

HELLFROST LAND OF FIRE

• REALM GUIDE #21 •

THE FREE EMIRATE STATES

Introduction

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Of the three great human realms, it is the Free Emirate States that actually comes closest to fulfilling Suleiman's vision. Only a fool would deny there are problems, but here at least citizens of both creeds live side by side in peace in harmony. For the most part, people of are judged by their skills, not the method in which they choose to worship the higher powers. The Emirates holds much promise, for here anyone can rise to a position of great influence and authority. So welcome, noble traveler, to a realm that boasts of being a gateway to both the deserts of Al-Shirkuh and the frozen land of Rassilon.

The first part covers the Free Emirates as a whole, and details only general facts or areas of interest not within the boundaries of one of the six 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*. While not essential, *Realm Guides #19* and *#20* detail the core tenets of the Devoted and Faithful creeds.

WHERE DO ALL THE PEOPLE LIVE?

The population of the six great cities and the territories they control accounts for 66% of the total population. With various nomads numbering a further 6% or so, that leaves just two 346,000 souls unaccounted for. The great majority live in villages and towns along the great rivers and coast, with smaller pockets clustered in the foothills of the mountains, where much of the Emirates' mineral wealth lies.

Geography

Locked behind the time-weathered peaks of the Dusty Mountains and Nazir Range, the Free Emirate States enjoys more rainfall than the rest of Al-Shirkuh. Spring is the time of the heaviest rain, for clouds borne on moist air sweep inland from the ocean and race toward the distant peaks. In summer, hot, humid air up the coast from the south, giving birth to tremendous thunderstorms that swirl around the coast, often for several days. The weight of rain may be greatly reduced from a generation ago, but there is still enough to water the land and feed the rivers.

Although the Free Emirates is not prone to native sandstorms, strong summer winds whip sand from the Empty Zone high into the atmosphere, from where it is deposited on the southern cities. Much of the time the sand is a light dusting and troubles no one save those

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the whole of the Free Emirate States unless superseded elsewhere.

* **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.

* **Languages:** The native language of the Free Emirates is Sandspeech. Humans must take it as their first language. Non-humans must pick Sandspeech as their second language.

* **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:** All the great cities are major coastal ports. Characters who make a successful Streetwise roll can locate a ship departing for one of the other Free Emirates 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).

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.

who must sweep the streets. In bad years, the rivers and irrigation channels become clogged, top soil is stripped bare, the temperature rises dramatically, and plague ravages the land.

Despite these natural events, the Free Emirates is as close to a verdant paradise as one can find. With a few notable exceptions the land along the major rivers is ideal for growing a wide variety of crops, while the plains in between are covered in scrub grass perfect for grazing livestock. Although the region is not a breadbasket, its cities rarely suffer famine.

Social Hierarchy

As part of the treaty drawn up in 22 CJ, it was decreed that the rulers of each of the six great cities would hold the title of emir. For over five centuries they have ruled as absolute masters of the six great cities, answerable to none one save their conscience, yet bound together by oaths to aid their neighbors should the need arise. Periodically, one of the emirs raises the subject of the titles, claiming they should be elevated to caliphs or sultans, so as to be equals in name and authority to the lords of the Caliphate and Sultanate,

but the motion never gains much support—most educated people know the Caliph and Sultan are largely figureheads, and that the other great cities are virtually as independent of central authority as those of the Free Emirates.

Save in Qurqas, City of Slaves, the titles wielded by the emirs' direct kin follow a set pattern. An emir's siblings and children are awarded the title of sirdar, nephews, nieces, and grandchildren hold the title pasha, and so on down the line until everyone is an effendi. As older family members die, so children are promoted up the ranks. Thus, an emir's grandchild may actually hold the same title as one of his uncles if his father is deceased (or otherwise passed on the title). Should the emirate change to an entirely different family, all kin of the old emir are reduced in status to honor nobles of the same rank as their blood titles. Regardless of their title, the emirs' direct kin are considered member of the *muk-battim* class.

In order to prevent a land grab that might lead to war, the charter accorded each emir all the land within 25 miles of the city. The emirs might enter into alliances with those outside their borders as they saw fit, but they were forbidden from claiming direct or indirect governance and imposing taxes. The garrisoning of soldiers outside the borders was deemed acceptable as part of individual agreements, but is subject to strict limits.

All others who chose to dwell in the Free Emirate States, or who already lived here, would be free to govern themselves as they saw fit. The sole condition was that they could not wield noble titles of emir or higher. Given the many benefits of an alliance with one of the emirs, it was considered a small price to pay.

While a sirdar from one of the great cities and a sirdar from outside a city might share equal title, they do not hold equal status. Over time, there has arisen an unspoken hierarchy, given superiority to the city nobility by dint of their (generally) greater political influence and financial wealth. Of course, such snobbery brings with it certain social and political complications. While a city sirdar might keep his rural equivalent waiting longer than decorum dictates for an audience, he would only seat him at a lower table during a feast if he meant deliberate insult.

Below the true nobles are the honor nobles. As elsewhere in Al-Shirkuh, they place their title after their given name, not before. In accordance with the great charter, only the highest authority within a domain may grant honor titles, and then only at a lesser rank than his own. Thus, an emir can create a honorary sirdar, but an independent pasha is limited to effendis. Naturally, an effendi cannot grant honor titles.

Honor titles are awarded for service. Military officers, clerics, senior bureaucrats, and perhaps even rich merchants are most likely to receive such titles. Whether or not a title comes with a land grant depends on the whims of the ruler, but in no case are titles or grants passed on. After death, they revert back to whoever awarded them. Similarly, the children of honor nobles are not automatically entitled to adopt a noble title.

Where a honor noble ranks socially depends on whom he is addressing. Lower classes typically defer to them as

if they were *shabrum* or *mak-shabrum*. True nobles, and the genuine upper classes, rate them depending on their profession, influence, and wealth. For instance, a bureaucrat awarded a minor title for 30 years loyal service is still just a small cog, and thus unlikely to be seen as anything better than a *jaleepa*. These are, of course, sweeping generalizations—individuals may be accorded higher or lower status, depending on other factors. A sycophantic military commander who said the right things to get noticed might not be shown the same level of respect as one renowned for his leadership and courage in battle, for example.

Even in cities where one creed is dominant, clerics and mages do not hold automatic social positions in the Free Emirates just because of their training. Instead, they are placed according to the same factors as everyone else. Thus, a lowly junior scribe in the cult of Qedeshet is a *jaleepa*, whereas a mage master alchemist is probably a *shabrum*. Due to their ability to wield supernatural powers, they are rarely ever found in the *harajam* class. Those fallen on hard times or who work in certain professions can be found among the *mushaf*, though.

Education

Another section of the great charter concerns education. The emirs agreed that all people, regardless of social class, creed, gender, or race, would be accorded the basic right of education. No universal standard was laid out, leaving the specifics to each city.

All children are required by law to undergo basic schooling. Although free, the quality of education varies immensely. The same laws that require children to attend school only dictate they do so for at least one hour. Depending on the needs of the family, children might attend for the bare minimum or the entire day. A full curriculum covers literacy and numeracy in Sandspeech, the native language of the Emirates, and the history, laws, and customs of their native city.

At the age of 12, a child either leaves education and begins work, or attends an intermediate school. These establishments bridge the gap between basic school and university, and are not free. While they do not teach any new subjects, they instruct students to a higher level. Most characters with Smarts d8+ are assumed to have been to intermediary school.

Schools are run by the state and avoid religious teachings. Instruction in religious practices is considered an extra-curriculum activity, and is not compulsory. For many children, such teachings come from their elders within the family, not temples or kadas.

Universities represent the pinnacle of education. Most are categorized as basic universities. They provide a grounding in specialized topics, such as foreign languages, geography, heraldry, history, law, or religion, but to no great depth. Advanced universities focus on one or two specific subjects, and provide a higher level of understanding. Counted among the universities are trade schools, places

where those seeking a career in a useful trade may be sent by their masters (if already accepted as apprentices) or parents. Most universities are secular, even if they have clerics, mages, or imams on their staff, though there are noted exceptions. A university catering to the study of magic will accept Faithful students, but only for generic classes, such as topics covered by Knowledge (Arcana). Specific magic classes, such as golem creation or spirit binding, are closed to them. Similarly, a school that provides deeper knowledge of a cult or clerical practices will not permit Devoted students to enrol. There is a middle ground—a university dedicated to the study of alchemy will accept both Devoted and Faithful, though students are naturally segregated as the methods employed are vastly different.

More on universities and how they can be utilized during by characters during play can be found in *Realm Guide #19*. Typically, player characters cannot pick up most Knowledge skills without some form of advanced education or extensive traveling. 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

When the first wave of refugees fleeing the War of Copper Jars crossed over the mountains, they found flourishing temples and cults to the old gods. Here the jinn held no dominance, the Anari did not enforce worship of their foreign deities, and the gods had not forsaken the races. Unfortunately, the old faith, while it honored the same gods, did not tally with the new faith, which was built around the teachings of Suleiman as the bringer of a new age of worship and enlightenment.

Had the new Faithful not been possessed of righteous fervor and evangelical zeal, their might have been two versions of the Faithful creed coexisting. Having endured the centuries of isolation and cruel lash of the jinn and witnessed firsthand the authority of Suleiman, who spoke for all the gods, the new creed was not about to roll over and play dead. Within a few short years, teachings that had been passed down the generations for millennia had either been swept aside in favor of new ones, or absorbed into the resurrected Faithful creed.

Although they followed the basic teachings Suleiman laid down regarding the returned gods, the new cults did not bow before the Caliph when he rose to power a decade after the foundation of the Free Emirate States. They did not accept Shamash as highest among equals, for Suleiman has been a cleric of all the benevolent gods, and thus they were all of equal status. Bound by the great charter (see below), they did not officially side with him during the wars against the Sultanate, though they spoke out against the Sultans and their religious intolerance.

For nigh on two centuries the cults of the Emirates and Caliphate were engaged in a series of bitter disputes over what was canonical and what was heresy. It was only in 193

MILITARY UNITS OF THE EMIRATES

INFANTRY & ARCHERS

Sandspeech Name	Personnel	Commanded By
Patrol	10	Corporal
Squad	20	Under-Sergeant
Platoon	60	Sergeant
Company	120	Captain
Regiment	240	Regiment-Captain
Legion	480	Commander

CAVALRY

Sandspeech Name	Personnel	Commanded By
Squad	5	Sergeant
Company	50	Captain
Wing	250	Commander

CJ that an agreement was finally reached. First, Shamash would be patron of the Caliphate, but his cult would enjoy no special favors in the Free Emirates. Second, the cults of the Emirates would remove practices considered heretical (because they were based on older versions of the gods) and adopt a standard canon. Third, the Faithful of the Emirates would answer to the decrees of the high priests in Hajjad, City of the Gods, but not the Caliph, who they saw as a temporal ruler rather than a divine spokesman. Fourth, the cults of the Emirates would be bound to the dictates of their emirs, and would take no sides in any wars in foreign lands.

In terms of playing an Emirate cleric, the basic Faithful teachings as detailed in *Realm Guide #20* hold true.

THE DEVOTED

For the first century of its existence, Devoted were a minority in the Free Emirate States. By 80 CJ it was obvious the growth of the creed was not going to be reversed. To ensure that the "Free" part of the Emirates' name was not a token nod to equality, the great charter was amended to forbid persecution or restriction of office based on creed (not that this was ever a problem). Not even the position of emir was exempt from the change to the law. Naturally, there were common sense exemptions—the cults were not required to hire Devoted, for instance, though they could not refuse to sell services or goods to them.

It should be noted that the emergent Faithful creed, for all their zeal, never attempted to erase worship of the gods of Rassilon, nor persecute the Devoted creed. Scholars have argued that this tolerance came about because, unlike the Caliphate, the Free Emirates was not born from bloody origins. There were certainly arguments between the two creeds, but a common understanding was quickly reached. It cannot be said that Suleiman's vision has truly been achieved, or the two sides are still poles apart, but it is perhaps the closest the creeds will ever achieve.

The Devoted creed is explored in *Realm Guide #19*.

Military

Every city is responsible for its own military forces. No legal limits exist on the size of army an emir may maintain, though few can afford, or have need, to be excessive. As part of the founding agreement, every city is sworn to defend the others should one come under attack. In 500 years, the cities have worked together only once—during Rawdah's era as a corsair base. Land invasion is unlikely. Even if there was a neighboring hostile state, the mountains are a natural barrier with only a single, easily defended pass, and Qurqas, the sole city exposed to possible land invasion, is very well defended. The threat of six separate naval fleets working to a common cause is a strong deterrent against invasion from the sea.

Not wishing to have their nobles gang up on them, the emirs have all placed strict limits on how many troops nobles under their authority may permanently maintain. That figure is fixed at one company for effendis, two for pashas, and four for sirdars. To pacify the nobles, the emirs' personal forces are responsible for protecting the greater territory, not just the bits they directly rule. Should the need arise, the emir can commandeer these forces into his personal army.

Similar restrictions apply to the cults. No cult may have more than one full company of soldiers within the boundaries of any city. This number includes faden and paladins. Only the cult of Karmelos comes anywhere close to this number—most others maintain only enough to provide security at the temples.

Every settlement may maintain a militia for day-to-day protection. No more than 3% of the population may be enlisted as militia except in times of war. Most have far fewer than this. Should the call to arms be issued by an emir, every adult male citizen capable of carrying a spear is expected to answer.

INFANTRY AND CAVALRY

The cities of the Free Emirates have developed a common military organization structure. The basic infantry unit is the 10 man patrol, which is led by a corporal. The names, personnel, and commanding officer ranks of larger units are shown on the table above. Cavalry use fewer names and ranks. All units bear a number, rather than names. Within the First Legion, for instance, there is a First and Second Regiment. Each of these regiments has a First and Second Company, and so on.

All soldiers within a company are always of the same specific type. One never finds light and heavy infantry, for example, grouped together in smaller units. Regiments may be made up of different company types, and legions may contain permanently attached cavalry units of varying sizes. For instance, a legion might comprise one medium infantry regiment, a regiment broken down into one heavy infantry and one archer company, and

three cavalry companies. Whenever infantry and cavalry are mixed, the highest ranking infantry officer always has superiority. Troop shortages often mean that legions are not at basic full strength (two infantry regiments).

Corporals, under-sergeants and sergeants are junior officers. Often of low social class, they have worked their way up the ranks through long service, courage in battle, leadership skills, or a combination of all three. Captains may be former sergeants, but many are true nobles. It is rare for a commoner to advance to the rank of regiment-captain or commander, but it has been known.

Regardless of its size and composition, a general has overall command of a city's entire military force. Except in times of war, they remain at court, where they hold the position of wizar.

NAVY

The Free Emirates is a maritime nation, and every city maintains a navy. Regardless of size, every vessel is commanded by a captain. Ships are usually grouped into squadrons of 3-5 ships, and are led by a squadron captain. Commanding the entire fleet is an admiral. Much like his land-based counterpart, he spends much of his time at court rather than in the field.

Law & Order

As with everything else, law and order is handled at a city level, with no central authority. That said, to prevent chaos, the emirs drew up a list of what would constitute a crime in all the cities. Punishments, however, would be left to the individual emirs. Thus, what may carry a hefty fine in one city might warrant public flogging or even slavery in another. The fact that one does not necessarily know the punishments within a city is not an excuse for law breaking—a crime is still a crime. In order to prevent corruption, punishments are enshrined in local law.

Communication within the Caliphate and Sultanate is fairly slow. Unless his crime is particularly heinous, a wanted criminal in one city might be able to evade capture for months, years, or even escape punishment altogether simply by moving to a different city. In the Free Emirates, escaping justice is much harder. Not only is communication faster due to the cities being less distant from each other, but there exists an organization known as the Far-Reaching Hand.

An independent body operating under a charter signed by all six cities, they are funded by charging for their unique services. Unlike the city guard, their powers extend only to criminals trying to evade justice or who have escaped before sentence can be carried out, and they can only arrest persons for whom an arrest warrant has been drawn up. They are legally entitled to carry out death sentences on the spot, providing the punishment has been sanctioned by a recognized court. They are not immune from prosecution should they commit murder,

though. Their rates are high (as are their success levels), and they are rarely deployed to track down petty law breakers—their quarry are necromancers, murderers, traitors, and the like.

The Watch

Policing works differently than in the other great civilized realms. With the threat of attack almost negligible, and to save money on employing, training, and overseeing two separate forces, the city guard and the city watch are the same entity. Soldiers are assigned to watch or guard duties on a rotating basis. This is bad news for criminals—unlike most watchmen, those in the Emirates are professional soldiers.

The Courts

When the watch makes an arrest, criminals are thrown in jail to wait their day in court. Within the great cities and large towns, justice is dispensed by separate courts.

Civil, criminal, and religious offences that do not carry slavery or death as punishments are handled by the Low Court. With regard religious crimes, the presiding judge must also be learned in the tenets of both creeds as well as the law. A single judge hears evidence from both sides, accepts testimony from eyewitnesses, and listens to character witnesses before deciding on a verdict.

The High Court deals with all civil, criminal, and religious matters where slavery or death may be imposed. This court is presided over by the highest ranking noble in the territory the crime was committed. Since the emirs are busy people, they are permitted to delegate this power to one of their wizens. Whereas the Low Court sits daily, those whose crimes require a sitting of the High Court may languish in jail for weeks or even months before their trial. Conditions in jail are tough—unless one has sufficient wealth to bribe the guards, rations are meager and sanitation is poor.

Serving soldiers whose crime falls purely under military law, such as desertion, mutiny, or refusing to obey a lawful order, face the Court Martial. Officers holding the rank of captain or higher have the right to trial in the High Court should they so wish, regardless of the seriousness of their crimes. A panel of two captains chosen by lot and a civilian judge overhear the case. Only the judge determines innocence or guilt—the officers are merely advisors. The Court Martial has the authority to dispense slavery and death sentences.

Although punishments are based on Suleiman's writings, the courts are secular bodies, meaning no cleric or imam may sit on the bench. Those directly involved in the case have the legal right to appoint an advocate to speak on their behalf. Professional advocates may be civilians versed in the law, but are more likely to be clerics or imams. Learned they may be, but their services are not cheap. For most, an advocate is simply a friend who

NEW PROFESSIONAL EDGE

FAR-REACHING HAND*

Requirements: Novice, Fighting d6+, Investigation d6+, Notice d6+, Streetwise d6+, Tracking d6+

The Far-Reaching Hand is an independent Emirate-wide police force charged with tracking down and bringing wanted criminals to justice.

While they have the power to execute wanted criminals sentenced to death by the court, most must be brought back alive and unharmed so that their punishment can be meted out. They ignore the -1 penalty to Fighting rolls for inflicting nonlethal damage with an edged weapon.

In addition, they are well versed in getting information out of people and in following tracks left by those fleeing justice. They have +2 to Streetwise and Tracking rolls.

** Characters who take this Edge during character generation gains the Connection Edge and Orders Hindrance regarding the organization for free.*

happens to know something about the law or, more likely, has enough charisma to make a good impression on the judge.

Despite claims that the courts offer equal justice for all, social standing, influence, charisma, and popularity all play a part in whether the accused is found guilty or innocent. Money helps as well—judges can be swayed toward a verdict by a suitable bribe. Defendants caught red-handed by the city guard rarely receive a lengthy trial. A list of crimes and punishments can be found in *Realm Guide #20*.

APPEALS

Under law, every criminal has the right to appeal his sentence directly to the emir. Every month, the emirs set aside one day for this purpose. Only a small number of cases are heard in each sitting. Those who seek to delay punishment by demanding an appeal are usually in for a rude shock. First, the dungeons are filthy places, and one is just as likely to die from disease or an infected rat bite as from the headsman's sword. Second, if the appeal is unsuccessful, the punishment is increased for wasting the emir's valuable time. For those facing death, the misery is augmented by torture before sentence is carried out.

Magic, Miracles, & Law

Despite both major creeds being treated as equals in the Free Emirates, clerics and mages do not have the right to cast powers in public as they see fit. As the old saying goes, with great power comes greater responsibility.

With regard the law, a spellcaster who uses arcane powers to perpetrate a crime is charged not only for the mundane crime, but also for misuse of magic (a term that covers magic and miracles equally). For instance, if a cleric or mage kills someone using a *bolt* spell, he faces charges of murder and misuse of magic. Given that the mundane crime is extremely serious, the second charge will be elevated to gross misuse, bringing with it a heavier punishment, even if it is a first offense.

What actually constitutes misuse of magic is open to interpretation, and the guard and courts employ common sense when dealing with spellcasters accused of causing trouble or breaking laws. As a rule of thumb, unless there is an actual victim of wrongdoing or obvious crime, no crime has been committed. Spells like *boost Streetwise* may appear to give mages an unfair advantage in haggling, but unless the target is using the power for criminal purposes, it is no different to him having a naturally high charisma (such as through the Charismatic Edge). This does not mean spellcasters won't be approached by the guard and ordered to cancel any Maintained spells—in the same way that wearing armor and carrying weapons attracts attention, so does having any form of showy magic.

Clerics are permitted to employ miracles within the confines of a temple, for these are tools they wield in daily life. Again, common sense is applied. No one in their right mind would complain that a priest of Marqod cast *healing*, for instance, but charges will be levelled against a paladin of Geb-Agni who strikes you with a *bolt* for no good reason. Mages are accorded the same respect within their homes or in schools catering to their art. In both instances, care must be taken not to annoy one's neighbors—practising *blast* in your backyard will have the guard banging on your door in short order.

The summoning of elementals and jinn is a special case. While it is unusual to see one walking around, these creatures are not prohibited by law. However, since these summoned entities have only a temporary presence in the realm of mortals—and few guardsmen would care to try and arrest an ifrit or fire elemental—any crimes they commit are automatically commuted to the summoner, along with a charge of misuse of magic.

Worship of Iblis is forbidden, as is membership in any cult of a minor deity associated with the god of chaos or the demon princes. Khem-hekau mages are tolerated, but their spells are not. Parading around town with a cloak of swirling spirits (*deflection*) or bone *armor* will result in a swift visit from the authorities, not to mention clerics of Shamash and Tammuz. Employing *zombie* in a civilized realm is sure to end up with charges of necromancy being brought against the mage.

In social situations, people tend to react with a mix of suspicion and fear if a spellcaster is obviously Maintaining a spell. The key word here is "obviously." Trappings vary immensely, and while one cleric might have glowing *armor* that few could miss, a mage using the same spell might have magically hardened clothing that would pass as conventional garb except to *detect arcana*.

Trade & Tribute

Until trade opened with Rassilon, the Free Emirate States was an economic backwater. Ships sailed between the six great cities and caravans carried cargoes to and from the Caliphate, Sultanate, and Kingdoms. But economically the cities had little to offer these distant nations save for luxuries few could afford.

Trade with Rassilon made the Emirates a major economic power overnight. Until then, the Caliphate and Sultanate had only two choices, and neither was popular. Goods coming by caravans using the Northern Trade Road had to travel thousands of miles at a laborious pace. The Sphinxes offered a maritime route, but their merchants charged handsomely. The Emirates quickly realized that by charging minimal taxes on imports from Rassilon, it could claim a sizeable chunk of the market. As an added bonus, the goods imported through the Emirates were markedly different to those carried by the Bedu or Sphinx caravans.

Internally, there are only a few minor trade roads. The great cities are all built on the sea or major rivers, and ships can carry more cargo than caravans and reach market faster. All but one of the major rivers, the Mosak, is navigable, making them effective trading highways. Externally, there is only the Free Trade Road, which runs from Qurqas, City of Slaves, to Clearwater Oasis, where it joins the great road and well traveled trade network that stretches north, east, and south.

As befits their independent status, the emirs have full control over all taxation within their domains. Various agreements signed over the centuries ensure that trade is not stymied by fixing import and export duties at reasonable levels, though the ambassadors from the Caliphate and Sultanate are always pushing for lower rates.

All Faithful are expected to tithe 10% of their income. This is considered a legal, moral, and spiritual obligation. Failure to do so can result not only in fines for tax avoidance, but being excommunicated. Of this sum, 75% goes to the cult of the Faithful's patron deity, and 25% is divided among the other cults equally. Citizens can offset some or all of the annual demand by donating throughout the year. All donations are given a receipt, which the citizen hands in with his tithe to explain any shortfall. Both goods and services are accepted in lieu of hard coin. Devoted are under no legal obligation to tithe, though generosity is considered a core part of the creed. Most voluntarily pay between 5% and 10% to a kada, maktab, or worthy cause.

Major Locales

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

CASTLE OF MADNESS

Overlooking the caravanserai that protects Wind Pass is a crumbling Anari fortress. Far more defensible than the tiny outpost occupied by Qina's soldiers, it is avoided by all who travel the high road. The Bedu of the western Great Northern Desert have a legend that has been passed down the generations since the days when the Anari held power. Around their campfires they speak of how the entire garrison went mad. Some soldiers leapt from the walls to their deaths far below; others clawed out their eyes or thrust daggers into their ears, turned on their comrades like wild beasts, or simply entered a state of shock so deep that they died from dehydration.

Despite the warnings, a few Bedu each year dare to spend a night in the castle as a sign of their bravery. Of those who emerge, most never speak of their ordeal—the look in their eyes is enough to say they suffered for their foolhardiness. Others whisper of unearthly piping drifting up through the lower levels, screams of madness that reverberate from the walls and claw at one's sanity, and terrifying nightmares involving black tentacles and hungry maws. Few are ever the same again, and none have any wish to return to the lonely, empty castle.

The cause remains open to conjecture, as does the date of the initial incident. Scholars who have studied the castle estimate it was constructed around -198 CJ, a few decades after the invasion. When it was abandoned is anyone's guess. A small minority insist the legend is fictitious, and that any visions or sounds endured by visitors are figments of an imagination fed on repeated tellings of the grisly tale. Some say the Anari angered a greater khamsin, the spirit of the mountain rose up against the invaders, or the undead masters of Hekata laid a curse on the pass after their last invasion was halted.

CASTLE OF ROT

High on the western slopes of the Dusty Mountains stands a crumbling castle of Hekatic design. The site has long been considered tainted, and despite its prominent position it lay abandoned until the Anari invasion. Seeing sense in saving money and time by using an already built structure, they ignored the "superstitious and barbaric locals," and promptly garrisoned the fort. Almost immediately things began to go wrong. Soldiers succumbed to disease that rotted their flesh with preternatural speed, biting flies swarmed the site in great clouds, and food spoiled at a rate that made it impossible to keep the castle supplied. Within a year, the castle was abandoned.

Locals claim the Anari uncovered a secret cache of gold and gems. In trying to steal it, they brought down a terrible curse. Stories of treasure still circulate, and treasure hunters still make sporadic forays. Unfortunately, never have they ever returned, so whether the stories are true or not remains unknown.

Unbeknownst to the Anari, the castle was actually a temple. Long ago, Hekatic clerics of Marqod battled a mighty demonic minion of Steriklus (see *Region Guide*

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#45: *The Abyss*), demon lord of decay. Unable to destroy it or banish it back to the Bottomless Pit, they imprisoned it in the earth and constructed a temple over its remains. Golden ankhs, symbols of life, were embedded in the walls to prevent the demon from escaping. Each contained a powerful spell, fuelled by a relic hidden in a secret chamber.

Unfortunately, most of the ankhs were removed by greedy soldiers, allowing the demon to escape its immediate prison and move throughout the castle. It cannot escape into the wider world until the relic, which it can neither touch or destroy, is carried across the threshold of the main gates by a willing volunteer of good heart.

The castle-temple is a cesspit of corruption. Pus drips from the walls, the floor is coated in congealed blood, swarms of flies attack all who enter, diseased corpses (the remains of trespassers) wander the halls and corridors, and deep in the cellars lurks a very powerful and frustrated demon of disease and decay.

THE EMPEROR'S LOST MINE

Stories of lost mines are two a dirham in Al-Shirkuh, and the Free Emirate States is no exception. Few common people believe the Anari launched a major—and costly—invasion purely to acquire new slaves for their distant estates. The lure that brought them to the sands was undoubtedly the rich precious stones and scarcer gold and silver deposits found beneath the western flanks of the Dusty Mountains.

The basic story of the emperor's lost mine follows a standard pattern—a powerful lord extracts great wealth from a secret mine, the location to which is subsequently lost due to some terrible event. In this case, it was the collapse of the Anari Empire.

As for the state of the mine, stories vary. One version has it that the mine was worked by golems. Without orders to stop, they have toiled undisturbed for 500 years. This story has so many similarities to that of the pharaoh's lost mine (see *Realm Guide #4*) that it may simply be a new version of an old story. Then again, the Anari were very fond of employing golems for manual labor. Even if they used human miners, it is quite likely golems served as guards to prevent gems being smuggled out. Others say the mine was completely abandoned, leaving rich veins untapped, or collapsed during an earthquake.

The Anari actually opened dozens of mines in the mountains. Those seeking to reopen them face a big problem—the region has been extensively worked by various cultures down the ages, and there are literally hundreds of abandoned and worked out mines.

THE IRON CRYPT

Storytellers in every city tell a version of the legend of the Iron Crypt. Locations vary, but every version has familiar features—a crypt for some ancient king (or dynasty of kings); walls, floors, and ceilings covered in iron plates, and fabulous treasure. No story would be com-

plete without danger, of course, and the various iterations of the tale of the Iron Crypt have plenty of hazards. Electrical shocks that pass along the metal lined walls; scything blades, tipping floors, and crushing walls; and an army of iron golems patiently waiting to pound tomb robbers into bloody pulp.

Most of the stories are gross exaggerations of a simple truth—the crypts are merely the final resting places of Anari nobles laid to eternal rest with iron weapons and armor. At the time, these were a rarity outside the Jinn Lands, for it was the jinn who first brought the art of iron working to Al-Shirkuh.

ISLE OF GIANTS

Set sail from Maqneh, City of Peace, and head west until the sun touches the horizon ahead of you, and you should spy a large island. Almost lost in the dense jungle is a paved avenue flanked by gigantic statues of mundane domesticated and wild animals. The beasts are arranged in pairs and carved as if walking. Follow the road into the interior, and it ends abruptly in a pile of rubble that has slid down the side of a large hill. Discovering whether the road passes through some portal, and maybe descends into the bowels of the earth, would require months of backbreaking labor.

The island is named for the scale of the statues. Not for the monuments themselves, but for the supposed carvers—were humans scaled up to be in proportion to the creatures, they would be over 40 feet tall. Whether the builders were truly giants or just built on a huge scale is unknown, for no trace of any civilization has ever been discovered. Weathered and cracked by time, and damaged by vines, there is no trace of inscription or recognizable artistic style. The other unanswered questions are what do the procession represent, and to what are they walking?

MOUND OF A THOUSAND KINGS

Before the Anari founded the great cities, before even the jinn walked the mortal realm, the land now known as the Free Emirates was home to a number of disparate tribes and petty kingdoms. Among these was the Kingdom of Amjad. All that remains of the culture today is a single enormous hill of artificial origin.

The mound, which stands over 600 feet high and covers half a mile in diameter, began as a lone mastaba tomb, the eternal resting place of King Amjad, the kingdom's semi-legendary founder. Successive generations of royalty, nobles, and well-to-do citizens deigned to be buried near the hallowed spot. New tombs were built next to, and later above, the original multi-roomed royal mastaba. Within a few generations, the site was a vertical and horizontal necropolis. Scholars disdain the site's name, whose origin lies with storytellers, for it is likely less than a dozen kings were ever interred here.

No records have yet been unearthed describing what fate befell the kingdom or when, but its death knell duly

sounded and its name became just another footnote in the history of Al-Shirkuh. Over time, sand covered the outer and lower mud-brick tombs, while the wind and sun caused the upper levels to crumble to dust, so creating the towering hill visible today.

Tomb robbers have plundered many of the outer mastabas, and several exploratory tunnels were hacked deep into the interior. No-one has yet discovered the final resting place of King Amjad. Indeed, only one royal tomb has been unearthed to date, and that was a king near the dynasty's end, and yielded little treasure. Despite the risk of collapse brought about by robber tunnels weakening walls and the weight of the upper levels and sand, not to mention the threat of undead, robbers still make occasional forays into the interior in search of treasure.

