

HELLFROST LAND OF FIRE

• REALM GUIDE #20 •

THE CALIPHATE OF AL-SHIRKUH

Introduction

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To the Faithful, the Caliphate of Al-Shirkuh is the promised land, a place where they can worship their gods freely, as Suleiman desired. It was to have been a theocracy, governed by clerics for the betterment of all. In reality the position of Caliph has become a civil office in all but name, the emirs who rule the cities are rarely clerics, and the Caliphate is a political entity rather than a religious one. Still, there are men and women of great faith who strive to make the world a better place. Yet equally there are men and women who use their faith for personal gain.

The first part covers the Caliphate as a whole, and details only general facts or areas of interest not within the boundaries of one of the eight great cities. Each great city has its own unique section, providing specific information to that territory. This supplement expands on material found in *Hellfrost: Land of Fire*.

WHERE DO ALL THE PEOPLE LIVE?

The population of the eight great cities and the territories they control accounts for 31% of the total population. With nomads numbering a further 8%, that leaves just under two million souls unaccounted for. The great majority live in villages and towns along the great rivers and coasts, with smaller pockets clustered around wells, springs, and oases in what city-dwellers ignorantly refer to as the “wilderness.”

Geography

Natives often refer to their homeland as being divided into an Eastern and Western Caliphate. Though commonly mentioned in daily speech, these are not true political or geological divisions. The imaginary divide is the Road of Gods, which begins in Marresh, City of a Thousands Gods, and runs north through Hajjad, City of the Gods, and the capital before entering the Jinn Lands of Old.

The eastern half of the Caliphate is more rugged. Around half the region comprises the lower portion of the Pillars of Suleiman and their foothills. Further south, the land is divided by geography, this time into three parts. Between the Rivers Shalak and Syrah the ground is exceptionally marshy. While the rivers have been given different names, they are actually both part of the Syrah—the ground between them is a silt-formed delta broken

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the whole of the Caliphate of Al-Shirkuh unless superseded elsewhere.

* **Clerics & Noble Titles:** A character with the Arcane Background (Miracles) Edge cannot hold a noble title except those of honor nobles (see below).

* **Honor Nobles:** A hero who wants to be an honor noble begins play as a pasha. He has to take the Noble Edge. He does not gain the Rich Edge, nor does he have any land or people to manage.

* **Religion:** Though the Caliphate is primarily Faithful, characters are free to pick their faith. Those who chose to be Devoted may be recent settlers or going against family tradition.

* **Temperature:** The temperature in Alak Paret is Warm along the coast (and for 25-30 miles inland), and Hot in the wilderness. At night, the temperature in the coastal cities drops 1d2-1 levels.

* **Transport Hub:** Save for Hajjad and Hufrah, the great cities are major coastal ports. Characters who make a successful Streetwise roll can locate a ship departing for one of the other major southern coastal cities in the next 1d6 days. On a raise, the ship is leaving in half that time. With a suitable bribe (200 dinars per point of the ship's Toughness), the ship can be made ready to sail on the next tide (assume the next morning or evening for ease).

Caravans take much longer to assemble. A successful Streetwise roll locates one ready to depart in 2d8 days, or 1d8 days on a raise.

Hiring a ship costs 50 dinars per point of Toughness per week or part thereof if the captain is allowed to trade on the voyage, or 200 dinars per point of Toughness per week or part thereof if not. Allowing the captain to conduct trade is cheaper, but it trebles the journey time unless the characters are heading to the next port anyway.

by narrow channels. On either side are flat, sandy plains that pay little heed to lines on maps or in the minds of men. Conversely, the western side encompasses very little of the Desert Wall Mountains, and actually stops just north of the foothills. As a result, much of the terrain is flat, sandy, and arid. As one early geographer put it, "The gods are varied in their majesty, but the land they created is not."

Greenery of any note is most commonly found along the coastal belt, bordering the mighty rivers, and in the Syrah Delta. As a general rule of thumb, the closer one is to the sea, the wider and more fertile the surrounding land. Since the rivers are the source of life in the desert, it follows that their banks are densely populated. The highlands are well watered by moist air blowing in from the ocean. The rains, though failing more often and falling with less intensity when they come, feed the great rivers. Rainfall is more common in the east thanks to the

higher peaks of the Pillars. Both halves have numerous *wadis* (river channels) that are dry until the rainy season, when they turn into short lived torrents of water.

Social Hierarchy

The position of Caliph is a strange one. Though flesh and blood, he is the Lord High Priest of Shamash, and has always been seen as the god's spokesman in the mortal realm. Since Shamash is the chief of the gods, the Caliph speaks for the pantheon as a whole (save Iblis, naturally). Thus, his authority is not only political and spiritual, it is also deemed infallible. In reality, of course, the Caliphs have proven just as prone to errors as any man. Despite his title of Lord High Priest of Shamash, the Caliph may honor any deity he wishes as his patron, save for Iblis.

That the emirs rule the cities largely without interference is not the result of political machinations or grabs for power. As an agent of Shamash, the Caliph technically retains the right to impose or veto local laws on any settlement he chooses, though that authority is rarely used on the cities—decreeing a law and enforcing it are two very different things, and few Caliphs have had the stomach to start a civil war. Where his authority is unquestioned is on matters of religious law—failing to adopt such laws quickly leads to cries of heresy levelled against an emir.

Since he is infallible, the Caliph largely has a free hand in appointing his heir. The only hard rule is that the heir must be Faithful and his position must be agreed by the actual high priest of Shamash (a true cleric). The latter possesses the power of veto, but it is an unwise cleric who defies his lord. Most often the title is passed to the eldest child, but it has been known to skip children and generations. When there is no appointed heir, the new Caliph is chosen by a council made up of every high priest in the land. Until the conclave convenes and a new heir is named, the high priest of Shamash in Hajjad governs as regent. The gods have truly blessed the Caliphs, for the line has been unbroken for over five centuries.

The Caliph's children carry the titles prince and princess, as do their children's children, and so on. The title remains only so long as the incumbent Caliph is a member of their family. Once the Caliphate passes outside the control of their family, these titles are forfeited.

Next in terms of power are the emirs, the rulers of the great cities. Their positions are entirely temporal, though no law prevents an emir from also being a cleric. All told, the emirs directly govern close to 600,000 citizens, or 19% of the total population. Everyone else is answerable to the Caliph. The Caliph, the emirs, and their children (regardless of titles) form the *muk-battim* social class.

In theory, the next social class moving down the ladder is that of the *battim*, or lesser nobles. Their children are always effendis. Those who use it after their given name are honor nobles, and are numbered among the *mak-shabrum*. Thus, Pasha Ahmed is a true noble, while Ahmed Pasha is not. The latter titles are not hereditary,

and the children of such those bestowed the honor carry no official title. Only the Caliph or the emirs may appoint honor nobles. Honor titles are normally awarded for long military, religious, or bureaucratic service, reaching a certain rank, or for performing special favors.

It is a rare high priest of a major temple who is not offered an honor title. Whether or not he accepts is personal choice. For every cleric who accepts, there is one who turns down the honor. Many of the latter do so in order not to be distracted from their religious calling.

When a person joins a cult, he renounces all ties to his old family—from here on, his life is dedicated to serving his deity. As a result, the scions of noble houses are not permitted to inherit titles, land, and so on. Despite this, many second and third children are urged to join the cults, ensuring noble families have allies in the faiths.

Traditionally, all ordained clerics (except those of Iblis) are members of the *shabrum* social class. Novitiates rank among the *jaleepa* until their spiritual training is complete. As noted above, some high priests carry honor titles, and thus a higher social class. Those who do not are *mak-shabrum*.

Education

Schooling in the Caliphate is broken into basic and advanced education. Basic education is compulsory until the age of 12, though classes are put on hold during harvest season and picked up again in summer. In cities and towns, tutors are clerics of Qedeshet. When there are no specific temples to Qedeshet, another temple is used. In many villages, basic education is carried out by whatever cult is dominant. In farming villages, for instance, clerics of Ashtart adopt the role as mentors to the young.

Children learn basic literacy and numeracy, and the history, laws, and customs of their home city. Storytelling is a familial activity, and from this children learn folklore. Despite worshipping the gods, young children receive only a rudimentary religious education. They learn the names of the major and minor gods and their aspects, but no more. More specific instruction is reserved for novitiates and those taking advanced education.

Advanced education is carried out at temples of Qedeshet or secular buildings (usually still owned and operated by the cult). Only the great cities have the resident population and priesthood necessary to support these centers of higher learning. Regardless of their size or focus, these institutions are known as universities. Universities cover topics such as geography, world history, religious lore covering all the cults and the Devoted creed, military tactics and strategy, the laws of the various lands, foreign languages, storytelling, and astronomy. More on universities and how they can be utilized by characters during play can be found in *Realm Guide #19*.

Although universities are run by the cult of Qedeshet, tutors are not exclusive to the cult—the god may be the patron of knowledge and wisdom, but his followers ac-

cept that they are not as wise in certain matters as others. A university that teaches herbalism, for instance, has tutors who are clerics of Ashtart. One specializing in medicine and anatomy would call upon clerics of Marqod.

Typically, player characters cannot pick up most Knowledge skills without some form of advanced education or extensive travelling. Either way, it has taken them time. For each die in an arcane or Knowledge skill, a character should be one year older than the typical starting age (around 16, the age of adulthood).

Religion

The wars of religion that wracked the Caliphate and Sultanate have not been forgotten, but they have been forgiven. While there are still a minority of Faithful who think of Devoted as heretics, most refuse to put their voice behind such claims. For all its faults, the Devoted creed does promote good deeds and thoughts over evil ones, and in that regard they are on the good side of Maat. Furthermore, its core teachings do not openly deny the existence of the gods, though their denial that priests are required does border on blasphemous at times.

Maat

Despite centuries of warfare and vehement claims that the two rival creeds of Al-Shirkuh have little in common, they actually share a major tenet—the belief that good and bad deeds directly affect not only the soul, but the entire universe.

Maat is often simplified by laity as a struggle between good and evil; those learned in the deeper philosophies know it is far more wide-ranging. “Good” implies truth, order, law, morality, and justice, while “evil” covers falsehood, chaos, tyranny, immorality, and injustice. What constitutes these activities is subject to slight differences in interpretation by the various cults, as represented by the deity’s list of prohibited sins. On top of these, adherence to the laws of the land and universal constants is also applied.

Although the God War technically ended in a draw, the struggle continues. On the side of good are the majority of major gods. Only Iblis stands on the side of evil, but such is his strength that even alone he can prevent his peers from applying harmony to the universe. Strangely, Iblis does not seek total dominance, not the total implementation of universal chaos. Evil he might be, but he is not stupid. His focus is not winning the war himself, for what evil could he possibly commit in a universe where good did not exist? He desires only that his enemies do not win the contest.

In one heretical text, the *Book of Hidden Truth*, Iblis is described not as a force for evil, but merely as a force for change. Thus, he should be accepted into the greater pantheon and offered prayers. The text continues by claiming that if the other gods achieved victory, they would impose such order that the only possible

CLERIC HIERARCHY

Priests and paladins hold a position in the hierarchy of their cult and are expected to obey the commands of their superiors.

* **High Priest:** A high priest is usually in charge of a temple. Among major cults that have no true temples, such as Duamutef and Upuaut, the title is honorific, awarded to any cleric of advanced years and/or experience by his peers as a mark of respect. Traditionally, nomads grant this status to the eldest clerics of Duamutef and/or Upuaut in the tribe, regardless of their actual age. Minor deities rarely have temples dedicated solely to them. The title still applies, though, as temples of associated major deities have shrines.

The position is as much temporal as it is spiritual. High priests are elected by resident disciples and clerics, or directly appointed by a superior in instances where a larger temple governs a subordinate one. Though many temples are run by priests, the title applies equally to paladins.

Although there is only one title, there are four distinct tiers. These are described below in descending order. Things work differently in the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes. Here the sphinxes are high priests and temples within one domain hold no allegiance to those in other domains.

* The high priests of the great temples of Hajjad.

* The high priests of the temples in the other great cities (including those in the Al-Wazir Sultanate and Free Emirate States).

* The high priests of temples in towns and villages.

* High priests in charge of a shrine. Except when a minor deity has a dedicated temple, high priests of the cult are of this tier.

Requirements: GM's discretion, but Faith d8+, Knowledge (Religion) d8+, and Persuasion d8+ as a benchmark.

* **Disciple:** This title is carried by any priest or paladin who has proven his devotion to his god.

Requirements: Automatic when a character takes the Disciple Edge.

* **Cleric:** The bulk of any cult are its fully ordained priests and paladins. Unless they have the Novitiate Hindrance, all player characters begin at this level.

Requirements: Automatic for any starting character with Arcane Background (Miracles) unless he has the Novitiate Hindrance.

* **Novitiate:** Clerics in training are known as novitiates. They have taken holy vows (and thus have the Arcane Background (Miracles) Edge and are subject to sins), but are not yet ordained. Regardless of their knowledge about the god's tenets, they are not permitted to lead rituals and ceremonies unsupervised.

Requirements: Automatic for any starting character with the Novitiate Hindrance. To achieve promotion, the character must undertake and pass a final assessment (as determined by the Gamemaster).

outcome was universal stagnation. That, the anonymous author concluded, was akin to a form of slavery, for there could be no free will less it upset the harmony.

Places of Worship

Worship of one's patron deity is at the heart of daily life in the Caliphate. Where one worships is largely unimportant, but it is worth describing the main centers used for prayer.

ANYWHERE

When it comes to places of worship, Faithful have a saying—temples are better than shrines, shrines are better than nowhere, but anywhere will do.

Worshippers, even clerics, are under no compulsion to offer daily prayers on holy ground. This is especially true of itinerant clergy, who may be many hundreds of miles from the nearest sanctified ground. Most citizens don't bother attending temple every day, even if one is available locally. Few temples can house every worshipper in the local vicinity, anyway.

For most, prayers are offered at home or work. Usually there is a small shrine containing a statuette or holy symbol at which routine prayers can be offered. Such shrines are considered holy only for the purposes of desecration laws.

SHRINES

Shrines are one step below temples. They can take many forms—anything from a statue to a living sacred animal to an indentation in the ground said to have been made by the god in question can serve as a shrine. Shrines are holy ground, as is a small amount of space surrounding them (typically no more than 20 feet radius for shrines that are not in buildings). In many small communities shrines are the center of worship.

Many shrines do not have resident clergy. On important holy days, one is assigned to visit by the nearest temple so that the ceremony may be carried out. Larger shrines, or those considered important enough to attract pilgrims, may boast a handful of permanent clergy.

TEMPLES

The most important places of worship are temples. Temples are categorized as minor or major, depending on their size. Size is determined by several factors, most notably the number of worshippers in the local vicinity, the temple's annual income, and the number of permanently resident clergy. In reality, it is the former that is most important, for large numbers of worshippers typically lead to the latter two.

Since the creation of the Faithful creed, temples and wealth have gone hand in hand. This was one of many factors that lead to the war between Devoted and

Faithful, for in the eyes of the Devoted the temples were avaricious and more interested in temporal power than spiritual provision. To Faithful, temples require wealth in order that they may fulfill their function—carrying out the gods' will in the mortal realm. The largest temples have hundreds of staff, of which only a tiny minority are ordained clergy.

Temples rely on various sources of income to provide wages for the clergy, fund good works, perform powerful rituals, and maintain buildings. Many temples are centers of business, producing goods or offering services. Large temples often own agricultural land or mines. Most of these resources are bequeathed by nobles in return for daily prayers for their soul in life and after death, though the most important temples were granted resources by Caliphs to curry favor, show his support of all faiths, and display his largesse.

Although temples in Devoted-dominated lands are usually small affairs, in the Caliphate they are majestic structures, true symbols of the gods' power and the fidelity of their mortal worshippers. Regardless of size, those built on the surface follow a roughly similar layout (there are exceptions).

Surrounding the site is a high wall of brick or stone. Everything within the compound is considered part of the greater temple, though it is not sanctified ground. Much of the space is given over to temporal activities, such as accommodation, workshops, storerooms, stables, and the like. The greater area is properly known as the temple precinct. Faithful rarely use this term, as the context of a conversation usually makes it clear whether the word "temple" means the precinct or the sacred building in which ceremonies are conducted.

The temple proper sits in the center of the compound. Often rectangular in design, the entrance is marked by pylon gates. Beyond, one is lead through a processional way of open courtyards and colonnaded halls. Although everything inside the gates is sacred ground, the deeper in one moves, the more holy the ground becomes. Regardless of size, each temple has five inner areas. The outermost area is as far as laity and non-believers may pass. It is here clerics conduct common rituals and speak with visitors. The second area is as far as novitiates, may enter. Only fully ordained clerics may enter the third area, while the fourth area is restricted to all but disciples and high priests.

The fifth area, the holy of holies, is the most sacred part of the temple, for it is here the god dwells. The spiritual focus of the temple resides in the holy of holies. Often it is a statue of the god, though in some temples it is a small box (an ark), which contains holy texts.

Only the local high priest or the Caliph may enter the holy of holies freely. Others may enter with the permission of the local high priest. Such permission is awarded to any visiting high priest or senior clerics on high holy days as a formality.

While temples regularly operate as businesses, Faithful do not see them as merely centers of cult activity, nor as symbols of their god's power. In their eyes, a temple is literally a house of the god, and the god resides there.

Prayers

Unlike with the Devoted creed, the time of day when prayers are said and the number of times prayers are said is largely a personal choice. Such activity depends more on the time the worshipper has to spare, though any Faithful is likely to find time for at least one prayer a day. There are certain exceptions, though these are based on the deity in question. For instance, followers of Shamash prefer sunrise, noon, and sunset.

While worshippers are free to make request of the deity through prayer as and when they feel fit, there are specific liturgies that have been passed down for centuries. Typically, a worshipper will utter one or more of these before making any personal request to the deity.

When in a temple, worshippers always face the holy of holies when praying. Since the sacred spot is always at the back of the temple, this means facing toward the interior. At shrines, prayers are spoken facing the venerated object. When neither is available, personal choice plays a large part. Again, there are certain expectations. A follower of Shamash will always face the sun during the day, regardless of the compass direction. A worshipper of Apsu will pray toward water whenever he can, even if that means praying before a waterskin. When in doubt, it is always considered acceptable to face east, toward the house of Shamash.

Magic

Devoted see little difference between magic and miracles. A Devoted magician needs no external force on which to focus his will, whereas a Faithful cleric requires belief in a god to give him the will to invoke a miracle, but otherwise the two achieve the same result. Faithful see things differently.

Miracles are bestowed by the gods to their most faithful followers, those who have accepted the deity into their body, heart, and soul. In return for these powers, clerics are expected to stick to the deity's teachings and avoid breaking divine laws. This doesn't mean that all miracles are only ever cast for purely benevolent reasons, though. Iblis's minions aside, clerics are mortals, and mortals are prone to weakness and temptation.

Attempts to link magic with the gods have long failed to hold up to philosophical and theological scrutiny. For instance, it was once thought that mages were clerics of Ishkar, goddess of magic, or perhaps even other gods, but did not realize it. Since they did not follow the goddess' teachings, it meant they were all surely consigned to the Bottomless Pit on their deaths.

This gave rise to questions no one could answer with any authority. Why was it mages never lost their spells by sinning? Why would the gods grant them such powers if their fate was so cruel? Some clerics argued that acceptance of the gods in life would save mages from the Bottomless Pit, but it was an answer few were comfortable with. After all, the gods could not grant free will with one

FUNERALS

Death does not care about creed, race, gender, status, wealth, or fame. Sooner or later, all mortals will feel its icy hand on the hearts.

Funerals are especially important to Faithful. The level of preservation bestowed on their mortal remains, the security of its tomb, and the grave goods placed in the grave all have a direct impact in the Afterlife, as noted in the main text.

Grave goods are especially important, for the gods provide nothing to those who have entered their realms. For the poor, this usually means just a simple bowl and cup, and maybe a favored tool or weapon for a craftsman or soldier respectively. For nobles, grave goods are far more extensive, and include common items like game sets, furniture, and weapons. These funerary objects are as elaborate as those used by the living, as befits the deceased's status, and can easily run to many thousands of dinars.

Devoted funerals, by comparison, are simple affairs. Preservation of the corpse is anathema to the belief that the flesh is naturally corrupt and that only the spirit is eternal, and grave goods are meaningless to the soul, which wants for nothing.

COST

Devoted or Faithful, funerals cost money. For the former, it represents the cost of firewood, paying storytellers to recount the deceased's story so that his deeds are not forgotten, and the feast held after the ashes blow away. For Faithful it represents the construction of a tomb, the quality of preservation of the corpse, and the quantity and quality of grave goods.

The deeds a character performed in life affect his Glory, which in turn affects how many Experience Points the player's next character begins with. The extravagance of a funeral is the last method of earning Glory, though the character who just passed away has little say in how his friends and family treat his corpse.

The cost of a funeral is detailed below, along with the Glory the deceased earns posthumously. The table is intended for heroes—most common citizens lack the money for anything other than a simple funeral.

Funeral	Cost (d)	Glory
Rudimentary	10	-5
Simple	100	+0
Generous	1,000	+5
Rich	10,000	+10
Extravagant	50,000	+20
Kingly	250,000+	+40

hand and then demand obedience by tempting mortals with gifts with the other. Likewise, why did ordained clergy have to obey the rules when mages did not?

Since magic still cannot be easily explained by Faithful, most mages are still treated with a great deal of suspicion. That most often manifests in them being treated as a low social class—most citizens tend to ignore them.

Fate

Tamarni may be the goddess of fortune, both good and bad, but she is not the mistress of fate. In accordance with the peace treaty that marked the end of the God War, it was declared that mortals would have free will in their thoughts and deeds. The gods could guide them through holy doctrine, but they could not shape their future to a preset conclusion. The only law written in stone was that all mortals would receive a finite existence. No specific limit was set, but aging of flesh ensured that death would eventually claim them.

As well as affecting one's soul, and thus determining whether one proceeds to a blessed afterlife or an eternity of damnation, one's actions in the mortal world fuel the cosmic struggle. Too much evil tips the balance in favor of Iblis, making it more likely that misfortune will occur in the world. Conversely, the more one's deeds are toward good behavior, so fortune will flow into the world, making it a happier place.

Fate is merely fortune and misfortune made manifest. Since the gods have not predetermined any destiny for mortals, they are not to blame for the ills of the world. Indeed, that lies very much at the feet of mortals. In order that fortune may occur more often, it is in everyone's interests to act on the side of good.

Devoted & the Caliphate

Since the dawn of the new age of understanding and cooperation, Devoted have been permitted to erect kadas in the Caliphate. Such structures are rarely large—they are places of learning, meditation, and mediation, not places of worship in the same vein as temples.

Since kadas operate as schools, they are considered businesses as well as sacred places. In that regard they must pay taxes (temples are charged taxes, as well). The returns are pitifully small—kadas do not charge for education, own resources, or run actual businesses.

Nature of the Soul

Although Faithful speak of the soul or spirit in the singular, it is actually made up of three distinct parts.

The first part is the *ka*, or divine essence. Also known as the "breath of the gods," this portion is what gives a mortal life. On death, the spark returns to the universe, separating itself from the other parts of the soul. The *ka*

not no identity or memories, no concept of good or evil, and cannot be harmed or destroyed.

The second part is the *ib*, or heart. The *ib* is the memory store of one's sins in life. This belief is often used to describe a mortal. For instance, a man renowned for charitable deeds may be said to have a good heart, while a sinner has a black heart, implying it is corrupted or diseased. It is the *ib* that is weighed before one may enter the Afterlife. The *ib* is sundered into its good and evil portions, and these are weighed against each other.

Regardless of whether one is found innocent or guilty of being sinful, the *ib* is destroyed after judgment. The deceased is no longer capable of changing its nature. A sinner will forever be tainted with sin, while the pure are incapable of taking sinful actions.

The final part is the *ren*, or name. The *ren* is a mortal's spiritual shadow, and it is this which ventures to the Afterlife or to the Bottomless Pit. It takes his physical form, and has his memories. When Faithful speak of the soul, they are normally referring to the *ren*.

The Afterlife

In the same way that mortal life is fleeting, so the Afterlife is not forever.

As noted in *Land of Fire*, souls are not eternal. Their existence continues only so long as the corpse they once inhabited exists. Once the last bones naturally crumble to dust, the spirit joins with the deity, losing its unique identity and memories. For this reason, *gravespeak* cast by a cleric requires part of the corpse in order to speak with a departed Faithful. This second death is rarely mourned—by the time it occurs the soul's unique name has long been forgotten by its living relatives (even natural dessication, the method favored by peasants, can keep a corpse intact for many thousands of years). While its memory and personality are no more, the soul is not erased from existence. Rather, it passes to a higher state of existence beyond mortal comprehension.

Deliberately damaging a Faithful's corpse directly affects his soul, though in a lesser way. Hack off a corpse's arm, for instance, and the soul's arm will become weaker (but not severed). Since the body cannot heal, the injury is permanent. Such acts do not cause the soul pain, nor is it possible to kill a soul by such means as it would be a mortal—only total destruction of its corpse can do that. Here there is a difference in the nature of the soul. If the corpse is destroyed by violent means, then the spirit is wiped from existence rather than joining with the god. Harming a corpse (accidentally or otherwise) is seen as a worse crime than harming a living person.

To help prevent this untimely erasure from existence, richer citizens are buried with a life-size stone statue carved in their likeness. During the funeral rites, the link between mortal remains and soul is extended to the more durable statue as well, providing a double safeguard. For the purposes of *gravespeak*, the statue counts as part of the deceased's mortal remains.

Souls also need nourishment. This is not provided in the Afterlife. Since few families can afford to supply ritual food and drink on a regular basis, corpses are given amulets inscribed with standard prayers that provide this service for eternity. Such amulets are available from the cult of Tammuz, and are very cheap. Grave goods are optional, but only objects buried with the corpse are available to the soul in the Afterlife.

Military

Protecting the Caliphate falls primarily to the Caliph, though the emirs play a vital role. As well as garrisoning a fraction of the Caliph's grand army, every emir maintains a standing army and navy, over which he has complete jurisdiction. This requirement, enshrined in law, helps the Caliph to spread the cost of defending the nation. There is no maximum size for the emirs' forces, but there is a strict minimum—1% of the population under the emir's direct authority.

There is always a risk that an emir might get ideas above his station and seek to carve out an independent nation. Fortunately, the Caliph holds a potent trump card—his status as Shamash's spokesman. The emirs may wield great temporal power, but their people would quickly rise up in arms against them if threatened with eternal damnation for warring against the Caliph.

To ensure the emirs send troops to defend the Caliphate, the Caliphs call for a religious crusade to fend off any invasion. Since this makes the war a religious matter, the emirs rarely choose to ignore the call to arms. Few send more than half their army, though—only a fool places all his goods on one camel.

All lesser nobles (sirdars and below) have the right to maintain a professional army, as do the cults of the major and minor benevolent deities. Armies are not cheap to maintain, which places a natural limit on their size and prevents the nobles at least from ever becoming a serious threat to the *status quo*.

By law, the armies of lesser nobles are ultimately answerable to an emir if within their territory, and the Caliph otherwise. They are expected to provide troops when ordered. The temple armies answer only to the local high priest, the high priest of the cult, and the Caliph, not the emirs or other nobles—they cannot be compelled to muster, only asked. While the officers and elite troops of any temple's military are its paladins, the bulk of the strength is made up of *fadeen*, devout laity who serve alongside the paladins in an official capacity.

In addition to any professional army, every settlement has both a militia and a peasant levy. The militia is a part-time military force made up of volunteers. Members serve alongside the professional army for a few weeks a year (usually in summer), and in return are granted some form of concession (such as lower taxes or the right to bear arms at other times). In small towns and villages the militia might be the only military force of any note.

MILITARY UNITS OF THE CALIPHATE

INFANTRY

Name	Sandspeech Name	Personnel	Commanded By
Azam	Squad	16	Sergeant
Askar	Company	176	Captain
Naffah	Regiment	1936	Commander

ARCHERS & CAVALRY

Name	Sandspeech Name	Personnel	Commanded By
Azam	Squad	8	Sergeant
Askar	Company	88	Captain
Naffah	Battalion	968	Commander

The levy is made up of ordinary citizens. It is mustered only in times of great need as it takes workers from the fields and other industries. Service is neither optional nor voluntary, nor is it rewarded in any manner—it is one's civil and religious duty to serve when summoned. What they lack in skill and equipment (they are issued short spears, but no armor or shields) the levy makes up for in numbers. Still, only a fool relies on the levy—few ordinary citizens have the stomach for war, no matter the cause or the rewards awaiting them in the Afterlife.

INFANTRY AND CAVALRY

Like the Sultanate, the Caliphate has built its army around a squad based on Suleiman's bodyguard. Each squad comprises either 16 infantrymen (light, medium, or heavy), 8 archers or other missile troops (bows, crossbows, javelins, or slings), or 8 cavalymen (light or heavy). Each squad is named after one of the 11 benevolent deities and led by a sergeant.

Eleven squads form a full company, which is commanded by a captain. Again, they bear the name of one of the 11 good gods. Eleven full companies form a full regiment. Regiments are led by a commander, and are named after that officer. Thus, while lesser units always retain the same name, those of regiments change periodically. Ranks are prefixed with "Infantry," "Archer," or "Cavalry," as applicable.

The Company of Shamash is the senior company in any regiment. Within that company the Squad of Shamash is the most senior. This makes it the most senior squad in a regiment). As a sign of its status, it carries the regimental or company banner, as appropriate. Membership is reserved for veterans, though what classifies as a veteran depends on how much action the unit has seen. In regiments that have had few engagements, years of service replaces battlefield experience.

As with any army, these numbers are ideals, not absolutes. This is especially true of the armies of lesser nobles and the cults, which often struggle to get anywhere near full strength. Regardless of whether an army is under or

over strength, there can only be a maximum of 11 squads to a company and 11 companies to a regiment. For instance, the army of a pasha might contain only five squads. It is still referred to as a company and its commander holds the rank of captain.

Clerics (especially paladins) are welcome to join an army, but few outside the cult of Karmelos chose to do so on a full-time basis. As holy men beholden to their god before any mortal ruler (save the Caliph), they have other duties to perform.

Although the Caliphate has always been Faithful and the Caliph the spokesman of Shamash, a strict separation of cults and state with regard to the military has existed since its foundation. Devoted native to the Caliphate, even mages, have always been entitled to enlist in the secular armies. Like any soldiers,

Devoted must swear allegiance to the local ruler and abide by the military law of the Caliphate.

NAVY

Every city, even landlocked Hajjad, City of the Gods, maintains a navy. Naturally, Hajjad's navy is not berthed in the city—it's home port is Marresh.

Individual vessels are commanded by a Sea Captain, and named after one of the benevolent gods. In large fleets, where the name of an individual deity may be used more than once, other words are added to distinguish between vessels. For instance, Glory of Upuaut, Storm of Upuaut, and Barque of Upuaut (the latter being a reference to his celestial ship).

When ships gather to form a fleet, the senior captain is awarded the honorific rank of Sea Commander. Regardless of whether a city boasts a single ship or many dozens, the officer in overall command is an admiral.

Law & Order

Law and order are the backbone of a civilized society. Just laws exist to protect the general populace, not punish them. In the Caliphate law and order is divided between the cults of Shamash and Tammuz. While any noble can create a law, their authority extends only to the territory they control. The emirs may ignore laws that affect the rest of the Caliphate, unless they are religious decrees. Despite holding this power, any changes to the laws must be sanctioned by the local cult of Shamash through the Law Day ceremony. Thus, political leaders are kept in check by religious authorities.

The laws are, in theory at least, applied equally to all members of society, regardless of the social status, profession, loyalties, or fame. Ignorance does not exempt one from obeying both the laws of the land and the local laws of the great cities.

The Watch

Responsibility for maintaining law and order within a town or city falls to the watch. While the watch is a civil body, answerable to the local noble and separate from the military, tradition demands the commander of the local watch is a follower of Shamash. Ideally a cleric should be appointed, but there is no strict requirement for this.

The cult of Shamash has the legal and spiritual authority to act as a second branch of the watch. They fall under the jurisdiction of the local high priest, not the nobility. Despite this, they have the same powers to enforce the law as their secular brethren.

Secular watchmen have no jurisdiction inside a temple, its greater compound, or buildings legally owned by a cult. Ensuring law and order prevails is the responsibility of the cult's clerics. Indeed, the secular watch has no authority to enter such premises in the course of their duties, even if the criminal they hunt is a cleric. Entrance is granted solely at the permission of the resident high priest. The cult of Shamash, however, is under no such restriction.

The Courts

Whereas upholding the law falls to secular authorities and the cult of Shamash, judging breeches of the law lies in the hands of the cult of Tammuz, god of justice.

While there is only one book of law and one court, crimes are broken down into civil, criminal, military, and religious, as laid down by Suleiman. Cases are always heard by just a single judge. Exceptions exist, especially among the nomadic tribes, but within any town or city judges are usually priests of Tammuz. Lesser crimes can be handled by any level of priest (even one in training), whereas serious crimes require the presence of a senior judge—an experienced priest.

In communities might lacking a resident cleric of the god of justice, the role of judge is handled by a magistrate. A lay worshipper of Tammuz (or more rarely Shamash) and versed in the law, he has the legal authority to judge lesser crimes. To ensure justice is carried out in accordance with the law without bias, magistrates must keep accurate records of trials.

Checking the records and judging greater crimes is handled by itinerant clerics of Tammuz. Each is responsible for a set number of communities arranged in a circular pattern. These are known as circuits. The clerics (a senior priest and a paladin of any experience level are always teamed together so that judgment and execution might be carried out swiftly) spend their days walking their circuit and judging crimes as called upon. As an added service they also oversee funerals and recite prayers for those departed since their last visit.

While most citizens understand what actions constitute a crime, few possess knowledge of how the courts work. A defendant has the right to an advocate to speak on his behalf. Anyone who has an understanding of the

law may serve in this role. Clerics of Tammuz are preferred, but their services are not free.

Defendants awaiting trial are held in jail, though influential citizens might be granted house arrest.

Civil: Tax and duty evasion, falling into debt, breaches of contract, fraud, libel, and failing to carry out a produce a license (when such applies) is a matter of civil law. Such crimes are rarely handled by a three-judge panel.

Typical punishments include fines, flogging, and confiscation of goods. If a fine is not paid within one month, the guilty party is automatically sentenced to slavery until the debt is worked off.

Criminal: Acts of arson, assault, murder, rape, and theft are matters of criminal law. Sentences include flogging, dismemberment, slavery, and death. Failure to obey a lawful order given by an on-duty member of the watch falls into this category as well, though the sentence is rarely more than flogging.

Military: Soldiers, militiamen on duty, and members of the secular watch are subject to additional laws covering failure to carry out an order, negligence in carrying out a duty, desertion, cowardice in the face of the enemy, and mutiny. Flogging, slavery, and death are the three punishments the court may impose.

Religious: During the religious wars, crimes committed against Devoted and their places of worship were often ignored. These days, the laws governing blasphemy, desecration, heresy, and sacrilege apply to both creeds equally. The laws of Shamash apply within the Caliphate. Devoted defendant's have no right to be tried by an imam, but they may appoint one as an advocate.

A religious crime is a crime against the gods, and thus extremely severe. Minor instances of blasphemy may result in heavy fines (typically half a year's income) being paid to the cult concerned, but most of those found guilty face execution. Failure to pay the fine within 30 days automatically raises the punishment to death for insulting the gods a second time.

APPEALS

Except for the Caliph, mortals are fallible. While judges hear statements for and against the defendant, they are not the final arbiters of the law. Once evidence has been presented, the judge retires to the temple (or other space set aside for this purpose) to consult with Tammuz. After meditating on the issue, the judge determines guilt or innocence, and passes sentence in accordance with the law. Since Tammuz is a deity, and thus infallible, the decree is final, and not subject to appeal. Release Day exists because mortals may, on occasion, misinterpret Tammuz's will.

Extenuating circumstances for a retrial do exist. New evidence, for instance, may prompt one. In such cases Tammuz is not considered to blame for the earlier judgment—his decision was based on evidence presented at the trial, and thus mortals are to blame for any error. Still, a retrial does little good for those condemned to mutilation or death.

Magic, Miracles, & Law

Clerics of the benevolent deities are respected members of society, but good manners and humility demand they do not go around casting miracles in public without good reason. As a rule of thumb, use of a helpful miracle (such as *healing* or *mend*) or one unlikely to result in public disturbance due to its trappings or effect (*boost trait* or *farsight*, for example) is politely ignored. Maintaining a defensive spell (*armor* or *deflection*) with visible trappings usually leads to a stern caution both from the watch and one's local superiors. Using an offensive spell or affecting an unwilling recipient (whether it causes physical harm or not) is likely to result in charges of assault unless the caster is both sanctioned by the state (as clerics of Shamash serving as watch are) and done in accordance with the law.

Exceptions exist, of course—clerics use miracles as part of their daily life, and in their civil and religious duties. Clerics of Shamash serving as watch might well have defensive spells active while on patrol. A cleric of Upuaut serving as a messenger probably won't draw much attention if he runs through the city using *speed*.

Since the peace treaty with the Sultanate, mages have been treated as clerics with regard public use of spells, but with less leeway in their actions. Use of defensive spells is likely to result in a small fine rather than a caution, and the charge for using magic to harm or impair others is attempted murder or grievous assault rather than common assault. Jinn mages are often subject to even harsher penalties (and automatic suspicion).

One may cast miracles or spells in one's home as one desires, so long as the result does not constitute a crime in and of itself or create a public nuisance.

Using magic or miracles to commit a crime carries a stiffer penalty than employing mundane means alone—it is an abuse of power and an insult to the gods (even for mages). While the city watch has the legal authority to arrest wayward spellcasters, most are rightfully fearful of their power and would rather summon clerics.

Clerics of Iblis (or any minor deity associated with him) are automatically treated as criminals. Just being revealed as one carries an automatic sentence of execution. One using a miracle in public would face lengthy torture before the release of death.

Trade & Tribute

While a great deal of internal trade and trade with the Al-Wazir Sultanate uses waterways, the Caliphate enjoys the benefits of two major and one minor trade roads.

The Road of Gods begins in Marresh, City of a Thousand Gates and terminates at Dry Water Oasis. As well as supplying the capital, the road carries goods from Jadid, City of Trade (via the Ash Road) and the various tribes that inhabit the Jinn Lands of Old. To the west, the Southern Trade Road provides access to the rich markets

of the Free Emirate States, and through them northern Rassilon. How long the Southern Trade Road will remain open is subject to much debate, for the Great Dune Sea threatens to engulf the land.

Internally, a minor trade road runs between Hajjad, City of the Gods, and Tamarah, City of Heavenly Sin. It is a popular route with hashish smugglers and slavers.

The emirs have the right to set taxes and duties in their city and the wider territories they govern as they see fit. Other settlements are answerable to the Caliph. In theory they are supposed to use the same taxation levels as the capital, ensuring that all who serve the Caliph are treated equally. Those close to Hajjad usually comply, but further afield, where messages take weeks to reach and the grip of the Caliph is weaker, rulers act with far more independence.

All Faithful are legally and morally required to pay religious tax. While every settlement caters to the followers of every deity in some manner, most have one or more notable deities, those who receive the most worship. Taxation is fixed at 10% of a worshipper's annual income, a level that only the Caliph can change. Both goods and services are accepted in lieu of hard coin.

Half the religious tax is divided equally between the cults of the settlement's notable deities. A further 40% is donated solely to the cult of the citizen's patron deity. The remaining 10% may be donated to whatever benevolent cults the worshipper wishes.

Devoted are not spared religious tax—they must pay 10% of their annual income as well. Of this, half goes to a kada of their choice within the Caliphate and half to the cult of Shamash. Again, goods and services may be donated in place of hard currency.

Major Locales

The following locales are situated outside the control of the emirs, and thus are part of the greater Sultanate rather than an individual city's territory.

AIN JAMAL

Population: 604

Ruler: Pashar Ahlam bint Hud

Religion: Faithful (Upuaut, Duamutef)

Imports: None

Exports: Exotic birds, lizard meat

In the cradle of land where the River Syrah bends tightly east of Hufrah, City of Idols, lies dank marshland. Extending in a thin line between the river and the mire is the village of Ain Jamal. Unlike in most settlements, the inhabitants build their homes out of wood. They are raised above the ground on thick stilts to avoid the flood waters that sweep across the land each year. Elevated walkways create a network of thin roads, though many villagers own a small, flat-bottomed boat for when the land is inundated.

The Caliphate of Al-Shirkuh

The mire is home to many species of exotic birds noted for their brilliant plumage. They are prized pets of the nobility and fetch a high price (200 dinars) in the great cities. The villagers sell them for 50 dinars each. Armed with nets, the villagers hunt each Alak Paret, after the chicks have flown the nest. Aside from the risk of quicksand and venomous snakes, the marsh is home to a small number of hydras. It is also the source of the villagers' staple food—lizard meat.

Tradition requires that one feather from every captured bird be gifted to the village ruler. These are used to create and maintain an elaborate headdress and robe, which are worn for all important functions. The pashar is also considered the local high priestess of Upuaut, whether or not she is a cleric. The title is purely honorary, but does grant her the right to conduct ceremonies. The day before the hunting season is a local holiday.

BLACK SKY OASIS

Population: 305

Ruler: Sheikh Izz al Din

Religion: Faithful (Shamash)

Imports: None

Exports: None

This small oasis lies far from the major trade routes. While the local Bedu tribes know and make use of it, the oasis is largely unknown to the rest of Al-Shirkuh.

Black Sky takes its name from an unusual nocturnal phenomenon. While the moon is readily visible at night, within a mile of the oasis the sky is utterly devoid of stars. On nights of the new moon, the firmament is an endless void of utter darkness. In the world of men, such nights are always Pitch Dark (−4). Despite the laws of hospitality and regardless of tribal affiliations, strangers who arrive after dusk on such nights are always treated as scorpion guests—with no moon and no stars, Iblis is especially powerful, and his minions takes many forms.

Strangely, standing even an inch outside the boundary allows one to see the heavens clearly. As soon as one crosses into the oasis, the stars vanish without fanfare. Many travelers do not notice the phenomenon unless there is a new moon or they happen to glance skyward.

Astronomy magic does function within the boundary of the oasis, and any maintained astronomy spells end the instant the line is crossed.

According to local tradition, the oasis was once home to a mighty ifrit. Long ago a seer foretold the ifrit would never be destroyed so long as the stars burned in the heavens. During the War of Copper Jars, Suleiman cast a potent spell, hiding the stars. While this trick did not allow him to destroy the jinni, it did permit him to imprison it by transforming it into an obelisk of black stone. Onto its inky surface Suleiman engraved a warning—the ifrit would be released if ever starlight fell upon the obelisk.

The Observatory: Of the few outsiders to regular visit, the most frequent are astronomers from the Royal Observatory of Sirhan, City of Stars. The lack of stars al-

lows them to study the moon in greater detail. A small observatory has been constructed at the edge of the oasis, away from the glare of campfires.

BLOOD RUBY MINE

Population: 2500

Ruler: Hatih Ma'in abd Amr

Located high in the foothills of the Pillars of Suleiman, the mine is named after the color of the rubies excavated there and the high turnover in slaves sent here to work in appalling conditions. It is said that for every ruby mined here, at least one slave loses their life.

Haith (governor) Ma'in governs a company of infantry, a company of cavalry, a handful of clerics of Geb-Agni, and over 2000 slaves. The infantry is responsible for guarding the prisoners, the mining camp, and the mine. The cavalry escorts caravans laden with precious stones to Hajjad, City of the Gods, and hunts down slaves who think to escape the justice of the Caliph.

Life for the slaves is extremely tough. Rations and water cost money, and so they are kept to a minimum, the tunnels are cramped, and the hours are long. Few slaves sent here for less than life terms actually live to complete their sentence. Fortunately, there are always more convicts to serve the Caliph.

