knowledge (Commerce) d8+2, Knowledge (Cosmology) d6, Knowledge (History) d8, Knowledge (Magic) d8, Knowledge (Politics) d10+2, Notice d10+2, Stealth d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7 (1); **Toughness:** 6

Edges: Alchemist, Alertness, Jack-of-all-Trades, Keowlin Academy Graduate, Level Headed, Martial Artist, Scholar

Gear: Dagger (Str+d4), Bracers (+1 Parry), one or two potions of each Power listed.

Known Formulae: *Armor, Blast, Boost Trait, Greater Healing, Healing*

Essence: 10

REMUNERATION CONSORT

Seduction to create compromising circumstances is the stock-in-trade of a consort in service to the Remuneration faction. Manipulation and extraction of secrets is their primary goal, though they certainly earn a great deal of coin for the base activities they offer, as well.

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

Skills: Climbing d6 (+2), Fighting d6, Knowledge (Politics) d6, Lockpicking d6 (+2), Notice d8, Persuasion d10 (+4), Stealth d8 (+2), Streetwise d8 (+4), Taunt d8, The Way d8, Throwing d8

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

Edges: Acrobat, Adept, Attractive, Backstab, Dreamdancer, Linguist, Thief, Very Attractive

Gear: Dagger (Str+d4), Bracers (+1 Parry), Nazatiran Throwing Spikes (Str+d4, AP 1,4/8/16), Focus Crystal

Powers: *Deflection, Mind Reading, Puppet, Telepathy*

Essence: 10

SCHOZIM AGENT

Surviving an encounter with a Schozim Agent usually requires seeing them coming, which is rare. The only comfort to the knowledge of their very existence is the rarity with which they are used. Anyone causing the Chamber of Dominion significant annoyance, however, may discover the danger of the Schozim... entirely too late.

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

Skills: Climbing d6 (+2), Fighting d10, Lockpicking d8 (+2), Notice d8, Stealth d12+4 (d10 Wild Die), Shooting d10, Survival d4, Throwing d8, Tracking d8

Pace: 8 (d10 "Run"); **Parry:** 8 (1); **Toughness:** 9 (3)

Edges: Acrobat, Ambidexterity, Dirty Fighter, Extraction, Fleet-Footed, Improved First Strike, Quick, Marksman, Opportunity Strike, Schozim, Tricky Fighter, Two-Fisted

Gear: Two Enchanted Short Swords (Str+d6+1, +1 Fighting; one is Black Iron, the other Blood Steel), Nazatiran Throwing Spikes (Str+d4, AP 1,4/8/16), Bow (2d6, 12/24/48), Full Shayakar Night Chain Armor (+3 Armor, -4 Coverage; +2 on Stealth rolls at night), Bracers (+1 Parry), Poison (Lethal, usable on blades, spikes, or arrows), Pointer