SPIRES OF AMSHAD

The Doom of Amshad is a popular tale in the coffee houses and taverns of the Free Emirates. Almost every citizen has heard of the great city, which stood below sea level a day's sail off the coast.

It is said the city was created by the gods, though Devoted legends point to a magician of immense power. To stop the city being flooded, it was surrounded by a great dike, which had but one gate. Each day at low tide, the king, who held the only key, opened the gate to allow water from the river to flow into the sea and merchant ships to enter the harbor. He would then lock it tight again as the sea level began to rise.

The citizens worshipped all the gods save Iblis, whose name they would not even speak, for they were a pure people who knew nought of anger, greed, or pride. Duly angered, the dark god seduced the king's daughter into stealing the key. While the inhabitants slept, Iblis opened the gate at high tide, allowing the sea to submerge the city, save for its highest spires. Devoted legends speak of a powerful and wicked marid who claimed ownership of the surrounding sea, and was affronted that the city was constructed without asking his permission.

Those who think to dismiss the tale need only sail west for a day. Protruding from the water are the top floors of great stone towers. Entrance is easy enough through a window or where tiles have slipped into the ocean. While the interior is largely dry, everything of value has long since been plundered.

The rest of the city is flooded. While any books or tapestries are long destroyed, gold, silver, and precious jewels remain largely untouched by time and tide. Retrieving them is not easy, though. The lowest level of the drowned city is home to a kreana colony, and they dislike trespassers from the world of air-breathers (except as a meal or sacrifice).

TOMBS OF THE THIEF LORDS

Sirhan's fabulous wealth has given rise not only to open warfare between its thieves' guilds—it has spawned a very popular local myth.

THE CLOTHES ON ONE'S BACK

Purely for simplicity, *Hellfrost* lists clothing as three categories—normal (covering everything from peasant garb to work outfits to soldiers' uniforms), formal (best outfits for peasants and everyday garb for nobles and the upper-class), and tailored (best dress for nobles and upper-class, usually worn in court, and daily ware for emirs). For those interested in more detail, some basic garments are described below.

Note that apart from donning prayer robes when attending a kada or temple, neither creed places demands on how someone should dress—that is determined by social status, profession, wealth, and personal taste. A man in women's clothing would raise a few eyebrows, however.

Agal: A cord worn to keep one's *keffiyeh* in place.

Bedlah: A belly dancer's costume—bra, headband, jewelry (optional), skirt, pants, and veil.

Bisht: A man's woolen cloak. Usually black, brown, gray, or beige. Typically worn only for special occasions, though among Bedu it is worn by many nobles on a daily basis as a mark of their office.

Burqa: An outer garment worn by women to conceal their entire bodies. A veil covers the eyes, but can be rolled up to reveal one's upper face.

Fez: A felt hat, shaped either like a truncated cone or a short cylinder. A tassel is attached to the top.

Hijab: A veil that covers the head and chest but leaves the face exposed. Worn only by women.

Izaar: A light, thin, kilt-like garment.

Jellabiya: Similar to the *thawb*, but has no collar, a wider cut, and longer sleeves. The sleeves can be sewn into pockets for storing small items.

Jilbaab: A generic term for any long, loose-fitting coat worn by women. Covers the entire body except for the head, face, and hands.

Kaftan: Ankle-length, long-sleeved, front-buttoned coat or overdress tied at the waist.

Keffiyeh: A headdress. Among Bedu, each tribe wears the same color and pattern. Sand hoods are heavier, thicker versions. Can be worn loose and held in place by an *agal*, or wrapped into a turban.

Sirwal: Baggy pants. Available in long or short.

Tantour: A cone-shaped woman's headdress. Attached to the peak is a white veil, which can be used to cover one's face. Height and decoration is a sign of one's social class—those of the highest nobility are made of gold and encrusted with precious stones.

Taqiyah: A short, round cap.

Thawb: Ankle-length, long-sleeved garment worn by men. Out of modesty, an *izaar* is normally worn underneath.

Turban: A head covering. Some are long scarves which must be manually wound. Others are knotted or pinned, allowing one to remove it easily.

The stories go that somewhere outside the city (or inside, accounts vary) is a secret necropolis. Buried within are the mortal remains of the city's thief lords of old. No treasure lies within, but there is wealth to be had. Before he died, each thief lord hid his treasure, recording its location on an amulet to be placed around his corpses' neck. Anyone who could retrieve an amulet would be the rightful inheritor of the owner's fortune. Of course, the number and lethality of the traps in the tomb complex has thwarted any such inheritance to this day.

The stories have several holes. For instance, no storyteller can explain why Faithful thief lords did not choose to be buried with their treasure. Concealing multiple treasures would not be easy. Certainly the workers could have been killed to hide the location of one stash, maybe two, but to do so several times seems most unlikely.

The origin of the story lies far back in time, to the days of Anari rule. Fragments learned by successive generations of storytellers were heavily modified, transforming them into the largely unbelievable story heard by audiences today. There is but one tomb and just a single thief lord, but he does have a fabulous treasure concealed inside his trap-laden crypt.

TREASURY OF THE JINN

Talk of a jinn treasury first came to light not in the days immediately after Suleiman's revolt, but two centuries later. Although variations exist, the basic story is identical. As arrogant as they were, the noble jinn saw fit to hide their most precious treasures on the off chance the slaves plundered them. To that end, the fabulous wealth was taken beyond the edge of the Jinn Lands and concealed. Obviously the jinn meant to reclaim it when the war was won, but that, as history records, never happened. The stories diverge on two important facts—the location of the treasure, and the nature of the treasure.

Almost every land is mentioned, but many modern versions agree the Dusty Mountains are the most likely location. The obvious reason for this choice is because the peaks were not far from the border. These days, they are popular because the higher ground is inhabited by orcs, making exploration dangerous.

As for the nature of the treasure, that varies between precious metals and gems, knowledge, works of art, magic relics, and objects fashioned in Jinnistan. Just to ensure every aspect of the audience remains interested, storytellers often ask their listeners what they think might be included in the haul. They then confirm or deny these "facts" based on their believability and credibility.

After this the stories converge again, for after tempting audiences with talk of wealth beyond imagination storytellers must warn them off trying to recover the great wealth. Every tale makes mention of deadly traps, both magical and mundane, of cunning design; of tireless guardians tasked with slaying all intruders; and of terrible curses that can inflict generations of a thief's family. No one has ever seen the treasury, but if it exists, then all these hazards are likely to exist in great numbers.

PERSONS OF NOTE

JAZIRA THE BEGGAR

Jazira appears as nothing more than an elderly beggar. Those who provide her with generous charity are rewarded with a blessing that soon proves beneficial. For example, she may say something like, "May the fates roll in your favor." The next time the person gambles, fate indeed rewards him with a generous win. In game terms, the person receives a benny that can only be spent on something very specific as indicated by her blessing.

Most people do not even notice she has rewarded them—all beggars say similar things to those who give them a few coins in the hope they will be generous in the future. A few suspect she might be an eccentric cleric of Tamarni rewarding charitable souls with good fortune. Those who deliberately seek her in an attempt to pay for good fortune never find her.

Each of the six great cities claims a Jazira the Beggar. Whether it is the same woman or a name used by different women with similar powers is unknown.

ROCHAD AP-GUIDAN

An Anari who came to the Free Emirates in the hopes of earning a fortune, Rochad soon fell into poverty. To survive, he has resorted to what can only be called upper-class begging. He never spins his tales of fictitious woe to natives of Rassilon, lest they spot the obvious lies.

Rochad changes the name of his homeland regularly, but it is always somewhere off the beaten track. He has a battery of hard luck stories prepared—a nobleman usurped by a wicked uncle, a skald whose greatest work was stolen by a jealous rival who promptly accused Rochad of copying it, or a farmer wrongly outlawed so that a powerful noble could steal this wife.

Whatever his alias, he has a well rehearsed excuse prepared as to why he cannot demonstrate any particular skill. As a skald, for example, he has vowed not to tell any stories until he has restored his reputation. His guise as a mage won't use any magic until he has found his master's murderer. He has contingencies ready for specific circumstances as well. If, for instance, he realizes that those he is mooching from are themselves spellcasters, his mage guise isn't looking for a murderer. Instead, he was robbed of his arcane powers by a cursed relic fostered on him by an enemy or had them stolen by a demon whose cult he helped defeat. These lies not only give him a sob story; they explain why *detect arcana* reveals him to be lacking any supernatural power.

In return for telling his story, all he asks is a hot meal and a few drinks, and maybe a little loose change. Naturally, he is prepared to accept more charity if offered. Rochad travels between the six cities regularly (and usually for free) so as to lessen the chances of running into the same marks twice.

MAQNEH

City of Peace

Maqneh's long history of diplomacy has made it the unofficial capital of the Free Emirate States. Within its walls, all manner of deals and negotiations that affect the lives of millions of citizens across Al-Shirkuh take place of a daily basis. On the surface, it is a city of enlightened understanding and peaceful cooperation. Below the surface, it is a city of double-dealing, political maneuvering, and treachery.

Social Hierarchy

Emir Yusef's family has ruled over the city in an unbroken line stretching back to before the birth of the Free Emirates. Under the Anari, they held the position of mayor, and governed the city on behalf of the imperial governor. When the Anari withdrew their nobles and soldiers, the mayor stepped in to prevent the city descending into chaos as a result of the sudden power vacuum. Declaring himself emir, he steered the city toward self-rule and its neighbors toward the foundation of a new political state.

Emir Yusef's ancestors would be ashamed of his recent actions. Though not all were good or wise men, each and every one of them put duty to the city before personal matters. As a result of his being lovestruck, several important foreign dignitaries have been snubbed. It is only the skillful intervention of the grand wizar, Pasha Nasir, that has prevented the situation from worsening. Nasir knows he must act soon, but he is also very aware that his plan comes with great risks. While it may refocus the emir on his appointed task, it might also send him plunging into a depression from which he may never recover.

Maqneh's nobles hold power in two ways. First, noble blood is still considered more important than education or talent when it comes to positions of authority. One can train a man to lead, of course, but leadership has flowed through the veins of the nobility for centuries, and titles carry great weight. Thus, it tends to be nobles who run the major bureaucratic ministries and hold other important government offices. Their titles and positions also grant them access to foreign officials, allowing them to broker private deals to increase their influence and wealth. Second, their country estates are rich farmland, and cereals are the city's main export.

The emir's strange behavior has not gone unnoticed by the nobility. Rumors abound he is sick of body or mind, and that his days on the mortal realm may be numbered. As he is unmarried and without issue, the title would pass to one of his relatives. With no named heir,

the various houses are courting several likely candidates so as to boost their chances of promotion within the court should their candidate ascend the throne.

Snobbery courses through the upper- and middle-classes. Whereas the citizens of Qurqas, City of Slaves, crave physical artifacts like pottery and tapestries from foreign lands as a means of displaying their wealth and cosmopolitan nature, those in Maqneh are cultural snobs. They adopt foreign fashions and words, listen to songs and stories from distant lands, eat foreign food, and make sure everyone knows that they are friends with, or at least entertained, a visitor from some far away land.

What everyone, regardless of social class, lacks is security. Social promotion brings with it increased influence and wealth, and competition is fierce. While most laborers and farmers won't ever rise above *barajam* status, for those with a skill there is always hope. Those lower down the social ladder look up at their superiors with envy as they quietly plot their removal. A small few do resort to treachery or violence, but most often it is hard work and getting your name and face known in the right circles that give one a much needed boost. Naturally, those higher up the ladder strive to prevent this from happening. There are only so many positions at court, in the bureaucracy, or in the military, and every time someone moves up, someone else must move down, sideways, or out.

THE EMIRS' COUNCIL

The Emirs' Council deals with matters concerning the Free Emirate States as a whole. Despite its name, the six emirs rarely sit in session, leaving that up to their ambassadors (though they must sign any treaties in person). The council convenes only when summoned, a privilege every emir and ambassador has. This was last invoked several months back, when a nobleman from Rassilon requested military support in a war (see *Thegn Siegwulf Arnlaksunu*, p.18. Reaching any unilateral decision requires intense politics—although bonded by charter, each city still looks after its own interests first.

Education

Everyone in Maqneh understands the importance of a good education, and parents are keen to take advantage of free schooling. True, most children are destined to fill the lower echelons of society, but education offers the faint glimmer of a better life for those prepared to study hard. Rural children receive less education. Typically,

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Maqneh.

* **Food:** Food is plentiful and cheap, though mainly vegetarian. Cheap meals cost 0.5 dirhams, average meals 2 dirhams, and expensive meals 2+ dinars.

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

Diplomacy: For one skill point, a character may take one skill from Knowledge (Heraldry), Knowledge (Law), or Persuasion at d6, two at d4, or choose to be fluent in any two languages from Al-Waziran, Anari, Beduan, Holy Tongue, Sphinx, or Trader. A maximum of one skill point may be spent on this perk.

* **Weapons & Armor:** Only the city guard, paladins, nobles, and embassy staff may legally carry weapons. Illegal weapons cost three times normal, or ten times normal if the wielder requires a forged permit. There are no weapon shops in the city. Armor is available, but costs 20% more than normal.

Characters openly carrying weapons, even if sheathed or hooded, will be stopped at least once a day and asked to produce their permits. Carrying a weapon without a permit is punishable by a 500 dinar fine, confiscation of the weapon, and enforced slavery for up to 3 years.

they are in full-time education between the ages of 5 and 8, with older children receiving schooling during the hot summer months, when little can be done in the fields.

Though Sandspeech is the official language of the Free Emirate States, virtually every major civilized tongue from Al-Shirkuh and Rassilon can be heard on the streets of Maqneh. Children are not taught any of these during basic schooling, but most citizens know a few words or simple phrases in several tongues. Many of these are curses, something every child is quick to pick up.

Maqneh has two universities—the Free Emirate States University and the Diplomatic College. The former is a basic institution offering a wide range of courses. Unless a student desires to learn a subject not taught at the more prestigious, and specialized, second university, it is likely he is here because he failed to meet the College's higher entry standards.

Despite its name, the Diplomatic College does not exclusively cater to raising new generations of diplomats. As well as educating those who will one day help shape the fate of nations, it also trains heralds, lawyers, scribes, and translators. Admittance is free—students are accepted based on the results of entrance exams held each summer, not wealth (though the latter does help, as bribery is not uncommon). Two-thirds of student places are reserved for citizens of Maqneh and one-third from elsewhere in Al-Shirkuh.

Religion

When it comes to the major benevolent gods, the Faithful of Maqneh favor four above all others.

While renowned as a political center, cereal production is the true lifeblood of the city. As a result, Ashtart is the most popular deity. Despite this, her temple is quite small—most of her ardent worshippers live outside the city walls, and every village and town boasts a shrine and resident cleric. This is not to say she is ignored by the urban denizens—the emirs have always acknowledged the goddess' importance, and all her high holy days are set aside as public holidays.

Marqod's standing in the city is actually due to one of her affiliated cults. Under city law, civil crimes may be settled out of court if both parties can agree a solution. As a result, the cult of Tashmetum, minor deity of mediation (see *Realm Guide #4*), has become very popular with Devoted and Faithful alike, not to mention rich (their services are not free). Clerics are sometimes invited to attend high-level meetings, even those involving Devoted delegates. Strictly neutral in their dealings, they serve to keep the peace and prevent minor disagreements from escalating into something more serious.

For obvious reasons, Qedeset's aspects of diplomacy and trade are both popular. As well as two temples—one dedicated to each aspect mentioned above—there is a temple to an affiliated cult (one also affiliated to Marqod). The foreign diplomats are far from home, yet must still send missives to and fro. Many have their own networks of agents or employ *voice on the wind* spells, but among Faithful delegates these are often clerics of Isimud, minor deity of communication (see *Realm Guide #10*). Isimud is also patron of scribes, and Maqneh has those in abundance.

One minor cult, that of Hemsut, god of secrets (see *Realm Guide #9*), thrives in Maqneh—espionage is big business, and his clerics are masters of the art. Since revealing oneself as a cleric of Hemsut is a major sin, no one is entirely sure how many are operating in the city. This presents something of a problem for those looking to hire freelance spies—while they are tight-lipped for a time, they are permitted to pass on the secrets they have learned after holy days.

With so many important treaties signed in Maqneh, it is little surprise the cult of Tammuz has prospered. Agreements between Devoted parties rarely carry their seal, but those where one party is Faithful invariably do.

In order to help the various dignitaries from Rassilon feel more welcome, the emirs permitted the construction of a single temple. While every good deity is represented, Hoenir and Hothar are especially honored.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

The Parade of Nations: The six cities may be independent of each other, but the emirs still meet to discuss important business. Such visits are rare—they only occur when a new emir is appointed (he must sign the char-

ter to confirm his acceptance of the various trade and military pacts), if a new pact is formed, or if an existing one is to be amended. Routine business is handled by ambassadors. At the start of summer, the various Free Emirate ambassadors return to their home city to make their reports and receive new orders for the next year..

Exactly when they return to Maqneh is personal choice, but tradition demands they do so by Amt Yaus al-Niwt Amt Alak Paret. On this day, the various ambassadors and embassy staff assigned to Maqneh (including those from other lands) parade from the Grain Gate to the palace, where the emir formally accepts their letters of introduction and welcomes them as friends.

It has become the norm for each embassy to try and outdo its rivals. Some embassies wear traditional costumes. Others throw coins from their homeland to the crowd, carry elaborate banners, ride on magnificent beasts (the embassy from the Sultanate with its Pegasus Guard escort is always a huge hit), or hire dancers and musicians. The end result is more a carnival than a procession of diplomats, scribes, and lawyers.

Military

Maqneh's title as City of Peace is not an exaggeration. Its small regular army has a lot of territory to cover, and is woefully under strength. While the emirs have never been pacifists, they have long favored defence over attack as the best means of protecting the city.

ARMY

The professional army charged with defending the city's holding outside its walls stands at just one legion and one wing, a force of just 730 men (0.5% of the greater population). The first regiment has one light and one medium infantry company, while the second has one archer and one light infantry company. The entire wing is light cavalry.

Every nobleman with farmland must maintain a militia. The size of the force depends on the amount of land, not the population. For some, this means having to hire mercenaries to make up the shortfall.

The eastern edge of the emir's personal domain, which extends into the foothills, has become a no-go area for the army. Orcs dwell here in large numbers, and the army lacks the manpower to drive them out of their nests—the last attempt resulted in an entire regiment being wiped out almost to the last man. Several remote settlements have been pillaged, but the emir's response is always the same—Maqneh will not declare war, lest it provoke the orcs to greater reprisals that threaten the safety of the entire Free Emirates.

Instead, the emir sends material for the villagers to improve their fortifications and rebuild their homes. This does little to quell the growing anger among farmers who have lost loved ones or had their homes and

crops destroyed. They are starting to talk openly about whether they should secede from Maqneh and form an independent state. Some settlements have started collections with the aim of hiring mercenaries or adventurers to deal with the orc problem.

With so many important dignitaries resident, it is little surprise that protection of the city is taken very seriously. The city guard numbers an impressive three legions (1440 men). Two legions are entirely medium infantry, while the third has one regiment of archers, one company of artilleryists and one company of heavy infantry. That the city guard has twice as many soldiers as the main army further adds to fury about the lack of action concerning marauding orcs.

The emir and the palace are protected by the Phoenix Guard, a platoon of medium infantry armed with halberds and short swords. Their helmets are crested with a plume of red, orange, and yellow feathers. The captain of the guard sports three actual phoenix tail feathers in his plume, one of each color. These are extremely rare, and have been part of the captain's uniform for over 200 years. Misuse of the feathers carries a minimum punishment of 10 years as a slave.

NAVY

Despite its peaceful nature, Maqneh maintains a fleet of 20 light warships divided into three squadrons.

The River Squadron comprises five warships. They are responsible for patrolling the River Al-Gib and transporting the army to and from postings. There is little risk from pirates, and each ship has just a single squad of lightly armed marines.

The Escort Squadron serves to protect ambassadorial ships. While most ambassadors from the Free Emirate States and Rassilon prefer to travel on military vessels of their own nation, Maqneh extends the courtesy of ensuring they reach their homelands safe and sound by providing an escort. The squadron has ten warships, each manned by a half-strength compliment of marines.

Lastly there is the Corsair Squadron. The five warships patrol the high seas on the look-out for corsairs. Designed to be fast and maneuverable, these warships are not interested in engaging the enemy. Instead, they act as scouts. When corsairs are spotted, they set sail for the nearest safe harbor to raise the alarm.

Law & Order

Patrolling the streets and protecting the inhabitants against crime falls to the city guard's two medium infantry legions. At any one time, an entire legion is beating the streets and protecting the gates.

The city guard has no jurisdiction in the Diplomatic Quarter. Security there falls to the men and women of the Diplomatic Guard, but their powers are limited. Embassies are foreign soil, and what goes on inside them is beyond Maqneh's jurisdiction. Even if sounds of murder

were heard, no one from Maqneh could legally enter the building and stop it. This is a rather extreme example, but it shows the problem faced by the Diplomatic Guard.

Furthermore, each embassy is entitled to maintain a security force of 20 personnel. These must be registered with the city authorities, as they require licenses to carry weapons. As well as safeguarding the actual building and its contents, they have the authority to prevent crimes against staff members by any means, including lethal force. What they cannot legally do, however, is investigate crimes that have already taken place—that falls to the Diplomatic Guard.

For the most part, the Diplomatic Guard exists to stop rivalries between ambassadors turning into bloody conflicts in the streets. As well as being good soldiers, its officers must be skilled at soothing ruffled feathers and mediating (often petty) disputes. This is not to say they aren't efficient. Solving a crime committed against a member of an embassy has to be dealt with quickly to avoid a diplomatic incident. The Diplomatic Guard has a network of informants across the city, is thorough in following up leads, is skilled at spotting clues, and is not afraid to crack skulls to get results.

The ban on weapons extends even to daggers, but it has not stopped violent crime. Nor could it ever do so. While the thieves' guild is busy supplying illegal weapons and forged permits, those who wish to cause harm to others can use anything from a chair leg to a carpenter's adze to their bare hands.

Maqneh's vast agricultural holdings provide more than enough food to feed the city and export vast quantities. With so much farmland to spare, some farmers have taken to growing secret crops of hashish. In most cases the local nobility is ignorant of this—they rarely survey their entire lands, and the farmers are always careful to conceal their illicit crops. In a few cases, it is the noble who is the actual ringleader.

Maqneh has just one thieves' guild—the Unaligned Nation of Thieves. The guildmaster holds the title Ambassador of Crime. Talk of the guild making a fortune selling illegal weapons and forged permits are false. First, the guild doesn't want to put weapons in the hands of citizens who might subsequently use them to protect themselves against thieves. Second, there just isn't much call for weapons from the general populace. Their main income sources are the staples of their chosen trade—protection rackets, hashish, and good old-fashioned theft in all its forms.

Although the embassies never pay protection money, thieves are not permitted to burgle them unless under direct orders from the guildmaster—to do otherwise is to court death. This rule began 95 years ago, after the ambassador from the Sultanate placed a bounty of 10,000 dinars on the head of the then guildmaster after his signet ring and certain papers were stolen from the embassy. The unfortunate guildmaster survived just five days before he was handed over to the authorities and beheaded. Each guildmaster since then has written to the various ambassadors on being appointed to reaffirm that the guild will not trouble them, and that anyone flouting the law will be dealt with internally.

Trade & Tribute

In terms of trade, Maqneh has little to shout about. Largely self-sufficient in basic goods, its only notable export is cereal, and much of that travels only a short distance up the coast the Qina, City of Smells. While the northern bank of the River Al-Gib remains barren, land to the south is swathed in great fields of barley, buckwheat, millet, oats, and wheat. A few farms now produce rice, but this crop is only consumed locally.

All farms must donate 10% of their harvest to the city granaries to help protect the city against famine. Furthermore, the price of grain is strictly controlled. This ensures the citizens have ready access to affordable staple foods—as every ruler knows, a well fed citizen is a happy citizen (for the most part).

Like all the great cities of the Free Emirates, Maqneh trades various goods with its neighbors, and through Qurqas, City of Slaves, with lands beyond the mountains. The quantities are not enough to warrant a separate entry, though. Virtually all trade is carried by water, due to the speed and greater quantities that can be transported in a single trip.

COINAGE

Maqneh's coins carry a phoenix on one side and he name of the incumbent emir on the other. The former is the traditional symbol of the Free Emirate States, which rose phoenix-like from Anari rule to begin a new life.

The most common coins in daily use are the one dinar (a "Gold Phoenix"), one dirham ("Silver Phoenix"), one-half dirham ("Silver Feather"), and one-quarter dirham ("Silver Claw"). Foreign coins are rarer than one might think. While the city attracts diplomats from different realms, it has very little to offer merchants or other visitors.

LOCAL TAXES

Maqneh is not a rich city. Its major export is a low value commodity, albeit one sold in huge quantities, and its tax rates are relatively generous.

Customs Duty: Exports of grain are levied at 0.5%. Imports and other exports are charged at 2%.

Docking Fees: Ships are charged 5 dinars per day whether they dock at the river or the main harbor. Ambassadorial ships are exempt from docking fees for a period of one week.

Gate Tax: Visitors approaching by land are charged one dinar per leg or two dinars per wheel. Access through the Harbor and River Gates is charged in dirhams. Embassy staff are exempt from gate tax.

Property Tax: Maqneh does not bother with annual income tax. Every three years, citizens pay 5% of the value of their property and possessions. In order to ensure crop production remains high, nobles pay a paltry 1 dinar per ten acres of farmland.

Sales Tax: General goods are charged at 2%. Armor carries a 20% surcharge. Sales of food, whether raw or in the form of meals, carry no levy.

Weapon Permit: Any visiting paladin, noble, or embassy staff member who wants to carry a weapon must purchase a permit. The cost is equal to the standard price of the licensed weapon, and one is required for each and every weapon. The permit is good for one year from the date of issue. If the holder commits a crime involving a licensed weapon, the permit is revoked as part of his punishment and he is forbidden from purchasing a new permit from between three years and life, depending on the seriousness of the crime.

Architecture

Aside from the imperial governor's residence, little remains of Anari-ruled Maqneh, even in the Foreign Quarter. Partly this is because the Anari favored wooden buildings, but mostly because as the city grew, old districts were torn down and rebuilt in the style common across Al-Shirkuh—large courtyard homes for the rich, smaller houses in terraces for the poor. Occasionally one finds foundations or a lone building that survived the redevelopment. Many of the street names are a holdover from the days of Anari rule. Silver Street, for instance, was once home to silversmiths, though today it is part of a nondescript residential district.

Major Locales

Below are a number of locations that heroes may wish to visit while enjoying a stay in Maqneh.

CITY DISTRICTS

The population of Maqneh proper is around 74,000, which is just under half the total number of citizens answerable to the emir. Most upper- and middle-class housing is in the center of the city, with lower-class districts nearer the city walls.

Clerical: In order to accommodate the Diplomatic Quarter and keep the general public away from the embassies, the bureaucracy was moved to a district northeast of the palace. As well as government offices, the district is home to many scribes, translators, accountants, and other government officials.

Diplomatic Quarter: The Diplomatic Quarter stands within the grounds of the emir's palace. The various outbuildings have been converted, extended, and modernized, and now serve as embassies. Visitors must state their name and business at the gate to the main palace. A guard then goes to fetch a junior functionary from the relevant embassy, who decides if the matter needs the attention of someone more important.

Docks: The main docks lie in the southeast, outside

SAME SKILL, DIFFERENT REALM

If you have both *Land of Fire* and the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, it is quite likely that at some point heroes from Al-Shirkuh will want to explore Rassilon, and vice versa.

Whereas Knowledge (Area) is very specific and handled as written, Folklore, Heraldry, History, Law, Religion, and arguably Alchemy and Riddles cover an entire realm. For instance, once a character from Al-Shirkuh takes Knowledge (Law) at d4+, he is considered conversant with numerous laws of the entire continent. He may not be competent with just d4, but he still knows the law. So what happens when he moves to a different continent?

The number of advances a character gains between Novice and Legendary is finite. Few players are going to want to invest in new versions of skills they already have just because the GM has decided they need a holiday on foreign shores. It's also unfair to punish characters who have invested valuable points or advances in these skills just because they have left their native realm.

To keep things simple, the hero is treated as untrained in the Knowledge skills listed above until he gains a new Rank (or 20 XPs after Legendary). At this point he has picked up enough knowledge to use his full die rating.

the city walls. An artificial horseshoe shaped structure, the docks contains wharves, warehouses, taverns, customs offices, merchant offices, lower-class housing, and the temple of Qedeshet's trade aspect.

Foreign: Not all the Anari returned to Alantaris Isle. Those who stayed were permitted to stay in Maqneh, but were forced to move to the northwest corner of the city. Today it is largely a mixed neighborhood, though there is still a high proportion of citizens of Anari extract.

Military: The Military District lies against the southern wall. Within are barracks for the city guard, the main armory, parade grounds, the city jail, the homes of junior officers, and various workshops.

Noble: The houses of the nobility, important bureaucrats, high priests, senior military officers, and rich merchants stand south and east of the palace. Each is built around a central courtyard, with gates to ensure privacy.

Palace: The emir's palace occupies the main keep of the old castle and several adjoining structures. Though the outside is rather drab, the interior is as opulent as any emir's residence.

River: Between the city wall and the River Al-Gib is a narrow strip of land known as the River District. Wharves cater to grain barges from the communities upriver, small merchant vessels intending on servicing the distant farms, and the city's fishing fleet. Warehouses and lower-class housing for laborers and fishermen dominate the district.

ELEMENTALISM & JINN MAGIC

Elementalism and jinn magic use the same game mechanics, and yet are different forms of magic. Discussions between the Convocation and jinn mages have been hampered by several key points.

- * Elementalists consider the elemental realms leftover energy from the creation of the world. Jinn mages don't believe in the elemental realms. The nearest equivalent they have is Jinnistan.

- * Elementalists see elemental loci as places where the four realms overlap and touch upon the mortal realm. Jinn mages see loci as areas that resonate with energy left behind by the jinn.

- * Elementalists cast spells by directly manipulating threads of energy emanating from the elemental realms. Jinn mages summon a lesser jinn and bind it into short-term service. Both sides do agree on one general point—magic comes through force of will.

- * Elementalists are not direct servants of the gods, but they still pray to the gods (and have a separate and powerful goddess of magic). Jinn mages accept the existence of gods as isolated aspects of Asha and Druj, but they do not pray to them as individual entities.

CITY LOCALES

Aelfric the Sage: The aging Aelfric is a Lorekeeper. A recent arrival, he came to Maqneh seeking information on the era of Anari rule. Too infirm to travel far, he spends his days in whatever libraries he can gain access, while hiring young adventurers to explore more distant ruins. To make ends meet, he sells books and scrolls from his homeland to local collectors.

Aelfric cannot abide the heat of Al-Shirkuh, which saps the energy from his tired bones and weak muscles. Whenever he is at home, he strips down to his loincloth. He has been known to entertain possible hirelings while seated naked in a bath of cold water.

All Nations Theater: A recent innovation, the theater plays host to dancers, musicians, and storytellers from Al-Shirkuh and Rassilon. Ticket prices range from one-half dirham (standing room) to 10 dinars for a private box. Refreshments come in the form of cheap or average meals, and cost extra. Shows are held every night and typically last for several hours.

The proprietor is always after new talent. Characters can earn 5 dinars per die in Agility or Knowledge (Folklore). Those with Acrobat, Storyteller, or Arcane Background (Song Magic) earn an extra 20 dinars, while the Master Storyteller Edge is worth an extra 10 dinars. Whether or not the character receives an invitation for a repeat performance depends on the crowd's response.

City Walls: Maqneh is surrounded by strong, high walls. In place of towers, the wall is dotted with semi-

circular firing platforms that jut out from the walls. Atop each one is a pair of ballistas. Sentries are posted at regular intervals, and their number is doubled at night.

Convocation Outpost: The Convocation of Elementalists has had a small presence in Maqneh for three decades. In that time, they have studied the principles of jinn magic and conversed with many jinn mages in a bid to better understand, and ultimately unify, the two similar yet disparate forms of magic. Thirty years, and still the two sides face seemingly immovable obstacles that have stymied in-depth exchange of wisdom.