While uncaring of the slaves' plight—they were found guilty by due process and so deserve their fate—Ma'in is not a cruel man. Prisoners are encouraged to toil with a lick of the lash, but they are not punished without good reason. Family who want to give their relatives sentenced here extra food or water at their own expense are permitted to do so, and Ma'in diligently ensures the produce is delivered to the right person. The governor refuses to deal with slave traders—any slaves sent here must come with official court documents.

This is not to say Ma'in is completely honest, though. He manages to secret away one or two gems a year—not enough to be noticed or make him instantly rich, but over time he has built up a sizable retirement fund.

CAVE OF THE DEAD

For countless generations, the Tammishel Bedu tribe, who live in the shadow of the Jinn Wall Mountains, have interred their dead in a certain cave. The site is kept secret from outsiders and protected by paladins of Inpu (see *Realm Guide #1: Hekata*), for it contains a plethora of grave goods as well as mortal remains. As well as being a cemetery, it serves the tribe as a temple to Tammuz, their patron deity. The site is unusual in that the spirits of the dead still reside here, though only on holy days of Tammuz and when summoned by their descendants for one specific purpose.

During the afternoon on the eve of every child's 14th birthday, the tribe gathers outside the cave to sing dirges and honor their ancestors. As the sun sets, the child, whether male or female, strips naked and enters the cave. Here, alone in the dark, they must spend the

entire night. Sleep is impossible, for the spirits of the dead assail the child with terrifying visions.

Those who flee before dawn breaks are forever branded children by their tribe (they gain the Outsider Hindrance). Some emerge insane, their sanity stripped away by the visions they have endured. Those who retain their sanity and wits emerge into the light as adults. A small few are blessed by Tammuz with the capacity to master their fear (gains the Courageous Edge).

Outsiders who enter the tomb are assailed by skeletons (animated by their original spirits, and thus tolerated by Tammuz's clergy) and incorporeal spirits. Regardless of their other stats, all the ancestral spirits can cast *fear* using their Spirit as their arcane skill die. Their number is legion, and their anger at being disturbed knows no bounds. Anyone who manages to steal so much as a single dinar's worth of grave goods suffers from a *nightmare* as if cast with a raise every night until the stolen plunder is returned. This curse cannot be *dispelled* or *negated*.

THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE

Calling the site a fountain is akin to calling a pond the sea. The title is one bestowed by storytellers and poets. Inside a small cave in the upper slopes of the western Desert Wall Mountains is a stalactite. It is known locally as the Finger of Marqod due to its shape and unique abilities. Beneath its tip is a tiny golden thimble inscribed with runes of healing and health. Over the course of an entire century, the receptacle fills with water that drips from the rock.

The thin, red liquid (the Blood of Marqod) has amazing healing properties. Drinking the thimble's worth heals all physical afflictions, regardless of when they occurred.

Living in the cave is a solitary Caregiver of Marqod. He calls himself only by his self-appointed title, the Caretaker. No one knows how old he is, and there are Bedu who claim he was old when their grandmothers were infants. One legend says he was a disciple of Suleiman, though the old man responds only with a wry smile when confronted with this claim—he has heard such stories about others. In return for food and drink, he offers healing salves, potions, and spells.

Each century, the Caretaker has the responsibility of granting the thimble full of precious liquid to one mortal. Powerful magic protects the cave and the Caretaker. The liquid cannot be taken by force, guile, or coercion—it must be freely given. Over the centuries, the fluid has been granted to kings and beggars alike. The Caretaker's criteria is known only to him, and he offers no explanation for his choice.

Ninety-nine years have passed since the last thimble full was granted. Knowing that the time draws near, ambassadors from the great houses, cults, and organizations of Al-Shirkuh have begun arriving outside the cave. The bemused Caretaker receives frequent guests, but so far he has given no indication of who will receive the gift.

THE IFRITS' BATH

One of the peaks in the western arm of the Pillars of Suleiman is an active volcano. A steady stream of foul-smelling smoke rises from the caldera. Despite this activity, there are no stories or legends concerning an eruption. Two hundred yards wide, the caldera is filled to within 50 feet of its summit with bubbling lava.

Despite lying far south of the core Jinn Lands, Bedu legends claim greater ifrits bathed here in days of old, scouring their flesh with lumps of scorching volcanic stone and washing away grime with lava. Some travelers claim to have seen them bathing in recent times, though it is just as likely they witnessed fire salamanders.

Of more interest to those of adventurous heart are the regular holes that can be seen just above the level of the lava. Clearly they are the work of hands guided by intelligence and purpose. No one is known to have entered them, and thus storytellers have unleashed their imaginations. Stories abound they lead to a greater ifrit's palace, a lost temple of Geb-Agni, and even a fire giant's lair. A few claim they lead to the Bottomless Pit. All the tales speak of fabulous treasure concealed within, though the storytellers are quick to point out the dangers of high temperatures and choking sulfurous fumes.

MARTYRS' PILLAR

In the hills that rise and fall in the break between the Desert Wall Mountains and Pillars of Suleiman stands a tall, solitary pinnacle of rock. It is said that when the jinn invaded the Kingdom of Magor many hundreds of citizens climbed the pinnacle in search of sanctuary. When it became clear their realm was lost, they chose to throw themselves to their deaths rather than submit to slavery.

Every Remembrance Day eve (Amt Yaus al-Nefar Alak Neteru; see *Realm Guide #1*), dead on midnight, the spirits of the suicides can be seen falling from the spire, ghostly shapes that briefly appear as falling stars before they vanish once more. Clerics of Tammuz claim the souls are trapped in limbo. The gods wish to welcome them to the Afterlife for their faith and refusal to bow before the jinn, but suicide is a mortal sin. Rather than condemn them to the Bottomless Pit, they allow them to remain tethered to the mortal realm. It is said that one can release a soul by completing an arduous and very difficult task. Devoted claim the souls are trapped because, though good people, they took their own lives.

Spirit Name: The Nameless Martyrs.

Ambience: A site of mass suicide, the aura within line of sight of the pillar is one of utter hopelessness. Spirit is lowered by one die, to a minimum of d4.

Deity: Tammuz.

Senses: Notice d6.

Communication: None.

Powers: A successful sacrifice grants a single benny. This benny can be used as normal, or used to gain a single use of the Ancestral Guardian Edge (ignoring all requirements). The marker used to record bennies should be different to

the standard ones, as it is retained between sessions until used or lost. The benny is permanently lost once used, or if it remains unused by the next Remembrance Day eve, whichever comes first. Gaining the benny is also worth 5 Glory—it's not everyday one saves a soul from limbo.

Sacrifice: In order to gain the power, a mortal must free one of the spirits from limbo. He must begin climbing the spire the exact moment the sun disappears behind the horizon on Remembrance Day eve. Flying up or down the rock renders the sacrifice null and void.

Near the top (300 feet), the names of the dead appear in glowing script at the point where the faller released his grip. The mortal must then descend before midnight (no easy task) and catch the falling spirit whose name he has learned. This requires keen eyesight, for the name is not visible from the ground, and there are hundreds of falling spirits. He must then tell it the gods or have forgiven it, whereupon the spirit will grant its gift as thanks.

Learning more than one name is impossible—the gods erase the memory of additional names the instant they are learned—they are benevolent, but even their grace has its limits. Once a spirit has been released from limbo, its name vanishes from the pillar. Its savior, though, never forgets it.

MOUNTAIN OF GHÛLS

Whereas the City of Ghûls (see *Realm Guide*) is nearing its end, the Mountain of Ghûls is a thriving community. The vile flesh-eaters dwell within a network of dark, dank, natural caves and tunnels in the western end of the Desert Wall Mountains. One cannot mistake their homes for those of other creatures—the scent of decay and the plethora of bones are a surefire sign one has trespassed into their territory.

While the inhabitants occasionally raid caravans passing near their lair, much of their larder is stocked by slavers. In return for uncut gems, which the ghûls seemingly possess in abundance, slavers provide them with a steady stream of captives. Unusually, the ghûls are servants of a greater power—the Ghûl King, a corpulent fiend whose powers are (so storytellers say) many. It is said he can distend his jaw wide enough to swallow small creatures whole; his jaws are so powerful they can sever a limb with a single bite, crunching through the thickest armor; a mere touch of his claws bestows death; and he is surrounded by a stench of death so vile it causes even hardened warriors to weaken. Some are so bold to say he was once a jinni who savored human flesh.

Whether there is a relationship between the city and mountain is unknown. Possibly the ghûl emir is a subject of the hellish king. More likely they have little knowledge of the other exists, and would consider the other a rival.

THE PIT OF PESTILENCE

Although Hajjad, City of the Gods, is the capital of the Caliphate, it was not the first site chosen. On reaching a

EXCREMENTALS

Excrementals are vaguely anthropomorphic piles of slimy fecal matter rising from a pool of liquid dung that flows with the creature as it moves. They are grouped among the quasi-elementals, such as magic, and wood elementals. Many ancient texts list them with earth elementals, though excrementals do not hail from any of the elemental realms. The *summon elemental* miracle brings forth a disease spirit from Iblis' fell realm, which takes up residence in a pool of filth, imbuing it with both form and intelligence.

Summon excrementals is now added to the powers lists for Baalzebul (see *Realm Guide* #8) and Iblis.

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d8, Stealth d6

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

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Elemental:** No additional damage from Called Shots; Fearless; immune to disease and poison.

* **Immunity:** The semisolid body of a excremental gives it limited resistance to attacks. Against non-magical attacks they have +2 Toughness.

* **Pool of Filth:** The upper body of an excremental rises from the center of a pool of rancid filth that fills a Medium Burst Template. The area covered by the filth counts as difficult ground. Any character who runs in the template and rolls a 1 on his running die slips and falls prone.

* **Slam:** Str+d6. A success on the Fighting die, regardless of damage, means the victim is covered in filth. He loses one point of Charisma until it bathes.

* **Smother:** If a excremental scores a raise on a grapple attack it has enveloped its target and begins to force its way into his nose and mouth. The victim suffers a Fatigue level from suffocation each round he remains smothered. Anyone smothered has his Charisma drop to -6 until he thoroughly bathes.

verdant and large oasis some 80 miles southeast of the current capital, the refugees gave praise to the gods and vowed to build grand temples in their honor. All that it is, save one. Iblis, angered though he was, waited patiently before taking dire revenge.

Disease struck the fledgling town, biting flies gathered in huge swarms, and the water turned black and viscous. Some scholars say the Caliph was the first to die of the resulting plague, though many others dispute this. When prayers failed to remove the taint, the citizens fell back to pragmatism and abandoned the site. Within a few years, the filthy oasis had expanded before finally sinking into the sands, leaving between a bubbling pit of vile filth surrounding the one remaining building—the first Caliph's palace. No sandstorm has erased it from the earth, and thus it festers still.

Giant maggots slither through the ichor, eventually transforming into huge, disease-laden biting flies. Swarms of lesser biting flies cloud the air. Excrementals (see p. 13) haunt the fetid edges of the pit. Pestilence hangs heavily in the air, and every breath risks infection. Open wounds quickly fester, and healing spells are less reliable.

All too often, those who perish here rise again as cancerous corpses, their flesh riddled with weeping sore, their hearts pumping pus through decaying flesh. (Use the Contagious and Putrefying zombie special abilities from the *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion*).

One thing above all others draws the curious and foolish here—rumors of the first Caliph's fabulous treasure, which lies unclaimed in his abandoned palace. If the stories are true, it is a reward well worth the risks.

SULEIMAN'S THRONE

By all accounts, Suleiman's throne is a magnificent object, one worthy of the great man. Cast from solid gold, and inlaid with silver, ivory, and precious gems, it was offered to Suleiman as a gift. Though there are many stories concerning its origin, every legend ends with Suleiman rejecting it.

Faithful hold it was created by the gods. As a reward for restoring belief in them, Suleiman was offered mastery of the world if he but sat on the throne. The prophet politely turned down the offer, being content to live out his life as a simple man. Thus, he passed their test and displayed his humbleness. Devoted point to the jinn. Their version says Suleiman was offered kingship over the jinn and the mortal realm if he ended the War of Copper Jars. Suleiman turned down the offer, for he knew the jinn were wicked and meant only harm for mortals. Thus, despite its name, Suleiman never actually sat upon the throne.

Regardless of its origins, Suleiman would not destroy the throne. Instead, he had it hidden inside a secret vault. In his last days, he promised that when the time was right, when the races needed a great leader to weather a terrible storm brewing in the north, the throne would be found and sat upon.

WABAR, THE CURSED CITY

Little is known of Wabar's origin, save that it stood before the Kingdom of Magor was founded, once traded with Hekata, was fiercely independent, and had never fallen to war, treachery, or guile until its last day. Of its demise much is said, though the first stories were told only after the War of Copper Jars ended, and are thus based on scholarly supposition and the fanciful imagination of storytellers.

The jinn, powerful beyond measure, sought to destroy Wabar shortly after arriving in Al-Shirkuh. Though but one city, it weathered their assault for a year and a day. Eventually, it was laid waste by an army of ifrits, its treasures melted to slag, its temples and palaces reduced

to smoldering rubble, its inhabitants transformed into fire-blackened skeletons. Only the king was kept alive.

As punishment for his people's defiance, the jinn cursed him to eternal life. His lower half was transformed to stone, and then buried on a hill overlooking the ruins of his city. Unable to move, he would gaze upon the desolation wrought upon Wabar for eternity.

Over a thousand years later, and the king still endures his fate. Some visitors say he is completely mad—he welcomes visitors into his palace and requests they partake of imaginary feasts, scolding those who do not eat or drink for their lack of manners. He talks matters of state as if his city still stands, sometimes giving orders to servants whose bones have long since melded with the burning sands. Others say he remains a font of knowledge and wisdom for those interested in history before the jinn arrived. Some historical texts say Suleiman visited the king after defeating the jinn, but even his powers could not undo the terrible curse.

Countless treasure hunters have scoured what little remains of the city, but none have found much of value. Still, rumors abound that the treasury, its precious metals melted into lumps the size of elephants, remains concealed beneath the sands.

PERSONS OF Note

JAMAL THE WANDERER

Jamal, a Bedu, was part of a caravan that sought to cut across the sands from Hamra, City of the Stone, to the Southern Trade Road. Late one night an eerie song drifted across the sands, beguiling and entralling the caravan. Ensnared by the siren call and no longer in control of their faculties, the caravan veered northward into the great open expanse.

Jamal cannot recall what events transpired during the rest of that night. On occasion he has troubled dreams about a ruined city, a network of subterranean passages, grasping tentacles, and cruel death, but the images are jumbled and cause him to waken in terror before he sees any true details. All he know for sure is that he awoke alone in the empty desert with a new purpose.

Jamal appears distant, his gaze is often on the far horizon and his thoughts elsewhere. Often he cocks his head to one side, as if listening to some faint sound. Many who cross his path think him permanently brain-addled from sunstroke, but there is no doubt that he knows this part of the world better than anyone else.

Whatever Jamal witnessed or suffered on that dark night long ago, it left him insane. His mind reverberates with the siren song and its irresistible lure. Once a year, Jamal is compelled to seek employment as a guide for those wishing to cross the open desert west of Hamra. Once out in the wilds, he steers his unwitting paymasters toward the source of the siren song and whatever fate awaits them.

FASHIR

City of Water

Fashir, City of Water, Gateway to the Caliphate or Sultanate (depending on which way one is travelling), is renowned for its wealth and unusual layout. Yet it is not without its problems—those who have money often crave more.

Social Hierarchy

In the event an emir dies without children, the title does not pass to another branch of the family. Thus, the brothers and sisters of an emir have no guaranteed succession. Instead, a new emir is elected by the nobles and high priests. Vast sums can be paid out in buying votes. By law, whoever is granted the title must forfeit his entire estates, as well as those of his entire family. Though harsh, it has prevented any one family from becoming all powerful. Emir Abdul-Salam's family came to power in this manner 97 years ago.

The emir is 53 years old. He ascended the throne just 15 years ago, when his father died of grief shortly after the death of Abdul-Salam's mother. He and his wife have sired four sons and two daughters (aged between 29 and 20) in their 32 years of marriage. They in turn have blessed the emir with seven grandchildren. Abdul-Salam has instilled charity and generosity in his offspring, for he firmly believes that wealth shared is wealth well spent.

As is his right, Abdul-Salam has appointed his own heir from among his children. That honor has fallen to his second daughter and third child, Manaal. With three children already, she has all but ensured the family line will continue for at least two more generations.

The youngest child, Sakhr, harbors a dark secret. Always treated as the baby of the family, he has never been given any responsibilities, and thus lacks any influence. While his siblings run estates on behalf of their father or have married and moved away, he has been kept at court with nothing of importance to do. Sensing his frustration, dark powers have whispered poisonous words into his ears, and he has given himself over to worshipping one of the demon lords.

The emir's chief wizar is Merchant Lord Dhatir alim-Yataram, a cakali priestess of Endursaga, minor deity of trade. Her official position is Wizar of Trade, and it is her duty to ensure the city economy runs smoothly. Though young (just 31 years old), she has an innate grasp of logistics, a firm head for figures, and a no-nonsense approach to business. Plucked from obscurity, she is now arguably the second most powerful person in Fashir, and many would say *the* most powerful. The position of Wizar

of Agriculture, another very senior post, is always held by the high priest of Ashtart.

Fashir's nobles earn their income and status from agriculture. Though most reside in the city, so as to be close to the emir, their prosperous estates stretch along the banks of the River Shalak. In order to ensure they could not form a powerbase, the emirs of old assigned them estates that were non-coterminous. In the most extreme cases, parts of the same family's holdings may be as much as 100 miles apart. As a rule of thumb, the eldest child resides in Fashir and learns politics, while lesser children are assigned to manage part or all of the estate (depending on its size).

Despite their wealth, there are nobles who desire more. Fashir's main economic rival is Hufrah, City of Idols, which also grows plentiful grain. Were its crops to fail, Fashir would become the Caliphate's eastern breadbasket, vastly increasing its power and prestige. With little hope of starting a war against what many consider a holy city, they are forced to act through subterfuge. Many attacks against Hufrah's farms, supposedly instigated by the Sons of the Sand or orc raiders, are actually funded by the nobles of Fashir.

Those who serve the emir well in his bureaucracy or military are rewarded with honor titles and small estates. Abdul-Salam has little love of those who try to buy his favor, and only the most charitable of merchants has ever been rewarded in this manner. Like the title, the land reverts back to the emir on the death of the titleholder. This allows the emir to be generous, but not fritter away his personal land with permanent endowments.

Merchants and clerics fill the middle class. Thanks to the city's ever-growing trade, many merchant families are the financial superiors of the lesser nobles. As a result, many merchants have found it easy to marry their children into the lower echelons of the nobility, thus increasing their family's wealth and influence. Despite the obvious benefits to be had, many older families look down on this practice, for it taints their bloodline.

The great bulk of the population are concerned with agriculture, fishing, handling cargo, and crafting. Fashir does have master craftsmen holding higher status, but these industries are small scale affairs, barely registering in the trade ledgers.

Education

Basic education in Fashir is free, paid for by the state. Classes cover basic grammar and numeracy, as well as

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Fashir.

* **Cheap Food:** Food is cheap in Fashir, and there is plenty of choice of vegetarian and fish dishes. Cheap meals cost 1/2 dirham, average meals 2 dirhams, and expensive ones 3+ dinars unless a hero wants a sizable portion of meat (typically lamb or goat), in which case they are the standard price.

* **Metal Goods:** Fashir lacks mineral ore deposits, forcing it to rely on expensive imports. The cost of all metal equipment is 15% higher in Fashir.

* **Native Heroes:** When deciding what other languages they know, native characters must pick Al-Waziran before Sandspeech.

* **Native Heroes 2:** Travel by boat is extremely common, and most people pick up the basics at a young age. Characters with Agility d6+ who were born in Fashir can take Boating d6 for the cost of one skill point during character generation.

* **Native Heroes 3:** A native character can choose to be a graduate of the Archery and Artillery School. He treats the Rank requirement for Siege Breaker and Siege Engineer as Novice during character generation. He must meet all other requirements as normal.

* **Shipyard:** Thanks to having plentiful timber on hand, Fashir's shipbuilders can produce ships for 20% less than normal. A ship built to order takes one week per point of Toughness (including Armor).

* **Trade Center:** The docks and markets are full of goods from across the Caliphate, Sultanate, and lands beyond. Special availability goods can be purchased outside the usual places, but cost five times as much. Village Availability items cost 75% of normal and Town items 85%.

* **Transport Hub:** Fashir has an extremely busy port. The characters can find a ship departing in 1d4 days with a successful Streetwise roll, or later the same day with a raise.

the fundamentals of the city's history and laws. Despite this, attendances are very low. While Fashir does have craftsmen, much of its income comes from fishing, crop production, preparation, and storage, and trade. Most children are destined to follow in their parents' footsteps, and there is little need of formal education as a farmer, fisherman, porter, or warehouseman. Better children are put to work as quickly as possible in order to increase the household's income. Neither of the powerful cults of Apsu or Ashtart have spoken out against this practice—their worshippers are primarily fisherman and farmers, and increased earnings means increased tithes.

Of course, there are other opportunities. Those who excel at school might find apprenticeship with a merchant or craftsman, join one of the cults, or become a cog in

the vast bureaucracy that greases the wheels of trade and keeps the city functioning. The city has only a basic university, the University of Fashir, forcing those who desire a more focused education to look elsewhere.

Although a major port, Sandspeech is rarely heard on the streets or waterways. Most outsiders who visit are merchants from the Sultanate, Fashir being the first, and often only, Caliphate port on their route. As such, Al-Waziran is the unofficial second language.

The Archery and Artillery School serves Fashir's City Guard. While all recruits undergo basic training in the establishment, advanced courses are open only to those who show promise as officers or can privately fund their instruction.

Religion

While Fashir has places to honor all the gods, Apsu, Ashtart, and Upuaut are the chief deities.

While fishing forms a relatively small part of the city's business, it is Apsu who ranks as the chief deity, though only by a thin margin. Without his blessing, the river would not flow and the crops could not grow. As patron of the river, he also blesses the many mariners that ply its waters every day. Even in the farming communities, Apsu receives plentiful prayers. His great temple dominates a small island in the heart of the city.

Ashtart ranks as the second most honored deity. Although her cult is strongest in the rural settlements, her influence is still felt in the city—grain may not be the most expensive export by weight, but it is by far the largest, and the backbone of the economy.

Upuaut may not have a temple, but he is a major deity. No matter whether they are fishermen setting sail for the day or merchant captains, it is a fool who does not ask the god of travel for a blessing before he begins any voyage. Such is his influence that many water taxis carry both his and Apsu's holy symbols for good luck.

Of the other deities, Qedeset ranks highest. Currently the cult has only a small temple on the Isle of Docks, but plans are afoot to create an artificial island nearby and erect a grand temple that would serve as the city's financial hub. While the emir backs the plans, the merchants fear a loss of business to the cult's traders, and have repeatedly frustrated the cult's scheme.

Due to its close trade links with the Sultanate, the Devoted population of Fashir is high (around 7%). The two creeds have lived peacefully since the last war ended, and Fashir boasts two kadas and a maktab.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Day of Generosity: As noted in the core city write-up, the emir bestows one dinar to every citizen on his birthday. This falls on Anshi Yaus al-Hamala Baot Alak Shemu. Traditionally, citizens spend this coin on a feast in honor of the emir and his family.

Military

As an island city built on trade, Fashir's army is concerned with protecting the city and its inland trade "road"—the River Shalak. Unlike other cities, it lacks a perimeter wall, though key installations are fortified.

ARMY

For its size, Fashir maintains only a small army. Technically, it comprises just four companies (704 men) of medium infantry. They serve to remind the distant population that the emir is their master, as well as protect the farms and the riverbank from marauders and beasts.

Fashir's true military might lies in its City Guard, which consists solely of archers and artilleryists. Though it has been called out to battle beyond the city limits, the number of times this has occurred in the city's long history can be counted on one hand.

There is a single battalion of archers (968 men). Though commanders have come and gone, the battalion has always been known as the Sting of Fashir. Of these, eight companies wield crossbows and three conventional bows. The first company are expert archers (all have the Marksman Edge). Competition to join their rank is fierce, as they receive better pay. Every three years, those already in the company are pitted against hopefuls in a series of competitions. The top 88 scorers are assigned to the company for the next three-year term.

Manning the artillery pieces that protect the city is a company (176 men) of artilleryists. As part of their regular duties, men from both units are seconded to the navy.

The Hippos of Apsu are an elite squad of 16 paladins of Apsu. All members are required to know *environmental protection*, as well as be strong swimmers. Trained as saboteurs, their role in battle is to disable enemy ships from beneath the surface.

The emir is protected by six squads of medium infantry (96 men), known as the Spears of Fashir. Ever fearful of assassination by power-hungry nobles, it is a long standing law that no scions of any of Fashir's noble houses may enlist in the emir's bodyguard. It is also a tradition that one squad be entirely female.

NAVY

Much of Fashir's mundane military spending goes on its navy. Ten warships and five heavy warships patrol the coast, the estuary, and the riverbank. Aside from their crews, each carries a half contingent of marines, lightly equipped infantry trained to fight on the rolling decks. Should reinforcements be required, troops are seconded from the army. At anyone time, five ships are docked in the city, five are patrolling within a day's sail of the city, and five further afield.

Though clerics of Upuaut are prone to frequent wandering, the city has a long-standing agreement with the

cult. As well as providing alchemical devices for military use at reduced rates, clerics who visit the city are handsomely paid to serve with the navy, both as instructors and spellcasters. So long as they swear allegiance to the emir, khamsin mages are accorded the same employment opportunities.

Law & Order

Fashir may be a wealthy city, but few residents are allowed to share in its prosperity. For most, life means hard work and little to show for it in old age. Little wonder that some turn to crime to better their prospects.

Law and order is maintained by the City Watch. Four hundred strong, they are divided into four Watch Companies of 100 men. Numbered one through four, they each work a fairly relaxed 6-hour day. During the day, there are more patrols but with fewer members in each squad. At night, the reverse is true.

By day, half the Watch patrols the river, while the other half guards the bridges and walks the streets. River patrols are always fewer at night—no one wants to risk falling overboard into the black water or encountering some terrifying monster (not that Fashir has a problem with aquatic monsters), and the thieves guilds pay well for the Watch to remain on land while they conduct their business via the waterways.

Though the Watch is not excessively corrupt, many merchants prefer to hire private guards at personal expense. City law grants them the authority to "act as necessary to protect the person, property, and goods" of their paymaster. If these private guards kill a thief in the act of robbing a warehouse they are protecting, the Watch rarely does more than ask a few questions to ensure no misuse of power was committed (it has been known, on occasion, for bodies of those their masters wanted removed to be dumped inside warehouses, for instance). Even if foul play is suspected, the Watch can usually be bribed to carry out their patrol.

Fashir boasts six thieves' guilds. Four of these are small, and concern themselves with running water taxi services. In essence they are legitimate businessmen, but those who work for them must pay "insurance" to safeguard their boats against unforeseen accidents. Competition between the guilds is fierce, and often results in violent gang warfare.

The two major players are the Brotherhood of Shared Wealth and the Night Boatmen. In general, the Brotherhood is a traditional thieves' guild, burgling homes and mugging citizens who stray into the wrong area at night. The Night Boatmen dominate smuggling—Fashir may be a convenient port, but its high excise duty on all goods being shipped straight out the city is enough to cause some merchants to employ them. There are also items that the authorities take a dim view of, such as hashish not sold through the cult of Tamarni, khem-hekau artifacts, and Hekatic relics.

The two main guilds are run by a brother (the Brotherhood) and sister (Boatmen). Although tied by blood, the pair have no love for each other, and consider each other rivals.

Trade & Tribute

Fashir is a major trading port. Lying on the River Shalak, which flanks the marshy delta, it serves as one of the seaports for Hufrah. A trade pact (The Grain Accord) has existed between the two cities for centuries, ensuring that merchants from Hufrah receive generous duty discounts to use the city. Despite this, Hufrah still divides its trade between Fashir (goods destined for the Sultanate) and Marresh, City of A Thousand Gates (goods destined for the Caliphate), preferring not to put all of its eggs in one basket.

The coast between Fashir and the westerly cities of the Sultanate is treacherous—corsairs, both living and dead, plague the region, and there are numerous reefs. Caliphate merchants (save those from Marresh) prefer to sell their wares in Fashir, rather than risk their ships on the long eastward journey. Conversely, those from the Sultanate are eager to make port as soon as possible, and few yet venture further west than Fashir. Thus, the city is a vital trade hub for the neighboring nations.

Fashir exports great quantities of fish, grain, papyrus, and timber. Seafood (including freshwater fish) is a major part of the natives' diet, and its eateries have long prided themselves on their imaginative and flavorful recipes. It is typically pickled in brine or salted for export.

Papyrus plants are harvested in the estuary and along the riverbanks. Once prepared, it is formed into rolls of papyrus, many of which are destined for Hajjad, City of the Gods. Locally it is used to make baskets, hats, fish traps, and mats. While wood is readily available as fuel, papyrus is a cheaper alternative for the lower classes.

Fashir claims a thin stretch of land either side of the river extending all the way to the end of the delta, where the River Shalak divides. Along the banks are many farming communities whose primary crops are grains—barley, wheat, rice, lentils, peas, beans, and peanuts. Roughly 45% of these are the private estates of the emir. Law dictates that half their harvest must be freely given to the city granaries, while the other half may be sold for profit. Nobles own the other 40% of the farms. As private property, the crops may be disposed of as the owner sees fit. Many families have followed the emir in donating a portion of their crops to the city, though rarely more than 10% unless they need to win public approval for some reason. Ten percent of the estates are held by honor nobles, while the last 5% belongs directly to the cult of Ashtart. A small percentage of the farms are independent, answerable to the emir but run by collectives with elected leaders.

While many coastal cities have timber available, Fashir has enough to export. Its primary markets are the coastal ports, who need to maintain their navies.

COINAGE

Fashir's coins have long carried the head of the incumbent emir on one side and a wheat stalk on the reverse.

The one dinar coin is known locally as a "Barrel" after a standard measurement of grain. One grain barrel holds 10 pints, the standard amount of grain a small family needs for a week. The city also mints 5 dinar ("Sack") and 10 dinar ("Double Sack") coins, again named after units of grain. For trading and very expensive purchases, such as houses and ships, there are gold bars in values of 500, 1000, and 5000 dinars. These can be exchanged for coins at the city treasury.

The half-dirham coin is known as "Short" and the one dirham coin the "Long." These are a direct reference to the length of water taxi journey one can purchase. Coins worth one-quarter dirham (known as a "Walk" because you can't get a taxi for that lowly sum) are used for very small transactions.

LOCAL TAXES

Although the emir has a sizable navy to maintain and is known for his generosity, he is kind toward his people when it comes to tax. Vast exports coupled with decent revenues from trade means he is able to keep income tax low and the citizens happy. Most citizens pay around 20% of their earnings in various taxes, including tithes.

Docking Fees: Ships wishing to moor at the southern dock are charged a flat 20 dinars per day or part thereof. Those docking at the northern or western docks are charged 10 dinars per day or 5 dinars if from Hufrah.

Excise Duty: Fashir has long played on its geographical position. Cargoes brought to the city purely to be sold on for export to more distant ports are charged a 10% (2% if destined for Hufrah). Imports to and exports from Fashir are charged at 4% (1% for Hufrah).

Sales Tax: General sales tax is 5%. Food grown and sold locally is not taxed (or subject to excise duty), making it cheap to dine in the city.

Tolls: In a bid to keep the streets as free of traffic as possible, the emirs of old imposed bridge tolls. Pedestrians are charged one dinar and mounts two dinars each time they wish to cross any bridge. The roads are too narrow for carts.

Architecture

With space at a premium, Fashir has precious little open land. That which does exist belongs to the emir or the major cults. Movement through the city is claustrophobic—the roads and river channels are narrow, with buildings rising as high as five stories on either side.

With living space restricted by the amount of suitable land, buildings rise upward rather than outward. For most citizens, home is a couple of rooms in an apartment block. The only open space is the roof, access to

which is shared by all the occupants. Newer buildings, built on smaller islands, have small rooms, and may have communal cooking facilities. Hence, while the older parts of the city are more rundown, the inhabitants at least enjoy more private space. Those of sufficient wealth might own an entire floor, while the truly rich may enjoy ownership of an entire building.

The flat roofs have another purpose beyond being somewhere to dry laundry and socialize. In times of invasion, they serve as firing platforms for the archers.

Major Locales

Unlike other great cities, where typically 50-65% of the population live in the city proper as opposed to its greater territory, Fashir's permanent residents account for just 35% (approximately 55,000) of its people. The rest live in small towns and villages along the banks of the river or in the marsh to the west.

CITY DISTRICTS

Fashir's haphazard growth onto neighboring islands means the city has very few separate districts. While mercantile activities are confined to the Isle of Docks, most every district boasts small shops (either on the street or one of the major bridges) and workshops. Unless one knows the city layout, finding a particular type of shop can be a lengthy process.

Barge Isle: As living space grew more limited, so some families took to living on the water permanently. Over time, the small boats and barges drifted together for security, and today they are a static community officially recognized as a city district and linked to the nearest island by a wooden bridge. Most of the residents are lower class, and the authorities have long suspected at least two thieves' guilds operate from here.

Brown Isle: Fashir has no sewers, and the river is the only source of water. To prevent its pollution, citizens are required to excrete bodily waste in barrels. This is collected daily and transported to Brown Isle. Here, urine is used in tanning, while solid waste is turned into manure. Barges carrying steaming piles of manure travel up the river to the farms, where the cargo is sold for use in the fields. Despite being located away from the residential islands, the wind carries a distinctive odor that blankets the city when the wind blows in the wrong direction.

Accommodation on the island is extremely cheap, though only the lowest members of society care to live and work here. Brown Isle is considered a slum, and houses 80% of Fashir's sand goblin population.

The Court: When the emir of old had a new palace built, the nobles were quick to build homes closer to the new structure, so as to be as near as possible to the seat of power. Although the houses of the nobility can now be found on many islands, those of the oldest families stand on a single island, known locally as the Court. The

NEW PROFESSIONAL EDGE

FADEEN*

Requirements: Novice, Faithful, Spirit d6+, Strength d6+, Vigor d6+, Fighting d6+

Fadeen are laity who serve the cults as full-time warriors. The character must have a patron deity, and he is a fadeen in that cult only.

The character gains the benefits of the Champion Edge, but the modifiers are only +1.

Additionally, once per day he may pray to his deity to grant him aid. He may cast his deity's signature power, using his Spirit in place of Faith. Where a deity grants a choice of powers, the fadeen counts as a paladin.

The Edge has downsides. The hero becomes susceptible to the sins for his deity. Because non-clerics don't have Faith, the penalties for committing sins are different than for clerics.

Minor: The hero loses the benefits of this Edge for four days.

Major: Robs the character of the benefits of this Edge for two weeks.

Mortal: A mortal sin not only strips the hero of this Edge until suitable penance is made, but the hero cannot benefit (directly or indirectly) from the deity's spells until he seeks absolution. He still suffers any negative or harmful effects, though.

Being a fadeen is a lifetime commitment. A character who changes patron deity or wishes to give up his fadeen status immediately and irrevocably loses the benefits of this Edge. In addition, no other deity will ever accept him as a fadeen.

wealthy nature of the inhabitants is obvious from the prices charged in the local eateries and shops, as well as the quality of the goods.

Mainland: The Mainland is the local name for the central island, the heart of Fashir. As the original center of habitation, it contains residential areas, shops, industrial centers, shrines, and schools. Sorely in need of maintenance, its upper class population long since moved out in favor of newer accommodation.

Necropolis: The nature of Fashir and the shortage of room for the living means there is no space for the dead. Burials take place on the eastern bank of the river, half way between the city and the Isle of Docks. Completely walled, the only access is via a narrow, artificial channel, the gates to which are opened only on request. The cult of Tammuz protects the cemetery as best it can given its small presence in Fashir.

Palace: The old emir's palace stood on the Mainland. Torn down to make space for more residential buildings, the emir decided to construct his new palace on the water. A vast barge topped with wooden structures, it is no

FLATTERY

As well as their noble title, most higher nobles (emir and above) have unofficial ones. For instance, Emira Rasha of Jirja, City of Colors, is known as Lady of Splendor. When addressing a social superior in person, the accepted form is to use one or more of their unofficial titles (or create a new one), but never their noble title or given name.

Such flattery is frequently used toward other individuals. Praising social superiors is most common, but it is acceptable to heap such praise on anyone you want to impress, befriend, or at least make a decision in your favor. Unlike with the higher nobles, such titles are rarely ever permanent. Rather, they are created by speakers as required. For an instance, a criminal hoping to receive a lenient sentence from a judge may call him Fountain of Mercy or Sultan of Justice. A beggar might refer to someone as River of Wealth in order to encourage him to donate a few dirhams, or Pillar of Generosity as thanks.

To create such titles just pick a few words and string them together. In order to mean anything and have any effect, though, they should relate to the person, his occupation, and/or what the character wants from him. For instance, a judge won't be flattered by Pearl of the Sea, whereas a female ship captain probably would be. Similarly, one should not use too many titles during a conversation—excessive flattery can quickly become embarrassing, even to the Caliph or Sultan.

To help you out we've created three lists of sample keywords. These aren't the only ones available, of course. When addressing a greater majin, for example, one might call him Root of the Mountains, Father of Stone, or Supporter of the World.

OPTIONAL PREFIX

(These terms can be added for extra flattery) Acclaimed, August, Beautiful, Benevolent, Elevated, Eminent, Eternal, Exalted, Glorious, Grand, Grandest, Heroic, Highest, Honorable, Honored, Illustrious, Magnificent, Majestic, Mightiest, Mighty, Most High, Noble, Peerless, Puissant, Radiant, Renowned, Resplendent, Shining, Sublime, Supreme, Transcendent, Unequaled, Venerable, Wisest, Wondrous.

FIRST PART

Beauty, Bestower, Carver, Champion, Commander, Creator, Defender, Dispenser, Father/Mother, Font, Fountain, Glory, Guardian, Heart, Imam, Judge, Lantern, Light, Lord/Lady, Majesty, Master, Navigator, Noble Title*, Overlord, Overseer, Patron, Pearl, Pillar, Potentate, Protector, Radiance, Reflection, Revealer, River, Root, Ruler, Shield, Son/Daughter, Source, Sovereign, Strength, Sword, Voice, Well.

less grand in scale or design than the stone and marble structures favored by other emirs.

CITY LOCALES

Archery & Artillery School: Fashir's military academy trains recruits in the basics of their art and instructs officers in the finer points. Civilians are permitted to enrol, but after completing their course they are legally bound to serve with Fashir's military for three months. They are paid for this service, but are expected to live with the regular soldiers. Pupils can avoid conscription by paying a further 200 dinars.

The school also serves as the central armory. Leather armor, spare bows and crossbows, and ammunition are stored in a secure storeroom. A fortified vault protected by *glyphs* and complex locks contains the city's military alchemical devices—arrows, ballista bolts, and quarrels enchanted with *blast*, *entangle*, *obscure*, and *stun* (courtesy of the cults of Apsu and Ashtart), horns containing *becalm* (donated by the cult of Upuaut) and such like.

Although it has a permanent staff of skilled instructors, the school hires freelancers of proven skill. In return for their time, the school provides basic accommodation and pays a modest wage. The current rates are 200 dinars for teaching a basic course (one month), 450 dinars for an advanced course (two months), and 1000 dinars for a specialist course (three months).

Archery Skills: Shooting: *Edges:* Coordinated Firepower and Take Aim.

Artillery Skills: Knowledge (Siege Artillery): *Edges:* Siege Engineer (see *Hellfrost: Rassilon Expansion*) and Siege Mentality.

The Golden Tagine: One of the most popular eateries, the Golden Tagine serves vegetarian dishes prepared by the proprietress, Farah. The diner only opens an hour for breakfast and lunch, and two hours for dinner. Food is take-out only, and the generous portions are served in freshly baked flatbread. Farah's repertoire of dishes is vast, and she always has something different on the menu.

The Grand Bridge: The longest and widest bridge is the nearest thing Fashir has to a souk. The stone structure is lined with shops on both sides and covered with a low roof. Above the main street, accessible by narrow stairs, are two more levels of shops. Though lanterns illuminate all three levels day and night, the interior alleys are gloomy and smoky.

During the day, crowds of shoppers make movement along its length a laborious process, and the noise of shopkeepers touting their wares and furious haggling makes conversation difficult. Pickpockets and cutpurses are a constant menace. Most of the petty criminals are children or sand goblins, whose small size allows them to squeeze between the crowds with relative ease when making their escape.

Muzzafar's Ship Designs: Muzzafar is widely accepted as the best naval architect in Fashir, if not the entire Caliphate. While his designs are cheap (100 dinars), turning his drawings into actual ships is not. For

an additional 100% of the price of the desired ship, the vessel is easier to maneuver than standard models. The vessel's Handling is improved by one point. For an extra 50%, it cuts through the water like a knife. This gains it +1 to its Top Speed. These designs cannot be retrofitted onto existing vessels, only new builds, and a vessel may only have one of each modification.

Porters' Guild Office: Porters are the only way to move cargo around town. Long ago they formed a guild to ensure their rights were protected. Today, they are an extremely powerful thorn in the side of merchants desperate to keep costs down. By law, only signed up members may be hired to move cargo. Those looking to hire non-guild labor, or perform the chore themselves, face a visit from the guilds' representatives. Failure to comply with their demands can lead to "accidents." It is said even the Night Boatmen respect the guild, and pay them a stipend to ignore their smuggling activities. The office is located on the Isle of Docks.

Several prominent guild members have recently disappeared. The guildmaster, Boulous the Ox, strongly suspects foul play, and has drawn up a list of likely suspects, all of whom are merchants with whom the guild has current disputes. His own agents are too well known around town, and he dare not risk offending the suspects without evidence, lest they complain to the emir. To that end, he is planning on hiring outsiders to investigate.

The Quiver: This shop sells bows and arrows, as well as accessories such as arrow heads, flights, strings, and quivers. The proprietor, Nasuhith, a cakali, is a master craftsman, though his stock covers all budgets. Among the high-end weapons are bows with Range 15/30/60 (300 dinars), high tension bows that inflict 2d8 damage but have a d8 Minimum Strength requirement (500 dinars), and arrows that are recovered on a roll of 1-3 on a d4 (150% of the normal price).

Shrine to Upuaut: The shrine stands within the fortress on the Isle of Docks. The god of travel has no clerics permanently resident. The shrine takes the form of a statue of Upuaut. Around its base are piles of nautical equipment. Captains seeking a blessing leave something of from their ship, such as dried provisions, a coil of rope, bucket of pitch, or spare sail. In return, they are permitted to take items they need. The swap scheme relies on honesty. It is said that those who abuse the system are plagued by terrible storms, doldrums, or voracious keel worms gnawing at their ship's hull until they make amends for their blasphemy.

Sinbad's Rest: While the owner, a retired sea dog by the name of Sabri, claims Sinbad once drank at the tavern, no one really believes the story. Every inch of the tavern's walls is covered in nautical charts, some dating back centuries. It has been a long standing tradition that any patron who hands over a map receives free food and drink of the best quality. A patron is permitted to copy any map, but he must buy everyone a round of drinks. Only ship captains and their guests are permitted as patrons, and the tavern has long been a favorite haunt for mariners wishing to socialize with equals.

The tavern functions as a specialized library covering

FLATTERY CONTINUED

SECOND PART

Al-Shirkuh, Animal*, Battle, Celestial Ocean, Charity, Copper Coin (a veiled insult), Destiny, Devoted, Eloquence, Equals, Faithful, Fate, Four Winds, Generosity, God*, Gods, Gold, Gold Coins, Good Fortune, Heavens, Hospitality, Jinn, Justice, Kindness, Knowledge, Lords, Magic, Majesties, Mercy, Occupation*, Patience, People, Radiance, Righteous, Silkeness, Silver, Silver Coin, Sky, Splendor, Stars, Terrain Type*, Truth, Wealth, Wisdom, Wise, World.