The staff comprises one arkhwisard, four maegisters, six magi, and 10 non-mage servants (three of whom are Justiciary). While the senior wizards are engaged in highbrow arcane debate and study, their six juniors are involved in more practical ventures. The Convocation is quietly gathering up as much written material, anecdotal evidence, alchemical devices, and jinn relics as it can lay its hands on. This is shipped back to their headquarters, where it is being studied. Adventurers from both continents can find employment as guards and escorts for their missions into the desert. The Convocation's activities have not gone unnoticed by the Reliquary. They are desperately trying to put a stop to the dangerous trade, but are for now concentrating their efforts in Rassilon.

Diplomatic College: Located in the Clerical District, the College is regarded as the city's premier educational facility. Most of the city's top bureaucrats trained here, as did many of the embassy staff from the other cities of the Free Emirate States.

Skills: Knowledge (Heraldry), Knowledge (Law), Persuasion; **Edges:** Charismatic; **Languages:** Al-Waziran, Anari, Beduan, Holy Tongue, Sandspeech, Sphinx, Trader.

Embassy of the Caliphate: Pashar Samar bint Sahl is a rarity—she volunteered for the position of ambassador. She sees the post as a means of social climbing, and takes her duties extremely seriously. This has made her unpopular with her staff, many of whom have been stationed here for several years and know the political situation far better than Samar.

Twice in the last month Samar has discovered a venomous snake in her bedroom. Her aides have waived the matter aside, claiming the snake merely wanted somewhere warm to spend the night. Samar is convinced the serpents were assassination attempts. Unsure who she can trust, she has decided to hire outside help to discover the identity of the person who wants her dead and deal with them accordingly.

Embassy of the Crystalflow Confederacy: A powerful and political stable trading nation, the Confederacy was the first northern power to open an embassy in the Free Emirates. After enjoying decades of economic growth and political influence, the Confederacy has found itself sidelined—since the creation of Orcmark two decades ago, trade has dropped by 80%.

The role of ambassador has always been awarded to a merchant from Drakeport. The baron knows the ambassador and his mercantile enterprise will profit greatly from the appointment, so rival families bid vast sums for

the right to hold the title for a period of five years. With trade continuing to decline, the major families have lost interest in the posting.

The current ambassador, Rodbert ap-Gwyn, arrived only last year. Rodbert hopes to reverse the trend. Sadly for him, the local merchants seek safe profits, not dangerous routes, and they can find them in the Magocracy. If he can find a way to break the orcs' naval power, the Confederacy will once again return to glory, bringing immeasurable wealth to his family.

Embassy of the Magocracy: Despite its name, the embassy has until recently been dominated by mages from the Principality of Sethnor. Since Mage-Prince Septimian went into protective custody, Mage-Count Octavix Dragomilov of the Third Sphere, has served as ambassador. Octavix is a shrewd diplomat, but he has no interest in soiling his hands with the daily concerns of trade. That side of his role he leaves to a merchant, Bronwyn ap-Govier. Her official title is High Commissioner of Trade. Her interest in Hekata is public knowledge, as is her buying of Hekatic maps, texts, and mundane royal objects.

For those who own the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, Emir Aziz, the Free Emirates' ambassador to the Magocracy, is not actually an emir. In recognition of his post, and because he speaks for all six cities equally, he was granted the very rare honor title of emir, dropping his actual sirdar title to avoid any confusion. That didn't work as planned—the northerners confused Aziz with a noble title, forcing the diplomat to switch to the true noble use of emir.

Embassy of the Sultanate: Sirdar Jaun ibn Munjid, ambassador to the Free Emirate States, has absolutely no talent for the diplomacy. A boorish man with a penchant for hashish, he only got the post because the Sultan couldn't stand his presence in court any longer. Outside of attending banquets, he leaves his duties to his senior counselor, Hessa Pashar bint Raja. Hessa plays the part of a shy and retiring aide uncomfortable at being thrust into the limelight, but is actually a very talented and wise wizir counselor.

Gates: To the north is the River Gate. The western wall is broken by the Grain Gate, the only landward gate accessible by civilians. In the south is the Gate of Arms, which opens directly into the Military District and is reserved for military use only. Lastly, there is the Harbor Gate, which opens onto the docks.

The Gate of Arms and Grain Gate see little traffic, and are normally kept shut. The other two are open between dawn and dusk. During the hours of darkness, they are opened only to allow the passage of embassy staff and the city guard. All four gates are heavily fortified, with portcullises on either side and murder holes in the gatehouse floor.

The Gilded Letter: Clothes may make the man, but a well crafted and written letter can open many doors. The owner, Husnu, a male cakali, is a calligrapher of rare skill. Each work is a masterpiece, worthy of being framed and displayed. Such skill takes time (1d4 days) and costs (20-100 dinars depending on the length), but comes with benefits. Depending on the nature of the letter, the

wielder either gains +1 to applicable Persuasion rolls or improves the reader's reaction one level. Unbeknownst to the thieves' guild, Husnu also forges weapon permits. These cost a flat 100 dinars, regardless of the weapon.

Ozman's: Located just outside the Noble District, Ozman's has developed a reputation as *the* place to be seen eating. Prices are exceptionally high (only expensive meals are available, and they start at 20 dinars a head for a simple salad) but the quality is only average.

Rikh's Place: An upper class tavern just outside the Diplomatic Quarter, Rikh's Place is a popular haunt for diplomats, who come here to enjoy the good food and drink, smoke some tabac (and maybe some hashish), engage in high-stakes gambling games, and do some behind-the-scenes deals. Naturally, it is also a haunt for spies and informants, as well as black marketeers happy to provide any goods or services for the rich patrons. Rikh's has a strict dress code—if you're not wearing formal or tailored clothing, you don't get in.

Suits and Smiles: This business is run by Ghanim and Ara, a father and daughter team. Ghanim is a master tailor, and Ara is a beautician of outstanding skill. It is widely agreed she could make a camel look attractive. Ghanim only sells tailored clothing at the standard rate, but he can produce them in the style of any civilized realm in Al-Shirkuh or Rassilon. Ara offers beauty treatment and hair styling that raise a woman's Charisma by one point for eight hours. This costs 20 dinars.

As well as catering to high class patrons, the pair sideline in helping the thieves' guild in lieu of paying protection. Whether one wants to look like a beggar with weeping sores or pass as a well-manicured courtier, such is their skill that they can disguise someone so well he is unrecognizable to his own mother. A disguise lasts until it is removed. Outsiders recommended to the couple by the thieves' guild are charged 100 dinars.

PERSONS OF Note

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

AF'AA

The man known only as Af'aa ("Snake") is a freelance assassin. No doubt his life is a horror story, for Af'aa is not entirely human. His eyes and skin are those of a snake, his right arm is a venomous serpent, and his left arm is a powerful constrictor. He also has the ability to charm and summon snakes (as *beast friend* and *summon beast*) by hissing.

Those who have seen his face speculate he is a cleric of Ss'eeleis, his visage altered by spells to look more impressive. Perhaps if it were commonly known the ophiidae have reemerged they would change their musing to consider him some vile experiment either escaped from captivity or deliberately unleashed on the world.

EMBASSIES

While citizens normally use the word embassy to refer to specific buildings occupied by a foreign power's diplomats, it is properly the name for the permanent diplomatic delegation.

Characters should note that embassies do not cater to the needs of ordinary citizens from the same nation. If you get into trouble in a different country, that's your problem and you have to deal with the consequences. Nobles may be accorded some support, but only if they are very well connected and doing so won't sour relations with the host nation or city—commit murder, and you'd better be the offspring of an emir if you want the embassy to help. Embassies exist as a means for the Caliph, Sultan, and emirs (the sphinxes don't have any embassies) to ensure their voices are heard, smooth over incidents that might lead to war if unchecked, and facilitate trade agreements.

The chief foreign representative to a court holds the title of ambassador. These are normally high-ranking blood nobles, though a cleric of Qedeshet holding an honor title might suffice. Few ambassadors have the necessary talents do everything required of them. To be honest, most don't actually want the posting. Aiding them is a staff of translators, lawyers, scribes, merchants, and heralds. The senior delegates run ministries, and hold the title of minister.

Whereas the post of ambassador might be changed every few years, most staff are permanently assigned to one embassy. Thus, they have a greater knowledge of local customs, laws, linguistic nuances, temperaments, touchy subjects, and important people than the ambassador they serve.

Ambassadors, like heralds, are accorded great respect and privileges, for they are the personal representatives of the highest authority in their realm or city. An act of violence against you is considered an attack against their lord, and thus a very serious matter. They are immune to prosecution, but can be expelled from their host nation or city for serious or repeated breeches. Similarly, diplomatic correspondence is considered sacrosanct. Ambassadors and their key staff may not be searched when crossing borders or entering a settlement, and no package marked with their seal can legally be opened by another power.

In order to deal from a position of strength, one requires intelligence on rivals' strengths and weakness. The gathering of intelligence falls to spies. Every nation has its spy networks, and every nation knows its rivals operate spies in their territory. As well as gathering information through larceny, seduction, bribery, and blackmail, spies work to uncover and disrupt enemy plans, relay false information to their foreign counterparts, and assassinate enemy agents or convert them to work as double agents.

Whatever cruel fate befell him, Af'aa is a man without morals. He will consider any killing in any part of Al-Shirkuh without concern as to the intended victim's age, gender, race, or creed, so long as the price is right.

SIRDAR AHMED THE FAT

Sirdar Ahmed is the cousin of Emir Aziz, ambassador to the Magocracy. Aziz often gives natives of Rassilon who teach him something of their culture Ahmed's address, and asks them to perform some minor favor for a friend, such as delivery a small package or sealed scroll case to his cousin should they decide to visit Al-Shirkuh. When they arrive, Ahmed treats his guests like kings, sating their hunger with elaborate feasts and showering them with extravagant gifts as thanks. Then he too asks a favor from his new friends.

The aptly-named Ahmed is a jolly fellow, full of warm smiles and humor, but also scheming and manipulative. A merchant-prince, he is also a close friend of the thieves' guild, and is heavily engaged in smuggling hashish and khem-hekau artifacts.

THEGN SIEGWULF ARNLAKSUNU

A nobleman from beleaguered Vestmark whose injuries prevent him fighting with the army, Siegwulf came to Maqneh in the hope of securing military aid in his country's struggle against Orcmark. Despite eloquently putting his case to Emirs' Council, he failed to garner support. Merchants from the Free Emirate States are not suffering any serious orc privations since switching their route to Sethnor, nor do the emirs have any wish to enter a foreign war that has dragged on for two decades. He was also snubbed by the ambassadors from the Caliphate or Sultanate. So long as trade continues to flow, they had no interest in becoming involved with what they saw as Rassilon's domestic affairs.

Instead, the ambassadors suggested he hire mercenaries from Rawdah. Vestmark is already paying a vast mercenary force that so far has done nothing beyond maintaining the decades long stalemate, and its coffers are virtually exhausted—hiring more with no guarantee of success would likely be the death of the war-fatigued nation.

While drinking with local soldiers and swapping war stories, Siegwulf learned that there are numerous orc tribes in the Dusty Mountains and that they are growing ever bolder. A few days later, he received word from spies operating inside Orcmark that an orc emissary set sail for Al-Shirkuh several weeks ago (information takes time to get out of Orcmark). The nobleman suspects the emissary is trying to expand King Nagrat's authority into the desert, and perhaps recruit new allies to his cause. He knows full well that an influx of new warriors could tip the balance of war in the orcs' favor.

If he could uncover proof, perhaps in the form of a letter or talisman, he could approach the Emirs' Council again and persuade them to rethink their decision. All he needs is someone willing to go searching for that proof (if it even exists, of course).

QINA

City of Smells

It is said that one need only sniff the desert air to know the direction of Qina. This is an exaggeration, of course, but it shows how the twin smells of bodily waste and perfume has entered folklore. Things smell bad on the surface, but beneath ground and behind locked doors, there is the added stench of corruption.

Social Hierarchy

Primogeniture is the norm in Qina. No account is taken of gender, creed, or even competency to rule. When an emir dies childless, scholars work out who is next in line from his family tree, but go back no further than two generations—any further would produce too many possible candidates. Should an entire family wither and die, the nobles elect a new emir from their number.

Emira Ghadah's worries concerning her brother's possible return could, of course, easily be solved by her retiring. After all, she is an old woman now, and her children have produced issues of their own. Unfortunately, she refuses to contemplate the notion. This is not entirely by choice, though. Shortly after ascending the throne, she had an astrologer read her future in secret. He informed her that if she ever abdicated, regardless of the reason, Qina would be consumed in fire.

Qina's nobles have never been particularly wealthy. The land surrounding the city is extremely poor, and suitable only for raising livestock. A few have managed to purchase productive land upriver, but most of the prime agricultural land lies in the hands of independent settlements or nobles only loosely allied to the emira. What fortunes they have comes from importing grain and vegetables, and even then their hands are tied—produce must be sold at a set rate to ensure no one profits to any excess from Qina's need, leaving wealth to be made in securing the best purchase price.

During summer, the court is largely deserted. Faced with the overpowering stench of the muck-filled stagnant river, slime-covered streets, and competing perfumes (not all of them the highest quality), they prefer to spend their days on their rural estates. Those prepared to face the triple assault to their olfactory sense are almost guaranteed to catch the emira's eye at some point, and more than a few poorer nobles have achieved high office simply by being available at the right time.

Perfumers hold a special place in society. In most other cities, the highest a craftsman can hope to rise is to the *shabrum* class. In Qina, recognized master perfumers are always *mak-shabrum*, and most hold honor

titles. A small few have been rewarded for their skill with hereditary noble titles, though rarely do these come with a grant of land. Journeymen in a master's employ are *shabrum* by dint of their association and the fact they may one day become masters in their own right—this potential attracts wealthy patrons. Most perfumers sit in the *jaleepa* class, though not all are equal. Those apprenticed to a master are shown more respect than other practitioners. Given the dire concoctions some so-called perfumers produce, their claim to be a craftsman is often begrudgingly acknowledged by the general populace.

Perfume varies in quality and price. Merchants who have managed to secure a contract with a master perfumer are far richer than those who sell more common fare. Likewise, grain merchants are generally poor in comparison to other merchants thanks to the emira.

Among spellcasters, clerics of Marqod, Upuaut, and a select few minor deities enjoy great favor, as do khamsin jinn mages. So long as they have at least one useful spell for helping get rid of rats or bad smells, they number among the *shabrum*.

Qina has a large percentage of *mushaf*. Citizens who contract incurable diseases make up most of their number, but laundry workers (nothing stays clean for long in Qina), sewer workers, and street cleaners fill out the ranks of the tainted.

Education

When asked what they want to be when they grow up, most children say a perfumer. Fortunately, Qina boasts a Perfumer School. Admittance is free, paid for in part by taxes and in part by the master perfumers, the latter being keen to ensure there are potential apprentices who don't need to be taught the basics.

Many a starry-eyed pupil with dreams of becoming a household name is destined to end up producing vats of cheap perfume in his mother's kitchen. Most qualify knowing the basic skills, but only those with intelligence and ambition have any hope of graduating to the next level—an apprenticeship under a master.

In other trades, masters can be approached and asked to take a child on as an apprentice. In Qina, the master perfumers only select from graduates of the Perfumer School. In the same way that the master perfumers produce a fragrance for the emira to judge, so students close to graduating must produce a fragrance to be judged by the acknowledged masters of their trade. Each master takes only one apprentice a year, so there is no room for

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Qina.

* **Biting Flies:** During each day of Alak Shemu, every hero must draw a card from the action deck. A numbered Spade indicates biting flies plague him. He must make a Vigor roll or be Fatigued from itchy bites. On a Spade face card, his Vigor roll is made at -2. Fatigue from the bites is removed after 24 hours or with the application of a single dose of antihistamine rubbed into the skin.

If the hero is wearing insect repellent (see *Realm Guide #15*), he suffers an attack only if the card value is 2-4 or an Ace of Spades. Otherwise, the insects are just a buzzing annoyance.

* **Disease:** Heroes must make a weekly Vigor roll or contract Apsu's Curse (see *Realm Guide #15*).

* **Fire Spells:** Any use of a power with a fire trapping, including summoning fire-based creatures, earns the offender a 1000 dinar fine and one month sweeping the streets as a slave of the state.

* **Herbal Remedies:** Antibacterial, antibiotic, antihistamine, and insect repellent cost 20 dinars a dose.

* **Infected Wounds:** A character who receives a lethal wound that is not treated within 10 minutes must make a Vigor roll. With failure, the wound becomes infected. The character is Fatigued until all his current wounds are healed. Alternately, he may take a five-day course of antibiotics. This cures the infection and removes the Fatigue.

* **Native Heroes:** A native character with Smarts d6+ may take Knowledge (Alchemy) d6 for one skill point during character generation.

* **Natural Healing:** Due to the unsanitary conditions, Natural Healing rolls in Qina have a +0 modifier if the character is treated by a doctor with Healing d6+, and -1 for if the skill die lower.

* **Perfume:** Cheap perfume sells for around 5 dinars a quart and smells not unlike vinegar. Higher quality perfumes begin at 100 dinars a bottle (three ounces), and the truly masterful ones selling for as much as 500 dinars an ounce.

* **Respected Trade:** Perfumers are highly respected in Qina. Characters with Hedge Magic and Knowledge (Alchemy) d8+ gain +1 Charisma while in the city and dealing with its inhabitants, irrespective of gender, creed, race, culture, or homeland. Those with the skill at d12+ gain +2 Charisma. These modifiers do not stack with those from the Noble Edge.

error—a bad day means the student must either go into business for himself or retake his final year.

By tradition, the first choice of apprentice goes to the master who has the emira's patronage for the year. The order in which the other masters pick depends on their generosity—it is based on how much money they pledge to the school for the next academic year. The pledging is done at a public auction to ensure that a master cannot easily

renege on his bid once he has the apprentice seconded in his workshop. By law, an apprentice must remain with his master until he qualifies as a journeyman (typically three to five years, depending on intelligence) or his master expels him. Should he wish to leave early, he must buy out his contract. The amount is calculated as a percentage of what his master bid—in the first year he must pay 100%, in the second 80%, and so on. Apprentices' wages make this impossible without a rich family or patron.

Masters have little need to worry about apprentices running off with their secret formulae—many masters refuse to pass the secret on until they are at death's door, and many take their secret to their grave. Thus, to become a master, one must also be prepared to spend years experimenting in one's own time.

The city's only other university, the University of Qina, has suffered a steady decline in student numbers over the decades since the Perfumer School opened.

Religion

Religion in Qina is a strange affair. Though every major benevolent deity is recognized and honored, it is specific affiliated cults of minor deities who actually receive the most regular worship. As a result, these few cults have grown very influential and wealthy.

While Marqod has few devout worshippers, the sort who attend temple weekly, the ever-present risk of disease means almost every citizen says a prayer in her honor on a daily basis. Her temple is a hospital specializing in the treatment of diseases and infected wounds.

Sharing the temple is the cult of Ashtart. While the goddess of plants and herbs has many worshippers, these are mostly inhabitants of settlement supplying perfumers with plants, and they are independent of Qina's authority. Within the city, worship is unusual.

The temple is shared by a third cult, that of Zerbanitu, minor deity of medicine (see *Realm Guide #4*). Less concerned with general remedies, the local cult specializes in antihistamine, antibacterial, antibiotic, and insect repellent concoctions—and it does a roaring trade. The temple, with its stocks of herbal remedies and alchemical *healing* potions, is a prime target for the thieves' guild. Since paladins of Marqod must refrain from causing harm, security falls to the Violent Hands and paladins of Zerbanitu.

One of Tamarni's aspects, and thus affiliated minor deities, is especially honored. The most popular of these is Sekhmet, goddess of rodent extermination (see *Realm Guide #9*). Her cult has very close ties to the Ratcatchers' Guild—it trains the vicious cats they use in the course of their duties and sells them alchemical devices at very favorable rates. The few clerics resident in Qina are all paid-up members of the guild. Since it is a crime for non-guild members to kill a rat, most citizens pray to Sekhmet to protect their homes and purchase non-lethal alchemical devices. Most everyone wears a (mundane) protective amulet when they venture out into the street.

Although the recipes of master perfumers are highly sought after, any popular fragrance attracts attention from rivals. Freelance spies are avoided in favor of trusted agents. The main reason for this is to thwart the activities of the cult of Hemsut, god of secrets (see *Realm Guide* #9). Were his cult to uncover a secret formula, it would likely be public knowledge within a matter of weeks. Since every perfumer could then produce it, the fragrance would rapidly depreciate in value.

The last major deity who receives an abundance of prayers from the general populace is Upuaut. Worship is specifically focused toward his wind aspect, though—every one preys the wind will rise and disperse the foul stench that hangs over the city.

The city's problems are not helped by the presence of evil. Baalzebul, minor god of pestilence (see *Realm Guide* #8) has a large number of followers among all social strata, as do several demon lords concerned with disease, slime, and rats. With the cult of Shamash being exceptionally small, it falls to the paladins of Marqod and Zerbanitu to root them out. Often this means venturing into the overflowing sewers.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Contest of Bouquets: The awarding of the emira's patronage to the best master perfumer is held on Anshi Yaus al-Maat Tamith Alak Shemu. This gives rich citizens chance to purchase supplies of the winning fragrance before the start of holy month, when many feasts, festivals, and social functions take place.

Military

With little farmland under its direct authority and no mines of any real value, Qina maintains only a small army (less than 1% of the population). Its general, like his men, is very keen on undertaking maneuvers in the countryside—even a 30 mile route march beats being stationed anywhere near the city.

ARMY

Qina's less than impressive army comprises one legion and one wing. One of the regiments is entirely medium infantry. The second regiment has one company of light infantry and one company of archers. The cavalry wing has three light companies and two heavy companies.

Qina's nobles are under no compulsion to maintain a militia. Given that the army is barely adequate for the task of defending the city's outer territory, nobles who can afford to train and equip soldiers do so. Most must settle for arming farmers with simple armaments, but the richest issue long-term contracts to mercenaries from Rawdah, City of Heroes, in return for favorable rates.

The city guard comprises just a single regiment. Since it is not intended to fight in the field, it breaks the "no

mixed troops in company rule." One company is entirely made up of medium infantry. The other is divided into a platoon of archers, one squad of which are cross-trained as artillerists, and a platoon of light infantry.

Protecting the emira and the palace is the responsibility of the Shields of Qina. They number just a platoon of heavy infantry—the palace has plenty of other guardians on hand should the need arise. Though membership is open to any soldier who has served loyally in the army for five years, the emira is biased toward khamsin jinn blooded. Partly this is because of their ability to summon cool breezes on demand, and partly because they get on well with the large number of lesser khamsins resident in the palace.

NAVY

Qina's navy of a dozen light warships is hampered by the fact the city lies inland. In the summer, the river, never easy to maneuver along at the best of times, becomes impossible to navigate. To ensure they can resupply and make repairs, Qina has a standing agreement with Sirhan, City of Stars, its closest neighbor. No money changes hand. Instead, the emira ensures it enjoys favorable tax rates for perfume imports. The sailors rarely grumble that they are away from home for months of end.

Law & Order

While few citizens doubt that even orcs would try to invade their stinking city, the city guard companies compete for the job of manning the walls. Its mind-numbingly boring and it doesn't help one escape the stench, but it doesn't keep one's feet from becoming encrusted in filth or being nibbled by hungry rats. Many guardsmen are members of the Ratcatchers' Guild. Though they do not work as traditional members, having a license to kill rats exempts them from prosecution and gives them something to do to help pass the time.

Those who draw the short straw are loathe to leave the relative cleanliness of their watch stations, especially after dark, when it is rumored all manner of fell creatures rise up from the sewers and stalk the streets. As a result, the night belongs to the thieves' guild, the aforementioned beasts (the rumors are true but unproven), and depraved cultists bent on mischief and mayhem.

Slavery is legal in Qina, but only when sanctioned by the courts. In place of suffering flogging or dismemberment, the court may instead sentence a criminal to a period of slavery. Anyone sentenced to slavery is destined for one of two fates. Those who committed crimes that would normally warrant flogging or dismemberment are assigned to help sweep the streets of the filth that bubbles and oozes up from the sewer. For crimes that carry a slavery sentence, the criminal is given the job of helping unblock and maintain the sewers. At least one sewer worker a week vanishes, never to be seen again. Even

if one escapes that fate, infected rat bites and disease ensure he endures a thoroughly miserable sentence.

The thieves' guild, known as the Unclean Hand, has two non-traditional income streams. First, it helps merchants avoid the high export tariff on perfume by smuggling the goods out of the city. Second, it openly engages in espionage against perfumers. Recipes are sold to the highest bidder, and the cult is very strict about only selling a given recipe once—to sell it to multiple perfumers would be bad for everyone's business. A perfumer can avoid having his secrets stolen by paying protection. The cost is based on the perfumer's reputation. As well as not robbing their property, the guild doubles as an extra level of security, protecting workshops and houses against freelance spies and thieves and agents employed by rival perfumers.

Despite having broadly similar goals, a battle for supremacy has broken out between the various factions of evil cultists. The cult of Baalzebul, the largest faction, has survived largely unscathed, but only because the various sects of demonists hate each other just as much as they the clerics. As if things weren't bad enough, a new player has recently entered the struggle.

Clerics of Vali, the northern deity of disease and vermin, among other things, had long known of the city and its reputation, but had concentrated their activities in their traditional homeland. Through dreams, Vali instructed a handful of clerics to go to Qina, beneath which lay a powerful relic—the Chalice of Putrescence. Their numbers are small, but they are backed by a major deity and supported by eager followers of Haratt (minor god of rats). Given time, they may yet become the dominant faction.

Trade & Tribute

The narrow fertile belt along the River Tamaz has never supported much agriculture. Certainly the city always imported food, but never in the quantities it does today. When the sewers began to overflow and demand for perfume increased, the farmers soon realized they could make more money selling fragrant plants. Over the centuries, the perfumers have learned to use all manner of barks, flowers, fruits, leaves, resins, roots, seeds, and woods. As a result of this change in focus from food to fragrance, the city is forced to rely on imports of cereals and vegetables to feed the population. The former comes mostly from Maqneh, City of Peace, while the latter is bought from any city with produce to spare.

The only export of note is perfume. The trade initially began purely to sate local demand, but as the skill of the perfumers increased, so did the reputation of their wares. While much of it is designed to be applied directly to skin, Qina produces a variety of other products, all of which are labelled as perfume locally.

Some oils are designed to be mixed with water and either sprinkled on carpets or clothes (evaporation re-

leases the fragrance) or gently heated in a censer. Others take the form of scented wax cones that are worn on top of the head. As the wax melts, the aroma wafts out (it is recommended hats or wigs are worn). There are also scented cloth balls for hanging in wardrobes, scented gloves or scarves, and even scented nose plugs.

Each master perfumer's particular recipes are a closely-guarded secret, and security borders on paranoia. As well as bodyguards, his home and workshop is protected by *glyphs* and mundane security measures.

Exports of perfume barely cover the cost of food imports, and only a few citizens benefit from the trade. Tax levels, while high, are imposed on citizens who earn a pittance and nobles whose wealth is paltry in comparison to their counterparts elsewhere. As a result, Qina is extremely poor.

COINAGE

Qina's native coins have the name of the emir and year of minting on one side, and a generic flower on the other. The standard coins in circulation are the gold one dinar (a "Flower"), a silver one dirham (a "Petal"), a silver one-half dirham ("Half-Petal"), and a silver one-quarter dirham ("Quarter Flower") piece. Unofficially, the one dinar coin is known as a "Rat," after the penalty for unlicensed killing of one of the ubiquitous vermin.

LOCAL TAXES

Qina's stinky citizens pay 40% of their income in assorted taxes. Most wouldn't grumble if the money was used to modernize the sewers. Even with grain prices kept artificially low, the people have a lot to grumble about. Many believe that much of their taxes goes toward keeping the emira's palace clean and smelling pleasant. Were this ever proven, there would likely be riots.

Cat Tax: The powerful Ratcatchers' Guild has used its influence to maintain its monopoly on rodent extermination. As well as the rat killing fine, it has managed to get a tax on felines passed. No citizen may own a cat unless he pays 200 dinars per cat per year for a license. Of this, half goes to the emira and half the guild. The guild, naturally, has a ready supply of cats on hand, since it is exempt from the tax, as are the cults of Tamarni and Sekhmet.

Customs Duty: General imports and exports carry a 3% levy. Imports of grain and vegetables are charged at just 0.5%.

Docking Fees: Except during Alak Shemu, docking fees are 5 dinars per day. Even with this low level, few visitors stay any longer than is absolutely necessary. During summer, docking fees are waived.

Excise Duty: In order to ensure perfume remains expensive, the master perfumers successfully lobbied for an excise duty of 50% on all exports. In order that their business was not threatened by imports, a tariff of 100% was imposed (not that anyone tries to compete).

Gate Tax: Except during summer, gate tax is set at one dirham for pedestrians, two dirhams for mounts, and five

dirhams for wagons. During Alak Shemu, when river traffic dries up along with the water, the tax is waived. Citizens of Qina are exempt from this tax.

Perfumer License: All perfumers must have a license to operate. This is charged at 3% of their previous year's income (before any other taxes) and 300 d for the first year.

Architecture

Although it was founded by the Anari, Qina was designed in the fashion of local cities. Aside from a few large courtyard houses for the nobles, most of its buildings were small, crammed together along narrow alleys within the towering walls.

During the expansion, the emirs lacked the funds to extend the city walls far. As a result, the architects opted to fit as many citizens into as small a space as possible. In order to achieve this, they opted to build homes with small footprints that rose higher into the sky. The spacious, disordered suburbs outside the walls were abandoned as citizens rushed to live within the city proper.

Outside the old part of the city, houses rise three, four, even five stories. In more affluent areas, one family occupies an entire floor. In poorer districts, a family squeezes into a single room. These tight living conditions only aid the spread of disease.

Major Locales

Below are a number of places the characters may wish to patronize or visit during their (likely short) stay in and around the City of Smells.

CITY DISTRICTS

Of the 89,000 citizens answerable to the emira, 42,000 (47%) actually live inside the city walls. Qina has always straddled both sides of the River Tabaz. The southern bank is more rugged, and it was the northern city that was expanded to house incomers.

The city is divided into three separate areas. The larger New City occupies the northern bank and the smaller Old City the southern bank. In between them, on an island in the middle of the river, is the Palace District. The palace itself fills only the eastern half of the island.

Citizens wanting to cross the river can catch a ferry (except in summer) or use the bridges. There are two bridges, but neither spans the entire river. Instead, they terminate on the island.

Docks: Too low to permit anything other than river barges from traveling beneath, the construction of the bridges facilitated the necessity for two separate docks.. The North Dock lies west of the island and caters for ocean-going vessels. The South Dock is located to the east, and caters for small river crafts and barges.

CLEANLINESS

Both creeds, with the exception of certain, often evil cults, place a great emphasis on cleanliness.

BATH HOUSES

While one can wash one's body and hair at home, the place to get truly clean is at a bath house.

After disrobing, bathers begin in the warm room, where hot, moist air causes one to perspire. Suitably sweaty, one may optionally move on to the hot room. Warm or hot, the next step is to wash in cold water. Once thoroughly scrubbed, one enjoys an invigorating massage before ending up in the cooling room to relax before dressing. Note that bath houses rarely have pools in which to fully immerse oneself—running water splashed on the body is the norm, being considered more hygienic.

Actual hot baths are available. These are private tubs filled with clean water before each use. Some baths are heated, allowing cold water to be poured into the vessel, while others require hot water to be added. Various scented herbs and salts are often available on request, though rarely are these free.

Except in bath houses run by the cult of Tamarni, the genders are separated. Large bath houses have two sets of rooms (usually in different wings to prevent mixing), while smaller ones have fixed hours when men and women may bathe.

BARBERS

Barbers don't just cut hair and trim beards—they also provide full shaves, dentistry, and basic healing, such as dressing sores, stitching wounds, setting bones, minor surgery, cleaning ears, and lancing boils. Some are even trained as beauticians. All, as everyone knows, are excellent sources of information.

COSTS

Typical prices for bodily cleaning services are shown below. Some establishments charge more just to ensure a certain type of clientele, but rarely are the services they offer any better—a bath is a bath.

Bath: 2 dinars (whether in the main bath house or a private hot soak).

Hair Cut: A simple cut or shave costs one-half dirham, while a more elaborate hairstyle might cost as much as 10 dinars.