* *Substitute a specific name or type.*

NEGATIVES AS POSITIVES

As well as using positive second parts, it is permissible to use negatives (such as Cowardice, Cruelty, Injustice, or Misfortune). However, unless insult is intended, the first part of the term should be something that turns the negative into a positive. Examples include Adversary, Conqueror, Enemy, Foe, and Smiter. Thus, Father of Generosity and Enemy of Frugality are both terms of praise.

the seas and oceans of Al-Shirkuh. Investigation rolls concerning matters regarding the location of islands, wrecks, and so on, receive a +1 bonus. Rolls for other topics are not permitted.

Temple of Apsu: The temple precinct occupies an entire island. No bridges link it to the other islands—those who wish to worship here must arrive by water. The clerics of Apsu serve the city by keeping the watercourses free of detritus. Fouling the river is considered a religious crime in Fashir, and fines are paid directly to the cult. The clerics are zealous in their persecution of criminals, and even dropping small items into the river is enough to warrant arrest. The cult also operates a fleet of water taxis. These cost twice as much as normal, but there is no chance of being robbed by the operator.

Temple of Ashtart: In return for being granted an island on which to construct a temple, the cult was charged with housing and protecting the city's granaries. The cult owns extensive farmland, which generates much of its income. Other income is derived from various crafts carried out in the precinct, most notably the creation of herbal remedies. Dried herbs cost 3 dinars a bunch.

The cult regularly conducts expeditions into the Great Delta to gather medicinal herbs. With most of the paladins away protecting the farms, adventurers can find gainful employment as guards. The high priest, Alhusain Golden-Teeth, so named because his teeth are stained yellow by years of heavy tabac use, is currently seeking heroes to locate a party of herb gatherers whose return to Fashir is a week overdue.

Temple of the Seven Gods: Located on the Mainland, this holy site caters for all the deities, save for Iblis, who otherwise lack dedicated temples or shrines elsewhere in the city. None of the cults is particularly large, as the temple lacks a precinct for them to carry out the business side of their faith (it was knocked down to make way for housing). Inside, the long walls are divided into separate areas, each dedicated to one of the gods.

THE GREAT DELTA

The delta framed by the Rivers Shalak and Syrah is dominated by marshy ground and narrow channels bordered by high reeds. Citizens searching for fowl or medicinal herbs can earn an honest living, but few have cause to venture far into the interior. Papyrus is harvested near to the western shore.

Many stories exist of how the channels change course with alarming frequency, rendering maps unusable and confusing even those who have spent their life exploring the mire. Crocodiles and venomous snakes are a constant danger, and swarms of ravenous biting insects plague travellers. Pools of quicksand promise unwary travellers a ready-made tomb. Tales abound in Fashir's taverns and coffee houses of ancient ruins whose names no one recalls, forgotten temples to unknown gods, statues to nameless rulers, and ferocious crocodile-headed men. Fragments of pottery and inscriptions are occasionally unearthed, as are coins, but actual eyewitnesses to larger structures or sentient non-human denizens are few and far between.

Fashir makes no claims of governance over the small marsh communities that dot the eastern fringe. The locals make a meager living harvesting papyrus stems, selling fowl and herbs in Fashir, and offering their services as guides and porters to those intent on exploring the region. Conditions in the marsh can be grim, and there are few amenities, but the locals are a proud people with a strong sense of community and independence.

RIVERSIDE FORTS

Dotted along the River Shalak from the point it splits from the Syrah to 10 miles upriver from Fashir are numerous small forts. Each comprises a three story tower, a separate storeroom containing supplies, and a wide courtyard surrounded by a mud brick wall. Protruding into the river is a wooden wharf large enough to berth a heavy warship. As well as housing small military patrols, stationed here to protect the riverbank from invaders and deter pirates and smugglers, they serve as resupply points for Fashir's warships on river patrol duties and to provide merchant ships and grain barges a safe refuge for the night. No docking fees are charged, but visitors must supply their own provisions and tents. Honored guests may receive a bed in the tower, but conditions are still very basic. The soldiers have the right to order passing ships to dock and allow their cargo to be inspected for contraband.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Described below are a few of the city's many denizens the heroes may encounter while exploring the city.

THE LADY OF MANY-MASKS

Rumors have long circulated that somewhere in Fashir lives a cleric, wizard, or jinni (opinions differ) capable of changing people's appearance through some unknown form of magic. The service is not cheap, but for those cursed with ugliness or seeking to alter their visage so as to avoid arrest warrants it is a great opportunity. According to popular gossip, the heads of the two major thieves' guilds have avoided capture through this means.

The Lady charges 5000 dinars to remove the Ugly Hindrance or add the Attractive Hindrance, and double that to make an attractive person Very Attractive. A simple change of appearance, one that does not affect Charisma, costs 1500 dinars. She does not negotiate, nor can she be swayed by threats of hard-luck stories.

The Lady is not blessed with any form of supernatural power, nor is she an unearthly being. Her ability is achieved through an ancient relic, a clay mask that dates from the age of Hekata (though not that region). Her skill comes through shaping the clay to whatever features the wearer desires. Once she is satisfied, she activates the relic, permanently altering the wearer's flesh to match her sculpting.

ROJ

Roj is easy to spot around town—he stands 8 feet tall, weighs over 2000 pounds, and is made completely of bronze. One of the city's most unusual residents, Roj is a metal golem. No one alive today knows his origins, and the golem has nothing to say about his past. Records in the Porters' Guild archives reveal he has been a paid-up member of the guild for over 250 years.

Whoever created him (he is politely referred to as "him" rather than "it") was either no master of the ancient art or worked with a very small budget. Roj is smaller than normal metal golems (Size +1), has thin skin (Armor +2), is quite fragile (Vigor d8), possesses no Sweep Edge, and exhibits minimal combat capability (Fighting d6).

While dim-witted, Roj is an independent creature, bound to no master and capable of making his own decision (given time to ponder things). He has no interest in cerebral pursuits beyond a fondness for backgammon, at which he displays much talent. Despite being a construct, Roj pays his taxes and is thus a citizen of Fashir.

While he understands both Holy Tongue and Al-Waziran to a rudimentary level, striking up a conversation with him is extremely difficult. To date, Roj has only ever said one word—roj (from where he gets his name). What language it might be has never been deciphered, but it is an affirmative expression.

HAJJAD

City of the Gods

Capital city and center of religion in the Caliphate, Hajjad should be a burning beacon of righteousness to guide the Faithful. Its golden surface aptly portrays that image, but it is only a thin veneer. Scratch just a little deeper, and one uncovers corruption, decadence, and decay in the heart of power. To many, Hajjad has become known as the City of the Sun, but as the sun is beginning to diminish, so is the morality of the city.

Social Hierarchy

The first Caliph served as high priest of Shamash within the Sultanate. Indeed, the title translates as “Voice of the Highest.” It was he, so scholars say, who maintained order when the wickedness of the Sultan’s decree forced the Faithful to abandon their homes and seek new lands, an act that threatened to consume them in chaos. When the first city was founded, his position became both spiritual and temporal. It was the sixth Caliph who turned his religious position into one largely symbolic.

As with any nobles, there have been good and bad Caliphs down the ages, not to mention a few madmen. And yet the familial line has remained unbroken. Thanks to his position as spokesman of Shamash, not even the most power-hungry noble has sought to replace the Caliph through assassination.

Caliph Amr sees his first duty as governance of the people and the maintenance of order. That these are also duties required of Shamash’s clergy has not swayed him to take a more active hand in spiritual matters.

In olden times, the Caliphs appointed clerics, nobles, soldiers, and wise men as wizzirs. Each would offer their lord advice, though it was often tempered by personal opinions and desires, coupled with political maneuvering intended to weaken rivals and strengthen their own position. Indeed, it was long joked that if you asked ten wizzirs for an opinion, you would receive 11 answers. In order to rid himself of infighting and curb the power of individuals at court, Amr’s great-great-grandfather abolished the system and instigated an advisory council in its place. Each cult is represented, as are the noble houses and senior military officers, and the councilors are still referred to as wizzirs. Even Iblis has an advocate (so as not to give him reason to turn his attention on Hajjad), though it takes the form of a wooden mannikin. Several mages sit on the council. Ostensibly, they are there to demonstrate the new age of cooperation between the creeds. In truth, they are impartial with regards the bickering cults, and not easily swayed by their favors.

When the Caliph has need of advice, he puts his problem before the council. They then debate the issue, and report with one voice to High Priest Rashid, Amr’s chief wizzir, confidant, and closest friend (save for the Calipha).

Rashid is innocent of many of the charges leveled against him, but he is not without his flaws. Blinded by his faith, he seeks to expand the Caliphate’s sphere of influence, even if that means war with the Sultanate. It would be unjust to lay the blame for his support of claiming Marqod’s Well entirely at his feet, though. His wife is actually an agent of the Puppeteers, whose motives and plans are mysterious, and has slowly been poisoning his mind.

If the Caliph is the sun at the center of the Caliphate, then the nobles of Hajjad are lesser celestial bodies. Those wise in the ancient arts of politics are like the planets. They maintain a steady presence around the Caliph, yet tread carefully so as not to be seen as currying favor—neither Amr nor his senior courtiers put much faith in brown-nosing nobles seeking to further their own ends. Others are comets. They quickly rise from obscurity to become glowing beacons, only to fade into nothingness when their moment in the sun ends. At the back of the court are the stars. Faint but ever present, though with little hope of catching the Caliph’s eye, they lack the ambition and ruthlessness to advance.

Hajjad’s nobility is a vast web of ever-changing alliances and pacts. The wise nobles have one hand on their heart and one hand on their daggers, for treachery in the form of political maneuvering is as common as sand in the desert. Even the cults are part of their court games. Though scions must forfeit any noble titles, blood is thicker than water. Traditionally, second children are encouraged to join the cult of Shamash. Other children are urged to join one of the other cults, so as to extend the family’s sphere of influence.

The allegory of celestial objects applies equally to the middle classes. Some individuals, families, and businesses hold stable positions in society, weathering all storms. Others rise and fall as the fortunes of Hajjad wax and wane. Even the cults are not spared this. While Shamash shines brightly and Qedeshet’s cult is enjoying more popularity, the others jockey for position in the hearts and minds of the Caliph and his people.

As brightly as the sun shines on those with wealth and influence, those at the lower end of the social spectrum are cast in shadow. Poverty is rife, food shortages and inflated prices tempt people into crime, and the authorities are more concerned with enforcing the law than addressing the underlying problems. Amr tries his best, but as Caliph, he is largely segregated from the daily affairs of his people.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Hajjad.

* **Audience with the Caliph:** There is no die roll to gain an audience with the Caliph. Such an honor is granted only by the GM, and it should be done so extremely rarely. At *minimum*, a character would need to be a councilor (which means spending his days at court), have 150+ Glory (at which time the Caliph might summon the hero to regale him with tales of his adventures), become high priest of a temple in Hajjad, or bribe the chief wizar (at least 10,000 dinars).

* **Books:** Tomes of lore cost 175 dinars per point up to +3, and 600 dinars per point between +4 and +6. These can be purchased in the souk.

* **Food:** Expensive meals cost 10+ dinars.

* **Holy Season:** During the month of Alak Neteru, the cost of all meals, including rations, is increased threefold. The price of other objects increases by 25% as traders look to make money from the many pilgrims.

* **Jinn:** Jinn (but not jinn blooded) are banned from entering Hajjad under any circumstances. Any found within the city proper may be attacked and slain by any citizen without legal repercussions. Anyone caught summoning a jinni faces harsh penalties. Jinn spirit relics must be handed to the cult of Shamash on entering Hajjad. These are kept in secure storage until the visitor leaves, at which time they are returned to him at the gate.

* **Native Heroes:** A native character with Smarts d6+ may choose to be a graduate of *one* of the city's advanced universities. Each university grants certain benefits, as listed below, but only during character generation and the hero must meet all other requirements (where applicable).

Al-Shirkub: For one skill point, the character may take two skills from Knowledge (Area), Knowledge (Folklore), Knowledge (Heraldry), and Knowledge (History) at d4, or one at d6. He may not spend more than two skill points on this benefit.

Higher Wisdom: For one skill point the character may take Knowledge (Religion) at d6.

Illuminators & Scribes Minds: For one skill point the character may take Knowledge (Craft: Illumination) at d6. Alternately, for one skill point, he may instead pick two additional languages.

* **Prohibited Objects:** Spirit relics and alchemical devices created by jinn magic and khem-hekau are outlawed by the cult of Shamash, though they can be found on the black market. Finding a seller (or buyer) requires a weekly Streetwise roll at -4. Prices for these objects are double that of normal.

* **Temple Purchases:** The cost of any goods or services purchased directly from a temple are 10% higher than standard. Even donations to the cult must be 10% higher.

AUDIENCE WITH THE CALIPH

The Caliph is a very busy man. As well as running the realm, he must frequently meet with emissaries from the Sultanate and Free Emirate States, consult with the advisory council, treat with the high priests, and appease the nobles. Even if one has a pressing matter that threatens the entire land, one must slowly work one's way up the bureaucratic ladder until one reaches the top. Most petitions fail to reach the Caliph, being considered important enough only to trouble a junior functionary. This is not to say they won't be heard—their petition just won't be to the Caliph in person.

Education

Through the tithes it receives, the cult of Qedeset offers free basic education to all children, regardless of creed. Most children attend school—the natives are of the mind that if they're paying for something, they might as well put it to good use. As a result, literacy rates are the highest in the Caliphate and children have higher ambitions (though due to the increased competition, they are just as likely to fail as elsewhere).

Among poorer families, having a child selected to receive training with an aim to becoming a cleric is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it means the child will have a secure job and there is one less mouth to feed. On the other, it means one less potential wage earner in the household.

Until 80 years ago, Hajjad had only one center of higher education, the University of the Caliphate, and it offered only basic instruction. Desperate to stop the Caliphate's brightest young minds moving to Qarah, City of Learning, the cult of Qedeset took action. In return for receiving 10% of all tithes, it would provide free basic education to all Faithful citizens *and* sponsor the creation of three advanced universities. While the other cults protested, the Caliph at the time saw sense and passed a new law. Through this shrewd move, and coupled with the city's reliance on trade, the cult elevated its standing in Hajjad to second behind that of Shamash.

Although the cult still has much influence over these, they are considered secular institutions. Though they have earned a well-deserved reputation for excellence, they are not yet the equal of those in Qarah. The advanced universities are detailed in the section on City Locales.

Religion

As its title implies, Hajjad was built with the purpose of honoring all the gods. It was to be the spiritual heartland of the new realm, where all the benevolent gods were equals. To the uninitiated, that view remains true today. After all, it is here that every deity, save for Iblis, has the grandest

The Caliphate of Al-Shirkuh

temple, and here the chief high priests of the major cults live, work, and preach. Appearances and truth are not always the same thing, though.

For sure there are majestic temples, built on truly monumental scales, and pious men whose decrees affects many tens of thousands of worshippers. But here, in the City of the Gods, Shamash reigns supreme.

Shamash may be the chief of the gods and responsible for ensuring universal order, but the cult did not purposefully set out to elevate itself above its peers. With the Caliph as *de facto* head of the faith, it was only natural that it would enjoy greater prestige on the mortal realm. Shamash was not originally the god of nobility, either. Keen to show their support for the Caliph, nobles took to honoring his patron deity. The cult grew rich from donations, and with wealth came influence and power. Alas, with those came corruption, not while Shamash is infallible and righteous, mortals, even clerics, are not.

The Caliphs are not without blame in Shamash's ascension. Those of strong faith freely granted the cult greater authority and benefits to win favor in the Afterlife, while those with weaker wills sometimes fell prey to high priests looking to boost their cult's status.

While the cult of Shamash shines brightly, there are corners of Hajjad where darkness reigns. Beneath the gaze of the cult's fervent paladins, citizens from the highest nobles to the lowest peasants secretly worship Iblis and the demon princes. Of the nobles who treat for expansion toward Margod's Well, many have had words whispered into their ears by their dark masters, who crave only chaos and suffering. Though the cult of Shamash is quick and ruthless in stamping out these vile cults when it unearths them, for each one destroyed another soon springs up.

During Alak Neteru, thousands of pilgrims from across Al-Shirkuh descend on the city. Although it is not required of them, Faithful make it their business to pray at the great temples and marvel at the palace of the Caliph at least once in their lives. Those who complete the pilgrimage receive a badge styled in the holy symbol of the various deities whose homes they visit.

Initially, every cult offered a badge. In a bid to curb the influx of pilgrims, whose presence brings in extra revenue but places an immense strain on the city infrastructure, one of the Caliphs ruled that only one cult per year could offer a badge. Thus, a Faithful hoping to collect all 11 badges must make 11 pilgrimages. The scheme backfired somewhat, for many citizens strive to collect all the badges, so as to show their piety to Tammuz at the time of judgment.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Day of Radiance: This day marks the incumbent Caliph's ascension to the throne. While it once fell on the anniversary of the actual day the new Caliph took power, it has long been fixed in the calendar as taking place on Baot Yaus al-Niwt Amt Alak Shemu to prevent it clashing with other high holy days or important events, such as planting or harvesting. On this day, the Caliph

makes a rare appearance on the streets as he visits each of the temples in turn (starting with that of Shamash) to receive a blessing.

Day of Stamping Gods: On Anshi Yaus al-Hamala Amt Alak Shemu, the Pantheon marches through town. Each regiment sends one company on a rotating basis. With banners held aloft and weapons drawn, they parade through the city, stamping their feet. The display was originally intended to show the people that the armies of the Caliphate were ready to protect them from all foe, while the stamping was intended to cause any enemies to quake in terror. Today it is merely a public holiday.

Military

Hajjad is also the heart of the military, for the army of the Caliph is that of the land, as well as the city. If the Caliph is the mouth of Shamash, then the army he commands is his just hand, through which the forces of darkness and chaos are kept at bay. While some Caliphs have been warmongers, the incumbent is a seasoned soldier. He knows the misery war inflicts, and he has no wish to inflict unnecessary suffering on his people.

ARMY

The core of the army is formed of regiments whose headquarters are the great towers of Hajjad. Collectively, these veteran units are known as the Pantheon. Each regiment is actually at full strength (1936 men), but only five companies of each are ever in the city at any one time. Unlike other regiments, each is named for one of the gods, rather than its commander.

Most of these regiments are medium infantry. Those not are the Regiment of Duamutef (a double strength regiment of archers, with one regiment being mounted archers), Karmelos (ultra-heavy infantry), and Upuaut (ultra-heavy cavalry, known as cataphracts). Except for the Regiment of Shamash, troops stationed in Hajjad form the city guard. The Regiment of Shamash forms the Caliph's bodyguard, and the entire compliment lives in Hajjad when the Caliph is present. Five companies are garrisoned at their tower and six inside the palace grounds.

The rest of the main army is made up of eight regiments of infantry (two heavy, two medium, and four light), five regiments of archers (two crossbows and three bows), and five regiments of cavalry (two heavy and three light).

In addition, there are a number of special units serving the will of the Caliph.

Artillery Regiment: Responsibility for siege weaponry and engineering falls to these five companies. Except when the Caliphate is at war, three companies are permanently stationed in Hajjad as part of the city guard.

The Black Regiment: Made up of dark-skinned tribesmen from the jungle lands far to the west, the regiment has only five companies. Four of these are skirmishers and scouts. The fifth is war elephant cavalry (40 elephants).

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The Company of Upuaut: That the Sultan has the Pegasus Guard has always grated with the Caliphs. The Caliphate has never tried to raise a direct counterpart—no Caliph has wished to be seen as copying his peer. It does have a single company mounted on flying carpets, though. Each carpet holds one rider and three archers, giving it just 44 carpets. The men serve primarily as scouts and messengers.

Regiment of Iblis: Soldiers sentenced to slavery may end up in the mines or on galleys, but the Caliphate is loathe to waste experienced soldiers, even if they are criminals. The Regiment of Iblis is a penal unit. Unwilling to waste good armor and weapons, the troops carry only small shields and light spears. Whereas those sentenced to conventional slavery must carry out their full sentence, those assigned to the regiment can earn early release if they serve well.

The Regiment of Light: While there is a separation of state and religion in the military, there are paladins who wish to serve the Caliph full-time. They have taken special vows placing service to the Caliph before that of their cult, and answer to the Caliph over their high priest. Although termed a regiment, this unit has just two companies of paladins.

The White Regiment: Only four companies strong, this regiment comprises barbarian volunteers from the lands north of Al-Shirkuh. Whereas the Black Guard are professional soldiers beholden to the Caliph, the White Guard are mercenaries.

NAVY

Hajjad may be land-locked, but the Caliph has a strong navy. His personal fleet comprises 30 warships, 20 heavy warships, and 10 galleys, plus a large number of smaller vessels. Though far from the seat of power, Mazar, City of Eyes, serves as the fleet's main base and the headquarters of the High Admiral. His post is purely bureaucratic, concerned with training and logistics—command of the fleet in times of war is assigned to other officers. Warships patrol along the maritime trade routes, sweeping the seas of corsairs, tackling sea monsters that might threaten trade, and reminding the other cities that the arm of the Caliph is long.

Law & Order

Over time, the duty of policing the streets has moved away from the civil authorities and into the hands of the cult of Shamash. Law enforcement is divided into two distinct categories.

Most crimes are dealt with by the City Watch. The Watch is divided into the Sun Watch and Moon Watch, with each subdivided into Early and Late. Within each subdivision, there are numerous squads, each given a numerical title. Thus, one finds squads named First Early Sun Watch and Tenth Late Moon Watch. Each Watch patrols the streets for six hours.

Watchmen may be of any faith. Each squad is led by a Watch Sergeant, who must be a follower of Shamash. Each of the Early and Late Watches is commanded by a Watch Captain, who is always a cleric of Shamash. A Watch Commander oversees the Sun and Moon Watch, and again he must be a cleric of Shamash, as is the Grand Commander of the Watch. The watch has a deserved reputation for being zealous in its duties. In a bid to prevent the courts being swamped, the Caliphs of old ruled the watch could impose of-the-spot fines for minor offences. Half of the fine goes to the state, and half to the cult of Shamash. Over time, the line being crimes that can be fined and crimes that require the courts to judge has blurred, as has what constitute a crime. Caliph Amr has reigned in some of the watch's power in a bid to curb excess and prevent widespread unrest.

Religious crimes (which includes spellcasting) are policed exclusively by the Morality Watch, more officially known as the Guardians of Virtue and Enemies of Vice. The Morality Watch is structured like the City Watch, except that watchmen and sergeants must be fadeen of Shamash. Like the main watch, they have no authority inside the grounds of a temple.

Crime is as rampant in the City of the Gods as in any other city. Hashish is semi-legal here—it can only be bought from the temple of Tamarni, and must be smoked inside the precinct. The Clouds of Bliss is a thieves guild focused on the smuggling and distribution of hashish. The City Watch strongly suspects the diplomat from Tamarah, City of Heavenly Sin, is a ringleader in the guild, but cannot do anything about it without incontrovertible evidence. The trade in spirit relics and khem-hekau alchemical devices is largely controlled by the Black Guard.

There are two general thieves' guild. The Darkened Suns operate out of the northwest quarter, while the Shadowy Hands have their headquarters in the southwest. Both are located in the slums, but ply their trade across the city. Territorial disputes are frequent and bloody.

A powerful bandit chief, Bakir, plagues the Road of the Gods north of Hajjad. Rumors abound he has a jinn or mage in his employ. The Caliph would dearly love to end his raids, but Bakir is careful to keep his activities to the neutral territory just beyond the border. The Sultanate has refused to grant the Caliph permission to send his troops into the region, forcing Amr to look at hitting independent adventurers.

Trade & Tribute

Due to its position on the Road of the Gods, Hajjad is a key trading city for heavily laden caravans. While this brings in much revenue, its position far from a major water source brings its own problems.

Starvation is a very real threat. The springs that enable the city to exist do not produce enough water for extensive agriculture. What farms exist are a day or more from the city, and are clustered around small springs and oases. The local harvest is never enough to sate the needs to the

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populace, forcing Hajjad to rely heavily on imports of grain and vegetables. While grain is subsidized, vegetables are not, placing them beyond the reach of most citizens. Live-stock are raised in the surrounding scrubland, but again, there is not enough to satisfy demand for meat. Most are reared for milk, which is turned into cheese. During Alak Neteru, when thousands of pilgrims flock to the city, the shortages become more dramatic, causing prices to inflate and rationing to be implemented.

The city exports a variety of goods, the most notable of which is illuminated manuscripts. This is a relatively recent advent, prompted by the cult of Qedeset. In order to produce these fine works, though, the scribes and illuminators must import papyrus from Fashir, City of Water. Keen to support the trade, Caliph Amr's father abolished taxation on imports of parchment, papyrus, ink, and other essential goods.

While the temples grow fat on donations from pilgrims and the higher cost of goods and services (see below), this wealth also benefits the Caliph. The temples are businesses, and thus are taxed accordingly.

COINAGE

Locally minted coins carry the name of the incumbent Caliph on one side and the holy symbol of Shamash on the reverse (despite the cult not being responsible for minting them). Dinars, being gold, are named after aspects of the sun. The one dinar coin is known locally as a "Sun." Higher denominations are the five dinar ("Ray") and 50 dinar ("Noon"). Silver coins are found in one dirham ("Moon"), one-half dinar ("Half Moon"), and one-quarter dirham ("Crescent") denominations.

Each cult in Hajjad mints its own bronze coins stamped with the god's holy symbol and their value. Anyone looking to purchase goods (except for export purposes) or services directly from the temple, or even make a donation, must first exchange their coins. The cult charges a commission for this service. For the purposes of play, the cost of all goods and services purchased directly from a temple in Hajjad is 10% higher than normal. These coins are not legal tender outside the temples of Hajjad, even in other temples of the same deity.

LOCAL TAXES

Though the Caliph has a large military machine to maintain and a city to finance, income tax burdens are low (10% of earnings). Much of the city's revenue comes from trade duties and taxes paid by the great temples.

Customs Duty: No goods may enter or leave the city until customs officials have inspected them and levied tax. Papyrus, books, and other related goods are duty free. Imports of grain are charged at 2%, while all exports of foodstuffs are at 50% (in a bid to stifle trade). All other goods carry a 5% levy.

Gate Tax: Entrance into the city is charged at one dirham for pedestrian, five dirhams for camels or other mounts, and one dinar for carts or chariots.

Sales Tax: No tax on parchment, writing equipment, or tomes of lore. A flat 5% is charged on everything else.

Tithes: Though the cults have pushed for a higher rate in order to help provide essential services, the tithe rates remains at 10% of earnings.

Hajjad may have major temples to all the gods, but the cult of Shamash receives 50% of all tithes. Ten percent goes to Qedeset to provide for education, while the remaining 40% is divided equally between the other cults. Of the Devoted tithe, 50% goes to a kada of their choice, 40% to the cult of Shamash, and 10% to the cult of Qedeset.

Weapon License: Only clerics of the benevolent gods, city watch, city guard, and the Caliph's bodyguard may openly bear arms. Others must obtain a license. The cost is 10 dinars times the damage die type of all weapons. Bows and crossbows are charged at 60 dinars. The number and type of weapons is listed on the license, which is valid for one month. Wearing armor is not prohibited or taxed, though it does raise eyebrows.

Architecture

Cutting arrow-straight in a north-south direction through the city is the Road of the Gods. Its division of Hajjad into a western and eastern portion is not merely symbolic. The western side contains most of the population. They are crowded into multistory apartment blocks that border narrow streets. In the worst slums, entire families share a single, small room. Little money is spent on maintaining the roads or buildings, lending the area a taint of decay. The eastern side is much more open, and vast sums are spent maintaining it. Homes are surrounded by courtyards, streets are wide and bordered by trees and shrubs, and even the presence of the great temples does little to crowd the area, for each is surrounded by a huge precinct, walled but not oppressive. As one commentator put it, the sun rises and brings light in the east and sets into shadow in the west.

Major Locales

This section details locales inside the holy city of Hajjad adventurers might wish to explore.

CITY DISTRICTS

With little agricultural land nearby, 85% of Hajjad's population lives in the city. Over 75% of these live in the western half. While there are lower class residential areas in the east, most are located in the west, as are the worst slums. Middle class residential districts in the east are clustered around the souk and bordering the Road of the Gods.

During Alak Neteru, numbers swell by many thousands. Since accommodation space in the city is limited, a great tent city forms outside the main gates. Given that

the approaches to Hajjad are flanked by caravanserais, many pilgrims have to walk as much as a mile from their temporary homes just to reach the city gates. Internally, the city is divided into four quarters by the north-south Road of the Gods and the east-west Sun Road.

Embassy: Adjacent to the palace is the upper-class area containing the embassies of the Free Emirate States and the Sultanate, and the homes of diplomats from the Caliphate's other great cities. Though it frustrates the cult of Shamash, the various buildings are governed by the laws of their native lands or cities, not those of Hajjad. Forcing entry, even into those owned by cities within the Caliphate, would be a declaration of war.

Palace: The great palace of the Caliph dominates the city skyline. Built of yellow marble, with roof tiles of beaten gold, it symbolizes the power and faith of the Caliph. As well as being home to the noble family and senior courtiers, it contains extensive barracks, the law courts, and bureaucratic offices, as well as the city jail. Areas accessible to the public are in a separate compound, and diligently watched over by the Caliph's bodyguards.

Papyrus: This district is home to craftsmen involved in the production of manuscripts and writing supplies—bookbinders, illuminators, inkers, parchmenters, pastelers (grinds pigments), scribes, scroll case makers, and so on. A small market, the Scholar Souk, sells only their wares.

Temple: Straddling both sides of the western Sun Road, the Temple District houses the grand temples. The actual temples themselves are immense, but fill only a small portion of the precinct. Clustered here are houses of priests, workshops, storerooms, barracks, and buildings devoted to various cult activities. Each is a miniature town, with a population in excess of 1000 souls (ordained and laity).

Warehouse: Though caravans reside at the various caravanserai outside the city walls, their goods must enter in order to find buyers. The area around the crossroads where the Road of Gods and Sun Road meet is devoted to warehousing. The eastern side of the district is much larger than that on the western side. Despite frequent patrols, thieves still manage to ply their trade here.

University: While the University of the Caliphate is part of the temple precinct of Qedeshet, the new universities border the eastern half of the southern Road of the Gods, opposite the Papyrus District. Many of the city's most notable scholars have taken up residence here.

CITY LOCALES

Azir's Embalmers: While the cult of Tammuz offers embalming services, prices are steep. For those on modest budgets, there is Azir. Despite his low prices, Azir produces marvellous work. Such is his reputation that even nobles bring their dead to him. It is often commented that the bandages corpses are as solid as wood. This is not surprising, given that beneath the wrappings is an actual wooden statue. Azir, a vile cultist, gives the actual corpses to a gang of ghûls living in the tunnels beneath the city.

City Walls: Hajjad's defensive walls are impressive. Protruding above them are the huge guard towers of

the Pantheon regiments. In between these are smaller towers, where archers and artillerists keep watch over the approaches. Each of the main towers has a separate armory, containing mundane and alchemical weaponry.

Culverts: Water is a precious commodity in Hajjad. Over the centuries, the springs have been channeled into a large network of tunnel and culverts beneath the city, from where citizens draw water through wells. The maze of tunnels, which vary in diameter from a foot to a dozen feet, are used by thieves, smugglers, cultists, and other ne'er-do-wells. Responsibility for maintaining them falls to the Ministry of Water.

Embassy of the Emirates: Trading partners with the Caliphate since its foundation, the Free Emirate States are keen to ensure that goods continue to flow in both directions. Ambassador Pasha Khalis ibn Sofian, a noble hailing from Qurqas, City of Slaves, is aware the specter of war has reared its ugly head, and has made no secret of his opposition against any move to annex Marqod's Well. The Free Emirate States would not tolerate interference in trade along Suleiman's Road, its gateway to the markets of the Sultanate.

Elements within Hajjad's mercantile community, keen to boost trade along the Road of the Gods, have approached the ambassador several times. Each time they have been rebuffed, the ambassador claiming that the Emirates, as a free nation, trades with whom it wishes. Unwilling to accept his refusal, these elements are planning to have Pasha Khalis removed (either politically or the time-trusted method of assassination) in the hope a more pliant ambassador is appointed.

Embassy of the Sultanate: Official communication between the Caliph and Sultan occurs through its ambassadors. Although regarded as sovereign territory of the Sultanate, the embassy does not offer sanctuary to fugitives wanted by the Caliph, nor does it seek to interfere in local matters. It exists purely as a political and economic representative of the Sultan.

Sirdar Abdul-Fattah, ambassador to the Caliphate, has much on his mind. There is a strange air around the court, and he suspects something of importance is being discussed in secret. His agents have reported nothing untoward, save for a few extra military units being stationed in the north. Unaware of the Caliph's dream, he does not suspect that war may be on the horizon.

Gates: The walls of Hajjad are broken by four gates. The largest are in the north (The Trade Gate) and south (The Gate of Enlightenment), as these cater for caravans. At either end of the Sun Road are two smaller gates—The Dawn Gate (east) and Dusk Gate (west). These gates are opened at dawn and closed at dusk without fail. Traffic seeking entrance after hours must circle the city to one of the other gates.

The Great Temples: In Hajjad, "temple" refers to any of the 11 great holy sites run by the cults. Since Duamutef and Upuaut don't inhabit physical temples, there are in fact nine great temples and two great shrines (the latter still within a huge precinct). Everyone in the city knows what someone means if they say they're going to the pre-

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cinct, shrine, or temple of these deities, and clerics have better things to do than correct everyone's terminology.

Only a few of the temples are described below, leaving GMs free to describe others as they see fit. GMs should remember that every cult operates as business as well as spiritual organization, and the temples are hives of appropriate industries. In addition, every cult has a specialized grand library (+2 to Investigation rolls concerning matters covered by the god's aspects, +0 regarding other areas of interest).

Temple of Geb-Agni: The surface precinct is a hive of industrial activity, with gem cutting, metalworking, and sculpting being the main arts. From dawn to dusk, the air rings heavy with the sand of chiselling and hammering, and the precinct is blanketed by smoke from the furnaces and forges. Though places of work, the various workshops and other buildings are works of art, lovingly constructed by the cults' masons. The actual temple is underground. Shrines exist above ground, in artificial grottoes.

Temple of Duamutef: Monumental shrines exist to everyone of the god's aspects stand within the sacred precinct. The ground here is covered in sand, symbolizing the desert. Clerics and laity raise and train camels, create bows, arrows, saddles, and tack, and provide instruction in the finer arts of hospitality and riding. Except for the shrines, which are permanent structures, other buildings are tents. In honor of Duamutef being god of nomads, their position is changed at the start of each season.

Temple of Upuaut: Like the precinct of Dumauteuf, there is no majestic temple, only shrines. Aside from the shrines, there are no permanent structures—to honor their god, clerics and laity work and live in tents, which are moved around the precinct at the start of each season.

The laity (and clerics present at the time) raise and train song and hunting birds, while workshops produce chariots, footwear, kites, trail rations, wagons, and other objects associated with travel. They compete with the cult of Duamutef with regard saddles and tack. The library contains travelogues and maps.

The Golden Palm: Standing squarely in the center of the crossroads where the Road of the Gods and Sun Road meet is a lone palm tree. Its name derives from its fruit—succulent dates the color of gold. According to local tradition, the date was planted by the first Caliph from a seed given to his ancestors by Suleiman. Of late, people have noted that the leaves have become tainted, and the fruits no longer seem as plump. Whatever shadow clouds Hajjad, it is being mirrored in the palm.

By ancient decree, anyone touching the tree may freely speak their mind about any subject or person without fear of legal retribution. Still, legal prosecution and private vengeance for committing slander (or blasphemy) are entirely different things.

Hajjad Officer Academy: The finest military school in the Caliphate, the Officer Academy serves to turn men into officers and give officers the best training available. Admission is not free, and for those not born to wealth the only hope is to be awarded a scholarship.

Graduates not serving in an emir's army are required

to spend five years serving the Caliph. They begin as a captain in one of the standard regiments, or a sergeant in one of the Pantheon regiments. Since there are only a limited number of posts available, many end up serving as junior officers, forced to wait for a vacancy before assuming the full rank.

Full-time students must spend three years in the Sultan's army after completing their course, but begin their careers as sergeants (or captains if they pass with honors). Those who undertake shorter courses (such as player characters) must complete a military tour equal to three times the number of months spent in class. Such pupils are usually seconded into a common regiment, as opposed to the Pantheon.

Skills: Knowledge (Battle); **Edges:** All Leadership Edges.

Shrine of the Sword: Located within the precinct of the temple of Shamash is a large shrine. It houses the Sword of Suleiman, a golden scimitar the prophet wielded in battle against the jinn. Its existence has been a bane of contention between the Caliphate and Sultanate, the latter insisting the fabulous relic was stolen by the refugees fleeing the religious purge. The Caliphate argues otherwise. The blade is used only for ceremonial purposes, and then only when a new Caliph is enthroned. Only he may touch the blade without gloves. For others to handle the blade is to invite a fiery death, for a legend has arisen that only the most worthy may handle it.

Its keeper, Eye of Shamash Izzaq ibn Mahmoud, is a man with a troubled mind. Several months ago, while polishing the blade, he noticed the pommel had come loose. On investigating, he discovered the handle was hollow. Inside was a tiny scroll, proclaiming the blade to have been manufactured in 74 CJ. Izzaq has no idea what to do with this knowledge. For sure, his cult would seek to cover up his discovery, but his conscience tells him that the truth must be made public. Of course, if he could find the real blade and replace it, all would be well again.

The Silent Citadel: Hajjad's largest library (+1 to Investigation rolls) stands within the precinct of Qedeset's temples. It takes its name from the fact that it is impossible to generate any sound while inside the imposing structure. The cause of this remains a complete mystery even to the clerics who work here. While much loved by scholars, who favor the quiet, it remains a no-go area for those who fear assassination—no drawing of dagger or cry for help would be heard among the towering stacks of books and scrolls.

Souk of All Gods: This enclosed market straddles the Road of the Gods north of the Warehouse District. The souk is vast. Even a cursory glance in every shop would take an entire day, and visitors frequently become lost in the maze of narrow passageways. Entirely covered, it is breached by wide gates in the north and south to facilitate the flow of caravans, and several smaller gates in the east and west. Lower quality goods are found in the western half, and higher quality ones in the east. It opens from dawn to dusk.

University of Al-Shirkuh: Though the early Caliph-

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ate was insular in its outlook, today it embraces its part in the wider realm. The aptly named university teaches courses covering the lands and places of Al-Shirkuh, as well as folklore and history.

Skills: Knowledge (Area, Folklore, Heraldry, History); **Edges:** Scholar (the +2 bonus must be applied to one of the skills the university teaches); **Languages:** Teaches all.

University of Higher Wisdom: The last of the three universities founded by the cult of Qedeshet focuses solely on religion. It is not without vocal critics, for some think that all religious training should be handled solely by temples. The cult argues that a broad knowledge of all the gods provides better understanding and unification of the faiths. Tuition also covers the Devoted creed, another factor that has attracted critics.

Skills: Knowledge (Religion).

University of Illuminators and Scribes: Initially founded to teach the finer arts of penmanship, the university has since expanded to become the gateway to a career in the civil service. With literacy rates in the city high, those seeking to secure a post in the Caliphate's bureaucracy are encouraged to enroll at the university. The cult of Qedeshet subsidizes courses for those wishing to become bureaucrats, but graduates must serve for three years in the civil service or with the cult.

Skills: Craft (Illumination); **Languages:** Teaches Al-Waziran, Holy Tongue, Sandspeech, and Sphinx.

THE FIELD OF DREAMS

Population: 56

Ruler: Abdul-Ghani ibn Shafi

Abdul-Ghani ibn Shafi, a carpenter from Hajjad, had a dream. Ashtart spoke to him, telling him to plant seeds in the arid desert. Abdul-Ghani initially put the strange vision down to his wife's bad cooking, but the dream returned night after night. Believing the only way to rid himself of the unwanted visions was to follow the instructions, Abdul-Ghani bought a bag of seed and headed into the desert. At the spot indicated by Ashtart he duly sowed the seeds in the barren sand.

Having no wish to wait around for nothing to happen, Abdul-Ghani returned home. The dream never troubled him again. Months later, driven by curiosity as harvest time neared, he returned to the desert. To his surprise he found not lifeless sand, but a verdant crop.

That was 15 years ago. Today, Abdul-Ghani and his extended family run a small farm. They have dug a well for drinking water, but their fields are not irrigated, nor are they fertilized. No matter what seeds the family sows in the sand, every harvest there is a ripe crop. The family does not decide what crops to grow each year, though. On the eve of the first day of Alak Arkhet Abdul-Ghani has a dream, in which Ashtart reveals what plants will prosper in the coming year.

The fields produce enough to feed the family well and allow them modest exports (after voluntarily donating 10% to the cult of Ashtart). Unfortunately for the family, there is no chance of increasing the yield or the size of

the fields. Water or fertilizer cause the crops to wither, and beyond the current fields (40 acres) nothing grows.

The Field of Dreams, as the site has become known, is a place of pilgrimage for followers of Ashtart. They come for harvest, helping to gather the crops in return for nothing more than simple meals and the chance to pray at the small shrine Abdul-Ghani erected.

GEB-AGNI'S PAINTBOX

Population: 480

Ruler: Effenda Tarub bint Bakr

Located in the foothills of the Pillars of Suleiman is a mining camp. The workers, all of whom are slaves bound into servitude by the courts, toil to quarry stones rich in colored mineral pigments. Once ground, these are sold to the inkers and pastelers of Hajjad. The quarries are operated by the House of Imad, one of the oldest noble families in Hajjad. Though the modern quarry is less than 80 years old, pigments have been extracted from the rocks for centuries. Such is their purity that the painters and scribes of distant Hekata favored them above all others. Ruins of former blockhouses inhabited by these long-forgotten miners still dot the hills.

Effenda Tarub, who runs the camp for her father, is widely regarded as a brilliant artist. Even the Caliph owns copies of her works. Though her workers are slaves, she treats them well. The hours are long and back-breaking, but few grumble—compared to other mining camps worked by slaves, life here is tolerable.

Tarub has not been seen for several weeks. Guards at the camp said she and a small party of workers went into the hills to investigate a recently discovered ruin, which the noblewoman intended to paint. Her father's personal soldiers have scoured the landscape, but have unearthed no sign of any notable ruins, yet alone their master's daughter. Desperate, Sirdar Bakr is preparing to hire experts—adventurers—to locate his daughter.

PERSONS OF Note

Below are is a one of the many denizens of the city the heroes may interact with during their time in Hajjad.

SCRIBE ABRA BINT FALAH

Though still young (32), Abra, a Scribe of Qedeshet, is regarded as something of an expert on matters concerning the jinn before the War of Copper Jars, though she is also accused of having a fanciful imagination unbefitting a scholar. Her research has led her to believe that a forgotten jinn palace lies somewhere near Hajjad. Few of her peers believe the jinn ever settled this far south, despite conquering Magor, and her lectures on the subject are met with snorts of derision. Unable to secure temple funds to finance a full expedition, she hopes to attract adventurers to help her scour the landscape for evidence.

HAMRA

City of the Stone

Once considered the most law-abiding city in the Caliphate, Hamra is today gripped by paranoia and terror. The Stone of Justice is ever hungry, and even those guilty of the most minor transgression are subject to the only sentence it passes—death.

Social Hierarchy

While the emir has always held the right to choose his successor, many families have sat on the throne. In cases where the nominated heir has been killed by the stone before claiming the title, deciding his replacement falls to a council made up of senior clerics and the heads of the noble families. Being appointed heir is often met with trepidation, but the laws of old do not give the one chosen a chance to avoid his fate—once selected, he or she will touch the stone willingly or by force.

More than once a candidate was selected because someone with enough influence wanted a rival removed. Sometimes this plan backfired, with the stone selecting the candidate as the new emir. Vengeance against those who forced his hand inevitably follows.

Emir Kaldun is despised by his people. The popularity of the emirs has been in decline for centuries, but Kaldun's lunacy has brought the city to the brink of disaster. There is little pattern to his lucid moments, and to gamble on his being aware of his surroundings when proposing a course of action to him is a dangerous game.

The wizirs are impotent, terrified of making any decision without the approval of the emir, and fearful that an order given and duly carried out one day will earn them execution for treason the next. To be selected for the post has become a death sentence. Little surprise, then, that in the last ten years corruption has risen dramatically, with the wizirs seeking to skim as much for the city coffers and escape Hamra before their day with the headsman comes.

The emir's madness has forced the nobles to avoid court. Given chance, they avoid the city altogether, spending their days in their remote estates and musing on how to keep their ailing family's fortunes intact, in the face of economic hardship, plot their next moves in the power struggles between the families, and avoid the attention of the emir. When they must send courtiers, that duty falls to lower children, never the head of the family or his heir. To be summoned by the emir is a call that cannot be avoided, but it is one few relish. For sure, the emir might reward the noble for his service (perceived or real), but he might equally be calling the noble to his doom.

The clerics of the two city's major cults, Tammuz and

Shamash (in order of size), have little to fear from the lottery, but they are still subject to the will and whims of the emir. Neither cult enjoys much support among the general populace, for they are the champions of justice, a word that has all but lost its meaning in Hamra.

Hamra's middle classes are primarily merchants. The difficulty in getting trade goods into and out of the city has weakened their wealth. Smaller enterprises have either consolidated with former rivals, or been swallowed by larger merchant houses.

The city's population has greatly expanded in recent years. Agricultural workers have been forced into the city in droves, increasing the population from 40% to 65%. As demands for porters lessens at the docks, there has been less and less work available for these largely unskilled workers. Many survive on charity from kindly souls and the cults, but few go to bed with full stomachs.

Reduced income has led to cutbacks in the city's spending, food shortages and exorbitant prices plague the markets, unemployment is high, the influx of newcomers has placed immense strain on the city's infrastructure, and still the emir does nothing. A dark mood exists in Hamra, and though few have the courage to speak openly of revolt, for that is sedition, it would not take much to spark a violent revolution.

Education

Hamra boasts the highest school attendance in the Caliphate. Since education is compulsory by order of the Caliph, truancy is technically a crime. As trivial an offence as it might be elsewhere, in Hamra, all crimes are treated equally. Unfortunately, the cult of Qedeset has only a small presence in Hamra. Class sizes are extremely large, and tutors have little time for those who fall behind. Private tuition is available, but that comes at a price beyond the reach of the average citizen. As a result, education standards for the masses are about the same as elsewhere in the Caliphate.

There are two universities. The University of Hamra is a basic educational establishment, offering standard courses one finds across the great realms. Its second university is the University of Justice, which specializes in law. Ironically, while its graduates are widely renowned for their knowledge of the laws of the four great realms, not to mention laws governing even the minor Bedu tribes, not one has ever found employment in Hamra. Despite this, all local clerics of Tammuz are required to attend the school for a minimum of one year.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Hamra.

* **Air of Paranoia:** Paranoia is rife, and many citizens are fearful of strangers, believing they may be spies sent to trick them into committing crimes. When rolling for a citizen's initial reaction, roll 1d8+1 instead of 2d6. Even if a character has managed to increase the reaction to Friendly or Helpful, most citizens are very reluctant to knowingly break the law.

* **Bartering:** High unemployment and lack of money for wages means many citizens are paid in goods. They also barter for what they need. Heroes with trade goods may spend them freely in the city as if they were coins of equal value.

* **The Emir's Spies:** Emir Kaldun's paranoia extends even to visitors, especially those who have made a name for themselves. Heroes with Glory 100+ who are recognized will be followed. Noticing there is a spy on the party's tail requires a Persuasion roll at -2 (they are very good at their job). One character may attempt the roll each day. Losing the tail requires a Streetwise roll at -2 and an hour of moving through the city. Success means the heroes shake the spy for an entire day. On a raise, they are free from observation for two days. Naturally, deliberately throwing off a spy only makes the emir more suspicious. Any suspicious activity committed by the heroes will be mentioned to the emir.

* **Food Prices:** Each month, the price of food fluctuates depending on what is available and how much the nobles think they can squeeze from the populace. Roll 1d4. Multiply the standard cost of food, including rations, by the rolled number.

* **Justice:** All accused of a crime are forced to touch the stone. Those found guilty are instantly killed, and their bodies absorbed. The nature of the stone and the punishment for all crimes is well known across Al-Shirkuh. Make sure to warn visiting heroes there is no hope of appeal or mercy if they are found guilty by the stone.

* **Hashish:** Illegal hashish is available for 5 dinars per smoke. Finding a seller requires a Streetwise roll at -2 each week until one is found.

* **Metal Goods:** All metal goods listed in the core rules cost 25% more than normal. Small items, like buckles, unadorned plates and platters, horseshoes, and nails, are charged normally.

* **Native Heroes:** All natives of Hamra receive +1 to Common Knowledge rolls with regard the laws of their city. During character generation, a native hero with Smarts d6+ may take Knowledge (Law) at d6 for one skill point.

* **Slaves:** Since the stone does not sentenced criminals to slavery, and other forms of slavery are illegal in the Caliphate, one cannot buy slaves in Hamra.

Religion

The cult of Tammuz is the most important in Hamra, though arguably one of the least influential—it has no authority over the law courts, for none exist, and very few undead have ever troubled the citizens.

The god's status in the minds of the citizens is a complex one. On the one hand, the stone that houses his emissary is emblazoned with his holy symbol and speaks in his name (or so it says). Thus, it is logical that Tammuz sent the stone to the mortal realm. However, the stone has absolutely no sense of justice. Everyone accepts that the guilty should be punished, but it is written in the holy texts that not all crimes are equal, and thus not all deserve equal punishment, especially death. It is hard to argue that the cosmic balance, of which Tammuz is patron, has not tipped firmly toward tyranny in Hamra. The question a small but growing minority of citizens now quietly ponder is whether the stone is all it seems.

Those who believe the stone does house a spirit of Tammuz may be the majority, but they are not unswerving in their support of the cult or the stone. Many have come to believe that the stone was meant to be used only as a means of executing criminals found guilty by mortal judges, or to judge complex cases where mortals might falter. After all, the stone has not spoken any words save "Guilty" or "Innocent" in the better part of five centuries, and its decree was first written down years after the event. The imbalance regarding the lottery has done little to earn the cult supporters, as citizens ask themselves who judges the judges?

Their musings are not entirely paranoid, for even the cult of Tammuz, the guardians of justice, has been touched by the dark hand of corruption. Tampering with the lottery is treated the same as falsifying evidence, a minor sin for clerics. Those with enough money can ensure the names of rivals end up drawn, for those clerics open to corruption care little for suffering a diminishment of their miracles for a few days, and can sate their conscience in the knowledge that it is not they who actually pass sentence. Undoubtedly those guilty of such sins will face Tammuz's unbiased and infallible judgment eventually, but for now, they can enjoy the best of what mortal life has to offer.

The cult of Shamash is poorly perceived. In the order of the universe, mortals, while guided by Tammuz, are responsible for judging mortals, while Tammuz judges souls. That Tammuz has, seemingly, taken it upon himself to judge mortals directly goes against that divine order. Worse, while the watch might turn a blind eye, clerics of Shamash are far less likely to do so.

In the past, various clerics of Shamash have spoken out against the stone, but they have always found their names drawn in the lottery and been found guilty of having perpetrated crimes. Today, even those in the cult who object to the stone's influence no better than to open their mouths in public.

Until a few decades ago, Ashtart was the most popular deity in terms of numbers of worshippers. As the desert consumes more farmland, so her influence withers away. Many now look to Geb-Agni as the city's savior, for the number of quarries is slowly expanding. The quarries can only produce stone to match demand, though, and unless exports start to grow and the number of quarries increases, the cult may have reached the peak of its popularity.

Both Apsu and Duamutef receive plentiful prayers. Most, though, are cries to be merciful, to provide rain to swell the rivers and to halt the relentless advance of the sands. A growing minority actually blame Duamutef for the problems. Unable to strike back against the god, their ignorance and bigotry have combined to cause them to turn their frustration against nomads, most of whom honor Duamutef in some form. Violence against visiting nomads is not uncommon, and yet few of those dragged before the stone for judgment are found guilty.

This has led to two consequences. First, the number of caravans calling at Hamra is decreasing. With river traffic hampered, this has only added to Hamra's economic woes. Worse, seeing that there is no punishment has encouraged others to take up arms against the Bedu, no matter the reason for their anger.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

The Day of Names: Held on Alak al-Maat Alak Neteru, this is the day the annual lottery is drawn. Beginning at dusk, the high priest of Tammuz draws 100 names at random. These are then passed to the high priest of Shamash, who confirms the draw. City watch patrols, led by clerics of the two cults, then begin rounding up the citizens and escort them to the stone. The judgments begin shortly after noon, and go on until every citizen has been judged.

Military

Hamra's military is in a sorry state. Lack of revenue coupled with corruption at high levels of government means the troops sometimes go months without being paid; new equipment to replace breakages is in short supply, meaning only around half the troops are fully armed and armored; and the officer corps has been severely depleted in recent years thanks to accusations of treason leveled by the emir.

ARMY

The main army comprises 2% of the greater population of the city, but this still means there are less than 2000 permanent soldiers. It boasts a single infantry regiment of eight companies (one heavy, six medium, and one light), three archer companies (bows), and one light cavalry company. In recent months, over half the army has spent its time marching to and from the city as the

emir first orders them closer to protect against threats that exist only in his troubled mind, and then banishes them into wilderness for daring to plot against him.

Protecting the city on a permanent basis are just one company of light infantry (176 men) and one archer company (88 men) collectively known as the Civil Guard, plus an archer strength company (88 men) of artilleryists. On good days, the emir allows them to bear arms. On bad days, he confiscates the infantry's spears, replacing them with sticks, and orders all arrows and artillery ammunition to be collected and locked in the armory.

The emir is protected by his fanatical mameluks. Three companies known as the Steadfast Shield (also known as the Rabid Dogs on the street) have turned the palace into a fortification. Guards are posted in every corridor, and few courtiers have the freedom to walk around unescorted.

NAVY

What navy Hamra possessed has all but ceased to exist save in name. In theory, it has six warships and two heavy warships, but these have been unable to set sail in several years thanks to the state of the river. This does not prevent the emir giving his captains orders to patrol the rivers and ocean. So long as he sees flags being moved on a map, Kaldun sees content enough.

Law & Order

Law enforcement is maintained by the city watch, the Hands of the Stone, and the cult of Shamash. Try as it might, civil and religious functions in Hamra have remained separate. While the cult of Shamash does have the authority to patrol the streets and arrest criminals (and performs this role), it has yet to usurp control over the watch.

The city watch is divided into six companies. Three patrol during the day, each working an 8-hour shift, and three at night. Whether one is arrested for a crime depends on one's luck, and the nature of the watchman. A large number now turn a blind eye to minor crimes, at least if they can trust their comrades to share the same views. A small few are prepared to play the odds of being caught as corrupt and forget they saw anything if suitably bribed. The value of the bribe depends on the severity of the crime. Others, usually fearful of being judged themselves, will immediately arrest a suspect for even trivial offences. Due to a lack of funds, the size of the watch has been reduced to a level where it is more a token nod to law enforcement than an effective force.

The watch's authority extends only as far as it is prepared to patrol. It is thus ironic that it spends most of its time patrolling the western half of the city, where live the most corrupt inhabitants (the rich and powerful) and where the crime rate is lowest. At night, it is rare to see a patrol in the docks or the slums of the eastern city, both areas being considered too dangerous.

With no judges involved, there exists the possibility that the watch might simply round up anyone it likes. Odds are that most people have committed some breach of the law at some point, no matter how insignificant. Though there are bad eggs, the cult of Tammuz as a whole is not draconic in its approach to justice. As Tammuz weighs good and evil acts, so an otherwise law-abiding citizen who commits a very minor crime is not going to be hauled before the courts for a single offence.

Fearing the watch could be used as a form of legal assassination squad by rich citizens prepared to buy their loyalty, the cult of Tammuz has not yet relinquished total authority. Anyone arrested must first be taken before a cleric of the cult learned in the law. He does not judge innocence or guilt; he simply determines whether the suspect has a case to answer. His decision cannot be appealed, but it can be overruled by a more senior cleric should the latter choose to interfere.

Despite this check, which does serve to curb excess by the watch an cult of Shamash, and thus prevent unnecessary executions, the citizens of Hamra have grown every more paranoid. People are wary of strangers, especially those who ask favors, believing they might be spies sent to trick them into breaking the law. Conversely, citizens are very honest, which may not always be a good thing for visiting adventures. While the chances of being given false measure by a shopowner are extremely slim, most citizens will quickly report crimes they witness.

Hamra is the only city in Al-Shirkuh not to have a single law court. All crimes are judged by the sacred stone. It cannot be swayed by pleas for clemency, claims of mitigating circumstances, or instance on mistaken identity, for it judges all crimes the accused has committed, not just the one for which he is currently charged. Since it is (apparently) an agent of Tammuz, and thus of divine origin, it is infallible (contrary, so the cult of Tammuz preaches, to what some mortals may believe about its judgments).

Death has become the penalty for every crime, yet there are wicked men and women who are never brought before the stone of Tammuz thanks to their status, money, and influence. Oddly, while the stone has failed to punish extremely evil people, it has never once sentenced a truly innocent soul (not that there are many of those in the world).

The citizens of Hamra may fear rather than respect the law, but there are still those prepared to knowingly and willingly engage in crime. Some do so out of circumstances; others do so out of choice.

The largest organized crime is hashish smuggling. For many, the only release from the daily fear is the sweet embrace of its fragrant smoke. Given the severe penalty smugglers face if caught, the prices for illegal drugs are higher than one might normally expect. The largest operation is controlled by the Sleepless Hands. Hamra has only one conventional thieves' guild—the Forty Thieves (so named because of its membership). With wealth in the city diminishing, their activities are turning to the distant palaces of the nobility.

Trade & Tribute

Hamra is a trading city suffering a decline that may well prove terminal. Lying many miles upriver from the sea, it is at the mercy of the drying river. Low water levels, sandbanks, and narrow navigable channels have placed restrictions on the types of vessels that can now reach its shores. All cargo arriving or exiting by sea must be transferred to barges five miles south of the city, a process that leads to lengthy delays and higher prices.

Hamra never grew enough crops to export any significant quantities, but it could once feed its people with ease. As the desert encroaches ever closer to the river, so farmland is being swallowed. Famine has become a very real threat, striking every few years, and yet no one is prepared to begin trade negotiations to start importing food without the decree of the emir. Enterprising merchants from other cities who try to forge new routes find city officials turning away their cargoes, being unable to accept them into the city granaries without official paperwork. Private merchants do import food, but they lack the capital to make much difference. In order that their incomes do not suffer too badly, the nobles, who own much of the agricultural land, dramatically inflate the cost of their crops.

As noted above, hashish smuggling is big business. Much of this is imported from elsewhere in Al-Shirkuh, but several nobles have decided there is more money to be made in supplying drugs than supplying food.

Despite the presence of the cult of Geb-Agni, Hamra has never boasted much in the way of metal ore, nor the craftsmen to work it. While its smiths can forge horseshoes, nails, buckles, and similar objects, they lack the skill to produce weapons and armor, and decorated plates, jugs, pots, and bowls.

The geology of the land around Hamra has proved a major boon. Both limestone and granite can be found within 30 miles of the city (though in different directions), and there are extensive quarries. The emir owns 60% of these, nobles 35%, and the cult of Geb-Agni 5%. Unable to buy slaves locally, the quarry foremen work their employees hard, pay a pittance, and rarely buy the best tools. The cult of Geb-Agni pays slightly better, but it is not a charity. Given that those who work the mines live outside the city, and are thus discounted from the lottery, there are always plenty of strong men willing to endure the conditions.

As well as raw blocks, the city's craftsman are masters of dressing stone to precise measurements, carving thin slabs of stone into decorative facades, shaping pillars, and producing statues.

COINAGE

Hamra's coins all carry the name of the emir at their time of minting on one side, and Tammuz's holy symbol on the other. Due to its reliance on imported metal, the city only mints gold one dinar coins (known as a "Greater") and silver one dirham coins ("Lesser"). For small

transactions, citizens cut coins into halves or quarters (known as “Bits” and “Bites” respectively).

LOCAL TAXES

In his deranged state, the emir blames the people for the decrease in trade revenue, believing that they are involved in a plot to overthrow him. As punishment, he continually increases the tax burden they must shoulder. At present, various taxes eat away 50% of earnings. Coupled with the high price of basic foods, this leaves the average citizen very little spare money, if any at all, for other necessities. The nobles, whose business ventures lie outside the city walls, have long enjoyed reduced rates of taxation, and pay nothing on their earnings. The cult of Tammuz has been tax-exempt since the city was founded. In a bid to quash its growing bad reputation, it donates a sizable portion of its profits to the poor through soup kitchens.

Citizenship Tax: All residents of Hamra, regardless of age, are required to purchase an engraved wooden amulet from the cult of Tammuz. Permanent residents must buy one yearly at the cost of one dinar. As they have to sign for these amulets, the register of names used in the lottery is kept up to date. Visitors must also pay one dinar, but need not sign. The designs for residents and visitors are different, and both are changed annually. Failure to display an amulet at all times while in public is a crime.

Docking Fees: Hamra is the only city that charges vessels based on their dimensions. With barges being long but unable to carry as much cargo as ocean-going vessels, the rate of 3 dinars per point of base Toughness (ignoring Armor) per day has only further increased the price of imports.

Gate Tax: Access through the two major city gates is charged at one dirham for pedestrians, two dirhams for mounts, and four dirhams for carts. Access through the two lesser gates is half this, but there are often delays of an hour or more due to the volume of traffic. There is no charge for using the interior gate.

Excise Duty: General imports and exports are charged a flat 3%. Imports of metal are charged 1%, while exports of stone are levied at 2%.

Guilty Tax: In other cities, certain crimes carry fines. Sometimes these are paid to the city coffers, other times to the victim. Without this possibility, Hamra instead charges every citizen 5% of his earnings yearly to go into a compensation fund. Visitors are charged 5% of the value of their equipment when they enter, and issued a permit valid for one entire season (which makes Alak Neteru a poor time to visit). Failure to produce a valid permit on demand is a crime against the city.

Architecture

With its quarries of excellent quality stone and master masons, Hamra was once a beautiful city. Even the houses of the poor were of solid construction and deco-

rated with bas reliefs. Since the start of the economic slump, there has been little spare money. Many buildings are in sore need of structural repairs, and the bas reliefs have weathered or cracked. Not even civic buildings, city walls, or roads have been spared—without the nod from the emir, no one is willing to spend money on such tasks less they be accused of stealing or misusing funds.

Major Locales

Hamra is a small walled city. Though built with room for growth, the recent arrival of so many displaced agricultural workers have filled the city to bursting, and more come every day.

CITY DISTRICTS

Hamra is a city of two unequal halves in more ways than one. The part that stands on the western bank of the River Noari is the smaller. It is sparsely populated and inhabited only by the rich and powerful. The larger eastern half is now extremely crowded. It also the industrial and commercial heart. Known as the Upper Hamra and Lower Hamra respectively, the names derive from the status of the inhabitants, not their elevation or orientation.

Craft: Most of the city's craftsmen are concentrated in the north of Lower Hamra, behind the city wall and adjacent to the road that brings goods into the heart of the city. As usual, families live above their workshops.

Docks: The docks lie on the banks of Lower Hamra, and are divided from the city proper by an inner wall with a single gate. With most river shipments now being brought into the city by barges, the amount of traffic has actually increased due to the barges carrying less cargo than ocean-going vessels. Further inland are lower class residential districts boasting taverns and gambling halls with unsavory reputations. Desperate to keep the city supplied and money flowing, merchants pay workers to toil day and night loading and unloading the continuous stream of heavily-laden barges.

The Farm: The newest residential district is a near slum built up against the eastern city wall. Home to former agricultural workers, it comprises shoddily built houses clustered around narrow streets and alleys. The name has become a byword for poverty and desperation (“He moved to the Farm” being local slang for falling onto hard times).

High Quarter: An area of large homes built around central courtyards, spacious roads, and wide parks, this district fills much of Upper Hamra. Here live the city's elite, its nobles, high priests, senior bureaucrats, and wealthy merchants, as well as diplomats and officials from other cities. It boasts its own souk catering to the needs of the denizens, giving few any reason to visit Lower Hamra save to pray at the temples.

Palace: Located at the northern end of Upper Hamra, the emir's palace is separated from the rest of the city by

CRIME & PUNISHMENT

Player characters may be heroes, but they are not above the laws of the land. When they commit a crime they face due judgment and punishment. Although regional variations exist with regard punishments and what constitutes a crime, and leniency can be shown in exceptional circumstances, the examples listed below are a good starting place. The *Realm Guides* covering the four major civilized lands may contain more specific information for certain crimes.

Entries concerning Devoted and Faithful refer to the dominant faith in the land the crime was committed. The value of fines, periods of slavery, and number of lashes depend on the severity of the crime and the social status of those involved. In all instances, unpaid fines result in slavery. Except where noted, death is by beheading. Crimes punishable by branding use different brands to distinguish specific crimes.

CIVIL

Breach of Contract: Fine.

Debt or Tax Evasion: Fine equal to double amount owed (Devoted); add flogging for Faithful.

Fraud: Fine; confiscation of goods for Faithful.

Giving False Measure: Fine (Devoted); add flogging for Faithful.

Illegal Growing of Hashish: Fine (Devoted); flogging or slavery (Faithful). Destruction of crop by burning occurs in all cases.

Libel: Fine.

Operating a Business Without a License: Fine (Devoted), flogging plus confiscation of goods and property (Faithful).

Smuggling: Confiscation of smuggled goods plus fine. Persistent offenders may be handed to the criminal courts, which impose slavery.

CRIMINAL

Arson: Loss of nose plus flogging (first offense), slavery and branding (second offense), death (third offense).

Assault: Flogging (first offense), loss of right eye (second offense), slavery for life (third offense).

Breaking Curfew: Fine (first offense), fine plus flogging (second offense), slavery (third offense), slavery for life (fourth offense).

Corruption in Public Office: Loss of left eye plus flogging (first offense), slavery (second offense), death (third offense).

Eating Flesh of Sentient Creature: Slavery for life or death (doesn't apply to sphinxes in the Kingdoms).

Enslavement of Civilized Creature: Loss of ears and branding (first offense), slavery for life (second offense). Extends to enslavement outside of official punishment. [continued on next page]

a high wall and strong gates. Very few nobles and senior officials live here these days—those that have not wisely moved out have been expelled as being potential threats to the emir's rule. A small gate leads to a private jetty on the Noari, where the emir's pleasure barge is moored.

Temple: The city's temples are congregated roughly in the geographical center of Lower Hamra. Here stand separate temple precincts to Tammuz, Shamash, and Geb-Agni, and one dedicated to all the other deities.

Warehouse: This district lies between the docks and the interior city wall. A single row of long, stone warehouses butt up against the wall, their wide doors facing toward the docks.

CITY LOCALES

Ali the Barber: Ali is a quiet, unassuming man, and very popular with his clients. For a mere one-quarter dinar, patrons receive a close shave, the latest gossip (but never seditious or slanderous talk), a cup of coffee, and a pipe of tabac. Everyone wonders how he can afford to stay in business being so generous, but no one pries too deeply into his affairs. The general rumor is that Ali found a treasure haul in his youth, when he was an adventurer. In truth, Ali is head of the Forty Thieves.

Basri's Legal Services: Basri ibn Mahmoud, a graduate of the University of Justice, has put his teaching to use preying on the fears of visitors who have heard of the city's unusual justice system. For 10 dinars a day, he escorts visitors around the city, showing them the sights and alerting them to any breaches of local law they might be about to inadvertently commit. He is extremely knowledgeable about Hamra's laws, and knows which watch officials can be bribed to ignore even major crimes.

City Walls: Towering walls enclose the city except along the river banks. Though the rest of the city is falling to wrack and ruin, the solid stone walls (created at vast expense and manpower) remain impenetrable barriers to aggressors. As the old local saying goes, "If the emirs were as strong as the walls, we'd have nothing to worry about."

Nine towers, four in Upper Hamra and five in Lower Hamra, provide barracks for the city guard and firing platforms for archers and artillerymen (when they have ammunition). All of the gatehouses are fortified.

Whether or not the defenders have any ammunition depends on the mood of the emir. If it becomes important, draw a card from the action deck. A Joker or red card indicates they have stockpiles, and a black card means they do not.

Gates: Hamra has two major gates. The Golden Gate opens into Upper Hamra. Located in the eastern wall of Lower Hamra is the Trade Gate, so named because it cuts through the city to the Warehouse District and Docks, and is thus favored by caravans. There are two smaller gates—Water Gate in the south and Wheat Gate in the north. The interior gate that allows passage to and from the docks is known as the City Gate. Like the rest of the city, the gates need urgent repairs. While the walls are strong, they are of little use if an enemy can smash the gates with minimal force.

The Great Bridge: Though wharves now line the entire eastern riverbank, until recently ocean-going vessels were limited to the lower part of the city by the presence of this majestic stone bridge, whose arches were too low to permit masts to pass under. The bridge is the only legal way to cross between Upper and Lower Hamra. Passage is permitted only between the hour before dawn and the hour after dusk.

Latifah's Leaf: Latifah, a sweet old lady politely referred to as "grandmother" by those who patronize her little shop in the souk, sells tabac. As well as common varieties, she also produces a number of custom blends to suit all tastes. She also sells hashish to those she knows or who come to her through her network of contacts in Hamra's underworld.

The Little Shop of Horus: Horus ibn Khamul buys and sells mundane Hekatic and jinn artifacts, such as statuettes, coins, inscribed tablets, weapons, scrolls, jewelry, and pottery. The cult of Tammuz doesn't approve of Horus' shop, but nothing he sells contravenes civil or religious law. Despite rumors, he does not trade in spirit relics.

Horus is an eccentric old man who has adopted the name of one of Hekata's local deities. He dresses in the style of a pre-necromancy pharaoh and is fluent in Hekatic (as well as Black Tongue and Jinn). Visitors who play on his eccentricity or show an interest in his wares may be allowed the rare privilege of perusing his impressive collection of ancient scrolls and inscriptions. These grant +1 to Investigation rolls when researching matters concerning Hekata (pre-necromantic era) or the Jinn Lands (pre-War of Copper Jars).

The Souk: When it was built, the souk was regarded as one of the most magnificent buildings in the Caliphate. Carved with the same expensive materials and attention to detail as any emir's palace, it was a showpiece for Hamra's masons and the wealth of the city. Like all the buildings today, it was fallen into a state of disrepair. While the souk does have shops catering to wealthier citizens, most of its wares are aimed firmly at the lower end of the market. Competition for custom can be fierce, with shoppers who look like they have money to spend being physically dragged into shops. They may also find themselves in a tug-of-war between two rival shopkeepers selling the same type of goods.

The Storytellers' Quarter: Rather than being an official district inhabited by poets and storytellers, this area is a small cluster of streets in one of the lower class residential district. For reasons unknown, gossip from across the city always ends up in the ears of those who live here. For a price, that information is available to any who care to listen. General news (what goods are coming in on the next barges) costs only a single dirham, often less, while very privileged news (that the mameluk sergeant on guard duty at the palace gates tonight has a weakness for hashish) might run to hundreds of dinars. Even the thieves' guilds pay for information from the locals. Streetwise rolls made within the Storytellers' Quarter have a +1 bonus.

The Temple: A holy place only for those who worship wine, The Temple is a very popular tavern located in a

Failure to Obey a Lawful Order of the Watch: Flogging (first offense); increased number of lashes for each subsequent offense. Persistent offenders may be enslaved.

Failure to Obey Court Summons: Confiscation of all goods and property (first offense), slavery and branding (second offense), death (third offense).

Murder: Slavery for life or death.

Piracy: Slavery and branding (first offense), death (second offense).

Pollution of Water Supply: Flogging (minor offense), slavery or death (major offense).

Rape: Castration plus branding and slavery for life.

Sedition: Loss of tongue (first offense), slavery for life (second offense); covers both verbal and written offenses.

Theft: Loss of right hand (first offense), slavery and branding (second offense), slavery for life or death (third offense).

Treason/Insurrection: Slavery for life or death.

MILITARY

Cowardice: Flogging (first offense), slavery (Faithful) or loss of thumbs and expulsion (Devoted) for second offense.

Desertion: Slavery for life (Faithful) or death.

Mutiny: Death.

Negligence in Carrying Out Orders: Flogging (first offense), branding and flogging (second offense), death (third offense).

Refusing to Obey a Lawful Order: Flogging (first offense), slavery (second offense).

RELIGIOUS/MORAL

Adultery: Loss of manhood (men) or exile on pain of death (women).

Blasphemy: Heavy fine (minor offense), death (major transgression or second offense).

Desecration: Death. The method is determined by the cult involved (beheading for Devoted).

Heresy: Death.

Membership in Proscribed Cult: Loss of tongue plus slavery for life or death (non-spellcasters), death (spellcasters).

Misuse of a Spirit Relic: Death.

Necromancy/Trafficking with Demons: Death.

Public Disorder: Fine (first offense), branding (second offense), slavery (subsequent offenses); most commonly applies in Devoted areas when the crime involves alcohol or hashish.

Sacrilege: Death.

Unlawful Use of Magic: Fine (first offense), heavier fine plus branding (second offense), mutilation in a manner that hinders spellcasting (third offense), death (fourth offense).

dingy backstreet. Patrons frequently get away from their spouses by telling them they are “going to the temple.”

University of Justice: Some of the best judges in the Caliphate trained at the university. Although run by the cult of Tammuz, it accepts non-clergy at both students and lecturers, regardless of their creed. The curator of its small and highly specialized library, Judge Ayat bint Abbud, is fascinated by Hekata and how its laws became more draconic following the banishment of the cult of Tammuz. She hopes to find adventurers willing to escort her to Hekata in the hope of unearthing ancient records. Knowing her cult would not sponsor such an expedition, her plan is to use her influence to arrange for a party arrested by the authorities to be released, so long as they agree to swear a sacred vow to escort her.

Skills: Knowledge (Law).

THE PLAIN OF GIANT JARS

Protruding from the desert between Hamra, City of the Stone, and Hulwan, City of Gardens, are dozens of huge stone jars. Carved from stone and hollow, they vary in diameter and height between one and three yards. The presence of lipped rims indicates they originally had some sort of lid or seal, but these have been lost. Stone discs found near to the jars carry a name written in Giant. Bedu legends tell that the jars held colossal bones. Given all the evidence, scholars are convinced the plain was a sand giant cemetery.

The jars visible on the surface are empty, their contents long since removed for valuables. Beneath the sand lie countless others awaiting discovery. Sand giants universally worshipped Duamutef during the age when the cemetery was last used, and thus there is every likelihood there are grave goods in intact jars.

QUARRIES

The quarries owned and operated by the nobles of Hamra are not the only ones supplying stone. Hamra's legal authority stretches just 30 miles into the desert on either side of the river, though it extends for over 100 miles upstream. Outside the greater city limits there are numerous private operations whose owners hold fealty to the Caliph, not the emirs of Hamra. One of the most notable, known in Hamra as the Giant's Playground, has been operated for centuries by a family of sand giants. Though welcoming of strangers, they have no interest in the city or its politics.

PERSONS OF Note

Detailed below are a small few of the city's many inhabitants the characters may cross paths with in Hamra.

THE BLACK JUDGE

In recent times, the cult of Tammuz has come under physical attack. Several clerics have been murdered, and

the word “justice” carved into their flesh. Word on the streets is that the murderer is a vengeful spirit, whom citizens have nicknamed the Black Judge. The cult scoffs at such talk, placing the blame at the hands of a very earthly and evil killer. Despite a reward that increases with each new murder, no information regarding the identity of the killer has been unearthed. Of more concern is that fact that *gravespeak* spells have failed to establish contact with any of the victims, implying their souls are not with the gods. This piece of information has not been made public.

COMMANDER NASIB IBN JAMAL

Head of the army, Nasib is all that stands between disgruntled murmuring and open mutiny. Naturally charismatic, he has managed to hold the ailing army together in this time of crisis. That he has managed to keep his head when so many other officers and courtiers have lost their is pure luck, though many of his men consider him blessed by Karmelos.

By far the most experienced officer left, Nasib is also the army's greatest weakness. Should he be executed by the emir, or assassinated by an enemy of Hamra, morale would surely break, leaving the city ripe for attack. Nasib knows this, but he refuses to appoint bodyguards, believing that to do so would only attract the attention of the emir (who he despises for his weakness).

Unable to wield the army against Hamra's enemies (mostly bandits and orcs) without drawing unwanted attention, Nasib is prepared to divert monies to pay for adventurers to act as the hammer of Hamra, even though doing so could mean him facing charges of training assassins to act against the emir. A small group of mercenaries could not hope to defeat a marauding orc warband in open battle, but it could assassinate its leaders and other key personnel, thus throwing the rest into a state of infighting for supremacy. This would not remove the threat, but it would buy the city valuable time.

MUTI IBN BASIL

Some drawn in the lottery go to their fate with head held high, believing (rightly or wrongly) that all will be well. Some must be dragged kicking and screaming to their destiny. For a few, their fear is such that they seek to evade the authorities (a very serious offence). Muti ibn Basil, a merchant, has found a way to prosper during the recession by offering the latter an escape route.

Muti acts through greed, not charity, and his services do not come cheap. For the right sum (usually hundreds of dinars, which is far more than most citizens can spare) he arranges for those wishing to escape judgment to be hidden, and later smuggled from Hamra. Those who cannot meet his fee are offered contracts of servitude with one of his many contacts in the other cities of the Caliphate. Until their debts are paid off by their families (they earn no money themselves), they are slaves in all but name.

HUFRAH

City of Idols

Hajjad may be home to the largest temples and most important high priests, but few can argue the citizens of Hufrah are not the most devout. Yet religious intolerance is rife. Those wishing to advance to positions of authority are forced to honor certain deities, crimes against Devoted are rarely prosecuted to the full extent of the law, and fervor can turn to zealotry in the blink of an eye.

Social Hierarchy

The emirs of Hufrah have no authority to appoint an heir. When the incumbent dies or retires, the new emir is selected by the high priests of the major cults. By law, no cleric may serve as emir, nor may a Devoted. Sealed away from outside influences, the clerics meditate in seclusion before casting their vote. Iblis is not ignored. Someone clad head to foot in black robes and wearing black gloves casts his vote. Traditionally, his vote is always for someone who has no hope of selection (such as a randomly chosen peasant). No one actually believes the votes are cast based purely on the will of the gods. For sure, the high priests are devout, but they are also very human, and can thus be bribed, threatened, blackmailed, or cajoled into making the right choice.

Quite why Emir Adel decided to abdicate is a mystery. In good health and popular with the people, his decision has never been adequately explained. Even Adel cannot give a satisfactory reason, saying only that it was the right thing to do, while furrowing his brow as if trying to recall some hazy memory.

Though overall responsibility for the city still lies with the emira, her forebears handed responsibility for daily affairs to the cults. Each high priest assigns one cleric to act as wizar for their part of the city. Since the position gives one the ear of emira, only the best candidates are selected, and competition is fierce.

Not all the cults are equal in terms of responsibility, of course. While the wizar of Karmelos has the burden of overseeing the military and the wizar of Qedeshet both education and trade, the wizar of Geb-Agni only serves to oversee new building projects, and the wizar of Tamarni focuses mainly on protecting the granaries (both important, but far more limited in scope).

The unusual system has dampened the usual inter-cult rivalry and politicking. While there is some crossover in certain minor areas (such as Ashtart and Marqod having a vested interest in herbs), the cults' responsibilities are largely segregated. With no hope of expansion into another's territory, the wizirs concentrate on their jobs

rather than political one-upmanship and backstabbing. As a result, the city government runs smoothly for the most part.

With no hope of becoming wizirs, the nobility is a token political power. Its voices are still heard by the emira, but they carry far less weight than elsewhere. This does not mean nobles are absent from court, though. To become the next ruler, one must have the backing of the cults. Ensuring one is noticed for the right reasons is essential, as is digging up dirt on the cults and placing the right bribes.

If one wishes to advance in Hufrah, one needs to select the right patron deity. With the cults effectively in charge of the city, it is only natural that senior government and military posts are held by clerics and laity who share the appropriate patron. At the lower end, faith is not important. Thus, there are common soldiers honoring a variety of gods (or the Devoted creed), but every officer worships Karmelos.

Even within the city proper, the great bulk of the lower class is filled with agricultural workers and porters—grains must be threshed, dried, milled, and stored, and goods carried to and from granaries and warehouses.

Hufrah has a Devoted population of around 4%. If Emir Adara had her way, they would be driven out by force and their property and goods confiscated. Fortunately, wiser heads have prevailed. Still, with social status heavily tied to faith, it is very hard for individuals to rise above *jaleepa* status unless they marry into a socially higher Faithful family. Mixed marriages are frowned upon in Hufrah, though, and Faithful nobles are frequently required to forfeit any titles and lands if they wish to marry a Devoted. Only those who achieve the status of master craftsman reach the level of *shabrum*.

Education

Basic education is free in Hufrah, though classes are strongly biased toward religion. Even Devoted must attend these classes—if they wish to learn about their own creed, they must do so in their own time. No time is wasted educating children in other languages. As a result, few citizens understand anything other than Holy Tongue, and even merchants have trouble with Sandspeech. With agriculture so essential, children receive only minimal schooling during planting and harvest. They make up for this with long hours during summer.

Hufrah has three universities. The University of Hufrah is the largest, but provides only standard courses at a relatively low level. Citizens who wish to learn other lan-

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Hufrah.

* **Food:** Cheap meals cost one-half dirham, average meals 2 dirhams, expensive meals 2+ dinars, and rations 1 dinar.

* **Languages:** Non-human native characters must take Holy Tongue as their second language. Most NPCs in the city know few other tongues, including Sandspeech (racial languages aside).

* **Native Heroes:** All native heroes begin play with Knowledge (Religion) d4 for free. Due to the educational bias toward religion, they have -1 to Common Knowledge rolls regarding other aspects of the city (such as folklore, history, and law) unless it concerns a religious fact. In addition, a hero may be a graduate from *one* of the advanced universities. Each provides a single benefit, which applies only during character generation.

Advanced Wisdom: The hero must be a cleric with Smarts d6+. For one skill point, he may take either Knowledge (Alchemy) or Knowledge (Arcana) at d4 and increase his Knowledge (Religion) to d6.

Stewardship: The character must have Smarts d6+ to qualify. The hero may take Knowledge (Stewardship) or Persuasion at d6, or both at d4, for one skill point.

* **Not So Attractive:** Emira Adara places no emphasis on physical appearance, and cannot be swayed by good looks. Anyone dealing with her directly gains no benefit from Attractive or Very Attractive.

* **Religious Intolerance:** Devoted natives may not take the Noble Edge unless they are nomads.

guages are likely to be graduates, since it is the only formal educational center teaching them. Schooling is not free, but it is subsidized. As a result, most middle class citizens can afford to have at least one child attend. The city is not ignorant of the fact that intelligence and social class are not firm divides. Poorer children may apply for a fully-funded scholarship. Only limited places are available each year, and entrance exams are arduous to ensure only the brightest are accepted.

There are two advanced universities. The University of Advanced Wisdom accepts only clerics. Education is not free, though most students have their fees paid by their cult in return for working in the city until their tuition costs are paid back.

Knowledge of bureaucracy, accounting, and time-management, not to mention people skills, are essential for those looking to rise in status through employment with nobles, mercantile families, or the city bureaucracy. The University of Stewardship teaches pupils these vital business skills. Courses are not cheap, and thus general placements are restricted to those with money. A handful of scholarship places are open to gifted students. Candidates may also apply for a sponsor to cover their tuition

fees. Such contracts typically require the student to work for his sponsor until the fee is paid back. Normally, around 5% of his earnings is deducted at source to cover this, tying the student to his patron for many years.

In all three universities, courses are conducted only in Holy Tongue, making it a requirement for entry as both a student or lecturer.

Religion

The citizens of Hufrah readily acknowledge that Hajjad has the grandest temples, but claim themselves to be the most devout and diverse in their beliefs. Here, they say, the gods are truly equals. While the former claim is most definitely true, the latter is not. For sure, all the gods receive plentiful worship, not to mention very high tithes, but not all cults are equal. Agriculture is the city's core focus, and thus Ashtart has more worshippers. In terms of followers in positions of authority, within the city walls though, she ranks lower than Qedeshet.

With position (and thus social status) within Hufrah's bureaucracy and military tied to specific faiths, the very nature of the city places more power in the hands of certain cults. The basic city responsibilities of the cults (as opposed to their purely religious ones) is given below.

Within each ministry there are various departments. The Ministry of Trade may oversee all aspects of trade, but there are Departments of Customs and Excise, Department of Taxation, Department of Trade Policy, and so on. In a large ministry, finding the correct department can be time consuming.

Apsu: Ministry of Water (maintenance of the city's cisterns, fountains, and wells, and the irrigation channels on state-run farms).

Ashtart: Ministry of Food (oversees food production for the state and sets what crops the farms of the nobility may produce) and Ministry of Public Records (births, marriages, and deaths).

Duamutef: A very minor deity within the city's government, the cult only commands the archer companies in the military, and then under the overall governance of the Ministry of War.

Geb-Agni: Ministries of Armaments (productions of armor and weapons) and Mines and Quarries.

Karmelos: Ministry of War (army and navy).

Marqod: An oddity found in no other city, the cult of Marqod oversees the Ministry of Civil Defence (maintaining the city's defences and command of the city guard).

Qedeshet: Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, and Trade.

Shamash: Ministries of Legislation (creates and distributes new laws) and Policing (oversees the watch).

Tamarni: Ministries of Granaries and Warehouses (protection and maintenance of granaries and warehouses) and Housing.

Tammuz: Ministry of Justice.

Upuaut: The god of travel enjoys more worship here

than in most other cities, for his cult is responsible for the Ministry of Docks and Roads (maintains the city's essential infrastructure).

In addition, most private employment with any authority is dominated by the appropriate cult. For instance, the person in charge of maintaining the irrigation channels on a noble's farm is very likely to be a follower of Apsu, while few foremen working a private mine would be anything other than a supporter of Geb-Agni.

The temples are much smaller than those of Hajjad, though still impressive in size and architecture. Unlike in the capital, neither the cults of Duamutef nor Upuaut maintain a precinct—there are enough shrines and statues to ensure worshippers can honor their gods.

Given the power the major cults hold, it is little surprise their affiliated minor cults prosper. The percentage of citizens having a minor deity as sole patron is much higher here than anywhere else in Al-Shirkuh. Watchmen looking to gain promotion must favor Shamash, for instance, but those who honor Assur, patron deity of the profession, have greater chance of rising through the ranks.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

The citizens of Hufrah enjoy far more holidays than their counterparts in other cities. Every high holy day of every deity is considered a city-wide holiday, regardless of one's faith. In practice, the city only grinds to a halt on All Gods Day (see below). On other festival days businesses and government offices are shut for only a few hours. Essential personnel, such as the city guard and watch, don't even enjoy this extended break.

All Gods Day: The joint religious festival held on Amt Yaus al-Maat Alak Neteru is known as All Gods Day. In Hufrah, it supersedes all other high holy days which fall at this time. For clerics in the city, Exile Day (Tammuz), and Sword Day (Geb-Agni) are treated as holy days rather than high holy days.

Military

Hufrah's army and navy is controlled by the Ministry of War. The City Guard is a separate entity, and falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Civil Defence. In times of war, command is centralized to prevent disputes. Who takes charge depends on whether the city is attacking or defending. All officers (sergeant upward) in the infantry and cavalry must be followers of Karmelos, while archer and artillery officers must be followers of Duamutef. City Guard officers follow Marqod.