Healing: The cost for medical attention from any source is detailed in *Realm Guide #20*.

Massage: Included for free in a bath house, but has no game benefit. A basic massage (again, no benefit) from a barber costs 1 dinar. A full massage (with benefits as per the Barber Edge) costs 3 dinars.

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All the raw sewage in the streets is swept into the river, making the docks the smelliest parts of the city. In summer, when the river dries up and the filth becomes concentrated, the stench is enough to make even hardened residents gag. Anyone who falls into the river can expect no rescue attempt—if he doesn't drown in the thick sludge, one of many diseases will do the job.

Palace: The emirs have never been wealthy, but they have spared no expense in making the palace as comfortable as possible. Aside from the usual marble, gold, silk, and rare woods one expects of any city ruler, they invested heavily in spirit relics that spray perfume on whoever touches them, in hiring khamsin jinn mages to create gentle breezes that blow through the corridors and chambers, and even persuading lesser khamsin to inhabit the palace for the same purpose. As an added bonus, the mages and jinn double as guards.

Perfume: Perfumers can be found working in all parts of the city, but many have congregated to an area just north of the North Dock.

Uptown: Located on the southern bank, this residential district is named because it sits on higher ground. Here, the physical side of the sewage problem is barely noticed. Over the centuries, property prices have soared, and today only the wealthiest residents can afford to live here. As well as richer nobles, many master perfumers choose to live here.

CITY LOCALES

Clean Feet Travel: The cleanest and safest way to move around Qina is in a litter. Many wealthy citizens have private litters, so this business caters mainly to tourists and poorer citizens who need to stay clean for some reason. Prices start at 1 dinar an hour for an open litter, rising to 50 dinars for all day use of an enclosed litter. Prices increase threefold after dark.

The Garden of Qina: This perfume workshop is owned by Pashar Muruj bint Subhi. She is regarded as one of the best perfumers in the city, having won the emira's favor seven times in her career, a feat that earned her a hereditary title. She works only rarely now, and has not entered the contest in the past three years. Her rivals believe she will announce her retirement soon.

Pashar Muruj is dying from an incurable illness and she knows it. Although elderly, she has no wish to die just yet. Since the diagnosis, she has spent a great deal of time researching arcane texts. Though she found nothing that would return her health, she did come across mention of a fragrant resin drawn from a long extinct flower. By luck, one document listed the grave goods of a Hekatic pharaoh. Among the many objects was a jar of the precious resin. With it in her possession, she believes she can create a fragrance that will exceed anything produced before. Her dying wish is to breathe in that fragrance.

Too ill to make the dangerous journey and with time against her, she is seeking brave adventurers. In return for bringing the jar of resin to her, she offers the secret of that yet to be created formula. Anyone capable of re-

producing it would be sure to earn a tidy income for the rest of his life.

The Golden Bathhouse: Named because it is expensive, not because of the decor or furnishings, this establishment is at the most exclusive bathhouse in Qina. A bath and massage costs 10 dinars, high enough to keep out the lower classes. The price includes free rose water, clean water imported from upriver of Qina by the barrel, and hot coffee. For 25 dinars, one can receive a soothing massage from a lesser khamsin barber who works here.

The High Market: In a bid to keep their produce as clean as possible for as long as possible, and prevent rats from gnawing at both it and their customers, the stallholders decided to move the market above the problem. With the blessing of the emira, they have created a network of platforms atop wooden scaffolding that now houses the main market. Ratcatchers are employed to guard the staircases, and their ferocious cats stalk between the stalls at leisure.

In order to keep the platforms clean, all footwear must be left at the bottom of the stairs. This has led to a new line in petty crime. Street urchins watch for wealthy looking shoppers, steal their footwear, and then demand money for its return. Given that the alternative is to wade home barefoot through filth, slime, and rats, most choose to pay the ransom (rarely more than a dirham or two).

Whereas most guild members are *mushaf*, the guildmaster, Dabir Pasha ibn Nabil, is rich and influential. While most of his employees live in tiny hovels, he resides in an upper class part of town. Money and popularity cannot make up for breeding, though, and Dabir Pasha is tolerated in high society purely because of his job.

Lady Luq: Most people know Luq as a researcher who trawls libraries on behalf of rich clients. Among perfumers, she is known as the best industrial spy in the city. Her services range in pricing depending on the intended victim. When it comes to robbing homes and workshops protected by the thieves' guild, she enjoys a cat-and-mouse relationship, pitting her talents against their security measures. The two parties have a loose understanding—she doesn't commit general theft, and they won't kill her if they catch her.

The Marid's Fountain: A popular cafe, the Fountain offers a range of beverages. Its most popular is its rose water, which bubbles up from a golden fountain that sits on the counter. Not only does the drink taste divine, but a single glass acts as an antibacterial herbal remedy with a 4 hour duration. A single glass costs 30 dinars. Customers are restricted to one glass per day.

All attempts to steal the fountain have failed—it is impossible to lift it by any mundane or magical means. The proprietress, Maha bint Budayl, claims it was a gift from a greater marid, but does not elaborate further.

Mostak's Medicines: Mostak sells herbal remedies and alchemical *healing* potions, all of which he creates himself. Oddly, he isn't a cleric or a mage. A former adventurer, he unearthed a collection of alchemical texts from a Hekatic tomb, along with highly specialized arcane laboratory equipment. The texts revealed a dark and terrible formulae—the secrets of how to create healing

remedies from human organs. Utterly immoral, Mostak went into business when advancing old age ended his adventuring career. His raw materials come from unfortunates he kidnaps and murders.

Noktak's Sanitation Wear: Noktak, a sand goblin, is trying to make an easy living from the city's twin problems. All his homemade devices have some inherent flaw. The truncated wooden cones designed to stop rats crawling up one's legs either allow them an easy climb (if worn wide end facing down) or make it impossible to walk properly (if worn wide end up). The cat urine that supposedly drives away rats is actually from a source closer to home (though it is pungent). Stilts were actually a sensible idea, but few citizens have the balance required to remain upright for more than a few steps.

None of these problems stop Noktak promoting his wares as the latest in counter-rat and anti-filth solutions. Noktak has no set prices—he charges based on how wealthy, not to mention gullible, a potential customer looks, and how desperate his need.

Perfumer School: Students have reported hearing strange sounds and seeing a ghostly figure walk the halls. Some whisper that it is the specter of a long-dead master perfumer. Whether he has returned to pass on his knowledge or punish a transgressor is hotly debated. Others insist the figure is something far more sinister, perhaps a demon. More level-headed students argue the figure is probably nothing more than a thief trying to steal secrets or a fellow pupil up to no good or sneaking out for a romantic liaison. The faculty wants the matter resolved with all haste, and is prepared to offer cash or free tuition as a reward.

Skills: Knowledge (Alchemy); **Edges:** Hedge Magic.

Ratcatchers' Guild: On paper, the guild is the largest guild in the city. In order that citizens can kill rats without the threat of prosecution, the guild offers associate membership for 10 dinars a year. This entitles the member to kill rats inside his home or business premises. City guardsmen are offered a similar scheme, but it applies only to the streets and then only when they are on duty.

The guild's main line of work is trying to keep the streets rodent free, a battle they are currently losing. Since removing rats from a house is a very short-term endeavor, the guild makes most of its real money through renting cats. For 5 dinars per month per room, a citizen can take possession of a particularly feral feline, subject to availability. The animals don't need feeding, and only a fool would try to pet or groom one.

Scent of Paradise: This small workshop is run by Abdul-Badi, one of many middling perfumers with aspirations of becoming a master. He has the talent to reach the highest tier of the profession, but he lacks the patience and, more importantly, the money—the creation of a top-class fragrance requires either lengthy experimentation using expensive herbs or paying a thief to steal a formula. Undeterred, he has hit upon an idea that will save him both years and coin. Since no living master will share his secret formula, he intends to learn one from a former master, one whose secret has been lost for cen-

MAKING PERFUME

In terms of character abilities, the manufacture of perfume requires two things. First, it requires Knowledge (Alchemy), not Knowledge (Craft: Perfume). No matter how high his die type, the best a character using just the Alchemy skill can hope to achieve is cheap and relatively unpleasant perfumes. To create true fragrances, one also needs the Hedge Magic Edge. Hedge magic is not all balms and poultices—practitioners understand the properties of a wide variety of plants, including their aromas, how to extract essential oils, and how to mix and blend them, all essential arts of perfume manufacture.

Characters who want to go and create perfumes that sell for 500 dinars an ounce are out of luck if they still want to be adventurers. First, these ingredients are rare plants (and very expensive if purchased off farmers). Second, it takes years of trial and error to perfect a single master formula.

If they really want to be perfumers, we offer two suggestions. First, read the sidebar entitled **Working for a Living** in *Realm Guide #10*. Second, suggest they take the Rich Edge. This represents them creating and selling batches of perfumes between adventures. Taking Filthy Rich either means the character is a master perfumer or sells a lot of fragrances, depending on his Alchemy die type.

turies. He has already purchased a *gravespeak* scrolls in preparation. All he needs now is someone willing to steal a personal object from the tomb of a long dead master perfumer.

Sewers: To be fair to the emirs of old, the city's sewer problem isn't just down to lack of investment. Qina grew so rapidly that residential districts had to be hastily constructed to accommodate the influx. By the time anyone thought about adding new sewers, it was too late.

Poor town planning is not the sole reason for the flood. Even before the population expanded, the thieves' guild had walled off sections of the sewers for their private use. Shrunk by as much as 25% in place, the sewers were barely coping with the original population, yet alone thousands more residents.

Over the years, citizens have dumped everything from broken furniture to unwanted clothes to dead bodies in the sewer. Many tunnels are now totally blocked, forcing the effluent into confined spaces and preventing it from flowing into the river.

Su'da's Soap Emporium: A graduate of the Perfumer School, Su'da bint Nusrat repeated her final year six times, but never managed to impress a master perfumer. With a small loan from a merchant, she started her own workshop making and selling soap. The merchant has been repaid with interest, Su'da has a good reputation, and she lives in an affluent part of town.

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Cheap products (2 dinars) are simple soap made with tallow, palm kernel oil, or olive oil, and perfumed, but not otherwise unusual. Her most expensive soaps act as antibacterial herbal remedies. They cost 100 dinars, but have the added advantage of being reusable—a single bar is good for 10 uses, though application requires a full body wash, which takes several minutes and requires one to undress.

Watch Station 13: While most officers of the watch are content to let the thieves have free run of the city after dark, the under-sergeant in charge of this recently fortified watch station in a middle-class residential district has other ideas. Young, idealistic, and eager for promotion, he has declared war on the thieves' guild in his district. All the bad eggs in his squad have been removed, leaving him with a dedicated group of soldiers who share his ideals. The thieves' guild has its own plans, and they don't much appreciate interference. Several soldiers have been murdered and the watch station has come under attack. If he is to clean up the streets, the officer needs some external assistance, strangers who can get close to the guild leaders and make the arrest.

Workhouse: When a citizen is no longer able to support himself financially, he turns to the workhouse. Beggars are also dragged off the streets and dumped here by the city guard. Inmates are fed, clothed, and given a bed, but must earn their keep through hard work and strict discipline. The workhouse has a contract with the city to provide laborers as required. Most end up down the sewers or cleaning the streets. The lucky ones work in the workhouse tannery, break rocks for gravel in building projects, or grind bone to make into fertilizer. Those with a skill are put to use producing goods the workhouse then sells.

Several inmates have disappeared over the last few months. The owners suspect they have absconded. Had they any care for those who watch over, they would have realized that all the missing inmates disappeared in the days before the new moon. A few inmates have spoken of seeing strange shadows flitting through the building in the dark of night, but no one in authority takes them seriously. Too poor to hire investigators, the inmates have decided to find charitable adventurers to find the cause of the disappearances. So far they have had no luck.

AL-SHAB

Population: 540

Ruler: Effendi Khoury ibn Fawzan

Religion: Mixed (Ashtart)

Al-Shab is one of many villages that cultivates fragrant plants for sale in Qina. For the last three years, any dogs entering the settlement have been destroyed on sight by the militia, with no recompense offered to their owners.

The reason for this odd, and some might say barbaric, behavior stems from a traveler who called at the village in search of a bed for the night. He was bitten by a dog, but shown no sympathy by the locals—accidents happen, after all, and the injury was very minor. In a fit of rage, the stranger uttered a curse and left. The next day, every dog in the settlement went berserk, chasing and

biting the frightened villagers. New dogs were purchased after the old ones were finally slaughtered, but the same thing happened.

Effendi Khoury is offering a modest reward to anyone who can track down the stranger and get him to reverse the curse. The only information the villagers can provide is a rough description, a name—Ayser ibn Hilmi—and the fact he was intending to go to Qina to meet with a master perfumer (they don't know which one, though).

THE BATTLE FIELD

Many centuries ago, a small rural community was put to the torch and its peaceful inhabitants brutally massacred to the last. With no survivors, written evidence is sketchy and largely based on second hand accounts of visits to the site. Scholars are divided as to the identity of the aggressors—some blame orcs, others point the proverbial finger at the Anari, Hekatics, or jinn. Since that fateful day, fragrant plants have grown among the crumbling remains of the village. It has not gone unnoticed that they are found in patches that vaguely resemble a prostrate human form and their petals and sap are various shades of red.

The plants are highly prized by the perfumers of Qina, for they grow nowhere else in Al-Shirkuh. No one is sure if they are foreign, or are truly unique. Those who seek to profit from picking them take a great risk. Some have returned insane. Most have not returned at all, nor have their corpses ever been found. The few survivors inevitably tell the same tale—the dead do not sleep on the Battle Field, they are far from quiet, and they resent anyone who disturbs the plants. The dangers of harvesting make the plants very expensive in Qina.

KISHTRA

Population: 750

Ruler: None

Religion: Mixed (Ashtart)

The farming community of Kishtra, which lies just outside Qina's control, is currently without a ruler. The last effendi was the scion of two rival houses. His parents married to settle an ages old feud, and for a while all was well. The birth of their son was seen as a great omen for the future. Then things took a turn for the worse.

While boating on the river, the effendi and his parents were drowned (and partially eaten) when a large crocodile upturned their small vessel. The effendi was unmarried, and had no children or siblings. Barely were the victim's ashes cold when the old rivalry reared its ugly head, albeit with a new focus—both families claim they alone have the right to decide the next ruler, who naturally will be a member of their family.

Since the two families are the largest landowners in the area, the peasants are equally divided. Violent assaults and the burning of crops are commonplace as the nobles seek to weaken their rivals. Both sides are seeking mercenaries to deal the others a final blow.

QURQAS

City of Slaves

Maqneh, City of Peace, may be the political brain of the Free Emirate States, but Qurqas is its financial heart. Qurqas is also a gateway, not only to the trackless sands, but to the strange northern land known as Rassilon. Among all the great cities, Qurqas, a city ruled by the descendants of warrior slaves, is the most cosmopolitan.

Social Hierarchy

Naming the head of one's bodyguard as one's successor is often considered an unwise move—this is a man or woman who is often alone in your presence while armed, knows how to fight, and has the loyalty of his men. The mameluk's oaths of loyalty to their brethren has ensured no emir-in-waiting has ever ascended the throne of Qurqas through foul play. In rare instances when the incumbent emir was assassinated, no suspicion has ever been laid at the feet of his successor. Unfortunately, the murder of an emir while in office does taint the new emir's reputation—he was, after all, responsible for the protection of his mameluk brother.

Since the title of emir is not hereditary, his spouse and children do not receive full noble titles. Instead, they hold honor titles of emir/a or meliq/a as appropriate. Their children receive no titles at all, neither do the emir's other relatives. That is assuming he has any, of course—most emirs orphans with no ties outside the bond shared within their company. When the emir dies, all honor titles are lost. The emir's spouse is given a generous stipend to live on, but children receive nothing.

Only three times during the city's history has the child of an incumbent emir risen through the ranks to become captain of the Swords of Suleiman. The practice is not forbidden by law—it is simply that the emir's children are not raised as true nobles or courtiers, nor are they destined to become rulers.

Of Emir Ubaid's children, all of whom are adults with families of their own, two are in the regular army, one is a cheese merchant, and one has joined the cult of Marqod. All four have already dropped their honor titles. Aside from the privilege of being able to enter the palace at will, they are ordinary citizens.

Emir Ubaid has the blood of a warrior coursing through his veins. Having delegated much of the city's routine business to the cult of Qedeshet, he spends his time out in the field with the army or locked in secret meetings discussing the various strange events taking place in Al-Shirkuh with his mameluk captains. Part of him craves war, but so far he has managed to hush the

voice in his mind—a career soldier, he knows war is not a glorious endeavor, and he has no wish to see trade wither and his people suffer just to satisfy an old man's desires.

When the slaves conquered the city, all land held by Anari nobles and local sympathizers was confiscated and divided between the new emir's military commanders and slaves who has suffered under the Anari. The former became the city's new hereditary nobles. While they still hold land, most have become the heads of merchant companies. Even so, it is still traditional for the second child of a noble to join the army or city guard.

The slaves awarded grants of land cannot by law ever declare themselves nobles. Their children, while answerable to the emir, would be under no other yoke. Even today, their farms and villages are governed by elected officials. Some rule as mayor, others as part of a council. They form the majority of the honor nobles. Military commanders, powerful merchants, senior clerics, and notable mages make up the rest of the *mak-shabrum*.

The mameluks have always held a special place in Quaqas' society. The captains of the various native companies are always honor nobles, and number among the *mak-shabrum*. Sergeants are accorded respect normally reserved for *shabrum*, while under-sergeants and common soldiers are treated as *jaleepa*.

Education

Qurqas's earliest inhabitants were mostly denied an education. The Anari overlords saw little need to educate their subjects, and most of those who came later were slaves of the jinn, fit only for manual labor or military service. This has never been forgotten, and the inhabitants of Qurqas take great pride in attending school. All education is free, paid for by taxes. Parents and guardians who deny a child education are fined for denying the child a future.

Basic schooling lasts until the age of 12. Brighter students go to senior school for more studies in wider fields of knowledge, while those less gifted begin their working life either with their family or in the form of an apprenticeship.

It is only possible for an able-bodied citizen to enter advanced education after completing two years compulsory military service. Qurqas has four universities—the basic University of Slaves, and three advanced universities. As with basic schooling, enrolment at all four is free, but places are limited. Aspiring students must have

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Qurqas.

* **Compulsory Military Service:** Characters born and raised in Qurqas *must* either take both Fighting and Shooting at a minimum of d4 or one of the skills at d6 during character generation.

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

Beduan Studies: The character must be able to speak Beduan. For one skill point, the character begins play with either Knowledge (Nomads) d4 and Survival d4, or one of them at d6. Only one skill point may be spent in this way.

Economics: The character can lower the die type of one required Trait by one step when taking Expert Haggler (see *Realm Guide #13*).

War: For one skill point, the character begins play with Knowledge (Battle) d6.

* **Slaves:** No slaves may be purchased here. Any slave discovered in the city is immediately freed.

* **Trade Center:** The docks and markets are full of goods from across southern Al-Shirkuh and the lands beyond. Special availability goods can be purchased outside the usual places, but cost double. Village Availability items cost 50% of normal, Town items 75%, and City items 90%. Heroes selling goods in Qurqas have +2 to Streetwise rolls to find a buyer.

* **Transport Hub:** Qurqas 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.

Caravans are almost as frequent. A successful Streetwise roll locates one ready to depart in 1d8 days, or 1d4 days on a raise.

a letter of recommendation from their old school and the captain of the company they served with during their period as a conscript.

At the School of Economics, students learn the administrative, economic, and people skills essential for running any form of enterprise. While many graduates go on to become merchants or business owners, others prefer to enter into local politics—many of the elected officials who run rural settlements trained here.

For those who plan to work in a caravan in any capacity, interaction with Bedu will form part of daily life. The School of Beduan Studies teaches students the customs of the various tribes (so as to avoid accidental insult), as well as how to speak Beduan (most Bedu speak Sandspeech, but knowing their native tongue often makes them more welcoming). Desert travel is fraught with peril, and students can also take classes in the essentials of desert survival.

For those who desire to become officers, or improve their existing knowledge of warfare and battlefield lead-

ership, there is the War College. While anyone can enlist, priority is given to mameluks first, then career soldiers, then civilian citizens, and finally outsiders. Students explore military history, study key battles, explore theoretical tactics and strategy through war games, and learn basic and advanced leadership techniques. In their final year, students are awarded the title Cadet Sergeant and given command of an actual platoon, under the watchful eye of the regular sergeant.

Attendance in no ways guarantees one will ever become an officer, but the army looks more favorably on graduates when promotions become available.

Like Maqneh, foreign languages are common on Qurqas' streets and in the markets, and in far greater numbers. Not only does it retain a sizeable Anari population that still speak their native language, it is also home to engro and Saxa merchants and visiting Anari scholars. Among native merchants, Trader is slowly emerging as the second language.

Religion

As the gateway between two very different lands, Qurqas is extremely relaxed in its attitude toward religion. Temples to the gods of Rassilon (while small) stand side by side with the temples of their desert counterparts and the kadas of the Devoted. So long as the deity is benevolent, it is welcome in Qurqas.

Qedeshet is the most honored native deity in the city. Although his trading aspect was always very popular and paladins has long provided security in the Trading Square, Emir Ubaid's decision to hand control of the city's bureaucracy and finances to the cult has greatly boosted their status. This does not prevent Devoted from achieving positions of authority in government—part of the emir's decree included a clause ensuring the cult's civil and religious practices were kept separate.

Any Faithful starting out on a voyage utters a prayer to Upuaut, and Qurqas sees plenty of ships and caravans. Two great shrines honor the deity—one on the docks, and one inside Traders' Gate.

In a city ruled by warriors and that boasts the largest standing army in the Free Emirates, it should be no surprise that Karmelos is popular. His temple is part of the War College. Many of his clerics, though not an official part of the army, serve as instructors.

While some visitors from Al-Shirkuh are tourists looking to explore new places or adventurers passing through on their way to adventure, those who come here regularly or choose to settle are invariably merchants. Of the alien deities, Var, the northern god of trade, has the most adherents.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Blooding the Emir: During the enthroning ceremony for a new emir, a small sample of his blood is taken.

This is daubed on his forehead and breastplate in the shape of a scimitar, and smeared on his actual blade. This symbolizes his bond with the city and its inhabitants, and his willingness to die to protect their freedom from oppression and tyranny.

He then inspects the captains of the native mameluk companies and officers ranked captain and above in the regular army. Each slices his own thumb with the emir's sword before adding to the bloody designs. This is a sign he accepts the authority of the new emir, and will follow his orders without question, so long as they be lawful and just, even if it means his own death.

The Guards' Parade: The victorious slave army, led by the mameluk companies, entered Qurqas on Baot Yaus al-Hamala Amt Alak Paret. On this day, the nine native companies parade through the streets. In order that law and order be maintained, only a single squad from each participates, though each is lead by its captain. By tradition, the Swords of Suleiman lead the parade. Any visiting mameluk companies present may join in, but are always placed behind the native companies.

The procession begins at Traders' Gate and proceeds along all the major thoroughfares before ending in the Trading Square, which is cleared of stalls for the day. Here they take part in drill formations and displays of weapon prowess to the delight of the cheering crowd. When this is done, the emir inspects the troops and receive verbal oaths of allegiance.

Traditionally, orphans present themselves to the assembled captains at the end of the display in the hope of being accepted into the mameluk ranks. Not all are here willingly—some guardians try to foster their unwanted wards onto the companies.

Military

Five centuries of rule have not weakened the mameluk emirs of Qurqas, nor tempered their battle spirit. While the main army has a general, he is primarily involved in day-to-day affairs. Where the legions ever to match to war, then the emir would assume the role as senior battlefield commander.

ARMY

Many outsiders assume the mameluk companies make up the entire army. In fact, they are but a small part of the city's impressive military machine. The bulk of Qurqas' military might comprises four standard legions and two wings. The First Legion is entirely heavy infantry. The Second and Third are entirely medium infantry. The Fourth Legion has one regiment of archers and one regiment divided into a company of light infantry and a company of skirmishers. Of the two cavalry wings, one is heavy and the other light.

Qurqas rules over territory extending 25 miles north of the River Al-Shum, 25 miles south of the Free Trade

Road along the route inside the accepted borders of the Free Emirates, and everything in between. Army activities are concentrated along the river, the trade road, and the southern border.

Without exception, all able-bodied citizens are conscripted into the army for two years on reaching their 16th birthday. Avoiding this duty carries a penalty branding followed by two years hard labor in service to the city (paid at basic laborer's wages). Even those who have already taken holy vows must enlist. Pacifism is not considered an excuse for military duty, though fully ordained junior priests of Marqod receive special dispensation on religious grounds from having to undergo weapon training. They serve as medical orderlies.

Conscripts are paid the same wage as regular privates, but receive only basic weapon training. Conscripts are only ever assigned to the infantry and can never achieve a rank above private. Those who wish to enlist in the cavalry or train as officers must do so after completing basic service. Most conscripts never see battle. Even those who do face only small parties of bandits or orcs. For two years, most only know route marches, building and dismantling temporary camps, guarding caravans, drill, weapon training, and long patrols, all of which are designed to bond them together and instill a sense of loyalty to the city.

Even after finishing his service, a citizen is automatically enrolled in the city militia until he reaches the age of 40, injury prevents him from serving, or he receives dispensation because of his profession. Citizens are under no compulsion to remain in the city while part of the militia, but those present when the call-to-arms is sounded are expected to answer. Accurate censuses are kept, and citizens who fail to notify the authorities they are leaving the city are charged with desertion *in absentia* should the militia be summoned and they are found to be missing.

The city guard currently comprises eight companies of mameluks. Emir Ubaid's recent decree that the city guard increase its strength has resulted in each company having three platoons (180 men), though not all are yet at full strength. Each company is semi-independent—the captains swear oaths of fealty to the emir and vow to defend the city, but they are never formed into regiments. Each captain sits on a military council, an advisory body that reports directly to the emir.

The Swords of Suleiman, the most prestigious mameluk company, serve as the emir's bodyguard. As the emir's heir, the captain is also chief wizar.

NAVY

Qurqas' impressive military might is not matched by its navy. Its fleet numbers 16 light warships and 12 heavy warships. The fleet is divided into four squadrons, each having four light and three heavy warships. Of these, one of each type of squadron is normally in harbor, one patrolling local waters, and two escorting merchant ships up and down the coast.

Qurqas has never tried to muscle in on Rawdah's business of hiring armed escorts prepared to sail all the

way to Rassilon—it lacks the warships, its vessels are inferior, and its crew are less comfortable with strange seas. Instead, it offers merchants the same basic deal it does caravans—pay us and we'll escort you safely to the edge of the Free Emirate States. For ocean-going vessels, that means 200 miles if they are heading for Sethnor in the Magocracy or as far north as Rawdah.

Law & Order

The eight companies of mameluk city guard are responsible for protecting the city and upholding the law. Despite having served the city for 500 years, the companies are still technically mercenaries, are paid at standard rates, and could leave the city's employment at any time. After five centuries loyal service, and with guaranteed wages for what is rarely difficult work, that is unlikely to happen.

At any given time, two companies are assigned to patrol the walls and six act as watchmen. Those assigned to the watch work an eight-hour shift, with two companies (approximately 360 men) on duty at any one time. Roughly four hours is spent actually working the streets. The rest of their time is taken up with briefings, paperwork, escorting prisoners from the jail to the courts, and the like. Despite their reputation, mameluks are not superhuman, nor are they incorruptible paragons of virtue. They are just as prone to error, apathy, intolerance, laziness, and bribes as any watchmen.

Security for the Trading Square falls solely to paladins of Qedeshet. No more than a dozen are on duty at any one time, but this does not mean security is lapse—each paladin has anywhere from three to five fadeen under his command. The same law that permits the cult to act as the watch also gives them the right to act as judges. Any civil or criminal breeches of the law are handled by the Trade Court, which sits within the small temple in Trading Square.

There is no legal restriction on carrying weapons or wearing armor, though social problems will still arise. This does not mean violent crime is tolerated—sentences for misusing a weapon are much more severe. Not every case reaches court—anyone drawing a weapon in a city policed by experienced mameluks had better be able to use it, because the mameluks aren't compelled to take prisoners alive in such cases.

Qurqas' reputation as a safe haven for slaves is not entirely true. Those sentenced to slavery for committing crimes are not considered slaves in the same manner as those shackled against their will—they are criminals doing legally enforced penance. As such, the courts of Qurqas can still impose slavery as punishment for wrongdoing, though this is commuted to a fine, public flogging, or branding. It never imposes life sentences, however. Those whose crimes warrant such punishment elsewhere are executed in Qurqas.

Qurqas has only one thieves' guild, the Black Ledger. The city's transformation into a major trading hub has

profited them very well—not do they control smuggling in and out of the city, they hold the monopoly on smuggled goods coming in or out of the Free Emirates. Over the last century they have acted less like common thieves and more like brokers and merchants.

With smuggling more profitable than picking pockets and burglary, they allow freelance thieves to carry out more traditional guild duties. Freelances must register with the guild, must inform them of any missions they are planning (the guild still runs a protection racket), and pay 10% of their illicit income in "tax." Those who play by the rules are left alone. Those who break them are not given a second chance to offend the guildmaster.

Trade & Tribute

Qurqas geographic location coupled with the open of trading links with western Rassilon has transformed it from a large but minor city into a bustling cosmopolitan trading superpower. Although fed by only one trade road, that road is part of a network that stretches to the four corners of the continent and beyond. The Silk Road may be closed, but Jadid, City of Trade, gives it access to the markets of the distant and enigmatic Jade Empire.

Qurqas also benefits from being mostly self-sufficient in natural resources. True, its farms and mines don't allow it to produce any major exports, but neither is it reliant on imports to survive or satisfy the basic needs of its citizens. Much of what enters the city is considered luxury goods, though merchants cater for all tastes and budgets.

The emirs have always seen themselves as the defenders of the Free Emirates. With Wind Pass being relatively easy to defend by a small number of troops, the most obvious route for invaders is around the bottom of the Dusty Mountains. In order that the army remain well fed, all farms must give 10% of their harvest to the city. The rest they may do with as they wish.

COINAGE

Qurqas's coinage has always emphasized the city, not the ruler. One side bears the city name in Sandspeech, the other a pair of crossed scimitars.

Whereas most coins are circular, Qurqas has always been different. The one dinar gold coin has nine sides, representing the nine mameluk companies that serve the city. It is known locally as a "Mameluk." The one dirham silver coin has six sides in honor of the major cities of the Free Emirates, and is known as a "City." The one-half dirham piece has seven sides. No one knows why, and the coin has become known as a "Town" simply because it is of less value than a city. The one-quarter dirham is round, and carries the nickname "Village."

Foreign coins (those minted outside the Free Emirates) are almost as numerous as locally minted ones. As with all coins, their value is based on weight rather than their denomination.

LOCAL TAXES

Qurqas makes a fortune from taxing merchants, allowing its citizens to benefit from low personal taxes. All told, few citizens pay more than 20% of the earnings in taxes, and half of this is actually tithes. Visitors looking to trade in the city must remember to purchase an appropriate license, as detailed in the core setting book.

Customs Duty: All goods entering or leaving the city are charged at 5%.

Docking Fees: In a bid to attract merchant vessels and yet not have them clog up the docks for too long, ships are not charged docking fees for the first two days. After this, a fee of 100 dinars per day is enforced. Ships from Rassilon are charged half this rate—the emir is keen to foster greater mercantile links, as it ensures continuing business with the Caliphate and Sultanate.

Gate Tax: Passage through Traders' Gate costs 1 dirham per leg. Tight-fisted merchants often leave their camels and horses outside the city, instead loading their cargoes on the backs of caravan guards and bearers.

Sales Tax: There is no sales tax.

Architecture

For the first century of Anari rule, much of the new city they built was styled in Anari fashion—small houses built separate from each other. Over time, the Anari adopted the architectural style of the natives, replacing wooden houses with brick and stone structures, building homes around open courtyards. In some back streets, one can still find remnants of the city that stood before the Anari occupation. Locals claim some of these structures have stood for a thousand years, but their claims are hard to verify.

When trade blossomed, the center of the city was extensively remodelled. Entire residential areas were levelled to construct the Trading Square. New houses were built in what space remained. Typically lower class districts now, the houses butt against those of their neighbors and the streets are much narrower.

Major Locales

Below are some of the more important or interesting places in and around Qurqas likely to attract the heroes.

CITY DISTRICTS

Qurqas sits on the southern bank of the River Al-Shum—the northern bank is too soft to support heavy walls, and is prone to flooding. Much of the population lives in the west and east of the city, with lower, middle and upper class residential areas largely undifferentiated save for the architecture.

Anari Quarter: Although Qurqas was captured and

NEW HINDRANCE

DUAL HERITAGE (MINOR)

The hero belongs to two lands and/or cultures. He may have been born to Hadaree parents but later adopted by cakali, spent his youth between two cities, or have one parent from Al-Shirkuh and another from Rassilon. He has either divided his formative years between them or been schooled in the ways of both, though he truly belongs to neither.

The character can use Common Knowledge for rolls appropriate to both cultures, lands, or cities. However, he lacks an in-depth understanding of either. When making Common Knowledge rolls covering relevant Area, Folklore, Heraldry, Law, and Nomads (if applicable), he treats his Smarts as one die lower. A d4 Smarts drops to a d4-2, as if unskilled.

expanded by the Anari, the invaders never made up more than a few percent of the population. When the Anari nobles were defeated, those who agreed to accept the new emir as their overlord were permitted to remain in the city. Though they had adopted the deities of Al-Shirkuh in place of those of Rassilon generations before, they had never given up their native tongue—Classical Anari, as it is now known. Since trade began, the Anari Quarter has seen an influx of fresh blood. With the incomers have come changes—temples to the gods of Rassilon once more stand in Qurqas, and the modern Anari language has replaced Classical Anari as the *de facto* tongue of the Quarter.

Clerical: While the temple of Qedeset in the Trading Square handles trade matters, the business of running the city lies in the various offices within the Clerical District. Located south of the western end of the docks, a stone's throw from the palace, it is also home to many of the city's bureaucrats, as well as a variety of craftsmen and shops catering to their needs.

Harbor: Following the gentle curve of the river, the Harbor District occupies a long, wide belt that stretches two-thirds of the way along the bank. Beyond the many wharves, the district contains warehouses, customs offices, guard posts, taverns, shrines to Apsu and Upuaut, and mainly lower class housing. The harbor operates day and night, the wharves lit by scores of lanterns after dark. The wharves for the city's naval fleet are located at each end of the district.

Mameluk: Located in the southeast corner of the city, this area is home to the eight mameluk companies that make up the city guard. With no familial ties, they live in square fortified barrack blocks, each containing an armory, mess hall, kitchen, and storerooms. An open courtyard provides space for weapon and drill practice. In the northeast corner are small barracks for visiting mameluk companies.

Merchant: The city's growing number of merchants

WHO CREATED THE RELICS?

While legendary relics (see the free *Hellfrost* download of that name) are usually born from exceptional circumstances rather than manufactured, most relics are the work of intelligent beings.

Although two types of mage have mastered a means of binding spirits into mundane items to create spirit relics, their enchantment is not permanent, nor can they provide a fixed modifier (such as +1 to Fighting rolls). The ability to create true relics has long evaded the greatest craftsmen and spellcasters of Al-Shirkuh just as it has in Rassilon. Certain greater jinn (the fabled arcane artisans) certainly knew the secret, but their methods are incomprehensible to other races, for jinn are inherently magical creatures and understand the arcane arts in ways other (or as they say, lesser) races cannot hope to fathom.

In Rassilon, it was the moðsognar, the mysterious elder race of dwarves whose name does not appear in ancient legends and is unknown to many younger frost dwarves, who forged the relics. There are no native dwarves in Al-Shirkuh today, though that was not always the case.

Several images unearthed in the tombs of early Hekatic nobles (pre-Apophis era) clearly show diminutive craftsmen at work. Rather than slaves or common workers, they are depicted as being highly respected individuals, far above ordinary craftsmen in status. None are given individual names (nor have any tombs been discovered). Instead, they are always called Pitahmeses, a title translating as “Child, or born, of Pitah.”

Pitah was the early Hekatic deity of craftsmanship, among whose major aspects were metalworking, carpentry, and sculpture. That these crafts also form the basis of golem creation, whose origin is also lost in the mists of time, may be nothing more than coincidence. Like the dwarf artisans, Pitah was portrayed as being short, bearded, and dressed in robes or an apron that concealed his feet.

Worship of Pitah ended when Hekata banished the old gods and turned its efforts to necromancy. That his cult never survived the migration to Magor has long perplexed scholars. Logically, a race looking to build a new home would honor the deity of craftsmanship above many others. Geb-Agni is a much later addition to the pantheon, being the amalgam of two older elemental deities—Geb, god of earth, and Agni, god of fire. Despite having no divine links to Pitah beyond patronage of metalworking, Geb-Agni is depicted in art as bearded and wearing a long apron. His temples are also constructed underground. Could folk memory of the moðsognar of Hekata have helped shape the new deity, and did their disappearance cause Pitah to be shunned or forgotten?

Continued on next page

congregates in the northeast of the city, between the Trading Square and the harbor. Most merchants operate from their homes, having one wing of their house devoted to receiving guests and conducting deals. The area is a mix of middle- and upper-class residences.

Palace: A palace has stood on a high in the northwest of the city for close to a thousand years. Of the older structures, only the dungeons and the perimeter wall remain. Over time, the main structure has been demolished and rebuilt to suit the latest ruler. The current palace was built in 195 CJ. The emir and senior courtiers have apartments here, but much of the space is devoted to the Swords of Suleiman and storage since the bureaucracy moved into the Clerical District.

Slave: An unofficial district and located outside the city walls, the Slave Quarter is a tent city where visiting caravans and merchants keep their slaves. Despite the presence of slaves so close to Qurqas, city officials do nothing to liberate them from their servitude. The law is quite specific—only slaves who enter the city are freed, not the greater territory it rules.

Trade: The Trade District comprises Trading Square, and the caravanserais and warehouse that border it. By day it is crowded and noisy. Once business ends, it is mostly deserted, though the caravanserais are open 24 hours so as to accommodate newly arrived caravans.

CITY LOCALES

The Cursed Ship: Properly named *The Dolphin*, everyone who knows the story of this unlucky jalibut simply refers to it as the “cursed ship.” On every voyage in the last year, one crew member has vanished without trace while the ship was at sea. No one suspects foul play by the captain—he has a reputation as an excellent skipper, skilled mariner, and honest soul. When his ship last called into Qurqas, the remaining crew quit. The captain has a large amount of money tied up in goods stored in the hold, but can’t reach one of the other cities to sell them. Despite offering very good rates, no local mariners are brave enough to sign up.

The First and Last: A stone’s throw inside Traders’ Gate, the First and Last is the last tavern before entering the parched desert and the first when entering the Free Emirate States along the Free Trade Road. Thanks to the cheap drinks and generous portions of food, the place is always busy.

Garden of Inner Reflection: Known locally as the Whispering Garden, these elaborate formal gardens are popular with lovers, spies, and those who merely want to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life. Talking above a whisper, or making any other loud noise, is punishable by a stiff fine. It is said this dates back to the days when one of the emirs would sit here and meditate on troubling issues, though no one is really sure when or why the law was introduced.

Harbor Towers: The northern bank of the river opposite Qurqas is not entirely unoccupied. Three massive towers with deep foundations house stand sentry over

the harbor. Sixty feet tall, they are divided into six floors and an open roof. Within each floor are wide slits facing north and south, firing platforms for ballistas and archers. Atop the roofs are small trebuchets mounted on rotating wooden platforms.

A single tower stands in the Harbor District. Keen to ensure merchants stop in Qurqas, a heavy chain extends between the tower and the one opposite, effectively dividing the docks into two parts—a larger portion for oceangoing traffic and a smaller one for ships and barges from the communities upriver.

Hireling Square: With the Trading Square is a smaller square dotted with thick, square wooden posts. Originally a place where the emirs posted public proclamations, today it is mainly used by citizens seeking employees on short-term or long-term contracts. From finding lost pets to uncovering lost lore from trap-filled dungeons, heroes looking for work are spoiled for choice.

With hundreds of bits of paper competing for attention, citizens have taken to hiring street urchins to shout out their needs. Those with more money hire heralds who louder voices and bright clothes are sure to attract attention for those seeking work. Visitors to the square who look like they might be adventurers are immediately surrounded by a gaggle of children, all of whom want them to visit their masters.

The Icehouse: Visitors from Rassilon, while grateful to be away from the freezing temperatures of their homeland, often find the stifling heat too much to bear. Those seeking to cool down can find relief in the Icehouse.

The tavern is the brainchild of Isambard Cold-Hands, an engro immigrant. The interior temperature is kept at Temperate levels by an icewood hearth. Importing icewood to the Free Emirates is very expensive, and Isambard covers his business costs by charging exorbitant prices for drinks and meals—treble the normal prices. To help keep the cold air in and so reduce the amount of fuel required, the tavern is built below street level.

Aside from northern nobles and merchants seeking to cool down, diplomats, nobles, merchants, senior clerics, mages, and other wealthy individuals native to Al-Shirkuh come here for the novelty, to sip iced drinks, listen to stories of the northern lands, admire the tapestries lining the walls, and because the high prices keep out commoners.

Iron Guild Office: With dominance over the trade routes of Rassilon secure, the Iron Guild has decided to expand its business into Al-Shirkuh. Five years ago, it sold a Qurqas franchise. The operation is run by Gauntlet-Captain Sigmund Cuthwulfsunu, a former mercenary who had previously lived in Rawdah for many years.

Despite the number of caravans that leave Qurqas, the business is struggling. Most caravans are operated by Bedu, who use their own warriors as guards. If they need more protection than extra caravan guards can be hired at cheaper rates than what the Guild charges. Added to that, independent guards don't have to pay any dues.

Having invested 30,000 gold scields in the franchise, much of which was secured by a loan, the Gauntlet-Captain is not about to give up. Acting through intermediar-

Continued from previous page

While their appearance in Hekata remains pure conjecture, there is a distinct possibility that the moðsognar worked their arcane art among the races of Al-Shirkuh as recently as 2400 years ago, long after they abandoned the surface of Rassilon. Quite why this should be so is an enigma, as is the reason for their disappearance. Did they object to the rise of necromancy? Did they abandon the surface in response to the necromancers demand that they use their secret arts to give human immortality? Was some other factor at play?

Research into the subject is hampered by the fact that no scholar in Al-Shirkuh has actually heard of the moðsognar. As far as the wisest sages are concerned, the diminutive craftsmen of Hekata were merely short humans who took their title because their physical appearance and talent for craftsmanship mirrored Pitah.

ies, he has been selling information on departing caravans and their protection details to bandits and orcs living in the wastes between the Free Emirates and Clearwater Oasis. He hopes that if they are successful in their raids, the caravan masters will have little option but to turn to the armored might of the Iron Guild for protection.

Mameluk Catacombs: Standing at the western edge of the Mameluk District is a large marble mausoleum decorated with exquisitely carved friezes depicting warriors engaged in battle. One squad of city guard in full ceremonial uniform stands watch here day and night. Only the emir and mameluks whose companies serve the city are permitted inside.

It is no secret that inside is a statue of a mameluk knelt in prayer before a stone inscribed with the traditional mameluk oath of loyalty. Inscribed on the wall in tiny writing are the names of every mameluk who has died in service to the city since the mameluks seized control. As far as most citizens are concerned, it is simply a place of remembrance.

Few know that beneath the floor lie the catacombs of fallen mameluks. The final resting places of Devoted are marked only by a weapon, helmet, or shield, and a plaque listing the name of the departed. Faithful mameluks are buried in larger vaults along with their grave goods.

Recently, a small-time fence was caught trying to sell a funerary statue bearing the name of a mameluk. On inspection of the catacombs, it was revealed the vault, along with several others, had been plundered. The captain in charge of the watch detail has no doubts security was thorough—the oaths of allegiance extends equally to dead comrades. What he wants to know is how the thieves got in and out given there was no sign of a break in. Furthermore, the entire catacomb is protected by *security of the home* miracles (see the free **Resource Management and Miracles Update** download). His own men lack the necessary skills to infiltrate the thieves' guild, and so he is quietly seeking outsiders with a good reputation.

School of Beduan Studies: The university is built around a central courtyard. On three sides are buildings. These are primarily student and staff accommodation, and storerooms. In the courtyard is a collection of tents set up to resemble a small Bedu camp. Among the many topics covered are those many Hadaree consider unimportant, but which are a core part of nomad ways—how to approach a tent properly, how to behave at a feast, and even how to drink coffee. Although focused on Bedu customs and laws, the school does not neglect study of cakali and hyaenidae nomadic customs. Members of both races serve on the faculty.

Visiting Bedu come here to watch the students learn, laugh at their mistakes, pass on a little wisdom, and share gossip in a familiar setting. Anyone looking to pick up rumors about life in the desert is well advised to make this a port of call.

Special: The student must be able to speak Beduan; *Skills:* Knowledge (Nomads), Survival; *Edges:* Desert Son, Woodsman.

School of Economics: The university stands close to the southern edge of the Trading Square. It is divided into a number of colleges, each specializing on one aspect of economics and stewardship, interspersed with accommodation blocks. First year students learn the basics of buying and selling in a small market run by local shopkeepers. The market is a legitimate one—the stalls sell typical things students require, such as writing material and clothes. Here they roleplay scenarios as both seller and consumer. In their final year, students are given 100 dinars, which they are expected to turn into a profit if they want to graduate.

Skills: Knowledge (Steward), Streetwise; *Edges:* Expert Hagglers; *Languages:* Beduan, Trader.

The Smokehouse: A combination of tavern and tabac shop, the Smokehouse sells native varieties from across the continent and pipeleaf from Rassilon. Hashish is also available, though not legally. It is very popular with visiting engros from the Vale, who come in search of new strains that might prosper back home and to sample the many regional varieties on offer. Some are prepared to journey great distances to collect living plants, while others prefer to hire local adventurers.

War College: Standing north of the Mameluk District, the War College also houses the temple of Karmelos. Students learn everything from small unit tactics to leading an army. As well as the warfare side, they must master aspects of military life such as logistics and military law.

The college is currently home to two visitors from Rassilon—Knight-Master Arrowcloud (male hearth elf) and Knight-Commandant Ila Muircholaich (female Tuomi). Members of the Knights Hrafn, they are part of a twin delegation sent to the Free Emirates to exchange ideas and battle strategies, and determine whether the order should open a field office and if so, where (the second delegation is in Rawdah).

Both are something of local celebrities—Arrowcloud because hearth elves are rarely seen in Al-Shirkuh, and Skjalf because of her fiery red hair and woad tattoos.

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

ZAWDAR

Population: 460

Ruler: Elected council of elders

Religion: Mixed (Ashtart, Geb-Agni)

Zawdar is a small farming community located three miles south of the Free Trade Road and 15 miles from the city. Caravans sometimes stop here to trade or rest before making the final stage of their long journey. Adventurers also call here for supplies, to recuperate, and to tell of their exploits. Everyone loves a good story, but the arrogance of some so-called heroes began to grate on the locals' nerves. So it was they hatched a plan. Knowing there was a lesser ifrit living in the Dusty Mountains, they offered it a deal—it could live in peace in the village forge if, on occasion, it performed a small service. The terms were favorable and the jinni became a citizen of Zawdar.

Whenever arrogant visitors call at the village, the jinni produces a great cloud of smoke and fire in which it hides. It then calls out in a booming voice, calling the strangers mighty heroes, peerless champions, and other flattering terms. Bound by Suleiman, it continues, it must reveal the location of fabulous treasures to those it considers worthy of possessing them. Naturally, there is no treasure, and the locations it gives are hundreds of miles away.

PERSONS OF Note

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

PASHA ALTAF IBN HUDHAFAH

The owner of a small but successful mercantile company, Pasha Altaf is well known in Qurqas as a patron of the arts and for his charitable donations. Despite being Devoted, he regularly donates to the cult of Marqod and every beggar knows him by sight. Pasha Altaf wants for nothing, and with that has come extreme boredom. In order to spice up his life, he has become a freelance thief. The nobleman is scrupulous about who he robs—only those who can afford to lose wealth are targeted. He has no shortage of targets in Qurqas, and he tends to know what items he wants to steal long in advance—extremely affable and with an excellent reputation, he is a frequent guest at social events hosted by wealthy citizens.

POUK

A venerable sand goblin, Pouk is frequently seen wherever storytellers are performing or heroes are recounting their deeds. Pouk never says a word as he puffs on his pipe of pungent tabac or fiddles with his corrective lenses. He is not without power, though. Having heard thousands of stories, locals trust his judgment—a simple nod of his head immediately makes any tale popular, while a shake can destroy the storyteller's reputation.

RAWDAH

City of Heroes

Rawdah's history is one of violence, dramatic declines, and warlike resurgence. Though it has been well over a century since Rawdah's military strength was last exerted, there are those who feel she should once again stamp her authority on the Free Emirate States. Even outside the city, there are those who believe Rawdah is a caged lion, kept in check by regular tribute, but not truly domesticated.

Social Hierarchy

For much of its modern history, the title of emir changed hands violently. Indeed, the title has been drenched in blood since its inception. When the Anari withdrew, rival warlords rose in place of the feudal authority. After a brutal struggle, one emerged victorious and crowned himself emir. Ravaged by the Anari, ignored by the new wave of settlers, and coming from a military background where might meant right, rival families fought repeated wars to take, and then hold, the crown. It was only the strength, foresight, political cunning, and willingness to remove rivals before they became a threat of the emira's great-great-grandfather that brought stability to the city and enabled a dynastic line to extend beyond one or two members.

The shadow of the old ways still exists in the hearts of men, though. Emira Kalila is dying, and she is the last of her family. Five generations of her line have governed the city, and there is no clear line of succession—several candidates all have an equal claim based on their ancestry.

All that stands between peace and civil war is Grand Wizir Jafrah. The wizir deeply loves the emira in a platonic way, and would do literally anything to protect her. Unfortunately, one willing to do *anything* often loses sight of the line between right and wrong. Jafrah's actions are noble, but they are becoming increasingly more despotic. Those who must treat the emira are sworn to vows of secrecy. Those who break them, or others who stumble across the truth, vanish. Sometimes their corpses are discovered, sometimes they are not. This has had the unfortunate drawback of drawing attention to the sudden spate of disappearances and murders.

So far, both the court and the citizens have been kept updated of their emira's "expedition." An edurdite scholar who interest in Hekata's ancient history with her city is well-documented, that she should take an extended break is nothing unusual—she has done it several times during her short rule, though never for this long. Still, the city is running smoothly, and while her presence is

missed, it has yet to attract too much undue attention. Emira Kalila is aware of the cover story, writes regular reports in her own hand to be read out to the court and the people. She has no idea about the drastic steps her wizir is taken to keep the truth hidden, however. Given her feebleness, she is likely nothing she could do about it even if she found out.

Rawdah's old noble families trace their ancestry back to the corsair captains who once terrorized the sea lanes. Content to live on the ill-gotten wealth of their forebears, they became the new nobility in a city finally enjoying not just a stable monarchy, but a return to prosperity. Enconced in their lavishly appointed houses and with gold enough to make even the most avaricious dragon envious, they scoffed as enterprising families invested in forest estates and shipyards. The glory days are now over, and it is the new families who have the money and influence. All the old nobles lines have left are stories of pillage, the dwindling remains of their fortunes, and their open intolerance toward those with "new money."

It is these old families who still crave power the old-fashioned way. As the city continues to go from strength to strength, many murmur that growth would be quicker if the city crushed its trading rivals. Other have turned away from open aggression to political machinations. Whatever their motives and methods, the old families are a nest of vipers. Their venom may be diluted by the passage of time, but they remain coiled to strike. The new nobility, by comparison, has less interest in turning Rawdah back into a military superpower. Though brought up on tales of war and conquest, their focus is on economic expansion, and Rawdah can do that without raising a fist in anger. Social commentators have oft remarked that the old houses want more of what they *had*, while the new houses want more of what they *have*,

A new breed of "corsairs" has risen from the ashes to dominate the upper-class. Rawdah still remains relatively poor, for it has little to offer in terms of regular trade, but its ship captains have grown very wealthy. With fast ships and a fearless attitude, they have prospered from trade with Rassilon. Following in their wake are the master shipwrights, whose talents have ships manufactured in Rawdah the envy of the Free Emirate States.

The warlike days may be over, but clerics of Karmelos and Upuaut and ifrit and khamsin jinn mages are still held in high regard. Those with even modest abilities are also regarded as being among the *mak-shabrum*.

The lower classes are dominated by those who rely on shipbuilding. The *jaleepa* class is dominated by shipwrights and carpenters, while the *harajam* has many laborers and lumberjacks.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Rawdah.

* **Mariner's School:** The Mariner's School entry in the core setting book was written before the rules for universities were invented. GMs using the rules for advanced education (see *Realm Guide #19*) should use the entry in this volume.

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

Combat School: Rawdah boasts a number of private military academies. The hero can lower one Novice Combat Edge Trait requirement by one die type during character generation. For instance, he could take Lurker with Agility d6+ or Stealth d4+. Other requirements are unchanged.

Mariners: For one skill point, the hero may take Knowledge (The Seas) d6.

* **Native Heroes II:** For one skill point, any native character can begin play with Boating d6.

* **Ships:** Conventional ships cost 80% of normal in Rawdah. Construction takes one week per two points of Toughness (round up). Buyers must pay 50% in advance and the rest on completion.

* **Slaves:** The price of slave laborers varies depending on the duration of their sentence. Multiply the standard price by 10% for each year of slavery the court hands down, to a maximum of +200% for a sentence of 20+ years. Add 300 dinars to the base price if the slave has the Brawny Edge.

* **Weapons:** Carrying weapon is not seen as unusual, and is not a social *faux pas*. Actually using drawing and wielding them, however, is still forbidden except in cases of self-defence.

Education

Rawdah's citizens have never put much value on education beyond basic literacy and numeracy. Before the Anari came, most sought fame and fortune in the military. In recent times, this has been replaced with a longing to sail the sea. Few children actually remain in education beyond the age of ten. Some fulfill their dream and become a cabin boy, the bottom rung of the ladder, but most are forced into employment to help their family make ends meet.

Sailing is not a common pastime for the masses unless their work relies on it, yet the art of seamanship runs in the blood. Most every child can tie basic knots and steer a rough course, even without formal training.

For those lucky enough not to have to work, there is the luxury of advanced education. Those not interested

in learning to sail receive schooling at the New University, Rawdah's basic higher education establishment.

For those who feel they must answer the call of the sea, the Mariner's School offers the best prospects. The school has two colleges. The Deck College is open to those who lack the brains necessary to become a captain. Students learn essential skills, such as splicing ropes, repairing masts, advanced knots, and the like. For those with aspirations of becoming a captain, and who have the brains to match, the Captains' College teaches cartography and navigation, as well as leadership skills essential to the smooth running of a ship.

Rawdah's reputation as supplying the best mercenaries is well deserved—it has a long, if not always glorious, history when it comes to war. While there is no one university devoted to training soldiers, there is a plethora of small schools devoted to one specific aspect of combat. These are private enterprises and rarely accept more than a dozen students at a time.

Religion

Perhaps Rawdah's citizens cling to the memories of the old days out of nostalgia. Maybe they're just afraid of what fate the future might hold as the city continues to grow in a new era of cooperation and trade. Whatever the reason, and despite the small army, Karmelos has remained an extremely popular deity among the Faithful.

In addition to a large temple, a magnificent structure that far outstrips the needs of his truly devout worshippers, his image appears dotted around the city in the form of statues in suitably heroic poses. Times have changed, and the cult is rarely permitted such grand temples and equally impressive military forces inside most cities. In return for being allowed to construct a large temple and garrison it, the cult was required to swear an oath to help defend the incumbent ruler from any threat, internal or external. This vow is one reason the nobles have been held in check against committing open insurrection in recent decades.

Upuaut is popular in most settlements, but in Rawdah his aspects as deity of ships, wind, and travel enjoy enormous popularity, as does the affiliated minor cult of Sirsir, patron of sailors (see *Realm Guide #5*). The cult, perhaps to curry favor with the emira's distant relative, declared that Rawdah was where Sirsir lived as a fisherman before his travels with Upuaut.

Tamarni may seem an odd choice for special veneration at first for a city devoted to maritime affairs, but not when one considers the damage rats can cause aboard ship. As well as being harbingers of disease, they chew through ropes, devour rations, and spoil water supplies. Ships run by Faithful crew typically have a statue of a cat aboard to drive rats off.

Beyond the city walls, it is Ashtart who holds the Faithful's hearts. The cult is currently trying to appease both farmers and foresters. Unable to take sides since

both have equally valid arguments, it has failed to broker a working arrangement.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

First Ship Blessing: Since the days of the corsairs, the emirs have personally blessed the first new warship constructed each year, regardless of whether it was built for the navy or a private citizen. The crews of such vessels have long reported having good fortune (the ship gains a benny the captain can use for any roll relating to the vessel or her crew while at sea), and captains these days pay a small fortune to have the shipyard get their vessel seaworthy first. With the emira absent and the grand wizar set to take her place, no one knows if the good fortune will continue next year.

Military

Although protected by natural geography, Rawdah once maintained a mighty army. In return for tribute, its steadfast legions stood firm against the black hordes of Hekata time after time. Decadence had sapped its strength and morale, and it was no match for the Anari invasion force.

After centuries of turmoil Rawdah is back on its feet, but things have changed—there are no major threats to the Free Emirate States, and in place of disparate tribes and petty kingdoms stand great cities more than capable of looking to their own defence. The vast army that once served the corsairs was disbanded long ago, the soldiers giving rise to the first generation of mercenaries to call the city their spiritual home.

ARMY

With no major threats to contend with and many prospective recruits drawn to life as a marine, Rawdah's current army stands at just one legion and two wings. Within the legion are one medium, one light, and two archer companies. Both cavalry wings are light cavalry.

Rawdah could still make a difference, for orcs are massing in the mountains further south, and especially in the neutral ground between it and Qina, City of Smells. Two key factors prevent the expansion of the army. First, the city lacks the money to invest in a large army, and Qina isn't in any position to pay for mercenaries to guard its back door even if it saw the need. Second, Rawdah's geographic position and naturally protected borders have given rise to a peculiar sense of isolationism—the city is safe from attack, so why waste money on unnecessary ventures in what amount to foreign lands. True, some nobles press for expansion, but the emira, and most citizens, no longer crave battle.

Protecting the walls and policing the city are the city guard. Strong belief in the power of the navy to crush any threat before it reaches land (Rawdah of old focused

entirely on land strength) has allowed the emirs to get away with just one legion of guardsmen.

In the unlikely event the city should ever be attacked in future, the emira can draw upon the strength of the temple of Karmelos, the many khamsin and ifrit mages who call the city home, and the hundreds (sometimes thousands) of mercenaries living here at any one time.

Protecting the emira is a company of medium infantry known as the Emira's Corsairs. As well as being veteran soldiers, each member is a skilled seaman. This is a throwback to the days when the emir was little better than the corsair captains he commanded.

NAVY

The true power of the armed forces is the impressive navy. A small city, Rawdah nonetheless supports a fleet of 40 light warships and 20 heavy warships, plus a full contingent of marines for every vessel.

No warships sail the turbulent River Mosak, and few are ever assigned specifically to harbor duties. The fleet earns its keep escorting merchants on the long voyage to Rassilon, a route regularly troubled by Seareavers, northern cousins of the corsairs, and an ever-growing number of orc galleys.

The captains are not just military commanders. Merchants who require an escort do not approach city officials. Instead, each captain is responsible for drumming up his own business, and may set whatever rates he thinks he can get away with. Each year, captains are set a minimum figure they must earn for the city. This figure covers the wages of the crew, supplies, and basic repairs, such as careening.

Failure to meet the quota counts as dereliction of duty. Three failures in a row, and the captain is publicly demoted. The figure is high enough to make the captains and crew have to work hard (and perhaps take a few risks), but low enough that it is achievable. Any monies over the minimum are split equally between the captain (who usually rewards his crew) and the city. Captains may alternately defer taking their rightful share in order to receive a lower target the next year.

Between them, the old noble families maintain about a dozen warships. These too are hired as escorts, though the captains and crew are paid a fixed wage and bonuses are few and far between. Like the nobles the ships are long past their best. All are in need of updating to match the latest shipbuilding techniques.

Law & Order

The city guard mostly has to contend with breaking up fights between rival mercenaries in Rawdah to rest, recuperate, and train. With a ban on carrying weapons seen as a grave insult to the inhabitants' ancestors, not to mention personal freedom, these brawls frequently result in serious injuries, and sometimes in death. By

TYPICAL SOLDIERS

Troop types in the various Realm Guides are often described in generic terms, such as heavy infantry or light cavalry. The *Hellfrost Bestiary* equivalents of these troops are detailed below. These are standard types designed for quick use in play, not strict limitations—nothing prevents the GM adding a unit of heavy infantry armed with great scimitars or light cavalry carrying small shields.

Troops with multiple weapon choices may carry mixed weapons within the company—the damage values of these weapons are the same. If troops are described as “veteran,” “elite,” or similar in the text, use the veteran mercenary, experienced town watch, or other veteran stats as appropriate, noting any gear changes below.

INFANTRY

Heavy Infantry: As common mercenary, but with Strength d8, full helmet, plate armor, medium shield, long sword or short spear. Parry 6, Toughness 9(3). Polearm troops have halberds, but no shields. Parry 5.

Medium Infantry: As common mercenary, but with pot helmet, scale hauberk, medium shield, short sword, axe, mace, or short spear. Parry 6, Toughness 8 (2). Polearm troops have halberds, but no shields. Parry 5.

Light Infantry: As common mercenary, but with medium shield and axe, mace, short sword, or short spear. Parry 6.

Archers: As common mercenary archer, armed with bow or crossbow as appropriate.

Skirmishers: As common mercenary skirmisher.

CAVALRY

Ultra-Heavy Cavalry: As common mercenary cavalry, but with full helmet, chain shirt, plate greaves, and large shield. Secondary weapon is an axe, mace, or short sword. Parry 8, Toughness 9(3).

Heavy Infantry: As common mercenary cavalry, but with pot helm, scale hauberk, and medium shield. Secondary weapon is an axe, mace, or short sword. Parry 6, Toughness 8(2).

Light Cavalry: As common mercenary cavalry, but equipped with short spears instead of lances.

Mounted Archers: As common mercenary cavalry, but with Riding d6, and equipped with bows and daggers.

law, injuring or killing someone in self-defence is not a crime—it is one’s right to meet force against one’s person, family, or property with equal or greater force. When the guards become involved, who started the fight depends on who is prepared to offer the largest bribe.

Criminals sentenced to slavery by the courts are auctioned, even those whose punishments are shorter than full life terms. In olden times, most ended up rowing galleys. Today, it is the nobles who control the timber trade who need strong backs. The amount charged varies by the length of sentence. Even then, the sum isn’t excessive—slaves may not need wages, but they still need to eat and drink, and an exhausted slave is no use to man nor beast. Not that slaves enjoy an easy ride—felling trees, hauling them to the mill, and sawing planks day after day is back-breaking work.

The city has just a single thieves’ guild—the Rats of Rawdah. Smuggling is a relatively minor problem, and the guild earns its income in the time-honored fashion. With the old nobles having little wealth left, it is the new nobility and the rising upper- and middle-classes they target. With the guild’s attentions turning away from them, and not wishing for their near-impooverished state to become public knowledge, the old families have actually started letting everyone know they have been targeted by thieves, even when they haven’t. If the guildmaster is feeling mischievous, he puts out word that the guild did indeed try to rob a noble’s house, but it has a firm rule against taking from beggars.

Trade & Tribute

Located at the northern end of the Free Emirate States, Rawdah is far from the major trade routes. Even ships from Rassilon vary call here, despite it being the closest port—most captains are prepared to stay at sea a few days longer and reach the lucrative and more varied markets of Qurqas, City of Slaves.

Rawdah does have exports, of course. Its shipyards do a lot of business with merchants in the other cities, it has an excess of timber, and it remains the home of many mercenary companies, who come here to take advantage of the training facilities and countless drinking and gambling dens keen to take their gold.