ARMY

Whereas Hufrah once maintained a large army to protect it against the Sultanate, centuries of peace have seen its numbers dwindle. Its focus has also switched from block formation to skirmishes, Hufrah's main threats be-

ing raiders rather than trained armies. With a large area of inhabited land to protect, the permanent army stands at just under 4% of the city's total population.

The army is both secular and religious. For her part, the emir maintains an army comprising five half-strength regiments. Each consists of two light infantry, one medium infantry, one archer, one medium cavalry, and one light cavalry company). In total, a force of 3872 soldiers.

The major cults (save for Marqod) are each required to supply the city with one company raised from their own funds. Many of the common soldiers are fadeen, assigned either permanently or as part of their military training. The captains are normally paladins, most often undergoing their final year of martial instruction. In order that inexperience in battle does not risk the unit's welfare, junior paladins are assigned an experienced sergeant as advisor. He takes the rank of Sub-Captain, and has the authority to assume command if the paladin falters. Two companies are assigned to each of the regiments, and bring the total army numbers to 5720 troops.

Every farming settlement must raise a militia, often the first line of defence, though their strength and quality varies immensely. The nobles prefer not to rely on the army or semi-trained peasants for protection, and so maintain small personal armies.

The emira's bodyguard, the Colored Cloaks, comprises a full company (176 men). Each squad wears a different colored cloak. By tradition, each squad is named after one of the benevolent gods, and serving soldiers must be followers of that deity.

The City Guard officially comprises one medium infantry, one archer, and one artillery company. Their sole duty is to man the gates and walls. With such a small force, it is impossible to maintain high vigilance along the entire wall. Fortunately, the cults are also required to play their part, and do so by raising one or two squads from their fadeen.

NAVY

Hufrah doesn't have much of a navy. Just two light warships—each with a fighting force of 32 marines—and a number of troop barges patrol the upper stretches of the River Syrah. Being reliant on the harbors of Fashir, City of Water, and Marresh, City of a Thousand Gates, for access to the ocean trade routes, the city donates money and goods to help maintain their navies.

Law & Order

Maintaining order and preventing crime falls to the City Watch, who work for the Ministry of Policing. The Watch patrols the city for only 22 hours per day, leaving the two hours when Iblis' Gate is open to priests and paladins of Shamash. The Watch comprises 11 separate patrols, each named for one of the gods. The names bear a sign of appeasement, and bear no actual relevance

OPTIONAL: MONEY & STATUS

As a rule of thumb, society is divided into lower, middle, and upper class citizens. Physical trappings within these broad strata are extremely important to the citizens of Al-Shirkuh. Unless one is planning subterfuge, no one wants to be mistaken for a member of a lower social caste. While travellers in villages and small towns have little choice of where they shop, there are shops in the great cities that cater specifically for different social classes. This extends even to the ubiquitous coffee houses. As in real life, one gets what one pays for.

Prices in *Land of Fire* are for lower or middle class items—functional, of functional quality, but nothing special to look at. Items intended for the upper class look better and are often of higher quality and craftsmanship, though they do not function any better in game terms. They do, however, cost more.

Though *players* can sometimes be frugal with their hard-earned cash, high status *characters* are ingrained from birth to look and act their station; paying more for something of better quality and craftsmanship is as natural to them as breathing. At the GM's discretion, upper class characters must pay 25% more for equipment *after* character generation if they want gear suitable to their elevated station.

No one is going to start casting aspersions at high station heroes who use average quality common gear, such as flasks, lanterns, and rope. Clothing, armor, weapons, and other highly visible objects of lower quality will, however, cause others to whisper about his tight-fistedness, wonder if the hero really is of high station, ponder what problems beset his family, and so on. Heroes who dress down are subject to a -1 Charisma penalty.

Similarly, appearances, while very important, can be deceptive. Someone who uses higher quality gear (again, especially clothes, armor, and weapons) is more likely to be mistaken for someone of importance, and thus treated with more deference. A lower or middle class character who pays for higher quality visible gear receives a +1 Charisma bonus.

to the deities—officers must be followers of Shamash, and the area a patrol is assigned to police is decided by the Watch Commander. At any one time, four patrols are on duty simultaneously, working a 10-hour day.

Clerics of Shamash often accompany patrols, though unless they are permanent members they hold no official rank. Most often they are assigned to check a patrol's diligence to ensure there is no corruption. While some watchmen grumble, most are grateful knowing their is supernatural backup if things get really rough.

The city's underworld is ruled by a single thieves' guild known as the Ministry of Crime. The guild structures itself on a government department. At the top is the guildmaster, so is referred to by his underlings as the

Wizir of Crime. Each aspect of their enterprise is known as a Department, and is headed by a thief lord with an appropriate ministerial title.

Among the departments is the Department of Free-lances. Visiting thieves who contact the guild before embarking on their business are given a license to practice. They must check with the guild before committing a crime in case the guild is planning the same job, fence any pilfered good through the guild, and forfeit 25% of their earnings. Those who fail to comply with these terms may find their corpses being dragged from the river by the Watch. Should a freelance be discovered working his trade without a license, he is given one warning. After that, he is fair game for any thief who wants to earn the bounty placed on the interloper's head.

Although they do not, as a whole, hold Iblis in any special esteem, the thieves' actively promote this belief. It serves them well, for the devout of Hufrah are mightily afraid of the god of chaos, and few ordinary citizens have the courage to dabble in their affairs.

Trade & Tribute

When one thinks of trading cities, Hufrah barely registers. Although it enjoys water trade links with Fashir and Marresh, it lies far from the major ocean routes. A small caravan road linking Hajjad with Al-Wazir, City of Spires, passes through the city, but the caravans are small and cease during the hot summer months.

Despite these factors, Hufrah is an important city. Surrounding the walls and flowing along the river are rich, well-irrigated agricultural lands. Such is the abundance of produce that commentators decree Hufrah's beggars to be the best fed anywhere in Al-Shirkuh. Even bad harvests cause few problems, for the city stores adequate grain to ensure bread and porridge are available, not to mention dried or preserved fruit and vegetables. Half the farms are owned by the emira, one-quarter by the noble families, and one-quarter by the cult of Ashtart.

Further afield, the farmland gives way to scrub grass suitable for rearing goats and sheep. Some hide, horn, meat, and milk are exported, but mostly it is live animals that find their way to distant markets.

Coffee and tabac are the main imports. Growing these crops could boost the city's economy, but the emir's have long decreed that filling stomachs must be the farms' main priority. Licenses to fixed sized fields of coffee and tabac are awarded every five years.

Although the cults receive many privileges, their workshops are only permitted to produce general goods for use in the temple, to fulfil their civic responsibilities, or for sale to shops as complete pieces. Again, rules exist in the latter case to prevent them undercutting craftsmen producing similar goods. Religious wares are excluded, since only the cults supply these. Thus, the cult of Geb-Agni keeps the army, city guard, and city watch equipped, but visitors cannot purchase armor and weapons directly.

COINAGE

The first city of the Caliph founded by the Faithful, Hufrah boasts the oldest mint (following the expansion of the Caliphate, Hajjad became the capital because of its more central position). While the design of its coins has remained the same down the centuries—the name of the city on one side and the emir's name on the other), denominations and nicknames have changed.

At present, the city mints only a one dinar gold coin (a "Herald") and a one dirham silver coin (an "Aspect"). These coins may be cut into half or quarter for smaller exchanges, and are named accordingly. Older dinar coins, which may have varying denominations ranging from five to 50, are still in circulation, and are legal tender (being based on their weight rather than their stamped value).

For larger transactions, when citizens might not wish to carry around large quantities of dinars, coins may be taken to the Ministry of the Mint. Here, they are weighed and melted down into ingots, stamped with the appropriate value. The Ministry charges 5% for this service to cover its costs. Note that merchants base the value of ingots on their weight, so as to prevent fraud by the buyer.

LOCAL TAXES

In order that the cults can fulfill their responsibilities to the city, the emirs decreed that tithes would be set much higher and income tax to the emir abolished. The cults pay no tax on earnings. All other taxes are collected by the city, which also pays 40% to the cults.

Armaments Tax: Invented purely as a means to keep armed citizens from roaming the street and make money from visitors, the Armaments Tax covers all armor and weapons. Locals must pay a flat 250 dinars a year (excluding those on official city business), a sum few ordinary people can afford. Visitors pay a flat 5 dinars per day, and are issued with a license on entry to the city.

The fine for not having a valid license is equal to the standard cost of all armor and weapons carried at the time of arrest (including alchemical devices, spirit relics, and true relics) or 500 dinars, whichever is higher.

Customs Duty: Exports of grain and vegetables are set at 2%, and other goods at 5%. Imports are charged at 3%, though food carries a 10% levy.

Gate Tax: Passage through any of the city gates is charged at 1 dirham for pedestrians and mounts, and 2 dirhams for wagons. Those choosing to enter through Iblis' Gates are thoroughly questioned by clerics of Shamash.

Sales Tax: Food purchases are tax exempt. All other goods are levied at 5%.

Tithe: Regardless of faith, all citizens are required to give 40% of their earnings to the cults. The money is collected centrally by the Ministry of Trade and distributed in accordance with the duties the cult must perform. Rules exist governing how much extra a citizen may donate to a cult outside of his tithe, so as to keep the balance of income relatively stable.

Architecture

As a rule of thumb, the city is well-maintained. Poorer areas are more run down than richer districts, simply because the emira demands the various ministries pay more attention to these parts of Hufrah, but their level of upkeep is still far higher than in other cities. The size and shape of the various districts has evolved over time to meet the changing needs of the city, but Hufrah's population has not expanded much since its walls were laid down. Many of the buildings' foundations date back centuries, and some structures have remained unchanged since the day they were built.

The city is quite spaced out, with even the homes of lower class citizens being built around small courtyards. Poorer districts may have multiple families sharing one house, but they still enjoy a communal open area. With water no issue, there are several areas of open park and sculpted gardens open to the public, most with trees to provide welcome shade.

Major Locales

Described below are some of the city's more interesting locales, as well as locations beyond the city walls that might appeal to adventurers.

CITY DISTRICTS

The emira may govern the third largest territory in the Caliphate in terms of total population, but Hufrah is a small city. Just 35% of the people (over 51,000) live within the walls. The rest are scattered in villages and towns along the river and deep into the fertile belt. As a general rule, the quality of housing increases with proximity to the center of the city. The poorest areas are located near Iblis' Gate, in an area commonly known as the Pit.

Craft: While some craftsmen live and work in districts nearer to where their wares are required, most are gathered adjacent to the Warehouse District, inside Apsu's Gate. The quality of housing and workshops ranges from lower to upper class.

Granary: Although it contains the city's granaries, vegetable produce intended for export is stored here as well. In addition to storage facilities, there are drying yards, mills, and businesses dedicated to preserving various foodstuffs. Security is provided by the Ministry of Granaries and Warehouses, rather than the City Watch.

Noble: The mansions of Hufrah's nobles lie east of the palace. Keen to display their social status and piety, the walls surrounding their homes are brightly adorned and decorated with their patron deity's holy symbol.

Palace: Located in the center of the city, the emira's palace was the first to be completed in the Caliphate. Twelve thin spires, each facing the center of one of the

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city gates and emblazoned with the appropriate deity's holy symbol (save the Spire of Iblis, which is noticeable by being made of black marble and unadorned) rise majestically into the sky. Although it still contains the wizirs' apartments, much of the city bureaucracy has moved into the Temple District. As a result, the palace is very quiet, with access restricted to nobles, senior priests, and citizens granted an audience with the emira.

Temple: Occupying a ring surrounding the palace are the temples of Hufrah. Now the seat of the city's bureaucracy, the district houses the main government offices.

Warehouse: Located inside Qedeshet's Gate, the district is packed with warehouses, merchants' offices, and customs posts.

Wharf: The bustling riverfront lies outside the city gates. As well as numerous wharves, there are customs posts, lower class housing, drinking dens, and eateries, and craftsmen catering to the needs of the ships and their crew. Qedeshet's, Upuaut's, and Ashtart's Gates open into the heart of the district.

CITY LOCALES

The Adventurers' Rest: Popular with visitors and locals alike, this inn offers good food and entertainment. Outsiders who enthrall the discerning patrons with a tale of adventure and derring-do receive free room and board for one night per tale. The quality of both depends on the response from discerning patrons.

The Belly of Hufrah: Located close to the Craft and Warehouse Districts, half the Belly is the local nickname for the souk, and comes from the fact it contains many food shops. The aroma of fruits, vegetables, herbs, spices, nuts, cheese, and meat assails the senses. As well as fresh seasonal produce, there is a startling array of candied, pickled (in vinegar or oil), salted, smoked, sun dried goods. Many of the spice traders have secret blends only they sell.

Eateries: Food is so plentiful, varied, and cheap that citizens of all social classes dine out at least twice a week. Whether is one is after a quick snack or a leisurely banquet, there are eateries to suit all tastes, budgets, and social classes. The quality varies, but few go away hungry.

City Walls: Though planning and construction proved troublesome for the early city designers, Hufrah's dodecagonal walls are today considered a work of great piety. Aside from the dozen gates, there are guard towers where the walls meet.

Garden of the Gods: Popular with those who favor secret liaisons, the Garden of the Gods is a public park. It is divided into separate zones by rows of shrubs and trees. Here one cannot escape the devoutness of the inhabitants, for each zone has a topiary of one of the major gods—save for Iblis, whose area is open grassland where people take their pets to do their daily business. Within each zone are small gazebos and secluded glades, and numerous bubbling fountains, all of which help ensure hushed conversation is not eavesdropped on.

Gates: Hufrah initially had four gates. The other eight were constructed following the peace treaty with the

Sultanate, when the threat of invasion by a large army ceased to be a serious concern. Even so, there are those who fret that so many gates makes the city a defender's nightmare. Arranged like the positions on a clock face, the names of the fortified gates, beginning at the 12 position and running clockwise around the city, are Iblis, Geb-Agni, Karmelos, Shamash, Duamutef, Marqod, Tamarni, Apsu, Qedeshet, Upuaut, Ashtart, and Tammuz.

Aside from Iblis' Gate, the gates are normally open between dawn and dusk. On high holy days, only the gate of the appropriate deity is open. As a mark of respect, the others are closed. Local belief is that the god will send benevolent spirits into the city to watch the festivities and report back on the citizens' piety.

Otik's Funerary Wares: Otik, a cakali, makes a living selling funerary wares for all budgets. Whether one is after a simple bowl inscribed with prayers to Ashtart to provide the deceased with food or a gold sarcophagus, Otik likely has it in stock. He even sells statuettes of the gods, though he claims these are antiques dating back to before the birth of the Caliphate and charges accordingly.

Most everything in stock is stolen. Otik is a fence for the Department of Graves and Tombs, a branch of the thieves' guild specializing in grave robbing. Though he is lining his own pockets, he considers himself to be doing the guild a favor—common grave goods are usually worthless to thieves, but he is providing them with a means of earning extra coins. Thanks to a network of legitimate contacts involved in the funerary trade and in the cult of Tammuz, he quickly learns what goods recently deceased too to their graves. After sufficient time has elapsed, his requests the robbers go fetch items he thinks he can sell without raising suspicion. Some of his wares are genuine antiques, plundered and sold by tomb raiders and adventurers.

Sellsword Office: This recruitment center for adventurers and mercenaries seeking short-term employment with the cults or nobles is run by Maizah bint Frahan. Employers send her notices of vacancies, and she takes away the burden of finding suitable applicants in return for a set fee. The jobs on display are all honest work, though she also recruits for positions her paymasters do not wish to broadcast.

Maizah is also a Jinn Slayer, and recruits for the organization. Her vocal hatred of the jinn is well-known, though in Hufrah that is nothing out of the ordinary. Any potential recruits who profess to be jinn mages are likely to have an encounter with a Slayer before leaving Hufrah. Finding the victim in the city isn't hard—any one looking for a position needs to leave a contact address.

Shrine of Names: Hajjad may be the center of faith for modern pilgrims, but Hufrah holds the honor of being the first city raised by the displaced Faithful. (Many refugees, including the Caliph, refused to settle east of the River Syrah, and continued west in search of a suitable site for a new capital. During those early years, the Caliph ruled from a tent).

As well as pilgrimages to Hajjad, many Faithful consider their duty to visit Hufrah once in their lives. Within the temple of Tammuz is a massive collection of

papyri and parchments bound together by string. Here, pilgrims record the date of their visit, their name, occupation, home settlement, and patron deity, as well as the details of their parents. Though there are gaps, and tracing names is a long and frustrating process, the tome forms a remarkable genealogical record.

The Silent Street: Until three years ago, this street in a lower class residential district was just another of many. Then, one night, neighbors awoke to discover the residents had vanished into thin air. There was no sign of a struggle or mass exodus. Indeed, in some cases it appeared the residents left partway through chores. Several cults investigated the mystery, but no firm conclusions were drawn. Although no similar events have occurred, the street is shunned even by the city's homeless—no one lives here, and citizens take detours to avoid walking the Silent Street, even in daylight.

Street of No Gods: Every street except one boasts numerous statues of the gods, small shrines, or passages of holy texts inscribed on the walls. Iblis may be feared and hated in equal measure, but not even the rulers of Hufrah were going to ignore him completely. Thus, it was decided that one small street should “honor” Iblis, even though any trappings relating to his worship are forbidden.

Few righteous citizens had any desire to live here, and so it became home to *mushaf* families. Though but one street, albeit quite a long one, it is a slum—dirty, overcrowded, and home to many beggars and petty thieves. Sand goblins make up the bulk of the inhabitants. This has given rise to its unofficial name—Humpback Street. Anyone looking to contact the thieves' guild or purchase small items with no questions asked is pointed here, though they are advised to keep firm hold of their possessions.

Tower of the Stars: The cult of Anu, minor god of the constellations and patron of astronomers, has persuaded the emira to grant them permission to construct an enormous tower. At present, it stands 100 feet high, but will be three times that when completed. At the top will be an observation dome and telescope, where clerics, astronomers, and astrologers can observe the night sky. Quite why it a smaller structure wasn't built in the desert, far from the city, has perplexed commentators and critics. A few tongues have wagged that its true purpose is a platform from where the emira can converse with the gods.

The high priest, Talak, a cakali, plans for it to rival the Royal Observatory of Sirhan, City of Stars, as a center of stargazing and learning. In order to achieve this, he offers good money for astrological and astronomical charts and texts, no matter their age or origin. The cult, being very small, also requires money to complete the construction, on which work has temporarily ground to a halt.

University of Advanced Wisdom: Founded to promote advanced study into the greater mysteries of the gods, the university, despite frequent protestations by the cult of Qedeshet, remains closed to non-clerics. The alchemical devices created by students are handed over to the city, for use by the bureaucracy and military.

One of the tutors has a gambling habit. To help fund his addiction, he sells alchemical devices on the black-

RELIGIOUS WARES

Items marked “S” are usually sold only in temples.

Charioteer's Coins: A pair of ritual coins used to pay Djemuti to ensure he delivers the soul to the right door. The coins are placed over the corpse's eyes. Available only from temples of Tammuz.

Cost: 5 d; *Weight:* —; *Availability:* S

Funerary Amulet: Small amulets inscribed with short prayers offering the deceased food and drink. They are placed on corpses to ensure they are nourished in the Afterlife. The cost reflects the quantity of spiritual provisions, as well as the quality. At minimum the soul receives a piece of bread or bowl of thin soup, and a cup of water each day.

Cost: 1+ d; *Weight:* 0.5 lbs; *Availability:* S

Holy Symbol: Commonly taking the form of amulets or engraved discs, these symbols of faith are worn or carried mainly by clerics. Lesser symbols are made of wood, bone, or ceramic. Greater symbols are usually small, but are made of precious metal. They are available for purchase at any temple, though only for the relevant deity.

Cost: 5 d (lesser) or 20 d (greater); *Weight:* 0.5 lbs; *Availability:* S

Incense Stick: Burned by clerics during ceremonies and by citizens to scent their homes. A single stick burns for 10 minutes, though the aroma may last for many hours.

Cost: 0.5 d per stick; *Weight:* —; *Availability:* T

Mourner: Available only from temples of Tammuz, professional mourners are hired to attend funerals. They wail and mourn like family members, and offer prayers for the dead. Mourners are laity but are well versed in funerary rites.

Cost: 1 d per funeral; *Weight:* —; *Availability:* S

Prayer Rug: A small, hard-wearing rug used by both creeds when praying. They are often embroidered with images of the god or sayings from the *Hamad*.

Cost: 5+ d; *Weight:* 2 lbs; *Availability:* V

Prayer Robes: Simple white linen or wool robes donned by Devoted and Faithful when praying to symbolize their purity. Pilgrims wear them for similar reasons.

Cost: 3 d; *Weight:* 1 lb; *Availability:* V

Religious Text: This covers the *Hamad*, as well as books and scrolls of common prayers and parables for individual deities. More expensive versions may have illumination, illustrations, and/or expensive covers, inks, or adornments (such as gold leaf).

Cost: 10+ d; *Weight:* 2 lbs; *Availability:* T (*Hamad*) or S (Faithful)

Statuette: A small statue of a deity intended as a focus for veneration in a home or business, or for Faithful on the open road. The higher the price, the better quality the workmanship and materials.

Cost: 10+ d; *Weight:* 1 lb; *Availability:* S

market. The thieves' guild has bought many of his debts, and is forcing the cleric to produce devices beneficial to their employees, such as *boost Lockpicking*, *boost Stealth*, and *invisibility*. As a result, the guild has a large stash of alchemical devices at its disposal.

Special: Must speak Holy Tongue; **Skills:** Knowledge (Alchemy, Arcana, Religion); **Edges:** Alchemy, Delay Spell, Enhanced Maintenance, Potent Magic, Spell Finesse.

University of Stewardship: Many of those who study here are destined to hold positions of authority in the city bureaucracy and its financial houses. As a result, the university has become a playground for the Puppeteers and a recruiting ground for other factions looking to gain influence within the city.

Special: Must speak Holy Tongue; **Skills:** Knowledge (Stewardship), Persuasion; **Edges:** Happy Citizens.

The Whipping Post: In the center of the city square is a towering obelisk engraved with the symbols of every known benevolent deity. Chained to the pillar is a greater ifrit. Manacles and chains forged long ago by jinn smiths to imprison their own keep it bound and unable to use its arsenal of powers.

Criminals found guilty of a crime warranting public flogging may instead pay for the punishment to be transferred to the jinni. The price varies based on the nature of the crime, and the frequency of the offence (career criminals thus pay more than first time offenders). Lashes transferred to the jinn are always done so in multiples of 11, meaning the criminal may suffer a handful. Each cult then appoints a cleric to carry out their portion of the lashes. Clerics of Marqod are accorded special dispensation for this, and their participation is not a sin.

For five centuries, the ifrit has taken its punishment with stoicism. Not once has it cried out in pain or sworn vengeance on its persecutors. Perhaps, as many believe, it is serving a penance set by Suleiman, and bears mortals no ill feelings. On the other hand, some whisper, the creature may simply be biding its time and storing its rage. Either way, the city takes no chances—a squad of paladins of Shamash guard the creature day and night.

THE LIFELESS FARM

The House of Hassan, a minor noble family, has never enjoyed a good name. At various times its scions have been branded corrupt, larcenous, lecherous, impious, and even treasonous. Despite this, the house has survived every stain to its reputation.

Lacking favor in court, and with few merchants willing to curry its favor, House Hassan has struggled financially. Bad management, paying off gambling debts, confiscated land, and dowries have seen its agricultural holdings dwindle. It doesn't help that the fields are far upriver, where the soil is poor, and must be irrigated by channels and imported manure.

Under the reign of Pasha Abdul-Aziz al-Hassan, its current head, the family's fortunes have slowly begun to reverse. Quite how he has achieved this transformation is quietly debated by his peers, but few doubt it is by

honest means. Fortunately for House Hassan, their estates are so remote and their name already so tarnished that no one cares to investigate.

Workers demand both wages and time off, neither of which helps profit or productivity. To combat this, this pasha has begun using undead on its most remote farms. Skeletons and zombies, animated by the scions within the cult of Iblis, now plow, sow, and harvest the fields.

The family's prosperity may be short-lived. In a recent accident three zombies fell into the river and were washed downstream. Though the water did them little physical damage, their staggering through a farm caused much alarm and caused the cult of Tammuz to become involved. Worse, one of the laborers realized one of the undead was her son, who died of fever a year earlier and was duly buried in the local cemetery.

For now, the cult's investigation is focused on the area around where the zombies were first spotted (no one saw them clamber out of the river). Given that House Hassan must frequently replenish its workforce (mindless undead and scythes are a recipe for disaster), they may soon attract unwanted attention.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Described below are a handful of nefarious characters adventurers might have course to interact with while enjoying the sights of Hufrah.

BURHAN AND HAWRA

A husband and wife team, Burhan and Hawra run a small business from a barge. Burhan is a blacksmith, while his wife is the trader. They sail up and down the River Syrah, selling their goods and services to the farms and as an impromptu ferry service for small groups of travellers. They sideline in grave robbing. Since they don't ply their nefarious trade in the city proper, save to fence goods, the thieves' guild permits them to work as freelancers. As well as working for Otik, they supply corpses to House Hassan (and others with a need for earthly remains). With the cult of Tammuz now sniffing around the small rural cemeteries, they have recently taken to murder to meet demand.

FIRESTARTER

Tensions between Devoted and Faithful are running high in the city. A spate of arson attacks has gutted several buildings and damaged one of the granaries. Without producing any evidence, the emira has informed the people the culprit is either a jinn mage or wields a jinn spirit relic. The few resident jinn mages in the city have been arrested and interrogated, but all have been deemed innocent. The guilty party is, in fact, a cleric of Geb-Agni with pyromaniac inclinations. He has no grudge against the city—he just likes watching buildings burn.

HULWAN

City of Gardens

The transformation of the desert around Hulwan into the breadbasket of the Caliphate is nothing short of miraculous. Yet this beacon of prosperity and man's dominion over the desert has many problems—its water supplies are stretched to breaking, attacks by the Sons of the Sand are increasing, its emira is young and inexperienced, the merchants of Hajjad seek to monopolize trade with the Free Emirate States, and its isolated position leaves it vulnerable to assault.

Social Hierarchy

No emir may sit upon the throne without the blessing of the cult of Ashtart. Seeking a grip of the new city, the high priest decreed that to do so would offend Ashtart, and she would vent her wrath by bringing famine to the land. This is not to say the city has always enjoyed popular or capable rulers—even high priests can be bought, intimidated, or blackmailed. Fortunately, the current emira's line, which has ruled for five generations, has proven popular with all segments of society.

Emir Daud, though wise, hated being lord of Hulwan. From the day he took the throne, he made it very clear to his people that he would abdicate as soon as his eldest child reached their majority. For many years, his wife pulled every trick in the book to avoid becoming pregnant. In the end, though, fate could not be beaten.

Emira Rihana knew from an early age that she would become the youngest city ruler in the Caliphate, but no amount of preparation and schooling could prepare her for the heavy burden she now shoulders. While some of those who know of her pregnancy whisper that it was an act of teenage rebellion, or a mistake that should never have happened, most know it came from an act of true love. Unfortunately, they are less clear as to whether the emira will follow her father and abdicate.

The people would be horrified if she actually harbored such thoughts. Extremely popular, she is unofficially known as the Spring of Hulwan, for being so young she carries the promise of a long period of stability and renewed growth. No one doubts Hulwan has problems, but they look expectantly to Rihana to fix them. That she might be an unmarried mother will raise many eyebrows, but a child would help secure the line's survival, and that is a cause for celebration.

Rihana has several wizens to help her rule wisely and justly. Most senior is Abbud ibn Zain, the high priest of Ashtart. He served under her father, and treats the emira like a granddaughter. He knows her pregnancy will upset

her mother, but he frequently counsels her to reveal the truth sooner rather than later. As he tells her, "Even the worst storm must pass to reveal clear skies." What prevents Rihana from telling her mother is a question mark over the father's identity. While Rihana and Pasha Bursik are smitten with each other, they have never made love. Indeed, she is still a virgin, despite being pregnant.

Being so far from Hajjad, City of Gods, seat of the Caliph, Hulwan's nobles are isolated from the politics of court. A small few try to extend their interests further afield, but most are concerned only with local events. For generations, their wealth and power have resulted from ownership of the rich fields that surround the city. Individually, even the great houses are weak. Together, though, the nobles form a powerful bloc capable of influencing decision making at the highest levels. For their part, the emirs plot to keep them divided.

The middle class is mainly merchants. They have grown fat and rich from buying and selling, yet producing nothing. It cannot be argued that they are lazy, though, for it is their drive that keeps trade flowing.

The lower class is made up of farm laborers for the most part. The city boasts few craftsmen. Indeed, such is the deficiency that there is a very real risk the people of Hulwan will lose the basic crafts of carpentry, masonry, and metalworking so vital to the construction of their home. Some argue this is no bad thing. Others are concerned the reliance on manufactured goods and master craftsmen from other cities will leave Hulwan open to unwanted outside influences.

Education

Prospects for social promotion are few and far between, and education is not prized among the common citizens. From an early age, children are put to work on the farms. With summer just another growing season, there is little time for even the most basic education.

The children of nobles and rich citizens who earn their income other than through agriculture have no need to work, and regularly attend school. Those accepted as novitiates within the cults are quickly brought up to speed in the core subjects. The cult of Qedeshet, small though it is, is not prepared to ignore promising children from poor families. Those who display an aptitude for learning are taken into the cult's care and educated. Their family is given a small sum to cover the loss of the child. Even so, Hulwan has the highest rate of illiteracy in the Caliphate.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Hulwan.

* **Food:** Cheap meals cost one-quarter dirham, average meals 1 dirham, expensive meals 1+ dinars, and rations 5 dirhams.

* **Herbalism:** Herbalist kits cost 30 dinars, dried herbs 2 dinars per bunch, and fresh herbs and herbal remedies are half price (see page 53).

* **Native Characters:** A native character with Smarts d6+ may choose to be a graduate of *one* of the advanced universities. Each grants one benefit, as listed below, but only during character generation and the hero must meet all other requirements.

Caravans: For one skill point, the character may take one from Knowledge (any Area relating to the Free Emirates), Knowledge (Nomads), or Survival at d6, or two at d4. A maximum of two skill points may be spent in this manner.

Healing & Herbalism: For one skill point, the character may take one from Healing and Knowledge (Herbalism) at d6, or both at d4. A maximum of two skill points may be spent in this manner.

* **Poorly Educated Masses:** Citizens, including native player characters without Smarts d8+, or Arcane Background, Noble, or Rich, suffer -1 to Common Knowledge rolls. Many NPCs are illiterate. Patrons of Apsu and Ashtart suffer no penalty on rolls relating to their deity. When a native hero's Smarts reaches d8, he is assumed to have picked up enough knowledge to remove this penalty.

* **Trade Center:** The docks and markets are full of goods from across distant Rassilon and southern Al-Shirkuh. Village Availability items cost 70% of normal, Town items 85%, and City items 95%. Heroes selling goods in Hulwan have +1 to Streetwise rolls to find a buyer.

* **Transport Hub:** Hulwan has a small but busy port, though ships tarry longer at times in order to benefit from the arrival of caravans. The characters can find a ship departing in 1d4+1 days with a successful Streetwise roll, or later the same day with a raise. It is also a starting point for caravans along the Southern Trade Road. A successful Streetwise roll locates one ready to depart in 2d4 days, or 1d4 days on a raise.

Hulwan has three centers of advanced education. Its basic university, the University of Hulwan, is small, and offers only limited placements each year. Only those who previously attended school can hope to pass the entrance exams, meaning few from the lower classes are ever accepted.

Though edible crops are the city's main focus, the cult of Ashtart has always grown medicinal herbs. Once dried, these form one of the city's minor exports. After years of political and religious pressure, the then emir finally gave permission for the clerics, in conjunction with the cult of Marqod, to open the University of Healing

and Herbalism. Thanks to the prevalence of cultivated medicinal herbs and the quality of the instructors, it has risen to become the Caliphate's preeminent center of learning for those who wish to become healers.

The second advanced university is the School of Caravans. Despite its name, it offers little in the way of training in how to manage the logistics of caravans or mercantile matters. Rather, courses focus on desert survival, knowledge of the Free Emirate States and the various nomad tribes that live along the trade road, and languages one is likely to need while in the desert.

Religion

Apsu and Ashtart are the most honored deities, and the two are irrevocably linked in the minds of the locals. Should Apsu fail to bless the waters, the crops cannot grow. Should Ashtart withdraw her support, the crops would wither, the soil would turn to dust, and the desert would swallow the oases. Since the city was founded, the high priests of the cults have been engaged in fierce theological debate with their superiors in Hajjad. In traditional Faithful teachings, the city's patron deities are brother and sister. In Hulwan, they are seen as husband and wife, with the imagery of Apsu's water of life and Ashtart's fertility being metaphors for sexual reproduction. The gods themselves have cast no light on their true relationship, leaving mortals to argue their status within the pantheon.

Shamash sits in distant third place in terms of popularity. Though his aspects of nobility, order, and vigilance are not ignored, they rank far behind his role as sun god.

Duamutef receives little direct praise from the locals. Instead, rituals are carried out to compensate him for the loss of so much desert to farmland and placate him so he does not send sandstorms to cover the land. Given that he is also patron of nomads, he receives prayers from those who rely on the caravans for their livelihood.

Trade may be essential to Hulwan's merchants, but few other citizens give Qedeshet much thought. Though it presses for more recognition, the cult remains small and largely without political influence. Should the water supply fail, Hulwan would have to rely more on its trade links, and the cult would rise in status.

While honored across the Caliphate, the lesser deities Kamalos (camels), Melissah (bees), Sekhmet (rodent extermination), and Zerbanitu (medicine) enjoy plentiful worship in Hulwan. Such is the importance of bees in pollinating major crops that Melissah's cult is more popular than that of any deities except Apsu and Ashtart, and even boasts a dedicated temple.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Regardless of their patron, all citizens celebrate the major festivals to Apsu and Ashtart. The city's tiny Devoted population has created special prayers, so as to be able to fulfil their duty.

Fertility Day: With no annual flood to cover the land in the land in thick, fertile mud, the citizens of Hulwan do not celebrate Inundation Day. In its place they have Fertility Day. The statue of Apsu is brought forth from his temple and carried through the farmland. Every now and then, the procession stops and the land is sprinkled with cloudy water. This symbolizes Apsu ejaculation into Ashtart, and helps ensure the soil is fertile.

First Meal: When the city was young, the nobles would bring the first armful of the main harvest from their estates to the emir as a gift. He would then invite the nobles to share the food in a ritual feast. The meal allowed the emir to check the quality of the harvest, and was a means of reminding the nobles that while they owned lands, they answered to the emir. Today, the date is fixed in the calendar on Tamith Yaus al-Nefar Tamith Alak Paret. While it retains its older significance, the feast gives the emir the opportunity to address the assembled nobles, listen to their grievances, settle disputes, and chastise those whose lands failed to produce adequate crops.

Garden Day: Almost every house in Hulwan grows flowers. For some, their garden is an entire courtyard, complete with water feature. For those with less money and space, it is a simple window box. On Baot Yaus al-Kemi Baot Alak Paret, the gardens are open to the public. A panel of clerics from the cults of Apsu and Ashtart tours the city and judges the various displays. Those selected as winners are invited to the palace to collect a gold medal reward from the emira. Competition is strong in every category, and being awarded a medal is a source of much local pride and envy.

Military

Although some 80 miles of the Southern Trade Road lies inside the Caliphate, responsibility for patrolling the road falls to Tamat (p. 54). The jurisdiction of Hulwan's army ends at the edge of its farmland.

ARMY

Two factors have led to Hulwan investing heavily in cavalry. First, it is unlikely to ever come under attack by a conventional army of any size. Any attacks are likely to be raiders staging hit-and-run opportunity attacks. Mounted troops allow the army to respond quickly. Second, fodder for mounts is plentiful. The army comprises four cavalry regiments, each with just three companies. Of these, two companies per regiment are light cavalry while the third is mounted archers.

Should Hulwan ever come under attack, the emira knows that defending the open farmland would be impossible—the terrain is too open, and no one wants to encircle the city with forts. With its extensive granaries and internal water supply, Hulwan was designed to withstand a lengthy siege. One company of artilleryists, six companies of archers, and one company of medium in-

fantry protect the walls and gates. They are known as the Green Stings for the color of their cloaks and plumes.

The emira's bodyguard comprises one company of medium infantry and four squads of medium cavalry. They are commanded by Pasha Bursik, the emira's lover and likely future husband. Emira Rihana has always loved riding. Her father created the cavalry bodyguard to ensure his daughter would always be adequately protected.

NAVY

Were it not for its trade ties with the Free Emirate States, Hulwan would forgo the expense of maintaining a navy—its native exports are not great draws for corsair. Unfortunately, renewed trade in goods from Rassilon has attracted corsairs like bees to honey, and the waters are growing increasingly more dangerous.

Even so, its navy is a token eight light warships, far too few to be an effective deterrent. Merchant vessels are responsible for their own safety on the high seas, and the odds of a lone ship being plundered are relatively small. The navy focuses its attentions on keeping the approaches to the harbor free from corsairs, and rarely ventures more than two days' sail from the port.

Law & Order

Deterring crime falls to the men and women of the City Watch. Officially known as the Hornets (supposedly for their relentless attitude in apprehending criminals), locals jokingly refer to them as the Honeybees because they concentrate their patrols around the docks, businesses, and homes of the elite—areas with money. In a bid to prevent thieves from extorting protection money, the early emirs beat them to the punch. Citizens who want their homes and premises protected must pay the city an annual fee. In return, special attention is paid to those properties. Naturally, this is a service only the rich can afford, as it is a flat rate of 200 dinars per year. While the thieves' guild lost a revenue stream, it has made up for it by deliberately targeting these protected properties as a means of showing the nobles and merchants they'd be better off paying the guild. Protecting the granaries and oases falls to the City Guard.

Outside the city, police duties fall to the paladins of Ashtart (on their farms) or constables hired by the land owning nobles. They have the same authority and powers as the Watch, but only outside the city gates.

Bees, which are sacred to both Ashtart and Melissah, enjoy protected status in Hulwan. Killing one is a religious crime, punishable by a stiff fine. Destroying a next, even by accident, carries the death penalty.

Hulwan has a single thieves' guild—the Honey Suckers. They control all crime in Hulwan, and extend their operations even to the farms. Average citizens have little to fear from mugging or robbery.

While small quantities of hashish are grown by the cult

of Ashtart for the cult of Tamarni, the nobles have never had permission. Regular visits by paladins of Ashtart, ostensibly to bless crops and watch for bandits, helps ensure they are not tempted into secretly cultivating it. Thus, those who crave the drug but are unwilling to pay the high legal prices turn to the black market.

Stemming the tide has proven immensely difficult. Customs inspectors must also ensure trade flows quickly and efficiently, and ships do not clog the harbor. Though mostly honest and diligent, the inspectors have the time and manpower to adequately investigate barely one-fifth of the cargo passing through the city, and far less if caravans and ships arrive simultaneously.

The city is also a convenient gateway for the smuggling of khem-hekau texts and relics and other forbidden artifacts from Hekata. Little of this remains in Hulwan, though there are a few minor collectors.

Trade & Tribute

Hulwan's trade links with the western half of Al-Shirkuh date back long before the arrival of the jinn, to the days when the Empty Quarter was occupied. Modern Hulwan did not exist, of course, but its predecessor served the same role. Though trade had stopped following the old city's destruction, the foundation of the Caliphate and Free Emirate States saw a rapid resurgence in caravans along the ancient Southern Trade Road.

The city's faces several problems. Expansion of the Great Dune Sea threatens to both engulf Blue Water Oasis, a major watering hole, and force caravans to take ever wider detours. Hulwan's small harbor cannot cope with the amount of traffic required to efficiently keep cargoes moving. Then there is its water supply. As the number of fields continues to grow, so the water in the two exterior oases must feed more and more land. In hot summers, water is diverted from the city oases to the irrigation channels through a network of subterranean aqueducts. With the water having to go further than ever, the risk of over-farming has, for the first time, reared its ugly head. Finally, there is the city's reliance on imported finished goods. Should trade cease for any reason, there are very few local craftsmen to take up the reins.

Despite the number of caravans and ships that call here, acting as a focal point for traders is seen as a secondary source of income. With no other natural resources, agriculture forms Hulwan's major economic output. Hard work, financial investment, and the blessings of Apsu and Ashtart have transformed the desert around Hulwan into verdant fields. Unaffected by floods, they produce crops all year round.

The cult of Ashtart owns 20% of the field, the nobles 60%, and the emira 20%. Each year, the nobles bid for licenses that determine how much of their produce must be sold to the city (at heavily discounted rates) and how much may be exported. The less one must hand over to Hulwan's granaries, the higher the price of the license.

COINAGE

Hulwan has a small mint. Rather than smelting gold and silver, it purchases blank metal disks, which are then stamped locally. Despite being blank, the disks are still precious metal. With merchants basing the value of coins on weight rather than design or stamped denomination, they are accepted as legal tender. Caravans and merchant ships are forced to employ armed escorts to deter bandits, adding to the cost to Hulwan. As a result, the city produces only gold one dinar and silver one dirham coins. These are known locally as Gold Queens and Silver Bees. It is legal to quarter and half the coins to make smaller denominations.

LOCAL TAXES

Wages for agricultural workers are low. Rather than overburden already poor people, the emira imposes various taxes on the nobles, temples, and merchants. As well as various license fees, those who own land or business premises must pay tax equal to 3% of the value of their buildings, land, and goods each year. The poor are not tax exempt, but they pay only 15% income tax.

Customs Duty: Goods passing through Hulwan are taxed at 2%. Imports are levied at 1% and exports at 4%.

Docking Fees: Hulwan sits in the uncomfortable position of wanting to encourage merchant ships to visit yet not wishing them to stay too long. Ships are charged 15 dinars for the first day, double this the second day, and quadruple the third day. After this, they must pay a surcharge of 200 dinars per day (on top of the normal docking fees).

Gate Tax: Passage through the exterior gates is charged at a flat 1 dirham per person, mount, or wagon.

Sales Tax: Nothing on food, coffee, tea, or materials relating to herbalism, 10% on armor and weapons, and 5% on all other goods.

Water Tax: All citizens pay tax to help keep the city's water system maintained. Lower class citizens of all ages must pay 1 dirham, middle class citizens 1 dinar, and upper class citizens 10 dinars. Visitors are charged 5 dinars on entrance to the city.

Architecture

By the standards of the other cities, Hulwan is a paradise. Water trickles and gurgles along stone channels, the streets are wide, the air is filled with the scent of flowers, shady palms sway in the breeze, and there are open gardens and parkland where citizens can socialize in the cool air. Most houses have a courtyard, and even those without have flower boxes full of colorful blooms.

Naturally, this view is somewhat idealized. Many poor residential districts lack these amenities, and by the time the water reaches their streets it has become tainted with dust, garbage, and other refuse.

Major Locales

Below are some of the more interesting places the heroes may have reason to visit during a stay in Hulwan.

CITY DISTRICTS

Though the emira rules over 92,000 people, about 40% (37,000) live inside the city walls. For the rest, life is rural. Land close to the oases is reserved for crops, and so the villages and small towns sit further out, on the edge of the desert. Much of the city is open plan, and there are few designated districts.

Docks: Visitors are often dismayed upon arriving at the docks, for the city proper lies ten miles inland. Despite this, the docks is considered a city district. A wide road links the two settlements, and visitors can catch a ride into Hulwan for a few dirhams on one of the many chariots and wagons available for hire. A wall protects the landward side, and water is channeled into cisterns via underground pipes from Hulwan.