A few of the new noble families are slowly turning away from growing trees for the shipyards. In their place they are growing trees whose wood would be ideal for high-end furniture, such as mahogany and rosewood. It will be another generation before this plan comes to fruition, and master carpenters will need training to produce the finished products, but if it works, it will give the city yet another revenue stream.

Even with this plan in mind, the nobles are planting more and more trees every year to cope with the growing demand for new ships. They are continuing the ancient trend of using land meant for edible crops, forgetting (or ignoring) the fact the city’s population has grown in the meantime. Year on year, the amount of locally produced crops declines. The city has survived unscathed so far, but one bad harvest is all it would take to spell disaster. Worse, if the trend is not reversed in the next decade or so, so much farmland will have been lost that imports of food will become essential.

COINAGE

In the early years of corsair activity, vast sums flowed unchecked into the city. Successful captains spent money like it was going out of fashion, and inflation soared in response. As prices rose higher and higher, the corsairs were forced to secure more booty to live their lavish lifestyles, creating a vicious circle. At the height of the raids, the situation was so serious that the emir imposed a treasure tax (that, while the rate has shrunk, still remains in place today). Throughout the era, there were no native coins. Since the peace treaty that ended the raids, Rawdah has minted standard coinage.

The gold one dinar coin is known as a “Corsair.” Folktales say it got its name because corsairs were once so common and places on a ship so limited that you could hire one for a dinar. Dirhams follow a nautical theme, with coins known as a “Keel” (one silver dirham), “Sail” (one-half dirham), and “Oar” (one-quarter dirham).

LOCAL TAXES

With a small army to support, the navy being a profit-making venture, and the other cities of the Emirates paying regular tribute, Rawdah’s citizens enjoy very reasonable taxation levels. Even with tithes, taxes rarely come to more than 15% of total income. On the downside, only a small percentage of the populace enjoy the spoils of Rawdah’s main exports. Still, citizens here enjoy more luxuries than their peers in other cities, and for that they remain grateful and mostly quiet.

Customs Duty: In a bid to boost trade, especially with Rassilon, imports and exports are charged at 0.5%.

Docking Fees: Captains are charged 0.25% of the value of their cargo or 100 dinars, which is the higher, to dock in Rawdah. This allows them to berth their ship for as long as they want. Given the queue for repairs, most consider this a fair deal.

Gate Tax: Set at a 1 dirham for all forms of traffic.

Sales Tax: Set at 3%, except on ship construction, modification, or repairs, which are taxed at 0.5%.

Treasure Tax: All currency entering the city is taxed at 10%. Gems are not considered currency, and enterprising merchants have started a new sideline. They wait in the harbor and hail approaching ships. For a 5% fee, they change money into gems of equal value. Once the visitors clears customs, he can exchange these for no fee back into coin at the merchant’s shop.

Architecture

Buildings related to governance and the homes of the nobles (new and old) are recent constructions, dating back only to the height of the corsairs, as are the newer residential areas. With coin flowing through the city like water down the River Mosak, no expense was spared on size, architectural style, or furnishings. The older

districts, most of which lie near the center of the city and were built in the decades after the Anari withdrawal, are of far inferior workmanship. Most are in need of major repairs, and some threaten to fall over.

Major Locales

Below are some of the more notable places the heroes might wish to explore while in and around Rawdah.

CITY DISTRICTS

The Anari conquest of Rawdah was extremely thorough. As a militocracy, its belligerent people were considered a serious threat to Anari occupation of the land now known as the Free Emirates. To break their resolve and prevent them from ever using the city as a base for a rebellion, the invaders reduced much of it to rubble. When the Anari left, the decision was made not to clear the entire city of rubble. Instead the section around the harbor was cleared, the stone used to in fill new city walls, beyond which lay the shattered remains of the old city. As the population grew, the emirs built on vacant ground north along the coast rather than wasting time and money clearing the rubble and moving the existing walls outward. Thanks to the corsair money, the northernmost districts have long since left the rubble behind, allowing the city to expand inland once more.

Although there are several named districts, the city is officially divided into four quarters—The Old City, Corsair Town, High Town, and New Town. Of the 154,000 citizens the emira rules over, 60% live inside the city.

Corsair Town: The first major expansion built using the profits of piracy, Corsair Town lies north of the Old City. Half the quarter is lower- and middle-class residential areas, and the other half is taken up by Sword Town.

Harbor: Trade may be a small part of the city’s income, but the harbor is rarely empty. Merchants from Rassilon, especially those sailing to Drakeport, come here to hire escorts and gather final supplies before heading into the open and wild ocean.

High Town: Situated on bluffs north of Corsair Town, this mainly residential district is named both for its elevation and because it was built by the new nobility. It remains predominantly upper-class.

New Town: The last expansion to Rawdah, New Town sits east (inland) of High Town. Built at the end of the corsair era, when the population was still growing, its tightly packed houses and narrow streets are home to lower-class citizens.

Old City: The land around the harbor was cleared of rubble to form the center of the new Rawdah. Located here are the Harbor, Palace, and Shipyard Districts.

Old Rubble: Sprawling around the south and eastern flanks of the Old City are the remains of the original city. Long picked clean of any valuables, the unofficial district is deserted, save for a few scavengers following

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up stories of buried treasure in secret vaults. Movement through the district counts as difficult ground.

Palace: The emira's palace sits at the southern end of the harbor, from where it provides a majestic view over the Old City. Heavily fortified, it protects access to the harbor.

Shipyard: Situated at the northern end of the Old City, Rawdah's shipyards are a hive of industry. As well as ship building yards, the district is home to many craftsmen and laborers who rely on the industry for their living. Although treated as part of the Old City, the district is separated from both it and the adjoining Corsair Town by walls, a measure taken to prevent fire spreading.

Sword Town: The western half of Corsair Town is devoted to training, housing, and entertaining mercenaries. It has a deserved reputation for rowdiness. Intermingled with the inns, taverns, and schools are armorers, weaponsmiths, saddlers, stables, veterinarians, and barbers, all of whom do a roaring trade whenever a company returns to its spiritual home.

CITY LOCALES

Ansharu's Leather Goods: Despite being a hyaenidae with a laugh that grates on the nerves, Ansharu has a good reputation in Rawdah. The leather armor he produces is as strong as regular leather but is more supple, allowing greater freedom of movement. It is very popular with mercenaries and marines with coin to spare. Leather armor and barding costs double normal, but weighs half as much (retain fractions).

The Ash Pit: Two years ago, fire ravaged part of New Town, destroying several dozen homes. With nowhere else to go, the occupants were forced to move into a neighboring slum. Here they have become easy prey for criminals. Despite their frequent pleas to the emira, rebuilding work has been exceptionally slow.

The Caged Minotaur: Popular with mercenaries looking to prove their mettle (usually while fuelled with strong drink), this tavern actually has a caged minotaur. Anyone willing to stump up 10 dinars can try to best the beast in unarmed combat (no weapons, no armor, no spells). The 1000 dinars prize has not been claimed in many years. The cage is too small to prevent the minotaur, Gral, from goring, and his horns are tipped with thick leather caps when he is fighting.

Most people assume Gral is a slave. In fact, he owns a stake in the tavern. Ousted from his tribe by a rival, he brawls to keep himself fighting fit while he plots his revenge. Gral doesn't drink or smoke, and he is notoriously laconic.

The Captains' Tent: One of Sword Town's numerous drinking dens, only officers in the city's army or navy or a recognized mercenary company are permitted inside, as are those looking to hire mercenaries. The proprietor, Baligh the Blade, is a retired mercenary captain. His six staff all served under him at some point, and help ensure fights are quickly broken up. Baligh has countless contacts among the mercenaries—anyone looking to

hire a company off-the-record is swiftly pointed in his direction. Baligh charges a flat 100 dinar introduction fee, a rate far below the percentage charged for doing business through official channels.

The inn is currently home to Knight-Commander Tarquinix (male, Anari) and Knight-Master Aethelsieg Aelfredsunu (male, Saxa). Members of the Knights Hrafn, they are in the city trying to drum up business among the mercenaries.

Tarquinix hails from a Magocratic noble house. He was cast out from his family when it was discovered he lacked the talent for heahwisardry. Aethelsieg is fascinated by war elephants. He is seriously considering quitting the Knights Hrafn on his return home and founding a company of mammoth cavalry mercenaries. He is looking for local mercenaries who understand war elephants to form the backbone of his new venture.

City Walls: The landward sides of Rawdah are protected by strong walls guarded by eight watchtowers. While the coastal aspect is exposed, half the city is located on or behind bluffs. Even so, there are three more towers, not to mention the palace and the Sea Wall. Each Quarter is separated from its neighbors by thinner walls.

Combat Schools: Rawdah's multitudinous combat schools cover a wide range of styles. When creating one, the GM should pick a specific aspect of combat, such as archery, spears, shield work, or wielding two weapons. Each school teaches appropriate combat skills and one or two Edges specifically relating to its favored style. A Spear School, for example, will teach Fighting and Throwing, while its sole Edges is likely to be Spear Twist (though it might also teach Spear Catch).

Skills: Fighting, Riding, Shooting, or Throwing (as appropriate); **Edges:** One or two appropriate Edges.

The Crypts: Rawdah's rich Faithful citizens are buried in a catacomb beneath the Old City. The cost of a burial here has risen dramatically, and many burials now take place in a purpose-built cemetery a mile out of town.

Several months ago, maintenance workers employed to prevent the streets collapsing into the tunnels accidentally broke through a wall. Beyond was a set of far older passages that lead out beneath the Old Rubble. Curiosity could not overcome fear of the unknown, and they erected a makeshift barricade.

Since then, reports of strange noises and half-glimpsed figures have been commonplace. Braver souls claim the sounds are the work of thieves scouring the tombs for what little treasure remains (the old nobles took back much of their ancestors' funerary goods) or beggars who live in the tunnels. Others are worried the sounds are generated by restless undead.

Gates: Rawdah has six gates, but only one that breeches the exterior walls. Known simply as the Main Gate, it is located in the eastern wall of Corsair Town. Heavily fortified, it is open during hours of the daylight.

The five internal gates are the New Gate (between New Town and High Town), High Gate (between High Town and Corsair Town), Corsair Gate (between Corsair Town and the Shipyard District), Ship Gate (separates the

shipyards from the Old City), and the Palace Gate (leads into the palace). No tolls are charged for using any of the internal gates, which are kept open day and night.

The House of Al-Jal: This large courtyard house belongs to one of the oldest noble families. Sorely in need of repair, it is shunned by citizens, especially after dark. According to local gossip, numerous people have disappeared in its vicinity, never to be seen again. Others claim that while walking past at night the gate silently swung open on its own accord. Fighting down a sudden compulsion to enter the darkened courtyard, the passerby beat a rapid retreat, cold sweat prickling his skin. No official investigation has ever been launched.

The nobles of House Al-Jal are given a wide berth when seen on the streets. Gaunt, dark eyed, and with a fondness for drab colors, they have an unproven reputation for being students of *khem-hekau* and enjoying pleasures that can at best be labelled debauched and at worst depraved.

Lumbermans' Guild: Located in the Old City, the "Guild" is the local collective name for the nobles who own much of the forests on which Rawdah's shipbuilding industry relies. This building is where they meet to discuss business, set quotas, argue over prices, and settle disputes with customers.

The Guild currently has much to debate. Blight has struck the forests, and it is spreading rapidly. Huge areas of forest have been felled and burned in a bid to stop the contamination spreading, but despite the effort, it has barely slowed the advance. The nobles are prepared to offer a rich sum to anyone who can find the cause of the infection and stop the spread.

Mariner's College: As well as being an educational establishment, the school houses a small hostel used by Brothers of Sinbad when they are in port. Many work as tutors, though their notoriously restless souls mean few stay for extended periods.

The college's library, which houses a collection of charts and travelogues, is also a museum dedicated to the golden age of the corsairs. Displays include model ships, busts of famous corsairs, weapons used by the dread pirates, and even preserved human remains. Most citizens know the corsairs spent their booty freely, and don't place any value in the endless array of treasure maps stored here. Most are indeed fakes, but some point the way to genuine hoards and lost islands. Separating the wheat from the chaff is the hard part.

Skills: Boating, Knowledge (The Seas); **Edges:** Master Mariner.

The Sea Wall: During the clearing of rubble in the Old City, the emir ordered some of it be used to create a defensive wall encompassing the harbor. Running from the northern tip of the shipyards almost to the palace, the curved wall protects ships in harbor from spring and winter storms, and forces ships to enter and leave via a narrow channel.

Located at the southern end is a small fort (known simply as the Fort) bristling with ballistas and trebuchets loaded with alchemical ammunition. Much of the am-

HIRING AN ARMY

The armies of the great cities are usually enough to handle common problems. When extra troops are needed, those with money turn to mercenaries. Higher population levels than in neighboring Rassilon means that mercenary units are more common in Al-Shirkuh. As a result, rates are slightly cheaper. Pay scales are also more granulated.

As a guideline, the rates below are considered typical pay for a week's work for common soldiers. Garrison rates are half this amount. Prices are given in dinars. All bonuses are cumulative. Mercenaries receive a half-week's pay for the four unnamed days at the start of each month.

Pay is before any expenses, such as food, lodgings, tax, or replacing equipment. In many companies, soldiers pay a set fee to cover these. A common medium infantryman in employment for a year would receive 1040 dinars for the 52 whole weeks, plus 130 dinars for the 13 half weeks, a total of 1170 dinars. If he breaks or loses his short sword, replacing it costs 200 dinars, or roughly one-sixth of his basic pay. Fortunately, a mercenary can dramatically increase his income, or at least offset equipment losses, by looting fallen comrades or enemies.

Pay Troops Basic

10	Archer
10	Skirmisher
20	Medium Infantry
30	Heavy Infantry
20	Mounted Archer (with mount)
20	Light Cavalry (with mount)
35	Heavy or Ultra-Heavy Cavalry (with mount)
20	Mage or cleric

Bonuses

+2	Per Combat and Leadership Edge
+5	Expert Healer or Siege Engineer Edge
+5	Mage or cleric who knows <i>healing</i>
+10	Mage or cleric with damaging spell, such as <i>bolt</i> or <i>blast</i>
+20	Mameluk Mercenary Edge
+50	If cavalry mount is a war elephant

munition dates back to the days of the corsairs, when the city could afford to invest in such things. Stretching underwater between the fort and the palace is a massive chain. This can be raised to block access in the event of an attack or to prevent ships leaving port. At night, gigantic twin lanterns—one on the Fort and one on the palace—guide ships into harbor.

Rumors the Fort's lower level, which is inside the Sea Wall, houses a number of aquatic golems equipped with drills instead of hands are popular but unproven.

Temple of Karmelos: The grand temple is far from

just a place of worship. Heavily fortified and protected by paladins and fadeen, it also serves as the city's central armory. Situated in the temple precinct is the Mercenary Guild Hall. It serves as a recruiting center for the various mercenaries who call Rawdah home, taking in both aspiring soldiers and patrons who seek to hire one or more companies. Officially, all hiring must be done here. The Guild charges a percentage fee. Many patrons have started doing business through the Captains' Tent.

Tayyib's Hireling Hire: This small sells typical adventuring gear—backpacks, bedrolls, lanterns, rope, and the like. All of it is secondhand, but prices are 25% lower than normal. Tayyib also rents torchbearers and equipment carriers. These young men and women, some still children in the eyes of the law, cost a mere 1 dinar per week, but patrons are responsible for their provisions and medical bills. They are strictly noncombatants.

Every item for sale has been scavenged from adventuring parties who met their doom, brought back by the hirelings. In return, they receive a small bonus (10% of the secondhand value) for their efforts. The business is legitimate and the hirelings are neither thieves nor assassins—adventuring is dangerous, and the hirelings are merely making the best of someone else's misfortune.

Zela's Palace: Zela's offers good food, passable drinks, and the best entertainment in the city. Among the many acts are firebreathers, knife jugglers and throwers, and exotic dancers. Of the latter, the most celebrated is Blizzard, a female hearth elf.

A former Bladedancer, she now earns a living dancing in a skimpy costume while twirling a pair of finely-honed scimitars. The blood stains on the floor are testament to her popularity—many men have tried to touch her skin, but few have succeeded without receiving a deep cut. Blizzard claims she quit her previous job, but the way she keeps glancing at visitors from the northern lands leads some to believe the decision was not entirely her choice.

THE IFRIT'S GRAVE

Most shipyards in Al-Shirkuh create pitch by heating wood, a laborious process that must be undertaken on an industrial level. The shipwrights of Rawdah harvest their pitch from the Ifrit's Grave, a bubbling tar pit just below the foothills of the Nazir Range.

According to legend, the site marks the final resting place of a greater ifrit who saw fit to trouble the city. Slain by the stalwart soldiers, its flesh decayed into a mass of thick, black, hot tar. No one doubts the story's veracity—laborers have unearthed a collection of large bones from the primordial ooze since exploitation of the resource began in the corsair era. The only point of contention between scholars is whether the site is a singular or mass grave.

RUINS

Rawdah's ancient militocracy did not rise to prominence in the region by making peace with its neighbors.

At some point in the distant past, it warred against and conquered at least four rival cultures. Cities, town, and villages were put to the torch. Ruins dot the landscape north of the river extending deep into the foothills. The known settlements have been repeatedly plundered, though stories abound of hidden caches and secret tunnels.

Even today, shepherds and explorers stumble across previously unknown ruins. Most of these are minor structures, a village or remote temple or fort, but the fact they have yet to be properly investigated draws treasure seekers away from the comfort of Rawdah.

PERSONS OF NOTE

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

CAPTAIN WALIF FOESTOMPER

This eccentric mercenary captain is noted for his dazzling array of expensive ivory jewelry and his habit of riding through the city on an elephant bedecked in brightly colored leather barding. Walif is captain of the Unstoppable Force, a mercenary company of heavy infantry supported by five war elephants.

Loud, gregarious, and generous, Walif frequents several taverns when in Rawdah. While he disdains the vagaries of cards and dice, he enjoys backgammon, chess, and physical contests of strength. Of the latter, his favorite involves two contestants inside a chalk circle. The aim of the contest is to simple enough—push your opponent out of the ring through brute strength alone. Anyone who can beat Walif is guaranteed to be publicly showered with praise and gifts.

FARHAH AND HEAHRAED

Farhah bint Mukkaram and Heahraed Osricsunu are an odd pairing. She is a native of Sirhan, City of Stars. Young, attractive, slim, and athletic, she is a thief by trade, driven out of the city by the bitter struggle for supremacy between the rival factions. Tall, blonde, muscular, and well-past his prime, he is a warrior from Midmark.

The pair, while often having differences of opinion, are close friends, having journeyed and adventured together in both Al-Shirkuh and Rassilon for the past two years. Their relationship is closer to father and daughter, Heahraed being extremely protective of his younger companion—many a lovestruck suitor has received a bloody nose for his improper advances toward Farhah. Mischievous by nature, the girl has sometimes gone out of her way to tempt potential suitors into crossing her adventuring partner.

When not on the road, the pair reside in Rawdah. Patrons of several taverns, they feast and drink like emirs until lack of funds forces them to go on another perilous and exciting adventure.

SALIH

City of Fire

A city of constant din and belching smoke, Salih is an industrial complex of unprecedented size. It is a city choking on its own success, with toxic fumes, respiratory tract infections, and acid rain a constant menace. It is also a city blanketed by a growing dark cloud of ill-feelings, for nobles and metalworkers alike are concerned at the rise of a new industrial center, a complex that appears to have no living workers.

Social Hierarchy

The emirs of Salih have always had strong ties to the cult of Geb-Agni. When the Anari abandoned the city, it was the cult of Geb-Agni who took over the bureaucracy, keeping the furnaces and forges running as chaos beat at the very gates of Salih. Despite this, the cult quickly handed power to a secular government once the political situation had stabilized—it has little talent for governance, and if Salih was to prosper in changed world, strong governance was required above all else. Still, it has not entirely ceded power.

Under ancient law, the emir must always be high priest of Geb-Agni, and thus Faithful. More importantly, he must be an ordained cleric of the deity. This came with certain restrictions—the emir could not openly favor the cult above any other, such as by placing fellow clerics in high office or through tax breaks; he could discriminate against Devoted; and he could not neglect his civic duties. As a result, his position as high priest is mainly honorary—daily cult affairs are handled by his immediate subordinate.

Business is booming and great wealth is flowing through the gates, but Emir Abbas is coming under mounting pressure to explain what is happening at the new industrial complex outside the city walls. Both the nobles and the smiths are demanding to know not only who is working the foundries and forges, but what is happening to the finished goods. In the same way that no people are ever seen to enter or leave, no metal goods have yet left its gate, despite clear evidence of continual heavy industry taking place. Despite frequent reassurances that nothing untoward is happening and that everyone will prosper from the work, the mood in Salih is growing uglier by the week. Even the cult of Geb-Agni is becoming suspicious and frustrated—their paladins guard the exterior of the site, but none are permitted inside.

Salih's nobility are old, influential, and rich. Controlling much of the raw mineral resources, their status has grown along with that of the city. Ownership of the mines

has brought them power over the city's finances—if the mines produce too little ore, the price rises accordingly. Conversely, too much ore, and the price plummets. They play a delicate balancing act between making healthy profits and appeasing the metalworkers reliant on their goods. Both sides know the other is out to line its pockets at the other's expense, but equally that unless the situation becomes serious, the emir will not interfere.

Much of the *mak-shabrum* is comprised of senior clerics of Geb-Agni, powerful ifrit jinn mages, foundry owners, and master metalworkers. Few do not hold honor titles in recognition of their position in society.

The middle-class is undergoing huge growth. Many metalworkers have the wealth and status to qualify as members of the lower echelon. This dramatic increase has brought with it new problems—many formerly lower-class residential areas are now too expensive for poorer citizens. Forced out of their homes by rising rents, they crowd into lower-class districts that long since ran out of comfortable living space.

Of the *barajam* class, laborers are the largest group, with farmers a distant second. Some two-thirds of the population is involved in the production of metal goods, and an army of workers is required to shift timber, coal, and charcoal, stoke furnaces and forges, and shift metal in its various forms around the city. The hours are long, wages are low, accidents are common, but few dare to grumble openly—unskilled laborers are easily replaced in Salih, and a worker blackballed by one employer for daring to ask for a pay rise or better working conditions may find he cannot find work in any part of the metal-working industry.

The most unusual residents in the city are the many lesser ifrits who call the city home. At the last census, there were 124 resident. Some are mere servants, transients summoned by magic to toil in the foundries and forges as and when needed. A very small few are permanent residents of the earthly realm, but bound into a mortal's service. The great majority of those recorded in the census are actually free citizens, sworn to obey the emir and paid for their work. Given that the majority of the population is Faithful, it is not surprising that they are generally treated as being *mushaf*, regardless of their income or profession.

For their part, the jinn don't give a damn what anyone else thinks of them. Jinn society in Salih has its own internal social hierarchy, though few outsiders understand it. Some casual laborers seem to rank higher than artisans whose skill equals (if not surpasses) that of its mortal peers, while others with similar talents are little different in status to lower-class humans.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Salih.

* **Acid Rain:** On rare occasions, the heavy cloud over the city spontaneously produces mild acid rain. The GM should draw a card each day. A black deuce means a rain shower hits the city. Anyone caught outside must make a Vigor roll or suffer a level of Fatigue from Bumps and Bruises. Showers rarely last more than two hours, and are easily avoided.

* **Bad Air:** Salih is often blanketed in a thick cloud of choking smoke. Each week, characters must make a Vigor roll or suffer a minor respiratory tract infection.

Minor Respiratory Infection (Airborne, +0): Victims are Fatigued while infected due to shortness of breath. Any roll of 1 (regardless of Wild Die) on a physical Trait roll made under strenuous circumstances causes the victim to be Shaken by a hacking coughing fit. A Vigor roll to remove the disease made be made every four days.

* **Herbal Remedies:** Antibacterial, antibiotic, and healing (fire) remedies cost 20 dinars.

* **Lighting:** Due to the permanent cloud, lighting is Dim (-1) during the day and one level worse than normal conditions would give at night (to a maximum of Pitch Dark).

* **Native Heroes:** For one skill point, a native character with Smarts d6+ can begin play with Knowledge (Craft: Metalworking) d6.

* **Slaves:** The price of slave laborers varies depending on the duration of their sentence. Multiply the standard price by 10% for each year of slavery the court hands down, to a maximum of +200% for a sentence of 20+ years. Add 300 dinars to the base price if the slave has the Brawny Edge.

* **Temperature:** The heavy cloud hanging over the city and the many furnaces and forges that belch out heat 24 hours a day mean the city is Hot during the day and Warm at night during Alak Paret.

* **Weapons and Armor:** Mundane weapons and armor cost 75% of normal. When selling such pieces, characters receive 10% of the normal value on a successful Streetwise roll and 25% on a raise. Heroes with the Expert Haggler Edge (see *Realm Guide #13*) receive the standard 25% or 50% as appropriate.

Education

Despite the cult of Qedeset being popular, education is very much a secondary concern, especially to the average citizen—wages are too low for anyone capable of work to spend their time doing other activities. In direct violation of the Free Emirates' charter, children as young as ten are sent out to work.

For lower-class families who have managed to save a

little, there is the hope their child will be accepted into the School of Blacksmiths. Run by the cult of Geb-Agni (although it accepts students of any faith), the school teaches aspiring smiths the basics of the art. Unlike in other city's with trade schools, final year students are not selected as apprentices by masters. Instead, graduates must apply to a master, who then selects his apprentices for that year by setting them various tasks. Naturally, most seek out the best metalworkers in the city, for under their guidance they will learn much and, hopefully, earn enough to one day open their own forge.

Keen to harness the talents of mages, the emir opened the School of Fire eight years ago. This establishment provides instruction in jinn magic, but only with regard ifrits. Practised jinn mages who know additional forms are accepted, for the school also provides schooling in advanced spellcasting techniques.

For those whose talents and aspirations lie elsewhere, the University of Salih provides a wide-range of courses.

Religion

Faithful account for 67% of the population. Of these, over 50% honor Geb-Agni, the city's patron deity. The cult enjoys great power and influence, but it is not privy to the emir's thoughts or favor. Indeed, his refusal to allow clerics inside the new industrial compound has raised the ire of many clerics, who feel they of all people are entitled to know what is happening.

The cult operates its own foundry and many of its clerics are practising metalworkers. Others are hired by the nobles to help find new ore or protect their mines.

Qedeset ranks second among the gods, though only his aspects of invention and trade receive much worship. While clerics favoring the latter aspect grow rich, those preferring Qedeset's inventive nature strive to find more efficient ways to excavate, smelt, and work metal.

Marqod is not without her supporters. Burns, cuts, broken bones, and respiratory tract infections are serious problems, and the cult strives to keep the workforce on its feet. With its temple understaffed, the best it can do is provide herbal remedies at reduced prices.

In the fields around the city, worship of Geb-Agni is virtual unknown—here Ashtart reigns supreme. The cult has been pressing the emir to do something about the polluted river for years, as has the tiny cult of Apsu. Upriver of Salih, the water is fresh. Downstream, the oily slick prevents it being used for irrigation. Longer irrigation channels, the emir's current solution, simply won't work—cutting a channel around the city could be done over summer, but there is no way to keep the water moving over distances as much as ten miles from the river. The cult of Apsu has searched for underground water sources, but has found no viable ones.

The small cult of Karmelos has enjoyed a recent surge in royal favor. The high priest has been invited to several secret meetings in the palace, and the temple, a minor

structure with few dedicated worshippers, has received sizeable donations from city coffers. This has not gone unnoticed by the masses. Coupled with a recent increase in the size of the army, this has raised suspicions that the emir is plotting to go to war. Given that the only viable targets are the other Free Emirate cities, there is growing panic that Salih may soon become an aggressor. The high priest has publicly dismissed such talk, claiming the emir merely wishes to safeguard the valuable mines and citizens of Salih from any potential external threat. He may sound sincere, but few take his words at face value.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Lighting the Forge: Whenever construction of a new forge or furnace is completed, the owner may ask the high priest of Geb-Agni to light the first fire. A debate has long raged over whether this is a civic function (the forge or furnace is, after all, a business) or a purely religious one. The emir, who until five years performed this personally, has since declared it is a religious ceremony.

This means he no longer undertakes the duty, a move that has offended the Devoted, who accepted the honor out of tradition rather than spiritual belief. Many have since refused to allow the ceremony to take place in their workshops, instead offering the honor to ifrit jinn mages (and sometimes a lesser ifrit).

Military

With its ready access to ore and forges, Salih's army has always been well equipped. Since the mines are owned by the nobles, the army focuses its attention on patrolling the river and the area immediately surrounding the city.

ARMY

Salih's standing army is an impressive five legions and two wings, or 2% of its population. Until recently, the city had four legions—one heavy, two medium, and one light. Not only has another legion been added, but their types has been upgraded to two heavy and three medium, an alteration that required new armaments and mastering different tactics. The type designations cover three companies per legion—the fourth company is always archers. Similarly, both cavalry wings are now designated heavy cavalry, though each maintains one company of light cavalry as scouts.

When it comes to mundane equipment, the army wants for nothing. Soldiers have the best armor and weapons their type allows, receive good pay, and eat plentiful rations. As a result, the army is extremely loyal to the emir, not to mention enjoying very high morale.

The city guard numbers one legion—three companies of medium infantry and one company of archers who double as artillerymen. The infantry are currently in the

process of being upgraded to heavy infantry. At the current rate of rearming and retraining, one company every two months will achieve the new designation.

Palace security falls to the Hammers of Salih, a heavy infantry regiment. One squad is made up entirely of paladins of Geb-Agni and a second of ifrit jinn mages. The latter are technically light infantry—few mages have the strength to wear heavy armor for extended periods.

Protecting the mines against orcs, and the occasional subterranean beast, is the responsibility of each noble. Should they require help in protecting their mines, they can hire soldiers at cheaper rates than hiring mercenaries. Doing so, of course, indicates to the emir that the nobleman has skimmed on defences, thus threatening the supply of ore. More than one noble has been enslaved for allowing a mine to be overrun, and a handful beheaded for losing a mine to orcs, an act that forced the city to unleash its military strength.

The majority accept their duty, and the added expense, and hire a strong security force. Others scrimp on protection, preferring to quietly hire mercenaries should anything go wrong and prey they can deal with the matter before news reaches the emir.

NAVY

Salih's navy has 15 light warships. Unconcerned with what happens to merchant vessels once they leave harbor, the fleet is assigned to patrol the River Mushtaq and enforce the law preventing all river traffic except ore barges from using the waterway during daylight hours.

The city has no dedicated marines. Rather, each legion serves with the navy on a rotating basis. This means there is always a fighting force ready to respond should trouble break out upriver.

Law & Order

Traditionally, the city guard are responsible for manning the walls and protecting citizens on the streets. When it comes to protecting property, citizens must pay for the privilege. The guard charges less than the thieves' guild, but they are also notoriously lax in solving crimes. Of course, the guild only offers protection against theft, not other crimes. This left a niche that has been filled by private investigators. Metalworkers can pay the cult of Geb-Agni to protect both their property and person (the latter while in their home). With many clerics and fadeen employed elsewhere, the cult sub-contracts the work to private investigators and clerics of Qedeshet. This is not to say service is poor—the cult of Geb-Agni demands results in a timely fashion.

Most of the mine workers are free citizens, paid for their toil based on the amount of rock they excavate. Over the last few decades a growing trend has emerged—the use of slaves. Pressure from the nobles has resulted in traditional punishments being replaced with slavery.

Dismemberment sentences have been replaced with enforced slavery, as are all but the most heinous capital offences. Those who fall foul of the courts are sold at public auctions. Unable to meet demand, some miners have taken to openly purchasing slaves from other sources, asking no questions as to how they were acquired.

Salih has several unusual crimes. Using the river by day for unauthorized purposes warrants a stiff fine for a first offence, confiscation of one's vessel and flogging for a second offence, and enslavement for a third breach. Allowing a forge or furnace to go out is also punishable by a fine, the value increasing with each repeated offence.

The thieves' guild, the Scorched Fingers, is also enjoying the economic boom. As well more citizens having wealth worth stealing, the hashish trade has never been so profitable. The nobles ignore the trade, and even the city guard prefers to take bribes rather than spend time in paperwork and processing—arresting a few dealers won't harm the guild's operations, so why shouldn't they make a few dinars from it.

Trade & Tribute

Constructed by the Anari, Salih's location downstream from multiple rich ore veins made it an ideal site for an industrial city. The Anari may have gone, but the city continues to excavate, process, refine, and shape metal.

The mines are the backbone of the economy. When the Free Emirates was founded, most cities opted to grab land around the city walls and along the nearest river. The emir of Salih, however, elected to take only a small region near the city (about 15 miles in all directions), the river itself (with very little land either side), and a goodly portion of the distant foothills and mountains.

Much of the mineral rich land was sold to citizens who would become the nucleus of the new nobility. Many mines have closed, their ore worked out to the last ounce, but new ones are always opening in their place. Raw ore is shipped to Salih, where it is processed in foundries owned by the emir and a handful of private citizens. Each day, ingots are sold at auction to the hundreds of independent metalworkers resident in the city. Only very small quantities of ore are exported, and then only if demand in the city has been met.

Salih makes its money from the labors of its metalworkers. Armor, weapons, pots, flasks, grappling hooks, tools, and even some jewelry is exported far and wide. As a result, both the merchants and smiths have grown wealthy alongside the nobles.

The city is self-sufficient in food. All the farmland is the personal property of the emir, governed by state appointed overseers and worked by free citizens. Harvests are sold cheaply, ensuring the army of laborers and metalworkers has plenty of food. With the air in the city growing ever more toxic and many citizens forced to work in hot and dangerous conditions, citizens look at life on the farms as paradise.

Some timber is imported from Rawdah, City of Heroes. Sacks of charcoal are purchased in great quantities from Rassilon, where there are plenty of forests. Coal, a rarity found only in the Jinn Lands of Old, is imported, but not in sufficient quantities to fuel the massive industrial machine running day and night.

With the agricultural land devoted to edible crops, flax must be imported. Fortunately, much of this comes from independent villages along the river. Similarly, the river has scant deposits of clay, a substance used in the creation of forges and workshop floors as well as pots.

COINAGE

During the Anari occupation, Salih served as the mint for the entire region. Today, the city looks to its own manufacture only. All coins carry the name of the city and the name of the emir on one side. On the reverse, is stamped the holy symbol of Geb-Agni—two inverted triangles.

The basic coins are the gold one dinar and silver one dirham piece. Locals refer to these as Hammers and Anvils respectively. Rather than waste precious metals on smaller denomination coins, one-half dirham and one-quarter coins are minted in iron and are larger than the other coins. These are known as a Spark and Half-Spark respectively.

With wealth increasing, the emir has allowed the creation of higher denomination currency. To date, five dinar, ten dinar, and 50 dinar coins have been struck. Still relatively new, they have yet to acquire nicknames.

LOCAL TAXES

Citizens pay nothing on their wages. Businesses, however, pay 10% of their annual turnover to the city. Since laborers receive a pittance, this has done nothing to equalize the growing gap between rich and poor.

Calls for the business tax to be increased to 25% have been ignored by the emir, who has no wish to see industry stifled by excessive taxes. Furthermore, he argues, citizens enjoy cheap prices for metal goods and food, goods that in some citizens consume much of a worker's weekly wage.

Customs Duty: Imports are charged at 2%, except for ore mined outside the city's sphere of control. These cargoes carry a 10% surcharge. All exports are charged at a flat 3%.

Docking Fees: Barges carrying ore are not charged docking fees for the first 48 hours. After this, the standard rate of 10 dinars per day applies.

Metalworking License: Anyone wishing to open a metalworking business must pay a one-off of 2500 dinars. This has helped maintain the skill of businesses—those with only mediocre skills either cannot afford this, or know it will take many years to turn a profit and so give up on their venture before it begins.

Sales Tax: Nothing on metal goods, including weapons and armor, or food. All other goods and services have a 5% levy.

Tithes: 50% of all tithes, even those paid by Devoted, goes to the cult of Geb-Agni. Among Faithful, 25% is paid to the citizen's patron deity (which is often Geb-Agni) and 25% is shared among all the other cults. Devoted may give their remaining 50% to any licensed kada or maktab they choose.

Architecture

Rich under the Anari, the city underwent a massive amount of urban renewal over the two centuries. As the Anari adopted more local customs, so they turned to native architecture and decoration. Much of the old city has gone. Some of it has been demolished to make way for the growing Industrial Quarter. Of the buildings that remain, the murals and engravings that adorned the walls are concealed beneath a thick layer of soot. Architecture that somehow avoided the black cloak has been pitted and eroded by acid rain—it may be mild, but over the decades it can do considerable damage.

On the whole, Salih is a very drab and depressing place to live. Nothing stays clean for long, and citizens have stopped making any effort to spruce up the exteriors of their homes.

Major Locales

Detailed below are some of the more interesting or important locales in and around the soot-choked, smog-engulfed city that never sleeps.

CITY DISTRICTS

Within the grime-encrusted walls live 58,000 citizens (42% of the total population). A further 45,000 live in the land immediately outside the city. The remaining 36,000 live in the foothills of the mountains, close to the mines they work. Salih's industry is located in the east. The further one moves west, the higher social class the residential districts. Not that distance from the belching chimneys in any way reduces the effects of the smoke. Even in the emir's palace, the faint clang of the forges can still be heard.

City Docks: These docks, located at the western end of the city, cater solely to merchant vessels entering the city from the sea. Each warehouse contains a veritable arsenal. This has led to them being heavily fortified and protected by expensive traps and *glyphs*.

Industrial Quarter: The industrial heart of Salih occupies almost one half of the city. In the east is the Foundry District, where raw ore is smelted and transformed into metal ingots. Along the river is the River Docks, wharves and warehouses catering solely to ore-laden barges.

Only the poorest citizens live in and bordering the area. The cloud of smoke and soot is thickest here, the

NEW ARCANE BACKGROUND

ARTIFICER

Requirements: Novice

Arcane Skill: Artificer (Smarts)

Starting Powers: 3

Powers: *Aim, altered senses, beast friend, blast, bolt, burrow, burst, confusion, deflection, detect/conceal arcana, dispel, elemental manipulation, entangle, farsight, fear, fly, hamper movement, knockdown, leaping, light, obscure, sentry, slumber, stun, wandering senses, zephyr.*

Artificers, as practitioners are known, do not cast spells themselves. Their skill comes in building fantastic technological devices that manipulate the threads of magic. Though there are many similarities, their devices are not the same as true or spirit relics—they are not permanently enchanted and they need not be attuned. Basic machines are more similar to alchemical devices, in that they have a limited number of uses before the delicate mechanism breaks beyond repair.

Game Mechanics: Artificers are a form of weird scientist. They cast spells *only* through creating temporary machines. They gain the Alchemy Edge for free when they take this Arcane Background, ignoring all requirements. Unlike normal alchemical devices, an artificer can add more uses of the same spell to an existing device (one with at least one charge remaining) simply by repeating the creation process. Since the basic machine has already been created, these extra uses cost half as much as normal. Activating these devices always requires a Smarts, Artificer, or appropriate skill roll (such as Shooting for a *bolt* crossbow) and the user must have one hand free to manipulate the mechanism. Failure simply means the magic has not been released. A critical failure destroys the device and all stored charges.

Trappings: Although an artificer's devices use magic, all trappings must be based on effects capable of being produced by relatively primitive technology. For instance, *entangle* might take the form of a sticky glue or launched web, but animating vines or causing hands made of stone to rise up and grab everyone in the area is impossible. A *bolt* spell might be a repeating crossbow, a tube that fires pellets of burning metal or harnesses static electricity, or even a sonic cannon using oscillating crystals and membranes, but it cannot be a laser pistol or fire tendrils of necromantic energy. *Sentry* might be a little clockwork construct that patrols the camp.

Edges: Artificers may take the Golem Creator Edge, but can only build metal, stone, and wood golems. (If you have *Creature Guide: Golems*, they can also construct artillery, defender, and wall golems.) Artificers cannot take Spirit Binding.

NEW SCAVENGERS

MAERATHRIL

Virtually immune to magic and equipped with deadly ranged weapons, the silvery shells of Maerathril Scavengers are much feared by mages and clerics alike. With no Maerathril mines in Al-Shirkuh, the source of the metal remains a mystery. That the Scavengers are prepared to work such great quantities of one of the rarest metals in manufacturing a new anti-magic version can only mean they have learned one of their foes' major strength and are attempting to neutralize the advantage.

While normal Scavengers are creatures of instinct, Maerathril Scavengers are capable of independent thought and action. Unlike their mundane counterparts, they do not ignore creatures not carrying metal, nor are they automatically drawn to those who are. Instead, they analyze their threat potential, instructing their minions to attack if the Maerathril Scavenger considers them a threat.

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

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d8, Knowledge (Arcana) d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Tracking d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 10 (3)

Treasure: None.

Special Abilities:

* **Commander:** Scavengers within 5" of a Maerathril Scavenger are +1 to Spirit rolls to recover from being Shaken.

* **Construct:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.

* **Explode:** When a Scavenger is Incapacitated, it explodes, causing 3d6 damage to everything in a Medium Burst Template. The Scavenger's core is fused into a solid ball of molten slag.

* **Immunity:** Immune to acid and electrical attacks.

* **Maerathril Armor +3:** Metal shell. Grants +6 to Trait rolls to resist opposed arcane powers and +6 Armor against damage-causing magic.

* **Multiple Arms:** Maerathril Scavengers have four arms equipped with strange devices. Except where noted, any creature caught in the template must make an Agility roll opposed by the creature's Shooting roll or suffer the listed damage.

* **Acid Sprayer:** Cone Template; Damage: 2d8, AP 2 (acid trapping).

* **Arc Welder:** Line 1" wide and 12" long: 2d8 damage (electrical trapping).

* **Flamethrower:** Cone Template; Damage: 2d8 (fire trapping).

* **Magic Nullifier:** Range 8". Acts as *dispel* with a d8 arcane skill. Not subject to the Siphoning.

* **Sense Metal:** Scavengers can detect metal at a range of 48", regardless of how well it is hidden.

heat is stifling, and the clang of metal on metal reverberates day and night, a rhythmic yet discordant cacophony of competing beats not even wax earplugs or the strongest drink can totally block out.

Jinn Town: Home to the city's free jinn population, Ifrit Town is avoided by most citizens. The jinn rarely deign to speak to outsiders, any food and drink on sale is unpalatable to other races (even other jinn), and outsiders are rarely made to feel welcome. Jinn mages are tolerated, though only a few have chosen to live here.

Palace: Situated as far from the Industrial Quarter as possible, the palace has not escaped the soot. Many citizens say it resembles the skeletal hand of a gigantic mummy, the blackened towers stretching up toward the black sky like withered fingers. Others have likened it to a sickly plant, its fronds desperately attempting to pierce the permanent veil and reach sunlight above.

CITY LOCALES

Auction House: When citizens cannot pay their fines, the state confiscates and sells their property. In Salih, the goods are sold at a public auction held every Tamith Yaus al-Nefar. The auctioneers take 15% and the rest goes to the state. Private citizens who need money or simply want to unload items can sell goods through the auction house, again with a 15% commission. Items typically go for 30-60% (1d4+2 x 10%) of their true value, though rare or unusual items can fetch considerably higher prices, especially if two buyers are interested.

The next auction has already attracted plenty of interest. An ifrit jinn mages known to be a collector of jinn artifacts recently died. With no family to inherit his collection and no will bequeathing it to a friend or peer, it has fallen to the state to dispose of his estate (and profit from his untimely death).

Blacksmiths' School: The head of the school, Fatih Effendi ibn Izz al Din, has heard rumors of secret metalworking techniques known only to the master weaponsmiths of the Jade Empire. Were he to acquire one of their blades, known as a katana, he might be able to reproduce the technique. He knows that merchants from the distant realm visit both the cities of the sphinxes and Jubbah, City of Trade. Repeated attempts to acquire a blade through trade have failed, so he is resorting to hiring adventurers who don't mind stealing.

Skills: Craft (Metalworking).

The Golem Forge: The owner of this workshop, Ajda, a female cakali ushabti mage, specializes in the creation of metal golems. As well as standard models, she takes on custom work. She doesn't care what plans her patrons might have for her creations, and she asks no questions. Her prices are 90% those of normal, but she demands full payment in advance.

Although she does not advertise, Ajda is prepared to teach fellow ushabti mages the secret of golem creation. Since tuition takes her away from her daily chores, she charges twice as much as a standard university.

Edges: Golem Creation (ushabti magic only).

House of Fire: Situated at the southern edge of Jinn Town, this tavern is frequented by jinn mages and ifrits alike. The business is owned and operated by Kalizah, a lesser ifrit. In an attempt to boost business, he serves food and drink suitable for human consumption—so long as customers like their food spicy and overcooked, that is. Washing down a spicy kebab with the house wine in a bid to rinse quench the fire in one's mouth isn't recommended—it's flavored with chilli. The tavern has only one strict rule—no using water spells on the premises for any purpose.

House of Healing: Part of the temple of Marqod, the clerics and laity who tend to the sick have become especially skilled at treating burns. Healing rolls to cure injuries caused by fire or heat have a +1 bonus (in addition to any other modifiers), as do rolls to create healing (fire) herbal remedies. With burns so commonplace and most laborers on low wages, the cult has halved its standard treatment fees for these injuries.

Majdy's Forge: Majdy Effendi ibn Raja produces the sharpest blades in the city. The key to his success is not his skill, but his grindstone, which is the prison of a greater majin. It isn't a relic as such and so doesn't register as magical to touch, though it does to *detect arcana*.

For 50 dinars, Majdy will sharpen any blade to a fine hone. This gives the weapon a flat +1 damage bonus, but only until the wielder rolls a natural 1 (regardless of Wild Die) on his Fighting die, at which point the edge is blunted. A weapon cannot be sharpened again until the blade is blunted.

School of Fire: The School of Fire provides instruction in ifrit jinn magic. Several lesser ifrits are on the faculty, though they only work as classroom assistants because of their refusal to engage in long conversation on a regular basis.

The school's library specializes on all matters concerning jinn but has an entire section devoted purely to ifrits (–1 general, +1 specialization, +2 specialty). Given the risk of fire damage, any tomes presented to or acquired by the librarians are meticulously copied and the volume stored elsewhere for safekeeping.

One of the librarians, Tarun Singed-Hair (so named because she is a poor mage, and always ends up singing her hair) has grown suspicious about one of the lesser ifrits. The jinni comes into the library late at night and appears to be searching for very specific information. All attempts at help are rebuffed, the ifrit hurriedly closing whatever tome he was reading and making a hasty exit. No one on the faculty believes anything is amiss, so she is hoping to recruit outside help to get to the bottom of the mystery.

Note: Jinn Mastery can only be learned if the student's next advance will permit him to take the Edge. Spell Finesse can only be applied to a spell from the ifrit jinn magic list. Because the Jinn Magic skill covers all four forms equally, any student who knows ifrit magic can study the arcane skill—students who do have yet to master it gain no benefit from tuition.

Special: Students must be able to speak Jinn; **Skills:**



STAR METAL

Constructed from the scarcest of all metals, star metal Scavengers are extremely rare—to date, just one has been verifiably identified. Iron-red and equipped with a deadly array of weapons rather than tools, this seemingly unique variant appears to be a tactical commander. Like the Maerathril Scavenger, it is possessed of independent intelligence.

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

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Stealth d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 12 (5)

Treasure: None.

Special Abilities:

* **Arcane Resistance:** +2 to Trait rolls to resist opposed arcane powers and +2 Armor against damage-causing magic.

* **Construct:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.

* **Elite Commander:** Scavengers within 5" of a Star Metal Scavenger are +1 to Spirit rolls to recover from being Shaken, +1 Toughness, and +1 to melee damage rolls.

* **Explode:** When a Star Metal Scavenger is Incapacitated, it explodes, causing 4d8 damage to everything in a Medium Burst Template. The Scavenger's core is fused into a solid ball of molten slag.

* **Immunity:** Immune to acid and electrical attacks.

* **Improved Frenzy:** A Scavenger may make two attacks each round with no penalty.

* **Sense Metal:** Scavengers can detect metal at a range of 48", regardless of how well it is hidden.

* **Star Metal Armor +5:** Star metal shell.

* **Star Metal Weapons:** Str+d8, AP 6. Star Metal Scavengers have four arms, fitted with a variety of oversized hammers, maces, and sword blades. These are Heavy Weapons.

Jinn Magic; **Edges:** Jinn Mastery (ifrit only), Spell Finesse.

Shiyam's Forge: Shiyam Pasha bint Miqdad is a master weaponsmith. Several years ago, she acquired a Maerathril dagger from the auction house. No one knew what the metal was, and the smith picked it up cheap. Since then she has studied the properties of the silvery blade and learned of its true potential. She is desperate to get her hands on raw ore—even a few pounds would make her a very rich woman. Since it isn't found in Al-Shirkuh, she hopes to attract adventurers prepared to make the long voyage to Rassilon.

Slavers' Square: Those who find themselves sentenced to slavery are dragged here and locked in metal cages until the next auction. Exposed to the elements

for days on end (auctions take place only on Yaus al-Hamala), the slaves can do little but wait and ponder what their future holds. Children sometimes come to gawp, and those who try to drive the pests off are met with a hail of small stones and rotten fruit. Clerics of Marqod give the captives bread, soup, and water to keep up their strength, but can do little else to alleviate their discomfort save through prayer.

Soldiers' Souk: The most famous souk in Salih sells only weapons and armor. The shops in each street all sell the same type of equipment and are named accordingly. Prices are low anyway, so the owners compete for custom by offering free polishing and sharpening, fresh coffee and bread, and anything else they thing might tempt a customer into spending money on their wares.

The Temple of Earth and Fire: In a bid to attract metalworkers from Rassilon, who might know techniques as yet undiscovered in Al-Shirkuh, the emir has sponsored the creation of a small temple to Ertha and Kenaz. So far five clerics have made the trip. Ironically, they came to Salih precisely to learn techniques unknown in the north. The clerics are a source of some confusion and amusement among the locals, who cannot understand why the northerners need two separate deities when one is clearly enough.

Wasimah's Fine Garments: An elderly marid blooded spinster with a tongue as sharp as her needles, Wasimah is a weaver and tailor. She knows a secret technique that makes cloth resistant to fire. Her garments cost 150% more than normal clothes of the same type, but grant +2 Armor against spells with a heat and fire trapping and do not burn if exposed to brief intense heat, such as hot coals or sparks.

MINING CAMPS

The hills and lower mountain slopes east of Salih are homes to thousands of miners. Conditions are harsh even for free citizens, with long working hours, meager wages, and the risk of accident. At least these miners can go home to warm beds, hot meals, and loving arms.

The growing number of slaves brought to the mines receive no wages, are flogged if they fail to meet their quotas, are shackled together day and night, and are forced to sleep in the mines. Rebellions are brutally crushed, with any deaths put down to unfortunate accidents. As with the foundries and forges, mining continues around the clock.

There are hundreds of mines in the region, and more that have been worked out and abandoned. Some are extremely small, worked by barely a dozen people. Others are massive, stretching into the earth for miles with tunnels running up, down, and sideways, and worked by hundreds of diggers.

Not all the mines run smoothly. On top of mundane events, such as rockfalls and gas pockets, workers disappear (the owners assume they have either quit in favor of other work or escaped); orc raids, while sporadic, are growing in intensity; various subterranean beasts stalk

the cramped tunnels; and miners break into concealed vaults and chambers home to horrors beyond the imagination. For a budding adventurer, there is always steady employment undertaking some dangerous endeavor.

PERSONS OF NOTE

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

ATHIR PASHA BINT NA'IM

This elderly sage has devoted much of her spare time to researching the Jinn Forge. According to various legends, the forge allows one to produce armor and weapons with strength and sharpness beyond anything a mortal could hope to create. While she has yet to discover its exact location, she has learned that the construction of a special amulet will point the way and unlock the doors protecting its location.

Unfortunately, the materials required to construct the amulet are very specific and extremely rare on the mortal realm. As far as she knows, they are found only in Jinnistan, though undoubtedly the jinn made use of them during the centuries they ruled over central Al-Shirkuh.

The Sandspeech translations are ifrit iron (another name for star metal), marid steel (a form of solid quicksilver), khamsin silver (Maerathril, which is found in Rassilon, but not in Al-Shirkuh), and majin gold (an especially pure form that is as hard as iron).

Athir is prepared to pay very well for anyone who can deliver her a sample of these rare materials either in the form of ingots or manufactured items she can melt down.

THE MAD PREACHER

Until two years ago, Abdul-Salam ibn Firas was a priest of Geb-Agni. Regarded as a fanatic by his peers, he would regularly seize hot coals or run heated blades along his arms and legs as proof of his faith and to purge his soul of sins. Following one such incident, Abdul-Salam had a seizure. Upon recovering, it was clear his mind had broken, for he began ranting that the disciple of an "unliving god" had come to Salih, "eaters of metal" were planning to devour the city from within, and "men shall become as golems."

Having quit the cult, Abdul-Salam, his flesh more burned and seared than ever, wanders the streets, shouting out his warnings to no one in particular and waving a stout wooden club. On occasions he accosts people, violently trying to remove any metal items they are carrying while warning them to "carry only that which nature provides." With no money to pay fines and no noble wanting him as a slave, the guard throw him in a cell until he calms down and then release him back onto the streets.

SIRHAN

City of Stars

The fabled City of Stars, Sirhan is named both for its rich gem mines and its great observatory. Since before the birth of the Free Emirates, the city has enjoyed enormous wealth, and in that regard little has changed in recent times. Indeed, the city grows richer each passing year. But all is not well. While, the boiling river itself has not caused any drastic problems, locals cannot help but feel trepidation—the ancient prophecy so long ignored has produced an air of foreboding, for at night it is no longer possible to see the stars in Sirhan.

Social Hierarchy

It is rare that wealth and power do not go hand in hand, for one invariably leads to the other. Sirhan, never short of wealth, has been a plutocracy since the end of Anari rule. Believing that anyone who had wealth must know something of leadership and good management, it was decreed that a census would be taken every 20 years. The 19 richest citizens (measured by counting all land, property, possessions, and coin) are awarded seats in parliament. In addition, the high priest of Geb-Agni, the most senior imam, and the general in command of the army hold automatic seats. Regardless of their wealth, these three are never counted in the census.

Between them, these officials elect one of their number to serve as emir for the duration of the parliament. In the event that cannot reach a decision within four days, the emir is drawn by random lot. The next census is due in five years. Some emirs have been the best candidate. Others have been a compromise between rival factions. A small few have just been lucky in the random draw. The current parliament is divided into two main camps—Moderates and Progressives—with a smattering of Liberals.

In order to prevent assassination being used as a means of forcing a new election, it was decreed that in the event an emir died before his term reached its conclusion, the city would be governed by an independent triumvirate for a period of three years or until the next scheduled census, whichever came first. This body comprises the high priest of Geb-Agni, the most senior imam, and the general.

Further checks were added to prevent corruption in high office. To assuage any temptation to redirect them to his family, the emir has no direct access to city funds. All financial matters relating to the city treasury are handled by a senior wizar (the Grand Treasurer) elected by parliament from outside their ranks. While expenses incurred

by the emir through his office, such as state banquets for visiting officials and redecorating the palace, come from city funds, he is paid a salary of 25,000 dinars a year. Additionally, he can always use his private income.

The emir is not an autocrat. Indeed, he is largely a figurehead, for he cannot alter, create, or abolish taxes or laws, declare war or sue for peace, appoint or strip honor titles, or alter pacts with other cities without the approval of 12 members of parliament. He can be removed from office prematurely, but this requires 16 votes.

The current emir, Muttaib, is riding a tide of popularity and milking it to the full. A Devoted, he has nonetheless taken the unusual (and some might argue heretical) step of thanking Geb-Agni and Apsu for the unexpected recent fortunes.

As with the emir, noble titles are not an hereditary right. Instead, titles are awarded to those elected to parliament. The three richest citizens are awarded the title sirdar, the next seven that of pasha, and the final ten the rank of effendi. Since one of these will become emir, his noble title passes to his eldest child (or appointed representative). That person does not sit in parliament, however. In the event a noble loses his seat in parliament at the next census he forfeits his title. He does not forfeit any businesses or holdings he owns, however. The automatic members of parliament are not awarded nobles titles—they are given the title of wizar and an honor title of sirdar instead.

The children of nobles hold no official title, but most are unofficially given effendi honor titles by people who know them. Should a parent serving in parliament die, the appointed heir automatically assumes both his title and seat for the duration of the parliament.

While supporters of the system suggest that anyone who works hard might rise to emir, this is almost impossible in practice. Barring disaster, families with money are going to remain at roughly the same level or improve their status. As a result, the nobility is virtually hereditary and breaking into the upper echelons of society a pipe dream. Those with the most wealth control between them the majority of farms, mines, and large mercantile houses. The ancestors of those who control land served under the Anari as governors and overseers, clinging to power during the transitional phase to emerge as the first nobles.

Outside the nobility, unless one is close to being appointed to parliament, high social status depends on who you know, not what you are or earn. Lower down, wealth plays a more important roll. Gemcutters and jewelers are by far the richest normal citizens, though their income pales compared to that of the nobles.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Sirhan.

* **Bad Air:** Breathing in the moist, sulfur-laden air for even short periods is bad for the lungs. Each week, characters must make a Vigor roll or suffer a minor respiratory tract infection.

Minor Respiratory Infection (Airborne, +0): Victims are fatigued while infected due to shortness of breath. Any roll of 1 (regardless of Wild Die) on a physical Trait roll made under strenuous circumstances causes the victim to be Shaken by a hacking coughing fit. A Vigor roll to remove the disease made be made every four days.

* **Lighting:** The GM should draw a card each day. During winter, a red suit means the mist is light and visibility is Dim (-1) during the day. A black suit means the mist is thick and it is Dark (-2). In both cases, it is one level worse than normal conditions would give at night (to a maximum of Pitch Dark). A Joker means no mist. During the rest of the year, a club suit indicates light mist, with no mist on other draws.

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

Celestial Sphere: For one skill point, a hero with Arcane Background (Astrology) (see *Realm Guide #10*) may take Astrology at d6.

Gemcutters: For one skill point, a hero may take Knowledge (Craft: Jewelry) at d6.

Hekata: For one skill point, a character may take *one* of the three options below. Only one skill point may be spent in this manner.

* The hero learns how to speak Hekatic (in addition to his normal entitlement of languages) and gains Knowledge (Area: Hekata) d4.

* A hero who knows how to speak Hekatic may take Knowledge (Area: Hekata) d6.

* A character who knows how to speak Hekatic may take Detailed Area Lore (Hekata) (see *Realm Guide #13*) with Smarts d6.

* **Noble Titles:** Any character who takes the Noble Edge to represent nobility has two choices.

True Noble: He is the child of a true noble, with all the perks and drawbacks that entails. He can never rise above effendi unless he becomes a member of parliament. He may, at the GM's discretion, lose his title at the next census. He retains his income and responsibilities, but forfeits the +2 Charisma bonus.

Honor Noble: The hero has been awarded an honor title for some service. He gains the +2 Charisma, but not the Rich Edge or any servants/men-at-arms. On the flip side, he has no responsibilities to anyone, either.

* **Temperature:** During Alak Paret, the daytime temperature is Sweltering. At night, the temperature drops one to Hot.

Education

Basic education is free to all citizens. While everyone knows that acquiring true wealth is very unlikely, getting close to the source can be just as rewarding. Parents push their children hard to do well at school, in the hope they might become a civil servant, military officer, cleric, imam, or apprentice to a merchant and rise through the ranks. Oddly, becoming a craftsman is seen as a secondary option—unless a child displays an obvious talent, there is too much competition and craftsmen are not as likely to achieve any high office.

For those who already have wealth, Sirhan offers four advanced educational establishments. The University of Sirhan is a basic university offering a broad but shallow range of courses. Those seeking rapid advancement into the middle ranks of the bureaucracy or mercantile trade are advised to study here.

For those whose interests lie in the esoteric, the University of the Celestial Sphere teaches astronomy and astrology. Despite being part of the temple of Qedeset, it offers courses in the magical art of Astrology.

The University of Gemcutters is a trade school. Students learn not only the art of appraising, cutting, and polishing gems, but also creating jewelry. Graduates have a better chance of dining employment, simply because a master does not need to waste time teaching his apprentice the basics. The university is cosponsored by the cult of Geb-Agni.

Finally, there is the University of Hekata. Students learn of Hekata's rise to power and fall from grace, study physical artifacts, and decipher ancient texts. It is considered the least prestigious of the universities, being the haunt of future sages and tomb robbers.

Unfortunately, money matters in Sirhan, and none of the universities are free. A limited number of scholarship places are awarded each year to the brightest students.

Religion

Faithful number 60% of the population and Devoted 40%, but the city remains one where religion is a matter of personal choice and, save in specific areas such as the clergy, not a barrier to membership or promotion.

Of the gods, Geb-Agni is dominant. Even those who do not worship him as a patron praise him on his holy and high holy days, so it is his blessing that has brought prosperity to the city. The high priests have little interest in politics beyond ensuring that mining and trading in gems and jewelry are not affected in any negative way. The cult's political leanings vary based on specific situations, though they favor the Progressives.

Initially thought of as a curse, the heating of the River Arun is now largely seen as a boon. Certainly it required a change in the way people use water, and the heat and

stench are unwelcome, but the sulfur harvested from the banks has proved to be a major economic blessing, not to mention increasing local crop yields. With the emir personally thanking Apsu, the cult has enjoyed a sudden increase in the number of worshippers, both dedicated and casual.

The cult of Qedeshet has few concerns that its popularity with the masses has dropped in the last few years. Trade is booming, education levels are high, and its many financial interests ensure it remains wealthy even with tithes dropping. The damage to the Royal Observatory is a financial setback, but one the cult can weather.

Tamarni is another deity enjoying an influx of worship. With citizens having more money to spend, they are turning to pleasure, and the cult can offer that in abundance. Ashtart, always popular in rural areas, has seen little benefit from the increased harvest.

LOCAL FESTIVALS

Day of Crowns: The census begins at the start of Alak Neteru/Suha. On Baot Yaus al-Hamala, those who will form the next parliament gather in the main square. One by one they are given ceremonial crowns befitting their new rank, starting in reverse order. The new emir has already been elected in secret, but while the nobility know who will rule the city for the next 20 years, the people do not. Heavy bets are placed before the ceremony begins on who will hold what title.

Although the main festival is held only every 20 years, the date has become a half-day holiday. Businesses close at noon, and citizens return home to moan about the state of affairs, thanks what powers they hold in high esteem for the good times, and feast deep into the night.

Night of Upturned Eyes: On the first night of the new moon in Anshi Alak Arkhet, citizens turn their eyes to the night sky to watch the heavens. Although started by the cult of Qedeshet some 200 years ago, the festival is a civic one. Clerics and imams recite the various tales associated with the constellations as a means of keeping myths alive and instructing a new generation without the need for formal education. Astrologers do a good trade this night, selling forecasts to citizens keen to know what boons and banes the future holds for them.

Since the rise of the mists, fewer citizens have bothered to attend. Those who retain an interest in the heavens gather outside the city walls.

Military

With the richest citizens running Sirhan, and most of them having stakes in farms and mines, it is hardly surprising that the city's army is used to protect their property. Officially, they refer to this as protecting the city's economic interests. In reality, it means the cost of security on their private estates is met by the state, not their personal coffers.

ARMY

The army stands at three legions and one wing. Each legion has one company of heavy and one of medium infantry making up the first regiment, and one company of light infantry and one of archer forming the second regiments. The cavalry wing is entirely light cavalry.

The army rewards its officers well. For each five years loyal service with a good conduct record, an officer is awarded a gemstone. The value of these increases each term. It starts at 100 dinars, and doubles each time, to a maximum of 6,400 dinars after 35 years service. These are worn on ceremonial uniforms. When the officer retires, the gemstone is his to keep. An officer who does a full 35 years retires with gems worth 12,700 dinars.

By law, the general must divide the infantry equally between the farms and mines (a compromise reached by parliament centuries ago). Typically, three cavalry companies protect the farms, where they are most effective, and two the mines. The exact disposition and placement of troops, however, is the general's choice.