Grand: Much of the northwest quadrant of the city contains the homes of the rich and powerful. Surrounded by high, thick walls, the sprawling mansions and their elaborate gardens are spaced far apart. Despite occupying roughly a fifth of the city, only a few percent of the population live here. Nearest to the palace are compounds inhabited by diplomats from the other cities.

Lower Quarter: Separated from the rest of the city by an internal wall, this crowded residential district is home to most of the city's lower class, and thus the bulk of the population. The ground here is slightly lower than the rest of the city (hence the name), allowing water to trickle downhill into the streets and from there into the fields beyond. Never one to trust the peasants, an emir of old installed gates in the culverts that pass through the wall, with iron bars preventing anyone from tampering with them from the Lower Quarter side. Should the masses get rebellious, the gates can be closed and the water supply shut off. The water is then diverted into cisterns to prevent wastage.

Market: Hulwan has a small souk and a large bazaar, both located just south of the Trade District. The bazaar sells only fresh fruit, herbs, and vegetables, though the variety appears endless. Everything except fresh produce is available from the souk. The district is also home to many poorer merchants.

Palace: In order that the Floating Gardens were not eclipsed, the emira's palace was built outward rather than upward. Behind the walls are the usual private apartments, civic rooms, and areas set aside for the bureaucracy. The emira's private gardens are, as one might expect, spectacular. The water features use as much water in a day as the entire Lower Quarter.

Trade: The Great Southern Road ends in the vast plaza of the Trade District. To the north are the offices of the various merchant families. Caravanserais line the west, while warehouses face onto the plaza from the east and south.

NEW HERBAL REMEDIES

These remedies are additions to the ones detailed in the *Hellfrost Players's Guide* and *Hellfrost Rasselion Expansion*. Unless otherwise stated, cumulative doses have no additional effect.

Camel Calming (-1): This remedy works only on camels, and is highly valued by Bedu. When ingested, a dose helps to calm the camel, giving the beast +1 to Spirit rolls to resist Fear. As an added benefit, the beast is also easier to control, giving the rider +1 to Riding rolls.

Clotting (see below): Without some form of healing, a character Bleeding Out stands a very good chance of dying. This herbal remedy helps prevent blood loss. It can be created for use in one of two ways. The two methods are mutually exclusive—only the highest modifier applies.

Applied (+1): Applied as a poultice after a character begins Bleeding Out, it grants a +2 bonus for the next three rounds. An Incapacitated hero cannot apply the remedy himself. Applying a dose is an action.

Preventative (-1): This version is ingested. For an hour after consumption, the hero gains a +1 bonus to his Vigor rolls when Bleeding Out.

Cooling (-2): Rubbed onto exposed skin, this remedy helps protect against sunburn and heatstroke. For 12 hours after application, a character who doesn't drink the required amount of water makes a Vigor roll to avoid the effects of heat every six hours instead of every four (see Heat in *Savage Worlds Deluxe*).

Restful Sleep (0): While a stimulant I remedy helps one stay awake and a soporific sends one into a deep sleep, this remedy reduces the amount of sleep a character needs. A dose consumed within an hour of going to sleep reduces the character's required sleep from six hours to four hours.

OPTIONAL: LEARNING RECIPES

As written, an herbalist automatically knows how to create every herbal remedy. As an optional rule, he instead picks a number of remedies of his choice equal to his Knowledge (Alchemy) die type. The character cannot brew remedies he has not yet learned—he lacks knowledge of the right plants. For each die his skill increases during play, he automatically learns two new remedies—it is assumed he has been practising in his spare time. Above d12, each +1 increase grants knowledge of one new herbal remedy.

At the GM's discretion, he can also learn remedies from fellow herbalists in play. Herbalists tend to be protective of their secrets, though. Some want to trade recipes, while others charge money. As a rule of thumb, it takes one day to learn a new recipe in this manner.

CITY LOCALES

City Walls: The walls are tall and thick, built to withstand a lengthy siege. They slope inward as they rise, making it difficult for siege towers to get within range. As well as three fortified gatehouses, there is a tower every 50 yards. The distance is such that archers in neighboring towers can support each other. Walkways along the top of the walls provide additional firing positions, and link the towers as part of a continuous line of defense.

Within the city, catapults are housed in the central armory. Should invaders approach, the plan of defense is to bring as many people as possible into the city, seal the gates, and fire incendiary *blast* ammunition into the fields so as to deny the crops to the enemy.

Coffee Houses: Hulwan has only a handful of coffee houses, and they focus on special blends and imported varieties. Standard coffee and a variety of tea (a relatively recent import from the Jade Empire) are so plentiful that shopkeepers give free cups away to shoppers to encourage them to spend money.

Gates: There is one internal and three external gates. The internal gate leads into the Lower Quarter, and is known as Lower Gate. Except in times of civil unrest, it remains open day and night, though it is never unguarded. The main entrance to the city is in the northwest. Officially it is called the Emirates Gate, but most residents simply refer to it as the Gate. Water Gate lies in the south, and gives access to the docks. A broad avenue links Water Gate to the Trade District. In the east is Field Gate, which leads into the farmland surrounding the city and is primarily used by laborers going to and from work. The external gates are closed between dusk and dawn, but are opened to allow caravans from the north and wagon trains from the docks into the city at all hours.

Each main gate has two sets of reinforced doors. The covered passage joining them can be sealed with two metal portcullises (one at each end). Those trapped inside are exposed to attack from murder holes in the fortified gatehouse above.

Ghadir's Sweet Treats: Ghadir bint Jaun is a confectioner. She makes and sells a range of delicious candies. A herbalist by trade, she has perfected the creation of medicinal candy by infusing hard sugar with medicinal herbs. Not only are they tonics, but they taste great.

The Golden Doors: While laying the city's foundations, builders unearthed a set of gold doors. Though intact, whatever fate befell the city melted away the top layer, along with any inscriptions or reliefs. Beyond, stairs lead down into a small chamber, the rear wall of which is decorated with a damaged mural that purports to lead to a fabulous treasure. All attempts to solve the riddle of the mural, a stylized map of Al-Shirkuh, have so far met with failure. It seems that some sort of key is required (an amulet studded with small gems), but no one has yet unearthed any objects that fulfill this purpose. The doors are guarded day and night, and only the emira or those with official passes are permitted entrance.

Granaries: The city's extensive granaries are under-

ground. Here, cereals are stored for everyday consumption, while separate silos hold supplies for in times of siege. Hulwan has never actually suffered a siege, and likely never will, though they have proven useful on the very few occasions the harvest has failed. These stores are regularly cleaned out into the everyday silos, so as to prevent them spoiling. Access to the granaries is strictly controlled. Security rests in the hands of the cult of Ashtart supported by a band of clerics of Sekhmet.

Hanbals' Cafe: As far as most residents are concerned, Hanbal sells drinks and snack. He doesn't advertise the fact that his shop lies over an entrance to a network of tunnels and chambers lying far beneath the modern city. He charges adventurers 50 dinars a head to enter, but makes no claims to anything they find. Few have returned richer than when they entered, but to date explorations have covered only the top two levels of catacombs they go much deeper.

Khalim's Desert Apparel: An elderly Bedu now settled in Hulwan, Khalim is one of the few remaining masters of a dying art. He sells handmade burnouses, goggles, and sand hoods of rare quality and superb craftsmanship, though at prices to match. One of his burnouses sells for 200 dinars, but lowers the temperature two levels. The goggles he makes cost 75 dinars, but the Notice penalty is only -1. His sand hoods cost 80 dinars, and reduce the amount of water one needs to consume each day by one quart.

The King's Rest: Access to this tavern lies down a spiral staircase. Visitors cannot help but notice on entering the low-ceilinged room that the place looks very much like a tomb. This is not surprising, given that it was a tomb. The proprietor, Numair ibn Jal, tells patrons the tavern was once the final resting place of a king of whatever culture once lived in the earlier city. The faded murals and gold funerary ware on display certainly lend the story an air of authenticity. Locals know better.

The tomb belonged to a lesser courtier of the forgotten culture, and the funerary goods are all fake. The supposed royal mummy (which stands inside its upright sarcophagus) is a real preserved corpse, but came from Hekata. Anyone who causes trouble in the tavern must either "salute the king," which means buying everyone in the bar a drink, including the mummy (who naturally consumes only the most expensive beverages), or be thrown out by two hyaenidae bouncers.

The tavern is a favorite haunt of Tammuz's clerics. They know the tavern's true history (and the fact it was empty when discovered, having been plundered in antiquity). With tongue firmly wedged in cheek, they claim they only drink here in case the dead king should wake up and cause mayhem, and to prevent tomb robbers from pilfering the grave goods.

The Oven: A series of narrow streets in the Lower Quarter bordered by tall houses, the Oven is a slum. No water flows here, and its position close to the city wall blocks cooling breezes. During the day, temperatures are two steps higher than the rest of the city. Activity is kept to a minimum during the day, with people emerging from their poky, airless homes only after the sun has set.

Mulhim's Incense: Herbalists are a dinar a dozen in Hulwan, and those who wish to prosper must have some sort of edge over their rivals. As well as conventional incense sticks, Mulhim sells incense imbued with medicinal herbs. The pellets and sticks are extremely small and still only benefit one person, who must inhale the vapors, but they have the added benefit of a sweet fragrance.

Among his special products is an incense that smells pleasant enough to humans, but offends the olfactory senses of mice and rats. Though each stick costs 20 dinars and fills only a single large room with smoke, the scent remains for an entire month.

Mulhim has two other advantages—he is a cleric of Marqod and an alchemist. His alchemical devices take the form of incense. Instant spells take the form of pellets, which produce a short burst of smoke (to be inhaled), while spells with an hour duration take the form of slow burning sticks. The latter cannot be extinguished until the magic has run its course except through *dispel*.

Oases: The five oases inside the walls are little more than pools. Between them, they provide water for drinking, bathing, laundry, and the numerous fountains that dot the city and nobles' gardens, with enough left over to help irrigate the nearby fields. Clerics and faddeen of Apsu watch over the oases, and they are swift to punish those who befoul the water.

Reda's Collectibles and Curiosities: An elderly Hadaree, Reda buys and sells objects seen nowhere else in Al-Shirkuh. Among his wares are cloaks made of the skin of a spotted cat, feathered headdresses from unknown species of bird, wooden swords studded with obsidian flakes, and statuettes of strange gods. Questioned about the origins of the goods, he claims they come from beyond the Lands of the Lizardmen, from a country inhabited by bloodthirsty savages who offer human sacrifices to their gods, wear the skins of their enemies, and never invented the wheel. He refers to the place as Aztlan, but admits he is unsure as to whether that is the name of the nation or just one tribe. Reda has no current links to Aztlan—he acquired the goods in his youth from a sailor, and has no means of replenishing his dwindling stock.

Royal Gardens: Standing south of the palace, the Royal Gardens were a gift to the people of Hulwan by an emir of old. The walled garden is open to the public between dawn and dusk, and entrance is free. Among the spectacular floral displays are many rare plants, some from foreign lands, and topiary of ferocious beasts. It is widely rumored that some or all of the topiary are actually magical constructs created by the cult of Ashtart, placed there to protect the rare plants from thieves. Exotic new plants are always sought by the head gardener.

School of Caravans: The school is unusual in that the majority of its instructors are nomads and clerics of Duamutef. Lessons take place on campus, which is set up to resemble a typical Bedu encampment, as well as in the burning sands beyond the farmlands.

The school is also a recruiting station for those who want to hire on as caravan guards. Caravan owners post vacancies here, trusting the staff to find the most suit-

OPTIONAL: PRICE OF HEALING

Even in the temples of Marqod, healing is not free—healers must eat, and medical supplies must be purchased. The cult has no wish to see anyone suffer, of course, and those who cannot meet its fees in dinars are allowed to work off their debt.

HEALING

Immediate Care: 5 dinars per die type of the primary healer. After d12, the cost is an additional 10 dinars per +1 bonus. Thus, a cleric with Healing d12+2 costs a total of 45 dinars. *Wild Card:* A Wild Card healer costs double the base amount. *Edges:* A healer with the Barber Edge costs +10 dinars. One with Disciple of Marqod or Healer (the latter being a graduate of the Barber's School in Musayid, City of Wind) costs +25 dinars. *Assistants:* For each assistant aiding in a Cooperative roll an extra 5 dinars is charged. Assistants always have Healing d6.

Long-Term Care: Prices depend on the quality of care and skill of the healer. The most basic care can be carried out by anyone and costs 2 dinars per four days (covers basic medical supplies), but gives no modifier to natural healing rolls. For 10 dinars, a healer with Healing d6+ gives the patient receives +1 to natural Healing rolls (this is the norm in Al-Shirkuh). Those who find a Disciple of Marqod or a healer who is trained in the Healer Edge can pay 25 dinars to receive a +3 bonus.

Spells: Whether cast by a cleric or mage, or alchemical devices, healing spells are charged at 100 dinars per spell Rank. Alchemical devices cast with a raise cost an additional 100 dinars per spell Rank.

HERBS

Fresh Herbs: The rarer a herb, the more potent and easy to work with it is. Rarity ranges from +4 (extremely common) to -4 (extremely rare). Anything rated +0 or higher is considered common. Many temples of Ashtart and Marqod grow small quantities of common herbs, which are harvested when needed. Typically, freshly cut ingredients remain potent for only one day. After this, unless used or dried, they wither and become useless in medicines. *Cost:* Start at 16 dinars for +0 rarity, and halve in price for each +1 modifier, to a value of 1 dinar per batch for +4 rarity; *Availability:* S (temples of Ashtart or Marqod, or a herbalist with a garden).

Herbal Remedies: To keep things simple, all prepared herbal remedies have the same price. Remedies with higher creation penalties are rarer (the herbalist offsetting the remedy's penalty with a longer preparation time), though, and are found only in limited quantities. *Cost:* 50 dinars; *Availability:* S (temples of Ashtart or Marqod, or a herbalist).

able applicants based on specific criteria. Warriors who trained at the school always receive preferential treatment. Explorers looking to join a caravan purely for protection can also find details of those leaving in the next few days.

Skills: Knowledge (any Area relating to the Free Emirates), Knowledge (Nomads), Survival; **Edges:** None; **Languages:** Beduan, Cakalic, Sandspeech

Temple of Melissah: Hulwan has the only functioning temple solely dedicated to Melissah, goddess of bees. Shaped like a beehive, it sits in the grounds of the Floating Gardens. Thousands of bees make their homes in artificial hives, gathering nectar from the flowers in and around the city. The clerics harvest the honey to sell as food, use in herbal remedies, or ferment into *nehta*. The wax is used to make votive candles and talismans.

The bees have a preternatural knack of sensing visitors who approach the temple with bad intentions. The swarms defend both the temple and clerics aggressively. The cult has vowed that should Hulwan be besieged, the bees will help defend the city.

University of Healing and Herbalism: As well as teaching theory to aspiring barbers and surgeons, the university runs a training hospital where students may put their knowledge to practical use on actual patients. Medical care is free of charge, but the healers are usually first and second year students with limited abilities.

Should the heroes elect to come here for free treatment, draw a card from the action deck for each patient. A numbered card indicates the attending student has Healing d4. On a royal card (Jack through Ace) he has d6. A Joker indicates he is an advanced student with Healing d8. Only the poorest residents and those with minor ailments risk free medical care.

Skills: Healing, Knowledge (Alchemy); **Edges:** Barber, Expert Healer, Hedge Magic.

Zawi's Camels: Without camels and their legendary ability to go without water for prolonged periods, trade between the Free Emirate States and Hulwan would not exist. To merchants who walk the sandy trail, the cantankerous beasts are literally worth their weight in gold. Zawi dresses in the style of the Bedu and has many of the mannerisms, but is a Hadaree through and through. His tent is merely an office—at night he retires to a comfortable house. The nomads play along with his pseudo-disguise without comment, for he breeds and trains the best camels in the Caliphate.

Prices below are in addition to the basic cost of a camel. These options can be combined.

An existing camel can become Well Trained (removing the Ornery special ability) for double the fee listed below, but this takes time. Each month, roll the beast's Spirit. Success means it resists submitting and another month is required. After three months of failure, Zawi considers the beast a lost cause and refunds half the fee.

Hardy: the camel can go 10 days without water (+80 dinars); **Strong Back:** the camel has the Brawny Edge (+250 dinars); **Well Trained:** the rider ignores the usual -1 penalty to Riding rolls (+150 dinars).

THE INCENSE UPLANDS

Fifty miles northeast of Hulwan lies a region of rugged uplands inhabited by several Bedu tribes. The largest of these is the Faithful Ashtarishiel tribe. Initially resistant to the expanding Caliphate, peace came about only after a bitter and prolonged conflict. All the tribes have now sworn fealty to the Caliph, who in return agreed to leave them in peace so long as they sold their produce only to Hulwan. Seeing as the city is the closest major market, the Bedu raised no objections. The only sign the Caliphate exists here is a small town, Omjol (pop. 575), which sits near a small oasis at the southern edge of the uplands.

What made controlling the region so important to the Caliphs is the concentration of frankincense, myrrh, and sandalwood trees. So many grow here that the uplands are the major source of incense in the Caliphate. Omjol marks the start of the Incense Road, a minor trade route that runs to Hulwan.

Incense becomes more expensive the further it travels along the trade routes, but the Bedu see very little of the profit. What customers in Hajjad pay for a small stick, the Bedu receive for a large sack. Raw incense is attractive to bandits and smugglers, though, something of which the Caliph is well aware. Fortunately for his coffers, the Bedu do a very good job of chasing away outsiders without outside help.

TAMAT

Population: 1070

Ruler: Haith Pasha Yasir ibn Muslih

Religion: Faithful (Qedeshet, Duamutef, Upuaut)

Imports: Trade

Exports: Trade

The town of Tamat lies on the Southern Trade Road, at the very edge of the Caliphate. The first settlement inside the border, it has become a popular stopover for caravans heading to and from the Free Emirate States. As a result, its merchants have grown rich on passing trade (and by owning most of the agricultural land, which was sold off by a succession of corrupt governors).

Haith Pasha Yasir was appointed to the post by the Caliph. Although the town is close to Hulwan, its strategic location has kept it in the Caliph's hands. In theory, Yasir rules with a great deal of autonomy—Tamat is about as far from the capital as it is possible to get. In reality, his authority has been severely undermined by the powerful merchant families. If he threatens to impose higher taxes on their profits, they raise the price of goods to the point the people start to grumble openly, refuse to purchase basic wares from caravans in protest, or purposefully sell extra crops from their fields, leaving the town short of food and causing food prices to soar.

Although he has four companies of soldiers at his disposal (to protect and patrol the border), Yasir has been unable to break the merchants' power—the captains are all paid "bonuses" by the merchants to ignore any commands that might endanger their wealth or influence.

MARRESH

City of a Thousand Gates

Only rarely do the inhabitants of other cities consider their district anything other than part of the greater settlement. In the City of a Thousand Gates, when a citizen speaks of his city he usually means just the segment in which he lives.

Social Hierarchy

The emirs of Marresh are not hereditary rulers. When a vacancy arises, a council of 49 members is convened to elect a new emir. Seats on the council are drawn by lot, with 21 seats selected from the city's nobility, 11 from the wealthy merchants, seven from the major cults, seven from the largest settlements outside the city walls, and three from the common citizens. Each family, cult, or settlement must put forward three names for its one seat, with the final choice yet again being drawn at random. The three common seats are filled at random from the census. To ensure victory, the future emir must secure a minimum of 25 votes. While the council convenes, the chief wizar rules, though with very limited powers.

Strict laws govern who is eligible for election to emir. Those considered for the post must be a minimum of 50 years old, Faithful, a member of a family resident in Marresh for a minimum of five generations, and be of good standing in the community, among other criteria. Since a cleric could not be expected to put the interests of the city before his god or sever ties with his cult, no cleric may serve as emir.

Typically, those elected are renowned for their shrewd mind, business acumen, and diplomatic savvy. The process is not foolproof, and a few puppets have been appointed thanks to judicious bribes.

Although technically an autocrat, the powers of the emir are restricted while in office. To prevent nepotism, they may not have dealings, social or business, with a member of their family. To curb corruption, they may not own land, property, or business interests, nor may they have dealings with foreign dignitaries (defined as any diplomat from another city or territory) without the presence of at least three city officials. Marresh's treasury belongs to the city, not the emir. While he lives in style and money is set aside for vital state functions, such as giving gifts to foreign dignitaries and state banquets, he has only a modest personal income.

The emir rules for life. Should ill-health prevent him from carrying out his duties, he may apply for retirement. A panel of clerics (one from each of the major benevolent deities) passes judgment on whether or not he is fit

to remain as emir. If retirement is sanctioned, he receives a small pension and the thanks of the city.

Emir Abdul-Mu'izz has ruled for 26 years and shows no sign of letting old age (he is now 83) impede his rule. On paper, he is the ideal emir, putting the needs of the city before any one group of citizens. Not everyone agrees with his management style, though. Some believe he has tarnished the lofty position of emir by mixing with commoners and listening to their views. In their eyes, a shepherd does not ask his flock what they want. Others, notably the nobles and merchants, believe he threatens their status by giving too much money to the masses through tax concessions. No one is yet prepared to take drastic action—the emir is old and his days are few—but behind the scenes they are already sizing up potential replacements.

Emirs do not appoint wizens. Rather, his advisors are city officials who have worked, or more rarely bought, their way to the top of the bureaucracy. Their first loyalty is to Marresh as a whole.

Hereditary wealth and power lies with the city's noble families. While they do not perform mercantile activities themselves, many invest heavily in trade through ownership of small fleets of merchant ships. Speculative ventures have raised the profile and financial status of many noble families in a short period, but just as many have lost everything through bad investments. Other families act as loan brokers to merchants, growing fat on the interest repayments.

Clerics have a strange relationship with the city. While the benevolent cults may practice openly, clerics are forbidden from joining the city's bureaucracy. This ancient decree helps ensure the needs of the city are never supplanted by the goals and mores of any cult. This is not to say the cults are impotent—most peoples' patron deity matches their occupation, and few would deny a favor to or refuse advice from an important cleric. Any advice or favors would, of course, be between friends, rather than a covert attempt to influence government policy or further the cause of the cult.

Much of the *harajam* is made up of dockworkers, warehouse men, and porters, all essential to keeping trade flowing through the city. Though still peasants, they consider themselves especially blessed—taxes are low, and they have an emir prepared to walk among them and listen to their grievances (though not always act upon them).

Despite being a city of opportunity for those with the brains to pick the right schemes in which to invest or the money to weather heavy losses, the streets are paved with stone, not gold. Many of those who come here with a dream of making it rich are left destitute, their fortunes

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Marresh.

* **Limited Contacts:** The insular nature of the inhabitants means information and gossip rarely travels far. Streetwise rolls have a -1 penalty.

* **Native Heroes I:** A native character with Smarts d6+ may choose to be a graduate of *one* of the advanced universities. Each grants one benefit, as listed below, but only during character generation and the hero must meet all other requirements.

Historical Studies: For one skill point, the character may take two from Investigation, Knowledge (Area), Knowledge (Folklore), Knowledge (History), or Knowledge (Riddles) at d4, or one at d6. A maximum of two skill points may be spent in this manner.

Shield: The character may take Block and Shield-wall as if they were Novice Edges.

Trade: Students must be able to speak Sandspeech. For one skill point, the character may take one from Knowledge (Area), Knowledge (Stewardship), or Streetwise at d6, or two at d4. A maximum of two skill points may be spent in this manner.

* **Native Heroes II:** Native heroes must choose a segment where they grew up. Only those with the Noble Edge may pick a segment in the Noble District, and only clerics one from the Temple District. They treat their Smarts as one die type higher for Common Knowledge rolls concerning events, places, and people in their home segment, but one die lower (below a d4 it becomes d4-2) with regard the rest of the city.

* **No Animals:** Mounts and beasts of burden are banned from entering the city.

* **Slaves:** Strong backs are always needed, and merchants are ever keen to reduce costs. One way is to buy criminals sentenced to slavery by the courts. Due to demand and competition, laborers cost 250 dinars + 150 per point of Strength over d6. Those with the Brawny Edge start at 500 dinars.

lost in the many speculative trade deals that promise great rewards but rarely deliver. Too poor to leave for new pastures, the majority slide into abject poverty.

Education

It is widely remarked that in Marresh, anyone can become emir. Several notable examples began life as lower class citizens who, through education and hard work, coupled with a touch of favorable fortune and a network of contacts built up over years, rose to rule the city. Most children receive an adequate basic education, but few have the opportunity to attend university. A basic educa-

tion may let one join the civil service, but it would take a great deal of luck to climb the ranks without some form of advanced education, favoritism, or innate talent.

The city's two state-run advanced educational institutions are all in the same segment within the same ring as the temples. Locals know it simply as the University Quarter. The University of Gates is the largest in the city, but is non-specialist. While it provides a good level of education, those who seek power and money aim for the University of Trade.

Founded in 395 CJ, the school provides training in mercantile matters. Students learn everything from bookkeeping to haggling. The study of other cities and cultures is important—as the instructors say, “Know your market before you invest.” While no one doubts that there are many promising lower class children with the talent to study here, demand from wealthy families, both local and foreign, is such that only those who can meet the entrance fee are accepted. For those without money, their only hope is finding a rich patron prepared to invest in their future.

A third university, the University of Historical Study, opened its doors in 517 CJ. Privately run by the Society for Ancient Studies, it offers scholarships to those with potential. As well as theoretical work, students have the opportunity to get involved with fieldwork and excavations in distant parts of Al-Shirkuh. The school occupies buildings in the same segment as Qedeshet's temple.

Marresh also has a martial school. Known as the Academy of the Shield, the private institution stands in the Lower Metalworking Quarter.

Religion

Despite having no temples and little cult presence save for itinerant clerics and several official shrines, Upuaut receives the most prayers. Somewhat suspicious of their neighbors after the gate tax was abolished and travel around the city became more common, citizens took it upon themselves to carve the god's holy symbol on each gate. Even today, few pass through a gate without running a hand over the sign and whispering a brief prayer for a safe journey. Each of the merchant compounds outside the city has a large shrine.

Given the importance of mercantile activities, it is no surprise that Qedeshet has the greatest number of dedicated followers. Such is the strength of the cult that it dominates three whole segments.

All of the other gods have a presence, though not all are equal. Apsu and Ashtart share a segment, for instance, and Shamash is deemed third most important only because his faith is the state religion and everyone pays lip service to him at some point.

Business practices the cults are permitted to carry out are curbed by law. While they may freely offer purely religious services and goods and engage in general mercantile activities, they may not operate workshops other

than those required to keep their temples running. This prevents a cult from dominating one aspect of manufacture. The cults are permitted to sell raw materials to the city's craftsmen.

Although every craftsman must pay the city an annual fee for a work permit, the cults were granted the right to issue their own quality assurance licenses as a means of compensating them for lost revenue. Applicants are thoroughly vetted before being issued a license, and must renew the license annually. This is not free, but it is in great demand—having the cult's seal of approval assures buyers they are purchasing quality goods, and that means sellers can charge higher prices.

Though the temples are neither centers of industry or part of the state bureaucracy, many city functions and private enterprises have gravitated toward the appropriate segment. Duamutef's segment contains a small caravanserai used by visiting caravans, though it now faces competition from the inns opened by the cult of Upuaut. The law courts and slave market stand in Tammuz's segment. Many gambling dens and drinking halls are found in proximity to the cult of Tamarni. The hospital is located near Marqod's temple, and so on.

Military

Despite owing the people protection, the emirs have never much cared for the greater territory they control. Their focus has always been on protecting the city and, to a lesser extent, the two trading compounds.

ARMY

Protecting the outlying towns and villages beholden to Marresh falls to four cavalry companies (352 men), three light and one heavy. They patrol the roads from a series of forts known collectively as the Outer Ring.

The city's true army, which doubles as the city guard, is the three regiments stationed between Marresh and the trading compounds. The first has six companies (1056 men) of heavy infantry equipped with short swords and large shields. The second regiment also has six companies (1056 men), but these are medium infantry carrying long spears and no shields. The third is a full strength archer regiment (968 men). All told, the internal army alone comes roughly 3% of the population. Fortunately, Marresh has sufficient wealth to fund such numbers.

On a normal day, archers patrol the upper floors of the interior walls and the main battlements. Infantrymen are responsible for guarding the gates into each segment.

Should the walls ever be breached or the citizens riot, the archers rain down fire on the attackers from the upper floors and through the wall slits. Meanwhile, heavy infantry form shieldwalls in the tunnels and streets to block the enemy's progress. Behind them, a row of medium infantry is drawn up, their long spears protruding through the shields as a secondary offensive line.

Only a handful of trusted people know that there is a final line of defence—a dozen wall golems (see *Creature Guide: Golems*) purchased at great expense. They are stored beneath the palace until needed.

Protecting the palace and the emir is the responsibility of the Champions of Marresh. Although the emir is a civic functionary rather than a hereditary noble, and relatively easily replaced, a full company (176 men) is assigned to his protection. Elections take time to arrange, during which time no major decisions can be made. Thus, the city considers it wiser to spend money on bodyguards than risk economic chaos.

NAVY

Without maritime trade, Marresh would wither and die. Without river trade from Hufrah, City of Idols, Hajjad, City of the Gods, would be imperilled. To ensure both routes remain as free from pirates as possible, Marresh maintains two navies. Patrolling the river are four light warships. They are known as the River Fleet. Protecting the southern harbor and the sea lanes are ten light and four heavy warships. Each carries a half-strength complement of marines. They are known as the Maritime Fleet.

Law & Order

When it comes to maintaining law and order, the ever-present city guard concern themselves only with the gates. During the time of the gate tax, no one was immune from paying the fee (an oversight that went on for over 30 years). Left to fend for themselves, the citizens quickly organized neighborhood watches within each segment. Following the abolition of the tax, the then emir opted to retain the current system rather than bring it back under central control. Each segment thus has its own watch patrols, paid for from the pockets of the inhabitants.

Given the wide gap in wealth between segments, some fare better from this scheme than others. The Noble and Temple Districts can afford to pay for large, well-equipped patrols day that maintain order day and night, and whose wages and relatively easy workloads deter them from taking bribes. In the main residential areas, patrols vary in size, competency, equipment, work hours, and honesty, not to mention brutality. In the poorest segments, it falls to the Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls to protect the weak. Few who fall foul of them ever stand before the courts—a sound beating is considered punishment enough for most crimes.

Policing in the mercantile compounds is paid for out of a tax paid by those with business interests there. Merchants and nobles are also permitted to hire private guards to protect their warehouses, offices, and homes.

With watch patrols being so varied, crime levels vary from segment to segment. Most of the thieves' guilds were once nothing but barely organized gangs of mug-

gers, cutpurses, pickpockets, and burglars content to operate only within their segment and, if bold enough, neighboring ones. Things are changing, though. Slowly but surely, a shadowy figure known as the Upright Man has been transforming them into something resembling a true guild. Gangs that resist his offer soon find the corpses of their leaders left in their supposedly secret hideouts and haunts. At present, the Upright Man and his guild, the Brotherhood of Shadow, control about half the city's crime.

The identity of the Upright Man is a mystery to even his lieutenants. No one has ever met him and returned to tell the tale. Orders are delivered to the lieutenants by *voice on the wind* spells. Without hard facts, the thieves have begun speculating about their master. Depending on who you ask, he is a cleric of Tamarni, a khem-hekau mage, hideously deformed, a public figure who must conceal his identity, a demon, or even the emir.

As noted in the core write-up, smuggling is a serious problem that deprives the city of great sums of tax revenue. Pressure from the nobles and merchants has thwarted all attempts to change the law regarding ferry tax. Crooked customs inspectors make a great show about telling captains they are thorough in their searches and how the ship must remain in harbor until the cargo is signed off and manifest stamped, not to mention reeling off the penalties for smuggling and tax evasion. On hearing this well-rehearsed speech, captains know it is time to offer a bribe.

Trade & Tribute

Marresh and Fashir, City of Water, have long been rivals. Fashir has many homegrown exports, but its position nearer the Sultanate accounts for its success as a trading port. Marresh, on the other hand, has the advantage of being the official seaport for Hajjad and a terminus of the Road of the Gods. The emir has no wish to start a trade war with his neighbor, but many nobles and merchants push for Marresh to offer incentives to Sultanate ships to extend their journeys and bypass the City of Water altogether.

Hufrah does export some goods directly to Hajjad via a minor caravan road, but its primary exports are too bulky to send by camel train—the amount of crops a single ship can carry makes it far more profitable for merchants to send them to Marresh via the river.

The “Trade” entries for Marresh’s imports and exports is misleading, as it implies the city produces nothing and is largely self-sufficient. While it can feed itself and provide many common raw materials, such as clay, reeds, and wood, it imports various good and raw materials. In the same way, it exports wide variety of locally manufactured products. No one import or export is sufficiently high enough to warrant a separate entry, though. Merchants can always sell cargo here, just not in vast quantities.

Goods not intended for sale in Marresh arrive at one

of the two mercantile compounds. As soon as they are unloaded, and often beforehand if a particular shipment is expected and a buyer is already lined up and waiting to take delivery, merchants begin fiercely bidding for all of part of the cargo. Once a deal is struck, goods that need ferrying are weighed, inspected, and taxed. The seller is responsible for ferry tax, not the buyer. The goods are then transported to their warehouse in the compound, where they remain until the merchant can find a buyer.

COINAGE

Through good times and bad, Marresh’s emirs have kept a tight rein on the coins minted in the city. For daily use, the one dinar gold coin (a “Noble”) has been the largest denomination. In remembrance of the old gate tax, silver dirham coins are known as “Gates.” One-half and one-quarter dirham coins are also minted. They have no specific names. Within the mercantile compounds, gold bars with values of 100, 200, 500, and 1000 dinars are used for large transactions.

LOCAL TAXES

Though income tax is low (currently 10%), citizens are subject to other taxation. Most notably, businesses require a work permit, the cost of which is 2% of the previous year’s pre-tax earnings. Acquiring a cult quality assurance license eats away another 1%. On top of this, all businesses pay 2% of the value of their premises and goods yearly. Temples pay tax only on their annual earnings from the few business ventures they control.

Customs Duty: Goods entering or leaving the city are taxed at 4%.

Docking Fees: The ferry tax enables the city to charge very reasonable docking fees. Ships are charged a flat 5 dinars a day, regardless of size. Given that many captains delay their departure to coincide with the arrival of caravans, a week long permit can be purchased for just 25 dinars.

Ferry Tax: The cost to shuttle goods between the mercantile compounds is 0.5% of the value of the entire shipment, regardless of how many ferries are needed to move it. Passengers are charged 2 dirhams.

Gate Tax: The internal gate tax has been abolished, but citizens must still pay a yearly token sum to help with maintenance. Until recently, everyone paid the same fee. Emir Abdul-Mu’izz instigated bands that favor the poor. Lower class citizens pay 1 dinar a year, the middle class 10 dinars, and the upper class 50 dinars. Every citizen must pay, regardless of age. This is the one tax that citizens who have never left their segment in their life (and there are quite a few) grumble about the most.

Entry through either of the main gates costs 1 dirham per visit, though residents are issued a permit allowing them free passage. Mounts, beasts of burden, and wagons are banned from the city so as to prevent congestion and keep the streets clean.

Sales Tax: Fixed at 3% for all transactions.

Architecture

Exploring Marresh can be a claustrophobic experience. Though 20 feet wide and 15 feet high, the passages within the immense walls are busy thoroughfares, with very little natural light except near one of the gates. Air circulation is poor even with the gates open, though fortunately the temperature is relatively cool.

Marresh has not been threatened with invasion in over 300 years, yet strict building regulations laid down at its birth are still rigidly enforced. No building may be constructed within 10 feet of any interior wall. No building within 100 feet of an interior wall may be higher than 15 feet tall, and no building save the palace may exceed 20 feet in height.

Despite covering a larger ground area than most temples in other cities, the temples of Marresh lack the height that makes others awe-inspiring homes to the gods. The height restricted interiors produce an odd feelings in those not accustomed to them. In a standard temple, one is inspired by the grandeur of scale, yet feels insignificant. The low ceilings in Marresh's temples make one feel closer to the god in proximity and scale.

With the amount of ground space limited, only the houses of the nobles and those wealthy enough to live in the district have courtyards (by dint of there being fewer inhabitants competing for space). In poorer residential areas, the feeling of claustrophobia rears its head again.

Unable to build outward or up, the homes of the lower classes are small and crowded together in long rows broken by short covered alleys. Away from the walls, they are universally two stories tall, with only middle class families living across both floors. With wagons and beasts banned, the main streets are narrow so as not to waste valuable living space. The only open areas of any note are the flat roofs.

Major Locales

This section describes locations within the City of a Thousand Gates visiting heroes may have reason to visit.

CITY DISTRICTS

Marresh is home to some 63,000 souls, around 60% of the total population answerable directly to the emir. Due to its unusual layout and history, every segment has its largely self-sufficient with regard amenities, and most have developed a specialty.

Officially, every district (the correct term for the rings) save the palace, is assigned a name and number based on its location. The names, radiating outward, are Noble, Holy, Inner, and Outer. Numbers go from 1 to 12, starting immediately clockwise of the northern gate. Simply by asking a local the name and number of the segment,

NEW COMBAT EDGE

SHIELD STRIKE

Requirements: Seasoned, Fighting d8+, Strength d8+.

Shields are heavy objects and, in the right hands, are deadly weapons. When performing a shield bash, the character inflicts Str+d4 damage with a small shield, Strength+d6 with a medium shield, and Strength+d8 with a large shield, in addition to pushing his opponent. He can also throw his shield as an improvised weapon without the usual penalty to this Throwing roll.

a visitor can work out his bearings. Unfortunately, things are not that simple.

Over time, the segments have evolved unique names. Though used in everyday speech, they are not official titles in government records. In the Noble District, the segments are named after the most important family. The Temple Districts are named after the largest cults, and segments in the outer two rings after the predominant craft. When there are two segments with equal claim to the name, they are referred to as West or East, if in the same ring, or Upper or Lower, if in the same spoke. To add to the confusion, segments are known locally as quarters. Visitors searching for the Pottery Quarter, for instance, are often bemused on learning that it occupies just one or two streets in a single segment.

Mercantile Compounds: All trade, regardless of destination, ultimately ends up in one of the two walled mercantile compounds that sit outside the city. The northern compound handles goods from, and destined for, Hufrah and the Road of Gods, while its southern twin handles coastal cargo. As goods going between Hufrah and the Road of the Gods is never ferried between compounds, customs inspectors rarely bother searching it for contraband. This has played into the hands of the smugglers. Once secured in a warehouse, contraband is removed and placed into shipments heading to Marresh that have already been inspected.

As well as being bustling places of work, many merchants have chosen to take up apartments in the compounds. This allows them the luxury of larger living space, and means they are always on hand to make deals. The downsides are constant noise and smell.

Temple: While every segment has a temple, only those in the Temple District truly deserve the name. During the time when the gate tax was enforced, clerics did hold ceremonies at these smaller buildings (which they shared with one or more other deities). Today, they function as bureaucratic offices. All major ceremonies are conducted from the main temples. The cults of Apsu and Ashtart share a segment, the cult of Qedeset occupies three, and Iblis has no official presence.

RANDOM SHRINES

A shrine is simply a place of worship. Compared to temples, shrines are small places of worship, having at most have a single attendant cleric.

Not all shrines are equal. A personal shrine might simply be a statuette. Such places have little or no inherent spiritual energy, nor do they attract worshippers. True shrines are revered places, strongly tied to the deity in some manner.

Some are man-made, created for no reason other than to honor the deity. Others are places historically connected with the deity or a powerful cleric of old. For instance, a statue might serve as a shrine to Duamutef because legend says it marks the spot where the god first made camp, a white camel calf was born during a sandstorm, or a notable cleric performed a great miracle in front of an assembly of Bedu. However, shrines become imbued with spiritual energy only because generations of Faithful have chosen to worship at the site, not because of its origins. Duamutef walked all of Al-Shirkuh, for instance, yet shrines do not cover every inch of sand.

Although every deity has a preferred type of shrine and a location for its placement, most any place or object can be a shrine.

To create a random shrine, pick a deity, roll a d12, and check the result below. Not every entry may make sense for every deity at first glance, but with a little thought a plausible reason can normally be created.

d12 Shrine Appearance

- 1 Building (permanent small structure, part of a larger building, or a tent)
- 2 Ruin (as above, except the structure is partially or totally ruined)
- 3 Burial site (tumulus, grave marker, sarcophagus, tomb)
- 4 Water Source (pool, oasis, spring, well)
- 5 Cave, depression, indentation, hole, or similar feature
- 6 Stone (standing stone, obelisk, trilithon, stone circle, pile of stones or boulders)
- 7 Vegetation (usually a single tree, but may be a grove, small garden, or small copse)
- 8 Statue, statuette, or idol (normally this is of the deity, but it may be of a sacred animal)
- 9 Physical Remains (piece of clothing, mummy, skull, fragment of bone, writing, lock of hair)
- 10 Physical Object (piece of clothing or equipment, vehicle, armor or armament, banner)
- 11 Animal (this might be a living sacred animal or a lair—the latter might be abandoned, but could just as easily still be in use)
- 12 Imagery (bas relief carving, cut or painted text or images)

CITY LOCALES

Academy of the Shield: This private martial school is run by Sabaa bint Mu'min, an attractive woman in her early forties. Sabaa's main occupation is a drill instructor for the heavy infantry. Nearing retirement after 20 years loyal service, she founded the Academy with a loan from a noble patron two years ago to ensure she had a guaranteed future income. She teaches defensive techniques, as well as how to use a shield offensively. Her reputation as a teacher is spreading, and many of her private students quickly find employment as bodyguards to rich and powerful citizens. Sabba is a close friend of Munahid the armorer (see below). Should anything happen to him, she would enact a bloody revenge.

Skills: Fighting; **Edges:** Block, Bodyguard, Improved Bock, Shieldwall, Shield Strike (p. 59).

The Anvil: The city's most famous armorer, Munahid ibn Tahsin is completely blind. His eyes are white orbs, given the impression they have been replaced with large pearls. The armorer, who is helped around the forge by two young apprentices, is quite open about the cause of his blindness, though few locals believe his tale.

He claims he was taught his craft in his youth by diminutive bearded majins, who lived deep underground and whose homes he discovered by accident while prospecting. In return for teaching him one of their many secret techniques, they demanded the color from his eyes. Like all such deals with supernatural beings, there was a hidden catch. To protect their settlement, the jinn also removed all memory of its location from his mind. To protect their secret skills, the armorer is unable to teach others what he learned.

Whether it is true or not, Munahid produces metal armor and shields that weigh 25% less than normal (round down). He charges double the normal price.

The Camel's Hump: A popular inn among lower class natives and visitors, the Hump (its popular name) serves poor quality but strong alcoholic drinks at cheap prices. The Hump is a front for the Assassins. Assassins working in or passing through Marresh need only make a secret sign to any of the staff to receive free room and board. Behind a large wine barrel in the basement is a secret room, where the local *lashiq* can meet with Assassins without fear of discovery.

Couriers' Guild: Decades after the abolition of the gate tax, there are still citizens who refuse to leave the confines of their segment for any reason. Others are just too lazy or too important to deliver messages in person. Those seeking to send messages or small packages (no heavier than 10 pounds and must fit into a backpack) to other parts of the city rely on the Couriers' Guild. As well as internal messages, the Guild is prepared to travel anywhere in Al-Shirkuh, with any message.

When delivering messages between cities, trustworthy adventurers are hired as escorts. Clerics of Upuaut can earn good money acting as temporary messengers, though most carry missives only one way—another cleric must be hired if there is a reply. Prices for the Guilds' ser-

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vices vary with distance, weight, and any special security measures required.

Delta Supplies: Located on the east bank of the river, on the edge of the marshy delta, is a wooden hut. It stands on four tall legs, elevating it above the sodden ground. The shop sells supplies vital for exploration of the marsh—backpacks, firewood, flasks, insect nets, rations, spears, tents, waterproof satchels and scroll cases, and whistles. Much of the equipment is second hand, but prices are 90% of normal. A small “museum” contains a display of objects uncovered by explorers—fragments of statues, pieces of pottery, coins, and the like. Entrance to the collection, which the proprietor hypes as containing “rare wonders from a bygone age,” costs 1 dinar.