Nobles who want to ensure their property is adequately protected must pay for this privilege. A typical bribe is 500 dinars per infantry platoon or cavalry company—far cheaper than a noble having to pay troop wages but not so excessive the nobles have ever seen fit to create a new law fixing the numbers. A wise general is always careful to ensure no farm or mine is unprotected—that mistake could cost him not only his position, but his head.

Safeguarding the city is the city guard. One legion strong, it is divided into a medium infantry regiment and a regiment with one company of light infantry and one of archers.

The palace guard comprises one medium infantry regiment. Never ones to skimp on spending city funds instead of their own, parliament passed laws granting each member of the council a bodyguard of five soldiers. One company is dedicated to this role, with each member (including the three automatic seats) having a permanent guard of five soldiers. The remaining 15 soldiers protect the emir. The second company is responsible for general palace security.

NAVY

Sirhan's navy, a fleet of 24 light warships, is proving costly to maintain. The ships assigned to patrol the river, two squadrons of four ships each, require frequent repairs due to constant exposure to the boiling water. Even the maritime squadrons, which escort merchantmen loaded with gems and jewelry back to their home port for a modest fee, suffer damage when returning to the city to resupply or for routine rotation.

After consulting shipwrights and sages, the best protection was deemed to be sand or sun dragon scales, both of which are resistant to heat. Dragons aren't overly common in Al-Shirkuh (especially not in the Free Emirates), nor are they willing to just hand over their scales. In an effort to acquire enough scales for the entire fleet,

NEW ARCANE BACKGROUND

MATHEMAGIC

Requirements: Novice

Arcane Skill: Mathematics (Smarts)

Starting Powers: 3

Powers: *Analyze foe, arcane resistance, banish, bladebreaker, boost/lower trait, burrow, confusion, deflection, detect/conceal, dispel, elemental manipulation, energy immunity, fear, fly, fortune's favored, hamper movement, knockdown, leaping, lock/unlock, negate arcana, precognition, quake, quickness, smite, speed, stun, teleport, wall walker, wandering senses, water walk, wilderness step*

Mathematics began with the cakali. While humans lost much of their knowledge during the jinn occupation, the cakali never forgot. Following the War of Copper Jars, the study of mathematics again flourished. While most civilized beings in Al-Shirkuh understand basic mathematical principles, concepts such as algebra, binomial theory, cubic and quadratic equations, irrational numbers, mathematical induction, and spherical trigonometry are the reserve of scholars. Mathemagicians are wizards who manipulate the threads of magic not by summoning jinn, dancing, or through force of will, but through solving complex equations that combine mathematical and arcane principles.

Casting: The base formula that makes up each spell is unique and unchanging, but includes variables based on the target, range, trapping, and optional effect that the wizard must calculate during the casting process.

In order to cast spells, a mathemagician must either be able to speak or write. He does not require pen or paper for the latter—he can use a finger to draw in sand, or even “write” in the air.

The equations that make up a spell vary in length and complexity. A Novice spell can be cast (i.e., written and solved) as a single action. To cast a Seasoned spell, the wizard must spend one additional action speaking or writing the equation before making his arcane skill roll. A Veteran spell requires two additional actions. These actions must be taken on consecutive rounds or the casting automatically fails. While “preparing” in this manner, the mathemagician can be disrupted.

Trappings: Mathemagicians do not choose trappings when they learn a spell. By altering a variable in the basic equation of a spell, they can pick their trapping at the time of casting. Having a trapping with no associated game mechanic (even if it has a showy effect) involves no modifiers. For a trapping that involves a game mechanic, the mathemagician must spend an additional action preparing and solving the equation.

the city is offering bounties of 2000 dinars times the beasts' size. Many professional dragon hunters consider this far too low given the risks involved and the problems of hauling the scales back to Sirhan.

So far parliament has refused to increase the bounty, despite the city coffers being full—as frequently happens, those with money to spare are often loathe to spend it. As the cost of repairs continues to mount it is likely the state will change its mind, though that may be years away yet.

Law & Order

Sirhan's city watch has a bad reputation among the general populace. They are vigilant enough by day, but once the sun sets, they count the bribes paid them by the rival thieves' guilds and remain in their watch stations. On misty nights, they do not even need bribes to avoid patrolling—the presence of the mist creatures is enough to ensure their absence.

While the archers are assigned to man the city walls, the three infantry companies are paid to thwart crime. Patrols are divided into three eight-hour shifts, meaning there are only 120 guardsmen on duty at any time. Fortunately, most citizens are fairly law-abiding, having sufficient wealth to avoid the necessity of crime.

Despite the constant need for laborers in the fields and mines, Sirhan has avoided changing its age-old laws on slavery. Those sentenced to slavery are still put to work, but the courts decide where they are sent. In recent years, most are sentenced to harvest sulfur or scrape residue from buildings.

The guard is coming under increasing public pressure to solve a number of particularly gruesome murders. Every month for the last three years, one murder has been committed without fail. Death is nothing special in a city wracked by thief wars, but it is the nature of the crime that terrifies people—every victim was missing his brain. The cult of Qedeset has tried divinations, but has found their visions blocked by some unseen force.

Oddly enough, it was also three years that the thieves' guild suddenly and violently fractured. Until then, crime was the domain of just a single, well organized guild. Following the death of the guildmaster (he was found with his brain removed), the four thief lords fell out over who should be his replacement. Suspicions, lust for power, and deep-seated rivalries drove a rift between them that words could not heal. Each retreated to one of the main guild houses and declared himself guildmaster, so starting a violent struggle for supremacy that continues to this day.

Rather than divide the city equally, each guild wants to dominate it. Rival thieves are considered deadly enemies rather than mere rivals, and murder is the accepted way of removing the opposition. As a result, each of the guild houses has become a fortress, protected by cunning traps and magical *glyphs*. The four guilds are the Mistwalkers, Night Lords, Twisted Fingers, and Yellow Hand.

One “advantage” of the feud is that the guilds do not

have the inclination to track down freelance thieves. So long as the thief can avoid being detected (whereupon he will be assumed to belong to a rival guild) he can ply his larcenous trade to his heart's content.

Trade & Tribute

Never short of money, Sirhan is enjoying an economic boom. In addition to its ancient trade in gems and jewelry, sulfur has brought with it new wealth, not to mention increased harvests. Crops are so bountiful that now exports of them will soon become yet another growth area, further adding to the elites' wealth.

One industry that has lost out since the river began to boil is fishing. Never caught in quantities considered important to trade revenues, fishing was nevertheless a vital source income for some families. Nothing lives in the river now (at least nothing natural) and many fishermen have been forced into poverty or to migrate to one of the coastal villages.

The nobles do not have everything their own way in Sirhan. Backed by the cult of Geb-Agni, the gemcutters and jewelers have formed a powerful guild. Acting together, they have managed to curb steep increases in the price of precious metals and uncut stones, and set rates for exports. Parliament naturally disapproves of the organization, but it is powerless to act—any attempt to break up the guild might quickly result in industrial action that would paralyze the city's economy and would raise the ire of an important cult.

Guildsmen pay a small sum each week for the privilege of being members. The rate is based on their level of skill, with craftsmen being divided into apprentices, journeymen, or masters. In the event of an injury, a member receives a small lump sum to help tide him over financially until he is able to return to work. The fee also covers the cost of mediation in disputes between individual members or with merchants, and in legal cases brought against the member.

COINAGE

Sirhan has always had gems to spare, but it relies on imports of precious metals. The city mines only two standard coins—a gold one dinar (a “Sun”) and a silver one dirham (a “Moon”). Each bears the name of the emir at the time of minting on one side and a diamond pattern on the reverse. In order to get smaller denominations, citizens are permitted to cut dirhams in half (known as a “Star”) or quarter (a “Glint”).

Gems frequently exchange hands for larger transactions. Officially, this can only be done at the city mint, which charges a 1% administration fee. Every gem has been accurately valued, and the transaction comes with an official document declaring the value of the gems. Unlicensed money changers charge only 0.5%, but there is no guarantee the gems are worth their supposed value.

LOCAL TAXES

Sirhan's immense wealth comes from trade in gems and jewelry. Though it is forced to import precious metals, its exports more than outweigh this expense. Until the advent of the sulfur harvest, citizens paid 10% of their annual income to the state. In just three years, that has been lowered to 5%.

Customs: All shipments into or out of the city, except for food and uncut gemstones from one of Sirhan's mines, are charged at 2%. Thanks to parliament, whose members naturally benefit most, locally mined uncut stones and local foodstuffs carry no import levy.

Docking Fees: With river travel perilous, more and more visitors and shipments from the farms and mines are entering the city via land routes. In a bid to prevent the roads from becoming clogged and encourage river traffic, Sirhan has abolished docking fees.

Gate Tax: Pedestrians are charged a flat 0.5 dirhams, mounts 1 dirham, and wagons 2 dirhams. Citizens of Sirhan, but not its greater territory, are exempt. Parliament is considering asking the emir to change these rates to dinars and to apply the charge to all users, both to boost revenue and to make river travel more attractive.

Weapons Tax: Anyone wishing to carry a weapon in public must purchase a colored wooden disc at the city gates. These cost 20 dinars and are good until the end of the current month. Discs must be worn openly, and each month has a different color, allowing the guard to instantly spot when on is out of date. Most guards are prepared to ignore transgressions for a few dinars, but have also been known to alter other patrols so they too can take a bribe.

Architecture

In terms of basic architecture, Sirhan is unusual in that even lower-class citizens own, or at least occupy, courtyard houses, albeit small ones. With no rows of tightly packed houses and wide main streets, the city has a spacious feel. As the population has grown, though, new accommodation has had to be built, and the only way the builders could go is up. With houses now two or three stories tall, the benefit of having an open courtyard has been lost. Not that many citizens care to sit outside and inhale damp, hot air these days.

Where the city shines is in its architectural decoration—the citizens of Sirhan are keen to display their wealth. Houses are brightly colored, splendid arches have replaced rectangular entrances, glass windows are not unusual, statues stand proud at intersections or in public parks, and the grander houses boast murals and mosaics on the outer walls.

Keeping the city clean and in a good state of repair is becoming a major problem, though. The yellow mist leaves behind a thin residue of sulfur, which if left unchecked quickly hardens, and the hot, moist air causes brick to crumble and wood to rot at an accelerated rate.

Major Locales

Below are some of the more notable, important, or unusual places visiting heroes may have cause to frequent while in the mist-shrouded oven that is Sirhan.

CITY DISTRICTS

Sirhan is a small city, having just 41,200 inhabitants (40% of the total population under the emir's authority). Much of the lower-class housing runs in a band immediately north and south of the river, with isolated districts dotted elsewhere. Split by the steaming River Arun, the two halves are known simply as North and South Sirhan.

Docks: Sirhan has two sets of docks on the north bank of the river. In the east are wharves catering to ships sailing upriver from the ocean. To the east, the wharves cater for traffic sailing downstream from the farms and mines. These are known as the Sea Docks and River Docks respectively. The docks are no longer a bustling hub of commerce. To avoid damaging their ships' hulls, many captains are choosing to make port in a sleepy village on the coast and make the short trip to the city overland.

Health: The residential districts along the southern bank were, until the river began to boil, lower-class housing occupied by dockworkers and laborers. Wealthy entrepreneurs bought out the occupants (paying over the value of the properties), knocked adjoining buildings together, spruced up the interiors and exteriors, and transformed humble homes into bathhouses, steam baths, and health spas. The remain buildings were turned into barbers, massage parlors, beauty salons, laundries, taverns, and inns.

Observatory: Although considered part of Sirhan, this district lies three miles southeast of the Palace District. The district is named after the Royal Observatory, but that is not the only structure here. Nearby is the University of the Celestial Sphere. As well as classrooms, the campus has student and staff accommodation blocks. Although free from the mist and steam that blot out the stars, the district is very dark at night. So as not to interfere with stargazing, lighting is kept to an absolute minimum.

Palace: The palace is a sprawling structure in the southeast corner of the city. The main palace is a separate structure, around which are small but luxurious townhouses for the nobles, government offices, the parliament building, and barracks.

Warehouse: Nestled between the docks is the Warehouse District. The warehouses are small, windowless structures with thick walls and iron doors boasting complex locks in an attempt to keep out thieves. Armed patrols in the employ of the merchants patrol the area around the warehouses day and night. A small contingent is stationed inside. The docks may be quiet, but the Warehouse District continues to prosper. Covered wagons carrying iron chests trundle through the streets at all hours, flanked by burly mercenaries paid well enough that stealing the contents of the chests is a poor option.

CITY LOCALES

Atif's Jewelry Hire: As well as creating jewelry for sale, Atif ibn Lahib rents pieces for social occasions. He has a wide range of styles to suit every budget and occasion. While the rich have no compulsion about buying expensive jewelry, wearing the same piece to multiple functions has become a social taboo—it implies one is short of money. The rich didn't get where they are by frittering away money, and those not prepared to invest in new jewelry every time they socialize make use of Atif's ever-changing designs. Knowing he can rent them out many times, Atif offers good money for unusual pieces of jewelry. A seller directed to Atif receives 50% of the value with a Streetwise roll, and 75% with a raise.

Atif has never worried about customers not returning hired pieces—somehow he has managed to acquire the services of a collector demon. Atif has never paid the thieves' guilds a dinar in protection—bitter experience has taught them to leave him in peace.

Bridges: Three bridges span the River Arun. All are located along the bank between the docks. From west to east they are called The Last Bridge, Fisherman's Bridge, and Dreamers' Bridge. Constructed from stone and intricately decorated (much of this has been lost below a veneer of sulfur), each is wide enough to accommodate two carts side-by-side as well as two columns of pedestrians.

Fisherman's Bridge: When fish lived in the river, the bridges was crowded with citizens hoping to catch a free fish for their supper. The fish may be long gone, but people still gather here in numbers. Instead of fishing, they lower baskets or sacks of rice, vegetables and meat into the boiling water to save on fuel. The gathering is an ideal time for neighbors and strangers to swap gossip. Streetwise rolls to pick up common rumors have a +1 bonus here during the hours immediately before sunset.

The Sauna: Catering to merchants from Rassilon, the Sauna is a steam bath built in the style of the northern peoples. Pipes from the river draw in hot water, providing plentiful steam with no cost to the business.

The proprietor, Al Tayyib ibn Aws, is seeking discrete adventurers to help him with a "little" problem. One week ago, a patron was found dead in the steam room. From what Al Tayyib could tell, he had literally been boiled alive. Afraid, and not prepared to risk his reputation, he arranged for the body to be quietly removed and disposed of outside the city. No further incidents have occurred, but he wants the matter investigated before it happens again.

Souk of Stars: This small souk sells just cut and polished gemstones and jewelry. The craftsmen in each street sell one specific class of gemstone or type of jewelry—precious gemstones, semi-precious stones, jewelry made of gold, silver, ivory, coral, and so on. A prime target for thieves, and not willing to trust the city guard, the shopkeepers pay protection to the Gemcutters' Guild. A mix of obvious guards and undercover agents posing as shoppers keep a very watchful eye on the souk.

Like many souks it has multiple entrances. Inside

the strong doors are portcullises. They are lowered into place at night as extra security. When an alarm is raised, they are quickly lowered, trapping everyone inside. Anyone wishing to leave the souk must submit themselves to a very thorough search.

University of the Celestial Sphere: While the mundane charts destroyed by Arhan ibn Mahmoud have been replaced, the more valuable ones were copies taken from inscriptions the length and breadth of Al-Shirkuh or ancient texts. The university is sponsoring expeditions to Hekata, the ruins of Magor, and the Snakelands so new copies may be taken and, just perhaps, original texts and charts unearthed. As well as buying archaic astronomical and astrology texts and charts, the university sells star charts. Produced by students as part of their coursework, these are sold for 20 dinars.

The Edges the university teaches are only available to characters with Arcane Background (Astrology).

Skills: Astrology; **Edges:** Delay Spell, Potent Magic, Spell Finesse.

University of Hekata: The study of Hekata is a touchy subject. Despite having enjoyed 600 years of normal civilization, the realm is forever associated with necromancy in the eyes of most citizens. Those keen to study it are viewed with suspicion, even if their motives are noble. The curriculum does not shy away from the darker side of Hekata, but neither does it promote it—the study of the arcane, yet alone khem-hekau, forms no part of the syllabus.

Always keen to acquire new pieces for students to study, especially papyri and copies of inscriptions, the university sponsors regular expeditions to Hekata and purchases interesting artifacts from visiting adventurers.

The Shroud of Eternity infiltrated the faculty decades ago. While members are involved in the illegal trade in khem-hekau artifacts, their main purpose is to sift through the archives for information relating to the tombs of withered pharaohs or liche-wizards and destroy it before it falls into the hands of the cult of Tammuz.

Special: Students wishing to take advantage of the skill or Edge must be able to speak Hekatic; **Skills:** Area Lore (Hekata); **Edges:** Detailed Area Lore (Hekata); **Languages:** Hekatic.

The Vault of Celestial Wisdom: Naflah bint Sab, the owner of this small shop, is a mundane astrologer and sage. She also sells astrological charts. Always considered somewhat eccentric, Naflah has lost a lot of her regular customers since she started warning everyone who entered her premises that the jinn were soon to return to complete their conquest. The words didn't scare anyone—everyone knows the jinn are long gone—it was the wild look in her eyes and phlegm-speckled lips as she hissed the words conspiratorially that caused them to seek out a new fortune-teller.

Words and Whispers: This small shop is bare save for two plush couches and a number of large, plump pillows. It belongs to Alzubra, and what she sells cannot be stored on shelves or browsed by curious shoppers. Alzubra is a Wild Card lesser khamsin. Rare among her kind, she enjoys conversing with other beings, though

JINN IN COMMON SPEECH

Since the War of Copper Jars, the jinn have entered the parlance of every major tongue. More often than not they are used in a derogatory fashion, even by Devoted. Like other euphemisms and metaphors, they conjure a specific image in the listener's mind. A few examples are given below, along with their meaning. Throwing the occasional phrase into an NPC's speech will add an extra layer of depth.

* *All Jinn to me:* Gibberish; a concept the listener cannot understand due to lack of experience, education, or (more rarely) vocabulary.

* *As happy as an ifrit in a bonfire:* A very happy person. Other variants exist—as happy as a marid in a bathhouse is another popular one.

* *As nervous as an ifrit in a bathhouse:* Used to describe extreme nervousness or unease.

* *As welcome as an ifrit in a candle shop:* An unwanted event or person. A *majin* in a pottery shop and an *ifrit* among *cakali* have similar connotations.

* *As witty as a majin:* An insult implying someone is slow-witted.

* *Birthing a majin:* The act of passing solid bodily waste. *Bleeding the khamsin* is a more colorful way of saying one is passing urine.

* *Built like a majin:* Describes a very well-muscled person or someone who is both short and wide without being corpulent. An excessively fat person may be described as having *the body of a lazy majin*.

* *Cooks like an ifrit:* The person has a tendency to burn food. The related *eats like an ifrit* implies a glutton.

* *Fighting like an ifrit and a marid:* A bitter dispute, often where neither side holds an advantage.

* *Flogging a khamsin:* An impossible task or fruitless endeavor. Variants include *skinning a majin*, *drowning a marid*, *burning an ifrit*, and *walking to Jinnistan*.

* *Gone to Jinnistan:* Someone who has embarked on a fool's errand. *Sent to Jinnistan* refers to someone who has been exiled.

* *Graceful as a majin:* Clumsy or uncoordinated.

* *Ifrit's heart:* When used to describe a person ("He has an ifrit's heart") it means he has a fiery and often short temper.

* *Khamsin's piss:* A term used to let the proprietor of an inn or tavern know you find his beverages not to your taste.

* *Kissed by a jinni* or *dancing with a jinni:* The person is insane or has otherwise lost his senses.

* *Kissing a khamsin:* The act of farting.

* *Seeing the spires of Jinnistan:* Drink or drug-induced hallucination.

* *Skin like a majin:* Describes a person who is slow to take insult or react to taunts.

not socializing. She deals in information, from common rumors to secret information to which only a handful of souls are privy. She also gathers information to order, though this takes time and costs considerably more than passing on tidbits she has picked up off the streets.

THE IRON GRATE

Several months ago, prospectors searching for new deposits in the higher foothills of the Dusty Mountains came upon a small stream of cold water. Though it was undoubtedly just one of many that fed the River Arun's main channel, it was uncharted. More curiously, the channel it flowed along was clearly shaped by living hands.

Intrigued, the prospectors traced it to its source higher in the hills. Instead of emerging from a crack in the rock, as they expected, the water trickled out of a metal grille built into the living rock. The light of their torches revealed it flowed through a narrow artificial tunnel, but it stretched back too far into the hill for them to discern any clue as to its origin. A lengthy search revealed no sign of any ruins, nor any entrances.

That part of the hills is not inside any nobles territory, but they were being paid by a noble family. Suspecting some lost mine or forgotten temple, they decided to keep their discovery secret. After all, they would likely receive no special reward for reporting it to their patron. The prospectors are looking for potential business partners, adventurers capable of finding a way inside and mapping whatever lies beyond.

PERSONS OF Note

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

GHASSAN & THE MASTER

Ghassan's career as a tomb robber was abruptly cut short a little over three years ago. Exploring a subterranean ruin in the mountains, he came across a most curious, not to mention grotesque, artifact—a brain in a glass jar filled with milky fluid. The jar was seated on a pedestal of block stone into which was worked an intricate web of silvery lines that glowed with energy and pulsated like veins. Curious as to its value, and blatantly ignoring the pulsating silvery lines that should have been a warning to leave it well alone, Ghassan inspected the bizarre object. For centuries, possibly millennia, the brain had been kept alive by the latent psionic energy stored in the pedestal, dormant but still alive. Unfortunately for the tomb robber, it was also possessed of awesome mental powers. As Ghassan touched the glass, the brain awakened. With the merest thought, it ensnared the tomb robber's mind.

His will utterly crushed, Ghassan is now a puppet of the brain, whom he refers to only as The Master. Whatever intelligence he once possessed has been replaced

with the high animal cunning and survival instincts found in predators. The brain has put its slave to good use. In order to survive without the pedestal (which cannot be moved without destroying the circuits), the brain requires its fluid, actually the pulverized brain of a sentient being mixed with salt-saturated water, be replaced every month. For each month this is not done, its intelligence and psionic ability diminishes (though its hold over Ghassan is absolute).

The Master is not a Puppet Master. It was, however, given its unholy life by those mysterious beings. Like them, it has dreams and aspirations beyond the ken of any lesser being. Its first pet project was to split the thieves' guild into rival factions, though to what end only it knows.

HEARTHKEEPER SALAZAR

A free lesser ifrit, Salazar never placed much faith in religion. He was present at the destruction of the cakali homeland, and on that day he saw with his own eyes the impotence of the supposed greater powers. Where were the gods, he thought, as tens of thousands of devout followers were incinerated? Captured by Suleiman after the War of Copper Jars, Salazar expected to be imprisoned or destroyed. Instead, Suleiman bade him go into the desert, for in time he would find his faith and earn redemption for his cruel acts.

Five centuries later, the jinni ran across a cleric of Kenaz in the deep desert. Intrigued by the fiery being, the cleric attempted to open a dialogue. Equally intrigued by the human's red robes and mention of a deity of fire (without any earth additions), Salazar chose to respond.

Now a follower of Kenaz, Salazar is intrigued by the disappearance of the god and why fire-based powers are failing in Rassilon but not in Al-Shirkuh. He has a theory that neatly solves both issues in his mind—Kenaz entered Jinnistan, perhaps seeking aid from the ifrits, and was trapped there when Suleiman sealed off the realm. Being further away from the gates, it is only natural that Rassilon is suffering first. The accepted dates of the disappearance and sealing are decades apart, but given the devastation wrought upon Rassilon during the Blizzard War, he figures someone probably made a mistake.

SIGWIF BJORNSDOTTIR

A part-time student at the University of the Celestial Sphere and frequent visitor to the archives of the Royal Observatory, Sigwif is a priestess of Maera native to Royalmark. Her main interest lies in gathering together the many stories concerning the constellations and studying how different patterns evolved among different cultures. Having completed a lengthy tour of the northern continent, she is now embarking on a second volume of her *magnum opus*—the skies of Al-Shirkuh.

Fair-haired, not unattractive, and with freckled pale skin, she is prepared to join any expedition planning on exploring ruins likely to contain ancient astronomical or astrological knowledge.

GUILD OF HEADSMEN

Licensed Executioners

Physical dismemberment is a common punishment in Al-Shirkuh. Within the Sultanate, carrying out the grisly but necessary task is the responsibility of masked swordsmen belonging to the Guild of Executioners.

Among the Faithful, headsman are part of the cult of Tammuz, its members all paladins of the god of justice. Its headsman operate openly, backed by the power of their cult and favor of their deity, refusing to hide their features behind masks. This description applies only to the Devoted sect, as does the Headsman Edge.

History

The first official state executioners existed long before the arrival of the jinn, in an age when belief in the gods was absolute and unchallenged. In those ancient days, the task of carrying out the courts' judgments fell solely to paladins of Tammuz, god of justice.

When the Sultan forbade worship of the gods in favor of following the teachings of the *Hamad al-Shuf*, the paladins were forced to make a choice. Most refused to give up the recently rediscovered gods and fled the oppression. Others saw wisdom in Suleiman's teachings and gave up their faith in favor of the new creed. Now without a purpose, many of these banded together, creating an organization of independent executioners and offering their services to the state.

The nobility saw the benefits of such a guild, for while they held ultimate power and were responsible for determining sentences, albeit through the courts in most cases, the blood of those they condemned to death or mutilation would be on the hands of the swordsman.

The Guild was officially recognized by the Sultan in 34 CJ. For five centuries the Headsman have dutifully carried out their grisly but necessary work. Because the Headsman serve as convenient scapegoats, the Devoted nobility has never tried to assert any control over the organization. For their part, the Headsman have remained servants of the courts, never seeking to influence trials.

Unlike the paladins of Tammuz, for whom carrying out dismemberment is but one of their many duties, the Headsman have become specialists in removing limbs.

Structure

The Guild of Headsman is unusual in that while it is an independent organization, it is ultimately answerable to the ruling nobility of the Sultanate and the state courts, for it is from these that it draws both its authority to carry

out its work and its reason for existence. Because of this, the Orders Hindrance applies not the Guild directly, but to any court or nobleman with the legal authority to punish criminals with physical dismemberment. Similarly, the Connections Edge applies both to fellow Headsman and court officials. It does not, however, grant allies or friends among the nobility. To those of lofty station, Headsman are servants and tools, to be wielded as they see fit.

The word guild is misleading, for no formal hierarchy exists within the Guild. Rather, it is a collective, where each member is considered the equal of his peers. Deference is shown to long-serving members or those who serve the higher nobles out of respect.

As a result of its loose nature, the Guild polices itself—members are expected to act against comrades who bring the organization's name into disrepute.

The Guild formally acknowledges two types of Headsman. The first are in permanent employment, tied either to the law courts or to a nobleman with the power to pass sentence on criminals. The second type are itinerant executioners. They travel Al-Shirkuh in search of employment. Most often they find work among Devoted Bedu—while Bedu nobles are quick to sentence the guilty, they prefer not to stain their hands with blood, leaving the grisly work to professionals.

While the Guild is publicly acknowledged across Al-Shirkuh, it is a shadowy organization. The names of its members are closely guarded secrets known only to a small handful of bureaucrats. Even then, city officials know only a handful of Headsman. Boasting no guildmaster, headquarters, or central register, no one alive knows the exact size of the Guild or the names of its entire membership.

Often code names and alias are used to protect the executioners' identities from reprisals by the condemned's kith and kin. When not actively employed, many Headsman work in other occupations. A simple farmer, a laborer, even a merchant—anyone a citizen passes in the street could be a state sponsored executioner. A small few serve as bodyguards, or hold minor roles in their master's court. Due to the secrecy surrounding their identities, few Headsman actually know any of their peers when the masks are removed.

Although considered agents of the Sultan, Headsman have no authority to arrest criminals, conduct trials, or carry out sentences without official sanction.

Emblem

The Guild's main emblem is the mask that conceals its members from those who might seek retribution and from

his family and friends, who may shun him for his unclean occupation. Some favor simply eye coverings, while others prefer full face masks to ensure anonymity. Leather is preferred over metal, but there are no strict requirements.

The trademark mask was not officially adopted until 52 CJ. During the Days of Many Gods, executioners had no need to conceal their features—they were clerics carrying out a sacred duty. This is still true in modern times.

Although the mask is distinctive, all members are required to possess a license. Licenses are issued each year and are available from any Clerk of Executions within the Sultanate. By law, only Headsmen with a current license may perform legal dismemberment.

Playing a Headsman

As a Headsman you are bound to obey the orders of the courts and the nobility. You have no interest in guilt or innocence, for that is the job of the judiciary. When they pass sentence, you are expected to carry out the punishment without question or hesitation.

Being a Headsman is not easy. Your job has made you many enemies, though your mask affords you anonymity and protection from recrimination. Whether you can trust your comrades to keep your secret depends on their nature. If you can't, then your frequent disappearances as you answer the call for justice to be dispensed may lead to awkward questions. Be sure you have a good answer to hand.

Unless you have taken up a permanent position with the courts, you are free to travel as you wish. So long as you do not neglect your duties, the Guild, such as it is, cares nothing for what you do to earn a living or reputation. Just remember that in order to be issued a new license you must return to the Sultanate once a year.

COMBAT ADVICE

The best tactic open to you is to intimidate a foe as quickly as possible. Even if you only have Intimidation d6, the bonus from wearing your mask will allow you to terrorize many opponents. Assuming you succeed, the +2 bonus you gain to your next action against that foe automatically offsets the penalty for Called Shots to the limbs, and halves the penalties to the head or vitals. If you need to close to melee, keep intimidating him while you move, using the bonus to try and Shake your foe.

Once you get into a position to use your Headsman Edge, the modifiers combine to completely negate penalties for Called Shots to the head and vitals.

The great thing about this tactic is that you can keep reusing it, even against the same opponent. And if your Intimidation die is high enough to weather a multi-action penalty, you might even be able to benefit from one set of bonuses with a zero modifier Called Shot while setting up another for the next round.

Another variation on this theme is to intimidate several foes (over the course of several rounds), storing up those +2 bonuses for later in the combat.

ADVANCES

Accuracy is obviously very important when making Called Shots, so ensure your Fighting die is high. A maximized Strength die is not essential since most Called Shots afford some damage bonus, though it should not be neglected—there is little point in successfully performing a tricky maneuver if you don't have the strength to make the damage count.

Intimidation is your second most important skill. Although Taunt is not a core requirement, take it at d6. Then take Strong Willed. As a Social Edge, it stacks with your Headsman Professional Edge for a +4 bonus to Intimidation rolls (when you are masked).

Called Shots can be combined with Frenzy and Sweep. The former is especially useful, since it gives you two chances to deliver a maiming or killing blow each round. Sweep combined with a Called Shot to the head allows you the chance to decapitate a handful of foes in a single blow. If you're willing to spend bennies, One Step One Kill combined with an Intimidation roll and your Headsman Edge is a truly lethal combination.

Trademark Weapon helps further alleviate attack penalties, though be careful not to wield that blade when carrying out state punishments if it carries any identifying marks—no mask is going to protect your identity if you use a clearly distinguishable weapon.

First Strike is a good Edge for any fighter, but more so for you—if you haven't moved or don't intend to move during the round, it allows you to benefit from your Headsman Edge against a foe moving adjacent to you.

Given your Professional Edge requires you to be stationary when taking the Called Shot benefit, you're going to be stationary for at least one round, which means any nearby allies of your opponent are likely to vent their anger on you. If you want to survive, consider taking Block early on.

NPC Reactions

Concealed behind his mask, a Headsman is a symbol of fear, the swift, and many would say harsh, punishment that awaits those who break the Sultan's laws. Most citizens are Neutral toward the masked swordsmen, neither wishing to be seen to be friendly toward the executioners nor offending them. To the courts and nobles Headsmen are simply servants, and thus a Neutral reaction is the norm.

Without his mask, a Headsman is just another citizen. Reactions to him are thus based on his public profession and identity. Should he be publicly unmasked as a Headsman, though, he is likely to suffer Unfriendly or Hostile reactions—the citizens may see the need for executioners, but that does not mean they approve of the profession. Worse, it opens the Headsmen to revenge attacks—the courts or nobles may have issued the punishment, but it is the Headsmen who suffer vengeful citizens' wrath.