Haroun’s Sedan Hire: Marresh may be closed to mounts and wagons, but its use of manpower for moving goods internally left a loophole an enterprising young businessman exploited to his financial advantage. Visitors who wish to travel around the city can hire an open sedan chair for 5 dinars per 8 hours, or an enclosed litter for 10 dinars. Travel outside the city walls costs an extra 5 dinars per round trip if the journey is to either mercantile compound, or 3 dinars per mile to other locations inside Marresh’s greater boundary. Prices for external excursions are doubled between dusk and dawn.

Old Memories: This shop sells rare and historical books and scrolls. Though she does not advertise it, the owner, Barakha bint Barakh, also deals in khem-hekau texts, Hekatic manuscripts from the necromantic period, works concerning demons, holy texts written by clerics of Iblis, and alchemical scrolls, all of great antiquity.

A year ago, Barakh bought a stack of books from an adventurer. While inspecting one tome, part of a series of seven volumes describing the Anari occupation of Al-Shirkuh, she discovered a slip of parchment concealed inside the back cover. On it was a single line of poetry. By chance, she had another of the volumes in stock. Curious, she slit open the back cover to find another scrap of parchment with another line of verse on. She has managed to acquire a total of five books and five separate lines of poetry. After careful study, she deduced the poem was a map to some fabulous treasure.

She has recently discovered the location of the missing volumes. One belongs to a collector in Qarah, City of Learning, and one belongs to an Anari merchant living in Maqneh, City of Peace. Claiming she seeks to complete the set, which would be worth considerably more, she seeks adventurers prepared to travel and acquire the books for her. Unfortunately, the Anari merchant has since sent the book back to Rassilon as a wedding gift for a powerful noble whose ancestors are mentioned in the text.

The Plague Quarter: Ninety-nine years ago, plague broke out in one of the lower class residential segments. In order to prevent its spread, the emir ordered that all gates leading to the segment be sealed until the disease had run its course. So virulent was the outbreak that there were no survivors. The buildings were knocked down, the site blessed by clerics of Marqod, and the houses rebuilt. Despite the passage of time, few citizens

voluntarily choose to live here. The segment has become a slum, home to the poorest of the poor, and is a hotbed of crime and smuggling.

As the 100th anniversary of the outbreak nears, the locals have begun speaking of strange smells, like decaying flesh, emanating from some of the buildings. Investigations have revealed no obvious cause, and the claims are put down to hashish-fuelled dreams. A few have claimed to have witnessed diseased corpses stalking through the streets at night, their pus weeping frames surrounded by a cloud of buzzing flies.

The slum dwellers are not imagining the strange events. Cultists of Baalzebul (see *Realm Guide #8*) are operating in the segment. For months they have been preparing a grand ritual that, when complete, will unleash a host of plague demons and vile sicknesses on the unsuspecting city.

The Potion Shop: With few mages in Marresh, the cults successfully argued that they should be allowed to sell alchemical devices directly to the end user. The then emir agreed, but granted them permission for just a single shop, with the usual caveat of not selling damage-causing devices to the public. The potion shop is the only legal outlet for alchemical devices in the city, and it charges accordingly—prices are 25% higher than normal.

There are a finite number of alchemists in the city, placing demands on the number of devices they can create and limiting the spells within them. Visiting alchemists prepared to work can earn credit to the value of 50 dinars per device successfully created. The cult covers the cost of ingredients from its stores and provides laboratory space.

University of Historical Studies: In a hidden and well protected vault, the university houses a modest library of books and maps concerning historically significant (and often arcane) persons, places, and objects, and a museum containing such objects. The Society of Ancient Studies is a front for a collective of scholars, clerics of Ishkar, and mages intent on collecting and preserving important lost lore and objects. Students sent on excavations must return everything they find to the university. Objects the Society has no interest in are given to the students to do with as they please. When it finds a significant site that requires experienced explorers, it hires adventurers under the same terms.

Skills: Knowledge (Area, Folklore, History, Riddles), Investigation; **Edges:** Scholar (only in skills the school teaches); **Languages:** Hekatic, Jinn, Magorian.

University of Trade: The university provides start-up loans to graduates seeking to start their own mercantile business. Interest rates are a modest 20%, and the loan must be paid back within five years. Under city law, if the debt cannot be repaid, the university has the right to seize and sell off the debtors assets, even those unrelated to his business. Any monies still owing are then considered a bad debt, and the matter is referred to the courts. Given that the businessman is now penniless, he is likely to face a long period of slavery.

Special: Students must know Sandspeech; **Skills:**

NEW POWER EDGE

BLESSED WARRIOR

Requirements: Seasoned, Champion or Holy Warrior

While every deity bestows the power to destroy or repulse supernatural evil creatures through the Champion and Holy Warrior Edges, some extend these abilities to affect other creatures.

The character must pick an entry from the deity he follows. Where a choice exists, a single type must be taken. This cannot be changed. The cleric may take this Edge again to expand his sphere of influence. For the purposes of the aforementioned Edges only, the chosen creatures are treated as being both supernatural and evil. In all instances, swarms count as a single creature, and mundane beasts, such as rats, automatically includes giant specimens.

Where a name is given in parentheses, it refers to minor deities whose clerics may also take this Edge. Clerics of other minor deities may not take this Edge. This Edge is treated as a miracle with regard losing one's abilities through sins.

Apsu: Pick one from bufomi *or* crocodiles and gators (Taweret) *or* kreana (Nu) *or* water elementals*

Duamutef: Plants with an entry in the bestiary

Geb-Agni: Pick one from fire and earth elementals* *or* all creatures with Immunity or Resistance to cold

Marqod: All creatures with the Poison special ability (Nintinugga)

Shamash: Pick one from orcs *or* scorpions *or* snakes (Ningirama)

Tamarni: Rats (Sekhmet)

Upuaut: Air elementals*

** Elementals are obviously supernatural, but they are not inherently evil and thus not affected by default by the standard Champion and Holy Warrior Edges. For this purpose only, the entry covers both true elementals and jinn of the appropriate element.*

Knowledge (Area, Stewardship), Streetwise; *Edges:* Expert Hagglers; *Languages:* Al-Waziran, Beduan.

Upuaut's Inns: Upuaut may not have temples, but nothing prevents his cult from running businesses. Several inns, all in the Upuaut Quarter, are owned by the cult, though run by laity. The accommodation is basic, and they offer no food or drink, but they have proven very popular with penny-pinching merchants, pilgrims on their way to Hajjad or Hufrah, and down-on-their-luck adventurers. The rates are 1 dinar a night, and clerics of Upuaut stay for free. Indeed, business has been so good the cult now plans to expand its business empire by erecting waystations along the Road of the Gods all the way to Hajjad.

PERSONS OF Note

Below are a handful of persons whose paths the heroes might cross while exploring in and around the city.

"AMBASSADOR" IMAD AL JINN

Whether Imad is insane or merely eccentric is open to debate. An ifrit jinn blooded, he arrived in the city several years ago, and has made himself a nuisance ever since. He titles himself the Exalted and Honored Ambassador of Jinnistan, speaks only Jinn (though he clearly understands other tongues), and wears expensive red and orange silk robes.

Imad spends his days arguing fictitious points of diplomacy with any official (or anyone who looks important) whose eye he catches and loudly demanding to see the emir. At night, he tries to use his station as an ambassador to secure free food and drink. Most establishments have learned that giving him a small amount of charity keeps him from ranting about "diplomatic incidents" sure to have "serious repercussions" when he files his next report. His knowledge of Jinnistan indicates he is either an erudite scholar of the various theories and legends, or has actually been there.

NADA SILVERTONGUE

A storyteller by trade, Nada tours around the inns and coffee houses to earn drink money. When performing she is a consummate professional. At other times, she is either in a drunken stupor or recovering from the effects of one. Her most popular tale concerns a warrior-king whose treasury grew fat with plunder and harem was filled with nubile slaves. Proud and strong in life, he became fearful in old age, for his soul was stained with the blood of countless innocents. In a bid to escape his fate, he built a secret tomb, hopeful Djemuti would not be able to find him. There the tale ends. Asked about the origin of the story, Nada openly admits she learned it from an inscription carved into the remains of a stone wall in the delta. Sufficiently recompensed, she is prepared to sell directions,

UNFORTUNATE SOUL ABDUL-RA'UF

A life-long resident of Marresh, Abdul-Ra'uf has seen the very worst the city has to offer. Years of waging an unrelenting battle against corruption and oppression have transformed him from a guardian of the weak into an avenging angel. Threats and beatings have given way to excessive violence that have left a number of petty criminal severely scarred, and a few permanently disabled. That he has not yet killed someone is a miracle. In many ways, the skilled warrior has become the epitome of everything he hates.

MAZAR

City of Eyes

While various occupiers and colonists have come and gone, the City of Eyes has endured for thousands of years. Alas for those who currently call it home that their leaders eyes are as sightless as those as those of the pearls that dot the walls, for a great darkness is gathering strength and the time of its awakening draws nears.

Social Hierarchy

Until the end of the religious wars with the Sultanate, the emirs were military governors appointed by the Caliph. The last governor under the old regime was granted the hereditary title of emir and given permission to nominate his own heir.

Emir Mufid has ruled the city for 33 years. Although technically the most powerful man on the island, Mufid has little interest in running the city. His father's only son, he was groomed for a life of politics, despite his yearning to serve in the military. He much prefers to spend his days playing with his model warships and miniature soldiers, and reading treatises on warfare. Technically an armchair general, in that he has no practical experience of battle, his grasp of both land and nautical tactics and strategy is sound. When not restaging famous battles, he converses with his senior military commanders, listening attentively while they speak of their experiences.

Ironically, his eldest son and nominated heir, Shadi, has a great interest in politics but little chance to indulge. Perhaps reliving his life through his son, Mufid sent him to Hajjad, City of the Gods, where he reluctantly but loyally serves as a captain in the Caliph's army. Mufid's two daughters, Cala and Dimah, are both married—one to a sirdar and the other a rich merchant—and live on the mainland. More concerned with their own lives, they visit their father only occasionally.

With no family to watch his back, Mufid has fallen foul of noble ambition. Two powerful families, the House of Baligh and House of Ratib, dominate the court. Although clerics are supposed to renounce all ties to their families, blood is thicker than water. Both houses have children, and other allies, well placed in the cults.

The rivalry between the houses is fierce and deep rooted, extending back many generations. Were the city not host to the Caliph's navy and a contingent of soldiers almost equal to the city's own forces, it is very likely their desire to have one of their own sit on the throne would have resulted in civil war. As it is, they must engage in the slower but equally lethal game of court politics to achieve their aims.

Mazar's nobles fall into one of three camps: those who openly support House Baligh, those who openly support House Ratib, and those who play the dangerous game of waiting to see who emerges on top before pledging loyalty. With no farmland from which to grow rich, the city's nobles dominate mercantile activities and pearl diving. As demand for Mazar's jewelry increases, so they are extending their interests into that line.

Mazar's upper class is sorely lacking in diversity. The merchants who have raised themselves to this status are employees of the nobility. As far as the commoners are concerned, they have the wealth and influence necessary to be upper-class. As far as the nobles are concerned, most are just employees, not someone to socialize with. With so small an army, none of the officers has managed to rise to *mak-shabrum* status, either. In the eyes of the nobles, it is the high priests who fill the top rung of the non-nobility social ladder.

Like the nobility, the middle-classes are divided in their loyalty, though there exists a fourth group—those loyal to the emir. As the emir cedes more and more authority to the two great houses, those looking for promotion are coming under more pressure to pick a side.

As the city's jewelry exports continue to rise, so the *jaleepa* stratum is steadily following suit. Though jewelry is still a fledgling industry, a few craftsman have already managed to climb to *shabrum* status. They are much in demand by nobles looking to boost the status of their house. Master jewelers are frequently assigned bodyguards. Officially, this is a sign of their value to their paymasters. Unofficially, it is to protect them from attacks from rival families, and ensure the jeweler is not swayed to accept an offer of employment from another family. Lower down, the *barajam* is dominated by pearl divers, fishermen, and shepherds.

Centuries of relative isolation has led to some unusual customs in Mazar. While men hold many positions of authority, wealth rests in the hands of married women. The role of men is primarily to acquire more wealth for their wives. Thus, when marriages occur, it is men who present a dowry to their bride, rather than the other way around, as is normal elsewhere. Among the nobility, wives give their husbands a set sum at the start of each year. Exactly how he invests this money is his choice, but woe betide the man who reports a loss!

Some historians say this custom developed because of the dangers inherent in pearl diving and fishing, mainly male occupations—it was simply prudent to give wives control of the finances. Others say the women of Mazar are just shrewder with money. What is certain is that they dress better than their menfolk.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Mazar.

* **Animals:** There is little market for beasts of burden on the island. Mounts, saddles, and so on cost triple the normal prices. If the heroes want to purchase one, the GM should draw a card from the action deck. A black suit indicates that particular type is out of stock, but can be ordered from the mainland. The animal takes 2d6 weeks to arrive.

* **Barter:** Coins are in short supply. As a result, shops accept trade goods in lieu of coins when buying and selling.

* **Food & Services:** The prices of meals is unchanged, but the variety is very limited. Bread is served only with average or expensive meals, and fruit or vegetables only with the latter.

Supplies of water are strictly rationed. Each citizen or visitor receives enough to survive based on the temperature. Locals receive an extra ration equal to half the above amount for washing, laundry, and cooking. Extra water costs 3 dinars per quart. A trip to the baths costs 5 dinars.

* **Native Heroes I:** During character generation, a native character with Strength d6+ can take Swimming d6 for the cost of one skill point.

* **Native Heroes II:** A native character may choose to be a graduate of *one* of the advanced universities. Each grants one benefit, as listed below, but only during character generation and the hero must meet all other requirements.

Battleground: Clerics and faddeen of Tammuz can take Favored Foe (Undead) as a Novice Edge.

Navigators: For one skill point, the character may take two from Boating or Knowledge (Area) at d4, or one at d6. A maximum of one skill point may be spent in this manner.

Education

With the future for most citizens being endless hard toil, parents push their children into learning as a means of escaping poverty. Through education, one might be able to secure a post in the small bureaucracy or become a scribe for one of the mercantile enterprises. Unfortunately, Mazar is a small city—demand far outstrips the number of jobs available each year.

Mazar has just two universities. The basic center of advanced education is the University of Sayhut. Given the only other school is extremely specialized, and unlikely to further the ambitions of the city's wealthy inhabitants, the only option for students is to travel to the mainland.

As the Caliphate expanded and its coastal cities began to trade with each other, so the need for accurate maps of the coastline and islands of the Southern Ocean became more important. With Mazar the center of naval power,

the Caliph ordered the construction of a university dedicated to the arts of navigation and cartography. Thus was born the School of Navigators. The school has long since opened its doors to civilians and, despite its origins, now teaches land navigation and mapmaking.

Plans are progressing toward the creation of a crafting school based on the Sha'ib Academy of Precious Metals. Through this facility, whose entrances fees would be high, the nobles hope to develop a new generation of jewelers to secure the city's economic future.

Everyone knows of the Battleground, a facility run by the cult of Tammuz on a nearby island. Very few know exactly what takes place there, though. Most would likely have palpitations if they knew the truth. Details of this unusual, and dangerous, training center can be found in the section on Major Locales.

Religion

As jewelry becomes more important, so the cult of Geb-Agni has increased in popularity. Were there to be a temple, the cult would undoubtedly commence jewelry making, something the nobles see as their domain. To that end, the cult has been refused permission to construct a temple, though a shrine was completed a year ago.

Upuaut has the most adherents. Without temples and having only itinerant clerics, his faith is rarely organized, and so lacks political influence. Of all his aspects, it is Sirsir, minor god of sailors (see *Realm Guide #5*), who profits most, and profit he does. New ships are engraved with his holy symbol, a service for which the cult charges. Nothing lasts forever, and the cult has regular return customers. On top of this, there are the sizable annual tithes. Arguably, the cult is the richest in the city, and its clerics wield considerable influence over the minds of the citizens. Little surprise that it enjoys much noble patronage.

Shamash is more tolerated than praised. The nobles take great pains to show their support, and he is on of the patrons of the Mazar Rangers, but few others worship him regularly—the independent-minded citizens of Mazar don't like much being told what to do by a cult whose center of power lies far over the sea.

Karmelos is popular with the officer corps, but among the common soldiers it is Duamutef, in his aspect as gods of archers, who is considered the god of war. The god of the desert is the second patron of the Rangers.

The last major cult with any influence over the hearts and minds of the people is Apsu, and that is only because the city is reliant on a single water source for its survival. Were it to dry up, the city would die within weeks.

The cult of Nu, minor god of underwater protection (see *Realm Guide #5*), has always had a presence in Mazar. The nobles consider the clerics nothing short of a thorn in their sides. Highly vocal, they constantly preach that the removal of pearls must be met with sacrifices of equal value, something that makes no business sense to those who control the trade. On occasion they are stirred to a religious fervor

and grow more militant. Fights break out as the clergy try to throw oyster catches back into the ocean.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Day of Broken Chains: For four months in 63 CJ, Mazar was occupied by corsairs and orcs and its people enslaved. This festival marks the arrival of the Caliph's navy, the reconquest of the city, and the liberation of the slaves. During the previous night, a small flotilla of warships slips quietly out of harbor and sails out of sight. Festivities begin the next morning, when lookouts shout out the sighting of warships on the horizon as the vessels return, war pennants unfurled and marines beating weapons against their shields. Effigies of orcs are carried through the streets, where citizens lining the route punch and kick at them, before being burned as the sun sets. As a nod to history, and to show his compassion, the emir also releases one prisoner sentenced to slavery from his bonds. The festival is held every Amt Yaus al-Nefar Anshi Alak Shemu. The actual battle took place three days earlier.

Day of Closed Eyes: This festival is held on Baot Yaus al-Ittrou Alak Neteru. Despite being worthless, visitors occasionally pluck out pearls from the city buildings as souvenirs. On this day, city officials dab a blotch of red water soluble paint on each of the eyes while keeping count of how many they have marked. The tally is then recorded. If any are found missing, the emir imposes a tax of 2 dinars on every visitor for the insult to the city. The tax lasts the remainder of the year. Many citizens believe the eyes are a ward against evil. While they remain covered, many paint their eyelids in the style of the pearl, ensuring they are safeguarded from harm even while they sleep.

Military

Distant and isolated, renowned for its expensive imports and exports, and with many miles of exposed coastline, one might expect Mazar to maintain a powerful military. Since the Caliph choose Mazar to host his navy, and with the city having faced no threat of invasion in almost five centuries, successive emirs have cut back on the strength of the army to save money.

ARMY

The main force is the City Guard. A mere three companies strong, they are charged with manning the four forts that overlook the harbor. Two of the companies are archers (176 men) trained to double as light infantry, and one is artillerists (88 men).

Safeguarding the palace are two companies of archers (176 men) and four squads of artillerists (32 men). Though part of the regular army, they are grouped into a separate regiment known as the Palace Guard.

Protecting the remote herding settlements and patrolling the interior falls to the Mazar Rangers. Trained as mounted archers and skirmishers, the soldiers of this elite regiment (actually just two infantry strength companies) live in the wastes for extended periods. The orcs of the deep interior have posed no serious threat to the city since their strength was broken in 63 CJ. This is not to say they are not a nuisance—they are engaged in running cat-and-mouse raids with the Rangers. The Rangers lack the manpower and resources to eliminate the orcs completely—the best they can do is keep them subdued. Treat the Rangers as veteran mercenary skirmishers with Riding d6, and the Favored Foe (Orcs), Steady Hands, and Woodsman Edges.

The emir's bodyguard comprises six squads of medium infantry. Their shield bosses are painted white with a black dot in the center, giving them the name the Eyes of Mazar. As a mark of their position, members are given a pearl of the rarest quality for each year of service. These are worn on necklaces. Each of the six sergeants also wears a silver pearl ring, while the captain has a gold ring with a single black pearl placed inside a larger white one. Upon retirement, the jewelry is handed back to emir, who presents the soldier with money of equal value.

External to the authority of the emir are two companies of archers, four companies of medium infantry, and two companies of heavy infantry. Part of the Caliph's army, they are stationed here to protect the naval docks. Should Mazar be attacked, they would help in its defense. Daily concerns are dealt with by their commander, who is a member of the emir's court.

NAVY

In addition to hosting the Caliph's navy, Mazar has a fleet of ten warships for anti-corsair and bullion ship escort duties. Traditionally, bullion—most of which comes from Sha'ib, City of Mazes—is first landed at Fashir, City of Water. From there, local merchants transport it to Mazar. Thanks to the machinations of the nobles, the anti-corsair role has been all-but abandoned in recent years.

Law & Order

Justice in Mazar is all part of the great game being waged between House Baligh and House Ratib. While common watchmen are of little concern, most of the officers owe their station to one of the two houses, and thus their loyalty. Staunch supporters of the rival house face greater harassment, and may have cries for help ignored and investigations into crimes against them dropped, while allies of the same house are treated far more leniently and receive preferential service. The same goes for the judges and the punishments laid down. The average citizen faces little bias—he is beneath the notice of the higher nobility and his part in their game is miniscule.

All criminal activity in the city is run by one thieves'

guild—the Mazar Corsairs. The guild is currently having difficulties with one of its revenue streams. Traditionally, citizens and businesses paid them protection money. Recently, they have started paying someone else. Thieves sent to remind former customers of where their loyalty should lie are found floating face down in the harbor, their corpses horribly mutilated. Despite its many contacts at all levels of society, the guild has been unable to deduce who is muscling in on its territory and killing its members. One thing is for sure, the new player has everyone from the nobles down to the peasants scared.

When it comes to smuggling, Mazar stands out from the crowd. Hashish is popular, but it's a small scale enterprise. The big illegal import in the City of Eyes is actually dried herbs suitable for producing oxygenating herbal remedies (see *Hedge Magic* free download or *Hellfrost: Rassilon Expansion* for details). Neither possession nor manufacture of the remedy is a crime in Mazar, but trade is strictly regulated by the nobility. Independent herbalists who forget this are given a reminder in the form of a beating. Cheaper than alchemical devices, the nobles still control how much is sold, and by controlling the trade they make sure they profit from all sales.

The illicit trade is well organized. The guild pays peasant farmers on the mainland five dirhams a bunch to grow and dry the herbs. These are then smuggled to the guild's herbalists in Mazar, who transform them into the final remedy on a small industrial scale. These are sold to pearl divers at 15 dinars a dose, far cheaper than what the nobles charge, yet still making the criminals a tidy profit.

Trade & Tribute

Unlike Jirja, City of Colors, the other great island city, Mazar is not a trading gateway to foreign lands. Its importance stems from its vast oyster beds and, to a lesser extent, the vast herds of goats and sheep that graze on the scrubby grass along the coastal plains.

Pearl divers are the backbone of the economy, but are paid a pittance. In order to find a handful of pearls of any quality, they must harvest and open around a ton of oysters. Some oyster beds lie as close as a few feet to the surface, but the best ones lie as deep as 150 feet. Even for the most experienced divers, this is a hazardous environment, with dive times severely limited. The nobility *could* invest in *environmental protection* potions, but too many pearls would risk flooding the market and lowering their value, and each potion would require a diver to bring up a significant number of pearls to warrant the expense. Thus, the poor divers must risk life and limb without artificial aids.

Pearl divers are paid a few dirhams a day. Much of their income from selling the oysters they harvest. When they find a pearl of true value, they receive a bonus equal to 3% of its market value. It is the hope of a "big find" that keeps them risking their lives day after day. Nacre, also known as mother of pearl, is used as decorative inlay.

With no deposits of precious metals, the city relies on imports. Small quantities of slim gold and silver ingots are purchased from the cities of the Caliphate, but most journey from distant Sha'ib.

Mazar's other notable exports are livestock and meat. The goats and sheep raised on the island are hardy creatures, and noted for the unusual taste of the meat that comes from eating the salty grasses that grow along the coast. Those from the interior are considered lower quality in terms of flavor, but better as breeding stock. The city exports a variety of fish and shellfish as well, but not in sufficient quantities to warrant much notice.

With little agricultural land, Mazar must import grain and vegetables. Whereas bread forms a staple part of the diet elsewhere, in Mazar it is a luxury. Fruit and vegetables are beyond the price of the average citizen, save in very small quantities. As a result, the typical diet is protein rich, with cheese and milk other key ingredients.

COINAGE

Reliance on imports of precious metals has meant Mazar issues very few coins. The only native coins are the gold one dinar and silver one dirham. Given that few citizens handle one, they have become known locally as "Pearls." Most of the coins in circulation are foreign. Even among the merchants, barter is an accepted form of financial transaction. Characters looking to sell items are likely to receive goods of equivalent value in lieu of hard coin.

LOCAL TAXES

Mazar's small population means no one can be spared paying their share of taxes. Whether it is a fair share depends on whom one asks. Rather than tax income, the city taxes everyone at 2% of their assets. The poor obviously pay far less than the rich, but they own less to begin with.

Customs Duty: Import duty is 10%, except on grain, which carries a 5% levy. Exports are charged at 5%, except pearls and jewelry, which is 25%. This, and the high quality of workmanship, makes Mazar jewelry very expensive, and thus very desirable.

Docking Fees: Mazar is keen to attract merchants, and has plentiful berths. To that end, it charges 25 dinars per *week* or part thereof to berth a ship, regardless of its size. Given that refilling water barrels can take several days if the harbour is busy, this is a bargain.

Sales Tax: A flat 5% except for jewelry, which is charged at 20%, and meals, which are tax exempt.

Tithes: Unusually, the minor cult of Sirsir profits most from tithes. The five major cults, those recognized by the emir as patrons of the city, take their 50% as normal. With many citizens being mariners, whether naval personnel, merchant captains, or fishermen, Sirsir receives a lot of money each year. With the sea Mazar's only link to the rest of the Caliphate, many other citizens chose to support the cult.

Water Tax: Since citizens drink the same amount of water regardless of their social status, they are charged the same—10 dinars a year.

Architecture

Two different architectural styles compete in ancient Mazar. The old city dates from the time of the Pearldiver culture. Buildings are noticeably smaller and, aside from the pearls embedded in the walls, lack embellishment. The best word to describe them is functional. Citizens are permitted model the interiors of the old buildings as they see fit, but may do nothing to the exterior.

Further back from the bay are newer buildings. These are patterned after standard Caliphate designs. Generally larger than the earlier structures, those occupied by citizens with wealth or which hold some government functions are brightly painted. Real pearls are too expensive to use as decoration, so citizens paint white circles with black dots at the center to mimic the older buildings.

Major Locales

Below are some of the interesting or important places characters exploring the city might have reason to visit.

Mazar sits in a wide bay. The western side is marked by a long, thin peninsula, seaward of which are jagged rocks and reefs. To the east, the ground rises steeply to form high cliffs. Between these is the deep natural harbor. With the interior too arid to be of any real use, 90% of the population lives within the city walls. The remainder populate small herding communities along the coast and in areas of the interior where scrub grass grows.

CITY DISTRICTS

The city is loosely divided into three regions of unequal size. The peninsula is the sole domain of the navy. The eastern quarter is home to the rich, while the rest of the city is a mix of lower- and middle-class.

Docks: The docks occupy the waterfront from the eastern base of the peninsula to the emir's palace. Fronting the district are customs houses, watch stations, merchants' offices, ships chandlers, inns, and eateries. Further back there are rows of small warehouses. Directly behind these are the homes of lower class citizens whose profession relies on the busy docks.

The Gullet: A grim slum located just behind the docks, the Gullet is home to those to whom even hope is a pipe dream. A gang of vicious thugs, the Sharks, rules the streets. Visitors who look and act like they don't belong in the district are chewed up and spat out unless they pay a hefty protection fee. The Sharks aren't as powerful as they make out—they pay the thieves' guild a cut of their income and never harass those on guild business.

Naval: The Naval District occupies the thin peninsula and part of the mainland. Walled except on the eastern facing, it is part of the city yet also completely separate. As well as barracks for sailors, marines, and soldiers, and warehouses holding supplies for the constant stream of military vessels, there are civilian residential areas and workshops, plus a variety of drinking dens and gambling halls where the military can fritter away their wages.

Palace: Seated on a high bluff that bulges from the eastern end of the city, the palace overlooks all of Mazar. As well as being home to the emir and the seat of government, the palace is a fortress. Within its inner walls are the apartments of important persons—senior courtiers and bureaucrats, the High Admiral, and foreign dignitaries. The outer bastion houses the courts, bureaucratic offices, and the barracks of the palace guard. Three private wharves at the base of the bluff allow important visitors direct access to the palace.

CITY LOCALES

Apsu's Fountain: The city relies on an artesian well for its potable water. It stands within the precinct of the small temple of Apsu, but is accessible to the public day and night. A ceremonial guard of four paladins stand watch day and night. Each morning, citizens queue to receive their daily water allowance.

The Battleground: Located on an island several hours sail west of Mazar, the Battleground is a specialist training center run by the cult of Tammuz. Long ago, the cult realized that sparring against living opponents did not give clerics the specific skills they needed to battle the undead, and theoretical study only went so far. Travel to Hekata was always possible, but the long journey meant training clerics was a lengthy process.

After much debate, it was eventually decided to invest in khem-hekau alchemical devices capable of creating undead. So as not to taint their souls, the acquisition and application of the spells would be performed by khem-hekau mages under strict supervision. The corpses are those of prisoners sentenced to death. Since headless corpses make poor skeletons and zombies, many are strangled (again, not by clerics). Through death they have paid the price for their crimes, and their flesh and bones can serve Tammuz's cause. Not every cleric believes the cult has made a wise move—the means cannot justify the end when undead are involved.

In a series of tunnels cut and decorated to resemble ancient tombs, clerics track and battle undead in situations as close to real life as possible. In the darkness they learn to face their fears, study the various strengths and weaknesses of their eternal foes, and hone their combat skills and miracles to the point they become instinct. Injury and death are not uncommon—without these risks, clerics cannot truly comprehend the nature and deadliness of their sworn enemy.

In addition to the usual cost in money and time, students from outside the cult must swear a sacred vow to undertake a number of missions equal to the number

JEWELRY

Jewelry serves several purposes—it displays wealth and status, it makes the wearer look good, it can be functional, and it's a convenient way of carrying around one's personal wealth.

While a player character might shop for a piece of jewelry, it is more likely they will encounter it as booty—many travelers who have fallen prey to monsters are likely to have been wearing some form of jewelry, even if it is only a simple ring or necklace. Similarly, at least some wealth carried by a sentient opponent will take the form of jewelry—even the greater jinn wear jewelry.

Below is a list of sample jewelry types and gemstones GMs can use to spice up the description of loot taken from the party's kills. To create a random piece, simply select one or more materials, the type of jewelry, and (optional) gemstone.

As a rule of thumb, pieces with a low value might be made from lesser materials, lack artistic style, and/or be very small. Conversely, high-end pieces might incorporate precious materials and stones, be much larger, and/or be of masterful craftsmanship.

MATERIAL

Amber, base metal (copper or iron), bead, bone, coral, enamel, glass, gold, ivory, jade (imported from the Jade Empire), jet, nacre (mother of pearl), platinum, shell, silver, wood

JEWELRY

Amulet, anklet, armlet, bangle, belly chain, bracelet, buckle, brooch, chatelaine (decorative belt hook or clasp worn at the waist), choker, circlet, collar necklace, coronet, crown, diadem, earring, fascinator, hairpin, gold teeth, locket, medallion, necklace, nose stud, pendant, ring, seal, tiara, toe ring, torc

GEMSTONES

This entry covers true gemstones, rocks, and other materials commonly used to adorn jewelry. Entries marked "*" are precious stones. Jade is precious because it is imported from the Jade Empire. Others are either semi-precious or ornamental.

Agate, amber, amethyst, aquamarine, azurite, banded agate, black opal*, black sapphire*, bloodstone, blue quartz, carnelian, chrysoberyl, chrysoprase, citrine, coral, diamond*, emerald*, eye agate, fire opal*, garnet, hematite, jacinth*, jade*, jasper, jet, lapis lazuli, malachite, moonstone, moss agate, opal*, obsidian, onyx, pearl, ruby*, sapphire*, sardonyx, spinel, star ruby*, star rose quartz, star sapphire*, sun stone, tiger eye, topaz, tourmaline, turquoise, zircon

of months spent training for the cult. The cult decides when and where the missions occur, and it expects a prompt and full-hearted response.

Skills: Fighting; **Edges:** Champion, Fanaticism, Favored Foe (Undead), Holy Warrior; **Languages:** Black Tongue, Hekatic.

City Walls: Strong walls run up the western side of the peninsula and surround the city on the landward side. The waterfront is open to the elements. A separate inner wall divides the Naval District from the main city. Three towers form part of the southern wall, while four standalone towers watch over the harbor. The seaward ones have siege weapons mounted on their flat roofs.

The Colossus of Mazar: A small island in the harbor is home to one of the great man-made wonders of Al-Shirkuh. Standing watch over the city is a 100-foot tall statue of Upuaut. In his raised right hand he holds a torch, while his left clutches a nautical chart to his chest. Locals proudly boast it is made of solid iron melted down from weapons and armor captured from the corsairs and orcs who conquered the city. While the origins of the metal are true, the statue is actually hollow—the plates are hammered onto a sturdy wooden framework made of timbers from crippled corsair ships. The torch is actually a brazier, and is lit at dusk to guide ships safely into harbor. Due to centuries of accumulated rust, it is known locally as the Red Giant.

Gates: Mazar has just one external gate. Located in the southern wall, it opens into the interior of Sayhut. Officially known as the Great Gate, locals refer to it as the Grazer Gate. It is opened only when herders or military patrols require access, and then never after dark. Access to the naval wharves is through the Lesser Gate. One of the two doors is closed at night and security is doubled.

The Headscarf & Compass: This rough and ready dockside inn is owned by Bahrad, a sand goblin and semi-retired Brother of Sinbad. Fellow Brothers eat, drink, and stay for free, to a maximum of three days and so long as they do not abuse their host's hospitality. (The friends of Brothers are not included in this kindness). Bahrad is well used to jibes about his race's distaste for genuine work. He takes such insults with a wide grin, while surreptitiously adding a few dirhams or dinars to the patron's bill or accidentally slipping more hot peppers into their meal.

The sand goblin is close friends with the high priests of the temple of Sirsir and the head of the School of Navigators, with whom he frequently plays a friendly game of cards. As a favor to fellow Brothers, he is prepared to write a letter of introduction to either, speeding up the chances of an audience. Sooner or later this favor will be called in, and not all of Bahrad's business interests are completely legitimate.

Iqbal's Kennel: Iqbal breeds and trains ferocious war dogs. They have the same stats as normal war dogs, with the addition of the Favored Foe (Orcs) Edge. Although prized by herdsman, most are purchased by the Mazar Rangers. A trained dog costs 500 dinars. For 200 dinars, Iqbal can train any war dog to have the Favored Foe

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(Orcs) Edge. This process takes 1d4 consecutive months, during which time the dog must remain in his care.

The Marid's Palace: The sign outside proudly boasts that this tavern is modeled on an authentic marid's palace. That might be true, but the interior is tacky. Gaudily painted shells are plastered to the walls, woven lengths of grass hang from the ceiling to mimic seaweed curtains, the pearls are glass, and the statues of dolphins, sea horses, and marid maidens are made of wood coated in a thin layer of painted rough plaster. The only thing that draws patrons in are the dancing girls, who are renowned for their skimpy costumes and marid-like makeup. Their "Dance of the Breathless Pearl Diver" routine certainly lives up to its name.

The owner, Taslim Sea-Child, carries a trident and wears a coral crown. He claims these are family heirlooms handed down the generations from his maternal great-great-grandmother, who was a lesser marid of great beauty. They are in fact stage props he bought from a company of traveling storytellers a decade ago.

Meet for Meat: This restaurant only sells goat, lamb, and mutton. Each night, 12 whole animals (four of each kind) are spit-roasted over large pits, all the while being basted in one of the chef's special sauces. The sauces are named after the four races of jinn—ifrit (hot and spicy), khamsin (a fresh and light mix of lemon and mint), majin (sticky yoghurt, honey, and nut), and marid (salty).

Rather than choosing from set menus, patrons are charged by the weight of meat they consume. A cheap meal indicates a few slices of poorer cuts, while an expensive meal is enough to sate any glutton. Regardless of social class, seating is strictly first come, first serve—and the best cuts of meat are always taken by early diners.

The Rolling Deck: This tavern is located in the hold of a ship permanently moored in the harbor. The drink is strong (hence the name), the language is coarse, and the patrons aren't afraid to settle disputes with their fists. Drinking contests are held most nights. When someone is ready to start one, he rings a bell hanging from the roof. Anyone who wants to enter matches the wager decided by the challenger, and the last man capable of standing takes half the pot (the owner takes the other half to cover the cost of the drinks).

School of Navigators: The school has spent a fortune acquiring an impressive collection of maps and charts. Access to the library is open to the public during the hours of daylight, but costs 5 dinars. Investigation rolls to uncover the location of tombs, lost cities, and other such places have a +1 bonus. The school is always prepared to buy maps of proven authenticity.

The head of the school is currently hiring adventures. A month ago, one of the faculty stole a large bundle of maps of the Jinn Lands and fled to the mainland. A reward is being offered for the return of the maps and the capture of the criminal.

Skills: Boating, Knowledge (Area); **Edges:** Master Mariner.

Seluku's Safaris: Seluku, a hyaenidae, runs safaris into the mountainous interior of Sayhut. Excursions last

anywhere from one week to a month, depending on one's leisure time, budget, and ability to cope with life in the harsh wilderness. The quarry hunters are offered is not antelope (the largest wild beast on the island), but orcs. Commander Sadad of the Mazar Rangers has tried to have the business closed down, claiming it endangers lives and risks aggravating the orcs, but his pleas have been ignored—clients are warned of the risks in advance, and no one seriously believes the orcs are anything more than a minor nuisance.

Temple of the Gilded Sails: Located at the western end of the docks is the temple of Sirsir. Built from wooden planks from decommissioned ships, the temple doubles as a hiring hall where mariners can find work, merchants can find ship captains willing to carry their wares, passengers can book a berth, and those who sail upon the oceans can drink and eat at reduced prices. The various booking services are not free, but they save those concerned a great deal of time. The temple is named for three tall masts that poke through the roof, from which hang sails of beaten gold.

PEARLDIVER TOMBS

Until recently, it was theorized the lack of obvious tombs or cemeteries meant the Pearldiver culture buried its dead at sea or in the deep interior of the island. Quite by chance, a herder gathering eggs from the nests of the cliff-dwelling sea birds discovered a cave entrance. Within he found a series of burials. More importantly, the caves extended far back, forming a natural necropolis. Scholars have made some exploration, but the true extent of the labyrinthine tunnels remains unknown. With access a dangerous venture, most sages prefer to leave the actual exploration to seasoned adventurers.

Most of the grave goods were entirely mundane and valueless except to students of the past. The corpses, though, had a pearl placed in each eye socket. No royal burials have yet been discovered, so it is unclear whether status and the size of the pearls go hand in hand. The natural implication is that the eyes were removed before burial in a ritual that mimics the modern placing of coins over the eyes. The nobles acted quickly, passing laws that forced any pearls found in the tombs to be handed over to the city.

THE TIDAL PALACE

A mile out to sea on the ocean floor stands a magnificent palace made of coral and decorated with pearls the size of a man's clenched fist. Finding the palace is not easy, even for those who have witnessed it before—its presence is revealed only when the moon is in the right position in the sky and when the tide flows in the right direction. It is almost as if the tide shifts aside a veil, causing the invisible to become visible for a few brief hours.

Several pearl divers have seen the palace firsthand, but none have yet explored it. First, it lies in 300 feet of water, a depth at which even the most experienced diver

can remain for a few scant seconds. Second, most believe it is the home of a powerful marid, for how else could such a place vanish into nothingness? One or two have come to the conclusion (despite having no evidence to support their beliefs) that the palace is actually inhabited the remnants of the Pearldiver culture. When their culture collapsed, they used powerful charms to seal themselves away from the world.

Despite their fear, they all desire the pearls embedded in its walls, for a single one would bring them unimaginable wealth. They have not told the high priestess of Nu of their discovery—they know she would place paladins to guard the site against theft. They are prepared collectively to reveal the location to outside adventurers, but only on two strict conditions. First, the divers each receive one of the huge pearls as payment for the information. Second, any other pearls the heroes retrieve cannot be sold locally—too many pearls being sold at once would endanger their livelihoods, and pearls of such size and quality suddenly appearing would arouse the suspicions of the nobles.

Unfortunately for any would be explorers, the palace is not entirely deserted, and the occupant has no love of thieves vandalizing his home.

Persons of Note

Below are several natives the heroes might encounter on their exploration of Mazar and its environs.

COMMANDER SADAD IBN MAJAI

Commander of the Mazar Rangers, Sadad has served the city for 20 years. A career soldier of low birth, he worked his way up through the ranks. Devoted to his duty, he has shunned the court, and has few allies despite holding an important post. Sadad shuns the privileges of rank—he eats and sleeps with his men, takes the same rations, and leads from the front. Those who have served under him are eventually given permission to use his first name rather than address him by his title.

Sadad is growing concerned. Although the orcs have made no overt advances, he has sensed there is more to their raids than first meets the eye. Rather than raid the closest settlements, the attacks are widely scattered. Lacking the manpower to protect every community, the Rangers must ride to battle when the alarm is raised. To Sadad's trained eye, the orcs appear to be testing the response times of the Rangers and probing Mazar's outer defenses. As any soldier knows, an enemy only does this before launching a major assault.

All attempts to alert the emir to the possible danger have been stymied by his advisors—the last thing the nobles want is the emir suddenly taking an interest in events. Despite having no wealth of his own, Sadad hopes to hire adventurers to infiltrate the orc nests and uncover their long-term plans. He can arrange supplies,

and whatever the adventurers find in the way of treasure is theirs to keep. Any such mission would have to be one of stealth—the commander has no to stir up a sleeping hornet's nest or alert them he is suspicious.

THE GHOST PEOPLE

Everyone in Mazar has heard of the Ghost People, though few have ever seen them. Supposedly they are a race of nomads inhabiting the deep interior of the island. Some claim they are the remnants or ghosts of the Pearldiver culture, while others insist they are orcs, Mazar Rangers on patrol viewed from a distance, hallucinations caused by sunstroke, or a tribe of jinn who desire isolation from the rest of the world. What is known for sure is that no one has ever made contact with them, nor discovered any of their camps. Aside from the occasional sighting, they may as well not exist.

The Mazar Rangers have learned through experience that the mysterious nomads are true masters of desert camouflage. When they are seen, it is because they want to be seen; when they wish to remain unseen, they are invisible, leaving no trace of their passing. What the Rangers don't know is why the Ghost People would reveal themselves at all. Perhaps they really are spirits.

GUARDIAN OF THE DEEP ARA

High priestess of the local cult of Nu, Ara is vehemently and vocally opposed to pearl harvesting on an industrial scale. To her, it is nothing short of the rape of the sea. She has tried to prosecute pearl divers several times for desecration, but the courts have refused to even entertain the idea. Ara is currently investigating the disappearance of pearl divers. Since she considers them despoilers, she doesn't actually care one iota about their fate—she is more concerned that kreana have set up a lair in the warm waters. The cult is too small to engage in a wide search, and lacks the strength to take on a kreana outpost, so Ara is hiring adventurers. She is offering payment in the form of cult alchemical devices.

SAGE PASHA ANWAR IBN JIBRIL

Anwar is the recognized authority on the Pearldiver culture, which isn't saying much since virtually nothing about them is known with any certainty. Much of what he knows comes from ancient Hekatic and Magorian sources. The second son of a powerful noble, Anwar has no need to work, and spends a fortune on artifacts and manuscripts referring to the mysterious people.

Since the Pearldiver tombs were discovered, he has hired four adventuring parties to explore the necropolis. Of these, two have failed to return, one found nothing of interest, and he is waiting for the sole survivor of the last expedition to recover his sanity. Naturally, Anwar glosses over these previous ventures should potential new hirelings learn of them, labeling them as "fruitless endeavors" due to "poor planning and poor choices."

TAMARAH

City of Heavenly Sin

Depending on who you ask and what you seek, Tamarah is a city of light and dark, laughter and sorrow, pleasure and pain, joy and misery, virtue and vice. Here anything can be bought, if one has the money and inclination. Amid the many taverns, gambling dens, and hashish houses, one can ascend to the heavens or plunge into the deepest void of the Bottomless Pit, and there are plenty of locals willing to help you achieve either aim.

Social Hierarchy

Tamarah has long been a matriarchy, at least as far as the position of emir is concerned. Daughters rank above sons, and tradition requires that the throne must pass to a daughter where one exists. Only if there are no female children does power pass to a son.

Emira Nashwa's (any references to her are automatically about the succubus that has adopted her form) recent "vision" and decree have, in effect, made her an eternal ruler. Since she will not age, she has no need to hand over power—not that she is planning on siring any half-demon spawn just yet.

That no one has officially questioned her revelation does not mean questions are not being asked. Senior clerics still loyal to the faith have covertly sought confirmation from Tamarni, but have received no reply. Many suspect the emira is corrupt, but that does not automatically mean she is not blessed by Tamarni. Unless they receive a reply soon, their curiosity may not matter—their ranks are slowly being thinned in favor of those whose loyalty to the emira is unquestioned.

Social mobility in Tamarah is extremely fluid. A lucky roll of the dice might earn one enough money to suddenly rank among the upper class. One might lack the influence and contacts, not to mention the breeding and graces, of a true member, but one will quickly be surrounded by an army of friends—at least until they have helped you spend your money. Similarly, that same roll might reduce a noble to the financial status of a beggar. Stripped of his wealth, he rapidly finds his cronies abandon him for new patrons to fund their vices.

In general, the nobility is corrupt. Even those who have not sunk into depravity frequently overindulge in pleasures of the flesh simply because they are readily on offer. This can leave them open to manipulation from those who seek powerful puppet. Many of these nobles are innocent dupes, unaware of the role they play in Iblis' game. Others indulge in pleasurable activities so often that their fortunes have waned. Keen to continue

enjoying the best life has to offer, Tamarah's specialty, they engage in hashish smuggling to raise sufficient funds. Those who have descended into true darkness, willingly or through coercion or trickery, are typically of the younger generation.

The middle-class is dominated by clerics, merchants, and bureaucrats. With no large-scale industrial output, Tamarah has few traditional master craftsmen, such as carpenters and smiths.

The lower-class boasts a large number of citizen engaged in the service industry. Among the *jaleepa* are those considered to possess a skill—courtesans, brewers, chefs, tabac blenders, coffee grinders, and entertainers. A small few of these, the undisputed masters of their trade, rank as *shabrum*, and a tiny handful are *mak-shabrum*. Their social status is primarily due to their powerful patrons, for few boast excessive wealth. As well as the usual unskilled occupations found among the *barajam*, Tamarah boasts a lot of tavern owners, croupiers, common prostitutes, waiters, and the like.

CORRUPTION & DECAY

The write up on Tamarah focuses heavily on its darker nature. This is actually a relatively small aspect of the city, but it is the interesting part. Tamarah may have more legal places to drink, smoke, gamble, and fornicate, but at the end of the day these are just businesses, and have little to offer visiting heroes in terms of adventure hooks.

Whether it is a bureaucrat who accepts a few coins to speed up or delay paperwork or a merchant who prays to Iblis on the nights of the new moon, corruption filters through all levels of society. Some see their corruption as harmless. Some are corrupt out of desperation, either of their own making or due to the vagaries of fate. Some are just servants of greed.

It would be grossly unfair to label every citizen as corrupt, of course. Most are honest, hard-working sorts who like a drink, smoke, or game of chance on occasion, but few are so honest they would turn down hard coin for performing a minor favor.

Everyone knows the city has a dark side. By day, Tamarah is a city of genuine smiles and laughter, of warm hospitality, and of friendships quickly made. As night descends, fearful citizens scurry home to huddle around their lamps, fearful of even answering their doors lest they join the ranks of those who have disappeared. In other cities, screams and shouts in the dark of night might raise a hue and cry. In Tamarah, the innocent silently weep for yet another lost soul and pray the City Watch gets to them in time.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Tamarah.

* **Black Magic Market:** The sale of khem-hekau artifacts and those relating to demons is illegal, but there is a thriving black market for these tainted objects. Finding a buyer or seller requires a Streetwise roll at -2, made once per week. When buying, alchemical devices cost 150 dinars per Rank, tomes of learning 1250 dinars per Rank, and spirit relics 7500 dinars. When selling such items, prices are based on the standard book values.

* **Drugs & Poisons:** Legal hashish costs 10 dinars per smoke, but is only available through official outlets. Illegal hashish costs 5 dinars per smoke. Tabac costs one dinar per smoke. Medicinal herbs used to create poisons cost 10 dinars a bunch. Pre-made poisons start at 5 dinars for a +4 modifier (extremely weak), and double for each step the modifier is lowered, to a maximum of 1280 dinars for a -4 modifier (extremely potent).

* **Native Heroes:** A native hero may choose to be a graduate from *one* university. All entries have specific entry requirements. Each grants certain benefits, as listed below, but only during character generation and the hero must meet all other requirements.

Black Arts: The character must be able to speak and write Black Tongue or Hekatic, have Smarts d6+, and Arcane Background (Khem-Hekau). He can take Khem-Hekau d6 for one skill point *or* take Spirit Binding as a Novice Edge. He can pick only one of these benefits.

Courtesans: The hero must have Smarts d6+ and cannot have negative Charisma. For one skill point, the character can take Persuasion or Streetwise at d6, or both at d4. Only one skill point may be spent in this manner.

Entertainers: The hero must have Smarts d6+. For one skill point, the hero begins with Knowledge (Folklore) d6.

Nefarious Arts: The hero must know Roguetongue and have Agility and Smarts d6+. For one skill point, a character may take one from Gambling, Lockpicking, *or* Stealth at d6, or two of them at d4. Only one skill point may be spent in this manner.

* **Slaves:** The cost of courtesans and entertainers in the core rules does not take into account appropriate Edges, which include more than just their game stats. A courtesan with the Houri Edge, for instance, is automatically more skilled at seduction and pleasuring than one without the Edge. An entertainer with Storyteller knows more tales and can enthrall an audience better than one who lacks the Edge. A courtesan with Houri costs an additional 500 dinars. An entertainer with the Acrobat or Storyteller Edge costs 750 dinars if he has one, or 1000 dinars if he has both. The Master Storyteller Edge adds a further 500 dinars to the total.

Education

The lower classes keep the wheels of pleasure turning, but are badly paid for their efforts. In order to make ends meet, many must hold second jobs in cottage industries. It may be a master tabac blender who selects the leaves and sells pouches from his shop, but likely the actual tabac is mixed, shredded, weighed, and packed by peasants working from home and paid piecemeal (as little as one dirham per 100 pouches).

Education offers a way out of poverty, but for the poor, having a child attend school means the loss of a potential wage earner. Among the lower-classes, few children attend school after the age of eight. The emira doesn't bother to enforce the Caliph's law with any vigor—ignorant peasants are easier to manipulate.

For those stricken with poverty, the darker nature of Tamarah offers a way out for those with uncaring hearts, at least for a short time. Young children are often sold on the black market. The fortunate ones end as slaves in the household of a rich family. The fate of the unfortunate ones is best left unspoken.

Students who wish to receive a standard advanced education have two options—leave the city or attend the University of Tamarah, a general educational establishment. Those who wish to become masters of arts nobles patronize but disdain from learning can join the University of Courtesans or the University of Entertainers.

Despite their grand names, neither is a traditional university. Rather, they are trade schools with important-sounding names. Social status, educational standard, and wealth mean little when applying for the trade schools. Any student with the right aptitude can apply. Of course, such generosity must be repaid. Until the cost of tuition is paid off, graduates must give up 50% of their earnings. It is ironic that the courtesans and entertainers of Tamarah are some of the best trained, yet rank among the poorest.

As there is day, so there is night. Out of sight of the authorities, those interested in mastering darker arts are well catered for in Tamarah. The Academy of Nefarious Arts trains thieves, while the School of Black Arts provides instruction for khem-hekau mages and those who wish to learn more about the Bottomless Pit and the demons who dwell there.

Religion

Tamarni is the most popular deity in Tamarah, and all of her aspects are duly honored. Her cult operates a massive business empire. On top of the usual services, such as blessing homes and removing vermin, it has full control over Tamarah's legitimate pleasure industry. From simple coffee houses and taverns to bath houses and brothels, every establishment that offers anything the cult deems to be pleasurable requires a license to

operate. A license is not a blank check to act as the proprietor wishes—too many complaints, and the business may find its license revoked. Sadly, too many pay bribes to ensure they remain open no matter what they do.

As the darkness deepens, so Marqod's cult gains popularity. As goddess of mercy and protection, she is the one citizens turn to when fear grips their hearts. When fate strips a man of his fortune and pride, it is the goddess of generosity to whom he turns his prayers.

As the months progress, so Ashtart's cult waxes and wanes. Few citizens are aware of the perilous state of the granaries, and thus they pray that the cash crops do well. Ashtart's clerics have their suspicions that famine is only a bad harvest away, but their goddess is patron of all crops, and thus it is not their direct concern—they are paid well to bless the fields, and even their farmland grows few crops for food production.

Shamash holds an uneasy place in the hearts of the citizens. With the hand of Iblis clutching at the heart of the city, many would dearly love to embrace his teachings. Shamash is also the god of moral behavior, and his clerics are vocally opposed to what they see as Tamarah's love of sin but what the people see as freedom of choice and life's few pleasures. The nearest analogy is that of an over-bearing parent—offering protection and succor, but demanding his rules are obeyed.

The clerics of the benevolent deities broadly fall into three camps. The first are staunch supporters of their deity and tolerate no corruption in their ranks or in the city. It is they who fill the ranks of the Temperants. The second are loyal, but are too afraid to speak out or act. They are the good men that allow evil to fester in the city. The third faction, largely junior clerics, are thoroughly corrupt. More than a few have forsaken their true faith in favor of honoring Iblis or demon lords. Others are merely out to line their pockets with as much gold as possible, for they too enjoy pleasures, and pains, of the flesh.

Worship of Iblis is prominent yet splintered. As well as the greater god, there are small cults for each of the minor deities beholden to him. Not that Iblis cares worship is divided—he actively encourages the various cults to work against each other, for all chaos succors him. Some clerics see Tamarah as a microcosm of the greater battle of law versus chaos. Most see it as a playground where they can carry out their fell rites largely unopposed.

Demonists, those who worship and draw magical power from the demon lords, are more plentiful than anyone cares to think. Although servants of Iblis, they are not of divine origin as mortals understand. Virtually every demon lord has at least one worshipper, and a few have cults that rival those of the evil minor deities.

Military

Tamarah claims ownership of the entire length of the River Gebril to its main headwater in the mountains, and the land 30 miles from each bank.

ARMY

The main army comprises three infantry regiments with 11 companies total, and two cavalry regiments, also totalling 11 companies. The senior infantry regiment, the Lions of Tamarah, has three heavy infantry companies. The other two regiments have five medium companies and three light companies respectively. The lead cavalry regiment, the Thunder of Tamarah, comprises four heavy cavalry companies, while the second regiment has seven light cavalry companies. Most of these are stationed in the north, to combat the threat from marauding orcs.

Protecting the city proper are the two medium infantry, two archer, and one artillery companies of the City Guard. They are more a city militia than a professional army, and have only minimal training and basic equipment.

Emira Nashwa has taken great pains to ensure her bodyguard contains only handpicked individuals. Two companies strong, every member, regardless of gender, is attractive. Officially they carry the title Chosen of Tamarah, but everyone refers to them as the Harem behind their backs. Partly this is due to rumors the emira has slept with most of them, and partly because she pampers them with expensive clothes and jewelry.

Serving as an unofficial agency under the emira's personal control are the Blades of Seduction. A small but elite band of assassins trained as houris, they remove those the emira considers a threat. In order to keep the Brotherhood of Assassins from prying into the murders, Nashwa pays the organization a suitable annual tribute. The Assassins have made it abundantly clear that this in no way precludes them from accepting contracts against the emira should the situation arise—business is business.

NAVY

Tamarah has a navy of six warships. Their mandate is to patrol the large bay into which the River Gebril flows. The captains rigorously enforce anti-smuggling laws, for the emira brooks no outsider competition. Confiscated goods are delivered to the palace where the emira oversees their destruction. What actually happens is the goods end up being sold through a network of contact to the local black market.

Law & Order

Trying to maintain order in a city where drinking, gambling, hashish, and prostitution are, if on licensed premises legal, falls to the men and women of the City Watch. By day, they control the streets and are present in force. Businesses whose interests lie outside the law escape their attention through heavy bribes. Since the watchmen never enter these places, they never see any illegal activities first hand, and thus their consciences are not troubled. Those honest and courageous souls who insist their duty is to police crime, not turn a blind eye,

either learn to keep their moral outrage to themselves or they meet with a nasty fate.

At night, they relinquish authority to the thieves, murderers, and cultists who prowl the dark alleys, such is their fear of the dark. Patrols are limited to the upper-class areas, both residential and tourist. They might consider answering a cry for help from a middle-class areas, but lower-class districts are left to fend for themselves until dawn breaks and the darkness recedes.

Where the Watch will not patrol, the Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls takes over. Their task is both thankless (the poor have little to give save their thanks and a place to sleep) and ultimately futile (there is more wickedness than they can hope to combat). As well as the usual problems of corruption and intimidation, they fight a greater evil—the very poor are prepared to do almost anything to earn a few dirhams, and there are plenty of twisted souls willing to rent their flesh for a night of obscene depravity. Some of their victims emerge with only mental scars; others are physically maimed, sometimes permanently. The truly unfortunate are never seen again.

Legal pleasures are relatively cheap, and except for hashish, there is little black market in them beyond smuggling them out of the city. The real money lies in darker passions—the more perverted the pleasure (or pain) one seeks, the higher the cost rises.

Crime is rampant and varied. While the city has its fair share of murders and thefts, it must also contend with worship of the dark gods and demon lords, all the vile trappings that come along with such practises.

Tamarah's sinister underworld is a violent battleground, fought over by five rival thieves' guilds. Hashish smuggling, protection rackets, and theft form the bulk of their enterprises, but all have a share in the darker aspects of pleasure. The Grinning Skulls dominate the trade in khem-hekau artifacts. They have several necromancers among their member. More than one rival guild master has woken in the dead of night to find thieves standing before his bed, their throats slit from ear to ear, yet their cold corpses still animate. The other guilds are the Black Cats (sadism and perversion a specialty), the Brotherhood of Misfortune, the Red and Black Gang, and the Verminous Host. All have ties to the cults of the evil deities and demon lords.

The guilds fiercely protect their territory from each other and freelances looking to ply their trade in the City of Heavenly Sin. Within a day or two, a freelance thief who has practised his trade will be contacted by one or more of the guilds. The offer they make is simple—join with them while in the city and take on jobs as requested, or face punishment. Such is the guilds' reputation for imaginative, and particularly cruel, punishments that most outsiders know to contact a guild as soon as they set foot inside the city walls.

Keen to claim a slice of the illegal hashish trade, many nobles have devoted agricultural land to growing the drug. For every acre of hashish planted, an acre of food production is lost, imperilling the city and its inhabitants. The various thieves' guilds have also taken it upon them-

selves to plant their own fields in remote areas. About half of these illegal crops end up in Tamarah, where the emira, the thieves' guilds, and corrupt clerics of the cult of Tamarni profit. (The latter sell illegal hashish under the counter through the small temples and take a cut of the profits.)

Emira Nashwa is playing both ends of the game with regard illegal hashish growing and smuggling. On the one hand, she profits greatly from sale of illegal crops. On the other, she must be seen to be tough on crime lest the Caliph send agents whose minds she cannot easily control. To that end, she authorized the creation of the Claws of Tamarah, a special police force whose sole duty is to root out illegal hashish crops.

Officially, they burn the fields, thus ridding the city of illegal crops. Unofficially, they impose fines on the farmers without going through the courts. This money ends up in the emira's pockets and the crops remain untouched. Fields of genuine crops are sometimes put to the torch to maintain the illusion that justice is being done. Since she also secretly supports hashish smuggling, she gains a second income from a single crop.

Trade & Tribute

Tamarah faces a very uncertain future. Crops of barley, coffee, tabac, and vines, not to mention hashish, have proven very lucrative, but at the expense of cultivating only minimal surplus food crops. Driven by greed, the nobles sell their excess foodstuffs to foreign merchants for higher profits than could be had locally. Visiting merchants care little about Tamarah's future problems—it produces the best coffee, tabac, and wine in the Caliphate, and that is all that matters.

Hashish is legal in Tamarah, so long as it is purchased from a temple of Tamarni. In order to secure their monopoly and satisfy their customer base, the cult has opened temples in every district. Only the most fanatical supporter could ever accept these as true places of worship. Small but well fortified, they are nothing more than hashish shops, offering no other spiritual services. Naturally, not only is the cult the only legal sales outlet in the city, but only farms under its direct management can legally grow the drug.

COINAGE

Tamarah mints its own coins (with the emira's name on one side and a stylized cat on the other), but there are plenty of foreign coins in circulation, lost here by unlucky tourists. The local gold coins are minted with values of one dinar (known as a "Smoke" because it can buy a single pipe's worth of tabac), five dinars, (called a "Golden Lady" after the cost of a high quality courtesan's services for an hour), and 50 dinars (a "Night," because you can get almost anything you want for an entire night with that sort of money).

Silver coins are minted in values of one ("Silver Lady,"

because that's the cost of a cheap whore's company), one-half (a "Round" because it will buy a round of drinks for several people in lower-class drinking dens), and one-quarter (a "Drink," after the typical average of an average quality alcoholic beverage) dirham.

In order to protect tourists from con men and illegal businesses, the cult of Tamarni issues tin tokens stamped with varying denominations. Citizens hand over their dinars and dirhams at the main temple, and receive tokens to equal value. Every legitimate business must accept these as part the terms of its license. At the end of each week, the proprietors hand in their tin coins, along with their operating license. They are then reimbursed from the temple's treasury.

LOCAL TAXES

Tamarah is, in many ways, one huge business—the business of pleasure. Proprietors keep most of the profits and pay the workers minimal wages. Combined with income and property tax at 40% (total outlay), the average citizen is a true wage slave. Little wonder that gambling is endemic.

Business License: What constitutes pleasure is much debated by the cult of Tamarni. Some argue that purchasing anything counts, and this the cult should issue all business licenses. So far they have never extended their remit beyond the basics—drinking, eating, gambling, smoking, and sex. Still, Tamarah boasts a lot of businesses catering for such needs, and at 5% of the previous year's profits, or 500 dinars for a new licenses, the cult is making a huge profit.

Customs Duty: Most imports and exports are charged at 2%.

Docking Fees: Tamarah makes much of its money from its goods and services sold internally, and it actively encourages merchants to stay as long as they want. To that end, docking fees are a ridiculously low 20 dinars per week, regardless of the ship's size.

Excise Duty: Exports of alcohol and tabac carry a 15% levy, while imports of the same are rated at 40%.

Fines: The cults of Shamash and Tamarni have not yet given up using the courts to fight against debauchery and sin. Those found guilty of such crimes are fined twice as much as in other cities. Since all fines go into the city treasury, the emira allows them this minor victory.

Gate Tax: Those arriving by land to sample the delights and sins of Tamarah begin their experience of the city by paying no gate tax.

Sales Tax: 10% on any pleasurable activity (as defined above). Other goods and services are levied at 2%.

Architecture

Tamarah is a city of architectural contrasts. The homes of the rich are spacious and surrounded by courtyards for privacy. The wide roads are paved, swept regularly of

BEANS AND LEAVES

For the most part, coffee and tabac are legal and extremely common in Al-Shirkuh. The standard varieties have absolutely no medicinal properties. There are, however, a few varieties that grant the drinker or smoker short-term benefits. These varieties are rarer and far more expensive than common types.

COFFEE

Coffee is always brewed strong and served in small cups. A half pound bag of whole beans contains enough for 20 cups. Prices are per bag. When available in coffee houses, a cup of special coffee costs 1/10 the listed price. For reference, regular coffee typically costs 0.25 dirhams per cup in a coffee house, or 0.25 dinars per bag of beans in the souk. Making a cup of coffee requires hot water, freshly ground beans, and time (at least 10 minutes). Benefits only apply to fresh brews drunk while still hot.

* **Emir's Passion:** A powerful aphrodisiac guaranteed to stir one's ardor and stoke one's passion for an hour. *Cost: 20 d.*

* **Watchman's Delight:** This bean makes a seriously strong drink. A single cup has the same effect as a stimulant I herbal remedy, but lasts for only four hours. *Cost: 50 d.*

* **Long Walk:** A cup increases the user's Overland Pace by one for 6 hours. Favored by Bedu tribes. Multiple cups consumed within 6 hours have no additional effect.. *Cost: 45 d.*

TABAC

The listed cost is the standard price and grants five smokes. In all cases, a full pipe must be smoked in order to gain the listed benefit. This takes 1d6+4 minutes from start to finish.

* **Cloud Clearer:** Blows away mental cobwebs and aids clarity of thought, and is favored by those puzzling over conundrums or riddles, or trying to recall obscure facts. Grants +1 to Common Knowledge and Knowledge rolls for 30 minutes. *Cost: 80 d.*

* **Dreamweaver:** While not a soporific, this leaf aids a good night's sleep and leaves the sleeper feeling refreshed. If he goes to sleep within an hour or two after finishing his smoke, the character needs only four hours sleep to be fully rested. *Cost: 50 d.*

* **Golden Glow:** The invigorating smoke functions as a stimulant II herbal remedy. *Cost: 75 d.*

* **Marqod's Mist/Khamsin's Kiss:** Produces a particularly soothing smoke. After finishing a pipe, the smoker may make a Vigor roll. Success removes one level of Fatigue caused by Bumps & Bruises. No matter how much Fatigue he has, only one attempt may be made in this manner in any 24 hour period. *Cost: 60 d.*

both litter and beggars, properly maintained, and well lit. Upper-class businesses catering to patrons' seeking pleasure are gaudy affairs, with brightly painted signs and furnishings that badly mimic exotic styles (such as Bedu or Hekatic). The staff wear smart uniforms and are always eager to help customers. Most carry equally outrageous names to try and tempt customers inside.

Enter a poorer district, and one finds multi-story rows of small houses sorely in need of repair, narrow streets and dark alleys strewn with litter and potholes, beggars on every corner, and businesses with decor, prices, and atmosphere to match the budgets of the residents.

Major Locales

Described below are some of the more colorful, and often dangerous, places for heroes to explore while sampling the delights of the City of Heavenly Sin.

CITY DISTRICTS

Tamarah houses around 78,000 citizens (55% of the total population), and typically has several thousand non-permanent residents at any one time. The city is split in two by the Tail, a wide avenue that runs from the riverside in the east to the main gate in the west. As a rule of thumb, the further one is away from the main avenue, the poorer the area.

Docks: Due to the falling water level, ships can no longer berth directly at the wharves. Instead, they must drop anchor in the center of the river. Small boats and barges then ferry the cargo closer to shore, where cranes lift it ashore. This means merchant vessels must tarry longer in port, giving their crews more time to sample the riches of the city. Behind the wharves are rows of warehouses, merchant offices, customs posts, and poor quality housing for the dock and warehouse workers.

Noble: The homes of the city's rich and powerful lie on both sides of the avenue, beginning just inside the main gate and extending east for approximately half the length of the city. Behind the southern district are the homes and offices of foreign dignitaries, senior government officials, and the high priests. That they lie nearer the palace rankles many nobles, who consider their placement a social snub.

Palace: The emira's palace is located in the southwest corner. Separated from the rest of the city by a high wall, it is both her home and the center of the city's bureaucracy. One entire wing is devoted to pleasure, which honored guests are permitted to enjoy. In the cellars, special guests may indulge in all manner of perversion and depravity.

Tourist: For many citizens, visiting Tamarah is something that has to be done once in their lifetime. West of the docks and running north from the central avenue is an area dedicated to satisfying hedonistic tourists. Most inns offer a wide range of services intended to keep patrons from ven-

turing far from their doors—food and drink, tabac, hashish (there is a “temple” of Tamarni inside the largest and grandest places), gambling, and the company of courtesans of all races and both genders. Every business is legitimate, which is not to say it doesn't offer illegal services on the quiet. The area adjoining the avenue caters for upper-class visitors. The deeper one proceeds north, the lower the quality and prices become. Tourists who fail to budget properly or whose lose too often at the gambling tables often start drifting further toward the back of the district as time passes. Despite watch patrols, petty crime is rife.

CITY LOCALES

Academy of the Nefarious Arts: This unofficial educational establishment trains thieves. It caters to both young students seeking to learn the art of thievery and existing thieves who want to hone their skills. The guilds consider it neutral territory, for its mentors hold no allegiance to any organization other than the school, and do not meddle in the guilds' affairs.

Education for new thieves is free. At the end of their course, students are auctioned to the guilds. Competition to recruit the best graduates is fierce, and a promising thief can earn the academy thousands of dinars. The guilds naturally demand the thief reimburse them for the outlay through his work. When the debt is cleared, he is free to choose his own future.

Skills: Gambling, Lockpicking, Stealth; **Edges:** Thief; **Languages:** Roguetongue.

The Black Souk: The Black Souk is actually a series of interconnected streets in a lower-class residential district. As the center of the black market, anything can be found for sale if one has both the coin. The souk is another neutral part of the city as far as the thieves' guilds go, and is under their joint protection. Independent enforcers well versed in stealthy murder scrutinize anyone who enters. Until the enforcers are satisfied strangers are legitimate customers, the Black Souk does not exist—it's just another poor part of the city full of wretched souls. Once the all-clear is given, street urchins in the pay of the various guilds merge like a plague of locusts and try to tempt the customers into specific “shops” by promising the best deals. Strangers who cause trouble are not given a warning to curb their behavior, unless a dagger in the back counts.

The Citrus Grove: No one can give this restaurant much hope of staying in business beyond a month when it first opened, but seven years on it is doing a roaring trade. The Grove sells only non-alcoholic drinks—mainly fruit juices, and no coffee—and healthy meals. Tabac smoking is prohibited on the premises. While some health conscious locals regularly frequent it, much of the Grove's trade comes from visitors who need to detox after overindulging for days, or weeks, on end. Knowing that most tourists are short of cash at the end of their stay, the proprietor keeps prices as low as he can without jeopardizing quality.

Fazel's Vermin Control: Fazel runs a legitimate business hiring out vicious cats for the purposes of mouse

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and rat extermination. Prices are very reasonable, though customers are responsible for feeding the cat for the duration of the contract. For the right money, Fazel also removes larger vermin. He isn't an assassin himself—he just arranges the hits. Among those in the know, he has a reputation for achieving results, no matter the nature of the target. Not even his most regular clients suspect the truth behind his business—Fazel is a powerful demonist, and summons unholy assassins to do the dirty work.

Gates: Tamarah has just a single gate in the west wall—the west side opens onto the river. For a mile outside, the approach is flanked with weathered statues of crouched lions. These give the gate its official name—Lions' Gate. By day, the gate is protected by a squad of City Guard. At night, the guard is doubled. The gate is never closed unless imminent attack is expected.

Guild of Misery: For some, pleasure comes in the misfortune of others. The Guild of Misery specializes in everything from arranging harmless but embarrassing accidents to inflicting physical pain to destroying reputations. If the price is right, it will even torture, maim, or murder the target's friends and loved ones to achieve the desired result. Others use the guild to deliver a first warning—they start small and then escalate the misery until they feel enough is enough. Those who do not take the final hint may find the next person calling on them is an assassin (not a service the guild currently offers).

The Knife in the Back: This inn in the Dock District has a city-wide reputation for being a den of thieves and murderers. If the regulars take a dislike to you, so the story goes, they'll let you know by planting several inches of cold steel in your back. In truth, the inn is very respectable given the class of patron to which it caters, and weapons are not allowed on the premises. The proprietor chose the name of the establishment and started the rumor so as to keep tourists away.

Last Gamble Street: This lower-class street has gambling dens on both sides. It is widely said that you can tell how far a man has fallen from grace by where he gambles. Near the start, the games are innocent enough, accepting low bets but offering low rewards. Further down, the odds of winning become worse, but the rewards are greater. The very last game is one of extreme rewards and very low odds of success. Only those who understand true desperation enter its doors. No money is needed to play. Win, and you'll walk away with enough gold to join the upper echelons of society. Lose, and you forfeit your life. All the games are actually honest—the very nature of the various games means the odds are stacked in favor of the house—and the gambling dens, save for the last one, have a valid business license.

The Nobles' Respite: A large inn in the Tourist District, this establishment caters to very high end clients. Prices for cheap meals start at 5 dinars, and expensive ones cost upward of 50 dinars. One is paying for the very finest the city has to offer, though—as well as vintage local wines, there are imported foods, drinks, and prostitutes from Rassilon and the Jade Empire. It is decorated in the imagined style of an emir's palace—lots of marble

NEW HINDRANCE

EUNUCH (MINOR)

Only male characters may take this Hindrance. Whether by an unfortunate accident, self-mutilation, punishment for a crime, or because of his occupation, the character was castrated in his youth, leaving him with a high-pitched voice. The character has -2 Charisma and cannot sire children. On the plus side, he is immune to seduction attempts, and receives +2 to resist *puppet* spells cast by women.

NEW PROFESSIONAL EDGE

DESERT HERMIT

Requirements: Novice, Spirit d6+, Vigor d8+, Survival d6+, must have the Poverty Hindrance

Hermits are people who have chosen to live a life of isolation and privation in the deep desert. Some do so for spiritual reasons, others because they seek to leave behind the trappings of society in favor of solitude or escape a previous life.

The hardships the hermit has experienced have honed his fortitude and survival instincts. He gains +1 to Vigor rolls to resist Fatigue and +2 to Survival rolls made in the wilderness.

statues, gold furnishings, and silk hangings. The Respite is unusual in that it offers absolutely no illegal services.

The Pride's Den: A middle-class restaurant in the Tourist District, the Den (its popular name) takes its name from the pride of eight lions that roam the establishment. Mostly tame, they roar at anyone stupid enough to try and stroke them. They are trained to attack on the owner's verbal command or if a weapon is drawn in their presence. One of their favorite tricks is to sit and stare at patrons who order meat dishes in the hope he will feed them. Few have the strength of will to ignore them for long, especially when the beasts start licking their lips.

The Seven Veils: While patrons dine, drink, and smoke, they are entertained by sensuous belly-dancers. The owner, Mahibah bint Qasim, is the local contact for the Brotherhood of Assassins.

School of Black Arts: The school's sole instructor, Wedjet, takes on only a handful of students each year. Few are prepared for the sight that awaits them, for Wedjet is a liche-wizir. He has actually died several times during his 1500 year existence, but he is one of only a handful of liche-wizirs to have mastered essence transference (as per the dread liche from the *Hellfrost Bestiary*, but using Khem-Hekau instead of Faith).

As well as teaching necromancy, Wedjet is also well-versed in demon lore. While he cannot teach demonists

much in the way of magical power, he can start them down the dark road to servitude. Wedjet never charges money for tuition. Before he accepts a student, he then sets a quest. It might be to recover an object of Hekatic origin from its current owner, or merely translate a papyrus. The task bears no relevance to what the pupil wants from him—it is simply a mundane task Wedjet needs accomplished at that moment in time. The same principal applies to “purchasing” an item from his impressive collection of khem-hekau spirit relics and smaller collection of true relics. The next person seeking his favor must first travel to Rassilon and copy down the wards sealing the tomb of an undead known in northern legends as the Liche-Priest.

Wedjet does not suffer fools or sycophants. Those who pry into his affairs or attempt to elevate him above his station as a lowly servant of Apophis face a quick death, followed by eternity as one of the mindless minions that protect the school.

Special: Characters must be able to speak Black Tongue or Hekatic before they can take a skill or Edge; **Skills:** Khem-Hekau, Knowledge (Monsters: Demons); **Edges:** Alchemy, Potent Magic, Spirit Binding; **Languages:** Black Tongue, Hekatic.

Steel Shield Services: As the Bedu saying goes, “Friends are like the wind; enemies are like stone.” Whether it is a local nobleman who has fallen foul of the thieves’ guilds or a rich tourist who wants to explore the seedier side of the city in safety, those who fear for their wellbeing can hire experienced bodyguards. Adventurers looking for work can always find employment here. Rates of pay vary on the length of contract and the patron’s security needs.

The Strip: The Strip is a notorious street running south from the main avenue. On the surface, it appears nothing more than a pathway through a lower-class residential area that eventually leads to a slum. For those given the right introductory phrase, it is a street lined with businesses offering depravity to suit any budget and taste. It takes its name from the fact that the deeper one traverses, the more one is to be stripped of one’s money and dignity by the services on offer. The Watch never patrols here, even during daylight hours.

University of Courtesans: The university’s reputation as a training ground for prostitutes is largely false. Courtesans are trained not just in seduction techniques. They are educated women capable of conversing on many topics, mixing with all levels of society, and engaging in intrigue. Many hire themselves out as escorts to men who want to be seen with an attractive woman on their arm at a social event, or who just desire company for dinner. Some do go on to serve as spies, and more than a few have found work as assassins.

The proprietress, who goes only by the name Zalda, is seeking adventurers with strong stomachs. Several of her students have been murdered, their faces peeled from their skulls and taken by the killer. She has approached the Black Cats, to whom she pays protection money, but they have refused to help—their policy extends to property and possessions, not people.

Special: Student cannot have negative Charisma; **Skills:** Persuasion, Streetwise; **Edges:** Hourly.

University of Entertainers: Acrobats, belly-dancers, contortionists, escape artists, firebreathers, jugglers and storytellers—the university trains them all, and more beside. A legitimate business, students learn for free but must pay back the cost of tuition within three years or face prosecution in the courts for bad debts. Opportunities arise to pay off part of the loan before graduating—students are hired to private citizens to entertain at parties or other functions. Ten percent of the fee goes toward clearing the debt.

Skills: Knowledge (Folklore); **Edges:** Acrobat, Master Storyteller, Storyteller.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Below are some notable residents visiting adventures might encounter during their stay in Tamarah.

EYE OF TAMARNI BILQEES

The thieves’ guilds’ monopoly on the seedy aspect of Tamarah is not as complete as they would like. Eye of Tamarni Bilqeas, an elderly crone, controls all crime and depravity in one of the lower-class residential districts. She runs the area as a personal fief, lording it over the equally corrupt junior clerics in her employ. Nothing that goes on in the district escapes her attention. Locals believe she uses cats as spies. As a result, they are especially kind to the many feral beasts that stealth the streets, even allowing them into their homes. Needless to say, mice, rats, and other vermin do not last long.

SAHAR AND MAGRIB

Sahar (“dawn”) and Magrib (“dusk”) are experienced demon hunters. The pair are complete opposites. Sahar is a Devoted ifrit jinn blooded with a dark complexion, no sense of humor, and a love of heavy armor and big weapons. His solution to any problem is to beat it to death. Magrib is a Faithful follower of Shamash. She favors caution and stealth, is lethal with her paired daggers, and possesses a wry wit.

They have four strict rules: no discussing religion, no romantic complications, no taking work personally, and no prying into each other’s past—the haunted look in their eyes and the fervor with which they carry out their work is evidence enough each suffered sorrow and pain before they crossed paths a decade ago.

They are well known to the cult of Shamash, for whom they have worked as independent contractors on several occasions. Over the years they have slain dozens of demons, demonists, and cultists. Sometimes they are fulfilling a contract; other times they just follow their noses. It was the latter that brought them to Tamarah, a city they sense is rife with unholy spirits.

UNFORTUNATE SOULS

Defenders of the Weak

Beggars are common throughout the cities of the Al-Shirkuh. Some are truly beggars, down on their luck, crippled in some manner, diseased, or insane, but all in sore need of charity. Others are actually members of a vigilante group known as the Brotherhood of Unfortunate Souls.

History

For as long as there has been civilization there has been inequality. Those without status or wealth have the fewest rights and the weakest voice. At best they are ignored by those with great strength or influence and largely ignored by the masses. At worst, they become victims of cruelty, neglect, and corruption. But for as long as there have been downtrodden souls, there have been citizens of good heart willing to stand up for the rights of those who have none.

The current incarnation of the Brotherhood rose during the creation of the Sultanate. Suleiman's message had already been corrupted, and his dream of a society built upon charity and equality quickly failed to manifest. Within a generation of the liberation, the slaves who chose to build new cities had divided into social strata as had their ancestors.

Even in Suleiman's time, the growth of the fledgling cities attracted more and more freed slaves. This placed enormous pressure on their infant infrastructures. The lucky ones found work and prospered (though not all to an equal extent), while the unlucky ones survived only by begging or criminal pursuits.

In general, the first modern Unfortunate Souls operated openly. They favored political reform, arguing openly for redistribution of wealth, state-sponsored work programs to alleviate poverty, and equal justice for all. But there was little interest from those who held power in sharing anything, especially with the poorest members of society. It is unfair to tarnish all nobles with the same brush, but those who supported reform were a small minority.

Unable to change things politically, many Unfortunate Souls turned to open violence to achieve their aims. They robbed tax collectors who overburdened the poorest and invoked vigilante justice to punish those who tormented the weakest. Not surprisingly, their actions brought down the wrath of the establishment.

Rather than stand and fight overwhelming odds, the Brotherhood simply melted away, adopting the clothing, mannerisms, and, in many instances, the lifestyle of those they fought to protect. Even those who had rallied

against violence were forced to go underground, for all were tarred with the same brush. Where once the nobility faced a foe they could defeat, they now struggled against an army of righteous individuals hidden among the general populace.

Centuries have passed and noble dynasties have risen and fallen, but still the Brotherhood continues to operate from the shadows—and it will do until equality is a universal right.

Structure

The Brotherhood is not a single, unified organization, nor are there any formal ranks. It exists as a series of small groups of like-minded individuals (and more rarely loners) whose sphere of influence typically encompasses just a single city. In the largest cities, which may boast multiple slums and lower class areas, there is usually more than one cell operating.

Within their home city the Unfortunate Souls typically operate out of a number of safe houses spread across the slums. These are secretly watched over by those the kind-hearted souls protect. While many believe the claims that nothing goes on in the slums without the Unfortunate Souls knowing are exaggerations, they are closer to the truth than the governments would like to admit.

Most members are recruited from the poorest members of society, though affluent citizens are not denied entrance just because they were born to wealth. Those who wish to join must first prove their desire by acting like an Unfortunate Soul of their own volition. Word of their activities quickly reaches the ears of the true members, who then secretly watch the potential recruit, sometimes for months—the nobility frequently send spies to try and infiltrate the order. Only when the Unfortunate Souls are sure the newcomer is genuine do they make contact.

Aside from introductions and access to local safe houses, there is no formal training or initiation.

Emblem

As a secret society, the Brotherhood disdains all forms of overt identification. Despite the vast distances and cultural gulfs between cities, the Brotherhood has managed to develop a widely recognized system of hand signals and code words to aid in recognition. A stranger in a foreign city need only head to the poorest slums and make a few covert signs or utter a few key phrases in order to locate a resident comrade.

Playing an Unfortunate Soul

Regardless of your birthright, you have chosen to live and protect the poorest of the poor. Unlike general adventurers, who can pick their fights, you do not have that luxury—when the poor are oppressed, you must act.

While you may not be a wanted man personally, your organization is branded as a criminal one—many nobles have a standing reward for the capture of Unfortunate Souls. Unless you absolutely trust your companions, do not reveal your allegiance. Since you'll be a beggar in their eyes, they are unlikely to accept orders from someone so lowly, so you might be forced to resort to manipulating them into assisting you in your goals.

COMBAT ADVICE

Your greatest strength is your ability to appear as a harmless beggar, a creature beneath notice and contempt. Your greatest problem is deciding exactly when to strike down your chosen foe. While you remain disguised you can do nothing but move up to your Pace. That means you won't be able to help your comrades, even with Tricks or Tests of Will. But by remaining disguised you can get within striking range of your enemy.

Although Unfortunate Souls are primarily melee combatants, nothing prevents them using ranged weapons. Ideally, you should try to use your Unfortunate Soul Edge to get adjacent to or within short range of the most dangerous enemy—spellcasters and commanders are ideal choices. You might wish to strike quickly, aiming to at least injure him if not kill him outright. Another option is to bide your time until your opponent is already wounded, and then deal the death blow when his bennies are spent and his odds of Soaking reduced.

Of course, circumstances on the battlefield are rarely that generous. A spellcaster might be gesticulating in preparation for throwing a *blast* spell at your comrades, but he could just as easily be casting something fairly innocuous or irrelevant to you (like *detect arcana*, or *armor* one of his allies). Similarly, the enemy commander might not be distinctive enough to stand out from the crowd. You always need to be flexible.

Against a horde of nameless foes, it doesn't likely matter much when you reveal yourself. The sooner you do, the sooner you can lend your full weight to the fight.

ADVANCES

If your disguise is going to be of any benefit, you first need to be able to remain hidden. Keep boosting your Stealth as often as possible. While you might not be light fingered, the skills the Thief Edge boosts are useful ones to have in your line of work.

When you finally strike, you need to be able to kill efficiently. As well as good combat skills and a high Strength for melee, consider investing in Frenzy. Sweep

can be useful, though it does not stack with your Unfortunate Soul Edge, as this applies only against the first foe. Still, so long as you remain disguised you can walk into a group of enemies unopposed and attempt to cut them all down with one sweep. If ranged combat is your thing, then Marksman is an ideal Edge.

Fleet Footed increases your base Pace, reducing the number of rounds it takes to get within optimum striking range of a prime target. It is also very handy for that moment when you strike down your chosen target and his bodyguards divert their attention to you.

In order to defend the poor and give them the justice they crave you may have to track down the perpetrator of a crime. Although you have a network of informants to call upon, Investigation is a useful complimentary skill for those who prefer brains over brawn.

Persuasion is a handy Skill, especially for diverting attention away from yourself ("I saw the attacker run that way, my lord"). Having a Connection or two in your home city is especially useful—another reason to get a few dice in Persuasion.

Since you work best in a city, you might want to consider Detailed Area Lore (*Realm Guide #13*) and Face in The Crowd (*Realm Guide #19*).

NPC Reactions

In the eyes of the world an Unfortunate Soul is simply another beggar. Most citizens are Neutral, either ignoring the down and out completely or dropping him a few dirhams to ease their conscience before going about their business. Others, though, will react with Uncooperative intentions, shooing the Unfortunate Soul from their presence or shouting insults. A small few will tend toward Hostile behavior, openly striking the beggar who dares ask them for alms.

Unless a character reveals his allegiance, most nobles react to him as do other members of society. Should the Brother be identified as a vigilante, though, he can expect to be imprisoned, tortured, and then executed—unless he is fortunate enough to be captured by one of the few nobles who support the Brotherhood's cause.

Among the poor the Unfortunate Soul will find many friends. Most of the truly poor will be Friendly to a hero who reveals his allegiance, and a goodly number Helpful, though they have little to offer save for information and a place to sleep.

Despite being branded criminals by the establishment, the activities of the Unfortunate Souls are often ignored by city watchmen. Few have any interest in protecting the poorest wretches, and in many cases the worst slums are no-go areas for those who represent any form of authority. So long as the Unfortunate Souls don't cause trouble in other parts of the city or disrupt official government business (such as tax collection), wise guardsmen treat them as unofficial allies in the fight against crime. Unless an Unfortunate Soul has a price on his head, the watch tend to be thoroughly Neutral.